

THE NEOLITHIC OF SOUTHERN AFRICA*

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ABSTRACT: As the exception on the continent, southern Africa has no Neolithic period. In the 1920s, when the term came to mean Stone Age with food production, Neolithic was dropped in South Africa for lack of evidence for farming or herding in Stone Age sites. But since the late 1960s many sheep bones have surfaced in just such sites. Now, the continued absence of a Neolithic may say more about the politics of South African archaeology than about its prehistory. This paper describes food production in the southern African late Stone Age and argues in favor of (re-)introducing the term Neolithic to the subcontinent.

KEY WORDS: Archaeology, southern Africa, pre-colonial, environment.

TODAY, as the exception to nearly all archaeological regions of Africa, southern Africa has no Neolithic period. Although previously used, the term was withdrawn in the late 1920s from southern African archaeology because of a shift in definitions. Coined in the mid-nineteenth century, Neolithic originally referred to the period when new stone tools such as polished axes were developed.¹ In the early decades of the twentieth century the term gradually came to mean Stone Age farming and herding. At that time, it was thought that the indigenous southern African San or Bushmen had never advanced beyond hunting and gathering before immigrant, iron-using, Bantu-speaking farmers brought the concept of food production from the north. Thus, between the Paleolithic Bushmen and the Iron Age Bantu-speakers, there was thought to be no Neolithic in southern Africa.²

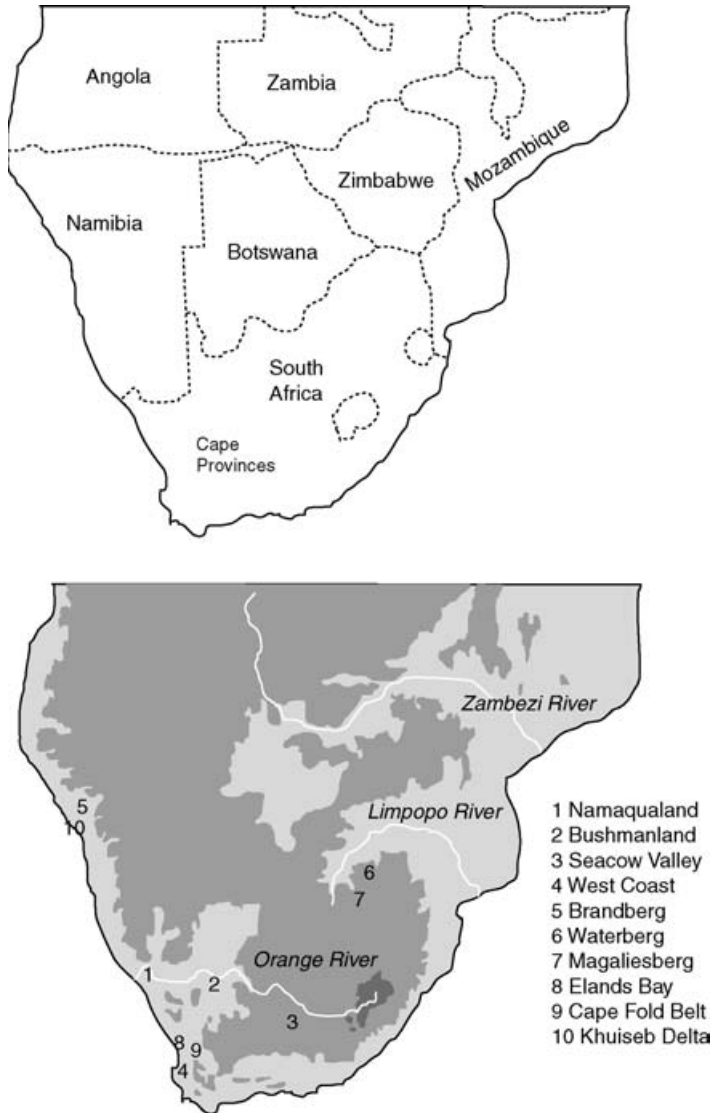
Interestingly, this point of view did not change even after the early 1970s, when bones of domestic sheep were discovered in sites of stone tool using hunter-gatherers. These were dismissed as stolen property or wages received from nearby (but archaeologically undocumented) pastoralists. These pastoralists were presumed to be immigrant Khoekhoe from northeastern Botswana, ancestors of the historically recorded Cape Hottentots, who reached the southern tip of Africa by at least 2,000 years ago.³

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¹ Lord Avebury (John Lubbock), *Pre-historic Times* (6th ed., London, 1900).

² A. J. H. Goodwin and C. Van Riet Lowe, 'The Stone Age cultures of South Africa', *Annals of the South African Museum*, 27 (1929), 1–289.

³ R. Elphick, *Khoikhoi and the Founding of White South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1985); C. Ehret, *An African Classical Age* (Charlottesville, 1998), 217–18.



Map 1. Southern Africa with places mentioned in the text.

Now, three decades after the first sheep bones were found, the ubiquitous ‘nearby’ Khoekhoe pastoralists have yet to materialize. It may be time to ask whether this is absence of evidence or evidence for their absence? Below, I argue for the latter possibility: that the sheep found in southern African hunter-gatherer sites were actually herded by the hunters themselves, and that this represents a type of low-intensity food production which characterizes the Neolithic period of southern Africa. The archaeological record shows that against this background of Neolithic ‘hunters-with-sheep’, there were brief, localized episodes of more intensive animal husbandry. Some of these episodes of more intensive animal husbandry may indeed have

resulted from one or more migrations of Khoe-speakers, but other such episodes may have developed in other ways. The origins of each localized episode of more intensive animal husbandry in the Neolithic of southern Africa eventually will need to be explained case by case.

THE NEOLITHIC

Neolithic, Greek for new stone, is the last of the Stone Age. C. J. Thomsen invented the Stone Age in 1836 as part of his three age classification system – stone, bronze and iron – for collections in the National Museum of Copenhagen.⁴ Nearly three decades later, in his 1865 bestseller *Pre-historic Times*, the English banker Sir John Lubbock (Lord Avebury) split Thomsen's Stone Age into the old and the new.⁵ His Paleolithic has remained an uncontroversial term; Neolithic not. Over time, this term has become overloaded with meaning. In Lord Avebury's original formulation it meant the polished Stone Age: a time of technological advance in stone tool production from the flaked implements of the Paleolithic.⁶ Although technological advance remains an important part of its definition, Neolithic has now become a label for Stone Age subsistence strategies involving either cultivation of plants or raising of domesticated animals. Paleolithic, in contrast, refers to Stone Age hunting and gathering subsistence strategies that involved no food production.

Cross cutting these technological and economic definitions, there are two subtler tendencies: one which considers Neolithic principally a cultural and economic label, and the other which sees it as mainly chronological. As an example of the cultural and economic view, Brian Fagan in his widely read introductory textbook considers Neolithic a general label for early farmers who had not the use of metals.⁷ As an example of the chronological point of view, Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, in their equally popular textbook, consider the Neolithic a period in the Stone Age when food production was practiced: they talk, for example, of 'Neolithic skeletons from a hunter-gatherer site in Niger', suggesting that even non-food producers could be Neolithic if they lived in that period.⁸ These (and more) conflicting definitions have led many researchers simply to reject Neolithic for lack of precision.

Neolithic, however, is a useful word and within limits one can define it to suit the problem at hand: as in any classificatory exercise there are no ultimately true or false definitions, only useful and useless ones. In this paper I will use Neolithic in Renfrew and Bahn's sense, as a period in a region's history when food production was known but metals were not widely used: simply put, Stone Age with food production. The food produced could be

⁴ B. G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge, 1989), 75–9.

⁵ Avebury, *Pre-historic*, 2–3.

⁶ In a recent variation of this technological bias, francophone archaeologists in North and West Africa have occasionally defined Neolithic by the presence of ceramics.

⁷ Brian M. Fagan, *People of the Earth* (9th ed., New York, 1998), 230.

⁸ Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, *Archaeology* (London, 1991), 386.

through cultivation of plants or raising of domestic stock; it could be intensive or low-key and mixed in any proportion with other subsistence strategies such as hunting and gathering. Pottery, polished stone tools and other 'advanced' artifacts may also have been present and could serve as a proxy for identifying sites of that period, but I do not consider these the defining characteristics of the Neolithic.

At this juncture, it may be useful to say a word about pastoralism as well. Here again, the literature contains a variety of definitions. Ecologically, for example, pastoralism can be seen as the way people exploit grasslands through the agency of livestock.⁹ Economically, one might emphasize that pastoralists subsist primarily on the sale or barter of their livestock and livestock products.¹⁰ Less materialist definitions emphasize ideology: pastoralists see livestock as social and political capital.¹¹ But an archaeologically useful definition of pastoralism, given the nature of our evidence, has to be based on more tangible variables. Indeed, it may be preferable to avoid the somewhat loaded term of pastoralism altogether and speak in the more neutral term of herding. In southern Africa, then, Stone Age herding and its variants are most practically defined by the presence and proportions of domestic animal bones in the faunal sample of individual sites. This is simply because inventories of animal bones are regularly reported in most publications, and hence can be used for comparative purposes. Equally pertinent information, such as the presence of livestock dung and hair, paintings of livestock, herd management strategies as reflected in mortality curves, the ritual use of livestock, animal enclosures and so on, is available only from a limited number of sites and so is less useful for regional comparisons.

From the point of view in which animal bones are definitive, the evidence suggests two main types of herding in the southern African Neolithic: herders who hunted and gathered and hunter-gatherers who kept some domestic stock. These two types probably represent the extremes of a continuum of sites containing few livestock grading into those with many livestock bones in their faunal samples. The animal bone counts from excavated sites in the Cape provinces, however, suggest a break in the continuum between sites with over 30 per cent bones of domestic stock in their mammalian faunal samples and those with less than about 10 per cent. Following this cleavage (which may yet prove to be a spurious by-product of our small sample of excavated sites), I make a distinction between herders and 'hunters-with-sheep'.¹² It should not be forgotten that there were also many hunter-gatherer sites without domestic animal remains in the Neolithic of southern Africa. Anthropologically oriented archaeologists would undoubtedly be interested in the social implications of these three different forms of Neolithic production. But answering this question probably

⁹ C. Lefébure, 'Introduction: the specificity of nomadic pastoral societies', in L'Equipe écologie et anthropologie des sociétés pastorales (ed.), *Pastoral Production and Society* (Cambridge, 1979), 1.

¹⁰ Michael J. Casimir, *Flocks and Food* (Köln, 1991), 75.

¹¹ Andrew B. Smith, *Pastoralism in Africa* (Johannesburg, 1992), 54.

¹² It goes without saying that adequate sample size and preservation of faunal remains must be kept in mind.

requires considerably more archaeological work aimed specifically at discovering those social correlates.

THE CURIOUS ABSENCE OF A SOUTHERN AFRICAN NEOLITHIC

In all archaeological regions of Africa – West, North, East, Central, the Sahara and the Nile Valley – the term Neolithic is used.¹³ Only southern African archaeologists have avoided it. But not always: in the early days scholars did use the term.¹⁴ Louis Péringuey, director of the South African Museum from 1906 to 1924, for example, catalogued ‘Neolithic’ tanged arrowheads and a ground stone axe.¹⁵ Similarly, Miles Burkitt, the first professor of archaeology at Cambridge University, thought that ‘Smithfield man ... should be assigned to a perhaps ill-developed, but definitely Neolithic civilization’.¹⁶

Others disagreed. Burkitt’s own student, A. J. H. Goodwin, the first South African-born professional archaeologist and the first lecturer in the subject at the University of Cape Town, considered that polished stone tools had to be found with pottery, domestic animals and agriculture in ‘complete association’ before a culture could be labeled Neolithic.¹⁷ Polished stone, he later maintained, would in itself not ‘constitute a Neolithic culture any more than a red blanket will constitute a European culture’.¹⁸ With this shift in definitions from a technological to an economic one, Neolithic had indeed become an inappropriate term for southern Africa since in Goodwin’s time domestic animal remains had not yet been found in a Stone Age context.¹⁹ In their seminal publication of 1929, he and his colleague C. Van Riet Lowe, later director of the South African Bureau of Archaeology, decided that the European divisions of prehistory into Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, etc., was not appropriate for the less evolved cultures of southern Africa. Instead they established the terminology still in use today, that of dividing southern African prehistory into an Earlier, Middle and Later Stone Age, followed by the (imported) Iron Age.

Thirty years later, J. Desmond Clark reiterated this stance when he wrote that the southern African Later Stone Age contains several cultures:

but to the very end of these times their makers remained hunters and gatherers possessing no domesticated animals unless it were the dog, and cultivating no crops. They never reached the economic attainments of the Neolithic peoples of

¹³ J. Ki-Zerbo (ed.), *UNESCO General History of Africa*, 1: *Methodology and African Prehistory* (Paris, 1981).

¹⁴ J. Deacon, ‘Weaving the fabric of Stone Age research in southern Africa’, in P. Robertshaw (ed.), *A History of African Archaeology* (London, 1990), 41.

¹⁵ L. Péringuey, ‘The Stone Ages of South Africa’, *Annals of the South African Museum*, 8 (1911), 1–218.

¹⁶ M. C. Burkitt, *South Africa’s Past in Stone and Paint* (Cambridge, 1928), 102.

¹⁷ Goodwin and Van Riet Lowe, ‘The Stone Age’, 277.

¹⁸ A. J. H. Goodwin, *Method in Prehistory* (Claremont, 1953), 68.

¹⁹ Actually, Péringuey, ‘The Stone Ages’, 145, had already reported sheep bones at Hawston, but the context is unclear and he made nothing of it.

the Near East and Europe or even of North-East Africa although we may find polished stone tools and pottery with some of our southern cultures.²⁰

ENTER SHEEP

From the late 1960s onwards, sheep bones were found in several southern African Later Stone Age sites.²¹ Instead of leading to a re-introduction of the term Neolithic, however, the sheep bones led archaeologists to search for the prehistoric ancestors of Cape Hottentots. Perhaps this was because questions about their origins and that of their livestock (which had been the main attraction for Europeans to settle at the Cape) had been in the air for a long time. Since the early years of the twentieth century, many thought that the Hottentots must have come from East Africa, maybe even from ancient Egypt.²² Later, linguists pointed to similarities between the Hottentot language and Khoe of northern Botswana.²³ Combining linguistics with oral traditions and archaeology, the historian Richard Elphick proposed that the ancestors of the Cape Hottentots, the Khoekhoe pastoralists, had originally migrated from northern Botswana about 2,000 years ago.²⁴

The early sheep bones were thus taken to signal the discovery of the Khoekhoe in the archaeological record. Somewhat disappointingly, however, the early sheep were being found in what were clearly Bushmen rock shelter sites.²⁵ Prehistoric open air kraals, of the sort inhabited by the Cape Hottentots in the seventeenth century, failed to materialize. This did not dent most archaeologists' faith in the central role of a Khoekhoe migration in introducing domestic stock to the Cape.²⁶ A few, however, ventured

²⁰ J. D. Clark, *The Prehistory of Southern Africa* (London, 1959), 185.

²¹ For a listing see table 1 in R. G. Klein, 'The prehistory of Stone Age herders in the Cape Province of South Africa', *South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series*, 5 (1986), 5–12.

²² G. W. Stow, *The Native Races of South Africa* (London, 1905), 267–8; G. McC. Theal, *History of South Africa, 1: Ethnography and Condition of South Africa before AD 1505* (London, 1910), 80–2; C. Meinhof, 'Ergebnisse der afrikanischen Sprachforschung', *Archiv für Anthropologie (Neue Folge)*, 9 (1910), 179–201; C. Meinhof, *Die Sprachen der Hamiten* (Hamburg, 1912); I. Schapera, *The Khoisan Peoples of South Africa: Bushmen and Hottentots* (London, 1930); C. K. Cooke, 'Evidence of human migrations from the rock art of southern Rhodesia', *Africa*, 35 (1965), 263–85.

²³ D. F. Bleek, *Comparative Vocabularies and Bushman Languages* (Cambridge, 1929); E. O. J. Westphal, 'The linguistic prehistory of southern Africa', *Africa*, 33 (1963), 237–64.

²⁴ Elphick, *Khoikhoi*, 11–13.

²⁵ F. R. Schweitzer, 'Archaeological evidence for sheep at the Cape', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 29 (1974), 75–82; A. J. B. Humphreys, 'A preliminary report on test excavations at Dikbosch Shelter I, Herbert District, Northern Cape', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 29 (1974), 115–19; R. G. Klein and K. Scott, 'The fauna of Scotts Cave, Gamtoos Valley, south-eastern Cape Province', *South African Journal of Science*, 70 (1974), 186–7.

²⁶ P. T. Robertshaw, 'The origins of pastoralism in the Cape', *South African Historical Journal*, 10 (1978), 117–33; A. J. B. Humphreys and A. I. Thackeray, *Ghaap and Gariëp* (Cape Town, 1983), 294; J. E. Parkington, 'Changing views of the Later Stone Age of South Africa', *Advances in World Archaeology*, 3 (1984), 89–142; H. J. Deacon and J. Deacon, *Human Beginnings in South Africa* (Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1999), 177.

that at times local hunter-gatherers may have become herders.²⁷ The idea that sheep may have diffused into southern Africa to be adopted by local hunter-gatherers (alongside a Khoekhoe migration?) has lingered in the literature.²⁸ But the weight of professional opinion soon settled on the idea that the immigrant Khoekhoe pastoralists' sites had simply not yet been found, and possibly never would be because nomadic pastoralists leave little behind.²⁹ Curiously, the fact that open air sites of highly mobile hunter-gatherers could be found with little difficulty seems to have had little effect on this accepted wisdom. The upshot of this line of thinking was to leave no conceptual category for non-Khoe herders: the sheep in the Bushman rock shelters had to represent either theft or wages received from nearby Khoekhoe pastoralists.³⁰ That the Khoekhoe pastoralists remained invisible was considered of little consequence: there were enough indirect signs of their presence. For example, the pastoralists were blamed for the death of the Wilton archaeological culture, and for pushing the western Cape hunter-gatherers out of their open camps and into their mountain refuge.³¹ They were credited with constructing fish traps on the coast and even creating a new art style.³²

²⁷ F. R. Schweitzer, 'Archaeological evidence for sheep at the Cape', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 29 (1974), 75–82; H. J. Deacon, J. Deacon, M. Brooker and M. Wilson, 'The evidence for herding at Boomplaas Cave in the southern Cape, South Africa', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 33 (1978), 39–65.

²⁸ J. Deacon, 'Later Stone Age people and their descendants in southern Africa', in R. G. Klein (ed.), *Southern African Prehistory and Palaeoenvironments* (Rotterdam and Boston, 1984), 269, 275; Klein, 'Prehistory', 9; J. Kinahan, 'The rise and fall of nomadic pastoralism in the central Namib desert', in T. Shaw, P. Sinclair, B. Andah and A. Okpoko (eds.), *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals and Towns* (London and New York, 1993), 375–7.

²⁹ P. T. Robertshaw, 'The archaeology of an abandoned pastoralist camp-site', *South African Journal of Science*, 74 (1978), 29–31; Deacon *et al.*, 'Evidence', 57; L. Wadley, 'Big Elephant shelter and its role in the Holocene prehistory of central South West Africa', *Cimbebasia Series B*, 3/1 (1979), 1–76; Deacon, 'Later Stone Age', 275; J. Parkington, R. Yates, A. Manhire and D. Halkett, 'The social impact of pastoralism in the southwestern Cape', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 5 (1986) 313–29; J. Kinahan, 'The archaeological structure of pastoral production in the central Namib desert', *South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series*, 5 (1986), 69–82; A. Smith and L. Jacobson, 'Excavations at Geduld and the appearance of early domestic stock in Namibia', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 50 (1995), 3–14.

³⁰ See for example J. Parkington and C. Poggenpoel, 'Excavations at De Hangen, 1968', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 26 (1971), 3–36.

³¹ J. Deacon, 'Wilton: an assessment after 50 years', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 27 (1972), 10–45; A. H. Manhire, J. E. Parkington and T. S. Robey, 'Stone tools and sandveld settlement', in M. Hall, G. Avery, D. M. Avery, M. L. Wilson and A. J. B. Humphreys (eds.), *Frontiers: South African Archaeology Today* (Cambridge, 1984), 118; Parkington, 'Changing views', 124.

³² G. Avery, 'Discussion on the age and use of tidal fish-traps (visvywers)', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 30 (1975), 105–13; W. J. Van Rijssen, 'Southwestern Cape rock art: who painted what?', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 39 (1984), 125–9; A. H. Manhire, J. E. Parkington, A. D. Mazel, T. M. O'C. Maggs, 'Cattle, sheep and horses: a review of domestic animals in the rock art of southern Africa', *South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series*, 5 (1986), 22–30. But see also R. Yates, A. Manhire and J. Parkington, 'Rock painting and history in the south-western Cape',

Finally, pastoralists' sites were found in the mid-1980s, and they were immediately assigned to the Khoekhoe. In the upper Karoo the evidence was stone kraals in large numbers, while on the West Coast excavations at Kasteelberg revealed plenty of sheep bones and supposedly Khoekhoe ceramics.³³ Kasteelberg was heralded as a Khoekhoe pastoralist site with a nearly complete sequence of occupation since about 2,000 years ago. Further excavations in the area allowed a distinction between the material culture of San or Bushmen hunter-gatherers and those of Khoekhoe pastoralists, thus pointing to the expected cultural as well as economic boundary between the immigrants and locals.³⁴ With the pastoralists found, and under the influence of Richard Elphick's writings as well as the so-called Kalahari Bushman Debate, the focus of enquiry now shifted towards the question of relations between Khoekhoe and the indigenous Bushmen hunter-gatherers.³⁵ The result of this was the Cape Khoisan debate wherein two views competed. On the one side, there were those who held that the Khoekhoe and the Bushmen (San) retained their cultural and economic differences until the arrival of the Europeans.³⁶ And on the other side, there were those who maintained that the two cultures merged shortly after the arrival of the Khoekhoe, and the now mixed Khoisan bands spent most of their pre-colonial time drifting between pastoralism and foraging, propelled by luck, the vagaries of nature, stock disease, theft and so on.³⁷

in T. A. Dowson and D. Lewis-Williams (eds.), *Contested Images: Diversity in Southern African Rock Art Research* (Johannesburg, 1994), 58–9.

³³ C. G. Sampson, 'A prehistoric pastoralist frontier in the upper Zeekoe valley, South Africa', in Hall *et al.* (eds.), *Frontiers*, 96–110; C. G. Sampson, *Atlas of Stone Age Settlement in the Central and Upper Seacow Valley* (Bloemfontein, 1985); Klein, 'Prehistory', 9–10; A. B. Smith, 'Seasonal exploitation of resources on the Vredenburg peninsula after 2000 BP', in J. Parkington and M. Hall (eds.), *Papers in the Prehistory of the Western Cape, South Africa* (Cambridge, 1987), 393, 395.

³⁴ A. B. Smith, K. Sadr, J. Gribble and R. Yates, 'Excavations in the south-western Cape, South Africa, and the archaeological identity of prehistoric hunter-gatherers within the last 2000 years', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 46 (1991), 71–91.

³⁵ R. Elphick, *Kraal and Castle* (New Haven, 1977); Elphick, *Khoikhoi*; E. N. Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies: A Political Economy of the Kalahari* (Chicago, 1989); J. S. Solway and R. B. Lee, 'Foragers, genuine or spurious?', *Current Anthropology*, 31 (1990), 109–46; E. N. Wilmsen and J. R. Denbow, 'Paradigmatic history of San-speaking peoples and current attempts at revision', *Current Anthropology*, 31 (1990), 489–524.

³⁶ A. B. Smith, 'On becoming herders: Khoikhoi and San ethnicity in southern Africa', *African Studies*, 49 (1990), 51–73; Smith *et al.*, 'Excavations', 89–90; R. Yates and A. Smith, 'A reevaluation of the chronology of Oudepost: a reply in part to Schrire', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 48 (1993), 52–3; R. Yates and A. Smith, 'Ideology and hunter/herder archaeology in the south western Cape', *Southern African Field Archaeology*, 2 (1993), 96–104.

³⁷ C. Schrire, 'The archaeological identity of hunters and herders at the Cape over the last 2000 years: a critique', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 47 (1992), 62–4; C. Schrire, 'Cheap shots, long shots and a river in Egypt: a reply to Whitelaw *et al.*', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 47 (1992), 132; C. Schrire, 'Assessing Oudepost 1: a response to Yates and Smith', *Southern African Field Archaeology*, 2 (1993), 105–6; C. Schrire and J. Deacon, 'The indigenous artefacts from Oudepost I, a colonial outpost of the VOC at Saldanha Bay, Cape', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 44 (1989), 105–13.

Soon, convincing pastoralist sites began to be found in other parts of southern Africa as well. Lita Webley excavated a very clear example at Jakkalsberg, in the lower Orange River valley, with over 90 per cent of the faunal remains belonging to small stock.³⁸ Nearby, another convincing pastoralist site has recently been excavated at Bloeddrift with over 70 per cent small stock remains in the mammalian faunal assemblage.³⁹ In Namibia, stone circles defined a series of pastoralist sites in the Hungorob Ravine of the Brandberg.⁴⁰ Far to the south, in the eastern Cape open air pastoralist sites were identified by their high proportions of domestic stock remains.⁴¹ It seemed the ancestors of the Hottentots had finally been found. Or had they?

THE PLOT THICKENS

Kasteelberg and the Seacow valley sites seemed to vindicate the majority opinion that the prehistoric herders had indeed migrated south and that there was a long sequence of Khoekhoe pastoralism at the Cape. Subsequent research, however, has shown the matter to be more complex. Kasteelberg, for example, is not just one site but a hill covered with over thirty sites from different periods.⁴² Recent excavations have shown that in the early first millennium AD, sites on Kasteelberg contained a typical Later Stone Age assemblage of artifacts, the so-called Wilton archaeological culture, which is normally associated with ancient Bushmen hunter-gatherers. Interestingly, the artifacts include some pottery and the sample of mammalian bones at these sites has over 30 per cent bones of sheep. A major subsistence focus was the collection of tortoise. With little change in the kinds and numbers of artifacts left behind, some of these sites continued to be occupied into the late first millennium AD. At that time, a second, distinct set of sites were also occupied. These too have over 30 per cent of small stock in their mammalian faunal assemblages, but the hunting of seal was nearly as important as herding sheep, while tortoise were not gathered as much.⁴³ It was some examples of this second set of sites which previously had

³⁸ J. Brink and L. Webley, 'Faunal evidence for pastoralist settlements at Jakkalsberg, Richtersveld, Northern Cape Province', *Southern African Field Archaeology*, 5 (1996), 70–9; L. Webley, 'Jakkalsberg A and B: the cultural material from two pastoralist sites in the Richtersveld, Northern Cape', *Southern African Field Archaeology*, 6 (1997), 3–20.

³⁹ A. B. Smith, D. Halkett, T. Hart and B. Mütti, 'Spatial patterning, cultural identity and site integrity on open sites: evidence from Bloeddrift 23, a pre-colonial herder camp in the Richtersveld, Northern Cape Province, South Africa', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 56 (2001), 23–33.

⁴⁰ Kinahan, 'Rise and fall', 379.

⁴¹ R. Derricourt, *Prehistoric Man in the Ciskei and Transkei* (Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1977), 158–9; J. N. F. Binneman, 'Symbolic construction of communities during the Holocene Later Stone Age in the south-eastern Cape' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1995), 39, 75.

⁴² K. Sadr, J. Gribble and G. Euston-Brown, 'The Vredenburg peninsula survey, 1991/1992 season', in *Guide to the Archaeological Sites in the Southwestern Cape*, compiled by A. B. Smith and B. Mütti (Cape Town, 1992), 41–3.

⁴³ Klein, 'Prehistory', 8; R. G. Klein and K. Cruz-Urbe, 'Faunal evidence for prehistoric herder-forager activities at Kasteelberg, Western Cape Province, South Africa', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 44 (1989), 82–97.

been identified as settlements of early Khoekhoe pastoralists. Examples of the first set of sites, on the other hand, had been identified as camps of Bushmen hunters and gatherers. But the artifacts of the two sets of first millennium AD sites on Kasteelberg are of similar style, so it is difficult to argue for a cultural and linguistic difference between the two sets of occupants. The two sets of sites do differ greatly in the relative quantities of artifacts, bones and sea shells. These differences are likely to be functional, probably relating to the different lengths of occupation and the different tasks carried out at the sites. The cultural, social and economic relations between the occupants of these two sets of late first millennium AD sites on Kasteelberg is now being investigated.

At Kasteelberg, major changes occurred in the early second millennium AD. Sites from after AD 1000 contained fewer sheep bones than bones of seal.⁴⁴ Unlike the first millennium sites, those of the second millennium in the landscape around Kasteelberg are found predominantly on the shore. Other changes are seen in the stone tools, bead size and shellfish species preferences.⁴⁵ Most importantly, a new style of ceramics appeared on the scene. The narrow necked, incised and impressed, spouted pots of the first millennium, which were probably used for pouring liquids, perhaps even milk, were replaced by larger undecorated jars with pierced projections, lugs, for suspending the vessel. Residue analysis suggest these were probably used to render seal fat.⁴⁶ Such lugged vessels are often considered to be markers of the Khoekhoe.⁴⁷ These material changes are dramatic, and if there ever was a major migration to the West Coast, the disjunction in the archaeological record of the early second millennium AD is its most probable manifestation. In this light, it is interesting to note that if the early second millennium AD cultural disjunction on the West Coast represents the arrival of the Khoekhoe, it correlates with a decline in the relative importance of herding.

By the middle of the second millennium AD ceramic styles on the West Coast changed yet again.⁴⁸ The new style of pots, with pierced lugs and incised horizontal lines around the neck, have been identified in Namaqualand as pottery used in historic times by the Khoe-speaking Nama.⁴⁹ Around Kasteelberg, sites of this last pre-colonial phase hark back to an earlier pattern: sites were again distributed inland and the stone tools had reverted to the types found in the first millennium AD.⁵⁰ Seals remained a

⁴⁴ Klein and Cruz-Urbe, 'Faunal evidence', fig. 2; K. Sadr, 'The first herders at the Cape of Good Hope', *African Archaeological Review*, 15 (1998), 101–32.

⁴⁵ Sadr, 'First herders', figs. 8 and 9; Sadr *et al.*, 'Vredenburg'.

⁴⁶ M. Patrick, A. J. de Koning and A. B. Smith, 'Gas liquid chromatographic analysis of fatty acids in food residues from ceramics found in the southwestern Cape, South Africa', *Archaeometry*, 27 (1985), 231–6.

⁴⁷ Sadr, 'First herders', 116; K. Sadr and A. B. Smith, 'On ceramic variation in the southwestern Cape, South Africa', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 46 (1991), 107–15; C. Bollong, A. Smith and G. Sampson, 'Khoikhoi and Bushman pottery in the Cape Colony: ethnohistory and Later Stone Age ceramics of the South African interior', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 16 (1997), 269–99.

⁴⁸ Sadr and Smith, 'Ceramic variation', 112–13.

⁴⁹ David Halkett, personal communication, 2002. ⁵⁰ Sadr *et al.*, 'Vredenburg'.

component of the diet, but foraging for tortoise again became more important.⁵¹ This final pre-colonial phase witnessed a brief episode of intensive herding which is principally known from seventeenth-century Dutch and English records concerning the Hottentots.⁵² In sum, the latest archaeological research at Kasteelberg and the West Coast presents a picture that seems a far cry from the static, 2,000-year-old, parallel cultural sequence of Khoekhoe pastoralists and San hunter-gatherers that is now the widely accepted textbook version of pre-colonial history at the Cape.⁵³

Elsewhere, beyond Kasteelberg and the West Coast, the expected long Khoekhoe pastoralist sequence has equally failed to materialize. In Namibia for example, the nomads of the Brandberg and Khuseb Delta represent only a geographically limited, mid- to late second millennium AD episode of pastoralism.⁵⁴ Older, first millennium AD Later Stone Age sites in Namibia with only a few potsherds, less than 10 per cent domestic stock in their mammalian faunal remains and typical hunter-gatherer stone tools can hardly be described as pastoral.⁵⁵ Further to the south the situation was similar. On the Namaqualand coast hunters-with-sheep are documented in the early first millennium AD levels of Spoegrivier Cave.⁵⁶ From later in the first millennium AD, another site in the Namaqualand Orange River valley named Jakkalsberg contains over 90 per cent small stock bones in its faunal remains.⁵⁷ Jakkalsberg also has another much younger component which is better documented at the nearby site called Bloeddrift. Dating to the late second millennium, this occupation represents a recent episode of intensive herding here with over 70 per cent small stock bones in the faunal assemblage.⁵⁸ The ceramics of Bloeddrift and Jakkalsberg are quite

⁵¹ Klein, 'Prehistory', 11.

⁵² H. B. Thom, *The Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck* (Cape Town, 1952), 176; R. Raven-Hart, *Before Van Riebeeck* (Cape Town, 1967), 62, 124. The archaeology of the contact period has not yet been seriously tackled on the West Coast.

⁵³ E. Boonzaier, C. Malherbe, A. Smith and P. Berens, *The Cape Herders: A History of the Khoikhoi of Southern Africa* (Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1996), 12–32; A. Smith, C. Malherbe, M. Guenther and P. Berens, *The Bushmen of Southern Africa* (Cape Town, 2000), 21–5.

⁵⁴ Kinahan, 'Archaeological structure', 69–82; J. Kinahan, *Pastoral Nomads of the Central Namib Desert* (Windhoek, 1991).

⁵⁵ B. H. Sandelowsky, 'Mirabib, an archaeological study in the Namib', *Madoqua*, 10 (1977), 221–83; Wadley, 'Big Elephant', 51, 58, 67; J. Richter, *Studien zur Urgeschichte Namibias* (Köln, 1991), 254; Kinahan, 'Rise and fall', 375–7; Smith and Jacobson, 'Geduld', 3; B. Keding and R. Vogelsang, 'Vom Jäger-Sammler zum Hirten: Wirtschaftswandel im nordöstlichen und südwestlichen Afrika', in B. Gehlen, M. Heinen and A. Tillmann (eds.), *Zeit-Räume: Gedenkschrift für Wolfgang Taute* (Bonn, 2001), 262–72; T. Lenssen-Erz, 'Picturing ecology through animal metaphorism: prehistoric hunter-gatherers and the first pastro-foragers in Namibia', in M. Bollig and J.-B. Gewald (eds.), *People, Cattle and Land: Transformations of a Pastoral Society in South-western Africa* (Köln, 2000), 111–13; M. Albrecht, H. Berke, B. Eichhorn, T. Frank, R. Kuper, S. Prill, R. Vogelsang and S. Wenzel, 'Oruwanje 95/1: a late Holocene stratigraphy in northwestern Namibia', *Cimbebasia*, 17 (2001), 1–22.

⁵⁶ L. Webley, 'Early evidence for sheep from Spoegrivier cave, Namaqualand', *Southern African Field Archaeology*, 1 (1992), 3–13.

⁵⁷ Brink and Webley, 'Faunal evidence', 73.

⁵⁸ Smith *et al.*, 'Spatial patterning', 26.

distinct:⁵⁹ as in Namibia, in Namaqualand there seems to have been a hiatus between the first and second millennium AD occupations. Although the later herders with lugged, incised pottery can safely be associated with the Khoekhoe-speaking Nama, there is nothing to indicate the linguistic affiliation of the first millennium herders as exemplified at Jakkalsberg. All in all, the long Khoekhoe pastoralist sequence is thus no more evident in Namaqualand than it is in Namibia.

The situation upstream in the Bushmanland Orange River valley is somewhat different. Here an alleged long sequence of Khoekhoe pastoralism was identified and christened the Doornfontein Industry.⁶⁰ But this claim merely rested on the presence of 'Cape coastal' pottery, long ago thought to be a marker of the Khoekhoe.⁶¹ Cape coastal pottery is in fact a mixed bag of at least four types and many varieties of thin-walled clay pots associated with Later Stone Age sites in the western half of southern Africa.⁶² Some of the later types were certainly made by Khoekhoe in historic times, but there is no reason to ascribe all Cape coastal pottery to them. Given that the Doornfontein sites and artifacts are typical of hunter-gatherer occupations and contain few if any bones of livestock, they are better described as sites of hunters-with-sheep. The same can be said for the contemporary Swartkop industry sites which are distinguished from the Doornfontein by their relatively crude ceramic bowls, the clay of which, quite unlike the Cape coastal pottery, was mixed with grass.⁶³ The exception, perhaps a local episode of more intensive animal husbandry in the late first millennium AD, may be represented at the site of Blinkklipkop which contains relatively many small stock bones.⁶⁴ A later episode of pastoralism is evident in the so-called Type R stone-walled settlements. These late second millennium AD sites may have been occupied by local Bushmen who

⁵⁹ Significantly, the ceramics from Jakkalsberg include ceramic vessels which are identical to those from the late first millennium AD sites on Kasteelberg, see figure 4 in Sadr and Smith, 'Ceramic variation', and figures 7 and 8 in Webley, 'Jakkalsberg'. The ceramics of Bloeddrift include a lugged and incised ceramic type which is found also at Kasteelberg in association with the last pre-colonial phase of occupation. In Namaqualand, this lugged and incised type of pottery is associated with the historically known Nama Khoekhoe-speaking pastoralists.

⁶⁰ P. B. Beaumont and J. Vogel, 'Spatial patterning of the ceramic Later Stone Age in the Northern Cape Province, South Africa', in M. Hall, G. Avery, D. M. Avery, M. L. Wilson and A. J. B. Humphreys (eds.), *Frontiers: South African Archaeology Today* (Cambridge, 1984), 80–2.

⁶¹ J. Rudner, 'Strandloper pottery from South and South West Africa', *Annals of the South African Museum*, 49 (1968), 441–663.

⁶² Sadr and Smith, 'Ceramic variation'; K. Sadr and C. G. Sampson, 'Khoekhoe ceramics of the upper Seacow River valley', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 54 (1999), 3–15.

⁶³ A. J. B. Humphreys, 'A preliminary report on test excavations at Dikbosch Shelter I, Herbert District, Northern Cape', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 29 (1974), 115–19; Humphreys and Thackeray, *Ghaap*; P. Beaumont, A. B. Smith and J. C. Vogel, 'Before the Einiqua: the archaeology of the frontier zone', in A. B. Smith (ed.), *Einiqualand* (Cape Town, 1995), 246–8; A. B. Smith, 'Archaeological observations along the Orange River and its hinterland', in Smith (ed.), *Einiqualand*, 265–301.

⁶⁴ Humphreys and Thackeray, *Ghaap*, 100–7; A. I. Thackeray, J. F. Thackeray and P. B. Beaumont, 'Excavations at the Blinkklipkop specularite mine near Postmasburg, Northern Cape', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 38 (1983), 17–25.

were architecturally and perhaps otherwise influenced by contact with Iron Age, Bantu-speaking farmers.⁶⁵

Further upstream, in the Seacow River tributary of the Orange, Garth Sampson has shown that pre-colonial herding in the upper Karoo did not constitute a long, unbroken sequence either.⁶⁶ In the Seacow valley, the same distinction exists as in Bushmanland between fibre-tempered and Cape coastal pottery.⁶⁷ Here too, all the excavated rock shelters revealed hunters-with-sheep, not herders.⁶⁸ Stone kraals are distributed throughout the upper Seacow valley, but which ones were used by herders and which by hunters-with-sheep is hard to say. So here as elsewhere, relatively intensive herding seems to have occurred in separate episodes, not as a long sequence of Khoekhoe pastoralism.

In other regions of southern Africa, there are many sites of hunters-with-sheep. For example, between Kasteelberg and the Namaqualand sites, several Later Stone Age sites with sheep and pottery have been found around the Elands Bay area and farther inland in the Cape Fold Belt mountains.⁶⁹ A local episode of pastoralism may be represented at Elands Bay Cave in the late first millennium level 5, which contains a high proportion of sheep bones, and a similar situation may obtain at nearby Diepkloof.⁷⁰ Elsewhere, in northern Botswana for example, the so-called Bambata levels at Toteng with its few remains of livestock probably represent hunters-with-sheep.⁷¹ Other occurrences of Bambata pottery in Zimbabwe, in the Waterberg and in the Magaliesberg are likewise associated with typical Later Stone Age tools and few, if any, domestic stock.⁷² Various researchers have recently

⁶⁵ Beaumont and Vogel, 'Spatial patterning', 263.

⁶⁶ Bollong *et al.*, 'Khoikhoi', 269–71; C. G. Sampson, 'Spatial organization of Later Stone Age herders in the upper Karoo', in G. Pwiti and R. Soper (eds.), *Aspects of African Archaeology: Papers from the 10th Congress of the PanAfrican Association for Prehistory and Related Studies* (Harare, 1996), 319.

⁶⁷ These are here confusingly called Khoi or Khoekhoe pottery, without meaning to make it a linguistic marker, see Sampson, 'Pastoralist frontier', 102; Sadr and Sampson, 'Khoekhoe ceramics'.

⁶⁸ Sampson, 'Spatial organization', 321.

⁶⁹ Parkington and Poggenpoel, 'De Hangen', 21–3; J. E. Parkington, P. Nilssen, C. Reeler and C. Henshilwood, 'Making sense of space at Dunefield Midden campsite, western Cape, South Africa', *Southern African Field Archaeology*, 1 (1992), 63–70; R. G. Klein and K. Cruz-Uribe, 'Large mammal and tortoise bones from Eland's Bay cave and nearby sites, Western Cape Province, South Africa', in Parkington and Hall (eds.), *Papers in the Prehistory of the Western Cape, South Africa*, 132–64; W. J. Van Rijssen, 'The late Holocene deposits at Klein Kliphuis shelter, Cedarberg, Western Cape Province', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 47 (1992), 34–43; A. Jerardino and R. Yates, 'Preliminary results from excavations at Steenbokfontein Cave: implications for past and future research', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 51 (1996), 7–16.

⁷⁰ Klein and Cruz-Uribe, 'Large mammal'; J. E. Parkington and C. Poggenpoel, 'Diepkloof rock shelter', in Parkington and Hall (eds.), *Papers in the Prehistory of the Western Cape, South Africa*, pp. 269–93, table 2.

⁷¹ A. C. Campbell, Southern Okavango integrated water development study. Archaeological survey of the proposed Maun reservoir, unpublished report to the Department of Water Affairs (Gaborone, 1992), 65–75 and appendix 5.

⁷² N. Walker, 'The significance of an early date for pottery and sheep in Zimbabwe', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 38 (1983), 88–92; L. Wadley, *Later Stone Age Hunters and Gatherers of the Southern Transvaal* (Cambridge, 1987), 53; L. Wadley,

claimed to see the presence of Khoekhoe pastoralists in the rock art of the upper Limpopo basin.⁷³ Considering the many paintings of sheep in this area,⁷⁴ the probability of finding hunters-with-sheep or even a local episode of more intensive animal husbandry is high, but a long sequence of Khoekhoe pastoralism seems no more likely here than in any other archaeological region of southern Africa.

CONCLUSION

The anticipation of finding prehistoric Khoekhoe, and the presumption that their sites should resemble Hottentot kraals, have, I think, distracted us from the actual archaeological evidence. Three decades after the initial discovery of sheep bones in a southern African Later Stone Age context, it may be time to consider whether the absence of hard evidence for a 2,000-year-old sequence of Khoekhoe pastoralism is not in fact evidence for its absence. Instead of trying to conjure up 2,000-year-old Khoekhoe pastoralists we might profit from studying the Neolithic of southern Africa for what the archaeological evidence suggests it is: a period starting about 2,000 years ago, just before the arrival of iron-using, Bantu-speaking farmers and herders, when ideas of food production, domesticated small stock and new technologies such as the manufacture of clay vessels, spread rapidly through the subcontinent. A period when these new ideas and animals were adopted in a variety of ways by many (but not all) local hunter-gatherer groups, some of whom assimilated more of these incoming traits than others, and most of whom changed little as a result to become what I have called hunters-with-sheep.

Perhaps the spread of new ideas and technologies was indeed occasionally aided by long and short distance migrations of larger or smaller groups of people here and there. Some of these migrants may have even spoken a language which later evolved into modern Khoe. But rather than providing a blanket explanation, such proposed migrations need to be examined and documented case by case and their size and shape must be worked out. Importantly, we should perhaps also aim to understand why, unlike in the Near East for example, the hunting and gathering way of life proved so resilient in southern Africa even when the herding option was available. And, conversely, we should also question why sometimes and in some places,

'Changes in the social relations of precolonial hunter-gatherers after agropastoralist contact: an example from the Magaliesberg, South Africa', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 15 (1996), 205–17; M. M. van der Ryst, *The Waterberg Plateau in the Northern Province, Republic of South Africa, in the Later Stone Age* (Cambridge, 1998).

⁷³ S. L. Hall and B. W. Smith, 'Empowering places: rock shelters and ritual control in farmer-forager interactions in the Northern Province', *South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series*, 8 (2000), 30–46; E. Eastwood, J. van Schalkwyk and B. Smith, 'Archaeological and rock art survey of the Makgabeng plateau, central Limpopo basin', *The Digging Stick*, 19/1 (2002), 1–3.

⁷⁴ E. Eastwood and W. S. Fish, 'Sheep in the rock paintings of the Soutpansberg and Limpopo River valley', *Southern African Field Archaeology*, 5 (1996), 59–69; N. Walker, 'Rock paintings of sheep in Botswana', in S.-A. Pager, B. Swartz and A. Willcox (eds.), *Rock Art: The Way Ahead* (Johannesburg, 1991), 54–60.

some groups did in fact briefly opt for more intensive forms of animal husbandry.

What might facilitate our re-orientation towards these questions is to adopt the more neutral term 'Neolithic' and discard the current terminology of 'pastoralist' archaeology with its subtext of Khoekhoe migration. Unlike the more open-ended 'Neolithic', the overly specific word 'pastoralism' can mask a lot of interesting local variability in subsistence strategies and, worse, it seems to force us into a conceptual dichotomy of Khoekhoe pastoralists versus thieving Bushmen hunter-gatherers, leaving us little room to recognize other cultural and economic combinations in the Later Stone Age of southern Africa. In the long run, adopting the Neolithic may even have the desirable side effect of helping to eliminate the obsolete and surely incapacitating notion that indigenous southern Africans never made it out of the Paleolithic.