

REVISITING NOMENCLATURE: 'EARLY IRON AGE', 'FIRST-MILLENNIUM AGRICULTURIST', OR WHAT?

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ABSTRACT

As an art historian who has recently become fascinated by First-Millennium Agriculturist ceramics, I have come across several attempts at dealing with an issue of appropriate nomenclature for designating this era. Conceptual frameworks are articulated using words, yet an apparent discomfort with the term Early Iron Age has seemingly not led to a consistently used alternative. I have been wondering about this and, with respect, offer my thoughts on the matter in a hope that debate will be furthered. Hereunder I utilise aspects of the KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape first millennium ceramic sequence to address some significances associated with such artefacts in interpretations of the past, and then discuss some ways in which ideas of particular social contexts are embedded in language. Thereafter introduction of the term Iron Age into South African archaeology is referred to with reference to past and current usage, and advantages/disadvantages of alternatives are suggested.

INTRODUCTION

I feel that it is time to once again consider widespread use of the term Early Iron Age (EIA) in an African context. My concern is partly founded on factors that include, for instance, discussions between some young Border Technikon Art Theory students who have expressed a sense of discomfort with this label. Furthermore, in a contemporary multidisciplinary context that includes an ever-increasing audience of people not schooled in archaeology yet deeply interested by precolonial southern African artefacts and associated discourse, the term carries some problematic baggage.

Conversely, EIA is a valuable term because it is widely accepted, easy to use, and clearly distinguishes peoples and practices referred to from those whose lifestyles were largely based on pastoralist and/or hunter-forager economies. EIA is thus readily understood by archaeologists to refer to some African people (Fig. 1) who, during the first-millennium AD, practiced an economy based on agropastoral farming complimented by specific metal-working and clayworking technologies.

In the light of these observations it is appropriate that my consideration of potentially more suitable nomenclature is properly introduced with a brief look at some relevant ceramics - so as to foreground the medium/technology marginalised by the EIA label - and associated interpretations that have become assigned to their presence in the archaeological record. I have then proceeded to consider ways in which conceptual frameworks upon which some

past researches have been based serve to position EIA (and by extension Late Iron Age) as troublesome terms. Thereafter, bearing in mind that in a sense all categories pose problems because they impose restrictions on the way we think about the world, some alternative terms are considered. This is, admittedly, a roundabout approach, yet my hope is to tell a story also geared for some of those who may not be well versed in such background, and thereby to emphasise that this matter of nomenclature does bear serious reconsideration.

SOME RELEVANT CERAMICS, AND ASSOCIATED INTERPRETATIONS

From my point of view the ceramics of this era largely constitute an exciting visual and tactile feast of prehistoric artworks. Very briefly, and primarily as a severely limited overview focussed on continuity/disjunction of visual aspect through time, these ceramics include those known as having been present during the "Mzonjani phase ... from AD 420 to AD 550" (Whitelaw 1996:76) (Fig. 2); Msuluzi phase (Maggs 1980a) (Fig. 3); Ndondondwane phase (Maggs 1984a; Loubser 1993; Van Schalkwyk, *et al.* 1997) (Fig. 4); and Ntshekane phase (Maggs & Michael 1976) (Fig. 5).

The latter three phases in KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape, spanning a time frame c. AD 650-1080 (Binneman 1996:30), are part of the Kalundu Tradition (Huffman 1989:76). Further north in Mpumalanga, the now quite well known, to art historians (Hall 1996; Maggs & Davison

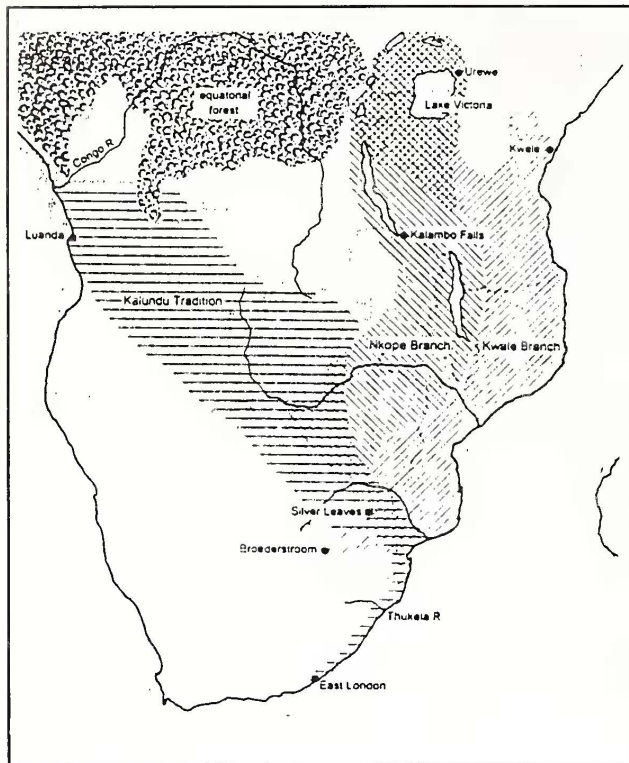


Fig. 1. 1st Millennium Agriculturist traditions of eastern and southern Africa (Whitelaw 1997: 446).

1981; Steele 2002:8) as well as archaeologists, Lydenburg Heads (Inskeep & Maggs 1975; c. AD 9th or 10th Century, Whitelaw 1996:82) (Fig. 6) are also part of this Tradition.

Ceramic artefacts of this era have acquired a central position whereby shifts in ceramic style (Huffman 1980) have been correlated, in conjunction with radiocarbon dating, to indicate a passage of time and people. Ceramics have also drawn attention to intimate domestic details associated with rhythms of daily doings and household utilityware usage.

Likewise, ceramics usage has suggested intermittent group activities, (such as at a time of making and using clay tuyère or small human figurines), and wider community activities (on occasions such as rites of passage at puberty and death). Different yet related significances associated with ceramics usage would also have arisen on occasions of intra-community activities such as at times of trade, or gift exchange. Furthermore, clay usage and hutfloor residues have drawn attention towards ways in which homestead and settlement layouts may have been influenced by world views in place at the time.

Prevailing cosmology would also have influenced those actions that led to intentional burial of ceramics, and also to acts that deliberately altered already fired ceramic vessels (Whitelaw 1994). Artefacts such as, for example, a vessel with a deliberately pierced base (Fig. 7), sculpted figurines and masks (Whitelaw 1993, 1994; Loubser 1993), and ceramics buried as grave goods may intimate ways of thinking wherein the past was honoured so as to secure the future (Murimbika 2000).

Such ways of thinking could have focussed on harnessing beneficial and appeasing detrimental energies

conceptually linked with particular tangible objects in the environment (Murimbika 2000:8,9). Thus a seamless inter-meshing of regular and irregular meaning-in-the-making events that arise “in the relationship between the object and the human subjects who invest it with meanings in particular contexts” (Davison 1996:135) are hinted at.

Meanings associated with first millennium AD ceramics have also been found to reside in a recognition that each ceramic vessel or fragment indicates a momentary culmination of technical and social knowledge, revealing the presence and intentionality of “skilled and knowing hands” (Dobres in press). This can be seen in chosen vessel shape, and in various engravings so consistently texturing vessel surfaces of the era. Furthermore, wiping striations left in the wake of long confident sweeping motions of fingers holding leaves or animal hide that applied finishing touches to a still damp clay surface (Fig. 8) hint even more intimately at deft manipulation of clay as medium in the deep past.

SOME EXAMPLES OF EARLY 20th CENTURY THOUGHT THAT INFLUENCED NOMENCLATURE BEFORE USE OF ‘IRON AGE’ BECAME PREVALENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Significantly, prehistoric ceramics have also acquired meaning as focal points allowing examination of conceptual concerns exhibited by writers of southern African prehistory. Gertrude Caton-Thompson, P.W. Laidler, and John Schofield’s writings during the first half of the 20th Century, for example, show that choice of ‘naming’ words and other phraseology, when writing about prehistoric ceramics and their own experiences, inevitably revealed disparaging thought paradigms and opinions current at that time.

Their ways of thinking were strongly influenced by prevailing colonialist conceptions of Western European superiority over indigenous primitive/uncivilised peoples. From this conceptual viewpoint “African societies were simultaneously viewed as mirroring a ‘paradisical prelapsarian’ state of ‘natural man’, and representing an instance of extreme degeneration from the ideal of the Adamic prototype created in the likeness of God” (Dietrich 1993:iii).

Such a way of thinking is evident in Gertrude Caton-Thompson’s (1971:19) rather peevish remark, made when writing of local workers employed to assist with excavation at Great Zimbabwe, that “on the whole ... their capacity to think for themselves was nil, and the natural gregariousness of uncivilised man was not conducive to ordered method”.

Thus, her achievements of being the first to use aerial photographs of a southern African site, and of creating the first ceramic sequence for southern Africa (Hall, M. 1984a:485;1990:7), and in being the first to clearly attribute this sequence to African origins, are nonetheless couched in commentary that is currently widely regarded as problematic. She stated (1971:103), for instance, that the architecture of Great Zimbabwe struck her as “essentially the product of an infantile mind, a pre-logical mind”, and



Fig. 2. Two Mzonjani phase vessels on display at Natal Museum (Photo: John Steele, 2000, courtesy of Natal Museum).

she found a “retrogressive continuity of custom down the ages”.

It seems harsh to put Caton-Thompson’s writings under this spotlight, but the point needs to be clearly made that despite excellence in many fields of activity, “settler paradigm” (Garlake 1982, cited by Hall, M. 1984b:263) nomenclature and ways of thinking inevitably haunt her writings because she was a person of her times. In this regard it is nonetheless essential to mention that her observations retained a remarkably even keel, and she (1971:7) was scrupulous in referring to the site as having been of “indigenous workmanship”.

Caton-Thompson thus did excellent archaeological work based on her own observations rather than on opinion, and resisted trends of her era by publicly and firmly proclaiming Great Zimbabwe as being of African origin and medieval in date. She (1971:10) also demonstrated a discomfort in generic use of the term “Bantu”, suggesting that usage of such a non-specific ‘naming’ word invited “reproach”. Bemoaning the lack of alternatives, she commented that “until anthropologists provide a substitute”, its usage “seems inevitable”.

In contrast to Caton-Thompson’s carefulness, P.W. Laidler (Medical Officer of Health, East London), writing about southern African coastal ceramics, paid scant regard to such niceties. His amateur interest is evident in attention to mainly surface finds, in a lack of focus and clarity throughout his prodigious writings, and in a baldly stated settler paradigm way of thinking and seeing.

He (1929:758) wrote, for instance, that “the race of men responsible for their deposit (ceramics) is usually termed ‘Strandlooper’ ... bastardisation appears to have taken place steadily, and the Hottentot was probably more and more Bush in blood further south and east that he migrated”. His

patriarchal colonialist conceptual approach is thus evident, for instance, in his attribution of ceramic remains to men (lack of gender awareness), in his stated concern with race, and in his focus on which peoples migrated where and miscegenated with whom to form which racial categories.

Furthermore, Laidler (1929:759) wrote frequently of “traditions” without being specific, made sweeping statements about origins, and was excessively judgmental in his reference to “late degenerate pots”, using this phrase in such a way as to also ascribe a degenerate character to the peoples responsible for the making of those pots. He maintained that “shape was dictated to a considerable extent by the development or degeneration of technique. As the Hottentot trekked along the African coast his technique ... degenerated as he became bastardised, and there was a consequent loss of standard”.

His (1935:560) seamless use of the term “degenerate” for peoples, as in “Bantu of mid 19th Century; Degenerate Pottery; Hottentot ...”, and pottery (Fig. 9) derogatorily equated people with things. Laidler’s conceptual framework epitomises colonial arrogance, emphasising such dualities as superior / inferior; good / bad; and civilised/primitive in his attempted classification of some prehistoric southern African ceramics.

Of Laidler’s approximate contemporaries, architect and amateur archaeologist John Schofield was more focussed, and created a relatively consistent and systematic classification of certain ceramic styles. His 1935 and 1936 reviews of KwaZulu-Natal coastal ceramics feature some of the earliest methodical records, amongst other contributions, of what are now known as Kalundu Tradition ceramics, and led to a general synthesis of this type in Primitive Pottery (1948:152, 153).

Unlike the writings of Laidler, Schofield’s 1948

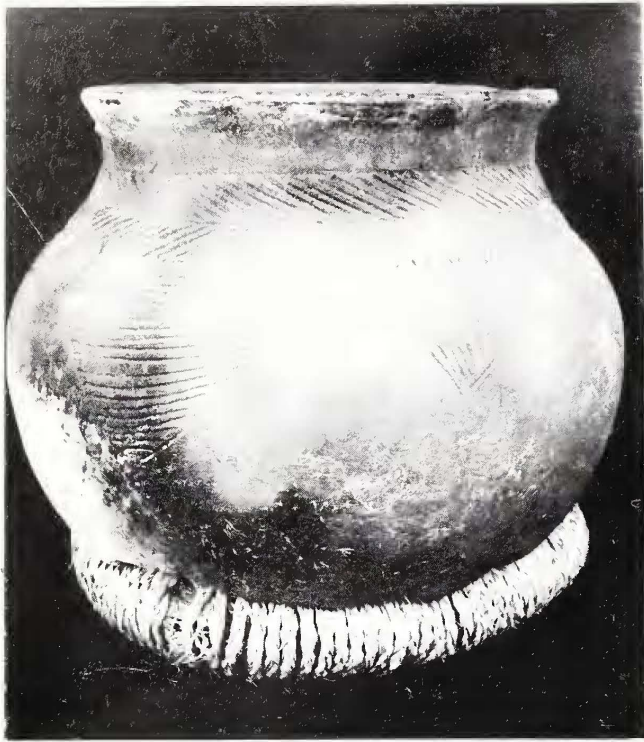


Fig. 3. Msuluzi style vessel from KwaGandaganda (Whitelaw 1994). Note the pendant motif on the body of the vessel, deep engravings, everted neck, and globular shape. Height 240mm; diameter at lip 180mm; diameter at belly 270mm; thickness at lip 8mm; thickness at belly 11mm (Photo: John Steele, 2000, courtesy of Natal Museum).



Fig. 4. Ndongondwane style slightly everted neck of a vessel from KwaGandaganda (Whitelaw 1994). Height of neck 120mm; diameter at lip 185mm; diameter at belly 240mm; thickness at lip 5mm; thickness at shoulder 6mm. Matchstick = 40mm (Photo: John Steele, 2000, courtesy of Natal Museum).

assessments were widely referred to by subsequent investigators into prehistoric material culture and, according to Tim Maggs (1993:70), “was to remain the basic reference work until the 1970’s ... [but] was, however, of limited [archaeological] value because it was based on small, often surface, collections and it was written before the discovery of radiocarbon dating”. Concurring with this view, Van Schalkwyk (1991:11) has observed that “Schofield’s classification remained the archaeological standard in the region until its re-appraisal by Maggs” (see Maggs 1976, 1980a, b & c).

Schofield’s title “Primitive Pottery”, for his 1948 publication, sums up in one phrase the extensive influence that prevailing dichotomous civilised/primitive ways of conceptualising indigenous material culture and peoples had on some of his thinking. This thought paradigm is also evidenced in statements such as “primitive pottery making (as might be expected from its association with primitive agriculture) is carried on by women, and is always shaped by the hand; while that of more advanced peoples is made by men with the aid of the potter’s wheel” (1948:15).

Despite such comments reflecting his era, Schofield (1948:25) did make an important contribution towards modifying the settler paradigm way of thinking in his admonition that “we must always regard primitive people as being just as much human beings as ourselves”. The significance of this observation, as paternalistic as it may have been, becomes evident when it is compared with earlier statements made at the turn of the century.

Writers such as G.W. Stow (1905:233) had conceptualised central African peoples as “a seething mass of equatorial life”, thereby presenting an image of people undifferentiated from animal and plant life, and G.M. Theal (1907:2-3) had maintained that “arrowheads, spearheads, scrapers ... (found along the South African coast) were the products of the skill of man in the lowest stage of existence”. Furthermore, S.P. Impey (1926:88) had explained his opinion regarding the origin of southern African rock art by asserting that “I have always been unable to believe that people of such a low degraded type of humanity could have painted the pictures attributed to them”.

These latter three writers throw the settler paradigm way of thinking into stark reality. Schofield’s alternative suggestion of finding significance in commonalities shared by humanity, backed up by systematic research, would have influenced a gradual trend towards nomenclature that indicated a more careful consideration of all players involved.

‘IRON AGE’ NOMENCLATURE INTRODUCED INTO SOUTHERN AFRICAN DISCOURSE

The term Iron Age seems to have entered southern African discourse in 1933 when L.H. Wells wrote about an expedition to Cathkin Park, KwaZulu-Natal area (Maggs 1993:70). Wells (1933:183) noted that “it may be suggested in explanation of the rarity of finds of metal implements on

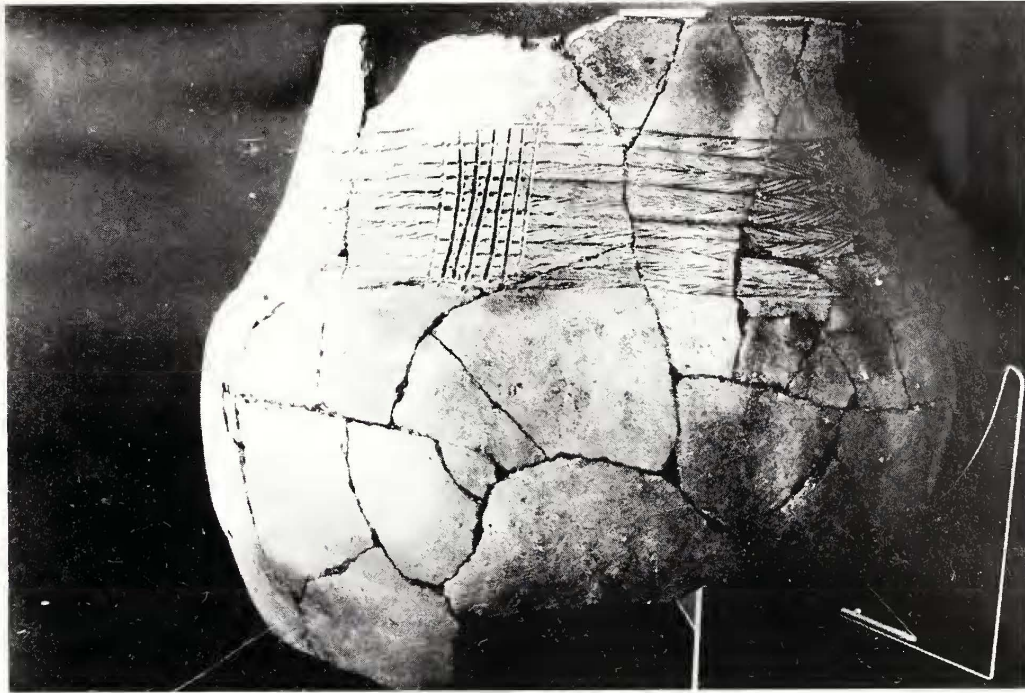


Fig. 5: Ntshokane style vessel, and closeup of engravings: Height of vessel 300mm; diameter at belly 350mm; thickness at lip 6mm; thickness at belly 12mm. Matchstick = 40mm (Photo: John Steele, 2000, courtesy of Natal Museum).

Iron Age sites that the metal was difficult to prepare, and that in consequence metal tools were used as long as possible and then melted down and re-worked”.

Fifteen years later the term Iron Age was used by Schofield (1948:27) to designate one of his five categories of ceramics listed under the title “A classification and terminology for South African Primitive Pottery”, and then in Part Four (*ibid*:71-162) ceramics of “The Iron Age” are discussed. Thus Schofield can be attributed as one of the first writers on early southern African ceramics to use the term extensively.

Then Mason (1952:70) attempted to formalise the idea of a local Iron Age. He suggested “the term ‘South African Iron Age’... indicates the period subsequent to the introduction of iron-working, but prior to the appearance of European metal artefacts within the area defined”. He went on to note that he did “not imply a rigid, chronological separation of the Stone and Iron Ages; the division between the two appears to vary and some sites ... suggest contemporaneity between the late Stone Age and Iron Age”.

Thereafter the term found general acceptance. Van Schalkwyk (1991:4) has conceptualised the southern African Iron Age as “known to have extended over approximately the last two millennia. As a cultural term it designates groups of people who were iron producing and metal using mixed-farmers; who first colonised the Zambezi and Limpopo Basins, the East coast littoral, and the Eastern and north Eastern Plateau slopes (following Wellington 1955), between c. AD 250-900. These Early Iron Age (EIA) people are held to be directly ancestral to the Late Iron Age (LIA) Bantu speakers”. Van Schalkwyk

cited Hall, M. & Vogel 1980; Huffman 1970, 1979, 1982; Maggs 1977, 1980b, 1984a & b; and Phillipson 1977, 1985 as having contributed to this view.

IS IRON AGE STILL AN APPROPRIATE TERM FOR USE IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN AFRICAN RESEARCH?

A decade ago Maggs (1992:131) suggested that “Iron Age is not really a suitable or desirable term”. Reasons given for this observation include that Iron Age “tends to relegate these communities to an impersonal and subjective status in history”. This is a very valid concern, but it seems to me that archaeological investigative trends in southern Africa towards avoiding the impersonal in favour of squarely and diligently recognising the presence of individuals in society are now clear and in place.

Maggs (1992:131) also expressed concern that the term Iron Age “seems ... technicist”. Avoidance of a technicist term is difficult, however, because both farming and clay working, as examples of noteworthy alternative identifying characteristics, require technical knowledge and associated skill in execution.

To worry at unpacking what constitutes a technicist term is to miss the point that most labels are conceptual tools that relegate communities to a relatively impersonal status purely by necessity. This usually happens because focus is placed on some or other reasonably representative aspect of economy, behaviour and/or beliefs, rather than on myriads of individual characteristics.

Thus the issue is not so much of whether the term is



Fig. 6. Lydenburg Head # 3 (Inskeep & Maggs 1975. Photo: Aubrey Byron for South African Museum).

technicist or not, but whether it does justice in a contemporary context to a mental construct using words of our time. It is in this spirit of enquiry that the term Iron Age - and by extension EIA and LIA - will now be further examined.

Maggs has (1992:131) pointed out that Iron Age is inadequate because it ignored a "contemporary introduction of cultivation" which he suggested was "a revolution of greater social and economic significance even than metalurgy". In his justifiable focus on cultivation as an important yardstick Maggs has, however, chosen to ignore the immense impact of ceramics technology - and concomitant facilitation of easy to use wet methods of cooking - as an influence on lifestyle. This may, however, be accounted for by the fact that peoples with hunter-forager and/or pastoralist economies created ceramics (of a significantly different style) during the era under discussion, and neither were metalworkers or extensive cultivators of the soil.

Nonetheless, omission of reference to ceramics technology as having a potential influence on an alternative label for Iron Age is remarkable because clay, like metal, undergoes a "heat-mediated transformation" from "natural product" to "cultural product". Ceramic and metal products

are also "linked through their fundamental nature of irreversibility" (MacLean 1998:173), and so it is surprising that iron working technology is so consistently valorised at the expense of the other.

Perhaps choice of Iron Age as a term was influenced by opinions about the relative importance of weaponry when compared with what may have been thought of as an insignificant technology associated with domestic matters? Thus, I wonder whether choice of the term Iron Age - and ongoing usage thereof - partly reflects a patriarchal bias towards valorisation of metalworking over clay working technology? Whatever its origin, such bias seems inappropriate, especially because issues of ceramic style and interpretations of lifeways derived from ceramics analysis constitute such a significant aspect of archaeological research.

Furthermore, Iron Age as a term is sometimes problematised both by the vast time frame encapsulated - from c. AD 350 to the beginning of the colonial period in South Africa - and usage that extends this time frame into the more recent past. These difficulties become evident, for example, in Van Schalkwyk's (1991:4) statement that the "Iron Age in southern Africa is now known to have extended over approximately the last two millennia". What bothers me is that, even if unintentionally, this statement implies a lumping together of deeply prehistoric lifeways with those of farmers in the "recent ethnographic past" (1991:4), a time frame that Lane (1998:198) refers to as "terminal Later Iron Age".

What bothers me is that even though usage of Iron Age phraseology is context bound, inadequate allowance is made for some recent communities encapsulated by this term who probably neither engaged in ceramics nor metalworking praxis. Furthermore, there are likely to have been some dramatically differing metaphysical interpretations of meaning in life between peoples separated in time by the passage of approximately two thousand years.

Such lack of specificity, despite acknowledgement of EIA and LIA subdivisions, suggests an overarching conceptual framework that reflects ideas of largely undifferentiated lifeways and metaphysical worldviews. This conceptual compression of peoples and events in such a way as to inadequately specify changes in lifeways is derogatory in that it implies a degree of static cultural timelessness (Nettleton & Klopper 1988:39).

Such a viewpoint fails to foreground intentionality and recognise change as stemming from deliberate responses to life experience. Such a failure to distinguish clearly between life ways of first-millennium AD, second millennium precolonial, and more recent peoples has also been described by a Xhosa speaking Art Theory student (pers. comm.. M-Afrika Mtiya, August 2000) in a seminar discussion session as being "insulting" of a rich and varied heritage.

Furthermore, a strong argument presented by Simon Hall (1992:12; cited by Maggs 1992:131) that the term 'Early Iron Age' is a "misnomer since it was imported from the European sequence with its Copper and Bronze Ages, and where it therefore has different connotations" raises another reason in favour of abandoning Iron Age usage. In short,



Fig. 7. Deliberately pierced vessel from Nanda, Trench 4, Burial 2 pit (Whitelaw 1993). Height 235mm; diameter at lip and belly 195mm and 230mm respectively; thickness at lip and base 9mm and 14mm respectively. Diameter of hole in base 140mm (Photo: John Steele, 2000, courtesy of Natal Museum).

this observation is a polite way of saying that the term is a leftover from colonialist dichotomous thought prevalent at the time when Iron Age gained currency as a term to conceptualise the life ways under discussion. There is also no doubt that the term is offensive to some people, and as such warrants discussion pending gradual replacement with a viable alternative.

This is not an easy undertaking, as can be seen from the fact that despite a recognised need for change, EIA/LIA shorthand for a myriad well understood concepts remains in use. Such usage can be seen, for instance, in recent titles such as Meyer 1997; Steyn & Nienaber 2000; Van Schalkwyk, J. 1998; Vogel 2000; and Whitelaw 1997. Furthermore, even when alternatives are found in a title, the phrase often appears later in the text when the writer has to explain clearly which communities and/or concepts are being specifically referred to. This circumstance can poignantly be seen in Maggs (2000:1) where, despite being in the forefront as a proponent for change in nomenclature, he also rather resignedly uses "Early Iron Age".

The matter of name changing is complicated by factors like personal preference, clear understanding of intended meaning, and - like vehicle or insurance house branding - the name is well established. Furthermore, EIA and LIA do refer to specific lifeways wherein both cultural change and continuities have been meticulously documented with extraordinary attention to detail, and the terms are generally used with respect rather than with disparaging intent.

VIABLE ALTERNATIVES?

Despite such very real obstacles it is appropriate to consider

whether viable alternatives can be found. Maggs (2000:1) hints at a workable label in his usage of "pioneer farming communities". Yet, it may have been the vagueness of this alternative that prompted him to shortly thereafter use EIA on only one occasion. "Pioneer" as a concept is also potentially problematic because by definition it refers to the first people only, and so to have pioneers extending over many centuries defeats clarity.

It certainly is difficult to find Africa-focussed, readily understood, easy to say, suitably specific, yet quite broadly encompassing alternative terms. It was particularly instructive to look at Huffman's (2000:14) handling of this problem. In the statement that, for instance, "Mapungubwe was the most important precolonial farming site in South Africa" LIA usage is avoided by specifying place and economy.

Another successful method of avoiding EIA usage can be achieved by means of being scrupulously date specific, as in Huffman's (2000:14) statement that the "Zimbabwe culture sequence can now be divided into three periods ...". Likewise, Huffman (2000:16) uses language and economy-specific terms as in "the first Bantu-speaking farmers ..." and facies/tradition specific nomenclature such as "Happy Rest facies of the Kalundu Tradition ..." to achieve similar ends. It should also be pointed out that "Early Iron Age" also appears more than once (*Ibid* 25, 27) towards the end of his article.

Other variants on possibilities for alternative nomenclature were looked at as long ago as 1986 when Martin Hall explored possibilities of using the phrase "agropastoral societies". Subsequently Maggs (1992: 131) tried out using "farmer", and settled for "agriculturist" as more viable.

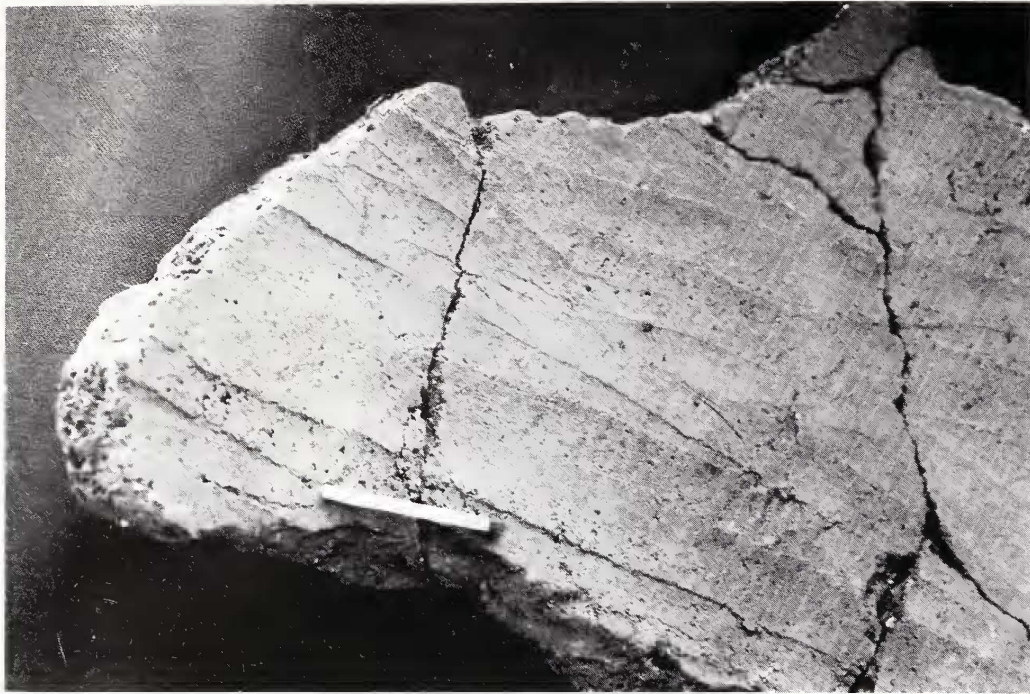


Fig. 8. Detail of long sweeping motions of a handheld tool as it was manipulated during the shaping process on sherds from Nanda. Matchstick = 40mm. (Whitelaw 1993).

Whitelaw and Moon (1996) have experimented with using “pioneer agriculturists”, and Maggs (2000:1) has used the phrase “1st millennium AD”.

A problem with 1st millennium as designator can be said to reside in the fact that it is time-restricted and thus does not cater for some first millennium sequences that continue unbroken into the second millennium. This difficulty is evidenced by turn of the millennium societies such as, for example, K2 and Mapungubwe, but can be avoided by being date or site specific. First-millennium usage is, however also potentially problematised by objections that may be raised about the sense of using a period-specific term to refer to peoples of a particular economic category.

In order to try and clear up at least some of my own confusion I then made further enquiries: In correspondence with Whitelaw (25/4/2000 & 5/5/2000) it was noted that use of “pioneer agriculturist” could be ambiguous and lead to confusion, especially considering that those farmers at the end of the 1st millennium were, as noted earlier, hardly pioneers compared to those five or six hundred years before. As an alternative he suggested “1st Millennium Agriculturist” as a replacement for EIA. He did, however, comment that even this phrase was problematic because in the more northerly regions of southern Africa “the EIA sequence persists to around 1300 - Eiland ceramics, and in Botswana to 1400 at Broadhurst”. Such reservations, as discussed earlier, can be dealt with by being site and date specific.

Thus, “1st Millennium Agriculturist” could be suitable. This phrase also allows for extrapolation to “Precolonial 2nd Millennium Agriculturist” and “Early Colonial Era” for LIA. Furthermore, by being time-specific it does implicitly recognise that some African people were farming and

making pots/metalworking before the specified time frame.

Despite feeling better about these terms I was still dubious because these phrases are usable but do not take into account metal and clay working technologies, are quite a mouthful, and also implicitly recognise BC/AD designators for dating, a procedure not universally accepted as is evidenced by trends towards BP phraseology.

Hall (Hall, M. pers. comm.2/10/2000) then helped clarify my thinking by confirming his preference for the accuracy of “agropastoral” over Iron Age. He, however, complained that agropastoral is an “ugly word”, and suggested “first-millennium farmers” for EIA as a simple alternative. So, considering these options I returned to the objection raised by Maggs (1992:131) to “farmer”, and found that I was still in agreement with his difficulty in using this simpler word. Nonetheless, Hall’s use of “first millennium” concurred with both Maggs (2000:1) and Whitelaw in accepting BC/AD usage, at least for the purpose of finding a workable label.

In conclusion, realising that there are likely to be other alternative terms that I am unfamiliar with, a few general comments are in order: Terms that use “Early” or “Late” without making allowance for pre-first millennium sequences, or which do not take into account the important distinction in many peoples minds regarding pre and colonial era life ways, are potentially problematic. Likewise, it is worth considering that the word “late” is used extensively in the Eastern Cape to refer to someone who is dead - not an ideal connotation, although also not entirely inaccurate.

Furthermore, even though I have complained about the marginalisation of ceramics praxis, I have clarified that it is an unlikely candidate for naming word unless a phrase such

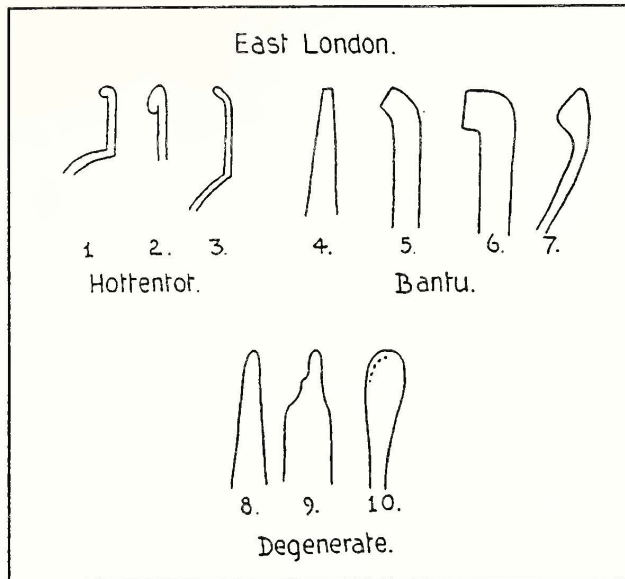


Fig. 9: Laidler's classification of East London area ceramic types per rim profile (Graphic by Le Helocco of Messina, in Laidler 1936: 140).

as “usually characterised by deep, boldly executed engravings” is used, and that is far too cumbersome. It is also worth remembering that I have not raised a serious argument against the use of “iron”, but must confirm objections against the word “age” because of different connotations arising from European sequences and colonial mind sets.

Thus “1st Millennium Agriculturist” may be regarded as a potentially useful point of departure for further debate because it seems to be appropriate for Africa, is economy specific, and creates a usable acronym in FMA. 1st Millennium Agriculturist, although rather a mouthful, can be extrapolated to “Precolonial 2nd Millennium Agriculturist”, as well as “Early Colonial Era Agriculturist” for the sake of clarity.

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