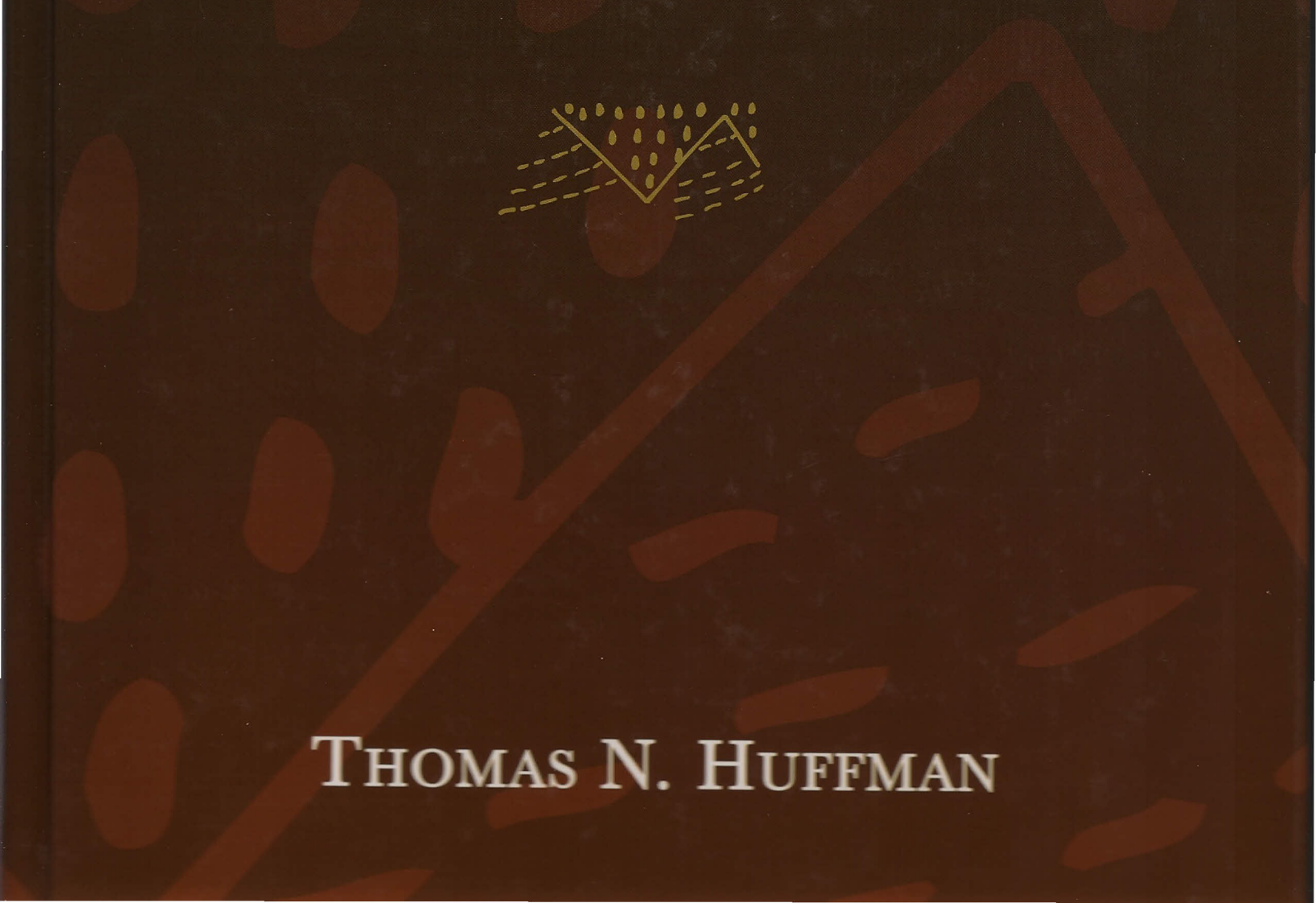


HANDBOOK TO THE IRON AGE

The Archaeology of
Pre-Colonial Farming Societies
in Southern Africa



THOMAS N. HUFFMAN

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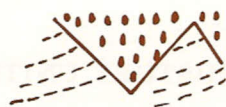
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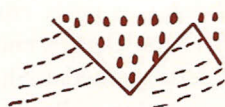
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The production of the Handbook was fairly complicated. The Publisher of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Glenn Cowley, encouraged every step of the process. My personal editor, Sally Hines, deserves a medal. She co-ordinated the technical team that included Trish Comrie (layout), Marise Bauer (maps and diagrams), Anthony Cuerden (scanning and technical expertise) and Marthina Mössmer (indexing). I am most grateful to them all.

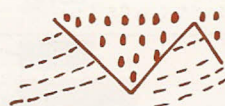
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INTRODUCTION

This Handbook is about the last 1 800 years in Southern Africa. Usually, Southern Africa includes the large area south of the Zambezi and Kunene rivers. For our purposes, however, this Handbook starts at 18 degrees South and 24 degrees East, encompassing parts of eastern Botswana and South Africa, and most of Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Mozambique is not included.

In pre-colonial times, various Eastern Bantu-speaking people inhabited this area, including Nguni, Sotho-Tswana, Shona and Tsonga (Figure 1). About 1 800 years ago, the ancestors of some of these Bantu-speaking people brought a new way of life to Southern Africa. For the first time, people lived in settled communities, cultivating crops such as sorghum, millets, ground beans and cowpeas, and they herded cattle as well as sheep and goats. Because these early farming people also made their own iron tools, archaeologists call this block of time the Iron Age. For convenience and to mark widespread events, we divide it into three periods: the **Early Iron Age** (AD 200–900), the **Middle Iron Age** (AD 900–1300) and the **Late Iron Age** (AD 1300–1840). This time frame covers the unwritten history of pre-colonial farming societies (Table 1).

Archaeologists studying these three periods use ceramic style to establish culture-history sequences – the who, where and when of early farming societies. Ceramic sequences are thus the framework for all other domains of Iron Age research, be it life ways (incorporating technology, subsistence and settlement patterns), or the explanation of cultural change. Because of this fundamental role, this Handbook uses culture-history sequences as the background for understanding the ‘big picture’. **Part One** concentrates on the method and topics one needs to understand this big picture; the references provide a sample for further reading. This first part will be of use to undergraduate students and anyone interested in Iron Age fieldwork. **Part Two** describes each ceramic unit in detail; a colour code makes for easy reference. This second part will be useful to amateur archaeologists and professionals involved with archaeological impact assessments. **Part Three** outlines the major debates that have occurred in Iron Age research over the last 30 to 40 years; the references here are comprehensive. This third part will be useful to postgraduate students, teachers and Africanists.

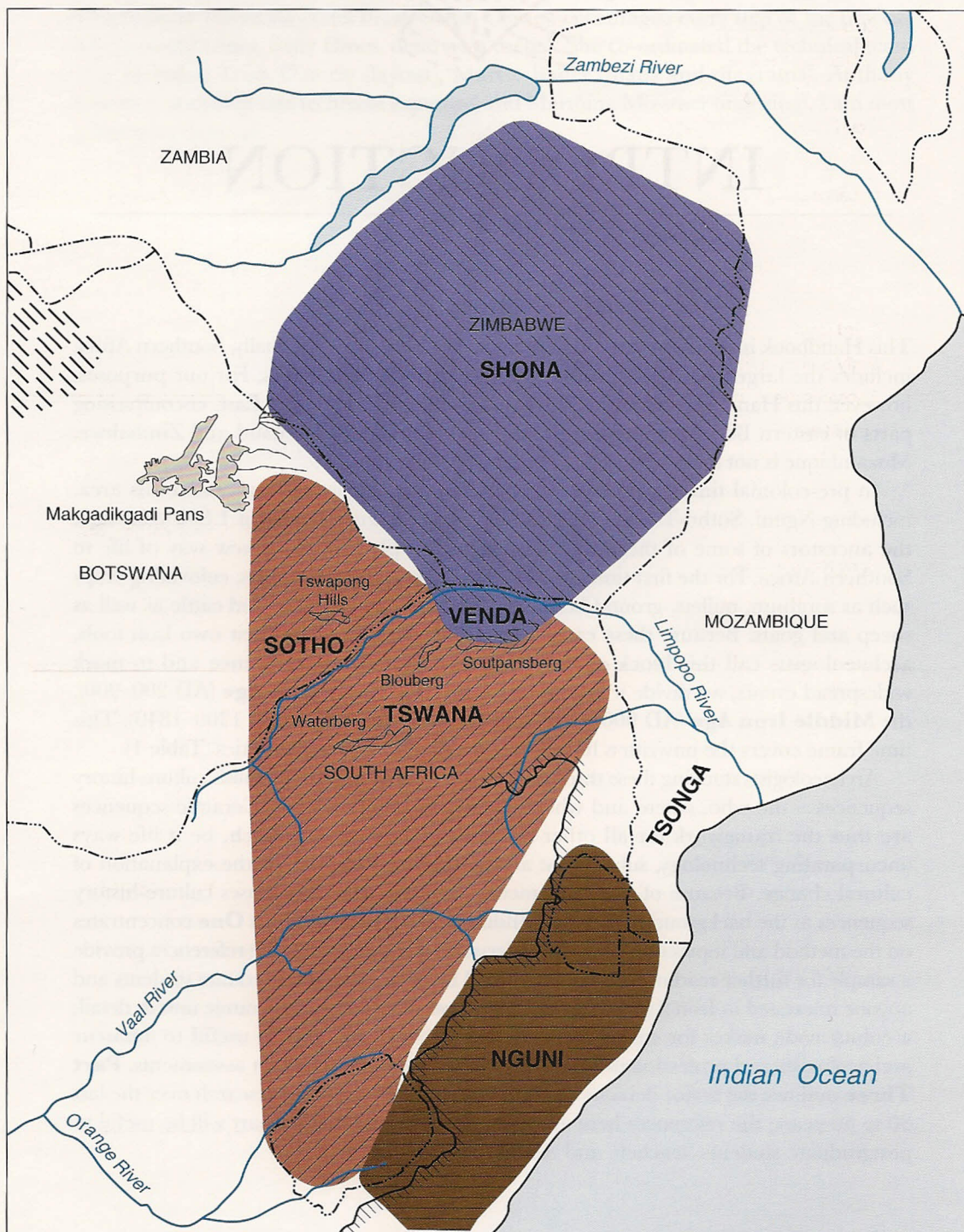


Figure 1 Distribution of Eastern Bantu languages considered in this Handbook.

Table 1 Chronological sequence of some important events and sites during the Iron Age in Southern Africa.

	EVENTS	SITES	PERIOD
1840	Zulu state	Ondini	
1800	<i>Difaqane/mfecane</i>	Molokwane	
1750			
1700	Venda and Rozwi states	Dzata and Danangombe	
1650			
1600	Local origins of Venda	Machemma and Tavhatshena	LATE IRON AGE
1550			
1500			
1450			
1400	Third state	Khami	
1350	Early Sotho-Tswana speakers	Icon	
1300	Second state	Great Zimbabwe	
1250	First state	Mapungubwe	
1200			
1150			
1100			MIDDLE IRON AGE
1050	Early Nguni speakers	Blackburn	
1000		K2 and Toutswe	
950		Schroda	
900			
850			
800		Lydenburg Heads	
750			
700			
650	Interaction	Gokomere and Msuluzi	
600			
550	Second farmers	Happy Rest	EARLY IRON AGE
500			
450	Internal developments	Mzonjani	
400			
350	First farmers	Silver Leaves, Bambata and Ziwa	
300			
250			