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USING MATERIAL EVIDENCE AND EVOCATIVE NARRATIVE TO  
PRESENT THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CONTACT AND TRADE ON THE  
NAMIB DESERT COAST

*Jill Kinahan*

**INTRODUCTION**

Indigenous pastoralists at Walvis Bay on the Namib Desert coast were drawn into global commerce at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They traded cattle and small stock for glass beads, copper and iron bars, tobacco and other exotic goods. Although the trade was at first limited, increasing demand for livestock during the nineteenth century and the apparently endless supply of industrially produced goods stretched local pastoral production beyond its sustainable limits. The standard view of these people, based on unflattering and prejudiced accounts of the time, is that they were hapless victims of processes outside their control, easily duped and fatally flawed by their own predilection for alcohol. However, extensive material evidence allows a different insight into the indigenous response. Careful use of this evidence together with a more critical examination of a variety of contemporary and other documents gives voice to a more fine-grained and nuanced perception of the local people.

In an attempt to counter the standard view, I present my data first as a narrative description or "vignette." Some archaeologists, working to redress negative stereotypes of urban areas branded as "slums" where local knowledge has faded, have used the narrative approach successfully to evaluate alternative interpretations. I briefly explain the approach and its appropriateness for the Namibian context, and then submit the material and documentary evidence on which it is based.

**NARRATIVE**

Walwich Bay, February, 1790

Drawing his sealskin cape more closely about his shoulders, Khaxab peered into the dispersing mist. As the minute droplets moved away, the damp flanks of the dunes appeared to come