

Holocene hunter-gatherer history in eastern southern Africa: Thukela basin and eastern Lesotho

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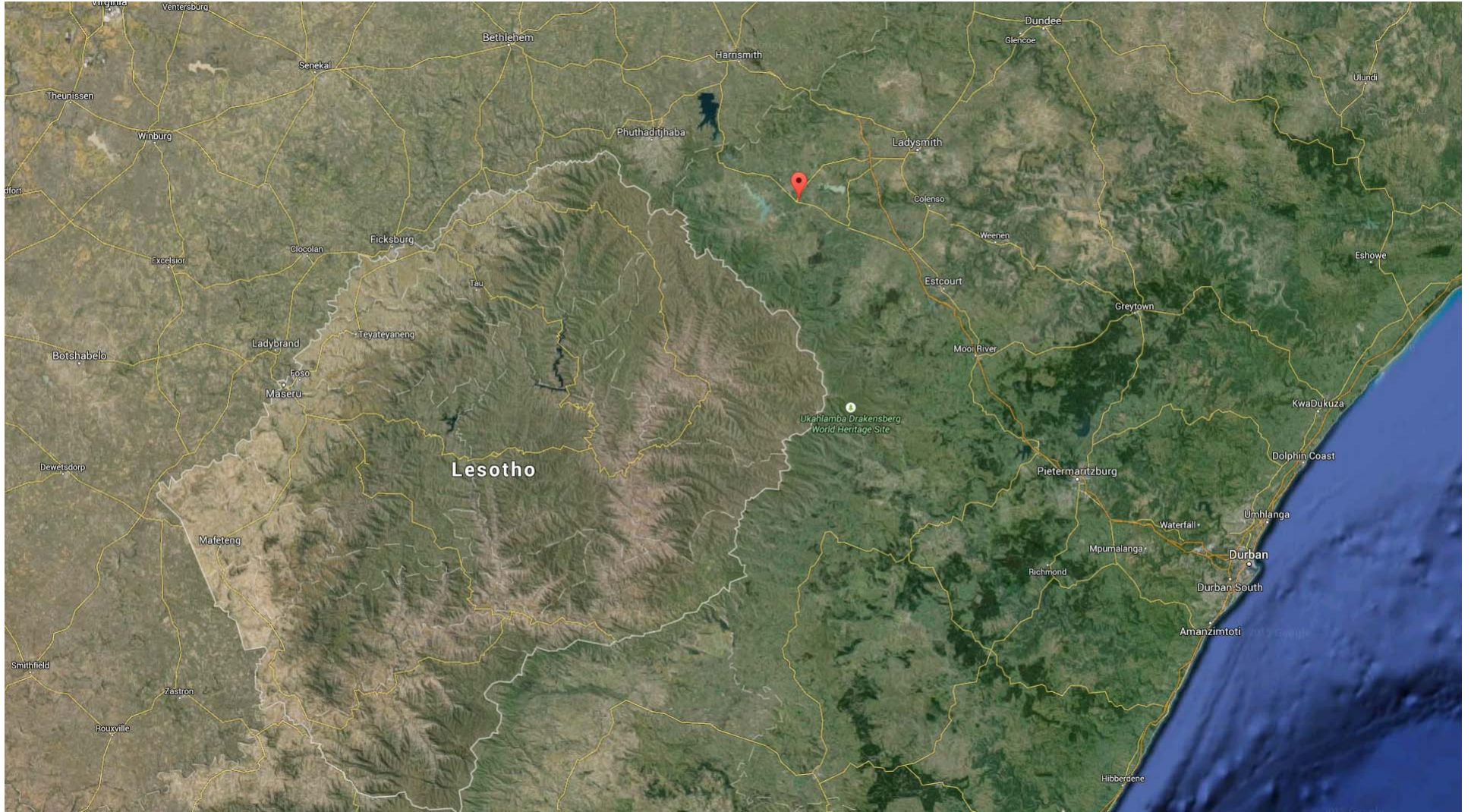
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Studies

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Structure

- Geography & sites
- Foci of research
- Lesotho sequence
- Thukela basin occupation, Maqonqo
- Intensification
- Regionalisation
- 2000 years ago!
- Abandonment of Drakensberg
- ? Herders, and Collingham Sh.
- Domesticates at Likoaeng
- Last 1000 years
- 19th century





Foci of research – similar/different

Lesotho

- ‘Nature of prehistoric exploitation patterns’ (Carter 1969)
- Sequence development
- Focused on large rock shelters
- Key players: Pat Carter and Peter Mitchell

Thukela basin (Tb)

Established within environmental paradigm (1980), however, switched - archaeological research should be historical: ‘document and understand the development of individual and particular situations and processes in all their complexity and their causal determination’ (Mazel 1989)

Underpinned Tb research in 80s and 90s

Focused on large and small shelters – excavated 14. All have been published

Lesotho and Thukela basin

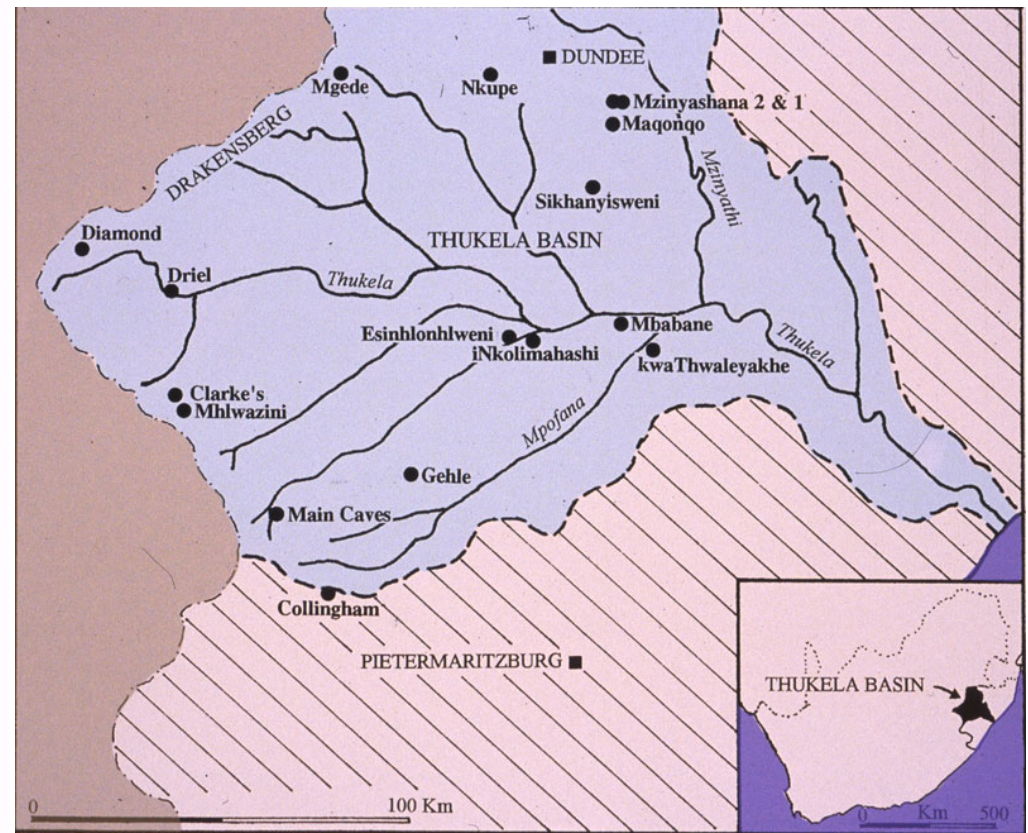
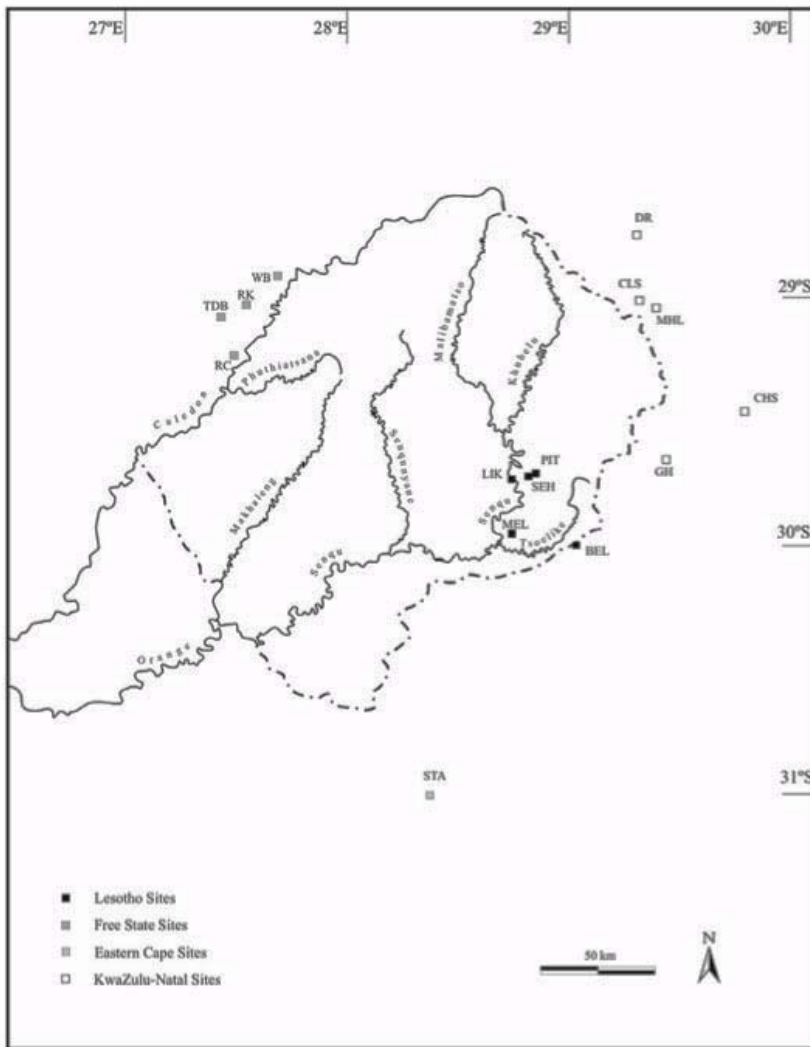


Figure 2 The Maloti-Drakensberg region showing the location of Likoang and other key sites mentioned in the text. Site names are abbreviated thus: BEL Belleview; CLS Clarke's Shelter; CHS Collingham Shelter; DR Driel; GH Good Hope; LIK Likoang; MEL Melikane; MHL Mhlwazini; PIT Pitsaneng; RC Rose Cottage Cave; RK Rookkrans; SEH Sehonghong; STA Strathalan A; TDB Tandjesberg; WB Westbury

Lesotho – Holocene sequence (Mitchell 1992)

Kyr bp	Melikane	Sehonghong	Ha Soloja	Moshebi's Shelter	Bellevue
< 1.5	Ceramic LSA	Ceramic LSA	Ceramic LSA	Ceramic LSA	Ceramic LSA
< 1.5	Pre-ceramic late Holocene LSA	Pre-ceramic late Holocene LSA	?	Pre-ceramic late Holocene LSA	Pre-ceramic late Holocene LSA
2.5 – 8	?	Wilton	?	Robberg ?	Wilton
12 – 18	Robberg ?	Robberg			Early LSA ??
20	Early LSA				



Early Holocene occupation of the Thukela basin

- No deposits/occupation between MSA - 10 000 bp
- 10 000 bp – Sikhanyisweni
- Terminal Pleistocene deposits to east and south, in particular around Durban and Pietermaritzburg, tempting to identify this as source area for Tb hunter-gatherers
- However, early Holocene deposits only in northern part of Tb means that areas to the north need to be considered as potential source areas. Strengthened - terminal Pleistocene and early Holocene in Swaziland

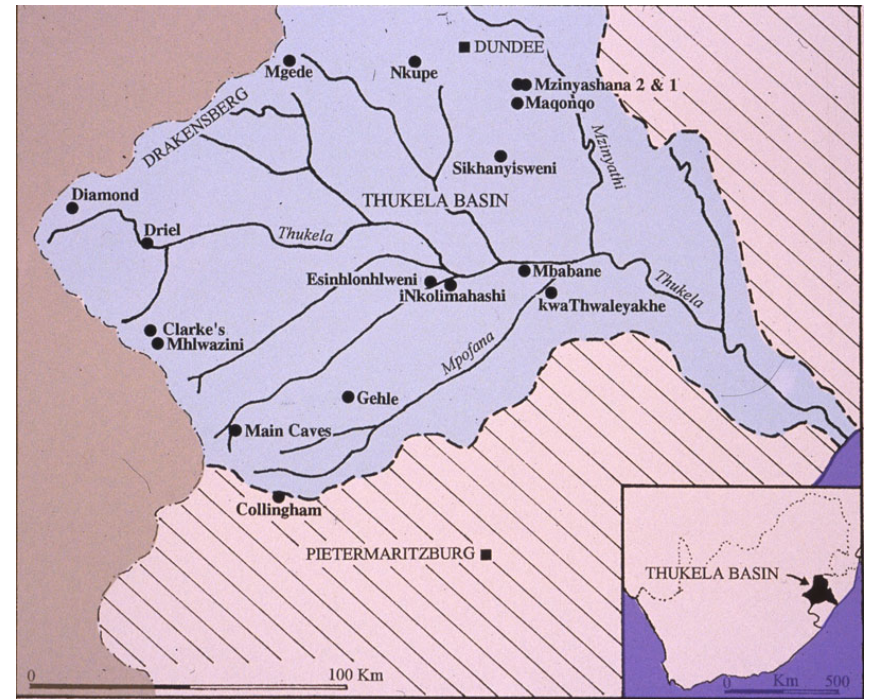
Window into early Holocene: Maqonqo - primarily occupied ca. 8000 - 3500 b.p.

- Before Maqonqo proposed early Holocene occupation ephemeral
- Abundance of cultural and subsistence remains suggests intensively occupied for 4500 yrs, e.g. >9500 pieces of OES. Substantial evidence of OES bead manufacture – ca. 400 pieces showing signs of manufacture outnumbering 150 complete OES beads
- 8000--6000 b.p. 30 marine shell beads



Maqonqo – new understanding

- Hunter-gatherers extensively occupied eastern Biggarsberg during the early Holocene, while rest of Tb was hardly, or not occupied at all
- Likely - after 7000 b.p. eastern Biggarsberg hunter-gatherers either spread into rest of Tb, or, if there was already an ephemeral hunter-gatherer occupation elsewhere in the Tb, it was intensified
- (p.s. northern Drakensberg around 5000 years ago)

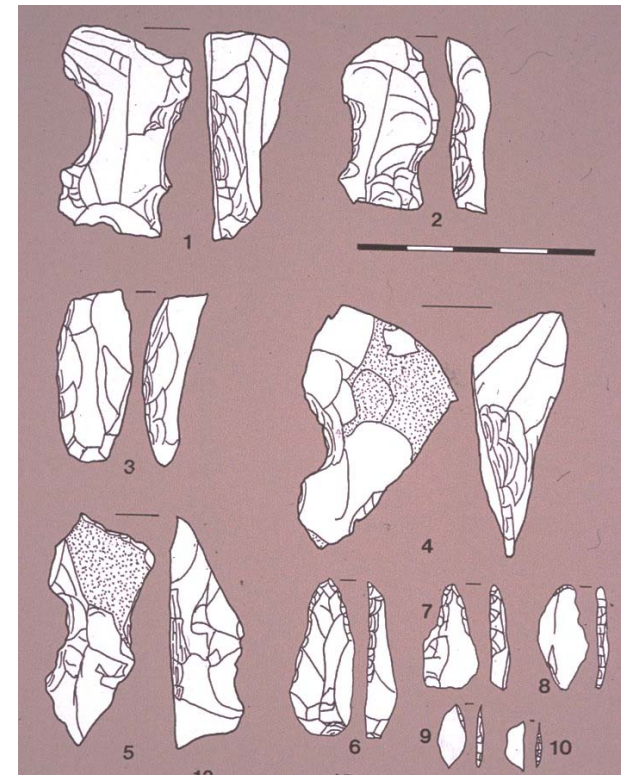


Intensification - Tb

7000-2000 b.p. people progressively extracted more food from nature: greater emphasis on already exploited resources and diversification of diet, i.e. increased production and productivity

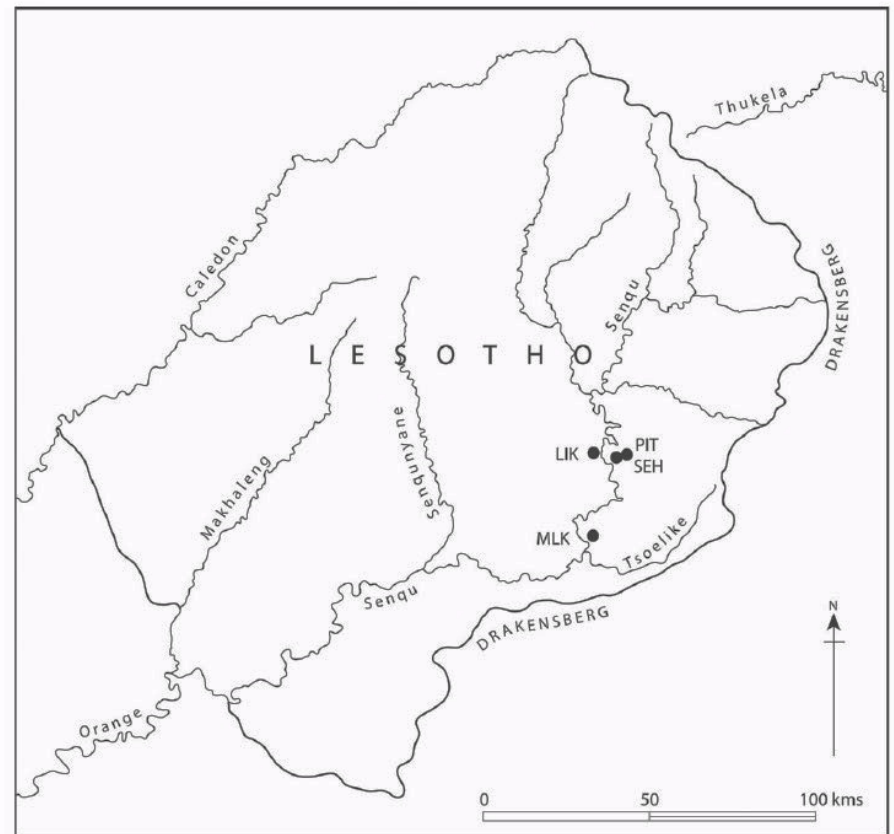
Suggested by, e.g.

- increased emphasis on small ground game
- increase in plant food exploitation - seed and corm remains
- also, increased adze proportions and greater number of grindstones



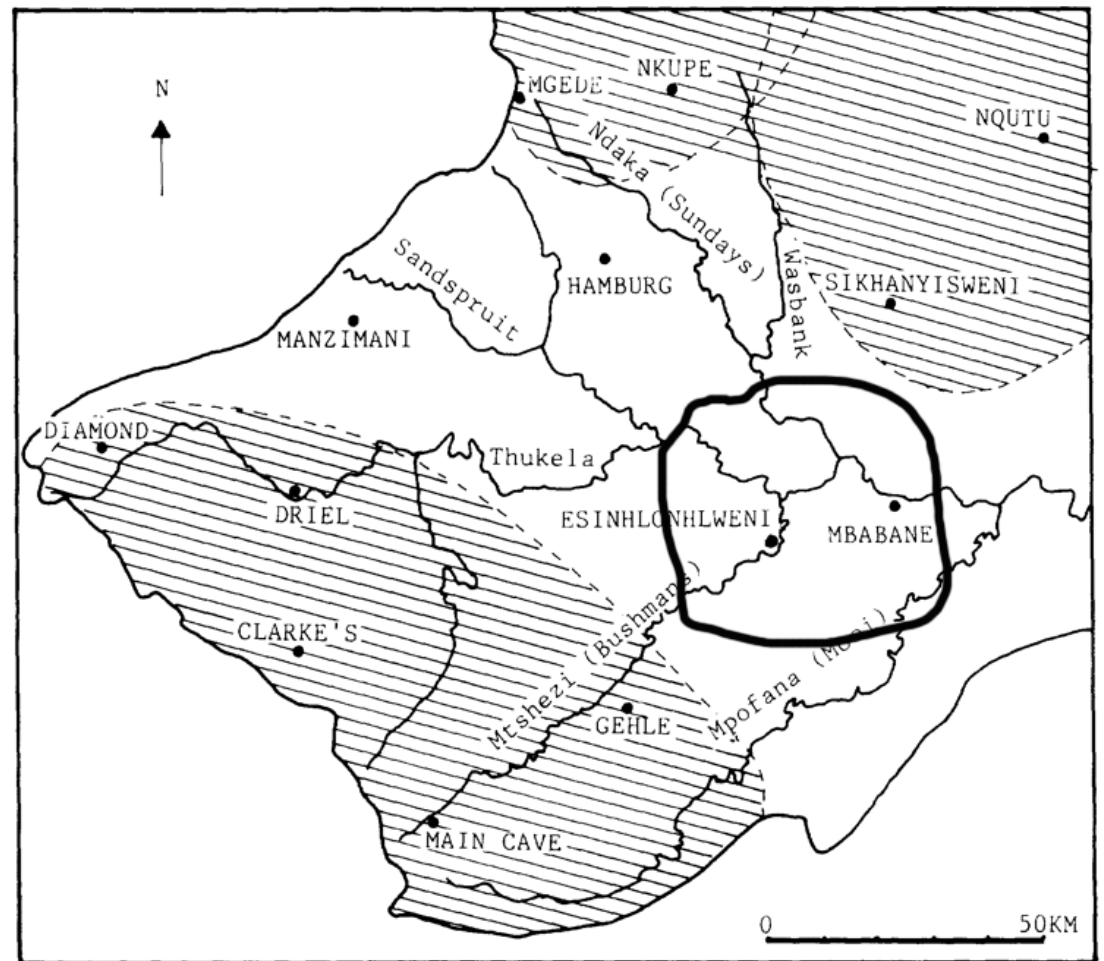
Intensification - view from Lesotho

‘The emphasis on fish, if only as a seasonal resource within a larger regional round, fits with the peak in fishing that marks the last 2000 years in the much longer sequence from Sehonghong Shelter, just 3km away ... Together, the two sites could perhaps reinforce the case for intensified late Holocene forager use of freshwater resources in southern Africa (Hall 1988; Mazel 1989)’ (Mitchell et al. 2011)



Regionality Tb social regions 4000 -2000 b.p.

- Ethnographic, historical and population modeling
- Differences in material culture and subsistence remains
- Small number of sites
- Needs to be reviewed in the light of further excavations



Regionality – eastern southern Africa

‘Early and mid-Holocene patterning in OES and marine shell distribution suggests four main areas of interaction: the Thukela basin, southern KwaZulu/Natal plus eastern Lesotho, the northeastern Cape, and the eastern Orange Free State. These patterns are unlikely to have remained static, as both Mazel's (1989) study of the Thukela Basin and the presence of marine shells in western Lesotho during the early Holocene indicate’ (Mitchell 1996)

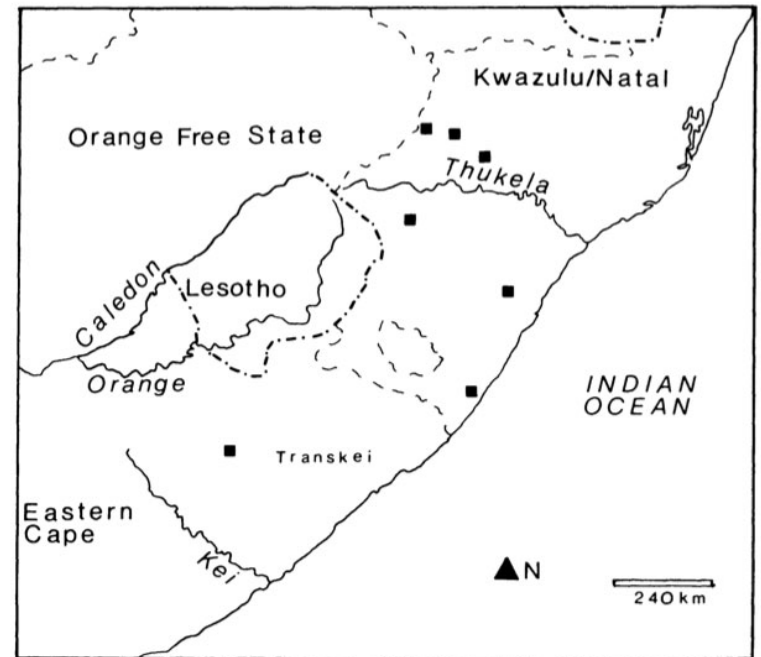
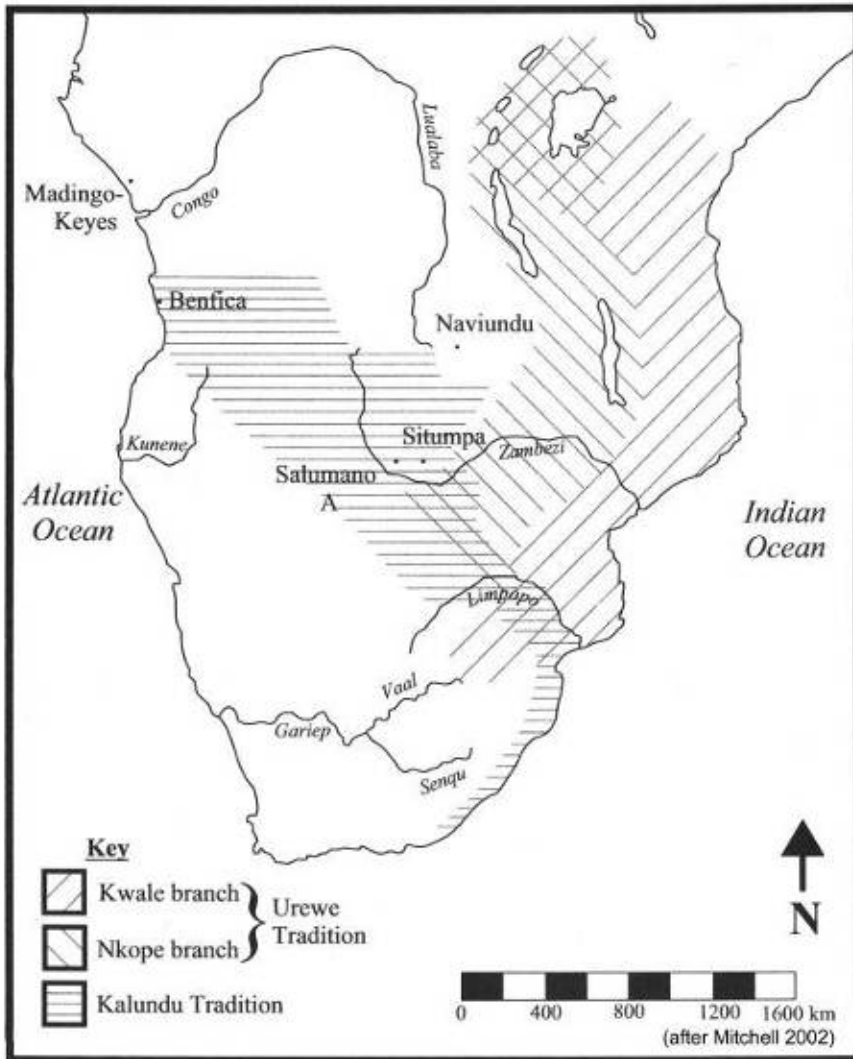


Fig. 7. Southeastern southern Africa: distribution of OES beads and pieces 5000-2200 B.P.

And, then 2000 years ago! Big changes!



Were herders involved? Pottery and paintings!

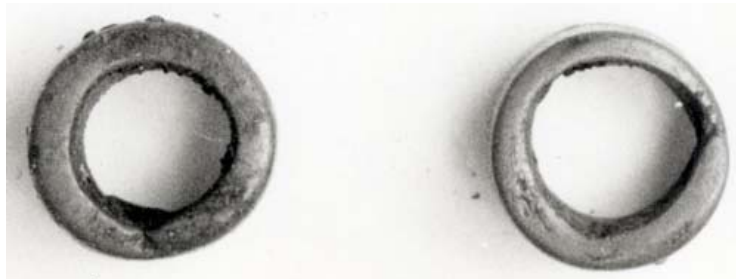
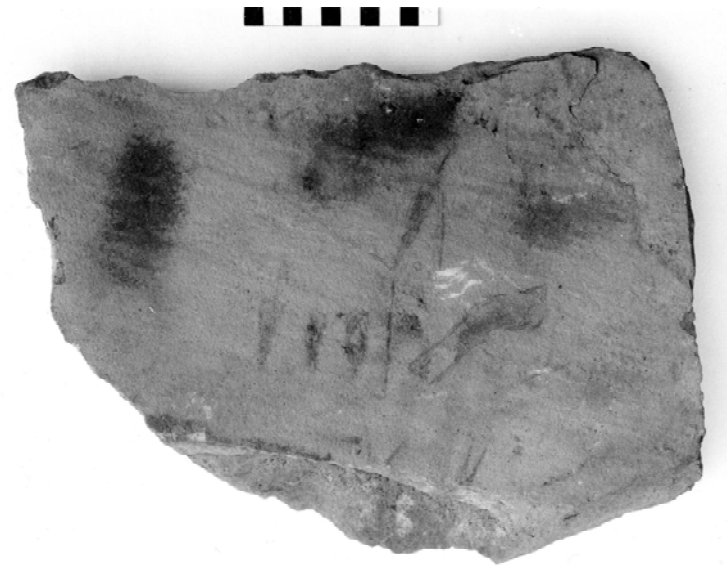
Early pottery - Mazel (1992) 'Was it brought into the area by incoming people or did it reach here through a process of diffusion, or perhaps through a combination of the two?'

Paintings - 49 (15%) of 338 sites I recorded in Drakensberg (1979-1981) contained finger/geometric paintings, associated with herders

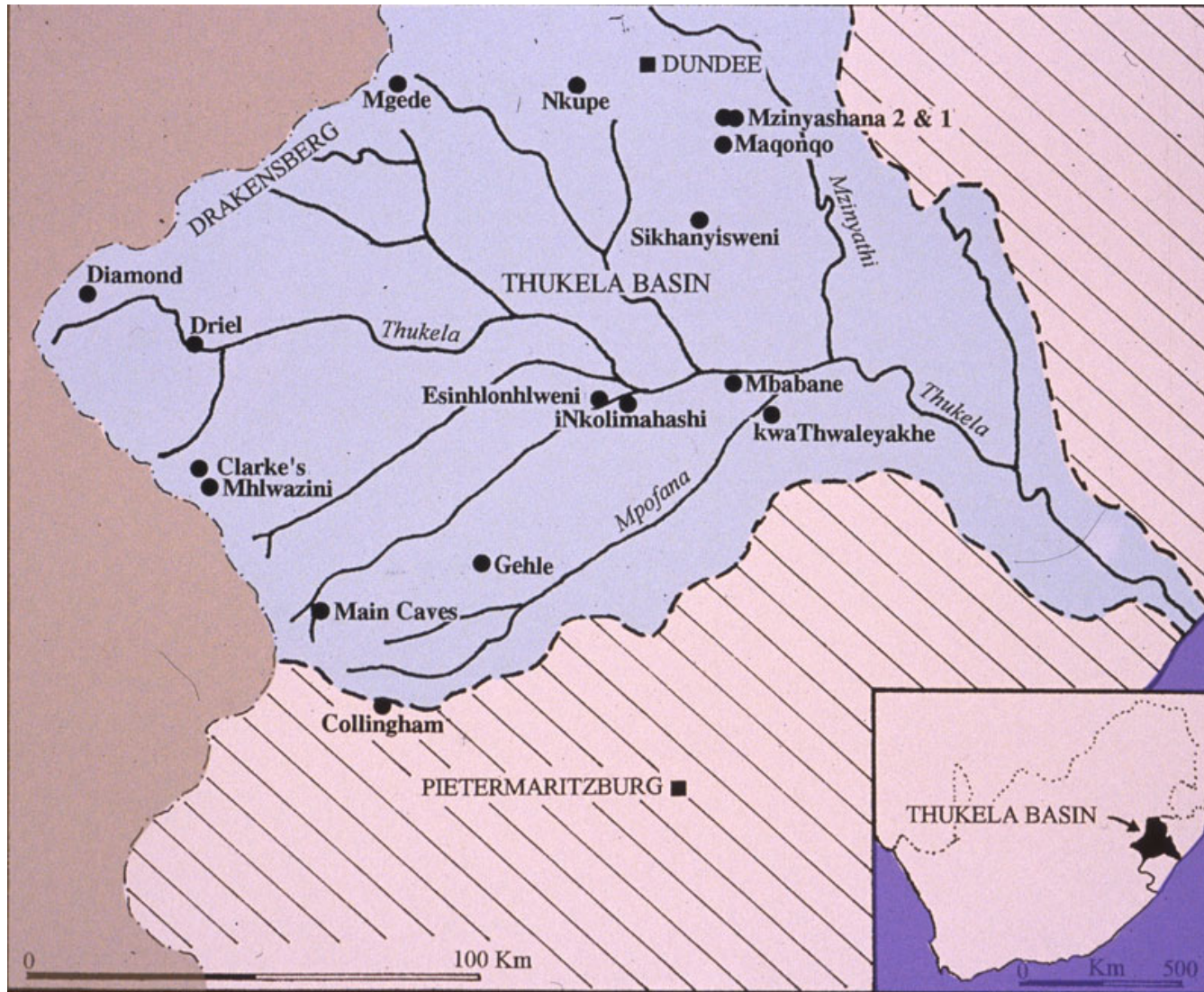


Collingham

- 1800-year old slab – paintings mostly fine line but also has finger style paint smudges – ?? hunter-gatherer (fine line) and pastoralist (finger style)
- Corresponds with other elements of material culture, e.g. >10 000 ‘hunter-gatherer’ microlithics in association with 1800-1900 year old fine-walled pottery and copper beads - typically associated with herders!



H-g abandonment of northern Drakensberg 1600-600 years ago



Domesticates and pottery - Lesotho –Likoaeng

- 9 bones and teeth attributable to sheep/goat, 2 to sheep, and 8 to cattle
- Mostly from Layer 1, AD 700/800
- Mitchell et al. (2011): ‘reflect a situation in which some late first millennium AD foragers acquired livestock and successfully integrated them into their own economy, an argument developed previously by Sadr (2003) for’ W Cape



Likoaeng and ‘ambivalent coexistence’

Mitchell et al. (2008) ‘the totality of the Likoaeng evidence (pottery, iron, sheep, cattle) speaks to close and enduring relations between foragers in the Lesotho highlands and farmers in KwaZulu-Natal’

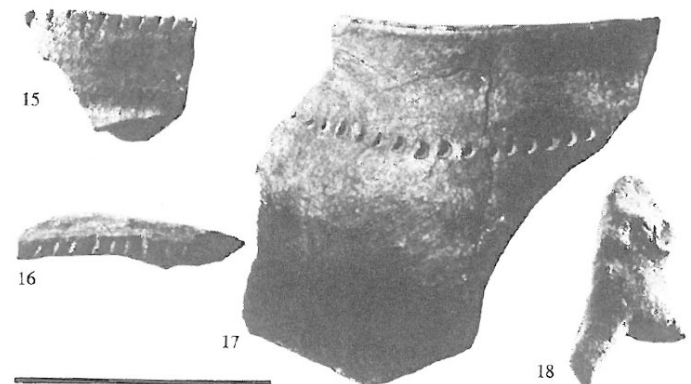
Link with Mazel’s (1998) notion of ‘ambivalent coexistence’ : ‘On the one hand, their relations were close and harmonious, but, on the other hand, and from a hunter-gatherer perspective, they were never quite trusting that their relations with the agriculturists could provide them with a secure future...agrees with a previous observation that the Thukela basin hunter-gatherers extended their exchange networks within and beyond the basin during the first millennium AD...’



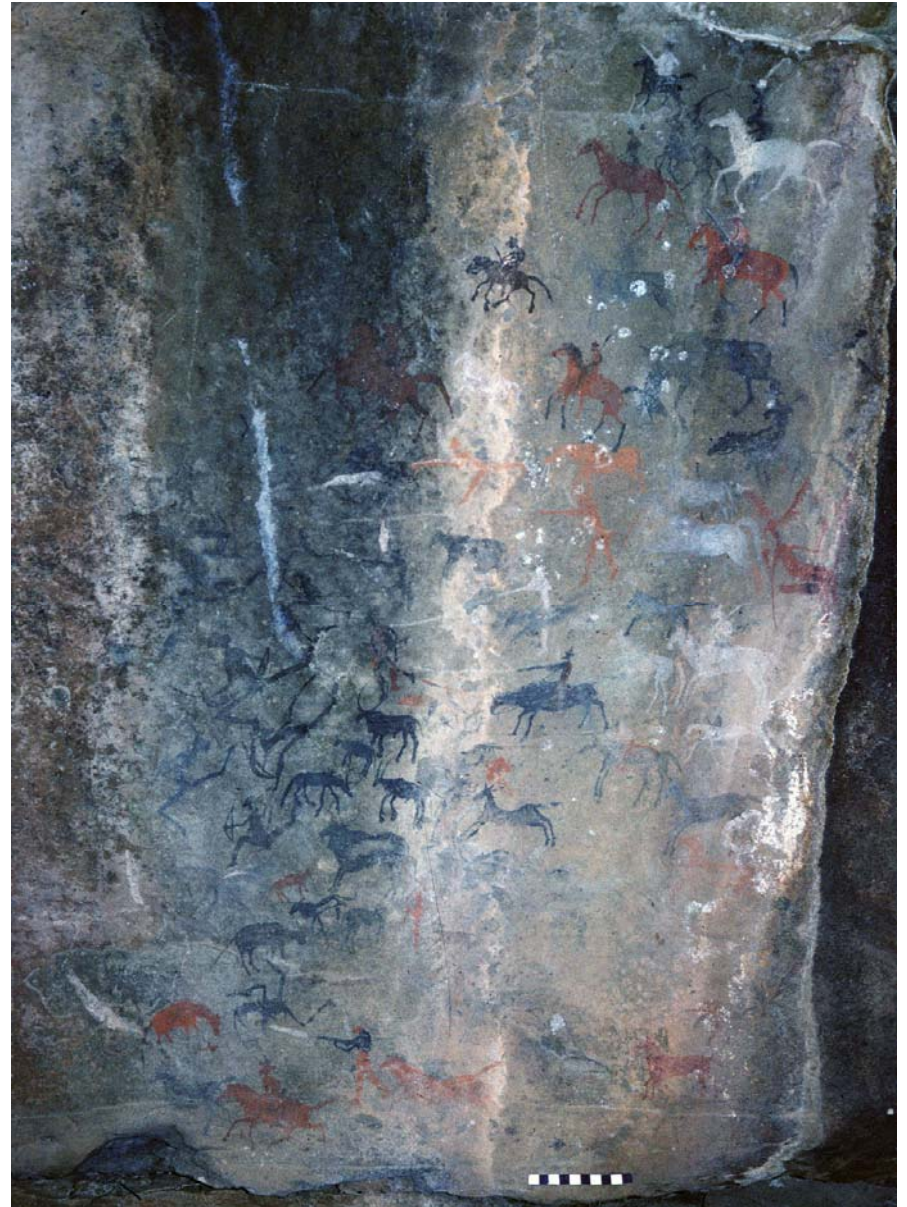
Msuluzi pottery ca. AD 650–950

Last 1000 years -Tb and Drakensberg

- In terms of archaeological remains - ongoing contact but less intense than before?
- Possibly some form of trading relationship or hunter-gatherers became clients of agriculturists. Rainmaking!
- Also, possibly agriculturists living in rock shelters, e.g. Mzinyashana paucity of hunter-gatherer material and presence of artefacts closely associated with agriculturists, such as a sweat scraper, a ceramic figurine, and decorated potsherds



19th century



Conclusions

- Complex history
- Many 'twists and turns'
- Need more research:
 - Dating of paintings (more)
 - Excavations
- New syntheses

