CHAPTER THREE

THE ARCHAEOLOGY

Interaction relationships are never purely functional, as the ethnographic examples discussed in Chapter 2 illustrate. Instead, they are always based on social structure and identities, which make interaction predictable and which establish expectations on both sides of the relationship. In the past, interaction studies have tended to focus on functional or economic exchanges while ignoring the social structures that facilitate interaction; this is in part due to the difficulty in identifying these aspects in the archaeological record. Apart from examining specific spatial relationships between hunter-gatherer and farmer sites, one of the aims of this project is to examine the social structures underlying interaction in the Shashe-Limpopo region, to begin to address this lack.

As yet, little is known about hunter-gatherers in the Shashe-Limpopo in general and hunter-gatherer / farmer interaction in specific. In contrast, the Iron Age sequence of the region is very well known; it is also the most complex in southern Africa. The changing nature, scale, and social and political complexity of these farmers makes a review of the Iron Age archaeology a necessity in order to understand both the hunter-gatherer sequence of occupation, and the sequence of interaction between hunter-gatherers and farmers that occurred in the region. It also provides an opportunity to examine the specific social factors underlying these hunter-gatherer / farmer relationships over the last 2000 years, in contrast to other areas in southern Africa. Thus, various other studies of interaction in southern Africa will also be discussed in this chapter in order to provide further insight into interaction, aiding in the construction of a model for interaction in the Shashe-Limpopo.

Hunter-gatherer use of space on the landscape, settlement choice, changes in perception of ‘place’, and changes in the archaeological record through time, can offer a fairly good picture of how hunter-gatherers perceived farmers, and therefore how they interacted with them, particularly where proximity is taken into
consideration (for example, Hall & Smith 2000; van Doornum 2000). The marginality of hunter-gatherers, as discussed by Kenny (1981) and Smith (1998) (Chapter 2), has obvious spatial implications (Hall, S. 2000): hunter-gatherers may retreat to areas unoccupied by farmers, may settle close to farmers, become restricted by the number of farmers that have settled in the region, or become incorporated into farmer settlements. Thus, variability in the distance between hunter-gatherer and farmer sites, and the density of farmer sites on the landscape, are important factors in contact studies as they help establish where and how interaction took place. It is also important to note that great variability in interaction residues may result over relatively small distances (van Doornum 2000; Sadr 2005). For example, in the ethnography, some hunter-gatherers (such as the Pygmies) involved in close relationships with farmers lived near farmer settlement for part of the year, while at other times they lived at some distance to farmers. Different material culture patterns would have resulted at each of these sites, which, if only one was studied, would have led to an incorrect interpretation of interaction being made. Thus, it is important that a range of sites be studied to ensure that all aspects of interaction relationships are represented.

Differences in the groups with which hunter-gatherers interacted also play an important role in interaction. For instance, hunter-gatherers will interact differently with KwaZulu-Natal Nguni speakers (Mazel 1989) to the way they will interact with Xhosa-speakers or with herders (Hall, S. 1990), because of the different identities and social structures of the groups involved. For example, in the Western Cape, hunter-gatherers tended to avoid herders and farmers rather than interact closely with them (Parkington et al. 1986), as was the case in the Eastern Cape, where seasonal proximity and co-operation between hunter-gatherers and herders, and later hunter-gatherers and farmers, occurred (Hall, S. 1990).

Archaeological studies of interaction in southern Africa

The different kinds of interaction, degrees of assimilation / independence and spatial relationships discussed in Chapter 2 are archaeologically expressed in several ways, and at several different spatial scales in southern Africa (van Doornum 2000). Archaeological assemblages accrued during the last 2000 years throughout southern
Africa range from those that can be used to make general / regional scale comments about interaction to those that provide insight into local or ‘face-to-face’ interaction. Important background studies for an investigation of contact thus include Mazel (1989); Wadley (1996); Wallace (1996); Thorp (1996); van der Ryst (1998); Hall, S. (1990, 1997, 2000); Denbow (1999); Hall & Smith (2000); van Doornum (1998, 2000); Kent (2002a, b, c); and Sadr (2005).

According to Sadr (2002), one of the ways that an assimilated, dependent hunter-gatherer population may be recognised archaeologically is by the presence in hunter-gatherer sites of large numbers of farmer artefacts (pottery, iron, glass beads, domesticated animal bones), and reduced numbers of hunter-gatherer artefacts (ostrich eggshell, stone tools, pigments). The opposite would then be true for independent hunter-gatherers, as well as pre-contact hunter-gatherers (Sadr 2002). This general pattern has been observed in Thamaga, Botswana (Sadr 2002), and in the Seacow River Valley in the contact between Bushmen and Trekboers (Voigt et al. 1995). However, one should hesitate to generalise this pattern for the whole of southern Africa because this may not have been the case with all hunter-gatherers, as each contact situation is context-specific (Kent 1992). It is thus also possible that high numbers of farmer artefacts in hunter-gatherer sites may also relate to intense, mutually beneficial interaction, where hunter-gatherers incorporate these articles into their own belief system, without being assimilated by farmers. Therefore, although hunter-gatherers in some areas may have become more dependent on farmers, they may not necessarily have adopted farmer meanings and beliefs.

In a study looking at how to identify subjugation and independence of hunter-gatherers in the archaeological record, Kent (2002b) compares three contemporaneous groups from the eighteenth and nineteenth century: African American slaves, Efe Pygmies and Kalahari hunter-gatherers. She found that African American material culture changed significantly as slaves were increasingly exploited and assimilated. European / Euro-American artefacts replaced slave-produced artefacts because indigenous objects were prohibited by their masters and were therefore hidden when manufactured. However, although European / Euro-American artefacts may have become dominant, they would have been given new meanings and interpretations when used by the slaves. In the case of the Efe
Pygmies, although their material culture contained mostly villager-produced objects, they still retained much of their own cultural material, also using farmer material in their own way. In southern Africa, Kent (2002b) believes that client relationships and enslavement are only evident in the archaeological record once southern Africa was colonised by Europeans. Prior to the European colonisation, Kent argues that hunter-gatherers and farmers participated in mutually beneficial relationships that did not change the hunter-gatherers or their material culture in any significant way. However, although enslavement and assimilation of hunter-gatherers may have increased during the colonial period due to the European presence, it is not true that client relationships are only evident in the archaeological record from this time (see Denbow 1990, 1999; Smith 1996). Evidence from rock art, for example (Campbell 1986, 1987; Dowson 1994) also suggests that client relationships with farmers have occurred further back in time than this. Kent (2002b) suggests that hunter-gatherers remain unchanged throughout the pre-colonial period in which they interacted with farmers – a proposal that can be easily tested in the context of the Shashe-Limpopo. Sadr (2002) also argues that, in general, the early contact period over most of southern Africa initially appears to have had little effect on hunter-gatherers, as the material culture of the pre-contact and early contact period in the region that he studied showed little difference (Sadr 2002). It seems that pioneer farmers did not place pressure on available space, and that hunter-gatherers were able to retreat permanently or seasonally from an area (see examples discussed in Chapter 2; Alexander 1984 and Moore 1985 in Chapter 1). Hunter-gatherer / farmer relationships only became increasingly complex and variable in the Middle Iron Age (MIA) and the Late Iron Age (LIA) (see for example Phillipson 1976, 1995; Wallace 1996; Musonda 1997; Kent 2002c; Klatzow 2002; and Sadr 2002), when greater numbers of farmers occupied the landscape. While this pattern may hold true for parts of southern Africa, as yet these hypotheses and observations remain untested in the Shashe-Limpopo region.

Although contact occurred at a later date in the eastern Free State than in other regions in southern Africa, initial interaction between hunter-gatherers and LIA farmers was also amicable (in keeping with Moore’s model of interaction), with mutually beneficial relationships forming between these groups (Wallace 1996). At
Twyfelpoort Shelter, no change through time occurs in artefacts and artefact frequencies, suggesting that no significant changes in hunter-gatherer mobility and subsistence strategies occurred in the first phase of contact. Hunter-gatherers appear to have had continued access to resources that they had utilised in the past, despite the presence of farmers on the landscape (Moore 1985; Wallace 1996). However, the interaction relationships would have changed during the turmoil of the Mfecane with larger numbers of farmers moving around on the landscape (Wallace 1996). Low artefact numbers in the later period of occupation at Twyfelpoort Shelter could indicate that fewer hunter-gatherers were living in the area - hunter-gatherers may have left the area entirely, or they may have been living closer to farmers, as part of the farming communities.

**Proximity and place**

Archaeological studies of contact and interaction, and of distance / proximity, between hunter-gatherers and farmers, have been done at various different scales, ranging from regional to local or face-to-face. Some studies focus on the sequence through time while others focus on specific periods or moments, although many combine both aspects. I will discuss selected examples of these studies, beginning with the larger scale of interaction followed by examples of direct interaction. At a regional level, for example, Mazel (1989; 2001) suggests that between AD 1000 and AD 1800 in the Thukela Basin of KwaZulu Natal, trade items moved from farmer communities to hunter-gatherers (unidirectional exchange), while before AD 1000, items were exchanged in both directions. In fact, following the arrival of farmers in the first millennium AD, hunter-gatherers left the Drakensberg, intensifying their occupation of the central Thukela Basin. However, the hunter-gatherers returned to the Drakensberg in the second half of the second millennium AD when too many farmers began to occupy the area (Moore 1985; Mazel 1993, 2001; Whitelaw 1997). In contrast, on the Waterberg Plateau, a decrease in hunter-gatherer material in rock shelters between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries corresponds with increasing numbers of hunter-gatherers settling in Iron Age villages on both a more temporary and a more permanent basis. Thus, instead of hunter-gatherers avoiding farmers entering the region, they followed them to the Waterberg Plateau, where they closely interacted with them, finally settling in their villages (van der Ryst 1998; 2003).
Another example of a regional study that comments on both sequence as well as space and place in interaction is Denbow’s (1983; 1984; 1990; 1999) work in Botswana. Denbow draws a contrast between eastern and northwestern Botswana, in terms of ecological diversity, and consequently, the political scale and settlement density of farmers. The situation in eastern Botswana is similar to that of the Shashe-Limpopo (in terms of the density of farmer settlements, ecology, and the political scale of the farmers) and thus provides an important analogue for research in the Shashe-Limpopo. Ecological diversity is minimal in eastern Botswana, where there are hierarchical settlement systems and dense farmer occupation. Denbow postulates that low ecological diversity led to competition for resources between farmers, who were tied to their land, which in turn produced political hierarchies. Hunter-gatherers had less space on the landscape, and so they were either absorbed or displaced by the highly centralised Iron Age polities (Denbow 1990). Evidence for intermittent interaction between farmers and neighbouring hunter-gatherers, or “multi-ethnic and multi-cultural communities” of both hunter-gatherers and farmers similar to many contemporary Kalahari cattleposts (Denbow 1999: 345) is found in the presence of scrapers, segments, blade cores and other stone tools on lower-echelon Toutswe sites (for example Taukome and Maiphetwane (Denbow 1999)). This need for hunter-gatherers and their tools may have been due to a lack of access to iron in lower-order late first millennium / early second millennium AD sites, as no stone tools were found on higher-order sites such as Toutswemogala or Thaswane.

Northwestern Botswana is more ecologically diverse, with fewer farmers (i.e. more space and opportunity for hunter-gatherers), who are less hierarchical, allowing for somewhat freer movement and interaction equality by hunter-gatherers than in eastern Botswana. Though farmers appear to have permitted the social and cultural autonomy of hunter-gatherers, Denbow believes hunter-gatherers became incorporated into a regionally integrated system of mutually supportive forms of production and exchange.

Denbow’s (1990; 1999) studies of two farmer sites approximately 2km apart in the Tsodilo Hills reflect a sequence of intermittent hunter-gatherer contact followed by a
later period of closer hunter-gatherer / farmer relations. Divuyu (AD 550 - AD 730), an Early Iron Age (EIA) site, had little material evidence for social amalgamation / interaction with indigenous hunter-gatherers. Items that did occur on the site included glass beads, and iron and copper artefacts, with a few hunter-gatherer artefacts, while the bulk of the meat portion of their diet was made up of sheep and goats. This contrasted with the slightly younger MIA site, Nqoma (AD 850 – AD 1090), south of Divuyu (Denbow 1990; 1999). Data from Nqoma (including an increase in wild / hunted fauna and an increase in the number of stone tools present at the site) suggested that hunter-gatherers may actually have been living at Nqoma and not just trading there. According to Denbow (1999), while it is possible that farmers increased their hunting activities, it is unlikely, because a decrease in consumption of cattle did not occur, even though the number of cattle present at the site increased. A large increase in stone artefacts and evidence for tool manufacture also occurred in conjunction with the increase in hunting. Since iron and copper are well-represented at Nqoma, this is not the reason for an increase in stone tools. Denbow therefore concludes that this evidence points to hunter-gatherers being present at the site for an extended period.

Thus, close relationships between hunter-gatherers and farmers changed significantly during the two centuries separating occupation at Divuyu and Nqoma. There was a shift from little or intermittent contact to more structured, closer contact between hunter-gatherers and farmers through time. An increase in scraper numbers that occurred during the first millennium AD (see Walker 1994) might indicate that hide-scraping was an important activity during this time, and that hides were exchanged with the nearby village (Denbow 1999). Furthermore, it appears that although hunter-gatherers initially settled at a distance from farmer sites, they moved closer to farmer settlements later on, and were perhaps even living in rock shelters at the base of the Tsodilo Hills (Walker 1994). However, an issue which has not been explicitly addressed by Denbow (1983; 1984; 1990) is exactly how distance and proximity between hunter-gatherer and farmers sites influences the amount of material in hunter-gatherer sites that originated from farmers (van Doornum 2000). This issue will be investigated in the context of the Shashe-Limpopo region.
Although hunter-gatherer-produced stone tools may often be found in farmer sites, many do not occur in contexts clearly related to interaction on the site. In these cases, typological specificity and debitage frequencies can be used to try to determine if the tools and farmers are contemporaneous, and if they represent direct face-to-face interaction within the sites (Maggs 1980).

Direct, close contact (face-to-face interaction, as opposed to the regional sequences discussed above) has been described for the Magaliesberg of Northwest Province (Mason 1981; Wadley 1996); Limpopo Province, including Madikwe (Hall, S. 2000) and the Shashe-Limpopo region (Hall & Smith 2000; van Doornum 2000); Thamaga (Sadr & Plug 2001; Sadr 2005) and Magagarane (Walker 1994), in Botswana.

Stone tools recovered from the EIA sites of Msuluzi in KwaZulu Natal (Maggs 1980), Broederstroom near Magaliesberg (Mason 1981), and Nqoma, in Botswana (Denbow 1999), are believed to provide evidence for co-operative contact between hunter-gatherers and farmers (Wadley 1996). Hunter-gatherers at sites such as Jubilee Shelter in the Northwest Province may have processed hides for EIA farmers, and later either moved to other areas, or become assimilated by the farming communities. Since no knapping debris occurred at Broederstroom, the tools found there must have been produced elsewhere, at sites somewhat distant from the farming settlement, for example Jubilee Shelter (Wadley 1996). As mentioned previously, stone tools found at the Botswana Iron Age sites of Taukome and Maiphetwane (Denbow 1984), are suggested to have perhaps been used by lower members of the farmer hierarchy in Toutswe. Alternatively, they represent intermittent contact with neighbouring hunter-gatherers, or even hunter-gatherers living in the Iron Age settlements (Denbow 1999). Stone tools have also been found in LIA sites, for example the Tswana site of Dithakong in the Northern Cape, which may also represent close contact between hunter-gatherers and farmers (Maggs 2004).

The context of LSA stone tools in farmer villages is often questionable, because it is difficult to establish with certainty if the two are actually associated. If the two are contemporaneous, interpretations may differ significantly, depending on the Iron Age community, geography, habitat and time period. Simon Hall (2000) has
proposed an interpretation of hunter-gatherer residues in archaeological villages that addresses this question, as well as issues of hunter-gatherer marginalisation and ritual power (as discussed in Chapter 2). Hall postulates an ideological construction of hunter-gatherers by LIA Tswana (Moloko) farmers involved in face-to-face contact with hunter-gatherers similar to that created by farmers for the Dorobo and the Basarwa. He describes two spatially discreet lithic scatters found in a Moloko homestead, 80m apart, and associated with two house floors. Stone tools produced using the bipolar technique were knapped in these areas and the debris buried in small pits. Hall believes the discreteness of these scatters within the homestead suggests that the location of direct, local, face-to-face interaction was closely controlled by farmers and that when hunter-gatherers were in a village context, they were allocated space according to the ideological perceptions of farmers. Generally, farmers believe hunter-gatherers share the natural world with spirits, and are “polluted and polluting”, because they can move between the natural, chaotic world of the bush, and the structured, organised and stable world of the village (see Chapter 2). This liminality gives them power (Hall, S. 1994). Farmer women are interpreted as being spiritually ambivalent because of their work in, and with, nature, and are therefore relegated to the outer ring of the homestead, close to nature. The private back courtyard of the household where farmer women work is also the domain where raw, wild food is cooked, and young children are raised. It is in this area that one of the hunter-gatherer lithic scatters (LS 1) is located. Hall (2000) reasons that when hunter-gatherers were within a farmer homestead, as part of nature and the bush (from which they came and to which they would return), they had to be constrained to the fringes of the settlement because, like farmer women, they were perceived to be in close association with nature. Then, after completing their work for the household and burying the tools that they made and used, the hunter-gatherers left. It is possible that this is a likely scenario for the LIA only, and that in the EIA male hunter-gatherers were allowed into the kraal area to prepare hides (a male task, in a male area). As farmer societies became increasingly complex and hierarchical through time, farmer perceptions of hunter-gatherers changed from *different but ‘equal’* to *different and inferior*, and they were relegated to the outskirts of the settlement (Hall, S. 2000:8). Thus interaction in the Madikwe Moloko homestead was situated within a framework of constructed identities which guided both the
hunter-gatherers and the farmers in their economic exchanges (S. Hall *pers. comm.* 2004).

A similar change in perception of hunter-gatherers from EIA to LIA times may have occurred in the Thamaga area of Botswana, where Sadr believes that the earliest form of contact between hunter-gatherers and farmers at Radiepolong Shelter, Thamaga, occurred over long distances, as no Iron Age sites occur immediately nearby (Sadr & Plug 2001). During the early contact period, there is no evidence for subjugation and assimilation of hunter-gatherers by herders or farmers (Sadr 2002). This may be due to the fact that Radiepolong lies a fair distance (about 4km) from contemporary surrounding Iron Age settlements and the pressure for hunter-gatherers to assimilate may have been far less because of this distance / low density of farmer settlements. This is because the low densities of farmers on the landscape would have allowed for hunter-gatherers to move away if they were unhappy being in close proximity to farmers. The high frequencies of formal stone tools, ostrich eggshell fragments and beads, and bone, occurring during the early contact period at Radiepolong are thought to represent a longer period of occupation by more hunter-gatherers or an intensification of occupation. Alternatively, Sadr (2002) says they may represent a period of increased production of items such as beads and processed skins for trade with farmers.

In the later contact layers at another shelter, Thamaga 1, a decrease in hunter-gatherer artefact densities occurs, which may indicate that the hunter-gatherers were becoming assimilated by surrounding LIA farmers. The fact that Ostrich Shelter, which is situated next to a contemporary nineteenth century LIA village, appears to have been inhabited by hunter-gatherers turned herders seems to support this. The assimilation of hunter-gatherers at Ostrich Shelter had progressed to the point that very little evidence of the hunter-gatherer way of life (for example, stone tools, ostrich eggshell fragments and beads) was present in the deposit. Sadr believes that the Ostrich hunter-gatherers had lost their (overt) hunter-gatherer identity because of the encapsulating presence of large numbers of LIA farmers on the landscape. This restricted their mobility and access to resources. Their material culture became synonymous with that of their farming neighbours. However, this does not preclude the possibility that, initially, hunter-gatherers may have used farmer artefacts in their
own ways, applying their own meanings to them, before becoming more like the farmers.

The Thamaga rock shelters show significant similarities to those of the Shashe-Limpopo region, most especially in the effects of proximity to farmer settlements on hunter-gatherer material culture. The changes in hunter-gatherer material occurring in the region will now be discussed against a background of growing numbers of increasingly politically and socially stratified farmers who settled in the Shashe-Limpopo region (in a scenario similar to that described for eastern Botswana by Denbow (1990; 1999)).

**The Shashe-Limpopo region**

Hunter-gatherer research in the Shashe-Limpopo region (Fig. 3.1) is at present limited to two observations in South Africa (see Robinson (1964) and Cooke & Simons (1969) for work done in Zimbabwe, and Walker (1994) for work done Botswana), and, while some complex interpretations have been made based on these observations, these are mostly speculative in nature. In order to better understand the changes that may have occurred through time in the region, an investigation of sites with a significant, deep pre-ceramic sequence would be essential, in order to provide a comparative basis for the sequence of the last 2000 years. However, the limited previous research (Hall & Smith 2000; van Doornum 2000) in the area appears to indicate that most shelters were only occupied during the ceramic period. In contrast to the paucity of data on hunter-gatherers, much work has been done on the Iron Age sequence, providing a good basis for an investigation of various questions and propositions, including the issue of possible regional settlement change during the first millennium AD when farmers first entered southern Africa.

**The Iron Age sequence**

The Iron Age sequence of the Limpopo Province, and especially the Shashe-Limpopo region (Table 3.1), is very well known (see Huffman 1986, 1996, 2000; Phillipson 1995; Whitelaw 1997; Mitchell 2002; Mitchell & Whitelaw 2005, for overviews).
Figure 3.1. Map of the Shashe-Limpopo region showing key sites.
Table 3.1. *The Shashe-Limpopo Iron Age sequence (after Huffman 2000).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farming Group</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happy Rest</td>
<td>AD 350 - AD 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhizo</td>
<td>AD 900 - AD 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leokwe Zhizo</td>
<td>AD 1000 - 1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K2</td>
<td>AD 1000 - 1220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapungubwe</td>
<td>AD 1220 - AD 1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Zimbabwe</td>
<td>AD 1300 - AD 1450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, farmers in the Shashe-Limpopo differed greatly from farmers in the rest of southern Africa. The Shashe-Limpopo region became increasingly sought after, with farmers competing against other farming groups for access to the trade resources of the region. The focus of this thesis considers the role of hunter-gatherers in this landscape, as it is against the changing sequence of farming groups that hunter-gatherers reacted and responded. Thus knowledge of the chronology, spatial distribution of known sites (Figs. 3.2 – 3.4) and social make-up of farmers is critical to an understanding of hunter-gatherers and their identity through time, and where, when and how hunter-gatherers and farmers interacted.

Bambata pottery first appeared in Botswana and South Africa in the first century AD (Hall & Smith 2000). The occurrence of Bambata ceramics overlaps with that of Happy Rest ceramics up to about AD 400. Although these ceramics are often associated with lithics, and both hunting and farming economies (Reid *et al.* 1998; Mitchell 2002), Huffman (1994) argues that Bambata ceramics form part of the Kalundu Tradition of the Western Stream (Whitelaw 1997). Others (for example Reid *et al.* 1998) believe that Bambata ceramics are associated with lithic-using pastoralist / herder communities and hunter-gatherers who had access to stock (Hall & Smith 2000; Mitchell 2002).
Figure 3.2. Distribution of Zhizo sites in the Shashe-Limpopo region (after Huffman 2000: 17).
Figure 3.3. Distribution of K2 sites in the Shashe-Limpopo region (after Huffman 2000: 18).
Figure 3.4. Distribution of Mapungubwe sites in the Shashe-Limpopo region (after Huffman 2000:22).
The identity of the makers of Bambata-ware has interesting implications for interpretations of interaction in the Shashe-Limpopo. Identity construction and other social structures that facilitate interaction would have differed greatly if hunter-gatherers were interacting with herders in contrast to interacting with EIA farmers. Paintings of sheep in the Shashe-Limpopo (Eastwood & Fish 1996a) hint at interaction between herders and hunter-gatherers, perhaps in the form of hunter-gatherers observing herders and including them in their art. The lack of a Bambata farmer signature (for example, no Bambata homesteads have been found) could indicate that the Bambata-ware makers were mobile herders, who left little trace of their presence on the landscape. At present, faunal assemblages from excavated shelters lack domestic fauna, leading to the assumption that if herders were present in the Shashe-Limpopo, they did not use rock shelters. Open-air herder sites will have to be found in order to clarify this complex issue.

The earliest true Iron Age sites belong to the Happy Rest Phase, and these date to between AD 350 and AD 600 (Huffman 1996; 2000; 2002), although not many sites have been found in the Limpopo Province, and none have yet been found in the Shashe-Limpopo region, as mentioned above (Eastwood & Cnoops 1999c; Hall & Smith 2000). This is no doubt due to the fact that the better-watered land to the south, around the Soutpansberg, would have been favoured instead (Hall & Smith 2000).

Between AD 600 and AD 900, the climate became colder and drier (Tyson & Lindesay 1992) - no farming communities dating to this period have been found in the region (Huffman 2000, 2002; Vogel 2000). Initially, it was thought that higher rainfall in about AD 900 (Tyson & Lindesay 1992; Huffman 1996) may have attracted a greater number of farmers to the area, resulting in an intensified occupation of the Shashe-Limpopo region (Huffman 1996, 2000; Whitelaw 1997). However, new evidence (Smith 2005) indicates that an increase in rainfall did not occur at this time, and that semi-arid climatic conditions in fact prevailed between AD 900 and AD 1010 (although these conditions did not preclude agropastoral activities). Huffman (2000) now suggests that large herds of elephant present in the region at this time may have initially attracted farmers to the area because of the economic opportunities they offered due to the growing ivory trade with the African
This second EIA phase - unrelated to the Happy Rest Phase - is known as the Zhizo Tradition, and lasted up until about AD 1020 (Hanisch 1981a; Huffman 1996, 2000; Calabrese 2000). Zhizo homesteads have been found from Zimbabwe to a few kilometres south of the Limpopo River (Huffman 2000) (Fig 3.2). During this period, the availability of space for hunter-gatherers would have become an even greater issue than in the Happy Rest period, affecting the way hunter-gatherers saw themselves on the landscape, as well as their concept of ‘space’ and ‘place’ (Hall & Smith 2000; van Doornum 2000). The Zhizo capital, Schroda (ca AD 900 – AD 1000) (Hanisch 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 2002; Huffman 1986, 2000; Hall & Smith 2000; van Schalkwyk & Hanisch 2002), is situated near the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo Rivers (Fig. 3.1), where modern Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa meet. It is the earliest known Iron Age settlement in the southern African interior to have been involved in the Indian Ocean Trade Network with the Orient; evidence for this trade comes in the form of imported glass beads (Hanisch 1981b; Phillipson 1995; Saitowitz et al 1996; Huffman 2000; Wood 2000). However, Schroda did not maintain control over the trade for long, and was abandoned about AD 1000 (Huffman 1986, 1996, 2000).

Schroda and the Zhizo chiefdom were replaced by the Leopard’s Kopje Phase around about AD 950 / AD 1000 (Huffman 1996, 2000; Eastwood & Cnoops 1999c). At this time, a three-fold increase in Zhizo-derived Toutswe ceramics occurs at Toutswe, in eastern Botswana (Denbow 1984; Hall, M. 1987; Huffman 1996, 2000; Whitelaw 1997; Reid & Segobye 2000). It appears that the Leopard’s Kopje people forced the majority of the Zhizo people out of the Shashe-Limpopo into areas such as eastern Botswana, although some did remain in the Shashe-Limpopo region (for example, at Leokwe Hill (Calabrese 2000, 2005; Huffman 2000; Vogel & Calabrese 2000)). Hunter-gatherers in the region would not have remained untouched by this new set of circumstances.

The Leopard’s Kopje phase dates between AD 1000 and AD 1290, and includes the K2 and Mapungubwe periods (Hanisch 1981a; Huffman 2000; Vogel 2000). The new capital of the Leopard’s Kopje A culture, K2, situated a few kilometres to the west of Schroda, was the largest and most important early Shona settlement in the Shashe-Limpopo region (Huffman 1996, 2000) (Figs. 3.1 & 3.3). When the K2
people took over the area during this wetter period (Smith 2005), they also took over the coastal trade, as can be seen in the great quantities of ivory objects (Voigt 1983) and glass beads (Wood 2000) found at the site. The influence of the K2 (and later Mapungubwe) people was felt as far away as the fringes of the Kalahari in east central Botswana (Reid & Segobye 2000). The scale of their economic power and density on the landscape would no doubt have had a significant impact on the hunter-gatherers inhabiting the Shashe-Limpopo region.

During K2 / Mapungubwe period, cattle became less important as a source of wealth for the farmer elites (although the bulk of the population would still have been dependent on their cattle), instead being replaced by trade goods and wealth (Huffman 1996; Eastwood & Cnoops 1999c). Smith (2005) suggests that a dry episode occurring in the Shashe-Limpopo region at this time may be correlated with the shift of the political centre away from K2, as the need for rain became increasingly important. The abrupt abandonment of K2 by AD 1220 coincided with an increase of people around Mapungubwe Hill about a kilometre away (Huffman 2000): K2 and Mapungubwe both lie on the farm of Greefswald, opposite the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo Rivers (Eloff & Meyer 1981; Voigt 1983; Meyer 2000) (Fig. 3.1). In a continuation of cultural changes which began at K2, the Mapungubwe leader moved up on top of the hill, physically separated from his followers (Huffman 1986; 1996; 2000). The leader was involved in rainmaking (Schoeman in prep.), and the control and redistribution of trade goods. The resulting power and wealth accrued from the trade led to the expansion of the Mapungubwe state (Huffman 1986, 1996; Eastwood & Cnoops 1999c). The Mapungubwe rulers politically and economically controlled large parts of the Limpopo Province, from close to the Limpopo River at Mapungubwe to the Soutpansberg Mountains (Hanisch 1981a), and was the most complex society in southern Africa at the time. Mapungubwe was only inhabited for a relatively brief period (AD 1220 – AD 1290) (Huffman 2000; Meyer 2000; Vogel 2000), during which time the social organisation had evolved into a new, class-based / elite pattern (Huffman 1996; 2000). The reason for the abandonment of Mapungubwe was previously thought to be due to unfavourable climatic conditions (Tyson & Lindesay 1992; Huffman 2000). However, if Smith (2005) is correct, and wetter conditions still prevailed in the region at this time, other factors (both political and economical) were probably
The hunter-gatherer sequence

Using the changing background of Iron Age farmers described above, Hall and Smith (2000) propose a sequence of interaction for the Shashe-Limpopo region where hunter-gatherers appear to have had declining access to farmers through time, as they became increasingly inferior in the eyes of the farmers. This ‘regional’ sequence is, however, only based on one observation, and thus the generalisations that are made with respect to interaction in the Shashe-Limpopo as a whole should be treated with some caution until further observations can confirm or refute this
hypothesis. Hall and Smith (2000) base their model on a series of changes occurring in the material culture and the use of Little Muck Shelter. Little Muck - chosen for excavation because it is situated within a kilometre of the farmer settlement at Leokwe Hill - exhibits four changes of ‘place’, from a pre-ceramic period occupation through to the Late Iron Age. The sequence is based on the correlation between abrupt changes in the density of material and the differing degrees of farmer political stratification mentioned above. Hall argues that the shelter was used as a pre-ceramic hunter-gatherer camp before AD 350; as a ceramic period hunter-gatherer camp during the Bambata / Happy Rest period between AD 350 and AD 600; and a hunter-gatherer camp / workshop during the Leokwe-Zhizo period between AD 1000 and AD 1100. Finally, it was used by farmers during the K2 period, when hunter-gatherers appear to have abandoned the shelter. Metal, glass beads and pottery provide evidence for farmer occupation between about AD 1100 and AD 1270, before the shelter was abandoned at a time appearing to correlate with the abandonment of Mapungubwe around AD 1290 (Hall & Smith 2000).

During the Happy Rest period, Hall and Smith (2000) suggest that hunter-gatherers presumably had access to all levels of farming communities because they were less ranked than later communities, and thus farmers may have seen hunter-gatherers as almost equal. This interpretation is dependent on the presence of farmers in the region. Interaction relationships would have been somewhat different if farmers and hunter-gatherers were only trading over long distances and not interacting on a face-to-face scale in the region.

In the Leokwe Zhizo period, when a greater farmer presence was present in the region, (Vogel 2000; Vogel & Calabrese 2000), hunter-gatherers at certain sites such as Little Muck Shelter may have interacted closely with farmers. During this period of occupation, the conception of Little Muck Shelter seems to have changed, from ‘camp’ to ‘camp / workplace’. The archaeological evidence for this shift of use comes in the form of extraordinarily high densities of scrapers, ostrich eggshell, Achatina land snail and ochre, as well as bone. Hall and Smith suggest that hunter-gatherers were interacting closely with Leokwe Zhizo period farmers at Leokwe Hill, perhaps preparing hides for them (see for example, Wadley (2001) and Klatzow...
(2002) who describe a large increase in scrapers - linked to hide-scraping and leatherworking for farmers - during the contact period in the Free State).

Other hunter-gatherers from more marginal, ephemerally occupied shelters such as Balerno Shelter 3 (van Doornum 2000) may have periodically visited farmer settlements, and sites such as Little Muck, in order to trade there. Even though the closest farmer sites (Zhizo-, K2- and Mapungubwe-type sites) are no more than about 3km away from Balerno Shelter 3, interaction material densities are low, and reflect little about the nature of interaction with farmers, other than that they were present on the landscape. Little Muck Shelter, on the other hand, situated 0.8 km from the farmer settlement of Leokwe Hill, had much higher densities of interaction material. Balerno Shelter 3 on its own would have therefore presented an erroneous generalisation of regional interaction. This highlights the importance of controlling for proximity in interpretations of interaction, as well as understanding the differences in the types of sites being studied (home base versus special activity site, or aggregation versus dispersal site).

In the later K2 / Mapungubwe period, when there were more complex social and political structures in place, Hall and Smith (2000) believe that hunter-gatherers were increasingly excluded, and that commoner farmers at the base of the farming political system began to perform more of the tasks and functions that hunter-gatherers had previously performed. During the K2 period at Leokwe Hill, it is interesting to note that while K2 people occupied the higher status areas on top of the hill, commoner Zhizo people lived at the base of the hill. This is especially of interest if these occupations were indeed contemporary (Vogel & Calabrese 2000). The emergence of specialists in ceramics (and possibly other artefacts) as a consequence of the new class structures and increasing farmer population numbers is also postulated by Huffman (2000).

At Little Muck Shelter, in the later Mapungubwe period, hunter-gatherers were excluded from production relationships by farmers, who then took over the shelter at Little Muck for their own ritual purpose. This is seen archaeologically in the marked contrast in the densities of artefacts – the frequencies of hunter-gatherer artefacts drop radically, becoming almost non-existent. Fourteen mankala boards have also
been engraved into the rock surface in front of the shelter (Hall & Smith 2000). The hunter-gatherer signature in the area became less distinct during this time, and eventually disappeared by the end of the Mapungubwe period. Hall and Smith believe that although commoner farmers at the base of the farming political system increasingly excluded hunter-gatherers, their rock shelters, as ‘places of power’ (see Deacon 1988, Ouzman 1995; Walker 1997), were seen as a ritual resource to be appropriated and controlled. It is interesting to note that the possibility exists that hunter-gatherers may have taken part in rainmaking rituals, on special rainmaking hills, during the K2 period, as the social marginality and the identification of hunter-gatherers as ‘First People’ gave them power which farmers could ‘tap’ into (van der Ryst 2003; Schoeman in prep.). Farmer use of hunter-gatherer shelters has also been noted in the second millennium in several other parts of southern Africa, for example the Free State (Wadley 1992; Klatzow 2002), KwaZulu Natal (Kaplan 1990; Mazel 1997, 1999, 2001; Wadley 2001; Wadley & Jacobs 2004) and Botswana (Walker 1995a). It is thought that some shelters were used as refuges (Phillipson 1976) as well as for ritual purposes such as rainmaking (Mazel 1993; van der Ryst 1998).

As yet, however, Little Muck Shelter and Balerno Shelter 3 are just two observations in the area, and it is therefore not yet clear whether the interpretations that have been made can be generalised for the entire Shashe-Limpopo region. For this reason, three sites located at varying distances from farmer sites – Tshisiku Shelter, Balerno Main Shelter and Balerno Shelter 2 - have been chosen for study. Data from these shelters will be compared and contrasted to those from Little Muck Shelter and Balerno Shelter 2. The resulting interpretations of the data from the three shelters will also be used to comment on the hunter-gatherer sequence and time depth of hunter-gatherer occupation in the region (keeping in mind the limitations of proposing a ‘regional’ sequence based on only five sites located in fairly close proximity to each other). The impact of growing numbers of increasingly complex farmers on hunter-gatherers and hunter-gatherer / farmer relationships will be considered. The occurrence of regional settlement changes in the first millennium AD, and between the first and second millennia AD, will also be assessed.