

## THE RELEVANCE OF PREHISTORIC ROCK ART IN THE PRESENT

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### Abstract

*Today the rock art of southern Africa enjoys worldwide appreciation, which is based on several factors: Certainly the art of various regions on the subcontinent responds to the aesthetic predilection of a wide, mainly western audience; this phenomenon is enhanced by tourists who add some cultural flavour to their travels that usually aim at the nature and wildlife of southern Africa. In a synchronic development, indigenous people began to re-define their relation to the art and appropriated it in various new ways. Today they are more explicit about their ontological association with the art, partly claiming more or less direct descent from the earlier artists (such as in Tsodilo). Moreover they accept that people made the pictures, an attitude that was less common a few decades ago when San, questioned about authorship of the art, maintained that people cannot paint this way but only the Great God can. This paper explores the connection between local communities and rock art in Southern Africa. It uses examples from Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe to argue and demonstrate that rock art is no longer the preserve of western sciences and tourism alone but that through appropriation the art has multiple motivations from spiritual to identity issues, and claims of land ownership to economic benefit.*

### Introduction

With the growing interest in the art it was an obvious step that some rock art regions have been declared World Heritage Sites. In their mutual feedback relationship with tourism all these regions and

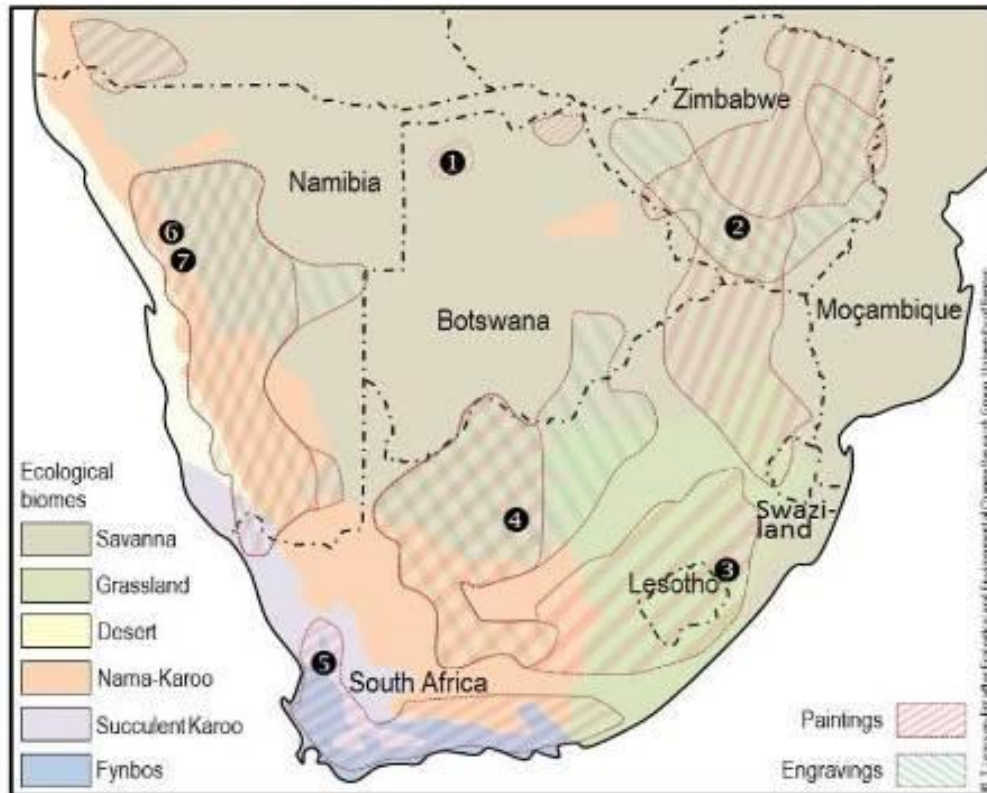
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sites have increased attention to rock art in general and created employment in site management, tourist services but also in academic research. Of course this means a commodification of the cultural heritage but in the cases described in this paper the implications of the integration of rock art into a global market are perceived by stakeholders as a lesser problem than the unfair distribution of benefits.



**Fig. 1:** Distribution of the main corpora of rock art differentiated by production technique of paintings and engravings. (Strictly speaking, “engraving” is one specific technique and often authors use the more neutral term “petroglyph” for this kind of pictorial production. Nevertheless we will use ‘engraving’ in the encompassing sense for all reductive techniques as it allows the derivations of the verb “engrave” or the nominalisation of “engraver”). Numbers indicate major rock art areas partly mentioned in this paper: 1=Tsodilo\*, 2=Matobo\*, 3=uKhahlamba-Drakensberg\*, 4=Karoo, 5=Cederberg, 6=Twyfelfontein-/Ui//aes\*, 7=Dâureb-Brandberg (the asterisk marks World Heritage Sites).

### Rock art in Namibia

In Namibia the world heritage site of Twyfelfontein (/Ui//aes in the locally spoken Damara language) attracts first attention. It is arguably the largest concentration of rock engravings in southern Africa (Twyfelfontein/Ui-//aes World Heritage Nomination Dossier, 2006), but its wealth of rock art was only discovered in the late 1940s, even though its first discovery goes back to before 1915 (Scherz, 1975).

Twyfelfontein is located on the slope of a wide flat basin in a hilly dry landscape with an average annual precipitation of c. 50-100 mm (Mendelson et al., 2002). Besides the several thousand engravings on sandstone slabs and walls there are also a few interspersed rock painting shelters which differ in their motif repertoire by an emphasis on human figures. The human figures are almost entirely lacking in the engravings where large game animals, animal spoor and geometric designs prevail (**Fig. 2**. See also Scherz, 1975; Twyfelfontein/Ui-//aes World Heritage Nomination Dossier, 2006). The site extends over a wide slope with a small perennial fountain and obviously was extensively used by the Later Stone Age hunter-gatherer population which is thought to have produced the representational motifs between many hundred to several thousand years ago (Twyfelfontein/Ui-//aes World Heritage Nomination Dossier, 2006). Geometric motifs, on the other hand, are often attributed to herder groups of Khoekhoen speakers purportedly having settled in the area between 400 and 2500 years ago (Ouzman, 2002), but except for the advent of domestic sheep in the wider region there is no evidence for the immigration of whole populations in that period (Sadr, 2013). Today and since colonial times mainly Damara people occupy this area and some even live near the site (Levin & Goldbeck, 2013).

The Damara are also the group from which most of the guides to the site were recruited (Molin, 2005). But as in almost all other parts of southern Africa, there is no direct link between rock art and an extant ethnic group. Accordingly, what the guides can relate to visitors about the rock art of Twyfelfontein is largely based on results of modern western research since this is what the guides hear during their training. Their own traditions do not provide them with knowledge about these motifs (Molin, 2005). In 2010 a "Damara Living Museum" was established near Twyfelfontein, where the traditional life of precolonial times is re-enacted for visitors. Despite the nearness to the world heritage site, performances at this "Living Museum" – as a matter of truthfulness – do not pretend any link to the production of rock art.



**Fig. 2:** With the closing down of the tin mine in Uis in 1990 most job opportunities vanished in the wider Dâureb/Brandberg region. Subsequently some people tried to generate income from tourism either as guides to the rock art sites or by producing souvenirs with rock art motifs (photo taken in 2006). Today only guiding still is a relatively safe source of income since souvenir production of this type has ended. (Photo: M. Th. Erz)

Another important Namibian rock art region with outstanding rock art lies south of Twyfelfontein being well visible from there. It is the Dâureb/Brandberg mountain, which is entirely different in character from Twyfelfontein, being a huge granitic inselberg rising up to over 2500 m a.s.l. (Lenssen-Erz & Erz, 2000). Rock paintings can be found mainly in the upper regions. The whole mountain harbours about 1000 rock painting sites most of which have been published comprehensively based on the outstanding documentation of Harald Pager (Pager, 1989-2006). Paintings largely date from the Later Stone Age period of 4000-2000 years ago (Richter, 1991), and a specific painting of which a small exfoliated piece was excavated in a stratified layer was dated before  $2760 \pm 50$  BP (KN-3544, Breunig, 1989). The art (**Fig. 3**) comprises largely human figures in a rich variety of activities. Motifs of the animal kingdom are dominated by rather few species (springbok, giraffe, gemsbok, ostrich, zebra, and elephant) that do not live in the mountain. Animals may have been used as metaphors for imploring or celebrating an intact and prolific environment (Lenssen-Erz, 1994, 1997). These metaphors would have worked by invoking the encyclopaedic knowledge that the people entertained about the animals and the environment. Human figures, on the other hand, stood for specific social values: community, equality and mobility (Lenssen-

Erz, 2001). Other authors (e.g., Kinahan, 1991) see the art of the mountain as being basically shaped by the pan-San shamanistic tradition (established by Lewis-Williams, 1981) where various trance experiences are rendered in metaphoric depictions. According to Kinahan (1991) these societies in the Dâureb/Brandberg were not static but with the introduction of innovations such as domestic animals power relations within the society changed away from the previous complete egalitarianism.

The surroundings of the Dâureb/Brandberg have been settled by Damara people at least since the earliest times of colonisation and the upper regions were still used by them until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Gürich, 1891). However, from colonial times until about 25 years ago, there was no noticeable connection between the local population and the rock art. Only in the economically problematic time after 1990 a group of young Damara from the nearest small town, Uis, started to informally organise guided tours to some rock art sites of interest to tourists. This initiative, which soon established itself as an association of the *Daureb Mountain Guides*, is among the few success stories of a modern appropriation of rock art and an entailing development process. Many of the guides underwent training and today they have become officially approved and certified guides of the National Heritage Council of Namibia. In the early years of 2000 some of them started a small project (Jutta Vogel Stiftung, 2009) with the aim to collect among their elders stories and knowledge about the traditional life at the Dâureb/Brandberg (Oeamseb et al., 2005). This, however, showed that there is no direct connection from the rock art period to the present, but this is no surprise in view of the archaeological evidence which suggests that the high times of painting ceased during the first millennium AD with the end of the LSA C-Phase (Richter, 1991). This is indicated by a decrease of 14C dates in the Daureb/Brandberg (Breunig, 1989, 2003; Vogelsang et al., 2002). Archaeological evidence becomes frequent again in the mountain only from the first quarter of the second millennium onwards with a peak some two to four centuries ago (see Breunig, 2003, p. 281, fig. 232, for a comparison of the 14C dates from various studies). There is no evidence that in this latter period significant rock art production took place except some finger paintings (Lensen-Erz & Vogelsang, 2005). Nevertheless, one of the present authors (TLE) has witnessed discussions among the guides about whether the art was made by San or Damara ancestors. While in archaeology and anthropology there is little doubt about a San ancestry, some of the young Damara guides put forward well-founded arguments based on details of body ornamentation, hair style and head gear that are seen in the paintings which were much more like Damara traditions than like the known traditions of any San group. Other young people of the *Daureb Mountain Guides* argued, however, that in view of the long time that has passed since the end of the painting period, it is more likely some common hunter-

gatherer ancestry can be claimed for the authorship of the paintings – an opinion that Molin (2005) also found among the Damara guides at Twyfelfontein. It can be anticipated that with the present trend of recollection of old ethnic traditions a more clearly articulated association with rock art will become noticeable. Very likely this will mark a move away from the statement that Megan Biesele recorded from a Ju/'hoan informant in 1972, whom she had invited to the Brandberg, who contended that the pictures could only have been made by God (Biesele, 1974a).



**Fig. 3:** Female community guides from the surroundings of the Dâureb/Brandberg during their first encounter with rock art in the high mountain in 2012 (Photo: M.Th. Erz)

### **Rock art in Tsodilo, Botswana**

The many implications of a new appropriation of a rock art corpus can be studied at the site of the Tsodilo Hills in Botswana. In a rural and hostile environment in north-western Botswana, these widely isolated inselbergs were declared a world heritage site with rock art that is meaningful to the present population of the area (Segadika, 2006). Today one of the requirements of the World Heritage Conven-

tion is the consultation and inclusion of local communities in the management of sites that are inscribed on the World Heritage list. According to Ndoro (2006, p. 336) the World Heritage Convention demands "...that policies that give cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community" must be implemented at World Heritage Sites. But it was not until 2007 that UNESCO, as the influential body in the management and in standardisation of sites, recognised communities as the integral part of the heritage sites (UNESCO, 2008). Before that, heritage sites were enlisted based only on the value of the material heritage property while the local communities were excluded in the management plan of heritage sites. The basis for the enlisting of a site was the World Heritage Convention (1972) with particular interest on the tangible heritage on sites. In the case of Tsodilo this is made clear in the Tsodilo management plan of 1994. The Ju/hoansi-San of Tsodilo also faced this affliction in 1994 when they were displaced from their ancestral land to give way to tourism, site conservation and developments in anticipation of increased visitor influx. Even today this community still recuperates from this move while lamenting the lack of intimacy they used to have with the art and the hill.

Although the site area is approximately 10 square kms, the rock art of Tsodilo is rich and diverse, not only in terms of themes, but also in styles and technique (Campbell, Denbow, & Wilmsen, 1994). In a historical perspective the general belief is that there is a portion of paintings made by San, paintings commonly labelled in South Africa as 'Bushman Paintings'. On the other hand there are numerous wild animal and cattle paintings which according to the locals, were probably made by the cattle-keepers assumed to have settled at archaeological site Nqoma plateau on the female hill. The exact time of occupation is unknown but estimated around 650 AD (Denbow & Wilmsen, 2010). One can find cattle paintings in association with stick people so that motifs of herding and many other paintings seem to be related and are possibly artefacts of the same people (Smith & Ouzman, 2004). In the early 1970s !Kung San living at the Tsodilo Hills, maintained that all paintings must have been by the great God Gaoxa since no one knew a person that could paint that way (Biesele, 1974b). While this was an apparently consensual opinion at that time, there were more idiosyncratic beliefs about why Gaoxa made the paintings. Moreover, one informant of John Marshall, ≠Toma, recounted a story of how handprints found among the rock art came into being through a person: "It is a story of a long-ago hunter stalking a giraffe. The successive prints of his hand move slowly towards the animal, marking spots where he crouched and froze to escape detection. Each handprint is a station in the story of stalking. Finally, at the print closest to the giraffe, ≠Toma said the hunter of long ago had pulled his bow and let fly the poisoned arrow." (Biesele, 1974b, p. 3)



**Fig. 4:** Depiction of a rock art panel from Tsodilo Hills, Botswana, one of the main panels that the local people interpret as a typical depiction of a hunting scene. The local San guides interacting with the rock art. (Photo: S. Basinyi)

Tsodilo Hills are a revealing example of the ambiguity of declaring a location a world heritage site. The rock art at Tsodilo was made by a number of different peoples at different periods. There are no dates and the fading of the art and superimposition are not useful when trying to determine age and authorship. However, knowing approximately when the paintings were made is important in ascribing them to particular groups or people. The Ju/hoansi San currently living at Tsodilo are said to be recent arrivals. They claim to have come in the early 19th century and found the Ncaekhwe-San living at the Hills, the latter subsequently leaving, but the Ncaekhwe have not migrated far since some are still living less than 80 km away in the Okavango Delta. However, the Ju/hoansi maintain that this area has always been their home that they frequented for generations. Therefore, they consider this their territory. The Hambukushu, dwelling at Tsodilo – and speaking a Bantu language – are also recent arrivals coming at about the same time as the Ju/hoansi, but they claim longer occupation by their forefathers based on the ancient settlement on the hill tops. Nevertheless, both groups deny direct authorship of the paintings. The Ju/hoansi say the Ncaekhwe told them that their ancestors had made the paintings. The Hambukushu deny all knowledge of the white paintings found at one hill – according to the local people there are rumours of the white man being the painters of some of them – even though in scientific writings they are associated with Bantu speakers (Campbell & Robins 2010), and the only Bantu-speakers believed to have occupied the Hills during the last three centuries have been ancestors of Hambukushu, judging by



the pottery left behind (Denbow & Wilmsen, 2010). However, some local !Kung San traditions suggest that the Ncaekhwe Khoisan who had formerly lived at Tsodilo were responsible for the white paintings (Robbins et al., 2000).

Found on the peripheries of the region and living as pastoralists, Herero speakers also claim continuous occupation of the hills but currently they are excluded from the site. These communities all have sacred places, including rain-making shrines for the Hambukushu, within the hills that they to some extent keep secret. They are afraid that these places will be lost when the old people die because of modernity, new perceptions, continuous interaction with “outsiders”, and lack of interest from the young generation.



**Fig. 5:** Tsodilo white paintings. (Photo: T. Kenathetswe)



**Fig. 6:** San hunters from Tsumkwe, Namibia, visiting relatives in Tsodilo, Botswana, and exchanging views about details of game animals in rock art. (Photo: M.Th. Erz)

According to the international community, the rock art in Tsodilo is a legacy of the African and the world's heritage that transcends political boundaries. In this outsider's view the Ju/hoansi are favoured as true heirs of the art and of the site in general. By contrast, the local people in Tsodilo perceive the art as a token of their diverse cultural backgrounds, their indigenous knowledge of the ecosystem and of their cultural values. Thus, despite some competition, there is prevailing harmony in diversity; the view of rock art as heritage reinforces social unity of the community and creates good relations between cultural groups in Tsodilo and the visitors. This relation manifests itself through collective and pragmatic symbolic efforts to conserve this cultural property with its important cultural values. In the quest to create community harmony, there is a tendency of standardising even the interpretation of this complex material culture across the diverse cultural groups residing in the area. However, the rock art in Tsodilo and its evident diverse interpretations through local lenses is a clear example of diverse values based on the different knowledge values and cultural heterogeneity in the vicinity of the hills. The interpretations

of the art inform the general conceptual range of values associated with this heritage site and the social relations within the community.

On the other hand, the wider Tsodilo community struggles against external influences of cultural transformations. Therefore they try to secure their cultural appropriations and still meet visitor expectations. This results in the creation of mental and physical boundaries and conceptual zones that the community maintains and which are being constantly supervised and negotiated among the groups. The idea of fixation emanates from fear of loss of this cultural capital both physically, through fading of the art, and conceptually in their memories and cultural attachment.

### **Rock art in Zimbabwe**

The World Heritage Site of the Matobo (also Matopo) Hills in southwest Zimbabwe represents the wider Zimbabwean rock art region. Matobo cultural landscape is home to some of the major rock art sites in Zimbabwe and is in fact one of the richest rock art loci in western Zimbabwe (Pwiti & Mvenge, 1996). The earliest of these paintings may have been made up to 12,500 years ago (dated through stratified spalls of exfoliated painted granite) and fine line hunter gatherer paintings may be as old as 8,000 years (Walker, 1987).

The Matobo World Heritage Site is regarded in Zimbabwe as a sacred landscape - the seat of God. It is venerated as a sacred burial ground and for containing rain-making and rain-control shrines, some of which are associated with rock art sites. Some of the rock art sites are also perceived as the dwelling places of ancestral spirits. In this case the rock art sites are considered shrines of the local communities. Academics may treat the rock art as sources of information and as artefacts through which some interpretation of the past can be achieved. To the local communities the rock art sites retain a religious function, even if Late Stone Age hunter-gatherers are accredited as the cultural authors of this rock art (Pwiti & Mvenge, 1996). The current local community are mainly Bantu speakers and they are the ones who use the sites for rain-making ceremonies. The fact that the Bantu communities are using the sites represents some form of appropriation.

This kind of appropriation is mainly experienced through the management regime that the sites are subjected to, whereby traditional custodianship is preferred and implemented. While the National Museums and Monuments Act legally binds the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe to manage the Matobo site, there has been some continuity in the role of the local communities in the maintenance of the rock art sites. The local chiefs and shrine custodians play a very prominent role in this

regard. For instance, to visit the sites, such as Silozwane rock art site – which is regarded as a rain control-shrine – consent must be sought from ancestral spirits and the visitors must be accompanied to the sites by a priest or priestess (Jopela, 2010). Such an appropriation has been given credence by the demand of the World Heritage Convention that local communities need to be involved in the management of sites, because, as Ndoro argued, the absence of community involvement leads to “...management practices that do not consider the interests and attitudes of local communities...” (2003, p. 336). This could pose a danger of vandalism of the rock art heritage resource as was experienced at Domboshava in Zimbabwe (see Taruvinga, 2003).

However, this appropriation and its continuity under the World Heritage Site banner considers and perpetuates the local view of heritage sites, in this case rock art sites, as the abode of ancestral spirits and hence functional spaces. It sustains local traditions which in turn ensure that the rock art and associated archaeology in the area endures. Appropriation of rock art sites in the case of Matobo is achieved through traditional custodianship of the sites by users and not necessarily the cultural authors. To the users (Bantu speakers) the cultural landscape of the Matobo, inclusive of the rock art sites, are living landscapes that provide tangible evidence of the spirituality of the area. Thus the appropriation of rock art satisfies the demands of the World Heritage Convention by giving “function in the life of the community” (Pedersen, 2002, p. 16).

### **Rock art in the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg**

The rock art of the Drakensberg (**Figs 5 & 6**) in South Africa and Lesotho has received much public and scientific attention (Willcox, 1956; Pager, 1971; Vinnicombe, 1976; Lewis-Williams, 1981; Lewis-Williams & Dowson, 1989; Lewis-Williams & Challis, 2011) over decades and it was an obvious step to declare part of it a World Heritage Site: The Maloti-Drakensberg Park is a trans-boundary site composed of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park in South Africa and the Sehlathebe National Park in Lesotho (Maloti Drakensberg, 2000). The landscape of the Drakensberg is grassland above 1500 m a.s.l., with the peaks higher than 3000 m. Before farming encroached on the South African side of the Drakensberg, and the pastoralist economy on the Lesotho side, the mountains and the surrounding plains were very rich in game, and were the hunting and gathering grounds of early San populations for millennia (Mitchell, 2002).

The Drakensberg play a crucial role in rock art research since the earliest sources relating oral testimony to rock art come from the area. Orpen (1874) published comments of the San man Qing in the Cape

Monthly Magazine, and the Frobenius expeditions visited this region in the 1920s and recorded rock art. Frobenius used the oral sources of Qing extensively, as well as those collected by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd in the 1870s in Cape Town from San informants (Bleek & Lloyd, 1911) for understanding rock art. Based on these sources he came to the conclusion that the culture of the San was "particularly shamanistic" ("ausgesprochen schamanistisch" – Frobenius, 1931, p. 27). From the 1980s onwards, David Lewis-Williams of Witwatersrand University also focused on shamanism and oral sources (Lewis-Williams, 1981), developing a complex shamanistic theory and supporting it with evidence from neuropsychological research. His theory was most influential on all rock art research worldwide but there is no mentioning by him that Leo Frobenius had already pointed out the shamanistic character of the art in the Drakensberg (cf. Garlake, 2001).

Dating of the Drakensberg art is unascertained for its beginnings which may lie at around 3000 years ago if not earlier (e.g., Mazel, 2013) but through motifs of colonial settlers for example people with fire arms or on horses, (Vinnicombe, 1976) we know that painting was still practised into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These pictures show the last testimony of the original hunter-gatherers in a region where they were pushed from their traditional hunting grounds to remote areas already when first pastoralists, coming from further north, settled the region some 1500 years ago (for regionally focussed studies see Wright, 1971; Vinnicombe, 1976; Blundell, 2004). By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the San hunter-gatherers of the region were considered to be extinct (Lee, 2003). It was only until some years ago when the public opinion about the San slowly became more appreciative of that culture – which to quite some extent was generated through writings about rock art – that more and more people professed their San descent (Oevernes, 2002; Francis, 2010) and left the status of 'secret San' behind (Prins, 2009; Francis & Francis, 2010). Yet their strategy for some time had been to hide in neighbouring Bantu-speaking communities (e.g., Szalay, 1995) so that once a part of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg was declared a world heritage site they found themselves challenged by other groups of San from across southern Africa for being the true heirs and therefore beneficiaries of the site's revenue from tourists. Today the San of the region have restricted special access rights to rock art sites where they still may perform some rites (though not producing new rock art or repainting the old art – Francis, 2010). This new found relevance of rock art is evinced by the fact that at an eland ceremony was specifically created in 2003 (Francis, 2010) and near Game Pass Shelter (**Fig. 6**) in 2007 about 400 San from all over the Drakensberg took part in this ceremony (Prins, 2009). San of the Drakensberg still draw upon the spiritual potency of the rock art and they requested that visitors, in order to avoid 'ritual pollution', should "brush against or rub themselves with

Turpentine grass (*Cymbopogon excavatus*) before entering the site. These ritual prescriptions have now also been incorporated into the heritage management plan of Game Pass Shelter. This is indeed the first time that indigenous perceptions have been incorporated into the management strategy of rock art in southern Africa." (Prins, 2009, p. 204)

The Drakensberg provide the only instance where a part of the extant population has direct ritual links to rock art (Frances, 2010) – the grandson of the presumed last painter was interviewed some years ago – and therefore they also have notions about the meaning of the art. When first interviewed in this respect, elders "related to the manipulation of supernatural forces as an 'act of renewal'. These actions involved the manipulation and re-balancing of environmental, sexual and healing forces." (Prins, 2009, p. 204) There was no reference to altered states of consciousness or shamanism, which is the most common interpretation of the art in western science. But since this paradigm is so strong today and hegemonic in all kinds of writings, be it scientific or for tourists, the San of the region have started to adapt to it and "San descendants living in the Thendela village adjacent to the Kamberg Nature Reserve now provide visitors with a classical coffee table book version of the shamanistic interpretation of the art." (Prins, 2009, p. 204)



**Fig. 7:** Game Pass Shelter at Kamberg in the Drakensberg where e.g. in 2007 San from all over the Drakensberg conducted rituals. (Photo: M.Th. Erz)

### Rock art from the Karoo

The inner highland of South Africa, the Karoo is another remarkable rock art region. It is a vast, moderately contoured arid plateau where rock shelters are rare and the prehistoric art that can be found here is basically engravings on open rocks. They encompass a variety of techniques, from rather rough pecked motifs to fine line engravings with outstanding naturalism.



**Fig. 8:** A community guide at Wildebeest Kuil interacting with tourists. (Photo T. Lenssen-Erz)

The site of Wildebeest Kuil north of Kimberley (Fig. 7) can be taken as a representative of this rock art region. It is a small hill comprising many rounded and flat boulders which harbour over 400 engravings. Here one can observe a very interesting case of new appropriation of rock art by modern San groups. In 1990, some 4000 !Xun and Khwe San from northern Namibia and southern Angola were resettled to a tent town west of Kimberley (Lee, 2003). This was the year of the independence of Namibia and the resettlement seemed necessary since a number of men from these groups had served the South African Army in its war against the Namibian independence fighters. After a destitute and desperate life in the tent camp, in 2003 the San moved to the small town erected for them on the farm Platfontein near Wildebeest Kuil. Some of the San became guides to the site and some started an art project. Among the !Xun and Khwe the rock art of Wildebeest Kuil is seen as a link to a broad Khoe-San cultural heritage in

southern Africa and the precolonial past on the subcontinent (Morris 2012). However they themselves – as almost all other Khoe-San groups of today – do not have a rock art tradition and there is no rock art in the home region of the !Xun and Khwe in northern Namibia and southern Angola.

The art project of the community thrived for a while with some of the artist's products finding their way to the international art market or into picture books being produced of the paintings (Rabbethge-Schiller, 2006). Notwithstanding this success, today the project has ceased, mainly because funding for the project has ended (Van de Weg & Barnabas, 2011) – a fate that seemed to threaten the comparable Kuru Art Project in central Botswana likewise until the latter regained stability and is working still today (Baracchini, 2014). The main technique in these art projects was painting with acrylic pigment on canvas, thus the paintings were of a colourfulness that rock art could never reach and only few motifs really overlap between the prehistoric and the modern corpora except that the same species of large game animals appear in both. Only one artist is known who also painted on rocks near his house (Stephenson, 2006). The motif spectrum of the art projects was much wider than in prehistoric art, and the artists only in part related their creations to the prehistoric rock art – but this view was willingly embraced by the interested western audience or perceived “traditional motifs” were in fact even encouraged by buyers (Barnabas, 2010, pp. 429-430). However, this acted as an affirmation of discourses on concepts of “primitivism” and the negotiation of “authentic San-ness” (Guenther, 2003). Even though there were attempts to take the artists of the !Xun and Khwe projects as artists in the sense of western art history with an opus generated through a specific biography (e.g. Rabbetghe-Schiller, 2006) they had little chance of persisting in a free international art market that they were expected to provide with authentic “Bushman art” (Barnabas 2010, pp. 429-430). Today only very few individuals from the community still work as guides at the public rock art site where they relate knowledge on the art that is strongly informed by western research mixed with “insights from their own personal histories and contexts (...) and their own reflections upon the academic ideas received during training” (Morris, 2012, pp. 236-237). Art production of paintings has ceased and only some of the people are engaged in craft making.

### **The southern African rock art cosmos**

The focus on a few 'lighthouse' sites and -areas should not veil the fact that the whole subcontinent is densely populated with rock art sites. The rock art largely originates from Later Stone Age up to the more recent past (Garlake, 2001; Mitchell, 2002) during which period the hunter-gatherer societies embraced a rich repertoire of pictorial art that was still enriched by pastoralists in the subsequent Iron



Age (Derricourt, 1977; Smith & Ouzman, 2004). It is the token of the appropriation of the landscapes but also a powerful bequest to their lifeworld. With their art that probably combined religiousness, mythology, encyclopaedic knowledge and aesthetics, the early inhabitants of the subcontinent created a means of symbolic communication and interaction among themselves and with supernatural powers.

Today cases of a more or less unbroken ritual tradition linking an extant group to rock art production may be found only in the Drakensberg where the painting tradition lasted until the 1920s. In all other parts of southern Africa the modern appropriation of the art has multiple motivations from spiritual to identity issues, and claims of land ownership to economic benefit. In the early 1970s bead artists from around the Tsodilo Hills in Botswana used rock art as an inspiration for their bead-artwork (Biesele, 1974b, p. 2). Other art projects that emerged from San groups in some places were nearer to Western canvas painting than to prehistoric rock art but this may also have been a reaction to the fact that the artists were expelled from their traditional lands and therefore lost the main medium on which to paint – the landscape and the various 'cavasses' it provides. Moreover, the attraction of commodification cannot be ignored and if paintings are to be traded then they need to be on canvas and not on immovable rocks. The ancient tradition of engraving has not yet found a modern expression even though it can be observed in a number of places throughout southern Africa where even in recent times anonymous people (maybe even herd boys) produced simple carved pictures (e.g. near to Apollo 11 Cave in southern Namibia, pers. observation TLE). These, however, do not seem to emerge from a background that is informed by cultural codes or religion but rather refer to everyday experiences such as with cars or trains. However, there should be no expectations that the old art can be revived; it has been the destiny of rock art at all times that, by its longevity, it can be appropriated by ever new groups and thus can be associated with new perspectives and meanings.

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