ROCK ART INCORPORATED: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF CERTAIN HUMAN FIGURES IN SAN ART

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Abstract

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Understanding a widespread motif in San rock art - a human figure depicted in frontal perspective with distinctive bodily characteristics - is the aim of this study. A concentration of these figures in north eastern Zimbabwe was first described by researchers in the 1930s and subsequently, when one researcher, Elizabeth Goodall, described them as `mythic women'. Markedly similar figures in the South African art have received little attention. On the basis of fieldwork in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg, the south western Cape (South Africa) and Zimbabwe, and an extensive literature survey, a spectrum of these figures is described. In order to further understanding of the motif, existing interpretive methods and the traditions which inform them are examined, with a view to outlining a number of areas in need of attention. It is argued that analysis of rock art remains dependent on a range of dualistic notions which may be linked to retained structuralist ideas. It is suggested that the dominant model in rock art research, in which the rock art is seen as essentially shamanistic, perpetuates distinctions between mind and body, myth and ritual, and sacred and profane, while in its search for general truths concerning the rock art, and its central focus on iconography, the model retains traces of linguistic structuralism. It is proposed that the `mythic woman' motif, with its gendered and sexual characteristics, is not well accounted for by reference to southern San ritual and religious practice alone. Drawing on contemporary theories concerning temporality and embodiment, it is argued that the motif is better understood in relation to recurrent themes of death and regeneration in San mythology and oral narratives, with shamanistic practice enacting related themes. The motif may be seen as representing San history in terms of culturally specific temporal schemes arising from San experience of the world. The `ethnographic method', by means of which San accounts are used to illuminate features of the art, is reassessed and extended. Hermeneutic theories are drawn upon in order to address questions regarding the way in which ethnographies and art may be mutually illuminating, and to account for the inevitability of multiple interpretations arising from the situated process of reading or viewing. Prominent themes, images and devices in San myth and oral narrative are discussed in an attempt to move beyond a narrowly iconography-centred approach and in order to account for devices and stylistic features of San arts which are evident in both verbal and visual media. Implications of the research for investigating an archaeology of gender, and the writing of San history, are discussed.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Assistance and support from many people and institutions made this study possible, and are gratefully acknowledged. In the Archaeology Department at the University of Cape Town, many thanks are due to my supervisor Professor Martin Hall, as well as to Professor Judith Sealy; Professor John Parkington; Royden Yates and Tony Manhire; Dr. Yvonne Brink; Dr. Duncan Miller; Dawn Fourie; John Lanham; Pieter Jolly and, in fact, almost all of the staff and many postgraduate students for help of various kinds at some time or another. Ms. Leonie Twentyman-Jones and her colleagues were endlessly helpful when I was working on the Bleek and Lloyd Collection in the University of Cape Town's Manuscripts and Archives Department. Many people assisted me with field work in Kwa-Zulu Natal and elsewhere. The Natal Museum gave me access to collections, and I am particularly grateful for the support of Dr. Tim Maggs and Dr. Aron Mazel of the Archaeology Department, as well as Mrs. Val Ward. Visiting rock art sites was made possible by many people and institutions. The Natal Parks Board and their staff were most generous, with especial thanks due to Bill Small and Petrus Ndlovu. The help of assistants and companions on field trips was invaluable; especial thanks to Aron Mazel, Frans Prins, John Morrison and Patrick Solomon. Without the extensive help of Peter and Barbara Mitchell and Felicity Morrison in Pietermaritzburg, this research might never have materialised. Many thanks are owed to Sven Ouzman of the Rock Art Department at the National Museum, Bloemfontein, for his hospitality. Field work in Zimbabwe was made possible by Dr. Michael Cronin, and Dr. Peter Garlake gave us valuable advice. Dr. Janette Deacon most kindly invited me to the northern Cape to view engravings. Field trips in the south western Cape were facilitated by many colleagues, with particular thanks to Emma Bedford of the South African National Gallery, and Shaen Adey for professional photographic assistance. The advice and inputs of Sue Williamson and her staff were invaluable. Many farmers generously gave me permission to view sites on their land; the hospitality and assistance of Mr. Piet Bruwer were particularly appreciated. I wish to thank Dr. Janette Deacon, of the National Monuments Council for permission to use her unpublished outline of the contents of the Bleek and Lloyd Collection; Professor Meg Conkey for encouragement and for material not available in this country; Pippa Skotnes and Dr. Marion Arnold for art historical inputs; Jill Wenman, Carol Hampshire and Cara Turner for illustrations; Dan Wilson, Information Technology Services and the Department of Surveying, University of Cape Town, for assistance with producing maps; Professor George Silberbauer for discussion and argumentation regarding San anthropology; Ann Turner and Ashraf Jamal for many other discussions; Dr. Patricia Davison of the South African Museum for various access to resources; and to Dr. Lyn Wadley and members of the Rock Art Research Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand, and interaction with post-graduate students at that University. Without the monumental works of Professor David Lewis-Williams and Dr. Patricia Vinnicombe, this dissertation would not have been possible.

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"The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development (HSRC, South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed in this work, or conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development"

Notes on illustrations, orthography, terminology, referencing and style

Illustrations

Reproducing rock art for publication purposes is problematic in many ways, apart from the obvious translation of three-dimensional sites onto a flat page. Practical and economic constraints generally entail the use of black and white ink drawings (usually line drawings). This alters the visual impact considerably. By eliminating colour, form is emphasised. Black and white copies create a degree of contrast of figure and ground which is not true to the originals, and line drawings may also unfaithfully smooth the contours of images. The fluency of line which is created is often in contrast to that of the images on the rock face, and it is difficult to convey the effects of fading and differential preservation. Colour photographs are clearly the ideal solution, but are prohibitively expensive. A compromise was adopted, with the use of the burgeoning technology of colour photocopying for selected images, within budgetary constraints. Certain of the black and white ink drawings had been previously published, and are re-used. Some of the images are very faded, and suitable prints from slides could not be made. In these cases, sketches are used. Two artists executed the ink drawings at different times, while some of the simpler images were done by my untrained hand. As a result, there is a lack of representational consistency. Previous researchers, such as Pager (1971) and Vinnicombe (1976a) have utilised the same conventions for all the images they reproduce; for example, particular tones of grey represent specific shades of red, and techniques such as stippling represent particular painting techniques. Because the illustrations are the product of several years of experimenting with ways of reproducing copies of rock paintings, it was not possible to achieve such precision; however, the importance of scientifically accurate reproductions is open to argument.

Orthography and terminology

San languages contain an abundance of click sounds, which have caused researchers immense trouble for many years. The first recorder of /Xam texts, Wilhelm Bleek, devised an elaborate system of phonetic notation to deal with this; however, these characters are very difficult to reproduce on a word processor, and are disturbing to the eye of the unaccustomed reader. The linguist Patrick Dickens has devised a new, simplified orthography for certain Khoisan languages; however, it is outside my realm of competence to translate the various orthographies into this new orthography. In the case of the /Xam texts, my solution has been to imitate the original orthography as closely as possible, simply omitting those characters which are problematic to generate. Other problems include the fact that different researchers have used different orthographies and even different words for the same group. For example, Biesele (1993) uses Dickens' orthography to refer to the people who were formerly known as the !Kung; they are referred to as the Ju/'hoansi. Wilmsen (1989) refers to the same people as the Zhu. To address this inconsistency, I have systematically used the same orthography as the person whose work I am citing, except in the case of the /Xam texts, where characters are omitted. This is motivated on the grounds that this study is not an exercise in linguistics, but in archaeology. Similar orthographic problems are also relevant to the capitalisation of names, animals and characters in the narratives. For the purposes of simplification, anthropomorphised characters such as the moon and the blue crane are referred to

wherever possible in lower case; this also applies to motifs or thematic references, such as 'the story of the moon and the hare'. In some, but not all cases, the source text capitalises such names. Except in specific citations, when referring to proper names, or when the (Khoi)San word occurs at the beginning of a sentence, lower case is employed. This is due to an incommensurable multitude of orthographic variations amongst authors and sources. Similarly, italicisation was difficult to standardise. Where a character with a (Khoi)San language name is referred to, standard text is employed (e.g. /Kaggen). Other Khoi(San) words - e.g. *kum*, meaning 'story', are italicised. Simplicity and user-friendliness of presentation, rather than an idealistic orthographic and linguistic consistency, were prioritised.

Referencing and style

The referencing system required by the discipline of archaeology proved problematic, owing to the materials in hand. For example, references to the unpublished material from the Bleek and Lloyd collection required explanation and a specific referencing style, and contrary to established conventions, it was deemed necessary to make use of footnotes, especially when referring to paintings or narratives, rather than published works. Two types of quotation marks, namely single and double quotation marks, were used. Double quotation marks are used for direct quotations; single quotation marks are used when the word or phrase in question is problematic, value-laden or, in a few instances, necessarily used ironically or quasi-ironically. For example, the phrase adopted to describe the motif on which this study focusses was coined by a previous researcher. When the reference is a direct quotation of this researcher, double quotation marks are used. Thereafter no quotation marks are used. Single quotation marks are used to indicate problems with the verbal description of images; for example, researchers have used various words and neologistic usages to describe enigmatic images in San rock art, such as 'smear' or 'daub' to indicate the subjectivity of the identification and the incapacity of language to convey the character of the image. Single quotation marks are also used in relation to the naming of groups, a currently contentious issue. For example, there is no standard and generally accepted term generic for people speaking San or Khoi languages; indeed there has been a move to return to the the sexist generic 'Bushman'. In certain instances, single quotation marks are employed to indicate the problematic character of the term. Commonalities and distinctions between Khoi and San identities, cultures and economies are the focus of much debate. To deal with the referencing problems that arise, I use the term 'Khoisan' to refer to the language group as a whole; 'San' or 'Khoi' when referring to them as separable groups on linguistic or economic grounds; and '(Khoi)San' when the distinction is blurred.

Tables

Maps

Chapter 1

Figures

Certain human figures in the San art of southern Africa are the focus of this study. It is customary for figures (such as drawings) to be interleaved with the text, or collated at the end, outside of conventional chapters; however, the former strategy was technologically not viable, whereas it is implicit that the latter option spatially locates the primary subject matter of the study as secondary, and assigns to the images a status which differs from the verbal accounts of them. This relates to a range of problems inherent in the project of the archaeological study of rock art, which are addressed in the present study. To render the images in words is an inevitably reductive or reductionist enterprise, however necessary it may be in order to make sense of the extraordinary complexity of San art. The extent of this complexity is often underacknowledged in accounts which aim to produce hermetically closed explanations. As Preziosi (1989:44-53) has argued, writing about the art is also logocentric, entailing a particular set of assumptions about what art 'is' and how it works (or is mobilised). To present the images as an insert at the end would be to subordinate them to the accompanying commentary. For that reason, they are presented in this initial chapter, as a service to the reader, as a device to problematise the relation of words and images and as an acknowledgement of the primacy, in a relational rather than absolute sense, of the art itself, as well as those who produced it.

Colour photocopying was the primary technology chosen to generate the copies of the rock art, since black and white reproductions by definition eliminate colour, and affect the viewer's understanding of the image. The technology, as well as economic constraints, did not permit all the images to be reproduced in colour, and it was not possible to place detailed captions on the same page. In the following section, the colour reproductions are presented, followed by the relevant captions. They are succeeded by black and white reproductions. The medium of reproduction largely determines the grouping and order of presentation, although an effort has been made to group illustrations together, by motif, site and region. Maps and tables are interleaved in the text. Unless otherwise stated, all illustrations are the work of the author.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

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Figures 1 to 25: Captions

All photographs were taken by the author during field work, 1991-1995.

Figure 1. Gxalingenwa Rock 1: site view. (Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg).

Figure 2. Gxalingenwa Rock 1. Feminine figure with bent knees and crescent object in left hand, painted around a hole in the rock face.

Figure 3. Gxalingenwa Rock 1. Two obese figures with splayed or bent legs, painted around holes in the rock face.

Figure 4. Gxalingenwa Rock 1. Monochrome frontal view figure; a small, seated figure to the left apparently 'observes' it.

Figure 5. Gxalingenwa Rock 1. A figure painted around a hole in the rock face, with an indeterminate animal and associated figures; the panel may be interpreted as a rain-making scene.

Figure 6. Gxalingenwa Rock 1. A lateral view figure painted around a hole in the rock, associated with arrows, with figures in less faded paint and a crayonned animal. The figure has a penis with what may be an 'emission', in the form of two fine lines.

Figure 7. Gxalingenwa Rock 1. Rows of tall, slender male figures (Group B).

Figure 8. Gxalingenwa Rock 1. An unusual figure with zig-zag legs and other extraordinary features, associated with enigmatic shapes and a black baboon.

Figure 9. Keurbos: site view, showing the central panel of paintings. A small rucksack on the ground in front of the panel gives some indication of scale. (South western Cape).

Figure 10. Keurbos. Female figure with emphasised stomach, buttocks and calves. It may have once had a head in white paint, the most fugitive pigment in the San palette.

Figure 11. Keurbos. Panel view: elephants, women and sundry figures.

Figure 12. Keurbos. A row of six squatting or seated figures in frontal view, close up.

Figure 13. Keurbos. Three figures with elongated right arms held to the groin. At least one of the figures appears to have been repainted.

Figure 14. Keurbos. An 'upside-down' figure (note three fingers on hand), with bent legs and what may be an emission from the genitalia.

Figure 15. Keurbos. Two more frontal perspective squatting figures.

Figure 16. Keurbos. Another headless female figure, with emphasised buttocks and short legs. Below may be seen the rear of an elephant with a thin tail (cf. Figure 11).

Figure 17. Kleinvlei. A panel incorporating an extremely obese feminine figure (left), a medicine dance scene (right), a supine figure (lower right), bichrome eland and rows of human figures (top). (South western Cape).

Figure 18. Ngwangwane Shelter 8. A shaded polychrome frontal perspective figure, associated with a finely painted eland. (Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg).

Figure 19. Fulton's Rock. The main scene apparently depicts the female initiation ceremony, as recorded ethnographically. In the bottom left hand corner is a headless, squatting figure in frontal perspective. (Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg).

Figure 20. Brotherton Shelter. A splayed-legged female figure with red paint details on the head, legs and genital area. (Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg).

Figure 21. Clarke's Shelter. A finally painted therianthrope dominates the photograph, but a faded red, frontal view, obese figure may be seen to the right; an animal torso has been painted over part of the figure. (Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg).

Figure 22. Gambarimwe Cave. Two obese frontal view figures, one of which has long, meandering double lines from the genital area. These were among the figures referred to by an earlier researcher as 'mythic women'. (North eastern Zimbabwe).

Figure 23. Manemba Cave. Two obese frontal view figures, one of which has long, meandering double lines from the genital area. These were among the figures referred to by an earlier researcher as 'mythic women'. The left hand figure wields a crescent-shaped object. (North eastern Zimbabwe).

Figure 24. Manemba Cave. Two obese frontal view figures, without clear sexual characteristics. The right hand figure wields a crescent-shaped object. (North eastern Zimbabwe).

Figure 25. Gurure Rock. Two obese frontal view figures, one of which has long, meandering double lines from the genital area. These were among the figures referred to by an earlier researcher as 'mythic women'. The right hand figure has an eroded double line from the genital area. The figures are associated with a non-naturalistic elephant. (North eastern Zimbabwe).

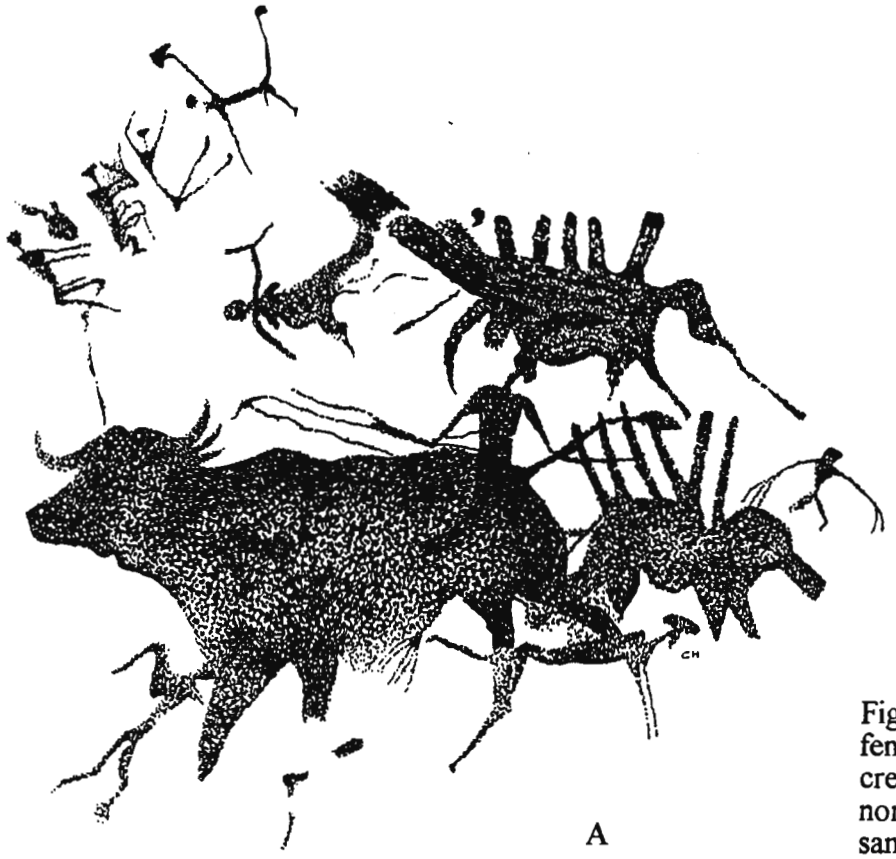

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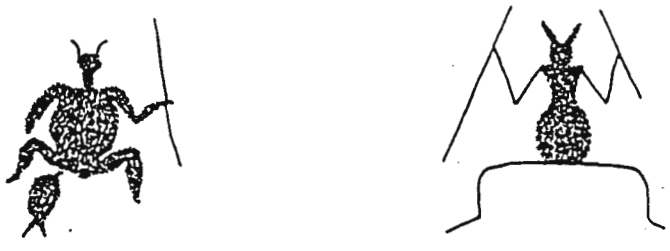
Figure 26. A: A swollen bodied female figure holding a stick or crescent, associated with buffalo and non-naturalistic elephants. B: In the same panel, a similar figure. Murehwa Cave, north eastern Zimbabwe.

B

Figure 27. Paintings of "mythic women" copied by Frobenius. A: Charter, Zimbabwe. B and C: Marondera, Zimbabwe. D and F: Macheke, Zimbabwe. E: Rouxville, Orange Free State (OFS), South Africa. After Frobenius (1931).



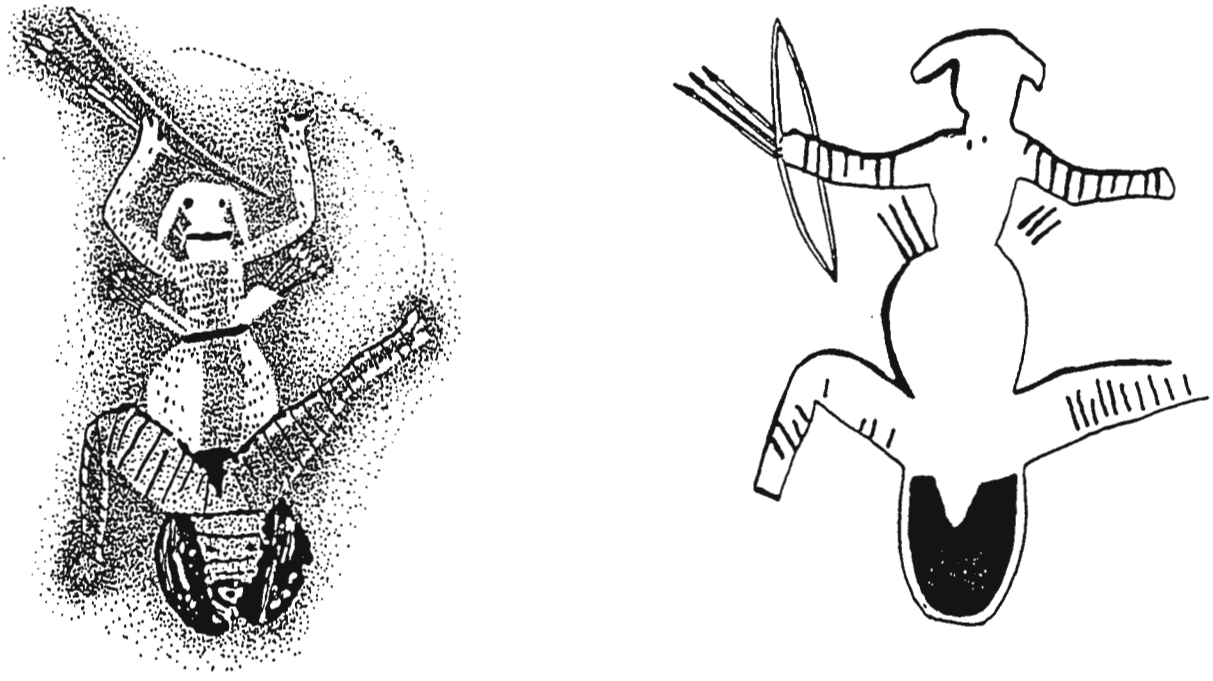


Figure 28. A mythic woman with animal features including floppy ears, paws and whiskers. Willcox's Shelter, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. After Willcox (1956).

Figure 29. A similar figure from Snap Shelter, Lesotho. After Vinnicombe (1976a).

Figure 30. A male version of the motif from Sorceror's Rock, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. After Pager (1971).

Figure 31. A frontal perspective figure with splayed legs and animal head. Arthur's Seat, Loskop, Kwa-Zulu Natal. After Pager (1971).

Figure 32. A frontal perspective figure with swollen body and raised arms. Sebaaieni Cave, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. After Pager (1971).

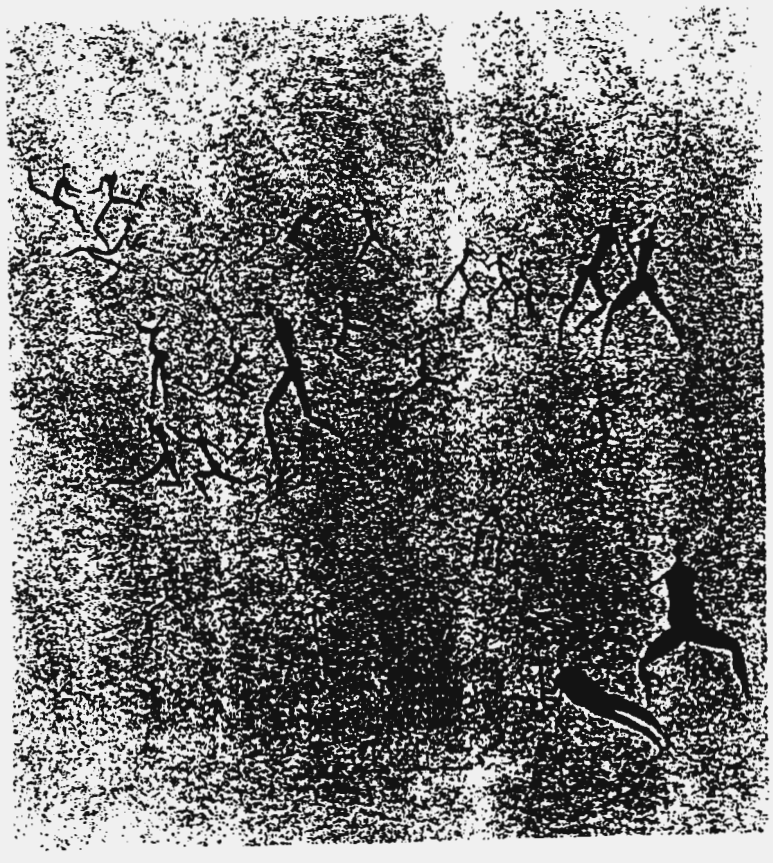


Figure 33. A frontal perspective figure (lower right corner) with splayed legs and a genital line. Hippo Shelter, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe (1976a).

Figure 34. Copy of an unpublished facsimile by Vinnicombe, including a frontal perspective figure with raised arm, splayed legs and a double genital line. West Ilsley, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg.

Figure 35. As above (Figure 34); Langalibalele Shelter, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg.

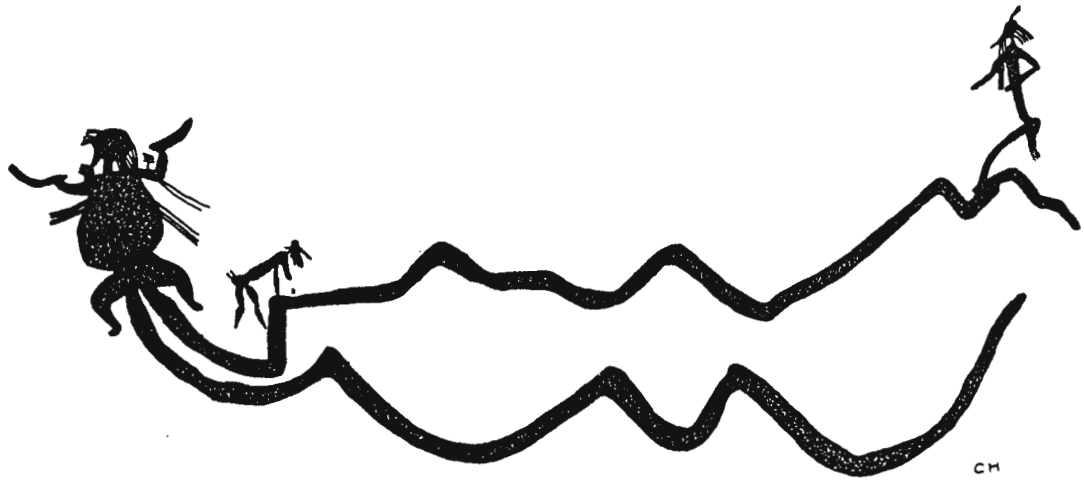


Figure 36. A mythic woman with crescents and a long genital 'stream'. The associated figures appear to be bleeding from the nose. Mshaya Mvura, Zimbabwe. After Goodall, in Summers (1959).

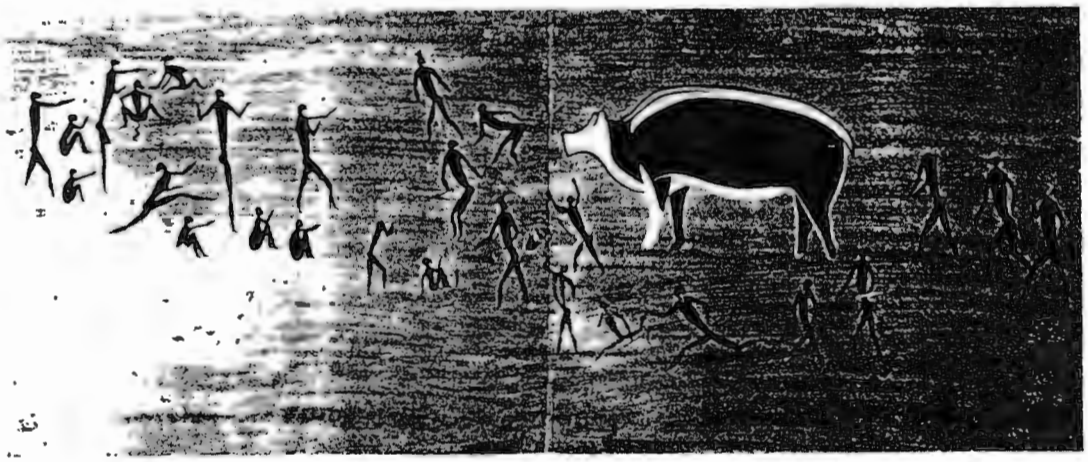
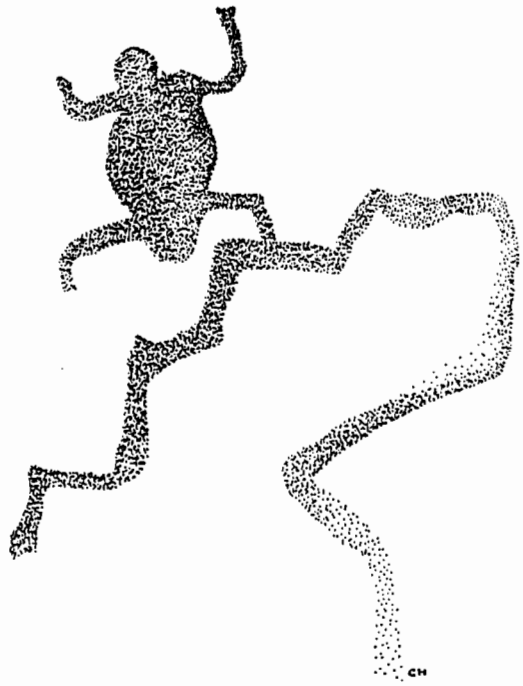
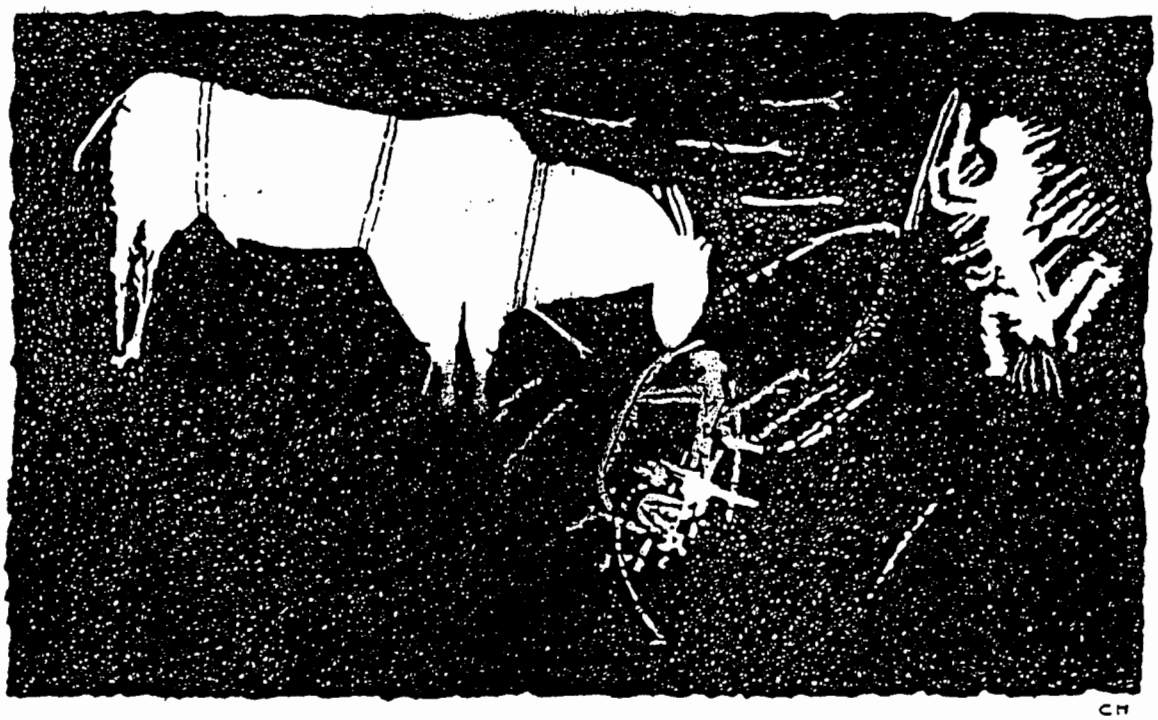


Figure 37. In the upper left hand corner of this nineteenth century copy is a seated, frontal view figure with a meandering genital line. The larger panel may be interpreted as a rain-making scene. After Stow, in Rosenthal and Goodwin (1953).

Figure 38. Two figures in this panel are portrayed with swollen bodies, splayed legs and meandering genital lines. Knoffelspruit, Orange Free State. After Stow, in Rosenthal and Goodwin (1953).





Figures 39-41. Further examples of the mythic woman motif. Figures 39 and 40 are from Prinswillemsklip and Traveller's Rest respectively (south western Cape). Figure 40 is an engraving from Springbokoog, Northern Cape.

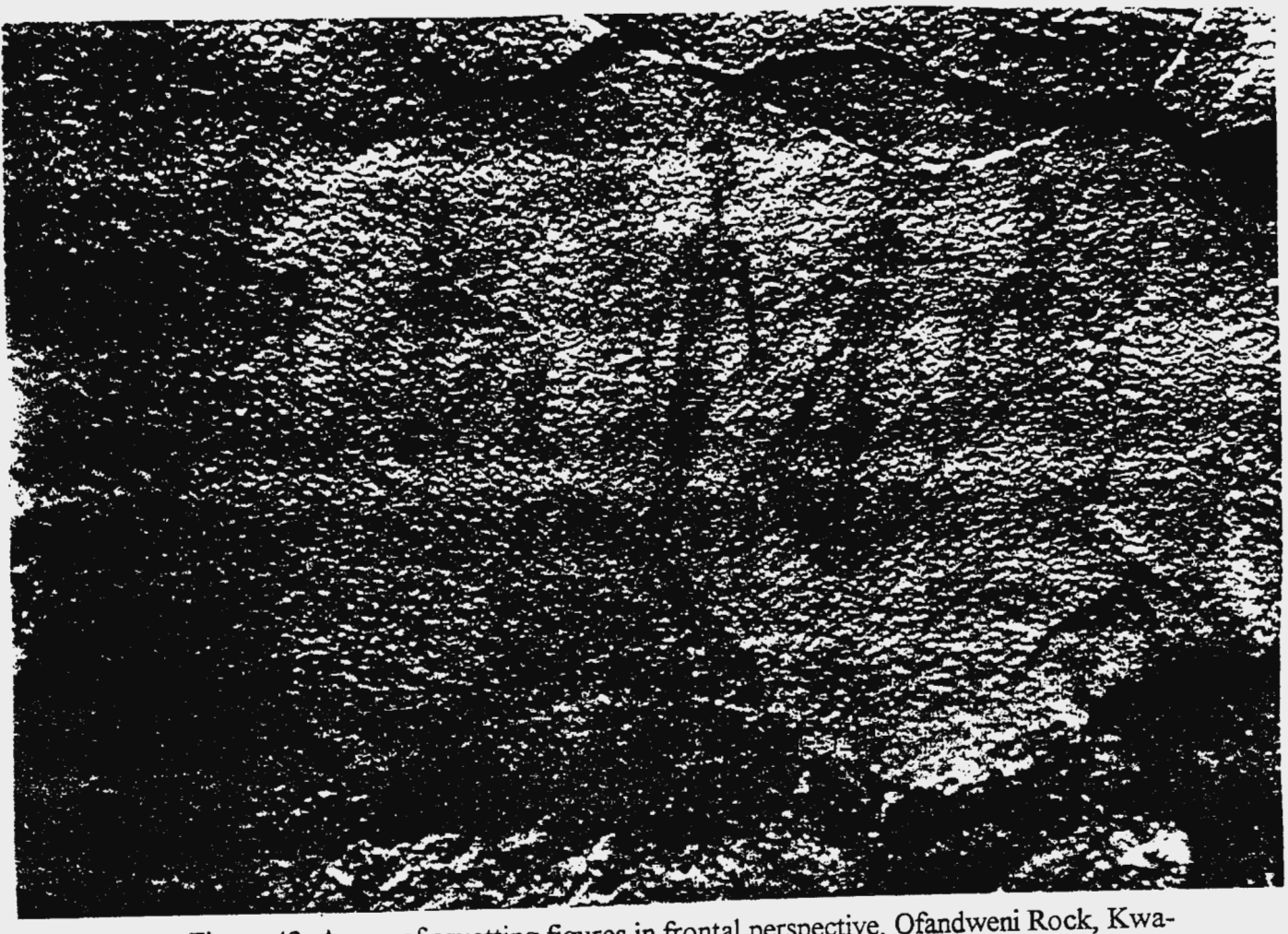


Figure 42. A row of squatting figures in frontal perspective. Ofandweni Rock, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. From a slide in the collections of the Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg.

Figure 43. A frontal perspective figure with an emphasis on the genitalia. Rheboksfontein, south western Cape.

Figure 44. A frontal perspective figure with swollen torso. Hungorob Gorge, Namibia. After Pager (1993).

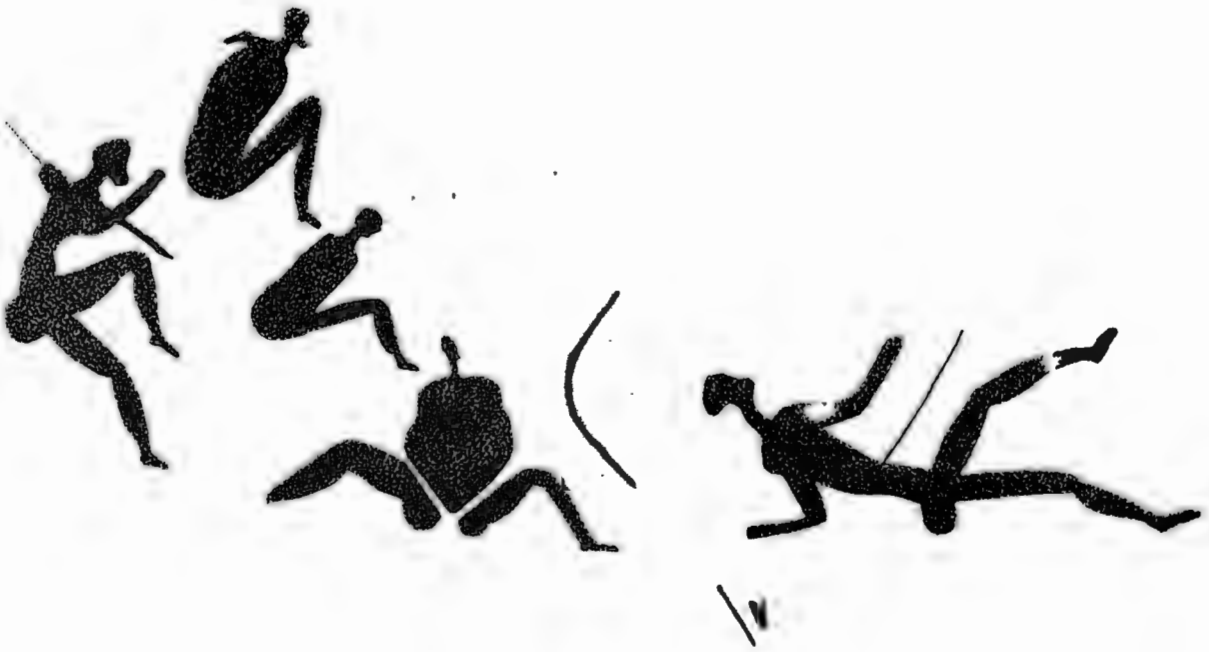


Figure 45. A swollen-bodied figure with splayed legs, associated with a possible dead figure. Magaditseng, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe (1976a).

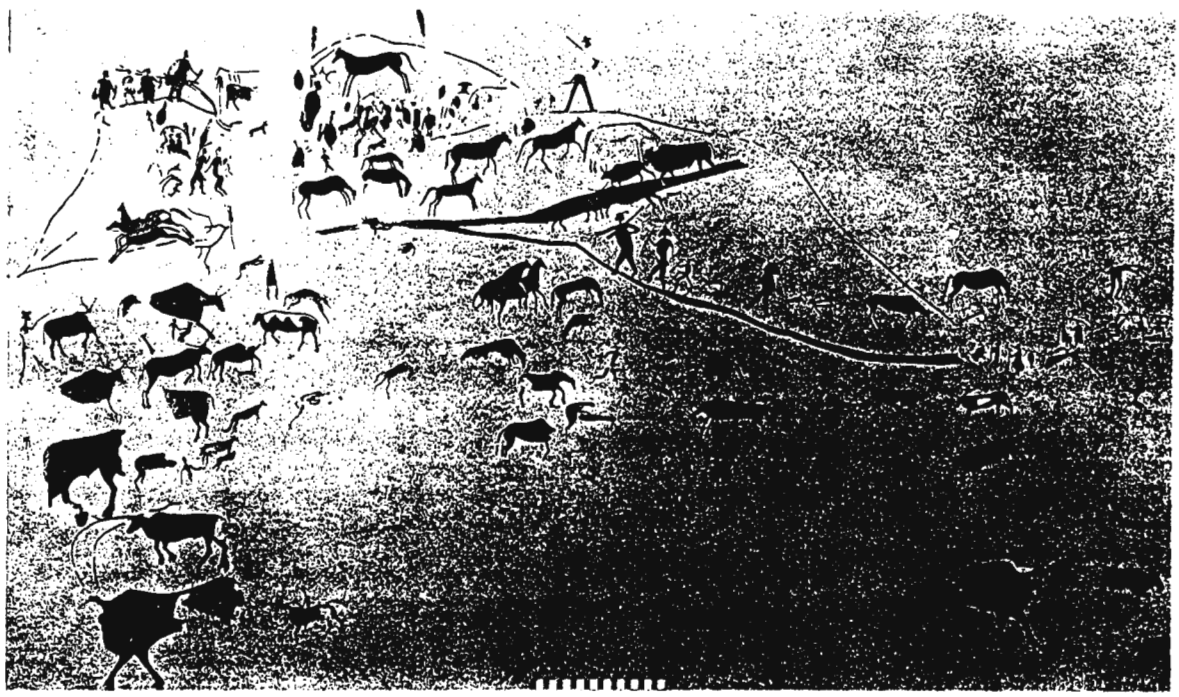
Figure 46. Frontal view figures associated with dancing figures, perhaps including shamans. One figure appears to be bleeding from the nose. No locality. After Stow, in Rosenthal and Goodwin (1953).

Figure 47. Rows of frontal perspective seated or squatting figures. Elandskloof, Orange Free State. After Stow, in Rosenthal and Goodwin (1953)

Figure 48. Rotund female figures in frontal view, apparently sitting in a shelter Bamboo Mountain, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe (1976a).

Figure 49. Eland and hunters. A small squatting figure is painted in the lower right hand corner. Belleview 3, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe (1976a).

Figure 50. A complex panel which can be dated to the nineteenth century because of the presence of horses and a British soldier. Squatting figures in frontal view are found on the right hand margin of the panel. This Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg site is called "Soldier on path". After Vinnicombe (1976a).



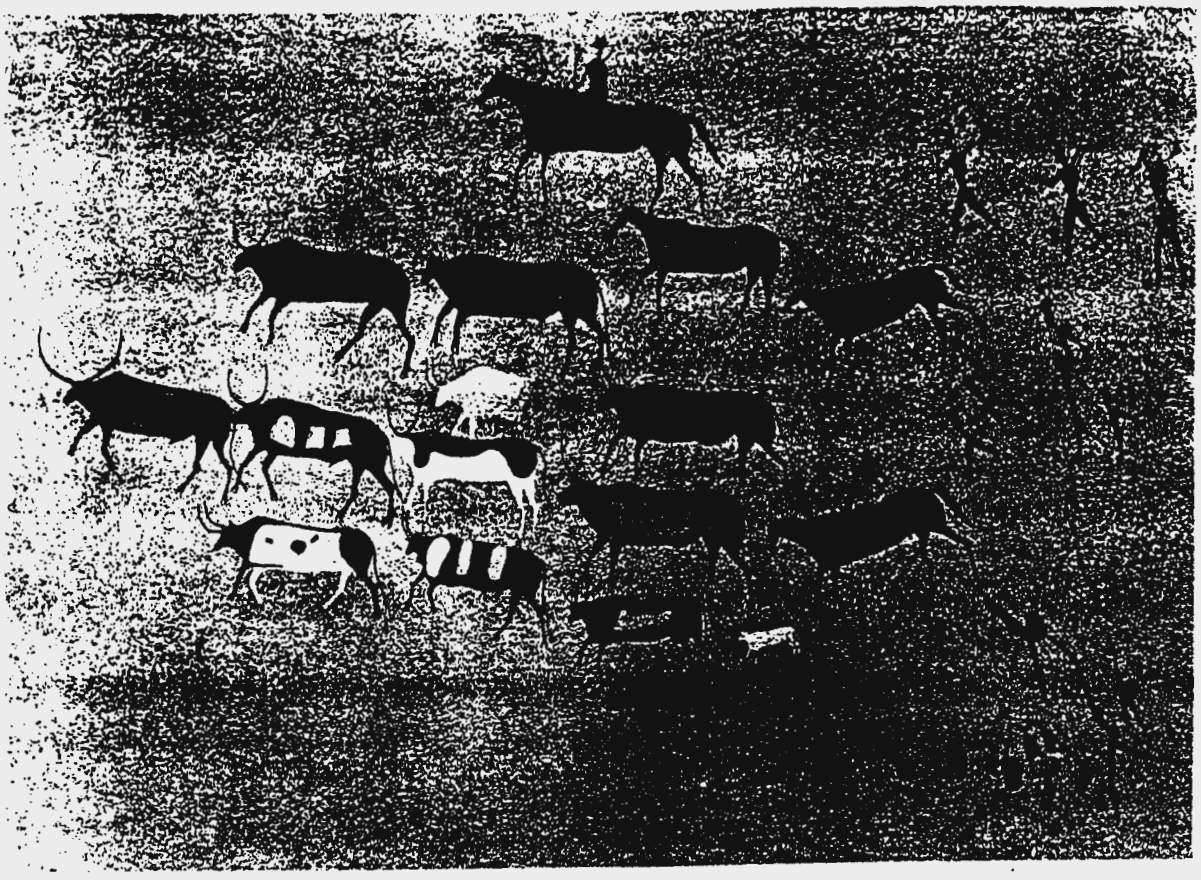
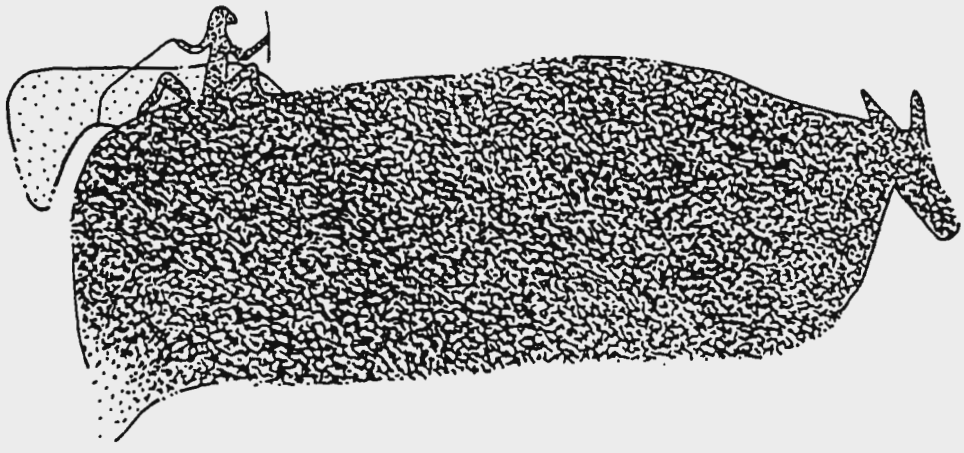


Figure 51. Cattle, horses and human figures. A feminine figure with exaggerated buttocks and a double genital line (lower right hand corner) is associated with seven seated figures. Mpongweni North, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe (1976a).

Figure 52. A creature, probably a rain animal, with a frontal human with splayed legs and raised arms on its back. Tandjesberg, Orange Free State. After Loubser (1993).



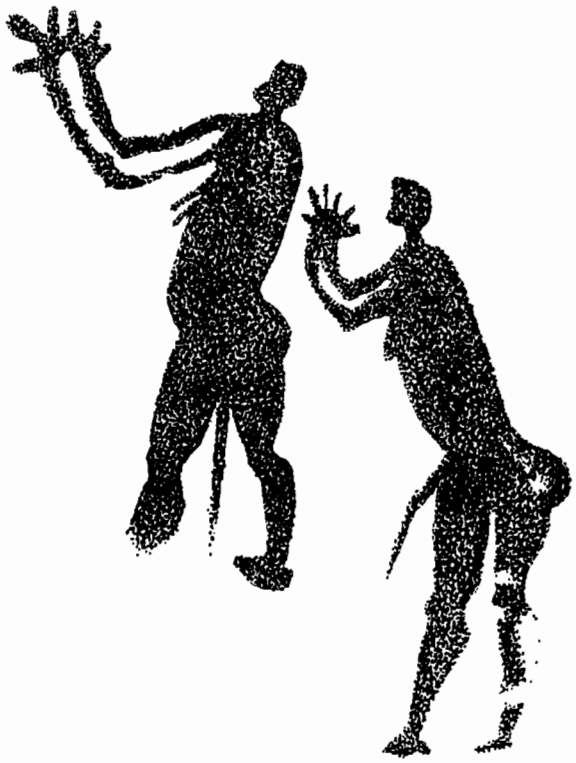
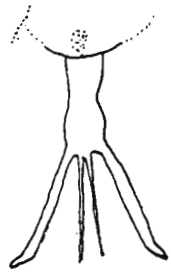


Figure 53. Two female figures at Crazy Paving Shelter, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. In this painting it is likely that the lines associated with the lower torso represent clothing.



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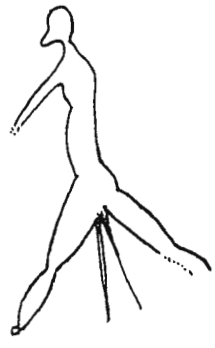

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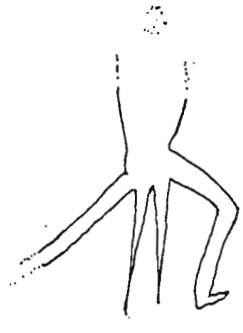

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Figure 54. A-E: Figures with genital lines. They are all very faded and had to be sketched, since their poor preservation made it impossible to make copies from the slides. All are from the Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. The original slides are housed in the Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg. A: A faded red monochrome figure, Procession Shelter. B: A lateral view red monochrome, Blob Rock. C and D: two faded red monochromes from Bemani Shelter. E: A frontal view figure in black paint with two lines in red paint between the thighs, Bamboo Mountain.

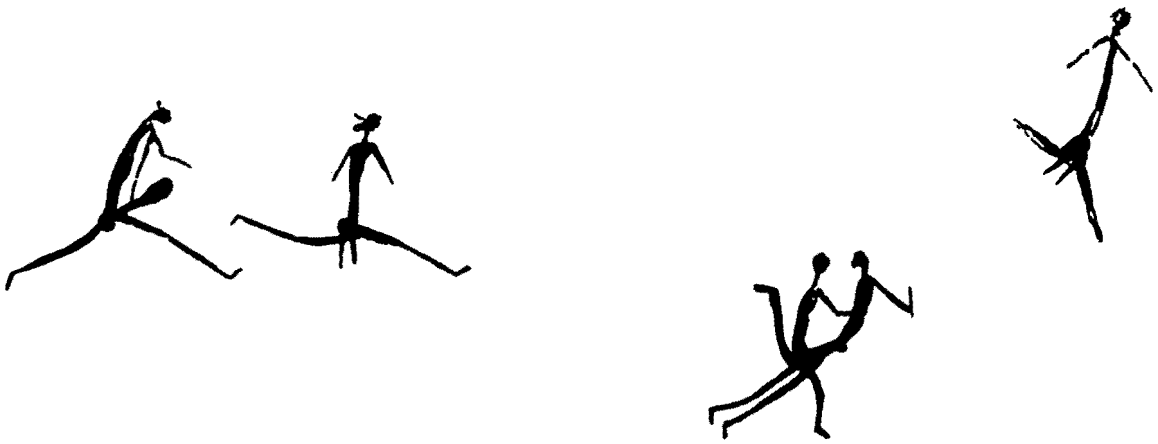

Figure 55. A series of paintings, described by Vinnicombe (1976a:246) as a "rape scene".

Figure 56. A figure with long double lines between the thighs, at Game Pass, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. It is one of very few female figures in this site.

Figure 57. A black and white version of the painting in Figure 23. Manemba Cave, north eastern Zimbabwe.

Map 1. Southern Africa, showing the areas in which the paintings discussed are found.

Chapter 2

Background

In the 1860's George Stow, an English immigrant to South Africa, set out to compile a collection of facsimile copies of San rock art, lest it erode away and vanish forever. This collection, he anticipated, would be "of very great interest" (Stow, cited by Rosenthal and Goodwin 1953:10). In iconographic terms, the specific foci of such interest have ranged widely, from early diffusionist efforts at identifying 'foreigners' (in the works of the Abbe Breuil, for example), to linking the art with shamanism and ritual (exemplified by the many works of Lewis-Williams and his colleagues) and, more recently, to examinations of gendered imagery (such as Parkington et al. 1991; Solomon 1989, 1992a,b, 1994a,b, in press; Stevenson (in prep.); and cf. Prins and Hall 1994).[1] The scope and direction of San rock art research has altered dramatically, in terms of theories, technologies and methods, and the sub-discipline of rock art has fuelled changes in South African archaeology more generally. Of especial importance were intensive, long-term regional studies of rock paintings from the Drakensberg mountain range, represented by the landmark works of Vinnicombe (*People of the Eland*, 1976a) and Lewis-Williams (*Believing and Seeing* 1981a).[2] Their introduction of sophisticated theoretical frames (initially structuralism), the cautious use of San ethnographies, and detailed and painstaking recording of large bodies of rock art led to innovative insights which have revolutionised contemporary rock art research. The importance, to both these pioneering researchers, of the Bleek and Lloyd Collection of /Xam San texts and ethnography, and of the 'ethnographic method', remain unsurpassed, albeit a little tarnished by a range of criticisms (see below). Regardless of problems of historicity and of iconographic bias, the approximately twelve thousand pages of stories and other accounts, related by /Xam-speaking people from the Northern Cape, and the "two way exegetical process" developed by Lewis-Williams (e.g. 1981a:34; 1980), enable and inspire southern African rock art studies and researchers in a unique manner.

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[1] A detailed study of gender ascriptions and gender ambiguity, as it relates to shamanism in South African rock art research, is in preparation by Judith Stevenson, University of the Witwatersrand.
[2] The eland is an exceptionally large bovid, *Taurotragus oryx*.

The achievements of the researchers mentioned above are still resonating through the discipline of archaeology, and keeping the debates around the rock art - and beyond it - lively and influential. Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1994:217) have noted the role of rock art research in the production of "explicitly theoretical social analysis of the Later Stone Age"; it has also generated discussion and re-examination of epistemological, political and aesthetic issues in archaeological research in a wider sense. Moreover, the rock art itself is reaching and engaging a wider audience than ever before.

Nevertheless, numerous problems remain. Amongst the most thorny is that of dating, with only a handful of dates available country wide, and the technologies for dating relatively underdeveloped (but advancing). Other areas receiving attention include the dominant model in rock art research, namely the highly successful and influential 'shamanistic thesis', principally developed by Lewis-Williams. The foundations of this model were forcefully and subtly argued in *Believing and Seeing* (Lewis-Williams 1981a), and subsequently extended by Lewis-Williams and a multitude of other writers; it proposes that it is principally - or "essentially" (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1994:217) - through knowledge of San shamanism and ritual practices that we can understand the art.[3] The shamanic connection seems, in many but not all instances, and in general rather than specific terms, irrefutable. Nevertheless, there are other avenues of enquiry that remain to be explored.

Insofar as the shamanistic thesis has tended (in part by virtue of its historical context) to emphasise 'man-the-shaman', attention to issues of gender has been somewhat lacking until very recently. Various efforts to address this issue have been presented previously (Solomon 1989, 1991, 1992a,b,c, 1994a,b; in press). The main contention of the initial thesis (Solomon 1989) was that gender is a social, cultural and political organising principle of crucial importance in hunter-gatherer societies.[4] This insight permits a different perspective on the art. Rock art researchers have accepted the argument that previous research displays a masculinist bias, and that the symbolic dimension of gender,

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[3] But see Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1994:210-11) for a partial refutation of this claim, and (1994:213, 218) for its repetition and the related claim for "the centrality and pervasiveness of shamanism" in San "life and art".

[4] The principal social divisions in San and other 'simple' societies are drawn along the lines of sex and age (cf. Collier and Rosaldo 1981).

and the partial embedding of the production of art in gender relations requires consideration (cf. Dowson and Lewis-Williams 1994:7). However, work to date on gendered images in San arts remains in its infancy. It is the aim here to explore the concept of gender further, with the additional intention of focussing on human figuration in the art in a more general sense. In order to do so, a particular motif in the rock art - strange human figures, dubbed "mythic women" by (Goodall 1962:402, 1949) - was selected for close attention (see below). These figures are partly distinguished by portrayal in frontal perspective, an uncommon choice by San artists.

Various areas of contention and potential revision have arisen of late. From the perspective of the discipline of art history, charges that archaeological research has neglected "the visual as a site of meaning" (Skotnes 1994) have come closer to the forefront of the discipline. The need to extend narrowly iconographic approaches to include formal studies (Skotnes 1990, 1991, 1994) and for the breach between archaeology and art history to be addressed (Davis 1990) are acknowledged and acted upon in this study. In terms of epistemology and theory, the structuralist and semiotic grounding of San rock art research requires reassessment in the light of subsequent theoretical developments (Solomon in press). Questions of historicity, of interdisciplinarity, and of method are also in need of attention. Contemporary theories provide ways of reconciling or mediating interdisciplinary perspectives on the rock art (Solomon in press; and cf. Preziosi 1989). The linked concepts of temporality and embodiment, outlined in Chapter 3, are used to address questions of gender, historicity, epistemology, interpretation and representation. These concepts also offer a way of considering archaeological landscapes (Ingold 1993), and of interrogating archaeological notions of time (and hence dating and chronology). The landscapes and the sites which help to constitute them are described in Chapter 4, along with an account of fieldwork conducted. In relation to representation, the use of San ethnographies also engages with questions regarding verbal, as opposed to visual, representation and the situated nature of the practice of reading (or viewing). It is proposed that the 'ethnographic method' as developed by Vinnicombe (1976a) and Lewis-Williams (e.g. 1977a, 1980, 1981a) is fraught with difficulties (but by no means irredeemably so). An assessment of the ethnographic method is presented in Chapter 5, followed by a re-reading of (Khoi)San ethnographies, which is also informed by the concepts of temporality and embodiment, in Chapter 6. In Chapters 7, 8 and 9 the mythic

woman motif and an account of a way of understanding it is offered. Via the images of the mythic women, these are the domains on which the study focusses.

First discussed by Leo Frobenius (1931) and later by his associate, Elizabeth Goodall (1949, 1962), a remarkable concentration of examples of the mythic women in a confined area in north eastern Zimbabwe was initially identified. Goodall (1949) described these examples as 'mythic women', speculating that they represented a mythological character. Although Frobenius (1931) published some parallel examples from South Africa, the existence of the motif in the South African rock art has received little attention, perhaps in part as a consequence of a masculinist bias, and also owing to the lack of an analytical frame within which such figures may be further understood; not all can easily be explained by reference to shamanism. The Zimbabwean figures have, however, been of ongoing interest to researchers, who have interpreted them in markedly different ways. An examination of these interpretations introduces the motif on which this study focusses, and illustrates the changing ways in which researchers have viewed the art, and drawn upon ethnographic sources, since the early years of the twentieth century.

Goodall and Frobenius, working earlier in this century, followed the general view, as expressed by W.H.I. Bleek (in Orpen 1874), that the images were in some way linked to mythology. However, the theorised and systematic use of ethnography to interpret rock art was then in its infancy. Goodall's suggestion (1962) that the image might relate to something similar to the 'earth goddess' in European folklore, and Frobenius' speculation (1931) that they related to mythological 'hare people' were unsupported by ethnographic materials or contextualisation. Nor was the validity of intercontinental comparison substantiated in any way (cf. Garlake 1987a), although this was a fairly common approach in the late nineteenth century and beyond (e.g. W.H.I. Bleek's (1864) comparison of similar characterisation, motifs and imagery in Khoisan and Australian folklore). By contrast, in recent years the specificity of beliefs to particular peoples, places and times has taken priority, although there is a growing recent interest in overlaps in beliefs between different societies (e.g. Campbell 1986; Mazel 1989, 1993; Jolly 1986, 1994, 1995; Prins 1994; Lewis-Williams 1986a; Dowson 1993, in press; Solomon 1994b; Solomon and Bedford 1994). Although this and other work potentially compromises the ethnic

assumptions inherent in the term 'San art', it is a question for ongoing investigations as to what extent this label is useful and appropriate.

In this light, an alternative view of the mythic women was presented by Cooke (1965). Noting that the images were to be found in an area with substantial evidence for Iron Age metal producers, with occupations marked by ruined stone settlements associated with Iron Age pastoralists and farmers, he suggested that they might not be 'San art' at all. In support of a putative linkage with Iron Age peoples, Cooke pointed to the symbolism of reproduction which is associated in many African societies with iron smelting (for example in Carlyn Saltman's film, "*The Blooms of Banjeli*", 1986). The smelting process is endowed with the symbolism of fecundity and birth, and ritual restrictions accompany the process. Women could not attend, and men had to undergo ritual observances. In some societies, the furnace was often constructed with female characteristics such as breasts. The iron bloom is smelted in the body of the furnace, and the process is likened to pregnancy and birth. Cooke suggested that the images in question might derive from such beliefs.

Though Cooke touched on topics which are of burgeoning interest in rock art research, namely questions of authorship and interaction (e.g. Van Rijssen 1994; Jolly 1993, 1995; Yates et al. 1994; Prins 1994), again, no direct archaeological support could be offered for his argument, and subsequent authors have not doubted that the images were indeed the work of 'San' artists.

Almost two decades later, Huffman (1983), himself an Iron Age archaeologist, reintroduced the mythic woman motif into contemporary debates. In an important article, Huffman explored the validity of the then novel 'trance hypothesis' for interpreting the rock art of Zimbabwe. Murehwa Cave, a richly painted site at Mutoko, about 90 kilometres by road north east of Harare, contains two examples of the motif, in the same panel; Huffman selected one of these for his discussion (Figure 26b). To explain the figure's feminine referents and the double 'stream', recourse was made to the body of beliefs about *n!ow*, a supernatural potency linked to women, and to amniotic fluid and menstrual blood (cf. Marshall 1957, 1976). Other features of the scene were interpreted by Huffman by reference to shamanism and 'trance imagery'. For example, the central figure

is portrayed surrounded by a series of short lines or dashes. Huffman identifies them as bees, which, along with honey, are also putatively linked with supernatural potency and trance (cf. Pager 1971; Lewis-Williams 1981a). The dancing and falling figures which surround the figure are held by Huffman to be trancers, and the scene as a whole is taken as support for the argument that shamanism constitutes the primary and most important context for the derivation, production and understanding of the rock art, in Zimbabwe as well as South Africa.

Subsequent comments on the motif have almost all proceeded from the argument that knowledge of trance is a prerequisite for understanding the significance of the figures, with the partial exception of Woodhouse (1992:77-8), who discusses them primarily as what he calls "source figures". Garlake (1987 a,b, 1990) has also assigned primary importance to shamanism in interpreting the motif. Instead of referring to accounts of women and *n!ow*, he suggests that the swollen torsos of some of the figures may relate to the supernatural potency that trancers believe resides in the stomach (Garlake 1990). Garlake also astutely makes the point that amongst the class of obese figures in Zimbabwe there are also examples which are male or of indeterminate sex. Deacon (1994:246; her Figure 3) considers an engraved example of the motif from Springbokoog in the northern Cape (Figure 41); though she does not relate it directly to shamanism, she conflates ritual activities in general with shamanism and trance experience, describing the image as follows: "The man to the top right has his legs wide open and he appears to be urinating because there are engraved lines spraying out between his legs". The image is then related to /Xam ethnography, and accounts of restrictions on urination imposed during the male initiate's first kill ceremony; if the hunter urinated, the prime prey, the eland, would do likewise, thus affecting the efficacy of the poison used to dispatch it. Shamanism is seen by Deacon as a necessary part of this ceremony.

Unlike the more speculative interpretations of Goodall, Cooke and Frobenius, recent studies such as Huffman's, Garlake's and Deacon's are careful to ground their arguments with references to ethnography. This illustrates the changing criteria demanded in rock art research. However, there are problems with such "text-matching" (Preziosi 1989:37), and, as Parkington (1989) has argued, ethnographies are only a "partial commentary" on the art. The method of text-matching ethnographic references has been described as

'ethnographic snap' (e.g. Garlake 1990); although, as a method, it has its successes, it also has its problems, insofar as it fails to interrogate its own limitations. The ethnographic method is an interpretive project, not a technique or set of rules. The possibility that texts which can be matched do not necessarily correspond is not fully accounted for in the method as it stands; nor is the possibility of different readings of the ethnographies.

Examination of Huffman's (1983) interpretation of the Murehwa mythic women exemplifies some of these problems. Huffman identifies the dashes which surround the obese figure at Murehwa as bees. Bees have been identified in paintings by, amongst others, Pager (1971), Lewis-Williams (1981a) and Mazel (1982), and there is little reason to doubt Lewis-Williams' argument that they are part of a complex of beliefs and symbols connected to supernatural potency.[5] However, the dashed lines in the Murehwa panel are not readily identifiable as bees - they are no more than short lines. Unlike paintings of bees identified elsewhere, there are no wings or other features depicted which permit this identification. A further problem is the selection of only one of the two mythic women in the panel, and, from the scene chosen, the use of only a few images and features as the focus of analysis. Huffman (1983: his Figure 3) uses a redrawing of a watercolour copy published by Goodall (in Summers 1959). However, having viewed some of the paintings copied by Goodall, I can confirm that her copies are not particularly reliable, in the sense that they do not meet the recording standards of the present day. Goodall's copy and Huffman's redrawing leave out one of the most prominent features of the scene, namely a large elephant with bands on its back leg. A human figure and an aardvark (antbear, *Orycteropus afer*) are superimposed on the elephant's lower limbs, and the elephant itself is superimposed on what appears to be a zebra. Goodall and Huffman's copies also omit other animals in the immediate environs of the central figure. In the light of the interpretation which will be offered in due course, this selectivity may be seen as seriously compromising the persuasiveness of the account. It is of course inevitable that researchers will have to crop and frame rock art for the purposes of publication, but the larger context of an image may be crucial to its intelligibility (cf. Skotnes 1994, and further discussion in Chapter 7).

Despite these problems, Huffman's interpretation at least engages with the very prominent gender and/or sexual symbolism which characterises the motif, before proceeding to an ultimate interpretation in terms of shamanism. Garlake, on the other hand, all but ignores the gender symbolism, and, though he alerts us to the existence of male and indeterminate

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[5] But trance and supernatural potency are not necessarily interchangeable; and it has been argued that 'explanation' by reference to the vaguely defined concept of potency is inadequate (Solomon 1989).

Despite these problems, Huffman's interpretation at least engages with the very prominent gender and/or sexual symbolism which characterises the motif, before proceeding to an ultimate interpretation in terms of shamanism. Garlake, on the other hand, all but ignores the gender symbolism, and, though he alerts us to the existence of male and indeterminate obese, frontal perspective figures, he makes no effort to account for the fact that many examples are, indisputably, female.

Such failure to consider the gendering of figures or to motivate the gender ascription made also characterises Deacon's (1994) interpretation of the Springbokoog engraving. Though the figure by no means exhibits clear male characteristics, the assumption is immediately and unproblematically made that it is a male figure. The grounds for so doing are not immediately clear, although the figure does appear to be brandishing a bow. However, identifying the sex of figures by means of associated equipment is not a suitable method, since it simplistically assumes that the art pivots on a literal relationship between image and 'reality' (Solomon 1994a). It has long been a practice to identify male figures, implicitly or explicitly, by association with bows or quivers, and by and large this is probably appropriate. It has been argued previously, however, that ethnographic reports on actual restrictions against women touching men's hunting equipment cannot be taken as evidence that all painted figures with bows are male, since the art is an imaginative realm which is in critical respects free from the realities of the everyday (Solomon 1994a). In mythology, gender anomalous figures are found, such as the trickster-deity, /Kaggen; and even in the ethnographies, there are accounts of women using the bow and arrow in ritual contexts: for example, Traill (pers. comm. to Guenther 1986) recorded that among the !ko, the female initiate released from menarcheal seclusion shoots an arrow at a piece of gemsbok skin as part of the necessary ritual observances. Given that initiation is a probable referent of some paintings, such as the scene at Fulton's Rock, (Lewis-Williams 1981a) and others (Solomon 1989, 1992a, Parkington et al. 1991), other ritual correspondences to the image might have been sought by Deacon. One might also question the statement that the figure is urinating, in the light of other possibilities. The problem with Deacon's account is that other possibilities are not entertained. Though paintings of urinating men are very rare,

female figures in this posture, with the genital 'emission', are relatively well documented.[6] Comparing the engraved example with paintings from distant locations incorporates assumptions about the trans-regional unity of the art (see below), but it may be suggested that such contextualisation is both valid and necessary.

Mythic women in the South African rock art

It was noted above that although the paintings which highlighted the mythic women motif are found in Zimbabwe, other figures which may be seen as effectively the 'same' motif, are also found in South Africa (Figures 28, 29, 30, 31,32). Two well known published examples (Willcox 1956; Vinnicombe 1976a, Pager 1971) are found in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg, in the sites known as Willcox's Shelter (Giants Castle area) and Sorceror's Rock (Cathedral Peak area). A further example was located by Vinnicombe at Snap Shelter, near Mathabeng on the Orange River in Lesotho (though not politically part of South Africa, its proximity to the other two sites places it here in the category of 'South African' rock paintings). Other examples, at Arthur's Seat and Sebaaieni Cave (Figures 31, 32) were recorded by Pager (1971) and classed as "mythological" or "ceremonial" figures (Pager 1971, his Figure 37, nos. 6 and 7).

Vinnicombe (1976a, her Figure 81a-c) drew attention to the similarities among such figures, although she did not discuss their affinities with the Zimbabwean examples. Posturally, they are virtually identical: all are portrayed in frontal perspective, with splayed legs and arms raised; but they differ from the Zimbabwean examples in that they are shown without the genital 'stream'. All three are instead portrayed with a rounded protrusion between the thighs; the figure at Arthur's Seat has a similar emphasis. The Willcox's Shelter figure is shown with a rounded shape with a small indent, in red paint. In the centre of the shape is what may be the sacrum. The less elaborate example from Snap Shelter is virtually identical in form. The Sorceror's Rock example is also formally very similar, though it has two features which set it apart from the two other Drakensberg examples. It

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[6] The only other example of which I am aware is one tentatively described as urinating, in White Clan Shelter, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg.

is painted with a bar across the penis; [7] this and its slender body form indicate that it is a male figure. Nevertheless, *irrespective of its sex*, its formal features link it to the other two examples. An engendered approach can accommodate the existence of non-literal representations, including feminised male figures, masculinised female figures and gender-anomalous figures. This illustrates the difference between sex (as a biological attribute) and gender (as a cultural construction, amenable to manipulation).

Again, interpretation of the figures has been diverse. Vinnicombe (1976a) did not focus particularly on the images, apart from usefully highlighting their similarities; she suggested that the three within her survey area might derive from mythology in some way. Willcox (1956) thought similarly, suggesting that the figure in the shelter which bears his name might be a mythological being. Pager thought that the male example was a sorceror, whereas he described the other two examples as mythological or ceremonial figures. Pager's interpretation of one of the paintings as a sorceror is echoed in that offered for the Willcox's Shelter figure by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989:173), where the image is captioned "A hallucinatory figure". This refers to an argument which is central to the shamanistic thesis. Lewis-Williams and Dowson have argued that, in the altered state of consciousness experienced by trancers or shamans, hallucinations occur which are cross-culturally identical since they are functions of the same neurophysiological system which is shared by all modern humans (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1984a; Lewis-Williams 1987; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988; and cf. Thackeray et al. 1981; Maggs and Sealy 1983). Drawing inter alia on the neurophysiological work of Siegel and Jarvik (1975) and accounts of shamanism amongst the North American Coso Indians, Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988) have argued that the rock art depicts hallucinatory experience filtered through a cultural mesh. Lewis-Williams and Dowson have used this approach to explain the derivation of geometric and abstract designs and distorted or non-iconic images, as well as proposing that shamanic visions may be implicated in the very origin of art (if such an original moment exists; for critiques of teleology and origins research, cf. Delphy 1984; Solomon 1989; Conkey 1991). The Willcox's Shelter painting shows numerous departures from iconic human figuration, including animal features (ears, whiskers, paws), and is

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[7] Such figures are commonly referred to as 'infibulated', although it is not clear whether the bar is a symbolic or naturalistic feature.

hence interpreted by Lewis-Williams and Dowson as hallucinatory. However, as I have argued previously (1989, 1992a), departures from naturalistic imagery do not need to be attributed to determination by the nervous system, and indeed, such an interpretation tends to downplay the imaginative dimension of image-making. As such, the labelling of the Willcox's Shelter figure as hallucinatory is open to question.

Regional and trans-regional studies, and the 'pan-San cosmology'

The Zimbabwean mythic women and those from the Drakensberg show marked similarities, but their grouping - heuristic or otherwise - as the 'same' motif requires motivation. Garlake (pers. comm.) believes that the differences between the Zimbabwean and Drakensberg figures militate against their being grouped together; however, it will be argued below that the similarities are sufficient to consider them in the same category. In approaching the knotty problems of trans-regional similarity and difference, it is necessary to consider a key underlying assumption. This is that there was a common cosmological view that accounts for the occurrence of like figures across such vast tracts of southern Africa.

At the same time, stylistic (as opposed to formal) and other differences between the mythic women in different regions cannot be dismissed. For example, although many of the Zimbabwean examples are shown in pairs, this does not apply to the South African examples. The vexed question of the historical specificities of regional differentiations remains to be addressed.

The 'pan-San cosmology' was initially proposed by Schapera (1930 [1965]), and later discussed by Marshall (1957), when she commented on similarities between /Xam beliefs about supernatural potency/rain, and beliefs about *n!ow* which she had encountered among the !Kung. The notion was discussed in more detail by McCall (1970); he proposed it on the basis of the 'Wolf courts Girl' motif which recurs in San oral literature over a large area, with related imagery also occurring in other sub-Saharan African societies (see Solomon (1989) for further discussion). The notion of cosmological commonalities is fundamental also to the earlier work of Vinnicombe and Lewis-Williams, in the sense that

it grounds the method they developed: cautious use of Kalahari ethnographic materials for the explication of the imagery in South African paintings. In the shamanistic model, this cosmological explanation for commonalities in imagery between regions has lately been neglected, apparently in the face of the problems of historicity facing the 'ethnographic method'. Instead Lewis-Williams and his colleagues have referred to the common structure of the neurophysiological system of modern humans as the origin of imagery and hence implicated in the occurrence of similar motifs in different places and times (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1984a; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988, 1989).

The notion of the 'pan-San cosmology' has received various challenges. It has been argued that the concept is anti-historical, in that it assumes a static uniformity across thousands of kilometres and up to twenty seven thousand years (Mazel 1989; Solomon 1989; 1992a, Jolly 1995). The revisionist debate in Kalahari ethnography has inspired and fuelled such critiques; and, whatever the shortcomings of its protagonists' arguments (cf. Solway and Lee (1990); and Lee and Guenther's (1992) critiques of Wilmsen [1989]), it has been widely accepted that the San have to some extent been accorded antiquity at the expense of history. Since a debate which originated in historical studies (Elphick 1977), writers began to question the static identities assigned to Khoi and San (Schrire 1980, 1984). With reference to Botswana, Wilmsen (1989) and Wilmsen and Denbow (1990) have argued that contact between San and Tswana-speakers, in the context of sub-continental trade in the last millennium, belies any notion of pristine, isolated San groups, lifeways and economies. Rather, they argue, the apparent isolation of some San groups (such as the Dobe !Kung) in the twentieth century may be seen as the product of a process of 'enclavement' that resulted from the British takeover of Botswana in the late nineteenth century. Although it seems that empirical historical and archaeological evidence to substantiate the argument is scarce, the principles are provocative, and have strongly highlighted the need to consider changes wrought by (potentially) centuries of interactions between hunter-gatherers, pastoralists and farmers.

In rock art research, an article by Lewis-Williams (1984a), in which he proposed that San rock art constituted evidence for long term ideological continuities, prompted similar criticisms to those mentioned above. Critics have focussed on notions of a static and enduring ideology and identity; however, there is a tendency for 'cosmology' and

'ideology' to be conflated. Separation of these terms is useful in assessing the ongoing validity, or otherwise, of the notion of the 'pan-San cosmology'. It may be suggested that a shared cosmology does not have to entail an identical ideology, although there is an overlap. If 'cosmology' is taken *sensu strictu* to mean a "theory of, or set of beliefs concerning, the nature of the universe or cosmos" (Seymour-Smith 1986:55) and 'ideology', *sensu* Marx, as referring to "belief systems [as] the product of material conditions and their transformation into the realm of ideas or consciousness' held by the dominant class(es)" (Seymour-Smith 1986:145), the terms may be disentangled. For example, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland may be said to share a cosmology (e.g. a universe comprising earth, heaven and hell, presided over by a supreme deity), but nevertheless, they may be said to have different religious and political ideologies. If 'cosmology' and 'ideology' can legitimately be separated in this way, then the problem of the 'pan-San cosmology' can be reassessed.

If it can be established that San artists worked with the same or a similar cosmology, then it is that much easier to argue that formally and iconographically similar images may validly be grouped together for analytical purposes. The figures selected for attention here are formally similar, even almost identical in some cases; though they may differ on other dimensions, these are seen here as secondary for classificatory purposes (but not secondary in any absolute sense). This is a subjective decision to a significant degree, based on the assumption that the gross form and frontal perspective are *designed* to present as primary.

Regional and sub-continental scales of analysis

Most rock art research, including the pioneering work of Vinnicombe and Lewis-Williams, has proceeded on a regional basis. However, one of the strengths of the shamanistic model has been its wider applicability to other parts of the subcontinent (e.g. Maggs and Sealy 1983, Huffman 1983, Yates et al. 1985). Effectively, this has paved the way for different, much larger scale approaches, which acknowledge a certain conceptual, iconographic and technical unity in San art, despite well-documented differences in style and medium (such as engravings). Even regional iconographic diversity does not necessarily compromise this unity: for example, the arts of Natal, the south western Cape and Zimbabwe all

prominently feature large herbivores, with the eland and elephant respectively taking a certain pride of place in the first two regions. Though for certain purposes it may be both useful and necessary to distinguish the paintings of different regions as different arts (Skotnes 1991), demonstrable commonalities also demand that the art of a particular region be contextualised in relation to the larger body of San art.

With reference to the engraved figure at Springbokoog mentioned above (Figure 37), it was suggested that a trans-regional comparison might have prompted a different identification and interpretation. Whilst 'urinating figures' are rare at best, the posture and features of the Springbokoog engraving link it more closely with the other examples of the mythic woman motif, and such a comparison broadens the range of possible affinities to be considered. If the 'pan-San cosmology' is accepted to any degree - and it is implicitly accepted by all proponents of the shamanistic thesis - then it is vital to consider images in terms of San art as a larger 'whole'. For that reason, the present study draws on images from Zimbabwe, the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg, and the south western Cape, and (tangentially) the Orange Free State, with reference also made to a published example from elsewhere (Namibia).

The adoption of a project which works on the scale of the southern subcontinent, rather than, for example, sub-regions in the Drakensberg, entails particular methodological choices, notably with regard to what is known in conventional, scientific archaeology, as 'sampling'. Detailed accounts of field work are presented in Chapter 4. Initial field work was aimed at viewing as many examples as possible of the mythic women in north eastern Zimbabwe. Four major painted sites were visited (containing four paired examples, and two unpaired examples), and all the available published literature relating to the motif in Zimbabwe was studied.

Field work was centred on the Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg, conceptually because of the occurrence there of five similar figures (published by Vinnicombe 1976; Pager 1971), and practically due to the facilitation afforded by the Archaeology Department of the Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg. The rock art slide collection at the Natal Museum was examined in its entirety (Appendix 1), along with various other facsimile copies. All major works describing the South African rock art were consulted, with Vinnicombe (1976a) and

Pager (1971) of particular utility. Pager's comprehensive study (1971) of seventeen painted sites in the Ndedema Gorge provided a complete regional database, as well as the basis for some rudimentary quantificative research (Appendix 2). Sites were visited in the northern, central and southern Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. Most of the examples in the south western Cape were brought to my attention by colleagues at the University of Cape Town. It is likely that I viewed well over a million discrete images during the course of the study.

A similar strategy was used for the ethnographic material. All principal anthropological works were consulted; all published material from the Bleek and Lloyd Collection; all available secondary works on the Bleek and Lloyd Collection, and a variety of other texts dealing with (Khoi)San oral traditions, myths and narratives. Much initial information was derived from secondary sources, and then checked in the primary source, the Bleek and Lloyd Collection. Given its vastness, it was not possible to study the entire collection. To gauge the extent to which reliance on published extracts and secondary sources had affected my sampling, I read about 35 of the 153 notebooks which form the core of the collection from cover to cover, thereafter selecting for entries of especial relevance or interest. Such pragmatic and subjective choices were entailed by the limitations imposed by a study of this nature, at the same time as such subjectivity is a vital part of it. The notion of an utterly comprehensive - and therefore atemporal - study may be ontologically and epistemologically unsound (see Chapter 3). Other primary sources of Khoisan oral narratives (e.g. Barnes n.d.; Guenther 1986, 1989; Thomas 1950; Thomas 1959) were consulted where available.

'Sampling strategies' were thus largely determined by opportunity and resources, and a subjective judgement of what constituted 'enough'. In view of the failures of quantificative approaches (see Chapter 8, Appendix 2), obtaining a statistically adequate sample is not possible in the way that it would be in a science laboratory - a conclusion which Lewis-Williams reached many years ago (Lewis-Williams 1983). It must remain my considered opinion that, at either first or second hand, I viewed a wide ranging spectrum and 'representative proportion' of Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg paintings; familiarised myself with the contents of most of the well known sites, and a high proportion of the lesser known ones; and became suitably acquainted with (Khoi)San oral literature in general, and

the relevant sections of the Bleek and Lloyd Collection in particular. Although (with some exceptions) paintings from the Orange Free State, Eastern Cape and Namibia were not studied in detail, the range - from north eastern Zimbabwe to the south western Cape - was deemed sufficient for the task in hand.

This task - to render the mythic women motif more intelligible, and to develop new ways of conceptualising South African rock art - is a movement of circularity (but not, I hope, a circular argument). It is proposed that one key to such understanding is theorisation (rather than, or as well as, the time-honoured archaeological strategy: tangible, physical Discovery). Towards this end, key theoretical concepts and their implications are described and evaluated in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Aspects of theory and rock art research

"Why have archaeologists produced a prehistory of genderless, faceless blobs?" (Tringham 1991:97).

The people of the past are the principal subject matter of archaeology, and archaeologists have a uniquely direct engagement with the physical remains of those people and their cultures. Yet, many archaeological narratives appear as disembodied accounts of a depopulated past. A great deal of current archaeology may be seen as environmental rather than primarily human (pre-)history. The reconstructed past has only too commonly been populated by strategies, techniques, technologies, assemblages and diets, which seem to exist almost independently of human hand, mind, and experience. Even in the literature which synthesises diverse specialist analyses to present the 'big picture' of South African (pre-)history, it is sometimes difficult to believe that the subject concerns people who once lived and breathed. To some extent, this is the legacy of approaches which draw on models derived from the natural sciences, where the epistemological underpinnings precluded enquiry into those aspects of human history and 'behaviour' that are not amenable to empirical proof. However, postprocessual archaeologies, by means of epistemological and theoretical shifts, offer analyses which are more stringently theorised, less scientistic and more sensitive to the socio-cultural, rather than the technical, dimensions of history. Such approaches have been described, inter alia, as an "archaeology of mind" (Renfrew 1982; Leone 1982).

In South African rock art research, innovations were initiated in the 1970s which may be seen as anticipating the movement achieved by postprocessual archaeology in the 1980s and since. Earlier work invoking structuralist theory (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1972; Vinnicombe 1976a) focussed on the social, cultural and 'cognitive' dimensions of the Later Stone Age (LSA); Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1994) have noted the contribution of the sub-discipline of rock art research in the development of social theoretical frameworks for the Later Stone Age. The innovations within rock art research have subsequently reverberated throughout the discipline. Insofar as rock art studies have restored past people to a prominent place in accounts of the past, they constitute a

significant advance over the disembodied and depopulated accounts which were formerly often traditional fare. However, there are still grounds for seeing rock art research as perpetuating the production of 'disembodied history': although San rock art research has highlighted human cognition and action (as opposed to analyses which foreground artefacts rather than agents), the accounts offered are still 'disembodied'. Like much archaeology, including some postprocessual archaeology, rock art studies remain geared towards being an archaeology of mind. In other words, the term 'an archaeology of mind' is at one level a metaphor for humanistic archaeologies, but at another level it may be seen as exemplifying a mind : body dichotomy. The fact that the study of excavated bodies is located in the discipline of physical anthropology may be seen as a consequence of the fact that archaeology implicitly eschews the body. Such separations may be seen as exemplifying a nature : culture dichotomy, as well as a mind : body dichotomy, which is pervasive within archaeological thought (Ingold 1993).

Shilling (1993:8-9) has argued that "Having been influenced profoundly by Cartesian thought, sociology has followed a longstanding tradition in philosophy by accepting a mind/body dichotomy and focussing on the mind as that which defines humans as social beings". His critique is also appropriate for archaeology, which, like sociology, operates according to a dualistic approach to the body. In rock art research, analysts have in general proceeded from a naturalistic assumption about the human body in which it is viewed as "the pre-social, biological basis on which the superstructures of the self and society are founded" (Shilling 1993:41). Despite the fact that human figures are among the most frequently painted images in San art, no specific and sustained attention has been paid to this emphasis. No attempt has been made to understand why human figures are such favoured subjects for painting, whereas, for example, a great deal of energy has been invested in exploring the significance of the high frequency of paintings of eland. Although it must surely be accepted that quantitative approaches in general are not useful for establishing the 'meaning of the art', the artists' selection for human figures begs attention, and may be open to explanation, just as the absence of human figures in some religious arts is amenable to understanding.

Iconographical studies have long dominated in rock art studies, but the specific ways in which human figures are imaged has been largely neglected. Given a scene composed of

human figures it has been more common for researchers to ask what the figures are, rather than why they are imaged in the way that they are; for example, interest has been in the question 'Are these figures hunters or rain-makers?' (i.e. *what* the figures represent), rather than 'How and why are they represented in the way that they are?' There are a few exceptions to this criticism; for example, Lewis-Williams and his colleagues, for example, have discussed specific postures, the portrayal of figures with animal features, and other physical characteristics of human figures, principally in relation to shamanism. Nevertheless, implicit in most interpretations is an assumption that human figures are in themselves pre-given entities which do not require further attention, with priority being assigned rather to the activities in which those figures are engaged. This may be understood as the product of a naturalistic bias. In contrast, it is argued here that human figures are not merely natural or biological forms, and that a theorised understanding of the human figure in the art is a necessary prerequisite for understanding the activities in which figures are engaged.

Parallel to this concern is one which I have previously addressed (e.g. Solomon 1989, 1992a,b, 1994a,b, in press), namely neglected questions of gender, and of sexual imagery and symbolism in the art. The charge that rock art research has been 'androcentric' has been accepted by workers within the discipline (e.g. Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1994a:7), and, hopefully, this awareness will effect necessary changes. The dominant model in rock art research focusses inexorably on the (usually male) shaman, and on the spiritual, ritual and religious affinities of the art. As such, it privileges the ideational and cognitive, at the expense of the physical and corporeal. (The implications of this receive further attention below). In view of this 'androcentric' heritage in rock art studies, the imaging of female or feminine figures will receive primary (but not exclusive) attention in this study.

Ingold (1993) has presented a perspective on apparent dichotomies in archaeological thinking which is particularly valuable because it engages explicitly with both archaeological concerns and visual art. This work proceeds from a critique of the way in which accounts of the past rest on the notion of human agents acting in, and on, an exterior, externalised landscape. Such an approach, in Ingold's view, unjustifiably "reproduces the dichotomy between nature and humanity" (1993:156). As an alternative to

such a separation, it is proposed that "organisms may be said to incorporate, in their bodily forms, the life cycle processes that give rise to them" (1993:157). The aim (and achievement) of this approach is the reconceptualisation of the relations between humans and 'environments' in such a way as to avoid structuralist tenets which work to "prioritize form over process" (1993:156) and which postulate the relation between humans and environment "as a movement of *inscription*, whereby some pre-existing pattern, template or programme, whether genetic or cultural, is 'realized' in a substantive medium" (1993:156; original italics). The relation is seen instead as mutually constitutive:

"Like organism and environment, body and landscape are complementary terms: each implies the other, alternately as figure and ground. The forms of the landscape are not...prepared in advance for creatures to occupy, nor are the bodily forms of these creatures independently specified in their genetic makeup. Both sets of terms are generated and sustained in and through the processual unfolding of a total field of relations that cuts across the emergent interface between organism and environment" (Ingold 1993:156).

Rather than approaching the problem in terms of the social/political construction of the body, Ingold speaks of the "dichotomy between nature and humanity" and of "life cycle processes" as being incorporated in organisms, thus extending the analysis to include 'natural' processes as influential. An advantage of this approach is that it potentially dissolves the opposition of nature : culture. This has implications for the disembodied historical accounts that were criticised above, and offers a way of integrating human and environmental history/archaeology. Another important feature of the approach is its emphasis on process and time. In Ingold's work, as in this study, the intertwined notions of 'temporality' and 'embodiment' are key terms.

Ingold suggests that there is a need to "bring the perspectives of archaeology and anthropology into unison", in order to "move beyond the sterile opposition between the naturalistic view of the landscape as a neutral, external backdrop to human activities, and the culturalistic view that every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space" (1993:152). He proposes that a concept of 'dwelling' (and archaeological practice as a process of 'dwelling') may address epistemological problems inherent in trying to understand the traces of the past. This may be understood in relation to the etymology of

the word 'expert', which derives from the word for 'experience'. The concept of temporality is illustrated by Ingold by reference to a painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder - not to actual archaeological traces or landscapes as such.

An attempt will be made here to adapt the insights offered by Ingold for the study of San rock art. It is proposed that this approach fuses insights from a range of disciplines, including archaeology, anthropology and art history, which often cannot reconcile their perspectives, technologies and apparati (cf. Preziosi 1989), and that it offers new ways of rendering San art more intelligible.

The two concepts which are employed as primary analytical devices in this study, namely embodiment and temporality, require further discussion. It is proposed that these concepts permit further understanding of the human figure in San art, as well as exploration and critique of theoretical, epistemological, methodological and interpretative problems in studies of San art. Ingold's approach may also be situated in relation to other work which employs notions of temporality and embodiment.

Embodiment

Theorisation of 'the body' has become a recurrent theme in contemporary writings in a variety of disciplines - history, anthropology, sociology and literary criticism, to name a few. This interest is obviously a reflection of contemporary concerns, and Shilling (1993:39) identifies four factors which contextualise it: the inputs of feminism; demographic changes in the West; the rise of consumer culture; and "a growing crisis in our knowledge of what the body is". In the contemporary world, technological developments, from organ transplants to virtual reality and cyberpunk, have redefined the boundaries of the human body, with profound implications for how 'the body' is conceptualised. Naturalistic views have of necessity been eroded and adjusted, and stress has instead been placed on the extent to which bodies are shaped and controlled in social contexts. The works of Michel Foucault (e.g. 1973, 1979), Pierre Bourdieu (1977), and a plethora of feminist writers have been particularly influential in this regard. A brief overview of some salient aspects of this work will serve to illustrate and situate the concept of embodiment.

It is generally accepted that the roots of the modern era lie in the seventeenth century: the 'Age of Enlightenment', of voyages of discovery, medical and scientific endeavour founded on reason, and a markedly different social order. As Barker (1984:10) has described it:

"The political upheaval of the mid-(seventeenth) century established...a new set of connections between subject and discourse, subject and polity, and in so doing, altered fundamentally the terms between which these mutually constitutive relations held. In the space of a relatively few years, a new set of relations between state and citizen, body and soul, language and meaning was fashioned. The older sovereignty of the Elizabethan period was disassembled, and in its place was established a conjunction of novel social spaces and activities, bound together by transformed lines of ideological and physical force, among which new images of the body and its passions were a crucial, if increasingly occluded element".

Foucault's analyses of the transition to modernity (e.g. 1973, 1979; Rabinow 1984) illustrate the ways in which the discourses associated with particular historical conjunctures are implicated in political power via the physical control of the very bodily movements of citizens. New disciplinary regimes produce new subjectivities, as individuals 'internalise' the new discourses, at the level of both 'body' and 'soul'. The current ethos becomes embodied in and by subjects, part of their behaviour, demeanour and physical manoeuvring in the world. The 'new images of the body' which Barker notes are inextricably historical, not mere pre-existing biological entities. Barker comments further:

"If the new ensemble of terms and relations is established conjuncturally around a particular corporeal status, this is not because the body is the essential foundation of the structure. Not only would it be wrong to assign such ontological pre-eminence to any one moment in the ensemble, but it is a related and relational body which is at stake. However necessary it may be to isolate the body for analytic purposes, the body in question is not a hypostatized object, still less a biological mechanism of given desires and needs acted on externally by controls and enticements, but a relation in a system of liaisons which are material, discursive, psychic, sexual, but without stop or centre. It would be better to speak of a certain 'bodiliness' than of 'the body'. It is the instance of a certain suturing of

discourse and desire to the organism (itself, of course, a historical entity although subject to a longer, evolutionary timespan...), and thus fully social in its being and in its ideological valency. Rather than an extra-historical residue, invariant and mute, this body is as ready for coding and de-coding, as intelligible both in its presence and in its absence, as any of the more frequently recognised historical objects. The site of an operation of power, of an exercise of meaning" (1984:12-13).

Given that Foucault's analysis is directed at the emergence of modern societies, rather than the different societies preceding them, of what possible value might this work be for formulating or addressing questions regarding the human figure in San art? San art arises in 'pre-modern', or 'traditional' social formations, which are not subject to the same discursive forces or disciplinary regimens as those of post-Enlightenment Europe. Indeed, following the arguments of Fabian (1983), there are dangers inherent in the very distinction of 'modern' and 'pre-modern', since such temporal distinctions have been implicated in anthropological constructions of 'otherness'. A similar temporal distinction is used by Barker when he refers to the pre-Enlightenment subject as 'the pre-disciplinary body'. Such a temporal distinction seems to imply that 'pre-modern' societies are without discipline, rather than subject to different disciplines. Consideration of the work of Bourdieu (1977) on the 'traditional' society of the Algerian Kabyle helps to address some of the problems which Foucault's work presents in relation to the study of non-western societies which are not the heirs of Enlightenment thought.

'Embodiment' is one important strand of Bourdieu's influential *"Outline of a Theory of Practice"* (1977). Aspects of his work are of archaeological and historical, as well as anthropological interest. For example, he argues that:

"Every group entrusts to bodily automatisms those principles most basic to it and most indispensable to its conservation. In societies which lack any other recording and objectifying instrument, inherited knowledge can survive only in its embodied state. Among other consequences, it follows that it is never detached from the body which bears it...The body is thus continuously mingled with all the knowledge it reproduces..." (1977:218).

Like Foucault, Bourdieu emphasises the status of the body as co-extensive with discourse or knowledge - an epistemological point. Also like Foucault, Bourdieu is critical of marxist tenets, but, with his emphasis on practice and agency, he is concerned with retaining a materialist basis for his analysis. It has been argued that Foucault's analysis of the 'discursive body' causes it "to vanish as a material or biological phenomenon. The biological, physical or material body can never be grasped by the Foucauldian approach as its existence is permanently deferred behind the grids of meaning imposed by discourse" (Shilling 1993:80).

Bourdieu's work is of particular value for the analysis in hand because he deals with the discipline of the body (or 'bodily hexis') in so-called traditional contexts: "If all societies...set such store on the seemingly most insignificant details of *dress*, *bearing*, physical and verbal *manners*, the reason is that treating the body as a memory, they entrust to it in abbreviated and practical, i.e. mnemonic, form the fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of the culture...nothing seems more ineffable, more communicable, more inimitable, and therefore, more precious, than the values given body, *made* body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as "stand up straight" or "don't hold your knife in your left hand"..." (1977:94; original italics).

From this point of view, which is, like Foucault's, antipathetic towards naturalistic conceptualisations of the body, bodily attitudes are in some way indexical of a particular social ethos, although this is not something that can unproblematically be translated or 'read off'. Broadly speaking though, it is possible to suggest on the basis of Bourdieu's argument that, although the range of bodily dispositions in San art is not amenable to decoding according to a pre-given set of rules, the attitudes must be seen as specific to a particular society and as arising out of that society's practices in a finite social and historical situation.

Bourdieu's analysis of the body is, however, based on the material body, whereas the present analysis is concerned with representations of the body. These representations are filtered through particular contexts of production. The currently dominant view (not

necessarily shared by this writer) is that San shamanism constitutes an all-encompassing context for the production of the art, and that shamanic rituals and shamanistic religious beliefs explain the features of human figures. For example, Lewis-Williams has convincingly argued that figures in the forward-bending, arms-back posture are figures involved in the trance dance (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1981a). (Implicit question = 'What are they?' Answer = 'Shamans'.) According to a !Kung man, shamans "hold their arms backwards when they are asking god to put more potency into their bodies" (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:44). It is further explained that the *nau* spot on the back of the neck is the place associated with the topping up of potency (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:44). Although this is a persuasive explanation of *what* the bending figures represent, questions remain. Why is the *nau* spot on the back of the neck? Why must the arms be held backwards? Are there not other postures in which the *nau* spot could be presented to the deity? Within what bodily schemes do these beliefs arise? Such questions have not been asked because of the bias of the shamanistic model towards the mind, cognition and ideation, at the expense of the body.

In terms of the suitability of the accounts of embodiment outlined for the study of the human figure in San art, it may be argued that it is not only living bodies which incorporate social ethoi, but that images thereof do likewise. Although powerful arguments have been formulated for viewing San art as metaphorical, symbolic and non-literal, this does not mean that the images bear no relation to 'reality'; indeed it is difficult to see how this could be the case. Lewis-Williams and Dowson's interpretation of the 'arms-back' figures shows that the art in all likelihood incorporates literal or iconic depictions; some iconic depictions were interpreted by Lewis-Williams (1981a:6) as "icons fulfilling a symbolic function". It is unacceptable to view the rock art as divorced from ordinary or mundane reality; a putative ritual context does not effect this separation (Solomon in press). As Bourdieu states, "Rites take place because and only because they find their *raison d'etre* in the conditions of existence" (1977:115). Moreover, ritual does not necessarily entail obscure symbolic transposition and translation; "Rite is indeed in some cases no more than a practical *mimesis* of the natural process that needs to be facilitated" (Bourdieu 1977:116). As such, there seems to be no reason to believe that the postures and attitudes of human figures in the art are extra-ordinary or specific to the medium of image making (except in cases of 'mythological' figures, therianthropes and the like), and, hence, Bourdieu's account of

embodiment can be transferred. Indeed, it seems most likely that representations of the human body amplify, rather than alter, their symbolic dimensions. (For an account of the female figure as sign in San art, see Solomon 1989, 1992a).

Embodiment and social differentiation

Bourdieu and Foucault offer perspectives on the ways in which bodies in general are socially, discursively and practically constructed and produced, while Bourdieu also presents a detailed account of gender symbolism. As Wiley (1992:62) notes, similarities exist between feminist and Foucauldian conceptualisations of power. However, it has been feminist researchers in particular who have explored and clarified the way in which social divisions and power relations are embodied in *gendered* subjects. The literature in this field is too vast to summarise; not only have contributors ranged across all disciplines, but it is difficult to select single authors who in some way exemplify the theoretical development in question. Amongst the most influential writers are those who have been called 'New French feminists' (see Marks and de Courtivron (1981) for an anthology); however, feminist sociologists (e.g. Delphy 1984) anthropologists (e.g. Moore 1986, Ortner 1974; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Strathern 1980, Weiner 1992) and literary critics (c.f. Moi 1985) have also made substantial contributions. In archaeology, the work of Conkey and her colleagues (e.g. Conkey and Spector 1984; Gero and Conkey 1991) and Wiley (e.g. 1991, 1992) has been particularly ground-breaking. It must be sufficient merely to say that a spectrum of feminist theories have amply demonstrated that the non-natural construction of male/masculine and female/feminine bodies both 'reflects' and reproduces gender differences and unequal statuses, by means of mystifications of the meanings of physical/sexual difference, in accordance with, and in the service of, social inequality. Recent sociological research has taken such work further by considering how class and other social divisions are similarly embodied in human beings (Shilling (1993) presents an overview of such developments in sociology).

The idea that social distinctions are signalled via human images in the rock art is far from new, although it has not always been explicitly supported by theory. Vinnicombe (1976a) argued that figures distinguished by larger size and clothing (skin cloaks, known as

karosses) made reference to the social sub-group of shamans. This idea has been adapted by Dowson (1993; in press), who suggests that as the role of the shaman changed through time, images of shamans did likewise (although how this argument is to be supported in the absence of dates for the paintings is mysterious). An approach to the issue of embodied social divisions in the rock art has been central to my previous research (see Chapter 2). The current research is in many ways a continuation and extension of that work.

Time and temporalities

The process of embodiment inescapably requires time to occur; to view the body in isolation from temporal processes is to adopt the static approach which is characteristic of much medical discourse, knowledge and representation (Jordanova 1989; Powrie 1993). Even in archaeology, which acquires a disciplinary status distinct from history partly by virtue of its focus on 'deep time' or long term history, there is seldom any exposition of what this time 'is'. With reference to anthropology, Gell has stated that "one of the reasons why anthropologists are insufficiently critical when it comes to writing about time is because they have no very clear philosophical ideas on this topic anyway. They are puzzled and mystified by the whole subject" (1992:149).

Time and temporality are not synonymous. Ingold describes temporality as follows: it "is not chronology (as opposed to history), and it is not history (as opposed to chronology). By chronology, I mean any regular system of dated time intervals, *in which* events are said to have taken place. By history, I mean any series of events which may be dated in time according to their occurrence in one or another chronological interval...temporality entails a perspective that contrasts radically with the one...that sets up history and chronology in a relation of complementary oppositions" (1993:157; original italics).

One way of accessing the notion of temporality is via critiques of time models which have been proposed. It is commonly argued that most accounts of time have been modelled on space; these are linear, geometric models of time (Faulconer and Williams 1985; Gell 1992:151). This (mutable) relationship of space and time is a topic of ongoing interest. Bell (1978, cited by Harvey 1990:201) has argued that the organisation of space has

"become the primary aesthetic problem of mid-twentieth century culture as the problem of time was the primary problem of the first decades of this century". Harvey continues, citing Jameson (1984), who "attributes the post-modern shift to a crisis in our experience of space and time" (Harvey 1990:201). Similarly, Giddens has focussed on the inseparability or 'mutuality' of space and time (cf. Giddens 1979:199; 201-206). In archaeology, it seems that concepts of time, like the body, may be related to a naturalistic bias.

Rather than seeing time as modelled on space, and consisting of a linear series of dimensionless, empty points, some writers, following Heidegger, have proposed that "time is neither spatially grounded nor contentless" (Heidegger 1962, cited by Faulconer and Williams 1985:1184). Rather, "Heidegger grounded our understanding of space in the notion of time...In Heidegger's view...time is *essentially* content: It *exists as* activity, such as concernful dealing and attention, rather than being "filled up" by such activity" (Faulconer and Williams 1985:1184; original italics). And: "Heidegger argued that temporality is the essence of being, which is to say that we do not have knowledge of and relation to things through the static and the necessary, but always in the active and the possible" (1985:1183). The epistemological implications of this shift will receive attention below.

The gist of Heidegger's arguments may, simplistically, be seen as shifting the terrain from 'objective' to 'subjective' time - although Heidegger himself rejected "the Kantian dichotomies of subject and object" (Harvey 1990:207). Many writers find Heidegger problematic (e.g. Gell 1992), few can resist comment on links between his philosophy and his prolonged Nazi sympathies, and many settle instead for a moderate version of Heidegger's reconceptualisations of notions of time. Harvey, for example, rejects naturalised time without wholesale adoption of Heideggerian philosophy, arguing that "it is important to challenge the idea of a single and objective sense of time or space against which we can measure the diversity of human conceptions and perceptions. I shall not argue for a total dissolution of the objective-subjective distinction, but insist, rather, that we recognise the multiplicity of the objective qualities which space and time can express, and the role of human practices in their construction...neither time nor space can be assigned objective meanings independently of material processes, and...it is only through

investigation of the latter that we can properly ground our concepts of the former" (Harvey 1990:203-4).

At the same time though, there can be problems with asserting that different people have different temporal perceptions and schemata. For example, Fabian (1983) has given an account of how anthropology has used time to perpetuate notions of the anthropological subject as 'other', and declines to consider the time reckoning of 'the other'. In a similar vein, Gell believes that all societies operate with the same kind of time to a greater or lesser degree, and argues that claims that different attitudes to time can be linked to modern or premodern societies cannot be sustained (1992:290). He concedes that "Different societies or social strata, operating under different ecological circumstances, employing different technologies and faced with different kinds of long term and short term planning problems, construct quite different vocabularies for handling temporal relationships" (Gell 1992:89).

Gell distinguishes two 'types' of time, namely A-series time and B-series time. In the A-series, there is "differentiation among events according to criteria of pastness, presentness and futurity", whereas in the B-series, events are "classified temporally according to whether they occur before or after one another" (1992:151). A-series time is thus relational, whereas B-series time is linear. Gell (1992:154) argues that "A-series temporal considerations apply in the human sciences because agents are always embedded in a context of [sic] situation about whose nature and evolution they entertain moment-to-moment beliefs, whereas B-series temporal considerations also apply because agents build up temporal 'maps' of their world and its penumbra of possible worlds whose B-series attributes reflect the genuinely B-series layout of the world itself". In a useful analogy, Gell compares "the A-series attributes of events and the visual attributes of spatial objects" (1992:158): a rectangular card on a desk may appear trapezoidal when viewed from a different angle, but, empirically, it remains rectangular. Similarly, depending on one's relation to the events in question, time may possess (or appear to possess) different attributes.

At the end of the day, the distinction between A and B-series time can be conceptualised (again at the risk of over-simplification) as the difference between subjective,

lived/experienced, qualitative time (A-series) and objective, measured, quantitative time (B-series). Although Gell's favoured view is that B-series time is primary, A-series time is nevertheless seen as of key importance; he believes that the distinction between these two kinds of time "is not only of parochial philosophical interest, but can be seen to have ramifications extending throughout the human sciences, including under that heading economics, sociology, psychology, geography etc., as well as anthropology" (1992:154). It is suggested that archaeology might profitably be added to this list.

However, Gell's claim that B series time is ontologically real time (the implication being that it is always primary) may be treated with some caution, since it may equally be argued that the primacy of one or the other is context dependent; Gell's suggestion that A-series considerations are especially important in the human sciences suggests such context dependency. It would seem that Ingold's view rejects the ontology which Gell proposes. Ingold draws upon the A/B-series distinction in the approach he proposes for archaeology, which he describes as 'temporalising the landscape'. He suggests that only through so doing "can we move beyond the division that has afflicted most inquiries up to now, between the 'scientific' study of an atemporalised nature, and the 'humanistic' study of a dematerialized history. And no discipline is better placed to take this step than archaeology" (1993:172).

With reference to South African archaeology, the A/B-series distinction helps to apprehend the differences between the approaches and products of conventional archaeology and those in rock art research, and the problems of integrating the two. In many ways, this focusses on the problem of dating the art.

With a paltry number of exceptions, the rock paintings cannot be dated, a highly problematic situation which seems likely to persist for some time to come. Although Lewis-Williams (1993) has argued that enough of the paintings can be dated to allay misgivings, I believe this is overstating the case. From the standpoint of 'mainstream' archaeology, which is centrally concerned with chronologies and sequences, this severely compromises the value of the rock art for historical purposes; indeed, rock art research, before its rejuvenation (largely through the efforts of Vinnicombe and Lewis-Williams) had become something of a peripheral interest in the constellation of archaeological endeavour.

This separation may be analysed in terms of rock art knowledge being in deep tension with conventional archaeology. San rock art studies have developed along a different trajectory, in which B-series temporal considerations are secondary. On the other hand, B-series 'physical time', measured and linear, is absolutely fundamental to conventional archaeological narratives, and is commonly regarded, it seems, as the superior and appropriate frame for understanding the past. The gap between the approaches cannot simply be envisaged in terms of affiliation to the A theory or the B theory, since the absence of dates does not necessarily mean that rock art research operates in terms of the A theory, but only that the lack of dates precludes its study in B theory terms. Nevertheless, the B-series grounding of 'mainstream' archaeology is intertwined with particular epistemological tenets which are in conflict with those underwriting contemporary approaches in rock art research.

Lewis-Williams has raised this problem in a commentary on contemporary South African archaeology: "There is a need to review the chronocentrism of present-day southern African archaeology. The accurate, chronological linearity implied by excavation sections and also enshrined in Western concepts of time has varied and profound implications for archaeological narratives" (1993:49). Though not explicitly stated as such, this charge is closely allied to the extensive and incisive critique of empiricism which Lewis-Williams has formulated (Lewis-Williams 1983, 1984b; Lewis-Williams and Loubser 1986). However, it may be suggested that matters are far more complicated, and that it is necessary to explore what *kind* of time is central in chronocentric approaches. This may profitably be seen as B-series time, with scant acknowledgement of the A-series. The replacement of one temporal scheme for another is not, however, the solution, and if Gell's arguments are accepted, both A and B series time must be accounted for.

Such an approach is implicit in that put forward by Conkey and Spector (1984), in the argument that the scale of analysis of archaeological materials is at odds with the scale at which the materials were generated and accumulated. Their contentions were directed towards a critique of the exclusion of gender in archaeology, illustrating how implicit temporal factors may have political implications (in other words, the conventional time scale was implicated in analyses which helped render women invisible in archaeological analyses). This work may be interpreted as an early effort to analyse different

temporalities, comparable in some ways to questions of integrating A and B series time[1]. Conkey and Spector were not demanding that analysis should take place on another temporal scale, but implicitly suggesting that there is a need for integration of variable temporalities. It is important that a particular scale of analysis be recognised as an analytical frame, and that its semblance to the past is of a particular order of similitude (cf. Conkey 1991). Other modes or scales of archaeological knowledge, differently framed, are also possible, and to insist that one mode is always primary is unacceptable.

The claim that knowledge of the past is legitimate only when cast in the mould of dated intervals (i.e. B-series temporal considerations) cannot be sustained. Such a claim may be seen in terms of the ongoing allegiance of archaeology to an epistemology derived from the natural sciences, in which atemporal certainties are sought (Faulconer and Williams 1985:1183). It adopts and propagates a time basis which prioritises a particular 'viewing position' - one which claims an immutable and transcendent view. However, it may be argued that the more interesting perspective is one that is founded on the temporal nature of human experience and the inevitable relationality of humans to things and events. Such an approach is more appropriate for the human sciences. From this point of view, the different relationality of contemporary Western thought and that of the producers of the art becomes important.

Although developments within South African rock art research have rippled through the discipline, rock art researchers cannot claim to have achieved integration of different temporalities. The acknowledgement of A-series considerations is not necessarily a feature of rock art research, which, in its continued dependence on structuralist tenets, is in many ways 'anti-time'. Thus it is not a matter of rock art research acting as some kind of corrective to conventional archaeology (it seems to me that this is implicit in Lewis-Williams' (1993) critique of archaeologists' chronophilia); rather, both branches of archaeology can benefit from paying attention to under-examined notions of time, and the epistemological and ontological implications thereof. The scope of the notions of temporality and embodiment requires further discussion, particularly by reference to its ontological and epistemological implications.

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[1] Another approach which addresses temporal issues is presented by Marshack (1991a,b); he analyses Upper Palaeolithic female imagery as 'time-factored' and 'storied'.

Epistemological and ontological considerations

Ingold sees 'temporalising the landscape' as a challenge to those approaches "whose ontological foundation is an imagined separation between the human perceiver and the world'; such approaches perpetuate 'an insistent dualism, between object and subject, the material and the ideal, operational and cognized, 'emic' and 'etic'...". The notion of temporality entails rejection of "the division between inner and outer worlds - respectively of mind and matter, meaning and substance" (1993:154).

This ontology is shared by approaches to embodiment, which challenge the notion of an externalised society in relation to an impermeable, bounded body. In the same vein, Ingold elaborates on temporality as an approach which rejects the idea of the detached objective spectator: "The notion that we can stand aside and observe the passage of time is founded upon an illusion of disembodiment" (1993:159). This corresponds to the idea of activity constituting time, rather than time being the matrix for activity, as expressed by Heidegger (1962); and cf. Gurvitch (1964); Harvey (1990). The links with A-series time are also clear. A-series time is inseparable from the perception of it; Gell draws on Husserlian phenomenology (e.g. Husserl 1966) and his model of internal time consciousness to argue that "time perception is co-extensive with perception *per se,* and more generally, that time perception is co-extensive with cognition as a process" (Gell 1992:233).

The concept of temporality has particular epistemological implications. For example, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the A and B theories is that in the former, truth is held to be dependent on time, whereas in the latter, truth is not held to be time dependent (Gell 1992:157). Faulconer and Williams (1985) extend this, arguing that:

"Traditionally (sic) it has been assumed that explanations are to be given in terms of something that cannot change. It was reasoned that if there is to be knowledge, that knowledge must have some unity with itself, and if it has unity with itself, then its principles cannot be different from one moment to the next. Thus, the best explanations, the only ones to render the subject intelligible, would be atemporal and strictly necessary. In this tradition, causality could offer explanations only in terms of atemporal, causal laws that are not

obvious in our everyday dealing with the world...natural science has not been particularly hurt by giving precedence to atemporality. Human events, however, more clearly depend on time" (1985:1183).

Suggesting that "Temporality is the proper and productive grounding for the human sciences" (1985:1179), Faulconer and Williams elaborate on the relevance of hermeneutics as developed by Gadamer (e.g. 1975). From a hermeneutic perspective, "Truth as temporality is manifest in *how* things are, not *what* they are" (1985:1185). This may be compared with the argument presented above that appropriate questioning in rock art research would be served by a shift from iconography (with the emphasis on identifying what an image represents) towards inquiry into how it is like it is. Rather than seeking explanation, what is sought in an hermeneutic approach is intelligibility (Faulconer and Williams 1985:1185): "The human sciences, because they are engaged in temporal investigation, are not designed to arrive at an atemporal causal certainty. Instead, their investigations have as their object the rendering of life and the world continually understandable. Gadamer argued not only that truth is conceivable apart from the postulation of atemporal principles but that truth is inconceivable if that postulate is made: We are forever in search of an impossible, atemporal transcendence" (1985:1186). Faulconer and Williams cite the criticism that such a position "necessarily reduces to an absolute relativity, a denial of any truth at all"; their response to that is that "the denial of an absolute standpoint does not deny the possibility of legitimate criticism; it only denies the possibility of absolute criticism - transcendent, atemporal criticism" (1985:1186).

The value of hermeneutic approaches in archaeology has been pursued by a number of writers in postprocessual archaeology, including Shanks and Tilley (1987), Tilley (1991) and Hodder (e.g. 1991a; 1991b, cited by Johnson and Olson 1992), while a particularly cogent account of its relevance is offered by Johnson and Olson (1992). They begin by describing the decline of the 'naturalist conception of archaeology' and lead up to various conclusions: that the present is the precondition for understanding the past, and that an hermeneutic approach (specifically Gadamerian) "can contribute to some of the most central theoretical issues in contemporary archaeology because it points to the situated character of historical, social scientific, and even natural scientific understanding. By illuminating the inadequacy of the idea that objectivity can be obtained via a restricted set

of simplistic methods...it makes any claim of "objective" or "value-free" conceptions of the past or of the scientific process impossible" (Johnson and Olson 1992:433; cf. Wylie 1992:52). In short, from such a perspective, it is not denied that there are atemporal facts about the past that can be known, but it is held that the extent to which the past consists of those kinds of facts is very much open to question.

Of what relevance is the aforegoing for furthering our understanding of the rock art? On the basis of the work outlined above, it may be suggested that human figures in the art may be seen as 'embodying history'; in other words, they are products of specific historical circumstances and experiences, and the corporeal schemata that are integral to them. To repeat Ingold's claim, they may be seen as 'incorporating the life cycle processes which gave rise to them'. The human body is linked to memory (Bourdieu 1977, above; and cf. Rowlands 1993) and perceptions of the landscape are linked to remembrance. Images of the human body are, as Barker describes, inalienably historical, and inseparable from the discursive and historical contexts in which they arise. Barker's analysis of Rembrandt's painting 'The Anatomy Lesson' illustrates this linkage of the body, art and history (Barker 1984). Given that the notion of embodiment is inextricably linked to that of temporality, this offers a way in which to integrate notions of time into rock art studies, albeit a time of a different order to that which is the staple of most archaeological accounts. This time is not identical to that of either history or chronology; rather it can be seen in terms of the A/B series distinction.

Acknowledgement and appreciation of different approaches to time/temporality (and hence epistemology) alert one to the qualitative dimensions of writing histories. With reference to qualitatively different histories, the narrativity of archaeological accounts has acquired new emphasis in postprocessual archaeology. For example, Ingold (1993:152) considers the landscape as itself a story; Hodder (1993) has considered archaeology in relation to narrative, rhetoric and specific narrative devices; Marshack (e.g. 1991:312) has discussed the way in which the meaning of Palaeolithic art is "storied"; Conkey (1991) has discussed "Original narratives"; Lewis-Williams (1993) has commented on the way in which excavations seem to provide a template for archaeological narratives; and many other examples from the literature might be cited. Proceeding from a position which moves away from a subject : object dualism enables appreciation of the narrativity and textuality of

archaeological accounts. As such, epistemological issues such as those discussed above also have an aesthetic dimension (this argument is elaborated in Solomon in press).

The concept of embodiment is of particular value to gender analysis, where gendering is seen not merely as a socio-political frame, but also as a cultural organising principle and an aesthetic issue. If a critique is to be made of Ingold, it must be that 'embodiment' needs to be understood in terms of differentiated bodies - gendered bodies, or black and white bodies (cf. Gilman 1985). Until recently, archaeologists in general were slow to acknowledge gendering, with San rock art research no exception. The neglect of gender in rock art research has ranged from selection for male figures (e.g. Pager's (1971) use of a male archer as an emblem for human figures in general), to man-the-hunter models, and more recently, a tendency towards seeing the art in a manner which may be called a 'man-the-shaman' model. The approach represented by rock art research in South African archaeology, with the rudimentary hermeneutic elements introduced by Lewis-Williams (1981a), offers the possibility of accounting for the relationality of humans and events or things, and the production of qualitatively different histories. Engendered accounts engage strongly with such relationality.

If it is valid that human images may be seen to embody the ethos of a particular culture at a particular time/place, and if images of the body are accepted as integral and critical to specific historical conjunctures, how is this to be accessed? It is axiomatic in the approach that there is no set of rules that permit information to be 'read off' from the material. The 'ethnographic method', as developed by Lewis-Williams and Vinnicombe in particular, is of enduring value in this respect, despite problems associated with it.[2] Lewis-Williams and Vinnicombe have demonstrated that San ethnographies do unquestionably offer a partial and qualified 'commentary', to use Parkington's (1989) term, on the paintings. These texts will be used to pursue two lines of enquiry relevant to the understanding of human images; firstly, the bodily schemes which may be understood as informing images of human figures, and secondly, the temporal schemes which the narratives incorporate.

The mythic woman motif described in the previous chapter has been selected for analysis in terms of temporality and embodiment. As noted, one of its interesting features is its

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[2] These problems are discussed in Chapter 5.

portrayal in frontal perspective, whereas most human figures are portrayed laterally. Hermeneutic approaches foreground perspectivity, in relation to epistemological issues and the relativity of understanding. For obvious reasons, perspective is also a key device in the production and consumption of visual art. It is suggested that aspects of perspective - as a factor in epistemology and as a visual device - may profitably be juxtaposed (but not conflated). The perspective (or "view") in which a painted figure is imaged affects the interaction between the figure and the artist or viewer, and this is a hermeneutic issue, foregrounding the ways in which images are generated and perceived. It is proposed that the mythic woman motif may be rendered more intelligible by means of the approach outlined above, and that further investigation of this figure may have repercussions for our understanding of San rock art.

Chapter 4

Sites, landscapes and fieldwork.

The sites which form the basis of this research are found in vastly differing landscapes. The Zimbabwean sites in the north east are mainly painted in caves in massive granite outcrops, surrounded by *Brachystegia* woodland (Allsopp, pers. comm.). The Kwa-Zulu Natal sites, which formed the core of the investigation, are situated in different areas of the Drakensberg, with some variation between them. The Drakensberg range consists of a series of geological strata, topped by volcanic basalt, and underlain by the Clarens Formation beds (formerly known as Cave Sandstone) and the Molteno Beds. Most sites are found at altitudes of about 1600-1800 metres, in the Clarens Formation, although a few occur in the high basalt, and the lower Molteno beds. The vegetation is largely grassland (sour and sweetveld), with marked variation according to altitude (Vinnicombe 1976a; Pager 1971; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1992). Sites are found either in caves and shelters or on large detached sandstone boulders. In the south western Cape, the paintings are executed in caves and rock shelters in Table Mountain sandstone, in the coastal zone and in the mountain belt inland. The vegetation is fynbos, including *Proteaceae*, *Restionaceae* and *Ericaceae*. In the arid Northern Cape, where caves are scarce, many of the engravings are executed on highly patinated, shiny, black dolerite boulders. Zimbabwe and Kwa-Zulu Natal are summer rainfall regions, whereas the south western Cape is a winter rainfall region.

The sites themselves are infinitely variable, ranging from deep, densely painted caves (e.g. Eland Cave, Kwa-Zulu Natal), to a site in the south western Cape (Opposite Driehoek) which is little more than a tumble of rocks, with barely a couple of square metres painting surface available. Several of the sites viewed are of such complexity that they virtually defy analysis; Eland Cave, for example, has over sixteen hundred images, whereas a site which appears to be relatively small, such as Gxalingenwa Rock 1, contains, on closer investigation, about one hundred and seventy images.

Of these areas, the Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg is perhaps the most hospitable. Water is freely available for the sweaty walker in the many river valleys, and, especially at lower altitudes, the walking is often through soft grass. The sites visited were all in

areas under the control of the Natal Parks Board, which has provided some excellent paths. On one occasion, the Natal Parks Board also provided horses and a guide, for an excursion to three sites, entailing seven hours in the saddle for three novice equestrians. Almost all the sites required two to four hours of walking to reach (including one ascent which was so steep that the contour lines on the map are almost inseparable), but in general, it is a gentle landscape, if one forgets the varieties of snakes which occur. The south western Cape, by contrast, is a rugged and sometimes forbidding landscape. For example, in the steep forty five minute ascent to Keurbos, one must repeatedly struggle through thickets of scratchy bushes, and engage in minor rock climbing, all the while weighed down by the necessity of carrying one's own water. In Zimbabwe, sites were easily accessible, since most occur near rural settlements, people generously showed us where to go, and the longest walk was less than an hour each way.

The contemporary experience of the landscape is shaped to a significant degree by existing infrastructures. The south western Cape sites are mainly on private farms, are seldom signposted, and guides are difficult to find. The co-operation of the Natal Parks Board and the Natal Museum greatly facilitated the Kwa-Zulu Natal fieldwork, although, until I acquired a sense of the landscape, some sites proved elusive on the first attempt. Initially, I was unable to see 'paths' that were clearly visible to people familiar with the Drakensberg, and found estimating distance extremely illusory, having become accustomed to the south western Cape and Cedarberg mountains. Fieldwork has its inevitable setbacks - sunburn, blisters, slipping on ice above a ravine, drenching rain, walking fully clothed and almost waist deep through a rapidly rising, strongly flowing river, and other occupational hazards. Nevertheless, I visited approximately 60 sites in the course of the research, of which about half are directly pertinent to the present study.

Various methods were employed for locating sites. These included examination of published paintings; where good published documentation was available, a visit was deemed desirable, but not vital. Hence, Willcox's Shelter and Sorceror's Rock (which are well documented) were not visited; the whereabouts of the Zimbabwean site of Mshaya Mvura are no longer known (Garlake pers. comm.), and as luck would have it,

documentation of some paintings was only located once field work was completed. Sites documented by Frobenius in central and southern Zimbabwe were too far distant from the north eastern region, where the mythic women are concentrated, for it to be possible for me to visit them. Similarly, apart from one figure from Hungorob Gorge (Pager 1993), inclusion of Namibian paintings was beyond the scope of the present study. Most of the relevant sites in the south western Cape were brought to my attention by colleagues aware of my research interests. One Orange Free State site (Tandjesberg) had been visited previously in the course of attending a rock art colloquium.

The collections held by the Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg, formed the core of the investigation. They include a slide record of documented rock art sites, black and white photographs, and full and detailed written descriptions of painted sites. The body of the collection was generated by archaeological recording completed by Mazel (1981), in the course of a survey of what was then State Forest land (now Natal Parks Board). Also in the Natal Museum's collections are tracings and copies by Vinnicombe, and sundry photographic material generated from other sources.

An example of the 'mythic woman' motif at Ngwangwane Shelter 8 (Figure 18), had already been shown to me by Mazel. To locate more, the general site reports were used first. Many of these - especially those recorded by Mazel - comprise detailed verbal descriptions of every image and smear on the rock face. The site reports examined are listed in Appendix 1 (120 sites in all). From the written reports, a number of possible sites was chosen, and later narrowed down to 25 sites apparently containing the motif, similar figures or related imagery. It proved possible to visit 12 of these sites, and another 5 - all major painting sites - were also visited. These are listed in Table 1; their geographical location is mapped in Map 1.

The next step was to examine the visual records, namely slides, and where necessary, black and white photographs, tracings and copies. Where adequate colour slides were available, the black and white photographs were not consulted, and time constraints imposed limits on the examination of copies, tracings and other sources. All the Natal Museum slides generated by Mazel's previous research were viewed. Though many of

the sites have been fully recorded, some sites are represented only by written records, while others have only been partially photographed. A further problem was that the figure in question is not necessarily a prominent image, nor has it been in the forefront of previous recorders' interests; for these reasons, the slides did not always provide documentation suitable for use in the project (e.g. too small or unclear on slides; not recorded in partially photographed sites).

Table 1: Sites visited and referred to in the text

Site	Museum site no.	District
Drakensberg		
Brotherton Shelter	2829CD23	Zunckel's
Junction Shelter	no number	Zunckel's
Esikolweni Shelter	2829CD59	Zunckel's
Nkosazana Shelter	2929AB32	Champagne Castle
Clarke's Shelter	2929AB33	Champagne Castle
Giant's Castle Main Caves	2929BC1	Kamberg
Fulton's Rock	2929BC8	Kamberg
Game Pass	2929BC24	Kamberg
Gxalingenwa Shelter 1	2929CB66	Sani Pass
Gxalingenwa Rock 1	2929CB68	Sani Pass
Ikanti 1	2929CB37	Sani Pass
Mpongweni North	2929CB41	Sani Pass
Bottoms-Up Shelter	2929CB55	Sani Pass
Ngwangwane Shelter 8	2929CC98	Bushman's Nek
Eland Cave	no number	Champagne Castle
South western Cape		
Keurbos		
Kriedouwkrans		
Kleinvlei		
Rheboksfontein		
Travellers Rest		
Sevilla		
Prinswillemsklip		
'Opposite Driehoek'		
Orange Free State		
Tandjesberg		
Zimbabwe		
Murehwa Cave		
Manemba Cave		
Gurure		
Gambarimwe Cave		
Ruchera Cave		
TOTAL: 30 sites		

While going through the slide collections, it became clear that the boundaries of the mythic woman motif category were not hard and fast, and that it would be necessary to include figures which displayed some but not all of the features characteristic of the Zimbabwean paintings. In this light, figures with possible genital emissions, and obese and squatting figures in frontal perspective were also incorporated into the study.

Notes on recording

It has been customary for researchers to use tracings of paintings, as the most useful recording method, since fine details can be observed, and tracings are not as vulnerable to the ravages of time as slide transparencies are. This may be so, but tracing is also an invasive and subjective recording method, as well as being labour intensive and time consuming. Given the constraints of time, labour and finance, tracings were not used in this study, with the sole exception of Rheboksfontein, south western Cape. Colour slides (Fujichrome 100 and 50 ASA, and Fujichrome Sensia) were used instead. The camera used was a Pentax K1000 with standard lens. The vast majority of photographs were taken using available light, since my preference is for photographs which do not flatten out the rock surface, as flash tends to do. Not only do slides adequately record the features of the art which are relevant to the present study, they also incorporate details of colour, style and preservation far better than tracings do, and were deemed perfectly suitable for the purposes of the task in hand. Furthermore, most of these sites have already been recorded and/or traced, and further physical interference with the rock face was judged to be both unwise and unnecessary.

Published materials

Given the practical, financial and time constraints of fieldwork, it was clearly unrealistic to try to visit all the sites apparently containing the motif. Published paintings or other copies were thus invaluable. Published materials referred to are listed in Table 2. The colour copies and black and white drawings made by Patricia Vinnicombe were especially useful. Many of Vinnicombe's meticulous reproductions

of paintings are published in Vinnicombe (1976a). Black and white photographs of other copies made by her are stored in a card catalogue at the Natal Museum and were utilised in the study.

Table 2: Published Paintings and Copies

Published paintings
(Figure numbers refer to the source text).

Source	Page/Fig. no.	Site name/location	Site no.
Vinnicombe 1976a	24-26	Bamboo Mountain	H2
	27	Mpongweni North	G3
	33a	Lesotho	W23
	34	Magaditseng, Mt. Fletcher District	--
	39	'Soldier on path'	E11
	51	White Horse Shelter	L9
	104	Belleview 3	Q4
	144	Belleview 3	Q4
	157	Cyprus 3	A5
	160	Belleview 2	Q3
	184	Sick man's shelter Lesotho	W8
	195	Sick man's shelter Lesotho	W8
Pager 1993, Vol II	105	Hungorob Gorge, Namibia	
Pager 1971	Pl.99	Ndedema Gorge, Natal Drakensberg.	
	Fig. 378, no. 6	Arthur's Seat. Loskop.	
Rosenthal & Goodwin 1953	1	Cave of Elands, Harrismith	
	7	Elandskloof, Zastron	
	20	Knoffelspruit, Rouxville	
	47	No locality	

Copies Site	Site no.	Area	Accession no.
West Ilsley	2929CD36	Underberg	A231
Langalibalele Shelter	2929CC4	Bushman's Nek	A384

Also of cardinal importance to this research is Harald Pager's colossal work, '*Ndedema*' (1971). Pager recorded 147 painted sites in the Ndedema Gorge area, and documented 17 exhaustively, using an innovative combination of photography and painting to reproduce colour facsimiles of the paintings. The book also comprises

archaeological, historical, environmental and related data, as well as a quantificative and descriptive record of every painting in each of the 17 sites. The relevance of this work for the present study is multi-facetted: it adjoins one of the areas of the Drakensberg in which I conducted fieldwork, namely the Cathedral Peak/Champagne Castle area, northern Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. It also adjoins an area where Mazel has recently conducted a series of important Later Stone Age excavations (see below). Sebaaieni Cave and Sorceror's Rock, two of the sites containing versions of the mythic women motif, are fully documented in Pager's book, as is Junction Shelter, one of the sites visited in the course of the fieldwork. Although subsequent research renders some of Pager's interpretations obsolete, '*Ndedema*' remains a unique and exhaustive study, a visual feast, and a valuable quantificative database. Pager has managed to convey a sense of Ndedema Gorge as a painted landscape, rather than a series of isolated sites. Because it is so comprehensive, it can be described as a 'field trip' in itself, and has provided a backdrop against which to view the paintings encountered in my own field work.

Aspects of the archaeological background to San arts

The dating of southern African rock art is perhaps the most severe problem facing researchers, with only a handful of reliable dates available. The oldest date, from Apollo XI Cave in Namibia (Wendt 1976) suggests a possible antiquity for the painting tradition of perhaps 26 000 years, whereas painted stones and spalls from various sites have been dated by association to between 2 000 and 10 500 BP (Deacon et al. 1976, Singer and Wymer 1982; Walker 1987). Ongoing excavation programmes, such as those initiated by Mazel in Kwa-Zulu Natal and the University of Cape Town's Spatial Archaeology Research Unit in the south western Cape, have the potential to extend our knowledge in this regard. Archaeological contextualisation of the artistic traditions is presented below according to region.

In Zimbabwe, Walker's (1987) excavations in the Matopos (southern Zimbabwe), at sites such as Pomongwe, Bambata, Nswatugi and the Cave of Bees, have provided information on ochre usage through time, and a possible range for the age of the

paintings. Though the presence of ochre clearly relates to the production of paintings, it provides only an indication of their possible age, since it has not been demonstrated that the pigment remains were used for rock painting, rather than body decoration or other ornamental or functional purposes. Walker (1994) records that "fairly large quantities of pigment" are found in shelters from the beginning of the LSA, with a marked increase around 9800 BP. Ochre densities decline after 7600 BP, although frequencies rise again after 2200 BP (Walker 1987, 1994). The rise in ochre frequencies approximately two millennia ago corresponds to the time when hunter-gatherer populations would have come into contact with pastoralists/Iron Age farmers. These trends are interpreted by Walker in terms of inter-group contact; following Guenther's anthropological observations among the Nharo of Botswana, on the increase in ritual activity in response to stress (Guenther 1975), Walker proposes that stress resulting from interactions between groups may have stimulated ritual activity and artistic production (Walker 1994:126-7). Garlake has noted that some sites contain paintings relating to non-San populations. They are commonly executed in "a thick clayey paint containing a lot of white pigment, producing light milky grey, cream, yellow and orange colours" (Garlake 1987:6). Such paintings, including large, 'cruder' animal and human figures in white are regarded by Garlake (1987:6) as "comparatively recent defacing".

Depictions of domestic animals are rare in the Zimbabwean art. Herds of sheep are depicted at the site of Ruchera in the north east (Garlake 1987b), but cattle have not been unequivocally identified. Garlake (pers. comm.) is not convinced by paintings which have been suggested as possible cattle depictions, since they are indistinguishable from paintings of young buffalo. Unlike all the other areas dealt with here, Zimbabwe has no 'historical' paintings, such as wagons, trekkers and horses (Garlake pers. comm.).

The paintings of the Drakensberg include many such images from the historical time period, including horses, cattle, dogs, wagons, armed soldiers, and paintings illustrating contact between hunter-gatherers and Iron Age peoples with shields and assegais. Such paintings indicate that the Drakensberg art persisted into the relatively recent past. Vinnicombe cites an archival report which illustrates San familiarity with

(and penchant for) horses as early as 1809 in the Eastern Cape, where horse theft had occurred for some years (Vinnicombe 1976a). By the late 1830's the Boers had reached Natal, where horses became a prime target in stock raids; paintings of horses (such as the magnificent examples at Mpongweni North) thus cannot predate the nineteenth century. Paintings of soldiers are in one instance so accurate that the regiment can be identified, dating this particular painting to as late as the 1860s (Vinnicombe 1976a; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1992). The earlier limit of rock art production is far more difficult to ascertain, especially in the light of the relative paucity of systematic Stone Age archaeology conducted prior to the extensive project undertaken by Mazel (1984a,b; 1986a,b; 1988a,b; 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993; Kaplan 1990).

Mazel's data on ochre densities shows a certain uniformity in the earlier Holocene (c. 7000 BP), with differentiation at around 4000 BP; excavations show that where ochre occurred in the post 4000 BP deposits, it was in low densities (Mazel 1989). Mazel ultimately sees this change as relating to a larger social shift at about 4000 BP, when, he proposes, new social networks had formed, and different 'social regions' can be identified. Mazel has also recently obtained a direct accelerated mass spectrometer date on a sample from a painted eland.[1]

A further notable differentiation in Drakensberg paintings concerns the distribution of images (Mazel 1982). Certain scenes and motifs are restricted to either the north or the south, with the dividing line running through the southern Giant's Castle area. For example, rain-scenes are found only in the southern area, while bees, bee's nests, honeycombs and ladders are confined to the north. The significance of this distribution is not clear (Mazel 1982:81). This distinction is not relevant to the mythic woman motif examined in this dissertation, since examples of it are found along the entire mountain range. Mazel (1981:81-82) also commented on an apparently higher frequency of female figures in the more southerly areas of the Drakensberg; however, the significance of this frequency is difficult to evaluate without specific study of the quantificative criteria utilised. What is of note is Mazel's argument that "One very

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[1] Further details of this research cannot be included here, because the publication of this date in an academic journal is in preparation. I was the assistant on the fieldwork to obtain the samples.

important lesson to be learnt from this study is that it is imperative for detailed studies to be conducted over large areas" (Mazel 1982:81). Such an endeavour is represented in the current project, although it is proposed that the 'large area' in question may profitably be defined in southern sub-continental terms.

Early excavations in parts of the Drakensberg are amply described by Vinnicombe (1976a). Her conclusion that the dating of the art must remain an open question is as true now as it was then. Stone Age archaeology in KwaZulu-Natal has been underdeveloped relative to the south western Cape, and although a number of archaeological investigations have been undertaken, few have yielded information relevant to the rock art, and many remain undated. Pager (1971:33-43) also describes some earlier work, including excavations in Shirley's Shelter. (For other earlier excavations [as opposed to surface collections] see Albino 1947; Cramb 1952, 1961; Farnden 1965, 1969; Cable et al. 1980; Davies 1947, 1975; Carter and Vogel 1974; Maggs and Ward 1980).

Of the sites visited in the course of the current research, four have been excavated: Giant's Castle Main Caves (Willcox 1957; 1971), Brotherton Shelter (Beaumont 1967), Clarke's Shelter (Mazel 1984), and Eland Cave (Wells 1933a,b). Only Mazel's excavation has yielded dates. Willcox's excavation at Giant's Castle Main Caves, which is densely painted and contains substantial deposit, yielded only two pieces of ochre in 6 metre squares of deposit (bedrock at 2 ft. 1 in.). These were a yellow piece in the surface layer, and an orange piece in the 60-75 cm layer (Willcox 1957). No dates were available from Eland Cave and Brotherton Shelter, although, like Giant's Castle, skeletal and/or cultural material indicated linkages with, or usage by, Iron Age peoples. This is also attested to by historical records. For example, Giant's Castle Main Caves were recorded as having been used by the Hlubi people after their relocation in the wake of the mfecane, a time of major disruption in the early nineteenth century (Wright 1971; Vinnicombe 1976a).

The age of the oldest Drakensberg paintings thus remains largely unknown, and Lewis-Williams and Dowson cite 'educated guesses' that the paintings in this region may be no more than eight hundred years old. Excavations by Mazel (1992) of late Holocene

deposits at Collingham Shelter revealed a collapsed ceiling, with paintings of white rhebok, polychrome eland and rhebok, and red human figures. Since the paintings were executed prior to the collapse, this excavation provides a *terminus ante quem* date for painting of 650 BP (Mazel 1992:4). It is, however, entirely possible that excavation results might push this limit back to significantly earlier time periods. The deposits also yielded a broken slab painted with black figures, and a dolerite palette, unusual because it is stained with black and white as well as red paint (Mazel 1992:19). Other excavations in the area indicate the antiquity of ochre usage. Kaplan (1990) has described a lengthy sequence at Umhlatuzana Rock Shelter, with over 2 800 pieces of ochre; the highest frequencies are in Middle Stone Age layers dating to before 45 200 BP (Kaplan 1990:66-8).

Excavations by Mitchell at Sehonghong in Lesotho promise to shed further light on ochre use and the age of the painting tradition in the general environs of the Drakensberg. Initial excavations produced 71 pieces of ochre throughout the sequence, with higher densities in the upper 4 spits. At the time of this publication, 29 pieces were assigned to the later Holocene assemblage (Mitchell et al. 1988:81). In terms of the age of the paintings, the authors initially stated that there are "sandstone fragments and spalls bearing traces of paint at Sehonghong in units which definitely predate 1,400 +/-140 BP, and could even date to before 6,780 +/-60 BP" (Mitchell et al. 1988:81). More recent research (Mitchell 1995:34) reveals that "a variety of ochreous material, including red, orange and yellow ochres, a red ochre with a blue/grey sheen and at least one kind of ochreous shale" are found at Sehonghong. Of especial interest are a yellow ochre 'cake' and concentrations of powdered red ochre. In Layer RF, dated to between about 6000 and 1200 years BP, ochre densities peak, as they do at the same time period at Elands Bay Cave in the south western Cape (Mitchell 1995:34). The current interpretation of the Sehonghong sequence suggests that after about 12 500 BP, the site may have been used as a home base, rather than a temporary shelter or hunting station (Mitchell 1995:37). Ochre-stained grindstones also dating to about 12 000 BP further indicate the antiquity of ochre usage (Mitchell 1985:34), but, unfortunately, not of painting.

In the south western Cape, like the other areas discussed, only *terminus ante quem* dates for the rock art are available at present. Images of horses/donkeys, wagons, trekkers, fat-tailed sheep (but no unequivocal cattle) indicate that the painting tradition persevered until at least the eighteenth century. However, whether all these paintings can strictly be called 'San art' is a matter of some debate (e.g. Van Rijssen 1994, Yates et al. 1994). The south western Cape boasts the first C^{14} date in the country obtained directly from a painting. A finger painting in black charcoal-based paint yielded an accelerated mass spectrometry date of 500 +/- 140 BP (Van der Merwe et al. 1987). However, the technique of dating paintings directly, either using organic based pigments or the organic fraction in the binders mixed with inorganic pigments, is in its infancy, and it is not possible to draw anything but the broadest of conclusions from current data.

Extensive excavations and archaeometric studies in the south western Cape, centering on the Elands Bay area and environs, have produced a great deal of information on sequences, settlement patterns, palaeoenvironments and the antiquity of human occupation. Much rock art research has until recently focussed on the recording of the art, in terms of iconography and spatial distribution. An archaeology which more specifically addresses problems in rock art research is finally emerging. For example, excavations by Jerardino at Steenboksfontein, Lambert's Bay, have uncovered a spall bearing a pair of human legs in red paint. Layers above and below have been C^{14} dated, and suggest that this painting is probably about 3 600 years old (Jerardino and Yates pers. comm.).

The engravings of the northern Cape present similar dating difficulties although various researchers have applied themselves specifically to the problem of the dating of petroglyphs (e.g. Beaumont et al. 1985; Beaumont and Vogel 1989; Whitley and Annegarn 1994). Excavations in the area have yielded dates on surface material and the upper strata of sites. These cluster around the 17th century AD, with a range from the 14th-19th centuries AD. It has been suggested that some scraped engravings may be older; excavation of material associated with scraped engravings at Springbokoog 13 and Jagt Pan 7 yielded uncorrected dates between +/-2700 and 1600 BP (Beaumont et al. 1985). Whitley and Annegarn's dates, using cation-ratio dating rather than

excavation, extend the timespan of the engravings considerably. The technique involves analysis of differential leaching of trace elements in the varnish that develops over engravings in arid environments. The analysis of the 46 samples taken resulted in 21 preliminary dates, suggesting that the technique of engraving may span the entire Holocene, back to 10 000 BP. However, the authors issue some caveats: small sample size prevented multiple dates on single engravings, and the calculation of error margins was not possible; the sample size may also have distorted results in favour of older material (Whitley and Annegarn 1994).

In general, the most reliable dates for paintings (other than those which can be tentatively dated by content, and the two direct, AMS dates) are those obtained from excavations, summarised by Thackeray (1983). To her table of dates may be added only that from Steenboksfontein (Jerardino and Yates pers. comm.).

Lewis-Williams (1993) has suggested that the problem of dating is not as serious as it seems; however, the quality and quantity of dates for the art is, in general, so tentative, indirect or preliminary, that this argument cannot be sustained. Though available dates give a very broad framework for the possible antiquity of the artistic tradition, their wide dispersal over space prohibits any general assumptions about the age of specific examples of the art. In other words, even if the Steenboksfontein date is correct, this does not mean that any of the other paintings in the area necessarily even approach that age. Similarly, the engraved pieces from Wonderwerk Cave, dated to about 10 000 BP (Thackeray et al. 1981), tell us nothing about the tradition of painting (as opposed to engraving) in the earlier Holocene. Also, even if it can be firmly established that the artistic tradition in general is of great antiquity, this is probably of little relevance for the majority of paintings visible today, since it seems unlikely that paintings exposed to the elements would endure for so many millennia. Although painting surfaces vary, and the chemistry of different rock types may render paintings more or less resistant to deterioration, studies show that significant natural degradation may occur at a rapid rate. For example, Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1992:10) recount Pager's finding that 2.2% of paintings recorded by him in one site in the Ndedema Gorge had vanished in the space of about five years, while a return visit by S-A and H Pager ten years later revealed that a further 10.5% had disappeared. The exfoliation of rock in another

Drakensberg site shows radical deterioration of a painting traced by Lewis-Williams in 1965 and by Dowson in 1986. The exfoliated area has doubled, and two of the six figures originally visible have gone (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1992:10-11). Although the Table Mountain Sandstone which forms the ground for the south western Cape paintings is less prone to exfoliation, it seems unlikely that existing paintings date back to the earlier phases of image production. In a more recent study (Ward and Maggs 1994), researchers used nineteenth century copies of paintings at Giant's Castle Main Caves and compared them with the preservation as evident today. They also report a disturbing degree of deterioration, apparently principally due to the poor quality of the paint in paintings dated by content to the nineteenth century, but due to the poor quality of the rock face in other instances.

Ochre studies

Archaeological studies of ochre have considerable, but currently under-utilised, potential for shedding some light, even obliquely, on the rock paintings (but see above, Walker 1994, Mitchell 1995). Such a study is being undertaken by Watts (e.g. 1994), inspired by Knight's study of the role of blood symbolism in human evolution (Knight 1991). Watts' work is not directly aimed at the LSA, or even the paintings in particular, focussing instead on ochre usage in the MSA. However, aspects of this research might profitably be extended for looking at LSA materials. Watts considers, *inter alia*, the developing use of a wider range of pigments and colours in the MSA (with a particular focus on southern Africa, but against a global backdrop), and is conducting a detailed analysis of the range of pigments. Such a dedicated analysis of the ochre from LSA sites would be invaluable, since existing data on ochre is not particularly useful for contemporary rock art research, providing as it does only a very general background to artistic production. In earlier investigations of the Drakensberg sites, where principal foci of interest were artefacts and typological classifications and general reconstruction of the site's history (e.g. Mitchell et al. 1988; Mitchell 1995), or physical anthropological data (e.g. the Wells' expedition in the 1930s), ochre hardly receive more than a passing mention. This has changed somewhat over time, and, as

noted above, Mazel, Mitchell and Walker specifically look at trends of ochre usage in the Holocene, within models of long term change.Walker correlates shifts in ochre frequencies with a putative increase in ritual activity in times of social and demographic stress, Mazel relates changes to the proposed emergence of new 'social regions' in the Thukela Basin area post 4000 BP; and Mitchell envisages Sehonghong turning into a more permanent home base after 12 500 BP.

These studies are geared to a particular analytical time scale linked to B-series time (namely the long term history of human occupation of southern Africa), but alternative avenues of investigation are open, geared to different questions and different scales of analysis. The quantitative methods employed by Mazel and Walker are appropriate to the time frame that they are working with (namely LSA/Holocene history), but these methods are not without their limitations. Mazel quantifies ochre occurrence in two ways: counts of the number of pieces retrieved from different sites and layers; and density in terms of frequency per m^2 (Mazel 1989:100). Walker (1994) calculates the number of pieces per unit of deposit through time, and also the percentage of pieces of pigment relative to stone artefact waste. In Kaplan's study, useful distinctions are drawn between ground and unground pieces, and ochre "pencils" (1990:66-8). However, owing to the important principal aim of these researchers (for example, to develop regional chronologies and spatial information), the ochre does not receive a great deal of attention. It is largely limited to piece counts, occasionally densities relative to excavated deposit, utilisation, and the presence of ochre-stained grindstones, rubbers and palettes. The colour range (if there is one) is almost invariably not described, with the partial exceptions of Willcox (1957), Mazel (1992) and Mitchell (1995).

Using piece counts has its uses, but it also has its problems. These include the fact that no indication of the size of the pieces is given - weighing the pieces might be instructive. Also, lumping all the ochre together is limiting in various ways. For the purposes of linking excavated ochre with the paintings, more detailed analyses, including consideration of the colour range, mineral/compositional differences and quality of the ochre, will be required.

Walker's spatial analysis of ochre distribution illustrates the potential of further studies. He shows that at Pomongwe Cave, ochre was rare in the centre of the site before 9 800 BP, but dense thereafter - up to 33000 pieces per m^3, perhaps representing a change in the context of ochre usage (Walker 1994:126, 128). However, in these studies, as in those from recent excavations in Kwa-Zulu Natal, there is virtually no reference to the actual paintings and no attempt at correlation of the colour range of excavated ochre and that on the rock face. Matching ochre from excavations (in terms of colour, quality, form and mineral composition) with paint on cave walls seems a viable project for selected sites, such as Rheboksfontein, south western Cape, and might add to understanding of the chronology (Solomon 1992b). Rheboksfontein consists of a large, deep cave, with deposit, containing black and red figures and handprints. On an adjoining ledge are a series of paintings in very different styles and colours. They are monochromes reds, with an unusually high proportion of female figures (including one mythic woman). Excavation might provide clarification regarding these apparently discrete painting episodes, as well as potentially providing dates (Solomon 1994b). Such an approach could take as its temporal scale of analysis the painting and occupation history of a single site, rather than focussing on broader trends through the Holocene (or longer time spans).

B-series archaeology and rock art research

The aforegoing should indicate the range of problems encountered in attempting to integrate excavated materials and the art. In the last decade and a half, rock art studies in South Africa have developed into a distinct sub-discipline, using substantially different approaches and methods. Most of the principal contributors to rock art research in this time period (e.g. Vinnicombe, Lewis-Williams, Dowson, Campbell, Solomon) have not conducted excavations; J. Deacon's valuable investigation of /Xam sites in the northern Cape (e.g. Deacon 1986, 1991) is a notable exception to this trend, while Loubser (e.g. Loubser and Lourens 1994) has also attempted to integrate rock art and excavation. However, rock art research does involve the cultivation of knowledge in areas which are neglected by 'dirt archaeologists', notably theory (e.g.

semiotics, structuralism, post-structuralism, structuration theory, and textual, social and cultural theory in general). Rock art research has in fact developed in some ways along lines closer to historical archaeology than to conventional Stone Age archaeology, because one of the most important methods in rock art research has been, and remains, the use of written texts - anthropological accounts, myth, folklore and the like. It is with this important element of rock art research that the following chapter is concerned.

Chapter 5

Ethnographies and San rock art

Ethnographies - which include anthropological and ethnohistorical accounts, mythology and folklore - have been inseparable from South African rock art studies since their inception over a century ago. In 1874, W.H.I. Bleek praised Orpen's account of Maluti San mythology, stating that "A collection of faithful copies of Bushmen paintings is...only second in importance to a collection of their folklore in their own language. Both such collections will serve to illustrate each other..." (Orpen 1874:13). This principle - that different media are in some sense mutually illustrative - has formed the backbone of much rock art research, and is at the heart of the 'ethnographic method'.

As noted in Chapter 2, early use of ethnographies in rock art research was not necessarily grounded in explicit theoretical and methodological formulations. This situation changed with the widespread adoption of structuralist analyses in rock art research worldwide. Levi-Straussian structuralism (e.g. Levi-Strauss 1963) gained enormous popularity in the 1960s, and was used to particular effect in Palaeolithic rock art studies by researchers such as Leroi-Gourhan (e.g. 1968). The innovations wrought by structuralism have been described as the most significant breakthrough in Palaeolithic art studies since the early twentieth century (Bahn and Vertut 1989), although, since the earliest days, structuralist approaches have been subject to a variety of criticisms (e.g. Parkington 1969). Structural analyses were brought to bear on South African rock art in the 1970s (e.g. Vinnicombe 1976a; Lewis-Williams 1972, 1974), and this engagement has had an enduring effect in the discipline, not only in terms of iconographic studies, but also informing research in far broader ways, via the introduction of new and explicitly considered theories of signification. Structuralism was an important influence on the first of the classic rock art texts of more recent research, Vinnicombe's '*People of the Eland*', as well as being fundamental to the earlier work of Lewis-Williams.

The first detailed and theoretically sophisticated accounts of how ethnographic sources might be used in the study of rock art was produced by Lewis-Williams (1977a,b, 1980, 1981a); he later moved towards the use of semiotic theory, which is a close relative of linguistic structuralism. Lewis-Williams (1981a:3) motivated this shift on the grounds that "the linguistic model...tends to impute to the data a form that they do not possess". Peirce-Morris' semiotic theory, which engages with signs in a more general sense, was drawn on to address this. One of the many advantages of this approach was the extent to which it enabled Lewis-Williams to contest literal, empiricist interpretations of the art and to emphasise its rich symbolic and metaphorical wealth, as well as its putative religious significance (as had also been done by Vinnicombe). Ethnographies provided support for the argument that painted images such as the eland are not necessarily iconic representations, but are also infused with symbolic value, and referential complexity that can not be accessed without the 'emic' perspective afforded by knowledge of San beliefs and practices. Though mediating this material is problematic, its presence remains fundamentally important. Working with the suggestion made by McCall (1970) "that certain concepts are 'pan Bushman' or nearly so", Lewis-Williams considered that "ethnography and iconography are inter-related expressions of a single belief system" (1980:479). The 'ethnographic method' as developed by Lewis-Williams in particular, draws on /Xam accounts of 'customs', beliefs/lore, oral narrative, and anthropological research, including field work among the Kalahari !Kung. In order to demonstrate the relevance of these texts, distant in place and time, to the art of the Drakensberg, Lewis-Williams (e.g. 1980, 1984a) carefully and astutely documented commonalities among San speakers, focussing increasingly on shamanistic practices and the trance dance. This permitted the convincing argument that similarities focussing on shamanism crosscut San societies with, for example, Drakensberg paintings depicting trancers in attitudes virtually identical to those which have been recorded in the Kalahari in the 'ethnographic present'. The ethnographic method - or the motivated assumption that ethnographies illuminate the rock art - has pervaded almost all subsequent rock art research.[1]

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[1] The 'ethnographic method' refers to the general procedure of using ethnographies as a key to or commentary on the rock art.

However, the extent to which commonalities are not derived from shamanism requires further investigation.

Although the use of ethnography, whether in ethnoarchaeological studies or in the ethnographic method, is an accepted component of the archaeological repertoire, it has been subject to a number of criticisms. Many of these focus on the uniformity of San culture that is implied, and the problem of incorporating historical processes and change into accounts of rock art; [2] these problems are, however, not necessarily merely effects of the ethnographic method *per se,* but are also linked to structuralist approaches and the pressing problems surrounding the dating of the art.

After the respective heydays of ethnoarchaeology in processual archaeology and structuralist analyses in Palaeolithic art studies, and (with reference to southern Africa) since the revisionist debate in Kalahari ethnography (e.g Wilmsen and Denbow 1990; Solway and Lee 1990; Lee and Guenther 1992), the validity of ethnographic analogy has become the focus of some suspicion (e.g. Gould and Watson 1982; Wylie 1982; Gilchrist 1991). As Stone and Bahn have recently commented: "The pendulum, which, thanks to Leroi-Gourhan and others, swung away from overtly ethnographic explanations for Palaeolithic art, is swinging back, now that the limitations of his deterministic approach have become apparent. The only hope of achieving any real insight into the motivations of Palaeolithic artists is through careful examination of the relevant parts of the ethnographic and ethnohistorical record" (Stone and Bahn 1993:114).

In the 1980s, before the pendulum began to swing back, Lewis-Williams and his colleagues moved in the direction of approaches which rely less heavily on ethnographic analogy. The shamanistic model, albeit derived from structuralism and ethnography, has since been developed into a more elaborate account of the way in which visual imagery might be seen to originate in the operations of the human nervous system, and the cultural incorporation of such 'hallucinatory imagery'. This represents

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[2] Lewis-Williams' article concerning ideological continuities in San history (1984a), and an article entitled "The Signs of All Times" (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988) have provided much material for such critiques.

a certain trend away from the use of ethnography in general, and mythology in particular. It has, however, been argued that in its scientific and biologistic aspects it represents a move away from the study of culture (Solomon 1989, 1992a).

While most researchers accept that the use of ethnographies is of ongoing importance, not just in rock art research but in archaeology generally, various writers have commented on areas in need of attention. Parkington (1989) has drawn attention to some of the limitations which ethnography as a 'partial commentary' entails, while other writers have focussed on methodological and related concerns (e.g. Guenther 1990, 1991, 1994; Solomon 1991). Lewis-Williams' claim that art and ethnography are expressions of the same belief complex (cf. Lewis-Williams 1980:479) has become a topic for closer investigation. In this light, Guenther has emphasised "divergences among the three genres of Bushman expressive culture and the methodological implications of this lack of homogeneity within the expressive domain for students of San art" (Guenther 1994:257; 1990).

Barnard (1992:93) has endorsed Guenther's argument, stating that "He remarks, quite correctly, that Bushman mythology and rock art seem to occupy two quite separate domains of expression, and that ritual is linked to art rather than mythology". Barnard makes another statement which has important implications when assessing the ethnographic method. He claims that "previous generations of writers have sought in vain the connections between /Xam myth and prehistoric painting" (1992:93). Similarly, the question of the inter-relationships of the 'San belief complex' has been addressed by Deacon, in her examination of the rock engravings from the area in the northern Cape occupied by /Xam narrators. She has argued that "recent models show a relationship between art and trance, but a correlation has not been demonstrated between art and folklore" (Deacon 1994:252).[3] However, nowhere is it spelt out what constitutes a correlation, and what contexts render putative correlations significant or otherwise.

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[3] From this writer's perspective, a more accurate statement would be that recent models show a relationship between *some* art and trance.

It is proposed that the relationship between myth or oral narrative and painting has become a central problem, potentially leading towards abandonment of the longstanding tradition of using mythology and narrative as explanatory adjuncts. In part, explanation by reference to mythology has been displaced by interpretation in relation to shamanism. Thus, to cite one example, the figure from Willcox's Shelter (Figure 25), interpreted by Willcox (1956) and Vinnicombe (1976a) as probably a mythological being, has been reinterpreted by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989:173) as an "hallucinatory figure", on the basis of the questionable argument that some, much or all non-naturalistic imagery derives from trance experience (cf. Dowson 1988; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988, Maggs and Sealy 1983). Therianthropic figures are also interpreted by Lewis-Williams and Dowson as shamanic (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1984; Dowson 1988; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989). Brief examination of a key paper (Lewis-Williams 1980) serves to illustrate the way(s) in which mythology has been used in rock art research.

Orpen, Qing and nineteenth century San mythology from the Malutis

In 1980, Lewis-Williams published one of the most important papers in the recent history of San rock art research, entitled "Ethnography and iconography: aspects of southern San thought and art". Not only does it outline and compellingly extend aspects of the ethnographic method, it also provides the basis for much of the shamanistic interpretation which has been generated over the last decade. Examination of this text reveals certain benefits and problems associated with the ethnographic method.

The ethnographic material with which the article deals was collected by Orpen in the later nineteenth century from Qing, a San-speaking narrator from the Maluti Mountains, who acted as Orpen's guide at the time of colonial intervention into the so-called 'Langalibalele rebellion' (Orpen 1874). Aspects of this account, along with comments by Qing and the /Xam narrator, Dia!kwain, were used by Lewis-Williams to interpret the paintings at the cave site of Sehonghong, Lesotho. The purpose of this section is not to consider the use of ethnography for decipherment of the Sehonghong

paintings *per se*, but to examine specifically the ways in which the Orpen/Qing account is used.

Firstly, it is notable that, of the entire text of Qing's narration, the section selected is prosaic, rather than mythological. The chosen extract concerns

"people spoilt by the ____ dance, because their noses bleed. Cagn gave us the song of this dance and told us to dance it, and people would die from it and he would give charms to raise them again. It is a circular dance of men and women, following each other, and it is danced all night. Some fall down; some become as if mad and sick; blood runs from the noses of those whose charms are weak, and they eat charm medicine in which there is burnt snake powder. When a man is sick, this dance is danced around him, and the dancers put both their hands under their arm-pits and press their hands on him, and when he coughs the initiated put out their hands and receive what has injured him - secret things" (Orpen 1874:10).

That this account refers to the trance dance as also practiced in recent times in the Kalahari (e.g. Lee 1968, Guenther 1975, 1986, 1994; Katz 1982, Katz and Biesele 1986) seems incontrovertible. Problematic though are the analyst's efforts to separate out fact and fiction, or statements which may be taken 'literally', and those which are seen as metaphors. For example, it has been suggested "that 'die' does not here refer to physical death: it is a metaphor for entrance into the altered state of trance" (Lewis-Williams 1980:472). Also: "The metaphors and beliefs which I have so far described suggest that the southern informants' reports of 'death', journeys beneath the water and the capture of a fantastic rain animal should *all* be seen as accounts of trance experience rather than other events. At least some of the paintings of rain animals therefore probably record hallucinations of rain medicine men in trance" (1980:473; my italics). Despite Lewis-Williams' prudent follow-up claim that 'some' paintings 'probably' refer to trance, this insight has, in time, become transmuted into fact, with it becoming unequivocally and unquestioningly accepted that death and underwater are trance references.

The identification of metaphors has been an important aspect of the ethnographic method; but it is problematic to assume that a narrator's 'real meaning' can be

excavated thus. In the case of interpretation of therianthropes by means of ethnographies, this leads the writer to go so far as to claim that Orpen - who, after all, did have the small benefit of direct contact with Qing - "fabricated the complex and misleading conflation I have tried to unravel" (Lewis-Williams 1980:475).

Therianthropic and other non-naturalistic figures have been variously interpreted as mythological or ceremonial beings, as spirits or figures of the dead (Willcox 1956, Pager 1971, Woodhouse 1974, Vinnicombe 1976a) or as disguised hunters (How 1962, Thackeray 1983, Lee and Woodhouse 1970). On the basis of the belief that death and underwater refer (only or primarily) to trance, Lewis-Williams argued that the Sehonghong therianthropes -"men who had died and now live in rivers" (Orpen 1874:2) - are better served by a different reading: "Not knowing anything about trance, Orpen could well have mistaken the related metaphors of 'death' and 'underwater' for separate and literal explanations; so the 'under water' experience of trance became 'lived in rivers after death'..." (Lewis-Williams 1980:474). Despite ethnographic support for other interpretations, it is claimed that the sentence "is a threefold metaphorical statement: the therianthropes do not depict mythical subaquatic people on whom no further information was obtained, but medicine men who had 'died' or been 'spoilt' in trance and whose experience is analogous to being underwater" (1980:475).

Yet, in the numerous menarcheal narratives, 'underwater' refers unequivocally to physical death as a consequence of the behaviour of disobedient female initiates, and there is absolutely no reason (or opportunity) to invoke trance, hallucinations or shamans in the interpretation (cf. Solomon 1989, 1992a). These narratives are discussed further in the following chapter, so one example will suffice here. Accounts in the Bleek and Lloyd collection tell of female initiates who disobeyed the menarcheal regulations and were turned into frogs; they are also seen as flowers or as stars in the waterpit. It is explicitly stated that these are the spirits of dead girls killed by the rain (Bleek 1933a). The belief that supernatural or mythological beings inhabit rivers is also not confined to (Khoi)San societies, but is also found among Bantu-speaking peoples (for example, cf. Berglund [1976:55-6] for an account of Zulu beliefs about spirit

beings/snakes in rivers), where it is enshrined in mythology and ritual, but devoid of references to trance and hallucinatory experience).

A further problem with the identification of metaphors is the way in which they become generalised beyond the context of their initial identification. Though in the context of Qing's account of the 'dance of blood' 'dying' very likely does refer to trance, this by no means implies that this can be amplified *ad infinitum*. References to death may well refer to the human quandary of actual mortal expiry; and the possibility that some therianthropes may represent spirits or masked hunters, or mythological or 'ceremonial' figures (Pager 1971) may be entertained. The trend in certain recent rock art research has been a creeping insistence on single, exclusively correct, interpretations, in contrast to the polysemy which was previously stressed by Lewis-Williams (1981a). A tendency has emerged, whereby once a metaphor (such as death = trance) has been identified in one context, it then becomes converted into a generalised principle which functions as a rule. A parallel example is provided by Loubser (1993:352) when he states that "It is always important to keep in mind, however, that San medicine people only painted after they tranced". This categorical statement is alarming, in view of the fact that the specific details of the relationship between shamanistic practice and painting are hypothesised, not actually recorded.

Such generalisations are theoretically, methodologically and logically unsound. Although some (ethnographic or painted) references to death may refer to trance, this needs to be argued for each case in context. Moreover, it is at the heart of the referential wealth of metaphor and symbol that multiple meanings may coexist; thus 'to die' may refer simultaneously to both real death and attainment of trance.

Undoubtedly, the sometime arcane San texts require further interpretation, but the contemporary analyst is unjustified in claiming that a reference, such as Qing's, to dead men living in rivers may not, at some level, mean what it says. The quest for metaphors may lead to indigenous accounts being unduly overridden. The same tendency is found in Lewis-Williams et al. (1993), a follow-up article to Lewis-Williams (1977a). Here, indigenous (San) accounts linking ichthyoid figures to beliefs about 'water maidens' are dismissed, and reinterpreted in relation to shamanism, regardless of a mass of

information which links female initiates and rain, water and the waterpit (e.g. Bleek 1933a; Lewis-Williams 1977a; Hewitt 1986; Silberbauer 1963, 1981; Solomon 1989, 1992a). Identification of metaphors is a useful exercise, but at the same time different readings of these metaphors (or other figures of speech [cf. Hodder 1993]) must be accommodated, in terms of hermeneutic principles.

Also of key importance in the use of Orpen/Qing's narrative is the way in which mythology is effectively sidelined in the interpretation. Although Barnard (1992) speaks of writers vainly seeking links between myth and art, it is clear from Lewis-Williams' analysis of Orpen/Qing's text that no attempt has been made here to utilise the mythological material. The part of the text that has been selected for analysis is that which refers to ethnographically recorded practices.

Orpen describes how Qing's narration came about as follows: "When happy and at ease smoking over campfires, I got from him the following stories and explanations of paintings, some which he showed and I copied on our route. I commenced by asking what the pictures of men with rhebok's heads meant. He said "They were men who had died and now lived in rivers and were *spoilt at the same time as the elands* and by the dances of which you have seen paintings." I asked when the elands were spoilt and how. He began to explain and mentioned Cagn" (Orpen 1874:2; original italics).

There follows a series of stories, dealing almost without exception with creation or with incidents that occurred in the time of 'the people of the early race', as Bleek and Lloyd (1911) described them. Although Qing specifically related his commentary to this corpus of mythology and narrative, this does not feature at all in the interpretation offered by Lewis-Williams. Instead, the brief passage concerning shamanism and the dance of blood is selected and prioritised. Even explicit references to other ritual domains, such as initiation, are not addressed here. The effect is that of a self-fulfilling proposition. Qing specified the relevance of mythology, and its relation to other ritual occasions (such as initiation); for example, when Orpen enquired about the origins of Coti, wife of the mythological trickster figure, Cagn, Qing professed ignorance, stating that these secrets were only known to initiated men of the dance (Orpen 1874:3). This illustrates the inseparability of mythology and ritual.

Though, as Barnard and others have stated, the links between art and ritual appear more direct, this by no means eliminates connections between art and mythology. Indeed, it might equally be argued that mythology is the conceptual universe within which beliefs about trance are formulated, rather than the other way around. The failure of rock art researchers to engage with San mythology in any consistent way may be seen in relation to longstanding debates in anthropology about the relationship of myth and ritual, and their relative importance. In modern anthropology it is generally accepted that primacy cannot be assigned to one or the other (Seymour-Smith 1986:203); yet in the shamanistic model and the ethnographic method, ritual is manifestly privileged over myth.[4] It also relates to the problematic status of oral tradition as history (e.g. Okpewho 1983; Vansina 1985). One of the primary aims of this dissertation is to address these questions, and to demonstrate that mythology may still be seen as of vital importance for understanding San art.

Why has recourse to mythology taken such a back seat of late? Contributing factors include the rise of the shamanistic model with its privileging of ritual and neurophysiology, and an unsustainable separation of myth and ritual. In terms of method, the use of oral narratives and myths, as literary and imaginative works, presents many problems for researchers. Rock art research, as a sub-discipline of history, seems to find it easier to accommodate those ethnographic references which can be shown to describe actual practices. Since Vinnicombe (1976a,b), few researchers have engaged with mythology and narrative, owing to associated methodological problems and issues concerning the factuality of oral narratives. Furthermore the literary status of narratives and myths requires different analytical skills, and an appreciation of the textuality of the narratives. The problem of textuality will be dealt with shortly, after discussion of some theoretical considerations, particularly those associated with the structuralist legacy in rock art research.

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[4] This privileging is discussed further, from a different angle, in Chapter 8, and in Solomon (in press).

The engagement with structuralism, in the work of Vinnicombe and Lewis-Williams, was a turning point in San rock art research but, over two decades after structuralism's zenith, numerous problems have been identified in the structuralist method, theory and practice. Related theoretical shifts are exemplified in Lewis-Williams' work - from linguistic structuralism to semiotic analysis (thus addressing some problems of the linguistic model [Lewis-Williams 1981a]); to a structural-marxist approach (Lewis-Williams 1982), incorporating issues of power and society; and, most recently, reference to Giddensian structuration theory, which modifies the insights of continental (especially French) post-structuralism (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1994:218-9; cf. Giddens 1979, 1984). Post-structuralism has been described as "a critique of structuralism conducted from within: that is, it turns certain of Structuralism's arguments against itself and points to certain fundamental inconsistencies in their method which Structuralists have ignored" (Sturrock 1986:137). As a set of contemporary theoretical perspectives on signification, it is of relevance to rock art research (see Preziosi 1989, Chapter 4 for an outline of art history in relation to changing signification theories).

Structuration theory, along with Bourdieu's theory of practice, has been previously employed in San rock art research (Solomon 1989, 1992a), on the grounds that it offers some corrective to the major problems of structuralist approaches, and permits engagement with the constitution of society in a more general sense. Both Giddens and Bourdieu address the problematic aspects of structuralism, including the problems of binarism, synchronic analysis and an anti-historical orientation, questions of agency, and analytical reliance on the supposed existence of general 'laws'. In post-structuralist approaches (*sensu latu*), structure is not the realisation of pre-given rules, but only exists in its instantiation (Giddens 1979) or in practice (Bourdieu 1977). The emphasis on praxis challenges Levi-Straussian notions regarding an unconscious logic, and redirects attention towards agency.[5] Bourdieu (1977) also incorporates time and temporality in human agency as an important feature of his work, and recasts the issue

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[5] With reference to oral narratives, it has been argued that "the implication of this attitude is that the logic of myth is beyond the scope of the individual inputs of the narrators" (Okpewho 1983:43).

of unconscious logic in terms of the non-discursive logic of practice. Such approaches address the issues raised in the following critique by Wald (1969, cited by Okpewho 1983:43): "By reducing men [sic] to the station of a thing structuralism reduces time to the present and thus abolishes man's most human property: the freedom to contest and to create". Nevertheless, structural analyses retain importance: "structural analysis is a phase through which knowledge must needs pass" (Wald 1969, cited by Okpewho 1983:36; Layton 1985).

Certain of the problems which persist in rock art research may be traced to retained structuralist tenets and, amongst many archaeologists, general unfamiliarity with signification theory of any kind, let alone contemporary debates and developments in that field and in cultural studies. The problems of accommodating history and change into rock art research, and the problem of the 'pan-San cosmology' may be seen as deriving in part from structuralist principles employed.

The existence of the /Xam ethnographies greatly facilitated the argument that signs (paintings) could not be seen merely as iconic or literal depictions of scenes from everyday life; both Lewis-Williams and Vinnicombe showed that the prominent symbol of the eland embodied far greater referential complexity than had previously been acknowledged. The symbolic approach incorporated a trenchant critique of empiricism, and iconographical studies were fundamental to this development. Iconography remains a crucial area of rock art research, as the range of San imagery continues to be documented. The limitations of this approach have, however, become increasingly foregrounded, partly as a result of encounters with art historical approaches. Thus, for example, various writers have considered non-iconographic approaches, such as the relationship of figure and ground (e.g. Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1990; Skotnes 1994). An aspect of previous research (Solomon 1989:113-19) drew *inter alia* on the art historical work of Schapiro (1985), to consider gender, perspective, and space : time. Schapiro discussed "directedness" in art as arising from "the task of representing an order of time in an order of space" (Schapiro 1969:215). This approach, which also does not simply focus on iconography, is extended here in relation to the mythic woman motif.

Though iconographical pursuits are as initially necessary as is structural analysis, the iconographic method is insufficient in itself. It has been argued that "iconographical deciphering has too often taken the place of meaning" (Zerner 1974, cited by Preziosi 1989:112), and that it may consist of "mechanical processes of iconographic text-matching" (Preziosi 1989:37). This also relates to formalist approaches, where meaning is held to be primarily inherent in form (e.g. Skotnes 1994). The approach has been criticised on the grounds that "iconography as a method is founded on the postulate that the artistic image (and indeed any relevant image) achieves a signifying articulation only within and because of the textual reference which passes through and eventually imprints itself in it" (Damisch 1975:31, cited by Preziosi 1989:195). As Preziosi notes further, "the artwork remains a medium through which pass intentions, concepts, meanings or signifieds. We are back to the transitive communicational model of artistic signification" (Preziosi 1989:110), a paradigm which is "idealist in the extreme with regard to its picture of language as such, occluding all but the most simple one-on-one interpersonal locution...It privileges Voice over its representations or material traces" (1989:48). Rather, Preziosi urges, it is necessary to consider signifieds as "present for thought, independent of a relation to language" (1989:110).

If images are to be seen as independent of language, then the ethnographic method must be seen as inadequate. This is because its very aim is to provide the textual references mentioned by Damisch (above). On the other hand, though the critique of the logocentric paradigm or transitive communicational model points to severe limitations in the iconographic method, it is not necessarily antithetical to a view of the artwork as a site of changing meanings. Specifically, Preziosi's critique points to a lack within art historical studies of appropriate ways of considering the 'nature' of visual signification, and highlights the tenacity of the linguistic model. Iconographic approaches ask 'what?' questions, rather than 'how?' questions. This problem is equally relevant in relation to use of the ethnographies. Though structuralism was designed for linguistic texts (even non-western mythology in particular in Levi-Strauss' work), in the ethnographic method there has been a failure to account for the textuality of the material and the ways in which the narratives work as narratives. Various problems of the ethnographic method may be discussed under the general rubric of textuality.

San narratives: textuality, texture, context

To a certain extent, the ethnographic method consists of 'text-matching'. This is particularly apparent in Vinnicombe (1976a), where painted images are discussed in tandem with ethnographic references, in a manner which might best be described as juxtapositioning. Thus, for example, Vinnicombe describes paintings of snakes, and expands on their possible significance by citing San commentaries which suggest that for the San snakes are generalised symbols of death and regeneration. Lewis-Williams took this method several steps further when he described the process of relating art and ethnography as one of endless two-way exegesis (Lewis-Williams 1981a:34), with art and ethnography mutually illuminating each other. However, the possibility of *non*-correspondence, and the problems of establishing the strength or otherwise of a putative correspondence, remain to be addressed. A more thoroughgoing account is needed as to how different media may 'illuminate' each other. The signifying differences of different media and their different constraints and possibilities also require further attention.

A less daunting and initially more feasible task is to place further emphasis on how the ethnographies 'work' as texts. An unfortunate feature of the ethnographic method concerns the selection and decontextualisation of ethnographic references. Such an approach has been described by Okpewho as "inventorial": "By extracting from each direct references to plants, trees, animals, objects, activities, techniques, persons, divinities, places, houses, patterns of living and thinking, and so on, one can compile an impressive inventory of...culture" (Biebuyck 1978:34, cited by Okpewho 1983:127).[6] Okpewho (1983) views this approach as quintessential functionalism which reduces culture to a list of items. More pressing problems concern the decontextualisation associated with the inventorial or evidential method.

Hewitt (1986) and Guenther (1991) have addressed some problems concerning the context of /Xam oral tradition; Guenther (1991) has highlighted the extent to which

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[6] In this case, the reference is to Banyanga culture.

narratives in the Bleek and Lloyd Collection are already abstracted from their original setting, and apparently tailored to the interview context. Thus, for example, the /Xam stories are intriguingly devoid of the scatological imagery recorded from !Kung and Nharo narratives, perhaps because two of the recorders were Victorian and Edwardian spinsters.[7] Traditional performative elements are absent, along with the conventional audience; and the recording context involved a power relation which in all likelihood influenced narration (Guenther 1991; Solomon 1991). Yet most use of ethnography takes little or no account of such factors, treating one ethnographic reference just like another, with little regard for contextual and textual features. Genre and narrative devices are not given due attention when ethnographies are used to interpret rock art.

The shifting ways in which ethnography has been used in rock art research have been described as involving "A new emphasis on hermeneutics, the interpretation of the art, and a wrestling with the very considerable theoretical and practical problems confronting such an enterprise" (Dowson and Lewis-Williams 1994:3-4). However, the hermeneutic component of this shift is limited. As the quotation indicates, the hermeneutic or exegetical approach was directed primarily at the art, rather than the ethnographies, and even then, it bears little resemblance to the hermeneutic tradition. Hermeneutics concerns "the phenomenon of understanding as a pre-condition for the interpretation of texts...[and] is mainly due to the work of Heidegger, Gadamer and Habermas", as well as "Dilthey, Schleiermacher, Ricoeur, Betti and Hirsch" (Nethersole 1982:147; Ray 1984; Ricoeur 1981; Thompson 1981). Contrary to Dowson and Lewis-Williams' claim, the influence of these writers is not evident in rock art research (cf. Johnson and Olson's (1992) critique of Hodder's contextual archaeology). In particular, there is little attention paid to the partiality of understanding or exegesis as "grounded in the individual's historicity and in the 'perspectivity' of understanding" (Nethersole 1982:154). The role of the reader in constituting the meaning of a text and the fact that the ethnographies are open to different readings are not accounted for. This is particularly relevant to the

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[7] It is also of interest that nineteenth century copies of paintings at Giant's Castle Main Caves were classed and reproduced according to the extent to which they offended the copyist. He constructed an 'obscene class' of paintings, which he did not copy, and also omitted to copy certain features, such as male genitalia (Ward and Maggs 1994).

interpretation of metaphors (see above); any approach which relies on the identification of metaphors should also take into account the contingency and situatedness of such identifications.

The shamanistic model is, in a sense, antithetical to a hermeneutic approach in that it has been underpinned by the notion of the homogeneous group (past and present) whose members share perspectives and consensus, rather than taking non-consensus as a salient issue. For example, drawing on theories of discourse (e.g. Macdonell 1986) it has been suggested that San art and narratives may have signified differently to different social interest groups, such as men and women (Solomon 1989, 1992a). Lewis-Williams and Dowson, however, appear to remain wedded to a notion of ultimate objectivity, and a subject-object dualism (cf. Ingold 1993, and cf. Chapter 3). The dominant model thus incorporates particular epistemological problems.

In summary, problems with the ethnographic method include lingering structuralist tenets, a hermeneutic approach (or the lack thereof); problems regarding the relationship between myth or narrative and art, and myth and ritual; temporality, historicity and perspectivity, textuality and contextuality. An alternative approach takes temporality and hermeneutics as important areas for development, with ontological and epistemological implications. This approach is developed further, with regard to the use of mythology, in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

San ethnographies and mythology

San narratives have been collected for over a century by travellers, colonial officials and dabblers, anthropologists and folklorists. The Bleek and Lloyd Collection, comprising accounts given by /Xam speakers from the northern Cape, is the largest such collection and contains *inter alia* stories, songs, genealogies, personal histories, accounts of experiences, and comments on aspects of belief, 'customs', ritual observances, and so on. Although not fully translated, its wealth of material makes it central not only to studies of San art in a general sense, but of relevance to researchers across a range of disciplines. The context of the collection is outlined in Bleek and Lloyd (1911), in which a number of the narratives are published in full, with the accompanying /Xam text. Wilhelm Bleek, a German linguist interested in African languages, obtained permission for /Xam language speakers from the northern Cape to be released from the Breakwater prison into his custody. They worked ostensibly as domestic servants, and lived at the bottom of the garden. However, their principal function was to provide material for Bleek's linguistic studies. With the help of his sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd, and later his daughter, Dorothea Bleek, they conducted interviews with the released prisoners (all male) over several years. Female relatives joined them in the later years, but most of the material was contributed by three male narrators, Dia!kwain, //Kabbo and /Han≠kasso. Further elaboration of the context of the collection may be found in Lewis-Williams (1981a); Guenther (1989, 1991, 1994); and Deacon (1986, 1991, 1994). Related texts include the publications from the Bleek/Lloyd collection by D.F. Bleek (e.g. 1924, 1928), and reports by W.H.I. Bleek and Lloyd (Bleek 1875; Lloyd 1889), as well as a number of compilations of extracts published by Dorothea Bleek, Wilhelm Bleek's daughter, in the 1930s (e.g. 1933a,b; 1935).

The references to the Bleek and Lloyd collection in this chapter require clarification. The notebooks in which the interviews were recorded consist of two columns on a page. The right hand column is the original /Xam version, in the phonetic script developed by Wilhelm Bleek. The left hand column is the recorder's translation. The initial letter (B or

L) refers to the interviewer and recorder, either Wilhelm Bleek or Lucy Lloyd.[1] Wilhelm Bleek's notebooks are simply labelled consecutively in Roman numerals. Lloyd's notebooks are further sub-divided, principally in order to correspond with the narrator, but also to indicate *reverso*, or notes made on the back of a page; hence LII-28.2504' refers to Lloyd's second series of notebooks (Roman numerals); the twenty eighth in that series; page 2504 in that series. The accent at the end indicates that it is on the reverse of page 2504.

A large collection of narratives has also been compiled by Biesele (e.g. 1975, 1993) during her work with the Ju/'hoan (!Kung), while a smaller but important store of Nharo oral literature (northern Botswana) has been published by Guenther (1989). Also in Botswana, Barnes (n.d.) collected a number of stories from the Basarwa at Lethlakane. Other sources include E.W. Thomas' (1950) collection of Hai//om stories (from northern Namibia), Orpen's publication of Maluti San mythology from Lesotho (1874) and !Kung narratives included by E. Thomas in her book on '*The Harmless People*' (1959). Schmidt's catalogue of Khoisan oral literature (1989) was unfortunately not available.[2] The principal groups and their distribution are shown in Map 2.

Schmidt (1991:1) notes that earlier researchers considered /Xam tales as "unique in every respect", and as standing "completely apart from the folklore of any other African peoples", a view strengthened by anthropological and archaeological suspicion of diffusionist explanations. More recently, researchers have demonstrated significant parallels in the narrative traditions of linguistically diverse Khoisan groups. Schmidt has argued that "A considerable number of /Xam tales have variants among other Khoisan folklore...beyond the mere enumeration of common topics" (1991:24), whereas Biesele (1993:34) has stated that "Bushman folklore itself is practically indistinguishable from Khoisan tradition as a whole". Researchers have noted various commonalities between the lore of various Khoisan peoples. Marshall (1957) noted conceptual similarities between /Xam accounts and the !Kung concept of *n!ow* (supernatural potency associated with birth

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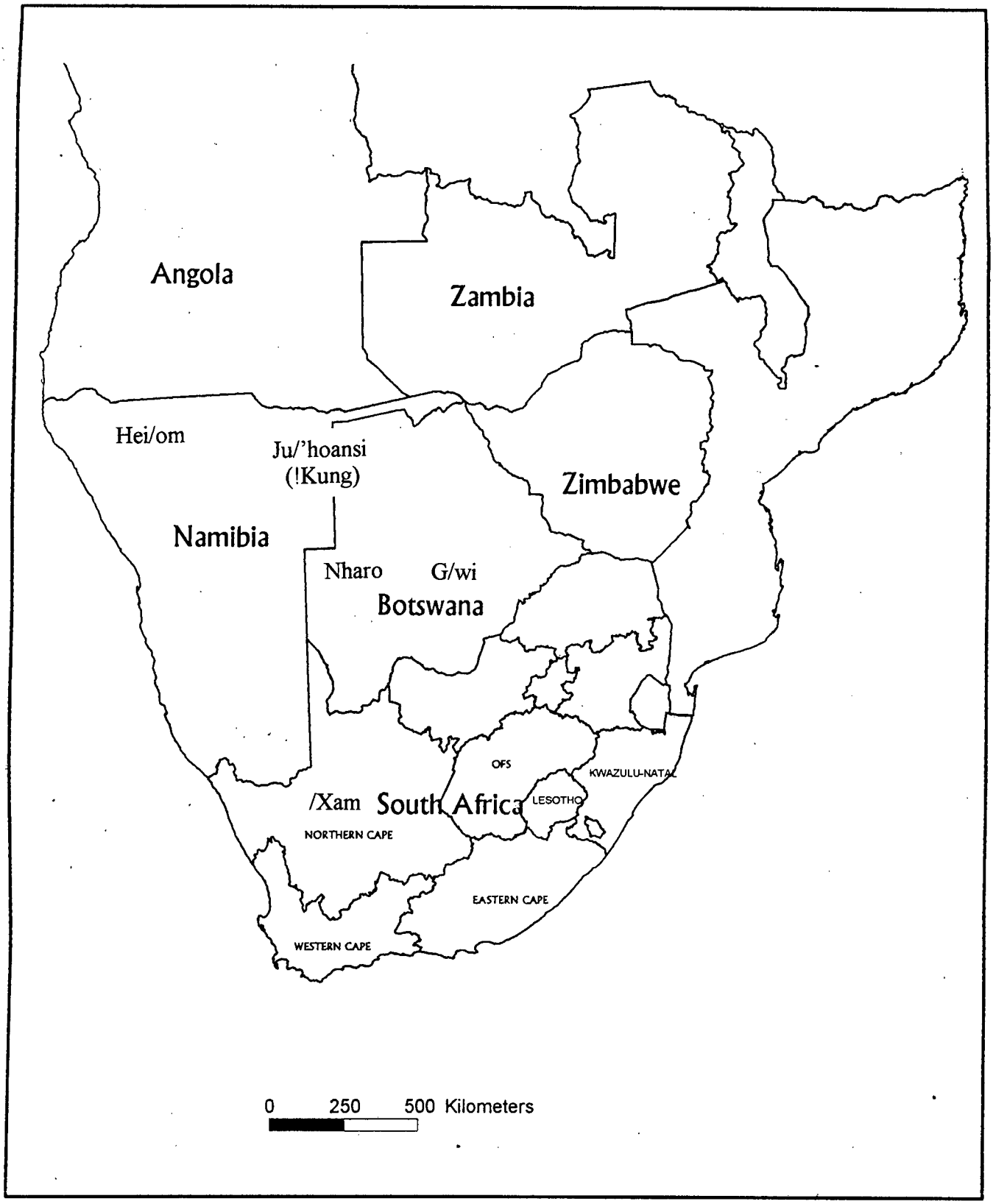
[1] The 153 notebooks compiled by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd were consulted; other notebooks and material which are part of the collection, including letters, drafts of manuscripts and later additions by Dorothea Bleek, were not consulted.

[2] Although ordered, it had not been acquired by the library at the time of writing.



Map 2. Southern Africa, showing areas occupied by certain Khoi and San speaking groups.

and rain); McCall discussed the widespread use of the 'Wolf courts Girl' metaphor in San texts; Lewis-Williams has demonstrated that certain shamanistic elements crosscut various San societies; while /Xam rainmaking practices (Bleek 1933a,b; Schmidt 1979) show marked structural parallels with the Khoi 'annual killing', discussed by Hoernle' in 1922 (Biesele 1975, 1993; Solomon 1989). The similarities between /Xam and Nharo oral tradition are brought to the fore in Guenther's (1989) collection of stories; these resemblances are highlighted by their textual juxtapositioning. Guenther has stated that both Nharo and /Xam narratives "are part of one mythological tradition and, despite some differences in content, texture and narrative style, they are remarkably uniform. This tradition would seem to include the other Bushman groups as well" (Guenther 1989:13).

As noted in previous chapters, the notion of a 'pan-San cosmology' has proven problematic and controversial; however, the implication of recent research is that widespread common cosmological features are very real, and at some level it is both possible and necessary to consider a 'pan-Khoisan' cosmology. It even seems that it would not be impossible to speak cautiously of a sub-Saharan African cosmology, since many motifs, such as that of snakes living in rivers, and stories, such as that of 'The Origin of Death', are found amongst sub-Saharan Bantu- and Khoisan speakers alike (Finnegan 1970), albeit with some differences (cf. Chapter 5).

Most of the San oral literature displays the influence of neighbouring linguistic, economic and social groups.. Khoi (Korana) influences are found in the /Xam collection; Tswana, Kalanga and Christian influences in Nharo and Basarwa narratives (Guenther 1989); and Nama influences in the Hai//om stories (Thomas 1950). The existence of significantly similar cosmologies amongst diverse groups challenges any notion of pristine 'San' oral literature, and enhances the relevance of oral tradition from areas distant to the paintings under consideration. It cannot simply be assumed that commonalities are merely the result of recent interactions.

Certain features are common to all (Khoi)San literature. According to Hewitt (1986:58) "All collections of San oral literature contain the notion that animals were once people and were later changed into the animals we know". Also, "Two central myths shared by all groups are the story of the moon and the hare and the acquisition of death and theft of fire

from a being (usually Ostrich) who carried fire under its armpit" (Guenther 1989:34).[3] Similarly the trickster figure, known to different groups by various names (e.g. Cagn, Kaggen, Kaonxa, Pisiboro[4]) is widely shared. Of especial interest are correspondences between the /Xam narratives and those told by Qing many miles away in the Maluti mountains in Lesotho. There are, for example, strong structural and iconographic parallels between Qing's account of the creation of the eland, and those found in the Bleek and Lloyd Collection.

Time and classificatory devices

Various typologies have been used to classify San oral tradition, with distinctions being drawn between myths, fables, legends, songs, poetry and so on. However, as Guenther (1989:36-7) notes, problems of categorisation are legion. He proposes a simplified version of the typologies devised by Bleek and Lloyd (1911) and Hewitt (1986), consisting simply of the categories 'Creation', 'Primal Time' and 'The Trickster'. This - as Guenther acknowledges - is clearly only partly satisfactory. For example, tales concerning the trickster-deity /Kaggen might be placed in all three of these categories simultaneously. However, Guenther regards this typology as fundamentally an "heuristic ordering device" which highlights the "nodal points" of San thought (1989:37). A problem with Guenther's typology is the absence of a category of menarcheal stories (introduced by Hewitt (1986) as a supplement to Bleek and Lloyd's typology). These are a particular feature of the /Xam tales (at least sixteen examples), yet, despite their prominence, they have not always received the attention they require. Whatever ordering devices are used, it should be borne in mind that no generic distinctions were made by the /Xam narrators, who referred to all stories as *kum* (pl. *kukummi*) (Hewitt 1986:47), and the same situation is found with reference to the Nharo and Ju/'hoan (!Kung), who speak of the stories of the old people, or some phrase to that effect (Guenther 1989; Biesele 1993).

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[3] In fact, the latter story is not found in the /Xam narratives, although the motif of fire under the armpit is found in the /Xam narrative concerning the origin of the sun (LII.4.487-489; Bleek and Lloyd 1911:44-57).

[4] Biesele (1993:17; my parentheses) notes, however, that in terms of content the adventures of Ju/'hoan (!Kung) trickster-deity "are very different from those of the G/ui [G/wi] god Pisiboro, even though the latter is also a trickster".

Temporal factors have been a recurrent theme in narrative typologies, time being the dimension along which much classification has focussed. Thus, for example, myths and legends have been separated on the basis of the latter's potential factuality, and relation to a recognisable 'real' past, as opposed to those narratives which are set in mythical times. In this regard it has been claimed by Barnard that "/Xam narratives tend not to be set in an ancient or other-worldly time"; but he adds that, despite accounts of encounters with Korana, "most of the tales do have a more mythological basis" (Barnard 1992:82). However, it may be counter-argued that this mythological time - primal time, or that of the 'people of the early race' - is inescapably other-worldly time. Commenting on Guenther's typology, Barnard has endorsed the separation of the themes of creation, primal time and the trickster, with the proviso that 'primal time' be taken as referring to "non-present oriented time" (Barnard 1992:83), thus acknowledging the importance of the temporal dimension in narrative. Time factors have also been drawn on as a feature distinguishing Nama (Khoi language) and San narratives: according to Schmidt (1991:24), Nama narratives make a clearer distinction between tales of primal time and those concerning the present or near past than is found in the /Xam stories. Schmidt (1991:21), in her analysis of the interrelationships of /Xam and Khoisan narratives, stresses the need to consider such relationships "from various angles and to go beyond the mere enumeration of common topics". This may be understood in terms of critiques of iconography-centred approaches (see Chapter 5). Instead of focussing narrowly on iconography, Schmidt repeatedly returns to address what she calls "the time dimension in discussions of Khoisan folklore" (1991:16), emphasising, as have others, the temporal settings of the narratives. The concept of temporality may be drawn on as an alternative to iconography-centred typologies.

As has been noted by almost all researchers of San oral literature, a majority of stories concern the 'first people', 'first Bushmen' or 'people of the early race', as Bleek and Lloyd (1911) translated the /Xam phrase. Common to the stories of diverse San groups is the theme of an initial creation time, after which the world was occupied by these people (literally "First-at-sitting people" [Hewitt 1986:63]), who were, at that point, inseparable from animals, and lacked appropriate manners and behaviour. Nharo narratives also

involve a second 'creation'; humans and animals were irrevocably separated, and the current order was instituted. In the /Xam texts, the second creation is described in narratives dealing with 'The Anteater's Laws'. Despite some regional differences, San notions of creation - or "dual creation" (Guenther 1989:31,34) are both distinctive and widespread. A very brief outline of the content of the narratives serves to illustrate further the importance of time factors in their construction.

The characters

Perhaps the most prominent character in the narratives is the trickster - /Kaggen, in the /Xam texts deriving from the northern Cape, and Cagn in the mythology collected by Orpen from Lesotho (both late nineteenth century). In the /Xam collection, /Kaggen, also known as the Mantis, is a gender-ambiguous figure whose supernatural abilities may be turned to either benevolent or mischievous and malicious deeds. He is married to the dassie, [5] and has two sons, !Gauna-ts'axau and young /Kaggen. He also has an adopted daughter, the porcupine, who is married to /Kwammanga; this couple also has two children, young /Kwammanga and the ichneumon (referred to hereafter as a mongoose). Other more or less prominent characters in the family include /Kaggen's sister, the blue crane, and the porcupine's father, //Kwai hemm, the all-devourer; the porcupine had fled from him because of his propensity for devouring everything in sight, fearing that he would consume her also. In the adventures of this 'first family', other 'primal people' are encountered, including baboons, lions, jackals, quaggas, tortoises, lizards, hyaenas, meerkats, elephants, anteaters, springbok, zorillas and other creatures which are simultaneously both human and animal.[6]

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[5] The hyrax or 'rock rabbit', *Procavia capensis*. Zoological identifications are based on Dorst and Dandelot (1970).

[6] Some of these require further description. Baboon: *Papio ursinus*; jackal: various species of the *Canidae*, similar to the fox; quagga: zebra, or an extinct species of zebra; meerkat: *Suricata suricatta*, a kind of mongoose; zorilla: *Ictonyx striatus*, striped polecat.

Creation

/Kaggen is one of the principal creators, being responsible for the creation of the moon and the eland (one version by //Kabbo, and one by Dia!kwain). There are very marked similarities between this story and that related by Qing to Orpen (1874). In the /Xam versions, /Kaggen takes the shoe of his son-in-law, /Kwammanga, and turns it into an eland which he nurtures with honey. The mongoose is sent to discover why /Kaggen does not bring home honey, and the eland is discovered. /Kwammanga kills the eland, to /Kaggen's great distress. He follows the eland spoor, only to find the meerkats dismembering the animal. By piercing the gall bladder of another eland he creates darkness but, unable to see his way, is forced to create the moon by throwing one of his shoes into the sky.

Not all creative acts are due to /Kaggen, however. The creation of the sun is attributed to the children of the first people. The sun was a man, from whose armpit light radiated, but this light only illuminated the area around his hut. The children threw the sleeping sun into the sky, where it has ever since given light more widely (LII-4.487-489; Bleek and Lloyd 1911:44-57). The Milky Way was also created by a girl of the early people (LII-28.2505-2524; Bleek and Lloyd 1911:72-79; Hewitt 1986:280-81). She was a female initiate (the "first girl" [LII-28.2504']), who, resentful in menarcheal seclusion, and subject to irksome dietary restrictions, threw wood ashes into the sky where they became the Milky Way (LII-28.2505-2524). She also made locusts from the peel of other food, and other stars from a fragrant root ((LII-28.2516'). Other narratives, while not dealing with creation *per se*, account for the origin of various phenomena. Thus, a fight between the lion and the ostrich, in which the former injures the latter, is said to explain a mark on the ostrich's leg (LV-5.4320-4345; LV-5.4320'; Bleek and Lloyd 1911:127-37). Similarly, another narrative accounts for the fact that baboons have bare skin on their rumps - because they were burnt after being tricked into sitting on hot stones (L-V.24.5974-97; Lloyd 1889). As a result of the she-jackal's successful deception, the hyaena fell into the fire and burnt the back of its body. "This is why the back part of the hyaena's body is very small, because it formerly was burning in the fire" (LV-5.4255). The reason for the long claws possessed by

the ratel (honey badger, *Mellivora capensis*) is explained by a narrative in which his hands become trapped in the neck of the Leopard Tortoise or *water schilpad* (LV-5.4281-2).[7]

The themes of reversal and regeneration are recurrent and pervasive in both the older and more recent texts. In 'The Mantis makes an Eland', as D.F. Bleek (1924) called her composite of five versions, /Kaggen takes a piece of his eland and reconstitutes it by placing it in the water (LII-4.489-519; LV-1.3608-3683; LVIII-6.6505-6595; BII.279-433). This is one of several references to the restorative powers associated with the waterhole. In another narrative, the male ostrich, killed by a hunter, is revived by means of a bloody feather being placed in the water (BXIII.1214-1306; BXIV.1307-1336; Bleek and Lloyd 1911:137-145). This theme is reiterated in the story of the blue crane, the frog and her husband. The blue crane, while helping to resolve a marital dispute between the frog and her husband, is caught and killed by lions. /Kaggen reconstitutes his sister, the blue crane, by placing a bone in the water from which she is regrown (L-VII.32.8794-8811; Bleek 1924:26-27).

Menarcheal narratives (discussed in further detail below) utilise similar motifs, but a different directionality, or reverse time. The girl at puberty is associated with !Khwa, the stormy, dangerous rain; he is attracted by her smell, and "does not like a new maiden" (LV-2.3865'). The consequences of an initiate's disobedience are the reverse of creation; she and her family are taken by the rain into the waterhole and drowned; their possessions revert to a natural state: karosses become springbok and arrows become reeds (e.g. B-XXVII.2609-2618; LVI-1.3930-3958)

The 'Anteater's Laws' and the story which prefaces them are also linked to the separation of the species in the time of the second creation, and demonstrate the role of creation stories in the definition of social norms. The narrative concerning the anteater whose springbok child marries a lynx is well described by Hewitt (1986); it is followed by a very long account of who should marry whom. Essentially, each animal is expected to marry its own kind, as opposed to the previous order in which the jackal might marry the quagga, the lynx the springbok, and so on. The 'Anteater's Laws' bespeak a new creation, after

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7 *Testudo pardalis*, one of the largest tortoise species.

which the world is as it is today, and proper marriages between appropriate species must be observed (LII-2.323-356; LII-3.383-475; LVI.1.3916-29; LVIII-29.8561-8602).

The moon and the hare

Particularly prominent in the Bleek and Lloyd Collection are narratives about the moon and the hare, also known as 'The Origin of Death'. The story of the moon and the hare is ubiquitous among Khoisan speakers, whereas that dealing with 'The Origin of Death' is a narrative theme found widely in sub-Saharan Africa (Finnegan 1970:337; Guenther 1989); Schmidt (1980) has recorded over forty Khoisan versions of these related stories. Seven versions of this narrative are represented in the Bleek and Lloyd Collection (BXV.1403-1482; BXXV.2361-2364; LII-6.670-77; LIV-4.3886-3900). Three are narrated by Dia!kwain, [8] three by /Kasin, and one by /A!kunta. The gist of the story concerns an interchange between the moon and the hare (sometimes a young hare), whose mother lies dead. Despite the moon's assurances that the hare's mother is only sleeping, and will rise again, alive, just as the moon waxes and wanes, the hare remains disbelieving. In four of the versions, the moon attacks the hare, either burning its mouth with a heated stone, or striking it with a stick - hence the cleft lip of all hares.

It has been customary to distinguish between Khoi and San versions of this narrative; in the Khoi (and other African versions), the motif of the messenger is present: "the Moon sends the Hare to men with the message of the renewal of life; but it reverses it into a message of death" (Bleek 1875:10); in another version (LV-1.3608-3683), this leads to the death of the moon's mother.

This narrative has also been collected from the Nharo in the 1960s (Guenther 1989; four versions), with some notable features. The hare is female; and in two versions, the hare attacks the moon, throwing her pubic apron and/or blanket, which are hot from the fire, at the moon, where they stick to its face. This is said to explain why the moon's face is "black and white", or has "many colours" (Guenther 1989:52-4). Another version was recorded

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[8] Although /Kasin gave the first page of one version.

by Lloyd (LXI and LXII-8.9627-9670) from Tamme, one of two young !Kung boys, and analysed by Dickens (1991). This lengthy and complicated text, which features much violence and conflict, takes the familiar theme of death and regeneration, but incorporates a great deal of narrative detail which is not found in other versions. Apart from the theme of whether or not the Bushmen will die or rise again, it incorporates the character Xue, who torments the grief-stricken hare, and also involves the moon beating Xue insensible, the moon and his wife attacking each other, as well as other sundry assaults.

The stories of the moon, the hare and 'The Origin of Death' echo the theme which is found in other accounts regarding the moon, namely that of endless cyclicity. Other /Xam accounts (e.g. BI.215bb) describe how "The sun's knife pierces the moon who smells badly"; the moon, who "is a man", entreats the sun not to dismember him completely, but to leave the backbone for the children.[9] The relationship of sun and moon revolves around this theme of the sun stabbing the moon in the stomach, thus reducing it to the new moon, and the moon's regeneration, whereupon the process repeats itself endlessly. Given the gendering of phases of the moon, this is an engendered process.

The temporal dimension of stories dealing with the moon is clear; it is also clear from the narratives that the moon is crucial to time reckoning, as well as being prominent in relation to the new maiden. !Kweiten ta //ken ('Rachel' to her interviewers), on the topic of new maidens and their seclusion in a special menarcheal hut, stated that "The moon is cut as she...lies; and another moon, it is the one which living comes; it is the one that the old women take her out at. The old women take her out when a new moon is the one which living comes" (LVI-2.4000-2). Lucy Lloyd noted (LVI-2.3999'; my parentheses) that "As far as I can understand R[achel], the girl lives one month in the house, half one moon and half another'. The moon is prominently associated with the female initiate among many groups, including the !Kung, who employ various 'moon metaphors' in relation to female biophysiology. For example, a !Kung woman, !Nisa, spoke of pregnancy (Shostak 1981:376) as being "cut off from the moon";[10] whereas in the /Xam story of the Leopard Tortoise, which refers to menarcheal seclusion, it is stated that "The moon died and

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[9] The new moon is considered masculine and the full moon feminine; (cf. Solomon 1989, 1992a).
[10] See Solomon (1989) for a fuller account of the links between the moon and women.

another moon came while she still lay ill" (LVI-2.4054').[11] In the menarcheal tales, an explicit linkage is made between time and the body. Before discussing this further, the concept of embodiment requires further discussion.

"All thoughts and actions emanate from the body. Therefore the description of a thought or action - however abstruse it may be - can be beaten home by bringing it onto a physical level. Every idea, intuitive or intellectual, can be imaged and translated in terms of the body, its flesh, skin, blood, sinews, veins, glands, organs, cells or senses" (Dylan Thomas, in Ferris 1985:39).

A striking feature of San narratives is the extent to which physical imagery occurs; landscape and the physical setting are not at all prominent, and although there are a number of narratives (e.g. the young woman of the early race who caught her breast in a rock [LVIII-32.8821-42]) where the action and dramatic tension focusses on a war of nerves between the characters, in many tales it is physical action which carries the plot. Very frequently this takes the place of physical violence and fighting (e.g. see Dickens' (1991) version of the !Kung moon and hare story). In Ju/'hoan and Nharo narratives, there is also a great deal of scatological imagery, which is partly used for comic effect (cf. Biesele 1993:27-31), but it seems likely that the Bleek and Lloyd Collection may have been constrained by the relationship between the /Xam narrators and the recorders (Guenther 1991; Solomon 1991). As Guenther (1991) has commented, this may have been a mutual effort on the parts of both narrators and recorders. Though almost devoid of the scatological features of other narrative collections, the Bleek and Lloyd material nevertheless displays a marked emphasis on the physical; indeed, it is replete with such imagery.

Various texts illustrate the significance of body symbolism in /Xam symbolic and cultural life. For example, the right and left sides of the body have different symbolic connotations; the right side, associated with the hunting arm (i.e. the arm which shoots the arrow) is

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[11] References to a girl or woman who 'lies ill' are generally references to menarcheal seclusion (cf. Hewitt 1986, Lewis-Williams 1981a, Solomon 1989, 1992a).

considered masculine, as are artefacts (e.g. the shoe) associated with it, whereas the left side of the body is categorised as feminine (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:329; cf. Solomon 1989, 1992a). This association is expanded on in the narrative tradition, where /Kaggen, as well as his son, are said to be left-handed (LII-34.3132'). This is indicative of /Kaggen's gender-anomalous character, and his feminine attributes. In the story of the /kain /kain bird (LVIII-3.6271-6303), /Kaggen carries a weighted digging stick, which is a woman's artefact, in his left hand, and is permitted contact with a girl in seclusion, who would be very much out of bounds for mortal men.

Physical metaphors are prominent; for example, reference to a person with "decayed arms" means that the person is stingy and ungenerous (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:125n.). Physical sensations are assigned oracular or prophetic value, as illustrated by //Kabbo's account of presentiments (LII-28.2531- 2656; Bleek and Lloyd 1911:330-39; original parentheses). He said that "The Bushman's letters are in their bodies. They [the letters] speak, they move, they make their [the Bushmans'] bodies move". In her annotation, Lloyd states that bodily sensations resemble our "letters", which carry a message or an account of what happens in another place (LII-28.2531'). //Kabbo described how a tapping inside the body tells them of people approaching: "With regard to an old wound, a Bushman feels a tapping at the wound's place, while the tapping feels that the man (who has the old wound) walks, moving his body" (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:333; original parentheses). In other words, he feels a tapping in his body at the place where someone else had a wound; this prefigures the approach of that person. Similarly, people "feel" the springbok; they feel the black hair on the springbok's flanks, and "a sensation in our face, on account of the blackness of the stripe on the face of the springbok" (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:335). Sneezing may mean that the person sneezing has been called by name (LII-6:634-53); and sneezing in the early morning is considered to be unfortunate (LV-21.5654'-5658'). Physical sensations are also linked to rain-making and dreaming in one statement: "I dreamt that I told the rain to fall for me, for my arms ached, my chest ached" (LII-6; inside front cover). The practice of shamanism (to which rainmaking, and the above statement, may be linked) also provides an abundance of physical metaphors and symbolism, as Lewis-Williams has shown.

Also prominent in the various Khoisan ethnographies is the belief in the potency of bodily fluids and substances. This is very marked in the menarcheal tales, where blood is believed to attract the malevolent rain bull, !Khwa. Marshall (1957) has described the !Kung belief in *n!ow* (*n!ao* in Biesele's orthography), where amniotic fluid seeping into the earth has lifelong effects linked to good and bad weather. Other accounts point to the supernatural properties of urine, saliva and hair.

In a similar vein, body markings are more than mere decoration; it is described that young women painted outgoing hunters with stripes resembling that of the zebra, so that they might have some protection from the rain (LVI-13972', 3973; Lewis-Williams 1981a). This also appears to be linked to the complex of beliefs surrounding women, whose relationship with the rain is particularly important at puberty and beyond, since the rain is attracted by the smell of female initiates and adult women of reproductive age.

More prominent than any other are physical metaphors centring in one way or another on eating, swallowing and the stomach. This metaphor is found in the story which describes the relation of sun and moon; the full moon is conceptualised as a person with a full stomach, whom the sun attacks, sometimes with a stone knife: "the sun must pierce break [i.e. stab] his [the moon's] stomach" (BI.215bb; my parentheses). Stabbing and disembowelment are relatively frequent events in the narratives. In most of the stories concerning the creation of eland and the moon (see above), /Kaggen pierces the gall of an eland, which was hanging on a bush, and thus creates a darkness. (Then, unable to see his way, he creates the moon). Thus it is not only human body parts which have magical significance.

In other narratives the stomach is again the focus of attention. In one which illustrates the ignorance of the first San, a stupid man believes his wife's enlarged stomach to be full of meat. He cuts her open, only to discover that she is pregnant (LVI-2.4064-4070). The 'stomach motif' is also found in a story which Hewitt (1986:47) classifies as a legend, rather than as a story about the first people, since it includes an encounter with enemy Koranna. Hewitt (1986:67) summarises the story as follows:

"!Kotta koe, a young boy, goes out to collect ostrich eggs together with his younger brother. While the younger brother packs and carries his eggs in the customary manner,

i.e. in a net on his back, !Kotta koe swallows his whole and in such numbers that his stomach sticks out in many places...While collecting eggs one day, the younger brother notices a number of !Koranas, and, it is implied, the !Koranas notice the boys. !Kotta koe and his brother take flight, although !Kotta koe is impeded by his overladen stomach. The boys come to a stream which the younger brother jumps with ease. !Kotta koe attempts the same feat but falls into the water where his stomach breaks open and the eggs pour out. A !Kora warrior then comes into view brandishing an assegai but !Kotta koe persuades him that, as he is already almost dead, the !Korana would do better to chase the younger brother. This the gullible !Kora does whereupon !Kotta koe replaces the eggs in his stomach, stitches himself up with thorns, takes a short cut to where he knows his brother to be waiting, and together they return home safely. (LVIII-28.8486-8506)".

The themes of cannibalism and autophagy are also recurrent in San narratives. Examples include the /Xam story of the !khau lizard who progressively eats more and more of his own flesh (LVIII-12.7114-18); that of the mongoose who eats his own thighs (Hewitt 1986) and the story of the jackal and the quagga, in which the mother quagga and mother jackal cut off pieces of their own liver to feed to their children (LVI-1.3898-3915). A similar story collected by Barnes (n.d.) tells of Yo/wa, the Basarwa trickster figure, who turns his own intestines into meat, whereas the Kalahari Kua tell a story about a man who eats his own intestines, and meat which keeps going back into the stomach of the trickster, Kaonxa (Valiente-Noailles 1993:61). In other /Xam tales, the blue crane is tricked by lions into eating her own husband (Hewitt 1986:113); a zorilla who was once a man of the early race made himself small by feeding on his own flesh (LVIII-13.7158-7205), while an elaborate narrative features lions who were once men, one of which eats meat from his own thigh, while the other eats a slice of his companion's thigh. They end up at the house of a woman who lives with a little hare; this animal may link it to moon and hare stories (above). Bleek (1875:12) described this narrative as a "remarkable myth".

The all-devourer

Equally remarkable are two versions of a story in the Bleek/Lloyd collection, one narrated by //Kabbo and one by /Han≠kasso. They deal with the character //Kwai hemm, or the all-

devourer. As mentioned above, //Kwai hemm is the father of the porcupine, who is married to /Kwammanga, but she lives apart from her father lest she is also devoured by him. Hewitt (1986:225) suggests that this is the only narrative in the /Xam collection which displays the influence of the oral narratives of Bantu-speaking peoples. Citing Werner (1968) Hewitt notes that in that tradition there are a large number of narratives about a monster who devours many people, but is slain by a boy hero.

The all-devourer appears in both /Xam narratives after a story which recounts how the Mantis stole the ticks' sheep. //Kwai hemm is summoned by the porcupine as a desperate measure in order to consume the enemy. He has a "red hot tongue" and is little more than an anthropomorphised stomach: "For, she is the one who, herself, sees the stomach as the man yonder comes, he whom I desire that you may behold, the stomach yonder coming, it does truly extend itself (on each side of us) to us" (LII-34.3077; original parentheses). //Khwai hemm, true to character, consumes everything in sight, including all the available water. /Kaggen has his hands burnt, before being eaten, along with /Kwammanga. Young /Kwammanga and young /Kaggen are armed with spears by Porcupine, and they kill the all-devourer, but not until after he has also burnt young /Kaggen's temple, and young /Kwammanga's "ear root" (LII-34.3137). The two young heroes stab //Kwai hemm in the stomach, whereupon "Their grandfather doubled up, he died" (LII-34.3138-9). Out come all the things that have been consumed, including people, bushes, 'buckets' and so on.

Men marry meat and wolves court girls: hunting and eating metaphors

McCall (1970) examined the metaphor of women as prey in San cosmology, noting its widespread occurrence. This metaphor is indeed very common. In the /Xam collection it is found repeatedly, for example in the narrative concerning the jackal and the quagga (LVI-1.3898-3915). In accordance with the recurrent theme of the female herbivore married to a male carnivore, the quagga had married a jackal. The narrative recounts how the mother jackal and mother quagga fed their children with pieces of their own liver(s). The tortoise takes a piece of the quagga's liver and takes it to the jackals, who, after tasting it, decide that the jackal has 'married meat'. Therefore, they kill the quagga. "The quagga went away; she rolled on the wet earth, the rain's wet earth; because she felt that she was hot

with poison" (LVI-1.3903). She dies underneath a *kareeboom*.[12] The young quagga sits in the *kareeboom* and cries for the loss of its mother; its tears fall onto pots in the fire below, cracking them, much to the puzzlement of the jackals who are unaware of the quagga's presence. The young quagga informs her grandparents, which leads to the killing of the jackal, and the quaggas return home.

This narrative is unique to the /Xam collection in terms of the characters, but, in terms of plot, extremely similar stories are recorded from the Nharo (Guenther 1989; 2 versions), the !Kung (Marshall Thomas 1959; 1 version); Ju/'hoan (Biesele 1993; 1 version); and the Basarwa (Barnes [n.d.]; 3 versions). Though there are substantial differences between the different narratives, they all focus on a man who was married to an elephant, or who 'was married to meat and thought it was a wife'. Like the moon and hare story, this narrative appears to be ubiquitous among San groups.

The shortest version available is that given to Guenther (1989) by a man named Sobe:

"There was an elephant who was married to the ≠e≠e bird. The bird had made elephant pregnant. They were staying at Elephant's father' place. One day ≠e≠e said to his wife: "Let us move to my parents". When they got there, the child in Elephant's stomach said "I smell my father, let me out of the stomach. I want to see my father". She said "I will die". The child said "You won't die", and out he goes through her left side, the kidney part of her body. After he got out they slept and the next morning he took a bag and went along with his parents who had left to return to Elephant's place. When they got near Elephant's home, little ≠e≠e tried to pull away hair from underneath his testicles. He pulled some hairs and threw them. These hairs became vultures. He said "My father, let us go and see what those vultures are eating". When big and little ≠e≠e ran ahead to see what the vultures were doing, a thorn got stuck in little ≠e≠e's foot and he said "Run on and see those vultures! I have to get this thorn out of my foot."

When Elephant came, having caught up with him, the child noticed the awl she was carrying and said "Lend me that awl of yours". She gave it to him and he took out the thorn. After he had finished he threw the awl into her heart and killed her - inside the

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[12] The *kareeboom* (Afrikaans) is a kind of tree.

nipple of the right breast of Elephant. ≠e≠e's big brother, the husband of Elephant, who had run after her, arrived and found little ≠e≠e cutting off Elephant's breast. "Why are you killing this woman? Did you kill her?" he asked. "No, come first and taste this meat". He asked and little ≠e≠e said "You married not a person, this is an animal". When they had eaten this breast and had finished it, they loaded up some of the meat and carried it to their own house, going back to their village.

Before Elephant's death, she had said this to the people at her place: "You must know this: if ever a hyena appears into the village and if there is a large amount of water flowing at the village, you will know that I have died".

When this water came, as well as a hyena, which both came to the village, they remembered what they had been told by the woman: "She must have died. Wwa [Elephant woman's name] must have died. Let us follow the water; it will lead us to where she died." All of the village people followed and they came upon little ≠e≠e and his big brother. They were at the site of the killing of Elephant woman.

When the brothers saw Elephant's people, they ran away and went to an ant heap not far from the site of the killing. Little ≠e≠e's brother said to the ant heap: "Open yourself!" The ant heap didn't do anything. When little ≠e≠e arrived (having caught up with his brother) he said "Open yourself!" And it opened and they both stepped inside. He then said "Close yourself!" and it closed. When he saw that all the people who wanted to fight him and his brother had arrived, little ≠e≠e said "Open yourself" to the ant heap and it opened. He leaped out and he stood, facing the people as they came crowding around him. He fought them, all of them, and killed them all, did that little ≠e≠e! After killing all of the elephants, little and big ≠e≠e went and called their people. They proceeded to skin the elephants and they ate the elephant's meat until they finished it all" (Guenther 1989:89-90).

This version of the story is essentially the same as other versions, although there are significant differences. Features linking virtually all the versions include the characters of the two brothers; the use of an awl or thorn to kill the elephant; the theme of woman as meat; the presence of vultures; a termite hill that opens to hide the elephant wife's killers; the warning of the Elephant's family by means of a flux of water (in other versions, clearly amniotic fluid), and a violent denouement. Variations between the narratives are

sometimes marked; when Guenther collected the Nharo versions, one narrator insisted that the former had got it all wrong, and proceeded to tell a corrected version (Guenther 1989:88). It seems likely that some differences may be directly linked to the styles and skills of individual narrators.

Regional traditions must also play some role. Though all the versions recorded are, by and large, strikingly similar, versions collected by Barnes depart somewhat from the familiar themes. She states that "All three stories involve the younger brother cutting his mother's stomach so he can get out and see his brother. In all three stories, the older brother is married to an elephant" (Barnes n.d.:46). However, though this is clear in the stories entitled 'The story of Kekataba/webe and Tetaxagomang' and 'The story of the elephant', the marriage to an elephant is not explicitly mentioned in the third story, 'The old woman, //atsaraka/we and Thatagatshu'. However, the character Thatagatshu is, in 'The story of the elephant', married to an elephant. In the first of these three stories, the only significant difference from the theme is that, at the end, the brothers climb a spider web to the sky and stay there (Barnes n.d.:48). The other two stories both contain the motif of an old woman who has all things in her stomach. When she is killed, "Many people came from this woman's stomach - white men, Bushmen, Batswana, dogs, impala, kudu" (Barnes n.d.:52). [13] Though these two stories may contain elements of non-Khoisan narrative traditions, it might be argued that their fusion derives from and is made possible by their preoccupation with the same themes. In support of this contention is the fact that the most 'atypical' of the three narratives was told to Barnes' narrator by "Piti, an old Bushman...", although what is meant by 'Bushman' is problematic in view of contemporary debates concerning ethnicity and identity in Botswana (e.g. Wilmsen 1989; Wilmsen and Denbow 1990; Solway and Lee 1990).

Barnes' narratives foreground a feature of the tales which is not found in other versions, namely the relationship of the story to beliefs about the rain. In Barnes second version, the narrative concludes with //atsaraka/we and Thatagatshu going up to 'the heaven'. "When the rain rains, you will hear Kgikgikgikgi with a big sound. It is Thatagatshu. When the

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[13] Kudu and impala are both medium to large bovids, genus *Tragelaphus* and *Aepyceros* respectively.

rain rains, you will hear Kgikgikgikgi-TSAA. It is //atsaraka/we. When you hear the rain with the sound TSAA, it is //atsaraka/we" (Barnes n.d.:50).

The Nharo version illustrates well the importance of the imagery of the body in the narrative: initially, the containment of the child in the elephant's 'stomach'; his exit through, specifically, "her left side, the kidney part of her body"; the magical transformation of pubic hair into vultures; and the death of the elephant when she is stabbed - again, described with precision as "inside the nipple of the right breast" (Guenther 1989:90). The significance of such specific anatomical references cannot be gleaned from the recorded narratives, though it may be proposed that they are informed by culturally determined schemes within which the body and its components have particular resonances.

Though the theme of woman as meat is found in the /Xam collection, there is no story of the elephant wife *per se.* Two versions of a story which feature /Kaggen, and one which substitutes a character called !Gwa!nuntu for /Kaggen, do, however, bear some small resemblance. These three narratives contain the motif of a child concealed in the stomach of an elephant (LVIII-4.6334-6413; LV111-5.6414-55). Fragments of the same story related by !Kweiten ta //ken (LVI-1.3883-94) are not discussed here, owing to their partial nature. The story featuring !Gwa!nuntu runs as follows:

!Gwa!nuntu is digging for 'blennerfly's honey' with his daughter's child, whom he loves dearly.[14] He converses with the child, saying 'Dig, dig, dig. Art thou not eating as I am eating?', to which the child replies 'I am eating, as my grandfather is eating'.[15] Then !Gwa!nuntu goes to sleep in the hole which had been dug, while the child remains above the ground. The elephants, who were once people (LVIII-5.6338'), came along; "an elephant picked up the child, the elephant put the child into the elephant's ear; while the elephant took out the little elephant, out of the elephant's ear, the elephant put down the little elephant, while she picked up !Gwa!nuntu's daughter's child. She placed her in her ear; she took her away" (LVIII-5.6341-2). When !Gwa!nuntu awakes and speaks again to

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[14] A note (BXXV.2417') states that the blennerfly is "a kind of wild bee, not the common kind". There is also a comment concerning two kinds of bees which store food for their grubs in holes in the ground.
[15] Although it was not made explicit, Lloyd noted that it was apparently a girl child (LVIII-5.6342).

the child, asking "Art thou not eating as I am eating?", the little elephant replies "rrrr! we are not used to eat these things" (LVIII-5.6343). !Gwa!nuntu then realises that this must be a little elephant, on account of its big ears. He cries, and resolves to follow the elephants' spoor, but, since night is falling, he goes home, and arises early the following day to track them down. Eventually he arrives at the elephants' houses, where he sees his grandchild playing. But the elephants are warned of his arrival, and the elephant mother puts the child in her ear, where s/he (1) becomes a membrane in her body, or (2) slips down in her body.[16]

There follows a long altercation between !Gwa!nuntu and the elephant. He threatens to enter the sole of her foot, and she says she will trample him to death; he says he will enter her hand, and she says she will clap her hands and break him. And so it goes on - if he enters her eye, she will rub it; if he enters her ear she will break him; if he enters her nostril she will sneeze him out; if he enters her mouth, she will spit or cough him out. Then !Gwa!nuntu jumps into the elephant's navel and retrieves the child. They emerge "above the back of the elephant's head, he went into the clouds...and the clouds sailed up into the sky; the clouds sailed along the sky, sailed along to his home" (LVIII-5.6372-3). There he washes the child and himself to rid himself of the elephant's bad smell, and makes a signal to alert the child's mother that his mission has been successful.

However, this does not bestow hero status on him, and the remainder of the narrative consists of the mother berating him for his stupidity in allowing the abduction in the first place and then for waiting until the following day before tracking down the elephants. !Gwa!nuntu defends himself, in part by emphasising his old age and creaking bones. After a lengthy altercation between !Gwa!nuntu and his daughter, the story ends without further events.

In the narrative which features /Kaggen, the story is very much the same (BXXV.2416-2434; BXXVI.2435-73). However, the abducted child is a springbok child, the daughter of /Kaggen's sister (as opposed to !Gwa!nuntu's daughter's child). Other differences are

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[16] Two possible translations are given in the notebook.

minor: the elephant calf says 'Kurru'[17] instead of 'rrrr!'; there are details of how /Kaggen kills the substituted elephant calf with a (woman's) weighted digging stick, and it is also specifically stated that he kills the mother elephant who has swallowed his springbok child by cutting its inside to pieces. Though the same motif of entering into the elephant's body is present, /Kaggen says he will enter her mouth, her nail and her rectum in order to retrieve the child. In most details, the story is the same.

Apart from the child who is unnaturally held in the mother elephant's insides, there are few other parallels with the stories of the 'Elephant Wife'. A story dealing with /Kaggen's loss of his pet springbok perhaps has closer affinities with the creation story of /Kaggen and his pet eland.[18] Nevertheless, these stories illustrate that elephants in all likelihood had a similar significance among both northern and southern San. It has been suggested previously that elephants in the rock art may be female, since they are often depicted with young (Van Rijssen 1980); in oral narratives, this would also seem to be the case, with the elephant's bulk lending itself to imagery centring on both swallowing and pregnancy. Biesele's Ju/'hoan colleagues emphasised the similarities between elephants and people, stating that "You don't eat it because it is like a person. The female has two breasts and they are on her chest like a woman" (Biesele 1993:150).

Narrative time

It has been said that one of the particular difficulties for contemporary readers of /Xam texts "was presented by the /Xam world-view, in particular the sense of time and logic which the narratives embody", and "the degree to which its [the material's] sense of time is not our sense" (Watson 1991:15; my parentheses). In this regard, Watson also points to "one of the most obvious features of the "verbal surface" of /Xam stories", namely "the frequent repetition (with minor variations) of syntactic and other elements, this being characteristic of oral literatures in many parts of the world. It is a feature which creates an

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[17] It may be coincidental, but the elephant-girl, G'kon//'amdima, in a Ju/'hoan tale collected by Biesele (Biesele 1993:159) also exclaims "Kuru!".
[18] The springbok is a medium-sized bovid, *Antidorcas marsupialis*.

apparent 'circling', rather than a linear progression in many of the stories" (Watson 1991:14).

The same feature is also present in relation to the role of dialogue in many of the narratives (such as the !Kung version of the moon and hare story, 'The Anteater's Laws' and other stories). The use of dialogue in the aforementioned story of !Gwa!nuntu and the elephants illustrates this. The latter part of the narrative consists of !Gwa!nuntu's daughter scolding him for his irresponsibility, while !Gwa!nuntu responds with various excuses. This continues for approximately fifty pages (i.e. columns), with no new details being introduced; neither character alters his or her stance and the dialogue does not progress towards any conclusion.

The plot device of reversal might also be seen in terms of cyclicity: the character sets out to achieve something, succeeds, but through his own stupidity ends up back at square one. Two narratives told by /Han≠kasso exemplify this. In the story of 'The Mantis and Koro-tuiten' (a 'man of the early race'), /Kaggen learns how to get 'Bushman rice' (ant larvae), but because of his bad behaviour, he is shortly deprived of this skill (LVIII-10.6885-6939). Similarly, in the story of Ku-te-!gaua, /Kaggen learns how to go into the fire without getting burnt, but, again, his lack of appreciation leads to the loss of this power (LVIII-11.7015-7031; LVIII-12.7032-64).

Regeneration is symbolised in many ways in San thought. One well documented symbol of regeneration is the snake; Vinnicombe has documented this extensively. She states that "It is significant that both snakes and lizards shed their skins annually, and the leaving behind of the old self to become a new body is an obvious symbol of transformation and reincarnation" (1976a:234). Vinnicombe also notes (1976a:234) that a metaphorical link between snakes and the regeneration of the moon is made in one of D.F. Bleek's publications of !Kung texts, where it is said that "The sun rose, and the Moon was not the moon, but was a little snake lying on the ground" (Bleek 1935:278-9). In other contexts snake powder is a regenerative product, as in one of the Maluti San stories related by Qing to Orpen (Orpen 1874). Snakes, tortoises, caterpillars and other reptiles were considered by the /Xam to belong to the rain - the rain being yet another obvious and pervasive symbol of regeneration (Bleek 1875; Bleek 1933a,b; Lloyd 1889). Quite apart from

providing necessary drinking water, the rain regenerated the grass, attracted the game, and thus food. A story about a caterpillar, connected elsewhere to the rain and regeneration, is also linked to earlier times, and apparently to female initiation; it was recounted by /Han≠kasso (LVIII-15.7307-7363); Lloyd (1889:11; my parentheses) describes the content: it features "a hairy caterpillar...[which] belonged in former times to the early race of men and women which preceded the Bushmen in their country. His habit was to die and rise again from the grave in order to disinter and eat the bodies of young women whose illness and death had been caused by his curses". This narrative echoes the cyclicity of moon and hare stories, and also alludes to the themes of gender, initiation and rain.

Pythons - whose significant characteristic is their swallowing of food whole - feature prominently in the Ju/'hoan tales collected by Biesele (e.g.1975, 1993). In a narrative entitled 'The branding of the animals', which recounts how various animals obtained their markings, the python is a beautiful young woman with smooth striped skin (Biesele 1993:121). In the narrative which deals with the creation of the world (version 1; Biesele 1993:123-28) which stars the female python, the jackal and the kori bustard (*Otis kori kori*), the python falls into the depths of the waterpit from where she is ultimately rescued by the giraffe, along with a number of baby pythons. A second version (Biesele ibid.:129-31) is much the same; both bear a striking resemblance to a /Xam tale (see above) about the jackal (male) and the quagga (female).

In view of the associations of elephants in the narratives with birth and swallowing, there are interesting parallels with pythons. In an unpublished narrative collected by Lee (cited by Biesele 1993:135, 205), the python's father was an elephant, though the narrative ends with the separation of the animal species for ever more. Biesele presents what she describes as "heroine" stories belonging to a female story-telling tradition (Biesele 1993:139-185). These feature G!kon//'amdima, the heroine, who was characterised by narrators as both an elephant girl and a python girl. It would seem that this unlikely elision centres on mutual associations of feminine gender, fat, fecundity and swallowing. Biesele's accounts of the stories of G!kon//'amdima closely parallel those concerning the elephant wife (discussed above).

In analyses of San narratives, much attention has been given to their mediation of the themes of "bride service, marriage, and residence, of insults, murder and blood vengeance, of sex, birth and the origin of meat, and of the balance of power between men and women" (Biesele 1993:151; 1976). The choice here to focus on the more general and overarching themes of life, death and regeneration requires motivation. After all, it might be argued that all societies and religions are preoccupied with such perennial problems. However, the extent to which this pervades the extant San materials is very marked.

Guenther, in the typology which he has proposed for San narratives, suggested that the 'nodal points' of San thought (as represented by the oral literature) may be seen as creation, primal time and the trickster. On a broader scale, the following might be seen as nodal points: shamanism and medicine; initiation/marriage; hunting and food collection in general; and rain or rainmaking. These themes were highlighted by Lewis-Williams (1981a), where the work is organised principally around the themes of initiation (female and male), rain and shamanism. In subsequent works by Lewis-Williams and those working within the same paradigm, shamanism has received primary attention. However, it is proposed that a more appropriate way of representing San thought and experience is to return to a more general emphasis on the themes of regeneration and devices of circularity. In terms of such a scheme, shamanism becomes but one facet of a world view which clearly focusses on the many problems of survival. Rather than considering shamanism as primary, it may be seen as one of several San life strategies. Though shamanism, as it has been described in recent writings, may incorporate other ritual practices, as in the proposed connection between shamanism and rain-making (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1977a,b, 1980, 1981a), it is this writer's view that the umbrella concept of shamanism is insufficient to account for aspects of San cosmology, culture and practice, particularly those associated with gender and sexuality. Before concluding this chapter, narratives dealing with these topics are discussed.

One of the most prominent narrative themes in the /Xam collection is that of female initiation. As Hewitt (1986) notes, there are sixteen menarcheal tales in the collection; since he does not list which narratives he places in this category, it seems possible that this is a conservative estimate, since other stories, such as that of the *water schilpad* (published by Bleek and Lloyd (1911:36-41) as 'The Story of the Leopard Tortoise) appear to make

subtle reference to this theme.[19] It is, however, important to note that this marked emphasis is not found to anything like the same extent in the other narrative collections. The menarcheal tales have been discussed in detail elsewhere (Solomon 1989, 1992a) and will thus receive only limited attention here, focussing on their relation to time.

Broadly, the menarcheal tales deal with the relationship of the female initiate at puberty (or beyond) and her special relationship to the rain. She was described by Dia!kwain as "the water's wife" (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:395), although it was also stated that the rain "does not like a new maiden" (LV-2.3865'). In other words, the female initiate and !Khwa are intimately connected, but the relationship is not a co-operative one. The narratives revolve largely around the various consequences of a disobedient initiate's behaviour. For example, it was said that rain water would come out of her parent's teeth and they would catch diseases if the ritual observances were not fulfilled (LV-6.4386'). Failure to observe a range of regulations concerning seclusion, diet and the like would invoke the wrath of !Khwa, the stormy male rain bull, who would effectively kill the girl, abducting her and turning her into a frog in the waterpit. The girl's family would suffer a similar fate, and their possessions would revert to their natural state (e.g. karosses would become springbok again). Hewitt (1986) has analysed these narratives in structuralist terms, emphasising the binary opposition of nature and culture:

"The imagery employed...[to emphasise the threat posed by the girl to society] frequently draws on the distinction between culture, represented by food and artifacts, and nature represented by !Khwa, the mists of his breath, whirlwinds and reptilian imagery. The motif, encountered in several narratives, of artifacts reverting to their natural forms crystallises this contrast into a single vivid image. Here the logical structure of belief declares itself in the juxtaposition of opposing concepts with the girl - of the cultural world but differentiated by it from her condition - clearly regarded as standing between these alternatives. Only by the application of ritual practices can she hope to return herself fully to society, and if she fails in this she is bound to move in the other direction and become absorbed into pure nature" (Hewitt 1986:79; my parentheses).

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[19] The unpublished notebook version speaks of the tortoise lying bleeding in her hut, which may be construed as a reference to the seclusion of menstruating women (and especially female initiates).

Debates concerning the association of women with nature and men with culture generated an enormous amount of debate and controversy in early feminist anthropology (e.g. Ortner 1974; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Strathern 1980), while structuralist analyses in terms of binary oppositions have also been strongly disputed in subsequent works, especially those informed by post-structuralism. It has been proposed (Solomon 1989) that, rather than employing the nature : culture opposition, the imagery may be better understood in terms of time. Various San texts echo the evolutionary theories held by contemporary western cultures, with reptiles standing as symbols of primitivity (rather than 'nature'). In particular, reptiles are associated with the realm of the rain, which is itself centrally constructed around beliefs concerning feminine gender and female biophysiology (Solomon 1989; cf. Lewis-Williams 1981a). Rather than considering menarcheal narratives in terms of nature : culture, the temporal dimension may be focussed upon.

Guenther (1986) has published a Nharo narrative concerning the First People, in which the husbands are so ignorant of sex that their wives climb a tree and instruct the men to look up; only then do the men cotton on to their role. In this and other narratives women are imaged as the first and original owners of knowledge (e.g. Dornan (1925) relates a narrative concerning 'The Origin of Marriage'). Time is one axis along which the distinctions between men and women are drawn. (As mentioned in a previous chapter, Fabian (1983) has analysed the way in which time may be deployed in constructions of the other.)

Menarcheal stories, their gender dimension apart, illustrate another facet of the importance of time, specifically time as age. To put this more clearly: the human life cycle clearly plays an important role in the structuration (*sensu* Giddens) of narratives and perceptions of the world. Gender and age are the most important social divisions in San societies, and further exploration of these themes is required. At the most superficial level, this is apparent in, for example, the use of young characters as symbols of innocence or ignorance (for example, in one version of the story of the moon and hare stories, it is a young hare who does not believe the moon's assurance that 'dead' people will rise again as the moon does). This is inverted for narrative effect in many of the /Kaggen stories, where /Kaggen

is constantly being chided by his children, such as his grandson, the mongoose, for his stupid behaviour (e.g. LII-9.976-996).

At another level, a focus on age connects with the concept of temporality, very loosely defined as lived experience, or A-series time, rather than formally measured, B-series time. The significance of female initiation has very little to do with age reckoned in years; its importance lies rather in the initiate's attainment of adulthood, eligibility for marriage, and the assumption of a new set of social responsibilities and relationships which affect the group as a larger entity.

The iconography of (Khoi)San narratives, and particularly the imagery of the body, and the circling narrative time, provide a way of reading the ethnography. In the following chapters, this reading is employed as a way of understanding the mythic women motif in San art in relation to iconography, form and style, and configurations of space : time in the rock art.

Chapter 7

Mythic women in San visual arts

The mythic women category comprises figures painted in frontal perspective with splayed legs, raised arm or arms and one or more combinations of the following characteristics: swollen bodies; sticks, bows or crescent shaped objects held aloft; and a genital emission or emphasis. Except in Zimbabwe, they are a relatively rare motif in the art, although ongoing field studies in South Africa continue to uncover further examples. This relative scarcity is interesting in itself, since it urges attention towards various questions arising from their distribution and their frequency.[1] A key feature is their portrayal in frontal perspective, a markedly unusual choice for San artists, who usually chose a lateral view for portraying human figures. Relatively little attention has been paid to this, although both Lewis-Williams (1977c; 1981a) and Pager (1971) discussed foreshortened frontal or rear view eland in the art. Lewis-Williams (1977c) also fleetingly invoked the device of perspective in an interpretation of so-called 'split figures', or split-bodied figures. These were interpreted by Vinnicombe (1976a) as game sorcerors; Lewis-Williams (1977c) disagreed, arguing that their "distinctive feature has been created by the painter's attempt to depict the white belly of the eland on human figures viewed from the front" (Lewis-Williams 1977c:241). The neglected question of perspective receives especial attention in the following chapters.

The distribution of the mythic women may be studied in fairly conventional archaeological terms. Indeed, it may be argued that much of their interest lies in their distribution rather than their frequency (although these are inter-related variables). As noted in Chapter 2, strikingly similar examples of the motif are found as far apart as Zimbabwe, the Kwa-Zulu Natal, Lesotho and Orange Free State Drakensberg, the south western Cape and Namibia. This distribution might be taken as qualified support for Lewis-Williams' arguments for 'San art' as potentially a similar entity from Tanzania to the Cape (Lewis-Williams 1986b)[2], as opposed to Skotnes' view (1991)

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[1] See Chapter 8 and Appendix 2 for a brief discussion of frequencies and quantificative approaches.
[2] Albeit on different grounds.

that regional differences are so distinctive as to designate them different arts (on stylistic rather than iconographic grounds). Without agreeing necessarily that it is the practice of shamanism that underlies this putative unity, and without denying clear differences, it may be argued that the given occurrence of the 'mythic woman' motif over southern Africa means *something*. The primary hypothesis which will be explored in this and the following chapter runs as follows: that, as Goodall suggested, the image may relate to creation mythology; that it relates to the realm of myth as well as ritual (and specifically female initiation, rather than curing); and that it has affinities to the realms of memory and history, rather than those of (allegedly) universally experienced trance hallucinations and human neurophysiological structures. However, before launching into argumentation of the hypothesis, a couple of steps back must be taken. Specifically, complicated issues regarding the assessment of similarity and difference must be addressed, and the ultimately subjective nature of the categorisation utilised requires further scrutiny.

With reference to the South African art, sites in which the mythic women are found were principally located in published works and the collections held by the Natal Museum. Initially, a list was generated of sites with paintings which fitted (sometimes not entirely happily) into the category of mythic women, based on the criteria outlined above. From this list of possibilities, I selected sites to visit in the field. This salutary exercise revealed the following: slides can be deceptive, and what looks like a mythic woman on slide may turn out to be something completely different; examples which are visible on slides are sometimes no longer visible on the rock face (e.g. at Ikanti 1); and there is no accounting for the role of serendipity, as in a recreational visit to Game Pass, a site which contains an interesting image which profoundly influenced my thinking about the motif and the significance of its distribution. More importantly, it became clear that the examples selected fell more happily into two categories - mythic women and seated or squatting figures.

Even during the phase of examining the Natal Museum slide collection, the artificiality of the category constructed (on the basis of the Zimbabwean examples) became clear. For example, I found a number of figures with 'lines' emanating from between the thighs. Some might be aprons, as has been suggested by Pager (1971) and Vinnicombe

(1976a), but others are more plausibly interpreted as genital emissions (i.e. as one feature of the mythic women category) or as exaggerated genitalia. I also discovered that a shaded polychrome figure at Ngwangwane Shelter 8 (Figure 18) was formally almost identical to many of the Zimbabwean examples, but lacked the genital emission or emphasis which characterises other examples. Another example (Brotherton Shelter; Figure 20) displays raised arms, legs wide apart, breasts and a 'genital emphasis' (namely genitalia in red paint, contrasting with the dark brown used for the rest of the body) - but it is sitting with widely splayed legs, rather than in the posture which characterises the Zimbabwean examples. Such typological problems necessitated adjustment of the approach. It is possible that the figures I have selected are all variations on a theme, relate to stylistic or contextual factors, or are all part of a spectrum; however, there is insufficient evidence to argue this much further. The problems of assessing similarity and difference are worthy of a philosophical debate on their own; however this is not the place for such a discussion. I have therefore adopted the following heuristic classification, which, despite its ultimately subjective nature, seems appropriate. The reader must make his or her own (equally subjective) decision, on the basis of the images themselves, rather than verbal description or checklists of traits, as to the appropriacy of this heuristic categorisation. It consists of:

1. Mythic women proper - i.e. figures which I believe display sufficient formal, postural and iconographic details to be compared and linked with the Zimbabwean examples first discussed by Frobenius and Goodall;

2. Seated and/or squatting figures, often in rows, which display postural and perspectival similarities to the mythic women proper, but lack other parallels, and cannot comfortably be accommodated in that category;

3. Affiliated figures. This category comprises figures which are reminiscent of the mythic women proper, but cannot be accommodated in either categories 1 or 2 above. In particular, this category includes figures with single or double lines associated with the genitalia.

The focus of this dissertation is on the mythic women proper, as I see them (my category 1); however, it is necessary to contextualise these in relation to categories 2

and 3. Most of the examples of the motif are illustrated in Chapter 1. Those not illustrated are those peripheral to the main category, namely those which are seated or squatting, or are 'affiliated figures'. In Table 3, sites containing relevant imagery are listed. Sites visited are italicised; other sources are indicated in brackets. An asterisk indicates that the figure is not illustrated.

Mythic women?: the problem of gender ascription

Although a number of the figures contained in the sites listed in Table 3 are clearly female, in many cases they cannot be identified by sexual characteristics alone; indeed, at least two examples (Sorceror's Rock; Gxalingenwa Rock 1) are unequivocally male (or masculinised). Imaging androgyny and sexual ambiguity as a deliberate strategy on the part of the artists needs consideration, and will be addressed below. The inferential process which has led me to describe these images as mythic women also needs further consideration. (At this point, the discussion will largely be confined to the figures in categories 1 and 3).

Certain of the images can easily be identified as female (for example, those painted with breasts, or female by activity: clapping figures are, almost without exception, female).[3] The Zimbabwean examples in particular, with the exception of one of two paired mythic women at Manemba Cave (Figure 23), are clearly depicted with breasts (a characteristic not necessarily conventionally employed in San art as an indicator of sex). A far more reliable indicator of the sex of figures is body fat, with steatomeria and steatopygia usually indicating female figures. It is also clear from San ethnographies that fat and roundness are generally considered to be feminine-linked characteristics; this is not only explicitly stated in connection with female initiation ritual, but is also a linguistic

[3] Research into the role of trance, in San art and in the contemporary Kalahari context, has shown that many paintings represent the trance dance, in which shamans (mainly men) dance, while women stand or sit in a group, clapping and singing medicine songs (e.g. Vinnicombe 1976a, Lewis-Williams 1981a).

Table 3: Mythic women
(note: italics indicate sites visited)

'Mythic women' proper:

Ngwangwane Shelter 8
Clarke's Shelter
Kleinvlei
Travellers Rest
Rheboksfontein
Murehwa Cave (2 examples)
Gurure
Marondera (2 examples) (Frobenius 1931)
Macheke (Frobenius 1931)
Fulton's Rock
Snap Shelter (Vinnicombe 1976a)
Langalibalele Shelter (Natal Museum records of Vinnicombe's copies)
Arthur's Seat (Pager 1971)
Cave of Elands (Stow copy; in Rosenthal 1953)
Gxalingenwa Rock 1 (4 examples)
Sorceror's Rock
Keurbos
Prinswillemsklip
Springbokoog
Manemba (2 examples)
Gambarimwe
Charter (Frobenius 1931)
Mshaya Mvura (Goodall, in Summers 1959)
Willcox's Shelter (Willcox 1956)
Hippo Shelter [Lesotho] (Vinnicombe 1976a)
West Ilsley (Natal Museum records of Vinnicombe's copies)
Sebaaieni Cave (Pager 1971)
Knoffelspruit (2 examples) (Stow copy; in Rosenthal 1953)
Hungorob Gorge 15 (Pager 1993)

TOTAL: 36 individual 'mythic women' in 29 sites
(Note: paired figures were counted here as single 'mythic women').

Seated or squatting figures

Ngwangwane Shelter 8
Brotherton Shelter
Sevilla
Kriedouwkrans
Bathplug Cave (Natal Museum slide collection)
Crazy Paving Shelter (Natal Museum slide collection)
Bamboo Mountain (Vinnicombe 1976a)
Magaditseng (Lesotho) (Vinnicombe 1976a)
White Horse Shelter (Natal Museum slide collection)
Bushman's Nek (Vinnicombe 1976a)
Elandskloof (Stow copy, in Rosenthal 1953)
No locality (Stow copy, in Rosenthal 1953)
Gxalingenwa Rock 1
Esikolweni Shelter
Opposite Driehoek
Elizabeth Rock (Natal Museum slide collection)
Pornographic Shelter (Natal Museum slide collection)
Ofandweni Rock (Natal Museum slide collection)
Watson's Shelter (Natal Museum slide collection)
'Soldier on path' (Vinnicombe 1976a)
Buck head Shelter (Natal Museum slide collection)
Belleview 3 (2 separate examples) (Vinnicombe 1976a)
Tandjesberg (Loubser 1993)

TOTAL: 24 examples in 23 sites.
(Note: Rows of similar figures are counted here as one example)

Affiliated figures

Game Pass
Bemani Shelter (Natal Museum slide collection)
Mpongweni South (Natal Museum slide collection)
Blob Rock (Natal Museum slide collection)
Cyprus 3 (Vinnicombe 1976a)
Belleview 2 (Vinnicombe 1976a)
Roodekuil (Stow copy, in Rosenthal 1953)
Gxalingenwa Shelter 1
Mpongweni North
Procession Shelter (Natal Museum slide collection)
Bamboo Mountain Shelter 2 (Natal Museum slide collection)
Sick man's Shelter (Vinnicombe 1976a)

and grammatical feature, whereby round or fat objects or phenomena are classified as feminine. This gendering was one of the principal themes of previous work (Solomon 1989; 1992a).

Inevitably though, in such a diverse body of art, this principle cannot be assigned the status of a rule. Nevertheless, many female figures display exaggerated body fat, but then again, some do not. Exaggerated calves also seem to be a feminine feature in the art. Innumerable examples of slender elongated male figures are to be found, whereas unambiguously male fat figures are very rare in the South African art.[4] In terms of body form, therefore, the art over a wide area displays a spectrum with elongated slender (male) figures at one end, exaggeratedly fat female figures at the other, and a grey area in the middle. In this grey area one might postulate: figures which, from the artist's perspective, did not require an emphasis on sex/gender; figures which might have been easily identifiable as male or female to the painting/viewing community, but not to distanciated contemporary viewers; figures which might be deliberately ambiguous; and figures which are now too indistinct to categorise. Available counts of male and female figures from different areas (Vinnicombe 1976a, Pager 1971, Lewis-Williams 1981a) are presented in Appendix 2.

Despite the high proportions of figures of 'indeterminate' sex in the art, the ends of the spectrum appear to hold fast: men tend to be painted as tall, slender and narrow waisted, whereas women tend to be portrayed with emphasised buttocks, thighs and calves. However, when considering gender rather than biological sex, such categorisation is inadequate, in view of the presence of figures which are of male sex, but are portrayed in ways associated by San artists with images of femininity.

The argument that most of the figures focussed on here are in all probability female is not provable in empirical terms; it is a motivated assumption, which will be problematised further in the course of the discussion which follows. Before leaving

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[4] For example, Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988:77) have interpreted elongation in relation to distorted bodily sensations experienced by trancers, but I have argued elswhere (Solomon 1989, 1992a) that this feature may also be seen as a device for signigfying gender..

this problem, certain of the figures in category 3 will be discussed, as further support for the claim that figures with genital lines, and obese figures in frontal perspective, are either female or feminine, and as motivation for the gender ascriptions I have made. This will be followed by discussion of Category 2 figures - those with affinities to the mythic women, but which cannot be described as mythic women as such.

Aprons, emissions or female physical attributes?

One of the features which characterise the Zimbabwean mythic women, as described by Goodall and Frobenius, is the 'genital emission', consisting usually of a meandering or zig-zag line, usually double, from the genitalia. At Gambarimwe and Manemba (Figures 22, 23, 24, 57) this line extends several metres. As noted in Chapter 3, most of the South African analogues (with the exception of the Springbokoog engraving (Figure 37) and the Prinswillemsklip painting, Figure 41) tend to display either a rounded red shape between the thighs or similar genital emphasis (cf. Arthur's Seat; Keurbos; Traveller's Rest, Figures 31, 12-15, 40). During the search for mythic women in the South African paintings, examples of figures with lines from the genitalia, as one trait relevant to the mythic women category, were also noted.

Vinnicombe (1976a) published various examples of figures or groups of figures with a double (occasionally a single) line from the rear (see Vinnicombe's Figures 157, 184, 186, 187, 191). She suggested that these represent a "rear apron consisting of a double thong" (Vinnicombe 1976a:285). In her Figure 3 (a and b) she compares a cast of a "Khomani Bushwoman from the Gemsbok Park...[wearing] a pubic apron of tanned skin" (Vinnicombe 1976a:7; my parentheses), and compares it to a painting of two women from Mpongweni North. These paintings show a waist band and a short line at the front representing the front apron. Vinnicombe uses the comparison to make the argument that "physical features often thought to be stylised by the Bushman artists are in fact very true to life" (Vinnicombe 1976a:7). Pager (1971:237, 333) also considered such lines as naturalistic depictions of aprons. In order to examine this assumption, paintings of figures with lines associated with the genitalia, from fifteen sites, were examined.

The sites are: Procession Shelter; Blob Rock; Bemani Shelter (2 examples); Crazy Paving Shelter; Mpongweni North; Bamboo Mountain Shelter 2; Gxalingenwa Shelter 1; Gxalingenwa Rock 1; Gxalingenwa Rock 8; Emerald Shelter; Game Pass; Ikanti 1; Roodekuil, Cave of Elands, Knoffelspruit (2 examples).

In many of these paintings it is impossible to distinguish between aprons, emissions or exaggerated genitalia. For example, at Crazy Paving Shelter are two clapping women, one of whom has a long single line between the thighs, while the other has a line in front (Figure 53). The line between the thighs of the one woman seems too long and thin to be a literal representation of an apron; however, it is difficult to argue this either way. Figures shown with single lines between the thighs are also difficult to assess. On the figure at Knoffelspruit, however, the double lines between the splayed legs are too long to be seen as an apron or as naturalistically portrayed female genitalia (Figure 38). Five other images are very unlikely to represent aprons: these are images at Procession Shelter, Blob Rock, Cave of Elands and two examples at Bemani Shelter (Figure 54). In all these examples, the lines are two long, and in some cases too thin, to represent aprons. At Cave of Elands, the line is distinctly meandering, and cannot possibly represent an apron or genitalia.

Two other sites are of interest in terms of colour: at Bamboo Mountain Shelter 2 (Figure 54), a faded frontal perspective figure is painted in black, with two short red lines between the thighs. This contrasts with other paintings which probably do represent women wearing pubic aprons (e.g. Vinnicombe's Figure 3a, cited above, where the figures are painted in orange-red ochre with black aprons). Similarly, a figure at Mpongweni North, also painted in black (lateral perspective), has two lines in front.[6] The thicker one, above, is in black, but between it and the figure's foremost leg is a long thin red line which is unlikely to represent an apron. A similar colour emphasis is found at Brotherton Shelter (Figure 20), where there is painted a seated female figure with widely splayed legs and raised arms. She is painted in a deep blackish brown, with the genital area painted in red. In view of the argument (cf. How

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[6] Not illustrated.

1962; Solomon 1989, 1992a) that red paint is symbolically associated with blood - perhaps especially menstrual blood and amniotic fluid - this colour choice may be significant.

Of the examples located, several are too poorly preserved or too ambiguous to be identified as male or female. However, genital lines of this kind are not associated with identifiable male figures, and appear to be a relatively reliable indicator of sex. A further example of this is a figure in what Vinnicombe tentatively described as a 'rape scene'. In this painting a figure with an exaggerated, erect penis follows a smaller figure with two short lines between the thighs (Cyprus 3; Figure 55). Several of Stow's copies show figures with genital lines. Of particular interest is a painting at Roodekuil (not illustrated), depicting a group of clapping figures. Four of the figures are clearly female, and two of these women show short double lines between the thighs. Another Stow copy from a site at Knoffelspruit (Figure 38) includes two figures, both with swollen torsos, one with a single line and one with a double line. At Game Pass (Figure 56), a site which has become well known for its shamanic imagery, there are almost no female figures; there is, however, one small dark brown/black steatopygeous figure (monochrome) with two lines between the thighs. Similarly, at Kleinvlei, Gxalingenwa Rock 1 and Prinswillemsklip (Figures 17, 2, 39), lines from, or other emphases on, the genitalia are associated with figures with swollen torsos - in general, an indicator of femininity or female sex. Of the examples listed above - eighteen examples in fifteen sites - six are indeterminate, four are probably female, seven are clearly female, and only one is even possibly male.

The possible male is a figure at Gxalingenwa Shelter 1 - a well known rain-making scene showing a rain animal, a pool of water and a number of associated human figures (published in colour in Woodhouse 1992; his Figure 88). This figure is tall and slender and is associated with other, probably male, figures. It has no clear sexual characteristics, but it has two elongated lines between the thighs. This exception does not prove the 'rule', but neither does it particularly challenge the claim that figures with lines between the thighs are usually female (or feminised). Another well known figure with a genital emission is on the Linton panel at the South African Museum. However, this is a supine shaman, and the emission is the 'thin red line with white

dots' described by Lewis-Williams (1981b), which bears no apparent similarity to the other figures discussed. Similar problems apply to a painting at Kriedouwkrans, south western Cape. It has been described by Woodhouse (1992) as a 'source figure', in frontal perspective, with splayed legs and a putative 'emission'. However, on field inspection of this painting, I decided it was impossible to associate the 'emission' with this figure or part of a figure adjoining it.

This examination of paintings - in the field, in slide collections and in published works - strongly associates figures with genital lines, especially double lines, with femaleness and/or feminisation. The lines may variously represent rear or fore aprons, labia, or genital 'emissions'. Indeed, a possible interpretation of the colour use at the sites of Mpongweni North (Figure 51) and Bamboo Mountain Shelter 2 suggests that beyond a certain point it may not be useful to try and separate them; they may be all have been symbolically fused in the minds of the painters as indices of femaleness, adulthood, sexuality and an associated set of gender beliefs. Nevertheless, this brief study suggests that despite Pager and Vinnicombe's caveats about symbolic interpretations, at least some of these figures cannot be interpreted as portraying items of clothing, and, like the Zimbabwean mythic women, appear to refer to a more complex, symbolic reality.

Seated and squatting figures

Amongst the figures noted are a number painted in frontal perspective, seated or squatting with markedly splayed legs. They are sometimes rotund (as in the Bamboo Mountain panel in the Natal Museum; Vinnicombe 1976a, her Figure 26), and are often shown in groups or rows, rather than as single figures (e.g. Ofandweni Rock (Figure 42); Esikolweni Shelter; Watson's Shelter; Elandskloof (not illustrated). It seems likely that some of these are dance or trance scenes, and that they represent the seated women who sing medicine songs while shamans trance. I have argued previously that such scenes are in accordance with the gender conventions associating women with roundness and shortness, and men with tallness and slenderness (Solomon 1989, 1992a). It also corresponds with a tendency for men to be portrayed as active, and women as passive. It has been suggested to me (Yates, pers. comm.) that in the art

of the south western Cape there is more stereotyping in the painting of female figures than males and a narrower range of activities in which they are shown to be engaged. Seated and clapping figures tend to be female, whereas most of the 'action paintings' tend to be of men.[5] Again this insight cannot be elevated to the status of a rule, since there are a number of paintings which show women in action and movement. It is my impression (beyond the scope of this study to explore further) that such scenes tend to be single gender scenes (e.g. Nkosazana Shelter, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg).

Examination of the seated and squatting figures has led to the following conclusions. They would seem to be more likely female than male; some may be merely seated, whereas some (e.g. Figures 20 and 42, Brotherton Shelter and Ofandweni Rock, amongst other sites) appear to be painted thus to emphasise the genitalia. As such, some may grade into the category of mythic women proper; however, the distinction is fine, and it is not appropriate to consider them further here. It is sufficient to repeat that the original list of possible mythic women seems to divide more appropriately into two possibly overlapping categories: 'seated or squatting figures' and 'mythic women'. It is to the mythic women that I now turn.

I have placed 36 examples from 29 sites in this category; 10 examples from 8 sites are those already discussed by Goodall and Frobenius; a further 3 were published by Vinnicombe (1976a), 3 more by Pager (1971, 1993), and 3 by Stow (Rosenthal 1953). The remainder were viewed during field work, and by examination of photographs of Vinnicombe's copies in the Natal Museum. As the viewer will see, some are more 'convincing' examples than others; I therefore rank these in Table 4 in terms of the closeness of their affinities with the Zimbabwean figures.

From an examination of the paintings designated 'mythic women', it will become clear to the reader that this is not a uniform category. All the examples share the frontal perspective and splayed legs, although there is substantial variability within the category which is worthy of further attention. Others have only one or more of the other traits - obesity; a genital stream or other emphasis; raised arms; wielding of

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[5] Paintings showing figures in contorted postures or clearly engaged in movement - be it battle, hunting, dances, trance or other activity.

sticks, crescents or a bow. Purists might wish to further reduce the category I have constructed; however the purpose here is to draw attention to a widespread and hitherto largely neglected component of the art. This neglect corresponds to a tendency for paintings of women to be marginalised in rock art research. The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with a conventional iconographic interpretation, utilising the ethnographic method, more or less as formulated and employed by Lewis-Williams and Vinnicombe. The contexts and stylistic attributes of selected figures are the topic of the following chapter.

Table 4 Mythic women - affinities

Group A: Very close affinities with the Zimbabwean figures
(Italics indicate sites visited).

Ngwangwane Shelter 8 (shaded polychrome, splayed legs, swollen torso; Figure 18)
Kleinvlei (obese, splayed legs, genital emphasis, raised arms; Figure 17)
Hippo Shelter (relatively fat, splayed legs, genital emission, raised arms with knobbed stick; Figure 33)
West Ilsley (one raised arm, splayed legs, ?double genital emission; Figure 34)
Langalibalele Shelter (raised arms with sticks, splayed legs, ?double genital emission; Figure 35)
Travellers Rest (obese, raised arms, genital emphasis associated with zig-zag line; Figure 40)
Springbokoog (raised arms holding bow, splayed legs, genital emphasis and emission; Figure 41)
Sebaaieni Cave (raised arms, swollen torso; Figure 32)
Arthur's Seat (raised arms, splayed legs, genital emphasis; Figure 31)
Rheboksfontein: (relatively swollen torso, splayed legs, genital emission; Figure 43)
Gxalingenwa Rock 1 (1 example; 1 hand raised with crescent shaped object; short double genital line; partly splayed legs. Unique emphasis on stomach/torso; Figure 2)

Group B: Close affinities with the Zimbabwean figures

Gxalingenwa Rock 1 (2 examples; obese, splayed legs. Unique emphasis on stomach/torso; Figure 3)
Clarke's Shelter (a faded, obese figure, in frontal perspective, with splayed legs and half-raised arm; other arm overpainted; Figure 21)
Prinswillemsklip (obese figure with parted legs and ?genital emission; Figure 39)
Fulton's Rock (fat squatting figure, with stocky splayed legs bent at the knee; Figure 19)
Keurbos (2 groups of females; one row squatting with genital emphasis; one row 'standing', with partially splayed legs; figures with one hand to groin; Figures 12, 13, 15)
Cave of Elands (squatting figure with hands on knees, meandering genital line; Figure 37)
Knoffelspruit (1 obese figure, splayed legs, single genital line; 1 relatively swollen bodied figure 'doing the splits' sideways, with two long genital lines; 1 armless obese fig with splayed legs; all examples in same panel in close proximity; Figure 38)
Hungorob Gorge 15 (Obese figure with splayed bent legs, genital emphasis; Figure 44)

Mythic women and ethnographic parallels

As described in Chapter 6, three features of San ethnographies and mythology/oral narrative stand out: in terms of ritual, the female initiation ceremony; in terms of

mythology, the importance of 'primal time' and creation; and in terms of narrative imagery, regeneration, and physical imagery, including autophagy, swallowing, and the cutting of the stomach. Possible ritual affiliations are discussed first. These include the linkage of women with rain and female initiation. This is followed by an account of other parallels with ethnography. These include connections, in terms of imagery, with narrative and mythology, especially creation mythology and the stories concerning the moon and the hare.

Mythic women and female initiation

The probable relevance of female initiation to the art has been extensively dealt with by various writers (Lewis-Williams 1981a, Chapter 4; Solomon 1989, 1992a, 1994a; and cf. Prins and Hall 1994). A brief summary only of this work will be repeated here.

Kalahari San interviewed enthused over the fatness of the female initiate or new maiden, comparing her to the eland (Lewis-Williams 1981a). As in other African cultures, female fat is equated with fertility, sexual maturity, adulthood and desirability. Lewis-Williams (1981a) interpreted a scene at Fulton's Rock (Figure 19) as a female initiation scene, with the initiate secluded in the menstrual hut, covered in a kaross, with the shelter surrounded by dancers. However, the published copy of this painting excludes a monochrome mythic woman figure situated a few centimetres below it. Stylistically it contrasts slightly with the finely painted, bichrome scene above, and is painted on a slightly larger scale; it may have been painted at a later date. Nevertheless, this association with a female initiation scene suggests that the motif may well refer similarly, with the posture and frontal perspective emphasising femaleness, femininity and sexuality.

Two of the three examples published by Vinnicombe, namely the paintings at Willcox's Shelter and Sorceror's Rock, may also make reference to female initiation. The Willcox's Shelter painting has been interpreted by Willcox (1956) and Vinnicombe (1976a) as probably a 'mythological being', whereas Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988:173) refer to it as an "hallucinatory figure" (i.e. envisaged by shamans in trance).

An alternative interpretation is that it too relates to female initiation. This possibility has, it seems, been excluded because the figure brandishes a bow and wears quivers full of arrows; it has been customary to identify the sex of figures by association with male or female associated artefacts. Though this method undoubtedly has its merits, it pivots on a literal, rather than symbolic understanding of graphic representation, and a denial of the prominent gender ambiguity to be found in San texts (e.g. the trickster-deity /Kaggen, in the tales of primal time). It also focusses on the biological rather than the social.

Ethnographic sources describe taboos against women handling men's hunting equipment, which has also militated against consideration of the female characteristics of the figure. The association of male weaponry is not, however, conclusive evidence of the figure's sex or gender. Further examination of ethnographic accounts brings to light the one ritual occasion where women actually utilise hunting equipment. Traill (pers. comm. to Guenther 1986) has described how the !ko female initiate, on release from seclusion, shoots a ritual arrow at a piece of gemsbok skin. Similarly, the G/wi female initiate, on release from menarcheal seclusion, is taken on a run around the camp, in imitation of the thunderstorm (Silberbauer 1963). Since the stormy rain is unequivocally male in /Xam texts and G/wi grammar (Silberbauer 1981), this also links female initiates and gender ambiguity. Lewis-Williams (1981a) and Hewitt (1986) have discussed such ambiguity in terms of the liminal status of the new maiden, rather than in terms of gender as such. (Also of relevance is a comment by one of the /Xam narrators, in the context of a discussion of female initiation: '...a young man, he also, when he is a young man, he also resembles a girl' [LV-6.4386'].) This illustrates the lack of coincidence between gender and biological sex. Given the female characteristics of the Willcox's Shelter figure - its swollen torso, and the red shape between the thighs, which may be interpreted as menstrual blood - and the account of the ritual 'hunt' of the !ko initiate, the figure may be related to female initiation. (The figure's animal features will be discussed below).

The engraving at Springbokoog (Figure 41) may also be interpreted in the light of ethnographic accounts of female initiation. It also wields a bow, from which arrows fly in the direction of an eland. As Marshall (1976) and Lewis-Williams (1981a) have

documented, the eland is a prominent symbol associated with female initiation among the Kalahari !Kung, and almost certainly among the southern San also. Though this figure has a slender body, it has an emphasised genital 'hump', from which issues a series of short dashes. Beneath the eland is another archer, of indeterminate sex. It may be proposed that the same interpretation as has been offered above for the Willcox's Shelter painting is relevant to this engraving.

Similarly, the figure at Sorceror's Rock (Figure 30) may be related to female initiation, even though the figure is narrow-waisted and is portrayed with an infibulated penis. A narrative in the Bleek/Lloyd collection entitled 'The moon is not to be looked at when game has been shot' (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:66-69) helps to provide a possible interpretation of this painting and its associations. It is recorded that the female initiate, during seclusion, may not eat meat shot by anyone but her father; her saliva would otherwise cause the hunters' arrow poison to 'cool', rendering it ineffective.

The Sorceror's Rock mythic 'woman' may be interpreted as follows. Despite its maleness, the figure is painted with a red shape between the thighs, directly comparable with the examples from Willcox's Shelter and Snap Shelter. However, researchers to date have not considered the possibility that a male figure, in an art which is imaginative and not literal, may be depicted in association with menstrual blood. From the red shape a red line runs, and loops back twice to cross the linkshafts and tips of arrows, which are attached to the figure by lines from the 'collar'. This line (one of several) runs further, to a painting of a vaal rhebok standing just above the line. Another line adjoins a 'stick' in the figure's left hand.[7] The visual connections effected by the lines parallel those made in the /Xam account: menstrual blood, arrow tips (poisoned) and prey animals are all linked, with the (?) father (possibly also the shaman) as central to the narrative. In short, this painting may be interpreted in relation to beliefs about the effect of the female initiate on the hunt. In this light, the association of menstrual blood with a male figure is in accordance with San beliefs, and consistent with an art which is non-literal and not constrained by the realities of biology.

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[7] This is very probably significant in view of left-handedness as associated with femininity, and accounts of the left half of the body being considered feminine (see Solomon 1989, 1992a).

The same set of beliefs about the dangerous potency of the female initiate may relate to the painting at Murehwa Cave (Figure 26B), discussed by Huffman (1983). Although Huffman considers San beliefs about the potency of female blood and amniotic fluid, he interprets the painting ultimately in the context of shamanism. An alternative (or complementary) view is that this painting of an obese figure with a lengthy double genital stream, surrounded by falling figures, refers to this dangerous potency. In such an interpretation, the falling figures are not trancers (they show none of the commonly accepted features of shamans), but men at risk from the potency of female bodily fluids.

If other paintings of figures with genital lines are accepted as representing emissions, then similar interpretations, focussing on the culturally constructed potency of female bodily fluids, may be generated for them also. For example, the Knoffelspruit scene (Figure 38), which has two figures with ?emissions, and one splayed-legged figure, is apparently a battle scene. Four pairs of figures attack each other with bows, arrows and sticks. Again, the accepted indicators of trance performance, as developed by Lewis-Williams, are not apparent in the scene, unless one unproblematically accepts the claim (e.g. Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:147) that battle scenes represent shamans fighting with the spirits. In the context of the 'battle scene', the figures with emissions may be interpreted as signifying both the dangerous potency associated with women, as well as its inverse, the physical capacity to reproduce and regenerate, contrasting with the scenes of conflict with which the figures are associated. A similar interpretation may be proposed for the Hippo Shelter scene (Figure 33), which also depicts a battle; at the bottom right of the panel is a relatively fat figure with splayed legs and a single line between the thighs. It is wielding a knobbed stick.

Despite scouring ethnographic sources, I have come up with little that sheds light on the significance of the sticks that many of the figures hold in one or both hands (e.g. Langalibalele Shelter, and the three hare-headed figures copied by Frobenius). Although in the Eland Bull dance (associated with female initiation), men carry two sticks which double as imitation eland horns (Lewis-Williams 1981a), this does not

necessarily bear any relation to the sticks associated with the mythic women. Holding two sticks is also associated with Sotho-Nguni diviners, probably as indicators of status or office (Jolly 1995), but again, this offers little illumination. The only corresponding San ethnography that I have found is recounted in Valiente-Noailles (1993:96), where it is stated that the Kua female initiate "is given at the beginning of the ceremony two little sticks, one to scratch her head and the other one to scratch her body". It is possible that the two sticks may have had similar significance in the female initiation rites of other groups also.

There is also no mention of the crescent shaped objects that several of the figures hold aloft (e.g. Figures 23 and 24, Manemba (two paired examples); Figure 26A, B, Murehwa (one, perhaps two, of two unpaired examples); Figure 36, Mshaya Mvura; Figure 2, Gxalingenwa Rock 1), but if they are indeed crescents, they may refer to the moon and hence to female initiation, to which the moon is linked. Also noteworthy are paired mythic women at Manemba (Figure 24) which show no sexual characteristics. Only one of these figures wields the crescent, which is in its right hand. It is possible that this relates to the representation of gender ambiguity.

If it is accepted that similar beliefs and practices may have been held in common by different groups in the southern sub-continent, then a further anthropological account, concerning female initiation in a Sotho society, may be of relevance. The Sotho-speaking Kgaga's home terrain in the Transvaal Lowveld extends as far as the foothills of the Drakensberg, and correlations may also in this case have something to do with interactions between different economic and cultural groups. Hammond-Tooke (1981:60-61) describes the female initiation rituals as follows:

"During the first week of the ritual the initiates gather daily at the river. The name of the ritual (*tlopelong*) comes fron the verb *tlopela* ("To be dropped into") and probably refers to the submersion in the cold river water, which forms an important episode. Much of the the time is spent by the *baale* girls singing and dancing under the direction of their leader, but on the first day several important actions must be performed.

The first is *lefagolong*. Each girl is held head downwards by the two *makhade* and beer, provided in little pots...by the girls' mothers, is poured into the vagina...I could

get no indigenous exegesis of this rite but it would seem to symbolise sexual intercourse, especially when it is noted that both beer and semen are euphemistically referred to by the Kgaga as "water of the ancestors"...The fact that the pots are thereafter broken by the mothers would, in the same vein, point to a defloration symbol, and, intriguingly, the word *fagola* means to castrate. The whole rite is obviously a symbolic introduction to adult sexuality, a symbolic intercourse" (Hammond-Tooke 1981:60).

Hammond-Tooke continues with an account which resonates with aspects of the mythic women motif, namely rows of squatting figures, and double genital lines:

"The girls are also daily instructed in *khwebá*, the lengthening of the labia. They sit in a row in a squatting position with knees flexed and thighs parted and the older girls use a piece of grass to measure the increasing length. When a length of about eight centimetres is attained the girl is said to be a woman...and she may now marry. It is said that the process is a painful one and that urinating causes the parts to itch. The reason given for *khweba* is that it makes the woman more sexually desirable and that one who does not possess long labia will be left by her husband. Some informants said that the object was to make the girls look more like men...Also on the first day the girls...are made to submit to a number of trials such as dancing on one leg with the other pulled up; they are forced to join their hands at the back with one arm over the shoulder; they must hop about like frogs with a stick behind their knees; they must submerge their heads in water. If they fail to perform properly they are pinched and beaten. Then they are "taken to Phepeni". This means that they are made to sit in a row and small sticks are placed between their fingers and pressed tightly together. This is excruciatingly painful, but they must not flinch...It was explained to me that this *komá* teaches them to keep secrets, especially fron their husbands, and to withstand pain if beaten by him" (Hammond-Tooke 1981:60-61).

The reference in this account to making female initiates more like men is significant in relation to liminality and gender ambiguity. Given the close association of the San female initiate with water and underwater, as well as associations with frogs (see Chapter 6 and below), as well as the postural and physical parallels, there may be some

overlap in belief and ritual between Sotho and San (cf. Jolly 1993, 1995). However, this cannot be due to hunter-gatherer/pastoralist interactions alone, since the same motif of rows of squatting figures (e.g. Keurbos; see Chapter 8) is found in the south western Cape, where contact with Bantu-speaking farmers did not occur. It is noteworthy however, that there appears to be an iconographic gradation from north to south. The figures with double lines (apron, emission or genitalia?) are longest and most elaborate and pronounced in the Zimbabwean examples, somewhat less so in the Kwa-Zulu Natal and Orange Free State arts, and hardly at all in the Cape art, where the genital emphasis on mythic woman figures is only seldom associated with lines. This may point to fundamental ritual similarities unrelated to contact, with a gradation dependent on the existence or degree of contact, influence and interaction with neighbouring farmers.

The occurrence of the motif in pairs in the Zimbabwean art may be interpreted similarly. Lim (pers. comm.) has conducted anthropological research among the Khoisan-speaking Sandawe in Tanzania. In their rituals, the motif of twins assumes ritual prominence, and is linked to fertility and rain, in a fashion which, superficially at least, appears remarkably similar to the constellation of beliefs about gender, initiates and the rain in more southerly San societies (Bleek 1933a; Solomon 1989, 1992a, and see below). It is well known that the birth of twins is extremely common in certain more northerly African societies, and seen as good fortune in some, whereas in others, such as the !Kung (Shostak 1981) one of the two will become the victim of infanticide, for pragmatic reasons relating to feeding and transhumance. The fact that paired examples of the mythic women are found only in the north-east of Zimbabwe, and not in the South African art, suggests that there may be regional differences at work, relating to regional interactions and circumstances; however this must currently remain speculative.[9]

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[9] The paired figures at Gxalingenwa Rock 1 are are a partial exception, but their pairing is due to the artist's use of the existing ground.

Mythic women and rain

A topic which has been extensively explored in previous work is the gendering of beliefs about the rain, and the special association of the new maiden (and other reproductively mature women) with the rain, the violent rain bull known as !khwa (Bleek 1933a; Solomon 1989, 1992a). It is generally accepted that scenes showing large herbivore-type animals, often not corresponding to known species, being led or enticed, are rain animals.[10] (Lewis-Williams (1981a) clearly outlines links between rainmaking and the rock art; it seems that this was an all-male practice). !Khwa is attracted by menstrual blood, and there are numerous narratives in the Bleek/Lloyd collection recounting !khwa's abduction of initiates who disobey the menarcheal observances; they are turned into frogs (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:198-203; Bleek 1933). Since this topic has been discussed previously (see Chapter 6), it will merely be mentioned here that at least three of the mythic women paintings may have some association with rain-making. Stow's copy of a painting from Cave of Elands (Figure 37) shows a group of men surrounding what is in all probability a rain animal. In the upper left hand corner is a squatting, splayed-legged figure, with hands on knees, and a meandering line from the genitalia. In this context it would appear that the motif may make reference to the gendering of beliefs about the rain. One of the figures at Gxalingenwa Rock 1 is also part of a scene which may be interpreted in relation to rain-making (see Chapter 8 for a detailed discussion).

It is possible that one or both of the mythic women in the same general panel at Murehwa Cave (Figure 26a/A) also make reference to rain. One example is associated with spiny, non-naturalistic elephants. Woodhouse (1985, 1992) and Solomon (1989) have both argued that elephants are rain animals in certain instances; this association of woman and elephants may turn on the linked themes of female biophysiology and rain. The other example at Murehwa (discussed by Huffman 1983) is also associated with an elephant with 'bangles' on its hind feet. Yet another Zimbabwean mythic woman site, Gurure, also depicts paired mythic women with a non-naturalistic elephant; Garlake (1987:51) describes it as having "mop-ears". It has stripes on its strange ears, and on

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[10] It is recorded that rainmakers would entice the rain animal from the waterhole, and slaughter it; where its blood ran, rain would fall (Bleek 1933b).

its trunk. Rows of squatting female figures at Keurbos are also directly associated with elephants, including one which appears to be non-naturalistic (see Chapter 8).

At Manemba, one of two pairs of mythic women is associated with buffalo, whereas at Gambarimwe, the closest association is with a kudu (of unascertainable contemporaneity). Similarly, the mythic woman at Ngwangwane Shelter 8 (Figure 18) is closely associated with a shaded polychrome eland, in the same style, and apparently part of the same scene or painting episode. Eland also appear as rain animals in the art.[11] Given that large herbivores are one of the most commonly painted animals in the art, not too much can be made of such associations; however, it is worth noting what Kalahari ethnographies tell us about *n!ow* (Marshall 1957). *N!ow* is supernatural potency acquired at birth when amniotic fluid soaks into the ground; a child will have either good or bad *n!ow*, depending on prevailing weather conditions. *N!ow* is influential in relation to rain, and again at death. Apart from humans, only certain large herbivores possess *n!ow*. The association of some of the mythic women with large herbivores may relate to this concept, and to beliefs about rain.

Mythic women and creation mythology

In the previous chapter, prominent themes in (Khoi)San mythology and oral narrative were described. An ubiquitous temporal setting is that of primal time, before people and animals were separated, and an ubiquitous narrative is that of 'The Moon and the Hare' (or 'The Origin of Death'). Although recent rock art research has focussed almost exclusively on accounts of ritual (rather than mythology), it may be suggested that the stories may be more efficiently deployed in order to contribute to understanding the rock art.

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[11] Cf. Vinnicombe (1976a; her Figures 109-10) or Solomon (1992a: Figure 1).

Mythic women and 'The Moon and the Hare'

As noted in Chapter 5, the story of 'The Moon and the Hare' recounts the way in which death came to the world, through the (often female) hare's disbelief of and disrespect for the moon's advice that San would die and rise again, just as the moon waxes and wanes. This set of narratives may shed some light on aspects of the mythic woman motif at the following sites: in Zimbabwe, Charter and Marondera (Figure 27); in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Willcox's Shelter (Figure 28) ; and in the south western Cape, Rheboksfontein (Figure 43).

Frobenius (1931) published several examples of the mythic woman motif, of which four Zimbabwean examples are presented here (Figure 27). Like the examples studied by Goodall, three of these show a figure in frontal perspective, with swollen torso, splayed legs, a lengthy genital stream, and a stick or two sticks held laterally. All three have animal heads. Frobenius described them as 'hare people' and linked them to mythology. Unfortunately, the original German text does not seem to motivate this ascription further. However, it seems possible that the link may have been forged via Frobenius' familiarity with the widely told tale of 'The Moon and the Hare'. According to Dorst and Dandelot (1970:20, n.1) true rabbits are only found in North Africa, so the question of genus does not assume any importance here. From Frobenius' copies (I was unable to view the originals) the figures do indeed seem to have 'hare heads', while the swollen bodies of two examples and the genital stream suggest feminine, rather than masculine associations. Given the wide occurrence of the 'moon and hare' narrative, as well as the close association of women with the moon and its symbolism, it seems reasonable to postulate that Frobenius may have been correct in his identification.

With one possible exception, the mythic women south of Zimbabwe do not have hare heads. However, the painting at Willcox's Shelter is portrayed with long (but floppy, drooping) hare-like ears and whiskers, and it seems possible that it too may have a hare head. A mythic woman at Rheboksfontein, south western Cape, is directly associated with a figure with similar floppy ears (Figure 43). The figure from Snap Shelter, Lesotho (Figure 29), has comparable, if more abstract, head features, whereas the

Another possibility is that the figure with the floppy ears is wearing a headdress. Teresa Usandivaras, Valiente-Noailles' anthropological assistant for field work among the Central Kalahari Kua was, as a woman, privy to the initiation of a Kua girl. On the first day of initiation the initiate dons an antelope leather cap made by her father for the occasion. On the first day, her hair is cut and buried. The cap may only be removed inside the seclusion hut, and she "must wear it for another three or four months because she may still be dangerous and the cap prevents this danger from extending elsewhere. It might cause the rain not to reappear, the fruits not to grow and so on...Her grandmother decides when to remove the cap. It seems that the new hair must grow first" (Valiente-Noailles 1993:97).

In view of the Willcox's Shelter figure being shown with whiskers (and other animal characteristics, i.e. whiskers, paws and perhaps hooves) it seems more likely that it is painted with animal ears, rather than a headdress. Either way, however, the Willcox's Shelter painting appears to relate more closely to either the female-associated mythology of the moon and the hare, or with female initiation, than it does to shamanism and trance hallucinations, as Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989) have claimed.

In this chapter, which has focussed on correlating features of the mythic women with ethnographic materials (at the risk of being accused of playing 'ethnographic snap'), not all the mythic women listed have been described or referred to. The examples at West Ilsley and Snap Shelter are known to me only from black and white photographs of copies made by Vinnicombe and no further contextual information is available to me, whereas the figure at Travellers Rest is too faded to bear further discussion. The example from Hungorob Gorge, Namibia, is in an area where I know little of the rock painting tradition. For these reasons, they will not receive further attention, and are included principally to demonstrate the similarities, range, frequency and distribution of the motif. Selected examples of the image which have not been mentioned in this chapter will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 8 represents an attempt to move beyond this conventional iconographic approach, and to consider the mythic women using a textual and textural approach, incorporating matters of style and form and, particularly, the frontal perspective which characterises these figures. In chapter 9, the findings of this study will be discussed in relation to temporality, embodiment and the writing of history via rock art studies.

Chapter 8

Beyond text-matching

The focus of the previous chapter was largely iconographic - an attempt simply to identify what is portrayed in the paintings by means of 'text-matching' (Preziosi 1989) or 'a two-way exegetical process' (Lewis-Williams 1981a), moving from written texts to the art and back again. This is a basic and necessary step in any South African rock art research. As such, the account offered in the previous chapter is very similar in approach to the earlier work of Vinnicombe (1976a) and Lewis-Williams (1981a). A difference needs to be reiterated: Vinnicombe 'text-matched' historical, mythological and ethnographic accounts with the art, whereas Lewis-Williams focussed largely on ritual practices (especially shamanism), and drew relatively fleetingly on the myths and oral narratives. This is perfectly understandable in view of the controversies and difficulties surrounding the use of oral narratives 'as history' (cf. Vansina 1985; Okpewho 1983). An attempt was made in the previous chapter to recuperate the relevance of mythology/narrative for understanding San art, incorporating theoretical and methodological advances which were not available to earlier researchers (e.g. the Bleek and Lloyd family; Goodall; Frobenius) who believed that mythology would be a key to understanding.

However fundamental iconographic studies are, they are insufficient on their own. Preziosi (1989) has described iconographic studies as 'mechanical', while Skotnes (1994) has emphasised the extent to which they neglect 'the visual as a site of meaning'; in other words, iconographic correlations, however crucial, privilege verbal correlations, at the expense of attention being paid to form, line, colour, style, perspective and other dimensions of visual art. Similar arguments have been made by other artists and art historians, who have also criticised the use of rock art as historical data, rather than as 'art'. In agreement with such critiques, most archaeologists have moved towards paying attention to questions of style, and the construction and configurations of the visual text. Some insights from art history (e.g. Schapiro 1969) were drawn on in previous work (Solomon 1989:113-119), and the art historian's criticism that iconographic studies focus on figure rather than ground was addressed by

Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1990), in a paper which focussed on aspects of the artist's use of the rock face. Other criticisms made by artists and art historians include the lack of attention to colour, perspective and other visual devices (e.g. Skotnes 1990, 1991, 1994). Aspects of perspective which were briefly explored in Solomon (1989; 1992a) are extended here; the human figure in frontal perspective in the art will receive especial attention in this and the following chapter.

Another related development which has been influential is that of considering sites as 'wholes'. This was initiated in the ground-breaking structuralist work, especially by Leroi-Gourhan (e.g. 1968), who moved away from narrowly iconographic studies to consider the positioning of images within French Palaeolithic art sites. A similar approach was presented by Lewis-Williams (1972), when he examined the 'syntax and function' of paintings at Giant's Castle. As critics of narrowly iconographic approaches have argued, such approaches are selective (although all rock art studies are at some level); but often selection has tended to be for individual motifs or images, at the expense of examining the location of the motif or image in the context of the panel, or in the site as a larger whole. In defence of these criticisms, which are relevant to the conceptualisation of this dissertation, such selection may be appropriate in specified contexts, if qualified, and the complexity of many sites (e.g. superimpositioning; no clear panel boundaries) may preclude such contextualisation.

In this chapter, the aim is to continue the necessary task of iconographic study, but to extend this further to incorporate a range of recent approaches and developments into our understanding of San art. This will take three main directions:

1) More detailed consideration of three South African sites containing mythic women, with attention paid to their location in panels and their existence as a part of a 'whole' site. Gxalingenwa Rock 1, Keurbos and Kleinvlei each invite a different 'reading'.

2) Consideration of features specifically pertaining to the visual text, namely form, perspective, figure/ground, colour, 'style', superimpositioning, and other visual devices and attributes.

3) In terms of method, the use of a expansive textual and textural approach, rather than a more limited iconography-centred method.

Outline of a textual and textural approach

One of the many ground-breaking innovations introduced into rock art research by Lewis-Williams (1981a) was semiotic theory (specifically, Pierce-Morris semiotics). Semiotics is closely linked to structuralism: "Semiotics or semiology is quite simply the study of signs or systems of signs and represents the largest possible extension of Structuralist ideas into the investigation of human culture. In principle, it is more embracing than social anthropology" (Sturrock 1986:71). Whereas Vinnicombe (1976a) had used structuralist ideas to propose that the symbolism of the eland in San art might represent the family unit, Lewis-Williams developed the use of semiotics to examine in more detail the ways in which symbols work. The shamanistic model is founded on this theoretical sophistication; however, in the light of critiques of structuralism and other theoretical developments, the structuralist and semiotic approach - or more precisely, the methods and models arising from it - require contemporary scrutiny and reassessment.

Lewis-Williams has moved from the structuralist position which was characteristic of so much 1970s rock art research, adopting a structural-marxist approach in work of the early 1980s, drawing on art historical insights in the later 1980s, and engaging with aspects of post-structuralist or post-modernist thought in the 1990s (for example, Giddensian structuration theory). Nevertheless, as Skotnes (1991) has pointed out, much work on San rock art remains centred on iconography. In part, this may be related to the persistence of semiotics, with its structuralist baggage.

In terms of a structuralist-semiotic approach, structures, patterns and grammar receive primary attention, alongside the explication of signs. There is thus a dual emphasis on iconography and structure. By contrast, contemporary approaches critique the notion of system or grammar (e.g. Giddens 1979, 1984; with reference to the rock art, Solomon 1989, 1992a); and iconography alone is seen as insufficient in that it neglects

textuality and process. These points have been made by art historians (see above); but another example may be given, by reference to the ethnographic method as developed by Lewis-Williams (cf. Chapter 4): the way in which the oral narrative sources have been used is also iconographic to a large extent. Selected quotations from oral tradition and narrative are used without further contextualisation; the sign is privileged over the texture and textuality of the larger work in which it is embedded. Iconographic approaches also neglect the role of the reader or viewer, as well as the ways in which different sites or texts present differently.

Perspective and rock paintings of people

The term 'perspective' incorporates a range of visual devices. Production of a wide-ranging art historical discussion of perspective is not the aim here (cf. Skotnes'(1990, 1994) discussions of perspective in certain panels). Instead, one dimension of perspective which is relevant to the mythic woman motif is foregrounded. Far and away the most common choice of San artists when portraying people - ordinary humans or non-naturalistic figures - is in profile, or side on. Pager (1971:331) notes that of 1669 human figures in the Ndedema Gorge, only 40 are portrayed in "front view". Of those in lateral view, 804 faced left, and 825 right. No rear view humans were recorded.

Some figures combine the two perspectives, with, for example, the lower torso in side view, and the upper body and/or head facing the viewer. Pager quantified "twisted perspective", his criterion being "a near 90° turn of a part of the anatomy"; a 90° turn of the head did not qualify as twisted perspective (Pager 1971:235, 331). The frontal perspective is, in quantificative terms, relatively uncommon.

This raises the old chestnut of quantitative approaches in rock art research. Quantitative studies are limited, in that although they may indicate the symbolic importance of a motif (e.g. the ubiquitous eland), the low frequency of an image does not necessarily imply its lesser importance, but may point to a qualitatively different significance. (as in certain arts where the most significant beings are forbidden as

representational subjects). Frequencies obviously have some significance, within a particular frame which must be specified. For example, the approach of Lewis-Williams has been to analyse quantification as a strategy of empiricism; yet though Lewis-Williams eschews such empiricism, the quantitative frequency of the eland most certainly underwrites *Believing and Seeing* (Lewis-Williams 1981a), where he is primarily concerned with the symbolism of the eland (as was Vinnicombe (1976a) before him, and as Dowson has been subsequently - see Lewis-Williams 1987, Dowson and Holliday 1989). The problem of quantitative approaches is then not so much whether or not they are valid, but how they are used (see Appendix 2). In this regard, one might consider the moth painted on the underside of a ledge at Eland Cave. Its uniqueness confers on it a significance (of a certain kind) which would be diminished if other examples of moths were to be found in the art. Similarly, the apparent absence of certain images also deserves attention. At the end of the day, if a motif exists, it exists, and whether there is one example or many thousands, it still requires attention.

Of further interest is that the frontal perspective seems to be a gender linked phenomenon; women painted in frontal perspective seem to be more frequent than male figures. Given the enormous diversity of the art, and the problems of quantificative approaches, this tendency cannot be elevated to the status of a rule - male figures in frontal perspective do occur - but the present evidence points towards conventions for portraying men and women in the art in different ways. There are several ways of interpreting this.

One interpretation of this putative convention may be made by reference to the category of 'seated and squatting figures' discussed in the previous chapter. As Lewis-Williams (e.g. 1981a), Vinnicombe (1976a), Katz (1982) and Katz and Biesele (1986) amongst others have shown, in the San medicine dance it is mainly men who dance, while seated women clap and sing medicine songs. Vinnicombe (1976a:312-3) compares two painted dance scenes with two photographs of !Kung dances in the Kalahari, graphically demonstrating the similar spatial and gender arrangements depicted in San ethnography and art. The obvious point to be made is that there is a set of gender conventions in the dance which is more or less faithfully repeated in some paintings of dances.

It has also been argued on linguistic grounds that there is another gender-symbolic dimension to such scenes (Solomon 1989; 1992a). It was proposed that in dance scenes such as those reproduced by Vinnicombe (1976a:312-3) linguistic conventions can also be seen to operate in the rock art: in terms of form, women (and feminity) are shown as short and round, and are directly contrasted with tall, slender men (Solomon 1989, 1992a). The correspondences between the inseparable realities of life and art may be seen in terms of the notion of recursiveness (Giddens 1979:75,77). Either way, it is apparently more common for women to be portrayed sitting (?passive) and for men to be shown standing/moving (?active).

However one wishes to interpret this, it seems that the difference in perspective may relate to a convention which may well refer naturalistically to real life, and its gender conventions. However, it is much more difficult to apply the same argument to the mythic women.

The mythic women, with their splayed legs, cannot all easily be interpreted as standing, sitting or squatting (with some exceptions, e.g. Figure 37, Cave of Elands; Figures 12, 13, 15, Keurbos). If one wishes to interpret them in naturalistic terms, some might be standing in an awkward bent-knee posture (e.g. Figure 18, Ngwangwane Shelter 8; Figure 35, Langalibalele Shelter; Figure 25, Gururе) or seated on something which is not painted. Alternatively, drawing on another dimension of perspective, some might be seen as lying on their backs and painted from above (e.g. Figure 26b/B, the two examples at Murehwa Cave). Some examples may be in a 'birth posture', and others may be compared to postures adopted in Sotho female initiation (described in the previous chapter).

Considering other features of these figures as well, it may be argued that for the purposes of this research, these variations are less important than their primary presenting features: the frontal perspective, and splayed legs. This perspective is emphasised in various ways. These include (1) the formal treatment, i.e. the obesity which characterises many of the figures (Kleinvlei (Figure 17) is an excellent example of this); (2) use of colour, for example at Ngwangwane Shelter 8 (Figure 18), where the image is a shaded bichrome, a relatively unusual technique, used here to emphasise

the figure's rounded torso; (3) choice of ground, as at Gxalingenwa Rock 1 (Figures 2,3,5,6), where the figures have been painted around natural holes in the rock, which represent the stomach. Another stylistic feature which will be tangentially addressed in the detailed site analyses, but only mentioned here, is the relative size and scale of the figures.

Much more could be written here about the stylistic diversity within the category of mythic women which I have constructed, the specific details of each example, and the implications of the stylistic choices, techniques and effects of the different figures produced by different artists. Such a detailed analysis is outside the scope of the current project. Furthermore, there are complications arising from more art-historical approaches. The complexity of some sites may make aspects of the art historical approach very difficult and time-intensive. We cannot always be sure that colours have not changed with time; in many sites, there may be invisible images - painted over, or so poorly preserved (faded, exfoliated or vandalised) that they have vanished altogether. When dealing with faded, damaged or otherwise indistinct figures, which are also undated, the value of some art historical insights and approaches may be limited, unless such approaches can accommodate the fact that rock art consists of traces with variable 'strengths of presence'.

Three sites: detailed studies

The notion of treating images as part of a site as a whole, or as integral to the panel in which it is located, is both innovative and important, but difficult. Many of the Drakensberg sites which I visited - even relatively small ones - contain so many images, often with such complex superpositioning and differential preservation, that to consider the mythic women in the context of the site as a whole is an almost impossible task. Three sites were selected for more detailed analysis, on the basis that they are small and hence more manageable, and their preservation is relatively good. This choice entails its own biases. Small sites are different to big ones, along various axes other than frequency of images (see Chapter 9); for example, none of the three had any visible, directly associated archaeological deposits, except surface scatters, and despite

the focus of my research in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg, two of the three sites deemed suitable for such an analysis are in the south western Cape, where the art tradition and archaeology differ in certain ways from that of other areas. Because no two sites are alike, their visual impact is markedly different from site to site, and there is a sense in which they invite different readings. This point is amplified after the following expanded description and discussion of specific sites.

The small sites I have chosen for more detailed study are Gxalingenwa Rock 1 in the southern Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg; Keurbos, near Algeria, adjoining the Cedarberg Wilderness area, south western Cape; and Kleinvlei, a site some 80 kilometres to the north-west. No dates are available for any of these sites, although their comparatively good preservation suggests that they may perhaps be part of the more recent art. They are very different sites in terms of environment, location and contour. These sites were chosen principally because they are sufficiently 'simple' (in terms of numbers of images); none of the other sites which I had visited were suitable on this criterion.

Gxalingenwa Rock 1

Gxalingenwa Rock 1, as its name suggests, is a very large boulder, as opposed to being part of the Drakensberg mountain ranges. The painted face (east facing) of the rock is approximately 14m high, and about 15m wide at its widest point (Figure 1). The site record for this site in the Natal Museum describes the site (at ground level) as about 9m long, 2m high and 2-4m deep. The paintings themselves are found across a wide, narrow band of the rock face, approximately 1.2m high and 3.8m wide. Mineral accretions are found along the lower margins of the painted band.

The site is close to a small tributary of the Gxalingenwa River. It offers little substantial shelter, and was almost definitely not a living site - there is no deposit, although it is noted in the site report that "Several artefacts [were found] on the surface', with "more in front of [the] overhang". The recorder counted 170 separate images, mainly people and animals. Other image categories used by the recorder to

reach this figure include finger smears, 'shapes', lines, arrows, bows and quivers separate from human figures, and 'daubs' (which are reinterpreted here as 'finger prints').

The significance of this site lies in two areas: its intriguing iconographic content; and its combination of figure and ground, to produce paintings with a sculptural quality that is extremely rarely found to this degree in San art. The site contains five figures which incorporate holes in the rock face (from which nodules had eroded) into the body of the human figure. The hole represents the emphasised stomach of the figures, which have been painted around these pre-existing cavities. Four of the five are painted in frontal perspective. They will initially be discussed as they occur from viewers left to right; this horizontal reading is prompted in part by the striking impact of the 'sculpted' paintings. To a viewer familiar with the art, the eye is immediately drawn to these holes in the rock, which occur more or less in a line from left to right, across the whole site. This, along with other panels which consist of horizontal rows of figures, initially encourages a lateral reading of the imagery.

The first painting on the viewers left, 87cm above the floor (Figure 2) corresponds strongly to mythic women from elsewhere. Although it does not have splayed legs as such (rather bent knees) it has two short lines in the genital area (see Chapter 7 for the argument for this as a female/feminine feature); and, like examples from Zimbabwe, it holds a small crescent shaped object aloft in its left hand. The other arm is bent, with the hand resting on the hip. Though it lacks other sexual characteristics, its form and correspondence to other examples of the mythic women convince me that this is yet another South African example of the motif. The crescent shaped object held in the left hand lends particular support to this claim, not only because of the parallel with crescents held aloft by some Zimbabwean paintings, but also because it is held in the left hand. As has been noted, /Xam and other ethnographic accounts indicate that the left hand or arm, the left side of the body and artefacts associated with it (e.g. a sandal) were considered to be feminine.

Above and to the right, are two fat-bodied figures alongside (Figure 3). The left hand example has one hand raised to its head, with the other bent to the waist, and parted

bent legs. The example alongside has both arms raised above its head - again like the Zimbabwean examples - and legs parted and bent backwards at the knee. It has been suggested to me that this figure is not, strictly speaking, a spread-legged figure, but rather looks as if it is 'jumping for joy'. However, I believe this to be another example of the same motif. Alternatively, it could be yet another variation on a theme. Both these two and the example previously discussed are not associated with other paintings, in the sense that they are not part of a panel. The pairing of the motif, not found elsewhere in the South African art, is clearly influenced by the ground.

A fourth example, with a hook head, is apparently part of a scene, probably a rain scene (Figure 5). Beneath it is an indeterminate animal, which the original recorder described as a '?hippo'; however, although fat, it bears only a passing resemblance to a hippopotamus, and is more appropriately interpreted as an indeterminate or mythological animal, and hence as a rain animal. Two other figures are spatially associated; a bending male 'holding' two vertical lines appears to be "enticing" the animal, whereas one beneath it seems to be "stalking" it (single quotation marks refer again to the site report). The most apt interpretation of this panel is as a rain scene: perhaps the best example of a rain scene in the South African rock art is found only a couple of kilometres away, at Gxalingenwa Shelter 1 (published in colour in Woodhouse 1992; his Figure 88). A brief account of rain-making and its gender connotations was presented in the previous chapter. In view of the very strong feminine gendering of rain symbolism and beliefs, it is unsurprising that one of the putative mythic women is associated with a rainmaking scene.

Although the mythic woman and rain animal are relatively faded, the two associated male figures are better preserved. This raises the question (addressed below) of juxtapositioning of images, and contemporaneity. It is possible, but currently untestable, that the elements of this panel are not contemporaneous; however, reading their contemporary juxtapositioning, the panel may justifiably be interpreted as a 'rain scene'.

The fifth example of these figures incorporating holes in the rock face (Figure 6) is apparently a male, since it appears to be portrayed with a penis. There may be some

kind of emission associated with the penis, in the form of a thin line. Although artefactual association is not a definitive sex marker, this figure is associated, *inter alia*, with six bichrome arrows with the linkshafts painted in fugitive white paint. The figure and arrows are of comparably faded red paint. Interestingly, in terms of the proposed gendering of perspective, it is the only example of the 'sculpted' paintings to be painted in lateral view. It may also be seen as in twisted perspective, since the stomach may be interpreted as in frontal view, whereas the head and legs are in lateral view. It is associated with three figures in darker, better preserved paint, and of less delicate line and form; one of these is apparently painted partly *over* this 'mythic woman'. Also of interest in this scene is that one of the human figures in darker paint is painted over a 'crudely' crayonned animal. This is relevant to questions of superimposition, style and sequence (see below).

Other images deserving of further comment include the zigzag legs figure and panel (Figure 8), previously interpreted in terms of shamanism, trance experience and altered states of consciousness (e.g. Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988:86-87). Apart from the zigzag legs figure itself, this panel contains two circular shapes, close to the front of the zigzag figure's legs. The first shape has two short lines, and might, admittedly at a rather long stretch, be related to the mythic woman motif, as a stylised version thereof. It is formally like the Kleinvlei painting (discussed below), but without limbs or head. Also noteworthy is a seated/squatting figure (Figure 4). It is a red monochrome, of indeterminate sex and gender, with hands firmly on its knees; in the same paint, a small seated figure to its right apparently gazes at the figure. This composition, where a figure or figures are portrayed apparently 'observing' a frontal perspective figure is also found elsewhere (e.g. Rheboksfontein [Figure 43; and cf. Solomon 1992b, 1994a]).

Gxalingenwa Rock 1 is a small site relative to many others in the Drakensberg. It may be seen as containing five or six panels or scenes, as well as having isolated images, and various figures in between which cannot be assigned to a particular panel or scene.[1] However, these boundaries are not hard and fast; for example a figure at the

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[1] In terms of stylistic unity and the spatial juxtapositioning of images.

top left of Group B belongs stylistically with the very different panel (the zigzag legs panel) to the lower right of Group B.

Even in this relatively small site, there is enormous stylistic diversity among the paintings. The following stylistic categories are found in this 'small site':

'Sculpted' painted bichrome

'Sculpted' painted monochromes - some may have once have been bichromes

'Fine line' bichromes (e.g. Group B)

'Crude' bichromes, characterised by thicker and less fluent line

Shaded bichrome

Monochromes, of variable delicacy of execution

Crayonning

Finger smears

Finger prints

The colour range is variable, although, as usual, shades of red predominate. These range from red to dark brown-red, and pinkish through to orange, varying according to preservation and context: the shading of the bichrome eland produces red and orange-red; whereas the addition of white paint detail to a red infibulated male figure produces a pinkish paint. Although white paint remains, the site contains several examples of partially preserved images, where the white paint is fugitive. Alternatively, some of these figures may never have been completed. Black is little used, except for a black baboon in front of the zigzag legs figure, and the outlining in black of one of the two circular red shapes in the same panel.

Although most of the imagery is figurative, there are also various enigmatic 'shapes'. The scale of the paintings varies from tiny figures in Group A (only a few millimetres tall) to the 'zigzag legs' figure, which is 23cm tall. The scale of the mythic women is

clearly determined by the size of the pre-existing cavities in the rock, rather than by artistic preference *per se*, or cultural/structural convention. Preservation is variable, especially where white paint is involved; for example, two white rhebok and a white baboon recorded by Mazel in 1980 are no longer visible, or, if still present, were not visible in the morning light. No trace of them is to be seen on my slides.

Spatial considerations

The positioning of the mythic women figures is obviously preordained by geological happenstance; however, the variations within this category of 'sculpted' paintings' may be interpreted in lateral spatial terms. The most clearly feminine figure is the first painted image on the extreme left of the site. The paired figures to the right of them are less clearly female, but their form, perspective and posture allow them to be classified as mythic women. The next example to the right is also not unambiguously female, but its form, posture, and its juxtapositioning with the rain scene permit the speculation that this too is probably a female or feminine figure. The fifth example is on the right hand margin of the site, and would appear to be either a male (in biological terms) or a feminised male (in gender terms). Unlike the others, it is painted in lateral or twisted perspective. This supports the argument made in Chapter 7 that the frontal perspective is primarily associated with female rather than male figures. It may also represent the gendering of direction which has been proposed previously (Solomon 1989, 1992a, 1994a). Briefly, it was argued that the very prominent gendering of left (feminine) and right (masculine) in San thought has influenced aspects of the rendition of the paintings in some instances. At Gxalingenwa Rock 1, one may read the figures in these terms, with the most feminine figure at the extreme left, and the male figure almost at the extreme right, with the figures in between being feminine in form and associations, but more ambiguous than the female and male examples which flank them. In terms of spatiality, it is also significant that these figures are isolated images. The figure in lateral or twisted perspective, going by preservation and superimpositioning, seems to have been initially portrayed in isolation, with the other figures added subsequently. Even the figure associated with the rain scene is different from most of the other

components of the panel. The colour and preservation of the paint used for the mythic woman figure and the indeterminate animal correspond, whereas other figures are in darker paint. The figure and the animal may have been the initial images painted.

Other paintings in this site, such as the row of small figures in Group A, and the three horizontal rows of figures which constitute Group B, also encourage a lateral reading of the site as a whole. This is dependent upon the row of separated 'sculpted' paintings, the scale of the paintings (large or small), style and preservation (depending on how close to the rock face one is standing). Looking at the site as a whole, these factors in combination tend to lead the eye laterally. As well as the sculpted paintings, the elaborate and well preserved Group B provides an immediate focus, as does the extraordinary zigzag figure. Although a closer inspection of individual panels and images disrupts this linearity, the site as a whole is most easily comprehended along a horizontal axis. However, given that the site seems to consist of a number of painting episodes, this may not always have been the case.

The evidence for superimpositioning in this site is relatively scanty. The shaded bichrome eland is superimposed on a previous animal; in Group B, one of the 'freshest' panels, one of the graceful tall male figures is superimposed on an indistinct red human; Group B is painted over an enigmatic geometric 'shape'; the finger smears appear to be beneath Group B; and the red circle associated with the zigzag legs figure is painted over an indistinct human in red paint. The most complex superimpositioning is associated with the lateral or twisted perspective 'mythic woman' (Figure 6): one associated figure is apparently painted partly over the masculinised, lateral view 'mythic woman', and these darker figures are painted over the crayonned animal. The only conclusions that can be drawn are speculative. It seems that the best preserved figures in Group B are more recent than the finger smears and older human figures which are now indistinct, and that the crude crayonned animal is older than the figures painted over it. This illustrates that there is no evolutionary style to be found here, neither from 'crude' to 'fine', nor *vice versa*. The superimpositionings and styles do not yield a sequence. It is tempting to suggest, on the basis of the superimpositioning associated with the 'mythic man', that the 'sculpted'/paintings are the oldest of the three styles in this panel, and that the site may originally have consisted of the

'sculpted' paintings, with other panels being added later; however, this requires further evidence.

Understanding Gxalingenwa's mythic women

Critics will undoubtedly point to an apparent contradiction in my analysis of the imagery in this site - namely that the swollen stomach which I have argued is indicative of female figures - is here found on a male figure. This occurrence does not necessarily affect that argument, since, as I have argued for the figure at Sorceror's Rock, feminised male figures are found in the mythic woman category. This distinction between sex and gender cannot be reiterated often enough. An engendered, social analysis takes account of this representational possibility, whereas a biologistic adherence to identifying figures merely as male, female or 'indeterminate' precludes it. In Chapter 6 a summary of a story about a boy who carried ostrich eggs in his stomach was presented. This may also be seen as relating to gender and sexual ambiguity, suggesting that the biologistic approach is utterly inadequate for understanding such images.

Such figures may be interpreted variously in view of the politics of gender difference and its representation, in terms of liminality (cf. Lewis-Williams 1981a), and gender ambiguity (cf. Solomon 1989, 1992a, 1994a; Stevenson 1994, in prep.). These interpretations will receive further discussion in the following chapter, as will a further potential objection: viz. that the lateral view figure belies the interpretation of emphasised stomachs as an index of sexuality in general. On the topic of obese male figures in the Zimbabwean art, Garlake has argued that swollen stomachs represent the potency which boils in the shaman's stomach. However, this figure is not clearly a shaman, and should be viewed in relation to the other images to which it relates in the same site, as well as to the mythic woman motif in general. Over-zealous application of the shamanistic model obscures the other affinities of such figures.

Keurbos

This south western Cape site is, by contrast, a shallow cave at the top of a high ridge, on approximately the 240 metre contour, above the Rondegat River valley. It is close to some of the highest peaks in the Cedarberg, and the ascent is very steep. The cave faces east-south-east, and is about 22m wide, 6m deep and 5m high. Being relatively deep and wide, the cave offers some shelter (compared to Gxalingenwa Rock 1). Although it has no excavatable deposit, some surface artefacts are present on the rocky floor, and the site may have been lived in, at least temporarily. The paintings are found in a wide band, mainly between ground level and approximately 2m high.

This site will be considered in less detail than Gxalingenwa Rock 1, but also with a view to moving beyond iconography. The significance of this site lies in its overwhelming predominance of female and/or feminine imagery. The imagery has strong affinities with the mythic woman motif. The images include a row of squatting figures with emphasised genitalia, four female figures in frontal perspective with one hand to the groin and an upside-down frontal perspective figure - 'doing a handstand' - with splayed legs and a possible genital emission.

The majority of images in this site are painted in the same orange-red, much of which has run due to water flux. Preservation is variable; the panel on the left and right of the site are very faded and an analysis as detailed as that offered for Gxalingenwa Rock 1 is more difficult because of this. Partly because of the differential preservation, the contemporary viewer is immediately drawn to the central panel. A general account of the imagery is presented, with particular emphasis on the two main panels, which incorporate most of the images in the site.

According to an earlier recorder (Van Rijssen), the faded panel on the left hand side of the cave includes 19-20 human figures of indeterminate sex, two animals, and a variety of 'marks', smudges', 'smears' and 'lines'.[2] Because of the extreme fading of most of the images in this panel, and the virtual impossibility of discussing their features, this panel receives no further attention here. Similarly, severely faded eland and a large

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[2] The site records are held by the Spatial Archaeology Research Unit, University of Cape Town.

number of lines, crayon marks and finger dashes on the right hand side of the cave will not be discussed.

Apart from the dominant orange-red paint, there are several figures painted in a very dark red, and one shaded polychrome - the latter being a very unusual occurrence in the south western Cape. White paint is evident on the single polychrome, and there is some evidence of partial figures, suggesting fugitive white paint. One of the dark red figures is clearly female, being depicted with breasts, but has no head, perhaps because of fugitive white paint. The polychrome figure is poorly preserved in the mid-body area, but it has a white head, black and white torso, and dark red buttocks and legs. Though it is not possible to identify its sex, it seems likely that it is female; the buttocks are somewhat emphasised, but, more importantly, its exaggerated calves correspond to those of three other clearly female figures executed in this darker paint, located further to the viewer's right. It has been suggested to me (Silberbauer pers. comm.) that exaggerated calves might be a good indicator of femaleness or femininity, on the basis of his experience of living among the G/wi in the central Kalahari (cf. Silberbauer 1981); in this site, this certainly seems to apply.

The site is dominated, in the centre of the cave face, by an orange-red panel consisting mainly of eight large elephants and a row of squatting women (Figure 11). The scale of the paintings, as well as their preservation, focus the eye on the centre of the site. To the left of this main panel, and perhaps constituting a part of it, is one of several figures of particular interest: an upside down figure, with fingers and foot detail, and legs sharply bent at the knees and splayed outwards (Figure 14). Its torso is slightly thickened, although not so much as to be described as distended. Between the legs is a single line, which curves almost to 90°. Although the original recorder described the figure as a male on the basis of this feature, it seems as, or more, likely that this is a female figure with a genital emission.

In the main panel, elephants constitute the top row, and include a calf following a series of elephants which get progressively larger. The calf is approximately 8cm in width, with the largest elephant about 50cm wide. Just above the top row of elephants, in the same colour, and closely spatially associated with the rear of one elephant, is a

headless steatopygeous female figure, with breasts, and with short legs and long arms. Although most of the elephants are realistically painted, one departs from naturalism. Rather than having the tail painted as a thin fine line like other examples in the site, this elephant has a thickened tail, almost like a trunk. In view of the association of Zimbabwean mythic women with non-naturalistic elephants (at Gurure and Murehwa), this is an interesting parallel. It is also possible that this painting has been repainted (cf. below). Beneath the rows of elephants is a row of six squatting figures, in frontal perspective, with exaggerated emphasis on the genitalia and/or buttocks (Figure 12). They are relatively large, ranging from 25-40cm tall. Fine details, if they ever existed, are no longer visible, due to paint from the elephants above which has run as a result of water flux. Nevertheless, they are almost definitely female; the first in the row (left hand side) may be portrayed with breasts, whereas the largest example seems to have a swollen torso, very similar to that of the examples from Manemba (Figures 23 and 24). They are visually emphasised by the repetition of the posture (i.e. five or six in the row), and by the accentuation of the genitalia and/or buttocks.

Although this central orange-red panel consists of rows of elephants and women, the site encourages a less lateral reading than others (e.g. Gxalingenwa Rock 1). The use of the same colour paint unifies the panel, whereas the rows of elephants and women are interspersed with images which disrupt the linearity of the horizontal axis. Marked variations in the size of the figures also counter this linearity.

To the right of the squatting figures are four humans facing right, one only 5cm tall, and to the right of these is a larger, faded figure with both arms held sideways and bent at the elbow (cf. Kleinvlei, Travellers Rest and Zimbabwean examples such as Manemba and Murehwa). Earlier recorders concur with the opinion (more forcibly expressed here) that most of these figures are probably female.

Close to the main 'elephants and squatters panel' are more intriguing female figures. Beneath the possibly non-naturalistically portrayed elephant are two separate figures (sex indeterminate) in the same orange-red paint and a 'palette'. [3] In this same area are

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[3] A circular patch of paint, interpreted by Yates and Manhire (1991:4) as "palettes", used for mixing the paint.

four female figures, three in a line, and one up and to the left of this line (Figure 13). Three of the four are executed in dark red paint, and are painted in frontal perspective, while the fourth - the extreme right hand example in the line of three figures - is in faded orange paint. All four figures have elongated right arms reaching to the groin, and the three dark red examples have breasts on either side of the chest - an unusual emphasis. It has been argued previously (Solomon 1989, 1992a) that this mode of displaying sexual characteristics laterally works to emphasise these characteristics, which would not naturalistically be visible in frontal perspective. Two of the three women have somewhat splayed legs, whereas one is more pronouncedly in a splayed-legged or squatting posture. These four figures are united by postural features (frontal presentation, hand-to-groin gesture) and style, although the fourth figure is relatively faded.

Of further interest is that at least one of these figures - notably, the one in the most pronounced splayed-legged posture - appears to have been repainted. The paint on the torso is thicker and a darker red, better preserved than that on the legs. Given that a very faded similar figure is found in the same row, it may be suggested that, of these figures, at least one has been touched up. The implications of this will be discussed at a later point.

In a separate panel further to the right of these figures are two more small squatting figures with emphasised genitalia/?buttocks. They are also in faded orange paint and are approximately 6cm and 4cm in height. These bring the total number of figures with affinities to the mythic women motif to 12 in this site. Apart from this frequency, the close association of most of these figures with elephant is noteworthy. It has been suggested (Solomon 1989, 1992a; Van Rijssen 1980) that elephants may be images with feminine connotations. In the south western Cape, they are frequently shown with young (Parkington pers. comm.). Furthermore, as was noted in previous chapters, elephants in oral narratives, as well as in terms of form, have connotations of femininity. Interestingly, elephant are very rarely painted in the Drakensberg, whereas it has been suggested that in the south western Cape, elephants may be the symbolic equivalent of the ubiquitous eland in the Drakensberg sites (Parkington pers. comm.) There may be some connection with the fact that elephants are organised

matriarchally.[4] Unfortunately, I know of no ethnographic material relating San views on elephant social organisation.

Beyond iconography: gendering at Keurbos

The preponderance of female figures and feminine-linked symbols at Keurbos - there are no clearly male figures - suggests that this site may be seen as a 'feminine site'. Such gendering raises various questions which may be amenable to further archaeological investigation (cf. Solomon 1994b). The archaeological implications, which take iconographic studies beyond the mere identification and description of the 'content' of the art, will be further explored in the following chapter. It is sufficient for the present to suggest that some painted sites may reflect specific gender-segregated ritual occasions, such as female initiation, in contrast to the densely painted, elaborate sites on which much research has focussed, which may coincide with group aggregation. Such an interpretation might explain various features of the Keurbos paintings, such as repainting. Another noteworthy point is that, contrary to the widely held belief that trance and shamanism inform much or all of the art, Keurbos contains no imagery whatsoever directly linking the paintings to shamanism. The relation of gender, trance, shamanism and paintings will be discussed further below, and in the following chapter.

With reference to the affinities of the mythic woman motif: the paintings at this site may be seen as variations on and around the motif as found in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in South Africa. Study of the images in this site reaffirms the association of this posture with female figures, and with female sexuality. As argued previously (Solomon 1989, 1992a,b), gender may be seen as an organising principle (rather than a rule) which permeates the art in terms of iconography, perspective and spatiality.

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[4] Acknowledgements to Julia Lee Thorp for this observation.

Kleinvlei

Kleinvlei is a very small but densely painted site some 80 kilometres to the north-west of Keurbos. The site may be seen as consisting of two parts. There is a large rock face which was once painted, but where the paintings are now too indistinct for more than a few images to be identified. Some artefacts and surface debris are present, but it has not been excavated. To the viewer's left, approximately ten metres away, and a few metres up, is a tiny overhang, with very little standing space around it; it barely permitted our party (6 adults and 2 children) all to view the paintings at the same time. The roof of the overhang is barely 1.5m high. This is the (sub-)site which I will discuss. There are no deposits or debris associated with this site. The more detailed analysis of the site is confined to a general discussion of the imagery, with reference to some of the concerns addressed above; it is included for further attention partly because it consists principally of one panel (Figure 17), with various peripheral imagery, as well as paint smears on the roof, and also because it contains the best example of the mythic woman motif that I have seen outside Zimbabwe.

The figure, in deep red-brown paint, has a vastly distended circular body, splayed legs bent at the knee, and arms in the same position; top and bottom halves of the figure are virtually mirror images of each other. No head is visible, suggesting it may once have been a bichrome with a white head. It also has two very small lines - perhaps better described as 'bumps' - in the genital region. Although the site is small, it is densely painted in various styles and colours. The figure is painted on the (viewer's) left hand side of the site, and can be linked to other paintings in the same colour paint. Immediately next to it is a slender male figure, facing away from the mythic woman. Unlike the stereotypical male figure in the art, it has a prominent but non-erect penis, in contrast to the many hundreds of examples with exaggerated and erect sexual organs. Just above the obese figure's left arm is another figure, probably male, with legs in the same colour paint and a white kaross. These figures, along with a number of others, face to the right, towards a scene which may plausibly be interpreted as a medicine dance. It consists of standing or walking figures, probably mainly males, 'approaching' three juxtaposed groups of smaller, probably seated and probably female figures, painted in a brighter red than the mythic woman. They are portrayed less

individualistically, and, like other south western Cape sites, are painted with their bodies or karosses fused into a single form. Above their heads are bags. Below these figures, in the darker red paint, is a hook-headed figure of indeterminate sex lying on its back. In terms of the shamanistic model, this may be interpreted as a shaman in trance; or, if the death=trance metaphor is rejected, it may be seen as a dead figure. Other images in the site include a long line of figures in red and yellow, as well as bichrome eland (red and white; white outline). These are partly superimposed over the figures approaching the clapping figures.

Although colour and style permit linkages to be made between some of the figures, the complexity of this small but elaborate panel disallows much further commentary on sequence. However, it appears that several painting episodes are represented here. The possible trance scene appears to be such because of the juxtapositioning of (a) male figures approaching the seated and clapping figures (cf. Vinnicombe 1976a:312-3); and (b) the juxtapositioning of this scene with the supine/prostrate figure below.

However, one might also attempt to separate the scenes on the basis of colour and style, although this involves some risky assumptions. If it is assumed that the dark red/brown paint is older, then the original scene in which the mythic woman features might be seen as consisting of various male figures and the prostrate figure. If such separation is valid, then the mythic woman might not always have been associated with clear shamanic imagery. However, such a separation must remain speculative until such time as technological advances and dating techniques permit further assessment. It is merely proposed that, taking the scene as a whole, as it appears to contemporary viewers, the mythic women is 'associated' with a trance dance, but future research might permit testing of the hypothesis that this may not always have been so. Such developments might allow us to see such panels in 3D, so to speak - showing the historical texture of particular panels, and the processes which formed them into the scene(s) we see today (essentially 2D). This dimensionality and texture will receive further attention in Chapter 9.

The panel containing the mythic woman, the dancers and possible trancers utterly dominates the site. Here again, a linear reading is disrupted in various ways. A line of

figures (facing right) form an arch over the figures discussed above, but this tends to emphasise the circular contours of the panel and the site at the same time as it is a directed line. Two large bichrome eland, one of which is quite markedly fat, also emphasise circular form. Other disruptions of linearity are effected by the groups of clapping and seated figures, which, by means of the fusion of their bodies into one painted mass, present a more circular form than would have been the case if painted as individual bodies. Other circular forms include the rounded bags which hang above their heads. Although there is a certain left to right directedness in the panel, this is mitigated by contrasting imagery.

In the above discussion of the mythic woman motif in three markedly different sites from two different areas, I have attempted to proceed from an iconographic analysis towards a more textual and textured approach. This might be extended a great deal further within an approach which can accommodate very detailed descriptions of small sub-sections of the art; for example, any single one of the sites above might form the basis of a full length study in the art historical tradition. However, there remains in archaeological research a pressing need for further iconographic, quantificative, distributional and contextual (historical, environmental) information.

Some problems of art historical approaches have been mentioned (above); however, several issues raised by art historians seem highly germane: those of perspective (in the limited sense used here), the relation of figure and ground, and the question of what Schapiro (1985) called 'directedness'. (To this might be added the whole issue of human figuration.) In the case of the 'sculpted' paintings at Gxalingenwa Rock 1, all three of these converge. Differentiation of paintings according to lateral, frontal or twisted perspective, however rudimentary, points to a hitherto unexplored patterning in the art, with relevance for the way in which images, sites and panels are perceived. The implications of this, evaluation of this study, discussion of its merits and demerits, and an open-ended interpretation of the mythic woman motif are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 9

Mythic women - towards understanding

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss, evaluate and interpret the mythic women and to outline some attendant epistemological, interdisciplinary and archaeological implications thereof. The 'interpretation' might more appropriately be seen as an attempt to extend understanding or *verstehen*, in hermeneutic terms (cf. Faulconer and Williams 1985:1185) - in other words, an attempt to render them more intelligible, rather than to offer an explanation which effects closure.

The shamanistic model has consistently and astutely emphasised the relation of the rock art to ritual; however, as argued in Chapter 5, this has been at the expense of investigations of the relation of the art to myth. A more recursive approach, which privileges neither myth nor ritual, but addresses their mutual inter-relation, is required. Furthermore, a semiotic approach tends to retain structuralist notions of systematicity, structure and rule at the expense of the textuality and texture of the works being considered. Thus, a 'textual approach' to the myths and narratives (Chapter 6) foregrounded not the symbol of the shaman, but the 'movement' of the narratives, and their temporal features. Although some accounts clearly refer to shamanic rituals, /Xam and other San myths and narratives display a preoccupation with themes of death and regeneration, in endless circularity. It is proposed that this prominent feature of myth and narrative which is crucial to an understanding of the mythic women.

It has been noted in Chapter 8 that most of the mythic women cannot easily be accommodated within the shamanistic model as it is currently formulated. Persuasive indices of trance(rs), such as forward-bending figures, figures bleeding from the nose, and the like are not associated with any of the mythic women I have seen, and the motif cannot easily be explained by shamanism alone, except by a tortuous chain of inferences which does not stand up to further scrutiny. Although Kleinvlei is apparently an exception here, being seemingly associated with a medicine dance, the contemporaneity of the imagery is questionable and technological advances may permit disassociation of the mythic woman and the medicine dance; but, at the same time, the motif is not necessarily incompatible with interpretations which highlight or privilege

trance and shamanism. The point is that the figures studied, even if compatible with the dominant model, cannot easily be subsumed into and subordinated to the shamanistic model as it stands; this will receive further attention below.

Rather than seeing the mythic women as primarily shamanic, hallucinatory or ritual-related, they may be interpreted in relation to gendered images as symbolising time. This in turn has a spatial dimension. One of the primary presenting features of many of the mythic women is their fatness. A simple correlation with ethnography associates female fat with fertility, and the celebration of the female initiate's passage into adulthood; both suggest a gender/sexual and temporal dimension to obese figures. An obvious way of interpreting the fatness of the figures is to argue that it represents pregnancy; Huffman (1983) made a similar suggestion when he associated the genital emission of one of the Murehwa mythic women with amniotic fluid and !Kung beliefs about its potency. The possibility that the spread-legged or squatting posture makes some reference to birth adds credence to such an interpretation. However, not all the figures display this obesity, suggesting that pregnancy alone cannot account for the configuration of the figures.

If the emission is interpreted as, or in relation to, menstrual blood then the motif can be related more widely to female sexuality and initiation - an extremely prominent theme in the /Xam narratives. However, not all of the figures have emissions, so this is also an insufficient interpretation on its own. The Keurbos 'hand-to-groin' figures, which have no emissions, point towards a more encompassing interpretation, focussing more widely on female sexuality, feminine gender and their cultural construction in (Khoi)San societies. However, even this is somewhat lacking, unless it moves beyond the sociological and actual, towards the representational. In other words, though it may point towards real life referents of the motif, it may fail to engage with the processes by means of which the figures are 'translated' from 'reality' into visual imagery.

The motif can broadly be related to female sexuality, including pregnancy, birth, and the attainment of adulthood. But what does female biophysiology 'mean' in terms of San cosmology? It may be suggested that these figures visually encode San notions of

time in a spatial format, and that gender and sexuality are utilised to convey this. The human lifespan and the human body appear as the template for this reckoning of time. This may also be related to a general feature of San kinship systems, wherein children and parents are in a 'respect relationship', but a child is in a 'joking relationship' with his or her grandparents (cf. Barnard 1992). In other words, social relations are organised around generational status, which effectively repeats itself after two generations.

Narratives and myths, such as that of the moon and the hare, foreground a particular conceptualisation of time, which may be referred to as circular time (cf. Harvey 1990; Gell 1992). Broadly, this is time as an endless repetitive cycle, like the waxing and waning of the moon. This is in contrast to, for example, the notion of time as progress or linear movement, characteristic of modern and capitalist societies, although (Khoi)San creation myths do also contain a sense of progression - from the early time, when animals and humans were undifferentiated, towards the present order.

Harvey's consideration of space:time and history takes as its "fundamental axiom" that "time and space (or language for that matter) cannot be understood independently of social action" and that "power relations are always implicated in spatial and temporal practices" (Harvey 1990:223-225). In this regard he draws on Gurvitch (1964), who presented a classification of eight "types of social time that have existed historically"; these may exist contemporaneously (Harvey 1990:223). Two of Gurvitch's types of time seem relevant to (Khoi)San studies: "enduring time" and "cyclical time" (Gurvitch 1964, cited by Harvey 1990:224); they are described according to "level", "form" and "social formations". Enduring time is at an "ecological" level; its form is "continuous time in which [the] past is projected in the present and future"; and it is linked to the following social formations: "kinships and locality groupings (particularly rural peasant societies and patriarchal structures". Cyclical time is at the level of "mystical unions"; its form is "past, present and future projected into each other accentuating continuity within change; diminution of contingency"; and it is said to be associated with "astrology followers; archaic societies in which mythological, mystical and magical beliefs prevail" (Gurvitch 1964, cited by Harvey 1990:224).

Without launching into an analysis of Gurvitch's schema, Harvey's assessment of the utility of Gurvitch's view may be noted: "it inverts the proposition that there is a time for everything and proposes that we think, instead, of every social relation containing its own sense of time" (Harvey 1990:223; and cf. Faulconer and Williams (1985:1183-4) on "the temporal nature of time"). The distinction of A and B series time used by Gell (1992) is most useful, but ultimately more dualistic. Harvey's work has many similarities with Gell's arguments, but Harvey's stronger engagement with questions of space-time, history and practice may prove more useful for investigations of notions of time in archaeology.

San arts may usefully be seen in relation to cyclical and perhaps enduring time, and the space:time relations of San arts may be seen as produced by particular social practices, associated with particular social formations and relations, and particular subsistence strategies and ecological contexts. For various reasons, feminine imagery is particularly amenable in the visualisation of this conceptualisation of time.

Time and feminine gendering

It has been noted in previous work that gender in (Khoi)San texts appears to have a temporal dimension (Solomon 1989, 1992a,b, 1994a). Examples include an association of women with primitivity and/or 'before', as in narratives which describe women as the first custodians of knowledge about sex, and food gathering (Guenther 1986; Dornan 1925). Guenther (1986, 1989) notes that the Nharo described two creations, one of which effected differentiation of humans and animals, and the other the separation of men and women - this further links time and gender. Also of key importance here is the figure of the moon, a symbol of regeneration which is closely associated with femininity, and which provides the clock or calendar which regulates the seclusion of the female initiate at puberty.[1] Undoubtedly, the moon is significant in

[1] Knight (1991) offers an ambitious hypothesis in which he relates the 'human revolution' and the origins of culture to an original 'sex strike'. The book, sub-titled "Menstruation and the origins of culture", collates a massive corpus of almost global ethnographic information - including San ethnographies - which relate *inter alia* women, menstruation and time reckoning. Although I cannot identify with the theory, methods, and conclusions offered in this work, Knight does highlight the

(Khoi)San time reckoning, although solid evidence for this in pre-historic contexts is lacking. From more recent times, the South African Museum has in its collections, an example of a Khoi calendar stick, apparently based on lunar notation (Watts pers. comm.).

As such, gender/sexuality and time appear to be closely linked, in both practical and conceptual ways. A general interpretation of the mythic women category may be predicated on this linkage. This takes the symbolism of femininity beyond the realm of 'women as reproducers' into the more complicated arenas of reproduction as symbolising social processes, the experiential/existential problems that face all human groups in different ways, and memory/history (cf. Rowlands 1993). The mythic women may be seen as symbolising cyclical, generational time, and the repetitive processes of death and regeneration which are emphasised in the mythology. The occurrence of mythic women figures in scenes which depict battles may also be interpreted in relation to the themes of death and regeneration.

Wilmsen has interpreted self-deprecating remarks by Kalahari San speakers, such as the cosmological statement that "god made white men with everything...but he made Zhu with nothing at all"; Wilmsen argues that such remarks "should be taken for what they are: personal expressions of existential despair in the face of dispossession, not structural acknowledgements of the cosmological rightness of things" (1986:360). While historical contextualisation of such cosmological statements is important, the present study suggests that these existential dilemmas of life, death and survival may be seen as organising principles (but not structural rules) in a more general context, and not necessarily only in terms of political and material dispossession in colonial times or the so-called ethnographic present. Nor can such remarks be implicitly relegated to a lesser status by categorising them as 'personal'. While cosmologies and regional political economic transformations interlink, since they are perpetuated in practice by agents in specific political and economic contexts, they must also be seen as working in different temporal dimensions. Nevertheless, Wilmsen's insistence on understanding

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neglected linkage of gender, sexuality, time reckoning and society. Motivation of my failure to engage further with this work must rest simply on the assessment that to do so would be beyond the scope of the present study.

cosmologies "in terms of Zu/hoasi interpretations" continues the process of trying to understand San arts from a point of view which approximates the experience of the various San peoples as closely as possible.

Another view of the significance of the distended - or at Gxalingenwa Rock 1, hollow - stomachs of many of the mythic women may also be offered. It may be suggested that they represent full or empty stomachs, as the case may be, and thus relate to abundance or lack of food, rather than sexuality and reproduction. However, these are not mutually exclusive possibilities, when one considers the elision of women and meat, and sex and food, in San thought (McCall 1970; Biesele 1993; Lewis-Williams 1981a; Solomon 1989). To cite just two examples, courting is described in terms of the hunt (cf. McCall 1970), and sexual intercourse is referred to as "eating fat" (Lewis-Williams 1981a:48-50). This merging probably arises in the socio-economic and political context of the structured dependence, in ethnographically recorded instances, of women on husbands, fathers and sons for large game meat. In terms of the experiential referents of San imagery, the mythic women may as easily be related to 'appetite' in a more general sense, referring to sexuality, reproduction and hunger for food. This is also relevant when examining the occurrence of the figures which appear to be male examples of the motif.

Gender and ambiguity

It was suggested in Chapter 7 that the masculine example of the motif at Sorceror's Rock, despite its maleness, was nevertheless a version of the mythic woman motif. The image was interpreted there by reference to female initiation, and a /Xam account which describes how an initiate may only eat meat shot by her father, lest her saliva ultimately affected the arrow poison and the success of the hunt. This illustrates the point made above, which proposes links between gender, sexuality and food along various axes. The lateral view figure painted around a hole in the rock at Gxalingenwa Rock 1 may also illustrate such a linkage.

It has been customary for rock art recorders to identify human figures as male, female or indeterminate, with most tallies indicating that the latter category constitutes by far the highest frequency. The problems of gender ascription are legion, and I have found a number of figures which (male) recorders have recorded as 'male', which I believe to be female (e.g. Figure 2, the example holding a crescent shape at Gxalingenwa Rock 1; Figure 14, the upside down figure at Keurbos; Figure 41, the mythic woman engraving at Springbokoog). Moving from sex to gender, other possibilities come into play, namely feminised male figures and masculinised female figures. Several examples of the mythic woman motif illustrate this representational possibility. As discussed in Chapter 7, the Willcox's Shelter figure may perhaps most plausibly be interpreted in relation to female initiation, irrespective of the figure's association with male hunting equipment. Lewis-Williams has discussed features of the art in relation to the liminality associated with rites of passage; this may be extended beyond the context of initiation. Gender ambiguity, which also characterises the trickster-deity in the mythology, and the symbol of the eland (Solomon 1989, 1992a) encompasses the wider sex/gender complex in (Khoi)San societies. The principal point to be made here concerns the importance of incorporating the concept of gender, as a cultural construct which is amenable to the play of representation, and goes beyond simple, literal imaging of biological sex. Although Lewis-Williams (1981a) offered an insightful analysis of the relevance of female initiation to the rock art, the use of the concept of liminality does not in itself, in the light of subsequent developments and by contemporary standards, constitute an engendered analysis. The term employed to describe the images focussed on here - mythic women - was coined by Goodall (1962), and underscored her speculation that the Zimbabwean figures might be a San 'mother goddess'. Though there is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of a 'mother goddess' in Khoisan mythology, the term is re-used here in a different sense, to emphasise the fictional dimension of both feminine and masculine genders.

Space, time and perspective.

At the heart of postmodernism are attempts to understand the implications of the reconfiguration of space and time as the world threatens to enter a new era: technological innovations (e.g. in travel and communications) have fundamentally altered the way in which space and time are perceived, and cast in relation to each other. From this contemporary position, Giddens (1979), drawing partly on the work of social geographers, has discussed the 'mutuality' of space and time (*apropos* San art, cf. also Solomon 1989, 1992a,b). In other words, one entails the other; to move in space requires time. This insight may be drawn on to address the perspectival dimension of the mythic women further.

Various frequently occurring contrasts between male and female figures have been mentioned: e.g. seated/'passive': standing/'active' in dance scenes, and the frontal rather than lateral perspective which has received particular attention in the present research. This perspective may be considered in relation to the mutuality of space-time, and the visual impact on the viewer.

Many of the paintings in lateral perspective appear to be 'moving' or otherwise active; hence, the lateral perspective often implies a certain narrativity. The frontal perspective works in a very different way: it is a face-to-face encounter. The mythic women are relatively static, in the sense that they are not 'travelling'. It would be inadequate to say that they are 'timeless'; but they are less 'timeful' than the lateral perspective figures. An even better way to describe them would be as employing a different kind of time or temporality, which engages the viewer in a different way. This effect is particularly strong at Gxalingenwa Rock 1, where the figures painted around holes in the rock face also give an impression of depth, which is otherwise unambiguously achieved in the paintings only in the shaded bichromes and polychromes.[2]

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[2] It is possible that large and small figures may be juxtaposed to give the impression of a vanishing horizon, but this cannot be further supported; e.g., some small figures may represent children. To my knowledge, the existence of vanishing horizon perspective has not been unambiguously documented in San art.

It may be suggested that this gendered lateral versus frontal perspective can be further understood in relation to the mutuality of space and time, taking into account the relation between viewer and image. When viewing figures in lateral perspective, the eye is led in the direction towards which the figure faces. A figure poised with a bow invites the viewer to follow that direction to find the archer's target; a frontal perspective figure does not, with the partial exception of figures (e.g. Keurbos, Figure 13) where the head is painted in lateral perspective. The mythic women, by contrast, do not direct the eye laterally, but encourage a circular scanning focussed on the image itself, rather than encompassing or pointing towards associated imagery. Again, Gxalingenwa Rock 1 exemplifies this: not only are several of the examples isolated images (and all may once have been), but the eye is directed inward rather than laterally.

The mythic woman motif illustrates the difference between visual art and verbal texts; visual art does not necessarily allow the linear reading which characterises the book (and which characterises history and archaeology as linear chronicles). The mythic women, as works of art, work in a very different way. The fact that the frontal perspective was so relatively rarely chosen for imaging human beings points to a different kind of signification and significance, apparently with distinct gender connotations. By drawing on archaeological, anthropological and art historical approaches, this difference is foregrounded in a way which might not have been possible without using an interdisciplinary approach. Fragmentation of academic research across disciplines is, of course, artificial. It is crucial to remember that such divisions are contemporary artefacts, which may reconfigure, diffract and dismember San experience.

In an article which suggests ways in which the visual constitutes a "site of meaning", Skotnes has analysed a painted site from the south western Cape by reference to "circular", "spiralling" and "centrifugal" composition (Skotnes 1994:323-5). Though she is critical of the way in which published copies (inevitably) distort the viewer's experience of rock paintings as images situated in particular three-dimensional spaces, she endorses the notion that "certain types of compositions owed their origins to the structure of trance visual experience". An equally plausible interpretation of circular

composition is that it relates to space, time and perception. Following Gell (1992), who endorses Husserl's phenomenological approach to time, time 'is' perception (see Chapter 3). If time is inseparable from perception, and space and time are seen as mutual, then composition must be seen as arising from the experiences of the artist; however, this is not only the visual (and especially not only 'trance visual') experience. To abstract visual experience from the experience of time is unacceptable in view of the inseparability of space and time; the way in which visual experience invokes time, and may invoke variable temporalities, is neglected in such accounts. However, this tendency for time, or temporality, to be eliminated in art historical accounts is apparently inherent in that discipline, which privileges space, just as archaeology tends to privilege time. Skotnes' analysis exemplifies this tendency. Rather than, or as well as, relating circular composition to "trance visual experience", one might equally relate it to the circularity and cyclicity manifest in mythology, which in turn may be understood as integral to the experience, structuration and representation of time in (Khoi)San societies.

A further example of the elimination of time in art historical accounts, and the elimination of art in archaeological accounts, may be cited by reference to an argument in the same article by Skotnes (1994), concerning a human figure at Junction Shelter, Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg. According to Skotnes, the artist has "singled out this figure for special attention by having first painted the ground behind the figure with a white pigment. Since the figure itself is painted a dark colour, the effect is a visual thrusting forward..." (Skotnes 1994:327). This may well be so; but it should be remembered that Junction Shelter is one of the larger and more complex Drakensberg sites, almost unquestionably consisting of a number of painting episodes. A problem of the art historical approach is its incapacity to address the complexity of sites, exemplified in Skotnes' work by the focus on and assumption of single painting episodes. Whereas archaeologists would probably consider such overpainting in terms of superimpositioning and sequence, Skotnes fails to interrogate the possibility that the association of figure and putative prepared ground is anything but an artistic strategy. Though in this single instance Skotnes' analysis may be correct, it nevertheless fails to engage with questions of time. Few instances of superimpositioning, especially in sites brimming with perhaps centuries of image-making, can unproblematically be

interpreted as artistic choice. The notorious problem with studies of superimpositioning is that we cannot currently establish what time lapse separates the layers. Just as this has foiled archaeological efforts to derive sequences or relative chronologies, it also renders the art historical interpretation questionable, from the opposite direction, namely the failure to engage with questions of time.

The frontal or lateral perspectives may be seen as visual devices with a range of implications. Although it is clearly an artistic concern, it is theoretically, as well as practically, problematic to interpret it purely as a considered artistic choice or strategy (Preziosi 1989). This relates to the assumption of intentionality, a critique developed by Derrida, which addresses specific assumptions concerning causality. However, the critique of causality supported here is that linked to the notion of temporality: "The objectification of history and culture - and indeed of all human behaviour - that historicism effects, arises from a commitment to a concept of cause inherited from the physical sciences" (Faulconer and Williams 1985:1182).

Simultaneously though, the artist's intention cannot be stripped away. A sophisticated approach to this problem is provided by Bourdieu (1977), whose *Outline of a Theory of Practice* emphasises that the logic of practice cannot be neatly deduced *post hoc*, because it has a logic of its own which cannot coincide with the logic of the subsequent analyst. Bourdieu's approach allows for, and mediates the positions of, the active practitioner and the distanciated viewer or interpreter. This echoes aspects of hermeneutic approaches (e.g. Gadamer 1975; Ricoeur 1981; Thompson 1981), which in effect eschew the notion that an original moment can be relived or recreated; there is always a fusion of horizons (Gadamer 1975), including temporal horizons. As various writers (e.g. Shanks and Tilley 1987; Tilley 1991; Conkey 1991; Olson and Johnson 1992) have noted, this presents a major problem for archaeologists, who are, or should be, constantly mediating fact and interpretation, and past and present, in efforts to produce situated histories.

Other implications of the perspectival distinction refer not to the individual artist, nor specifically to the contemporary interpreter. Just as it is unreasonable to credit the artist with full intentionality, it is clearly unjustifiable to divorce the image from an

ontologically real but epistemologically problematic historical and social context. Gendered distinctions in the art must be seen as relating to a reality; that reality may be seen as fragmented, in the sense that it is not the property of the undifferentiated social group, but might be expected to diverge according to identity (e.g. gender, age, and other statuses). Lewis-Williams (1981a) has sagely commented in relation to the use of commentaries and ethnographies from Kalahari (Khoi)San speakers that there is a sense in which these people, by virtue of their historical and spatial separation from the South African paintings, are as distant from the 'meaning of the art' as contemporary academics studying rock art. This distanciation (*sensu* Ricoeur) deserves further attention in rock art research, in relation to the hermeneutic principle that denies the possibility of single authoritative interpretations and closure, and directs us towards the inevitability of polyphony and dissent (cf. Solomon in press). In relation to the 'mythic women', the way they are understood will inevitably differ amongst contemporary researchers; for example, they may be understood differently by women and men (in the past and the present). As such, a space should be created within rock art research which more efficiently acknowledges polyphony. At the same time, the relation of the art to a past which can be 'known', at least in part, should not be neglected. It is proposed that the above study raises questions for archaeological research of the more conventional kind.

Archaeological implications

The analysis presented in this chapter will undoubtedly generate dismay among archaeologists who believe that B-series time archaeology is the only kind worth doing. The utility of the approach is motivated below, and rests on the proposition that the theoretical programme is - or may be - a necessary precursor to more strictly archaeological research. The research conducted has given rise to archaeological questions which could not have been formulated without the theoretical work which preceded this study.

Gendered sites

It was noted in the previous chapter that some sites, such as Keurbos and Rheboksfontein, owing to the predominance of female and feminine imagery, might be described as 'feminine gendered sites', perhaps used in sex-segregated rituals, such as female initiation. Following through this line of thought produces some questions which might be incorporated into the problematic area of method in an archaeology of gender.

The complexity and repeated usage of many sites, and the difficulty of separating painting episodes, original panels and so on, proved problematic in this research, in many ways. However, this encounter with the range of complexity of painted sites had an interesting spin-off. After examining the site records and slides housed in the Natal Museum and visiting a number of Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg sites, a hazy pattern emerged. At this point it seems that the most elaborate, perhaps more recent, aggregation sites, such as Game Pass, Giant's Castle Main Caves and Eland Cave are remarkably deficient in female imagery. Game Pass, a site which contains imagery which is extremely plausibly interpreted as shamanistic, contains almost no female figures, and certainly not the single sex groups which are found elsewhere. Sites with higher proportions of, or emphasis on, female figures tend, with the exception of Fulton's Rock, to be smaller sites. On commencing field visits, to view examples of the mythic women selected from the Natal Museum records, it also seems that these figures tend to be found on rocks (e.g. Gxalingenwa Rock 1, Fulton's Rock and Brotherton Shelter, all massive boulders) rather than in the big shelters in the Drakensberg ranges proper.

The same putative phenomenon may also apply in the south western Cape. A site not far from Keurbos, called 'Opposite Driehoek', resembles a heap of small boulders, in an open landscape. It is 3 or 4m high and wide, and offers very little possible painting surface. Not only does this tiny site contain squatting, frontal perspective figures, and a predominance of female figures, but the central panel appears to depict a female figure 'laying hands' on a smaller male figure. Although further research is necessary to establish the validity of such patterning, it seems at this point that there may be a

gender dimension at work, with predominantly female imagery being located in small (or smaller) sites. This may represent segregated female activity, and this hypothesis may well be amenable to further archaeological investigation, i.e. excavation. If the pattern holds, and pending further theoretical and methodological work, it may provide a way of identifying materials used by women, as well as pointing towards gender-differential use of the landscape (Solomon 1994b).

The notion of painted sites being used by gender-segregated groups may also be applied to instances of superimpositioning. At Kriedouwkrans, one of the most elaborately painted south western Cape sites, a rounded, probably female figure in lateral perspective has had a panel of tall male figures painted over it. Rather than seeing such superimpositioning as irrelevant (see Lewis-Williams (1974) for the deficiencies of that argument), it may be hypothesised that overpainting of this nature may have had social and gender significance. In other words, it may have been a socio-cultural imperative that a subsequent group of painters saw fit to virtually obliterate a female figure with a panel of male figures, when ample unpainted rock face exists adjacently. The notion that aspects of complex sites, i.e the superimpositioning therein, may be a consequence of preparing the ground for different ritual events conducted by different social/cultural groups on different occasions may be entertained, and might someday be archaeologically investigable (Solomon 1994b). At present, however, it remains speculative.

Another issue, relevant to archaeological practice, is highlighted by this research, namely the fact that although recorders and researchers have documented the mythic woman motif in the South African art, they have barely noticed it. Although both Pager and Vinnicombe recorded examples, and commented on them, the frequency of the motif has not been recognised. During the course of the study, researchers aware of the image focussed upon came to me on several occasions to alert me to the existence of such figures in their research areas (Blundell pers. comm.; Ouzman pers. comm.; Poggenpoel pers. comm.; Yates and Manhire pers. comm.). This indicates the degree to which even the most meticulous, scientific recording programme is ultimately subjective; even where examples have been noted, no particular significance has been assigned to them. Inputs from feminism and art history have contributed

towards foregrounding female figures and the frontal perspective respectively, and a trans-regional approach accentuates their presence, whereas regional approaches may obscure it.

The vast majority of rock art research has been based on intensive regional surveys (even if reference has been made to other areas and countries). The present study, because of the focus on the specific motif first identified in Zimbabwe, was not an intensive regional study as such, although an intensive study of recorded Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg sites formed the core of the fieldwork. The significance of this trans-regional approach is manifold.

Firstly, it draws attention to iconographic repetitions in the art over a very large area. For example, perhaps the finest example of a mythic woman, corresponding very closely to those from Zimbabwe, is found in the south western Cape. This seems to be a clear indicator that 'San art' has a certain qualified uniformity over an enormous area, and unknown time span. This has implications for the conceptualisation of 'San art'. Lewis-Williams (1984a) has been criticised for arguments put forward in an article which addresses itself to "ideological continuities" in San art. Criticisms of this positions were made *inter alia* by Mazel (1989), myself (1989, 1992a) and Jolly (1995), on the grounds that it did not accomodate change. Although aspects of these critiques remain valid, the distribution of the mythic woman motif suggests a spatial continuity which may also involve temporal, cosmological and possibly even some ideological continuities in San art. The distribution is also significant in relation to Skotnes' claim (1991) that the art in various parts of southern Africa should be seen as different arts, on stylistic grounds. The distribution of the mythic women challenges the notion of different arts, principally on iconographic grounds, but also to some degree in terms of formal and stylistic correspondences.

Valid related criticisms (e.g. Jolly 1993, 1995) have been directed at the notion of the 'pan-San cosmology', previously proposed by Schapera (1930) and McCall (1970), on the grounds that it fails to acknowledge interactions and contact between San hunter-gatherers and Bantu-speaking agriculturalists through centuries of occupation of the same regions, and the potential transfer and borrowing of imagery. Highlighting

iconographic similarities which cannot be due to contact suggests some problems with such arguments. To ascribe commonalities to interaction and contact obscures the extent to which sub-Saharan African peoples - even perhaps all modern humans - operate within similar sets of existential pressures and constraints. Indeed, frontal perspective female figures similar to those discussed here are found world wide (e.g. Getty 1990; Fraser 1966), and, although they may function differently in different contexts, this reinforces the humanist notion that all people share some things. Such commonalities may be acknowledged without necessarily rejecting the anti-humanist position (cf. Rabinow 1984), in which it is postulated that there is no such thing as human nature.

The existence of such commonalities must surely be understood in experiential terms, rather than resorting to an unproblematised historicist stance. It is proposed that consideration of experiential or existential commonalities for understanding parallels in the 'pan-San' cosmology constitutes an advance over the view contained in the shamanistic model, namely that such similarities derive from the fact that all modern humans share the same neurological structure and neurophysiological functioning (e.g. Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988). This is not to deny that this may also be true at some level, but to question the utility of such a biologistic proposition (cf. Solomon 1989, 1992a).

Although the assumption of uniformitarianism has its problems, the widespread distribution of certain motifs, such as the mythic women, supports the notion of San groups, who may well have been diverse in many ways, as sharing common concepts which were represented in the art. Such questions, already the subject of fierce debates, will undoubtedly preoccupy researchers in archaeology, rock art research, history and anthropology for some time to come.

Art, temporality and history

It has often been noted that San-speakers do not keep histories, in the western sense of history. Even accounts which make the critique that the San have been granted

antiquity at the expense of history (Wilmsen 1989; Wilmsen and Denbow 1990), tend to use the term history in a particularly western, B-series, sense (although all Wilmsen's work (especially Wilmsen 1986) strives for fusion). Though it may be that the San do not keep deliberate records of their past, even in the form of genealogies, it may be suggested that San arts are such a history, although cast in a different mould. The distinction between A and B series time, outlined in Chapter 3, may be employed to address the question of San arts as 'history'.

For the sake of simplicity, the division of subject and object, as rejected by Heidegger and others, will be retained here: B-series time may be seen as 'objective' time, and A-series time as 'subjective' or experienced time. Archaeology and history are deeply invested in B-series 'objective' time. Archaeologists aim to produce a linear history of human habitation of the world, from deep prehistory through to the present, principally by means of scientific methods, testable hypotheses and the like. Archaeology's 'history' is largely a history written from a single, allegedly objective point. San history is translated into archaeology's time scheme and frame, and ultimately its master narrative. Perhaps this is inevitable, and it is not necessarily undesirable. However, as Lewis-Williams, Vinnicombe, Wilmsen and others have argued in relation to San arts, the materials of the past are better served by an 'emic' view - at best a view which attempts to reconstruct the past in terms of San concepts and cosmology, filtered through contemporary understanding. The works of these writers ushered in a key phase, where 'objectivity' (and objectivism) were questioned, and attempts were made to mediate the subjectivity of the contemporary researcher and that of the artists and their communities.

Nevertheless, within the discipline of archaeology, this endeavour has only gone so far and no further. Despite the impact of theoretical developments in the sub-discipline of rock art, the subject remains somewhat marginal in South African archaeology. This may be attributed to the virtual absence of dates, and hence, the art's resistance to integration into conventional linear/chronological historical accounts, grounded in B-series time. But what of A-series time? It may be suggested that by considering this, San rock art and mythology may be seen as histories in their own right, albeit in a form which does not constitute 'history' in the western sense.

The writing of history in the west relies on certain technologies and devices - the history book, the museum or archive, the journal, monograph and other texts and institutions. Clearly it is absurd to dismiss San texts, as they are, as 'history' because they do not work with the same technologies, institutions and genres. Instead of being seen as a different kind of history, San texts have been seen as material for western histories, rather than histories in their own right. By invoking the notions of A-series time and of temporality, steps towards reassessing this situation can be taken; it is proposed that the distinction between history and historicism is in need of attention in some archaeological research.

If the arguments presented above, concerning San art and mythology as encoding space and time according to the experience of the painters/ narrators is accepted, then it may also be accepted that San texts are based in A-series time - 'subjective', perceived, experienced time-space. Both the lack of dates, and the resistance of ancient art, as opposed to technology, [3] to 'scientific' investigation, have thwarted the integration of rock art into archaeological/historical accounts - a lamentable situation. The principal response to this problem has been to extend efforts to translate rock art into the realm of B-series time - by attempting to acquire more dates, by excavation or archaeometry. Some seem to have shrugged off rock art altogether until such time as it is made amenable to conventional western histories underwritten by B-series time. Undoubtedly, this is a necessary task, and will enhance our understanding of the art immensely. In the interim, however, it cannot simply be accepted with resignation that the art is not subject to historical investigation. By envisaging the art as history founded in A-series time, a different kind of history - but a history nevertheless - can be re-generated.

History may be seen not only as the scientific ordering of knowledge about the past. San histories, in their terms, are ever present, as rock art, but they arise within a different temporality, [4] and utilise different technologies. Rather than being founded on

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[3] A distinction which may be undone, but which clearly operates in archaeology.

[4] Fabian (1983) has criticised works which utilise time in the construction of the Other; nevertheless, following the arguments put forward by Gell (1992), to distinguish temporal schemata is not to deny that there is an experience of time which is shared by diverse, and possibly all, human groups.

the linear model on a scale of millions of years, San history, or San understanding of the passage of time and the relationship between past and present, seems to be based rather on the endless repetition of the human lifespan. This may be related to 'subjective' time. The distinction might be compared to a numerical notational system that works on base two rather than base ten. 'Translation' is possible and necessary; but the format in which it 'originally' appears is in itself of importance (cf. the Russian Formalist critic Shklovsky's (1988) argument that linguistic translation is always a rewriting and re-creation).

If rock art is to be seen as 'already history', then its particular modes of representing time require attention. It is proposed that the devices used in rock art and narratives, such as perspective, motifs of cyclicity, circular compositions and the like are the nuts and bolts of San history 'from within', just as the book or the archive is fundamental to San history 'from without'. It is suggested that it is via such devices that the artists represented their own history in terms of their own temporal schemes. This is predicated on the notion that art not only has a temporal dimension inseparable from its spatiality, but that in the case of San art this is indivisible from images which derive from, echo, memorise and reconfigure San experience.

It was suggested in Chapter 3 that even postprocessual archaeology, despite its moves towards social theory and new epistemologies, remains an 'archaeology of mind' (Renfrew 1982, Leone 1982), and thus reiterates the mind : body distinction. The interpretation and analysis offered here attempts to dissolve that distinction, by emphasising embodiment, alongside temporality. The mythic women exemplify this, in the sense that they employ the human body and physicality in a particular kind of historical and textual representation. [5] The mythic women may be interpreted in terms of an ongoing cultural, cognitive and corporeal recursiveness, where distinctions between mind and body, internal and external, and individual and environment dissolve (cf. Ingold 1993). The emphasis here on the existential and experiential is problematic (for example in its inability to account for change). It is proposed nevertheless as a

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[5] This may be compared with the particular development within the so-called 'new French feminisms' which deals with 'writing the body', and with the relationship between gender and textual production. Examples include the work of Cixous and Irigaray (in Marks and de Courtivron 1981).

counterbalance, preliminarily formulated, to the 'mentalism' of much archaeology (including some postprocessualism).

This approach does not solve the problems which archaeologists would like to address, for example questions of change within the art tradition(s). It is not, however, merely an interim way of avoiding the dating problem, but points towards dimensions of the art as a historical and cultural resource, which have hitherto not been discussed. Nor is this study without implications for archaeological research in the B-series mould.

Mythic women and shamanism

The dominant model in rock art research postulates shamanism as the starting point for accessing the art; it is claimed (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1994:217; Deacon 1994:237) that the art is "essentially shamanistic". However, if one approaches one's material with this assumption in place, tautology is an ever-present risk. It is unsurprising that adherents to the shamanistic model find shamanism in almost all aspects of the art, since the model presupposes it - a circular argument. The present research began with the sceptical assumption that although some paintings undoubtedly relate to shamanism, the validity of generalising this assumption remains to be demonstrated. Starting from a position which (relatively arbitrarily) foregrounds gender and perspective in the art inevitably steers one into different terrain. Questions then remain as to what extent the interpretation becomes a self-fulfilling proposition, and whether the significance of different insights reached from a different starting point or angle is 'merely' a matter of perspective, or whether it has substantive capacity to alter the way in which we understand the art.

Although I have argued above that the mythic women cannot simply be understood or interpreted in the context of shamanism and ritual curing, if the notion of shamanism is redefined, then there is no major conflict of views, other than a rejection of the essentialist claim (cited above) which a priori privileges shamanism as the key to the art. Preziosi's critique is relevant here:

"A great deal of art historical writing works in such a way as to isolate and privilege one element in a totality such that the element or class of elements - forms, forms of belief, or forms of social interaction or ritual - serves as a master code or essence capable of explicating other elements of the totality in question...It has been precisely this reificational movement that has lent the history of art history's art its characteristic fictionality. At once reductionistic and scientistic, the projected history of artworks occludes complexity and contradiction, producing a curiously aestheticised version of social and cultural history" (Preziosi 1989:43).

In an article in which the aesthetic dimension of theory is explored, it is proposed that "Although this critique is directed at art history, it would seem equally appropriate for contemporary archaeological research into San art, and the images of San history which are presented. The shamanistic model seems to operate to produce precisely such an 'aestheticised' history as Preziosi describes. Firstly, it isolates and privileges shamanic rituals as the key to the understanding of the art. Secondly, the approach leans heavily on the frequently reiterated claim that the art is "essentially' shamanistic" (cf. Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1994:210; Deacon 1994:237). Knowledge of shamanic practices then serves as a master code which has been extended to incorporate and explicate all manner of images which have been grouped under the umbrella of 'trance metaphors' (cf. Lewis-Williams 1984). However, though Lewis-Williams has consistently stressed the complexity of San art, the shamanistic model, in its *modus operandi*, does not account for such complexity. Though the method employed is fundamentally hermeneutic, there is little accommodation of other readings of both art and ethnographies; the claim that many, if not all, images can be understood in terms of an 'essential' shamanic component works, as Preziosi describes, by privileging one element in a totality, thus relegating readings which focus on a different dimension to a status of lesser 'truth'. Despite the apparently hermeneutic grounding of the method employed, in its claims for truth and essences the shamanistic model comes close to falling foul of the very scientism and empiricism which its authors and proponents have expressly rejected (see Lewis-Williams 1983; Lewis-Williams and Loubser 1986, for statements of the anti-empiricist stance). The stated position of supporters of the shamanistic model is thus in subtle contradiction with the operations of the resulting texts... In its privileging of ritual, the model

implicitly reiterates a position which is widely accepted as deeply problematic - viz. the separation of the mundane and the extraordinary, or the sacred and profane. Writing in the early 1970's, the anthropologist Bourdieu described the problem, in terms of art historical and anthropological approaches to African art and culture:

"The world of art...a sacred island systematically opposed to the profane everyday world of production, a sanctuary for gratuitous, disinterested activity in a universe given over to money and self interest...offers, like theology in a past epoch, an imaginary anthropology obtained by denial of all the negations really brought about by the economy" (1977:197).

Though the economic determinism inherent in this position may seem overstated in the light of more recent critiques of materialist anthropology, Bourdieu's argument is still topical. Writers in archaeology, anthropology and art history are currently wrestling with problems of integrating the extraordinary reality of art with the mundane realities of production. For example, Preziosi has urged art historians to move away from an understanding of "art as representation in a narrow sense - art as a second reality alongside the world in which we live day to day, rather than one of the most powerful social instruments for the creation and maintenance of the world in which we live" (1989:49). Similarly, Weiner (1992) has criticised anthropological research which retains unexamined Durkheimian assumptions, and an implicit distinction between the 'sacred' and 'profane'; she points out how this separation has worked to render less visible the role of women in production. Insofar as the shamanistic model focusses on ritual, healing and transcendence, it tends to reiterate this distinction" (Solomon in press).

It is proposed that the concept of shamanism, as evident in San rock art research, requires expansion; Eliade's (1987) definition, with its emphasis on hallucinations and the like, may be seen as too narrow to encompass the social and cultural dimensions of San arts and experience. By reincorporating the mundane and profane, the mythic women may be seen in relation to shamanism. In a very broad definition, shamanism deals with the cycle of life and death, and the regeneration of life. The materials presented in this research are easily accommodated in such a broad definition. The

shamanistic model as it stands has emphasised the medicine dance, curing and trance; yet these are only a small part of shamanism in the sense described by Eliade. The dominant model has neglected consideration of the mythology, and the symbolism of regeneration which, it is suggested here, is exemplified by the mythic woman motif. Hence, the mythic women may be understood in relation to the shamanistic model, if that model is extended well beyond trance, curing and the interface with the spirit world - the current configuration of the model. Highlighting the twin notions of temporality and embodiment permits such an extension. By means of these concepts, a series of "insistent dualisms" (Ingold 1993:154) in rock art research may be addressed. Although Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1994:218-9) have endorsed the Giddensian notion of the duality of structure (initially used by Solomon 1989), rock art research has yet to come to terms with the binarist structuralist legacy.

As Muir (1976: Preface, no page number) has written: "There have been many descriptions of what history is, e.g. "A vast Mississippi of falsehood' (Matthew Arnold), 'Fables that have been agreed upon' (Voltaire), 'A confused heap of facts' (Lord Chesterfield), 'Little more than the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind' (Gibbon), 'The biography of a few stout and earnest persons' (Ralph Waldo Emerson), 'A cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of man' (Shelley), 'Bunk' (Henry Ford)".

In relation to this study, Shelley's observation is perhaps the most apt - if only he had been as perspicacious as Emerson, and used a gender-inclusive term. With reference to the writing of San histories, the devices employed in the art and narrative traditions of the (Khoi)San people of southern Africa may profitably be utilised; the circular movements in the art and narratives disrupt the linearity and logocentricity of western academic investigations and texts. An attempt has been made here to cast the research in a mould which utilises similar devices to those used by the subjects who made the art and told their stories, and to produce a qualitatively different historical account.

Appendix 1

Site records examined in the Natal Museum

Ofandweni Rock

Ladder Cave

Knuffel's Shelter

Porcupine Shelter

Rope Shelter

Lower Mushroom Shelter

Procession Shelter

Crane Rock

Gone-by Shelter

White Head Shelter

2829CC46

Xeni Stream

Umgobo Rock

Blob Rock

Cathedral Rock

Buck Head Shelter

Bemani Shelter

Anchor Shelter

Oqalweni Rock

Raimar's Shelter

2829CC752829CC76

Zunckel's Shelter

Boschman's Klip B

Red Elephant

2829CD22

Brotherton

Junction

Esikolweni

Erasmus

2829CD66

Pager's Shelter

Zunckel's Cave

Moon Rock

White Clan Shelter

Nkwazi Shelter

White Cliff

Baboon Rock

Driel

Bee Shelter

Firedance Shelter

Battle Cave

2929AB3

Fergie's Cave

Copulation Rock

Single black figure

2929AB14

Sebaaieni Cave

Elephant Shelter

Botha's Shelter

Nkosazana Rock 2

Elizabeth Rock

Nkosazana Shelter

Clarke's Shelter

Dancer's Cave

Lichen Shelter

Wonder Valley 3

Injasuthi 2

Injasuthi 3

Lower Injasuthi

Injasuthi Rock

Poachers' Rock

Robbers' Cave

Black Cave

Lizard Shelter

Ka-Masihlenga 2

Giant's Castle Main Caves

Fulton's Rock

Barnes' Shelter

Snake Shelter (Rest Camp Shelter)

Game Pass

Cyprus

Never-ending Shelter

Picket's Shelter

Picket Rock

Throttling Shelter

Red Ox Shelter (Bamboo Hollow 5)

Highmoor 4

Cleopatra

Cascades 1

Cascades 2

Bundoran

Watson's Cave

Ntuba 2

Skhelekehle Shelter 2

'Soldier on path'

Crazy Paving

Gxalingenwa Shelter 1

Gxalingenwa Rock 1

Gxalingenwa Rock 5

Gxalingenwa Rock 8

Pinnacle Rock

Ikanti 1

Ikanti 2

2929CB40

Mpongweni North

Mpongweni South

Mpongweni Rock

Whyte's Shelter

2929CB52

Bottoms-Up Shelter

Emerald Shelter

Pholela Shelter 4

Pholela Shelter 7

Tsuayi's Shelter

White horse SHelter

2829CC21

Spiderman Shelter

Ngwangwane Shelter 2

Ngwangwane Shelter 4

Ngwangwane Shelter 8

Ngwangwane Shelter 9

2829CC104

2929CD15

Baboon Shelter

West Ilsley 2

Cora Lynn 1

Eland Cave

Pornographic Shelter

Bamboo Mountain Shelter 2

Appendix 2

Quantificative studies: a brief foray

Although quantification was not a major strategy in the research, it cannot be avoided altogether. For example, a referee of one of my journal articles queried my claim that the motif on which this study focusses has been overlooked, suggesting that some simple quantificative material would pre-empt the response that it has been overlooked because it is scarce. For that reason, a brief consideration of existing quantificative studies is presented, based on data in Pager (1971), Vinnicombe (1976), and Lewis-Williams (1981a), with some reference also to Mazel (1981). It might at some future point be instructive to consider Maggs' (1967) quantificative study of the rock art of the south western Cape. Frequencies of humans figures, of male and female figures and perspective are considered.

All these writers quantify and categorise in interestingly different ways. For example, Pager (1971:332) uses the categories 'Man', 'Woman' and 'Human'. The traits he uses to sex human figures are 'Penis', 'Breasts', 'Sto'(stomach) and 'Stea' (steatopygia or steatomeria). Lewis-Williams (1981a:133-5) and Vinnicombe (1976a:363) have similar categories, namely male, female and indeterminate, and Lewis-Williams noted that he employed the same criteria for identification as Vinnicombe. The criteria employed by Lewis-Williams include male (presence of penis) and male by association with a bow. The percentages generated are broadly similar, but with some interesting differences.

Recorder	%Male	%Female	% Indeterminate	Total no. humans
Pager	86,3	13,2	0.5	408
Lewis-Williams	27,2	0.3	72.5	1274
Vinnicombe	9	2	89	4530

Pager and Vinnicombe were working in adjoining areas, yet there is a massive discrepancy between the frequencies of indeterminate figures they record. This is

unlikely to be a product of sample size or regional variation, but relates more closely to the more inclusive and intuitive method employed by Pager, just as the rough correspondence between Vinnicombe's and Lewis-Williams' indeterminate figure categories probably arises from using the same criteria (and larger sample sizes). Comparing Vinnicombe's and Lewis-Williams' percentages of male and female figures is also interesting. Given that quantificative studies suggest certain similarities in frequency across large areas (many more men; mostly indeterminate figures) the greater prominence of male figures in Lewis-Williams estimation, and of female figures in Vinnicombe's, makes one begin to wonder. Are there really more males in Lewis-Williams' Barkly East sample, and so few in Vinnicombe's? To what extent, or how, does the gender of the researcher impinge? In view of the subjectivity involved, even where researchers are explicitly using the same criteria for identifications, such studies are seriously problematic, as Lewis-Williams has strongly argued. By the same token, Mazel's suspicion (1981) that female figures are more common in the northern Drakensberg sites must remain problematic.

It is also interesting to consider the frequencies of clothed and naked figures, working with the same recorders' data. To calculate this, Pager (1971:333) uses a much larger sample. He excludes 'antelope men'. Vinnicombe mitigates her category by including a 'Fragmentary' class. As well as describing figures as clothed or naked, Lewis-Williams has separate categories for figures with decoration on the limbs or body.

Recorder	**%Naked**	**%Clothed**	**Total number of humans**
Pager	78,2	21,8	1417
Lewis-Williams	79,4	20,6	1274
Vinnicombe	58	20	4530 22% 'fragmentary'

The problems of reconciling and comparing the quantificative data compiled by different recorders are so extreme that the exercise seems ridiculous. However, it does show some very general trends. The available data on figures painted in frontal perspective contextualises the frequency of known examples of the 'mythic women'

image. Lewis-Williams states that perspective ('elevation') was recorded. However, the frequencies are not presented in Lewis-Williams (1981a), and Vinnicombe does not mention elevation or perspective at all in her quantifications. As noted in Chapter 7, Pager (1971:324) considers a number of human figures - this time 1669. Of these, 804 are painted in lateral view and face left; 825 are in lateral view and face right; a mere 40 are painted in frontal view; and none are portrayed from the rear. Pager does not analyse how many of the 40 frontal view figures are male, female or indeterminate, although it would be possible to derive this information from his detailed descriptions of the individual images in each of the seventeen sites in the Ndedema Gorge. However, given the subjectivity of Pager's sex attributions, and the problems of quantificative methods, I could not see the benefit of this exercise at this point.

This brief account provides some quantificative, rather than qualitative, background to the 'mythic woman' motif. If it is a relatively rare motif, then this appears to relate to the preference of San artists for lateral perspective. If it can be further shown that the frontal perspective is predominantly linked to female or feminine figures, this emphasises its (qualitative) significance. Moreover, low frequencies do not justify overlooking a motif; if this were acceptable, then, on the basis of the frequencies of female figures presented above, there would be little point in looking at female figures at all. (Perhaps this has been the perception, to some extent.)

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ERRATA

The following errors have been brought to the author's attention:

Pieter Jolly's M.A. dissertation should be referenced throughout as 1994, not 1993.
Page 39, last paragraph. 4 lines are repeated.
Page 46, paragraph 2, line 1. Figure 37 should read Figure 41.
Page 151. The following line is missing from the bottom of the page: ...figure at Arthur's Seat, Loskop (Figure 31), which has remarkably similar postural details, has a buck-like head.
Page 177, paragraph 2, last line. The word "which" requires deletion.
Page 179, paragraph 3, line 12. An end bracket should appear after "structures".