

# ECONOMY AND COSMOLOGY IN THE IRON AGE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Science, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg,  
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Pietermaritzburg, 2015



## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work unless otherwise acknowledged. It is being submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

Gavin Douglas Allies Whitelaw

11th day of August, 2015



## Abstract

This thesis considers economy and cosmology in the Iron Age of KwaZulu-Natal. It draws on models derived from anthropological and historical analyses of precolonial agriculturists in southern Africa and applies these to archaeological data.

Critics argue that anthropological approaches in archaeology are not conducive to the creation of a socially dynamic past. In contrast, I believe that their potential is considerable. The models targeted, principally Huffman's Central Cattle Pattern, obviously represent socially dynamic relationships. This is clear if we look at lower-level models: Ngubane's analysis of Zulu sickness and healing, which reveals fracture lines and tensions within the homestead, and Hammond-Tooke's observation that the Nguni and Sotho pollution systems are variations related to the specifics of marriage and settlement. Ngubane's analysis couples neatly with Guy's identification of the 'history-making' principle—the struggle for the accumulation, creation and control of human productive and reproductive capacity—that gave Iron Age societies their dynamism. It is an engagement that firmly integrates systems of symbolism and belief with economy. Throughout this study I focus on the expression of this dynamic principle in cosmology and material culture.

Consideration of pollution concepts in the Early Iron Age showed that the high exchange value of women created extensive lateral alliance networks as cattle moved as bridewealth from one homestead to another. The system worked against a concern for male agnatic continuity and so generated considerable structural tension within society, which was expressed in material culture.

My focus on fish remains in Iron Age sites generated an 'ethnography' and political history of fishing where none had existed previously. It established a cultural logic that explained the avoidance of fish eating in some societies, and its adoption and significance in others.

The approach combined with Kopytoff's frontier model revealed two key findings. First, the marginal category, *amalala*, originated at the Early and Late Iron Age interface. Secondly, the Zulu kingdom emerged from a dynastic shift in a complex of chiefdoms around the Babanango plateau, with the Zulu leadership usurping Khumalo authority.

An analysis of Nguni rainmaking, and of the record of interaction between hunter-gatherers and agriculturists, revealed no evidence that hunter-gatherers made rain for agriculturists until the late nineteenth century. This work marked their final tragedy, their loss of independent life as the colonial world closed in about them.



To my daughter and son, Isabella and Aidan,  
and to  
Justine,  
with love





## **Acknowledgements**

Various colleagues, institutions, fora, reviewers and editors contributed to each article. I am grateful to them all; each chapter contains specific acknowledgements. I am also grateful to the people who contributed to the altered forms in this thesis, who have shifted or advanced my understanding of the material since the original articles were published.

Here I offer thanks more generally.

From the beginning Tom Huffman inspired me and provided guidance. Other mentors and guides include Tim Maggs, Aron Mazel, Lyn Wadley, John Wright, Jeff Guy, Simon Hall, Carolyn Thorp, Juliet Armstrong and Frank Jolles.

The KwaZulu-Natal Museum and its staff backed me. I especially appreciate the support of Val Ward, Gavin Anderson, Joané Swart, Marlize Lombard, Bronwen van Doornum, Jeremy Hollmann, Penny Letley, Ganson Naidoo, Linda Ireland and Nkululeko Sibetha.

Ntombi Mkhize and Muzi Msimanga encouraged and enriched my understanding of Zulu culture, and continue to do so.

All of the Green family of the farm Van der Merwe's Kraal near Estcourt, most especially David and Dorothy, who welcomed me with love and supported me in the field. Graham McIntosh provided fine lunches and encouraged my work at Sewula Gorge.

Tongaat Hulett Sugar gave me access to sites at Umdloti.

Carl Grossman and his Rock Art Mapping Project team who spent time mapping sites. Alex Schoeman mapped Sewula Gorge for me.

Those at home for their support and tolerance of my absences and preoccupation. They are Isabella, Aidan, Justine Wintjes and Janice Whitelaw.

I received funding from the KwaZulu-Museum, the Human Sciences Research Council Centre for Science Development (award ref. 15/1/3/17/0042) and the National Research Foundation (grant no. 90995).

The CSIR provided me with radiocarbon dates. Iziko Museums of South Africa (Social History Collections), the Campbell Collections (University of KwaZulu-Natal), the Local History Museums (Durban), Claudio Velasquez Rojas and Homebrew Films, and the KwaZulu-Natal Museum permitted me to use either photographs from their collections, or photographs of objects in their collections.

No person or institution listed here necessarily supports the interpretations in this thesis.



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# 1

## Introduction

This study considers economy and cosmology in the Iron Age of KwaZulu-Natal. It combines the archaeological, ethnographic, historical and oral records of the region in ways that emphasize the 'history-making' capacity of Iron Age people.

'History-making' is a phrase borrowed from the German art historian Max Raphael, who David Lewis-Williams quotes in his book *The Mind in the Cave*. For Raphael, Marxist social theory was the means of gaining access to the history-making capacity of Upper Palaeolithic people (Lewis-Williams 2002: 53). I am convinced that the same is true for the southern African Iron Age. For this reason I use Jeff Guy's Marxist analysis of pre-capitalist agriculturists, outlined in a 1987 article and in subsequent publications. I also draw on the structuralist analyses of Adam Kuper (e.g. 1980, 1982), Tom Huffman (e.g. 1982, 2001), David Hammond-Tooke (e.g. 1975, 1981a) and Harriet Ngubane (1977).

Kuper adopts 'regional structural comparison' in his examination of southern Bantu marriage systems. He orders "a series of individual ethnographic studies and historical accounts, on the hypothesis that the systems they describe are variants of each other. The aim is to derive a model which will represent the shared basis of all the variants" (Kuper 1987: 8–9; also 1982). Similarly, Hammond-Tooke argues that the Nguni and Sotho pollution systems are variations on a theme, each related to the specifics of marriage and the nature of settlement (Hammond-Tooke 1981a: 22). This regional comparative approach "encourages the study of concomitant variation, structural transformation and historical change while imposing a sense of the context and meaning of cultural practices" (Kuper 1982: 4). The most obvious manifestation of this approach in archaeology is the Central Cattle Pattern, which is concerned with homestead layout and its relationship to the norms and rules that govern human behaviour (Huffman 1982, 2001). It too provides an interpretative context, in its case for the deeper past.

History is crucial to Kuper's project. He could not construct his model of shared principles without the variants that history-making generated, and a meaningful interpretative context would not exist for explaining the emergence of difference. His history is a history of the long term, a structural history rather than "the rush of political events" that do not necessarily alter "established social and cultural institutions" (Kuper 1987: 9). My focus is similarly not on the rise of kingdoms or state formation (Chapter Seven excepted). My

interest is rather simply on the ways in which people manipulated their social and economic resources. For this purpose, it is critical that the site of history-making in Iron Age society is located. Here I am convinced that Guy's Marxist analysis (1987), with its focus on relations within the homestead, provides the best way forward. For Guy, the dynamic principle that gave Iron Age societies life, the heartbeat of their history-making, was the struggle for the accumulation, creation and control of human productive and reproductive capacity.

Importantly, Guy's thesis engages neatly with Ngubane's (1977) structuralist analysis of Zulu sickness and healing, which reveals lines of fracture and tensions within the homestead. Together they provide a means of firmly integrating symbolism and belief with economy. In essence, the structuralist and Marxist paradigms intersect in the homestead phenomenon that was fundamental to Iron Age life. An interpretative approach inspired by these ideas seems specially suited to Iron Age archaeology, where the homestead is so often the unit of study. Consequently, my focus is on the expression of Guy's dynamic principle in cosmology and material culture.

For archaeological data I consider already published material, as well as some material from my own excavations. The study is in part a thesis by publication. Most chapters are developed from published essays. In this compilation, I have made some effort to remove repetition and to provide bridging text between each chapter, so that the thesis reads like a book with a single reference list. Some repetition nevertheless remains as its removal would destroy the integrity of individual chapters. This is especially true for the early chapters that set up the approach. Some comments on each chapter are necessary.

## **Notes on thesis chapters**

Chapter Two provides the background to the studies that follow, but with a special focus on the second millennium AD. A backdrop to this material is useful because I draw heavily on ethnographic and oral information associated with Nguni speakers throughout the thesis. The chapter is derived from several sources, mainly a chapter in the 2008 book *Zulu identities: being Zulu, past and present*, edited by Ben Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole, and to a lesser extent a 2005 *Journal of African History* article jointly written with Peter Mitchell. It is, however, rather different from those two essays.

Chapter Three comes from an article published in 2012 in the journal *African Studies*. The article was a response to a critique of Iron Age archaeology that appeared in several essays in 2010 in the same journal, as well as in the 2008 book *Five hundred years rediscovered* (Swanepoel et al. 2008). I modified the original to make it more appropriate here as a generalized position statement.

Chapter Four is essentially similar to an essay published in 2008 in *Southern African Humanities*, written jointly with Juliet Armstrong and Dieter Reusch. It examines the cosmological basis of beer-pot production and use in modern (twentieth and twenty-first century) Zululand. Like similar studies elsewhere (e.g. Braithwaite 1982; David et al. 1988;



Hall 1998), this study finds that Zulu pot decoration relates to the management of socially complex situations. To my mind the study provides an at least partial model for looking at archaeological ceramics, which I employ in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Five derives from a 2013 *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* article. It provides an interpretation of Early Iron Age marriage practice that goes to the detail beneath the exchange of cattle for women. This detail has implications for our understanding of the Early Iron Age–Late Iron Age transition in KwaZulu-Natal (discussed in Chapter Seven), interactions with hunter-gatherers (see Chapter Eight), and possibly other developments such as the origins of the Zimbabwe Culture. The chapter and corresponding article have had a long gestation as I have been thinking around this topic since 1992. It appears here with minor changes—improvements, of course—from the published version.

Chapter Six is an altered form of an article published in *Southern African Humanities* in 2009. The article was prompted by a visit to fish traps in the Kosi estuary system in 2009. I have been interested in Iron Age fishing since recovering fish bones from Early Iron Age sites in the Mgeni Valley (e.g. Whitelaw 1994a), and working on a furnace site in Chesterville Extension, Durban (Whitelaw 1991). My more recent (unpublished) excavations on a Blackburn phase site near Umdloti on the coast north of Durban yielded many more fish remains.

Chapter Seven is a slightly modified version of an essay that is currently in press to appear in a book edited by Nessa Leibhammer and Carolyn Hamilton. The title of the book, *Tribing and untribing the archive*, captures its intent: to challenge the manner in which the past comes to us through an archive of documents and artefacts organized in ways that render that past monolithic, unchanging and impregnable. As will become clear, much work has already been done on this topic, notably by historians Carolyn Hamilton and John Wright. Simon Hall and I co-authored the essay. We had independently wondered about a possible relationship between Early Iron Age agriculturists and the pre- and early colonial social categories, *amalala* and *Lala*. Simon's thinking on the issue was more developed. He provided the early writing, inserting the *lala* of both the Nguni and Sotho-Tswana worlds into a Kopytoffian framework. I provided additional details from the KwaZulu-Natal archaeological and oral records, and the sections on the *amantungwa* and *abanguni*. I also responded to comments on the chapter from colleagues, two anonymous referees and the editors, and edited the essay to unify our different writing styles. As with Chapter Four, I have retained the third-person pronoun here. I have also retained the footnote system that the book editors preferred for 'in-text' references and additional information. The full details of each reference appear in the reference list at the end of the thesis.

Chapter Eight is largely new, though it was prompted by and includes some material from an essay published in 2009 in the book *The Eland's People*, edited by Peter Mitchell and Ben Smith. My opinions on interactions between agriculturists and hunter-gatherers have changed somewhat since I wrote that piece. Here I have included a more detailed

discussion on interactions in the first millennium and on the archaeology of the Moor Park phase. The chapter forms a pair with Chapter Nine, which is also drawn from *The Eland's People*. It contains a detailed analysis of accounts of rainmaking recorded in the ethnography of Nguni speakers. I use these accounts to establish key social relations in agriculturist rainmaking. I believe that these relations can help us understand the topic of hunter-gatherers as agriculturist rainmakers.

The final chapter, Ten, provides a brief conclusion to the thesis.

# 2

## Background<sup>1</sup>

### Origins

The earliest agriculturists in southern Africa are represented by *Silver Leaves* ceramics, a facies of the **UREWE TRADITION**. By the mid-fifth century *Silver Leaves* had given rise to *Mzonzani*. The distribution of *Mzonzani* pottery indicates that by this time agriculturists had expanded into the coastal belt of what is now KwaZulu-Natal, reaching some 100 km south of Natal Bay (Fig. 2.1). On current evidence there is a strong correlation in KwaZulu-Natal between site location and iron-ore outcrops, suggesting that the discovery of ore reserves was an important motivating factor in the early expansion of farming settlement. Most *Mzonzani* sites lie within six kilometres of the shoreline, so this correlation does not extend to the more significant ore reserves further inland. It seems possible that arid conditions made the relatively dry interior unattractive (Whitelaw & Moon 1996): annual rainfall is higher on the coast, whatever the prevailing conditions.

Possibly, then, it was the onset of wetter conditions in the seventh century that allowed agriculturists to settle in bushveld environments further inland and push towards the southernmost limits of the summer rainfall region, near modern East London. The origin of this second phase of settlement differs from *Mzonzani*. Second-phase pottery, called *Msuluzi*, is a **KALUNDU TRADITION** style, indicating that the ancestors of these agriculturists entered southern Africa from the northwest. Evidence of interaction between people of the two traditions is preserved in the richly decorated style of *Msuluzi* ceramics, which includes *Mzonzani*-like motifs. The two styles are nevertheless largely distinct at a structural level: *Mzonzani* pots typically have a rim-shoulder layout, while the characteristic *Msuluzi* layout is rim-neck-shoulder (Whitelaw & Moon 1996). *Msuluzi* gave rise to *Ndondondwane* by the end of the eighth century, and *Ndondondwane* in turn became *Ntshokane* by the mid-tenth century (see Fig. 7.4). Similar changes are evident in the **KALUNDU** sequence in the Eastern Cape.

As a rule, **KALUNDU** sequence sites are situated on deep arable soil close to rivers or lakes, indicating that fields and gardens were established close to the settlements (Fig. 2.2). The surrounding bushveld offered year-round sweet grazing and wood for industrial and domestic use. Looking further afield, it is reasonable to assume that some agriculturists exploited the summer grazing potential of grasslands on the higher ground above the valleys, as people have done in more recent times (Maggs & Ward 1984). Sites commonly

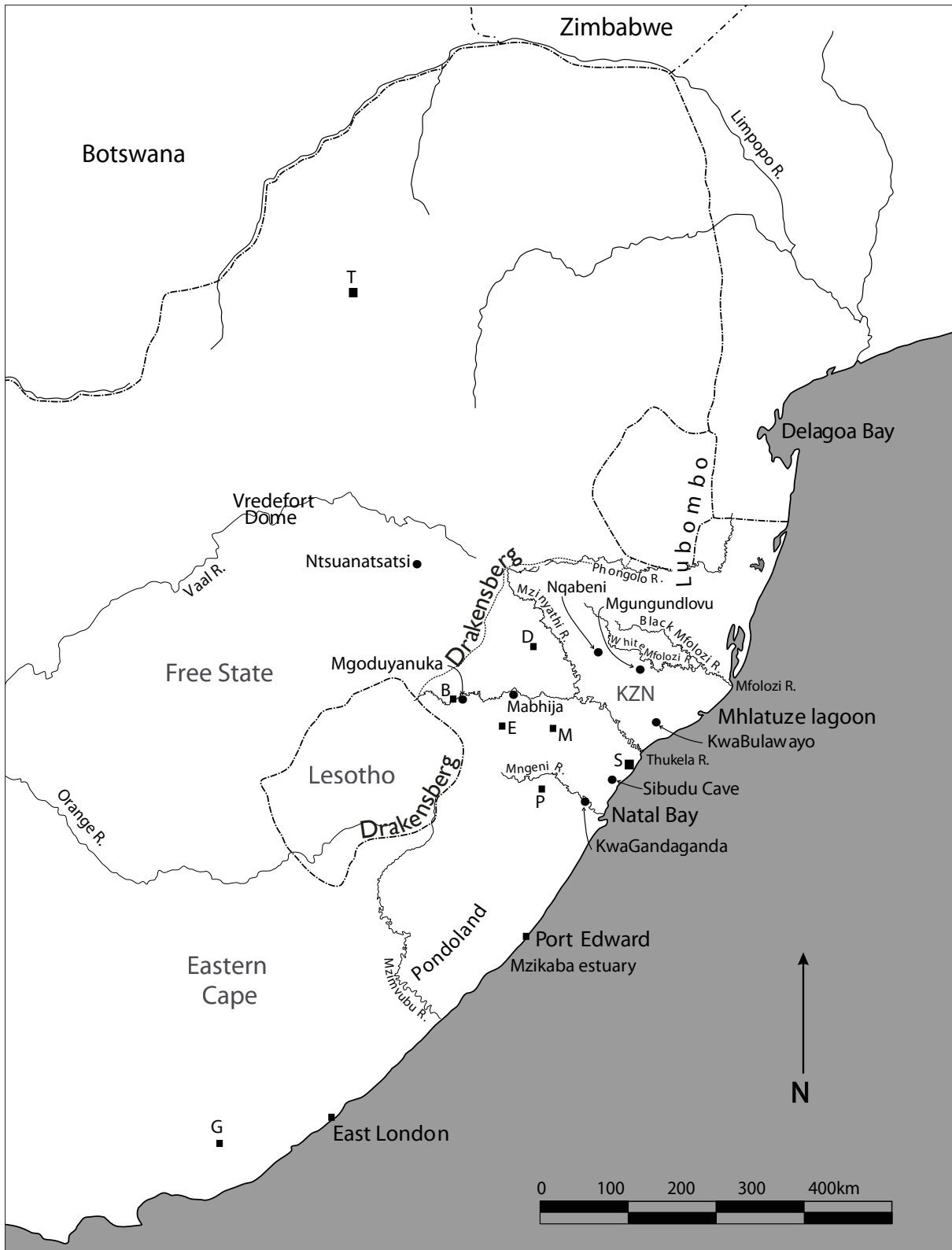


Fig. 2.1. Eastern southern Africa. T = Thabazimbi; KZN = KwaZulu-Natal; D = Dundee; B = Bergville; E = Estcourt; M = Muden; S = Stanger; P = Pietermaritzburg; G = Grahamstown.



Fig. 2.2. The Mngeni Valley, showing the characteristic riverside, bushveld location of **KALUNDU TRADITION** Early Iron Age sites. The darker green area in the bend of the river marks the site of KwaGandaganda, occupied between about AD 600 and 1050. The site is now flooded by Inanda Dam near Durban.

cover 7–10 ha, though site size is unlikely always to reflect settlement size. Some sites were occupied for long periods, while others were abandoned and reoccupied through the centuries. Consequently the various temporal layers must be teased apart to discern settlement size at any particular time. Nevertheless, at least some settlements were large: KwaGandaganda in the Mngeni valley near Durban was a little over 6 ha during the ninth and tenth centuries (Whitelaw 1994a).

The **KALUNDU** sequence in KwaZulu-Natal ended in the mid- to late eleventh century and was replaced by the *Blackburn* facies. A sharp stylistic disjunction exists between *Ntshokane* and *Blackburn*, which has long been taken to mark significant social changes at the start of the second millennium (Maggs 1980a: 11). In contrast to Maggs, who proposes *in situ* change, Wilson (1981) and Huffman (1989: 173–8, 2004) argue that the break in ceramic tradition is best explained by the arrival of Nguni speakers from East Africa.

Huffman draws on three lines of evidence. First, Nguni languages contain a locative suffix, *-ini* (as in eThekweni, Durban), that apparently originated in East Africa. Secondly, Huffman suggests that *ubab*, the Rwandan respect vocabulary, and *inblonipho*, the Nguni respect institution, have a common origin. He similarly suggests a common origin for Bugandan and Zulu pollution concepts; Chapter Five shows that this point—if correct—is significant. Thirdly, he draws on Hammond-Tooke's (2004) observation of cultural

similarities among Bantu speakers in East and southern Africa who possess the Iroquois kinship system and use variations of the word *-xala* for cross-cousins. These similarities led Hammond-Tooke to place Sotho origins in Tanzania and Nguni origins between Lakes Tanganyika and Victoria.

Such an origin suggests that ancestral Nguni speakers were party to developments that led later to the Interlacustrine kingdoms, where class distinction was defined in terms of pastoralism vs cultivation. The sharpness of this divide, even in embryonic form, perhaps throws light on the relatively extreme (in southern Africa) Nguni dichotomy of men-cattle vs women-crop cultivation (Huffman 2004). The dichotomy colours all aspects of Nguni life.

One other line of evidence suggests demographic processes for Nguni origins. In her linguistic study Ownby (1985: 75–80) identifies a substrate language in Nguni, which she calls Sala. Sala was apparently a sister language of an ancestral form of Shona. Ownby associates the spread of Nguni over Sala with the *Ntshekane–Blackburn* interface. Her hypothesis is of interest because of the independently established relationship between the **KALUNDU TRADITION** and the predominantly Shona Zimbabwe Culture (Huffman 1978, 2007a: 335).

From a strictly archaeological point of view, the question of Nguni origins would be best resolved with ceramic data. Huffman notes similarities between *Blackburn* and the **Kalambo branch** of the **UREWE TRADITION** in East Africa, but data of the quality of those that support the relationship between *Kwale* and *Silver Leaves* are not yet available.

Blackburn sites are known from the coastal belt north and south of Durban (e.g. Davies 1971; Robey 1980). Similar material occurs north of the Mhlatuze lagoon (Richards Bay) (KwaZulu-Natal Museum records). The *Blackburn* facies developed into *Moor Park*, which in KwaZulu-Natal has dates of 1300 to about 1650–1700 (Maggs 1976: 300). The distribution of *Moor Park* sites indicates that for the first time Iron Age agriculturists settled in the higher altitude grasslands. Sites are recorded near Estcourt, Bergville and Dundee (Davies 1974; Maggs 1984a; Whitelaw 2004; KwaZulu-Natal Museum records). Expansion into this new ecological zone opened the way to greater economic specialization and interdependence. The debris of iron production is absent from grassland sites, for example, though *Moor Park* and the unpublished Sewula Gorge yielded iron items, which show contact with iron-producing people elsewhere (Davies 1974: 322). *Moor Park* settlements were the first built in stone south of the Zimbabwe Culture area. Building in stone is an obvious response to a grassland environment, though this was not the only reason for the practice as the Zimbabwe Culture shows.

Further south, Umgazana Ware resembles NC2, which is *Moor Park* (excluding the NC2a/NC2D component, which includes *Mzonzani*) (Schofield 1938, 1948: 151–6; Maggs 1980b; cf. Derricourt 1977: 216). Umgazana Ware was originally known only from the Pondoland coast (Derricourt 1977), but Hall (1986) recovered sherds with *Moor Park*-like lip notching from north of Grahamstown. The sherds date to the fifteenth century. These

data extend the distribution of the *Moor Park* facies into the Eastern Cape. In the early 1900s, southern Nguni ceramics still retained *Moor Park* decorative features (cf. Davies 1974; Shaw & Van Warmelo 1974: 137, plate 20; Whitelaw 2004).

### The impact of climate

The *Moor Park* facies is contemporaneous with the Little Ice Age, during which temperatures around the world plunged and introduced the coolest period of the last 3000 years, with annual maximum temperatures up to 1°C lower than in the recent past (Holmgren et al. 1999; Tyson et al. 2000; Holmgren et al. 2001).<sup>2</sup> The impact on agriculturists was considerable. The stonewalled *Moor Park* sites in the grasslands are typically located on steep-sided hilltops (Figs 2.3, 7.6), unusual situations that Iron Age agriculturists elsewhere chose for defensive reasons (e.g. Denbow 1984: 31; Huffman 1990a: 117). These sites suggest a period of considerable social turmoil, most probably caused by a Little Ice Age-induced agricultural crisis. It was possibly this crisis that drove people to leave the lowlands and seek out new places in the upland grasslands. Dates from three excavated *Moor Park* sites place them firmly in the fourteenth century and associate them with the initial phase of the Little Ice Age (Table 2.1). A fourth site, iGujwana, yielded dates largely spanning the sixteenth century. iGujwana, therefore, suggests the possibility of pulses of trouble rather than continuous strife during the long *Moor Park* phase (Whitelaw 2004). These pulses perhaps related to alternating warming and cooling episodes.

Colder conditions in the 1300s were followed by a warming episode (Holmgren et al. 1999; Tyson et al. 2000). These climatic shifts evidently encouraged and made possible the expansion of agriculturists onto the southern highveld in the 1400s, and onward to north of the Vaal River (Huffman 2002: 14, 2007a: 444). In the northeast Free State they

TABLE 2.1

Radiocarbon dates from *Moor Park* sites. Calibration with the 1998 Pretoria program. Mid-point intercepts in brackets.

Site	Lab. number	Date b.p.	1- $\sigma$ calibration AD	Material	Reference
Moor Park	Pta-850	660 $\pm$ 50	1296 (1312, 1358, 1385) 1403	Charcoal	Davies 1974
	Pta-853	600 $\pm$ 50	1316–1352, 1390 (1406) 1421	Charcoal	
	Pta-849	750 $\pm$ 50	1270 (1285) 1298	Charcoal	
iGujwana	Pta-8101	390 $\pm$ 50	1462 (1509, 1598, 1616) 1637	Wood: hut-pole stub	Whitelaw 2004
	Pta-8335	360 $\pm$ 50	1487 (1525, 1560, 1630) 1646	Charcoal	
Sewula Gorge	Pta-8370	710 $\pm$ 50	1283 (1296) 1312, 1358–1385	Charcoal	Whitelaw 2004
	Pta-8372	660 $\pm$ 50	1296 (1312, 1358, 1385) 1403	Charcoal	
Ntomdadlana	Pta-8697	630 $\pm$ 50	1304 (1397) 1412	Bone	



Fig. 2.3. The Moor Park name site, southwest of Estcourt. Excavated by Oliver Davies in 1972 (Davies 1974). View north from above Terrace E. Photo: KwaZulu-Natal Museum, by Tim Maggs.

are archaeologically represented by Type N stonewalled sites and *Ntsuanatsatsi* pottery. Taylor (1979: 105–7) refers to similar but slighter younger sites on the northern edge of the Vredefort Dome as Group I. The northeast Free State is an area of relatively high agricultural quality on the southern highveld, which surely contributed to its early settlement (Maggs 1976: 18–20, 142–3). In time agriculturists spread west and southwest across the southern highveld. This expansion takes the archaeological form of Type V sites and *Makgwareng* pottery, which date from about the 1670s.

Almost all traditions of this area have the Fokeng as the earliest agriculturists, so it is probably their ancestors who built Type N sites. Sometime later, a Kwena group under Napo moved south across the Vaal and joined the Fokeng at Ntsuanatsatsi hill (Maggs 1976: 142, 308). Maggs (1976: 315) puts the origins of Type N-*Ntsuanatsatsi* in or a little south of the Bankenveld because of its resemblance to younger Sotho entities such as *Uitkomst* and *Klipriviersberg* (i.e. Taylor’s (1979) Group III). He also notes possible influences from east of the Drakensberg, especially identifying similarities between *Makgwareng* and *Moor Park* that include motifs also present in *Blackburn* (Maggs 1976: 299–301).

Huffman (2007a: 444) instead draws a direct relationship between *Ntsuanatsatsi* and *Blackburn*. This relationship, he argues, is archaeological support for Bryant’s (1929: 356–7) claim that the Fokeng were originally Nguni speakers from east of the Drakensberg. The hypothesis makes sense of the absence of a stylistic relationship between *Ntsuanatsatsi* and *Icon*, the earliest Sotho-Tswana facies in South Africa (Huffman 2002: 14; cf. Maggs 1976:



308). Huffman (2002) had earlier explained *Ntsuanatsatsi* distinctiveness by suggesting that the Fokeng had lived among and been influenced by Nguni speakers before settling in the northeast Free State. If instead originally Nguni, the Fokeng must have become Sotho under the influence of Kwena and other Western Sotho-Tswana people such as the Taung.

The antiquity of the association between Kwena and Fokeng is uncertain. From Kwena tradition, Ellenberger (1992: 68) estimates an arrival south of the Vaal around 1500. If correct, the subsequent spread of settlement north of the Vaal would have been undertaken by merged Fokeng-Kwena communities. But such an early date for the Kwena arrival is incompatible with the distribution history of Western Sotho-Tswana people from whom the Kwena emerged (cf. Huffman 2002). Kwena traditions may then backdate a later arrival (say, mid-1600s), presumably for political purposes (Huffman 2002, 2007a: 429, 436). Today in the Free State, Fokeng, Kwena and Tlokwa all claim links to Ntsuanatsatsi and celebrate it as an origin site (Maggs 1976: 142–3). This significance was probably reinforced by, or is perhaps primarily related to, Napo's split from his elder brother and chief, Mochuli, and his subsequent settlement at Ntsuanatsatsi, for Napo is reputedly the ancestor of all Kwena lineages south of the Vaal (Maggs 1976: 142). Such mismatch between the archaeological record and claims in traditions might well have its roots in political contestation between early settlers—of the Fokeng cluster in this case—and newcomers. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight return to this theme in other contexts.

According to Huffman (2004) recurring adverse climatic conditions prompted further movements of Nguni speakers to the north and northwest in the early 1600s, and then around 1700 when the Little Ice Age peaked. Current evidence suggests the movements emanated from both north and central KwaZulu-Natal; they comprised many small, uncoordinated groups. Wherever people settled they interacted in various ways with Sotho-Tswana, Venda and Khoisan people to form a range of new identities. Above all the Little Ice Age yielded a more complex cultural landscape. It is a landscape that is visible archaeologically, but it had a short lifespan. Colonization and the emergence of large-scale chiefdoms after 1750 flattened the terrain. These changes resulted from processes initiated by the penetration of Portuguese traders into the Indian Ocean after 1497.

### **Portuguese accounts**

The two earliest Portuguese accounts of interest to us, of the wrecks of the *São João* (1552) and *São Bento* (1554), concentrate heavily on the survivors' extreme hardships, which limits their value (but see Chapter Six). Both parties made their way north along the coast to Delagoa Bay, respectively from Port Edward and the Mzikaba estuary (Auret & Maggs 1982; Maggs 1984b).

The *Santo Alberto* (1593) account is more interesting. The ship ran aground on 24 March 1593 at the Portuguese landmark 'Rock of the Fountains', given as latitude 32°30'. This reading places the wreck site at Mazeppe Bay; the account records the local name for the area as 'Tizombe'. Bell-Cross (1988) instead puts it at Sunrise-on-Sea (32°55'), where

he identified shipwreck material of an appropriate date. The survivors were fortunate to have with them one Nuno Velho Pereira, who had been captain of *Sofala*. His experience in Africa and his knowledge of the 1552 and 1589 (*São Thomé*) survivors' accounts were critical. Instead of the coastal route, Pereira took the survivors inland on a north-northeast course. According to my interpretation of the account (Fig. 2.4),<sup>3</sup> the party reached the East Griqualand area, or possibly even southeastern Lesotho, where they saw “great and high mountains covered with snow” (Theal 1898, II: 314). From this point, the survivors turned east and east-northeast to come close to modern Pietermaritzburg. They then headed northeast to cross the Thukela River, probably in the vicinity of the Ndongondwane name site.<sup>4</sup> By this same course they reached the Lubombo mountains in June 1593. They travelled through the mountains “by a valley with a river flowing through it [probably the Phongolo], which they crossed many times [indicating a narrow valley]”, and reached an extensive plain on which they saw “many wild cattle, buffaloes, stags, hares, pigs, and elephants, which were grazing in large herds. These were the first animals of the kind which they had met in their long journey” (Theal 1898, II: 336, my insertions). The survivors eventually reached Delagoa Bay and most departed on a ship to Mozambique Island on 22 July 1593.

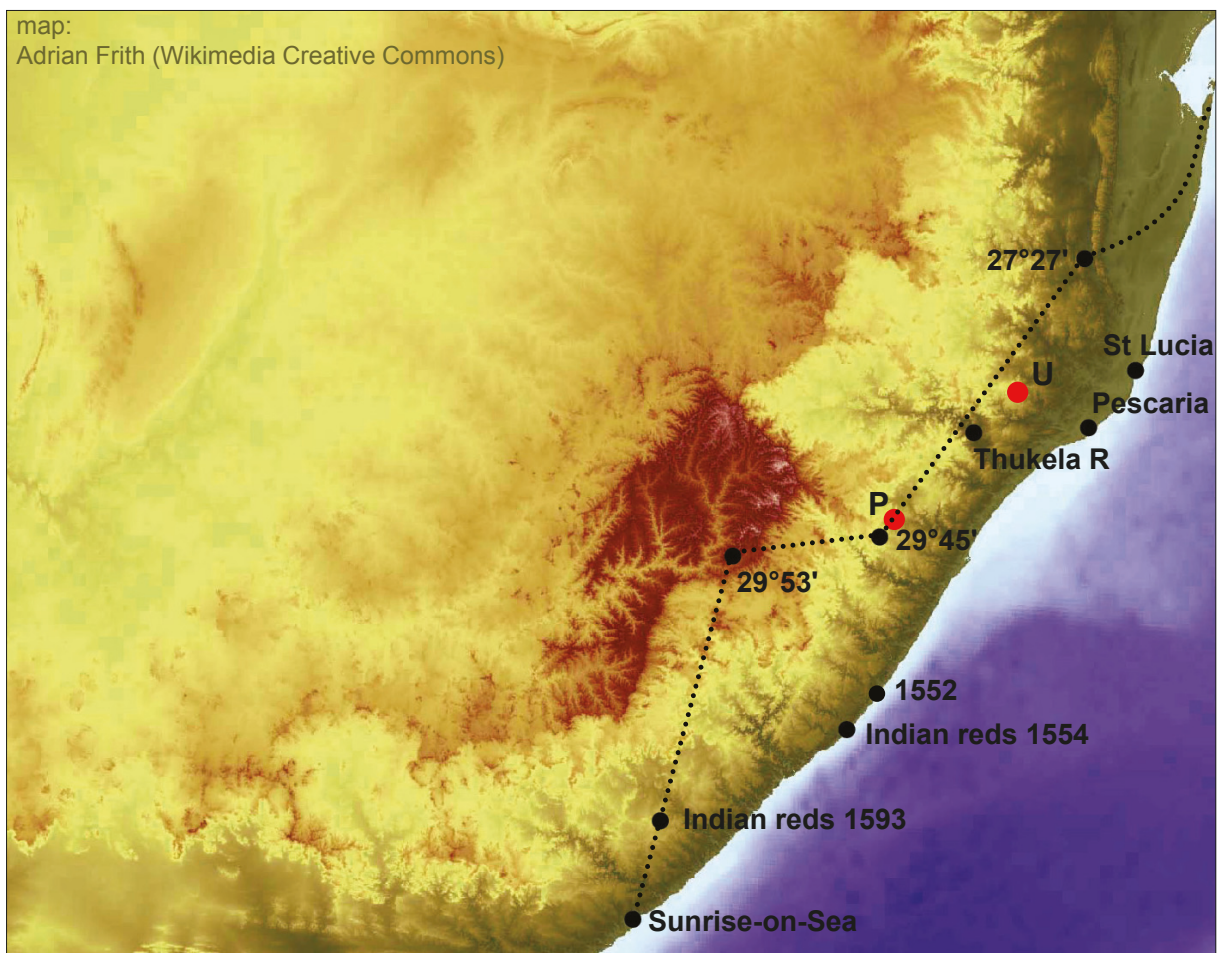


Fig. 2.4. Rough indication of the possible route taken by the *Santo Alberto* survivors, based on the account of their journey in Theal (1898, II). I have taken them into southeast Lesotho on this map. P = Pietermaritzburg; U = Ulundi. See Chapter Six for the coastal journeys of shipwreck survivors.

From the Portuguese accounts we learn that by the mid-sixteenth century people at Delagoa Bay were already “well adorned” with glass beads (Theal 1898, I: 269). Beads moved through exchange networks to reach more distant communities. At the *São Bento* wreck site, for instance, 630 km from Delagoa Bay, the survivors met about 100 men,

one of whom the rest seemed to make the most account ... and though there was no pomp or dignity about his person, being naked like the rest, yet he was distinguished from them by wearing a few beads red in colour, round, and about the same size as coriander seeds, which we rejoiced to see, ... for they are only made in the kingdom of Cambaya, and are brought by the hands of our people to this coast. (Theal 1898, I: 225)

This observation hints at the longevity of a Xhosa chiefly symbol—a necklace of red beads. Otherwise, according to Soga (1931: 31), Xhosa chiefs carry few symbols of royalty.

Nearly 40 years later, perhaps 140 km further to the southwest, the *Santo Alberto* survivors met people who wore

red beads in their ears .... Nuno Velho ... saw from their appearance that they came from the land of Inhaca, who is king of the people living by the river of Lourenço Marques. ... They are made in India ..., whence they are brought to Mozambique, and thence they reach these negroes through the Portuguese who exchange them for ivory. (Theal 1898, II: 303)

Now, it is possible that these beads were gathered on wreck sites, in the first case from that of the *São João* some 40 km to the northeast. But this possibility does not satisfactorily explain the value that people in 1593 in the Thukela valley, 400 km southwest of Delagoa Bay, placed in cloth, nor their access to copper and, probably, brass. Both are indicated in the observation that

for the same amount of copper,—of which they wear bracelets,—for which ... [people further south] gave three cows they would only give one, it not being so valuable among them, and they also value calico, which the others would not accept. It is therefore proper to trade with copper and iron for the purchase of provisions until reaching this place, and to keep calico for this place and the country beyond, for this is what they demanded in exchange for cows. (Theal 1898, II: 326)

It is unlikely that copper was produced locally, at least in any quantity, because there are no significant occurrences of ore or native copper in KwaZulu-Natal (see summary in Miller & Whitelaw 1994). It is far more likely that the copper (or brass?) bracelets were made from imported metal that, together with cloth, accompanied beads into the interior. Sandstone brass-melting crucibles associated with *Moor Park* pottery from the Muden area (Maggs & Miller 1995), and a cache of about 5000 Indian-made glass beads (dating 1450–1660) at Sibudu Cave (Wood et al. 2009) provide archaeological support for the documents.

The Portuguese accounts also include tantalizing and frustratingly rare comments on homesteads and social and political organization. On the plain east of the Lubombos, the *Santo Alberto* survivors noted a distinctive architecture with “huts like those in our vineyards, not round like those previously seen” (Theal 1898, II: 276, 339; partly my own

translation). Such a homestead previously seen, while still south of latitude 32°, they described as “consisting of a few houses around a kraal, in which there were about a hundred cows and a hundred and twenty very large sheep of the Ormuz breed. Here lived an old man with his sons and grandsons” (Theal 1898, II: 300). The description of homestead layout and of a relatively deep agnatic cluster rings true, though the kraaling together—if that is what is meant—of small and large stock does not. Such communities, the 1589 *São Thomé* survivors’ account notes, were “all ... in the possession of chiefs called Inkosis [correctly, *amakbosz*], who are the heads and governors of three, four, or five villages” (Theal 1898, II: 199, my insertion).

By contrast, the same account divides the region between latitude 32° and Delagoa Bay into three impossibly vast kingdoms. What seems a more realistic sense of chiefdom size comes from the *Santo Alberto* account, which mentions eight chiefs, lords or kings between the Pietermaritzburg area and the Thukela. This gives a very rough average of 14 km across for each polity (cf. Maggs 1989: 40).

The *São Thomé* distinction is not, in fact, based on observation by the survivors, who came ashore at 27°20' and then travelled north. All the survivors’ accounts commonly mix verbatim reporting with generalized information; in the *São Thomé* account the distinction presents the author’s perception of the political scene in southeastern southern Africa. Clearly faulty, the contrasted political scales nevertheless suggest that the Portuguese were aware of varying degrees of political centralization. There is perhaps a hint in the account of a link between larger polities and the ivory trade (Theal 1898, II: 199), though I am probably pushing the material too far here.

Even so, I think we should not ignore the impact of the early ivory trade on societies in the hinterland of Delagoa Bay. The trade began with Lourenço Marques’s visit to the bay in 1542 and remained at a low level for the next two centuries, with visits “about every two years” at the end of the 1500s. On each visit traders stayed several months, so they built huts on Portuguese Island at the edge of the bay (Theal 1898, II: 207, 343). ‘Low level’ is a relative assessment, however, both to the post-1750 trade volumes and in our modern eyes. Consider instead the remarkable speed with which imports spread deep into the KwaZulu-Natal interior and far south of Delagoa Bay in the sixteenth century. Still further inland, near modern Thabazimbi, people adopted maize cultivation in the seventeenth century (Huffman 2006). Clearly, beads, brass, iron and cloth were much desired commodities and people’s willingness to trade cattle for them meant that the *Santo Alberto* survivors reached Delagoa Bay with a herd of 19 beasts, despite regular slaughter *en route*. The ivory trade provided opportunities for people to gain access to these commodities and, in doing so, made more visible the competitive vein that influenced Iron Age life so profoundly (see Chapter Three). I digress slightly to reinforce this point.

In west, east and central Africa elephants are a potent origin symbol (see essays in Ross 1992), similar to origin pools in southern Africa. They are considered female in character, which reflects their matriarch-led herds. Tusks, seemingly analogous to reeds in origin pools, can stand for a ruler’s authority and virility. Elephants can also take on human

form, while humans can become elephants on death. The same kind of thinking exists among the Nguni. A Zulu folktale, for instance, contains a version of the elephant origin myth.

The elephant swallows two children of a woman, Nananaboseli, who had carelessly built her house in the road. Other animals direct her in her search for the elephant, and when she reaches him, he tries to deceive her by directing her elsewhere. She is, however, not deceived. The elephant swallows her, too, and she meets her children, and many others who have met a similar fate, in his stomach. Much to the astonishment of the other inmates of the elephant, who have not eaten anything since their arrival there, she begins to cut pieces off the liver of the beast and roasts and eats them. The other inmates follow her example, cutting off pieces of the beast to eat, and soon the elephant begins to feel ill. He says to the other beasts, 'From the time I swallowed the woman I have been ill; there has been a pain in my stomach,' and soon his groans rend the air. After a time the elephant dies and the woman cuts through a rib with her knife, thereby opening up the animal. A cow, a goat and all the people now come out, and give the woman many presents for their deliverance. (Krige 1962: 349; the full story is in Callaway 1866: 331ff.)

Elephants can also represent the authority and power of the Zulu king. His queen, like the Swazi queen mother, is called She Elephant. The Swazi king is Ngwenyama (Lion), but early on the main day of the big *incwala*, the annual Swazi ritual of kingship, he walks before his people wearing nothing but an ivory penis cover. The people praise him, "You of the Elephant" and "Elephant of the Ngwane [i.e. of the Swazi]" (Kuper 1973: 622). Amongst other things, the performance presents the king as the fount of the life force of the nation. This connection between elephants and royalty seems an elaboration of a more general relationship, because even the spirit of a deceased homestead head can appear as an elephant (Raum 1973: 435). Indeed, elephants are believed to so resemble people that young Zulus avoid eating the flesh, for young women fear that they will give birth to one (Krige 1962: 388).

Tusks moved upwards in hierarchical exchange systems that were genealogical in character (son>father>(chief)>ancestors) and in return came the means to produce and procreate (semen, rain, cattle) (Hunter 1936: 387; Bryant 1967: 686; Kuper 1982: 17). Now, with the ivory trade, there came opportunities for people to bypass their responsibilities to the chief and use ivory to acquire trade goods directly from the Portuguese. The trade goods could in turn be used to obtain cattle, then wives and followers. Short-circuiting the system thus usurps authority: status and power were potentially accessible by a means other than genealogy. An observation from another context reinforces this point: Casalis (1861: 155–6) notes that since people "have been able to obtain cattle by performing services for the colonists, the repressive power of the petty ... sovereigns has ... diminished". Similarly, in earlier times the ivory trade provided those who dared with a foundation on which to build a challenge to genealogy. Small wonder then that chiefs moved to protect themselves.

The *Santo Alberto* account offers a hint that they did so even this early. Somewhere in the vicinity of modern Pietermaritzburg the survivors met a 'king Gimbacucuba' who

claimed that his neighbour, one of Inhaca's captains, had taken his kingdom "in warfare, killing many of his people and obliging him to withdraw to this country, which belonged to one of his relations" (Theal 1898, II: 323). This area is so far from Delagoa Bay that the story might be dismissed as improbable (that is, if my interpretation of the journey is correct, and if the meeting with Gimbacucuba is correctly placed in the account). Perhaps the Portuguese suggested Inhaca as the perpetrator, but perhaps at least knowledge of him had spread well beyond the bay. After all, the appearance of trade beads in the interior surely demanded explanation.

### **Maize and conflict in the interior**

The adoption of maize was another major consequence of the trade. Maize yields more food per unit of land and labour than African grains, though it is easily ruined by drought (McCann 2001: 249). It was possibly the staple crop in high rainfall areas of KwaZulu-Natal from as early as the late 1600s. There is a marked increase in sites dating from this period in the interior grasslands, suggesting a population increase based on the more productive cereal (Maggs 1989). These sites belong to a third facies in the **Blackburn branch**, *Nqabeni*, which dates from about 1650–1700 to the early nineteenth century (Huffman 2004).

Several Nqabeni sites have been excavated, including Nqabeni itself on the Babanango plateau and Mgoduyanuka in the upper Thukela Basin (Hall & Maggs 1979; Maggs 1982a). Both are grassland areas (Fig. 2.5). Nqabeni is a Type B site, comprising several stonewalled



Fig. 2.5. View of Nqabeni from the east. The stone walls are visible on the slope in the middle distance.  
Photo: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.



Fig. 2.6. Nqabeni from the north. Photo: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.

primary enclosures connected by walling to form a large central secondary enclosure (Fig. 2.6). Huts would probably have been uphill of the enclosures. Type B homesteads seem to have been restricted to a Khumalo and, possibly, a Mabaso chiefdom (Hall & Mack 1983).

Zizi communities lived in the upper Thukela Basin. The sites there consist of one or more primary enclosures surrounded by huts and stone grain-basket platforms. Features of the residential area are generally poorly preserved, but rock engravings of settlement patterns complement and add to archaeological data. Where more than one enclosure exists, they are aligned side-by-side along the slope contour (Maggs 1982a, 1988). Huffman (2007a: 41) calls this pattern the Thukela Type (Fig. 2.6). While enclosure walls are usually of stone, of special archaeological interest is that many are constructed of stone-faced earth walls, a technique unknown elsewhere in South Africa. Middens on Types B and Thukela contain maize and faunal assemblages dominated by cattle and caprines (probably sheep).

As with the Moor Park sites, iron at Mgoduyanuka and Nqabeni must have come from bush- or thornveld areas. Excavation at Mabhija in the Thukela Basin thornveld revealed several smelting furnaces once fired by men of a Dlamini community. The area is agriculturally poor and, not surprisingly, oral traditions include stories of the exchange of hoes and spear blades for sorghum, sheep and cattle. Zizi people on the grasslands were an obvious market, while Sotho traditions indicate exchange across the Drakensberg (Maggs 1982b).

Life below the Drakensberg was rudely disrupted in about 1810, when the Ndwandwe attacked Matiwane kaMasumpa's Ngwane at the source of the White Mfolozi and seized

Ngwane cattle. In controlled flight Matiwane led his people into the upper Thukela Basin, shattering Zizi authority and establishing his own (Wright & Mazel 2007: 76–7). To understand this event, we must look to the intensification of a process initiated two centuries earlier, as chiefs competing for tradewealth in the hinterland of Delagoa Bay sought to consolidate and extend their spheres of influence. Control and maintenance of chiefdoms required the distribution of largesse, which was obtained more and more by raiding. In response, some chiefs formed loose defensive aggregations. Others abandoned their home territories to carve out chiefdoms elsewhere. Raiding for cattle escalated towards the end of the 1700s to supply a demand from American and British whalers (Wright & Hamilton 1989: 65), an activity that must have crippled the targeted communities. Key aggressors in this period included the Maputo, Tembe and Ndwandwe chiefdoms, with the Ndwandwe providing an especially destabilizing influence (Wright 2008, 2010a).

Rivalry between the Ndwandwe and Mthethwa, respectively led by Zwide kaLanga and Dingiswayo kaJobe, dominated the region north of the Thukela in the 1810s. The Mthethwa chiefdom collapsed after Dingiswayo's defeat and death in the late 1810s, though its Zulu ally under Shaka kaSenzangakhona evaded destruction. Shaka survived initial Ndwandwe attacks, all the while employing a mixture of rough diplomacy and military action to draw neighbouring chiefdoms into a Zulu-dominated alliance. So bolstered, the Zulu finally repulsed the Ndwandwe forces in about 1819. Zwide's control of his subjects faltered, and some subordinate allies such as Mzilikazi's Khumalo struck out independently. Zwide led what remained north across the Phongolo, where he rebuilt his power (Wright 2008: 230–2, 2010a: 225–6). His departure left the expanding Zulu chiefdom as the dominant power between the Phongolo and Thukela rivers.

Climatic factors probably contributed to these events. Analysis of a disc taken from a yellowwood tree felled in 1916 in the Karkloof near Pietermaritzburg (Hall 1976) reveals five very narrow consecutive tree rings between 1817 and 1823, give or take 2–3 years, perhaps indicating extreme drought (Vogel et al. 2001: 166; Fig. 8.1). Garstang and colleagues go further, arguing that the eruptions of an unknown volcano in 1809 and Tambora in 1815

created devastating drought and cold conditions in southeastern southern Africa for much of the second decade of the 19th century. These conditions initiated by the 1809 event, became extreme after 1815 and likely extended over much of the summertime rainfall region of southeastern and central southern Africa, reducing rainfall and the growing seasons to less than half of the mean annual values. (Garstang et al. 2014: 5)

Many years later people still told stories of the devastating famine of Madlantule (one who eats and remains hungry) in the early 1800s.<sup>5</sup> Such extreme conditions must have intensified the ripples of political tension that spread out from Delagoa Bay. Not only did the centuries-long ivory trade bind polities economically to the bay in ways that could no longer be easily broken, but the wide geographic extent and longevity of the climatic downturn meant that no escape through movement was possible. A commitment to drought-sensitive maize surely made a difference too (Huffman 2004: 106), especially for communities further inland; the



coastal margin is less susceptible to extreme climatic disruption (Garstang et al. 2014). Conflict followed.

The rest of this chapter outlines the rise and fall of the Zulu kingdom, which provides a well-researched example of the large polities that emerged from an Iron Age ancestry in southern Africa around the beginning of the nineteenth century. Also, the summary shows how local and international forces closed in on these polities, restricting their territories and independence, and finally eradicating them.

## **The Zulu kingdom and Natal**

About five years after the Ndwandwe defeat, in 1824, a small group of traders led by Englishmen Francis Farewell established a settlement at Natal Bay. Because they hoped to benefit from the trade that was till then funnelled through Delagoa Bay, they travelled north to meet Shaka at his capital, the *ikbanda* Gibixhegu, about 27 km east of modern Empangeni. It is mainly through their reports that the Zulu kingdom entered the written historical record.

Gibixhegu was situated on a high ridge above the Mhlatuze valley, but on an easterly slope with a view towards the Mhlatuze lagoon (Whitelaw 1994b). This location was in the centre of Qwabe territory, which had fallen to Zulu rule in the run-up to Shaka's 1819 victory over the Ndwandwe. Gibixhegu seems to have been named after an earlier Shakan capital in eMakhosini, the Zulu heartland (Hamilton 1985: 350). Nathaniel Isaacs (1970), who initially recorded the name as 'Gibbe-Clackee' (Gibixhegu), notes it as 'Umboolalio' (kwaBulawayo) on 15 July 1826. Wylie (2006: 228) suggests that Gibixhegu 2 and kwaBulawayo were different places, though this is not evident from Isaacs's diary.<sup>6</sup> Wylie may be correct on this point, because *amakbanda* commonly took the names of the regiments they housed (though some regiments were distributed across several *amakbanda*) (Koopman 2002: 90–1). On the other hand, the name kwaBulawayo might reflect a redistribution of regiments.

Wylie (2006: 230) further argues that the shift south from eMakhosini in about 1820 was primarily "a defensive bunching" of Zulu forces in response to the persisting Ndwandwe threat on the northern borders of the chiefdom (also see Wright 1989: 282). This is unlikely: Shaka did not abandon his newly won territory south of the Phongolo, but maintained control through strategically located *amakbanda* (Wright 2008: 232). Shaka's move south rather indicates that he felt secure enough to turn his personal attention away from his northern border, and direct it to stamping out the remaining, and significant, Qwabe resistance to Zulu authority. In addition, the territories south of the Thukela contained resources that would facilitate his expansion of Zulu hegemony (Hamilton 1985: 355–7; Wright 1989: 282–4).

Another southward shift of the capital late in 1826 to kwaDukuza near modern Stanger adds weight to the expansionist, rather than the defensive, argument. In this case, Shaka was probably additionally motivated by a desire to exert greater control over the settlers at Port Natal. He seems to have made the move shortly after he attacked and won a decisive victory over the Ndwandwe, in the izinDololwane hills north of the upper Phongolo (Wright 1989: 343, 2008: 233). Wylie offers a rather trivializing account of this campaign (2006: 376–83). For

the Ndwandwe it was more significant. Their chiefdom disintegrated and many of its subjects shifted their allegiance to Shaka. Some Ndwandwe elite nevertheless lived on to become influential in the Swazi and Gaza kingdoms (Wright 2008, 2010a: 231).

As is well-known, Shaka was assassinated in 1828 at kwaDukuza. The kingship passed to his brother and one of his killers, Dingane. Dingane moved the Zulu capital again, back to eMakhosini where he established the enormous *ikhanda* uMgungundlovu (Parkington & Cronin 1979), three times as big as Shaka's kwaBulawayo (Whitelaw 1994b). Dingane dominated political developments in the region till 1838; from uMgungundlovu he could reach out in all directions. He mounted numerous military ventures, including raids on Swazi territory, Port Natal and on Delagoa Bay, where he had the governor killed and replaced with a more pliant individual (Colenbrander 1989).

The influx of the Voortrekkers over the Drakensberg finally tipped the balance of power away from the kingdom. Dingane initially dominated the Trekkers, with his 1838 killing of the Retief party and devastating though only partially successful attacks on Trekker camps and Port Natal settlers. By late in the year, however, the Trekkers had regrouped under Andries Pretorius and on 16 December they inflicted a damaging defeat on Zulu forces at Ncome river (which the Trekkers and their descendants thereafter called Bloedrivier). In the peace that briefly followed, the Trekkers claimed the region south of the kingdom between the Thukela and Mzimvubu rivers, declared it the Republiek Natalia in 1839 and established a Volksraad in Pietermaritzburg (Ballard 1989; Colenbrander 1989).

Mpande, one of Dingane's two surviving brothers, fled south from the kingdom in September 1839, but returned with his own army alongside a Boer<sup>7</sup> commando in January 1840 to defeat Dingane's forces at Maqongqo. The cost of (the limited) Boer support was high: they claimed nearly 40 000 head of Zulu cattle, declared the Black Mfolozi the southern boundary of the Zulu kingdom and demanded that Mpande recognize Boer authority. In the end, they were too thin on the ground to exert any control over Mpande or properly claim the additional territory. Indeed, they were unable to administer even Republiek Natalia effectively. Britain annexed the Republiek in 1844 and again redrew the map, making the Thukela and Mzinyathi rivers the southern boundary of the Zulu kingdom. Originally run from the Cape, the annexed territory became the Colony of Natal in 1856 (Ballard 1989; Colenbrander 1989).

Clearly Mpande thought little of British cartography, because in 1847 he allowed Boers to establish a 'republic' under his authority between the Thukela and Mzinyathi rivers—the so-called Klip River rebellion. British disapproval forced him to drop the arrangement before the year-end. Mpande also initiated numerous military ventures intended to retain and increase his regional influence, against chiefdoms to the northwest (notably that of Langalibalele's Hlubi in 1848), the Tsonga, and especially (following Dingane) into Swazi territory. Again, British disapproval influenced Mpande and he eventually ceased his expansionist efforts (Colenbrander 1989; Guy 1994).

Meanwhile in Natal, in February 1846, Theophilus Shepstone took up the post of Diplomatic Agent to the Native Tribes of Natal. Natal then contained a population of a hundred thousand Africans, several thousand Boers and a few hundred British settlers. In

response to this threatening (from a colonial point of view) imbalance Shepstone implemented a “grand experiment in native administration” (Guy 2013: 4). By the close of 1848 his Locations Commission had established eight vaguely bounded ‘locations’, which sheltered about half the Africans in Natal under the authority of chiefs, either hereditary or appointed. The chiefs deferred to white magistrates, and the entire system was under the direct control of Shepstone. The remaining land in Natal, by far the greater proportion, was reserved for white settlement. On this land, Crown and private, most of the remaining Africans lived as labourers, tenants or squatters (Guy 2013: 113).

Colonial settlement and infrastructure expanded in Natal over the next few decades. Many Boers left in 1848, trekking again into the interior, but new settlers arrived, primarily from Britain. While there was adequate land available, the settlers faced a labour crisis. Many Africans in locations and on Crown and private land chose to work for themselves rather than enter the labour market. So, despite the import of labour from India and southern Mozambique, settlers looked with growing anger at the locations and at land owners that allowed Africans a degree of economic independence and competitiveness. But Shepstone (and Britain) resisted settler appeals to drive Africans more actively into the colonial labour force. Instead Shepstone sought more territory to accommodate the Natal Africans, recognizing that their growing numbers continued to threaten settler rule. He looked to Pondoland, to Basutoland, and then to the territory of the Zulu king (Ballard 1989; Etherington 1989; Guy 2013: 506–7).

Mpande died in 1872 and was succeeded by his son Cetshwayo. The succession was troubled, for Mpande favoured two other sons, Mbuyazi and then Mthonga. During Cetshwayo’s reign, the Zulu kingdom became increasingly subject to pressure from land-hungry settlers in the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek. Zulu independence initially served imperial interests, but these shifted after the colonial discovery of diamonds in the northern Cape Colony in 1867 and gold in the lowveld in 1873. An independent Zulu kingdom no longer fit in. Imperial interests would now be better served by a southern African confederation of white-dominated states. Accordingly, British and colonial forces invaded the kingdom in January 1879. The war ended with a Zulu defeat six months later (Colenbrander 1989; Guy 1994).

The Wolseley settlement that followed the war sent Cetshwayo into exile and broke up his kingdom into 13 poorly conceived chiefdoms. The result was inevitable. Three of the appointed chiefs—John Dunn, Hamu kaNzibe and Zibhebhu kaMaphitha—were more fully engaged with the colonial world than the others and moved quickly and aggressively to assert their authority. Their efforts set them, Zibhebhu and Hamu in particular, against the royalist Usuthu leadership, which was still largely intact. Then late in 1882, Britain reorganized Zululand again, creating three territories: the Zulu Native Reserve in the south consisting primarily of Dunn’s chiefdom, a territory for Zibhebhu in the north, and sandwiched between them, a territory for the rule of Cetshwayo, who was returned from exile in January 1883. War soon flared and in mid-1883 Zibhebhu achieved what the British forces had failed to do: his army burnt Usuthu territory, eradicated its leadership and drove a wounded Cetshwayo into hiding in the Nkandla forest. In February 1884 Cetshwayo died under British protection in Eshowe (Guy 1994).

Desperate, a new and younger Usuthu leadership entered into an alliance with Boers from the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek. Jointly they defeated Zibhebhu, but at huge cost to the Zulus. Their Boer allies and various assorted colonial opportunists declared the Nieuwe Republiek, incorporating nearly three million acres of what had once been the Zulu kingdom. The remainder became 'British Zululand' in 1887, ruled by the Governor of Natal. The Governor promptly restored Zibhebhu. Following another battle with Zibhebhu's forces in 1888, Usuthu leaders, including Cetshwayo's son and successor Dinizulu, were captured, found guilty of treason and exiled to St Helena. From then on Zulu men entered the colonial labour market in increasing numbers, on the Reef and elsewhere. The Zulu kingdom had been crushed. Zululand became part of the Natal Colony in 1897 and open for white settlement (Guy 1994).

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There is considerable diversity in this long Iron Age sequence. A major division lies at the long-recognized break in material-cultural patterning between *Ntshokane* and *Blackburn*. Within the first millennium there is a lesser distinction between *Mzonjani* and the following *Msuluzi* sequence. From 1300, building in stone and the spread of agriculturists beyond the preferred bushveld make it easier for us to identify diversity in the archaeological record. Apart from now more-evident exchange across ecotones, we see the growth of large chiefdoms and ultimately of a state with incipient class distinction, as well as the imposition of missionaries, colonization and capitalism. The next chapter outlines my interpretative approach to this sequence.

## Acknowledgements

Tom Huffman, John Wright and Carolyn Thorp made useful comments on this chapter. A National Research Foundation grant (No. 90995) funded the preparation of Figure 2.1 by Wendy Voorvelt. The chapter does not necessarily represent their views.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Mitchell and Whitelaw (2005) and Whitelaw (2008).

<sup>2</sup> Holmgren et al. (2003: 2323) date the Little Ice Age from 1500 to 1800. But see Huffman 2008: 2046) for an earlier start in the 1300s, as proposed by Holmgren et al. (1999) and Tyson et al. (2000).

<sup>3</sup> Other interpretations of the records exist. See, for example, Vernon 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Till recently still a well-known ford, but now spanned by a bridge.

<sup>5</sup> Bryant (1929: 63, 88) refers to the famine of Madlathule (one who eats and remains silent), which he puts in either c. 1802 or 1807. Doke et al. (1990: 474) give the name Madlantule (one who eats and remains hungry) to a famine "in the days of Dingiswayo". James Stuart recorded both names in 1909 (Webb & Wright 1976: 342). I suspect the two names refer to the same famine. Madlantule makes more sense as a name, but both might describe desperate hunger.

<sup>6</sup> Nor from the testimony of James Stuart's informant, Mayinga kaMbekuzana (Webb & Wright 1979: 253).

<sup>7</sup> I use the term Boer for settled communities, Voortrekker or Trekker for people on the move.

# 3

## **Anthropology and history in the southern African Iron Age<sup>1</sup>**

A recently published volume of *African Studies* (69 (2), 2010) and the book *Five hundred years rediscovered* (Swanepoel et al. 2008) reveal a refocused interest on the past 500 years by scholars of the southern African past. The publications emerged from conferences of the Five Hundred Year Initiative (FYI), a project that aims to stimulate and provide a forum for interdisciplinary approaches to the past. The *African Studies* volume is dominated by papers relating to the terraced slopes of Bokoni, in the Ohrigstad-Carolina area of Mpumalanga, but *Five hundred years rediscovered* covers wider research interests. Both volumes contain papers that review the history of archaeological and historical research in South Africa, as well as the history of ‘conversations’ between scholars of the two disciplines (Bonner et al. 2008; Delius & Schoeman 2010a, b; Wright 2010b). The reviews are critical of Iron Age archaeologists for adopting an anthropological rather than a historical approach in interpretation. Because I am interested in anthropological models, I consider and respond to the critique here.

An anthropological approach, the FYI reviewers say, generates a past that is anti-historical and populated by essentialist identities. Further, those of us who adopt an anthropological approach apparently have a tendency to ‘trawl through’ and ‘loot’ oral histories and ethnographic texts for whatever suits our purpose, rather than ‘unpacking’ them critically. Unhappy with the interpretations so generated, historians who had earlier engaged in conversations with archaeologists withdrew to create their own more nuanced, more fluid, more critical understandings of the past. Similarly, the anthropological approach contributed to a growing gulf between South African archaeologists and more historically inclined scholars in East and Central Africa. Critical thinking, it seems, is virtually synonymous with thinking historically.

In contrast to this polemic, the historian Etherington (2010: 368, my insertions) argues that

the main obstacle to reconnecting [historians] with precolonial archaeology has been the unwarranted assumption of newness in the states that dominated South-East Africa about the turn of the nineteenth century—an assumption grounded in the now discredited short [Iron Age] chronology but whose skeletal grip still maintains its hold on mainstream historical writing.

The short chronology was demolished in 1973 (Mason et al. 1973), though the news probably filtered through to historians only later in the decade, primarily via Tim Maggs's 1977 article in the *Journal of African History* (Etherington 2010: 364–5). By then, according to Etherington, the 'kingdom historians'—those working on late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century kingdoms—had already invested considerable academic capital in the short Iron Age chronology. They never reconsidered their work in the light of the long chronology and instead turned their attention to the twentieth century (Bonner et al. 2008: 5; Etherington 2010: 364, 367–8).

As if to confirm Etherington's point, in 2010 Wright still retained a distinction between the politically centralized, more socially stratified states of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and 'pre-state chiefdoms' (Wright 2010b: 230). In his view, pre-state chiefdoms were fluid, politically uncentralized entities, held together for historical moments by a lightly felt managerial and ritual authority (Wright 1989: 23, 1995: 165, 2010b: 231–2; Wright & Hamilton 1989: 58) (I return to this issue at points during the discussion that follows). Further illustrating the extent to which the idea of the distinctiveness of the 'kingdom period' is embedded in the thought of historians, a conference call in February 2015 from the Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative at the University of Cape Town advocated the subversion of "persistent habits of treating the past before colonialism as another country, and the advent of colonialism as the history of the region's starting point with only a passing nod to, or introductory paragraph on, what went before". Ironically, archaeologists and anthropologists have been subverting this position for decades now in drawing on historical and ethnographic accounts for interpretative models. The success of this approach in elucidating the nature of agriculturist societies of the first and early second millennia directly counters any thought of a "momentous world-historical transition" (Kuper 1997: 72) that in spawning a new kind of polity around 1800 marked the beginning of southern African history.

Etherington, of course, is pushing his own research agenda (e.g. Etherington 2004). The same is true for the FYI reviewers. My feeling is that their emphasis on the history vs anthropology dichotomy is somewhat contrived. It altogether too easily invokes what seems to have been a long-term and sometimes hostile frontier between the two disciplines (e.g. Wright 1986a; James 1997; Kuper 1997), and has all the unfortunate hallmarks of academics muscling for territory. Even so, some scholars do not like some of the interpretations found in Iron Age archaeology. There seem to be two major concerns. First, scholars are concerned about the categories or 'cultural units' that feature prominently in Iron Age archaeology. Secondly, scholars are concerned about the "structuralist and in some respects anti-historical" approach that has dominated Iron Age archaeology since 1980 (Wright 2010b: 231; also Bonner et al. 2008: 10–11). Iron Age archaeology is not alone in this critique. Yates et al. (1994: 29), for instance, express a similar concern about interpretations of rock art that focus on meaning at the (unintended) expense of history. With rock art, there is the difficulty of chronology, but that is not a difficulty that Iron

Age archaeology shares. So, let us look at the FYI concerns more closely. Wright expresses them thus (2010b: 231):

In its focus on defining cultural units, it is an archaeology that proceeds by highlighting cultural boundaries between groupings whose internal cohesion it takes for granted. It underplays their internal political and social dynamics, and thus finds it difficult to explain historical change except in generalised social evolutionist terms.

Wright's concern is worthy: we obviously should not accept or want to produce the kind of past that he outlines here. But I think it is partly rooted in misunderstanding so I try to offer some clarity in what follows. I am concerned especially with structuralist approaches and archaeological entities.

### **Archaeological entities and groups of people**

Translating material culture into people is not straightforward, but somehow archaeologists must make the shift from material culture to people, from archaeological sequence to history (e.g. Yates et al. 1994: 30). It is indisputable that people used and still use material culture to express identity, but there are questions around how material-cultural style should be characterized and the kind of identity it expresses. For purposes of identity, Iron Age archaeologists commonly (but not only) classify pots into types based on the dimensions of decoration, decoration position and pot profile. Each type expresses a relationship between three variables, one from each dimension, with an interrelated cluster of types forming a style unit. Tests show that this procedure is better than other classifications at separating pots of different origins into their correct groups (Huffman 1980). Classifications based on decoration technique, for example, produce mixed groups. Because it works with pots of known origins, we feel comfortable applying multidimensional analysis to archaeological assemblages. Importantly, identity rests in multidimensional combinations and in complex variables; simple variables occur too widely to define identity (Huffman 1980: 167). This means that archaeologists must reconstruct vessels so that they can see as complete a combination of variables as possible.

In a large-scale classification exercise, Evers (1988) found large areas of uniform ceramic style bounded by narrow zones where style changed. In other words, each style area or 'facies' has a discrete geographical distribution (cf. Hodder 1982: 22). Clearly, agreement about style choices and their symbolic dimensions is achieved partly through speech. It follows that, as long as makers and users of pots were the same, each facies most likely represents an area in which people once spoke the same language. Evers further reasoned that changes in non-verbal (stylistic) expressions of identity at facies' boundaries were probably accompanied by differences in verbal (linguistic) expressions of identity (Evers 1988: 58, 102). This was probably especially true where facies differed in style structure rather than in the details of variable choices. *Mzonjani* and *Msuluzi* provide one example of different structures (Evers 1988: 109–11, 132; Whitelaw & Moon 1996; see Fig. 7.4).

It is nevertheless possible that people making different facies were linguistically similar, because pot decoration is (and was) a selection drawn from a larger pool of motifs—a design field—that might extend across a ceramic-style boundary (Evers 1988: 32–4, 58, 131). In the case of the **Moloko** cluster, the ceramic facies *Letsibogo*, *Madikwe* and *Olifantspoort* emerged from *Icon* in a process of regional differentiation (Huffman 2002, cf. 1980: 172). The design fields of the three daughter facies probably overlapped significantly. Similarly, the makers of the daughter facies must have shared a language (Tswana, broadly speaking), though the facies might have corresponded to dialectical variation.

Clearly, ceramic style is not socially neutral, any more than language is socially neutral. Nor do ceramic facies represent “stable cultural behaviour”, as Esterhuysen (2008: 197) supposes. Style and behaviour are different things. Hodder (1982: 22–36), for instance, found social ‘fluidity’ even at the sharpest style boundaries, with cross-border interaction and alliances, and switches in identity as people explored new options. Like language, ceramic style is generated within a sphere of meaning (cf. Hodder 1982; Evers 1988: chapter 1, 136–9). It is and always was the ‘social object’ Esterhuysen seeks.

Indeed, contact between people of different facies did not inevitably blur facies boundaries because style structure was socially meaningful. For the same reason, contact led to emulation in some social contexts, and a blending of styles in others (Evers 1988: 57–8; Huffman 2007a: 318–19; cf. Hodder 1982). The best-known example of blending generated the *Tavhatshena* and then *Letaba* styles from *Icon* and *Khami* pottery. *Tavhatshena* and *Letaba* mark the emergence of the Venda language from Sotho-Tswana and Western Shona (Loubser 1991: 381–99). Ceramic (and perhaps linguistic) mergers were not restricted to the last 500 years, but occurred from the beginning of the Iron Age (e.g. Huffman 1982: 135–6, 2007a: 318; Burrett 2007).

The *Letaba* distribution shows that a facies can extend beyond the main extent of its associated language. The Venda state in this case exerted a heavy influence on Ndebele communities in the Mokopane-Polokwane area, where sites contain both *Letaba* and **Moloko** pots (Loubser 1994). Their presence seemingly challenges the relationship of style to language, except that assemblages include *Letaba* pots with **Moloko** decorative influences. These types do not occur on Venda sites. On current evidence they distinguish a Northern Ndebele ceramic identity that matches the distribution of Loubser’s Group II and Group III sites. Further, the particular mix of **Moloko** and *Letaba* ceramics on these sites reflects the origins and connections that headmen and chiefs emphasized (cf. Esterhuysen 2008): **Moloko** pots dominate at the sites of minor headmen with links to the Sotho-Tswana south, whereas *Letaba* pots dominate at the sites of more senior leaders with links to the Venda and northeastern lowveld. Northern Ndebele assemblages thus contain something of status differences, of the various Ndebele histories, and of identities drawn at least partly from those histories (Loubser 1994: 66–73, 140).<sup>2</sup>

To the southeast, the Ndzundza Ndebele of the Steelpoort valley made pots in the **Moloko** (*Marateng*) style, which they shared with Sotho-speaking Pedi and Koni neighbours.



Here again ceramic style seemingly represents a regional identity that cuts across linguistic boundaries (Schoeman 1997: 195–6). Yet distinctive settlement layouts show that the three groups maintained different identities (Schoeman 1998a, b; Huffman 2004; Delius & Schoeman 2008; Maggs 2008). Loubser's (1994) work suggests that these settlement facies may be mirrored in ceramic differences, but it demands the excavation, reconstruction and analysis of large samples—we must understand the regional ceramic context, rather than the ceramics from just a single set of sites. In this regard, it is useful to compare the published (1994) and unpublished (1981) versions of Loubser's Ndebele research. The dates bracket a period in which he learnt a great deal about *Letaba* pottery (see Loubser 1991), allowing him to identify nuances in the assemblages that were not evident before. If such differences do not materialize around Steelpoort, then that in itself is worthy of research.

So, what do ceramic facies represent? Their geographic extent indicates that they do not represent any kind of socio-political entity, except possibly, Evers allows, in the case of the Mapungubwe kingdom (Huffman 1980: 168; Evers 1988: 134). Boundaries between facies rather than gradual transitions across space show that ceramic style was a component of identity. But what kind of identity? What is *Msuluzi* (Figs 5.9, 7.4), a facies in which pots of the Mngeni valley are essentially similar to pots in the Thukela valley and in the coastal belt between the Mhlatuze lagoon and the St Lucia estuary? It is easy to understand why scholars anxious to deconstruct the tribal past of colonial and apartheid historiography (as we all should be) would feel uncomfortable with archaeological efforts to define ceramic facies. It would be all too easy to slip into a facies-equals-tribe or facies-equals-ethnic group scenario. And certainly there was a time when archaeologists saw a one-to-one relationship between material-cultural entities and people. But in recent times archaeologists have not done this; in fact, they have explicitly advocated otherwise (e.g. Huffman 1980: 168). On ethnicity Evers (1988: 134–5) writes:

The recognition that another group of people has a different symbolic code involves ideas of group identity but it is another thing to say that people are using these senses of identity affectively. Even though sharp boundaries exist between facies and traditions it is difficult to demonstrate whether these group differences are the result of ethnic concepts. The discovery of a minority style within an area dominated by another style could ... have ethnicity as a cause, but such a situation has yet to be demonstrated in the Iron Age. The finding of one or two vessels of a different facies at a site or group of sites ... is insufficient indication of relationships based on ethnicity.

In fulfilment of the situation Evers anticipated, Calabrese (2000, 2007) identified ethnic relations lasting some 200 years between K2 and Leokwe agriculturists in the Limpopo valley. The Klipriviersberg south of Johannesburg preserves another extraordinary instance: one small part of an otherwise Klipriviersberg stonewalled homestead is built along Type Z lines (Huffman et al. 2006–07; cf. Mason 1986: 499). But foreign pottery on a site does not necessarily indicate ethnic relationships, as Evers notes (also Hammond-Tooke 2000: 421). In a recent example, Esterhuysen (2008) found *Letaba* and **Moloko** pottery at the

Kekana Ndebele refuge site in the Makapan valley, dating to 1854. The **Moloko** vessels are most likely of or something like the *Waterberg* facies, a derivative of *Rooiberg* (cf. Huffman 2007a: 166, 174–8, 433, 2012: 235). They were concentrated around the chief's household. Esterhuysen uses historical data to suggest that the vessels represent marriage (and therefore political) alliances between the Kekana Ndebele and the Mmakau Kgatla (Esterhuysen 2008: 208–11). Huffman (2012: 235–6) on the other hand argues that the *Waterberg*-like pottery cannot represent this particular alliance, because the Kgatla made *Buispoort* pottery.

The kind of interpretation Esterhuysen applies to the Makapan assemblage is not new (e.g. Denbow 1982: 85; Jacobson et al. 1991; Loubser 1994; Thorp 2009: 208). We especially expect larger sites—indicating greater numbers of wives and followers—to contain non-local material, representing both the greater catchments of political centres and interconnecting networks of interaction that extended across southern Africa and beyond (Evers & Hammond-Tooke 1986: 38). KwaGandaganda in the Mngeni valley near Durban provides a first-millennium example (Whitelaw 1994–95). Seventh-century deposits there contained copper beads (possibly from north of the Phongolo River) and ostrich-eggshell fragments and beads (probably from the southern highveld), while the tenth-century deposits contained a Zhizo glass bead and a sherd of a ninth-century, turquoise-glazed pot made in the Sawad, southern Iraq (both perhaps originally traded into the Limpopo valley). Relationships can also have lower visibility for social reasons (e.g. Hodder 1982: chapter 4), or because they were between groups or polities of the same facies; their identification will require different kinds of analyses (e.g. Jacobson et al. 1991; Punyadeera et al. 1997; Wilmsen et al. 2009).

We are faced with an uncertain significance for a material phenomenon that no-one has yet demonstrated does not exist. What do we do with them then? Ceramic facies generally represent areas in which people spoke the same language, but in some cases did not. Ceramic facies generally did not represent ethnic identities, but in some cases they did. Ceramics, like other categories of material culture, demand interpretation that is constrained and released by their archaeological context, both synchronic and diachronic. The different interpretations offered for Esterhuysen's *Waterberg* pottery illustrate the importance of this point. Movement from archaeological sequences based on material-cultural entities to the history of the people who made these artefacts (Yates et al. 1994: 30) will always be a challenging exercise. It is an exercise that demands an understanding of archaeological entities and archaeological context, but also of past social relations.

## **Social relations and settlement models**

How can we move from assuming to knowing the nature of relations of production and reproduction during the Iron Age? This is a question to which archaeologists have devoted considerable energy since the early 1980s. The primary way of addressing the issue has been to consider settlement layout. Historians, anthropologists and archaeologists have known for decades that settlement layout is socially significant (e.g. Kuper 1972; Maggs 1976: 23–5; Guy 1994 (1979): 10), but Adam Kuper (1980, 1982) provided the key analysis. He detected,

first, an underlying regularity in Nguni and Sotho-Tswana homestead layout and, secondly, complex, integrating relationships between the spatial code of the homestead and other symbolic codes. From Kuper's analysis, Huffman (1982, 2001) developed the Central Cattle Pattern, a model that depicts the relationship between various features in the homestead (Figs 5.2, 5.10).

The Central Cattle Pattern is primarily concerned with the structure provided by sociocultural rules or norms or, perhaps, ways of doing, not with 'universal principles' (see also Kuper 1987: 110–15). But because it is derived from structuralist analysis, the pattern has long been criticized for the contribution it makes to a past that lacks social dynamism, or, in Wright's phrase, a past conceived in social-evolutionist terms (e.g. Hall 1984; Bonner et al. 2008: 12; Wright 2010b: 231). My feeling is that these criticisms stop well short of fully appreciating the potential in the pattern. To show this, I first consider the way in which the material world, having been constructed, exerts a shaping hand on society.

Homestead layout, through its material permanence, frames people's daily activities and interactions, offering certain kinds of opportunities and imposing certain kinds of limits. Hilda Kuper (1972: 421) quotes Kenneth Burke on drama to make this point:

From the motivational point of view there is implicit in the quality of a scene, the quality of the action that is to take place within ... thus when the curtain rises to disclose a given stage-set, this stage-set contains, simultaneously, implicitly, all that the narrative is to draw out, as a sequence, explicitly.

Life, of course, is messy (Fewster 2006). In the relationship between 'stage-set' and 'narrative'—homestead layout and life—some individuals are conservative and demand compliance with an ideal. Others are more relaxed. People make do and find ways of accommodating the difference between what they want and what is. Either way, we can think of homesteads as places at the centres of what Ingold calls 'spheres of nurture' (Ingold 2000: 140–4, 148–9; cf. Kuper 1972: 420). Spheres of nurture comprise people and things and the relationships between them. People grow within spheres of nurture. That is, individuals develop and change at the centre of networks of relationships with other people (alive and dead) and things. These networks have a three-dimensional character, connecting within and between age, gender and kinship categories, to the ancestral world, and to anticipated futures. In Ingold's view, people draw their sense of self from their relationships and, in relating, they renew and reaffirm the sphere of nurture. Their relating continues, after they die, as ancestors; death merely punctuates the cycle (Ingold 2000: 143).

This continual renewal of the sphere of nurture means that it contains within itself the potential for change. But change is difficult, especially when productive forces are simple. To a considerable degree, relationships lock every individual in place, just as a fly is trapped in a spider's web. Change requires that new kinds of relationships are created. This is why transitions in life are so highly ritualized: they do not simply mark change in individuals, but they establish new and different relationships between the altered individual and others. Relationships nevertheless do offer opportunities for negotiation that some individuals in

some circumstances can exploit. Such negotiation inevitably faces both acceptance and resistance. Change, as we know, is a social phenomenon.

Similarly, homesteads are social phenomena, because they are as nodes in a network of relationships. The arrangement of features in a homestead guides and shapes relationships between people, it demands that people move through the homestead in particular ways, and it provides a stage for formal events such as marriages and beer and meat feasts. Each conversation, each movement and each sip of beer renews relationships in the world; more than this, through such activities, a person generates his or her sense of self in relation to the world. Settlement layout is not socially trivial. In a person's formative years, when so much about the world is learnt, the homestead practically *is* the sphere of nurture. The same is often true for archaeologists: as places where deposit accumulates, the homestead site stands in for the entire sphere of nurture. Importantly for our purposes, it is associated with a particular set of sociocultural features.

As is now well known, the Central Cattle Pattern is associated exclusively with Eastern Bantu speakers who are (1) patrilineal, (2) maintain male hereditary leadership, (3) have a preference for bridewealth in cattle, and (4) hold generally positive beliefs about the role of ancestors in daily life (Huffman 1982, 2001). Ceramic sequences show independently of settlement layout that the Iron Age agriculturists of southern Africa spoke Eastern Bantu languages. It follows, then, that identification of the Central Cattle Pattern in the archaeological record as early as the sixth century indicates that these four key social features were part of the agriculturist worldview from at least that time, and possibly from the beginning of the Iron Age. I believe we can go further.

Every Central Cattle Pattern homestead contains a men's court, no matter what its size (Huffman 1982: 140, 1986a: 291; see Fig. 5.5). It is typically associated with the cattle pen. The court was and is still a physical manifestation of the authority of the homestead head. In the past, his authority was considerable; Hammond-Tooke (1991: 190) suggests that it included rights over life and death, even in the case of commoners. This view is consistent with Guy's argument that chiefly authority in the southern African past was an elaboration of the same social mechanisms that underpinned the authority of homestead heads. In other words, differences between homestead head and chief/king were those of degree rather than kind (Guy 1987: 28–9; 1994: 10).<sup>3</sup> Both chiefs and homestead heads exercised authority over kinsfolk and non-kin living within a defined area, the chiefdom in the one case and the territory managed by the homestead head in the other (Hammond-Tooke 1985: 310–11, 1991: 191). Thus, the Central Cattle Pattern represents the potential—resources permitting—for a chiefdom-level political organization.

This potential was realized in antiquity. For example, the best interpretation of the large middens adjacent to cattle pens on KwaGandaganda is that they were court middens (Whitelaw 1994a: 52). They are archaeological evidence for an institutionalized authority apparatus that existed from the seventh century (see especially Evers & Hammond-Tooke 1986; Huffman 1986a; also Hammond-Tooke 1984: 83, 1991, 1993: 66). They directly

contradict interpretations that argue that no such institutions existed before the late-eighteenth century, and on this basis distinguish between states and pre-state chiefdoms (e.g. Wright & Hamilton 1989: 58). Significantly, KwaGandaganda was a single large settlement occupied for multiple generations totalling some 300–400 years. It was probably the capital of a chiefdom in the Mngeni valley.

This discussion of authority and political organization alludes to what was the fundamental, the most profound, social divide in Iron Age societies, and thus to relations of production. The divide separated married men (homestead heads) from women and children, where ‘children’ included unmarried adults. It was “a social cleavage so deep that it can be usefully called one of class” (Guy 1987: 24). Hammond-Tooke (1993: 69) is critical of this particular claim, but I find Guy’s argument instructive. The relation between the two classes was essentially exploitative. Married men controlled cattle herds, which could grow rapidly under favourable conditions (e.g. Denbow 1986: 15–16). Cultivation belonged to the female realm, and could rarely generate a surplus given the low level of productive forces. Married men used cattle to acquire rights over women: through the exchange of cattle for wives—marriage—men gained access to and control of female productive and reproductive capacity.<sup>4</sup> Husbands allocated fields to their wives, who worked to support their own households and their husbands’ wider homestead interests. In doing so, they advanced the success of their husbands. The offspring of the marriage laboured too, daughters in the fields and sons with the herds, and in time daughters could be exchanged for cattle, making more marriages within the homestead possible, for brothers and for the father himself. Through marriage a man accumulated the capacity to survive and to expand socially into the future. Through marriage a man accumulated success and status, measured in human productive and reproductive capacity, measured in the creative capacity of women and children.

Guy argues, correctly I believe, that this “continuous acquisition, creation, control, and appropriation of ... [human productive and reproductive capacity] ... was the dynamic social principle upon which South African pre-capitalist societies were founded” (Guy 1987: 22). The struggle for this capacity shaped the Iron Age economy and created social tension between men, between men and women, young and old, ancestors and the living, chiefs and subjects, and between chiefdoms, all of which played out in a varied and frequently capricious landscape. Herein lay the site of Iron Age history-making: the struggle and tensions, and the economic relations, were rooted in the homestead (Guy 1987, 2013), and I would argue that the Central Cattle Pattern represents the economic structure that Guy outlines, just as it stands for the four key sociocultural features listed earlier. It is worth noting that Guy’s formulation of the pre-capitalist economy is derived from recent historical records. It is only through the Central Cattle Pattern that we can securely extend it into deeper time.

So can the application of the Central Cattle Pattern create a historically dynamic past? The answer must be ‘yes’, because the model represents a socially dynamic set of relationships, a dynamic economic structure. Its application to the archaeological record

does not necessarily result in an ahistorical or social-evolutionist past, and the approach does not abstract “power/force/coercion from the social and historical equation” (Bonner et al. 2008: 12). Nor does it necessarily make the past look like the present, although it does cut across the ‘kingdom period’. Some research history is useful here. A major concern of the early 1980s to the mid-1990s was the identification, or not, of the Central Cattle Pattern in the archaeological record. The purpose was to determine the nature of agriculturist societies throughout the Iron Age, that is, to determine the antiquity and extent of what the pattern represents. The work stimulated considerable debate. Since then, research has generated a surge of detail from the landscapes of Mapungubwe and the large Tswana towns in particular. Topics include interactions with hunter-gatherers, ethnicity and complex societies, struggles on the colonial frontier, rainmaking and sacred leadership, climatic histories, cultural mosaics, and political economy between hinterland and centre. These studies presumably form what Wright (2010b: 231–2) would call a ‘historicized’ archaeology. In all of them, settlement layout, whether the Central Cattle Pattern or the Zimbabwe Pattern, provides the meaningful context for interpretation. Perhaps this point is missed now because we have forgotten what it is like not to know.

### **A ‘historicized’ past?**

An alternative ‘historicized’ position advocated by some in the FYI emphasizes the inherent instability of precolonial political entities. Wright and others define a ‘historicized’ perspective on precolonial societies as one which

sees them as politically and culturally relatively fluid. Far from being politically unified and culturally more or less homogenous, they consisted of groups of different origins and varying cultures, in which political re-alignments and cultural shifts were constantly being made, and social identities constantly being renegotiated. (Wright 2010b: 231–2)

This statement raises several issues. Certainly, neighbourhoods, districts and chiefdoms were composed of people of varying descent (origins?) (Van Warmelo 1937: 49–50; Hammond-Tooke 1984: tables 1–2, 1985: 316), and larger chiefdoms contained even greater diversity, differentially incorporated (e.g. Kuper 1982: 94, 1987: 117–18, 1997: 75; Loubser 1991: chapter 6). As we have seen, this diversity could include people who expressed themselves differently in material culture (e.g. Calabrese 2007).

Social fluidity is less straightforward. It is true that homesteads, agnatic clusters, districts and chiefdoms sometimes broke up. People hived off to establish themselves elsewhere, although we might debate the use of the term ‘fluidity’ for this phenomenon. It is entirely possible that the degree of fluidity apparent in the historical record is a product of rapid globalization since the mid-1700s, which offered people previously unimagined opportunities (see Huffman 2012: 238–9). Whatever the case, the roots of this social dynamic are primarily in the homestead—in the Central Cattle Pattern—where tension between competing households was always a potential threat to unity (e.g. Ngubane 1977: 91–2).

The location of this dynamic meant that schisms occurred mainly between agnatic kin, while binding relationships, especially marriage, mainly connected genealogically unrelated people. Stability resided in social diversity, instability in sameness. This is entirely consistent with the heterogeneous make-up of communities, but less so with interpretations that make diversity the root of instability and so locate fractures between genealogical clusters (e.g. Wright 2010a: 218).

Because homesteads were created through marriage, social fracture and the relationships that bound people together are opposite sides of the same coin. They did not necessarily operate at the same scale, however. It seems unlikely that people living in small-scale societies, employing relatively simple productive forces in often difficult and sometimes marginal environments would have treated, or been able to treat, relationships in a cavalier way. Indeed, Hammond-Tooke (1993: 119, 128) suggests that marriages were generally stable; in the case of cross-cousin marriage, alliances were repeated across generations. Fracturing, on the other hand, was common between competing brothers in elite families of some societies (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 67–8). It was a relatively large-scale event that generated new chiefdoms. In other societies, elite families adopted parallel-cousin marriage, which united potentially competing close agnates (Kuper 1982: 56; Hammond-Tooke 1993: 119).

Marriage aside, the other significant cattle-based alliance was ‘redistribution’, in which men who owned large herds lent beasts to poorer men. ‘Redistribution’ was not an egalitarian institution, but rather a mechanism through which men expanded and enhanced their control of human labour and fertility (Guy 1987: 27). It gave people access to cattle, but also established relations of debt and appropriation that bound people to cattle-lenders far more strongly than “the rather abstract loyalties of kinship and [political allegiance]”. Moreover, “[c]hiefs and headmen frequently used ... [‘redistribution’] as a political weapon” (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 96, my insertions), bringing dissidents into line by withdrawing or threatening to withdraw loaned beasts.

There was also a counterforce to fluidity, because men worked to gather and hold people around themselves. Courts at every level of the social hierarchy served to judge cases and resolve tensions. Judgements typically verged on counselling sessions in efforts to mediate and resolve disputes fairly and generously (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 93–4). Furthermore, chiefs’ councils made up of community leaders acted to temper unreasonable chiefly behaviour.

If we do not give adequate attention to the capacity of these institutions to bind people together and to do so in unequal power relations, we run the risk of relying too heavily on military coercion and kinship. This point brings us back to Wright’s distinction between pre-state chiefdoms and states, for he argues that the coercive power of chiefs developed fully only after the mid-eighteenth century (Wright & Hamilton 1989: 62–5; Hamilton & Wright 1990: 14–16; Wright 2010a: 221–3). Before this, chiefs relied mainly on the less tangible, and more easily challenged, authority of kinship and ritual. One can

understand historians adopting such a position in the 1970s, but to maintain it now amounts to a rejection of the archaeological record. After all, they have not offered alternative interpretations of that record.

Even in accepting a more militarized environment from 1750 onwards, we should ask about the extent to which the idea is promoted by historical datasets. It is well known that warfare and violence were major foci of the people who gathered historical records; in fact, they served colonial (then apartheid) ideology. We can ask a similar question of descent. Ingold, for instance, argues that a genealogical model of the human past is very much a colonial model (Ingold 2000: chapter 8; cf. Robertshaw 2000: 284). He writes about hunter-gatherers so his argument perhaps is not entirely appropriate for southern African agriculturists. It is nevertheless worthy of consideration now that anthropologists have jettisoned the lineage as a social actor and shown that many descent groups were fairly shallow (though Nguni genealogies can reach back six generations or more; Kuper 1982: chapter 4; Hammond-Tooke 1984, 1985, 1991). Some historians seem to have not entirely followed their lead, because genealogical groups—a term which effectively replaces ‘lineages’—continue to populate the literature as actors. This no doubt reflects the emphasis in historical records on descent. Consequently, some interpretations have an ideational character, where entities seem to float ethereally disconnected from the territories in which people lived and produced (e.g. Hamilton & Wright 1990).

Archaeologists are influenced by the same themes in historical records. Hall et al. (2008) acknowledge that lineages do not form on-the-ground groups, but then construct a lineage geography for the Magaliesberg-Pilanesberg region. I suspect that what they are really constructing is a geography of chiefdoms or chiefdom fragments. The implications for identity and our interpretation of archaeological residues are significant. Lineages are homogeneous, ideological (colonial?) constructs. Chiefdoms are real social groups with fuzzy edges, incorporating a heterogeneous mix of people bound together by cattle-based alliances and (some) compatible interests. We can expect that during three centuries of interaction among people, initially organized in a variety of such small-scale polities (e.g. Huffman 2004: 96), identities would have been emphasized, abandoned, recreated, lost, crushed and formed according to socio-political circumstances. Hall et al. aim to track this identity flux in the archaeological record. Critically, their interpretation of the historical and archaeological records is facilitated by anthropological models.

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In the end, the kinds of pasts that archaeologists and historians write will differ, because the nature of their primary data differs. These differences have a creative potential, both in interdisciplinary projects such as in Bokoni and, more importantly, in the way they might stimulate improved interpretation in each discipline. Iron Age archaeologists have been using oral data for decades now (e.g. Maggs 1976). Indeed, oral data are widely accepted as essential to interpretation of at least the Late Iron Age, and I use them in the chapters that follow. Historians, sadly, have not made a similar engagement with archaeological



material. No doubt archaeologists can learn to use oral material more effectively and more judiciously. But then so too could historians of the last 500 years work at developing an understanding of the potential in archaeological materials and concepts, and of the relevant history of archaeological research. I have tried to provide some clarity on key issues in this chapter. To pursue one issue, ceramic facies and the role the material world plays in shaping society, the next chapter provides a detailed examination of modern Zulu pottery, focusing on the social significance of the decorative symbolism. I later apply some of these ideas to archaeological contexts.

## Acknowledgements

Carolyn Thorp, Jeremy Hollmann (both KwaZulu-Natal Museum), Tom Huffman, Justine Wintjes (both Wits), Peter Mitchell (Oxford), Tim Maggs (UCT), Jannie Loubser (Stratum Unlimited, USA) and Leon Jacobson (McGregor Museum) made comments on earlier drafts. Robert G. Mason (Royal Ontario Museum) identified the Sawad sherd, and Marilee Wood (Wits) the Zhizo bead from KwaGandaganda. I thank them all.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Whitelaw (2012).

<sup>2</sup> It is not clear to me from Loubser's site report which facies of the **Moloko** cluster is represented on these sites. One would perhaps expect to find stamped *Rooiberg/Waterberg* ware (Tom Huffman pers. comm.), which has its origins partially in *Blackburn*. Loubser's **Moloko** includes open bowls and necked and spherical pots, decorated with oblique hatched bands on the rim, with chevron motifs and horizontal bands of horizontal lines alternating with graphite or graphite and ochre colour on the shoulder (in the case of pots) and body. There is some use of punctates, but stamping seems rare (see Loubser 1994: fig. 28 bottom right) or absent. The pots do not seem *Waterberg*-like (cf. Huffman 2007a: 174, 178; Esterhuysen 2008: 204, plate 23), but perhaps are related to *Marateng*, or like *Marateng* derive from *Madikwe* (cf. Huffman 2007a: 200, 208) or a similar not-yet-defined facies out of *Icon* in northeast Limpopo Province. The issue of Northern and Southern Ndebele pottery style is important and clearly needs more work (Huffman 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Here we can see a real and significant difference between these 'ranked' societies and those of the Zimbabwe Culture, where royals belong to a different social class from ordinary homestead heads.

<sup>4</sup> I use some variation of the term 'productive and reproductive capacity' in preference to Guy's higher-level abstraction 'labour power', because it seems more in tune with the character of the ethnographies.



# 4

## **Pots that talk, *izinkamba ezikhulumayo***

This chapter is based on fieldwork and interviews by Juliet Armstrong and Dieter Reusch, and more recently by Juliet and me, conducted between 1991 and 2008 in rural areas mainly north of the Thukela River in KwaZulu-Natal. Juliet and Dieter produced a draft document, but Dieter was shot dead in June 2002 while on a field trip near Tugela Ferry. Juliet and I subsequently completely reworked the data into a new conceptual framework for publication (Armstrong et al. 2008). Juliet died of brain cancer on 22 August 2012. I retain the third-person pronoun for this chapter.

The fieldwork areas include Msinga, Pomeroy, mPhabalane, Phongolo, Eshowe, Nongoma and Hlabisa (Fig. 4.1). The wider research area overlaps significantly with those of other scholars working on Zulu pottery: Jolles (2005) defined and explained the emergence of five regional decorative styles of beer vessels since the mid-nineteenth century, while Fowler (2006) showed that this development coincided with a collapse in the overall Zulu ceramic repertoire. Our interest here is to show how the production and use of ceramic vessels is embedded in Zulu cosmology, with a special focus on the significance of decoration on beer vessels. We start by outlining relevant aspects of the cosmology.

In the precolonial past, a central component of marriage was the exchange of cattle for wives (Huffman 1982, 2001). For many people this is still true today (Kuper 1982).

In the precolonial past, the accumulation and control of human creative and productive capacity was the dynamic principle on which society was founded (Guy 1987: 22). Men accumulated this capacity primarily through marriage. From it flowed status: the number of wives and the size of the herd were measures of a man's success, while competition for human creative and productive capacity sometimes resulted in power shifts. Two significant features of the ideology that once supported this economic structure are still invoked today.

The first, pollution, or ritual impurity, inheres 'naturally' in classificatory ambiguity (including temporarily merged categories and transition states). More specifically, pollution is a metaphor for the threat that ambiguity poses to the properly ordered social world. Pollution manifests itself either as heat or, more seriously, darkness (*ummyama*). Contamination, it is believed, renders people vulnerable to bad luck and sickness, notably in terms of reproductive and productive success. Because people believe they can be unknowingly



Fig. 4.1. Places mentioned in the text.

contaminated by polluting situations, they always take steps to ensure that they are ritually pure before embarking on activities related in any way to the creative process (Berglund 1976: 225–8; Ngubane 1977: chapter 5).

Wives provide a template for thinking about pollution because clan exogamy makes them strangers to their husbands' ancestors. They are simultaneously their fathers' representatives and integral components of their husbands' homesteads—without wives a homestead cannot exist, nor can a man's line of descent extend beyond him. Wives link categories in another important way. When giving birth, they connect or form channels between the living world and that of their husbands' ancestors. No normal contact between ancestors and clan strangers is more intimate. Consequently, pollution is most

strongly associated with birth, when a wife's creative potential is fully realised, and with death, which is birth reversed. Milder pollution exists in other expressions of creative potential—pubescence, menstruation, sexual intercourse, pregnancy and breastfeeding—and, by extension, in all transitional or ambiguous circumstances (Ngubane 1977: chapter 5; Hammond-Tooke 1981a).

Subtleties in pollution beliefs are revealing. Pregnant women can be considered *balula* (flimsy) and in need of special care and protection from negative influences. Menstruation is more dangerous. A man preparing for war can have sex safely with a pregnant wife, but not a menstruating one (Ntombi Mkhize pers. comm.). The difference seems to reflect a distinction between the creative power of a woman's ancestors, expressed by menstruation, and that power brought under control by her husband's ancestors. But pollution represents more than male anxiety about uncontrolled creative power. Pollution beliefs provide a means to control that power, and the people who hold it, in ways that emphasize its apparent threat to success. This 'natural force' is in the employ of men in their pursuit of creative and productive capacity (Ngubane 1977: 92–5; Hammond-Tooke 1981a; cf. Guy 1987).

The second important ideological theme is the principle of *inblonipho* (respect), an institution of formalized speech and behaviour by which people avoided reference to or inappropriate contact with others. *Inblonipho* is still significant, especially in rural areas where it is the basis for appropriate behaviour. The principle applies to all people, but women especially suffer its burden because they live in their husband's homestead after marriage. *Inblonipho* served (and still can serve) to protect the integrity of the homestead head's agnatic cluster (Krige 1962).

The agnatic cluster includes the homestead head's ancestors (*amadlozi*), comprising both the undifferentiated legion of clan ancestors, as well as recognizable members who died recently. The ancestral world is underground (Krige 1962: 284; Bryant 1967: 711), but ancestors can emerge from deep holes and pools and move around on the surface. There are several places with which they are strongly associated. These include the main entrance to the cattle pen, the grain pits beneath its surface and the back of the pen, opposite the entrance. Similarly, the ancestors favour the entrance of the hut, its hearth and the storage area (*umsamo*) at the back of the hut, sometimes designated by a low ridge (*ubundu*). So close is their association with the *umsamo* that it doubles as a shrine. This is especially true for the great hut (*indlunkulu*), situated at the back of the homestead opposite its main entrance (Raum 1973: 144 ff.; Berglund 1976: 102, 112).

The ancestors play an important role in the lives of the living. They are present at all rituals performed by their descendents and are generally a source of good health and fortune. But the living do not always welcome their imperious, brooding attention. The ancestors are easily offended and at times admonish their descendents by withdrawing their beneficent attitude. Ancestral disappointment is most often attributed to a disrespectful neglect of duty and custom (Hammond-Tooke 1974: 331). These ideas of respect and social order permeate through pot making and pot use.

## Beer feasts

Nowadays sorghum (*amabele*) is the preferred grain for beer even though it is no longer widely grown. People generally buy sorghum and often mix it with maize (*ummbila*), which they do grow. Brewing is nevertheless more common in the winter months, after harvest time, despite the availability of sorghum in shops. In earlier times, sorghum was more commonly prepared as a solid food and beer brewed with finger (*uphoko*) and bulrush millet (*unyawoti*). These grains yield stronger, tastier beers, but the gradual adoption of maize from the 1600s onwards (cf. Huffman 2006) resulted in a shift away from the less productive, more finicky millets (Krige 1962: 58; Bryant 1967: 274, 311; Webb & Wright 1979: 113).

Sorghum beer (*utshwala*) is a pinkish, soupy liquid, mildly alcoholic and rich in carbohydrates and vitamins B and C (Quin 1959: 256–7). Adulphe Delegorgue, who travelled in southeastern Africa from 1839 to 1844, found *utshwala* nourishing and fortifying, saying, “it quenches the thirst, it strengthens a man when he is weak, and takes away fatigue; much more than this, it gives rise to a gentle gaiety and, for that alone, I swear by [the Zulu king] Dingaan, it makes one a better man” (Delagorgue 1997: 110). Similarly for Cetshwayo, beer was “the food of the Zulus; they drink it as the whites drink tea and coffee” (Webb & Wright 1978: 91).

Menstruating, breast-feeding or pregnant women, and especially those who have recently had sex or given birth, should not brew beer. Ideally, only women past childbearing age should brew. This restriction is often ignored today (Bryant 1967: 275; Berglund 1976: 210, 227–8), while certain precautions allow menstruating women to participate (Raum 1973: 273). The restriction arises from a conceptual association between pregnancy and fermentation: like a pregnant woman, the brewing vessels are *balula*, flimsy, and require protection from the negative influences of pollution to ensure the success of the brew.

Beer is brewed for parties, to celebrate birth, marriage and other rites of passage, to honour the ancestors, to reward work parties, for reconciliation following disputes, and to dispense largesse (Krige 1962: 58–9; Berglund 1976: 210; De Haas 1998: 13). Drinking beer is unquestionably a social act, hence our use of the term ‘beer feast’ (after Bryant 1967: 277). The ability to distribute beer enhances a man’s standing in his community, a point wonderfully illustrated by a tale that occurs in two versions in the *James Stuart Archive*. In the story, a man arrives at his senior brother’s homestead to find meat and beer prepared, but his brother absent. The brother is out hunting cane rats or herding cattle, activities associated with children and dependents. Other guests arrive and they wait, until the junior brother decides to dispense the beer and meat himself. When the senior brother returns, he finds himself replaced by the junior and leaves to establish a new place (Webb & Wright 1979: 120–1, 1982: 92; see Chapter Seven for more on this story).

Beer is always present at meat feasts (though the reverse is not true). The two foods are compatible: “Beer is the food of men. It is not just food. It is the food of men. It is like meat, eaten by all men.” The category ‘men’ here includes both the living and the ancestors: “If there is beer that is to be drunk, then there will always be that which is for the shades.

Nowhere is beer drunk alone. They are always participating in it” (Berglund 1976: 209–10; cf. Webb & Wright 1986: 376). Drinking beer in any context is thus a form of communion with the ancestors and beer is left in the *umsamo* for them whenever women brew (Raum 1973: 274). For this reason, many people do not distinguish between ritual and ordinary beer feasts.

Whatever reason exists for a beer feast, the homestead head determines the timing of the brewing. Those women involved in the brewing might call on neighbours to join them in a grinding party, which can go on for several hours (cf. Hunter 1936: 103–4 for the Mpondo). The women cook the wort in a brewing vessel (*imbiza*, pl. *izimbiza*) on the hearth in the great hut (*indlunkulu*) or, for larger parties, on a hearth outside the great hut. Alternatively, women might brew beer at their own place and carry it to the homestead holding the feast. Typically they use *izimphiso* (sing. *uphiso*) to transport the beer. These vessels have elongated necks to prevent spillage (Fig. 4.2). Since the pots within a neighbourhood are usually the product of a limited number of local potters and therefore similar in style, they are often marked in some way for easy identification (Fig. 4.3).

According to an early twentieth-century informant, drinking etiquette was strict, stricter even than conventions that governed the distribution of meat (Webb & Wright 1986: 376). This is still true today. Hats should not be worn. People should squat low or



Fig. 4.2. Woman with *uphiso*. Courtesy Campbell Collections, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

sit on or close to the ground when they drink, though older men sometimes use chairs to protect their knees (Figs 4.4 and 4.5). Beer pots must rest on the floor, to which their flat bases are well suited. Men and women drink separately, as do people of senior and junior status. This is true even when no guests are present. A man does not drink with his wife, nor with his sons.

Guests are typically drawn from the neighbourhood. While some may be invited, others simply turn up. The location of the different groups at the feast is dependent on the event. A member of the homestead always drinks before guests. Generally, a girl brings a full pot to the men and sets it down in front of them. She stirs the beer, skims the scum and chaff from its surface, and drinks from the pot. She then hands the pot to the homestead head, who drinks deeply before passing the vessel to the guests. Differences in detail depend on the nature of the event. For instance, if a feast directly concerns a member of the homestead, he or she always drinks before the homestead head. This prioritization focuses the attention of the ancestors on the specific person (Berglund 1976: 213; Mancane Magwaza pers. comm.). The feast ends only when the food and beer are finished, and guests might complain and show obvious disappointment if insufficient beer is available (Berglund 1976: 167, 212). Because of the various uncertainties at play—such as anxieties about the ancestors, guests, and the taste and quantity of the beer—beer feasts are typically marked by undercurrents of tension.

### **Making pots**

Potting is women's work. A variety of pots (*izinkamba*; sing. *ukhamba*) is used to prepare, transport, store and serve beer. Few survive continual domestic use for more than a decade or two and they are generally easily and cheaply replaced. Some vessels from the early twentieth century are nevertheless preserved in museums and private collections. These provide points of comparison with recent work.



Fig. 4.3. Pot marked with blue paint. Made by Azolina Mcube. Juliet Armstrong collection.





Fig. 4.4. Buhle Zondi watching a friend drink beer at the Magwaza homestead in mPhabalane near Ndondondwane drift, *umemulo* (girl's coming of age ceremony), 2006.

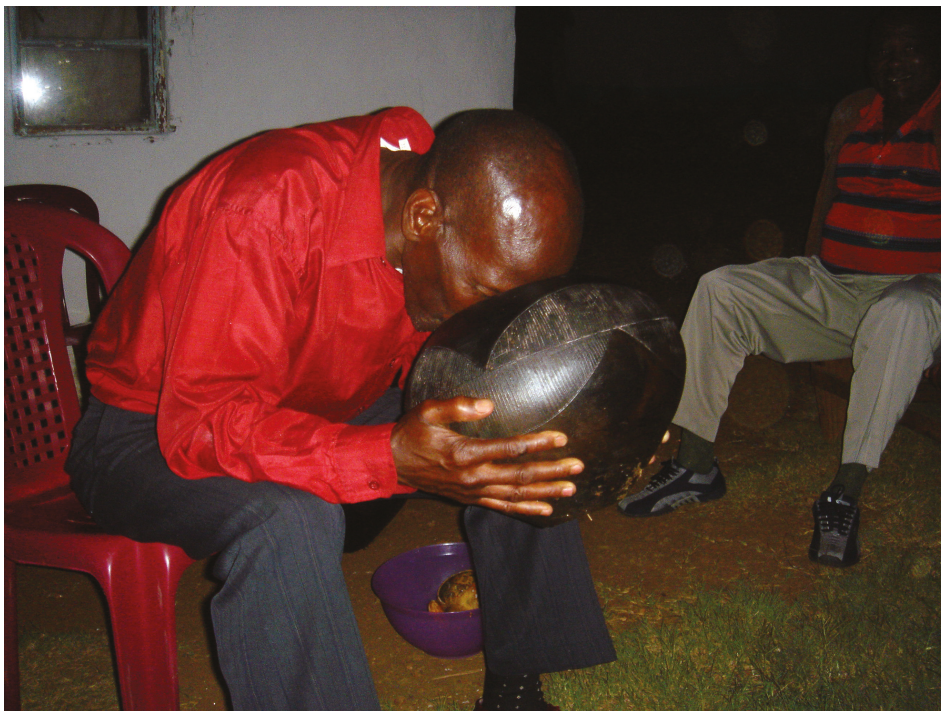


Fig. 4.5. Mr Magwaza at the same *umemulo*.

Some variation exists in the way in which people of different areas name and decorate vessels (Jolles 2005), but it is limited and the range of socially acceptable motifs and vessel forms is evidently restricted. Nesta Nala's beautiful but stylistically idiosyncratic pots, for instance, were directed solely at the global art market. For the local market she made "wonderfully refined" *izinkamba* (Jolles 2005: 120–1; also Levinsohn 1984: fig. 56; Garret 1998). Potters nevertheless develop a 'signature' that is expressed in terms of vessel construction, quality of finish and decoration (see Jolles 2013). Consequently, familiarity allows one to identify the work of individual potters.

On one level, the limited repertoire is not surprising because potters commonly learn the craft from a relative or neighbour. Also, some potters learnt their techniques in school (e.g. Lawton 1967: 54; Grossert 1968). Their subsequent conservatism is best explained first, by considering the pots as components of the potters' cosmology, and secondly, because potters belong to networks of relationships that frame their behaviour as communally responsible beings: "it is always the group, seldom the individual, that is important" (Krige 1962: 36). We explore these points in more detail in the discussion that follows.

Raum (1973: 274) recorded various pollution-linked restrictions, not all of which seem to apply today. For example, menstruation does not prevent potters of the Magwaza family from working. Pregnancy is more serious. Pregnant women do not make pots because the work conflicts with that of their husbands' ancestors and so can interfere with the timing of the birth. This is because moulding the clay is considered analogous to the development of the foetus, which a man's ancestors mould in his wife's womb from the blood that her ancestors supply. New mothers resume potting some three months after they have given birth. This relationship between procreation and potting means that newly married women cannot make pots in their husbands' homesteads until they have given birth to their first child.

Potters are usually secretive about clay sources. They collect it with the help of children, often from more than one place. Clay is often stored in its raw state near the cattle pen, so that it becomes familiar to the ancestors. Individual potters are solely responsible for its preparation. The potter grinds the raw dry clay with a rounded stone (*imbokodwe*) on a flat grinding stone (*itshe*). She mixes different clays in varying proportions, depending on the kind of pot she intends to make. According to the vessel type, she sieves the clay mixture, usually through an old kitchen sieve, before combining it with small quantities of water. Potters do not sieve the clay when making the large *izimbiza*. The coarse content of the clay helps the vessel withstand thermal shock during firing and acts like stone in concrete, producing a stronger ceramic.

The potter sits on the floor to make her vessels. The base is a flattened clay disc, to which she adds coils to form the body of the pot. She rotates the pot as it develops on a small square of cardboard or a wreath of dried grass (*inkatha*), smoothing and tapering the walls with various tools. After construction, when the vessel is cheese hard, she smooths it

inside and out with a piece of curved gourd (*ukhezō*). This process compresses the clay and prepares it for decoration.

After decoration, when the vessel is leather hard, the potter burnishes (*ukugudla*) it with a smooth stone (*imbokodwe*) and water, further compressing the clay on the exterior. This gives the pot a glossy sheen, which offsets the textured decoration—the motifs would pale into insignificance on a dull surface. Some potters then burnish the dryish vessel with oil or cattle fat, which produces an intense sheen. The vessel is then left to dry before firing. Any moisture falling on the vessel at this stage would damage the burnish. The duration and location of the drying period are determined by custom, the clay and the weather.

Ideally, only family members are allowed to touch unfired pots. Similarly, no strangers are allowed at the firing (Lawton 1967: 52). These restrictions probably exist because unformed and transforming pots are considered sensitive to damage from the contaminating presence of strangers. Juliet, however, attended firings by paying for the privilege.

Firing is usually done in a shallow pit in the dry winter months (contra Raum 1973: 274). In summer the firing would produce steam from the wet ground, which adversely affects the process. The firing pit is located downslope of the homestead entrance at a place where there are no crosswinds. Apart from the danger runaway fire poses to the homestead, flames and smoke can disturb and upset the ancestors (Thandiwe Magwaza pers. comm. 2005). The firing place should be free of stones, which can explode when heated and damage the vessels.

The firing fuel depends upon what is regionally available and can consist of grass, wood, cow dung, dried aloe leaves, dried *Euphorbia tirucalli* leaves, or a mixture of any of these. The potter places burning wood coal in each vessel before firing, to preheat it and drive any remaining moisture from the clay. She places the preheated vessels in the pit on a layer of fuel. Further fuel is stacked between and over the vessels so that they are completely covered. Often aloe trunks are leant against the pyre to contain and stabilise it. The trunks are dense and do not burn. The fire is lit from the top of the pyre so that the heat works its way down. The potter frequently turns the vessels with a long wooden pole to ensure even firing (Figs 4.6–4.9). The heterogeneity of the clay mixture helps the vessels withstand the thermal shock, preventing them from exploding, cracking, and breaking into pieces. The vessels are then removed from the ashes and allowed to cool.

The duration of firing depends upon the fuel. Temperatures can reach 900°C (measured by Juliet with an optical pyrometer), well beyond the temperature range over which ceramic change occurs (400–600°C). The ceramic change renders the pots hard and capable of holding water, although they remain somewhat porous. Porosity is an important characteristic of the pots. It permits evaporation in hot weather and so ensures that the liquid contents of the vessel stay cool and refreshing (cf. Hall 1997: 216).

After the firing, the potter taps her vessels with her knuckles to test for soundness. Good ones ring. Cracked ones are *ifile*—dead.



Fig. 4.6. Firing pots, Zululand in the early twentieth century. Courtesy Campbell Collections, University of KwaZulu-Natal.



Fig. 4.7. Firing pots, Zululand in the early twentieth century. Courtesy Campbell Collections, University of KwaZulu-Natal.



Fig. 4.8. Firing pots, Magwaza homestead, 2002. Khonzeni Magwaza in the background.



Fig. 4.9. Firing pots, Magwaza homestead, 2002. Khonzeni and Khulumeleni Magwaza.

## Decoration

Following Barley (1994: 45), for whom the “decorative element of pots may ... be wholly detachable”, the term decoration refers here to all embellishment of pots. It includes the surface treatment, textured decoration of various kinds, and the use of pot covers.

### Pot covers

*Izimbenge* (sing. *imbenge*) are small, shallow baskets usually made with strips of ilala palm folioles (*Hyphaene coriacea*; Grossert 1968: 621; Cunningham & Terry 2006: 98). *Izimbenge* are designed for serving food, but are also used as covers for pots of beer reserved for male consumption (Fig. 4.10). Some are decorated with geometric designs created with beadwork, dyed strips or variations in the weave, especially if made primarily as beer-pot covers (Grossert 1968: 622; Kennedy 1993: 201). This is the only decorative embellishment we know that serves to restrict beer to a particular group of drinkers.

### Surface treatment

Freshly fired pots have an ochre or terracotta colour. All drinking and serving vessels are then blackened in a smoke-firing (Figs 4.11, 4.12). The smoke-firing carbonizes (*fusa*)<sup>1</sup> the exterior of the pot, but causes no ceramic change. The fuel is usually grass, but cow dung, wood, or even old rubber shoe soles are used. The blackened vessels are then coated with ox fat, candle wax, or rubbed with leaves of *ugqumugqumu*<sup>2</sup> (Bryant 1967: 400), and polished with a smooth stone over the previously burnished areas to form a glossy sheen. The carbonized residue gradually rubs off with handling and, it is said, non-Zulus do not like it on their hands. For this reason, many potters treat the vessels they intend selling to



Fig. 4.10 (left). Pot with incised decoration and *imbenge* cover. Potter unknown.

Fig. 4.11 (right). Smoke-firing at the Magwaza homestead.



Fig. 4.12. Peni Gumbi smoke-firing, Phongolo. Note the shape of her pots, which is characteristic of the Phongolo area and adjacent Swaziland (Lawton 1967: 67, plate VII; Jolles 2005: 116).

non-Zulu customers with black shoe polish, which is more durable. The Magwaza potters smoke-fire the vessels before applying polish (Whitelaw pers. observation 2014).

The blackened vessels are especially attractive to the ancestors (Armstrong 1998: 43; Reusch et al. 1998: 26). In many ways, the ancestral world is the reverse of the world of the living. The ancestors are white, in contrast to the living. Their place is *emathunzini*, “the place of the shadows” (Berglund 1976: 87) and they do their work in cool, dark places. As one of Berglund’s (1976: 168) informants commented: “The [ancestors] do not agree with sunshine.” For this reason, diviners, who are in permanent contact with the ancestral world (Ngubane 1977: 88), avoid exposing their backs and shoulders to the sun. Diviners also carry a dark cloth called *ingubo yamadlozi* (cloth of the ancestors), which they use to throw a shadow or ‘create night’. The cloth represents the darkness of the ancestral world and allows diviners to “see clearly, in white” (Berglund 1976: 177). Similarly, a young bride carries her ancestors with her dark marriage skirt (*isidwaba*) to her husband’s homestead, where they provide the blood that ensures her fertility. In the same way, blackened beer vessels ‘carry the darkness’ and so facilitate the participation of the ancestors in feasts. Their use creates an ancestral presence (cf. Nettleton & Hammond-Tooke 1989: 11). The ancestors come to know pots, which people often refuse to sell because their absence could sow disharmony in the family.



Fig. 4.13. Mancane Magwaza standing with her pots in her *umsamo*, her shoulders covered out of respect for the ancestors. Note the *ubundu*, the low ridge designating the *umsamo*.

Brewing vessels (*izimbiza*) are not blackened. They are generally kept out of public sight in kitchen huts and in the *umsamo*, the storage area at the back of each hut (Fig. 4.13). They have a rough exterior surface made with a dried maize cob, which holds a slip of cattle dung and water (*ubulongwe*) that is applied from time to time. The slip serves at least two purposes. First, as the ancestors work to achieve fermentation, they generate the ‘boiling’ necessary to produce the beer. The same is true of their work at moulding a child in the womb. ‘Overheating’ in either case can cause failure. The dung and water metaphorically ‘cool’ and control the temperature of the *imbiza* and its contents. In this way, the application of the slip is analogous to resurfacing a hut floor with dung after a birth, or when the menstrual period of the hut’s occupant is over (cf. Ngubane 1977: 164).

Secondly, cattle are generally the most important medium of communication with the ancestors (Berglund 1976: 214),<sup>3</sup> so the cow-dung slip binds the household (the wife’s domain) to the homestead ancestors. Some brewers enhance this link by applying a line of ash from the brewing fire to the vessel rim (Mancane Magwaza pers. comm.; Fig. 4.14). Ash—extinguished fire—is cool like dung and water and can represent the ancestors (Raum 1973: 357; Berglund 1976: 206, 221).





Fig. 4.14. *Imbizqa* from the Magwaza homestead, now in the University of KwaZulu-Natal collection. Note the ash applied to the rim. Also note the *izimbizqa* in the *umsamo* in Figure 4.13.

Pots without a dung slip or the smoke treatment are considered hot, with the potential to attract lightning (Lawton 1967: 52; Sindisiwe Magwaza pers. comm. 1999). The iron minerals in the clay give them a reddish colour and at least some potters refer to them as *ibomvu* (red), a colour associated with heat and transformation (Berglund 1976: 41; Ngubane 1977: 116–17). They are sold to customers unfamiliar with Zulu custom. Potters shine them with shoe or veranda polish (not black) and store them outside under plastic sheeting. The sheeting is black, but this may be simply a function of its availability, rather than a concern about lightning strikes. Such pots are important only for their monetary value.

### Textured decoration

Textured decoration is applied only to vessels used for drinking and serving beer. It is produced by incision, impression and by the creation of relief elements. Incised or sgraffito designs are made in the cheese-hard vessel surface before burnishing, usually with a knife end, umbrella spoke or a sharpened stick. This technique is referred to as *dweba*, draw. The clay must be wetter for an impressed technique, *umkhexofoso*, in which the potter stabs the end of a reed into the clay to produce a burred, punctate surface (Fig. 4.15). The name refers to the sound the reed makes as it impresses the clay and is withdrawn. Other impressed motifs are made with fingernails, grass stems and nails (Lawton 1967: 56–9). Relief decoration mostly takes the form of nodules or bumps called *amasumpa*. *Amasumpa* occur in five of Jolles's (2005) six style zones—Phongolo, Nongoma, Hlabisa, Melmoth-Eshowe and Lower Thukela. The sixth zone, Msinga, contains only incised motifs. This difference no doubt reflects Msinga's history. From the mid-1840s it was part of British-governed Natal whereas the other areas fell within the Zulu kingdom. (Fowler (2011) recently reported decorative bumps in Msinga; they are perhaps a recent addition to the design field there.)

Many motifs are common across Jolles's style zones and can be depicted with any decorative technique. Motifs include horizontal lines and bands, chevrons, rectangular panels, triangles and diamonds, and circles, ovals and arcs. Some have modern origins,

such as those based on playing cards and the alphabet. In what follows, we consider the symbolism of various motifs and decorative techniques. We discuss *amasumpa* in more detail later because of the significance of the manufacturing technique. Similarly, we discuss letter-motifs separately because they form a special, modern category. If our comments sometimes overreach our data, we hope they will provoke further research.

Reusch et al. (1996: 120) give *imichilo* for semi-circular motifs. Today *umchilo* can be translated as *riem*, an Afrikaans word meaning ‘thong’, but it commonly brings to mind the thong used to fasten the *isidwaba* (a skirt worn by married women) around the hips (Bryant 1905; Samuelson 1923; Webb & Wright 1982: 326;<sup>4</sup> Dent & Nyembezi 1988; Doke et al. 1990; Ntombi Mkhize pers. comm.). Our colleague Ntombi Mkhize suggested, independent of examples, that *umchilo* decoration would be an incised line around the body of a pot. She subsequently identified examples of such motifs from Jolles’s (2005) figures. The examples include pots on which the incised line separates opposing arcs, that is, Jolles’s (2005: 118)



Fig. 4.15. *Umkhexoxoso* decoration with incision on an unblackened pot, Magwaza homestead.



Fig. 4.16 (left). Pot from the Hlabisa area. Made by Doreen Sishwili, who copied the decoration from her mother. It is called *inyanga*, moon.

Fig. 4.17 (right). Pot from Nongoma with Jolles’s ‘eye pattern’. Potter unknown (Jolles 2005: 127).

wave pattern (Fig. 4.16). Potters refer to this pattern as *inyanga*, moon (Lawton 1967: 56; Jolles 2005: 122, 129). That the moon's waxing and waning is associated with the menstrual cycle (Raum 1973: 129; Berglund 1976: 360) strongly suggests a related association for the pattern. Further, doorway arches in huts are identified with the entrance to the womb, while rainbows are symbols of female reproductive health (Berglund 1976: 168, 316–17 & 70, 178). Arc motifs, then, must refer to the creative capacity of women (see also Jolles's eye pattern (2005: 137, 141)). Narrower symbolism can be achieved with modifying motifs such as *umchilo*, which suggests married women (Figs 4.17–4.19). Diamonds, evidently, also suggest married women (Mertens & Schoeman 1975: 105).

The triangle, *umcijo*, is a common motif (Figs 4.20, 4.21). The word can refer to the diamond symbol on playing cards, though the diminutive form *umcijwane* is more commonly used for this purpose (Doke et al. 1990; cf. Jolles 2005: 128). *UmCijo* was the name of a



Fig. 4.18 (left). Pot from Ndondondwane area. Potter unknown (Jolles 2005: 132).

Fig. 4.19 (right). Pot from Hlabisa. Potter unknown (Jolles 2005: 129).



Fig. 4.20 (left). Pot from Msinga area. Potter unknown (Jolles 2005: 133).

Fig. 4.21 (right). Pot (*umancishana*) from Melmoth with incised and impressed motif. Possibly made in the 1960s. Potter unknown (Jolles 2005: 131).

regiment established by the Zulu king Mpande in the mid-nineteenth century (Krige 1962: 406). The name was no doubt drawn from the other noun form, *ulucijo*, a sharpened stake, and the related verb *cija*, sharpen, incite or urge, as in *ukucija impi*, to urge on an army (Doke et al. 1990). *Cijimpi* (< *cija impi*) refers to a military commander. The sharpened stake is an obvious male symbol. Stakes in the cattle-pen fence, for instance, should be planted only by men. Some are closely identified with the homestead head and must be respected as one respects him (Raum 1973: 144). A spear thrust into the ground in a dance-challenge to an enemy is another possible association. Indeed, Mertens and Schoeman (1975: 105) found that downward-pointing triangles on pots represent men. Zigzag or chevron motifs are possibly variations (Fig. 4.22).

X-shaped and hourglass motifs formed by two triangles connected at the apexes are probably variations on a theme (Figs 4.23–4.25). Hourglasses are sometimes depicted horizontally. Hourglass motifs are called *ihawu* in Msinga. *Ihawu* is the generic term for shield (Doke et al. 1990) and also the specific name for a small dance shield (Krige 1962: 403; Bryant 1967: 406). Hourglass motifs have been variously interpreted as representing married men (Mertens & Schoeman 1975: 105) and unmarried youths (Reusch et al. 1996: 120).

Youths can carry a shield only after puberty. When a boy experiences his first nocturnal emission, he wakes early, takes the cattle and hides with them in the veld. Older boys seek him out and drive him home with the cattle. Sometimes they present him with a gift of a spear from his father, a symbolic statement that recalls the triangle motif. As he returns home with the herd, his father calls out in welcome “*Nambla senginendoda eza neziblangu*” (“Today I have a man who comes with shields”) (Krige 1962: 90). The welcome suggests transformation: a man emerges from a boy just as shields are created from cattle. Also, the reference to war shields (*iziblangu*) alludes to the new adult role the youth will play in protecting the agnatic cluster from harm. The puberty ceremony follows. Afterwards the youth can court young women and carry a small courting shield called *iggoka* (Krige 1962; Tyrrell 1971).

These data suggest that both triangles and hourglass motifs represent sexually mature males, though they perhaps emphasize different aspects of maleness. The triangle/stake combination might stand for the virility and fierce leadership that people value in their bulls. The hourglass/shield set perhaps represents the stability and the ordered calmness that people value in their oxen: “In terms of authority and sexuality ... [the homestead head] is likened to a bull; in terms of social responsibility and value to the community he is like an ox. The two images reflect two sides of the complex role of maleness in [Zulu] society” (Poland et al. 2003: 25).

Another motif is apparently based on the beaded band (*umtamatama*) worn like a sash or bandolier by courting (or engaged) men and women. The beads are woven into a band of patterned rectangular or triangular motifs with alternating blocks of colour (Grossert 1968: 553; Mertens & Schoeman 1975: 61; cf. Tyrrell 1971: 115–16; Ntombi Mkhize pers. comm.). The ceramic motif consists of rectangles on the shoulder of the vessel with alternate rectangles ‘filled’ by incised vertical lines (Robert Papini pers. comm.).



Fig. 4.22 (left). Pot from Hlabisa. Made by Phwayinkosi Ngobese (Jolles 2005: 128).

Fig. 4.23 (right). Pot from Msinga. Potter unknown (Jolles 2005: 133).



Fig. 4.24 (left). Pot from Hlabisa with *amasumpa*. Made in the 1970s or 1980s by Annie Sishwile (Jolles 2005: 128).

Fig. 4.25 (right). Pot from Melmoth with both zigzag (triangular?) and X-shaped motifs. Potter not recorded (Jolles 2005: 130).

Such media crossovers are common in African material culture (e.g. David et al. 1988; Evers 1988; Collett 1993).

Two Msinga potters read a band of triangles around the shoulder of a pot differently. For MaZondo the motif was *ikbanda elentulo*, the head of a lizard. *Ntulo* is a type of lizard, rather than a generic term. The motif apparently refers to a fable in which uMvelinqangi (the creator) sent a chameleon to people with the gift of everlasting life. He then sent the lizard with a message of mortality. The chameleon dawdled and the lizard arrived first, hence the phrase '*sibamba elentulo*': 'we stick to the lizard's message', that is, 'we accept the first message when the second creates ambiguity' or, alternatively, 'we choose a conservative approach' (Bryant 1905; Doke et al. 1990: 609; Ntombi Mkhize pers. comm.).

Perhaps more prosaically, another potter identified the motif as *isaba*, saw. It is not clear to us whether she was struck by the visual similarity of the motif and the tool's teeth, was referring to the tool used to make the motif, did not know the symbolism, was reluctant to divulge this information, or did not understand the question.

Similarly, whereas one potter at the Pomeroy market named an elliptical motif *ihawu*, others from the area called it *ihlamvu*—a generic term for leaf, or a branch with branchlets and leaves (Doke et al. 1990). Both names could derive from a straight-forward visual similarity. But plant motifs occur in three of Jolles's style regions: Melmoth-Eshowe, Lower Thukela and Msinga (Jolles 2005: 120–1; cf. Lawton 1967: 371). Are they 'just decoration' of obviously recent origin? Jolles (2005: 120) argues on stylistic grounds that they are "part of a common heritage", which suggests a deeper significance.

*Ihlamvu* possibly has a medicinal reference. The word also refers specifically to several species of lilies, orchids and irises used to enhance reproductive success. Preparations are taken to promote health during pregnancy and ease childbirth, for the treatment of barrenness, impotence and unattractiveness, as aids to conception, as love charms and, most interestingly, to ensure the birth of a child of the desired sex. This last use is typically for families with only daughters (Hutchings et al. 1996); without sons, the line of descent ends.

Even if this restricted symbolic association is too narrow, most medicinal formulations are based on plants, and health is synonymous with fertility and productivity (Berglund 1976: 179). Alternatively, because on some pots the plants seem to emerge from a field (Fig. 4.26), perhaps the motifs refer to the fertility and productivity of the earth and, by extension, to the creative capacity of women. We develop this relationship later. (Another motif, the flower, might reflect similar concerns.) Whatever the case with *ihlamvu*, the motif is fascinating because its representational nature distinguishes it from most other motifs and suggests an origin probably not earlier than the mid-twentieth century. Yet, we suggest, it has a symbolism that is deeply rooted in Zulu cosmology.

#### Amasumpa

*Amasumpa* (sing. *isumpa*) are raised bumps on ceramic and wooden vessels, or handles on wooden milk pails. Contrary to popular belief, the word does not mean 'warts'. The Zulu term for warts is *izinsumpa* (sing. *insumpa*). Though *izinsumpa* apparently can refer to decorative bumps on vessels (Doke et al. 1990), potters and other informants are emphatic about the distinction. Only when pressed (and perhaps because we pressed them) did potters Bonisiwe and Zikhoti Magwaza identify some rather unusual bumps on a pot made by Nesta Nala as *izinsumpa*. We are uncertain of the widespread significance of this wart-style bump.

Today people associate *amasumpa* with the Zulu kingdom (Grossert 1968; Klopper 1991) and they are generally described by potters as *isiZulu*, the Zulu way<sup>5</sup> (Armstrong 2001). Several vessels at the Local History Museum in Durban were apparently recovered from the Zulu capital Ondini when British troops sacked it on 4 July 1879. *Amasumpa* occur on the two large *izimpiso* (Fig. 4.27). Further, 14 out of 19 beer vessels in a 1907 photograph of the



Fig. 4.26. Storage area at the back of Shongaziphi Magwaza's hut (equivalent to the *umsamo*), mPhabalane near Ndondondwane drift.

Zulu king Dinuzulu's wives are decorated with *amasumpa* motifs. None of our informants living south of the Thukela river had any notion of the uses and meaning of *amasumpa*, but *amasumpa*-like bumps occur in the Nguni sequence from *Blackburn* times onwards (Fig. 7.5). Since some of these data come from southern KwaZulu-Natal, the strong association of *amasumpa* with Zulu identity is a recent phenomenon. Our research indicates that several variations exist and that they have regional significance.

The construction of *amasumpa* is laborious and potters usually charge a higher fee for vessels decorated in this way, or make them for commissions only. Potters claim that *amasumpa* give the drinker a firmer grip when the pot is full of beer (Armstrong 1998). Potters make the bumps either by adding clay to the vessel surface, or by using the clay of



Fig. 4.27. *Izimphiso* reputedly recovered from Ondini, 1879. Local History Museums' Collection, Durban.

the already constructed pot. For example, potters in the Nongoma area make *amasumpa* by pulling clay up from the external surface of the pot to create dramatic, conical spikes (Fig. 4.28a).

Potters of mPhabalane in the middle Thukela Basin use an especially interesting technique. They make *amasumpa* by pushing a small stalk partially through the soft wall of a vessel from the inside, so that the stalk drives clay outwards to form a small, soft-looking lump (Fig. 4.28b). This technique is called *qhumbuza* and comes “from the old people”. As it happens, it does have antiquity: it occurs in assemblages dating to the 1300s. The ‘right’ to use the *qhumbuza* technique is not given to anyone, even within potting families (Mancane Magwaza pers. comm. 1998; Bonisiwe and Zikhoti Magwaza pers. comm. 2007).

The verb *qhumbuza* means ‘pierce’ or ‘puncture’, and can be used for something that is about to emerge or has just appeared or burst outwards (Doke et al. 1990). It also refers to the ear piercing which every child undergoes before puberty, usually around the age of seven (Krige 1962). In some districts, communal ear-piercing ceremonies were held, but the event is more usually restricted to individual homesteads. The ceremony most often takes place at the entrance to the cattle pen or immediately outside the homestead. Several children in a homestead might be pierced at the same event (Krige 1962). The pierced ear symbolizes an individual from whom a social being is about to emerge. A person with unpierced ears will “remain childish and foolish” (Mayr 1907: 645), or called *isicuthe*—a person with closed ears, that is, one who is not obedient, or is deaf (Bryant 1905), an asocial person. Thus, *qhumbuza* opened the ears “and prepared the youths to hear commands. During the *qhumbuza* ceremony, social codes were taught to the youths by their elders, inculcating notions of respect and of rank” (Hamilton 1985: 348). *Qhumbuza* bumps on pots surely carry the same symbolic load. Recognition of the symbolism, however, demands familiarity with the material: it is clearly a symbolism directed internally, not at outsiders.

In a third technique, potters add pellets of clay to the vessel surface. For best results, the pellets have stalk-like projections which are pushed through a small hole in the vessel wall like a rivet, binding them to the pot. Pellets without this ‘root’ pop off more easily during firing and use (Armstrong pers. observation; Schofield 1948: 188; Bryant 1967: 401). The pellet has the appearance of a flattened button, which Jolles (2005: 117) likens to the small chocolate ‘Smarties’ sweet (Fig. 4.28c).

In yet another variation *amasumpa* are made by welding slabs or strips of clay to the vessel surface. The potter cuts two sets of V-shaped parallel rows into the applied clay perpendicularly to one another to form small, faceted pyramids (Figs 4.29, 4.30). This *amasumpa* type is called *amapulubo* (sing. *ipulubo*), ploughs, derived from the Afrikaans *ploeg*. In appearance, these *amasumpa* closely resemble textured decoration carved into wooden headrests and meat platters and they are frequently organized in similar quadrangular motifs on artefacts in both media (Schofield 1948: 189; Grossert 1968: 497; cf. Klopper 1991: figs 67–70, 73–7; Zaloumis & Difford 2000: 43–121, 269–93). *Amapulubo*-style *amasumpa* are most commonly used by potters and carvers living in and around eMakhosini—the Valley of the Kings that was once at the heart of the Zulu kingdom (Klopper 1991: 85).





Fig. 4.28 (a). Purchased 1999 at Mona Market, Nongoma. Potter unknown. Juliet Armstrong collection. (b) *Qhumbuza*-style. Note impressions on interior of vessel. Pot from Utrecht, KwaZulu-Natal. Donated to the South African Museum in 1908. Iziko Museums of South Africa, Social History Collections. (c) 'Smarties'-style. Note the small hole left by a lost stalk and nodule. Pot by Nesta Nala, near Ndondondwane drift.



Fig. 4.29. Potter making *amafulubo amasumpa*, Entumeni area near Melmoth, 1994.



Fig. 4.30. *Amapulubo amasumpa*, pot from Melmoth/Eshowe area. Potter unknown (Jolles 2005: 130).

Klopper (1989: 36) suggests that these *amasumpa* “allude to large herds of cattle”. The name *amapulubo* suggests another meaning. The word is recently adopted, but not necessarily culturally inert in the way that *isaba* might be. It refers obviously to agricultural fields and, by association, to married women who are allocated fields by their husbands on the birth of their first child. Women can be seen as fields to be cultivated by their husbands (Ntombi Mkhize pers. comm.). These ideas are captured in a statement given to Ngubane (1977: 94–5).

The woman receives, takes in, the seed which grows to be a baby—just like the seed of the maize which because of the warmth of the soil which is fertile, germinates and takes root. The child belongs to the man because it is he who has sown. The woman is the soil, as you plant the maize in the soil it germinates. If the soil is not fertile the maize seed does not take root.

Since women are responsible for tending fields, but are excluded from using ploughs and oxen, this variety of *amasumpa* strongly emphasizes male control of female productive and creative capacity. Neither cattle nor ploughs were used to prepare fields in precolonial times, but the social conventions associated with their use merely add an additional layer to the theme. The modern name *amapulubo* is grafted onto a deeply rooted conceptual framework. Our interpretation is not incompatible with Klopper’s because the fundamental transaction in the accumulation of productive and reproductive capacity was the exchange of cattle for wives. It is a small shift to make from the creative potential of wives/cattle to the creative potential of wives/ox-drawn ploughs. The alternate readings are not surprising: Klopper’s wood-carver informants were men; ours are women.

It is fitting then that *amapulubo*-style *amasumpa* decorate some *izingxotha*, the brass gauntlets that Zulu kings awarded favoured subjects (Krige 1962: 374) (Fig. 4.31). Bryant’s

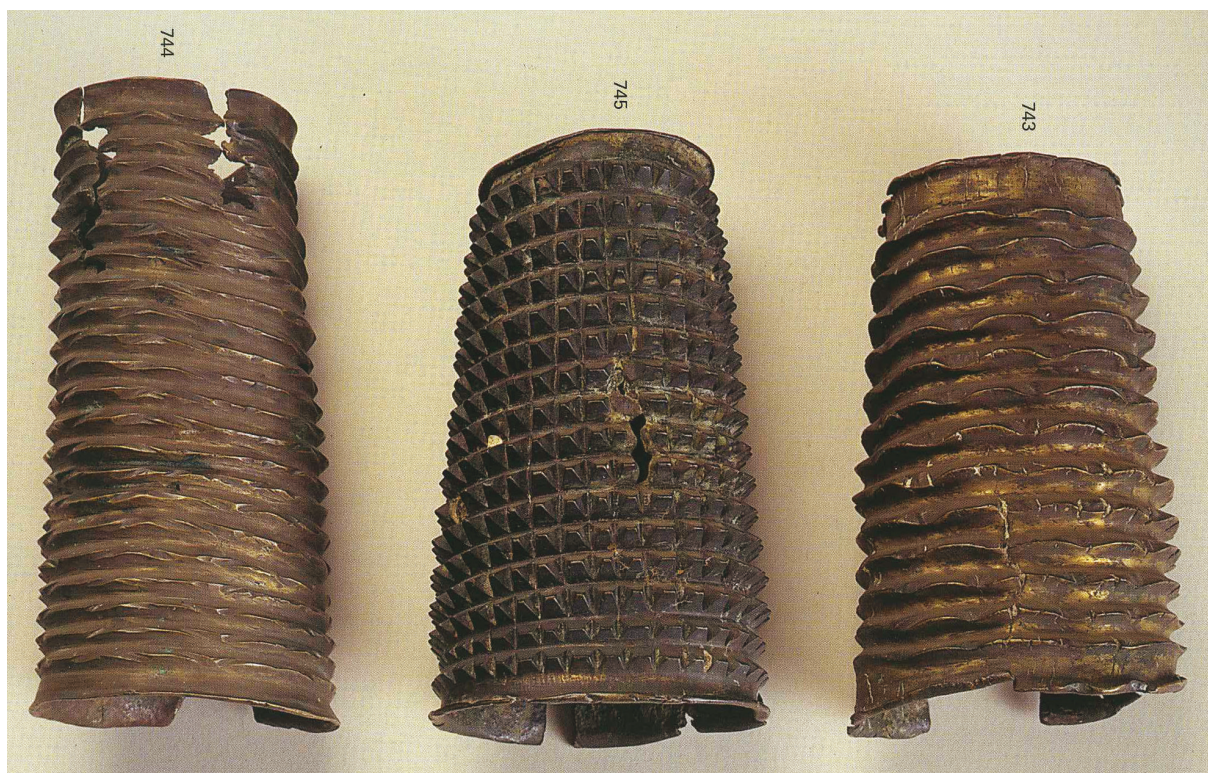


Fig. 4.31. *Izingxotha*, Iziko Museums of South Africa, Social History Collections.

(1967: 401) name for isolated lozenge and diamond *amasumpa* motifs on pottery—*ingxotha*—specifically associates this decorative technique with both media. *Amapulubo* motifs could well have evolved into symbols of royal power and patronage in the Zulu kingdom as Klopper (1991: 85) argues. They are extremely rare in ceramic assemblages that predate the early 1800s (but see Fig. 7.5.3, of the *Blackburn* facies) and were probably used primarily to decorate other media (see, for instance, Fynn’s (1950: 269) reference to “lines or marks” burned into headrests; he first arrived in the region in mid-1823).

Sets of ‘wales’ or ridges on pottery are rarer today, but might carry a similar symbolic load (Fig. 4.32). When set close together the wales are suggestive of ridges made in fields and, like *amapulubo*-style *amasumpa*, this technique has a counterpart on *izingxotha* (Fig. 4.31) and headrests (Jolles 2001: figs 12, 13, 15, 16; Zaloumis & Difford 2000: 75, 91, 95).

The arrangement of *amasumpa* into motifs provides the various decorative techniques with another layer of meaning. Bryant (1967: 401), for instance, gives the name *isidlubu* for *amasumpa* arranged in a circular motif. An *isidlubu* (pl. *izidlubu*) is a garden or field of *Vigna* (formerly *Voandzeia*) *subterranea* groundnuts; the nuts themselves are *izindlubu* (sing. *indlubu*) (Dent & Nyembezi 1988). Crops generally are incompatible with meat, an opposition that rests on the association of livestock with men, and of cultivation with women (Raum 1973: 126, 132, 274–5). Groundnuts are especially sensitive (Ngubane 1977: 79). They “do not agree” with meat and a man must respect (*blonipha*) the crop in the same way that he respects his wife. Further, strange men should not cross groundnut fields because their polluting character would cause the crop to fail (Raum 1973: 132).



Fig. 4.32. Pot with wales. Made by Bongeghile Nzuza from Mbongilweni, 2007.

We suspect groundnut sensitivity is rooted in their subterranean character. They are embedded in the ancestral world in the same way that a woman giving birth is embedded in the world of her husband's ancestors. The *umnyama* that affects her at this time is intense and, like groundnuts, she and her baby are especially vulnerable to negative influences (Ngubane 1977: 78, 85–9). The *isidlubu* motif, we suggest, represents wives giving birth, and further, the reproductive capacity of a man's homestead and its productive potential.

In support we note Junod's (1962, II: 12–13) observation that the southern Tsonga plant groundnuts in a securely fenced field, separated from other crops. Men can plant them (implant the seed), but must otherwise avoid the field. They would suffer swollen testicles and cause the crop to fail if they ignored the taboo. The restrictions extend to women, who cannot plant groundnuts in their first year of marriage (when its success is still unproven). Further, the Pedi do not plant groundnuts if drought is predicted, and uproot them when drought strikes. Nor do they plant them on virgin land (equivalent to unmarried women and pre-pubescent girls) (Quin 1959: 45–6). These data suggest that groundnuts are universally ambiguous among Eastern Bantu speakers in southern Africa. The prohibitions<sup>6</sup> regarding groundnuts are directly linked, we argue, to their association with parturient women: failed pregnancies—miscarriages—are dangerously polluting, while mismanagement of the foetus is the primary cause of drought.

Generally, *amasumpa* are arranged into a variety of continuous and discontinuous chevron, rectangular, triangular, circular and X-shaped motifs. Many are similar in shape to incised motifs. Some resemble the panels created in the past by cicatrization (Kennedy 1993: 230–1; also, see the motif on a woman's upper arm in Mayr 1906: fig. 7). In some areas the decoration on both media—ceramic and skin—shared the same name, *izinhlanga* or *izimpimpiliza* (Mayr 1906: 462, 1907: 643–5). Cicatrization was commonly practised in the nineteenth century by teenagers between the ages of 13 and 16, and mainly by young women (Krige 1962: 375; Bryant 1967: 165). Small incisions were made into the skin, sealed with dry cow dung and topped with a glowing ember. The wounds healed into small, raised

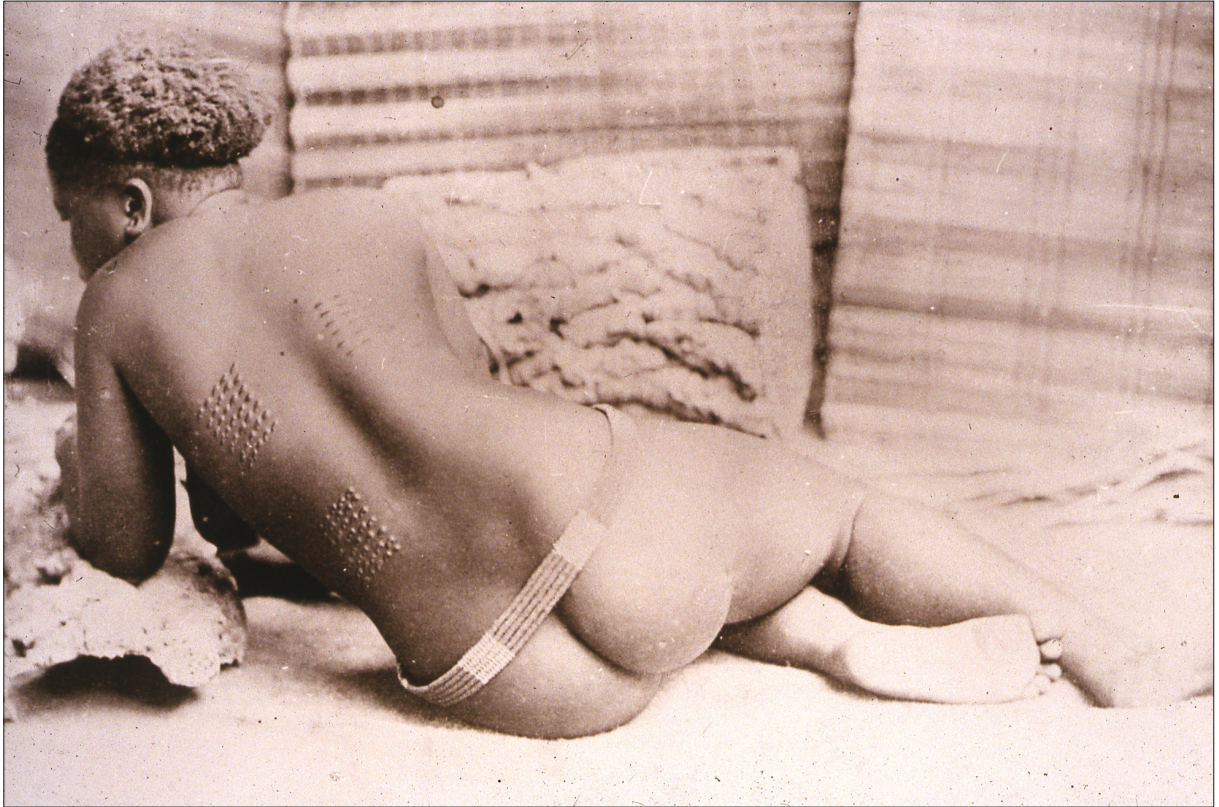


Fig. 4.33. Woman with cicatrization. Scars on the left-hand side and new cuts on the right-hand side show that it was a staggered process. Courtesy Campbell Collections, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

pea-sized lumps (Fig. 4.33). Cicatrization gradually died out in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and none of our informants had any idea of the practice (Kennedy 1993: 230; cf. Hunter 1936: 222 for the Mpondo; Junod 1962, I: 181 for the Tsonga).

It is worth briefly noting several pots in the KwaZulu-Natal Museum collection. They were acquired prior to 1910<sup>7</sup> from the Pietermaritzburg vicinity, south of our research area. These are decorated with quadrangular motifs made up of small impressions filled with a white substance, possibly ash. On some the impressions have forced up a corresponding bulge on the inside of vessel, rather like the *qbumbuza*-style *amasumpa* in appearance (Fig. 4.34). The white-filled impressions were possibly a local variant of cicatrization-like decoration.

Cicatrized patterns were made on the chest, back, abdomen, shoulders, and even on the calves. Cicatrization seems to have been a matter of personal choice. Evidently each age-set or ‘regiment’ had its own mark, but it was not a criterion of age-set membership. It was not associated with any formal behavioural practices or taboos (Mayr 1907: 645). By contrast, cicatrized motifs on young Tsonga women were linked to clan origins and in pre- and early colonial times the practice does not seem to have been one of choice: the pain meant that women “must be forced to submit to it” (Junod 1962, I: 180). The operation was preceded and followed by rules of behaviour and avoidance for the patient.

In light of these differences, it is worth exploring the meanings of the two terms Mayr gives for the scars. *Izinblanga* refers to reeds, thickets of reeds, medicinal incisions (on



Fig. 4.34. Pot purchased in the Table Mountain area near Pietermaritzburg in 1909. KwaZulu-Natal Museum accession number 1028A.

the body), brands or trademarks, ‘tribal’ (probably = clan) incisions, and incised decorations on people and pots (Doke et al. 1990). It also calls to mind origins. Reeds provide a vegetable metaphor for genealogical increase. People are meant to have originated from a reed bed by ‘breaking off’, just as reeds propagate vegetatively by breaking off and re-establishing. Reeds, not surprisingly, symbolize virility.

*Izimpimpiliza* (sing. *impimpiliza*) on the other hand derives from *mpimpilizi*, of spinning, from *mpi*, of fast movement that appears stationary (Doke et al. 1990). The terms are appropriately descriptive of the state of teenagehood: changing fast, but going nowhere. While *izimpimpiliza* decoration on pots can represent this age category, its permanence on skin means it must stand for more on people. Perhaps the political centralization that produced the Zulu kingdom resulted in the transformation of a mark of genealogical identity (*izinhlanga*) into a voluntary mark of age-set identity (*izimpimpiliza*). It no doubt served the state to de-emphasize potentially divisive identities (Hamilton 1985: chapter 6). Perhaps, in this transformation, cicatrization lost its baggage of ritualized incorporation.

It is worth noting that in pre- and early colonial times, the organization of people into age-sets was a means employed by chiefs to exploit young men and women. Age-sets provided chiefs with labour and, when necessary, soldiers. Chiefs also determined when young men could marry and establish homesteads, and so take on demands that would remove them from chiefly labour. Indeed, control of marriage became extreme in the early years of the Zulu kingdom (Krige 1962: 36–8). In effect, the age-sets represented the productive capacity of the chieftom and its reproductive potential (Guy 1987: 30–3). It is difficult, then, to escape the conclusion that *izimpimpiliza*, like *izingxotha*, symbolized royal control of this capacity.

### *Letters as decoration*

In Msinga, pots with motifs made of letters are called *izinkamba ezikbulumayo*—pots that talk, a phrase applied here to all pots. Methods of forming letters vary regionally. Incision is characteristic of Msinga and Nkandla, though the techniques differ. Letters are scratched into the leather-hard vessel in Msinga, whereas in Nkandla letters are cut with a serrated tool, giving them a jagged edge. Potters of the Ekushumayeleni area (between Ulundi and Nongoma) create letters with *amasumpa* or strips of clay.

The use of letters on material culture dates from the mid-twentieth century. Until then, rural education was driven primarily by mission schools, which were small and few in number. Growing familiarization with the alphabet followed the expansion of the government education system in Bantu Reserves in the 1950s. Potters and beadworkers added letters learnt from schoolchildren to their decorative repertoire (Wickler & Seibt 1990: 94), but did not necessarily learn to read and write. Even today, potters over the age of 40 in rural areas are generally illiterate and innumerate, but many use the letters as decorative motifs. ‘Words’ formed on pots and beadwork often have no discernable meaning and can contain odd mixtures of capital and lower case letters. ‘Phrases’ are without proper grammar. For example, an Ekushumayeleni vessel has the ‘phrase’ “ZUHAMBE ITShont Pn”, which has no literal meaning.

Where letter-motifs are literate, the messages most often relate to customs and beliefs associated with beer feasts. An emphasis on respect for the ancestors is evident on an Ekushumayeleni vessel with “NANKU UMSEBENZI UWENZIWA<sup>8</sup> KWAZULU” (“Here is your work that is done in the home of Zulu”). The motif acknowledges the cosmological significance of the feast and reinforces the invitation of the pot’s blackened surface. Another from Msinga is decorated with “BABAWAMI” (“my father”). Another from Ekushumayeleni politely reminds guests that beer feasts must eventually end with “HAMBA KAHLE” (“go well”).

Others warn of the dangers of beer feasts, demanding calm and moderation. To those impatient for beer, a letter-motif directs ‘Bonalapo’ (‘look over there’). An Msinga vessel (Jolles 2005: pot 6.02) carries the message “WENA PHUZA UthULE UMSINDO” (“you, drink and be peaceful”) (Fig. 4.35). Equally forcefully, a satirical letter-motif demands of troublesome guests, ‘Phuzu Phume’ (‘drink up and go’). These pots are not reserved for difficult situations, but their decoration reinforces the desire for appropriate behaviour at beer feasts.

Letter-motifs reflect ideas about hospitality and abundance, as well as the expectation that hosts should have sufficient beer for guests. A large Msinga vessel is incised with “PHUZAUDELE” (“drink till you are satisfied”). The literal message enhances the symbolism of the vessel’s size: it is *ukhamba udabulibheshu*, a pot so large that a man’s back apron (*ibheshu*) tears (*dabula*) when he lifts it.

But this same vessel carries an additional sobering message. Its letter-motif is accompanied by an incised machine-gun (Fig. 4.36), which reminds one that Msinga has a long history of bloody internecine feuds. The potter lost her husband in fighting. It seems



Fig. 4.35. Pot from Msinga, evidently made in the 1940s or 1950s (Jolles 2005: 133).

that the decoration on her pot promotes appropriate social norms, but with a clear warning of the violence that can erupt from drunkenness. Additional motifs, hourglasses, direct a message of social responsibility squarely at adult men.

Other letter-motifs respond to the commodification of pottery production, ‘Nithenga’ (‘buy me’), and to the impact of English, “THANK YOU”. And, at Mona Market in northern KwaZulu-Natal can be seen pots with “ZA” in *amasumpa*, taken from the identity stickers that vehicles crossing the national borders to Swaziland and Mozambique



Fig. 4.36. *Ukhamba udabulibhesbu* from Msinga, made by Mandojeyane Makhunja, 1989 (Reusch et al. 1998: 29). Note the hour-glass motifs that bracket the image of the machine-gun.



must bear (Fig. 4.28a). Perhaps these reflect the recognition of a larger scale of identity, that of South African versus foreign African.

Finally, letter-motifs make a statement about modernity. It does not matter whether a motif is linguistically correct, or whether users understand its literal meaning. The letter-motifs are unquestionably *isiZulu* (the Zulu way) in technique, layout and context. Users can appreciate them for both their Zuluness and expression of modernity. Pots with letter-motifs make an affirming connection between modern life and the Zulu way, providing conversation pieces around which such issues can be discussed.

## **Why pots are decorated**

It is widely accepted that in Africa pots can represent people and are therefore appropriate vehicles for socially significant messages (Braithwaite 1982; Welbourne 1984; David et al. 1988; Evers 1988; Evers & Huffman 1988; Collett 1993; Hall 1998: 249–55; Huffman 2007a: 103–10). Such messages are often, though not solely, conveyed by decoration. Consequently, articles associated with socially complex situations are commonly more decorated than others. By socially complex, we mean those situations that involve representatives of a variety of social categories, or the merging of, or transitions between categories. In such situations, decoration can function as ritual in that it facilitates the breaching of boundaries (Braithwaite 1982: 81) and provides protection from dangerous power (David et al. 1988: 374). It achieves these ends through its depiction or expression of the structures and themes upon which culture is built, through which it reinforces social relations by triggering symbolic associations deep within the viewer's psyche (Braithwaite 1982; Welbourne 1984; David et al. 1988: 370, 374–5; cf. Hammond-Tooke 1989a: 14–15).

The treatment of Zulu beer vessels is consistent with these principles. Beer (and meat) feasts are socially complex events. They are gatherings of disparate people: they involve young and old, men and women, relatives and strangers, invited and uninvited, all in close proximity to the homestead head's ancestors. Separation of groups and a strict code of behaviour serve to maintain order, but inebriation, expectations of hospitality and the desire to provide adequately can expose anxiety, tensions and promote challenges to authority.

Secondly, Zulu pots can represent people. Pots have a life history, just as people do. Probably for this reason, the smoke-firing is not repeated even after the colour has faded through use. People do not return to transformative events and neither should pots. Like people, pots should age and with age comes a more intimate relationship with the ancestors.

Vessel size can be significant in relating pots to people. Large vessels like *izinkamba udabulibeshu* are generally used by men (Reusch et al. 1998: 29). At the other end of the size scale, an *umancishana*<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 4.21) can signal that the host (regretfully) has insufficient beer or that the guest (regretfully) has arrived at an inopportune time (Mertens & Schoeman 1975: 104–5). Beer is not normally served to guests in *omancishana* because of their small size (Krige 1962: 397). Instead, people use *omancishana* to make offerings to the ancestors. The offerings are later drunk by the oldest members of the homestead, who are closest to the

ancestors (cf. Jolles 2005: 126, pot 1.02). While these particular *omancishana* are not given to guests, the association of the vessel type with seniority expresses the host's respect for his guest.

A small but differently shaped vessel is used for the same purpose in Msinga (Reusch et al. 1998: 26–8). Its name, *umgodi wenyoka* (hole of a snake), refers specifically to the ancestors, who commonly take the form of snakes and enter and emerge from the earth via *imigodi*—large holes such as aardvark burrows and grain pits (Doke et al. 1990). *Umgodi wenyoka* provides a 'home from home' for the ancestors in the *umsamo*. It explicitly invokes an ancestral presence in the home.

Bryant (1967: 611) provides another powerful example. A pregnant woman prepares medicine which she keeps in a pot stored in the *umsamo*. The pot and its lid are marked with a cross of red ochre that 'locks' the vessel. Should anyone look into it, his or her likeness would be captured in the medicine and transferred to the foetus when the woman takes the medicine. Here the pot stands for the woman; any action on its contents affects her and her child.

Finally, textured decoration on Zulu pots exploits this homology because at least some motifs represent people, defined in such terms as gender, age and status. Motifs do not, however, convey messages about who can drink from a vessel (contra Mertens & Schoeman 1975: 105). Potters are emphatic on this point. Rather, these concepts are the basis of social relationships. By marking out categories of people, beer-pot decoration complements and reinforces the code of behaviour and the spatial separation of groups at beer feasts. Referring to *amasumpa*, potter Mancane Magwaza said that decoration demonstrated respect (*inblonipho*) for the ancestors (Armstrong 2001). This is probably true for all decoration that is *isiZulu* (the Zulu way). It intensifies the presence of the ancestors at the feast. It reminds drinkers of the behaviour that ancestors would sanction and so confronts the potentially dangerous challenges to social order that can arise at beer feasts. We find it fascinating that decoration drawn from 'modern life', the letter motifs and machine gun, expresses precisely the same concern. MaZondo's *ikhandela elentulo* motif makes this point even more powerfully, with its appeal to ancestor-sanctioned values in the face of ambiguity.

This appeal to social order shows that there is a close relationship between decoration and pollution beliefs. They are different aspects of the same thing: decoration materializes pollution beliefs. Drawing on this point, several studies of the social role of pots have focused on proximity of men and women as a key threat to social order. The nature of Zulu beer feasts and much of the decoration seems consistent with this position, but it provides an incomplete explanation for Zulu decoration. It does not fully engage with the relationship between pollution and marriage. To go further, we consider curdled milk (*amasi*) vessels.

Curdled milk is a food of the home and was a dietary staple (Krige 1962: 55; Bryant 1967: 270). According to some informants it is commonly kept in the *umsamo*, but is removed when offerings of meat and beer are placed there, or when guests are due to gather in the hut. Meat, beer and guests form a set opposed to curdled milk, and meat and

beer are ideally kept separately in a beer or kitchen hut (Krige 1962: 55; Raum 1973: 126, 171, 275). The logic that supports the distinction between these foods rests on the explicit metaphorical association of curdled milk, semen and ancestors (Raum 1973: 357).

Curdled milk consumption is linked directly to descent. In principle, a man can eat curdled milk at the homesteads of people with the same *isibongo* (clan name) as any of his four grandparents; that is, people with whom he cannot enter a marriage alliance. He cannot eat curdled milk at the homestead of his wife's father, and she can eat it at his homestead only after the *ukudlakudla* ceremony at which she is more closely integrated with her husband's homestead (Krige 1962: 383).

Like beer pots, and for the same reason, curdled milk pots are smoke-fired to produce a black finish. Unlike beer pots, they are free of textured decoration. This absence is instructive. It shows that the textured decoration is not so much directed internally, within the homestead. Decoration is not simply about interactions between men and women. After all, both sexes can eat curdled milk from the same herd.

Rather, textured decoration on beer pots is directed primarily at people with whom one cannot share curdled milk, that is, at potential partners in marriage. Interaction with them is critical. Through it, agnatic clusters promote themselves as social entities. Without it, homesteads could not exist and lines of descent would have no future. And yet, however necessary this presence of strangers, it is potentially dangerous. Homestead inhabitants are exposed to negative influences and then made more vulnerable because of the polluting quality of beer (Berglund 1976: 225). In this sense, beer feasts are *isidlubu* motifs wrought large.

Beer pots then are central (if silent) 'communicators' at events at which the success of the homestead is celebrated and at least partly negotiated. It is to this success that the decorative references to reproductive and productive capacity allude. These ideas and practices persevere even though people today are bound into a capitalist economy and success is determined by the production and sale of commodities—the production of pots for sale at rural markets is a good example—rather than the accumulation and control of people. Notions of reproduction and production, the ancestors, decoration and pollution beliefs developed in precapitalist times are still invoked, but they are no longer of central economic significance. They are now tradition, still bolstering the authority of men (Guy 1987: 36–7; see also discussion of the Natal Code of Native Law and its emphasis on patriarchy in Chapter Five). The failure of potters to develop a market in rural areas for innovative designs is an indication of its vice-like grip.

## **Conclusion**

We have examined the cosmological, functional and economic context of beer-pot manufacture and use. We have been less concerned with aesthetics. We cannot comment on why individual potters chose to express themselves in a particular way (cf. Nettleton & Hammond-Tooke 1989: 9–10), other than by reference to the broader context. Because pots

create an ancestral presence, reverence for the ancestors must promote aesthetic excellence. This is probably true whatever the beliefs of individual potters, because pots are purchased and used by Zulu-speakers. Potters explicitly distinguish between the needs of Zulu and non-Zulu customers.

The pots clearly comprise a Zulu style (*isiZulu*), with local variants (see also Jolles 2005). It is not an ethnic style (cf. Hammond-Tooke 1989a: 19–20, 2000: 421). It is directed internally, made by Zulu-speakers for Zulu-speakers. We do not know its boundaries, though Msinga, without *amasumpa*, and Phongolo with its Swazi-like pot shapes (Fig. 4.12) are possibly border zones. Our other observations are from the region once dominated by the Zulu kingdom. We wonder about the region south of the Thukela River, which has experienced different social forces during the last 200 years. Changes there include a shift in homestead organization from a circular form to a linear arrangement, a process called *ukuvelwa umuzi* (to open out the homestead). Homestead heads regret the change, noting the loss of control it entails (Mack et al. 1991: 94, 127). Have there, we wonder, been related changes in beer pots? Or do beer pots reinforce the professed conservatism of homestead heads (Mack et al. 1991: 92)?

The style has limited historical precedent. Jolles (2005) shows that prior to the twentieth century, beer-serving vessels made by Nguni speakers east of the Drakensberg were primarily gourds and baskets (Jolles 2005: 109–10). Gourds dominate in many early photographs. His observation has implications for our understanding of Nguni-related culture-historical sequences in southern Africa. It perhaps helps explain, for example, the pattern of dual identity expressed at the Ndzundza Ndebele sites of KwaMaza and Esikhunjini (Schoeman 1998a, b), where the more ‘Nguni-like’ vessels might have been lost to decomposition. The same might be true of Ngoni assemblages (cf. Collett 1987).

Finally, whereas beer vessels today are components of tradition, in the precolonial past they ‘participated’ at every significant occasion at which men negotiated marriages. These negotiations were critical. Without them a homestead could not exist. The homestead was created as a node in a web of relationships. Beer gave the relationships a sensory, tactile character. And decorated beer vessels bound the uncertainties and tensions of the present to an enduring past and a predictable, hopeful future.

The next chapter develops the theme of pollution concepts and marriage and applies it to Early Iron Age data. It also invokes the lessons learnt from this study of Zulu pots.

## **Acknowledgements**

We are especially grateful to the potters for their hospitality and generosity with time, patience and knowledge. In many ways, this article is theirs. Ntombi Mkhize (Natal Museum) interpreted on occasion and was similarly generous with her knowledge of Zulu culture. Anitra Nettleton, Tom Huffman (University of the Witwatersrand), Tim Maggs and Simon Hall (University of Cape Town) commented on earlier drafts. The Campbell Collections (University of KwaZulu-Natal) (Figs 4.2, 4.6, 4.7, 4.33), Iziko Museums of South Africa (Social History Collections) (Figs 4.28, 4.31), the Local History Museums (Durban) (Fig. 4.27), and the Natal Museum (Fig. 4.34) permitted us to use either photographs in their collections, or photographs of

objects in their collections. The National Research Foundation funded Juliet Armstrong’s research. None of our interpretations necessarily represent their views. Figures 4.17–4.25 and 4.30, photographed by Gavin Whitelaw, first appeared with Figure 4.35 in Frank Jolles’s 2005 article.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *fusa*: smoke, fumigate, discolour (Doke et al. 1990), so *ukufusa*, to smoke, to blacken.

<sup>2</sup> Refers to both nastergal (*Solanum retroflexum* Dunal) and the exotic Cape gooseberry (*Physalis peruviana* L.). *S. retroflexum* is also called *umsobo*, pl. *imisobo* (Hutchings et al. 1996: 274, 278).

<sup>3</sup> A goat is preferred in some areas, such as Mnweni (Drakensberg) (Muzi Msimanga pers. comm. 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Mpatshana kaSodondo to James Stuart, 1912.

<sup>5</sup> *isiZulu* refers to the language, customs and mannerisms of Zulu people (Dent & Nyembezi 1988; Doke et al. 1990). Our expression of this concept comes from Dalrymple (1983: 74; cf. Webster 1991: 269 for *isithonga*).

<sup>6</sup> Also, groundnuts are not planted after a chief’s death and “[y]oung people” become sterile if they eat groundnuts that were not “mounded” (Quin 1959: 46)—that is, hidden from view.

<sup>7</sup> The collection also includes some acquired after this date, but which are similar to the pre-1910 examples and might be contemporaneous.

<sup>8</sup> Correctly, *owenzima*.

<sup>9</sup> From *ncishana*, to be stingy toward (cf. Doke et al. 1990).



# 5

## **Pollution concepts and marriage for the southern African Iron Age<sup>1</sup>**

In an article published in 1981 Hammond-Tooke compares Sotho and Nguni worldviews, drawing especially on studies of the Kgaga and Zulu (1981a). He focuses on pollution beliefs, interpreting these in terms of the articulation of each with its ‘social substructure’. As is the case with other Sotho-Tswana, Kgaga pollution emphasizes heat. Zulus, by contrast, stress bodily contamination. Hammond-Tooke poses a gentle challenge to archaeologists to investigate the origins and development of these different systems, or at least to interpret archaeological residues in terms of pollution beliefs. His work inspired several archaeologists to apply pollution-related interpretations to the archaeological record.

Hall (1998), for instance, argues that changes in Sotho-Tswana household layout and ceramic style constitute evidence for the development of increasingly hierarchical relations between men and women. Boeyens et al. (2009) interpret child burials in pots as treatment of the polluting effect of untimely death (see also Hattingh & Hall 2009). And Huffman (2009) uses burnt daga structures as a proxy for severe drought, arguing that structures were burnt deliberately to treat drought-causing pollution. In a remarkable validation of the interpretative approach, he matches the burnt structures, isotopic results from faunal remains and lake deposits in South America to identify a 2000-year sequence of intense El Niño episodes that caused droughts throughout southern Africa (Huffman 2010a).

This chapter attempts to examine links between pollution beliefs and marriage in a way that is archaeologically useful. It draws heavily on Hammond-Tooke’s thesis, though it offers new material and some different perspectives. I mostly use the present tense, either because people I spoke to still hold these ideas, or because the ethnographic sources are generally of the twentieth century. I start with an Nguni (mainly Zulu) perspective (Fig. 5.1).

### **Pollution and society**

Douglas defines pollution as a set of dangerous powers that “punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate” (2002: 140). People inevitably encounter such conjunctions and ruptures, partly because people’s models of the world do not perfectly match their experience in it, but more importantly because people experience change throughout their lives, from birth through childhood, puberty, marriage, parenthood, old age and death. Each transition, each mismatch is ripe



Fig. 5.1. East and central southern Africa, indicating various groups and places mentioned in the text: N = Ndondondwane; MC = Msuluzi Confluence; M = Magogo and Mhlopeni; K = KwaGandaganda; Mtd = Marothodi; KZN = KwaZulu-Natal; EC = Eastern Cape.



with creative potential, but also, by implication, contains uncertainty and even danger (cf. Douglas 2002: 117). Pollution represents this uncertainty. Living, then, generates pollution, sometimes intentionally, but more often unintentionally. Either way a “polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone” (Douglas 2002: 140).

For the Zulu, pollution manifests itself primarily as darkness (*umnyama*) (Krige 1962: 82; Ngubane 1977: chapter 5). The Mpondo and other southern Nguni refer to *umlaza* (Hunter 1936: 46–7; Hammond-Tooke 1962: 69–70). Whatever its form, pollution renders people vulnerable to bad luck and sickness, notably in terms of reproductive and productive success. Further, polluted people are dangerous for other people as well as things. Crops might shrivel, brews fail, pots crack and milk can dry in the udder (Hunter 1936: 46–7; Ngubane 1977: 78–9).

Polluted people protect themselves and others from the condition in several ways. Affected people *zila*, that is, they adopt an abstinence and avoidance behaviour, and cleanse themselves. New mothers and mourners should cover themselves with blankets, and then, in the case of mothers, apply red ochre to themselves as protection from negative influences in the environment (see Ngubane 1977: 24–9). Fearful of passing such influences on to their babies, mothers returning from an outing express a few drops of milk onto the floor before breastfeeding. Similarly, men who encounter strangers at work might regularly cleanse themselves by vomiting. Young men who feel themselves unattractive can take a course of steaming and vomiting with red medicine followed by a course of vomiting with white medicine (Berglund 1976: 328–9; Ngubane 1977: chapters 5, 6; Ntombi Mkhize pers. comm.). A menstruating woman who must cross a groundnut field (which she would normally avoid) spits onto an earth clod and throws it into the field (Ngubane 1977: 79). Here she apparently treats the field as one would a grave (see Berglund 1976: 334–5); they are the same in the sense that both are conceptually similar to the womb (Armstrong et al. 2008: 537–8). Spitting can be cleansing, but in this context is also a declaration of innocence, an indication that the woman means no harm. A menstruating Bhaca woman adopts the same strategy when crossing a river, which might otherwise “become aggravated” (Hammond-Tooke 1962: 70). Importantly, because people believe they can be unknowingly polluted, they always take steps to ensure they are ritually pure before embarking on activities related in any way to the creative process (Krige 1962: 82; Berglund 1976: 225–8, 329). To understand where pollution dangers lie, we must follow Hammond-Tooke and look at the ‘social substructure’.

### **Pollution in the ‘social substructure’**

The key social unit is the agnatic cluster, which together with wives typically occupies a homestead or set of closely associated homesteads. The cluster includes the homestead-head’s ancestors, incorporating both the undifferentiated legion of clan ancestors, as well as recognizable members who died recently. The first category comprises all the dead who

shared the homestead-head's clan name. The second, typically grandparents, distinguishes the ancestors of different agnatic clusters within a clan (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 151).

Each homestead is created through marriage. Unlike some Eastern Bantu groups who permit cousin marriage, Zulus are more strictly exogamous. Typically, a man cannot marry a woman from any of the clans of his four grandparents (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 107, 118). In a cosmological sense, therefore, his wife is a stranger to his agnatic cluster. She is simultaneously alien and a critical component of her husband's homestead—a homestead cannot exist without marriage, nor can a man's agnatic cluster grow beyond him. Because wives join unrelated clusters, they provide a template for thinking about pollution.

Wives join different realms in another important way. When giving birth they connect or form channels between the living world and that of their husbands' ancestors (Ngubane 1977: chapter 5). No contact between ancestors and clan strangers is more intimate. Consequently, pollution is most strongly associated with birth, when a wife's fertile potential is fully realized, and with death, which mirrors birth. Indeed, burial ritual reverses the birth ritual (Ngubane 1977: chapter 5; Hammond-Tooke 1981a).

Subtleties in this set of beliefs are revealing. Death pollution is treated initially with 'black' medicines and with rituals involving black sheep, both of which represent the darkness of death (Ngubane 1977: 81, 86, 109–10, 120). The Zulu use of the word *umnyama* (darkness) as a general term for pollution represents an overwhelming concern for dangers that might adversely affect the future continuity—or cause the death—of the agnatic cluster. Zulus nevertheless often speak of the opposite power, fertility, as heat (*ukushisa*), work (of the ancestors), and desire (*ukufisa*) (Berglund 1976: 253), so differentiating it from death pollution. Bhaca make the same distinction (Hammond-Tooke 1962: 69). Darkness and heat are linked symbolically, however. To be in a state of impurity or ill health is to be hot, and the black medicines used to purge bodily contamination, whether from pollution or witchcraft, are always heated. A course of white medicines always follows treatment with black medicines, often via a transitional step of red medicines. White medicines cool and restore a person's balance. Unlike black and red medicines, they are never cooked.

Of reproductive pollution, that associated with birth is the most intense. Milder but still threatening forms exist in other expressions of fertility—pubescence, menstruation and sexual intercourse—and, by extension, in other transitional or ambiguous circumstances. On the other hand, pregnant and nursing women are considered *balula* (flimsy) and in need of special care and protection from negative influences. A man preparing for war can have sex safely with a pregnant wife, but not a menstruating one (Ntombi Mkhize pers. comm.). The difference seems to reflect a distinction between the life-giving power of a wife's ancestors, expressed in menstruation, and that power engaged by her husband's ancestors, for fertility's power must be controlled—"let loose it can kill a man" (Berglund 1976: 254). Note that people say a man's ancestors fashion his child from his wife's menstrual blood, which her paternal ancestors supply. The blood also nourishes the foetus in her womb; for this reason the menstrual flow ceases during pregnancy (Hammond-Tooke 1962: 71; Berglund 1976: 117, 253).

Pollution, however, represents more than male anxiety about uncontrolled fertility. Pollution beliefs provide a means to control that power, and the people who hold it, in ways that emphasize its apparent threat to success. By punishing inappropriate ruptures and contacts, pollution acts as “a power by which the structure [of ideas] is expected to protect itself” (Douglas 2002: 140). It discourages challenges to social order by making inviolable the categories from which society is built: male vs female, young vs old, clan vs stranger.

To elaborate on this point: Hammond-Tooke (1981a) relates the differences between Nguni and Sotho pollution to the social boundaries maintained by the two groups. He argues that Sotho speakers, living in large villages with both kin and non-kin in close proximity, have to deal with strangers in a way that Nguni speakers in widely scattered homesteads do not. Boundary maintenance is further challenged by the Sotho acceptance of cousin marriages, which force a series of shifts in social relationships through life (see later). Given the greater potential for ambiguity and improper contacts, pollution dangers are more elaborate among the Sotho than the Nguni.

Hammond-Tooke draws partly on Sansom’s (1974) environmentally grounded explanation of settlement differences between Nguni and Sotho-Tswana to suggest that concentrated settlement was an appropriate response to the relatively arid environment of west-central southern Africa. Archaeological research provides a cautionary note, however, showing that concentrated Sotho-Tswana settlement in these parts was a response to military stress from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, not a long-standing pattern (Huffman 1986b). Significantly, Tswana leaders have more recently imposed various sanctions to curb their subjects’ desire to leave the large towns, as Hammond-Tooke acknowledges. In earlier times, settlements typically comprised fairly small homestead units arranged singly or in small clusters probably inhabited by closely related people (Huffman 2001: 27; Boeyens 2003: 65–6). We see a similar pattern of settlement density among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Zizi (Nguni) sites in the well-watered upper Thukela basin (see Maggs et al. 1986: 468–9, 478, figs 11–14), and for sixteenth-century Type N sites of Nguni origin on the Vredefort Dome (Huffman 1986b: 287). This common pattern in differing environments not only undermines Sansom’s expectation, but also suggests that settlement density was not a primary basis for the different pollution constructs, unless Sotho-Tswana beliefs are a recent phenomenon.

Marriage is a different matter. It was through marriage that people entered into a community of socially responsible adults and established homesteads, and primarily through marriage—the exchange of cattle for rights over women—that men gained control of other people. The more people living and working under a man’s headship, the greater his status. He benefited from their work and from their fertility, which generated more people. His daughters, when marriageable, were exchanged for cattle that made more marriages possible, either for their father or their brothers. Whereas sons provided for agnatic continuity and growth into the future, through daughters a man accumulated unrelated people (his in-laws). Thus the homestead-head gathered a following and enhanced his status. As we have seen, this constant accumulation, creation and distribution of productive and reproductive

potential—in the form of people or cattle—fundamentally shaped Iron Age economic structure and gave it life, for it established relationships between people with potentially competing interests (Guy 1987). Indeed, competition for people and cattle was a source of shifts in power throughout the Iron Age, sometimes in ways that usurped hereditary leadership. According to Kuper (1982: 51), rebellion “was frequent, as were preemptive strikes by the rulers”: Shaka famously killed his father’s heir to take control of the Zulu chieftdom, and later died at his brothers’ hands. And once in power, both Dingane and Mpande killed brothers.

Within the homestead, wives provide another potential schism. With the birth of her first child, a woman establishes a household within her husband’s homestead and, at the same time, creates the potential for conflict between herself, her husband’s other wives, and her in-laws. She has a significant degree of autonomy, with her own fields and cattle, and her principal concern is the success and eventual independence of her own household (specifically of her sons *vis-à-vis* their father, brothers and cousins). These competing interests create lines of weakness between each household, and between households (*izindlu*) and homestead (*umuzi*). Such differences can even manifest themselves in the names of children.<sup>2</sup> A disgruntled section of the homestead might then hive off to independence, or witchcraft accusations might flare up between households, with potentially serious consequences for the accused. Either way, the homestead-head’s control over his family is loosened or lost (Ngubane 1977: 91–2; Hammond-Tooke 1981a, 1993: 178; Mack et al. 1991: 124). Clan exogamy exacerbates the sense of threat by making new wives strangers worthy of deep suspicion, so much so that a bride’s family warns her, “You will be called lazy, a prostitute, a witch and all sorts of bad names” (after Krige 1962: 136).

Various control measures exist. The most direct is *inblonipho*<sup>3</sup> (respect), an institution of formalized and respectful speech and behaviour by which people avoid improper reference to or contact with others. The practice applies to all people, but women especially suffer its burden because they live in their husband’s homestead after marriage (Hammond-Tooke 1962: 122–3). *Inblonipho* eases with time as a wife becomes more closely identified with her husband’s people until, after menopause, when her father’s ancestors leave her, the requirement falls away entirely (Berglund 1976: 121; Ngubane 1977: 54). In southern Africa *inblonipho* is largely an Nguni phenomenon, most likely conceived to deal with the perceived dangers of strict clan exogamy.

*Inblonipho* is backed by pollution dangers. Unlike misfortune sent by witches and offended ancestors, pollution dangers are impersonal (Hammond-Tooke 1981a: 16–17). They seem to inhere in the natural order of things and so, significantly, are less easy to challenge.<sup>4</sup> Pollution dangers are seemingly unavoidable in the course of normal living and affect women most frequently and most severely. Failure to take appropriate protective measures is believed to bring on a neurosis that turns people into social misfits (Ngubane 1977: 82). It is as if the universe itself is demanding compliance with and acceptance of married men’s control of women and children.

There is another way in which pollution dangers are naturalized. They function in a way that seems to provide a symbolic map of marriage. Pollution weakens bodily defences, leaving people vulnerable to negative influences in the environment. Contamination is evidently believed to enter the body because treatment typically involves expulsion through purging—spitting, sweating, vomiting, enemas, expressing milk (Hammond-Tooke 1981a: 14–15). Similarly, marriage draws alien, unpredictable and potentially destructive individuals into the heart of the agnatic cluster (Ngubane 1977: 91–3). Pollution beliefs explicitly warn of the danger these people pose, as well as directing a cautionary note at scheming wives; at its most serious, purging can have dire consequences for witches. And, just as pollution is unavoidable in life, so is marriage, if life is to continue.

I am tempted to explore a similar significance for southern Nguni *umlaza*. In Zulu, *umlaza* is ‘whey’, a byproduct of curdling milk or a sign of ageing curdled milk, and is generally discarded as something sour (although some people eat it) (Ntombi Mkhize and Derrick Mhlongo pers. comm. 2012). Curdled milk (*amasi*) was an Nguni dietary staple in pre- and early colonial times (Soga 1931: 398; Bryant 1967: 270), and for the Zulu its consumption was (and still is) linked to descent.<sup>5</sup> *Amasi* are likened to the ancestors and to semen—people say that eating *amasi* promotes the production of semen in the homestead-head (Raum 1973: 357). In principle, a man can eat *amasi* at any homestead of the clans of any of his four grandparents, but clan exogamy excludes him from marriage alliances with these people. The same symbolic associations probably existed among the southern Nguni, who similarly restricted the eating of *amasi* (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 56–7; Sinegugu Zukulu pers. comm. 2012; cf. Soga 1931: 234 (but see p. 356); Alberti 1968: 64).

For food that has soured, southern Nguni use the noun *isilaza*. Whey, by contrast, is *intloya* (Fischer et al. 1985; Sinegugu Zukulu pers. comm. 2012). Unlike *amasi*, people might offer *intloya* to strangers for refreshment (John Steele pers. comm. 2012). In Zulu, the noun *uloya* is ‘life essence’, while the verb form *-loya* means ‘bewitch’ (Dent & Nyembezi 1988; Doke et al. 1990).<sup>6</sup> I am struck by a possible connection between life essence and menstrual blood, and between bewitchment and polluting impurity, founded on the notion that agnatic continuity depends upon a stranger. To explore this idea I turn to Bryant’s (1905) secondary meaning for Zulu *uloya*: “long extended, stratified cloud or stratus, generally prognosticating rain or thunder (cp. um-Kwazi)”. For *umkhwazi* he gives, “red streak or streaks, red streakiness, as formed by the rays of a rising or setting sun, or as exhibited in the long horizontal layers of golden stratified clouds (not a simply reddened sky)’ or ‘redness or blood-shot appearance of an inflamed eye”. To this definition, Doke et al. (1990) add “bad luck, misfortune”.

A key point here is that *umkhwazi* refers to a streaked rather than a uniformly coloured sky; in other words, a sky comparable to anomalous striped or spotted animals. These definitions suggest a bridge between Zulu whey and southern Nguni pollution through the liminal nature of dusk and dawn (Ngubane 1977: 115–17) and the unpredictability of rain (Berglund 1976: 37–8). If these associations have any substance, they suggest a linguistic

transformation that separates KwaZulu-Natal and southern Nguni dialects.<sup>7</sup> For, just as *amasi* production yields both curds and whey, so marriage creates homesteads containing both agnates (= curds) and affines (= whey). In the context of pollution dangers, whey would provide a powerful metaphor for wives and of the inevitability of pollution: curdling milk generates whey, and creating children demands wives.

The Sotho-Tswana conception of pollution is essentially similar to the Nguni form, but with some interesting differences in emphasis. For them I mainly summarize Hammond-Tooke's position (1981a, 1993: chapter 9).

### **The Sotho-Tswana variant**

Like the Nguni, native Sotho-Tswana speak of death pollution in terms of darkness, with the linked idea of a 'shadow' (Schapera 1979: 5; Krige & Krige 1980: 218–19; Hammond-Tooke 1981a: 15–16). In death-related or death-threatening circumstances, people are treated with smoking or charred material, as if the material's blackness will desensitize them to the darkness of death.<sup>8</sup> But unlike the Zulu case, darkness forms a comparatively small component of Sotho-Tswana pollution. Instead, people elaborate the pollution of reproduction, speaking of 'hot blood' or states of 'hotness' and extending this concept to other transitional or ambiguous circumstances (e.g. Schapera 1979; Krige & Krige 1980: 220–1; Hammond-Tooke 1981a).

Sotho-Tswana pollution is again rooted in the 'social substructure'. The key social unit was the 'family group', which consisted of 'several different households' containing families

whose men were all descended agnatically from a common grandfather or great-grandfather, by whose name the group was known. The family group ... could also include other relatives, such as affines or maternal kin, or even families of unrelated dependents. It was thus not a pure descent group. The family group was a closely knit unit, whose members co-operated in such tasks as building and thatching, agricultural labour, assisting each other with gifts and loans. It dealt with such matters as 'betrothal and marriage, the organization of feasts, the settlement of estates, and the future of widows, all of which [were] held to concern not one household alone but the group as a whole'. As in the case of the agnatic cluster, it also met, under the elder, to arbitrate over internal disputes. (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 110–1, quoting Schapera)

Sotho kinship terms emphasize the difference between the family group and the Nguni agnatic cluster. All kin, including affines, are called by one name, though the category is divided into paternal kin and close agnates of one's mother. Importantly, paternal kin living outside the family group are lumped with maternal kin (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 111).

This difference from Nguni derives from the Sotho-Tswana acceptance of cousin marriage. The social consequences are significant. Cross-cousin marriages set up politically advantageous, hierarchical alliances between two lines of descent that are repeated across generations (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 119). Cross-cousin marriage in particular helps explain

why the basic social unit extends beyond the agnatic cluster. Also, such inter-generational alliances made the incorporation of maternal relatives into the ancestral body possible, and even necessary (Hammond-Tooke 1981a: 11). Parallel-cousin marriage, on the other hand, unites close agnates who might compete with one another in the Nguni model, and so encourages settlement aggregation rather than hiving off or secession. It was especially favoured by elite families because it retained and concentrated control of people and cattle within the agnatic group (Kuper 1982: 56; Hammond-Tooke 1993: 119); people say, “child of my father’s elder brother/younger brother, marry me so that the cattle may remain in our kraal” (Mönnig 1967: 199).

The preference for cousin marriage provides the template for thinking about wives and, therefore, pollution. Because cousin-wives are daughters of families already allied and sympathetic to a man’s fortune, his desire for agnatic continuity is not faced with a potentially dangerous stranger. Rather, the history of repetitive marriages provides a sense of security about the future. For this reason, death pollution is little emphasized. This security comes at a heavy cost, however, for repetitive alliances can challenge the authority of homestead-heads. A relative of a Pedi bride warns the groom, “If she steals, do not kill her; if she bewitches, do not kill her; if she prostitutes, do not kill her; the head is ours, the feet are yours” (Mönnig 1967: 334). (Compare for contrast the warning the Zulu bride receives.) There is thus an ambiguity about a man’s control of his family. Further, cousin marriages mean that women and their close relatives can shift kinship categories, or be defined in multiple ways: from ‘sister’ or cousin to wife and from ‘father’ or uncle to father-in-law. Sotho-Tswana pollution concepts are entirely consistent with these social circumstances: ambiguity around reproduction is rife and so Sotho-Tswana pollution complexes are typically more baroque than Nguni ones.

We could predict, if we did not know already, something of their nature. Because wives are the daughters of allies, pollution beliefs typically do not demand the conceptually (and often physically) harsh expulsion of danger through purging—recall the warning to the groom. Rather, treatment takes the form of an *in situ* correction or restorative process, a cooling of reproductive ‘heat’, where ‘to cool’ might be alternatively expressed as “to calm, to free from agitation, to soothe, to appease, or, more generally, to put right” (Krige & Krige 1980: 221). It typically involves the application of ‘cool’ substances, such as ash, dung, chyme or water-based medicines, and the immersion of ‘hot’ things in ‘cool’ environments.

It would be archaeologically useful if an emphasis on heat pollution could be associated exclusively with cousin marriage, and the Zulu pollution form with more strictly exogamous marriage. Unfortunately, things are not so straightforward. The Tsonga, for instance, provide an intermediate example. They have marriage rules almost as restrictive as Nguni rules (Kuper 1982: 119–20), and seemingly conceive of pollution as both heat (especially in the case of ‘abnormal’ births) and as something that can be washed away and discarded like dirt at crossroads, to be carried away on the feet of passers-by (Junod 1962, II: 317–19, 477–8). In this latter form, Tsonga pollution resembles the negative influences or contamination that Zulu speakers flush out with vomiting and steaming (cf. Hammond-

Tooke 1981a: 22). Since washing can both cleanse and cool, pollution complexes evidently occupy a spectrum between darkness/dirt and heat. We possibly see just such a spectrum expressed in the Kgaga words for soot (*mošidi*), charred *tšhidi* medicines, and dampness (*bošidi*) (Hammond-Tooke 1981a: 20).<sup>9</sup> It is a spectrum that shifts uncertainly alongside a parallel spectrum of marriage practices. Do the two relate in an archaeologically useful way?

### **Pollution and marriage**

A way forward is to consider the debts established by marriage alliances, which range in type from elite patrilineal first-cousin marriage through to non-kin marriage. All types allow for compensation of a woman whose bridewealth is used to seal her brother's marriage (Kuper 1982: 158–9). In the preferred marriage among Sotho-Tswana and Venda a woman can claim her brother's daughter for her son—a mother's brother's daughter (MBD) marriage from his point of view. Nguni and Tsonga women, on the other hand, can claim a brother's daughter or a younger sister as a co-wife—a wife's brother's daughter (WBD) or wife's younger sister marriage from the husband's point of view. Intriguingly, the Xhosa have a different strategy.

A daughter was married with a substantial dowry. The dowry, of cattle, almost balanced a brideprice received for her. Her husband looked after the dowry cattle, but they remained legally hers, and could not be used except with her consent. Similarly the *lobolo* [bridewealth] received for her was not used by her father or brother to acquire a wife. The bridewealth cattle were held in trust for her. The cattle debts therefore balanced out. A woman had no claim on her father or brother arising from the use of her bridewealth. *And among the Cape Nguni, neither MBD nor the WBD was married.* Moreover, a woman was cut off from relations with her natal family, and her children had hardly any contact with their mother's brother. (Kuper 1987: 114, my insertion; see also Kuper 1982: 33–6)

There is something elemental here: a household shorn of alliances to the outside world, which by their absence emphasize the relationship between children and father. At the same time, the arrangement stresses patriarchal control because it is fathers who connect homesteads to the wider world through affinal relationships. These are enduring and demanding for Xhosa men. There is no limit to the bridewealth claim, which lasts for the life of the marriage and beyond: a man can even claim cattle from his son-in-law's descendants after the son-in-law dies (Soga 1931: 266). It is a claim underpinned by his right to withdraw his daughter from her marriage, even when there is no evidence for her ill-treatment (Hoernlé 1933: 371–2).

Marriage, therefore, generates three key relationships, first, between homestead-heads, secondly between husband and wife, and thirdly, between a married woman and her cattle-linked brother. We have already seen that structural tension exists between husband and wife, between homestead and household. The Xhosa arrangement highlights an opposition between the two external relationships. On the one hand, the relationship between a man and his father-in-law expresses patriarchal control over the homestead.



On the other, the relationship between a woman and her cattle-linked brother emphasizes relations that are independent from patriarchal control.

Clearly this is an area where pollution can flourish. The homestead-head to homestead-head relationship dominates among the Xhosa, where, interestingly, pollution beliefs seem less emphasized (Hammond-Tooke 1981a: 13, 1993: 179–80). In societies where the second external relationship is prominent, we can expect greater uncertainty, even tension, in relations between husband and wife, between homestead and household, due to the potential influence of forces beyond the husband's control. And we can then expect the expression of this uncertainty in more elaborate pollution beliefs, specifically those associated with reproduction. This result is consistent with the relationship Douglas defines between pollution and the control men exert over women (2002: 176).

Summing up, two things seem to influence the nature and significance of pollution beliefs. First, the degree to which marriage is restricted to unrelated people generates a basic form for pollution, indicated by the manner in which it is alleviated (e.g. cooled, washed, purged). Pollution as bodily contamination, for instance, indicates an anxiety about outsiders and suggests more restrictive marriage practices. This basic form can be altered by the second factor, the significance of cattle-linked relations between siblings. With their increasing significance, people seem to elaborate the simple fertility-desire-work-heat association into more complex heat-based pollution beliefs. The interplay between these two factors determines where on the pollution spectrum a particular set of beliefs sits.

Context is important. The archaeological record reveals circumstances and interactions that generated mergers and new identities throughout the Iron Age (e.g. Huffman 2007a: 317–20, 431–3; Hall 2012). The Kgaga themselves have Koni (Sotho-ized Nguni) origins (Hammond-Tooke 1981b: 2), and the Kgaga term *go fiša*, to be hot, is a cognate of the Zulu *ukushisa*, to burn (Adrian Koopman pers. comm. 2012). Kgatla (a Tswana group) use of *bollo* for hot (Schapera 1979) perhaps indicates a different linguistic history.<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, interaction and movement across the Drakensberg between Nguni and Sotho gave some Southern Sotho a version of *inblonipho* (Herbert 1990a: 468–70). This version, *blonepha*, is not as extreme as *inblonipho*, nor does its neglect attract sanctions. Appropriately used, *blonepha* simply indicates good manners. It is a gentler form of the practice, which Herbert ascribes to the influence of Sotho marriage preferences. In the same way, we can expect that a spectrum of pollution beliefs arose throughout the Iron Age, shaped by marriage practices generated in a range of social and environmental circumstances. This is probably as far as I can push the argument. I now turn to evidence for pollution and marriage in the Early Iron Age of KwaZulu-Natal.

### **Pollution residues in the Early Iron Age**

The Early Iron Age begins in the fifth century with Mzonjani sites restricted mainly to the coastal belt, but by the mid-seventh century **KALUNDU TRADITION** agriculturists had settled further inland in the relatively closed savanna of the deep river valleys. It is the **KALUNDU** material I deal with here.

Sites occur on arable soils close to rivers, where people would have had access to year-round sweetveld grazing and plenty of fuel for domestic and industrial use. The sites are large, commonly 7–10 ha, though it is unlikely site size always reflects settlement size. Some sites were occupied for long periods; consequently, the various temporal layers must be teased apart to discern settlement size(s) at any particular time. The sites are characterized by rich deposits with faunal material, structural and metallurgical remains, and abundant ceramics. Ceramics of all three phases, Msuluzi, Ndondondwane and Ntshekane, are richly decorated with bold incision, sometimes combined with graphite and ochre; almost every pot has some form of decoration, though it is less common on bowls (Fig. 5.9). This part of the Iron Age sequence lasts until the mid-eleventh century when it is succeeded by the Late Iron Age *Blackburn* facies and sites of a markedly different material-cultural signature (Table 5.1). Scholars now take *Blackburn* to mark the arrival of Nguni speakers in the region (Chapter Two).

A key debate on the nature of Early Iron Age society involves faunal samples and the significance of cattle. Some scholars once argued that the low ratio of cattle to ovicaprine remains on most Early Iron Age sites indicated fundamental economic differences between first- and second-millennium agriculturists. Badenhorst (2009a, b, 2010) recently revived these arguments as possible evidence for matriliney, but his argument fails to shift a significant body of counter-data and reasoning accumulated since the mid-1980s. Huffman (2010b) provides a comprehensive response. There is no need to rehearse the debate: cattle remains surely underrepresent the size of Early Iron Age herds. Further, since Iron Age people of both millennia maintained the Central Cattle Pattern, economic structure in both periods was fundamentally the same (e.g. Huffman 1982, 1990b, 2001; Whitelaw 1994a, 1994–95, 2012). The Central Cattle Pattern is a settlement form in which households are arranged in ranked order around a central cattle pen and court (Figs 5.2–5.5). Female access to this central area is restricted and controlled. In the past and to a varying degree still today, this homestead layout was “a map of the family structure [and] ... a microcosm of the community and the

TABLE 5.1  
Iron Age ceramic phases in KwaZulu-Natal in years AD.

<b>UREWE TRADITION – Kwale Branch</b>	
Mzonjani	400–600
<b>KALUNDU TRADITION</b>	
Msuluzi	650–780
Ndondondwane	780–910
Ntshekane	910–1030
<b>UREWE TRADITION – Blackburn Branch</b>	
Blackburn	1030–1300
Moor Park	1300–1700
Nqabeni	1700–1850

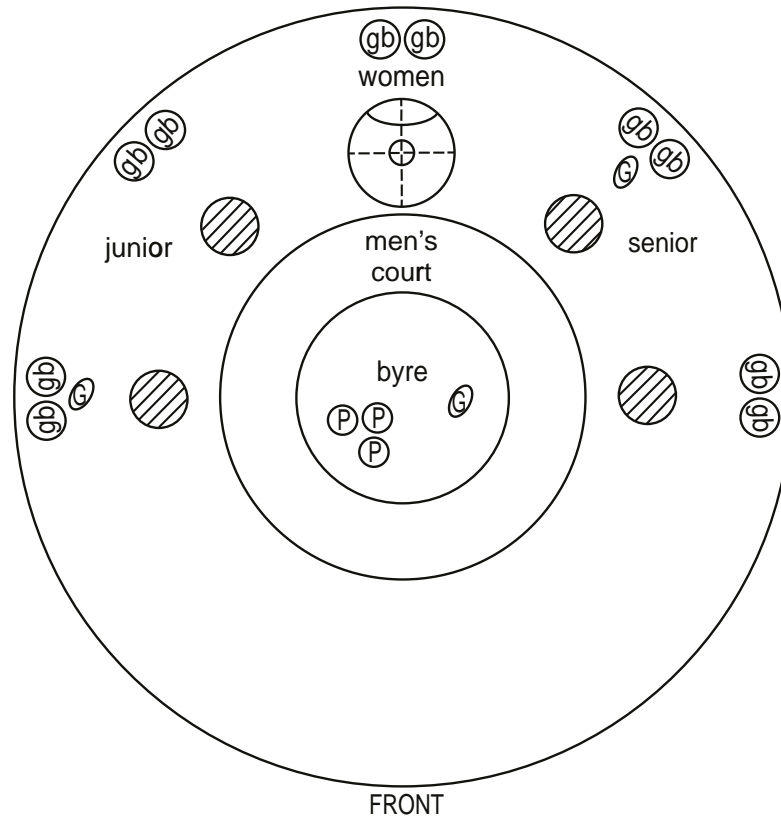


Fig. 5.2. The Central Cattle Pattern settlement layout: P = pit; G = grave; gb = granary. (From Huffman 1996: 175.)

spiritual world ... [It was a symbol] of a well-ordered world” (Maggs 1995: 134; cf. Kuper 1980) (Fig. 5.6). This common social framework allows us to say something about Early Iron Age marriage preferences based on archaeological residues and the pollution model. There are a few thin strands of evidence.

### Marriage preferences

Iron production provides a starting point. Most sites contain metallurgical debris, but its ubiquity presents a challenge and a full understanding of the organization of iron production still eludes us. Ethnographic accounts nevertheless indicate that smelting was associated with procreation and birth (e.g. Collett 1993; Herbert 1993). For this reason, smelting was typically secluded in some way from normal society. Forging generally did not carry the same intensity and degree of transformational baggage, and “often the smithy plays a central role in the community, not only as a gathering place for men to exchange the news but as a refuge from violence, a place of purification, even a place of healing” (Herbert 1993: 108). Since this distinction with its framing symbolism exists throughout the Bantu-speaking world, beyond the bounds of Eastern Bantu societies, it probably has great antiquity. We can therefore expect that southern African Early Iron Age societies maintained the same symbolic set.

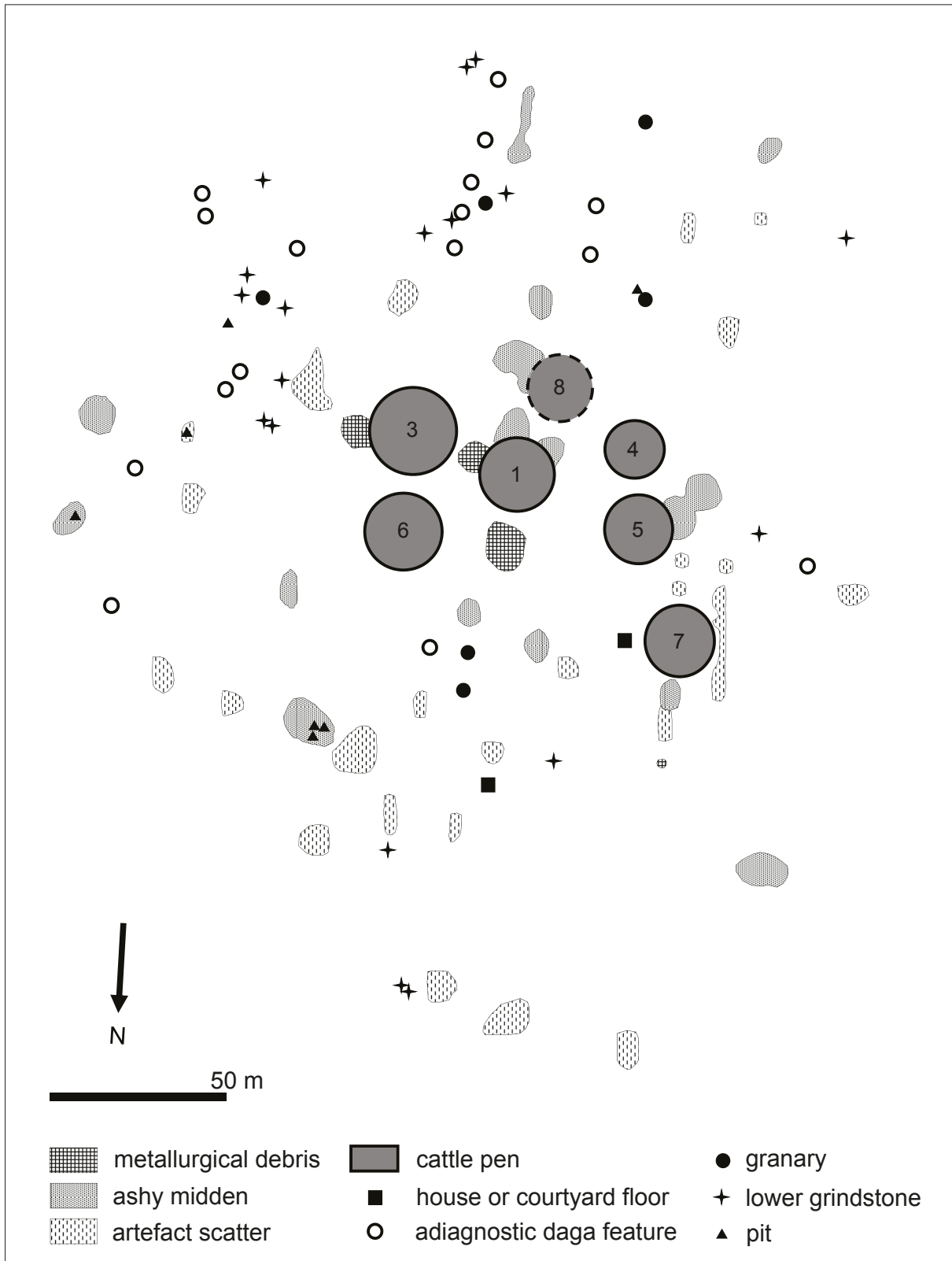


Fig 5.3. Combined Ndongondwane- and Ntshokane-phase features at KwaGandaganda (from Whitelaw 1994a: 50). Cattle pen 7 probably dates to the late-Msuluzi/early-Ndongondwane period. Surface lower grindstones that cannot be allocated to phase are indicated on both Figures 5.3 and 5.4.

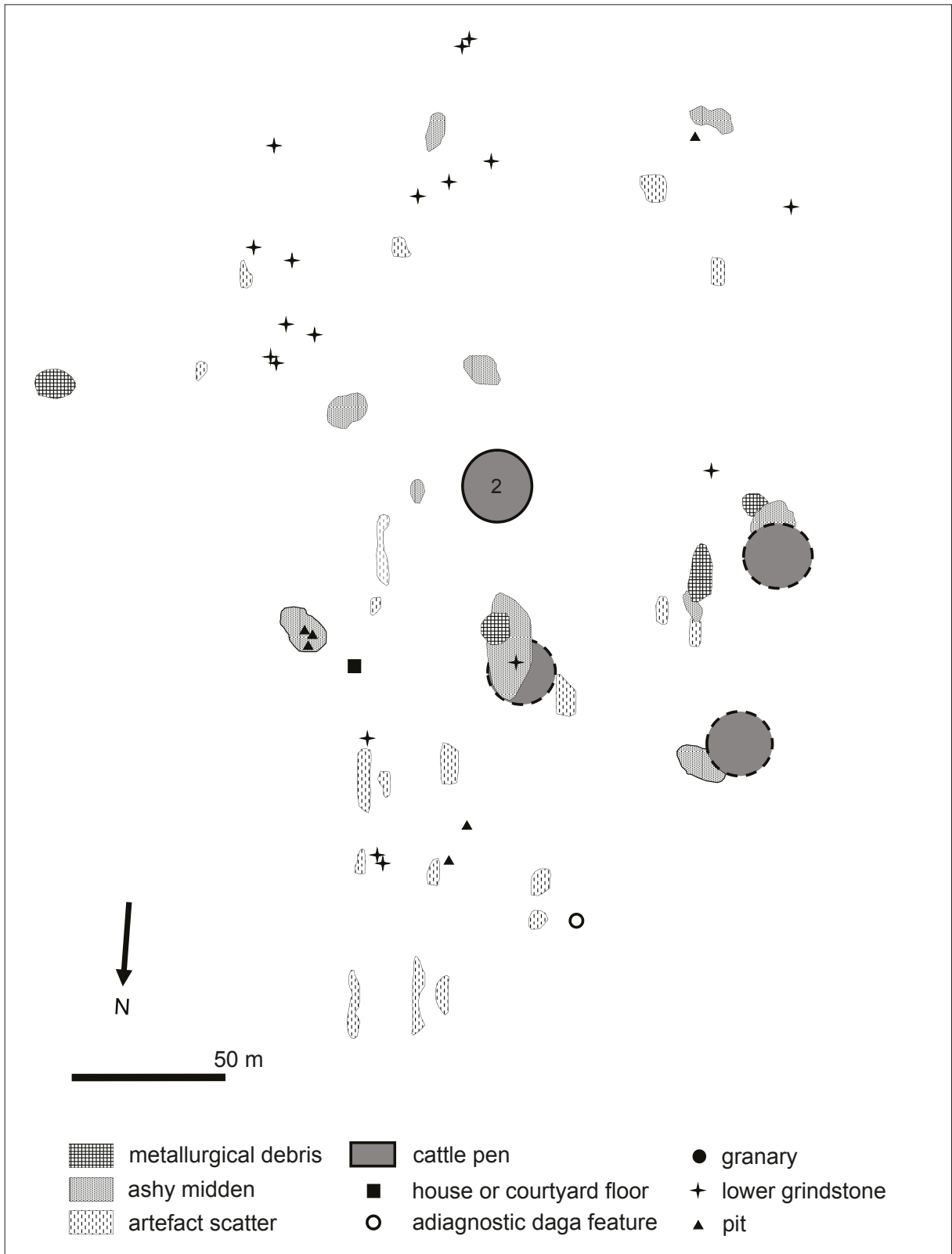


Fig. 5.4. Msuluzi-phase features on KwaGandaganda (from Whitelaw 1994a: 53). Surface lower grindstones that cannot be allocated to phase are indicated on both Figures 5.3 and 5.4. Compare with Figure 5.3 for the position of cattle pen 7, in the middle of the four Msuluzi cattle pens.



Fig. 5.5. A homestead in Zululand, photographed by G.T. Ferneyhough in 1886. The men are gathered in a 'court' area (the *inkbundla?*) downslope of the cattle pen. Just visible behind the huts are structures that probably include granaries. KwaZulu-Natal Museum accession number 1204.

Indeed, forging took place in an area where men gathered, close to cattle pens in the centre of settlements (Huffman 1990b: 7; Whitelaw 1994a: 26–8; Greenfield & Miller 2004: 1521, but see p. 1530). Smelting data are more equivocal. Furnace remains occur in a central area at Ndongondwane (Loubser 1993: 118–20), but might post-date the rest of the occupation (Fowler & Greenfield 2009: 381–2). A central midden at KwaGandaganda contains both forging and smelting debris (Whitelaw 1994a: 33–4), though primary furnace fragments seem underrepresented. At Magogo, there is no settlement context for the complex of smelting features (Maggs & Ward 1984). This complex includes an elongated furnace base measuring 2 m long, 55 cm wide and 60 cm deep, a charcoal-production pit, and another pit containing, along with the furnace bowl, fragments of furnace superstructure and other debris. A slag heap lies on the occupation surface near the furnace bowl.

In symbolic terms the furnace at the end of the smelt was like a woman who had just given birth. Proper treatment of her 'body' would not only protect other members of the community, but also promote the success of further work on the iron bloom—her 'child'. This reproductive symbolism suggests that the furnace superstructure at Magogo was demolished and buried in the bowl and nearby pit as part of a cleansing ritual. Slag was



Fig. 5.6. Man smoking (probably *Cannabis*) from an *igudu*, a hubbly-bubbly-like smoking horn, and expelling saliva through a reed to depict a homestead plan. He is either demonstrating or playing a mildly competitive game enjoyed by men. Small boys would attend to the men's needs (see Krige 1962: 50; Bryant 1967: 221–2). Photographed in Natal. Purchased from Father Mayr in 1906. KwaZulu-Natal Museum accession number 565B.

evidently largely excluded from this treatment, perhaps simply because there was so much of it and it inevitably accumulated in both smelting and forging areas. Demolition and burial of furnace remains partly explains why so few have been located (Maggs 1980c: 121). But not all furnaces were buried (e.g. Maggs 1980c: 121), so spatial context was perhaps a determining factor, with stricter disposal for furnaces close to or within the bounds of settlements. For the same reason, we find variable screening among the iron-smelting furnaces at the terminal Iron Age site of Marothodi, with those closer to living areas more heavily screened (Hall et al. 2006: 9).

Pits like those at Magogo occur in both residential and central areas on Early Iron Age sites. Many were originally excavated for storage, as indicated by dung and baked-earth linings. Many were subsequently used for a different purpose (Maggs & Michael 1976: 736). A disused storage pit at Mhlopeni, for example, was partially opened and reused as a grave (KwaZulu-Natal Museum records). More commonly pits contain a variety of cultural material that often accumulated in a characteristic way: “parts of some pit fills were clearly single episodes when a mass of cultural debris was dumped, sometimes above fine ashy lenses which had apparently accumulated over a longer period” (Maggs & Ward 1984: 111). These

pit-fills often include bottomless pots, a feature of Early Iron Age sites from Tanzania to the Eastern Cape. The removed bases are never found. Their deliberate removal, done sometimes with great care, was clearly part of a ritual, while the associated single dumping episodes suggest an ending or death (Maggs & Michael 1976: 736; Maggs & Ward 1984: 113).

I have argued elsewhere that these pits contain waste produced by pubescent girls, secluded for a period during which pit-fills accumulated gradually (Whitelaw 1993: 76, 1994–95: 44–6). The bottomless pots perhaps derive from a ritual that promoted the girl's future success as a mother—a symbolic defloration or 'opening'?—while the mass dumping of sherds and broken grindstones might mark the end of seclusion and the girl's reincorporation into society as a young adult. Such transformations, involving the end of one life-phase, a period of liminality and the emergence of a new person, generate considerable pollution and typically end with a cleansing ritual. In this case I suggest the cleansing included breaking the items used by the secluded girl and disposal of the remains in the pit. Like all such rituals, it was designed to remove a danger from society. This treatment of the remains (and those of smelting), I suggest, is more like purging than cooling. Purging, as we have seen, is consistent with more restricted marriage preferences, that is, with more strictly exogamous marriage.

It is worth asking why this material was discarded inside the settlement, rather than outside like the contamination discarded at crossroads or vomited up following the use of black and red emetics (Ngubane 1997: 26, 115–17). Clearly it was a different kind of waste, I suggest because of its association with a daughter's first menstruation. We saw earlier that a woman's paternal ancestors are responsible for her menstrual cycle, which is a sign of her reproductive potential. Menstrual blood, especially of first menstruation, is perhaps conceptually similar to blood from the fatal wound of a sacrificed beast. This blood has special significance because it links the living to the ancestral world. For this reason, people distinguish this first blood from the rest of the animal's blood and guard the blood-coated spear against possible witchcraft (Ngubane 1977: 121). Material associated with first menstruation was certainly similarly susceptible to witchcraft, and its disposal must have required special care. Puberty was a public phenomenon. It sent a message to the wider community that a man's (the father's) ancestors looked favourably on him, but it could also provide enemies with the desire or opportunity to counter that success. I suggest that Early Iron Age people used pits within the homestead in response to these concerns. Sometimes they used old storage pits, sometimes they probably dug pits specially for this purpose.

We see something similar in a different archaeological context. Middens on Late Iron Age Ndebele sites were periodically capped with reddish earth. Scholars interpret these cappings in terms of Nguni ideas about witchcraft, arguing that they protected ash heaps from possible exploitation by witches (Huffman & Steel 1996: 54; Schoeman 1998a: 51, 1998b: 79; cf. Hall 2012: 314). A possible interpretative elaboration is that the cappings protected particular kinds of deposits, such as puberty, initiation or birth residues (see, for instance, Berglund 1976: 95). This reproductive symbolism also suggests an explanation for Early Iron Age features at Msuluzi Confluence, where Grid 1 probably represents a household courtyard containing



three pits of varying shapes and depths (cf. Maggs 1980c: 134). All three contained bottomless pots, one of which had been smashed before burial, but after its base was removed. Nearby on the surface lay a small heap of low-grade iron ore, possibly originally contained within a pot, and an even smaller slag heap. If the pit-fills with bottomless pots are explicable in terms of girls' puberty, then so are the small slag and ore heaps. Iron 'dross', for instance, might be used to alleviate painful menstruation (Krige 1962: 100).

Early Iron Age middens also contain evidence of marriage preferences. The deepest and most extensive middens on KwaGandaganda were in the central area, closely associated with cattle pens (Figs 5.3, 5.4). One such Msuluzi-phase midden was perhaps 400 m<sup>2</sup> in extent, with a depth of nearly one metre (Whitelaw 1994a: 32). I once thought these middens were solely a product of administrative and other men's work in central courts (e.g. ironworking, ivory carving). I now think that ash and debris from households in the settlement possibly also contributed. For one thing, some central middens seem to have accumulated rapidly, given the preservation of their contents. Also, central middens at KwaGandaganda contained ceramic female figurine fragments. I once thought these were either the residue of communal initiation schools, or that central middens and cattle pens were appropriate discard places for them (Whitelaw 1994a: 51; Whitelaw 1994–95: 44). The latter possibility is more likely, because archaeological and ethnographic data show that female figurines are and were private objects, made by mothers for their young daughters and 'activated' at puberty and marriage when the daughter and her husband separately learn laws relating to social responsibilities and authority. When in use, the figurines are and were household things (Summers 1957: 72; Wood 2002). Their fragments in archaeological contexts show that discarded material moved from households to the central middens.

More tentative evidence for a household contribution comes from the few bones of riverine fish—such as scaly and sharptooth catfish. In the past most adult southern African Bantu speakers avoided eating fish (see Chapter Six; Whitelaw 2009a), so these remains are much more likely the product of children's activities than the remains of food eaten by men in a public forum. Similarly, brown mussel shells in the large Msuluzi-phase central midden perhaps represent household rather than public food.<sup>11</sup>

Household data are not as good, but we can suggest on the basis of archaeological evidence that a courtyard lay behind each hut (or behind the huts of each household), in which granaries stood and storage pits were sited (cf. Figs 5.3–5.4, 5.7–5.8). Grindstones indicate that this was where women processed grain, and scatters of broken pottery and bone show that people left some waste either at the back of their courtyard or behind it outside the settlement. Ashy middens associated with the residential area are rare and thin. This variation in residential area deposits seems significant.

Zulu practice provides a possible explanation. While each household has its own rubbish heap, wives clear the ash from their hearths every day and dump it on the ash-heap outside the homestead gate (Raum 1973: 146, 153). The ash, it seems, represents the homestead-head's ancestors because it comes from 'the place of the shades'—the hearth (Berglund 1976: 206).



Fig. 5.7. A homestead in the Umzimkhulu area, southern Natal, with raised granaries behind the huts. Photo purchased from Father Mayr in 1906. KwaZulu-Natal Museum accession number 552.

In particular, hearth ash apparently represents the agnatic life-force that ancestors provide: the terms for ash and semen have the same root (*-lotha*) and one can stand for the other. People draw on this symbolism to heal rifts between kinsmen and when invoking the ancestors (see Raum 1973: 146; Berglund 1976: 204–6, 221, 324). The significance for marriage is that the communal disposal of ash symbolically binds households within the homestead together; it counters the structural weaknesses along which homesteads can fragment. Thus, the development of separate ash-heaps at the homestead entrance can signal conflict within a homestead and its imminent segmentation, or indicate independent sections in more complex homesteads (Raum 1973: 146; Mack et al. 1991: 124).

The Zulu disposal pattern could explain the refuse signature on non-Zulu Nguni sites in precolonial times (Maggs et al. 1986: 459). Middens on Zizi sites in the upper Thukela basin, for instance, are relatively rare (Maggs 1982a: 84–5). Instead, refuse was “irregularly dispersed towards the periphery of the homesteads” (Maggs 1988: 425). Separation of ash from other refuse could produce this archaeological signature. Sherds from the occasional broken pot might be scattered, while dogs might eat uncovered bones. On the other hand an ash deposit devoid of harder materials is perhaps more susceptible to erosion. This disposal pattern differs significantly from that of many Highveld Sotho sites (Maggs 1982a: 85). It is therefore tempting to link a Zulu-like communal discard of ash specifically to a concern for homestead unity in the challenging face of non-kin marriage. Despite differences in detail, the Early Iron Age discard pattern may be an expression of this same concern.



Fig. 5.8. A woman at her granary, probably around 1900. Behind her is a platform piled high with unthreshed sorghum. Photographed by J.E. Middlebrook, probably in Natal. Photo purchased in 1904. KwaZulu-Natal Museum accession number 312D.

I suggest that Early Iron Age people considered household ash (at least) not as rubbish, but as a household product that was most appropriately left on central middens. Small things like shells and fish bones would easily be swept up with the ash to enter the central middens. There this material combined with the product of other households to make a public, physical statement about the work in which the homestead-head, his ancestors and his wives were jointly engaged; it was a statement about unity and success. By contrast, ashy middens in residential areas may then indicate households of unrelated followers, or of relatively independent brothers or sons.

Now we can see the logic underpinning the burial of a third-trimester premature baby in a pot in the large Msuluzi-phase central midden on KwaGandaganda (Whitelaw 1994a: 34). In several societies people consider miscarriages a source of severe 'heat', capable of scorching the earth and driving away rain if improperly handled. For this reason, people bury the foetus in cool, shady places, such as river banks, or in or close to the mother's hut (e.g. Junod 1962, I: 191; Schapera 1979: 5, 9; Hammond-Tooke 1981b: 114–15). Boeyens et al. (2009: 233) found no reference to midden burials in numerous ethnographies. But more than any other household 'product', a baby was a result of work undertaken to ensure agnatic continuity. Its failure in this case likely threatened the future reproductive potential

of the household (see Boeyens et al. 2009; Hattingh & Hall 2009), a threat apparently lifted here with rituals that included burial in central-midden ash. This central, public location indicates that the burial must have conformed to normal practice. Here Zulu ethnography is instructive. In completing medicinal treatment, a person using white emetics vomits “in the cattle byre or anywhere else within the premises” (Ngubane 1977: 111–12, 120). White medicines cool and restore good health. Central-midden ash—the cold residue of fire—evidently served the same purpose in the Early Iron Age, to counter ritual danger and return the community to health; it cooled, purified, cleansed and ‘made right’ in the face of death’s darkness (see also Berglund 1976: 324; Hammond-Tooke 1981b: 135–7, 145; Boeyens et al. 2009: 233; Hattingh & Hall 2009: 304).

The baby burial draws together ideas of healing and unity in the settlement centre that we saw earlier with forging and ash. In the case of ash, the symbolism may well elaborate a physical potential as a cleansing agent and pest repellent. Informants commenting on a Late Iron Age context near Johannesburg said that middens were placed at homestead entrances so that ash would coat the legs and bodies of cattle as they moved in and out, offering them protection from ticks (Huffman 1986a: 296). At KwaGandaganda ash also invokes a sense of heat pollution and so suggests, according to the pollution model, that relationships between cattle-linked siblings were potentially challenging for homestead-heads. I turn to this evidence now.

### **Marriage alliances**

The first strand of evidence involves site-location preferences and an ethnographic pattern. As a rule, **KALUNDU** sites occur on deep arable soils, often the best available locally, suggesting that fields and gardens were established close to settlements. Baked sorghum-stalk casts on the site Ndongondwane support this location (Maggs & Ward 1984: 135–6; Fowler et al. 2000; Greenfield et al. 2005). This distinctive preference strongly suggests a food-production emphasis on cultivation rather than pastoralism (in contrast to their relative economic significance). The year-round sweet, but limited grazing in the valleys adds weight to this point, because it probably demanded the adoption of a transhumance grazing strategy (Maggs & Ward 1984: 135), especially as herd sizes increased with time. By contrast, Late Iron Age sites typically occur on hillslopes above the valleys, reflecting a greater pastoral emphasis in food production (Hall & Mack 1983: 187). The distinction is important because southern African ethnography reveals a relationship between bridewealth and cultivation. Bridewealth in societies that emphasize cultivation is typically high in relation to average livestock holdings, and conversely low in relation to average livestock holdings in societies that stress pastoral production (Kuper 1982: 157–8, 1987: 113). Applied to Early Iron Age data, this pattern suggests that bridewealth was high whatever the size of the herds (see Huffman (1990b: 6) for an example of bridewealth increasing along with average herd size). The implication is that the marriages of most men would have depended on receipt of incoming bridewealth from their sisters’ marriages.

Such arrangements can generate considerable structural uncertainty. In the Tsonga case, the poor pasture quality of the Mozambican plains shapes marriage practice. There are simply too few cattle for many independent marriages, and incoming bridewealth cattle are earmarked immediately for the marriage of a woman's eldest bachelor brother. These cattle-based alliances bind people together, but also provide tension. A divorce and claim for the return of bridewealth cattle in a homestead several exchanges distant can cause the breakup of marriages further up the line, and can even result in a man losing his wife to his erstwhile brother-in-law—the wife's brother's wife marriage.<sup>12</sup> For some commentators bridewealth debts poisoned society, or were as ropes that denied human freedom (Kuper 1982: 108–12; and see, for example, Junod 1962, I: 161).

**KALUNDU** pottery provides further evidence (Fig. 5.9). A richly decorated material culture is often associated with socially complex situations, that is, situations involving representatives of a variety of social categories, or the merging of categories, or transitions between them. Pottery provides a particularly useful surface here because its widespread homology with people makes it a suitable vehicle for messages relating to social relationships. Decoration used in this way expresses the principles and themes upon which society is built, reinforcing social relations by triggering symbolic associations deep within the viewer's psyche. In this sense, pottery decoration is closely associated with pollution beliefs, being most prominent in situations where pollution is rife: both act as “a power by which the structure [of ideas] is expected to protect itself” (Douglas 2002: 140; also David et al. 1988; Hammond-Tooke 1989a: 14–15; Hall 1998: 249–57; Armstrong et al. 2008).

There is a risk here of overemphasizing a male concern for social order, because women are the primary source of pollution. But such an emphasis creates an interpretative imbalance, because women made and decorated the pots. Their adherence to a restricted, ‘traditional’ stylistic code does not reflect their total acceptance of male control, but neither do I think it was, as some once suggested, part of a discourse through which women collectively asserted their power and interests *vis-à-vis* men (e.g. Van Schalkwyk 1991: 127; Schoeman 1997: 197). These alternatives either ignore the dynamism in pottery production and use, or situate it incorrectly. We should not see ceramic traditions as if they are gradually mutating gene sets, passively inherited. Instead, potters actively invent and reinvent style as they work, selecting and modifying shapes and motifs from older vessels. Their choices (and those of non-potters selecting vessels) are motivated by personal desires and concerns (e.g. Handler & Linnekin 1984: 273–6), but also expressed within a context. Not only is style meaningful, but people belong to networks of relationships that frame their behaviour as communally responsible beings: Barley (1994: 115) records a Dwayo potter saying, “You do not want your children to be unlike other people's children. They should be the same but better. So it is with pots.” The same is true for rural KwaZulu-Natal where, for instance, Nesta Nala directed her beautiful but idiosyncratic vessel-sculptures solely to the global art market. For the local market she made more acceptably shaped and decorated beer vessels (Jolles 2005: 120–1). Thus, ceramic style change in the past was generally slow (though it was surely accelerated in some circumstances).

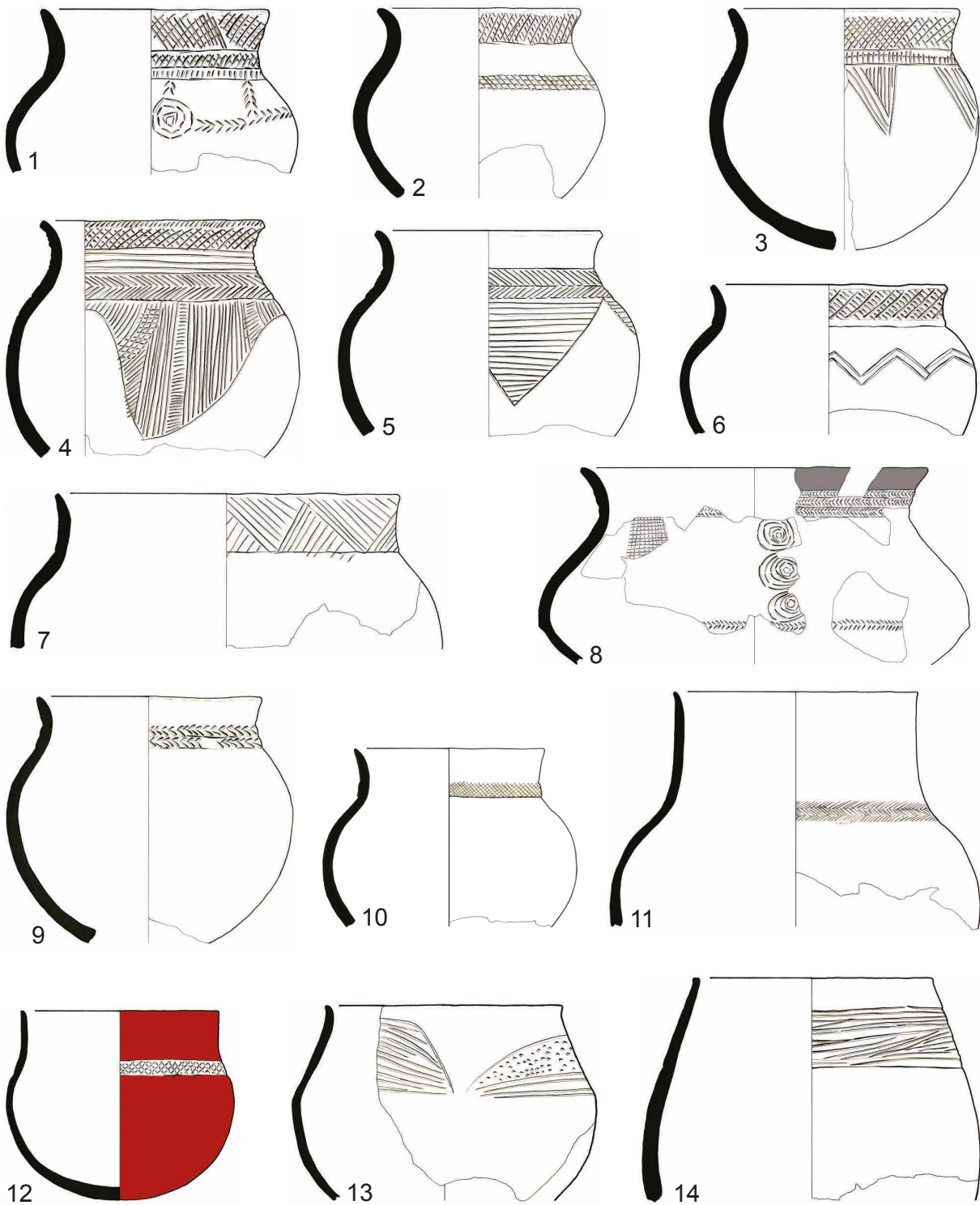


Fig. 5.9. **KALUNDU TRADITION** ceramics. Msuluzi phase: 1–8; Ndongondwane phase: 9–12; Ntshokane phase: 13–14. Pot 8 with graphite burnish on the rim, plain burnish below the neck bands. Pot 12 with red-ochre burnish. Pots not to scale.

Secondly, Karanga husbands and wives can use pots to communicate with one another, saying a woman's pots are her weapons (Aschwanden 1982: 199–201). Apart from emphasizing that ceramic style contains an agreed-upon symbolism, the practice highlights the use of pots in a key area of negotiation—between the competing interests of homestead and household. It is in this interactive, tension-filled arena that ceramic style and its appeal for social order are generated, driven by demands from both sides. Nowhere is this point more poignantly illustrated than on a pot by Mandojeyane Makhunja, who lost her husband in the bloody feuds that disrupted Msinga (KwaZulu-Natal) for so many years. The pot carries an incised image of a machine-gun alongside 'traditional' hourglass motifs that appeal to gentler, socially responsible qualities in men (see Chapter Four; Armstrong et al. 2008: 531, 541–2).

The study of modern Zulu pottery presented in Chapter Four suggests that something like the Karanga practice probably existed in other societies in southern Africa. The study shows that pottery decoration is directed primarily at groups that include people who are potential or actual partners in marriage, such as at beer and meat feasts (Chapter Four; Armstrong et al. 2008: 544). If the same pattern held true during the Early Iron Age—and the Central Cattle Pattern suggests it did—then we can argue that **KALUNDU** decoration reflected structural and personal tension in marital relationships.

**KALUNDU** pottery, however, is almost excessively decorated, especially the *Msuluzi* facies at the beginning of the sequence. While the demands associated with a high bridewealth were likely significant, Early Iron Age site locations provide additional context. In some cases, deposits represent single long-lived settlements, in others, probably a palimpsest of smaller homesteads. Certainly in the former case, and probably in the latter, continued occupation of the same location suggests an Early Iron Age stress on homestead continuity, that is, on continuity of the agnatic cluster. This makes sense in terms of pollution, which discourages settlement on recognizable remains of unrelated people (see Ngubane 1977: 18–20, 24–9; compare Loubser (1994: 143) on Ndebele Group II and III site locations). Ceramic female figurines similarly stress agnatic continuity because they materialize the relationship between women and their fathers and explicitly delimit responsibilities and authority over women for husbands and fathers (Wood 2002). 'Excessive' Early Iron Age pottery decoration therefore likely reflected an uneasy co-existence of a desire for agnatic continuity with dependence for that continuity on the challenging consequences of a relatively high bridewealth. There were, in effect, two opposing forces: one vertical (descent) and the other lateral (marriage).

Tension may have been further exacerbated by a hypogamous marriage practice. Ethnographies show that bridewealth exchanges always disadvantage inferior groups (Kuper 1982: 160), and the Central Cattle Pattern suggests the same would have been true for the Early Iron Age. We can expect then that Early Iron Age men commonly married up: a man's brother- and father-in-law were his superiors.

## Implications for the Central Cattle Pattern

An interest in pollution beliefs demands that we focus on the household and its relationship with other households and with the homestead-head, and thus on a key social dynamic in Iron Age life. Lane (1998: 187 ff.) argues that implementation of the Central Cattle Pattern results in an interpretative neglect of the household, and suggests that we consider a gynecomorphic settlement model instead. The Central Cattle Pattern, however, is too consistent with the ethnographic and historical and archaeological records for discard. Further, the pattern does not preclude an interest in the household, about which there is a rich ethnographic record. Lane nevertheless perhaps has a point in the sense that representations of the Central Cattle Pattern reflect and can affect our thinking about the homestead. We might therefore want to consider presenting the pattern in a way that incorporates the semi-independence of the household. For some time already textual descriptions have referred to private or household-controlled resources (e.g. Huffman 1986c: 89, 2001: 20, 2007a: 25), so a new presentation is best done visually.

Figure 5.10 illustrates three diagrams. Figure 5.10a—the original Central Cattle Pattern diagram—incorporates a degree of household complexity with its double-banked sets of huts. It also heavily emphasizes the homestead head through its depiction of the great hut, though in part the purpose is to show the gendered division of space within huts. Figure 5.10b offers more detail. The granaries attached to each hut and grain pits in the cattle pen make it clear that homestead resources are both segregated and communal, reflecting a distinction later made in text. Huffman subsequently developed 5.10b by adding an elaborated version of the great hut in 5.10a (see Fig. 5.2). In the most recent version (Fig. 5.10c), the right-hand side shows key concepts that generate the physical layout, represented on the left. Visually, the left-hand side is the culmination of a trend emphasizing the male, authoritarian aspects of the homestead, with the cattle pen and great hut. Wives and followers are reduced to text, and lost.

It is a significant loss, because images concentrate and make a variety of data simultaneously available, and so can powerfully influence our interpretation. In some ways Figure 10c echoes the definition of the homestead in the 1891 Natal Code of Native Law, which attempted to fix and preserve those aspects of the homestead useful to colonial capitalism. Guy (n.d.) writes,

The Code gave the *umuzi* [homestead] legal dominance, in its male, authoritarian, patriarchal aspects—but without the legal guarantee of land which had always been integral to the concept of the homestead, without the cattle with which the homestead previously had to have been established, and without the legal guarantee of women's productive rights in land. ... At a time when the historical sources relate how material poverty and social distress were in the process of tearing the homestead apart, the [Code's] ... clear visual and verbal assertion of the structured cohesion of the homestead is in fact evidence of its fragmentation and dispersal: of external coercion replacing internal integrity.



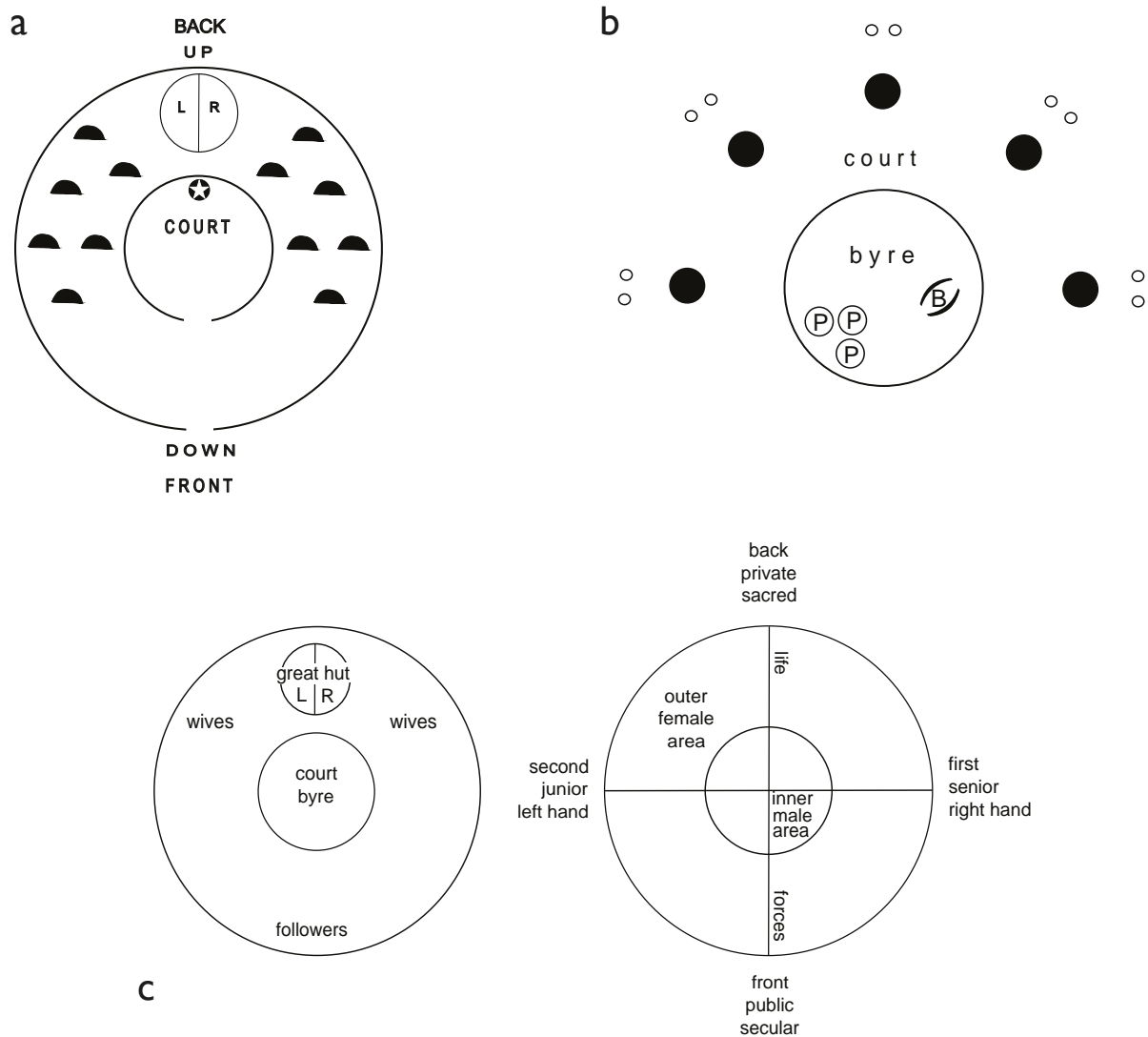


Fig. 5.10. The Central Cattle Pattern (a. from Huffman 1982: 140; b. from Huffman 1984: 33 (P = pit; B = burial); c. from Huffman 2001: 20; 2007a: 25).

Figure 5.10c in effect reflects a colonial and post-colonial ideology, with a Western and perhaps Christian emphasis on patriarchy. Figure 5.11 attempts to recapture some aspect of the homestead's precolonial internal integrity. Instead of a homogeneous unit, Figure 5.11 explicitly depicts a complex, heterogeneous entity, comprising semi-independent households with potentially differing interests. By illustrating the lines of weakness that mar homestead homogeneity, it incorporates a principal structural tension that contributed to the dynamism of Iron Age life.

### Implications for research

In precolonial times, pollution beliefs were integral to economic structure, a key weapon in the arsenal that men deployed in their efforts to control wives, children and followers. As a supposedly natural force, pollution dangers 'sanctioned' social relations, making them seem inevitable and proper. Pollution beliefs were intimately associated with marriage, which

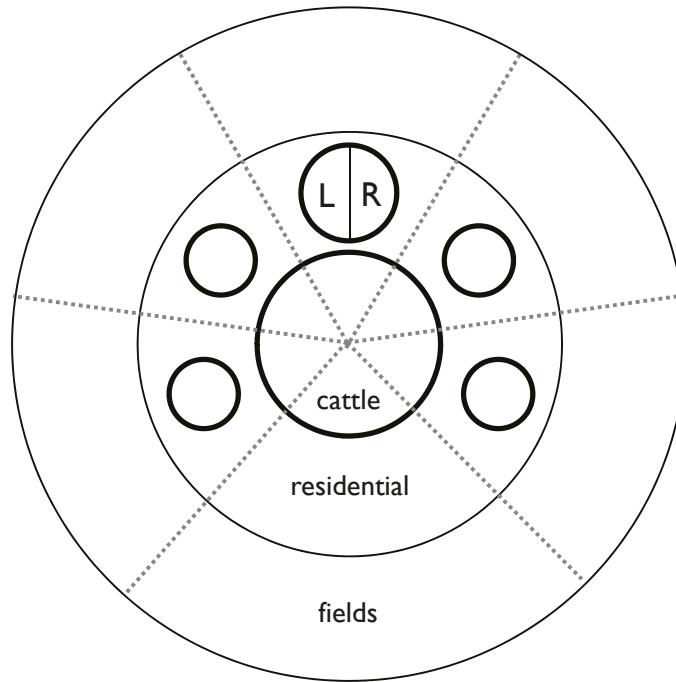


Fig. 5.11. The Central Cattle Pattern, showing lines of weakness separating households, each with its own agricultural resources (cattle and fields). The diagram can be elaborated as necessary.

was central to the maintenance of economic structure and, indeed, life, but came with the cost of uncertain success. Thus, the character of pollution beliefs varied on a spectrum along with the nature of marriage. Exogamous marriage preferences generated pollution dangers that admitted contaminants into the body, so representing the potential threat that stranger-wives posed to agnatic continuity. Pollution beliefs intensified with more complex marital alliances, first with the increasing significance of relations between wives and their cattle-linked siblings, and then with a shift towards a preference for cousin-marriage. These developments logically enough involved reproductive pollution, and so typically took the form of heat.

Applying these ideas to the Early Iron Age, I argue that **KALUNDU TRADITION** agriculturists practised non-kin marriage, possibly along Zulu lines, but at least as restricted as Tsonga practice. Their archaeology also displays an emphasis on agnatic continuity, plus a concern for homestead unity. Bridewealth, however, was relatively high, meaning that relations between cattle-linked siblings presented a significant challenge to the ambitions of homestead-heads. These two contrary forces, vertical and lateral, contributed significantly to the making of the rich Early Iron Age material culture. Hypogamous status differences between homestead-heads and in-laws might have contributed additionally.

These ideas are tentative, but worth airing, partly because of recent interest in the nature of Early Iron Age society (Badenhorst 2009a, b, 2010), but also because they flow naturally from earlier work on the period. Further, it may be that they provide a position from which to consider in more detail two topics of interest: the origins of the Zimbabwe

Culture and the Early Iron Age–Late Iron Age interface. Imagine, for instance, the response of young unmarried men—those who desired entry to Guy’s (1987) dominant class, but dependent for marriage on incoming bridewealth from siblings—on encountering a new system in which bridewealth was relatively low, in which relations with brother-in-laws posed less of a challenge to the authority of husbands. If the earliest Nguni maintained such a system, these encounters would perhaps have quickly broken the authority of Early Iron Age homestead heads, and resulted in a loss of practices bolstering their authority. It is worth exploring these issues in explaining the sharp transition between the Early and Late Iron Ages in KwaZulu-Natal.

We might also consider the relationship between cousin marriage and political complexity (e.g. Kuper 1982: 96–100, 159–60, 1987: 113–14; Hall 1998: 255; also see Hamilton 1997): did cousin marriage originate in the ethnically complex and stratified polities that developed in the last 500 years, or in similar developments that earlier generated the Zimbabwe Culture in the Limpopo valley, or was cousin marriage already a feature of the earliest Sotho-Tswana communities? And what are the implications of cousin vs non-kin marriage for political and cultural developments during the course of the Iron Age?

Finally, this approach surely has wider archaeological application. Douglas’s analysis shows that the relationship between pollution and marriage is (or was) widespread, even universal. Similarly, societies based on the accumulation of human productive and reproductive capacity probably existed across the world throughout history. Essentially, where technology was fairly simple people competed with one another for the capacity to expand socially into the future, with marriage as the primary means of acquisition (Guy 1987). Depending on how this capacity was controlled, we can expect that pollution beliefs varying in kind and intensity were generated (Douglas 2002). Through the careful application of appropriate ethnographic principles to the archaeological record, we may reveal these beliefs and so establish a more intimate understanding of the relations that lay at the heart of ancient economies.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to Tom Huffman, Lyn Wadley and Justine Wintjes (University of the Witwatersrand), Adrian Koopman (University of KwaZulu-Natal), Carolyn Thorp and Bronwen van Doornum (KwaZulu-Natal Museum), and Adam Kuper for comments on a draft. I am also grateful to the various people referenced in the paper who provided information, most especially to Ntombi Mkhize (KwaZulu-Natal Museum) and Sinegugu Zukulu (Indalo Yethu), and to my colleagues at the KwaZulu-Natal Museum for their on-going support. One of them, Nkululeko Sibetha, prepared Figures 5.2, 5.10 and 5.11. Dora Kemp (*Cambridge Archaeological Journal*) prepared Figure 5.1.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Whitelaw (2013).

<sup>2</sup> Say a man’s wife is pregnant. He marries a second wife. The first might then name her child ‘Velaphi’ (Where are you from?). The second wife might later reply, calling her child ‘Thulani’ (Be quiet). Assuming

nothing changes, the first wife might respond with the name of her second child, perhaps using a play on the word *-shaya*, strike, and so on (Muzi Msimanga pers. comm. 2013).

- <sup>3</sup> The verb is *hlonipha*, so *ukublonipha* means to respect, to act respectfully.
- <sup>4</sup> Colonial official James Stuart (1868–1942) writes, ‘[*Umnnyama*] means that some natural occurrence (in accordance with ordinary laws of nature) should take place which has the effect of bringing darkness over some person or persons, thereby affording their enemy an opportunity of stealing in upon them unawares ... The person or persons seized or overtaken by this “darkness” or “inability” or “powerlessness” are said to *have umnyama*.’ (Webb & Wright 1982: 323, italics recorded in Zulu) Stuart concludes from conversations about war doctoring that doctors could manipulate the elements to bring *umnnyama* down on enemies. If correct, then *umnnyama* was somewhat different in the late nineteenth century. Alternatively, and more likely from the argument in this paper, circumstances of the times might have allowed some doctors to claim such power.
- <sup>5</sup> *Amasi* is the plural form and so grammatically more like the English word ‘curds’, but both Zulu and Xhosa distinguish between the cheesy curds and the more smoothly consistent curdled milk (*amasi*).
- <sup>6</sup> For *uloya*, Bryant’s (1905) fuller definition is: ‘central, essential, vitalizing part of a thing; hence, life, spirit, mind, heart, of a human-being, etc.; main inside substance, core, as of a mealie-grain’. Northern Sotho and Tsonga also use *-loya* for bewitch.
- <sup>7</sup> Archaeologically, it is worth noting that a ceramic-style distinction appears to separate northern and southern Nguni regions from the period AD 1300–1700 (Huffman 2004: 88).
- <sup>8</sup> Compare the use of a Lovedu medicine of crushed python vertebrae (Krige & Krige 1980: 216), and the ‘smoking’ of babies among the Mpondo, Tsonga and Zulu (Hunter 1936: 152–4; Junod 1962, I: 43–4; Krige 1962: 66).
- <sup>9</sup> Zulu lexicon does not seem to contain this relationship. While *mošidi* and *tshidi* are cognates of Zulu *insizji* (soot, charred blackness) (Adrian Koopman pers. comm. 2012), dampness in Zulu is *umswakama*, *ubumanzi* or *umnepho* (Doke et al. 1990). Linguistically, Zulu sits close to the end of the pollution spectrum.
- <sup>10</sup> The Kgatla term *go bollo* might derive from English (Jim Denbow pers. comm. 2015), possibly from ‘boil/boiling’.
- <sup>11</sup> In 1905, Mcoyoyi kaMnini told James Stuart, “People living on the coast even nowadays eat *mussels*, but not in the presence of others” (Webb & Wright 1982: 56; italics recorded in Zulu). Mussel shells are prominent in household middens on sites in the coastal belt from Blackburn times onwards.
- <sup>12</sup> A man typically marries with cattle acquired through his sister’s marriage. Should her marriage fail, either her bridewealth cattle must be returned or another sister or niece must fulfil the exchange. If none are available, then the brother “must send his own wife as a replacement” (Kuper 1982: 114), because it was his ex-brother-in-law’s cattle that made his own marriage possible.

# 6

## An Iron Age fishing tale<sup>1</sup>

Archaeological research sometimes exposes ethnographic stereotypes. This chapter reveals as a partial stereotype the widely held assumption that precolonial agriculturists in southern African agriculturists refused to eat fish. Significantly for my purpose, the subjects of the stereotype—fish and fishing—were caught up in the symbolism of reproduction and production around Natal Bay, where they were a key political resource in the eighteenth century and probably earlier. This tweaking of the ethnography also allows me to account for the unique and unusual importance (in a southern African context) of fishing for Tsonga speakers.

For all other groups, ethnographies that address the issue show that people associated fish eating with immaturity, poverty and social degradation (Shooter 1857: 43; Holden 1866: 235; Fynn in Bird 1888: 124; Wilson 1969: 84). So while herd boys caught and ate fish, adults refused it (Stayt 1931: 80; Ashton 1952: 158), typically with disgust or even abhorrence (Shooter 1857: 43; Fynn in Bird 1888: 124; Junod 1962, II: 83–4). Venda women, for instance, demanded that their children wash with cow-dung after eating fish (Stayt 1931: 80), and even today many Zulu men regard fish as dirty (Ntombi Mkhize pers. comm.; cf. Kuper 1986: 44 for the Swazi). According to one informant, people were “*insulted* by eating fish” (Webb & Wright 1979: 278, italics recorded in Zulu).<sup>2</sup> The distaste for fish was so strong among Tswana that in 1842 starving people ignored easily accessible fish in the drying Kolobeng river (Wilson 1969: 84).

How can we, on the one hand, explain avoidance of what could be a nutritious and easily available food, and on the other, the Tsonga exception? I develop an explanation for the second issue during the course of this chapter. On the first, Wilson (1969: 84) suggests that fish avoidance served as a cultural marker that distinguished agriculturists from fish-eating Khoisan hunter-gatherers and pastoralists. That is surely true, but it is a distinction that likely post-dates the adoption or rejection of fish eating. Tambiah (1969) offers another a starting point. For Tambiah, animals of one class would be considered inedible if they possessed characteristics of another inedible class that has strong values. In southern Africa, most Bantu speakers liken fish—with scales and without legs—to snakes, which people generally do not eat (see Stayt 1931: 47; Quin 1959: 128; Bryant 1967: 363; Mönnig 1967: 175; Alberti 1968: 25). The dangerous, venomous species aside, snakes can carry great significance. Some snakes are identified with people, and the ancestors can take

on snake form. Zulu chiefs might appear as the long green *inyandezulu* and homestead heads as the shorter green *umhlwazi* or, having reached a great age, the longer, stouter brown *umsenene*. Women, even royal women, return as the small brown *umabibini* (Bryant 1967: 353–4; Webb & Wright 1982: 168<sup>3</sup>; cf. Kuper 1986: 62). The Mpondo identify different snakes with different clans and will kill snakes of foreign clans, while clan-snakes that arrive with new wives (i.e. snakes of the wife's father's clan) can cause sickness in the home. By contrast, people say that the clan-snake of the homestead might visit a pregnant woman, and so facilitate an easier birth and the health of the baby (Hunter 1936: 260–1). Not surprisingly, folktales draw on the relationship between snakes and people.

But when a woman gives birth to a snake, and is reviled and looked down upon by the others as a result, the snake turns out to be a human being after all. Thus, in the story of Mamba, the snake-hero, who is loved by a girl, casts his skin just before the wedding dances and appears shining and beautiful to dance before the assembled guests. The story called Nhlangunhangu deals with a woman, a chief wife who gives birth to a boa constrictor. The snake is cast into a pool, while the mother is at first turned out of the village, which is moved to get rid of the defilement of this unusual occurrence. Later she is allowed to occupy an inferior hut in the new village. Out of the snake ten children appear, five girls and five boys, who set out to seek their father, and are greatly welcomed and feasted when their tale is told to their father. (Krige 1962: 357; the full stories are in Callaway 1866: 267ff. and 321ff.)

Quite clearly, some snakes are linked to reproduction. An account given by a diviner in the Mhlatuze valley reinforces this point. Having been called by his ancestors to divination, the man entered a pool.

I saw a great python (*inhlwathi*) coiled on medicines. It was surrounded by many other snakes, big ones and small ones. They were the snakes of our fathers [i.e. ancestors]. They were just there, at the bottom of the pool, lying there and looking at me with open eyes. ... There was also a lady there with very big breasts, suckling the children of the python. There were many children of the python. It (the python) put spittle (*amate*) into the woman. She became pregnant and gave birth, producing the children of the snake. (Berglund 1976: 141, my insertion)

Chapter Nine develops this issue in relation to rainmaking. Here it is enough to note that, given the significance of snakes, their inedibility, and their conceptual similarity to fish, the avoidance of fish eating appears entirely consistent with Tambiah's cosmological schema. As a consequence, people assigned low status to others who ate fish; they were outsiders, 'different from us'. That is what is reflected in the ethnographies. A few archaeological and historical data nevertheless complicate the picture. Here my focus is on coastal fishing, that is, in estuaries and off rocky shores. Later I touch briefly on fishing elsewhere.

### **Fish in the archaeological and historical records**

Archaeological material analyzed since 1970 generally supports the ethnographic pattern of fish avoidance, though the second-millennium sites of Thulamela and Le2 in the Kruger

National Park are notable exceptions (Plug & Skelton 1991; Plug 1997). For the KwaZulu-Natal interior, faunal samples from 10 second-millennium sites contained just a single fish-bone fragment, indicating an Nguni avoidance there from 1300. Similar evidence indicates a Sotho-Tswana avoidance on the southern highveld, where excavations at seven sites recovered the bones of only three fishes (Maggs 1976; see also Dreyer 1992). And yet these same sites contained freshwater mussel shells, showing that people used other riverine resources.

Fish are better represented in **KALUNDU TRADITION** samples. Still, seven sites in the KwaZulu-Natal interior yielded just 106 bones. The pattern is similar for first-millennium sites elsewhere in South Africa; a single pit containing 310 fish bones at Le6 in the Kruger Park stands out as an unusual feature (Plug 1988: 170, 1989: 64). Some scholars nevertheless invoke these sparse remains in arguing for cosmological differences between first- and second-millennium agriculturists (e.g. Maggs 1994–95: 177; Badenhorst 2009a: 46, 2010). I suggest that their position reflects the strength of the ethnographic stereotype better than it does the significance of the archaeological data.

More interesting data come from sites on and near the east coast (Fig. 6.1). Mpambanyoni near Scottburgh south of Durban (Robey 1980), Blackburn, and an unpublished site near Umdlotti north of Durban yielded fish and shellfish remains.<sup>4</sup> All three contain *Blackburn* pottery and date to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Umdlotti and Blackburn fish samples are not yet identified, nor are bones from the Emberton Way midden, which contains both first and second millennium pottery (Horwitz et al. 1991: 17). The Mpambanyoni sample is identified. Its species list overlaps somewhat with lists from Nanda and KwaGandaganda, two **KALUNDU TRADITION** sites in the Mngeni valley dating from the seventh to the eleventh centuries (Whitelaw 1993, 1994a; Beukes 2000). All three samples are dominated in absolute numbers and in species count by marine and estuarine fish bones (Table 6.1).

Historical accounts provide additional evidence. In 1554 the survivors of the *São Bento* wreck bought fish at “the mouth of the Pescaria, which is in latitude  $28\frac{3}{4}$  degrees, and penetrates two leagues into the interior, and is about the same distance in width”. Fish were “very abundant there” (Theal 1898, I: 237). The latitude reading indicates that the Pescaria—the Fishery—was located in the Mhlathuze lagoon (Richards Bay) at  $28^{\circ}48'$  south, which extends about 10 km inland and is about half that in width. Since a league is 5.92 km (Stuckenberg 1997), the Portuguese dimensions roughly match the geography. Also, the next latitude given in the account is  $28\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  for “the river Santa Lucia” (Theal 1898, I: 238), five days journey from the Pescaria. The St Lucia estuary is at  $28^{\circ}23'$  south.

Some scholars distrust the latitude readings and place the Pescaria where one still exists today, in the Kosi lake system ( $26^{\circ}55'$  south), but the correlation between the Portuguese account and geography is too close to reject. Also, the Portuguese already knew of the Pescaria and the river Santa Lucia in 1554. Both are marked on a 1529 map (Axelson 1988: 109) and one gets a sense from the (translated) *São Bento* account that the survivors

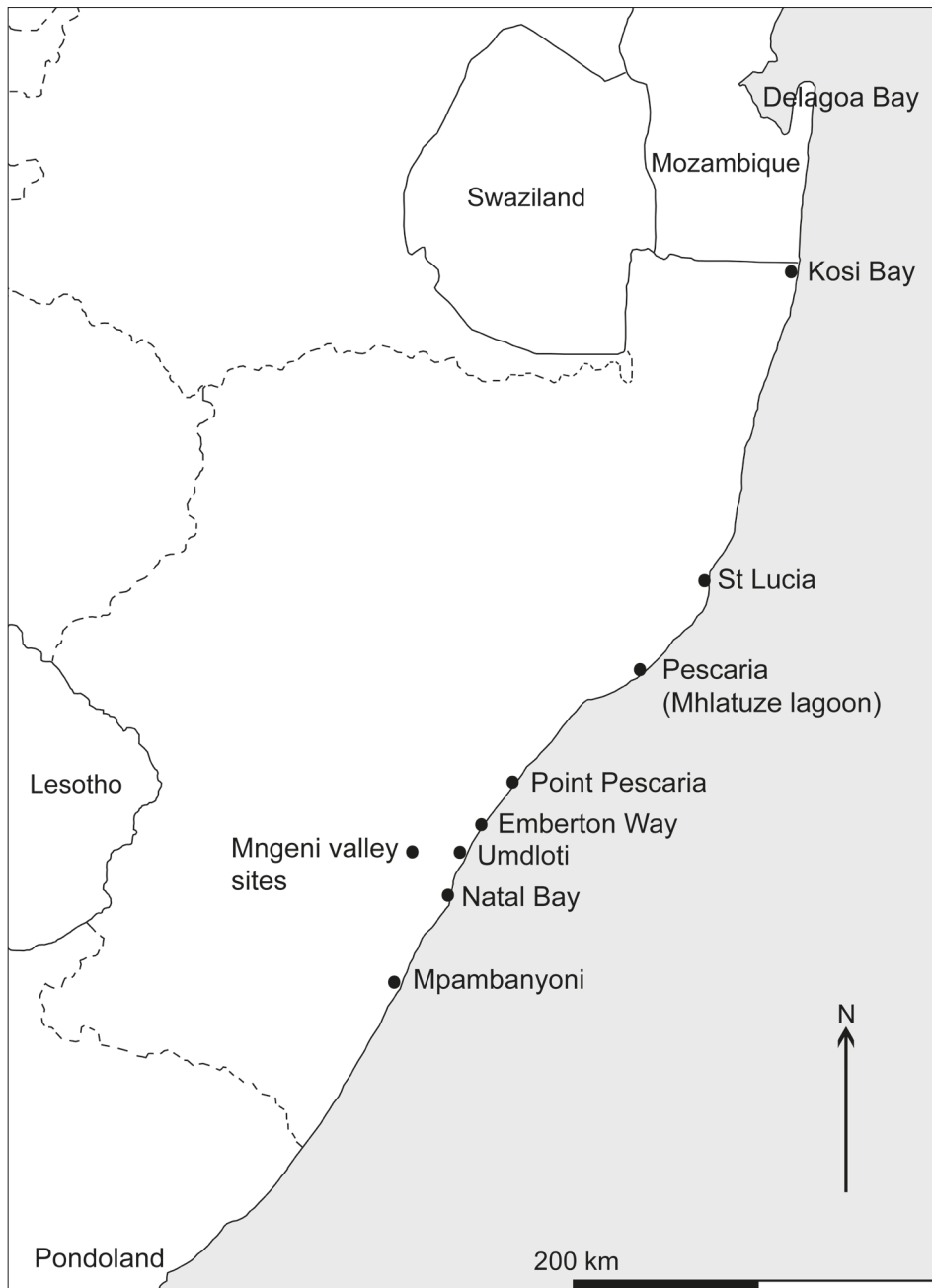


Fig. 6.1. Southern African east coast showing sites discussed in the text.

anticipated reaching the Pescaria. The name given to the place and its early identification surely indicates that the Portuguese perceived a formal, organized and *significant* industry, which I suggest probably included fish trapping.

Theal's belief that the Pescaria was in Natal Bay (Durban, 29°53' south) is even more unlikely than the Kosi option. Theal compounds his error by matching the 1575–76 Portuguese landmark, Point Pescaria, to the Durban Bluff (Theal 1898, II: xv, xix), but Point Pescaria at 29° south instead referred to a small rocky point near either the Mvoti or Zinkwazi estuary (Theal 1898, I: 323–4; Whitelaw 1997: 31; see Fig. 6.1). Its name suggests that people fished there.



The *São Bento* survivors most probably reached Natal Bay “in the latitude of thirty degrees” five days walk along the coast from the *São João* wrecksite at Port Edward (Theal 1898, I: 234). Here they found “one of the most considerable” rivers on the coast, “which the largest ships can enter”. It was then an unmapped ‘river’, probably because the Durban Bluff largely hides Natal Bay from an offshore vantage point. In Axelson’s (1988) edited volume on early Portuguese mariners and southern Africa, the bay appears only on maps that date from the late 1500s. The survivors’ reports probably contributed directly to the recording of the bay.

The *São Bento* survivors did not record fishing in the bay. Perhaps, as their account suggests, they were preoccupied with making rafts, the difficulty of the current at the entrance to the bay, and the hostility of the local people (Theal 1898, I: 234). In the nineteenth century, however, fish traps in Natal Bay netted thousands of pounds of fish. The trap owners were mainly white and Indian, but they had adopted the techniques (and perhaps originally appropriated the traps) of Africans who made a living selling fish to early settlers (Kearney n.d.). In 1839, for instance, Ferdinand Krauss (1973: 60) saw

many fish in the Bay, mainly the springers [flathead mullets], which jump up to 3’–4’ above the water surface when chased. The Kaffirs caught the fish in this way: near to the islands they put rows of reeds closely spaced in twisted channels so that the entrance was dry at low tide; the fish could enter the channels at high tide but could not get out again.

Fifteen years earlier, Henry Francis Fynn noted that the Thuli, who then occupied the Bluff, took “fish when the tide ebbed” (Bird 1888: 124), while Nathaniel Isaacs (1970: 26) reported traps baited with animal entrails (cf. Shooter 1857: 43).

The Thuli moved into the Natal Bay area from the upper Matikulu Basin in the 1770s (Wright 2009). According to Maziyana kaMahlabeni, an elderly Thuli man interviewed by James Stuart in 1905, they found four chiefdoms already established around the bay (Webb & Wright 1979: 274–8) (Fig. 6.2). The Thembu occupied an area north of the bay towards the Mngeni River, where central Durban is located today. The Khanyawo lived north of the Mngeni. The Mpofana chiefdom was south of the bay, about the Mhlatuzane and Mlazi rivers and the Bluff. It was the most senior of the four chiefdoms. Just inland of the Berea Ridge were the Nqondo. Theirs seems to have been a minor polity, closely allied to the Mpofana; Maziyana provided names for the chiefs of the other three chiefdoms, but not for the Nqondo.

The Mpofana controlled the best fishing grounds in the bay, in the waters around the Bluff. They “‘fenced in’ fishes in the Bay, i.e. *wove reeds* and made them into an *enclosure* to catch fish in when the tide went out” (Webb & Wright 1982: 54, italics recorded in Zulu).<sup>5</sup> “There was much more fish in the deeper water on the Bluff side. All kinds of fish were procured.” The Thembu on the northern side of the bay also “caught (*trapped*) fish by building *fences of reeds*” (Webb & Wright 1979: 276, italics recorded in Zulu).<sup>6</sup> According to Mcothoyi kaMnini, the newly arrived Thuli also took to eating fish once they had ‘cleared

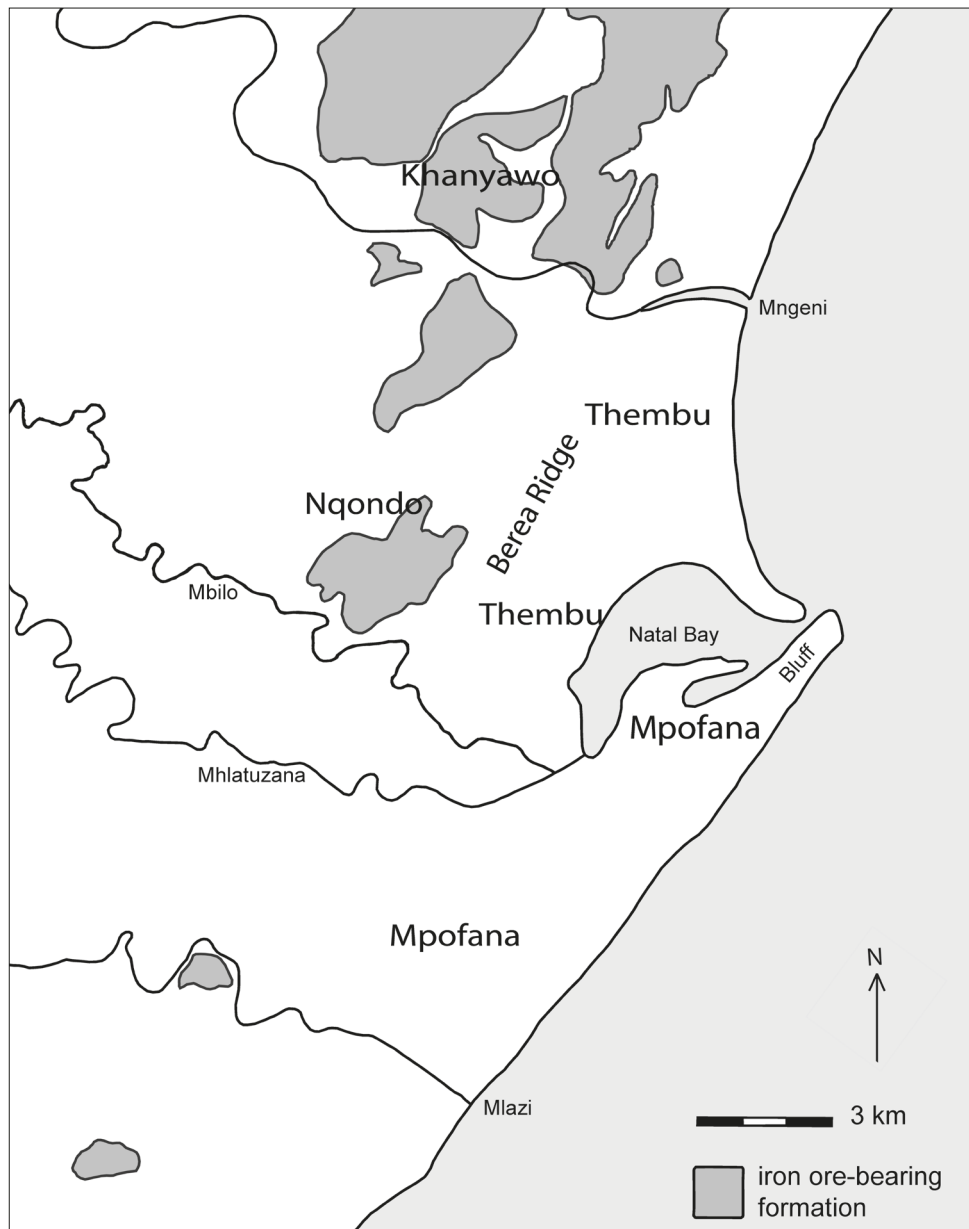


Fig. 6.2. Distribution of chiefdoms around Natal Bay in the mid-1700s.

out' the Mpofana (Webb & Wright 1982: 54). Presumably the Thuli appropriated the best fishing grounds in the bay.

This archaeological and historical evidence indicates a long history for fishing by agriculturists on the east coast of southern African. Quite clearly these fishing folk could not all have been Tsonga, but it is mainly to their ethnography that I turn to enhance our understanding of the data.

### Fishing in the ethnography

Tsonga fishing practices are well documented. On flood plains in the interior men *tjeba*, that is, they fish communally in pans using conical thrust baskets called *shiranga* or *izifonyo* (sing. *isifonyo*; Fig. 6.3). *Ku tjeba* takes place in late winter or early summer when drying pans



Fig. 6.3. Thrust basket (*isifonyo*), height = 64 cm. Ingwavuma district. KwaZulu-Natal Museum accession no. 6945.

concentrate the fish. All men must attend, at the command of the chief or headman, and women mock any man who ignores the chief's instruction. At the pan, the men advance in a line through the water, driving the fish ahead and thrusting their baskets into the mass, then grabbing hold of any fish so trapped (Junod 1962, II: 86–9; Tinley 1964; Felgate 1982: 69–72). Women often accompany the men, moving behind them and collecting the fish as they are caught, but women-only groups are unknown.

At the coast, the Kosi lake system contains the best-known example of estuarine fishing. There, semi-permanent fish traps consist of stake-and-brushwood guide fences that extend from the shore into the estuarine channel. At intervals, they curve upstream to meet small heart-shaped enclosures, which are in turn connected to circular traps made of palm-frond midribs (of *Phoenix reclinata*) (Figs 6.4, 6.5). The guide fences block the passage of fish swimming on the outgoing tide, direct them into the heart-shaped enclosures and then through one-way valves into the traps (Fig. 6.6). In the 1960s the one-way valves took the fish into removable baskets (Felgate 1982), which were perhaps used for centuries (cf. Shooter 1857: 393; Fig. 6.7).

Men inherit these traps from their fathers and pass them on to their eldest sons. Some men own two or more traps. Men who do not own traps can seek the headman's permission to build one. Similarly, a man can request that the headman allocate him a new location if his trap silts up. In either case, the new traps should not infringe on catches in existing traps. Men check their traps every day at low tide, and keep or dispense the fish as



Fig. 6.4. Aerial view of fish traps in the Kosi lake system (photo courtesy of Claudio Velasquez Rojas & Homebrew Films).



Fig. 6.5. Modern trap at Kosi made of palm-frond midribs (photo courtesy of Claudio Velasquez Rojas & Homebrew Films).



Fig. 6.6. Two views of the one-way valve, from above (top) and as a fish would see it (bottom) (photos courtesy of Claudio Velasquez Rojas & Homebrew Films).

they wish. They often sell fish at the water's edge to women who might resell them at the nearby Mangusi market, or a trap-owner's family might take them to market. In this way fish from Kosi today reach restaurants at least as far away as Durban (Scottie Kyle pers. comm.). In the past, men commonly gave excess fish to unlucky trap owners, who would return the favour when fortunes were reversed. In this way, most people in the surrounding community benefited from the fish traps (Felgate 1982; Kyle 1986).



Fig. 6.7. Valved fishing basket (*umono*); length = 133 cm. KwaZulu-Natal Museum acc. no. 5022. Purchased 1983, Mankawulani lake, Kosi.

Men use similar traps or “fixed instruments” (Tinley 1964: 28) in other suitable water bodies in Tsongaland, including Delagoa Bay. As Isaacs recorded for Natal Bay in the 1820s, they might also bait the baskets, or set them without fences. Junod recorded *nhangu* traps on the seashore and *shibaba* traps in estuaries (1962, II: 85–6). These were apparently less sophisticated than the Kosi traps, being designed so that receding water trapped fish in an enclosure that was submerged at high tide (compare with Fynn and Krauss’s descriptions for Natal Bay, given earlier).

People also fish with spears at Kosi, with groups either driving shoals into shallow water, or individuals stalking fish in *Phragmites* beds or the estuarine channels. Angling is less common and is probably a modern innovation. Boys or younger men typically use these techniques. Trap owners, by contrast, are generally middle-aged or older men (Felgate 1982: 64–6; Kyle 1986: 41–3). In the 1960s, Felgate saw annual fish-drives involving as many as 200 men, women and children with spears and machetes, taking advantage of large shoals of mullet in the estuary. This practice had perhaps ceased by the early 1980s (Kyle 1986: 40). Importantly for our purpose, each technique yields a characteristic haul.

People at Kosi rarely fish in the sea (Felgate 1982: 63), though this is not the case further south in Pondoland. There, Hunter saw small groups of men fishing with pronged spears in lagoons and rock pools, often at night. She observed no particular pattern. Men fished when they felt so inclined and stopped for a period when they grew weary of it. Fishermen typically lived within 10 km of the shore. “Coastal people are extremely fond of fish, some even preferring it to meat”, but people further inland refused fish (Hunter 1936: 96).

These accounts show that fishing was typically men’s work, though women participated in some of the more complex forms. I find it useful to distinguish complex fishing strategies such as fish-drives, *tjeba* and trap-fishing from the more informal kinds, like spearfishing in Pondoland and Kosi. While informal fishing is possible in any water body, opportunities for complex fishing are limited by environmental circumstances—they depend on suitable pans or estuarine environments. More importantly, the ethnography indicates that complex fishing is a social institution that has widespread implications for communities. I pick up this point later in the chapter, but return now to the archaeological and historical evidence.

### Fishing in olden times

Nanda and KwaGandaganda are about 24 km inland (Figs 6.1, 6.8). They contain marine mollusc shells as well as marine fish bones, indicating either visits to the shore, or contact with coastal communities, or most probably both. Coastal middens, for example, contain sherds with the ceramic signature of inland areas such as the Mngeni valley (Horwitz et al. 1991: 25–6; Punyadeera et al. 1997). Most of the fish species identified at Nanda and KwaGandaganda occur extensively along the east coast, although a few are more common in cooler waters to the south (Van der Elst 1981). It is thus reasonable to assume that

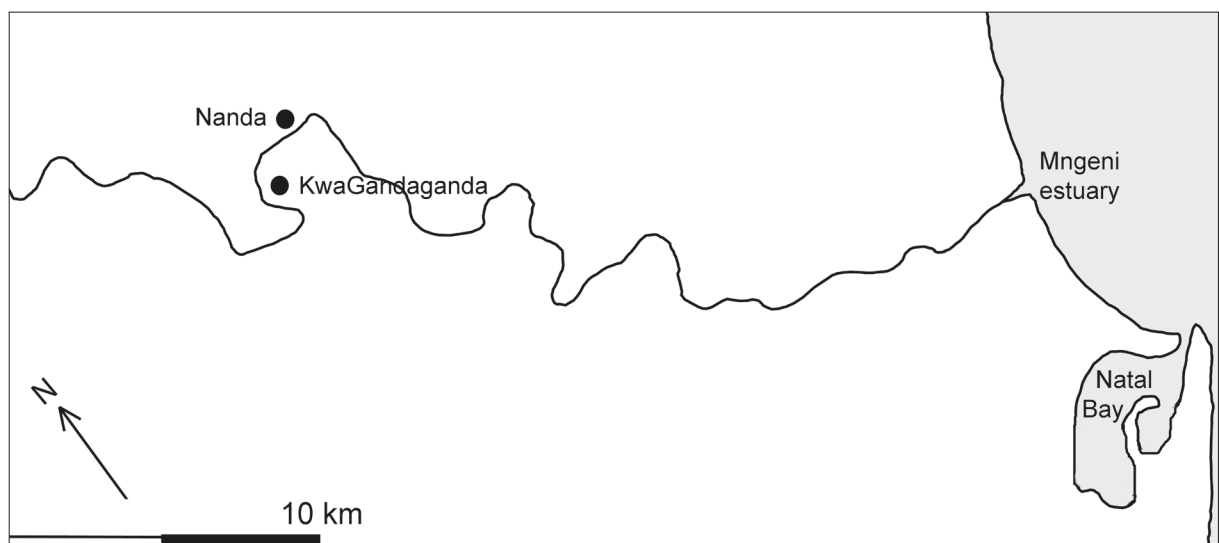


Fig. 6.8. Mngeni River and Natal Bay.

people travelled down-valley through familiar territories to the Natal Bay-Mngeni estuary area. This area was also a likely source for most of the shellfish in the KwaGandaganda collection, which contains species from rocky shores and sandy or muddy situations.

The fish-bone samples are too small for statistical analysis, but include several species of interest (Table 6.1). Three have periods of abundance associated with their reproductive cycles. First, adult flathead mullets migrate *en masse* from estuaries in mid-winter to spawn in inshore waters. The juveniles return to estuaries where they remain for the next 3–4 years. Second, spotted grunTERS spawn in open water in late winter, after which fry and post-spawn adults move into estuaries in a summer ‘grunter run’. Third, Natal stumpnose abundance peaks in summer when large shoals can occur in estuaries. Juveniles commonly stay in estuaries for their first year (Van der Elst 1981). The different phases of the life cycle for all three species are not as distinct in smaller estuaries where fish move easily between inshore and estuarine environments (Wallace 1975: 25–6).

Musselcrackers, on the other hand, rarely enter estuaries (Van der Elst 1981). Natal Bay is possibly an exception because it does not have the reduced salinities of true estuaries and many non-estuarine fish (e.g. galjoen, blacktail, zebra) would have entered it before it was so heavily disturbed by harbour development (Wallace 1975: 13). The marine fauna in the bay was rich and abundant then, and nineteenth-century catches included “brindle bass, swordfish, salmon bass, rays and sharks” so large that they were “lassoed round the tail” (Charlie Gorge, son of a fish-trap owner, quoted in Kearney n.d.). Even if musselcrackers were not caught in the bay, they typically occur off rocky shores where they feed on mussels, crayfish, sea urchins and other hard-shelled creatures. Anglers land them only with difficulty, but they are vulnerable to spearfishing (Van der Elst 1981). Anecdotal evidence suggests that one could spear musselcrackers from rocky promontories as they approach to feed (Lawrie Raubenheimer pers. comm.). Because white musselcrackers are locally resident (Van der Elst 1981), one could even ‘ambush’ known individuals, and the same is to some extent true for black musselcrackers.

Importantly, flathead mullets and spotted grunTERS dominate trap-catches in the Kosi system, both in terms of mass and numbers (Kyle 1986: 66–7). They are much less likely to be taken with the other techniques that Kyle recorded (1986: chapter 3). Natal stumpnoses were also once an important trap-catch, but reduced salinities have caused their numbers to decline in recent years (Kyle 1986: 89). The Mngeni valley sample, which includes all three species, therefore suggests trap-fishing in the first millennium, probably in Natal Bay. This is entirely consistent with the evidence for trap-fishing in the bay from possibly the 1770s. Conversely, the Mpambanyoni sample, which does not contain mullet and grunter remains, might indicate only informal spearfishing.

To sum up, the combined archaeological, historical and ethnographic evidence suggests that Iron Age people practised both complex and informal coastal fishing from the seventh century AD. Informal fishing was probably common among coastal communities, whereas complex fishing depended upon the availability of suitable locations. Natal Bay



TABLE 6.1

Fish recovered from Mpambanyoni near Scottburgh, and Nanda and KwaGandaganda (combined) in the Mngeni valley. Two species (*Liza richardsoni*, *Argyrozona argyrozona*) in the Mpambanyoni list are possibly misidentifications because they do not occur in east coast waters (cf. Van der Elst 1981).

Fish		Mpambanyoni	KwaGandaganda and Nanda
Scientific name	Common name		
<b>1. Marine and estuarine fish</b>			
<i>Mugil cephalus</i>	flathead mullet		*
<i>Mugil</i> sp.			*
<i>Pomadasys comersonnii</i>	spotted grunter		*
<i>Rhabdosargus sarba</i>	Natal stumpnose	*	*
<i>Rhabdosargus holubi (tricuspidens)</i>	Cape stumpnose	*	
<i>Rhabdosargus</i> sp.			*
<i>Galeichthys (Tachysurus) feliceps</i>	white seacatfish	*	*
Clinidae		*	
<i>Diplodus sargus</i>	blacktail	*	*
<i>Diplodus cervinus (trifasciatus)</i>	zebra	*	*
<i>Argyrosomus hololepidotus</i>	kob	*	
<i>Lithognathus mormyrus</i>	sand steenbras	*	
<i>Cymatoceps nasutus</i>	black musselcracker	*	*
<i>Coracinus capensis</i>	galjoen	*	*
<i>Sparadon durbanensis</i>	white musselcracker	*	*
<i>Liza richardsoni</i>	southern mullet	*	
<i>Argyrozona argyrozona</i>	carpenter	*	
<b>2. Riverine fish</b>			
<i>Barbus natalensis</i>	scaly		*
<i>Clarias gariepinus</i>	sharptooth catfish		*
<i>Clarias</i> sp.			*
<i>Labeo rubromaculatus</i>	Tugela labeo		*

was clearly one such location. Since fishermen included Nguni speakers from the twelfth century onwards, we cannot claim that fish eating distinguished agriculturists of the first and second millennia (e.g. Maggs 1994–95: 177; Badenhorst 2009a: 46). As Mcothoyi noted, “There is nothing remarkable in our taking to fish eating in a sudden manner. All tribes living right on the sea eat fish more or less in spite of whatever may be said” (Webb & Wright 1982: 54).

## **Fish and poverty**

Mcothoyi’s statement nevertheless acknowledges fish avoidance: “in spite of whatever may be said.” It seems to reflect the attitudes held by people living in the interior, whose rejection of fish eating is so prominently recorded in ethnographies. And indeed, Fynn claims that the Thuli taste for fish developed only after they had lost their cattle and were chased from their homeland in the upper Matikulu Basin. Fish nevertheless remained a favourite food of the Thuli after they rebuilt their herds in the Natal Bay area (Bird 1888: 124).

The context of Fynn’s observation is important. Shortly before he arrived at Natal Bay, the Zulu army attacked and broke up the Thuli chiefdom (Wright 2009). Fynn found an impoverished Thuli community living in hiding around the bay, which no doubt coloured his understanding of their history. He gave his account much later, in 1852–53, by which time he must have learnt of the widespread avoidance of fish in southern Africa and concluded, I suggest, that destitution drove the Thuli to fish eating. Holden (1866: 235) offers a similar opinion to Fynn.

Accounts from other informants give a different impression (see Wright 2009). Holden himself refers to the “great *Amatuli* nation”, though distinguishing between the ‘great’, more senior section inland and the fish-eating destitutes on the Bluff (1866: 133, 235). Taken together these accounts show that the Thuli took control of the coastlands with a ferocity that was still recalled more than a century later. Desperation can fuel fierceness, but the evidence indicates that the Thuli moved as an organized chiefdom in what was an act of independence, a refusal to accept submission to the Qwabe chiefdom (Wright 2009). Nothing suggests a disordered gaggle that took to eating fish out of desperation. The Thuli had, for instance, a maritime cosmology that excluded shellfish from public consumption, and discriminated between fish they considered edible and those they did not (Table 6.2). No doubt they adopted it from the people already living around Natal Bay, but its acceptance undermines Fynn’s position.

Stuart’s record suggests that, before the Thuli takeover, the Natal Bay natives regarded fish as both food and as a commodity worthy of exchange. According to Maziyana, the Khanyawo “bought fish from the abaTembu ... The fish was bought with assegais” (Webb & Wright 1979: 276). Here it is worth noting that smelting sites and iron-ore outcrops occur north of the Mngeni River (Sievers 1983); some of these might have been associated with the Khanyawo. The Nqondo were perhaps engaged in a similar exchange with the Mpofana. They too apparently ate fish, and archaeological data suggest that they made iron

TABLE 6.2

Marine creatures that the Thuli did not eat (Webb &amp; Wright 1982: 56).

	whale
<i>imfingo</i> (pl. <i>izimfingo</i> )	species of dark-coloured shark
<i>ithansi</i> (pl. <i>amathansi</i> )	species of broad, flat sea fish, skate
<i>imbelu</i> (pl. <i>izimbelu</i> )	swordfish
<i>izaza</i> (pl. <i>amazaza</i> )	electric ray, <i>Torpedo</i> sp. ( <i>T. sinuspersici</i> )

(Webb & Wright 1979: 276; Whitelaw 1991). Fish evidently retained their value in Thuli times, as Fynn notes, for Maziyana claimed that a “*person gets fat and sleek*” from eating fish (Webb & Wright 1979: 276, italics recorded in Zulu).

### Fish as a metaphor

This evidence for trade seems straightforward, but it is worth digging deeper. The phrase ‘fat and sleek’ suggests health, which in the Bantu world is synonymous with fertility and productivity (Berglund 1976: 179). The actual words Stuart recorded were “*umunt’ ukulupal’ a be bomvu*”. *Khuluhphala* means ‘to become fat’. *Bomvu* means red or reddish; it also carries the suggestion of ripeness (John Wright pers. comm.). Through its association with blood and the ancestors, redness can represent female reproductive potential (Berglund 1976: 160–1; Ngubane 1977: 121) and in the context of a marriage ceremony *ibomvu* can refer to a child (Krige 1962: 143). To say of a woman, ‘*umunt’ ukhuluhphal’ a be bomvu*’, is to remark on her attractiveness—‘a person becomes fat and beautiful’ (Ntombi Mkhize pers. comm.).<sup>7</sup> Maziyana’s phrase, therefore, strongly suggests a relationship between fish and female fertility.

We can tease out this relationship by considering fish traps. The traps require regular maintenance, but there is little else owners can do to increase the yield. It is a passive fishing method with the catch, in terms of numbers and the species caught, primarily dependent on the tide (water height) and the life cycles of the various fish species (Kyle 1986: 145, 182). Daily productivity is determined by the lunar cycle, which is allied both literally and metaphorically to women’s menstrual cycles (Raum 1973: 129). So, not only did a man’s traps augment production in his homestead, but they also perhaps represented his homestead’s reproductive capacity. The traps, in other words, represented his wives and their households, or more specifically, his wives’ wombs. Fish might then be likened to his daughters. The word *bomvu* emphasizes this point: red pigment on women refers specifically to paternal ancestors (Berglund 1976: 160). Just as is the case with the snake-children in the two folktales given earlier, fish-daughters were received with delight and embraced.

The water in which fish live perhaps carried a related symbolic load. The ocean provides inspiration to rainmakers and contains ingredients for rain medicine. Rain fertilizes the earth in the same way that semen fertilizes women, while ‘living water’ from running

streams is called *amalotha* (semen) in certain ritual contexts. Pools in these streams are places of origin from which the newly born ‘emerge’ (Berglund 1976: 144, 157, 169). Similarly perhaps, estuarine waters ‘live’ by virtue of the tidal rhythm and they ‘fertilize’ the traps so these can yield their bounty. We should not be surprised, then, that the Tsonga believed *ku tjeba* would produce rain, and that it was accompanied by a rite suggesting sexual intercourse (Junod 1962, II: 88, 323).<sup>8</sup>

Importantly, the Natal Bay trade was in smoked rather than raw fish (Webb & Wright 1979: 276). A young woman of marriageable age has similarly undergone a transformation from ‘rawness’ to maturity. The exchange of smoked fish for spears may not, then, be a literal record of the pre-Thuli past. Rather, I argue, it is a metaphor for marital exchanges—Khanyawo men marrying Thembu women in Maziyana’s example.

Why should the production of marriageable daughters have received such symbolic elaboration? It is because a man accumulated a following of unrelated people through the marriages of his daughters, and that following gave him status (Douglas 2002: 185). The formal structure of Zulu marriage negotiations illustrates this point. Representatives of a young man say to his lover’s father: “He is offering himself as a servant [*isikhonza*] and asks that you will build him a house.” (Krige 1962: 127) Here it is worth noting that the phrase ‘*umunt’ ukbuluphal’ a be bomvu*’ can also be applied to a man as a comment on his wealth (Ntombi Mkhize pers. comm.), which in precolonial times was measured in accumulated human productive and reproductive capacity. With each daughter’s marriage, an increasingly complex web of relationships developed around a man’s homestead, such that it came qualitatively to resemble the web that bound subjects to chiefs. It follows that Maziyana’s example suggests a hierarchy, with the Thembu fishermen senior to the Khanyawo iron producers. Other fishermen, the Mpopfana, were senior to all. Alternatively, perhaps it concerned a preferred marriage for the production of Khanyawo chiefs. Similarly, Hlubi chiefs are ideally sons of Msimanga or Xaba mothers (Muzi Msimanga pers. comm. 2014). The symbolic elaboration around marriageable daughters is thus partly, even mostly, a consequence of their profound political import. In other contexts we should expect that people drew on different aspects of production for the same purpose.

### **Fish as a political statement**

As is well known, women are exchanged for cattle in southern Africa. It is an exchange between the male, pastoral realm and the female, crop-growing realm that is mirrored in other lower-level exchanges. If we accept the metaphorical character of Maziyana’s fish, then what do the spears stand for? Spears as a symbol are generally involved in hierarchical, descent-oriented exchanges. A man might give a spear to his newly pubescent son, and to his daughter at her *umemulo* (coming of age ceremony) (Krige 1962: 88; Magwaza 2008: 487–9). Spears provide access to and communicate with the ancestors through sacrifice. A spear takes life in the same way that a penis creates life (Berglund 1976: 234; Ngubane 1977: 94, 121). They are things of descent, not of relations between descent groups. The

exchange of ‘fish’ for ‘spears’ thus sets the Thembu and Khanyawo apart from common practice.

If the Khanyawo spears rather represent hunting, the exchange is appropriate: male (hunting) for female (fish). But casting the central social exchange thus makes the Thembu and Khanyawo more like hunter-gatherers than agriculturists, again setting them apart.

What should we make of these Thuli perceptions of the Natal Bay natives? They are best understood in terms of a basic social principle, namely that status is partly a function of age because the aged are closer to the ancestors and the land in which they live. In frontier contexts, the principle allowed natives (= old timers) to claim seniority by virtue of their longer relationship with the land. Dominant newcomers—the Thuli in this case—responded in various ways depending on the circumstances. They either gave the natives a degree of ritual authority (especially in connection with the land and its productivity), or drove them off, or constructed a narrative that legitimized their takeover, or some combination of these strategies (Kopytoff 1987: 53–7). The next chapter deals with this theme in much greater detail. Here I simply argue that the Thuli dealt with the priority of the Natal Bay natives by treating them as either hunter-gatherers or people with strange and uncivilized customs, and thus not worthy of any claim to the land. So the Thuli legitimized their take-over.

The Thembu and some Khanyawo remained in place as Thuli subjects. The Mpfana, or at least their leading group, were chased away. As the senior chiefdom at the bay, they posed the greatest threat to Thuli authority. Some of them are supposed to have settled in Pondoland, where they perhaps influenced attitudes to fishing. Driving the Mpfana off was no doubt a far simpler and less dangerous strategy for the Thuli—assuming military superiority—than trying to negotiate ideological control over a longer term.

The military option was nevertheless possibly reinforced with an ideological one. The word *mpofana* means ‘poor or destitute person’ (Dent & Nyembezi 1988). Mpfana (or more correctly in this case, *amampofana*) was possibly a derogatory name given by the Thuli, perhaps inspired by inland perceptions of fish—after all, no people of substance would stoop to fish eating (cf. Junod 1962, II: 84). How ironic then that the Thuli themselves took so enthusiastically to eating fish.

That fish provided an abundant, easily tapped and healthy food source provides an obvious explanation for the new Thuli practice. At least as important was that fishing offered the Thuli an opportunity to assert their authority. As I have argued, fish traps were a powerful symbol of human reproductive and productive potential, the control of which determined status in Iron Age societies. For the Thuli, taking over the traps and adopting fish eating may have been absolutely necessary for full control of the Natal Bay natives, as it would have undercut any native claims to status and authority. So, the Thuli reclassified fish as food partly in response to a powerful political need. A tension between this political necessity and an earlier disgust of fish eating perhaps lay beneath the Thuli’s relatively subtle humiliation of their new subjects, one that is barely evident from the historical record. Without this ambiguity, they might have adopted a harsher approach.

## Wrapping fish

Natal Bay was something of a southern outlier for complex fishing, but it is one with a long history. At the bay, the Thuli excluded certain marine creatures from their revised class of edible animals (Table 6.2). All the excluded creatures lack scales and instead have smooth skins like people. So, fascinatingly, this restricted fish avoidance conceptually seems to resemble the wider interior one; people, of course, have great significance, and generally, they do not form a dietary item! This symbolic association and avoidance convention appears widespread. Recently Muzi Msimanga told me (pers. comm. Sept 2012) of eating in a restaurant with two Malawians. One of his companions, a man who lived in a rural area, ordered fish, which came cleaned of scales. He objected vigorously, attracting the attention of other diners and the restaurant management. He wanted his scales, he said. To keep the peace, Muzi exchanged meals with him. While Muzi ate the fish, his companion told him, “Eating a fish without scales is like eating a human being.” Muzi asked for clarity, “Are you saying I’m eating human flesh?” “Yes”, the man replied.

Around Natal Bay people might not have adhered to the convention absolutely, because both archaeological samples contain the smooth-skinned seacatfish. Alternatively, the seacatfish bones might represent catches by children. Similarly, most freshwater fish bones in first millennium samples might represent children’s activities. The Le6 pit is a special case and beyond my scope here, but its interpretation could perhaps be formulated in terms of ideas relating pit-fillings to girls’ puberty rites.

At KwaGandaganda, the marine fish possibly came as tribute from coastal communities (cf. Junod 1962, II: 85; Tinley 1964: 21). KwaGandaganda was a local capital and its occupants would have been aware of the significance of fish for folk living around Natal Bay. Alternatively, the fish perhaps came from exchange with people living closer to the coast, or were caught when parties visited the coast to gather shellfish.

By contrast, the size of the fish sample at second millennium Thulamela suggests *ku tjeba* or traps in the Luvuvhu and/or Limpopo rivers. Sharptooth catfish dominate this sample (Plug 1997), as they do, with two *Tilapia* species, thrust-basket catches in floodplain pans (Tinley 1964: 18). It may not be possible to distinguish informal from complex fishing in freshwater contexts using species occurrence; simple abundance might be the key. This point, the relationships between the Thulamela fauna and the different occupation horizons at the site, and the implications thereof, are worthy of future research.

Finally, it is clear that southern African Bantu speakers avoided fish, except when they encountered great abundance, as in coastal waters. Further, the symbolism described here is most likely associated primarily with complex fishing. Where complex fishing occurs, the symbolic net would extend to informal fishing. But informal fishing on its own, as practised in Pondoland, is an unlikely candidate for symbolic elaboration and so is probably not implicated in ideas of productivity and descent. Environmental circumstances that allowed for complex fishing perhaps occurred regularly only from the Mhlatuze lagoon (Pescaria) northwards, and from that section of the coast west onto the Mozambican

floodplains. It seems likely that positive attitudes towards fish spread from the coast into related communities on the floodplains and encouraged the development of *ku tjeba* there.

This is an important point, for it explains not just the adoption of fishing by the Tsonga—often simplistically attributed to making the best of an agriculturally poor environment—but also its deep sociopolitical significance. For contrast, note that even in the agriculturally impoverished lowveld where, unusually, first-millennium agriculturists relied heavily on wild animal resources, they did not resort to fishing (Plug 1988: 311, 329, 358).

The next chapter elaborates a minor theme in this chapter, namely, relations between natives and newcomers. It integrates archaeological, historical and ethnographic material to expose the histories of various categories of people that were used to construct a social hierarchy as the Zulu chiefdom began its expansion in the early nineteenth century. Among those who fell under Zulu domination were the Thuli. Just as they had earlier called their victims *amampofana*, so the Zulu gave the Thuli the derisory title *amalala* (Webb & Wright 1986: 14, italics recorded in Zulu), “for people that defeat others *insult* them.”

## Acknowledgements

John Wright (University of KwaZulu-Natal) and Brian Kearney (emeritus professor, University of Natal) directed me to various data and gave me access to unpublished material; Claudio Velasquez Rojas and Homebrew Films (Cape Town) allowed me to use Figures 6.4–6.6; Ntombi Mkhize (Natal Museum) discussed Zulu metaphors with me, and Nkululeko Sibetha (Natal Museum) prepared Figures 6.1, 6.2 and 6.8; Carolyn Thorp and Bronwen van Doornum (Natal Museum) and Tom Huffman, Lyn Wadley and Justine Wintjes (University of the Witwatersrand) commented on various drafts. The suggestions of three referees, John Wright, Jannie Loubser (Stratum Unlimited, USA) and Jan Boeyens (UNISA) helped improve the paper before publication. I am grateful to them all.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Whitelaw (2009a).

<sup>2</sup> Socwatsha kaPhaphu to James Stuart, 1905.

<sup>3</sup> Mkando kaDhlova to Stuart, 1902. He described *inyandezulu* as with black and green spots.

<sup>4</sup> Davies (1971) did not report fish bones from Blackburn, but they are present in the faunal sample.

<sup>5</sup> Mcotoyi kaMnini to James Stuart, 1905. Maziwana independently provided similar information (Webb & Wright 1979: 276).

<sup>6</sup> Maziwana to Stuart, 1905.

<sup>7</sup> The phrase reminds one of the Kgatla bride growing “fat and beautiful” in seclusion immediately prior to her move to her new home (Schapera 1940: 73, 1994: 136, also 132).

<sup>8</sup> What is perhaps also an allusion to sexual intercourse accompanied communal hunting among the Mpondo. A prepubescent girl sat at the gate of the cattle pen shaking a calabash filled with red ‘lucky beans’ for the period the hunters were away. When they returned with the slain animal she pierced its one eye (the hunters having pierced the other at the kill site) (Hunter 1936: 95; also Hammond-Tooke 1975: 25).





# 7

## **Archaeological contexts and the creation of social categories before the Zulu kingdom<sup>1</sup>**

Carolyn Hamilton's and John Wright's work since the 1980s shows that the Zulu kingdom comprised various categories of people that, in their relationship to the political centre, were either privileged and close, or subordinated and marginalized.<sup>2</sup> The Zulu kingdom, they argue, had a three-level hierarchy: an elite Zulu core ruled over a second tier of chiefdoms that had joined the Zulus early in their expansion. The disparate origins of these two tiers were glossed by the forging of a common *amantungwa* identity. A third tier on the geographic, political and social fringes of the kingdom comprised people labelled pejoratively as menials, down-and-outs and oddities. The term '*amalala*' is the best-known appellation of this category, but there were others.<sup>3</sup>

Hamilton and Wright stress the contingent and situated nature of these social categories, assembled and constructed within the process of political centralization. By contrast, in Alfred Bryant's view, the Lala and Ntungwa were clan groups, each with a distinctive history. The Lala comprised clans that once lived in the coastal region of KwaZulu-Natal, having arrived there via the Tsonga area from north of the Vaal. They might even have been originally Shona. They spoke a dialect that to the ears of pure Ngunis was *ukutekela*, to speak with a superabundance of dentalization. One cluster of pure Ngunis, the Ntungwas, arrived in Zululand somewhat later by a different route, from the west. It was from these pure Ngunis that the Zulu kingdom sprung. The Lalas were swept away during the emergence of the kingdom and were largely lost to history.<sup>4</sup> Various materials nevertheless entered the physical and documentary archive with the designation 'Lala'.

These various terms likely had different references in pre-Shakan times.<sup>5</sup> Bryant, John Soga and some of James Stuart's interlocutors, for instance, translate *amalala* as 'smelters and forgers of iron'.<sup>6</sup> Ndukwana kaMbengwana on this point is especially compelling, because

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Whitelaw & Hall in press

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton 1985, 2012; Wright & Hamilton 1989; Hamilton & Wright 1990

<sup>3</sup> Wright & Hamilton 1989: 72; Hamilton & Wright 1990; Wright 2012

<sup>4</sup> Bryant 1905: 26\*, 1967: 15–20

<sup>5</sup> Hamilton 1985: 266, 285–6, 289–90, 2012: 293; Hamilton & Wright 1990: 18–19; Wright 2012: 361

<sup>6</sup> Bryant 1905: 346 (Bryant notes that *lala* was sometimes also applied to rain doctors because they, like iron producers, came mainly from Lala clans); Soga 1930: 395

his testimony generally is so detailed and because he had personal knowledge of workers of both iron and brass.<sup>7</sup> Mqaikana kaYenge’s testimony, on the other hand, captures an ambiguity for the term. For him, ‘*amalala*’ was both a Zulu insult for conquered people, and a term applied to the Cube chiefdom—a close *umntungwa* ally of the Zulu king—“because they *worked iron*”. He noted that people “in other tribes”<sup>8</sup> also worked iron, a point which we know archaeologically to be true.

This translation of *amalala* is of interest because iron producers throughout sub-Saharan Africa were marginalized both cosmologically and politically, first because they worked at the interface of nature and culture in transforming ore to metal, and second, to prevent them from using their critical skills to accumulate status and power. The Lemba provide a good example,<sup>9</sup> but generally in southern Africa these marginal categories were not entrenched ethnicities.<sup>10</sup> Our argument is that the pejorative use of *amalala* that emerged in the early Zulu kingdom<sup>11</sup> drew on such ‘thought-patterns’.<sup>12</sup> On this point it is worth noting that the various recorded uses of the verb *lala* convey a strong sense of withdrawal from productive and reproductive life, of marginality and ambiguity, and of waste and even threat. The same is true for some nouns based on the word.<sup>13</sup> *Lala* is similar in meaning to *laza*, from which comes *umlaza*, the Zulu word for whey and the southern Nguni term for pollution. Whey—the sour byproduct of curdling milk, or a sign of ageing curdled milk

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<sup>7</sup> Ndukwana kaMbengwana in Webb & Wright 1986: 296–7. We are aware that Stuart’s interlocutors had personal interests and agendas that shaped their testimonies, and that these come to us through Stuart’s translation, always oral to text, and often Zulu to English.

<sup>8</sup> Stuart’s conceptual and linguistic gloss of Mqaikana kaYenge’s words, in Webb & Wright 1986: 14, italics recorded in Zulu

<sup>9</sup> e.g. Van Warmelo 1974: 81–3. Other Venda ironworkers (e.g. Tshimbupfe) and potters (e.g. Manavhela) are similarly marginalized (Jannie Loubser pers. comm. October 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Ndukwana kaMbengwana told James Stuart: “These blacksmiths were called *amalala* because it was their craft (*ngo bu nnyanga*), not because that was their *clan-name* (*sibongo*). A man belonging to any tribe would be called an *ilala* if he became a blacksmith.” (Webb & Wright 1986: 297; see also p. 14).

<sup>11</sup> Hamilton & Wright 1990

<sup>12</sup> A term we take from Axel-Ivar Berglund’s 1976 book *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism*.

<sup>13</sup> Bryant 1905: 345–6. Uses for the (Zulu) verb form include: sleep; lie down; pass the night (at a place when travelling); lie upon; hence, have sexual intercourse externally (i.e. as practised by unmarried boys and girls); lie fallow (for fields) or be left over to the next season (e.g. for cows not covered, or food left over from last season after the new harvest is in); lose flavour, become flat or insipid; and, be plentiful or numerous (as locusts or vermin or supplies). Nouns based on *lala* include: *ulala* – edge of forest; *ilalamanzini* – water animals, e.g. otters, crocodiles, both of which are ambiguous creatures; *umlalandle* – a wild animal, i.e. not kraaled or domesticated, used for cattle that habitually sleep in the veld.

(*amasi*)—is generally discarded.<sup>14</sup> The application of the word *lala* to people involved in transformation—always a polluting enterprise—would thus be entirely appropriate, while its malleable nature means that it can be shaped to fit a variety of purposes.

In this essay we seek to see beyond (and through) the events of the early nineteenth century and identify some archaeological contexts in which these categories of people could have been created.<sup>15</sup> We focus on *amalala*, *amantungwa* and *abanguni*. In the case of *amalala* we prioritize the translation ‘smelters and forgers of iron’, which suits the archaeological visibility of metallurgy. The next section outlines our approach.

## Identity and frontier dynamics

A consistent theme that emerges in our discussion is that people move, and thereby create the contexts, boundaries and internal frontiers through and over which they confront, conquer, absorb, meld and marginalize others. It is a theme directly relevant to the colonial discourse on African history, in which tribes gyrated and bludgeoned their way into new areas, retaining their mythic identities through displacement and destruction.<sup>16</sup> In response to this image, many scholars turned away from migration as a mechanism for change, noting that even where it was a historical factor, such explanations typically emphasized what happened rather than why. Our account categorically rejects this colonial image, but movement nevertheless remains integral to constructing a past in which identity was reworked and redefined in new social contexts.

We use Igor Kopytoff’s model of an ‘internal African frontier’,<sup>17</sup> bolstered with data relevant to southern Africa. Internal frontiers are the border zones between polities, which might be sharp when economic competition between polities is strong, or fuzzy when greater cooperation exists, or incorporate an uninhabited ‘no-man’s land’. The nature of the frontier is critical for the construction of identity, which is typically effected in relation to another. Indeed, a border’s cultural sharpness reflects the general tone of cross-border relationships and, especially where these are competitive, people might draw on material

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<sup>14</sup> Zulu pollution is *umnyama*; southern Nguni whey is *intloya*. See Chapter Five (Whitelaw 2013: 207–8) on this linguistic distinction. Bryant (1905) draws attention to the similarity between *lala* and *lazza*. Uses for the (Zulu) verb *lazza* include: become stale, lose freshness, pine away; be held over, delayed, postponed; and, pass a season without fertilization (for cattle; cf. *lala*). *Isilaza* is flat, stale beer (Bryant 1905; Doke et al. 1990). Albert Kropf’s 1915 dictionary records similar Xhosa associations for *lazza*. For southern Nguni pollution, not always named, see Soga 1931: 299–301 plus elsewhere (people between the Great Fish and Mbashe rivers); Hunter 1936: 46–7 (Mpondo); Hammond-Tooke 1962: 69–70 (Bhaca); Alberti 1968: 52–3 (people between the Great Fish and Great Kei rivers); Broster & Bourn 1981: 28 (Thembu particularly); Dold & Cocks 2012: 37 (considers plant use in the Albany Thicket biome of the Great Fish River region).

<sup>15</sup> cf. Hamilton & Hall 2012

<sup>16</sup> Consider Hugh Trevor-Roper’s flippant reference on BBC television to the “unedifying gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe”. He offered sub-Saharan Africa as an example of such a ‘corner’, but it was not his only one (see Wikipedia plus other web sources).

<sup>17</sup> Kopytoff 1987

culture to construct identities—material that might preserve in the archaeological record. Characteristically, discriminatory thinking accompanies an intensification of difference. People could nevertheless move across and (with some risk) into the no-man’s land of border zones.<sup>18</sup> Typically newcomers require sponsors in the areas in which they wish to settle, and approval from local administrators.<sup>19</sup> Typically also, chiefs establish district heads in frontier areas to deal with these and other administrative demands.<sup>20</sup> These political strategies for collecting and keeping people mean that various forms of identity are combined and reconceptualized in frontier zones as people move and relocate for a variety of reasons. The process generates social landscapes of accreted identities and histories, and, potentially, new polities as frontier administrators accumulate the followings and resources necessary for independence. We focus on only a few aspects of the process.

Age, still today, is a basic determinant of rank and precedence because elders stand in a closer relationship to the ancestors than the youth. The principle had consequences in frontier contexts in the past, because it demanded that newcomers to an occupied area acknowledge the priority of natives, or firstcomers in Kopytoff’s terminology. What is more, firstcomers had an established, intimate relationship with their land, developed through their production and reproduction on it and their laying down of ancestors in it. Such work effectively synchronized the life cycles of people and their land, creating a sense of ownership that leaders (typically men, from homestead heads to chiefs) administered. To this pre-existing authority, newcomers submitted. The logical outcome was one whereby latercomers and lastcomers linked in “a chain of hierarchy”<sup>21</sup> to the deeply embedded authority of firstcomers.

But in other cases, newcomers overwhelmed firstcomers—sometimes militarily—and asserted their own authority. Even so, they were faced with “a hard fact of life”<sup>22</sup>—the precedence of firstcomers and their special relationship to the land. A common solution was to claim that firstcomers had abandoned their land on first sight of the newcomers. Another was to exclude firstcomers from political power on the basis that they were without culture, and thus something less than human, and then retain them in roles that drew on their special relationship with the land. Such roles concerned aspects of procreation, a phenomenon that necessarily drew on the resources of the chaotic world outside culture. They included midwifery, rainmaking, circumcision, metal production and potting. This recognition of the cosmological potency of firstcomers fulfilled clear political and administrative needs, as it encouraged the subjugated to accept their new rulers.<sup>23</sup> Whatever option taken, these historical fantasies effectively invert historical sequence: newcomers become the first true

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<sup>18</sup> Hodder 1982: 22–36; Hammond-Tooke 1993: chapter 2, 2000: 422; Huffman 2000: 19

<sup>19</sup> Ngubane 1977: 18–20

<sup>20</sup> Hammond-Tooke 1993: 48, 62; Huffman 2012: 37. On this point we differ from Kopytoff, for whom frontiers fell into an administrative vacuum.

<sup>21</sup> Kopytoff 1987: 53

<sup>22</sup> Kopytoff 1987: 54

<sup>23</sup> Jannie Loubser pers. comm. October 2014

people. As successive layers accumulate, firstcomers are in one sense repeatedly generated, and in another sense lost in the abyss of history.

The oral and archaeological records contain material relevant to and illustrative of the internal African frontier. We start with general principles of leadership, using two stories in the *James Stuart Archive*. The first expresses the significance of inheritance, symbolized by the rib-meat (*insonyama*), which was reserved to honour and recognize authority and status: indeed, *insonyama* is a delicacy that connects the diner to his or her ancestors.<sup>24</sup>

A certain woman bore Kanyile and Mcunu. A beast was killed. The *joints of meat* were laid out, viz. *legs* and *rib-meat*. Kanyile, finding that he had a large *following*, decided to take the *leg*, having first choice. Upon doing this *the old women* [*izalukazana*] shouted out, '*Kanyile has lost the chiefship; it has slipped from his grasp. It has now been taken by Mcunu!*', for Mcunu got the *rib-meat* and became the great chief.<sup>25</sup>

The story opposes two aspects of authority. Kanyile has political authority—he is an 'owner of people'—and makes a choice that is consistent with his chiefly responsibilities. He is nevertheless outmanoeuvred by Mcunu's claim of a closer relationship to the ancestors, and therefore of the inherited right to rule. The noun used for the old women who despairingly (we suggest) call out Mcunu's succession emphasizes this point. *Izalukazana*, rather than the plainly descriptive *izalukazi* (= old women), is a demeaning term that might refer to poor old women, or to fakes or imitations or copies—not the real thing.<sup>26</sup> It is likely the old women support Kanyile; they are members of a false chiefdom.

The second story shows that inheritance (or precedence) alone cannot guarantee leadership.

Cele had a brother Ngati. The latter was senior to Cele .... Ngati *slaughtered a number of cattle. He then went off to hunt cane rats, even though he had slaughtered cattle. He left the meat which he had cooked. Cele arrived, took the meat in the absence of Ngati, and gave it to the people. Ngati returned. The people were giving praise for the meat to Cele. That is how Ngati lost the chiefship.* When Ngati arrived he found all the meat dished out. The people said, '*We give praise to Cele. As for you, Ngati, this is the end of your chiefship. You have now lost it.*'<sup>27</sup>

Here, Ngati holds both the authority of descent and the authority of a following, but unlike Kanyile in the first story he fails in his responsibility as chief. Instead of feeding his people, Ngati prefers to pursue an individual interest. In other words, he fails to act as a social,

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<sup>24</sup> Berglund 1976: 238; Ntombi Mkhize pers. comm. 2013; cf. Boeyens & Van der Ryst 2014: 37, 39

<sup>25</sup> Mini kaNdhlovu in Webb & Wright 1982: 129, italics recorded in Zulu; our insertion from Stuart's original notes. See also Mabonsa kaSidhlayi and Magidigidi kaNobebe in Webb & Wright 1979: 15, 84.

<sup>26</sup> Ntombi Mkhize pers. comm. October 2013. *Isalukazana* can also refer to a woman who has destroyed her life, say by sleeping around, so that her body *has lost its freshness and bouncy quality!* Compare to *lala*, *laza*, notes 13, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Melapi kaMagaye in Webb & Wright 1982: 92, italics recorded in Zulu; see also Mahaya kaNongqabana in Webb & Wright 1979: 120–1 for a similar story.

cultural being and is usurped by Cele. Despite their similar behaviour, the different results for Cele and Kanyile reveal a hierarchy of principles determining authority in agriculturist societies: descent first then the ability to distribute largesse. It is this second principle that makes the development of new polities in frontier zones possible.

The remaining examples deal specifically with frontier contexts. In the first account, the Baphalaborwa claim that under their leader, Malatji, they encountered the Bashokane, when

the BaShokane ... had no fire and the BaPhalaborwa brought fire and frightened them away and they were conquered. They had no weapons of iron and used knobbed sticks. They ate uncooked crops and had no cattle. Their meat came solely from hunting.<sup>28</sup>

The story quite obviously presents the Bashokane as without culture. As it happens, Bashokane territory contained iron ore. Malatji's people supposedly knew nothing of metallurgy, but various men of unknown origin (again suggesting an absence of culture) and thus without any claim to leadership joined the Baphalaborwa as iron smiths.<sup>29</sup> This tale is making a strong statement about political hierarchy in an area rich in iron ore but poor agriculturally, where smiths could potentially wield considerable power (Fig. 7.1).

Similar tales exist for the Soutpansberg region, where the Kalanga-speaking (Western Shona) Singo, newly arrived from Zimbabwe in the late seventeenth century, established their capital Dzata and eventually united various Venda chiefdoms into a single state.<sup>30</sup> In doing so they structurally marginalized earlier layers of people. The Singo took political control, expressed in mountain imagery in oral traditions, but accommodated (and co-opted) the precedence of defeated Venda dynasties by giving them responsibility for aspects of procreation, expressed in pool imagery. These dynasties, also originally Kalanga in origin, had themselves taken control of pre-Venda chiefdoms in the Soutpansberg region in the mid-fifteenth century. It was during this period that the Venda language evolved through interaction between Shona and Sotho speakers. With the Singo arrival, the residues of pre-Venda communities were pushed to the base of the social ladder as the 'dry ones', and disparaged as being infertile, chiefless, and without fire, pottery, metal or agriculture. Fascinatingly, the Singo adopted the Venda language of their new subjects, a development that supports the fiction that they are the original Venda, who arrived intact from Zimbabwe or "some distant country".<sup>31</sup> It surely also served a political and administrative stabilizing purpose.

Calabrese<sup>32</sup> and Hall and Smith<sup>33</sup> identify even earlier processes of layered subordination in the eleventh- to thirteenth-century run-up to the Mapungubwe state. In the

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<sup>28</sup> Scully 1978: 138

<sup>29</sup> See Van der Merwe & Scully 1971: 187–9

<sup>30</sup> Loubser 1991; Huffman 2007a: 417–21

<sup>31</sup> Loubser 1991: 420. The category to which people claim or are assigned membership can vary with context (Loubser 1991: 406).

<sup>32</sup> Calabrese 2007; also Huffman 2007b, 2014

<sup>33</sup> Hall & Smith 2000

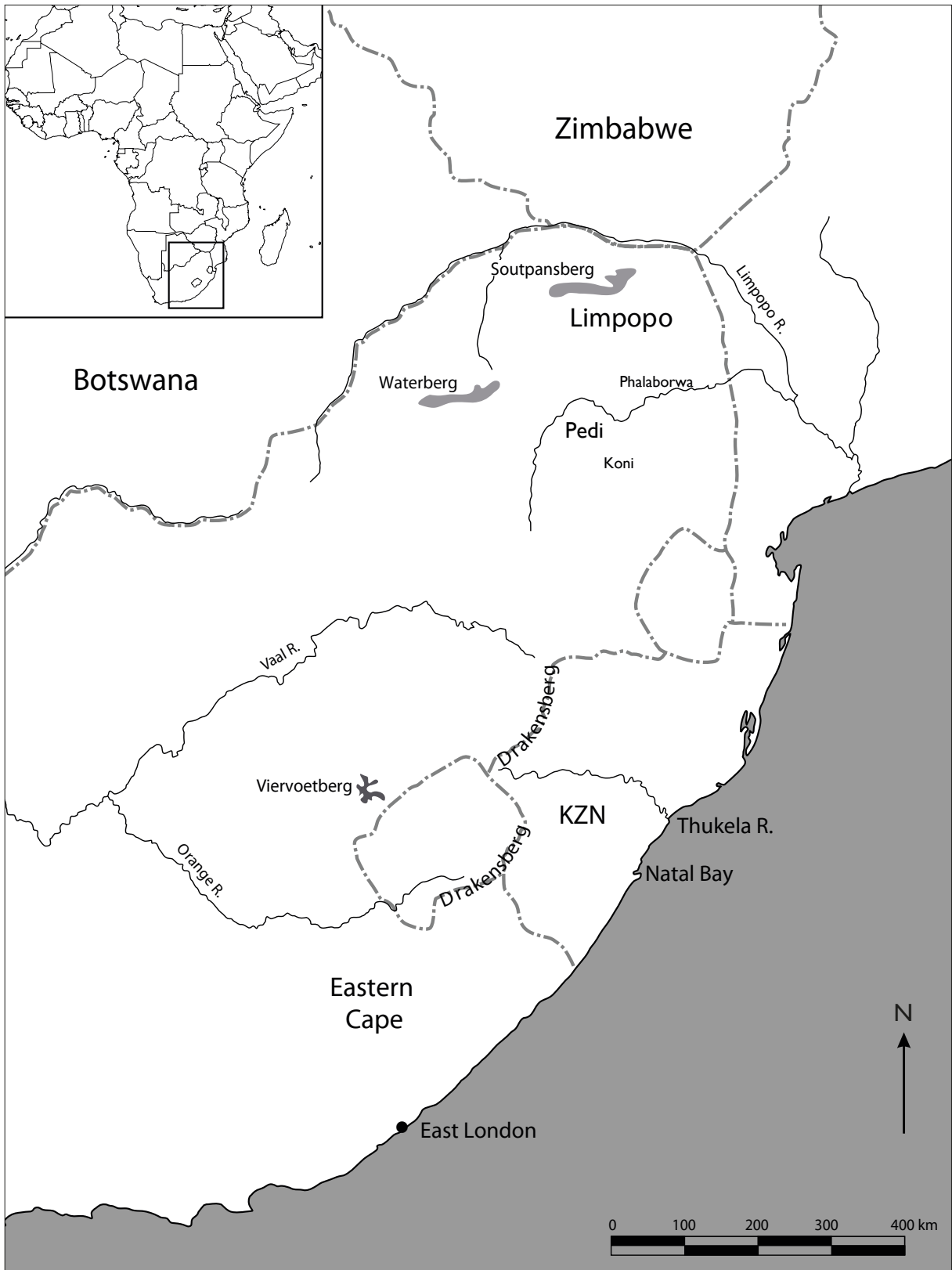


Fig. 7.1. Southern Africa: places and groups mentioned in the text.

latter case the authors argue that hunter-gatherers were integral to the structure of layered landscapes and in some circumstances could hold a status akin to firstcomer-agriculturists as owners of the land. Certainly, much evidence exists for contact and movement across the hunter-gatherer–agriculturist divide, and even for the formation of new kinds of accreted societies such as the raiding Thola and, perhaps, some ‘Vaalpense’.<sup>34</sup>

Further south, newcomer strategies are evident in Cele accounts (Fig. 7.2). Following their move into coastal areas to the south of the Thukela River in the 1770s, the Cele referred to resident locals as *inyakeni*, a word that Stuart’s interlocutor, Madikane kaMlomowetole, said applied to “those who knew nothing”, with “dirty habits” and who were unable to “distinguish between what was good and what was bad. A person of the *inyakeni* did not pay respect to chiefs, nor did he wash or keep himself neat”.<sup>35</sup>

In a related but earlier move, the Thuli took control of the region around Natal Bay,<sup>36</sup> where they came to regard Natal Bay natives—in what now seems to be a consistent pattern of discriminatory thinking—as either hunter-gatherers or people with strange and unusual customs. Their approach to their new subjects nevertheless seems to have been rather more subtle than that of the Cele, perhaps because of the considerable sociopolitical significance of fishing at Natal Bay, for the Thuli adopted this practice from the natives.<sup>37</sup> Particular circumstances can obviously ameliorate or intensify the oppression of politically subordinate peoples. In the case of iron production, for instance, the high (*umntungwa*) status of the Cube chiefdom distinguished its metallurgists from metallurgists at Zimpy near the Mkhuze River, who were in Adulphe Delegorgue’s opinion disadvantaged because of their prior association (some 20 years earlier) with the Ndwandwe chiefdom.<sup>38</sup>

The main point we take from this brief discussion is that internal frontier processes layer landscapes with accreted identities in which original occupants can become progressively subordinate, but might still fill important roles of transformation within society. Importantly, we can approach the dynamics of layering through the construction of basic archaeological sequences, as Loubser demonstrated in the Soutpansberg. The repeated recognition of a structure that underpins the political process of identity construction, which is often associated with the creation of subordinated categories of people or marginalized specialists, encourages us to think about these processes in KwaZulu-Natal. In the next section we argue that the category ‘*amalala*’ is rooted in politicking at the Early Iron Age–Late Iron Age interface in the eleventh century AD (see Fig. 7.3).

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<sup>34</sup> e.g. Maggs 1980c; Prins & Lewis 1992; Prins 1994; Dowson 1995, 1998; Mazel 1998, 2004; Van der Ryst 1998: 10–17; Hall 2000; Jolly 2000; Blundell 2004; Mitchell 2009a; Challis 2012

<sup>35</sup> Madikane kaMlomowetole in Webb & Wright 1979: 55; Hamilton & Wright 1990; Wright 2009

<sup>36</sup> Wright 2009

<sup>37</sup> See Chapter Six (Whitelaw 2009a: 206–9)

<sup>38</sup> Maggs 1992: 69–70, 76–7. Shaka apparently raised up his maternal cousin Zokufa to Cube chief, which provided the kinship basis for Cube status.



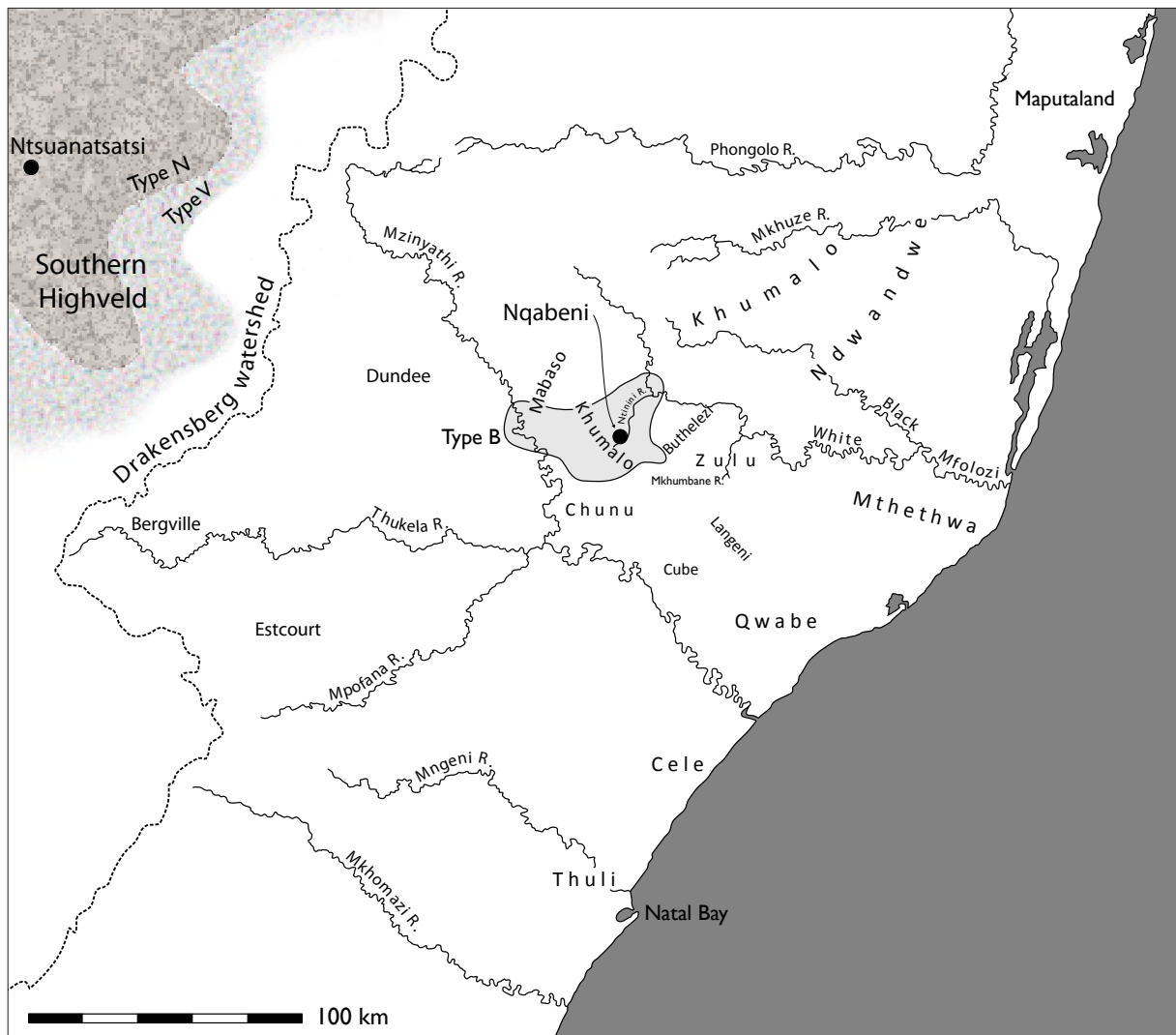


Fig. 7.2. Southeast-southern Africa c. 1780–1810: distributions of Types B, N and V, plus people, places and chiefdoms mentioned in the text.

### **Layered landscapes, layered identities, and the *amalala***

Chapter Two outlines the Iron Age sequence in KwaZulu-Natal, which is summarized here in Figure 7.3. Briefly, the **KALUNDU** Early Iron Age sequence ended with *Ntshekane* (Fig. 7.4) in the early to mid-eleventh century, when it was succeeded by the *Blackburn* facies (Fig. 7.5). The various data indicate a movement of Nguni speakers from further north (the Great Lakes region) into a heterogeneous social context, with hunter-gatherers, Early Iron Age agriculturists and, in the southern reaches, Khoe-speaking pastoralists.<sup>39</sup> Early Iron Age agriculturists did not simply disappear, however, and their sudden stylistic erasure must be sought in the nature of the frontier dynamic between them and incoming Blackburn people.<sup>40</sup> One implication of the material-cultural discontinuity is that interaction was one-sided, with Blackburn newcomers culturally ‘smothering’ and absorbing Early Iron Age

<sup>39</sup> Mazel 1989; Whitelaw 2008; Feely & Bell-Cross 2011

<sup>40</sup> Whitelaw 2009b: 155

AD	<i>facies</i>	TRADITION, Branch	Period
1800	<i>Nqabeni</i>		
1600			
1400	<i>Moor Park</i>		
1200			
1000	<i>Blackburn</i>	UREWE, Blackburn Branch	Late Iron Age
1000	<i>Ntshekane</i>		
800	<i>Ndondondwane</i>		
600	<i>Msuluzi</i>	KALUNDU	
600			
400	<i>Mzonjani</i>	UREWE, Kwale Branch	Early Iron Age

Fig. 7.3. The archaeological sequence in KwaZulu-Natal. Facies names are aligned with their start date. Hatched lines indicated breaks in ceramic tradition and period. The **KALUNDU** facies form an evolutionary sequence. *Blackburn* gives rise to *Moor Park*, but the origins of *Nqabeni* are uncertain. It perhaps comes out of *Blackburn* (i.e. not *Moor Park*).

people. Chapter Five suggests that differing details in marriage practices were likely a key factor in the rapid ‘smothering’,<sup>41</sup> but the full argument depends on future work on marriage practices in Blackburn communities.

Other factors probably played a role too. Almost every Early Iron Age site in KwaZulu-Natal contains ferrous metallurgical debris, which highlights the critical metallurgical knowledge of first-millennium agriculturists.<sup>42</sup> Blackburn smiths surely possessed a similar skill-set, though we speculate that at least initially they relied on detailed Early Iron Age knowledge of local ore sources. We wonder about the contribution such an early engagement might have made to the category *ilala*—ironworker.<sup>43</sup>

The significance of this issue should not be underestimated. Most iron was shaped into hoes,<sup>44</sup> without which agriculturists would not (and could not) have spread into sub-

<sup>41</sup> also Whitelaw 2013: 221–2

<sup>42</sup> Maggs 1992

<sup>43</sup> cf. Ownby 1985: 138.

<sup>44</sup> Maggs 1991: 136

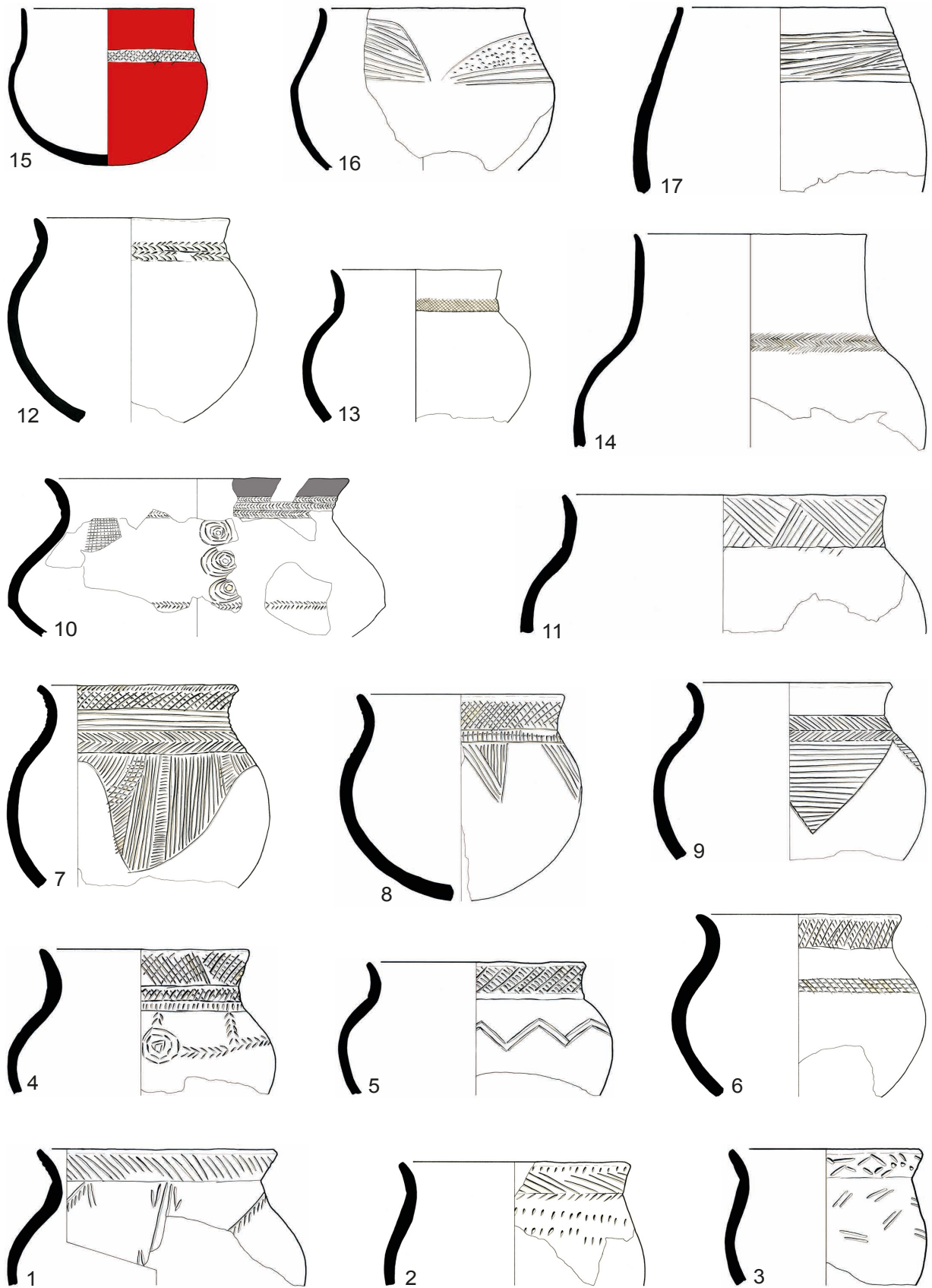


Fig. 7.4. Early Iron Age pots: *Mzongjani* 1–3; *Msuluzi* 4–11; *Ndondondwane* 12–15; *Ntshekane* 16–17. Pot 10 with graphite burnish on the rim, plain burnish below the neck bands. Pot 15 with red-ochre burnish. Pots not to scale.

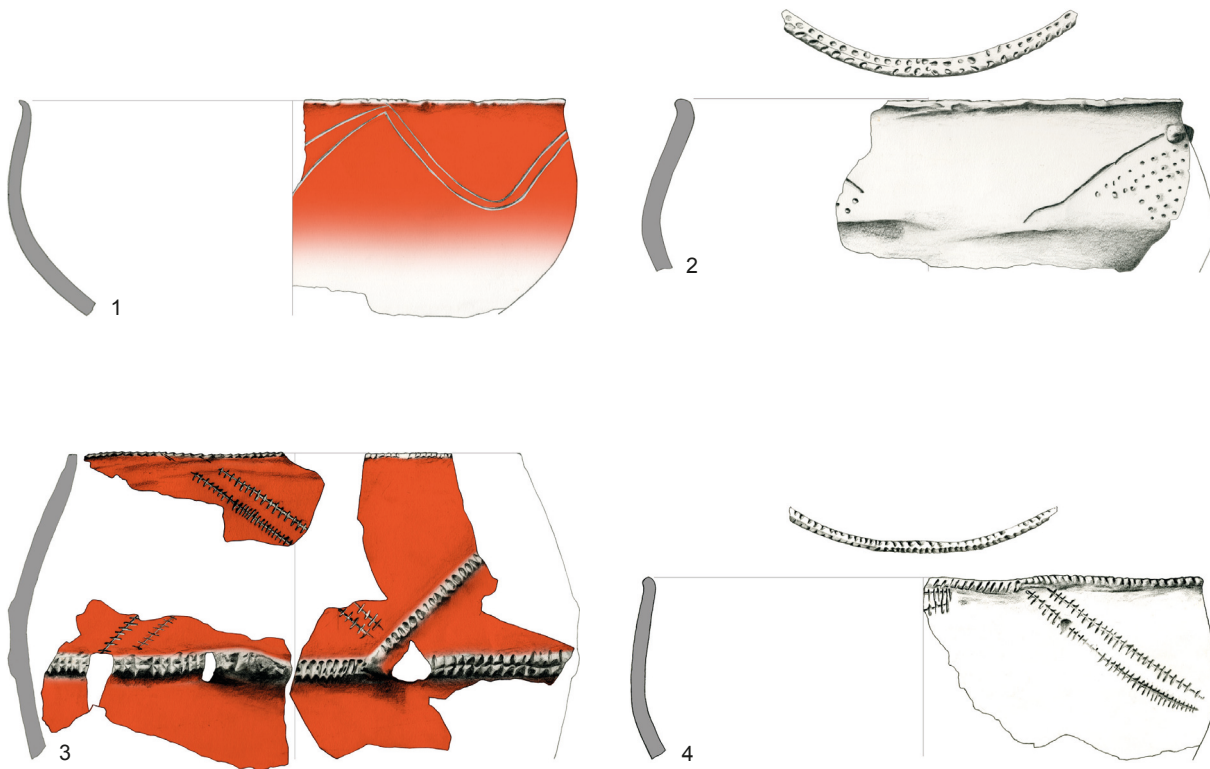


Fig. 7.5. Late Iron Age pots, *Blackburn* facies. Pots 1 and 3 with red-ochre burnish. The burnish on pot 1 might have originally covered the whole vessel. Pot 3 possibly combines *Ntshokane* and *Blackburn* characteristics (compare with Figs 7.4.16, 7.4.17).

Saharan Africa. Iron was a critical resource. The distribution of Mzonjani sites conveys precisely this point. Without the clutter of older sites, the association of these pioneering agriculturists with iron-ore sources is clear. The same message comes from post-1500 shipwreck records for the region south of Natal Bay, where ore sources are rare and of low quality. People there typically broke up and burnt wreckage to extract iron fasteners.<sup>45</sup> It is for good reason that archaeologists use the short-hand label ‘Iron Age’ for these communities.

Ownby identifies only a single word relating to iron in the Nguni languages that she considers a loan from Sala—the word *igeja*, hoe, in Zulu.<sup>46</sup> Archaeologically, it would be worth exploring the distributions of Early Iron Age sites, *Blackburn* sites and iron-ore deposits, and examining style minutiae at the *Ntshokane–Blackburn* interface (Figs 7.4, 7.5). Whatever the details, the widespread political marginalization of iron producers in southern Africa suggests a similar outcome at this interface.

### Lala and the Sotho-Tswana

Encouragement for the idea that it is worth seeking an origin for the *amalala* category at the *Ntshokane–Blackburn* interface comes from similar interfaces elsewhere. We turn briefly to Sotho-Tswana origins. Sotho-Tswana speakers are associated with a ceramic-style cluster

<sup>45</sup> e.g. Bird 1888: 28–9, 46; Theal 1898, I: 224

<sup>46</sup> Ownby 1985: Appendix B, p. 231; for Ownby’s Sala, see Chapter Two, p. 8.

called **Moloko**, which dates from the mid-fourteenth century. The earliest **Moloko** facies is *Icon*, in northern Limpopo (Fig. 7.1). Like *Blackburn*, *Icon* represents a sharp stylistic break with the terminal Early Iron Age, and an appeal is similarly made to demographic processes to explain its appearance. Linguistic and ethnographic evidence again suggests an East African connection.<sup>47</sup> The parallel appearance of Sotho-Tswana and Nguni speakers in southern Africa shows that they were linked phenomena. This history underpins a close historical association between the two from early in the second millennium AD, and an ongoing entanglement of the two belies their somewhat formal geographic separation in twentieth-century ethnographic texts.<sup>48</sup>

In eastern Botswana and the Waterberg, radiocarbon analyses date the final Early Iron Age facies to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,<sup>49</sup> indicating contemporaneity with the **Moloko** cluster. Their co-presence is not simply indicated by chronological overlap, however, but by clear evidence for interaction in the incorporation of some Early Iron Age stylistic attributes into **Moloko** ceramics.<sup>50</sup> The extent of incorporation is limited, but since the interface is archaeologically visible, it suggests, minimally, some intermarriage.<sup>51</sup>

It is in this overlap that frontier dynamics between firstcomers and newcomers possibly spawned marginalised people who emerged historically in Botswana as *kgalagadi*,<sup>52</sup> and as similarly subordinate people in the Waterberg and wider Limpopo region. Linguistically, *kgalagadi* is different from Sotho-Tswana and an early twentieth-century study found little evidence for its classification as “a dialect of Tswana”.<sup>53</sup> The implication is that there was an earlier linguistic layer, equivalent to Ownby’s Sala.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, people labelled as *kgalagadi* were part of an elaborate social and economic hierarchy, with Bushmen (*sarwa*) at the base, who were deeply denigrated as thieves. The *lala*<sup>55</sup> were a little higher on the social

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<sup>47</sup> Louw & Finlayson 1990: 408; Hammond-Tooke 2004

<sup>48</sup> Huffman 2007a: 428–56; Hammond-Tooke 2004; Hall et al. 2008; Hall 2012; Hamilton & Hall 2012

<sup>49</sup> Denbow 1981: 66; Van der Ryst 1998: 52; Huffman 2007a: 231

<sup>50</sup> S. Hall 1981: 46, 47, 128; 1985

<sup>51</sup> e.g. Loubser 1991: 417–21; Jacobson et al. 1991; Huffman 2007a: 317–19

<sup>52</sup> see Campbell 1998: 40–1 and Biemond 2014: 248 for a slightly different perspective on *kgalagadi* origins, also based on Early Iron Age pottery. *Ngona* in the Venda world might have similar origins.

<sup>53</sup> Van der Merwe & Schapera 1943: 3

<sup>54</sup> see Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945

<sup>55</sup> We have yet to pursue the use, origin and linguistic (if any) connection between the term ‘baLala’ in the Tswana world to the west, with *amalala* in the KwaZulu-Natal context. According to testimony collected by Schapera, there is a clear conceptual separation of *lala* from *kgalagadi*: “The baKgalagadi are human beings. The baLala are wild animals” (Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945: 148). Furthermore, a distinction between *lala* and *sarwa* is also made and in this context the term *lala* may be akin to the term ‘tame Bushmen’. In the relationship between *kgalagadi* and *lala*, the denigrating and deculturising strategy of frontier politics is clearly evident. Some *kgalagadi* did, however, accede to *lala* in some ritual matters (Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945: 160): “The baLala ask rain for us. ... We do not start this prayer if there are no baLala present. ... If any one of us dreams about our ancestors he does not make rain. Rainmaking is something done by the baLala.” And there is also the ambiguity of *lala* living in ‘nature’, from which they had a deep knowledge of medicinal cures (Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945: 162): “The baLala do not venerate anything. They eat everything as they are the big doctors.”

ladder and were subject to subordination by *kegalagadi*: it was their “duty to hunt animals and beasts of prey for us, and to bring the skins to us [the *kegalagadi*]”.<sup>56</sup> In turn, *kegalagadi* were subordinated to the Tswana, who ‘owned’ them.<sup>57</sup> Their situation was exacerbated in the early decades of the nineteenth century by the westward expansion of Ngwaketse, Ngwato and Tawana. Within this subordination there is, however, an acknowledgement of prior precedence in a tale that is conceptually identical to the story of Ngati’s usurpation:

The baTswana say that these people (i.e. the baKgalagadi) are our (i.e. their) seniors. However, they lost their seniority because they were too fond of food. They lost it because of fat. Two joints, one of an ox, the other of an eland, were placed side by side. They came along. They took the joint of the eland. Now, because it was a joint of a wild animal, it was said: “Those are the baKgalagadi. We took the joint of the ox. They took the joint of the wild animal.” It is said that by so doing, we lost our seniority. We became servants of the baTswana. The person who handed out those joints was Lôwe. He was the first man. He then said: “Because you acted thus, being drawn by the fat joint of a wild animal, you have lost your seniority, in spite of the fact that you were the seniors, being the first on earth. Your younger brothers took the joint of the ox, you took the joint of the wild animal, in that way you took to the open spaces, because a wild animal is something of the open spaces, an ox is something of the home. There are your younger brothers having taken the joint of an ox, and now they are your seniors.”<sup>58</sup>

The *kegalagadi* thus provide an example of a wider process of social layering evident in historical records. John Campbell, for instance, made frequent reference on his 1820 journey from Dithakong to Kaditshwene to ‘Bootshuana Bushmen’, who lived in small homesteads with few cattle, and who Campbell’s fellow Tswana travellers disparaged. The ‘Bootshuana Bushmen’ were clearly subordinate and marginal within the dominating matrix of the large stonewalled Tswana towns.<sup>59</sup>

### **Moor Park and intensified differentiation**

In KwaZulu-Natal, *Blackburn* developed into *Moor Park*, which has dates of 1300 to about 1650–1700 (Fig. 7.3).<sup>60</sup> For the first time agriculturists settled in the higher altitude grasslands, using stone to construct settlements. Sites are recorded near Estcourt, Bergville and Dundee.<sup>61</sup> They are distinctive because they occur on steep-sided hilltops and narrow spurs that are rocky, uncomfortable places to live, often far from water and arable land (Figs 2.3, 7.6). This extreme location strongly suggests that defence was an important consideration in locating settlements.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945: 65, our insertion

<sup>57</sup> Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945: 54–62; Kuper 1987: 11–15

<sup>58</sup> Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945: 142. Original footnote on L<sup>ô</sup>we excluded. L<sup>ô</sup>we is the apical ancestor who emerged from the rock sumps at Matsieng near Gaborone. The order of emergence also makes a clear statement about firstcomer–newcomer inversions.

<sup>59</sup> Campbell 1822: 189–202; see also Jacobs 1999

<sup>60</sup> Maggs 1976: 300

<sup>61</sup> Davies 1974; Maggs 1984a; Whitelaw 2004; KwaZulu-Natal Museum records

<sup>62</sup> Whitelaw 2004, 2008

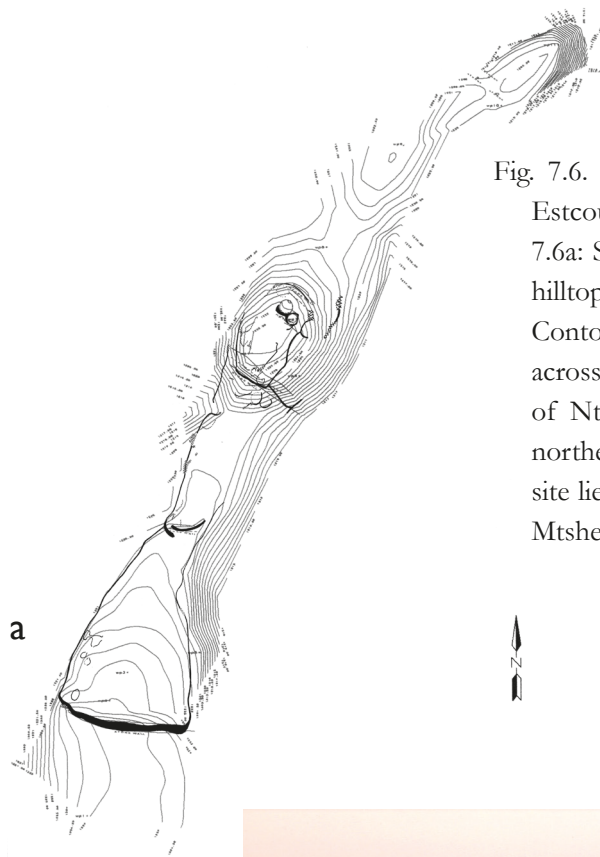


Fig. 7.6. Ntomdadlana, a Moor Park site 7 km northeast of Estcourt. This area was primarily grassland a century ago. 7.6a: Stone walling on the northeast point of Ntomdadlana hilltop, with two to four households around the central knoll. Contours at half-metre intervals. The hilltop here is 73 m across at its widest, at the front wall. 7.6b: Western slope of Ntomdadlana hill. Note its steepness. 7.6c: View to the northeast over the knoll. The nearest known Early Iron Age site lies in the distant low country beyond the hilltop, in the Mtshezi Valley.



The period coincides with the Little Ice Age, an episode of global cooling dated locally to between the fourteenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>63</sup> The colder and generally drier conditions probably affected crop production, so creating social stress and prompting movement away from the lowlands into the grasslands. Indeed, the defensive character of Moor Park sites indicates a period or periods when security was uncertain. These conditions probably resulted in intensified social differentiation. While some people—those in the hilltop settlements—evidently maintained an agricultural base, others lived at times in rock shelters and relied partly on hunting for their meat, perhaps encouraged by the presence of hunter-gatherers in the higher altitude grasslands.<sup>64</sup> It seems possible that hunter-gatherers and impoverished agriculturists co-operated and formed mixed bands, and that this was a period when impoverished agriculturists significantly assimilated aspects of hunter-gatherer cosmology.<sup>65</sup> This requires further research.

The conditions possibly affected attitudes to iron producers too. The distinction between iron producers and iron users becomes visible in the Moor Park phase. The debris of iron production is absent from grassland sites, yet two sites yielded iron items, indicating contact with iron-producing people elsewhere.<sup>66</sup> Some of these iron producers lived in the wooded Mpozana valley, where *Moor Park* ceramics occur together with metallurgical debris. Generally, it is the valleys where wood suitable for industrial use occurs and where exposures of ore seams are most accessible. Iron producers (*amalala*) were economically bound to the low, wooded country; the word *lala* perhaps alludes to this low-country situation in its reference to recumbence (sleep, lie down, flat). In the eighteenth century iron producers exchanged their product for livestock and grain,<sup>67</sup> and we can safely assume that a similar exchange operated in Moor Park times. An agricultural crisis could have given them an economic advantage. Instead, we think that the situation might have resulted in an intensified control of iron producers—already a marginal category—by their political and social masters. We think that such control would have been effected through a discriminatory emphasis on the cosmological marginality of iron producers. Later, in the growing Zulu kingdom, such thought-patterns, such ‘*lala-ness*’, formed the basis of politically inspired ridicule. Similarly, it is possible that it was in the context of early nineteenth-century political centralization among far-western Tswana speakers, that the status of people labelled *kgalagadi* shifted towards extreme subordination and derision.

The *amalala* were insulted in several ways: ‘those who hide and eat woodborers’ (i.e. those without culture); ‘those whose farts are so pungent that they dry up hardy acacia trees’; and ‘those who sleep with their fingers up their anuses’ (plugged, to allow sleep?—

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<sup>63</sup> Hall 1976; Vogel et al. 2001

<sup>64</sup> Mazel 1997: 32, 1999: 18–19; Plug 2002: 55, table 2; Badenhorst 2003: 50–1, table 3; Whitelaw 2009b

<sup>65</sup> Whitelaw 2009b: 156; and see Prins & Lewis 1992; Loubser & Laurens 1994; Dowson 1995; Prins 1996; Hammond-Tooke 1997, 1998, 1999; Jolly 2000; Blundell 2004

<sup>66</sup> Davies 1974; Whitelaw 2004

<sup>67</sup> Maggs 1982b: 139, 141



the last two insults probably refer to an inherent foulness, a polluted nature).<sup>68</sup> These insults are not arbitrary. They relate to a marginal social construct that, as we have seen, can emerge at frontiers. In other words, the frontier context gives the insults a meaning that reaches far below the superficial triviality of the words themselves.

One other characterization of *amalala* is of interest to us. It comes from the Qwabe chiefdom rather than the Zulu, and has the tone of adage rather than insult. Mmemi kaNguluzane told Stuart: “*A calf of the Lala speaks with two voices!*” He went on: “I do not know what had caused them [the Qwabe] to have this belief, but that they had it is certain.” Apparently, the ‘adage’ referred to a mother’s (or wife’s) influence on a *lala* man, the two voices being hers and that of the man’s father (or his (male) council).<sup>69</sup> Mmemi referred to it while describing Nomo’s and Phakathwayo’s dispute over the Qwabe succession. Their father, the chief Khondlo, had nominated Nomo, who also had the support of the Mthethwa chiefdom, for Nomo’s mother was the Mthethwa chief Dingiswayo’s sister. For Phakathwayo’s supporters, however, the Mthethwa were *amalala*, not *abanguni* like the Qwabe, and were therefore unworthy of the Qwabe chieftainship. The account obviously reflects a concern over an undue Mthethwa influence in Qwabe affairs. But Mmemi’s detailed explanation of the ‘adage’ is not directly related to the succession dispute, which seems merely to provide a suitable illustration of the principle. So perhaps the adage reflected a real kinship structure in *amalala* communities, one that for non-*lala* was unnecessarily ambiguous. Here we note an interpretation of Early Iron Age marriage practice that argues that the high exchange value of women, meaning that bridewealth was high relative to average cattle holdings, posed a significant challenge to the desire for agnatic continuity among men.<sup>70</sup> And we wonder whether some aspects of Early Iron Age culture survived in KwaZulu-Natal beyond the mid-eleventh century, in *amalala* communities, even though the material culture did not.

Mmemi referred derisively to the Mthethwa as *amalala* and opposes them to the Qwabe *abanguni*. We consider such oppositions in the final two sections.

### **Khumalo, Zulu and the *amantungwa***

There is a third horizon of archaeological identities north of the Thukela. Sites of this set contain *Nqabeni* ceramics, a third facies in the **Blackburn Branch** that dates from about 1650–1700 to the 1800s (Fig. 7.3). The facies name-site is Nqabeni in the grassland of the Babanango plateau (Figs 2.5, 2.6).<sup>71</sup> Nqabeni is a Type B site, comprising several stonewalled primary enclosures connected by walling to form a large central secondary

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<sup>68</sup> Dinya kaZokozwayo in Webb & Wright 1976: 118; Mahaya kaNongqabana (probably) in Webb & Wright 1979: 130; Mkando kaDhlova in Webb & Wright 1982: 150, 158

<sup>69</sup> Mmemi kaNguluzane in Webb & Wright 1982: 243–4, also 266, italics recorded in Zulu

<sup>70</sup> Chapter Five (Whitelaw 2013). Of possible additional interest here is Bryant’s (1905: 6\*) brief reference to differences in marriage customs between Natal and Zululand.

<sup>71</sup> Hall & Maggs 1979

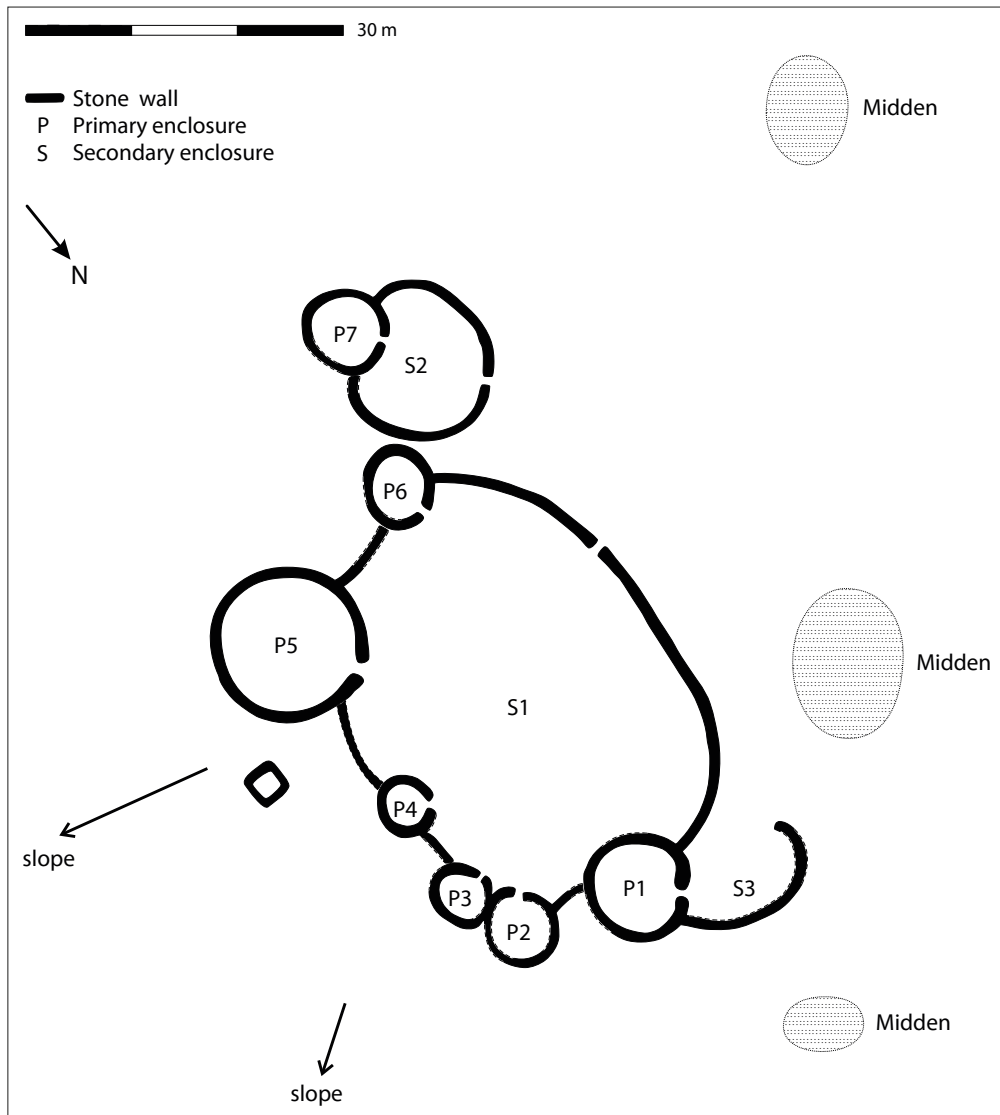


Fig. 7.7. Nqabeni, a Type B site on the Babanango plateau. After Hall and Maggs 1979: fig. 3.

enclosure. Huts would probably have been uphill of the enclosures (Figs 7.2, 7.7). Oral information collected by Stuart and Bryant around the beginning of the twentieth century, and by John Wright during archaeological research in the 1970s, suggests that Type B sites were built by members of a Khumalo-led chiefdom (Fig. 7.2).<sup>72</sup> They broadly resemble Type V on the southern Highveld (Figs 7.2, 7.8), perhaps indicating a historical connection.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Hall & Maggs 1979: 172; Hall & Mack 1983: 170–1, 189–90. For Hall and Mack the Type B area probably includes a Mabaso-led chiefdom as a western neighbour of the Khumalo. The two chiefdoms, or at least their leaders, had historical links, but on Bryant's map (which forms the basis of Hall and Mack's work) the Mabaso chiefdom falls largely outside the Type B distribution. We restrict the discussion to the Khumalo chiefdom.

<sup>73</sup> Hall & Maggs 1979: 175; Huffman 2007a: 41. They perhaps have a common ancestor east of the Drakensberg, which might predate the mid-1400s when Type N sites (which precede Type V) were first established in the Ntsuanatsatsi area (Fig. 7.2). Alternatively, Type N generated both Types V and B. The issue is worth future research.

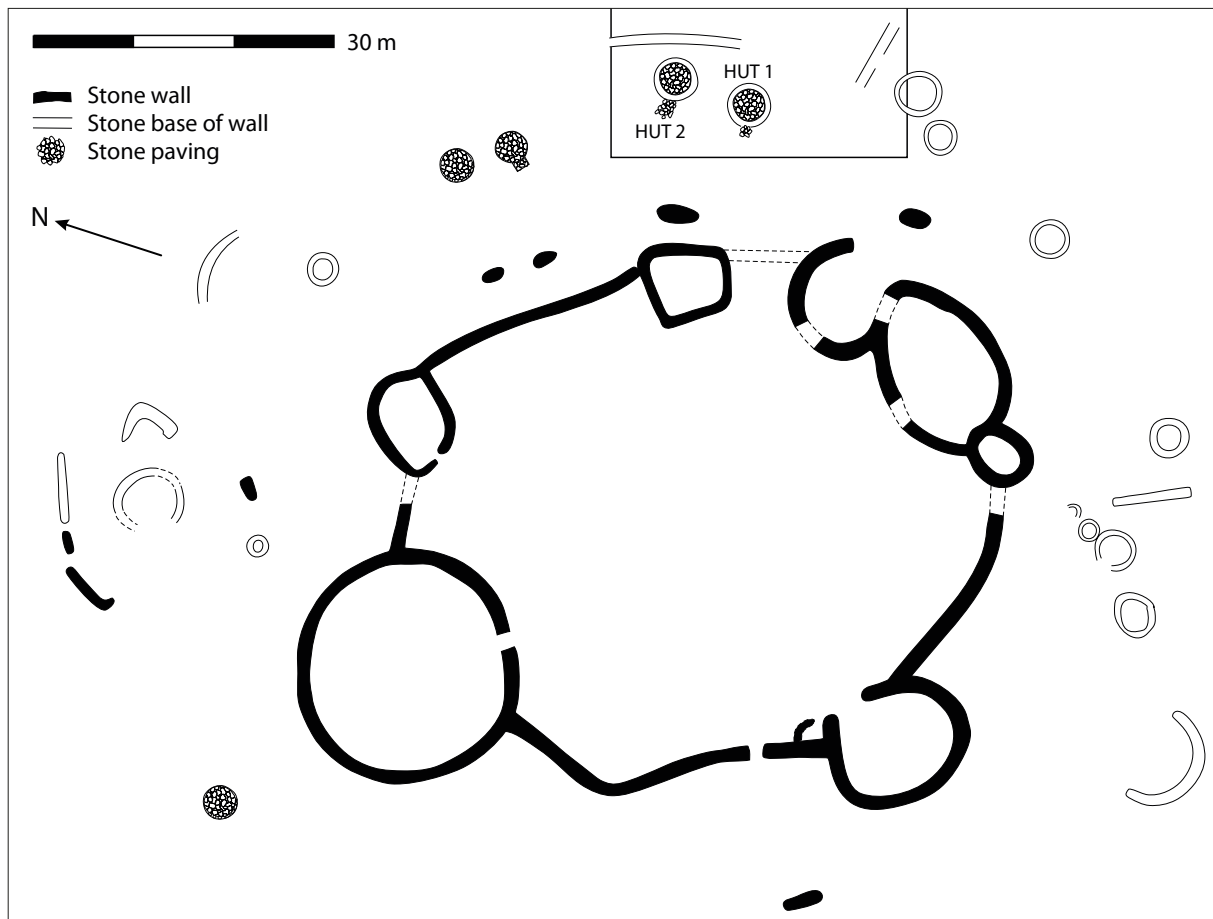


Fig. 7.8. OND3, a Type V site on the slopes of Viervoetberg (see Fig. 7.1), west of the Caledon Valley (after Maggs 1976: fig. 56). OND3 dates to the nineteenth century, up to about 1850. The huts were cone-on-cylinders with thick daga walls and passage entrances. Type V sites more typically had hemispherical huts of corbelled stone and/or of reeds and thatch, partially plastered.

Type B sites provide a context for thinking about the category *amantungwa*. Hamilton's analysis of the *amantungwa* concept is the most comprehensive.<sup>74</sup> She concludes that Shaka (surely with the support of his councillors) appropriated Mntungwa, a Khumalo *isithakazelo* or clan praise name, early in his expansion of Zulu hegemony and applied it to groups brought then under his control. His purpose was to use the concept of *amantungwa* to suggest a common descent for the Zulu and these various subordinate groups. The *amantungwa* origin story metaphorically backs this claim of common descent. The *amantungwa*, people said, rolled or came down or descended from up-country (alternatively, from the north) with or by means of a grain basket. In one account they rolled down inside a grain basket to Zulu country, following a man carrying a piece of fat—tribute for the Zulus.<sup>75</sup> The grain basket is always singular; indeed, two of Stuart's interlocutors explicitly rejected the

<sup>74</sup> Hamilton 1985: chapter 5, especially p. 277 ff.

<sup>75</sup> Mangati kaGodide in Webb & Wright 1979: 203; a story that distinguishes the Zulu elite from other *amantungwa*. The fat had first appeared inside the basket.

idea of more than one basket. Since a grain basket will hold the produce from only one woman's field, one reading of the origin story is that it suggests a single maternal source for the various *amantungwa* groups; that is, it suggests that the *amantungwa* were descendants not just of one paternal lineage, but of one house.<sup>76</sup> Such an emphasis would be especially powerful because a man's greatest competition generally comes from his half-brothers—the sons of other houses in his natal homestead. The origin story could thus have been an extraordinary expression of genealogical unity, presenting the *amantungwa* elite as full brothers. It might even have become a praise-phrase<sup>77</sup> for the *amantungwa*: 'Mntungwa (or an appropriate alternative), who rolled down with a grain basket!', with the phrase indicating sameness even where the *isithakazelo* suggests difference.

Shaka selected the Khumalo *isithakazelo*, Hamilton argues, because the Khumalo were resisting Zulu authority. His strategy was one of ideological co-option where he could not yet achieve full military dominance.<sup>78</sup> Hamilton also suggests, however, that Shaka might have drawn on and manipulated an older idea, where *amantungwa* referred to people of the uplands.<sup>79</sup> As archaeologists we are drawn to the deeper past, so here we briefly explore possible resonance between the oral and archaeological records.

Hamilton lists four chiefdoms with Khumalo leaders in the 1810s (Fig. 7.2).<sup>80</sup> Each responded differently to the growing Zulu chiefdom. Donda, geographically closest to Shaka, warned him of an Ndwandwe trap, while Mzilikazi, leader of a chiefdom at the upper Mkhuzi River, submitted initially to Ndwandwe authority. Mzilikazi's submission was probably motivated by the Ndwandwe killing of his father, but his early breakaway to the northwest strongly indicates a desire for independence.<sup>81</sup> The two other Khumalo-led chiefdoms offered a kind of passive resistance to Zulu authority until 1826–27, when they were more assertively incorporated into the kingdom. Till then, at least one of these chiefdoms seems to have maintained links with the Ndwandwe, perhaps playing them off against the Zulu.<sup>82</sup>

Our concern is rather with the eighteenth-century Khumalo chiefdom in the grassland of the Babanango plateau, where people built Type B homesteads (Fig. 7.2). At this time Zulu leaders controlled a lower-lying territory around the Mkhumbane River east of the Babanango plateau. This territory is more extensively wooded than the plateau and

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<sup>76</sup> See Hamilton 1985: 288 for a contrast between the grain basket and the reed as instruments of origin. The reed account emphasizes the patriline.

<sup>77</sup> see Koopman 2002: 81–2

<sup>78</sup> Hamilton 1985: 276–8

<sup>79</sup> Hamilton 1985: 289–90, 2012: 293. Hamilton expresses the likely antiquity of the *amantungwa* category more forcefully in her 2012 article. She (1985: 289–90) suggests that the term '*amantungwa*' was derived from *intunga* (more commonly, *intungwa*) grass, a name given to several species used for thatching and basket work (cf. Bryant 1905; Adrian Koopman pers. comm., April 2015, on terms for grass).

<sup>80</sup> Hamilton 1985: 262–3. The four chiefdoms lay from the Black Mfolozi to beyond the upper Mkhuzi River.

<sup>81</sup> Wright 2008: 231

<sup>82</sup> see Mkehlengana kaZulu in Webb & Wright 1982: 215, 220

people built homesteads of wood rather than stone. It is possible that their homesteads, and those of other nearby chiefdoms in wooded environs, had a Type B layout, but this is untested. Similarly, we have no Zulu ceramic-style data for comparison with the *Nqabeni* style associated with Type B sites.<sup>83</sup> But differences in the agricultural resources of the two areas allow us to speculate about a possible relationship.

The data come from Martin Hall's biogeographical study, which investigated the ecological basis of agriculturist economies in Zululand, from AD 400 to about 1800. His research defined three study areas: one in the coastal belt, one in the inland river valleys, and one in the uplands. The upland study area includes a significant part of the Type B distribution. Pasture in the Type B area is generally poor, with some quality only in the early summer. Good winter (and indeed year-round) grazing occurs only along the White Mfolozi, up the Ntinini valley and probably along the Mzinyathi River, which forms a small proportion of the total Type B area. Maximum pastoral benefit would derive from a strategy that combined transhumance with perennial grazing. Even so, this strategy would enable a carrying capacity of fewer than 8 beasts (cattle) per square kilometre.<sup>84</sup> By contrast, a better balance of pasture types gave the Buthelezi chiefdom, immediately to the east of the Type B area, an estimated carrying capacity of 11 beasts per square kilometre, while the Zulu chiefdom, even further east, could support an estimated 16 beasts per square kilometre. The comparison indicates that people of the Khumalo chiefdom faced a limited capacity for livestock accumulation, unless they employed strategies that extended beyond their area.<sup>85</sup>

So it is worth asking whether Khumalo grazing strategies extended eastwards into Buthelezi and Zulu territory in the late eighteenth century. Intriguingly, Jantshi kaNongila told Stuart that the Khumalo, Mabaso, Buthelezi and Zulu "used to build the kraals [presumably, cattle pens] of their respective kraals [presumably, homesteads] close to one another".<sup>86</sup> This possibility might be tested with strontium-isotope analyses, but the results would tell us little of the nature of the relationship between the Khumalo and Zulu chiefdoms. Jantshi, however, provided a saying supposedly of Senzangakhona's time (i.e. contemporaneous with Type B sites; Senzangakhona was Shaka's father):<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Though pottery from eLangeni, capital of the neighbouring Buthelezi chiefdom in the late eighteenth century, is of the *Nqabeni* style (Hall & Mack 1983: 179–80, 190; cf. Hall & Maggs 1979: 167–71).

<sup>84</sup> Hall's upland study area is displaced slightly east relative to the Type B distribution zone. It includes a greater proportion of the White Mfolozi valley than the Type B zone, but excludes the Mzinyathi valley completely. In terms of the carrying capacity calculation, the additional Mfolozi grazing probably approximately compensates for the absence of the Mzinyathi grazing. If anything, a more accurate calculation of the carrying capacity of the Type B zone would likely give a lower figure than ~8 beasts per km<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>85</sup> M. Hall 1981: 106–10, 159–64; Hall & Mack 1983: 184–6

<sup>86</sup> Jantshi kaNongila in Webb & Wright 1976: 176, our insertions

<sup>87</sup> Jantshi kaNongila in Webb & Wright 1976: 176, 199, 203. See also Ndhlovu kaTimuni's evidence, Webb & Wright 1986: 199, with a different version on p. 200, more like Jantshi's, and also p. 211.

*Wa beke' isigonogono sennja,*  
He looked at the earwax of the dog,  
*si blonywe nge nduku ya maNtungwa.*  
which had a stick of the Ntungwa people thrust in it.

The saying is almost certainly a mnemonic;<sup>88</sup> Jantshi even referred to its poetic rhythm, telling Stuart that the word '*pezulu*' was left out for euphony and to keep the metre. Mnemonics can in themselves be quite senseless, as Jantshi's seems to be. But mnemonics are constructed in a social context, which they might reflect even if devised for the memory of something entirely different from the literal. This point is likely especially true for small-scale, non-literate societies. Assuming then that Jantshi's reflects something of its context, we suggest the following.

For Jantshi, the mnemonic contains the names of four figures in deep antiquity: Beka (for Bekapezulu), who begat Mntungwa, who begat Nnja, as well as Sigonogono, whose precise genealogical relationship with the other three Jantshi did not give. Bekapezulu, Sigonogono and Nnja "caused the Zulu to *emerge as a people*".<sup>89</sup> Nnja supposedly provided the Zulu *isithakazelo* Lubololwenja—literally, dog's penis.<sup>90</sup> References to these three ancestral figures occur in the first line of the mnemonic.

The second line refers to the Khumalo of the *isithakazelo* Mntungwa, whose stick is thrust either into the dog or its earwax, or rather, we suggest, into the Zulu ancestor figures Sigonogono and Nnja, and thus into the Zulu clan. (As the supposed father of Mntungwa, Bekapezulu is excluded from this fate.) The word *blonywe* is the passive form of the verb *bloma*: to arm, stick or thrust in; skewer; to plant upright; set alight; or bring up thunder clouds or threaten a storm.<sup>91</sup> The second line therefore conveys a sense of impalement—and not of earwax; an alternative word for earwax is *isikholokotho*, which also refers to a deep hole. The sense of doom remains even with an alternative meaning of *isigonogono*, blazing hot sun, which is countered by *bloma*, bring up the clouds or threaten a storm.<sup>92</sup> We suggest as an alternative translation of the mnemonic: "The ancestors of the Zulu, who were impaled on the stake of the Mntungwas."<sup>93</sup>

So, whatever the mnemonic served to recall, it seems also to contain an aggressive dominance and horrific vulgarity aimed by the Khumalo at the Zulu. We acknowledge it might as easily reflect Khumalo resistance of Zulu dominance, but the independent nature

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<sup>88</sup> We benefitted enormously from discussions with Adrian Koopman, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

<sup>89</sup> Jantshi kaNongila in Webb & Wright 1976: 174, 176, 199 (italics recorded in Zulu).

<sup>90</sup> *Inja* is dog. *Ubolo* is a vulgar word for penis (Doke et al. 1990). A name given to the Zulu clan by a politically dominant group? The Khumalo-led Type B chiefdom?

<sup>91</sup> Doke et al. 1990

<sup>92</sup> Doke et al. 1990

<sup>93</sup> Ndhlovu kaTimuni regards the mnemonic as evidence that the Zulu came from the north. Presumably for Ndhlovu the first part—He looked at the earwax of the dog—refers to the Zulu, who were either similar to or linked to the amaNtungwa (Khumalo), who rolled down in a grain basket. He treats the mnemonic as a historical statement. But his versions indicate clear impalement.

of the Khumalo-led chiefdoms and use of a Khumalo *isithakazelo* for Zulu elite inclines us to the first possibility. We are struck also by the material distinctiveness of Type B sites, which on current evidence makes a physical statement that sets the Type B area apart from its neighbours. We therefore suggest that the mnemonic derives from a hierarchical relationship, underlined in Jantshi's sequence of ancestral figures, in which the Zulu are as herdsmen to, and dependents of, the Khumalo. Indeed, in discussion with Stuart, Baleni kaSilwane wondered how the Zulu had acquired their own herds, and speculated that they might have traded a medicinal herb (*ikhathazo*) for cattle. Others likewise regarded people of the early Zulu chiefdom as hawkers, or mocked them as *amantungwana*, the little *amantungwa*.<sup>94</sup> The implication is that the chiefdom acquired its status through a means other than inheritance.

If such a hierarchical relationship existed between the Zulu and the Khumalo of the Babanango plateau, it was one that Senzangakhona seems to have resisted with 'fighting'<sup>95</sup> and which the Zulu ultimately overcame. Importantly, however, it was a relationship that gave the Zulu and others under Khumalo—amaNtungwa—control legitimate access to the *amantungwa* category.<sup>96</sup> *Amantungwa* was indeed a category that existed before Shaka's chieftaincy: it derived from a complex Khumalo-dominated cluster of chiefdoms in which the Zulu eventually replaced the Khumalo. We might see Shaka's rise as a dynastic shift rather than as the emergence of an entirely new polity.

Bryant says that Magugu became Khumalo chief sometime around 1800. Magugu's brother Donda disputed his seniority and, with his cousins Beje and Mlotsha, and uncle Mashobana (Mzilikazi's father), moved northeast from the Babanango plateau with "a major portion" of the chiefdom.<sup>97</sup> Donda's faction established four chiefdoms, from the Black Mfolozi to beyond the upper Mkhuze River (Fig. 7.2). Bryant says that the Khumalo had long before passed through this area before settling on the Babanango plateau, which we might read as indicating connections between the two areas prior to 1800. Whether Donda's faction actually moved, or the story simply indicates a shift in political significance among Khumalo-led chiefdoms, our scenario suggests the change resulted from the loss of grazing resources to the Zulu (and others). Archaeologically, we want to know details of ceramic style and settlement layout in the Black Mfolozi-upper Mkhuze area. They are potentially significant for the origins of *Nqabeni*, and the *Ntsuanatsatsi*/Type N sequence in the Free State.

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<sup>94</sup> Baleni kaSilwane in Webb & Wright 1976: 29; also Magidigidi kaNobebe, Mbovu kaMtshumayeli, Ngidi kaMcikaziswa and probably Mmemi kaNguluzane (Webb & Wright 1979: 84, 1982: 25, 263, 2001: 31, 67).

<sup>95</sup> Bryant 1929: 56; Baleni kaSilwane and Jantshi kaNongila in Webb & Wright 1976: 21, 182

<sup>96</sup> Bryant's map includes the following either within or bordering on the Type B (Khumalo) distribution: Mabaso, Koza, Magubane, Bhele, Sithole, Thembu, Chunu, Mpungose, Zulu, Buthelezi, Ncubeni, Masuku, and Ximba. Compare with *amantungwa* listed elsewhere. In Hamilton (2012: 293): Zulu, Khumalo, Buthelezi, Chunu, Cube, Zungu, Bhele, Sithole, plus others. In Hamilton (1985: 264) for the end of the first phase of Zulu expansion: Zulu, Mbatha, Qungebeni, Langeni, Sibiya, Zungu, Thembu, Sithole, Mabaso, Chunu, Cube, and Bhele.

<sup>97</sup> Bryant 1929: 419–20

## Zulu vs abanguni

If the *amantungwa* label identified the elite of the Zulu chiefdom, for others it meant something different. Qwabe chief Phakathwayo, for instance, is reputed to have said that he would not dance with Shaka, “a little Ntungwa fellow from up-country, whose penis stood erect”,<sup>98</sup> one so insignificant that he is “like a string of beads that doesn’t fit round the head”.<sup>99</sup> Here the praise Mntungwa/*amantungwa* is turned to insult, being coupled with what is presumably a vulgar reference to the Zulu *isithakazelo* Lubololwenja. We can imagine that a story-teller might have used the alternative form of the name—Lufenulwenja—which contains additional vulgarity in what is perhaps a reference to masturbation.<sup>100</sup> How similar these insults are to those directed at the *amalala*.

Stuart’s archive offers at least three other ‘occasions’ in which Shaka is insulted this way. The context in all four cases is similar: Shaka is a foreigner either staying in or wanting to enter someone else’s territory. Twice the territory concerned is the Qwabe chiefdom, once the Langeni and once the Cele chiefdom. In each case the insult stems from competition over resources (which in some narratives take the form of game pieces). In each case things do not end well for the speaker; the narratives have the same underlying structure.

Of interest to us here is that people of Qwabe and Langeni descent used the clan praise Mnguni and apparently spoke of themselves (and the chiefdoms they led) as *abanguni* or *abenguni*. Cele status is equivocal, though interlocutors link them to the Mthethwa (especially) and Qwabe, who like the Cele are *abazansi* (people of the coastal belt). Dinya kaZokozwayo, born into the Cele chiefdom in the mid-1820s, claimed Qwabe ancestry and spoke of “[w]e baNguni”.<sup>101</sup> Throughout Stuart’s archive the categories *abanguni* and *amantungwa* are frequently set in opposition to one another. This opposition is likely in part a consequence of Stuart’s questioning, but it surely also reflects the thinking of his interlocutors. It provides a useful starting point for considering interaction in terms of Kopytoff’s firstcomers (or natives) and newcomers.

Wright’s analysis of the word ‘Nguni’ identifies several uses of the word prior to the twentieth century.<sup>102</sup> First, the account of the 1589 *São Thomé* sinking refers to a king called Viragune (for *abanguni*, or perhaps the praise, Mnguni?) who ruled the land of Fumos, today Maputaland in northeast KwaZulu-Natal (Fig. 7.2). In another Portuguese text probably derived from the original account, the variation Virangune is seemingly applied to the territory—the king of Virangune.<sup>103</sup> Next, people living south of the Thukela River in the early to mid-1800s referred to the Xhosa as *nguni* (e.g. Abangoonie). In a third context,

<sup>98</sup> Makuza kaMkomoyi in Webb & Wright 1979: 168, recorded in Zulu

<sup>99</sup> Mmemi kaNguluzane in Webb & Wright 1982: 241, recorded in Zulu

<sup>100</sup> Jantshi kaNongila in Webb & Wright 1976: 174; *ufenu* = obscene word for penis > *fenula* = press the terminal part of the male organ in and out (obscene term); Doke et al. 1990.

<sup>101</sup> Dinya kaZokozwayo in Webb & Wright 1976: 118

<sup>102</sup> Wright 1986b

<sup>103</sup> Both English translations of the original Portuguese: Theal 1898, II: 199, 1898, I: 34



north of the Thukela, the *isithakazelo* Mnguni was reserved for Zulu royalty, though prior to Shaka's ascendancy a wider set of clans claimed it (e.g. Qwabe, Langeni, Chunu). According to Stuart's interlocutor Magidigidi kaNobebe it was commonly used for *amalala* chiefs.<sup>104</sup>

Wright argues that Shaka appropriated the praise Mnguni because it conveyed a sense of historical primacy and so legitimized Zulu dominance.<sup>105</sup> Hamilton, by contrast, argues that this particular significance was invoked later, in the post-Shakan period.<sup>106</sup> She may be right. Zulu claims to historical primacy possibly first emerged after Dingane established his capital in the eMakhosini, the original Zulu heartland. The enormous size of his settlement indicates that the Zulu kingdom was by then at least one and more probably two political levels greater than any neighbouring chiefdom.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps also, with such political growth Zulu royalty was becoming mystically bound to the land in a way that first occurred in the Zimbabwe Culture 600 years earlier,<sup>108</sup> hence the appeal of the praise. Whatever the case, the final usage of *nguni* prior to the twentieth century came as a consequence of its adoption by Zulu royalty: neighbouring Tsonga and Sotho speakers used the word for the people of the Zulu kingdom.

Archaeological and historical evidence from elsewhere supports the link between *nguni* and firstcomers, or as Magidigidi put it, "anciently resident people".<sup>109</sup> Oral accounts collected in the early twentieth century show that people with historical connections to the stonewalled terrace complexes on the Mpumalanga escarpment claim an Nguni heritage.<sup>110</sup> Traditions also claim that their ancestors were already resident when the Pedi chiefdom established itself, suggesting an initial occupation around 1600.<sup>111</sup> Since they came to be called Koni (Sotho for Nguni), we presume by the Pedi, we take their name as evidence of an association here between 'Nguni' and first or anciently resident people as early as 1650. This evidence gives historical weight and depth to Magidigidi's testimony.

The same meaning probably underpins the use of *abanguni* for the Xhosa. In a context that experienced southward surges of humanity from at least the 1770s until well into the nineteenth century,<sup>112</sup> it would be logical to regard those furthest to the south as the most 'anciently resident'. And it makes sense that the flow of people into the literary ambit from north of the Thukela, where other groups claimed primacy, would in time fragment the recorded assignment of the word.<sup>113</sup> The idea of primacy seems common to all the uses of *nguni* that Wright identifies.

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<sup>104</sup> Webb & Wright 1979: 97

<sup>105</sup> Wright 1986b: 107–8; also Ownby 1985: 134

<sup>106</sup> Hamilton 1985: 189

<sup>107</sup> e.g. Huffman 1986a

<sup>108</sup> e.g. Huffman 2007a: 366; see Hamilton 1985: 337–40 for the ideological significance of the eMakhosini in the early Zulu kingdom.

<sup>109</sup> Webb & Wright 1979: 97

<sup>110</sup> Delius & Schoeman 2008: 144; see also Maggs 1995: 138–9; 2008: 176; Huffman 2004: 98

<sup>111</sup> Huffman 2004: 100

<sup>112</sup> e.g. Wright 2010a: 232–4

<sup>113</sup> see Wright 1986b: 98

It is in this sense of the word, in the opposition of *abanguni* to *amantungwa*, natives to foreigners, that historical characters supposedly insulted Shaka. It is the basis on which Shaka's right to resources and to rule is challenged, and of the thinking that presents him as a dangerously unpredictable and asocial usurper who acquired status through trade rather than inheritance. This relation between native and foreigner is, in fact, a fundamental social construct that was once activated (and still is) at every level of society.<sup>114</sup>

We see the opposition between native and foreigner most obviously in their respective origin stories. The Qwabe, *abanguni*, claimed to have originated in the great reed-bed of Ngqongqongqoza, the one who lords over his fellows.<sup>115</sup> They were the great reed of the Mhlatuze.<sup>116</sup> This is merely a Qwabe-centric version of the creation myth that is widespread among Bantu speakers in southern Africa. It roots Qwabe origins in nature and so supports a claim of primacy. By contrast, *amantungwa* origins are clearly situated in culture, in the grain basket that rolled down. Their origin story allowed them to claim a control of nature (manufacture of woven-grass baskets), and thus of the *abanguni* as beings that emerged from nature, as well as responsibility for the introduction of civilized, settled life (cultivation of the crops that filled the baskets). Importantly, these labels can serve as both praise and insult, depending on perspective.

Such ambiguity has power that can be deployed politically. Chiefs, Hammond-Tooke suggests, are similar to diviners in the sense that both are structurally ambiguous.<sup>117</sup> Diviners mediate between nature and culture—on the one hand the forest with its feared creatures and witches in evil pursuit of individual goals, and on the other the homestead with its domestic animals and moral society (recall the Cele origin story). Chiefly ambiguity lies in a role both as an individual and as the representative of society: they are of society, yet they rule over it. In the case of divination, individuals called to the profession leave society to enter the wilderness, where they encounter the power and danger of the world beyond. This terrifying experience gives them the capacity to engage with other worlds and interpret the universe; in a sense they are reborn into a different category of person.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, we expect that experiences or an origin elsewhere will provide chiefs with a greater “aura of fearsomeness and malevolent charisma”<sup>119</sup> that will enhance their distinction from ordinary people.

Hence, a Thembu chief claimed Fokeng ancestry,<sup>120</sup> the Taung chief Moletsane was supposedly raised by San herdsmen,<sup>121</sup> and Dingiswayo apparently spent several years ‘in the wilderness’ before returning to assume control of the Mthethwa chiefdom. On one

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<sup>114</sup> e.g. Ngubane 1977: chapter 5; Hammond-Tooke 1981a

<sup>115</sup> Mtshwayiza kaMamfongonyana in Webb & Wright 1986: 163

<sup>116</sup> Mbovu kaMtshumayeli in Webb & Wright 1982: 28

<sup>117</sup> Hammond-Tooke 1975: 32–3

<sup>118</sup> Hammond-Tooke 1975; Berglund 1976: 140–50

<sup>119</sup> Hammond-Tooke 1975: 32

<sup>120</sup> Ellenberger 1992: 19

<sup>121</sup> Ellenberger 1992: 58

hand these accounts might appeal to a once-common practice, still followed in some areas: chiefs sent their heirs to reach maturity among friends in distant places. The practice both protected heirs from jealous rivals and prevented them from becoming overly arrogant as a result of their position in society.<sup>122</sup> The implication, of course, is that the man returning from abroad is the designated heir. But the stories lend themselves to different readings too. Argyle's analysis of the Dingiswayo story identifies a structure common to accounts of 'dynastic change' in Africa and elsewhere.<sup>123</sup> Key elements include (1) conflict between son and father (in this case, respectively Dingiswayo and Jobe), (2) the son's flight into exile (3) where he eventually comes under protection of a patron, (4) under whom the son acquires prestige (5) before he returns home (6) to assume leadership, usually with some bloodletting. Argyle argues that the Dingiswayo who returned to the Mthethwa was not the same man who left, based on an actual case in Zambia, and then suggests possible contexts from where the second Dingiswayo might have originated.

Whatever the reality in Argyle's identifications of Dingiswayo, we are impressed by the structure of the account. The story of Shaka's rise to Zulu chief has exactly the same structure. Following an uneasy relationship with Senzangakhona and others in the Zulu chiefdom, Shaka and his mother Nandi go to live among the Langeni, the Qwabe and eventually the Mthethwa, where Dingiswayo takes Shaka under his wing. Shaka rises to prominence in the Mthethwa army, before he returns home, kills his half-brother and takes the chiefdom for his own.<sup>124</sup> Argyle found similar accounts of 'dynastic change' in Zambia, and they occur also in Biblical tales and in Greek and Roman classics. We doubt that they contain even a grain of truth other than that conventional inheritance was usurped. And even this point is uncertain—did the 'returning Shaka' come as usurper or heir? Was the story of Shaka's usurpation a Khumalo response to the dynastic shift that gave the Zulu authority over the *amantungwa*? Either way, Shaka's story suggests the Mthethwa as a potentially dangerous foreign power.<sup>125</sup> Such stories apparently appeal to, even illustrate, a social principle that opposes culture to nature, kin to non-kin, insider to outsider, native to foreigner, *abanguni* to *amantungwa*. The oppositions come together in the person of the chief. Dingiswayo's and Shaka's 'histories' are another way of expressing and relating the ambiguity from which they drew a particular kind of power—their chiefly 'fearsomeness and malevolent charisma'.

To what end? Fear of a dangerously unpredictable chief surely served to encourage acquiescence from subjects. In the Zulu case, without a highly productive and predictable agricultural landscape around which a large population could be gathered, the threat of

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<sup>122</sup> Muzi Msimanga pers. comm. June 2014

<sup>123</sup> Argyle 1978

<sup>124</sup> Wylie's (2006: chapter 4) version gives Shaka a conventional childhood in the Zulu chiefdom, but has him leaving for the Mthethwa as a young man following tension with Senzangakhona over succession in the Zulu chiefdom.

<sup>125</sup> Recall Mmemi kaNguluzane's account of the Phakathwayo–Nomo dispute in the Qwabe chiefdom.

violence offered an alternative means of accumulating, controlling and creating people.<sup>126</sup> The more extreme the threat, the further Shaka's reach, and the firmer his control. His persona was political strategy and weapon.

## Conclusion

The oral archive, then, contains two things. First, there is some historical detail, framed and presented in terms of a mix of native and settler worldviews. It demands critical evaluation for lacunae, memory loss, political manipulation and recording context. Second, much of the archive seems an expression of social principles, thought-patterns and symbolism, illustrated with stories populated by real and imaginary characters. In a sense, it is ethnography presented in story-telling mode, run through a colonial sieve. Rather than the historically particular, these data concern patterns in social practice. In this sense, they are similar to archaeological data, which accumulate through repeated behaviours. Our essay twines these different materials—archaeological and oral—together with anthropological models in considering the development of layered landscapes and the interplay of politics, memory and cultural inheritance. The result is somewhat speculative, but the speculation is constrained throughout by the different materials, and by the identification of similar patterns and processes elsewhere. Several points emerge.

First, the sharp stylistic break at the *Ntshékane–Blackburn* interface perhaps indicates a contact that was pivotal in creating the category *amalala*. Here Nguni-speaking newcomers encountered agriculturists settled at low altitudes, in the coastal regions and river valleys. Only in the extensive and deeply incised Thukela Basin did this earlier settlement penetrate significantly into the interior. Archaeological evidence shows that Early Iron Age agriculturists spoke a form of Shona and had considerable metallurgical expertise. The abrupt disappearance of their material culture a thousand years ago suggests that the authority of Early Iron Age men over people and land ended, while frontier patterns elsewhere suggest that Nguni newcomers drew on Early Iron Age *abanguni* (firstcomer) status in the arena of procreation. So, we suggest, people of Early Iron Age descent came to be identified with iron production, as *amalala*, and further as people of the low country, which in different contexts became *abazansi*. These three categories apparently share an origin in the frontier context a thousand years ago. They remained connected, though situationally exploited, until they entered the written record.

To some extent our hypothesis returns to Bryant's accounts of the Lala, but with greater time depth and without his appeal to genealogical relatedness. It also resembles Ownby's hypothesis, which has the Lala as Nguni-speakers of the *Blackburn* facies expanding into an environment dominated by Sala (Shona)-speaking Early Iron Age people. We see *amalala* generated at the *Ntshékane–Blackburn* frontier. Such an early origin does not

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<sup>126</sup> Jeff Guy (pers. comm. November 2014), a point also hinted at in his book *Theophilus Shepstone and the forging of Natal* (2013: 77–81).

completely negate the analyses of Hamilton, Wright and others. As they argue, ‘Lala’ was not an ethnic category, though it might have been becoming one in the Zulu kingdom (and also in colonial Natal). The metallurgical expertise within the Cube chiefdom, for instance, might in time have come to define and distinguish its people from others under the Zulu king (recall Mqaikana’s testimony on p. 124). Perhaps, though, the widespread use of *amalala* as an insult for people who quickly fell outside the borders of the kingdom worked against such an ethnic designation.

The category *amantungwa* clearly predates Shaka’s chieftaincy. We suggest that it arose from the eighteenth-century socioeconomic system dominated by the Khumalo chiefdom of the Babanango plateau, which involved the exploitation of grazing resources in surrounding tributary chiefdoms—the *amantungwa*. Originally one of the *amantungwa*, the Zulu managed to overthrow Khumalo authority, causing a dynastic shift that generated the Zulu kingdom. In time the Zulu distinguished themselves from other *amantungwa* with claims of primordality, taking the praise Mnguni from the *amalala*. But for Bryant, the *amalala* might have vanished into the abyss.

These hypotheses emerge from a relationship between anthropological models, social principles and patterns, and oral and archaeological data. It is a relationship that can arrange even mysterious material in sensible ways. Ultimately, such hypotheses need testing against the archaeological record. Constructing a past, even a past as recent as 200 years ago, demands an archaeological foundation, that is, a foundation composed of the residues of things that actually happened.

## **Acknowledgements**

Tom Huffman, Peter Mitchell, Jannie Loubser, Carolyn Hamilton, Nessa Leibhammer, John Wright and Adrian Koopman commented on the essay; Adrian Koopman discussed mnemonics and earwax; John Wright provided details from the *James Stuart Archive*; Ntombi Mkhize and Muzi Msimanga discussed various Zulu words and concepts; two referees made useful comments; Justine Wintjes provided digital editing on Figures 7.4, 7.5 and 7.6; and a National Research Foundation grant (No. 90995) funded the preparation of Figures 7.1, 7.2, 7.7 and 7.8 by Wendy Voorvelt. Our essay was introduced and discussed at an Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative Research Lab (University of Cape Town) on 24 July 2013. We thank all contributors—people, institutions and fora—to this final version. None of our interpretations necessarily represent their views.



# 8

## **An archaeology of interaction<sup>1</sup>**

During the last 2500 years hunter-gatherers in southern Africa participated in a variety of relationships with food-producing and linguistically distinct people. If we accept Güldemann's hypothesis (2008: 118–26) these new relations began when Khoe-speaking herders of a non-Khoisan genetic profile moved south into the western and central parts of the sub-continent through a filter of Ju-#Hoan- and Tuu-speaking hunter-gatherers. The resulting interaction meant that by the time herders reached the southern Cape some 2000 years ago they were physically similar to hunter-gatherers, while in the Kalahari hunter-gatherers adopted Khoe languages and Khoe herders made the shift to a hunting and gathering lifestyle. This last shift was perhaps in part a consequence of the settlement from c. AD 200 of Bantu-speaking agriculturists in the wooded northern and eastern parts of the sub-continent, where summer rainfall adequate for their crops occurred. In the case of both herders and agriculturists, the new arrivals and their forebears surely had experience or knowledge of people who lived in different ways from themselves. Similarly, we can expect that hunter-gatherers were well aware of approaching agriculturists and herders long before physical contact (Mazel 2009: 105).

The consequences of contact were considerable and, from an agriculturist point of view, they seem especially obvious in southeast southern Africa. They include influences on genetic profile, language and ritual practice, notably divination. Indeed, most scholars accept that Nguni divination was influenced by hunter-gatherer practice and belief. For example, the Xhosa term for diviner is *igqirba* (pl. *amagqirba*), derived from the !Xam *!gi:xa* (medicine man or shaman) (Botha & Thackeray 1987), and women diviners are sometimes addressed as *mtbwakazi*, meaning Bushwoman (Prins & Lewis 1992). Significantly, many southern Nguni diviners claim to have apprenticed themselves to San shamans rather than Nguni diviners. Also, much of the Nguni divinatory paraphernalia (rattles, sticks, flywhisks) appears to have been adopted from the San (Prins & Lewis 1992).

There are other, less obvious adoptions. The well-known witch familiar, the *thikoloshe*, is most probably an Nguni-ized version of Cagn, the San trickster deity (Hammond-Tooke 1997). Similarly, divinatory animals were probably derived from San animals of potency. Divinatory animals are special manifestations of the ancestors. Unconnected to lineages, they form an 'extra-societal' component of the ancestral body (Hammond-Tooke 1999). These beings feature mainly in the thought-patterns of Nguni speakers in the Eastern

Cape and southern KwaZulu-Natal. They are largely absent from the cosmology of people further north. Hammond-Tooke explains their incorporation into the Nguni worldview.

### **Cultural adoptions**

Hammond-Tooke (1998) draws on ethnography of present-day Nguni-speaking communities east of the Drakensberg to argue that these adoptions are best understood in terms of the nature of agriculturist society, rather than simply as a consequence of long-term interaction. As we have seen, wives are strangers and potentially threatening, and various mechanisms exist for their management, including *inblonipho* and pollution beliefs. These are accompanied, today at least, by a relatively extreme distinction between male and female roles.

Within this fairly oppressive ideological framework, the diviner's role offers a niche for people who do not fit into normative social categories, or who are dissatisfied with their assigned roles and might, therefore, challenge social order. Not surprisingly, the "overwhelming majority" of Nguni diviners are women (Berglund 1976: 136). For the same reason, divination provides a role for men who do not conform to accepted definitions of maleness (Ngubane 1977: 88; Hammond-Tooke 1989b: 118), and for other ambiguous figures (Jolly 2000: 87). The diviner's role captures and tames their dangerous ambiguity and places it at the interface of the ancestral and ordinary worlds in the service of social order—that is, diviners significantly reinforce the age- and gender-based hierarchical structure of the world.

This same ideological complex, suggests Hammond-Tooke (1998: 13), probably generated the distinctive and unique (in southern Africa) mediumistic character of Nguni divination. He draws on Lewis's (1971) observation that ecstatic religious cults tend to emerge in disempowered sections of society, and that certain kinds of ecstatic cults are widely used by women as a strategy to achieve goals that are normally unreachable. The cults deflect attention from individual motivation towards spiritual forces, in our case the ancestors. This is certainly true for Nguni divination, where women are able to acquire a prestige and wealth that they would otherwise not attain. Moreover, since it is the ancestors who supposedly select diviners, individual motivation is denied from the start. The novice has to be committed, however, because the initiation process is arduous and the life that follows can be challenging.

The ancestral call brings dreams and inner turmoil, discomfort and pain to the novice, which she (or he) seeks to cure or at least make manageable during training. The curing involves various rituals, including a dance during which the novice confesses her dreams. The novice dances alone to a clapping audience, leaps up and down and 'quivers' her body, and eventually enters a trance-like state (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 189). This unusual dance is peculiar to diviners (see also Berglund 1976: 153) and Hammond-Tooke (1998) argues that it contains elements of the San trance dance. He suggests that these elements were originally incorporated into divinatory practice because their ecstatic character meshed



usefully with mediumistic divination. For the same reason, most probably, diviners adopted paraphernalia such as rattles that enhance the ecstatic experience.

Diviners typically draw on a wide range of resources in making diagnoses, which can include non-local understandings of the world and different belief systems. Adding foreign elements, filtered through a local sieve, likely provokes awe and respect for diagnoses. It seems inconceivable that diviners with either knowledge of the hunter-gatherer worldview, or of hunter-gatherer descent, would not have invoked elements of the hunter-gatherer cosmos in their work. Such elements would have spread through society via apprenticeships: this was probably the key mechanism by which aspects of San ritual were widely incorporated into the Nguni worldview.

Some obvious questions arise. When did mediumistic divination originate? Was it a feature of Blackburn societies? And by extension, what was the nature of marriage among the earliest Nguni speakers in southern Africa? We cannot fully answer the last question now, and we know that colonization and apartheid promoted the marginalization of women (e.g. Guy 2013: chapter 14), but the ideology that today sharply distinguishes agnates from others possibly has its origins over a thousand years ago in East Africa (Huffman 2004: 81–2). Regarding divination, Hammond-Tooke (1989b: 112) distinguishes mediumistic divination from the kind of divination practised by Sotho speakers, which lacks an ecstatic element. Insights instead come from reading signs, most notably revealed by ‘throwing the bones’ (Hammond-Tooke 1989b: 114, 1993: 187). To my knowledge, such divining dice have not been recovered from any Late Iron Age site in KwaZulu-Natal or the Eastern Cape. They have, however, been recovered from Early Iron Age sites (Voigt 1984: 159; Voigt & Peters 1994: 114; Whitelaw 1994a: fig. 28.3; Beukes 2000: 106–7), suggesting that ‘bone throwing’ was a component of divination during the first millennium. Since the beginning of the twentieth century at least, there has been much cross-fertilization among diviners of different schools and many Nguni diviners now are ‘bone diviners’ (e.g. Berglund 1976: 185–90; Hammond-Tooke 1989b: 115–16, 1998: 13), so the two kinds of divination are not incompatible. But the current archaeological absence of dice in Late Iron Age sites favours the possibility that Nguni speakers have practised mediumistic divination from Blackburn times and, consequently, that they maintained the (class) relations that generated it.

At this point it is worth noting Herbert’s (1990b: 300, my insertion) observation that “Nguni languages ... exhibit a type of contact borrowing [from Khoisan languages] that appears most unusual in terms of the intensity (yet very restricted nature) of its linguistic effects”. Some 15 % of Xhosa and Zulu words contain clicks derived from Khoekhoe and Tuu languages, though the percentage decreases towards the north (Herbert 1990b: 296; see Güldemann 2008: 98–9). Herbert finds the “usual explanation ... for this extraordinary situation” (i.e. bilingualism and the nature of contact) inadequate. Instead, he argues that the institution of *inblonipho* (respect) provided a point to access for Khoisan clicks into Nguni speech. *Inblonipho* includes a prohibition on uttering the names of one’s seniors, which within the homestead most particularly include one’s husband, his parents and his

grandparents. The restriction extends also to words that contain the same syllables as are contained in the names of those seniors.

Specifically, it is argued that the native (i.e., Khoisan) phonological inventories provided Khoe, San, and Nguni women with a ready-made and 'natural' source for consonant substitutions as required by *hlonipha*. That is, it is in some sense natural that a woman who enjoys a prohibition against uttering the syllables *bo, nga, ni, di, ke, sa*, and so on would look to this alternative phonetic inventory in order to replace Nguni consonants. Bear in mind here that the precontact Nguni consonant inventory was relatively small. The substitution of a foreign element such as a click is perceptually salient and deforms the offending syllable acceptably. Furthermore, the use of non-Bantu consonants for this purpose precludes the possibility of the deformed word being homophonous with some other preexisting word in the lexicon. ... The existence of an extraordinary phonological inventory that could be invoked in *hlonipha* therefore served an important sociolinguistic function. (Herbert 1990b: 304)

Importantly for our purpose, *inhlonipho* is a key element of the ideological complex that Hammond-Tooke suggests gave rise to mediumistic divination. Modification of language and divinatory practice—both drawing on the hunter-gatherer world—were thus equally consequences of particular features of agriculturist society.

Sotho-Tswana divination does not seem to offer the same potential for admitting a hunter-gatherer worldview. Even though the profession is open to all who receive the ancestral call, most Sotho-Tswana diviners are men and the profession “is to some extent hereditary” (Schapera 1994: 255; also Mönnig 1967: 95). This difference from Nguni divination is probably related to the acceptance of cousin marriage, which generates marital relationships that are ‘softer’ and less oppressive than those generated by exogamous marriages (Hammond-Tooke 1981a). The demand for an escape niche for nonconformity falls away and, consequently, so does the influence of nonconformists. Where difference did exist, with wives of San descent, there would have been much reduced opportunities to enter and influence the profession. They could not claim that they were following ‘normal’ practice.

It is important to recognise here that Hammond-Tooke’s thesis is not dependent on a reification of an ‘Nguni way’ and a ‘Sotho-Tswana way’, nor should it lead to reification of these entities. These entities are heuristic devices in his argument, which relates the nature of divination to the nature of marriage—that is, to the specific ways in which men control their wives and children. In this sense, divination is similar to pollution. It is archaeological research that must determine the consistency, time depth and areal extent of the patterns Hammond-Tooke identifies. The presence of divining dice in Early Iron Age contexts is thus of real interest, because I argued in Chapter Five, independently of these artefacts and of Hammond-Tooke’s divination principle, that a high exchange value for women worked against (and presumably ameliorated) the emphasis given to patrilineal descent in Early Iron Age communities.

Biological data complement this cultural evidence. Analysis of blood serum protein, for instance, indicates a San admixture of between 37 % (Hlubi) and 60 % (Xhosa) in the Eastern Cape, and 45 % (Zulu) in KwaZulu-Natal (Tobias 1974: 26–7). Similarly, Soodyall's more recent study of frequencies of the mtDNA haplogroup L0d shows

that among Xhosa speakers some 25 % and among Zulu speakers approximately 50 % of all mtDNA lineages derive from a 'Khoisan' source. ... these data also indicate that intermarriage was biased toward the female side; whether this bias was affected/strengthened by very recent incorporation of hunter-gatherers into Nguni-speaking groups as a result of the population displacements associated with the early nineteenth century *Mfecane/Difaqane* remains to be investigated. (Mitchell 2010: 82 referring to Soodyall 1993)

The cultural material shows that the consequences of interaction are greater in the south. The biological data are equivocal, but are more easily biased by limitations in sample size and source (what criteria, for instance, are used to identify a Zulu group?). They prove intermixing between two biologically distinct populations, but perhaps, at this stage, provide no indication of where this was most intense. In the next sections I consider the archaeological evidence for intermarriage. Most of the evidence comes from the Thukela Basin.

### **The first millennium**

For the Thukela Basin, Mazel (1989, 1993) argues that three or possibly four hunter-gatherer social regions existed between 4000 and 2000 years ago. The regions are archaeologically recognisable from the distribution of artefacts such as ostrich-eggshell beads, scrapers and backed blades. Mazel argues that each region represents the extent of an exchange network, and each contained the resources for social reproduction. Hunter-gatherers must have moved across the landscape according to social and economic needs, but not necessarily in the way envisaged by Carter (1970) and Cable (1984), that is, summer aggregation in the upland grasslands, alternating with a winter dispersal phase in the lowland bushveld. Indeed, three of Mazel's social regions are located in the grasslands, with the possible fourth in the bush- and thornveld of the central basin.

Changes in the distribution of archaeological materials suggest to Mazel that the form of the social regions changed around 2000 years ago in response to the settlement of Early Iron Age agriculturists in the region. The hunter-gatherer response was two-fold. First, there was an upsurge in ritual activity in the Drakensberg in which trance dances served to promote a sense of hunter-gatherer identity, manifested in the production of shaded polychrome paintings (Mazel 2009: 107–9). Secondly, after AD 400 hunter-gatherers turned their focus to (or intensified their focus on) the more heavily wooded central basin where agriculturists had settled, and where both homestead sites and rock shelters contain evidence of interaction. This shift in interest was accompanied by a de-emphasis on the Drakensberg and its foothills (Mazel 1989: 135–6, 141, 1998, 2004; cf. Wadley 1996: 214–15 for the Magaliesberg; Van der Ryst 1998 for the Waterberg). At about the same time, Mitchell

(2009b: 125, my insertion) finds that hunter-gatherers living west of the escarpment, in highland Lesotho, “substantially reoriented their contacts to the west and away from the [east] coast”. These two patterns possibly have a single cause (Mazel 2009: 104–7; Mitchell 2009b: 125).

An exception stands out. The remarkable open-air site of Likoeng in Lesotho yielded a decorated *Ndondondwane* sherd, the undecorated sherds of 9–13 vessels (that I believe fit easily into an *Ndondondwane* assemblage (see Mitchell et al. 2008: fig. 6)), iron fragments, as well as adult cattle and adult and juvenile sheep/goat remains, well dated to the eighth-ninth century AD (Mitchell et al. 2008; Mitchell et al. 2011). The character of the layer in which the remains occur is different from that of the layers beneath it, where deposits suggest extended seasonal aggregation arranged around fishing. These data suggest to Mitchell and colleagues (2008: 16; 2011: 1238–9) that the people visiting Likoeng at this time had integrated livestock into their otherwise hunter-gatherer lifeway. Cattle and sheep remains associated with a date of 1100 b.p. at Rose Cottage Cave might be part of the same phenomenon (see Plug & Engela 1992: 19). The sherds and iron fragments show that the Likoeng group must have had links to the eastern bushveld. Of interest, then, are the contemporaneous deposits (unit TBS) containing pot and gourd sherds in Collingham Shelter in the Drakensberg foothills on the southern edge of the Thukela Basin (Mazel 1992). Also worth noting are paintings of cattle from sites such as eBusingatha in the upper Thukela Basin. They are differently painted from the more abundant cattle paintings south of Giant’s Castle and, unlike those, probably predate the nineteenth century (Manhire et al. 1986: 27). It seems possible that they date to the late first millennium, or earlier (for illustrations see Hollmann & Msimanga 2008; Wintjes 2013).

Certainly there is evidence for earlier interaction. Apart from Iron Age material culture in rock shelters, the ostrich-eggshell beads and (more rarely) fragments on Early Iron Age sites probably had a hunter-gatherer origin. Like Likoeng, these beads show that, despite a less intensive use of Drakensberg resources, hunter-gatherers must have maintained links across the mountains to the drier, open plains of the southern highveld, a habitat that ostriches prefer (Mazel 1996: 32; Greg Davies pers. comm. February 2015). This conclusion is reinforced by the shape of the hole through many ostrich-eggshell beads, which suggests a stone rather than metal drill (cf. Plug 1988: 343–4), and by the rarity of ostrich-eggshell-beads-in-production on Early Iron Age sites (Maggs 1984c: 89; Maggs & Ward 1984: 124). In the same way, exotic artefacts on Early Iron Age sites such as copper beads (seventh century) and Zhizo cane glass beads and a Persian sherd (ninth century) indicate far-reaching networks that seem likely to have included hunter-gatherers.

Flaked stone artefacts also occur on Early Iron Age sites and in Grid 1 on Msuluzi Confluence Maggs (1980c: 136) found a “definite linear correlation” in the distribution of stone artefacts and potsherds. The probability that the two artefacts types derive from the same occupation is “very high”. Scrapers dominate the flaked stone assemblage, indicating that it was related primarily to hide working. These data, Maggs suggests, might indicate closer relations between hunter-gatherers and agriculturists than the clientship documented

historically. Some caution is necessary. If Grid 1 at Msuluzi Confluence represents a household courtyard (see Chapter Five; cf. Maggs 1980c: 134), then the archaeological pattern at that site is the same as at the AD 1500–1700 Madikwe site in North West Province, which Hall (2000) argues indicates the restriction of hunter-gatherers, as socially marginal people, to the outer margins of the settlement. Further, Thorp (2000: 11–12, 73) points out that client relationships do generate material-cultural residues of the kind seen on Early Iron Age sites in KwaZulu-Natal.<sup>2</sup> There might, therefore, have been considerable similarities in agriculturist perceptions of hunter-gatherers in the first and second millennia.

The evidence for interaction extends to Later Stone Age deposits in rock shelters (Mazel 1986a, b, 1988a, 1992, 1993, 1997). Mbabane, kwaThwaleyakhe, Mgede and Mzinyashana 2 yielded *Msuluzi*, *Ndondondwane* and *Ntsbekane* pottery. Whereas Mbabane and kwaThwaleyakhe are situated in the bushveld that Early Iron Age people favoured, Mgede and Mzinyashana 2 are grassland sites. Mgede and Nkupe (a grassland site) also yielded one cane glass bead each, while Collingham (grassland) contained two beads of copper and one of iron, plus gourd sherds. As already noted (Chapter Three), cane glass beads appear towards the end of the Early Iron Age sequence. These artefacts support the argument that hunter-gatherers involved in interaction maintained alliances that extended well beyond the agriculturist world. Mbabane and kwaThwaleyakhe also contained metallurgical artefacts (slag and iron), while the latter shelter yielded divinatory equipment in the form of eight modified tali, probably originally of the same set (Plug 1993: 43). Hunter-gatherers might have adopted ‘bone divination’ from agriculturists (Mazel 1993: 32; Plug 1993: 43–4).

Quite clearly the interaction was a long-term one. Whatever its precise details, the intensified focus on the central Thukela Basin that Mazel identifies constitutes a most significant change in hunter-gatherer lifeways. This is clear if we take as a model the !Kung hunter-gatherers of Nyae Nyae, an area of nearly 26 000 km<sup>2</sup>. Marshall (1959: 337) says of them:

Those of the Nyae Nyae region almost all marry among themselves within the region, not because a formulated social rule definitely prohibits their marrying outside but because they almost never go out. They do not like strange places, strange situations, or strange persons, and have no way of feeding themselves where they cannot depend on receiving food from relatives or friends and, in strange country, either do not know where the wild foods grow or might not be allowed to gather them if they found any.

Mazel’s scenario thus suggests that hunter-gatherers from around 2000 years ago experienced a steep learning curve and social uncertainty as they came to terms with a new area and established relationships of trust with new people. Trust of potential affines was a necessary precursor to marriage (see Marshall 1959: 349). Marriage was surely the most important kind of interaction,<sup>3</sup> and evidently consisted mainly of agriculturist men marrying hunter-gatherer women. Such marriages would have served both kinds of society, because both were founded on the same economic imperative: the accumulation, creation and control of people, or, put more abstractly, of social relationships. These relationships—created

primarily through marriage—gave people access to the resources necessary for survival and status (Marshall 1959: 349; Guy 1987). I argue in Chapter Five that bridewealth among **KALUNDU** agriculturists in the first millennium was high relative to average cattle holdings. Marriage to hunter-gatherer women might then have seemed attractive if such marriages required a smaller bridewealth or the option of bride service. Marshall's account of the Nyae Nyae !Kung offers a scenario that can accommodate the requirements of both hunter-gatherers and agriculturists.

Marriage among the !Kung involves an agreement between the parents of the boy and girl, who must also agree. There is some exchange of gifts between the two families, but no bridewealth or dowry is transferred. Bride service is demanded, however, and can last ten years. The principal purpose of bride service is that a man should provide meat and hide (for karosses) for his wife's family (Marshall 1959: 351). If hunter-gatherers of the Thukela Basin in the first millennium had similar marriage conventions, then agriculturist men would have been able to acquire hunter-gatherer girls (probably) without transferring bridewealth cattle. Further, they could have fulfilled the primary obligation of bride service—the provision of animals (probably sheep and goats) for meat and hides—while remaining in place as agriculturists and without spending years as hunter-gatherers.

This arrangement would perhaps have bound hunter-gatherer families to agriculturist homesteads for long periods (though the evidence indicates that they lived separately) and so changed the seasonal patterns of hunter-gatherer life that had prevailed in the centuries prior to contact (cf. Wadley 1996: 215). The data are suggestive. Faunal and floral remains at the shelters of kwaThwalayakhe and Mbabane suggest that first-millennium deposits accumulated in spring and summer. In earlier times, hunter-gatherers spent spring and summer in the grasslands at sites such as Nkupe and Diamond 1 (Mazel 1984: 67, 1986b: 415, 1988a: 370; Plug 1993: 41). There was perhaps a radical shift in the way that hunter-gatherers used resources in the landscape. Living close to agriculturist homesteads for lengthy periods would have allowed them to learn about livestock management, giving them the opportunity to add herding to their way of life and create archaeological deposits such as at Likoang. It would also have changed the nature of Later Stone Age home-base (i.e. shelter) deposits in the lowland bushveld, while the processing of animals hides on the margins of homestead households could have generated the stone artefact-potsherd pattern in Grid 1 at Msuluzi Confluence.

Because of the nature of the exchange (i.e. not-quite-marriage) and the 'otherness' of hunter-gatherers, I suspect that for agriculturists these marriages would have been politically unsuitable; that is, unsuitable for first or senior wives. I suspect that hunter-gatherer girls and women would have typically been acquired 'in addition to' rather than 'instead of' agriculturist wives, and hunter-gatherer wives would typically have ranked low within the homestead. Their integration into agriculturist life, perhaps as co-wives, is a topic worthy of research. The degree of intermarriage is unknown. Marshall's work in Nyae Nyae shows that marriage between hunter-gatherers and agriculturists is rare, even in the

case of the hunter-gatherers who work on Tswana and Herero cattle posts. The same might not have applied to the Thukela Basin, where current understanding has hunter-gatherers seeking contact with agriculturists. Genetic analyses of first-millennium skeletons might in time provide more information.

In the eleventh century Nguni speakers settled in KwaZulu-Natal and brought significant change to the region. The rapid disappearance of Early Iron Age material culture suggests that the authority of Early Iron Age homestead heads was quickly undone. The communities that they had administered (or at least sections of them) were probably marginalized politically and given responsibilities for procreation-related work. This work included iron production and, I would argue, rainmaking. Kopytoff's frontier model suggests that this political contestation might have been accompanied by a greater emphasis on differences between hunter-gatherers and agriculturists. It is even possible that the established relationships with hunter-gatherers were invoked in the marginalization of Early Iron Age people. A change on this scale possibly disrupted networks linking hunter-gatherers to agriculturists, and in some way disturbed the hunter-gatherer experiment with herding in the mountains. Current evidence, from Type R sites to the hunter-gatherer-based creole 'AmaTola', nevertheless indicates that hunter-gatherers kept livestock in various ways until the twentieth century (e.g. Loubser & Laurens 1994: 92–103; Jolly 2007; Challis 2008, 2012; Humphreys 2009).

### **The Moor Park phase**

From about AD 1300, hunter-gatherers began using rock shelters in the Drakensberg and adjacent grasslands of the Thukela Basin again, or at least, using them more frequently. At the same time agriculturists expanded into the grasslands. The two phenomena were possibly linked, although it is not clear whether hunter-gatherers moved with agriculturists or independently of them. As we saw in earlier chapters, the Moor Park phase coincided with the Little Ice Age when the climate was considerably colder and drier than it is today (Fig. 8.1). That these conditions contributed to social stress is strongly indicated by the hilltop settings of Moor Park sites (Figs 2.3, 7.6). Defence was surely a primary consideration in decisions about settlement location.

If the hilltop locations served to isolate settlements from the surrounding world, then the same end was perhaps achieved by separating settlements in space. The closest two of four known sites in a well-surveyed area (by local farmer David Green and archaeologist Oliver Davies) northeast and east of Estcourt are iGujwana and Selbourne, separated by 600 m and a valley (Fig. 8.2). iGujwana is 6 km from Ntomdadlana and 9.7 km from Sewula Gorge. iGujwana, however, dates to the mid- to late sixteenth century, whereas Ntomdadlana and Sewula Gorge, separated by 5.4 km, date to the fourteenth century (Selbourne is undated). Moor Park sites provide no sense of clustering, no sense of neighbourhood such as we see with later sites in the upper Thukela Basin (e.g. Maggs et al. 1986). Site size varies. On Selbourne a sparse but an extensive spread of material suggests a settlement

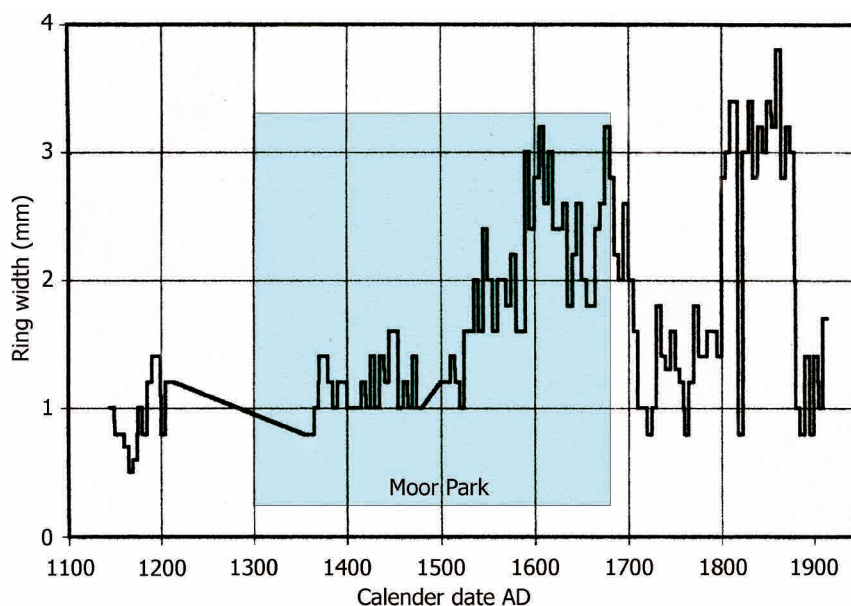


Fig. 8.1. The Moor Park phase and annual ring width of a yellowwood felled in 1916 in the Karkloof Forest (after Vogel et al. 2001; cf. Hall 1976). Growth is most likely affected by temperature and precipitation. The periods 1360–1580 and the 1700s were especially bad (see Chapter Two). Ring widths of the period 1220–1360 hidden by scarring.

perhaps comparable to the name site, Moor Park (Fig. 8.3). These sites probably represent settlements organized around larger agnatic clusters, but including followers. iGujwana and Ntomdahlana are medium-sized sites, while little Sewula Gorge perhaps represents a man with two or three wives. People, it seems, were clustered tightly in small groups at points in the landscape.

Other aspects of their archaeology similarly suggest a ‘defensive mindset’. iGujwana, for instance, lies at the extreme northern end of a triangular spur above the Mtshezi Valley. The approach to the site on the spur is on relatively level ground, but the slope either side drops off steeply to the valley floor. The main part of the site is cut off from the spur by a substantial stone wall that curves gently away towards the slopes either side, where it turns sharply north to run somewhat roughly along the top of the slopes. This walling ends on both sides of the site before reaching the rocky point of the spur.

The entrance through the front perimeter wall is uncertain because of collapse and tree growth. The most likely possibility is awkwardly situated. Approaching from the south, one must bear left and down a steep slope to enter through what appears to be the remnants of a short passage created by two overlapping parts of the wall. The entrance brings one into the extreme southwest corner of the site, which is somewhat isolated from most structures within. Perhaps the closest structure would have been a hut standing on a terrace upslope of the entrance, some 15 m away. Visitors to the settlement would most probably have climbed more directly and steeply upslope to level terrain 8 m higher than the entrance, where the men’s court enclosure stood.

This difficult entrance is reminiscent of Moor Park itself. Here Davies’s ‘citadel’ occupies the highest point of the hilltop and is separated from the rest of the site with



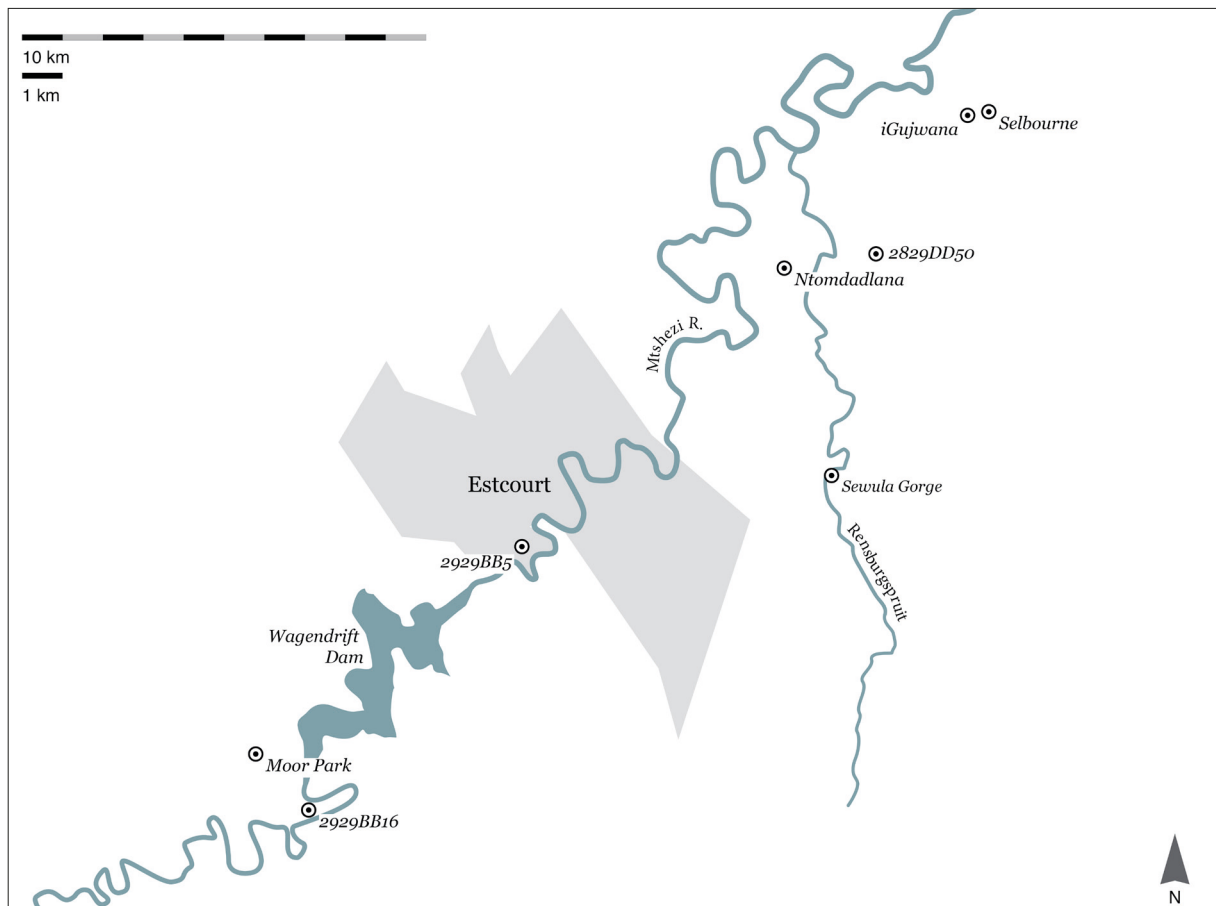


Fig. 8.2. Moor Park hilltop sites recorded around Estcourt. Based on the site records, 2929BB5 is probably a Moor Park site, 2929BB16 is possibly one, but I suspect that 2829DD50 is not.

walling. It seems to have been the first part of the settlement built (Davies 1974: 293). The citadel contains a Terrace C that resembles the court enclosure at iGujwana, as well as many other enclosures, terraces and platforms (Fig. 8.3), some of which supported huts. Of the entrance to the citadel, Davies (1974: 308) writes:

If the citadel gate had been between *E* and 11a, as suggested ..., there would be no easy access from it. The easiest way, across *E*, would have been blocked by a structure, while to the south the slope is very rough and rocky. There may have been a narrow path along 11a, turning at right angles at 10d and up to *F* and the higher part of the citadel. A tortuous entrance of this sort would be easy to defend.

Considerations of defence from physical attack may have motivated the design of the citadel entrance, but perhaps more likely is that the entry would place visitors at a psychological disadvantage. The same is true for iGujwana: an indirect route takes the visitor to the lowest point within the perimeter wall, from where he or she must climb steeply while being watched from above. Entry must have been intimidating.

Something like the Moor Park citadel occurs at the contemporaneous Ntomdadlana, where hut platforms are arranged around a knoll situated towards the northern point of the hill (Fig. 7.6). A wall across the southern slopes of the knoll cut these huts off from large





Fig. 8.4. Sewula Gorge from the south. The approach to the site is from the right, walking up the slope. Two walls that cut across the slope mark the front of the site. Rensburgkop is off-picture to the left.

open compartments and other huts situated towards the south and front of the settlement. Again the wall seems to have served a defensive purpose, again probably psychological, in distinguishing some inhabitants from others.

Sewula Gorge is situated on a dolerite dyke with an almost east-west alignment (Fig. 8.4). The dyke is split longitudinally to form two small parallel, but offset hills separated by a stream course and vlei. The site is on the northernmost hill. To the west, the dyke is cut through by the Rensburgspruit, which drops into a small narrow gorge that curves sharply from west of the site around to the north. The spruit then swings north, west, then sharply north again, a looping course determined by dolerite intrusions (Fig. 8.2).

The dyke fragment on which the site is situated is narrow and steep-sided and offers a commanding view up the wide, low-lying valley to the south, as well as over the gorge to the west and north. The gorge and associated topography create a box-canyon effect and close the valley off immediately to the west, north and east of the site. It is a 'backs-to-the-wall' location that is reinforced by recent history. When Zulu forces attacked the Trekkers in February 1838, the small party led by Johannes Frederik van Rensburg retreated to the southernmost of the two parallel hills (Rensburgkop), from where they managed to hold off the *impi* until it abandoned the fight.

My analysis of the material from these sites is incomplete, but thus far the sense of isolation seems to extend to the ceramics. The court area at iGujwana yielded 2155 sherds, which are generally thinner and come from more finely made vessels than sherds associated

with hut floors. They are thus what one would expect of vessels used in a public forum such as a court. Nevertheless, only 3.5 % have any surface enhancement (i.e. burnish and/or textured decoration). The enhancement is concentrated on sherds that preserve some part of the vessel lip, occurring on 22.9 % of these. In most cases, textured decoration (i.e. not burnish) consists only of lip notching or lip impressions (e.g. Fig. 7.5, though *Moor Park* lip decoration is simpler). Of the remaining non-lip sherds, only 2.2 % display any surface enhancement. Generally, many *Moor Park* vessels are poorly executed, with rough surfaces and wobbly lips, and it is often not easy to gauge sherd orientation. The ceramic is fairly soft and I suspect that many pots were dung fired. This assemblage contrasts sharply with the one from eighteenth-century Mgoduyanuka in the upper Thukela Basin, where nearly a third of the 4736 sherds display surface enhancement.

Earlier, in Chapter Five, I argued that ceramic style was primarily a product of the competing interests of husband and wife, set in their wider social context. The study of modern Zulu pottery in Chapter Four supports this position in that it shows that pottery decoration is directed largely at people who are potential or actual partners in marriage. The decorative impoverishment of *Moor Park* assemblages is thus surely significant, though its full import will become clearer only following comparison with pre- and post-*Moor Park* assemblages (that is, assemblages within the same sequence). At this stage I suggest that the ceramics indicate a de-emphasis of relations between husbands and their wives' natal homesteads.

It is of course possible that pottery was not the chosen vehicle for decorative messaging, and that for this purpose *Moor Park* people used gourds and baskets, which are now lost to us. As Jolles (2005: 109–10) observes, baskets and gourds seem to have been the primary vessels used for beer in the KwaZulu-Natal region prior to 1850, with ceramic mainly used for the large brewing vessels that are always undecorated. As a counter I note that in historic times gourd vessels and beer baskets were closely identified with men. Men were responsible for making the finely woven baskets used for food and drink (e.g. Krige 1962: 207; Bryant 1967: 402), and the modern use of woven *izimbenge* (small shallow baskets; Fig. 4.10) as covers for pots of beer reserved for men<sup>4</sup> seems a continuation of this association. The men-gourd identification is derived from *amasi* vessels—both contain the vitalizing substance of life, semen-*amasi*—but it is so strong that missionary George Champion wrote in January 1836 that gourds “are considered for being equal to a cow” (Champion 1967: 44 in Kennedy 1993: 241). Indeed, a man's ownership of an *amasi* gourd is related to his ownership of cattle and the gourd is destroyed on his death. This treatment is surely directly linked to the man's membership of Guy's dominant class, that of married men (1987: 24). By contrast, the *amasi* gourds “of Wis [wives] and Chn [children] are not destroyed, since Chn (also Wis?) do not own cattle” (Raum 1973: 356, my insertions). The point here is that the use of baskets and gourds rather than pots might also, like the limited decoration, suggest a de-emphasis of relationships with in-laws and a contrasting emphasis on the authority of the homestead head and his senior agnates.

What consequences did this competitive social environment and isolationist mindset have for interactions? Following Hodder (1982) and Hammond-Tooke (2000), we can expect that differences between insiders and outsiders were intensified in a discriminatory way. The Moor Park archaeological evidence suggests that the scale at which this distinction operated was small: insiders consisted of no more than agnatic clusters. I suspect that there would have been an intensification of *inbлонipho* as agnatic clusters stressed their distinction from outsiders.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the focus on defence as a key factor in site selection meant a reduced consideration of the needs of cultivation, and consequently a reduced consideration of the productive role of women. Following Kuper (1982: 157–8), I would expect a reduced exchange value for women. This point is for future research. But if so, I would expect the lower value to have applied especially to hunter-gatherers.

The archaeological evidence supporting interaction in the second millennium occurs mainly in Later Stone Age deposits. Little evidence exists for the other side of the relationship. Ostrich-eggshell beads from Late Iron Age deposits are restricted to one from eleventh-century Mpambanyoni near Scottburgh on the South Coast (Ward & Maggs 1988: 416) and an entire necklace at fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Sibudu (Wood et al. 2009: 242). They are elsewhere absent, even from eighteenth-century Mgoduyanuka which preserves delicate bone and ivory artefacts and was built by people who are supposed to have had “intimate” relations with the Bushmen (Maggs 1982a; Bryant 1929: 355, 358).

In Later Stone Age deposits at the grassland shelter sites of Clarke’s, Mgede and Mhlwazini, levels dating to the second millennium yielded pottery and iron artefacts, including blade-like objects. Facetted bone artefacts suggest access to and the use of iron tools (Mazel 1984, 1986a, 1990). Floral and faunal remains suggest a spring and summer occupation, perhaps indicating a continuation of the practice established in the first millennium of contact with agriculturists at this time of the year. Ostrich-eggshell beads at Mhlwazini (notably in layers contemporaneous with the Moor Park phase), Mgede and Nkupe in the grasslands (Mazel 1986a, 1988a, 1990), and Mbabane, eSinhlonhweni and Sikhanyisweni in the bushveld (Mazel 1986b, 1988b) indicate that hunter-gatherers nevertheless maintained lives independent of agriculturists.

It is not certain what hunter-gatherers offered agriculturists in return for these various items. Presumably exchanges included animal skins and perhaps ivory. Diviners and herbalists probably made contact with hunter-gatherers while seeking medicinal ingredients and so acquired knowledge of wild resources. The genetic and linguistic evidence shows that people were part of the exchange. It is extremely unlikely that these traces of interaction accumulated only from 1700, so the acquisition of hunter-gatherer girls and young women must have been a part of Moor Park life. Within the difficult Moor Park social environment, marriages to hunter-gatherer women might have provided access to in-laws who could occasionally or seasonally watch over herds, and yet who did not compete directly for land. Although I suspect the same basic mechanism of acquisition applied as in the first millennium, bride-service obligations might have been fulfilled at a lower cost to

agriculturists than in the first millennium (with more emphasis on grain?), in an exchange that thus enhanced the marginalization and ‘otherness’ of hunter-gatherers.

Generally, Mazel’s sense from the record is that the degree of interaction decreased from the first to the second millennium. It is reasonable to suggest that the decreased interaction was a consequence of the social tension of Moor Park times. The dating evidence from iGujwana, however, shows that the Moor Park phase was not uniform in character. Tension and conflict probably fluctuated with climatic conditions. So too did the nature of interaction. Two sites open the possibility of interaction of a different kind. The rockshelters Mzinyashana 1 and iNkolimashashi respectively yielded *Moor Park* and *Blackburn*-like pottery (Fig. 8.5) (Mazel 1997, 1999). Mzinyashana 1 also contained a ceramic female figurine and a modelled ceramic horn fragment. At both sites this material came from layers different in character from deeper layers associated with hunter-gatherer



Fig. 8.5. Top: Sherds from iNkolimashashi. The one on the left (from Layer 3) resembles *Blackburn*/*Ntsuanatsatsi*. The sherd on the right came from Layer 4. Bottom: Sherd from Mzinyashana 1, Layer 2. It is *Moor Park* in style. Layers 1 and 2 yielded other *Moor Park* sherds, and Layer 2 the ceramic figurine.

materials. Mazel argues that these deposits were laid down by people of agriculturist origin (1997: 31, 1999: 19). They could relate to young men and boys out tending cattle, although the location of iNkolimahashi suggests otherwise. But the deposits could possibly relate to impoverished agriculturists who had lost their cattle and taken up a foraging lifestyle (cf. Mazel 1997: 32). Such people might have joined with hunter-gatherer bands and, during the sustained hardship imposed by the Little Ice Age, significantly incorporated aspects of hunter-gatherer cosmology into their own thinking. Of interest here, but of uncertain value, are two encounters between the 1593 *Santo Alberto* survivors and ‘rebels’, who supposedly lived by hunting and theft (Theal 1898, II: 315, 331). Both these encounters were in sour grasslands, described as ‘deserts’ by the Portuguese. My reading of the survivors’ journey places the first encounter in East Griqualand and the second on the Melmoth plateau.

In such a context people might have found much inspiration in the hunter-gatherer world for divination and *inblonipho*. And from such a context they might have introduced such innovations to agriculturist society. Divination, as we have seen, is closely associated with social marginality, and although everyone is bound by the conventions of *inblonipho*, its impact is greatest on wives and dependants. It is they who were perhaps especially driven to seek out ways of avoiding particular syllables and words (Herbert 1990b).

As indicated earlier, the archaeological data come from the Thukela Basin, but the consequences of interaction are more significant further south, in the Eastern Cape. The settlement and ceramic sequences provide an explanation.

### **A layered landscape**

Moor Park settlement layout emphasizes the front-back axis (Huffman 2004: 89), a layout that was probably shaped by the defensive mindset of the time and the topography of the favoured hilltop locations. Ntomdadlana provides a good example (Fig. 7.6); Moor Park itself is another, though its arrangement is more specific to the shape of the hill (Fig. 8.3). Houses were typically located at the back of settlements. Cattle pens and courts were sited in front of the houses. This arrangement characterizes Huffman’s (2007a: 33) Moor Park walling cluster. Today, homesteads of the Ndzundza Ndebele follow this Moor Park arrangement, and Huffman argues that they and other Southern Ndebele have origins in the grasslands of the Thukela Basin (2004; 2007a: 448).

The Thukela Basin also contains many Thukela Type sites, which post-date the Moor Park phase (Maggs 1982a, 1988; Maggs et al. 1986). Similar sites occur in the upper Mkhomazi valley (Maggs et al. 1982). Thukela Type sites have a centre-sides arrangement (a set of concentric circles) (Fig. 8.6). They belong to Huffman’s (2007a: 33) Ntsuanatsatsi walling cluster, which he suggests originated in northern KwaZulu-Natal. He further argues that the distinctiveness of the two walling clusters dates to at least the mid-1500s (Huffman 2004: 101). If correct, if Moor Park sites did not morph into Thukela Type sites in the 1700s, then it follows from the settlement evidence that the upper Thukela Basin is another layered landscape. The ceramics apparently add weight to this argument. Earlier I briefly

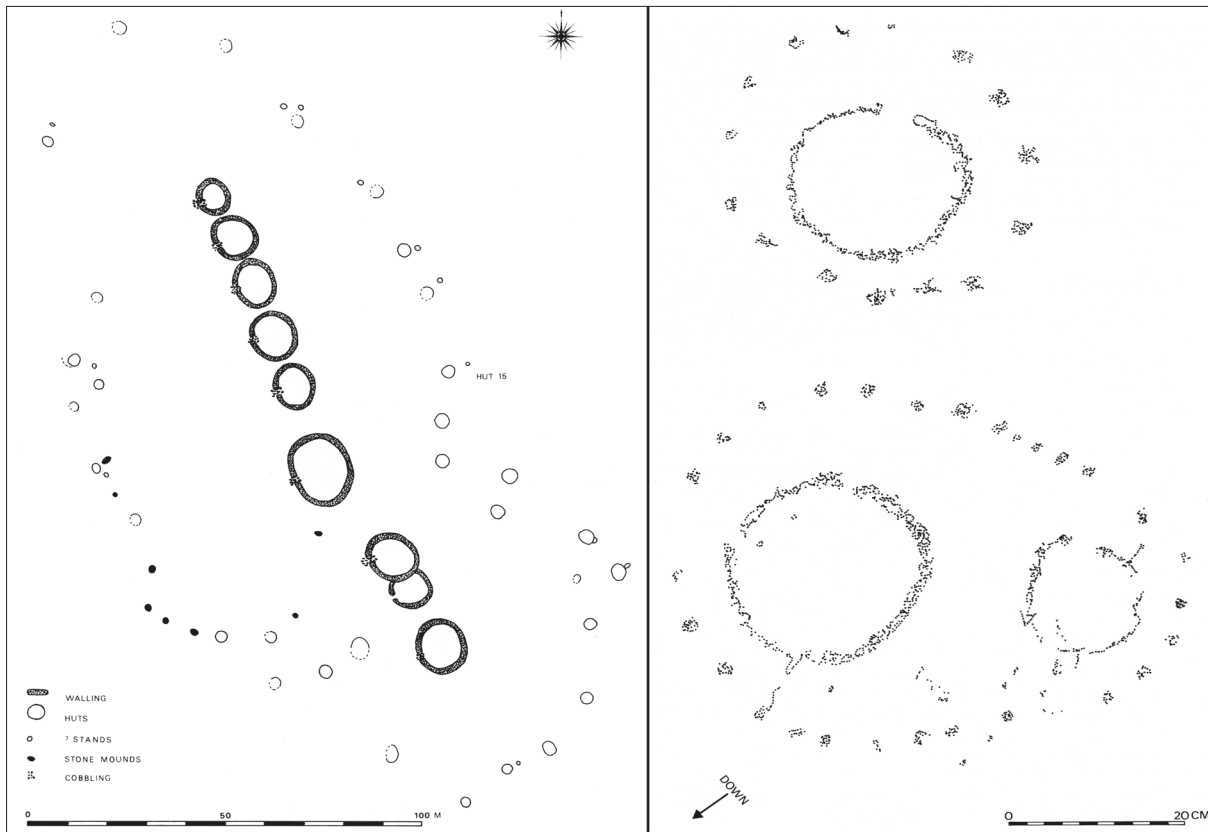


Fig. 8.6. Left: site at Mgoduyanuka, upper Thukela Basin, with stone-faced, earthwalled enclosures surrounded by hut floors. From Maggs 1982a: fig. 12. Right: Engraved settlement plan, about 15 km downstream of Mgoduyanuka. From Maggs 1988: fig. 7.

contrasted pottery from iGujwana with the pottery from Mgoduyanuka, which Huffman places in the *Nqabeni* facies (Huffman 2004: 101). Differences do, however, distinguish the Mgoduyanuka assemblage from those of *Nqabeni* and *eLangeni*, notably the use of red burnish and the absence of *amasumpa*-like bumps (see Maggs 1982a: 111). *Moor Park*, interestingly, does contain bumps. This sequence needs more research, as Huffman indicates (2007a: 451). Nevertheless, because *Nqabeni* at present “cannot be directly derived from *Moor Park*” (Huffman 2007a: 451), the ceramic and settlement-layout sequences in the upper Thukela Basin are broken at the same point: *Moor Park* pottery and front-back layouts lie below *Nqabeni* pottery and centre-sides layouts. Following Huffman, Thukela Type people would have entered the basin from the northeast.

Bryant’s (1929) map of ‘native clans’ suggests that Zizi communities built the Thukela Type sites. Their descendants still live in the area. Bryant also says that the Zizi and the neighbouring Bhele, Tolo and Nhlanguwini claim Dlamini descent (of varying proximity to the Swazi chief Dlamini II) (Bryant 1929: 346–7, 354–5, 358). It is uncertain what kind of groups these various ‘clans’ represent. The archaeology suggests limited political stratification and, although dolerite intrusions provide soils suitable for cultivation, pasture is of mixed palatability and would have placed limits on the accumulation of cattle. It seems likely that people lived in agnatic clusters grouped into neighbourhoods that sprawled across the upper





Fig. 8.7. Grindstone, iGujwana.

Thukela landscape, more concentrated on better soils (where stone building material was also available) and more scattered where resources were poorer (Maggs et al. 1986: 478).

Possibly, Thukela Type people began to move into the Thukela grasslands from around 1600, when the Little Ice Age ameliorated somewhat. Perhaps they introduced maize to the region at this early date; I found what is perhaps a maize grindstone on a hut platform at iGujwana (Fig. 8.7). The radiocarbon date range at iGujwana extends from the late fifteenth century to the early seventeenth century, with midpoints in the mid- to late 1500s—contemporaneous with the journey of the *Santo Alberto* survivors through the region (Chapter Two). Their account shows that people in the bushveld of the lower Thukela Basin probably had access to goods imported through Delagoa Bay. Perhaps the same was to some extent true for the interior grasslands. Maize was certainly cultivated there during the 1700s (Maggs 1982a: 110).

Vogel et al.'s (2001) interpretation of the Karkloof tree-ring sequence indicates a climatic downturn in the mid-1600s, then improvement again towards the end of the century (Fig. 8.1). Such climatic shifts might again have alternately encouraged and discouraged movement into the basin from the northeast. In this scenario we can see an increasing social complexity in the Thukela grasslands, with communities composed of various proportions of Moor Park and Thukela Type agriculturists, the latter in growing numbers, and hunter-gatherer bands living independently on the edges, interacting, but possibly with

their spatial freedom gradually closing down. Oral accounts that Bryant collected suggest political tension, with the Phetla and Polane departing inland over the escarpment in the 1600s, followed by the Phuthi in the early 1700s (Bryant 1929: 355–6). It is possible that the metaphor used to express this tension—arguments over the distribution of an eland carcass—derived from the significance of this animal for hunter-gatherers (Whitelaw 2009b: 153), but I am not certain of this point. Raum (1973: 436) says that eland symbolize the authority of homestead heads and chiefs, that is, the authority of Guy's (1987) dominant class. Ideally, we would want more detail on the regional significance of this symbol.

Whatever the case, I am tempted to wonder whether the layering process in the Thukela Basin was accompanied by a degree of cultural erasure: Thukela Type people might have had a limited and less intensive history with hunter-gatherers and their settlement of the basin might have resulted in some loss of hunter-gatherer influences on the agriculturist worldview there. The origin of Thukela Type is worthy of research.

Further south, grassland is a relatively more extensive vegetation type, even reaching the coast in the Transkei. Also, a significant proportion is sourveld—the 'deserts' of sixteenth-century shipwreck survivors, devoid of habitation. Agriculturally favourable wooded areas are relatively restricted and this affected the distribution of Iron Age sites (Derricourt 1977; Feely 1987). The region's economic marginality was further enhanced by the absence of significant iron-ore bodies (Whitelaw 1991), and it is possible that the resource crisis during the Little Ice Age was especially severe there. Nevertheless, since the southern Nguni ceramic sequence (from *Moor Park/Umgazana*) seems to continue into recent times, there is greater continuity in the history of people there than in the Thukela Basin. The impact of the hunter-gatherer world on the southern Nguni reflects this history.

## Acknowledgements

I thank Carolyn Thorp and Aron Mazel for discussion and comment, and Justine Wintjes who prepared Figure 8.2. I am also grateful to those who commented on the essay in *The Eland's People*: Bronwen van Doornum, Peter Mitchell, Lyn Wadley and Frans Prins. The Centre for Science Development (award ref. 15/1/3/17/0042) and the KwaZulu-Natal Museum funded my fieldwork.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Based on Whitelaw 2009b.

<sup>2</sup> 'Clientship', incidentally, is not a term I favour as it suggests a hierarchical relationship. I am not convinced that hunter-gatherers always saw their labour this way.

<sup>3</sup> I am in debt to Carolyn Thorp for this point, which gives special emphasis to a relationship that many scholars have discussed (e.g. Mazel 1989: 142–5, 150–1 for the Thukela Basin).

<sup>4</sup> I am uncertain, but I suspect *izimbenge* ideally cover the mouths of pots of beer reserved for *married* men. The *izimbenge* perhaps make the pots 'decent', considering that pots can represent women and, more specifically, the womb. It would not surprise me to find that this practice is no longer widespread.

<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, *inblonipho* possibly originated in Moor Park times, though this would require that the same social processes characterized the entire Nguni-speaking region c. AD 1300–1700.

## 9

### **“Only fatness will bring rain”: rainmaking and hunter-gatherers<sup>1</sup>**

We saw in Chapter Seven that work cosmologically underpinned by procreation is often associated with politically marginalized people, and that this association can arise from frontier contexts and historically layered social landscapes. The discussion considered ‘*amalala*’, a term that was originally applied to iron producers, and argued that many of these specialists came from communities largely descended from first-millennium agriculturists. Since that time these communities had taken up Nguni speech and lost their Early Iron Age material culture. It is nevertheless possible that they still retained some residues of Early Iron Age practices (e.g. in marital patterns).

Bryant (1905) records that the word *amalala* (sing. *ilala*) was sometimes also used for rainmakers, because they often came from the same clans as the iron producers. Here it is worth noting that rainmaking is generally an inherited profession in the Nguni-speaking world, almost in a genetic sense, and therefore associated with particular clans. It is similar in this respect to iron production and other specializations, such as preparing the dead chief for burial (Hunter 1936: 80; Berglund 1976: 53; cf. Hammond-Tooke 1993: 110). And like iron production, the rainmaking role is often constructed and allocated within layered social landscapes.

Stephen Mini’s rather vainglorious testimony to James Stuart (given between 1908 and 1922) combines these issues of historical primacy, political marginalization and descent-bound production. Mini said he was of the Tolo<sup>2</sup> clan and a great-grandson of Gasa, a rainmaker who was the last in his lineage to make rain: Shaka apparently killed Gasa for bringing thunder rather than rain alone. Mini linked the rainmaking prowess of the Tolo to their status as descendants of ancient occupants of the land and “owners of the sky” (Webb & Wright 1982: 134): they preceded even the *amalala*, who sprang from them. He even claimed that the Zulu received their right to rule from the Tolo, who have “a natural inclination or tendency ... to associate themselves with the royalty of various countries”, so that one “will always find a Zolo [= Tolo] man next to [i.e. marginal to] a king or chief” (Webb & Wright 1982: 133, 134, my insertions).

The Tolo appear again in the following rather charming tale told to Stuart in 1905 by Mahaya kaNongqabana.

Mboto's father and mother were killed at the Mpafane (Mooi) river for preventing rain; they were killed among the emaTolweni [= Tolo] tribe. Mboto *escaped* with his sister Myalwana (she afterwards bore the amaYalo and amaDiba *of the place of Mdantsha*, at the Mzamuba, a river beyond the Mtamvuna in Pondoland). Mboto *went* down the Mkomazi river, *catching fish and eels* and eating them. *They were in a state of starvation*. They came on to the Mzinto where they found the Imtwana already living ...

Mboto and his sister found them living on game, especially buffalo. There was famine in the land. These were the days of Njilo [the Imtwana chief]. The Imtwana would kill a buffalo, then Mboto and his sister, after the Imtwana had taken what they wanted and had gone, would come, take *the stomach contents, squeeze out the moisture*, and drink same, and also eat the *coagulated blood* and the backbone which had been cut out.

The Imtwana now noticed that as often as they killed a buffalo a gentle rain or *drizzle* would come, so much so that Njilo directed a watch to be kept. ... Presently smoke was noticed in the scrub or bushes along the coast, and Mboto and his sister were the cause of it. When discovered, Mboto made the rain pour down. ... Njilo was the only one who had seed; this he had preserved, of various kinds. He planted gardens ... After this crop, he got more seed and distributed same to all his tribe.

For his action in bringing rain Mboto was given a *wife to marry, and an umdhlunkulu*. He paid no *lobola*. This was the origin of the amaMboto ... They are now under Mlotshwa ... of the emaTolweni people ... (Webb & Wright 1979: 111–12, italics recorded in Zulu, my insertions).

In addition to reinforcing the interlinked themes in Stephen Mini's testimony, the story makes several other points. It highlights Njilo's responsibility as chief for the well-being of his supporters. It establishes a relationship between fish and starvation, but links it directly to the orphaned siblings who contain within themselves a potent—the *most* potent—creative capacity. There is a link between chaos and creativity here, and also a hint of the thinking around fish traps that we saw in Chapter Six. Significantly, the orphans' use of the green stomach contents (*umswani*) of the dead buffalo indicates a cleansing. Njilo takes their creative capacity into his care, tames it and nourishes it for the benefit of his chiefdom, and so enhances his status. His actions are conceptually equivalent to marriage: Mboto is to Njilo as a wife is to her husband. Further, Mboto's marriage binds him to Njilo in a relation of debt, because cattle, presumably Njilo's, must be exchanged for women. But the alliance between the two is heavy and complex, because *umdhlunkulu* here should probably be translated as a 'maid of honour', usually sent as tribute to a chief (Doke et al. 1990: 540). Her award to Mboto emphasizes this complexity and shows that the fortunes of chief and rainmaker were irrevocably bound. Their relationship has implications that resonate through the entire cosmology and economy. Finally, the rainmakers operate in two dimensions, a linear one that connects them across space (Tolo – Mboto – (Myalwana) – Diba – Yalo) and allows them to claim a past in deep antiquity, and a cyclical dimension (they start and end with Tolo) that synchronizes them with the rhythm of the world. Women operate similarly, moving linearly from one homestead to another and cyclically in reproduction. We see later that these principles underpin rainmaking in agriculturist societies.

## Rainmaking and hunter-gatherers

Some scholars consider rainmaking to have been a significant arena of interaction between agriculturists and hunter-gatherers. In one account, hunter-gatherers were “rainmakers without equal ... [whose skill was] ... an obvious advantage over the agrarian Cape Nguni-speaking groups ... [which] gave them a ritual niche that also had political and economic advantages” (Blundell 2004: 65 summarizing Campbell 1987, my insertions). Following Campbell (1987: 44), Dowson (1995: 59, 60) argues that “as the original inhabitants and custodians of the land”, hunter-gatherer rain shamans “had (ideological) control over the farmers’ economy”. Their role was facilitated by cross-cultural, subcontinent-wide beliefs about snakes and rain (Dowson 1998).

For Challis (2012: 277), long-term interaction with Bushmen in the upper Mkhomazi and upper Mtshezi basins provided the basis for the Tolo rainmaking reputation. The rainmaker Gasa, says Challis (2008: 120), “undoubtedly drew on Bushman beliefs”, though he cites no evidence for this point. Gasa, it seems, lived near Qudeni forest, a little northeast of the Thukela-Mzinyathi confluence (Bryant 1929: 358; Webb & Wright 1982: 136; cf. Webb & Wright 1979: 84), and it is unknown whether he had any actual connection to the Drakensberg Tolo. His story might be somewhat fictional. He might even be a personification of the Gasa ‘tribe’ (agnatic cluster?) living near the source of the Black Mfolozi, who, the story goes, were Shaka’s rain doctors and who Dingane put to death on the trumped-up charge of bringing lightning (Webb & Wright 1979: 250–1).<sup>3</sup>

To my mind, these scholars’ statements either depend on a misunderstanding of the social principles involved, or do not take cognisance of the slipperiness of the data. Historical primacy is not so much about actual precedence as it is about the potential to claim precedence in a way that is convincing and challenging to listeners. The agriculturist rainmakers discussed so far could claim (linear) connections from the Save River to the Mthatha and from the Drakensberg to the sea, a spread so extensive that conceptually it demands an ancient presence. Their claim could convince because it was rooted in a familiar, descent-based social world that rendered distant places and communities understandable, even if these had never been visited. Moreover, management of procreation in frontier contexts is not so much a right of natives, as work negotiated and allocated according to political circumstances by those in authority. These tasks depend on framing the workers as the ‘other’.

Schoeman (2006) offers an interpretation that resembles Dowson’s, based on material recovered from several hilltop sites in the Mapungubwe area. Her excavations yielded rainmaking debris and “deliberately hammered stone”, some of which displays a Later Stone Age working technique (Schoeman 2006: 160, also 157). She argues that K2 rainmakers in the Mapungubwe area selected hills located outside society, in nature, for their work. Since this same area was frequented by hunter-gatherers, who were similarly outside society, K2 rainmaking rituals initially included hunter-gatherer specialists and so exploited their intimate, First-People relationship with the land. Leokwe people, by contrast,

were excluded from these rituals as part of a strategy of conquest and marginalization (Schoeman 2006: 162). In time, hunter-gatherers were similarly excluded from rainmaking as K2 people came to own the region (but see Schoeman 2009: 292, where hunter-gatherers might have later made rain for a new kind of society, formed through interaction between hunter-gatherers and agriculturists).<sup>4</sup>

Schoeman (2009; also Brunton et al. 2013) identifies several features common to hunter-gatherer and agriculturist rainmaking practice, and specific to each. Cupule production, she argues, was a hunter-gatherer practice, whereas animal sacrifice and ritual cooking belong to the agriculturist world. Pools (or rock tanks in the K2 case), hills and some kind of rain animal feature in the rainmaking cosmologies of both. She argues that in K2 times rainmakers combined elements from both forms of rainmaking to create something new (cf. Van der Ryst 1998: 46–7, 53), and so contributed to a new, ‘national’ identity (Schoeman 2006: 160–3, 2009: 291–3). For support, Schoeman (2009: 289) draws attention to the rainmaking rituals of hunter-gatherers and agriculturists of the Eastern Cape, and specifically to the ‘encounters’ with mystical snakes in pools that occur in both forms. These encounters, she suggests, refer to trance experiences that result from interaction and merged practice. There is, indeed, historical evidence from the northeastern Eastern Cape for a social context that might encourage the kind of scenario that Schoeman proposes. There,

the remnants of a San family ... had been in the care of the Mpondomise chiefs towards the end of the previous [nineteenth] century. Stanford in 1886 refers to them as the official rainmakers of the western section of the Mpondomise. They occupied a homestead site on the Umnga River and did not live in any rock shelter. (Prins 1990: 110–11, my insertion)

And:

According to informants the first San to settle in Batweni came from the Umnga area in the Tsolo District. They were a group of 20–30 individuals. Initially they lived in rock shelters ... During droughts at the turn of this [twentieth] century the local Mpondo chief used to send a few men to these San to ask for rain. Later the San settled among the Mpondo, living in huts as the Mpondo did. In time they abandoned their language and took up farming and herding. However, they were still highly regarded as rainmakers and as knowledgeable on ritual. (Prins 1990: 111, my insertion)

There are, however, compelling alternative interpretations of the K2 data that do not necessarily incorporate hunter-gatherers (Murimbika 2006: 208–14; Huffman 2007b: 180–3). (Murimbika (2006: 19–20, 214), referencing Schoeman, allows for this possibility.) My sense at this stage, on currently available evidence, is that it is uncertain that hunter-gatherers were included in K2 rainmaking rituals. My preference here is to try to make sense of rainmaking rituals within the economic context (or some semblance of it) they once served. I find in the various accounts of rainmaking in Nguni-speaking societies east of

the Drakensberg a structure that is largely consistent with agriculturist practice recorded in similar societies elsewhere. I describe the process next. Thereafter I consider the issue of hunter-gatherer involvement in agriculturist rainmaking.

### **Rainmaking in the ethnography**

Rain comes from uMvelinqangi, the first to appear.<sup>5</sup> uMvelinqangi is masculine and of the sky. He was not alone. The word *nqangi* strongly implies the first of twins (Bryant 1905: 444; Berglund 1976: 34). In this case, the second twin is feminine and of the earth. Berglund's informant commented, "They are one, but the one is above the other" (1976: 34). The same idea of two in one is contained in Mahaya's story of the orphaned rainmaker siblings, Mbotu and Myalwana (were they twins too?), which is essentially an origin story.

uMvelinqangi has a "haphazard way of acting" that inspires fearful respect (Berglund 1976: 42). Rain can be equally unpredictable. It has the power to destroy and to create life. This capacity associates it closely with chiefs and kings, who similarly have power over life and death. The same principle applies in watered-down form at lower levels of authority. A homestead head, for instance, is closely identified with the virility and dangerous unpredictability of the bull at the head of his herd (Poland et al. 2003: 23). The shared dangerous unpredictability of uMvelinqangi, rain, chiefs, homestead heads and bulls indicates an ideological relationship to a vitalizing life force that resonates at every level of the social and political hierarchy.

Chiefs are responsible for procuring rain, just as they are responsible for the timing of other activities of the annual cycle (Hunter 1936: 83; Sansom 1974: 137–8; Berglund 1976: 53, 55). The actual work of making rain was usually given to specialists who, under normal circumstances, had no claim to political power. Hunter (1936: 79–84) provides a useful account of rainmaking. Typically, men of particular clans approach an Mpondo chief to ask for rain. The delegation calls out praises to the chief's ancestors as it approaches his homestead, pleading for rain. This appeal alone might bring rain. If it does not, the chief turns to a specialist rainmaker. Many prominent Mpondo rainmakers have come from the Yalo clan—descendants, Mahaya's story suggests, of the orphaned sister Myalwana. The chief sends a black beast with 'special men' who know the customs of the rainmaker's clan to ask that he go to work. The animal's colour symbolises the darkness of rain clouds (Hunter 1936: 79–84; Hammond-Tooke 1993: 81).

The beast is slaughtered at the rainmaker's place and eaten. The rainmaker smears the animal's fat on his ox-hide robe (alternatively, the hide of the slaughtered beast) and wraps it around himself.<sup>6</sup> He goes to 'his pool' and lies all night on a rock projecting out of the water (alternatively, he waits in a hut in his homestead, which is conceptually equivalent to the pool). During the night a mist covers the pool and the water rises. A great snake emerges and licks the fat on the hide. The water subsides and rain starts falling. In one account the snake is identified as an *intlantu* (python).<sup>7</sup> It is not, according to Hunter's informants, an ancestor-snake (1936: 83).

This is an important point. Although angry ancestors (presumably the chief's) can prompt disruptions to rainfall patterns (Berglund 1976: 53; cf. Murimbika 2006: 193), the rainmaker does not invoke his ancestors in his ritual work. They “could have no influence over the affairs of the chiefdom as a whole” (Hammond-Tooke 1998: 14), especially given the characteristic marginality of rainmakers. According to Muzi Msimanga (pers. comm. September 2013), the colour of the slaughtered animal clearly distinguishes the two types of labour. Black animals (he referred to goats), essential for rainmaking, are ideally not sacrificed to the ancestors. If one must use a black goat for this purpose, then it is usual to perform another ritual to ‘buy another colour’. Rainmaking, by contrast, is a magical practice that Msimanga says is more like witchcraft than rituals directed at the ancestors (cf. Hammond-Tooke 1998: 14).

Berglund's (1976: 55–6) account of rainmaking is similar to Hunter's, though with some important additional details. The men sent from the chief ask the rainmaker “to plead with the sky”. Instead of a beast, a fat black sheep or goat was provided for slaughter. Berglund's informants emphasized both the importance of the animal's fatness—“only fatness will bring rain”—and the need for quietness; in the case of a goat, the animal's mouth is held closed to prevent it bleating.<sup>8</sup> The preference for fatness and quietness point clearly to the desired outcome: a gentle, soaking rain that brings health and well-being to the land. The snake that emerges from a “very deep pool” is a python. Once it has licked the fat off the skin, it lies next to the rainmaker on his four rain-medicine horns, before soundlessly disappearing again. In the morning, the rainmaker makes rain beside the pool, causing a mist to rise from the water. The mist becomes clouds and rain falls.

Pythons symbolize a potent life force, and in the opinion of many diviners are closely associated with uMvelinqangi, the sky. Male pythons are believed to fertilise females with their spit and python spittle is considered effective in the treatment of infertility. Doctors (*izinyanga*) collect it from the bodies of animals ‘rescued’ from ingestion by pythons (Berglund 1976: 140). It is like semen, and the rain which fertilizes the earth. I believe that one purpose of this particular ritual is to ‘collect’ a key ingredient for rain medicine—the spittle the licking python leaves on the hide.

Pythons are also regarded as the coldest of all animals, both literally and in terms of their demeanour. The python's nature corresponds to the preference for a rain without anger, while its bodily temperature serves to cool the rainmaker and his medicines and so retain their potency. Sometimes, it is claimed, pythons will visit a rainmaker's homestead to lie on and cool the rain medicine (Berglund 1976: 54). The python does the same at the pool. Cooling is critical. The rainmaker's work would fail if he were ‘hot’ because of recent contact with or participation in a polluting situation. Indeed, people commonly blame drought on pollution or some neglect of accepted social practice (Hunter 1936: 82; Berglund 1976: 58–9; Hammond-Tooke 1981b: 115). So, it is worth noting here the emphasis given in ethnographies throughout southern Africa to the rainmaking taboo regimen, and to the slaughter of an animal with a coat of solid (unambiguous) black. Strictly speaking, then, the



'encounters' with the python are concerned with the effectiveness of the rainmaker and his medicines, rather than with the actual act of rainmaking.

These ideas about pythons are drawn from life. Pythons are most active at night. They enjoy water and will frequently stay submerged for long periods in deep pools. Females stay with their eggs until they hatch, incubating them by coiling themselves around the clutch. They lay 30–100 eggs, each about ten centimetres in diameter; most other oviparous snakes for which figures are known lay less than ten (Marais 2004).

Berglund's informant was reticent about how he made the mist rise at the poolside, but he did provide details of another key part of the rainmaking process, one performed in a cool quiet place, either in his homestead or elsewhere (at the pool, perhaps?). His medicine is stored in four horns, two considered male and two female. He pours male medicine into the female part of a firestick kit and dips the male firestick into the female medicine. The sexual symbolism here is unmistakable and the heat generated by the firesticks is like the heat of sexual intercourse. For this reason, rainmakers are necessarily married; only married people should have productive sex (Berglund 1976: 54–5, 62–3). Today in the upper Thukela Basin rainmakers gather wood for the fire from detritus on river banks, that is, they use wood washed downstream from hills, from whence the water comes. They do not collect wood from the forest (Muzi Msimanga pers. comm. September 2013; cf. Murimbika 2006: 114).

As the rainmaker works, he calls out praises to the royal ancestors and, finally, to the sky (uMvelinqangi), asking for rain. uMvelinqangi here is called Nsondo, a praise name that refers to origins and the cyclical repetition of good things (Berglund 1976: 36, 55). When the fire is going, the rainmaker adds green branches to generate black smoke, which rises to become rain clouds. A name given to the preferred branches (*Senna occidentalis*) translates as 'egg of a snake', an obvious reference to the python's extraordinary fecundity.<sup>9</sup>

The praise 'Nsondo' is revealing. It captures in one word both the linear (origins) and cyclical (the seasonal round) dimensions of the rainmaker; it seems that here the rainmaker identifies with the sky. This relationship probably underpins Stephen Mini's claim of Tolo ownership of the sky. Mahaya's story of the orphaned siblings allows for further cosmological elaboration. The complex alliance between chief and rainmaker established in that story is like the relationship between the sky, uMvelinqangi, and the earth, his sister/queen: 'they are one, but the one is above the other'. They are irrevocably bound in their constitution of the cosmos, a cosmos that is essentially marriage writ large.

The rainmaker's praise of the chief and his ancestors is consistent with a concern for social (and environmental) order. This emphasis on the chief becomes more obvious when drought occurs, as people shift their appeal to a higher level of authority. Thus, in Pondoland, "the amaKwalo in a very bad drought, when their own chief had failed to procure rain, appealed to the paramount" (Hunter 1936: 79). If things worsen in KwaZulu-Natal, then the chief and his people climb certain hills (that are neither built nor grazed upon) to approach and pray to the sky (uMvelinqangi) (Berglund 1976: 44–6). The hilltop

appeal Berglund describes seems influenced by Christianity, but the principle of using hills for rainmaking in the past is suggested in the *James Stuart Archive* where rainmakers are often linked to hills (e.g. Gasa himself, the Gasa ‘tribe’, the Tshangala people of Sibata). It is worth investigating these hills for rainmaking deposits.

A near last-resort strategy involves the killing of a ground hornbill brought from an area in which rain is falling (Hunter 1936: 83; Berglund 1976: 57). Berglund’s information indicates that the bird is associated with spring, mist and rainbows: it represents feminine fertility. The rainmaker suffocates the bird, or breaks its neck.<sup>10</sup> He must not spill its blood. The manner of killing appears to mirror the work of the python, which displays a ‘dignified’ superhuman power in killing—squeezing its prey to death rather than cutting or stabbing it as humans do (see Berglund 1976: 60). The rainmaker then weighs the bird’s body and lets it sink into a ‘deep pool’, presumably intending that the python will find it and think that its own work killed the bird. I suspect that in Berglund’s study area, largely Zululand, the ground hornbill either represents or is closely associated with Nomkhubulwana, the beautiful virgin daughter of uMvelinqangi and his queen/sister (Berglund 1976: 64ff., also 34).<sup>11</sup> In Pondoland there is no such personification of spring and the hornbill rite was “was a magic known to all” that could be done without involving the chief (Hunter 1936: 83, 269–70). The rite seems intended to produce desolation in the sky at the loss of his daughter/spring to a dreadful drought. Related practices probably include the killing of the sky’s messenger, a bateleur eagle (Berglund 1976: 58; cf. Huffman 1996: 134–6), the burning of grass, especially around a rainmaker’s homestead (Berglund 1976: 56) and, in Lesotho, parties of young men moving up a river course and killing every wild animal encountered (Ashton 1952: 132; cf. Murimbika 2006: 94).

The rainmaking outlined here belongs to Murimbika’s ‘Practice A’ (2006: 192–5), which is characteristic of ranked societies.<sup>12</sup> Variations of Practice A were and to some extent still are widespread among Bantu speakers in South Africa (Murimbika 2006). As Murimbika emphasizes, rainmaking is not an event, but a process that is integral to the annual agricultural cycle. This point is implicit in Berglund’s discussion of rain medicines and the philosophical demands the work places on the rainmaker (1976: 56–7), in the steps taken to resolve drought (1976: 58–9), and also in the recognition that the ‘encounters’ with the python are part of the preparation for rainmaking. The process in more centralized polities is typically more elaborate, involving public praise of the chief and his ancestors and deployment of state resources. Also, the locus of rainmaking is commonly shifted to the chief’s homestead, though his personal identification with any failure is buffered by the complexity of the process and the variety of resources (dependent on the size of the chiefdom) he controls. This was true for the Zulu kingdom too, where under Mpande elaborate rainmaking rituals took place between the little and the great *umkhusi* ceremonies that initiated the new year (e.g. Webb & Wright 1976: 69–73,<sup>13</sup> 1982: 108,<sup>14</sup> 1986: 114–21<sup>15</sup>). The Swazi kingdom equivalents are the little and big *incwala*. With both Zulu and Swazi, there are weeks of preparation involving the collection of medicinal ingredients that

include materials derived from rivers of the kingdom and the sea (Kuper 1986: 71–4; Webb & Wright 1986: 119). Rain rituals during these ceremonies underline the responsibility of leaders for the wellbeing of their people and the health of the land (see Chapter Two, p. 15).

Murimbika (2006: 128) observes that for the Tswana, divination is performed at every stage of the process to determine such things as the sex of the beast to be slaughtered, the mental state of the rainmakers, and so on. This aspect of rainmaking is not evident in Berglund and Hunter's accounts, and its presence in the Tswana literature might relate to a more centralized process. It seems entirely possible that chiefs in Zululand and Pondoland made decisions using diviners (how else could it be determined which royal ancestor was unhappy?), but that these remain unrecorded in a modern ethnography that focuses on events at the rainmakers' places. Berglund does note, for instance, that divination might be used to isolate the cause of drought (1976: 59).

I return now to hunter-gatherer involvement in agriculturist rainmaking.

### **Hunter-gatherers as agriculturist rainmakers**

Campbell (1987: 42) suggests that agriculturists gained access to hunter-gatherer rainmakers through marriage alliances, but the relationship between such marriages and rainmaking is not straightforward, despite the symbolic structure already noted. As we have seen, there was a long history of contact and probably intermarriage between hunter-gatherers and agriculturists around the Drakensberg massif, but historical evidence for the use of hunter-gatherer rainmakers is restricted to chiefdoms in the southern foothills of the mountains. No similar evidence exists for the Caledon valley area, where interaction and marriage were equally significant (Loubser & Laurens 1994: 99).

The *kegalagadi* of the Kalahari provide another example. Chapter Seven notes that this marginalized category of serfs lived in a complex social hierarchy: they were once 'owned' by cattle-keeping Tswana and in turn 'owned' *lala* groups (largely 'tame Bushmen?'), beyond and below which were the *sarwa* ('wild Bushmen?'). In others contexts, both *kegalagadi* and *lala* were called Vaalperse (Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945: 153; Van der Ryst 1998: 13), illustrating the instability of these categories.<sup>16</sup> The *kegalagadi* category includes various groups, probably with different origins and apparently with different attitudes towards the *lala*. According to a male informant, the Ngologa *kegalagadi* considered marriages with *lala* quite acceptable and in the past such marriages were common. A *lala* wife could be the senior wife and her son could succeed his father, even as chief. A *lala* man could even marry a Ngologa woman. Yet the Ngologa did not ask the *lala* to make rain (Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945: 57, 62–5). On the other hand, a Ngologa woman said she would leave her Ngologa husband if he married a *lala* woman. For her, such marriages were generally unacceptable to *kegalagadi*, as would be a marriage to her dog (Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945: 88). Similarly, the Siwane *kegalagadi* rejected the idea of marrying *lala*, or even sex with them, "because they are just animals" (Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945: 154). Yet the Siwane asked the *lala* for rain, which the *lala* 'prayed for' at the *kegalagadi* place with a

communal dance involving clapping and singing (Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945: 160). According to Peires (2003: 29), there was much the same situation in the Eastern Cape, where the San were renowned rainmakers but intermarriage between them and the Xhosa was supposedly rare.

We should be cautious of these rejections of intermarriage, especially given the estimated 60 to 64 % San admixture in Xhosa and 'Kgalagadi' (Tobias 1974: 26). But even allowing for contradictory attitudes rooted in gender differences, the twentieth-century liberation of people from serfdom, the influence of capitalism on exchange, and allowing for the nonsense these and other testimonies contain (informants suggest the *lala* and Vaalperse were cannibals, lived in holes or in trees, and were scarred from sleeping too close to fires (see Schapera & Van der Merwe 1945; Van der Ryst 1998)), there is no clear relationship here between marriage and rainmaking. What then are the circumstances under which hunter-gatherers would serve as acceptable rainmakers for agriculturists? I think we need to look at the key relations in agriculturist rainmaking, just as Hammond-Tooke and Herbert looked at exploitative relations within agriculturist society to understand hunter-gatherer influence on or involvement in divination and *inblonipho*.

Divination, *inblonipho* and rainmaking operate in different arenas. Divination and *inblonipho* are, of course, significant for interpersonal relationships in local communities, but fundamentally they are activated and experienced in the homestead. It is circumstances within homesteads that create diviners and it is in the homestead where *inblonipho* bears down most heavily on people. Rainmakers serve the chiefdom, or rather, the chief. Rainmakers benefit from their relationship with the chief (e.g. Hunter 1936: 82), but are typically marginal to political power. In no sense does their work threaten the position of the chief. Outside the Zimbabwe Culture, no rainmaker or set of rainmakers ever had ideological control of an agriculturist economy (except in unusual historical circumstances). Instead, ethnographic accounts, Mahaya's story of the orphaned siblings and Kopytoff's frontier model show that rainmakers existed at least partly in a relation of dependency and obligation to chiefs.

In Mahaya's story, Njilo the Imtwana chief made Mboto's marriage possible. In return he received the results of Mboto's creative genius. The story goes on to illustrate the extent of Mboto's obligation: When years later a drought struck and the amaMboto refused to make rain for the Imtwana, the Imtwana attacked them and killed their chief, Njilo—named, I imagine, for their original benefactor (Webb & Wright 1979: 130). This extraordinary conclusion (if that is where the story did end in its native setting) highlights once again the cyclical nature of rainmakers. It suggests a return to the beginning, with a drought, the killing of rainmakers, and the reflection of Njilo. Importantly, the story also emphasizes the consequences for rainmakers of a failure to make good on their debt. Their rainmaking work served, I suggest, as only partial fulfilment of their obligation. I suggest that the remainder they fulfilled by carrying the burden of blame if the rains failed to come. Good rainmakers were surely particularly astute observers of weather and climate and, like diviners, sensitive to and capable of managing tensions within society.

The conceptual similarities I noted between rainmakers and women, and the complex, marriage-like alliance between chief and rainmaker are significant here. Rainmaking is and was a magical art. When the rains failed to come, there was always the possibility that rainmakers might be accused of causing drought, just as wives might be accused of witchcraft in the event of disharmony within the homestead. The consequences for rainmakers in this position were likely severe. Indeed, rainmakers are killed in several stories in the *James Stuart Archive*. I suspect this result was unusual. Normally, I suspect, rainmakers fell out of favour and lost status or, worse, suffered social exclusion—something of a social death. This sanction could only be socially effected if the rainmaker were part of agriculturist society, under the control of the chief—‘married’ to him. It would be ineffective applied to rainmakers who were socially and economically independent of the chiefdom, who were not bound tightly into the relationships the territory comprised. It would make little sense for a chief to select a rainmaker to whom blame could not be attached. This point seems to me to be the key to understanding hunter-gatherers as agriculturist rainmakers.

The archaeological record outlined in Chapter Eight indicates hunter-gatherers interacting with agriculturists throughout the sequence, but maintaining their independence (cf. Mazel 1989: 144). This independence continued into the nineteenth century in various forms, including that of the AmaTola of the high Drakensberg (Challis 2008, 2012). Blundell (2004: 128) describes the social situation in nineteenth-century Nomansland, south of the Drakensberg massif in the northeast Eastern Cape:

[T]he San were not simply an underclass of their Bantu-speaking neighbours. They employed a range of economic strategies, including trade in the form of ivory, bribery/tribute in the form of stolen stock paid to their neighbours and at other times, they sold their ritual services, particularly as rainmakers, for payment. When it suited them, they entered into alliances with various neighbouring peoples; at other times, they acted as independent agents, even stealing from their own allies.

Blundell (2004: 156) argues that the provision of rainmaking services to chiefdoms, and the benefits accrued from that work, was central to the independence of hunter-gatherer bands in and around Nomansland in the late nineteenth century. My analysis of Nguni rainmaking suggests otherwise. I argue instead that rainmaking for agriculturists marks the final tragedy for the people involved—the loss of independent life and their incorporation into chiefdom economies, notably those of the Mpondomise. The Mpondomise effectively ‘owned’ them, just as the *kgalagadi* ‘owned’ the *lala*. It is tempting to wonder whether the mixed ancestry attributed to various Mpondomise chiefs, starting with Cira in the 1500s, was an invention that served to legitimize their ‘ownership’ and exploitation of people of hunter-gatherer descent. I am generally sceptical of these sorts of claims, which so often serve a contemporary political purpose (see Chapter Seven).

## **Cross-pollination**

Rainmaking was less about the impossible task of making rain than it was about social institutions that ‘made the territory nice’ for production and reproduction in the annual seasonal cycle. People are similarly meant to prepare themselves properly for any creative activity (e.g. smelting, potting, ritual slaughter). Because of the scale at which it worked, and because the chief’s fortunes depended on the smooth turning of the cycle and the rituals that marked it, rainmaking was a conservative institution. This should be obvious from the essential similarities evident in rainmaking practice in Bantu-speaking communities across southern Africa today and in the historical and archaeological records (e.g. Murimbika 2006). It was clearly not a practice particularly open to innovation, for it provided ‘natural’ legitimacy to the fundamental economic relation, that between husband and wife. Variation in practice was primarily linked to increasing political stratification, because the chief was ultimately responsible for rain. But even here, variation was mainly a result of elaboration and intensification of existing practices, rather than innovation. Any incorporation of foreign elements into the ritual, whether as practitioners or practice, would probably have invited blame in the event that the weather did not oblige. In the case of drought, it seems likely that investigation (including through divination) would have extended even to the rainmaker’s associates. The involvement of the Christian church in rainmaking from the 1840s onwards (e.g. Hunter 1936: 84; Kuper 1987: chapter 11) deserves more consideration. It surely signals significant change from the ideology that supported the precolonial economy and was thus a key factor in the shift to capitalism (see Guy 1987, 2013, n.d.).

So, I am not convinced that it is useful to identify elements common to culturally distinct practices as foci for the emergence of merged practice. Pools (abundant water) and hills (source of rivers) are widely, perhaps even universally, associated with rain. Snakes are similarly widely symbolic of creative forces; they are both linear (in form) and circular or cyclical (in posture and in their regular shedding) in nature, and in that sense contain a creative ambiguity (as, I think, do Nguni rainmakers). (Note that it is the python that is significant in rainmaking, not any snake.) These elements are rather like a hatched band in ceramic classification. They are too simple to be useful in identifying relatedness, contact and interaction. Rather, if we can identify how these various elements are bound together in a context of social relationships, we are more likely to locate unusual or odd practices that might represent contributions from different worldviews. The novice diviner’s curing dance provides an example (Hammond-Tooke 1998).

People do, of course, find meaning cross-culturally. The large painting of a snake at eBusingatha Shelter in the upper Thukela Basin surely prompted the belief among the local Zizi community that a dangerous serpent called uMhwabane used to live at the shelter. The painting is said to depict uMhwabane, whose eggs glowed at night (Hollmann & Msimanga 2008: 285). And from the other side, a shelter in the same area contains paintings that appear inspired by a first-fruits festival, which were closely linked to rainmaking rituals. Hunter-gatherers would surely have observed such events if they did, as the archaeology

suggests, seek contact with agriculturists primarily during spring and summer. One remarkable painting depicts a man in an Nguni apron (*ibheshu*) killing a bull with an axe (Jeremy Hollmann pers. comm. 2014). An understanding of this subject matter, paintings and local beliefs, should first be sought in the societies that created them.

## Acknowledgements

I thank Carolyn Thorp, Muzi Msimanga, Ntombi Mkhize, Jeremy Hollmann, Frans Prins, Tom Huffman and Zandile Mbhele for discussion and comment, and Jan Boeyens who provided me with details from Schapera and Van der Merwe's (1945) compilation of *kgalagadi* oral evidence.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Based on Whitelaw (2009b).

<sup>2</sup> Also spelt 'Zolo' in James Stuart's archive. For 'Tolo', see Bryant 1929: 357; Wright & Mazel 2007: 73; Challis 2008: chapter 5, 2012: 277, and, for example, Mahaya kaNongqabana (1905) in Webb & Wright 1979: 112.

<sup>3</sup> Mayinga kaMbekuzana to Stuart, 1905. 'Tribe' is Stuart's gloss. Mayinga possibly meant a Gasa agnatic cluster. It could hardly have been the entire Gasa clan and it seems unlikely that he meant a Gasaled chiefdom. The name (Gasa) and territory (of the Gasa 'tribe') suggest (or were meant to suggest) linkages to the recalcitrant (for Shaka) Khumalo, and so to the Ndwandwe and Soshangane of the Gaza kingdom of Mozambique (see Wright 2010a: 226–31). The Tshangala people of Sibata (again, possibly an agnatic cluster) apparently suffered the same fate as the Gasa at Dingane's hands, and for the same reason (Magidigidi kaNobebe to Stuart in 1905; Webb & Wright 1979: 84). But rather than murder and massacre, it is more tempting to see these repetitive narratives as indicating a passing of old ways, of Zulu royalty exerting more direct control over creative forces.

<sup>4</sup> I understand Schoeman's use of the term 'rain control' rather than 'rainmaking'. People do not make rain, but neither do they control it. 'Rain management' is perhaps better, in the sense that chiefs and rain specialists manage people's expectations. But 'management' is a word badly tarnished by the modern bureaucratic world, so I use 'rainmaking'.

<sup>5</sup> For the use of the name uMvelinqangi, see Ndukwana kaMbengwana to Stuart, 1900 (Webb & Wright 1986: 302, 303), also Weir (2005: 203–7).

<sup>6</sup> In one of Hunter's accounts a person is killed and his skull used to hold the fat while it is smeared on the hide. I am sceptical of this requirement, especially given the widespread metaphorical associations drawn between people and various animals, some of which are used in rainmaking (e.g. sheep, snakes, elephants, lizards, fish, whales). I suspect that in some contexts the animal origin of these ingredients can be glossed as human.

<sup>7</sup> Zandile Mbhele of the Natal Museum provided this translation (pers. comm. 2007). Bryant (1967: 360) gives *intlatu* for python.

<sup>8</sup> By contrast, a death cry or bellow is important when an animal is slaughtered for the ancestors (Berglund 1976: 228–9). Here is another element of rainmaking that distinguishes it from rituals relating to the ancestors.

<sup>9</sup> *Senna* (previously *Cassia occidentalis*) is a naturalised alien from tropical Central and South America, including Brazil. For the same purpose, Junod (1962, II: 322) recorded the indigenous *Cassia* (now *Senna*) *petersiana*, which occurs in bushveld areas from Swaziland/northern Maputaland northwards. *S. occidentalis* is a food plant and serves as a strong laxative and purgative (MacDevette et al. 1989; Raintree Nutrition 1996).

It is very similar in appearance to *S. petersiana*, and was perhaps an early introduction along with maize. Berglund (1976: 55) gives the Zulu name as *umQanda-Nyoka*; his translation is presumably derived from *iqanda* (egg) and *inyoka* (snake). Ntombi Mkhize (pers. comm. March 2015) would say *iqandalenyoka* for this particular translation. Doke et al. (1990: 590) give the different form *unqandanyoka* for *S. occidentalis*, which they translate as “what keeps away a snake”. In this case the name might express the need to keep the coldness of the python away from the rainmaking fire. As we saw in Chapter Four, insufficient ‘heat’ can cause creative failure. Of interest also is the alternative term Berglund gives for *S. occidentalis*, namely *isiNyembane*, which translates as ‘the way (culture) of natives of Inhambane’ and is used as one would use *isiZulu* (the way of the Zulu). It provides a clear reference to the country north of Delagoa Bay where the Gaza kingdom was situated, and so perhaps to the source of *S. occidentalis*, and perhaps makes a statement about the historical primacy of Berglund’s informant’s practice through reference to a distant (vaguely Swazi-linked) area.

<sup>10</sup> Properly, pythons should be killed this way too; their killing was restricted to royalty, heaven herds and rainmakers (Berglund 1976: 62).

<sup>11</sup> Berglund records her address-name as iNkosikazi, but Ntombi Mkhize (pers. comm., February 2015) insists that this term can apply to anyone’s wife. Royal wives, she says, are called iNkosazana, and this term is correct for uMvelinqangi’s queen/sister.

<sup>12</sup> Practice B is characteristic of class-based societies, such as the Venda maintain. Practice B can co-occur with Practice A, with A typical of lower levels of authority and B practised by the king. Practice C occurs only among the modern Shona, where political and religious power is split respectively between chiefs and spirit mediums (Murimbika 2006: chapter 12). It probably dates from around the beginning of the nineteenth century (see Huffman 2007a: 401–2, 425).

<sup>13</sup> Bikwayo kaNoziwawa and Ndukwana kaMbengwana to Stuart, 1903.

<sup>14</sup> Mgidhlana kaMpane to Stuart, 1921.

<sup>15</sup> Mtshayankomo kaMagolwana to Stuart, 1922.

<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, one difference claimed to distinguish *sarwa* and *lala* is that *sarwa* used bows and arrows.



# 10

## Conclusion

The archaeological, ethnographic and historical records that provide the raw material for my thesis are abundant, varied and frequently obscure. The extraction of information from them is not straightforward. Although my initial inspiration came from David Hammond-Tooke's 1981 article and Mary Douglas's book on pollution (*Purity and danger*), my understanding of them only really began when I read Jeff Guy's 1987 article and Harriet Ngubane's book, *Body and mind in Zulu medicine*. These two works mesh beautifully, despite their different theoretical bases. Guy's Marxist analysis and Ngubane's and Hammond-Tooke's structuralist analyses provide models for the identification and organization of data. To my mind they belong to a complex of complementary models that includes Adam Kuper's model of bridewealth systems and Tom Huffman's Central Cattle Pattern.

This complex of models served two key purposes. First, they exposed me to the fundamental schisms and tensions that existed in precolonial agriculturist societies in southern Africa, and thus to the history-making capacity of those people. Identification of the site of this capacity is critical. Apart from Chapter Seven, my work here, like much archaeological work, deals with small-scale phenomena rather than state formation or the emergence of kingdoms. To populate these small-scale archaeological phenomena with people, to bring them alive, I believe we must organize our data around the fundamental divisions in society, around the economic relations and principles on which societies were founded. This is where the force that animates daily life lies and, indeed, where we should seek the origins of 'radical change'.

Secondly, the combination of Marxist and structuralist models revealed with considerable clarity just how cosmology is engaged with economy. Without an appropriate materialist perspective, the symbolic systems recorded in ethnographies, while fascinating, can appear somewhat disconnected from the lives of the people who held them. They are not, of course. The chapter on rainmaking shows that the universe itself was constructed as marriage, so that it made natural the relationship between husband and wife. At the same time it conveyed the fiction of unity in the concept of twins: 'they are one, but the one is above the other'. The organization of the universe legitimized the authority of the dominant class, and worked closely with that other force of nature, pollution. This ideology denies the heterogeneity of the homestead and the rifts and tensions within it, much as does

the disposal of hearth ash on the ash heap at the homestead entrance. A similar integration of symbolic system and social relations is evident in the study of modern Zulu beer pots, where the decorative symbolism serves to support the so-called traditional authority of men.

The models also have a heuristic capacity, perhaps best shown in the chapter on Iron Age fishing. Here the archaeological record prompted an investigation that, in a sense, created an 'ethnography' and political history of fishing. The new and unexpected finding that emerged provides a powerful argument for my approach. It hints at another point too, as does the discussion of various social categories that feature strongly in oral accounts of the Zulu kingdom. Archaeologists sometimes talk about the way in which symbolic systems recorded in the ethnographic record can give life to the archaeological record. But with fishing and the *amalala* and the Khumalo, it seems to me that it is the archaeological record that allowed interpretative advancement. It is the archaeological record that complicated and enriched our understanding of the past. It would be a mistake to neglect the shaping force that the material world has on people.

Several chapters suggest future work. First, the Early Iron Age–Late Iron Age interface remains unresolved. I recommend an avenue for research that targets marriage patterns on either side of the interface. Chapter Five contributes to one side. The success of this interpretation will perhaps be tested by Simon Hall's (pers. comm.) forthcoming consideration of the famous Lydenburg heads. Chapter Eight alludes to marriage practice on the other side of the interface, but research must ideally incorporate the entire sequence from *Blackburn* through to *Nqabeni*. Ceramic facies should not be treated in isolation. This research might also detect a relationship between *Moor Park* and the remarkable elemental character of the Xhosa homestead that Kuper describes (Chapter Five).

The nature of marriage has implications for another research issue that demands attention: our understanding of agriculturist relations with hunter-gatherers. Aron Mazel has provided a solid foundation to build upon, but focus now should perhaps be on the precise nature of interaction through the sequence, and on the timing and tempo of incorporation of hunter-gatherer concepts into the agriculturist worldview. I do not believe, at least on current evidence, that hunter-gatherers featured as rainmakers for agriculturists until the nineteenth century, when colonization closed down their world and so stripped them of their independence. Rainmaking is, of course, another worthwhile research theme. Useful material surely still awaits collection from modern-day rainmakers, which will help our understanding of this important issue. Also, we can identify hills throughout the region that were (and still are) significant for rainmaking. Deposits on them and in their vicinity might support an Early Iron Age origin for rainmakers, giving some substance to the claims in the oral record. Research time will tell.

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