



# Characterisation of archaeological ceramics from the Khwebe Hills of northern Botswana



Sorcha Diskin<sup>a</sup>, Ceri Ashley<sup>b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> HESAS, University of Glamorgan, United Kingdom

<sup>b</sup> Department of Anthropology & Archaeology, University of Pretoria, South Africa

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 4 November 2015

Received in revised form 19 March 2016

Accepted 22 March 2016

Available online 2 April 2016

### Keywords:

Ceramics

XRD

ICP (AES & MS)

Botswana

Khwebe Hills

Tswana

Khoekhoe

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present an unusual approach to studying the provenance of archaeological ceramics. To this end, a series of ceramic sherds from a nineteenth century Tswana site in the Khwebe Hills of northern Botswana are considered. Visual analysis has divided the ceramics into three fabric and two stylistic groups, including styles broadly consistent with Tswana and Khoekhoe pottery typologies. Thirty four samples were subject to analysis by XRD and ICP (AES and MS) and the results analysed using sediment provenance analysis diagrams. This analysis verified the visual data, and identified at least two discrete areas of provenance; one local to the Khwebe Hills, and another > 100 km away. These results are interpreted as evidence of sustained contact between hunter-gatherers and herder groups in the Khwebe Hills, and incoming agro-pastoral Tswana settlers. This has implications for the understanding of early settler/autochthon relations in the region, suggesting higher levels of mutual interaction than previously supposed.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

This paper presents the results of mineralogical and elemental analyses of archaeological ceramics excavated at the nineteenth century site of KWH4 in the Khwebe Hills of Ngamiland, Northern Botswana (see Fig. 1). Settled in around 1805 by incoming BaTawana,<sup>1</sup> KWH4 was occupied for approximately twenty years, before resource depletion forced them to establish a new capital at nearby Toteng (Tlou, 1985; Wilmsen, 1989; see Fig. 1). Archaeological research between 2008 and 2010 focused on exploring the experiences and impact of this migrant community, and how the BaTawana interacted with autochthonous hunter-gatherer and herder communities. As part of wider investigation, ceramics excavated from a rubbish midden in KWH4 were examined macroscopically, and shown to include three different fabric groups and at least two typological styles. In order to test these visual categories, and determine possible provenance, the major and minor/trace element concentrations were studied by XRD and ICP (AES and MS), using an approach more traditionally used in sediment provenance analysis.

The application of such compositional analyses is relatively rare in southern African archaeology, where typological and stylistic analysis dominates ceramic studies (e.g. Huffman, 2007). Nevertheless, as growing number of studies incorporating PIXE, XRF and petrographic analysis of ceramics show, there is much interpretive potential in such work (e.g. Miller, 1991; Bollong et al., 1993; Jacobson et al., 1995; Jacobson, 2005; Bollong et al., 1997; Jordan et al., 1999; Pillay et al., 2000; Rosenstein, 2008; Wilmsen et al., 2009; Fowler et al., 2011; see also Jacobson, 2005: 11–13 for a review). This includes petrographic (Wilmsen et al., 2009) and XRF (Jacobson, 2005) analysis of a small number of ceramics from the Khwebe Hills and the surrounding area. Indeed, Jacobsen argues that the unique local geology of the Hills means they hold great potential for further provenancing work, while Wilmsen et al identified a discrete category of bone-tempered ceramic from nearby Toteng. The current research is thus an attempt to contribute to this discourse with new empirical data from alternative methods (XRD; ICP AES & MS), as well as an evaluation of a more unusual analytical approach that applies a sediment provenance discrimination method.

### 1.1. Historical Background

Located on the northern fringe of the Kalahari Desert, and c 70 km south of the Okavango Delta, the Khwebe Hills are a range of low-lying rocky hills that stand out upon the otherwise flat sandveld terrain. Oral tradition (Tlou, 1985) records the settlement of the Khwebe Hills

\* Corresponding author at: Department of Anthropology & Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria, Private Bag X20, Hatfield, Pretoria 0028, South Africa.

<sup>1</sup> The BaTawana are Tswana polity, and part of the broader Western Sotho ethnolinguistic group who currently and historically occupied large parts of North-west province, South Africa and Botswana. Other Tswana polities in the group include the BaNgwato and BaKwena who had large capitals in south-east Botswana at this time, and from whom the BaTawana trace their ancestry.

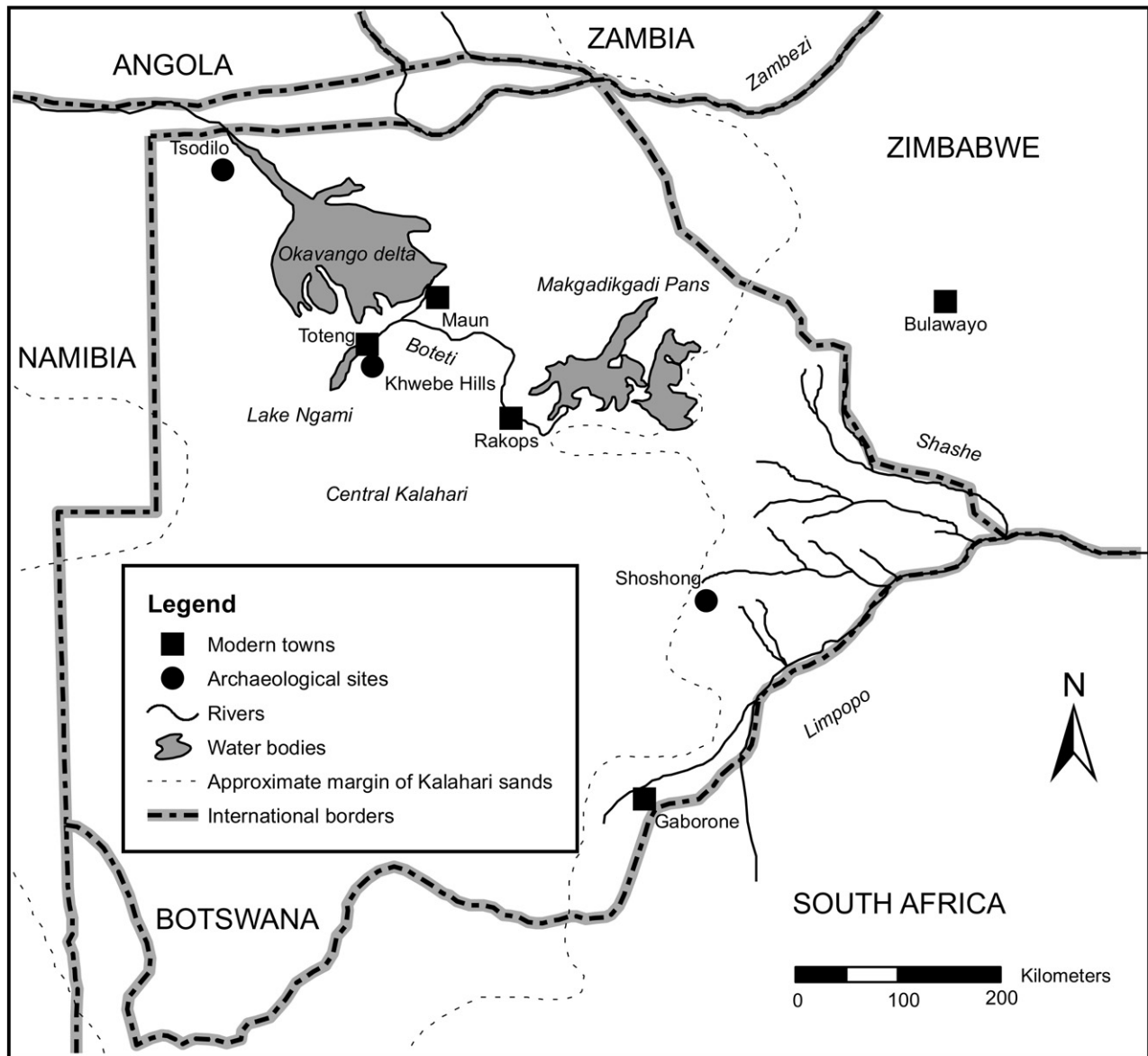


Fig. 1. Map showing location of sites mentioned in the text.

between c 1805 and 1825 by the BaTawana, who having seceded from the BaNgwato at Shoshong following a succession dispute (see Fig. 1), migrated c 475 km northwest under a new leader, or *kgosi*, Tawana, establishing the first Tswana polity in the region – the BaTawana. There, the agro-pastoral BaTawana met specialist herders as well as San-speaking hunter-gatherers (Tlou, 1985; Wilmsen, 1989). The ensuing relationships between these groups were both complex and fraught, and came to be defined by a system of unequal clientship or serfdom known as *bothanka*, in which non-Tswana groups were suppressed and assimilated by the BaTawana (Tlou, 1985, 1977). Tlou (1977: 373–6) portrays the earliest contact in the Khwebe Hills as one of essential colonisation, as the authority of an incoming leader was asserted through military strength, imposing a new social order structured around the centralised and hierarchical BaTawana state. The mobile herders and hunter-gatherers are portrayed as powerless to withstand the superior political and military authority, and thus became vassal communities.

Such a historical picture, however, is arguably in danger of retrojecting more recent socio-political systems into the distant past. Tlou (1977: 372–7) himself recognises that the formalised system of *bothanka* was not widely instituted by the BaTawana until after the 1840s (see also

Wilmsen, 1989: 101, Dziewiecka, 2008: 12). Previously, a much more informal system of reciprocal clientship was in place (Tlou, 1977: 378). Similarly, Wilmsen (1989: 107–8) has portrayed the “interdigitation” of different communities for mutual benefit in the area (see also Denbow, 1986). Furthermore, he has argued that the very idea of a static and centralised Tswana polity at this time is itself a misnomer. Rather than the Tswana state system typified by late nineteenth century capitals in the southeast of Botswana, for the first half of the century, Tswana polities were mobile and politically dynamic, acting within a “fluid social mosaic” (Wilmsen, 1989: 98, see also Morton, 2004). The site of KWH4 therefore provides an excellent opportunity to re-evaluate these contrasting histories, and to use evidence from this short-lived settlement as a window into the first phases of such contact and interaction.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. The archaeology of KWH4

KWH4 is a stone walled site of some 650 m in length, comprising a series of low walls enclosing domestic spaces and cattle enclosures or kraals. In 2009 a rubbish midden immediately outside the northern

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7446580>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7446580>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)