



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Recent Archaeological Research between the Orange and Kavango Rivers in South-Western Africa by J. Kinahan

L. Jacobson

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Other papers are less successful. Collett's model for the spread of the Early Iron Age is tentative and seems to have little to do with the theme of the volume. Collett also makes an over-simplistic and assertive association between classes of evidence that cannot automatically be linked, a problem shared to some extent by Ambrose's approach to the study of East African prehistory, although this second author has at least provided the reader with a clear map through the jungle of evidence from his part of the continent. Ehret's two contributions share an extraordinary reliance on glottochronology: a method of dating long out of fashion with other linguists and an approach which will make many of his readers uneasy.

The various sections of the volume are linked together by useful editorial commentary, although the vituperative attack on Gramly and his model for the origins of the southern African Iron Age seem a little out of place. Many people have written bad papers on this topic and, on re-reading the subject of Ehret and Posnansky's dismay, this reviewer could not see what distinguished Gramly from the rest.

Nevertheless, the volume as a whole is a useful contribution to the study of the African past even if the papers will serve to reaffirm many an archaeologist's opinion that archaeological and linguistic evidence do not make good companions.

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HOPKIRK, P. 1984. *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 252 pp., 13 illus., 2 maps. R14,95 excl. GST (paperback).

The Silk Road was a caravan route linking Antioch and Tyre in the west with Ch'ang-an in China in the east. It was in fact not one but a series of routes connecting adjacent cities and forming a trade network from the Mediterranean to China. Few travellers covered the entire distance but merchandise which included gold and other metals, textiles, ivory, coral, amber, asbestos, glass, ceramics, cinnamon, rhubarb and fur in addition to silk, passed through a series of middlemen. Another very important 'commodity' that moved along the Road was Buddhism with its sacred books and texts and its art. The Silk Road was entirely dependent for both its existence and survival upon the line of strategically situated oases, each no more than a few days' march from the next, which skirted the perimeter of the Taklamakan desert, an area which for over a thousand years has "enjoyed an evil reputation among travellers". Over the centuries some of the larger and more prosperous oases gained sway over the surrounding regions and developed into independent feudal principalities. The art and civilization of the Silk Road reached its highest point during the T'ang Dynasty (618—907 A.D.) but in time, as the Chinese lost control of the region, it began to decline and eventually only the strongest and best-watered of the oases survived. The other oases with their riches disappeared beneath the desert sands, remembered only in strange legends among the tribesmen of the Taklamakan.

In *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road* Peter Hopkirk tells the story of archaeological raids almost a thousand years later, at the beginning of this century, to recover some of the priceless treasures from the temples, tombs and ruins of the Silk Road in Chinese Turkestan. The book tells how the lost towns were relocated and of the "free-for-all" that developed in the international race for the treasures of the fabled Silk Road. It is concerned primarily with six men — Sven Hedin of Sweden, Sir Aurel Stein of Britain, Albert von Le Coq of Germany, Paul Pelliot of France, Langdon Warner of the United States and "the somewhat mysterious" Count Otani of Japan. Between them these six men removed literally tons of wall-paintings, manuscripts and sculptures, material which is today spread over at least thirty institutions in thirteen countries. One's horror at the plunder perpetrated is tempered to a degree by a sneaking admiration for the sheer determination of the adventurers. On one occasion, for example, Sven Hedin's party ran out of water and so desperate were they to quench their thirst that they attempted to drink spirits from the primus stove, rooster blood, sheep blood and camel's urine — in that

order! Surprisingly enough Hedin and one other survived the ordeal! But this was not enough to put Hedin off. Later he was back again, this time in conditions where nocturnal temperatures fell to -22°F (-30°C), drinking water was carried in the form of blocks of ice and where he had to resort to using a pencil for his notes because the ink in his fountain pen was frozen solid. And he had no tent!

Hopkirk traces the story of each of his main characters in a highly readable style (he is a reporter with *The Times*) and though his purpose is neither to condemn nor to condone he does raise some important issues regarding the morality of the plundering of these sites as against leaving the material *in situ* to the mercy of hazards such as the elements, local treasure hunters and religious fanatics. *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road* is worth reading not only for what one can learn about events in archaeology on the other side of the world but also because it is as good an adventure story as one will find anywhere.

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KINAHAN, J. ed. 1984. Recent archaeological research between the Orange and Kavango rivers in south-western Africa. *Cimbebasia* B 4. State Museum, Windhoek. Price approx. R14,00.

Seven consecutive issues have been combined in this volume to present recent archaeological results from Namibia. The geographic spread of the papers shows current research patterns or biases — six out of seven papers deal with sites in or along the Namib desert whilst four are concentrated in the north-west. Subject matter also shows an uneven spread, namely four papers on the Later Stone Age and one each on coastal archaeology, Iron Age ceramics and a surface survey.

The volume opens with a paper by Richter on excavations at the Messum Mountain, an area which receives less than 50 mm of rain per annum. Faunal and floral remains argue for short occupations after highly variable rainfall events which characterize the area today. Sea shells and imported raw materials provide evidence of a high degree of spatial mobility. Stone artefacts are abundant, particularly microlithic tools post-dating the arrival of herding into this part of the sub-continent.

The following paper is by Kinahan who describes the Falls Rock Shelter. The artefact assemblage was divided into three phases, a pre-herder O phase and two post-herder phases, H and R, the latter two associated with both microlithic artefacts and dung. An attribute analysis was devised in order to assess the formal differences between the phases. Eight attributes, consisting of three or four states each, are defined and scored for the three phases. They are then 'crunched' by the Relative Homogeneity Function and dendrograms are derived showing their relationship to each other. H and O phases are closely linked to each other though they are less close as a whole to the R phase. This is most interesting in view of the current debate concerning the identity of hunters in the post-herder archaeological record. I see a number of problems with the analysis, however, which unfortunately lessen its impact and also show that little thought has gone into its planning. For example, is the analysis one of function or style? Were the attributes chosen to reflect one or other of these? There is also no discussion of what these attributes mean. Is raw material specifically collected or are close approximates selected during the course of other activities (Binford 1979)? If so, is there really a significant difference between quartz and crystal quartz? What Kinahan also seems to have missed is that the function of the site changed over time. It was initially occupied by hunter-gatherers (of the pre-herding period) but was subsequently used, from the evidence of the dung, as a stock pen (amongst other possible uses) by herders. Or were they hunters with stolen stock and the dung results from slaughtering activities at the site rather than herding? At any rate, how have these differences affected the type of material remains found in the site? There is also no attempt made to put the Falls site into any sort of context by relating it either to local sites with similar assemblages (Jacobson 1978) or sites slightly further afield yet very relevant (Sandelowsky 1977; Wadley 1979). I also query the statistical

analysis. This was carried out on attribute *frequencies*. However, a close look at the number of scrapers reveals frequencies of 8, 33 and 23 for R, H and O phases respectively. Apart from the question of whether 8 specimens represents an adequate sample, which it does not, the use of frequencies results in scores for phases H and O being overrepresented relative to R, especially if they have an equal probability of occurring. Some method of allowing for widely differing sample sizes is clearly called for (Jacobson 1978). It is thus possible that the homogeneity values simply reflect sample size and have nothing to do with the attribute similarity of the phases. It would also be advisable to analyse more than just one site as the homogeneity values between the Falls assemblages might be insignificant if analysed on a broader scale.

I have spent some time on the Falls report as it is an important site although the data need to be handled better. One also hopes that carbon-13 values for the dung will be published as well as a faunal report, although bone tends to be highly comminuted in these arid zone sites and to be of little analytical value.

The Rosh Pinah Shelter by Sievers is a description of the excavations which yielded a small but interesting assemblage (including a cowrie shell and specularite) as well as further evidence for a discontinuity of site occupation spanning 8 000 years.

Wadley looks at food scheduling in the Erongo. I find this model a little too rigid. In this type of arid environment the most important input to the ecosystem (and hence primary productivity or plant growth) is precipitation. As this can come early, late, in two separate events (the small rains and the big rains some months later) or even not at all, seasonality should not be defined in calendar terms. I have collected many edible plants far later in the year than Wadley lists, albeit in a slightly different area. For example, *Cordia gharaf* is listed in her table 3 as occurring in December whilst I have collected it in the Brandberg in April. So-called seasonal mobility, I believe, was as variable as the availability of resources, did not necessarily affect the whole population of an area, and was definitely not as structured as elsewhere in southern Africa.

Shackley deals with the problem of artefact visibility and the distribution of sites relative to topographic features and represents an important contribution to arid zone archaeology.

Kinahan and Kinahan present an interesting report on a coastal site where the remains of whalebone huts are still visible. They point out that faunal remains from the site could have been deposited by jackals and quote an example. They therefore confined their analysis to the white mussel middens. Unfortunately, these could also have been deposited by modern fishermen or other campers who might have used the mussel as bait or food. In the immediate vicinity of the hut site is some evidence for European settlement. This lessens the value of their meat weight and energy count. In addition, fig. 2 showing the relationship between shell length and meat weight is wrong. It is also a pity that both left and right umbos were not represented in fig. 3 as my own work has shown that one can get a very different size distribution for each half with consequently quite different meat weights. Using both halves would give some idea of the limits to the variability inherent in the remains. I also query the assumption that the weight of the fragmented shell is proportional to the size classes. Smaller shells are thinner and could be more prone to shattering than larger ones. Some experimentation is clearly called for.

The final paper deals with thin section analyses of Iron Age ceramics from the Kavango by Woods. The fact that tempers such as grog and bone are used could possibly create problems for trace element analyses.

To sum up, in spite of some criticisms, this is a very welcome collection especially as it raises more questions than have been answered, particularly as regards problems such as contact and interaction between hunters and herders which has both a socio-economic base as well as an ecological one, hence the importance of the papers by Richter, Kinahan and Wadley. There is a need, however, for a stronger theoretical base within which to frame the relevant questions. For the time being, this volume will serve to draw attention to current archaeological directions in Namibia and hopefully attract more interest to fields such as the Iron Age or ethno-archaeology which are woefully under-studied at present.

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- LEAKEY, M. 1984. *Disclosing the past: an autobiography*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson. 224 pp., map, 50 illus (25 in colour). R29,95.

This is the inside story of the discovery of our remote ancestor, *Homo habilis*, and our equally remote collateral, *Australopithecus boisei*, written by their discoverer.

Mary Nicol started her archaeological career as a fieldworker when she was only 17 years old at Hembury, Devon, England, but being a born draughtswoman — her father was an artist — she was soon drawing stone implements, not only for the director of the Hembury dig but for other excavators as well. It was this faculty which brought her into touch with Louis Leakey, and the story of the subsequent Cambridge scandal is told with courageous candour — indeed, both courage and candour illuminate the book from start to finish.

Less than five years later, Mary Nicol made her first acquaintance with Africa. She landed in Cape Town in January 1935 and soon met John Goodwin, founder of the South African Archaeological Society. She was invited to Oakhurst Shelter where Goodwin was then excavating and, in helping him, she had her "first experience of the proper scientific excavation" of a rock shelter, although she had already seen French archaeologists at work at Les Eyzies. It would have pleased Goodwin to learn that she found his techniques and methods "way ahead of his time" (p. 51).

Soon she moved to East Africa, where so much of her life has been spent, and her account of Kenyan and Tanganyikan sites in the later 1930s is especially delightful. Here are passed in a single review sites such as Olduvai, Engaruka, Kisese, Hyrax Hill and Njoro River Cave: names in textbooks to many, but here real places set in a vivid East African landscape.

The central chapters of this book (9 and 10) deal with *Proconsul* whose fossil skull she first met face to face on Rusinga Island in October 1948; 'Zinj' (short for *Zinjanthropus*, the generic name suggested for *A. boisei*) which she found lying on an eroded surface at Olduvai in 1959; and *Homo habilis*, one of whose leg bones was spotted by her eldest son, Jonathan, when he was holding a plumb-line for her at Olduvai in 1960. Her vivid descriptions of fieldwork — who did what, when and where; how an unusual tooth leads to a jaw and so to a skull — bring to life the discoveries all too often described so soullessly in scientific papers. Nor does she fail to highlight the discoveries by recounting some of the many disappointments one experiences in fieldwork.

With her artistic background, it is only to be expected that Mary Leakey should be interested in rock art. During her first visit to Africa in 1935 she saw some of the fine painted sites around Kondoa, Tanzania, and in 1951 she spent three months in copying them. She recorded 186 sites in all and copied 43 of the most interesting of them, separating the various superimposed compositions. Many of these copies have been reproduced in her recent book *Africa's Vanishing Art* (1983), but she used others as museum exhibits, transferring them to a model of the actual rock face. (I saw the first one in 1956 and a very fine exhibit it made.)

But these happy chapters are followed by an extremely distressing one which she admits she would rather not have written. It records the decline, physical and mental, of Louis which, by accident rather than by design, she had to watch from afar. The writing of this