

TALKING HEADS

Simon Hall

People throughout the ages have inscribed animals with qualities that reflect a particular point of view about cultural practice and cultural meaning. Hunters and farmers consumed animals not only because they are good to eat, but also because they integrate their physical and behavioural characteristics into cultural practice in order to frame themselves, their identity and their relationships with the wider world. Animals were also 'good to think'. The depiction of eland in southern African Later Stone Age rock art is a well-known example. The qualities of eland that made some San 'people of the Eland' are perhaps self-evident. The eland embodies power, size, strength and is rich in fat. San enculturated these attributes into ideas about health, plenty and well-being. More specifically, the eland was central to the process of defining a proper person and ordered relationships between people.

The physical and behavioural characteristics of an animal that were revered by some may not have been self-evident and obvious to others. In different contexts and at different times the characteristics of other species such as kudu, springbok, giraffe or elephant were more favoured as symbols. How and why specific people-animal relationships arose is a complex issue, but the important point is that people selected appropriate animal symbols through their cultural taxonomies. Food taboos provide many examples. Southern Bantu-speakers, for example, generally do not eat fish because they are classified as snakes, and this makes them inedible.

These questions concerning the symbolic properties of animals are pertinent to a discussion of the Lydenburg heads, particularly to the meaning of the diminutive head (head number 7, Inskeep & Maggs 1975, Fig. 1) that combines both animal and human features. The animal attributes of this head sets it apart from the other six heads that comprise the two large heads (1 and 2) and a group of four smaller heads (3, 4, 5 and 6, Fig. 2). These sculptures are formally decorated Early Iron Age (EIA) pots that date to the late first millennium (Whitelaw 1996). While Mike Evers (1982) convincingly reasons that all seven



Fig. 1: The aardvark/
human head number 7
(with thanks to T Maggs
& P Davison)



Fig 2: One of the four small
human heads number 4
(with thanks to T Maggs &
P Davison)

heads were buried in a pit, the position of that pit within the wider settlement is unknown. The heads are remarkably well preserved and near complete. Fragments from similar sculptures have been found at other EIA settlements and so this form of expressive culture was widespread and the Lydenburg heads are not unique. They do, however, indicate considerable technical skill and esoteric knowledge on the part of the potter/sculptors.

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The Lydenburg heads were clearly used in a ritual context (Inskeep & Maggs 1995, Maggs & Davison 1981) and probably served an educational function in rites of passage at initiation schools for young girls and boys (Loubser 1993). Additionally, the reconstruction of the heads shows that they were deliberately broken before disposal. This reinforces the initiation interpretation because objects used in rites of passage are often broken to symbolise the status change of the initiates from children to adults.

The important animal feature of head number 7 is the extended snout that is finished at the end with a half disc of flattened clay (Fig. 1). The obvious question is what animal it represents. The elongated snout means that the mouth is a relatively long slit running back towards the head, in contrast to the mouths of the other heads. Head 7, however, does share a common feature with human heads 3, 4, 5 and probably 6, namely teeth that are moulded from small pegs of clay and suspended from the upper jaw (Inskeep & Maggs 1975:130). The animal mouth has two pegs of clay on the left side and four on the right. Tim Maggs and Patricia Davison (1981:30) have suggested that these features are dog-like. Instead, I suggest that the animal features were modelled on the armadillo (African antbear or anteater, *Orycteropus afer*, Fig. 3).

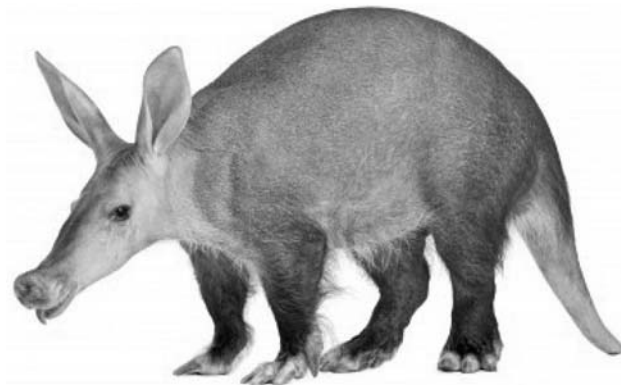


Fig. 3: Armadillo (*Orycteropus afer*)

The disc of clay at the end of the snout accurately captures this fleshy feature of the armadillo snout, which is described as pig-like. More important in support of the armadillo identity of head 7 is the armadillo dental formula: incisors 0/0, canines 0/0, pre-molars 2/2, molars 3/3. The armadillo has two upper and lower premolars, three upper and lower molars, but no canines or incisors (Fig. 4). While the armadillo may be born with small incisors and canines, they are lost as the animal approaches maturity and never replaced. Armadillo dentition is thus at the back of the mouth and the front is toothless – open. The clay teeth in the mouth of head 7 are fixed towards the back of the upper jaw and not the front. No teeth are missing and have not broken off. My suggestion is that the head 7 animal features were modelled on the

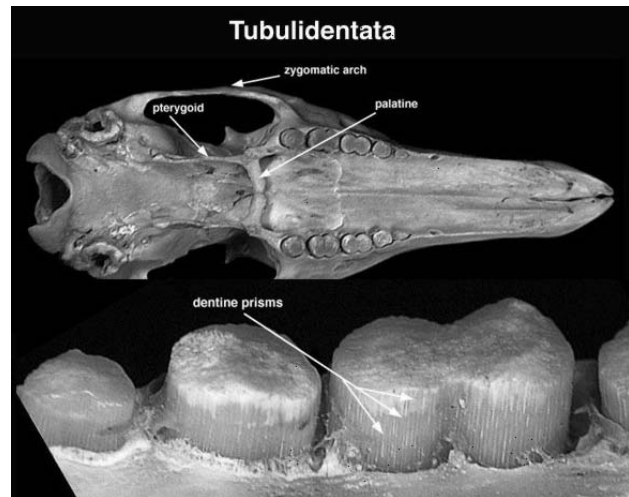


Fig. 4: Armadillo dentition, upper jaw

armadillo, creating a merger of human and animal.

This dental pattern also resonates with the dentition of the diminutive human heads where the mouth is preserved intact (Fig. 2, numbers 3, 4 and 5). In these heads the teeth are fixed to the jaw to create a gap at the midline where the incisors would be. The inference is that the organisation of the teeth in the diminutive human heads references the dental arrangement in the armadillo. This is a more subtle reference to armadillo in contrast to head 7 where armadillo is human and human is armadillo.

Because the seven heads were probably disposed of together in a single event and in a single pit (Evers 1982), it is reasonable to infer that they were used together as a complete set; a cast of characters that 'spoke' to each other in a didactic play. When we consider the practice of dental modification in Early Iron Age burials we may 'hear' some of the lines in the narrative between the armadillo/human head and the four diminutive human heads.

Dental modification was a common cultural practice in the EIA. Burials show that incisors and canines were removed or modified well before death. Alan Morris has made the connection (Morris 1998) between this practice and the dental modification modelled in the small human sculptures. Furthermore, analysis of the EIA burial from Nanda (Fig. 5), where the four lower incisors and upper central incisors were removed, and the lateral upper incisors chipped, suggests that tooth removal occurred when the individual was about 16 years old (Morris 1993). Dental modification of incisors is evident, for example, from a burial at Happy Rest in Limpopo province, where the upper central incisors were removed and the neighbouring left lateral incisor chipped (Steyn et al. 1994). There are many other examples. In contrast, dental modification does not seem to have been common practice in the Late Iron Age in South Africa.

There is ample commentary in African ethnography, particularly from Central Africa, that describes dental



Fig. 5: Early Iron Age skull from Nanda showing dental modification (with thanks to AG Morris)

modification as a necessary operation in the early stages of puberty rites and initiation. One purpose is to physically and visibly mark the body to signal social and reproductive identity. Ethnographic sources support Alan Morris's age estimate for the dental modification of the Nanda individual. Junod (1962: 182) notes that Tsonga girls undergo 'pointing of the teeth (incisors)' as a first step in the initiation process. Both boys and girls of the Plateau Tonga of Zambia go through the rite of *kubangwa*, the removal of the upper front teeth. This process is staged with a cutting of the first tooth and a second tooth modification shortly before puberty (Colson 1958:277).

The norm for girls was to have teeth removed before their first menstruation. If the operation had not been carried out she could not proceed to the seclusion stage of initiation (Colson 1958:278). This is consistent with Lango practice, where children around the age of 13 have the two central lower incisors 'levered out' (Driberg 1923:51). It has been suggested that these operations may explain the presence of isolated incisors and canines recovered from dung deposits at the EIA site of Broederstroom (Huffman 1993). In the Lunda creation stories, teeth are a central motif in restrained and cultured behaviour (Luc de Heusch 1982). These examples clearly consolidate the use of the Lydenburg heads in initiation.

Both boys and girls are subject to dental modification, although references in the ethnography refer more to girls than boys, particularly in relation to their changing sexual status. Dental modification also elaborates African ideals of feminine beauty. An admired feature in Mpondo women is a gap between the two front incisors (Hunter 1961:222). At the other end of the continent, Mende women in Sierra Leone file their front teeth to open up a space between them that is also considered a mark of beauty. The gap is filled by the tongue and connotes sexual intercourse (Sylvia Ardyn Boone 1986:100). In a possible elaboration of the tongue/penis link a wedge of metal may be

inserted between the two middle upper incisors to enhance the gap.

I have suggested that the dental characteristics of the aardvark provided a model to which the dental modification evident in the diminutive Lydenburg heads and in burials make reference. For the aardvark, the disappearance of the front teeth is a natural physiological sign of maturity. Maturity for EIA girls and boys was made visible through the cultural extraction and modification of incisors and canines at an early stage in rites of passage. From the ethnography, this visibly anticipates their complete social and physiological transition. But if head 7 as an aardvark/human conflation triangulated conceptually between the dental modification evident in EIA burials and the dental modification visible in the diminutive Lydenburg sculptures, what concepts and meanings were communicated in these narratives?

To address this challenge I return to African narratives that comment upon other physical and behavioural attributes of the aardvark that are symbolically relevant to social categories and actions. An obvious attribute of aardvarks is that they are nocturnal, and retreat underground during the day into extensive tunnels and chambers where they rear their young in dens. They are powerful diggers and can out-tunnel hunters in an extensive network of underground passages. The aardvark crosses the boundary between above and below ground, and live in perpetual darkness or by the dim light of the moon when they leave their burrows. This behaviour makes the animal a rich resource for symbolic action.

The aardvark's characteristics are woven by Africans into stories, such as creation myths. A Tabwa myth (eastern DRC) tells of an anthropomorphic aardvark called Mutimbi (the burrower) who lived in a dank and dark world. With his hunting dogs he pursued a cane rat down a burrow that eventually led to the city of light, the place of the divine being Leza. To ease Mutimbi's unhappiness about the state of his world, Leza sent Mutimbi back up to the surface with a man and women who carried a basket from which the man made a fire and the women released the moon and stars. Together they released the sun. In the face of these transformations, Mutimbi fled back down the burrow and from then onwards ventured out only at night (Roberts 1985:24). The aardvark's intolerance of light means that it is 'eyes in the night', has the mystical power of a sorcerer and resides in the underground world of the dead (De Heusch 1982:188).

Cosmological references to the aardvark among Bantu-speaking South African farmers is muted compared to the more substantial beliefs evident in Central and West African societies. Pierre de Marais has reviewed some of these references and argues that Seth in Egyptian iconography is based on the aardvark (2005). The animal is indistinct and shadowy in local cultural practice. The Tlokwe have the aardvark *thakadu* as their totem and aardvark bones are

included in the paraphernalia of some diviners. The most explicit reference is to be found in the story of the anteater's laws told to Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd by /xam interlocutors. It is similar to the Tabwa story: the aardvark is central to creating the world as we know it by laying down the rules of marriage and diet. These narratives may also have been expressed in rock art (Fig. 6).

In these stories the aardvark is a key agent in setting the cultural clock ticking and transforming a primordial world into one that is familiar and ordered. In myth he mediated the creation of people, which is also a core function of initiation where girls and boys are instructed and transformed into culturally responsible adults. However, his presence is spectral, and while he is central to creating culture he retreats from it below ground. If we remember that head 7 merges animal and human to create an identity that is neither one or the other, as is Mutimbi in the Tabwa creation story, the head also weaves together the natural and the cultural. Head 7 prompts multiple narratives about origins, creation, transformation and relationships between people and the natural world.

A central theme in initiation is preparation for marriage, sexual readiness and responsibility in the relationship between men and women. The aardvark also prompts, and I suggest prompted, comment on sexuality and fertility. The snout is a feature of ribald comment among the Tabwa, because it is a penis on a head. This signifies a high degree of fertility, because the animal has a penis at both ends of its body, and equally, unites male and female in a single being. Furthermore, the aardvark is an immensely powerful digger and this prowess is tapped into in the physical exertion necessary for cultivation and agricultural production (Roberts 1995:83). The snout as penis penetrates the earth and this has obvious sexual connotations. The animal once again connotes values around roles, responsibility, and the hard work that supports the order and stability of households and homesteads.

These values are expressed in Shona. Aardvark in Manyika is *gwerekwete*. In Zezuru the word can also mean 'a good farmer', while *dzere* in Manyika it can also mean a 'garden in a wet vlei'. Words for aardvark are also linked to work and effort, so that aardvark in Korekore, *dikita* or *dukuta*, also means perspiration, while the verb *dikita* in Hlengwe is 'to work hard'. These meanings are also true in Zulu. The aardvark as cultivator is reinforced by the symbiotic relationship it has with the aardvark cucumber (*Cucumis humifructus*). The aardvark eats the pulp and seeds that it locates underground and then defecates and buries the dung around its burrows (Hollmann 1997). The plant is dependent on the aardvark for propagation in this natural act of 'cultivation'. This behaviour is a natural model for production, reproduction and homestead life at the centre of agricultural cycles.

If the aardvark identity of head 7 is right, it suggests a



Fig. 6: Rock painting from Concession, Zimbabwe that includes an aardvark and people in a burrow (from B Woodhouse, 1984, *When Animals were People*, Johannesburg: Chris van Rensburg Publications)

range of symbolic properties that its presence may have invoked if used as an educational prop in rites of passage. These may have been multi-vocal and not fixed, being called into action as needed. As suggested, the characteristics of the aardvark invite reflection on creation and cultural order, maturity, sexual responsibility, hard work and honest production. These are values that are fitting in the context of initiation. A further consequence of an aardvark identity for head 7 is that it directs our analytical attention towards how it potentially drew upon the six other heads, and they in turn drew on it in a larger 'conversation' of meaning. Fragments of this 'conversation' are hinted at between the aardvark/human head and the four small human heads. This assumes that the seven heads comprised a complete set and were made, used and discarded as a set. With this in mind there are many other attributes of the heads to think about, especially the two large heads that as possible helmet masks literally performed meaning as talking heads.

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UNMARKED HISTORICAL CEMETERY IN THE CROWN MINES AREA

Stacey L Lander

In 2010 a number of human bones found protruding through the surface were identified in the Crown Mines area south-west of Johannesburg's central business district. What started out as a small rescue mission eventually evolved into something much bigger, and in the process shed light on the early history of Johannesburg and what South Africa is internationally best known for – gold mining.

Initially the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) approached local archaeologists to complete this rescue mission, but further investigation revealed that the exposed remains were not the only ones in the area. In fact, many burial pits were identified. What was interesting was that the burial

to the cemetery's historical context.

The investigation and historical context

In April 2011 SAHRA granted permission for a full-scale investigation to be conducted to exhume all burial pits, as well as a historical refuse dump that had been identified nearby. The aim of the investigation was to determine the age of the dump and the cemetery by cultural association, and to provide information about the individuals buried in the cemetery. Pelser and van Vollenhoven (2011) determined that the cemetery was located on a portion of the farm Langlaagte, which was linked to early gold mining when George Harrison discovered gold on the farm in July 1886.



The dig site where the cemetery is located with the excavation team consisting of archaeologists and anthropologists (photo: SL Lander)

pits were not situated randomly, as initially thought, but were organised in sequential rows in close proximity to one another as is the case in modern cemeteries. Questions that came to mind were: Who were the individuals buried here? Why was the cemetery created situated in this particular area? And how did this aspect of Johannesburg's history become lost with time? This article shares what the archaeologists and anthropologists found with reference



A long bone displaying the blue cortical bone (photo: SL Lander)

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An
excavated
burial pit in
the Crown
Mines
cemetery
(photo: SL
Lander)

Cultural material identified in the refuse dump included cups, saucers, plates and rum, whiskey, beer and ginger beer bottles. All the companies identified as being associated with the materials were in operation during the early gold mining period, particularly from about 1890 to 1920. Based on a fragment of porcelain plate inscribed with the words 'Robinson Central Deep', it was suggested that the cemetery was related to this mine, which was one of seven mines operating on the Langlaagte farm at that time.

By the end of the investigation it was estimated that as many as 650 individuals were buried in the cemetery and that it may have been one of the largest cemeteries in the Johannesburg area in the early 20th century (pers. comm. Anton Pelser).

A huge influx of people from within South Africa and all over the world made their way to Langlaagte – later to be known as Johannesburg – following the discovery of gold in 1886. This massive gold rush resulted in Langlaagte becoming one of the largest mining towns on the Witwatersrand during this time (Callinicos 1981). By 1899 nearly 100 000 labourers, consisting mostly of black South African farmers, were employed by the mines. Two years later the Transvaal Chamber of Mines had set up a recruiting

organisation – the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association – to source the additional workers needed. Recruiting agents were sent to villages all over South Africa, as well as Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana, offering to pay the taxes of the farmers in return for working in the mines (Callinicos 1981). In addition, nearly 100 000 unskilled labourers from China were imported from 1904 to 1908 to ease the labour shortage.

The vast increase in labour employed over the years did not result in the most ideal living conditions for the unskilled workers. The miners were housed in compounds comprising wood and iron shacks, each sleeping 20 to 50 people on concrete bunks one above the other, or worse, on rotten wooden or earthen floors when there was no space available. Callinicos (1981) described these compounds as being badly built: the shacks had no windows or lights, there were no washing facilities, cracks in the walls were filled with rags to keep out the wind and cold, and the only source of heat came from a big coal brazier giving off dangerous fumes. Although in later years new and improved compounds were built, in particular for the Chinese indentured labour, many of the black workers continued to be housed in the older compounds. In addition, each miner received only 2,27 kg of mealie meal and 0,91 kg of meat a week, which provided insufficient nutrition for a ten-hour shift of hard manual labour. This forced the workers to spend almost half their wages on buying food. Liquor or dagga was often consumed.

The poor quality of food and medical care, as well as the dangerous work underground, resulted in many deaths each year. Diseases such as pneumonia, tuberculosis and cerebrospinal meningitis spread rapidly as a result of overcrowding in the compounds. By 1903, 5 022 labourers had died on the mines (Callinicos 1981), with 59 per cent succumbing to pneumonia and meningitis because of overcrowding, damp conditions, sudden changes in temperature and general weakness. Another 11,86 per cent died from intestinal infections resulting from bad food, 5,8 per cent from scurvy because of a lack of vegetables, 4,08 per cent from accidents worsened by the fact that no proper work clothes or protective helmets were provided, 5,39 per cent from bacillosis (an infection caused by bacteria) and 5,39 per cent from tuberculosis. Similarly, of the 80 000 Chinese workers working on the Witwatersrand, 3 000 had died in accidents, by suicide or from disease.

The cemetery

Were the individuals identified in this Robinson Deep cemetery migrant mine workers? Did their deaths perhaps result from a mine-related accident or from disease resulting from poor living conditions? Unfortunately, the anthropological assessment of the skeletons has revealed little information about the indi-

viduals as the bones were very poorly preserved. Many of the bones were damaged or fragmented, and in several cases appeared to be cemented together, which make it difficult to determine age, sex, stature and ancestry. The initial reports, covering 65 individuals, nonetheless suggested that the majority of the individuals were adult males, most likely black Africans, with some dental evidence suggesting the presence of individuals of Asian, possibly Chinese descent.

Sadly, no information could be found about the cemetery. The archaeological investigation revealed that very little care was taken to preserve the cemetery. Eventually, it was buried beneath a gold mine dump for what may have been many years. The recent removal of this dump for the purpose of being reworked resulted in the discovery of the human skeletons and consequently the cemetery itself.



A flattened skull from a skeleton buried in the cemetery (photo: D Brits)

The presence of the overlying mine dump may explain why many of the skeletons were physically and chemically altered. I investigated this aspect for my MSc thesis (2014). The weight of the overlying material may have compressed the underlying soil, possibly causing the bones to flatten, a detail observed in particular in the case of the femora, tibiae and skulls. This could also be the cause for the bones being damaged or fragmented. Another interesting discovery was *blue bones*; a number of the skeletons had cortical bone that was stained blue (see the photo on page 5). Was this blue colour a consequence of the overlying mine dump or completely unrelated to this?

In my MSc thesis a number of femora acquired from skeletons exhumed from the cemetery were microscopically assessed to investigate the degradation of the bones, or to what degree the bones had been physically, biologically and/or chemically affected by the surrounding environment. A few bone samples also underwent chemical analysis to determine if the

blue-coloured bones were chemically associated. The results of this project will be published later this year, but some observations have included microscopic alteration of the outer and inner surfaces of the bones, with the middle cortical area remaining relatively intact. In addition, a number of chemical elements had transferred between the soil and the bone and vice versa, and although initially the blue-stained bones were suspected of being chemically associated, results suggested that fungi infiltrations may have contributed to the blue colour instead.

In summary, this historical cemetery has provided an interesting insight into the life of early gold miners. More importantly, it reminds us that without a past, we do not have a future. May history and the lives of those that lived before us not be neglected and forgotten as this unmarked cemetery was, but rather embraced and remembered in order to shape a better future.

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CONFESSION OF A BOER SNIPER

Manie Opperman

Snipers are operators with specific talents that are strengthened by training and specialised equipment. Such an operator was Chris Kyle, a member of the US Navy Special Forces (Seals). A recent film, 'American Sniper', is based on an autobiography of his sniping activities in Iraq where he accounted for 160 confirmed victims in military operations. In newspaper reviews the film is described as the most popular war film in recent years and Kyle is portrayed as a national hero.

Having read the reports with interest, I remembered an engraved dolerite stone on which a Boer sniper recorded his victims during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899 to 1902. The stone is located in Orania, a Northern Cape town, on a hill overlooking the Orange River. A concentration of prehistoric and historic engravings occurs here (Opperman 2014). The stone is 1, 5 m long and 50 cm wide at one end, tapering to 27 cm at the other. Below the words *Engelse geskiet* ('Englishmen shot') scratched lightly on the stone, are two groups of vertical parallel lines or strokes scratched 11 cm apart. One group consists of 37 and the other of 17 strokes. Each stroke represents a British soldier, making a total of 54. The lengths of the parallel strokes vary from 7 cm to 15 cm and the distance between the strokes varies from 1 cm to 3 cm.

The style of the lines gives the impression that one person was responsible for making them. There is no name or date attached to the engraving, which is in contrast with other historical engravings found on the site, including some by British soldiers who identified themselves. British forces suffered heavy losses at Magersfontein in December 1899 and minor battles took place at Graspan, Belmont and Modder River in the initial stages of the war. However, there is no documented or oral evidence of fighting having taken place in the area where Orania is located.

A farm house dating to the period is located about 1 km north-west of the site. It is possible that the owner at the time, SO Vermeulen, knew who the sniper was and also saw the engraved stone. According to oral family history, Vermeulen often visited the hill and left several engravings himself for posterity (Opperman 2011). Circumstantial evidence, which may indicate the identity of the Boer sniper, was supplied by Flip Vermeulen, a descendant of SO Vermeulen.

The Vermeulen men were good marksmen and hunters. However, outstanding in this regard was Urbanus Johannes Vermeulen (1883–1962), whom Flip remembers well. He was the half-brother of SO Vermeulen who acted as his guardian after he lost his father at the age of five months. Urbanus was the

youngest of a family of 26 children. He was proud of his shooting ability and kept a record of his hunting successes. Once he bought 100 rounds of ammunition and shot and killed 98 buck. In a photo album of the family Pieters, his name appears with the annotation *Goeie skut* ('Good shot'). Urbanus took part in the Anglo-Boer War, just as many Boer colonials did in the beginning. It would fit his profile to engrave a record of his sniping successes during the war on a stone at a place where there were other engravings by his family.



Dolerite stone from Orania, Northern Cape, with an engraving by a Boer sniper, Anglo-Boer War

Even in a military context shooting and possibly killing so many soldiers must have influenced the life of the person responsible. The engravings suggest a desire by the Boer sniper to leave a record of his activities, as was the case with the autobiography written by Kyle. Such a desire was not common among members of Boer commandos, although they had a reputation of being good marksmen. Reminiscences of my grandfather, Jan Opperman, who was a member of the commandos of General Koos De la Rey and other *Oudstryders*, whom I met as a youngster, did not quantify the British soldiers shot during his campaigns. In this respect the engraved stone is unique.

Members of Boer commandos were mostly unpaid citizens called up for military service. Their preferred weapon was the 1896, 7 mm Mauser (Bester 2003), which could shoot accurately for up to 400 m. Probably relying on good eyesight and good physical condition, experience gained as a hunter and in previous conflicts, as well as steady nerves and motivated by religion and nationalism, the Boer sniper survived extreme conditions. Even artillery was applied by the British to neutralise snipers.

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ENCOURAGING ROCK ART TOURISM IN THE DRAKENSBERG

Celeste Rossouw and Michelle Dye

Long-term conservation of heritage sites in South Africa includes the sustainable use of such sites as prescribed by the National Heritage Resources Act No. 25 of 1999. This aim can only be achieved through a marriage between long-term rock art conservation practices and the management of tourism strategies at these sites. Specific rock art sites in KwaZulu-Natal can only be opened to public visitors if the site has a management plan and accredited custodians in place. To ensure that the integrity of such sites is not compromised by illegal visits, Amafa's Access Policy stipulates that no one may go to a site without being accompanied by an Amafa accredited custodian.

Visitors have complained about not having a central hub where they can establish which sites are open and where they can find a custodian. It was therefore decided to create an elaborate 3D Google-Earth web-page with all the relevant information. This will ensure compliance and promote rock art sites that form a niche in the tourism market.

The first section of this article will cover practicalities related to the development of a Google-Earth web-page that is dedicated to officially open rock art sites; the benefits of such a web-page for the general public and the main stakeholders; and the content of the programme. The second section will provide a summary of the significance of rock art destinations in the Maloti Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site and its buffer zone. Some of the more significant rock art sites that include rare images and features will receive attention, and an explanation of how the rock art differs in the northern, central and southern sub-regions of the Drakensberg will be discussed.

Practicalities

The creation of low-impact tourism strategies and the marketing of rock art destinations within the MDP are not the core functions of either of the two main managerial stakeholders, Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal and Amafa aKwaZulu-Natali. Ezemvelo, the legal owner of the park, focuses on the conservation of natural resources, and the marketing it is involved in is concerned mainly with bio-diversity, scenic landscapes and eco-tourism.

Amafa, the provincial heritage resources agency, manages the cultural heritage resources in the park on behalf of Ezemvelo, which does not employ its own

dedicated cultural heritage manager. The agency focuses on legal and compliance issues linked to preventative care and direct interventions at rock art sites, drawing up management plans for sites that are threatened or are officially open to the public. It also trains rock art custodians.

The rock art custodian project was initiated as research has shown that 25 per cent of damage to rock paintings is caused either unintentionally or intentionally by visitors (Topp 2009). Unacceptable actions include the touching of rock paintings and throwing water over the art to take better photos, or purposeful vindictiveness, such as vandalism and even attempting to chip paintings off the rock face.

A second reason for initiating the rock art custodian project was to empower local communities living in proximity to the park. Training by Amafa ensures that local people are able to act as rock art custodians. This involves accompanying guests to a shelter, relating the code of conduct at the rock art site and supervising the guests' behaviour. This promotes an entrepreneurial spirit among locals that leads to the development of opportunities for economic benefit.

So far Amafa has trained more than 60 rock art custodians to ensure both the sustainable usage of heritage sites, as stipulated in the National Heritage Resources Act No. 25 of 1999, and the long-term conservation of these fragile resources. KwaZulu-Natal is the only province where the provincial heritage resources agency tries to make local communities more aware of the value of rock art, and encourages management partnerships for such sites.

However, the generation of tourism is not the main deliverable of either Amafa or Ezemvelo, and guests have complained that the list of open sites on Amafa's webpage at www.heritagekzn.co.za is not helpful in accessing the sites. As a result, Amafa, in consultation with the African Conservation Trust, decided to develop a dedicated webpage with more information on the open rock art sites in the MDP and buffer zones, including in community areas, on private resort land and on farms.

Benefits and content of the webpage

For the webpage to be useful, it had to include the following data: name and locality of the site, name(s) of rock art custodian(s) trained for and working at that specific site with their contact details, a photo and a statement of significance of the key panel or image, site visiting times and at times the cost of visiting a site. It was decided to include those rock art sites where access control is well managed and central booking systems are in place.

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Procession Shelter Cathedral Peak



Here figures are depicted being partly human and partly insect with praying mantis heads. The praying mantis was the Bushman's deity. He was also called the trickerer deity as he was a shape-shifter, meaning that he could change into different animals and even into a human.

Conservation Manager, Eleste Hadebe 084 777 0877 or 036 489 1880

Hospitality Manager, Lihle Madondo 071 682 7794, Madondl@kzwildlife.com

Office number: 036 489 8000

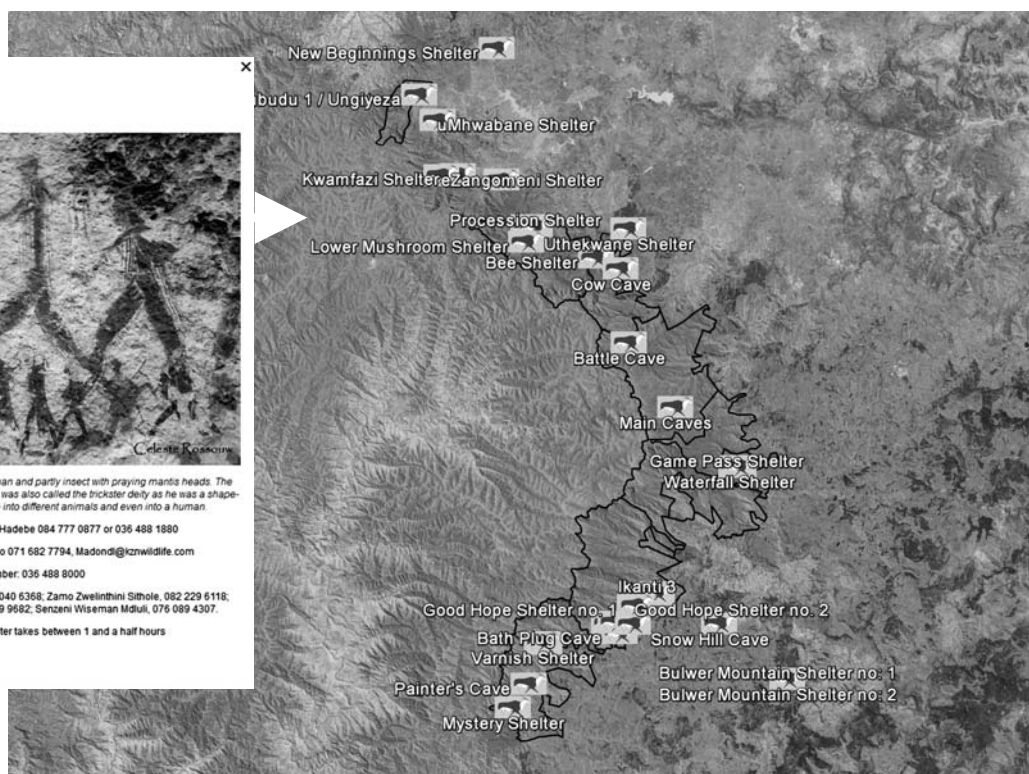
Rock art custodians: Sifiso Nsumalo, 071 040 6368; Zamo Zwelinthini Sithole, 082 229 6118;

Christopher Bhekisisa Radebe, 076 639 9682; Senzeni Wiseman Mdluli, 076 069 4307.

The hike to Procession Shelter takes between 1 and a half hours

Directions: [To here](#) - [From here](#)

Interactive web-based
map with a key image



The interactive web-based map shows 33 rock art sites that are open to the public, and allows people to take a virtual tour of the sites. The user can zoom in to see detail of the surrounding landscape and can view the key image, a description of the paintings and contact information for booking a guided tour.

How the webpage was created

The GIS specialist of the African Conservation Trust, Michelle Dye, assisted the rock art officer of Amafa, Celeste Rossouw, to develop an easily accessible Google webpage with links to the webpages of Ezemvelo, Amafa, Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, and the Mnweni and AmaZizi Rock Art Custodians and Monitors. Mrs Meridy Pfothenhauer, community liaison officer of the latter group, edited this article, and Dr Janette Deacon edited the content of the webpage.

The map was created using freeware programmes and provides the public with detailed information about specific sites conveniently summarised on one page. The GPS coordinates of each site were marked in Google Earth and simple coding was used to customise the pop-up windows. The key site photographs were uploaded to Picasa web albums and linked to the pop-up windows. The Google Earth map was then embedded into the website for easy access.

The map is a useful tool that will boost tourism by informing people of the cultural heritage treasures that exist in and around the park. To view the map visit www.maloti-drakensberg.co.za/rockart/.

Significance of the art

The Maloti-Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site is one of only 25 world heritage sites that were declared

for both their natural and cultural significance. The biodiversity and pristine natural landscape are important for the park's natural significance, but the legacy of rock paintings by early San hunter-gatherers lent considerable weight to the park's bid for a combined World Heritage status. Studies have recorded about 600 painted sites containing 40 000 images (Derwent 2006).

The rock art of the Drakensberg region is globally significant for its use of the shaded polychrome technique in which human figures, eland and other animals are represented through the use of more than two colours delicately graded into one other. Compared to other rock art images in South Africa, Drakensberg San rock art images are small and intricate, and it is this minute detail that impresses researchers across the world. An eland, for example, may be represented as a 35 cm tall image not only with clearly indicated eyes, mouth and ears, but will have a mane of individually painted hairs no more than 1,5 mm long. Animals are not only shown side-on, walking and running, but also lying down, leaping and looking back over their shoulders. They are also painted from the front and the rear. Human figures are depicted in sophisticated positions (Derwent 2006: 86).

Rock art in the Didima Special Conservation Area in Cathedral Peak is of exceptional value, taking into consideration that this limited area, including a 5,5 km long gorge, contains the highest concentration of rock art in Africa: more than 17 sites that include 3 909 individual images (Sycolt 2002:68).

Rock art in the southern part of the Drakensberg is more interpretative/representative or narrative, depic-

ting, for instance, men on horses, guns, people in European clothes, ox-wagons and people with knobkieries, shields and Nguni cattle. In the central and northern sub-regions rock art is more abstract or non-interpretive, for example shamanistic or hallucinatory art (Mazel 1981).

The Rosetta Panel

Research in the Drakensberg, and more specifically at Kamberg's Game Pass Shelter, by Prof. David-Lewis Williams of the Rock Art Research Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, allowed researchers to 'break the code' concerning symbolism in San rock art. The Rosetta Panel at Game Pass Shelter displays a dying eland, stumbling, with his head lowered and the hairs on his body standing erect. Behind the dying eland is a shaman or therianthrope (the figure has an eland head and hoofs, but the body of a human) copying the posture of the eland – the therianthrope is also stumbling, is bent forward by stomach spasms and the hair on his body is raised. Ethnographic research has concluded that there is a relationship between the dying eland and the therianthrope: by entering trance, a shaman 'dies' to the natural world and 'enters' the spiritual world. The transition into trance is very painful, and when the shaman falls unconscious, he is difficult to waken.

Therianthropes or images containing both animal and human features, for instance an image with an eland or rhebuck head and a human body, are the physical representation of a bridge between the natural and supernatural world to allow the shaman to cross into the spiritual sphere to obtain supernatural potency. This potency is needed to cure the sick, to bring rain and to ensure a successful hunt. Images of humans with either wings or fins are also linked to the trance experience, since the experience during altered states of consciousness are similar when one is "under the water or 'flying': one experiences blurred vision, lack of oxygen and a feeling of weightlessness.

The Secret San

The living heritage value and the fact that many of the rock art sites are still being used by San descendants as ritual destinations, add to the significance of rock art in the Drakensberg. Based on a genetic investigation, Prof. Himla Soodyal of the University of the Witwatersrand discovered that about 400 'Secret San' still live in the central and southern buffer zones of the Drakensberg. These are Zulu people whose ancestors intermarried with the San and have knowledge of their painting traditions, songs and rituals that were carried out at rock art sites. They refer to themselves as 'Secret San' because, their ancestors were intimidated by both blacks and whites who, because of the migratory nature of the San, the fact that they were hunter-gatherers and had no permanent abodes, led to the perception that they were vagabonds (Derwent 2005). Researchers like Frans Prins and Ndukuyakhe Ndlovu are investigating the spiritual

use of San painting sites by local, indigenous people.

Varied rock art traditions

Another characteristic that adds to the value of rock paintings in the MDP is the presence of more than one rock art tradition. The park contains San, Khoekhoen and Late White or White Daubing traditions from different cultural groups or societies and/or times. San paintings are the most abundant, while Khoekhoen finger paintings are extremely rare. Many rock art sites contain both San and Late White paintings. The latter is a tradition of finger painting initiated by indigenous Bantu-speaking farming communities in South Africa. Because this tradition was first researched in the Limpopo province, where paintings were executed in white, they were called Late White paintings. In the province of KwaZulu-Natal the paint is mainly red in colour, and less skilful and aesthetically pleasing than San rock art. It was perhaps created on the spur of the moment.

Ethnographic research has indicated that finger smears in red paint functioned to 'neutralise' the 'heat' or 'dangerous potency' of a rock art site where Zulu ancestors wanted to carry out initiation rituals (Prins 2008). According to Prins, it was necessary to create a delicate balance at a rock art site chosen by the Zulu since the paintings had been executed mainly by powerful San shamans and the red paintings may have contained the blood and fat of the San god's favourite animal, the eland. The site was therefore spiritually charged with supernatural potency. This was a necessary element for the ritual of the new users to be successful, but it was also dangerous and had to be 'neutralised'.

Some significant rock art sites

To experience the rock art fully, and to cater for families and people that may not be able to walk too far, some reserves within the MDP developed interpretation centres, such as the San open-air museum at Main Cave at Giant's Castle and the San museum and audio-visual centre at Didima, Cathedral Peak.

Main Cave is marketed very well and receives between 600 to 800 guests a month. The outing includes a short, 40-minute walk to the cave, which features two main rock art destinations. The southern section of the cave deals mainly with narrative and contact-type art, for example cattle, men on horses and people running with knobkieries. The northern section has more abstract art featuring therianthropes. A spectacular rain-making ritual can be viewed here with shamans swimming along the inkhanyamba, a mythological creature with an antelope head, a mane and a snake body that is believed to be able to control rain: soft 'female' rain for those who live morally correct lives and hard 'male' rain for those that do not. The custodian at the site, Thandeka Mlaba, is one of Amafa's best custodians and guests will enjoy her lively interpretation.

The Didima Museum includes an interpretative centre focusing on both the archaeology and rock art of the central Drakensberg, and the history of the researchers of the area. Guests can combine their visit to the museum with outings to one or more of the officially open rock art sites on Cathedral Peak property. The famous Lower Mushroom Shelter and Procession Shelters can also be visited. These rock art destinations include some very rare panels.

At Lower Mushroom, guests can view an example of polymelia, a therianthrope painted with six fingers on one of his hands. This links with experiences during altered states of consciousness when people 'feel' as if they are 'growing extra' fingers or limbs, or even wings or fins. What is also interesting here is what was originally thought to be 'war paint' in the form of zigzags on the leg of one of the therianthropes. However, David-Lewis Williams has described this as being entoptic: the zigzags travel from the figure's leg into the air. Entoptics are zigzags, nested u-shapes, sunbursts, dots, crosses and grid patterns that all people experience during the first stage of trance. These images are derived from our nervous system (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999). It is clear that these images are in essence also shamanistic.

At Procession Shelter images of therianthropes with praying mantis heads that walk on two groups of smaller therianthropes can be viewed. Many exciting outings to rock art sites can be enjoyed at Cathedral Peak – most are not too far to get to and fit visitors may even be able to see three sites on one day.

While the southern sub-region is not as developed as the central and northern sub-regions, it is home to backpackers that are dedicated hikers. Sipongweni Cave in Cobham Reserve is one of five rock art sites that was declared a national site under the National Monuments Council. It contains both narrative and abstract art, as well as a very rare but faded fishing scene as well as dancing rabbit therianthropes. Most likely, this is a depiction of 'transformed' shamans dancing during a trance. The presence of a bull therianthrope shows that cattle became even more important than eland during historical times and that domesticated animals could have replaced game as the latter became scarcer because of the improved hunting techniques of whites.

In Bushman's Nek Reserve, within a semi-primitive wilderness area, one can hike to Painter's Cave and Mystery Shelter. The latter is one of a small number of shelters where elaborate super-positioning occurs (several layers of paintings, one layer covering another).

The buffer zones

Several sites are located on hotel property or private farms where custodians have been trained and access is controlled. Of importance here are two groups of rock art monitors and custodians working in the traditional authority areas of AmaNgwane and AmaZizi, which together have more than 130 rock art

sites. Three are officially open for visiting in the AmaNgwane area and two in the AmaZizi area. The custodians monitor and carry out preventative care that does not require a permit, such as removing dead wood that poses a fire threat and trimming vegetation that rubs against the art. Depending on the availability of funding, an outreach is made to local schools and activities are implemented to raise community awareness. These are two areas where a marriage between conservation principals and low-impact tourism strategies have been successful.

Overnight facilities are available at the Mnweni Hiking Centre in the Amangwane area. The centre includes a curio shop and the guides specialise in both natural and cultural tours. The AmaZizi monitors also have an arts and craft centre called the Thandanani Centre, which lies on the way to Royal Natal. Amafa recently assisted this group to obtain an exhibition to orientate guests about the eBusingatha (Mghwabane) Shelter. The exhibition can be visited at Thandanani before eBusingatha, which is a short walk from a local homestead.

Conclusion

If rock art destinations are to be conserved, visitors need to have a deep appreciation of the value of the art and the fact that it is irreplaceable. This will ensure that everyone will act as the custodian of an exceptional resource, a true reflection of the creative genius of the San people.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Chris Sommer from Vertical Endeavour who created the website and Mrs Meridy Pfotenhauer, community liaison officer for the Amangwane and AmaZizi Rock Art Custodians and Monitors, who edited this article, and to Dr Janette Deacon who edited the web page.

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THE UNDERSTANDING OF ROCK ART IN SOUTH AFRICA

Victor Biggs

When I wrote the article, 'A critical look at the understanding of rock art in South Africa', for the August 2014 issue of *The Digging Stick*, I was warned by people who were acquainted with my views on rock art that I was treading on dangerous ground. The fact that RARI does not appear to tolerate any views on rock art that are different to their own is well known. As anticipated, in the December issue of *The Digging Stick* I got the full blast from the director of RARI, Prof. David Pearce.

In the article he is sarcastic and rude, and labels my views as false. He also scoffs at my research into the British soldiers and the Victorian lady paintings. My findings in this regard are based on historical facts and not on an ethnography-based guessing game. I was not aware that the depiction of a line of British soldiers was well known. Perhaps I missed a nose-bleed or two that would have made them a line of transformed shamans performing a trance dance. David Pearce's onslaught is unbecoming of the director of an institution such as RARI. Throughout the article he portrays me as an ignoramus. Nevertheless, I am very confident of my rock art knowledge and must defend myself.

For those who do not know me, I will give a brief history of myself. I saw my first paintings in the early 1950s at the age of ten. I was absolutely fascinated and I have been looking for, recording and studying rock art ever since. What started as an interest became a hobby and then a passion. Now it is an obsession. I have found and recorded hundreds of sites that nobody else knew about. When I bought the book *Images of Power*, it became my rock art bible and author David Lewis-Williams my hero. Lewis-Williams may very well have laid the foundation for my present understanding of rock art.

After retiring from farming, I ran a rock art centre in Thomas River for several years and I had personal contact with hundreds of people from all over South Africa and beyond. I was shocked by the ignorance and apathy of my countrymen towards our best heritage. Over the years I became frustrated with not being able to match that which is written in rock art literature with what I saw painted on the rocks, so I started doing my own research. Fortunately I am fluent in isiXhosa and was able to communicate with

Xhosa healers, Bushmen descendants and other Xhosa about their beliefs, customs and rituals. I also have wonderful friends at Rhodes University who are also doing excellent work in this regard and keep me informed.

I think that I have developed a deep understanding of these beliefs and can recognise them in the paintings on the rocks. The healers admit that the Xhosa learned their healing skills from the Bushmen. The age of the paintings indicates that Bushmen healers were practising these rituals and beliefs long before the arrival of Bantu-speaking people. I cringe when I read the interpretations of our rock art researchers in the literature. They give the impression of having no knowledge of local traditions and beliefs. But trying to interpret the meanings of rock art through 'ethnography' leads to a guessing game and confusion. South Africa is in desperate need of a complete revision of the understanding of rock art.

Because of space constraints, I will not answer each allegation separately, but get to the main points straight away. First of all, I am not an academic. Even so, David Pearce tries to brand me as an ignoramus for not knowing academic terminology and ways. I am not subject to academic rules, but am a practical thinker and have full confidence in my knowledge of the subject. There is nothing scientific about academics sitting around a table discussing a subject they know little about. It is not a state secret that peer reviews are a means to ensuring that researchers toe the official line. Examples of the way-out conclusions reached by them exist in the rock art literature, and these make a complete mockery of our best heritage from the past. I will discuss some of these here.

David Pearce names some rock art researchers who have considered Nguni beliefs and then suggests that I have missed their work. I can add many other names to that list, but have seen no evidence that their views have ever been considered in rock art research. I am surprised at the mention of Frans Prins, as I have personally seen how his work is scorned by RARI rock art researchers. I have a high regard for Frans and he has been an inspiration to me as regards his work with Zulu sangomas and Bushmen descendants.

As an example, I turn to Stephen Townley Bassett's book, *Rock Paintings of South Africa*. Stephen is a meticulously accurate artist and his work is a joy to behold. By his own admission, he does not know much about the interpretation of rock art and thus relies on experts to comment on his paintings. The chapter entitled 'Pools of power' (page 113) shows a

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section that is most interesting. Here we have an excellent example of a Bushman painting that depicts a belief that is still being practised widely in South Africa today. The painting is accompanied by comments on the underwater world and the ritual being portrayed by Frans Prins, which bears out what several healers far removed from each other have describe to me as 'being taken under the water by the underwater people'.



A Bushman painting depicting a belief that is still being adhered to by blacks all around us today. Note the figure with the snake around the neck.

In Stephen's second book, *Reservoirs of Potency*, the same painting is commented on by David Lewis-Williams and Benjamin Smith in the chapter entitled 'Theriatropes and fish'. They completely ignore Frans's earlier work and indulge in a guessing game. If they had understood and heeded what Qing told Orpen, namely that the kaross-clad figures with the animal heads were 'People that had died and now lived in rivers', they would have recognised that a similar figure was depicted here. They seem to have no understanding of water divinities and their comments are way off the mark. The most important clue ignore by them is the figure emerging from the water with a snake around its neck. This is a common belief of indigenous people, but there is no reference to it in the so-called ethnography. When you see fishes and snakes, you know you are dealing with the underwater world.

The above is a classic example of how the meaning of South African rock art is made a mockery of by academics. If you were to show the picture to any black South African and ask which comment is correct, they would instantly recognise Frans Prins's explanation, and have no understanding for that of the other two. This is what I meant when I stated that the views and beliefs of black South Africans have been totally ignored by our rock art researchers. After decades of this, they no longer realise that the rock art portrays their own beliefs and thus do not respect the rock art.

The second example is found on page 65 of *Rock Paintings of South Africa*. Entitled 'Call of the water spirits', Frans Prins on page 69 gives an excellent description of the water divinities. However, Prince's views have been challenged by proponents of the shamanistic approach, who quote the opinions of /Han#koss'o, a 19th century /Xam man who interprets these figures as transformed shamans with swallow tails. This view shows the dangers of trying to interpret rock art through the /Xam ethnography. Rock art researchers have developed a theory that the aquatic figures are modelled on swifts, the local beliefs in *watermeide* or water maidens are ignored. Speak to any of the locals and they will tell you which is the correct version. Penny Bernard investigated this.

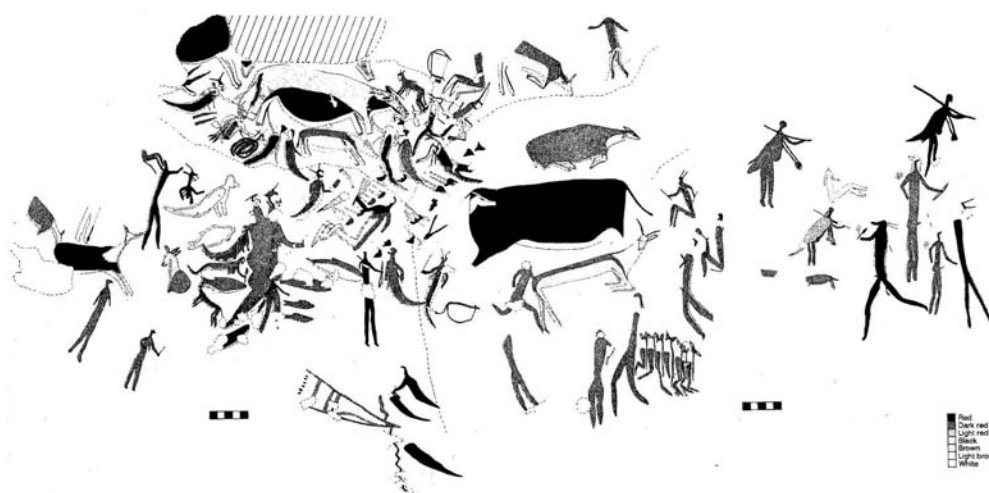
If you do not understand the water divinities you will make mistakes. A classical example is that of David Pearce and David Lewis-Williams in the research project entitled 'Southern African rock painting as a social intervention: a study of rain-control images'. The very title of this paper shows the fixation with rain, which I commented on in my August article and Pearce denies in his discussion. In my view, there is absolutely nothing in the panel that indicates that it has any connection with rain. The presence of fish indicates that it is a depiction of the water divinities. The mythical creatures have aquatic features confirming Frans Prins's description of underwater people having aquatic features such as fish tails or, in this case, eel-like tails. The two researchers try and find another explanation and come up with the explanation that these creatures are modelled on 'tadpoles'.



People of the underwater world clearly showing their aquatic features, in this case fish tails

They also notice that many of the creatures have a red line across their faces. They conclude that these represent nasal bleeding and that the figures are probably engaged in a sub-aquatic shamanistic activity. In fact, the red stripe across the face is not a nose bleed, but the mark of a spirit: a red stripe across the face indicates that you are dealing with a spirit-world creature and not a transformed shaman. There is no

When you see fish you know you are dealing with the underwater world. The panel has nothing to do with rain as some rock art researchers would like us to believe.



such thing as a transformed shaman in rock art. To the Bushmen, the spirit world was real.

The transformed-shaman error has resulted in the misinterpretation of much of our rock art. A very good example is provided by the Linton Panel in Cape Town's Iziko Museum. David Lewis-Williams has claimed that the red stripe across the faces is nasal bleeding. However, there are very few actual depictions of nose bleeds in the rock art, far fewer than what academics would like you to believe. A doctor friend of mine told me that it is physically impossible to bring on a nose bleed by doing a trance dance. Only an irritant on the mucous membrane or injury to the nose will cause a nose to bleed.

In his criticism of me with regard to the Orpen/Qing saga, David Pearce states that I said the exchange between Orpen and Qing lacked indigenous knowledge. However, in my article I clearly state that it was the researchers who lacked indigenous knowledge and had misconstrued the facts Quite a difference!

David could also not have chosen two better illustrations in his response to try and prove my ignorance of the Orpen/Qing saga. The first is Orpen's sketch of humans supposedly leading quadruped animals. Not surprisingly, one of Bleek's informants who knew nothing of rock art or the local beliefs of the people of the area where the painting is located said they were leading a 'rain bull', and all the academics believe him. However, Qing said that it was a 'snake'. This has puzzled Orpen and rock art researchers since.

Qing was quite correct when he calls it a snake. A mamlambo is a snake that lives under the water but can appear in many forms, e.g. as a quadruped animal. It was greatly feared and even today there is a strong belief that it harms people. But if a healer or diviner can capture and keep a mamlambo, he is regarded as a very powerful and feared person. A good example of this was the well-known diviner Khotso Senthuntsa, an extremely wealthy and greatly feared man, who lived in the Kokstad/Pondoland area from 1898 to 1972. He was reputed to have possess-

ed a mamlambo. The painting used by Pearce depicts the capture of a mamlambo.

A more recent example of how deeply people believe in the mamlambo is the 'Mount Ayliff Monster'. It was described as a mamlambo, lived in the river and was killing the children of the area. Eastern Cape legislature in Bisho debated the matter and, afterwards, Div de Villiers, the chief nature conservation officer, was given a directive to capture or kill the mamlambo. Even though it was a snake it was described as having the body of a horse and the head of a fish.

The academics who got together to debate the Orpen report had no local indigenous knowledge. The only thing that they could recognise in the report was a reference to nose bleeds and a dance. The whole meaning of the Orpen saga became twisted to suit their trans theory. But they were still puzzled by the painting that Qing said was a snake. A RARI team thus set off to solve the mystery. Lo and behold, they find a painting of a snake in a nearby shelter. Snakes are not an uncommon depiction in rock art shelters, so it is not surprising to find a snake in that or any of the other nearby shelters. By a great feat of rock art research ingenuity the problem is thus solved: Qing was referring to the snake that was found in the nearby shelter. The researchers cannot conceive that Orpen and Qing actually discussed the depiction of the quadruped animals. They label the snake a 'rain snake' and the human figures dancing around the snake have the inevitable 'nose bleeds'.

David Pearce is fully aware that I and several others find rock art sites from afar by locating the invisible line of energy that emanates from every painted rock art site. Why the denial? I have found countless sites by this means. A few years ago I went on a long hike with some of my friends in the Kei Valley. We were accompanied by two academics. Along the way I located seven previously unknown sites. At the end of the hike I asked one of the academics what he thought of my rock art discovery method. He replied that he saw how I worked and appreciated the results, but still did not believe it. It could be a real scientific challenge

for a rock art researcher to investigate this phenomenon, if it was not for the curious academic denial.

When I ran the rock art centre in Thomas River, one of the most frequently asked questions was where rock art information could be obtained. Many complained that the books on rock art were unreadable. I sympathise with them as even I find some of the books hard to follow. A good example is one of the books, *Deciphering Ancient Minds*, recommended by David Pearce. When Sam Challis was doing research for the book, he asked me to take him to a certain Stow site. It was with great excitement and anticipation that I bought the book when it was published. But it was the worst book I have ever tried to read on rock art. George Stow is accused of forging a copy of a hunting scene to provide an illustration of a hunting practice. Would he have forged the tracing paper as well and who was he trying to deceive? No one has ever rediscovered the site. The most likely explanation for the confusion is that the ostrich was superimposed over a Bushman hunter and Stow mistook this for a Bushman using the ostrich as a disguise. Stow was not an academic but is accused of not being academically correct. I have found many of the sites he recorded and considering the circumstances he worked under in the late 1860s and 1870s, I have found his copies surprisingly accurate.

Examples of what I have discussed here can be found throughout the rock art literature. It should not be about the vanity of a few people. It affects what our children learn at school. It affects what our university students learn and it affects our society as a whole.



WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY

Safeguarding indigenous burial grounds

The Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage (IPinCH) project, an international research group based at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada, has spearheaded the development of a new declaration signed by 28 international scholars calling on national and provincial governments to strengthen their accountability for indigenous sacred sites and develop more effective ways of involving indigenous peoples in stewarding these sites. This came about in reaction to a number of cases in British Columbia concerning burial grounds, but is applicable well beyond. The 'Declaration on the Safeguarding of Indigenous Ancestral Burial Grounds as Sacred Sites and Cultural Landscapes' is online at ipinch/resources/declarations/ancestral-burial-grounds. Organisations such as the Society for American Archaeology have endorsed the declaration.

IPinCH, established in 2008 with \$2.5 million in funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, explores the rights,

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values and responsibilities of material culture, cultural knowledge and the practice of heritage research. The experts include archaeologists, lawyers, anthropologists, human rights specialists and scholars of cultural heritage. 'The declaration is a reminder of existing obligations and expectations regarding burial sites and sacred places,' says IPinCH director and archaeology professor George Nicholas.

Vancouver, BC, 10/12/2014

Neanderthals could talk like humans

A highly specialised bone that enables humans to speak has also been found in Neanderthals, bolstering the theory that they could vocalise as well as we can. The horseshoe-shaped hyoid bone supports the base of the tongue and is critical for speech. An international team of researchers working with a Neanderthal throat bone created a 3-D model and found that it worked just like a Homo Sapien throat bone does. They said there was strong genetic, fossil and archaeological evidence that modern speech and language existed not only among Neanderthals and Denisovans, but also in early human species.

Frontiers in Language Sciences/BBC News, 23/12/2013

REFLECTIONS ON A JOURNEY THROUGH THE SOUTHERN OMO VALLEY, ETHIOPIA

Tim Forssman

The southern Omo region is a social melting pot. Here, the cultural frontier is not a point at which groups arrive and interact, but a normative condition within which groups constantly manifest and maintain their identities (Brittain et al. 2013). This does not imply that group identity is meaningless; it is in fact a dynamic and changing unit of cohesion providing a rich source of belonging (see Abbink 2000: 3 and Brittain et al. 2013). Travelling through the southern Omo, one is immediately aware of the distinction between, for example, the Hamar and the Mursi people, and the elaborate measures to which people go to identify themselves with their community in a unique manner.

It is perhaps so because in this region, spanning some 113 000 km², there are about 1,3 million people and 45 distinct tribes (Michael et al. 2005). These groups regularly exchange goods, share resources and engage in violent conflict (Brittain et al. 2013), all within a harsh environment that requires traditional and specific coping mechanisms for survival (Admasu et al. 2010). In this paper I describe my recent journey through the lower Omo Valley where I visited various tribal groups and witnessed a Hamar bull-jumping ceremony. The aim with this article is to present African life-systems found elsewhere on the continent that might reflect certain aspects archaeologists identify in our own prehistoric records.

Before proceeding, a comment on the role of tourism on the southern Omo landscape. Visitors have, in some instances, altered traditional life-ways, causing social, cultural and material change within affected communities. For example, the Mursi have altered their mobility patterns to settle near main roads where they can attract paying tourists. They have also established a 'chief'. He has no power within Mursi society but is there simply to maintain tourist expectations of village life. Much of what one sees as a visitor is thus created intentionally to conform to tourist expectations (Régi 2014). Other issues include the emphasis people might place on certain aspects of society deemed of greater interest or shock value to visitors, such as violence, gender abuse or poverty. It is important to acknowledge this critical view and be aware that while in some cases tourists bring in much needed income, there is also a negative result from these interactions.

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Hamar women preparing animal hides outside a residential hut. Note the cowrie shells, beads and metal bangles which are permanently fixed to the arm.



A Mursi woman with an elaborately decorated lip-plate and ceremonial wear.

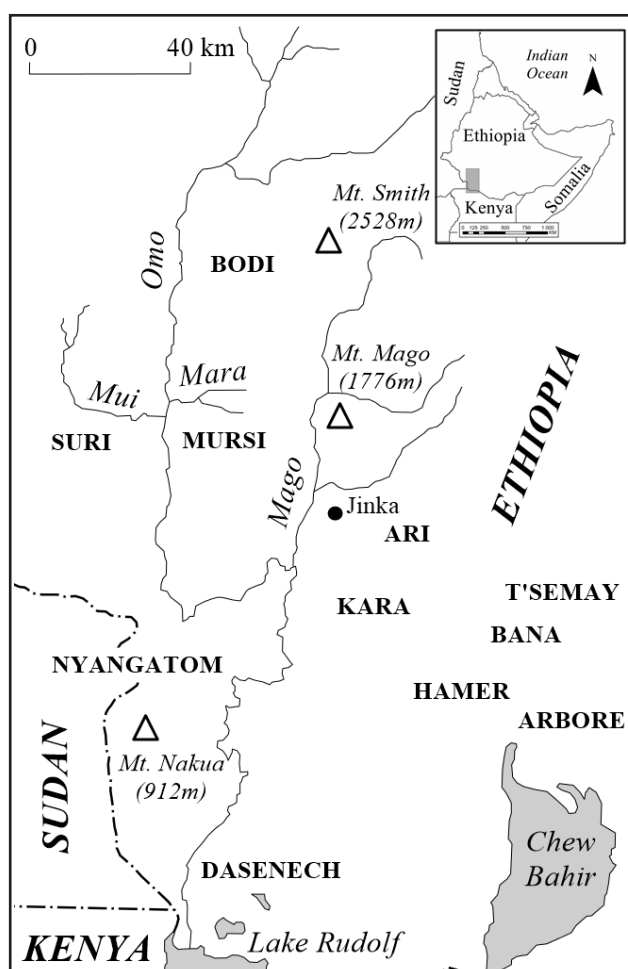


Fig. 1: Map of southern Ethiopia showing the location of the lower Omo Valley and tribal areas

The Hamer, their neighbours and the bull jumping ceremony

There are nine distinct groups in the lower Omo: the Bodi, Chai, Dassanetch, Hamer, Kara, Kwegu, Mursi, Nyangatom and Suri. Together, they speak six different languages derived from Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan dialects (Brittain et al. 2013). Such diversity within a small region necessitates trans-group identity, varied forms of mobility and regular cultural interactions, which include inter-marriage, resource sharing and conflict. Only the Hamer and Mursi are discussed in detail here, and to a lesser extent the Kara.

The Hamer, one of the region's largest tribes, are semi-pastoralists living in the mountainous zone of the lower Omo Valley, a dry but tsetse-fly free area. In contrast, Kara territory is along the banks of the Omo River, a fertile zone ideal for cultivation but infested with tsetse flies. This environmental dichotomy provides an interesting framework for interaction between these two groups: Kara families establish close relations with a host Hamer family who take care of their livestock and in return keep most of the milk. Kara livestock owners will visit their bond-friend to

inspect their cattle and might spend extended periods of time in their village. Sometimes the Hamer bond-friend will visit the Kara and when they do they receive sorghum as a gift. This relationship assists in alleviating subsistence pressure during difficult periods, but occasionally results in conflict. This is usually on a small scale and is resolved by the elders (Aredo 2004).

Engrained in Hamer identity, masculinity and social cohesion is the bull-jumping ceremony. It is the most important ceremony amongst the Hamer and in a man's life; it is his rite of passage from boyhood to manhood after which he can own cattle and marry. A shocking aspect of this ceremony to Westerners is the whipping of women, an act encouraged by the community. The scars that this act leaves behind are worn proudly because they demonstrate a women's devotion to men. Often women fight over who is to be whipped first, even stealing the other's whip. Unmarried men who have successfully performed a bull-jumping ceremony, known as *maza*, are the ones in the community that whip the women. In return a *maza* enters into an agreement with the women he has whipped that he will support her if the need arises.

While in Hamer territory I was fortunate to witness a bull-jumping ceremony. On arrival at the village we were introduced to the initiate (*ukuli*) who welcomed us. We then walked through a hut zone into what could roughly be considered the centre of the village, although no kraal existed here and it appeared more like a meeting area. In one area a large group of women were singing and dancing frenetically, jumping in the air at regular intervals and moving in a circle, all the time blowing horns and clapping or rattling metal bells fastened to their legs. The noise was intense and the dancing relentless. This continued for about four hours.

Nearby under a large tree sat the *maza* who were surrounded by various elderly people. Women of various ages approached a single *maza* and taunted and teased him, possibly even pulling or pushing him around. She then handed him a reed, which he usually accepted timidly, and while she riled herself up by jumping or blowing a horn, he whipped her over her shoulder, striking her exposed back. The cut-marks were often deep and have the potential to cause considerable scarring, accentuated by ash and other substances rubbed into the wounds. This continued for many hours and some women were whipped repeatedly, often bringing up to four reeds and handing them to the *maza* one after the other.

Later in the afternoon, all those involved broke from their activities and sat in the shade of the tree drinking coffee and tea. Eventually, the women began singing loudly and this seemed to signal the start of the bull jumping. The entire group moved to an open area and made a large circle enclosing the cattle. It was now the *ukuli*'s duty to select the cattle he wished to 'walk' or jump over and he did so with due consideration. If

the cows are too small it might appear that he is uncertain of his abilities and if they are too large he might not succeed. Failure would mean that he cannot marry or own cows and would have to try again the following year. While choosing the cattle, a large group of women sang, danced and prodded the cows into the centre of the circle, with the *maza* running around the outside.

The *ukuli* selected about 12 cows that were lined up shoulder to shoulder and held steady by married men. A calf is placed at the front of the row of cows to assist with his first leap. When ready, the *ukuli* leapt onto the calf and with several strides bounded across the cattle, arms raised in the air so as not to touch one, before returning. This he did four times, making eight runs across the cattle's backs. We were told afterwards that running so often is unusual and that this initiate was making a statement and providing his family with great honour. Eventually one of the elders had to step forward and grab him to stop him from continuing. The cows were then released and all of the women gathered around the initiate singing songs to protect him. At this point the community dispersed into the village where they would gather to feast and continue celebrating for the next three days.

The Mursi in the Mago National Park

Mursi people were made famous by their elaborate lip-plates. These large disks, usually made from clay but also from wood, are decorated in various fashions and sometimes painted. At the age of 15 or 16 a slit is made at the base of a girl's lower lip, which is extended over time by placing increasingly larger lip-plates in the incision. Eventually, the lip-plates become so large that the front lower incisors must be removed, which causes considerable discomfort for the women (Latosky 2006). The origin of the Mursi lip-plate is not clear. One thought is that during the slave trading period the Mursi intentionally mutilated their women to make them unattractive to traders. However, this explanation does not come from Mursi informants and it is now generally not accepted. Today, the lip-plate is an expression of social adulthood, reproductive potential, identity and prestige (Mursi Online 2015).

Lip-plates are not all that the Mursi people are known for. They are renowned locally as an aggressive and unlikable tribe while also possessing great wit and humour. Their tenacity can be seen in the stick-fighting ceremony, said to be the most brutal in the region. Stick-fighting or duelling involves young unmarried men keen to impress girls. A stick or *donga* measuring about 2 m long is used to strike an opponent, who is defeated when he falls to the ground or concedes willingly. Each duellist is adorned with elaborate protective garments known as a duelling kit and includes a thick headdress (Brittain et al. 2013), which also serves a decorative purpose. The ceremonies may involve up to a dozen affiliated clans, not all of whom



Women dancing at the bull jumping ceremony with rattles below their knees, horns and bells.

are considered Mursi. Of interest is Turton's (1994: 17–18) explanation of what it means to be 'Mursi'. He argues that it has less to do with origins than shared experiences and, very importantly, the occupation of what they call 'a cool place' (*bha lalini*): a riverside area with cultivatable zones in which both flood-retreat and cleared woodland agriculture can be practiced. Identity, place and materiality thus become central components of what it means to be Mursi.

The formation of the Mursi therefore has a backdrop rooted in migration. It is in fact one justification for the many wars that the Mursi have faced; they fight not because they want to but because, despite losing lives, it reasserts their territorial position and identity, allowing them to maintain their life-ways (Turton 2007). This conflict is often prompted by mobility, which itself could be linked to resource depletion, earlier conflicts or, as in more recent times, contact with the Western world. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Mursi had settled south of the Mara River. Because of crop failures they moved north to find woodland areas that could be cleared for cultivation, settling in the buffer zone between themselves and the Bodi living north of the Mara River. While at first interactions were peaceful, with some Mursi and Bodi even cultivating fields together, it did not last and during the famine of 1972, and 1973 warfare broke out between these two tribes. Almost immediately a buffer over 30 km wide was established, but localised skirmishes took place within it. The largest battle involved a raid on a Mursi village housing several hundred cattle. The attack was largely successful but the Mursi rallied and pushed the Bodi back north along what is now called the Rotten Path because of all the bodies that were left strewn along it during that particular campaign.

In 1975, peace was declared and each group performed cleansing rituals along their newly established borders. Another tribe, the Nyangatom, attacked the Mursi in 1987 in apparent retaliation for the Mursi slaughter of a group of Nyangatom pastoralists, which itself was in response to an earlier

attack on a Mursi child. Between 500 and 1 000 Mursi were killed in the attack, mostly women and children. In addition to periodic conflicts, the Mursi are frequently raided when taking their livestock to pasture by the Hamari, a collective term for the Hamar, Bashada and Bana. Typically these result in the loss of both cattle and human life, and impose particular strain on Mursi livelihoods. Men only marry at the age of 28 so that during their physical prime they can defend Mursi livestock and life-ways (Turton 2007). It is clear that life in the Omo Valley is filled with perils constantly threatening traditional life-systems.

Since 2009, a large-scale archaeological and anthropological project has sought to explore the history of the lower Omo, but in particular that of the Mursi people (see Brittain et al. 2013). One of their more intriguing finds is large megalithic platforms that dot the landscape in the northern Aurichukgirong area. Each platform, varying from 2 m to 26 m in diameter, is composed of concentric rings made of large rounded rocks. The purpose of these structures is not yet certain, but suggestions made by Mursi people range from hut or sleeping platforms to burials. Several excavations have revealed a concentration of lithic debris and faunal remains in the centre of the platforms, possibly supporting the claim that they were hut floors (Brattain et al. 2013). This find will likely yield more evidence as excavations continue.

Reflections

Travelling through the southern Omo region provides one with a sense of great contrast between the lives of those who live there and that of our own. A visit is sure to enrich the observer with a deep realism, but one not entirely pleasant. Habitat destruction from the Gibe III dam development and large-scale agricultural enterprises that include sugar, cotton, oil palm and maize, as well as the introduction of sophisticated weapons, have all had a devastating effect on life-ways in the southern Omo. The reach of the modern world is taking a firm grasp on the ripe fruits the Rift Valley has to offer but does unfortunately not appear willing to share with local tribes. Reports of crimes against humanity and, rape accusations are increasing, and people are imprisoned with little explanation. Some of



A Kara man with the lower Omo Valley in the background. This gentleman sat here knowing he would attract eager photographers willing to pay for an image.



Image 6: A young Mursi girl wearing ceremonial wear including a bell and warthog tusks.

these atrocities are being committed not only by local police and labourers, but by the Ethiopian military currently tasked to protect foreign investments in the area (Survival International 2015). While this taints the image of the region, it still remains home to many incredibly vibrant cultures that, even though threatened, are resisting change and maintaining parts of their own way of life.

Acknowledgements

I thank Tau Anthropological Safaris for inviting me to partake in this excursion, and in particular Lee Gutteridge, Adam Riley, Henok Tsegaye and the various communities we visited.

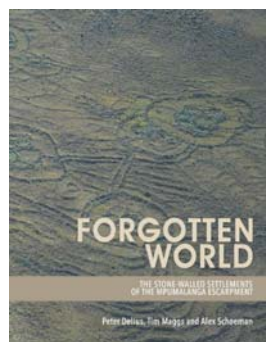
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BOOK REVIEW

Forgotten World

Delius, P, Maggs, T and Schoeman, A. 2014. *Forgotten World: the stone-walled settlements of the Mpumalanga escarpment*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. xii–xvi + 157 pp. ISBN 978-1-86814-774-8. Price R250.00.



Gazing at the title of this book, you may be excused for thinking it is another coffee table new-age esoteric exploration of the nature and beauty of the ancient 'alien portals' or 'Indian temples' of Mpumalanga. But after reading it, you will find that, contrary to what the title connotes, this book is unashamedly opposed to such views.

The unscientific and unsubstantiated arguments of authors such as Michael Tellingner and Cyril Hromnick purport that Bantu-speaking peoples of southern Africa did not create many of the archaeological finds associated with the stone-walled settlements of Mpumalanga. Such arguments accentuate racist stereotypes of a backward nation, a cultural backwater and an unoccupied land. Books telling readers that the stone circles and the associated technology that accompanied their construction were not created by black settlers have denied these people their histories. In effect, what was their world has been largely forgotten.

To counter these conceptions, the authors of *Forgotten World* present the evidence of these technologically skilled and worldly people in a matter of fact way. The evidence is clearly illustrated and substantiated. The authors have avoided essentialism in terms of ethnicity and language, rather using the term Bokoni, which refers to a specific area in Mpumalanga, not a specific ethnic or language group. The fluidity and permeability of the political and cultural boundaries of the groups of people living in this area are a major theme throughout the book.

Delius, Maggs and Schoeman attempt to answer some big questions in Iron Age archaeology; probing questions such as what makes Bokoni unique from other settlement sites across southern Africa? Why was it only here that such dense settlement and such intense modification of the landscape occurred? What were the factors that led to the development of this unique way of life? Using a truly interdisciplinary study, the two archaeologists and an historian use a range of data to try to answer these questions. Drawing on a mixture of oral traditions, historical sources, missionary records, ecological and geographical data, and the settlements and rock engravings of the area, they are able to reconstruct the history of Bokoni from the 2nd millennium AD to the

1820s.

The Bokoni area stretches over 150 km from north to south and 50 km or more from east to west between Ohrigstad in the north and Carolina in the south of Mpumalanga. Within this area are found hundreds of abandoned stone-walled settlements whose origins lie in a much larger system of production and exchange containing within it distinctive but complementary and linked economic niches and extensive trade networks. These networks linked the Bokoni to the socio-political milieu of the first polities and a much wider world beyond. The Bokoni settlements around Lydenburg during the Later Iron Age in the 19th century grew, as a product of these trade routes, to house an estimated 19 000 to 57 000 people if all homesteads were occupied contemporaneously (Marker & Evers 1976: 160).

In the first four chapters, archaeological evidence is presented in the main. It is here where the archaeologists that co-authored the book may, at times, have traded a fluid narrative for a thorough catalogue-like description of artefacts in order to preserve a scientific aura. This leaves the archaeological evidence sometimes lifeless and dry. However, the honesty of the authors when discussing their limited data is refreshing. In contrast, many books that have been written about the Iron Age present a coherent narrative (Huffman 2005, 2007; Mda 2013), with the evidence presented with such conviction that it is often considered as 'truth', not an interpretation amongst many. It leaves very little ambiguity or room to improve the interpretations. The Bokoni picture is far from clear and the evidence is scanty, which makes one question the clarity of evidence and inference in other areas, such as the greater Mapungubwe area.

In chapter 5, a change of tone occurs. The rich historical sources and oral traditions recorded from the 17th century onwards provide readers with a more visceral experience. This is more than likely because historical records shed much needed light on the peoples' lives compared to the limited available interpretations discernible from the artefacts alone. Poetically, Peter Delius pieces the history together in a story as bizarre as it is tragic, with macabre and mythic tales of cannibalism, heads on stakes and violence owing to family fissions and friendly neighbours turning on each other. These events had an effect on the stone-walled settlements themselves, as many were transformed into fortifications and strongholds during the 18th and 19th centuries.

In conclusion, the authors mention how heritage agencies in the 21st century, which should be at the forefront of protecting and promoting the stone-walled settlements, have given them no official recognition as heritage sites. With little in the way of protection, they are often vandalised and covered in litter. Research continues on different aspects of Bokoni,

not only by senior academics but younger aspiring archaeologists as well. It is with the public's help that this research will ensure that the achievements, challenges and tragedies of Bokoni are not forgotten.

Are these structures extra-terrestrial, or do they stand as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and represent a continuity with a people still practicing this time-honoured way of life? I recommend you read the book and visit the sites to make up your own mind.

Review by Law Pinto

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"Just because you can't figure out how ancient civilisations built stuff doesn't mean they got help from Aliens."

– Neil deGrasse Tyson. American astrophysicist, cosmologist, author and science communicator.

OBITUARY

Paul Lownes Oppenheimer (1936–2015)

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death on 1 February 2015 in Oubaaai near George in the southern Cape of the former treasurer of the South African Archaeological Society, Paul Oppenheimer. He was born in 1936 in Buffalo, New York, and graduated with an AB degree in Fine Arts from Brown University in 1957. Thereafter he worked for nearly 30 years in his family firm, The Silent Watchman Corporation, and was affiliated to the Columbus Museum of Fine Arts and various charitable organisations in the vicinity of New York. After spending some years in Ohio where he was on the board of the Online Computer Library Centre, an early advocate for harnessing the power of computers in libraries that has since spread to more than 113 countries, he retired to Cape Town in the early 2000s and joined ArchSoc. In 2005, he offered his services as treasurer and gave generously of his time and financial experience. He moved to Wilderness in 2009, but by 2011 found it increasingly difficult to attend Council meetings and resigned in 2012. We will miss his wise counsel and deep interest in the welfare of the Society. As our Assistant Secretary, Carole Goeminne, recalls, Paul once told her: 'I want to leave the world a better place than I found it', and he certainly did so.

J Deacon

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'Thorn tree study at Homob Waterhole, Etosha'

Oil by Frederike Stokhuyzen – 36 x 51 cm

Frederike is widely recognised for her extraordinary wildlife and landscape paintings. A Fine Arts degree from Rhodes University was followed by studies at the Central School of Art in London. She has exhibited throughout South Africa and England. Major group exhibitions include the Royal Institute of Oil Painters, The Royal Society of British Artists and the Society of Wildlife Artists, all in London, as well as the Paris Salon. *Frederike Stokhuyzen: born to be an artist* (2010) reviews her career, influences and techniques.

The Cape Gallery deals in fine art work by SA artists and stocks a selection of paintings depicting South African rock art.

The Sheltering Desert

Sir: I read the article on Henno Martin's *The Sheltering Desert* in *The Digging Stick* 31(3) with great interest. I first read the German version of the book when it was published, and then the Afrikaans edition in 1962. In 1964, after my studies, I got permission from the Botswana government to visit the Bushmen/San (Masarwa) living in Chief Sechele's tribal area. This eventually led to successive visits until 1967. Already then did I recognise the importance of Martin's book: among others, how taste is determined by daily diet and the difficulty these people had to explain an unfamiliar taste. They simply called it *sleg*, the Afrikaans word for 'distasteful'.

In 1978 I joined a South African publishing company as a commissioning editor. As South West Africa/Namibia (as it was known at the time) fell under my jurisdiction, I had the opportunity to experience the land and its people first hand for many years. In 1982 while researching a book on Namibian artists, I bought publications on individual artists; mainly brochures as very few books on Namibian art had been published at the time. In one of these I found an original photograph of the Karper Krans after it had been evacuated.

In 2008, I continued my research on Namibian artists. I came across the book *Zwiegespräch in der Wüste* ('Discussion in the desert') by Hermann Korn, published in 1996. Apart from the interesting text, it contains 24 full-colour images of Korn's aquarelles (impressionistic) of the Namib and the places referred to in *The Sheltering Desert*. The original works were collected by Anne-liese Scherz after Korn's death. Most of these were handed over to the family and are now in Germany. Korn's biographical info and images of some of these works were included in our book, *A Directory of Namibian Artists – A Collector's Guide*, published in 2012.

Sas Kloppers, Bela Bela, Limpopo



Confession of a Boer sniper (continued from page 8)

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Marine hunter-gatherer has early SA lineage

What can DNA from the skeleton of a man who lived 2 330 years ago in south Africa tell us about ourselves as humans? A great deal when his DNA profile is one of the 'earliest diverged' – oldest in genetic terms – found to-date in a region where modern humans are believed to have originated roughly 200 000 years ago. The man's mitochondrial DNA was sequenced to provide clues to early modern human prehistory and evolution.

When Prof. Andrew Smith from the University of Cape Town discovered the skeleton at St Helena Bay in 2010, very close to the site where 117 000 year-old human footprints had been found, he contacted Vanessa Hayes, a world-renowned expert in African genomes and at the time professor of Genomic Medicine at the J Craig Venter Institute in San Diego, California. The complete 1,5 m tall skeleton was examined by biological anthropologist Alan Morris, also from the University of Cape Town. He showed that the man was a 'marine forager'. A bony growth in his ear canal, known as 'surfer's ear', suggested that he spent some time diving for food in the cold coastal waters, while shells carbon-dated to the same period and found near his grave confirmed his seafood diet.

Because of the acidity of the soil in the region, acquiring DNA from skeletons has proven problematic. The Hayes team therefore worked with palaeogeneticist Svante Pääbo at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany. The team generated a complete mitochondrial genome, using DNA extracted from a tooth and a rib. The findings provided genomic evidence that this man, from a lineage now presumed extinct, as well as other indigenous coastal dwellers like him, were the most closely related to 'Mitochondrial Eve'. The study underlines the significance of southern African archaeological remains in defining human origins.

Prof. Hayes said that Alan Morris had undertaken some incredible detective work. He used his skills in forensics and murder cases to assemble a profile of the man behind the St Helena skeleton. He helped establish that this man was a marine hunter-gatherer, in contrast to the contemporary inland hunter-gatherers from the Kalahari dessert. We were very curious to know how this man related to them, she said. 'We also know that this man pre-dates migration into the region, which took place around 2 000 years ago. We could demonstrate that our marine hunter-gatherer carried a different maternal lineage to these early migrants – containing a DNA variant that we have never seen before. Because of this, the study gives a baseline against which historic herders at the Cape can now be compared.'

Prof. Hayes continued: 'We need more genomes that do not have extensive admixture; we need to reduce

the noise. In this study, I believe we may have found an individual from a lineage that broke off early in modern human evolution and remained geographically isolated. That would contribute significantly to refining the human reference genome.'

Genome Biology and Evolution/Past Horizons, 19/09/2014

1,5 million-year-old human hand fossil shows evidence of complex tool use

Researchers have discovered a 1,5 million-year-old fossil that possesses an anatomical feature that is believed to be vital for making and using complex tools. The implication is that our human ancestors had the ability to make tools 500 000 years earlier than believed. The discovered fossil is a third metacarpal bone, which allows the hand to lock into the wrist bone. The suspect *Homo erectus* fossil is about 1,42 million years old and was unearthed west of Lake Turkana in northern Kenya.

According to Carol Ward, anatomist and paleoanthropologist at the University of Missouri, it is not just intelligence that gives a species the ability to make complex tools, but also the anatomical features of the hands. There is a little projection of bone in the third metacarpal known as a 'styloid process' that we need for tools. This tiny bit of bone in the palm of the hand makes it possible for the thumb and fingers to apply greater amounts of pressure to the wrist and palm. It is part of a whole complex of features that allows us the dexterity and strength to make and use complex tools. Until now it was believed that only *Homo sapiens*, Neanderthals and a few other human ancestors possessed the styloid process, but it was not known exactly when this feature first emerged. It was believed to be fairly recent, in evolutionary terms, but now it appears that the feature is fundamental to the genus *Homo*, which began about 2,5 million years ago.

Ancient Origins, 17/12/2013

Early human ancestor primate tiny, scrappy

The oldest known fossil primate skeleton, which dates to 55 million years ago, reveals that one of our earliest ancestors was a scrappy tree dweller with an unusual combination of features. The discovery, from central China strengthens the theory that Asia was the centre of primate evolution. *Archicebus Achilles* weighed less than 1 oz. Its eye orbits were not large, suggesting it was active during the daytime, and it had incredibly long legs. Analysis has determined that the skeleton of *Archicebus* is about seven million years older than the oldest fossil primate skeletons known previously. The tiny primate lived close to the evolutionary divergence between the lineage leading to modern monkeys, apes and humans (collectively known as anthropoids) and the lineage leading to living tarsiers. It has many features that support its tarsiform affinity, but also has many features typically seen in anthropoids.

Nature, 05/06/2013

The South African Archaeological Society

This is the society for members of the public and professionals who have an interest in archaeology and related fields such as palaeontology, geology and history. Four branches serve the interests of members. They arrange regular lectures and field excursions guided by experts, annual and occasional symposia, and longer southern African and international archaeological tours.

The Society was founded in 1945 to promote archaeology through research, education and publication. It is a non-profit organization – Registration No. 024-893-NPO.

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The Society produces the following publications:

- ☐ **South African Archaeological Bulletin**, a scientific publication of current research in southern Africa – twice a year
- ☐ **The Digging Stick**, the Society's general interest magazine – three issues a year
- ☐ **Goodwin Series**, an occasional publication on a specific field of archaeological interest

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