

## ■ NAMIBIA

### Archaeological investigations in the Kaokoland: Survey and excavations in 1999 and 2000

Ralf Vogelsang  
Heinrich-Barth-Institut  
Universität Köln  
Jennerstr. 8  
50823 Köln, Germany

#### Introduction

The question of the origin and spread of pastoralism is the central aspect of the archaeological component in a collaborative research centre "SFB 389/ACACIA", which was established by the "Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)" at the University of Cologne in 1995 (see <http://www.uni-koeln.de/sfb389>). In some models for the introduction of domesticated animals to southern Africa, the northern part of Namibia plays an important role (Smith 1992: Fig. 3.10, Fig. 3.11, Fig. 10.1), but up to now archaeological evidence is scarce. The only excavations in the Kaokoland were test pits (Kinahan 1981; Smith 1988) and the only comprehensive work focuses on ethnoarchaeology (Jacobsohn 1988, 1995). Archaeological fieldwork began in 1995 (Figure 1).

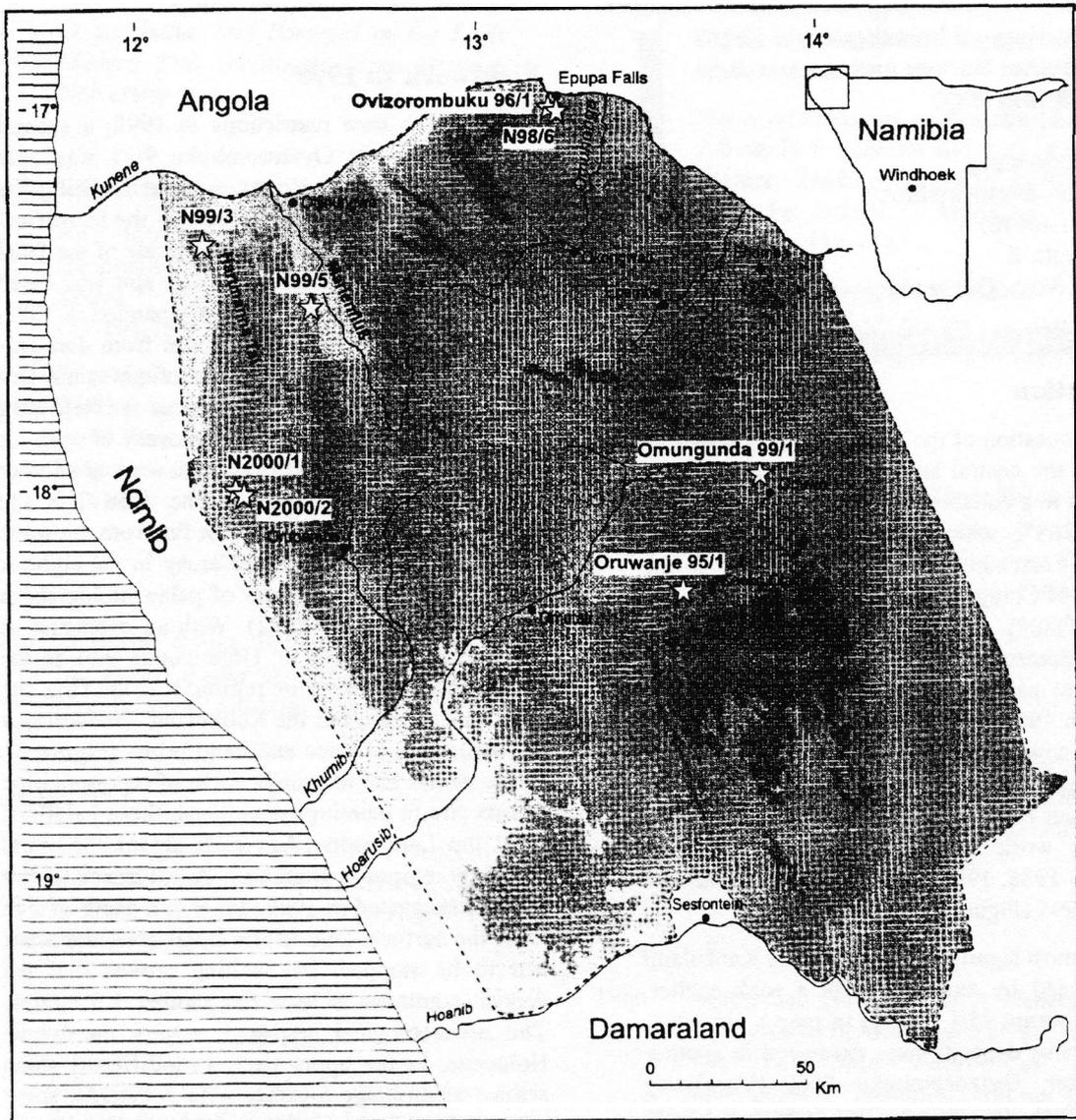
The most significant results in the Kaokoland were provided by excavations in a rock shelter, named Oruwanje 95/1 (Frank, in prep.). In 1998, comprehensive deposits were excavated in another rock shelter, Ovizorombuku 96/1 (Vogelsang 1998). At first, the stone artifact assemblage from the basal layers of this site seemed to show some Middle Stone Age attributes. However, radiocarbon dates point to an Early Holocene to Late Pleistocene Age (around 10,000 B.P.). Further analysis will clarify if there is a macrolithic stone artifact industry of this age in north-western Namibia. This would be of special interest, because sites belonging to this period are extremely rare in Namibia. Only two small assemblages could be classified as Late Pleistocene/Early Holocene by Richter (1991) in his comprehensive analysis of sites in the central and north-western parts of the country. The sediments of this age point to an arid

climatic phase (Richter 1991:166), that might explain the scarcity of sites.

#### Fieldwork in 1999

Due to time restrictions in 1998, a second trench at the site Ovizorombuku 96/1 was only excavated in the upper part, without reaching the rock floor. Of great importance was the identification of a sheep bone, coming from one of the final spits. A charcoal sample from this spit was dated about 2500 B.P. This trench was expanded in 1999, in the hope of getting more bones from domesticates. So far, the analysis of these finds is not finished. Although the main interest of the fieldwork in 1999 should have been the discovery of open air sites of an early pastoral phase, the work at another rock shelter took up most of the time. The site Omungunda 99/1 is situated not far from the town Opuwo. It was found by R. Camby in the eighties and was visited by a group of palaeontologists in 1992 (Pickford et al. 1992). With an extension of approximately 23 x 4 m, Omungunda 99/1 is the largest rock-shelter in the region. It is the first site with rock paintings in the Kaokoland. Predominant are depictions of lines and hand prints (Figure 2). These motifs and the rough form of representation of two giraffe paintings distinguish these paintings from the Late Stone Age rock art of the more southerly regions in Namibia. A test trench of two m<sup>2</sup> was excavated in 1999, down to a depth of 2 m from the surface. Due to the small area, the work had to be stopped, but drilling proved that the deposit continues at least for another 1.5 metres. The archaeological sequence covers the whole Holocene. In the upper part, an indifferent stone artifact assemblage together with potsherds, some of them decorated, was found. Underneath followed a microlithic LSA assemblage with pottery and then an LSA assemblage without pottery. Finally macrolithic artifacts, comparable to the finds from Ovizorombuku N96/1, were excavated. First radiocarbon dates (around 12,000 B.P.) from charcoal associated with these stone artifacts again point to a Late Pleistocene/Early Holocene age. There is a good chance that the so far not excavated basal deposits might contain MSA material. At the end of the fieldwork in 1999, the sought after surface sites with stone circles were located in Hartmann's (N99/3) and Marienfluss valleys (N99/5). In both cases the sites are located on top of hills, giving

Figure 1: The research area with all sites mentioned in the text.



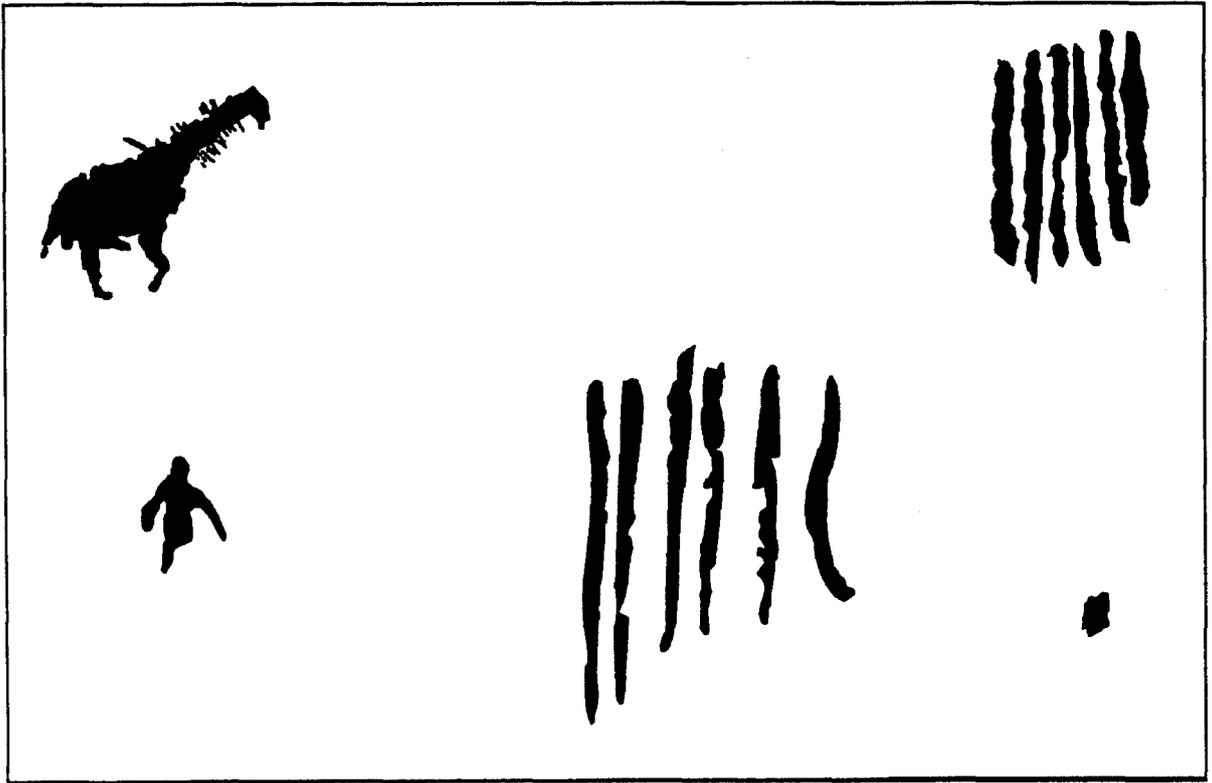
them the appearance of "fortifications". Besides potsherds and glass-beads an iron arrowhead was found at one site. A first radiocarbon date from a fireplace inside one of the hut-circles has an age of 230 years, broadly corresponding with the suspected date of the immigration of the cattle keeping Himba people from Angola.

**Fieldwork in 2000**

During the fieldwork in 2000, the rock paintings from the site Omungunda 99/1 were documented and a second area of 6 m<sup>2</sup> was excavated, espe-

cially to enlarge the pottery sample. Therefore, work was stopped at the beginning of the Early Holocene layer. Besides numerous potsherds, the high number of bone points from the Later Stone Age deposits is remarkable. Survey activities in 2000 concentrated on the more marginal areas at the edge of the Namib desert. It was hoped, that in such a frontier zone even slight climatic changes might influence the ecological settings of the landscape significantly. Also, the drier conditions nowadays and the sparse population promised better preservation conditions even for surface sites.

Figure 2: Rock paintings from Omungunda 99/1 (Scale 1:5).



Settlement areas in this arid region are restricted by the availability of water. Whereas large parts show no signs of human occupation at all, a feature of favorable areas is the concentration of sites. Several clusters of stone circles were located at a granite hill close to the border of the Skeleton-Coast-Park. Seven of these structures were situated under a large rock shelter (N2000 1), where remains of deposits were also preserved. Due to the slow weathering of the rock and perhaps deflation of sediments, the maximum depths of the deposits is only 40 cm, but again the archaeological sequence covers the whole Holocene. In addition, the basal assemblage is without doubt Middle Stone Age with blades and points.

Only 200 m away from this site, the floor in front of 4 small caves was plastered with stone artifacts. The excavation in one of these caves (N2000 2) leads one to assume that they were only intermittently occupied by LSA hunting groups. The stone tools are almost exclusively microlithic projectile insets, like lunates and micropoints. In contrast to most of the other up to now excavated

sites, there seems to be no pre- or post-LSA occupation. Finally a test trench in a smaller rock-shelter (N98/6) in the vicinity of the site Ovizorombuku 96/1 confirmed the archaeological sequence of that site.

### Discussion

Since 1995 about 100 archaeological sites could be located in the Kaokoland and 8 of these sites have been excavated. The excavated finds permit a first reconstruction of the settlement history of the region. The extensive material from the Late Pleistocene/Early Holocene period found at all larger excavations is remarkable. Due to arid climatic conditions, other regions of Namibia seem to be nearly unpopulated during that time, the Kaokoland might have been a retreat. On the other hand, the younger microlithic Later Stone Age assemblages are relatively rare in the Kaokoland in comparison to other parts of the country. Domesticates and pottery appear for the first time at least around 2000 B.P. in the area, but further analysis is neces-

sary to clarify the process of introduction. Not much is known about the younger periods up to colonial times. There is still no archaeological evidence for the beginning of specialized cattle pastoralism, that characterizes the economy of the area today. Therefore, research will be concentrated in the next year on the analysis of the finds from the up to now excavated sites and on the continuation of the archaeological survey.

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