

1. Description

- 1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: Damara (or Khoekhoe), Nama, Khoisan (1)
- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): naq (1)
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): 14°- 21°S and 11.5° - 17°E
- 1.4 Brief history: The **Damara** ([Khoekhoegowab](#): **ǀNū-khoë**, literally *Black people*, [German](#): *Berg Damara*, referring to their [extended stay](#) in the hills of [Khomas Highland](#), also called at various times the **Daman** or the **Damaqua**) are an [ethnic group](#) who make up 8.5% of [Namibia's](#) population. They speak the [Khoekhoe language](#) (like the [Nama people](#)) and the majority live in the northwestern regions of Namibia, however they are also found widely across the rest of the country. They have no known cultural relationship with any of the other tribes anywhere else in Africa,^[2] and very little is known of their origin. It has been proposed that the Damara are a remnant population of southwestern Africa [hunter-gatherers](#), otherwise only represented by the [Cimba](#), [Kwisi](#), and [Kwadi](#), who adopted the [Khoekhoe language](#) of the immigrant Nama people. (2)
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: In the past they were often attached as clients or servants to Nama or Herero clans.
- 1.6 Ecology:
- 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: Estimated pop. In 1880 was 30,000. Around 90,000 in the early 1980's.

2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Berries, roots and bulbs
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Antelope (some other larger game would occasionally be brought down), frogs, lizards, young birds and birds' eggs
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Lance, bow and arrows
- 2.4 Food storage:
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: Women collected food stuffs (except pre-pubescent girls), women also did most of the construction work since they were considered to own the permanent huts.
- 2.6 Land tenure: Burned off the grasses during the winter months of August and September to attract game when seedlings sprouts after the first rains.
- 2.7 Ceramics:
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:
- 2.9 Food taboos: Adolescent girls had to avoid eating spring hare, turtle, some birds and even some berries, as well as certain parts of the flesh of goats and game animals.
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

3. Anthropometry

- 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):
- 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f):
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f):
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Polygyny is common
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Inheritance of names
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin) Cross-cousin marriage is preferred.
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring:
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? Strict avoidance is maintained between brothers and sisters, and between parents in-law and children in-law.
- 4.24 Joking relationships?

- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Yes but second marriage is accompanied by no virtually no ceremony at all.
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? Traditionally, one name was given by the father after some recent event. Great names are passed from father to daughter and mother to son, and are the most important. Their cross-descent great names, but not patrilineal surnames, identify exogamous units.
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Men arrange children's marriage.
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):
- 4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: Usually no more than 10 huts to an encampment to shelter an extended family
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Moved camps from time to time
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): No well-defined tribal units or tribal chiefs. Vedder (1928a: 42) claims that chieftainship was unknown in his time and that each large family acted as an independent political unit. But this point is unclear since a powerful chief is mentioned in the beginning of the chapter.
- 5.4 Post marital residence:
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Had no claim to land and no concept of land ownership.
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:
- 5.8 Village and house organization: The permanent hut (*oms*) was divided into sections, while there was a smaller hut (*!nus*), that was used only for sleeping, was centered around the family fire. The holy fire was the center of social activity and was located under a camp tree. So the position of the tree and fire (directly to the east of the tree) dictated the camp layout.
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (men's houses): The permanent hut (*oms*) was divided into sections and only occupied by the women. All doors to huts faced the holy fire. 'Owner' of the village has their hut in the east and it faces west.
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Ground
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: Extended families
- 5.12 Trade: Some trade for goats or cattle (rarely)
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? No complex hierarchies but they did give pride of place to the 'owner' of the village, the first wife of the village elder.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

- 6 Time allocation to RCR:
- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):
- 6.2 Stimulants:
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Girls first menstrual cycle was celebrated with a feast. A goat was slaughtered if there was one and everyone was welcome to the feast. The girl was confined in her hut, in silence, and tended by her mother and other female relatives. They would bedeck her in ornaments, teach her to prepare a powdered perfume to use in adult life, and instruct her in an appropriate behavior, especially in relation to her brother. After puberty, a girl could not sit next to her brother, turn her back to him, or look him directly in the eyes. Similar taboos applied to her potential husband if one had been chosen for her (Vedder 1923, I:52; 1928a: 50; Lebzelter 1934: 139)
- Male initiation was a collective affair, only rarely would a young boy or man be granted a ceremony on his own. The father of each initiate would bring a goat or a large game animal, but before these were eaten preparations had to be made. A space was cleared away from the village, usually, and a circle made with branches. The head of the family who was organizing the feast would then gather roots and bitter herbs to soak in a wooden bucket. On the next day, the elders would lead the initiates in a hunt. Each initiate was equipped with a lance, bow and arrows. With senior men at the front and initiates at the back, a large group of men and boys would leave the camp. They marched in a straight line and shouted as they went. The game they killed was eaten only by the senior men. Meanwhile, one of the elders who had remained in camp would have cooked some of the goat over the holy fire. Before and after cooking, this meat was laid out in a highly ritualized fashion. The method of slaughter included the removal, by hand, of the beating hearts of the animals. After cooking, the men would blow up and tie off the intestines and the gall bladder, for these had to hang on the initiates when they returned to camp. The initiates could then drink from the bucket of bitter herbs prepared earlier, while the senior men ate their meal. After all of this, the initiates were instructed on proper conduct in married life, and the next day they returned to hunt again. (Vedder 1928, I:50-2; Lebzelter 1934: 137-9) Men customarily went through three hunting rituals, each time advancing to a higher stage. Only after the third, which frequently took place in adulthood, were they granted the status of elder. (Vedder 1928a: 52)
- 6.4 Other rituals:
- 6.5 Myths (Creation):

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect: Lutheran or Catholic churches have replaced the holy fire, and at least in some Damara areas, no vestige of the custom remains.

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: When one dies, the soul leaves the body and takes the wide road which leads to //Gamab's village (Vedder 1928a:61-2). At one point, a narrow road branches off but the the Damara do not know where it leads. At anther point, there is a giant cliff which overlooks a fire far below. If the deceased falls off then, his or her soul will be lost forever. There is no notion that wicked people fall over and good people reach the sky. All Damara, provided they are careful, can get past the cliff. When the deceaced near //Gamab;s village, other spirits come out to bid welcome. The new arrival is given a bowl of liquid fat to drink, and then takes his or her place among the dead. Life in heaven is much like that on Earth, only better. The reason why earth is so sparse in resources, say the Damara, is that heaven is so plentiful (Vedder 1928a: 63).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): Had three pillars as part of their religion; the holy fire, a deity Gamab, and evil spirits. Gamab was said to live in the sky, in a village laid out on the same plan as the Damara village.

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect: Replaced large parts, or all, of the Damara's original religion

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

9.1 They have a number of taboos, but the most important one involves water. It is said to rob the hunter of his potential for success. Even the hunter's wife had to avoid water while he was hunting. The Damara would wash themselves with fat in order to avoid the consequence with water, and in winter they covered themselves with ashes.

Numbered references

1. ethnologue.com

2. Wikipedia

3. Bernard. A, Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa: A Comparative Ethnography of the Khoisan People. Cambridge Uuniversity Press. 1992 (All unmarked information is from this book. The citations of Vedder and Lebzelter were from this book too.)