

The Rock Paintings of Williston

**An interpretative study of rock art, rituals and the
landscape in which they are created**

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Abstract

The Williston district in Northern Cape, offers an exciting and new contribution to the rich world of rock art in South Africa. The paintings found here are solely geometric finger paintings, with a variety of different images and motifs. There are possible connections between these paintings and the initiation ceremonies of the Khoekhoen, once pejoratively known as the Hottentots. The main motif and link between the rock art and these rituals, is the so-called 'apron motif'.

These images show a resemblance to Khoekhoe and Bantu women's ceremonial aprons, aprons that are known from ethnographic sources to have been worn both in daily life, and during different rituals, especially those connected to initiation into different social places and states. We know that during girls initiations, the girl was considered to be holding an extremely potent, powerful and potentially dangerous force. Because of this force, the girl was to be introduced to the so-called 'Watersnake', to ensure the creature's goodwill, and in a special ceremony this introduction was made. In this ritual the girl was, among other things, painted in geometric symbols.

From the rock art data gathered during my fieldwork in the Karoo, the dry area in the interior South Africa in which the Williston district is located, several patterns can be drawn out. First of all, the landscape features are almost identical in all the sites. There seems to be a prerequisite of closeness to water for these paintings to have been made, as almost all are made in very short distance from rivers and waterholes. As the Karoo is a very dry place, the presence of water is a vital and special element of the landscape, and our understanding of it. The sites have a very varied number of images in them, ranging from just one to over two hundred separate images. The images are varying in quality, from figures faded almost entirely, to figures that look almost completely new. The enormous amount of imagery and the varying quality of the paintings, points to some sites as being used for a long time.

In combination with what we know from ethnographic sources, exploring the rock art sites offers a good start into unmasking the secrets of the geometric rock art. With a theoretical background based on space/place theory, the paintings can be seen as a performance more

than a product. Used in combination with theory surrounding rites of passage, we can utilize the notion of these sites as arenas for ritual practice as an interpretation. This is based on their landscape characteristics and the nature of the rituals conducted in relation to these characteristics. It is my belief that research conducted into the widely shared beliefs concerning the Watersnake and its connection to girls initiation ceremonies, will further enhance our understanding of these images.

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Dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Karl Hykkerud

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this thesis I will present and discuss newly discovered rock art material from the Williston district in the Northern Cape, South Africa. The rock art was recorded during fieldwork from April through June 2004, and was conducted by myself, Jeremy Hollmann and Catherine Namono, both representing the Rock Art Research Institute of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The fieldwork and the following thesis were both made possible by the Rock Art Project, a collaboration project between Norway and South Africa.

In my approach towards an interpretation of the rock paintings, I will apply a theoretical framework based on recent thoughts concerning landscape and its different spatial and temporal aspects. This is based on the notion of rock art as features that are incorporated into the landscape, by people who act along with the world, an idea that challenges the long-standing division in modern Western thought between nature and culture. I will also use different South African ethnographic sources in the interpretation. Together, I intend to use the rock art, the theoretical tools, and the ethnographic sources to put forward an interpretation. This interpretation is based on rock art and its connection to rituals conducted by people that are a part of the landscape around them. The specific nature of these rituals I will of course return to, but they can be termed as rites of passage, and more specific, initiation rituals. They mark the end of childhood and the entrance to the adult world. The questions I propose in this thesis are all connected to this interpretation.

There are three major questions I wish to address. The first is concerning who made these paintings. There is currently a shortage in the research in South Africa when it comes to these geometric finger paintings, and I hope to answer some of the questions surrounding the makers of the rock art. The second main question is; where is the rock art in the landscape? I wish to see if there are certain places that have been used more frequently than others, and if so, what makes them so special. The last question is why they were made. Here, I turn the thoughts I briefly mentioned above, a search for answers within the ethnography and landscape theory. With these questions in mind, there are of course several sub-questions that can be asked. I will however not go further into asking questions, but instead concentrate on the ones that I have proposed here.

The thesis will be divided into four parts. First I will present the theoretical background of my work, with keywords being space, place, time, temporality and landscape. Also of importance here is the rites of passage, and initiation rituals. In chapter three I present the landscape, the rock art and the people. This is in many ways an introductory chapter, giving a setting and characters for the thesis. The following chapter is a presentation of the data, with several tables and analysis of patterns and occurrences in the rock art. In chapter five I will incorporate the three foregoing chapters, and offer interpretations towards the questions I have proposed. The last chapter will be a short summary of this thesis and also give some thoughts for the future.

Chapter 2: A model for interpreting rituals in landscape.

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present and discuss theories concerning landscape. I will look at special places in the landscape and their connection to rituals, in a spatial and temporal context. My starting point will be newer understandings of space and landscape and in particular, Tim Ingold's essay "The temporality of the landscape" (2000). After establishing a background based on my interpretation of this essay, I will look into certain aspects of liminal zones and rites of passage. I have chosen to include this theory because of the nature of my study, which is about the landscape of rock art and rituals in the Williston district in the Northern Cape in South Africa. There are several indications in ethnographic material from South Africa that involve stories of how symbol making is connected with initiation rites (Engelbrecht 1936, Morris 2002, Turner 1967, 1969). I will return to these at the end of this chapter, and also in later chapters.

2.2 The temporal and spatial aspects of landscape

To begin this chapter I would like to first define the concepts of landscape, space and place and time and temporality.

Landscape

I will adopt Ingold's definition of landscape as the world that is created from the perception of those that dwell in it, from living, working and travelling in it (Ingold 2000: 190-194). It is not defined as the same as land, space or nature, but has more in common with the term environment.

I will refrain from talking about landscape with the use of the dichotomy of nature versus culture, because I believe that this is a division which is, at least in my case, both unnecessary, and to some degree, false. It is unnecessary because nature and culture are, when trying to interpret rock art, two concepts that cannot essentially stand alone. It is partly a false division, because it will always be open for different interpretations as to where nature ends and culture takes over, and vice versa. They are socially constructed

terms, marked by individual understandings. This subjectivity is also apparent when trying to create an understandable bridge between extremely different perceptions of nature and culture, for instance the different views between a Kalahari-native San-bushman and a New York-native stockbroker. The distinction between nature and culture is a product of modern, Western thought (Thomas 2004, Tilley et al. 2000). It emerged in the Renaissance, along with other imposed dualities, such as mind and matter. Nature was, in short, something that consisted of a set of laws that was unchangeable. With the background of knowing these laws, nature could be mastered by humanity and the inventiveness and imagination of its individuals. Since this distinction was made, the duality of nature and culture has become a part of how Westerners see themselves in the world. There are, however, no boundaries as to where nature ends and culture begins. The different ethnographic records show that most cultures see humans as a part of nature as much as nature is a part of us and our activities and relations. Without a proper discussion of nature and culture, we can end up drawing wrongful conclusions from ethnographic material.

The ethnographic record thus resists the imposition of a nature/culture dualism which cannot simply be projected onto other cultures either in the past or in the present as unproblematic.

(Tilley et al. 2000:219)

Because I find the distinction between nature and culture unnecessary for my paper, I will use the concept of landscape as a way of uniting nature and culture.

Christopher Tilley discusses “abstract space” and “human space” in his book “A Phenomenology of Landscape” (Tilley 1994:8). Abstract space has its history from the “new” geography and “new” archaeology, which started to take shape during the 1960s. Its aim was to attain, through a positivistic functionalism, a rational, more realistic and “truthful” view of the landscape. It was an approach that aimed to be neutral in its observations, and through meticulous plotting, sampling and mathematics, the data could be analysed with objective eyes. As Tilley says; “Lurking beneath the distribution of the dots on a map was a spatial process and causality to be discovered” (Tilley 1994: 9). For the rock art research, this new method resulted in different types of numerical inventories within specified geographic areas. Researchers hoped that this approach would make rock

art research, besides more scientific in its observations, more “respected” within archaeological communities, and bring rock art to a new level of scientific recognition (Dowson and Lewis Williams 1994, Lewis-Williams 1998).

The “abstract” view is now regarded by many as more irrational than rational, mainly because of its inability to see space as a medium rather than a container (Tilley 1994). It fails to regard the sociality of space. Human space is a more complex and subjective space. It consists of not one space, but many spaces, all in interaction with each other. This forms the foundation of the phenomenological perspective. With this approach, a difference is made between space and place. A place has been given more meaning by the subjects who experience it, because of the temporality that is added to its spatiality. It is given a sense of time and meaning.

The key issue in any phenomenological approach is the manner in which people experience and understand the world. Phenomenology involves the understanding and description of things as they are experienced by a subject. It is about the relationship between Being and Being-in-the-world.

(Tilley 1994:11-12)

Although recognized as a more rewarding tool for landscape archaeology, the phenomenological approach has not been without criticism. One thing that can be said, is that it is sometimes hard to say how much we, as modern people, can use our own senses in search for the views of those who dwelled in the landscaped long before us. To consciously adopt one's own views and regard them as the same as those of a prehistoric community, is loaded with pitfalls. I will try use phenomenology as part of this study, but with a caution and reflexivity towards my own subjectivity, only because my background is so different from those societies I wish to study.

Temporality and “taskspace”.

I will here define the term “taskspace”, which is introduced by Tim Ingold in his essay. The spatiality of a landscape consists of the different meanings that we put into the places that we go to or live in. The difference between space and place takes its meaning from this. Tilley divides space into many different categories, but the key issue is “(...) the manner in which places constitute space as centres of human meaning (...) within particular

lifeworlds” (Tilley 1994: 14). To define this we need also to include temporality into the equation. Temporality is different from history and chronology. It is with the merging of temporality and historicity that we can approach the experiences of those that, in their activities, create the spectrum, or process, of social life. It is these activities that, in their spatial, temporal and historical entirety, Ingold refer to as taskspace (Ingold 2000: 194). Thus, taskspace can be said to incorporate both spatiality and temporality. These are connected to each other through the movement of those that are engaged in the landscape. Movement is a crucial factor for interpretation. It is through movement in the landscape we create taskspace. Movement is the link of which Edmund Leach uses the metaphor of music when he describes symbology and ritualistic sequences (Leach 1976: 43-45). He analyses an orchestral performance, and divides up the different parts of a symphony. The movement of all the different musicians in the orchestra creates a message, in this case music. It is only when they are all playing together, when the pitch and rhythm are consistent, that we can make sense of what we are hearing. Likewise is the taskspace and the temporal and spatial dimensions of the landscape connected. When we divide up the different parts of the landscape, we miss the totality of it, its collective meaning.

Just as land is measured in units like kilometres, and value is measured in money, taskspace consists of activity, and activity can be measured in time. However, time can be categorised into two groups; astronomical and social. The first one is based upon the rotation of the earth and its relationship with the sun. This repetitive system gives us the background to build clocks, which we use to measure time. It is quantitative. The second is however based on more qualitative foundations, namely the rhythmic and symbiotic relationship created between individuals, and the experience that is created and gathered from activity. Ingold borrows this distinction between social and astronomical time from Sorokin and Merton, and uses it to show how the temporality of the taskspace is measurable in social time. I will here use a personal example of what social time can consist of, and how it is perceived differently from person to person or group to group.

When travelling on the Finnmark plains in Northern Norway, there is a good chance to encounter Saami reindeer herders in their traditional environment, a landscape of great distances and extreme temperatures. When asking a Saami how far it is to the next so-called “mountain-cabin”, the answer could be given in three different versions. The first two could be “it is three miles away” or “it is six hours of medium paced skiing”,

reflecting, respectively, a distance measure in units of miles and in astronomical time. This would be perhaps the ‘normal’ way for most people to give an answer to this type of question. The third option could be the answer “it is three coffee-breaks away”. This answer reflects an aspect of social time. It is of course extremely subjective, but subjectivity is a core issue in the concept of social time.

Ingold also uses an analogy between music and taskspace to make clear (at least in some sense) what he means by the term (Ingold 2000). He stresses three points as important parallels. The first point is that social life and music both consist of cycles and repetitions, they are both rhythmic. Each segment in a musical piece contains a building-up and preparation-to, the next segment. Together these segments construct a rhythm. So do our activities in social life, each situation is unique, and at the same time linked to what went before and what comes next. Together these situations make out the rhythm of daily life. The second point Ingold makes, is that there is not one rhythm we play in music or live our lives in, but many interweaving rhythms. It is in the complex relationship between these that we can identify the temporality of taskspace. The last similarity to be pointed out is that of movement. Music cannot exist without movement, and likewise taskspace is depended upon, and made up from the activities that people engage within it.

With the concepts of landscape, temporality, and taskspace now defined, we can move on to see how we can use these in approaching our research. In the next section I will discuss how Ingold sets the stage for temporalising the landscape.

2.3 Temporalising the landscape.

The basic message Ingold wishes to postulate is that we, as human beings, are a part of the world and the landscape around us as a whole, and in our dwelling within this world we are moving along with it. The goal here is to see how taskspace and landscape can be brought together when trying to understand the world around us. First, we need to approach the landscape and its aspects and features, as part of a previous, present and future process. The traditional Western view is one that emphasises the finished product, the form or shape of things, over the process in which it was created. We have many examples of non-

western societies where painting for instance, is seen as an act, or as Ingold puts it; “The emphasis, here, is on painting as a performance” (Ingold 2000:198). The object of this is often to re-enact stories of old or to communicate with ancestral spirits, and thus give these new life, or recreate them in other ways. Nancy Munn gives an account of such a ritual from the Walbiri Aborigines in Central Australia (Munn 1973). Here a fertility ceremony called the *banba* contains different gestures, chanting, and dances, which all are connected with ancestral spirits. The symbolism of different designs, each type bearing its own meaning and drawn or painted through different mediums, is also described in detail.

Each design class is connected with a specific sort of efficacy, but can only aid in attaining the ends desired when created in the right contexts and accompanied by the singing of associated songs. The singing is a central feature, for singing and painting (or more generally, the construction of design-marked sacra) constitute the essential core of ritual action connected with the ancestors; it is, in particular, the singing that ensures the efficacy of the designs.

(Munn 1973:34)

The notion of the painting of figures itself being important is also of interest to my study, where a possible answer to the question “why are these fingerpaintings made”, could be linked to ceremonies or rituals, similar to those mentioned above. As the singing in Munn’s example is a vital part of the ritual and the painting, the notion of specific rituals surrounding the making of the fingerpaintings in Williston, can be equally important. The paintings must be seen as a part of a ‘package’, an act, or task, that cannot be interpreted on solely its own basis. This is especially important with initiation rituals, where the object of

So, with an understanding of the landscape as something that has notions of both yesterday, today and tomorrow in it, we can look at how we relate to these different temporalities. We act upon the land, not through inscription, but through incorporation. Incorporation means that our human life cycles, together with the life cycles of everything around us, is, to cite Ingold again, “woven (...) into the texture of the surface itself” (Ingold 2000:198). And as the taskspace contains an unending number of activities, the landscape is always under construction, thus we, or perhaps more importantly, our perception of the landscape, is always under construction.

As landscape is what we can see around us, the visual, the sense of hearing can help us identify the taskspace. For sound to exist, we need movement, and this movement is created by the agents inside the taskspace. These agents, and by “agents” I mean humans, animals, wind and other features that can produce sound (a person cutting down a tree for instance), are acting in correlation with each other, thereby making action and interaction a necessary criterion for taskspace to exist. With the presence of sound and movement, we are brought back to the analogy of music. Ingold does not restrict the notion of taskspace only to living things by saying that we need activity for it to exist; he sees the world, with everything in it, as part of the same cycle or process:

This means that in dwelling in the world, we do not act *upon* it, or do things *to* it; rather we move along *with* it. Our actions do not transform the world, they are part and parcel of the world’s transforming itself. And that is just another way of saying that they belong to time.

(Ingold 2000: 200)

As I discussed above, this view ignores any distinction between nature and culture, and instead tries to incorporate the two. To summarise Ingold’s essay, I will use his own example for showing temporality in the landscape. This example is a painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, called “The Harvesters” (Figure 2:1). It is a painting showing a nice and quiet autumn day on an idyllic countryside, and in it there are people engaged in different activities surrounding a field of wheat. First we have to imagine ourselves inside this picture, as bystanders and observers of the scene unfolding itself in front of us. This is the starting point for the interpretation. Ingold points out, in detail, six different features of the painting, but I will only briefly discuss each of these, summarising his main points and also adding some of my own.



Figure 2.1: *The Harvesters* (1565) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

The hills and the mountains

Set against the background of the painting is two small hills and the valley between them. These constitute a permanence to the rest of the painting, a solid base for which other features can operate on and move around. But this permanence is a relative one. Indeed, the hills and valley has a sense of time to them, it is a time-span that is extremely long and slow, compared to the human time-span. It has been going on for thousands of years, and in it, the hills and valley has endured the rise and fall of sea levels, the wear-and tear of human occupation and dwelling, and the slow, but efficient, erosion from the river flowing through the valley. If it were possible to fast-forward the time, we would see these things happen. So, even the most permanent and solid features of the landscape, has a certain amount of temporality in them, all depending on how we choose to look at it.

The tree

In the centre of the painting we see people nestling under a pear-tree. Being autumn, the tree has ripened fruit hanging from its branches, and the same branches offer shelter from

the sharp autumn sun to the people resting beneath it. We can hear its leaves rustle in the soft wind. The tree represents several aspects of temporality. First, it is different from the hills and valley, because it is more consistent with the human memory. The people underneath it have probably seen this tree grow since their childhood, spent harvesting corn in the same field. Second, it also represents an annual life cycle, with blooming in spring and summer, bearing fruit in autumn, and finally shedding its leaves in when winter comes. These temporal rhythms are, as everything in nature, in correlation with other beings' life cycles, for instance migratory birds, the life of insects, and as mentioned, the agricultural activities of humans. It is a symbiosis of not just nature, but also of time.

But the tree also has some of the same elements of permanency as the hills and the valley has, as it represents something organic that is capable of withstanding the fiercest storms and coldest winters. Herein lies also a small irony, namely the one of a tree that can hold out against all of nature's furies, but not the simple, but crude blade of a saw, wielded by a human being. The fact that this tree still stands here, close to the field, bears witness of consideration and interest from previous generations.

The corn

The corn also shows an interrelation with humans. Its life cycle is closely connected with the daily lives of these people, and it is the closest link between man and nature in this picture. It carries with it sound; we can hear the gentle swaying of the corn in the wind. Its own life cycle is also shown, from being cut down, to be bounded and then carried down to the farm, there being processed into bread, and finally ending up as lunch for the people sitting under the tree. It is indeed a great example of a landscape-features change through time, brought forward by movement.

The church

By now we have begun to understand the temporality of the natural features in the painting. Now we turn our attention towards a man-made structure, the church in the background. The church has many similarities with the tree; its temporality stretches backwards as far as human memory goes, and beyond that. Ingold compares the roots of the tree with the graveyard of the church. Both constitute a feeling of temporality. With the graveyard as well as with the church itself, the activities that are engaged there give it a certain meaning. Much in the same sense is this meaning apparent when discussing places

with rock art. The rituals I wish to examine in relation to these places with rock art are connected to initiation and entry to the adult world, and hold thus another parallel to the church, with the ritual of confirmation. Both serves as the arena upon which the transformation takes place. In constructing these arenas, we make space into place. The place holds a certain meaning that is both given by itself, and by its inhabitants. The church also represent the human life cycle, with baptisms, confirmations, weddings and, in the end, funerals. The spatiality of the church is thus given an aspect of time to it, making it temporal. Connected with all of these is the church bell, which, with its bells ringing, can be heard all around the hills and through the floor of the valley. It is, relatively speaking, a timeless sound.

The paths and tracks

The paths and tracks in this painting are indicators of human activity. The paths show a link in time to past generations and their activities. As Ingold says it; “It is the taskspace made visible” (Ingold 2000: 204). From the movement along these paths, we gain an experience that enters what Bachelard calls our “muscular consciousness” (In Ingold 2000: 203). This is where the movement manifests itself in our mind, whereas it is shown in the landscape as the paths themselves.

The people

The last point to be made is that of the people in this painting. Now the use of our hearing is as important as that of our vision. We hear as well as see, the different activities of the people around us. They are all engaged with each other, or with the corn, in a landscape that is created on this basis. People in relation to their surroundings, and the surrounding features relation to the people.

There are more senses than only seeing and hearing which can be use when trying to interpret a landscape. We can use smell, touch, and perhaps even taste in creating a lively image in our mind. In the painting we can “smell” the fresh cut corn, and if we try, we could sense the touch of features in the painting, like the bark on the tree for instance. As we try to incorporate all our senses into the analysis, we gain a more complete experience.

To conclude, the examples show that there are many considerations to be made when trying to say anything about time and space in a landscape. But even if we try to unite

nature and culture, there will always some difference in what meaning we put into a place. These meanings are sometimes tied up to specific activities that we engage in, and these may sometimes be called “rituals”.

From the discussion above, we can see the entire landscape, with all its agents, as a framework for understanding. Yet, there are some places that are considered to carry more meaning than others. Sometimes this is because of certain special features in the landscape, like mountains shaped in a peculiar way, and sometimes there are other reasons for the way in which people connect to them. In pre-historic times, these places were sometimes given a human element in them, which in this study would be the rock art. The rock art is, as I see it, a visual manifestation, an inscription, but in trying to interpret the art, it is more rewarding to see it as an incorporation. This means that the rock art added, or enhanced, already special places in the landscape. It made space into place. The rock art I am dealing with consists of geometric motifs, and thus dealing with something that is more difficult to understand than more naturalistic motifs. Because of the nature of these motifs, there can be many interpretations as to what they mean. Taking into account ethnographic material, we also know that one motif may hold several meanings (Munn 1973). Some motifs may have had a more limited meaning as their complexity increases; as their elaboration increases, the possible meanings is narrowed down. This means that a complex motif need not necessarily hold more meaning than an apparently simple motif (Bradley 1997).

In the beginning of this chapter I discussed a view of landscape without the distinction of nature and culture. The view in landscape archaeology used to be focused on the “built environment”, that is, the landscape that was changed by human intervention. From this standpoint, we see the landscape as divided into fields, and boundaries marked by fences, stone walls, and so on. It is clear that this does not apply to hunter/gatherer groups. In the later years, more attention has been given to places and paths as boundary markers for these groups (Bradley 1997). Rock art situated along paths, and on places that lie high in the landscape for instance, may have contributed to mark these places as belonging to certain groups, or enhanced their meaning in some other way. While I do not disagree with the notion of rock art as boundary markers, this will not be the focus of my interpretation. Instead, I will concern my study to special places, and the meanings they might hold in a spatial and temporal context. For interpreting certain rituals in the landscape, I will now turn the attention to rites of passage, or rites de passage.

2.4 Liminal zones and rites de passage

Rites de passage as a phrase, was first coined by Arnold Van Gennep in his book “Rites de Passage” in 1909. He showed that all rites of passage are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, from Latin; threshold), and aggregation (Van Gennep 1960). In the first phase, the subject is removed from the group, and also from a certain structure (for instance; that of a *child*). In the second phase, the subject is considered to be in a liminal state, the characteristics of the subject is now ambiguous and undefined. In the last phase, the subject emerges from the liminal stage as something new, is taken into a new group, and is expected to behave according to this groups social structure. Victor Turner further explored the defining aspect of the second phase;

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arranged by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualise social and cultural transitions.

(Turner 1969: 95)

The three stages of a rite de passage all hold a different relation with the world around the subject. The second phase, which can be called the liminal phase, takes the relations of the subject to extreme lengths. It cannot any longer connect to its surroundings the way it could before, the sense of both space and time has been altered. In many societies the subjects are regarded as, in some sense, dangerous for its surroundings; it is ritually polluting (Turner, 1967). It is therefore secluded to a special place, a “seclusion site”. This shows that a rite de passage takes place not only within the subjects own personal space, but also in what I have discussed as social space. The aspect of time also operates on different levels: the subjects sense time in a liminal stage can hardly be measured in minutes because things are experienced outside of what is normal. Time can be said to be divided into three groups, in relation with the three stages; the before, the between and the after. How these groups of time are experienced will be different between those that stand “outside” of the subject, and the subject itself. For rites de passage we can therefore use the term social time, which I discussed earlier.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have discussed ways of looking at the landscape around us. From the term taskspace I have drawn out the different spatial and temporal aspects it holds, and shown how I wish to use them in interpreting rock art. My focus has been special places in the landscape, and the many different meanings they might hold. These meanings are sometimes brought to life through rituals, and I have pointed to the ritual process of rites de passage. In the following chapters I will try to show how the rock art of my study is connected to rituals like these.

Chapter 3: The Landscape, the Rock Art, and the People.

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present a description of how the fieldwork was conducted, and what we found. I will divide the rock art into groups to separate the different types of images from each other. After presenting what the rock art looks like, I will connect the paintings to one of the major rock art traditions of South Africa, the geometric rock art tradition. It is my aim to show that these geometric paintings (also known as “herder” art, separating it from the San “hunter-gatherer” art) were painted by a group of people known as the Khoekhoen (also known as Khoikhoi, and once pejoratively known as the “Hottentots”). I will establish this viewpoint through a deduction of other possible groups of painters, like the San, and by showing how the geographical placement of the rock art fits with what is known of Khoekhoen settlement patterns. In addition, I will present an introduction to the ethnographic sources on the Khoekhoen, and also discuss some of the problems and challenges involved in applying written sources in the interpretation of the rock art.

3.2 The Landscape



Figure 3.1: The Karoo.

The fieldwork took place in an area commonly known in South Africa as the Karoo (Fig. 3.1, Fig. 3.2). It was centered on the small town of Williston, Northern Cape, and lasted for one month, from May to June 2004. The community in the Williston district consists of large farms, which are based on sheep herding, and situated quite far apart in the landscape. Sheep are one of the few animals that can successfully be kept as livestock in the Karoo. This is because of the marginal amount of resources that grow here, something that is even reflected in the meaning of the word Karoo, an apt translation being “the place of great dryness” (Morris 2002: 29). The vegetation consists mainly of different kinds of thorny bushes, with a variety of grasses and different types of succulents. The vegetation is in a constant danger of being overgrazed, which is reflected in the large areas of land needed for each farm to sustain a comparatively small sheep herd (Smith, 1992: 137-138). Also, the effects of exotic intruders are in the process of having dramatic effects on the landscape.



Figure 3.2: Southwestern part of South Africa, with the research area outlined in the circle (www.multimap.com).

Rain is, to say the least, quite scarce, averaging an annual rainfall in the vicinity of 300 mm each year (Smith 1992: 137-138). This rain often comes in great thunderstorms, and fills the great pans and dried rivers and their tributaries. However, this water rarely stays for long. Because of seepage and evaporation, the waterbeds are soon empty again, leaving only the dried out cracks in the topsoil as visible signs of the rains short, but intensive, appearance. The climate of the interior Karoo can be described as semi-arid, with

extremely hot summers, and cool winters, when temperatures can drop to -15 degrees centigrade. The area is also susceptible for drought, which happens when the summer rains coming from the coast fail to reach the central inland. With this background, it is easy to understand why surface water is a rare thing in the Karoo. But still there are a few places where one finds permanent water sources, although this water is not drinkable as it contains far too much salt, algae and other pollutants for the human digestive system to handle. Some of these sources originate from underground streams, called *syfers* in Afrikaans, and some are not-yet-evaporated remnants from the great rainfalls. The importance of these places with permanent water would prove to be a key factor in finding the rock art.

3.3 The Rock Art

Before the fieldwork took place, little was known of the rock art from this area. There were only three sites on record, and in addition three sites were reported in from farms in the 1930s. In comparison, when the fieldwork was concluded after one month, over 80 new sites were on record. All of these were paintings, and all were figures that can be described as geometric.

As a part of the Rock Art Project, I traveled to the Williston district accompanied by Jeremy Hollmann and Catherine Namono from the Rock Art Research Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. With the much valued help of Nico and Dalene Hogdson, local sheep farmers, we got in touch with other farms in the area, and were guided to places where paintings had been found. The use of local informants was a tool that was planned beforehand, but we did not know at that time to what extent we could use this tool or how useful it would be. It turned out to be the most valuable tool we had since an astounding amount of imagery showed up from the guidance we received. Common for all the paintings we found was that they only resembled only geometric motifs and they were finger-painted. This is a quite different style of painting than the well-known San paintings, which are delicately painted with fine brushes and often depict human figures and different animals (Vinnicombe 1976, Lewis-Williams 1981). The geometric images, however, resembled the tradition of the Khoikhoi, or Khoekhoen, a tradition that until recently has been paid little attention in the South African rock art research (Smith and Ouzman 2004).

The fieldwork was conducted following a quite simple strategy. We followed the farmers instructions of where they remembered seeing paintings, or where they had heard from others that there were paintings, and started looking along the cliffs for sites. When we found paintings, they were documented with photography and tracings. Not all sites were traced because of time issues, but a selection was made based on the general or unusual characteristics in the paintings. These characteristics could be figures with intricate designs with lines criss-crossing inside circles, or just two simple lines making a cross. A while into the fieldwork a peculiar pattern emerged from the sites. We started to notice that the sites we found were almost always in the vicinity of permanent sources of water (fig. 3.3). The term “permanent” is here meant in the sense that in these places one can usually find water, but the amount of it is more or less based on the rainfall and temperatures each year. These places became quite interesting then, because of the scarcity of surface water in the Karoo, and the rock art that seemed somehow tied to it.



Figure 3.3: The site Leuwkrantz lies close to the water. The paintings were found in the shadowed outcrops, or *kranses*, to the right in this picture.

The paintings were located on sandstone rock formations called *kranses*, and they were made almost always within a range of 100-150 meters from the water. Soon, we no longer needed the help of the farmers to locate the art, we simply followed the *kranses* until we came close to water, and found paintings. In order to establish whether this pattern was purely coincidental, or even a product of our imagination, we also searched away from

water sources for paintings, that is, kranes and shelters that would have been suitable as painting surfaces, but found nothing. We searched for engravings, knowing that there were many engraving sites not far from the Williston district. The engraving sites outside of our research area were often located on top of small, rounded hills called 'koppies', and the engravings were made on the black stones that are found on these hills. This type of stone is yellowish underneath the black surface, making the engravings "shine out", and easy to spot. However, although there were several of these 'koppies' in our area, we could not find any engravings belonging to either the San- or Khoe-traditions. There was only one engraving site, Grootfontein, and these pictures showed scenes from colonial times, making them too different from the geometric motifs, both in style and most likely in time as well, to be properly discussed in this paper.

Looking away from these images then, what we found were images that were altogether different from the San-paintings. Their colors varied from mainly red and white, with a few figures in black and yellow (though this might be a faded white color), and one case of blue paint. The images can all be characterized as geometric, and some of these soon turned out to be more frequent than others. I have thus divided them into five main groups, these groups being, respectively; 1: 'apron'-motifs, 2: vertical lines, 3: dots and fingersmears, and 4; circles, with the fifth group being divided into 5a and 5b. 5a is the images that are unique motifs and do not fit into any of the image groups. 5b represents images that are too faded to be distinguished as any specific type of image.

Group 1, the apron-motif (Fig. 3.4), is a group whose figures have been identified as a cross-cultural motif, found in both San, Khoekhoe, and Bantu-speakers rock art traditions (Eastwood 2003). The name comes from the similarities between the figures and the aprons worn by women among many of the peoples in South Africa. The apron motifs vary in size and outline, and are rectangular, oval, or square in shape, with vertical lines inside. These lines vary in numbers from just two or three up to ten. These are the most common motifs that we found, and are the most vital link between the paintings and the question of who made them. I will return to these later in this chapter.



Figure 3.4: Four different apron-motifs, all in white paint and on the right side of the picture. In the top left corner is a red line figure belonging to group 2, and below it is a unique white figure belonging to group 5a. Site: Leuwkrantz 1.

Group 2 consists of different sets of vertical lines. These lines appear either alone or crossed with other lines, sometimes in distinct, repeating ways. In some localities the lines were made with different colors, like red and white, although the white were often almost faded away (fig 3.5). The most common feature with the lines is one horizontal line, with vertical lines going down from this top line. This group can be difficult to distinguish from both group 1 and group 3. This is because the paint is in some places so faded that it is impossible to determine how the original figure looked like. In addition, there are in some localities cases of superimposed images, making them difficult to separate. One can say that maybe there is no point in separating them, as they should be seen as one complete picture, in their entirety so to speak, but these cases belong to a small minority of the localities, and in trying to find the meaning of the most frequent images, we must try to divide them into groups.



Figure 3.5: Example of image belonging to the lines group. Site: Ongeluksfontein 3.

Group 3 describes different sets and formations of dots and finger smears. These dots can appear spread with no apparent form, but can also be found within circles or other shapes (fig. 3.6). The dots did not appear often, and are therefore awarded with their own group. The use of color varied between white and red, but never both in the same motif. The finger smears can also appear alone, or in connection with several others.

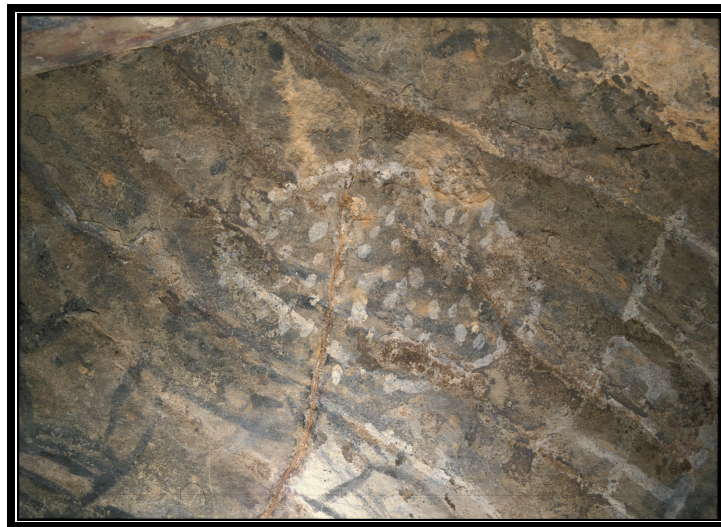


Figure 3.6: Dots within a circle. The figure is superimposed on an undistinguishable black image. Site: Leuwkrantz 1.

The fourth group is the circles. These are often seen in relation to different sets of lines, and sometimes they appear alone. When singular, they often contain lines crossing inside

them, either just making a cross, or intertwined in different ways. The images with lines and circles together sometimes took shapes that could resemble animals. As one farmer called them “lizards”, it is easy to see why this assumption was made (fig. 3.7). The circle at the end of the figure to the right can be seen as a head, and the lines coming down from the horizontal line can be seen as feet. It is, however, my distinct impression that these figures are not meant to resemble lizards or other animals, other than, perhaps, supernatural creatures. This is because of the many different forms the circles and lines take, alone, and in relation to each other. As I will discuss in chapter five, I believe these are both figures that are connected to ritual clothing and ornaments.

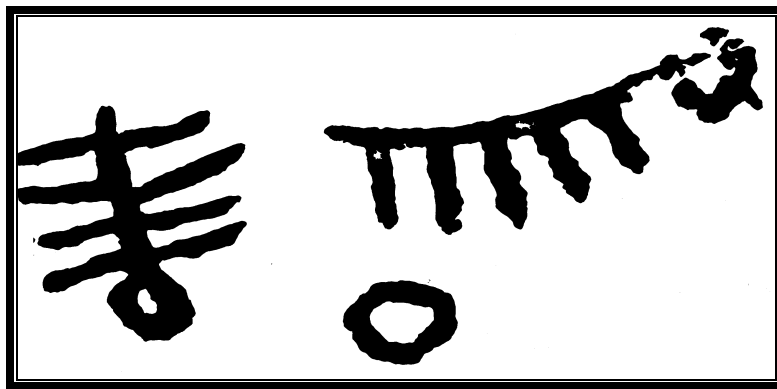


Figure 3.7: Redrawing showing different compositions of lines and circles. Site: Sandtuin 5

The last group, group 5, is the most diverse group of images, and consists of images that do not readily fall into any of the groups presented above. This group is divided into two subgroups, 5a and 5b. 5a are images that are unique in their composition and design, geometric paintings that are not of any representational kind. There are not many of these images, and they seem to be found often in sites with a large number of images. 5b is the images that are too faded to be categorized further, and thus cannot be asserted to any specific group.

3.4 Dating

When it comes to dating these figures there are several problems. First of all, there is no archaeological data from this area that can be used to establish a meaningful settlement pattern. There are several rock-art shelters where ostrich-egg shells were littered about, but time and resources would not permit further investigation into these. Second, the dating

of geometric rock art in South Africa is quite sparse, with dates varying from the first-millennium A.D. in the northern part, with increasingly younger dates further south and west in the country, the youngest going all the way up in the mid-eighteenth-century A.D. (Smith and Ouzman 2004: 508-509). This obviously presents a large time span to possibly connect these motifs. However, the long duration of the geometric painting tradition is also a factor to consider when applying ethnography to the rock art. I will return to this discussion later in this chapter.

3.5 The people

The geometric painting tradition is generally associated with herder groups, which we can collectively call the Khoekhoen (Eastwood 2003, Smith and Ouzman 2004). Although the Khoekhoen actually consisted of many different groups of herders, they shared a common belief system and general way of life (Elphick 1985). Before I describe their history and what relevant ethnographic material I will use, I will first explain why the paintings are considered to have been made by the Khoekhoen.

Geometric motifs occur in all the major rock art traditions of South Africa. While geometric motifs in San-paintings are usually explained as representations of entoptic phenomena experienced during trance, the herder geometrics are not connected to this (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988). There are several reasons for this, but summarized we can say that differences in style, technique and the lack of integration with representational imagery, indicates a different explanation than entoptic phenomena. In addition to the differences in the rock art, there are ethnographic data that suggests a different tradition than that of the Bushmen. In the 1870s, a /Xam advisor who was commenting on copies of forager rock art, did not recognize these paintings as something made by the San bushmen (Stow and Bleek 1930, in Smith and Ouzman 2004). The Bantu-speaking tradition, another of the major rock art traditions, also has features that differ from the geometric rock art. Among these is the use of color. While most geometric motifs are painted in red color, white is the primary color in the Bantu-speakers` rock art. Also, the settlement pattern of the Bantu-speaking farmers does only variably occasionally with the distribution of geometric rock art. Archaeological traces of these farmers in the early Iron Age are not found in the central and southwestern parts of South Africa, and especially not in my research area, the Karoo. What we are left with is the Khoekhoen.

Although the rock art is divided into different traditions, it is important to keep a few things in mind when describing them. Just as the different groups of people, the Khoekhoen, the San, the Bantu-speakers, must have interacted with each other on different levels, there are elements in the rock art groups that shows interaction and influence between the groups. The “apron-motif”, which I will discuss more thoroughly in chapter five is one example. This motif we can identify in both the Khoekhoen, San, and in the Bantu rock art (Eastwood 2003).

Though the archaeological traces of the Khoekhoen is widely discussed, there is a general consensus that they migrated southward from an area near northern Botswana. There are two models suggesting when this happened. The first model suggests an entrance in the Western Cape province approximately 2000 years ago (Elphick 1985: 12-13). This is based on both radiocarbon dates and linguistic research. This migrational model suggests that the Khoekhoen came to the southern tip of Africa with livestock and pottery, and established their communities along the rivers, especially the Orange River, and the coastline (Morris 1995, Beaumont et. al. 1995).

The second model is more of a diffusionist viewpoint. Here, the earliest appearance of pottery and livestock is not considered as being brought to the southern tip by migration, but as a result of a complex relationship between groups of people that were not restricted to the categorization of hunter-gatherers or herders, but instead had elements of herding in a hunting culture, or as Sadr calls them: “hunters-with-sheep” (2003: 208). It suggests that herder groups ancestral to the Khoe did not reach the coastal areas until sometime between 1000 and 1400 A.D, long after the appearance of pottery and livestock in the southern tip. In short, this conclusion is based on the difference in pottery styles, regional variability in the archeological finds, and an unsynchronized distribution of dates (Sadr 1998). The appearance of cultural elements such as herding and pottery are considered being spread between hunter-gatherer groups, with the knowledge deriving from the Bantu-speaking farmers. The argument between these two opposing theories thus involves theoretical aspects of the relations between herder and hunter-gatherer groups. The question, or questions, revolves around how fast the Khoekhoen could have migrated from northern Botswana, and how the ideas of herding could have been spread from the herders to the hunter-gatherer groups. This question draws upon aspects of hierarchical versus egalitarian

construction of societies, the ethos of “sharing”, and the problems of categorization, like “herders” and “hunter-gatherers” (Elphick 1985, Smith et. al. 1991, Sadr et. al. 2003, Sadr 1998, 2003). Without venturing far into this debate, I will restrict myself by saying that both theories are equally considered, both in South African archaeological research, and in this paper.

So, who were the Khoekhoen? The earliest accounts of European travelers to the southern tip of Africa in the early 1600s, described the people they encountered as wild savages and cannibals (Boonzaier et. al.1996). For the general European, Africa was at that time a continent of myths, and these mythical categories were used when describing the inhabitants of the unknown land. The Khoekhoen were later on given many names, one being the Dutch word “*strandloper*”. This translates as *beach-ranger*, and describes a people living on the beach-line, living on marine foods. Further inland however, the Khoe lived mainly of their livestock, which were sheep and cattle. When the increasing expansion of Dutch colonists came in the 1700s, the Khoe groups on the coast were pushed north- and eastwards.

The Khoekhoen were not one homogenous group of people, but many different groups spread over large parts of the South African geography (Mitchell 2002). These were not always in peace with each other and the emergence of colonists contributed to internal disputes. Some allied themselves with the Dutch, seeing this as the only way to keep their livestock in suitable grazing areas, while others either fought the colonists or moved away. Whenever this happened, they came into hostile contact with the Khoe-groups already using the land for grazing. The access to water holes was also an important factor in the increasing competition for land, which illustrates the key-role resources, and especially water, played for both the colonists and the Khoe-peoples (Boonzaier et. al. 1996).

As the pressure increased on the different Khoe-groups, many of them were faced with a choice between adaptation or extinction. The land claim made by the freeburghers, the Dutch colonists, was only one of the causes of these rapid changes. With the introduction of new people to the continent came also the threat of new diseases. Many of the native Khoe-groups fell victim to small pox epidemics, a story which is a familiar one from all places of the world whose history includes rapid European colonization. Not only did

people die, but also the livestock, further increasing the stress on the traditional Khoe ways of life.

Throughout the 1800s, many changes occurred, not only in the social system and demographic patterns, but also in the Khoe language (Elphick 1985: 210-214). The language was beginning to disappear in the mid-1800s and one of the reasons for the loss of the Khoe language was the difficulty (or perhaps reluctance) Europeans had in learning the San and Khoi click-based languages. Since the Khoekhoen were dependent on communication with the colonists, their main language became Dutch, which later evolved into Afrikaans.

The Khoe people eventually became somewhat of a servant-folk, a sub-class in the white society, and even far inland, beyond the reach of the colonists, their traditional societies were changing and adapting quickly to new ways of life. An example of this was the Baastards, who were people of mixed descent, Khoekhoe, Europeans, and San. These groups, in general, avoided contact with the settlers, and ventured farther inland in order to maintain their pastoralist lifestyles. Being a group that did not fit into what the settlers would consider a “pure culture”, and being rivals of other Khoe groups, they fell, so to speak, between two chairs. As an example of the way they were viewed by the colonists, we can just look at the word “Bastaard”. To this day it is laden with negative connotations, and whether or not it comes specifically from these groups of people, it still reflects the views of cultural “purity” in the early colonial writings.

The Orange River on the present day Namibian border became a borderline area for the frontier settlement and the now changed Khoe groups (Penn 1995). Because of the changes that occurred from the time of the colonization, and the rapid decline of the traditional Khoekhoe way of living, the written accounts we have of this people is largely colonial transcripts and mission records. These records must be treated with caution, as they were, for the most part, written by people who were not trying to describe an objective view of the Khoekhoen, or explain how their societies was structured (Boonzaier et. al. 1996). Ethnographic records of the Khoekhoen in their original communities are thus non-existent. However, some elements of their religious system, beliefs, rituals, and kinship-systems did survive, although perhaps changed, in time for some ethnographers in the early 1900s to observe.

3.6 Ethnographic sources

Before I describe what my ethnographic sources are, I must present some important points of consideration. The use of ethnography in this thesis is quite moderate, and so is the weight it will have in the interpretation. The sources that describe the Khoekhoen are all from a time when the people had undergone serious changes in the course of only a few hundred years, and must therefore be used with caution. Some of the oldest sources, such as missionary accounts, are also quite hard to get a hold of, and will not be used for interpretation in my thesis. Instead, I will turn to the first documentation that can be called ethnographic in its composition and observation. In these earliest sources, however, there is no direct identification of the geometric designs painted on the walls of shelters. However, since we have identified a motif that can be directly linked to girls' initiation, the apron motif, in the rock art, I will instead focus on the many descriptions of rituals, and especially rites of passage. This might help with some clues as to how the landscape was a part of the experience of transition from one station in life to the next. Also of special interest are the widespread stories and beliefs on the mythical creature, 'the Water Snake' (Schapera 1930, Engelbrecht 1936, Hoff 1997, 1998, Morris 2002). The stories of the water snake are reoccurring myths in both San and Khoekhoen groups, a further indication of the closeness of these groups. They describe a creature that lives in the river, a presence of almost godly character that has many different powers. Among these is the ability to control the rain. Especially interesting is the relationship between girls entering adulthood and this snake, for in many of the stories these girls hold a special bond to the water snake entity (Engelbrecht 1936, Hoernlè 1985, Hoff 1997, Morris 2002). The nature of this bond is somewhat different in each story, but in general, the girl initiate is considered to be extremely potent (full of the rains' magic power), and this can anger the snake, making it not willing to let the rain come. Thus the girl must be introduced to the snake, in a special ritual, in this case the initiation ritual, so that it will not be angry, and ensure a good rain season. In this chapter I will only briefly introduce the main sources of these stories, further exploring the themes of the water snake and puberty rituals in chapter 5. From this, we can try to connect the rock art as a part of, or a telling of, initiation rituals.

Winifred Hoernlè is considered to be one of the greatest contributors to early South African social anthropology, and in 1985 the University of Witwatersrand Press published a volume entitled "The Social Organization of the Nama and Other Essays by Winifred

Hoernlè”. This was a compilation of her most significant essays, written between 1917 and 1930, which stands to this day as a vital source of information on Khoekhoen societies. In 1987 her field diaries were also published, further supplementing her published anthropological work (Carstens et. al. 1987). In addition to Hoernlè, J. A. Engelbrecht wrote in 1936 the book “The Korana. An Account of Their Customs and Their History with Texts”. This book gives an intricate look into the life of the Korana, perhaps the biggest and most well known Khoe groups. The knowledge we have of them today is largely in debt to this book. The last reference I will mention at the end of this chapter, is the book “The Khoisan Peoples of South Africa. Bushmen and Hottentots” by Isaac Schapera (1930). This is considered to be one of the most influential texts written in South African anthropological research, and must be included in any attempt to describe the life of the Khoekhoen. First published in 1930, in this book Schapera was the first to use the term “Khoisan” as a collective description for the many groups of people it would embrace. Although using some of already mentioned Hoernlès work in the descriptions of ceremonies, the book gives a near complete summary of what was known of the Khoisan peoples at the time of first publication.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter I have tried to piece together the story of the Khoekhoen, their customs, beliefs and their rock art. The ethnographic section of this chapter will be further explored in chapter five, where I will also use some of the sources given by David Morris in his thesis on the engraving site of Driekopseiland in the Northern Cape (Morris 2002). Before I turn to these ethnographic accounts, I will present the rock art data gathered from the fieldwork.

Chapter 4: Analysis of the rock art

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present the results from the fieldwork, and give an analysis based on a selection of the sites that were found. Due to the large amount of data that were collected, over 80 sites, I have made a selection of sites based on the number and variety of sites based in a centrally located area, as well as the practicality of using one map. All of the image-groups are represented in this material, and their distribution is coherent with the amount and distribution of the image-groups in the entire research area. The maps that were used in this fieldwork are many, and cover a large area, but for this thesis I will use only the map Williston 3121 AA (fig. 4.1 and fig. 4.2). The map given here is an electronic map made in ArcMap, and shows 44 sites. This is half of the total number of sites; and the map holds therefore the largest concentration of sites. The sites are grouped under locations, location being the area in which several individual sites can be found. Sites are separated from each other by a change in the overhang, or ceiling, of a shelter or cave, or by a distance between paintings exceeding 5 meters. Localities are named by the farm on whose properties the sites were found (for instance, Grootfontein). Each location may thus hold several numbered sites (Grootfontein 1, 2, 3). As the map clearly shows, there are many rivers and tributaries in this area. This is however deceptive, as these rivers are not filled with water until the rain season comes. The blue lines on the map show where these riverbeds are filled up when this rain comes. There are actually only a few places that have water the entire year, where the water has gathered in large holes and other sunken features in the riverbed itself. It is close to these waterholes that we find the rock art.

The altitude on the map ranges from approximately 1100 meters to 1400 meters above sea level. The rock art sites seem to be found randomly between these heights, and the height levels have therefore not been given any more consideration. On the map small circles can be seen around each site. These circles are buffer zones, covering an area of 100 meters in diameter around the site. This is used to see how far away from waterlines each site is. The idea of “closeness” to the water is of course a very relative approximation, but the range of 100 meters is one that I found to be sensible when discussing how close a site is to each riverbed. When exceeding this limit, we are stretching the limits of what “close to water”

means, in relation to the rock art. If we were talking about settlement sites or other archaeological features, the notion of close would probably be very different.

The buffer zones on the map are quite small compared to the scale, but, in working with ArcMap, they were easily magnified, and yielded the results presented later in the chapter.

The motifs and sites found on the map are representative for all the five groups that I have divided the rock art into --- the apron group, the lines group, the dots and finger smears group, the circles group and the miscellaneous group. In the following tables I will show how the different localities and sites fall into these groups.



Figure 4.2: Satellite photo of the area shown on the map of Williston, from Google Earth.

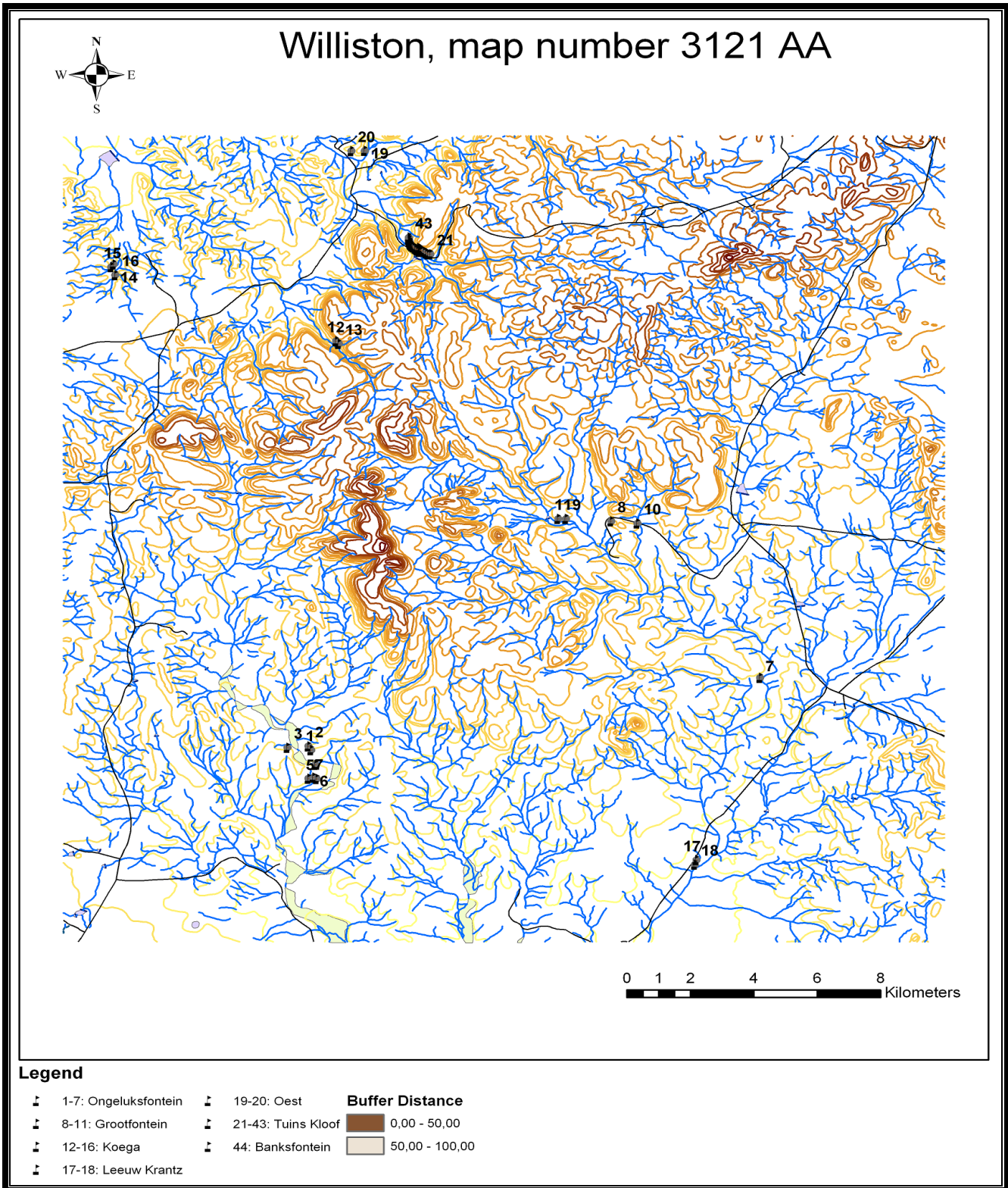


Figure 4.3: Map of area 3121 AA, the area of which the sites in this chapter are located.

Table 4.1. Examples of the different image-groups. The number of each group can be seen on the left hand side of the table, and four examples follow each group number.

	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3	Example 4
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

4.2 Data presentation

In the following table, 4.2, I will present the data from the sites on the map. The rows present the variables for each site and the sites are grouped in localities. The first column gives the site name, while the remaining columns represent each data group: the first column tells which image-groups are found at the site; the second column gives the colors of the paintings; the third column shows how many individual images are found at the site, with the image-group to which they belong given in parentheses; the sum is the total number of images; and the last column shows how close to water each site is situated.

SITE	IMAGE GROUPS	COLORS	NUMBER OF IMAGES	S U M	PROXIMITY TO WATER
Banksfontein 1	1, 4	Red	1(1), 5(4)	6	3 meters
Grootfontein 1	1	Red	2(1)	2	30 meters
Grootfontein 2	1, 5b	Red	1(1), 1(5b)	2	20 meters
Grootfontein 3	1, 5b	Red	1(1), 2(5b)	3	30 meters
Grootfontein 4	X	X	X	X	X
Grootfontein 5	1, 2b	Red, White	1(1), 3(2b)	4	20 meters
Koega 1	1, 3	Red, White, Black	16(1), 14(3)	30	60 meters
Koega 2	1, 2b	Red	1(1), 1(2b), 1(3)	3	50 meters
Koega 3	1, 2b, 3, 4, 5a, 5b	Red, White	8(1), 3(2b), 1(3), 3(4), 1(5a), 2(5b)	18	5 meters
Koega 4	3, 5b	Red, White	3(3), 8(5b)	11	15 meters
Koega 5	2b	White	1(2b)	1	60 meters
Leeuw Krantz 1	1, 2a, 2b, 3, 4, 5a, 5b	Red, White, Black	45(1), 31(2a), 33(2b), 25(3), 51(4), 24(5a), X(5b)	209 + X	5 meters
Leeuw Krantz 2	1, 4	Red	1(1), 2(4)	3	5 meters
Oest 1	2a, 2b, 3, 4, 5a, 5b	Red, White	3(2a), 6(2b), 6(3), 7(4), 6(5a), 2(5b)	30	5 meters
Oest 2	1, 2a, 2b, 3, 5b	Red, White	4(1), 5(2a), 3(2b), 1(3), 7(5b)	20	100 meters
Ongeluksfontein 1	4, 5b	Red	2, (4), 1(5b)	3	5 meters
Ongeluksfontein 2	2a	White	3(2a)	3	5 meters
Ongeluksfontein 3	1, 2a, 2b, 3, 4, 5a, 5b	Red, White	5(1), 6(2a), 4(2b), 4(3), 7(4), 4(5a), 6(5b)	36	5 meters
Ongeluksfontein 4	5b	Red	2(5b)	2	20 meters
Ongeluksfontein 5	2a, 4, 5b	White	2(2a), 2(4), 2(5b)	6	20 meters
Ongeluksfontein 6	2a, 2b	White	1(2a), 1(2b)	2	20 meters
Ongeluksfontein 7	2a, 3, 4	Red	2(2a), 1(3), 3(4)	6	20 meters
Tuins Kloof 1	1, 5b	Red, White	1(1), 2(5b)	3	15 meters
Tuins Kloof 2	2a, 2b, 5b	White	1(2a), 1(2b), 1(5b)	3	15 meters
Tuins Kloof 3	1	White	4(1)	4	15 meters
Tuins Kloof 4	1, 4	White	1(1), 1(4)	2	15 meters
Tuins Kloof 5	1, 2a	Red, White	2(1), 2(2a)	4	15 meters
Tuins Kloof 6	1, 5b	White	3(1), 3(5b)	6	15 meters
Tuins Kloof 7	1, 2a, 2b, 3	White	3(1), 1(2a),	6	15 meters

			1(2b), 1(3)		
Tuins Kloof 8	2a, 2b, 4, 5a	Red, White	1(2a), 1(2b), 4(1), 1(5a)	7	15 meters
Tuins Kloof 9	3, 5a, 5b	White	2(3), 3(5a), 2(5b)	7	15 meters
Tuins Kloof 10	2a, 3, 5b	Red, White	2(2a), 2(3), 9(5b)	13	10 meters
Tuins Kloof 11	3, 4	White	1(3), 2(4)	3	10 meters
Tuins Kloof 12	1, 5a	Red, White	1(1), 1(5a)	2	10 meters
Tuins Kloof 13	2a	Red	1(2a)	1	10 meters
Tuins Kloof 14	2b, 3, 5b	Red, White	1(2b), 1(3), 1(5b)	3	10 meters
Tuins Kloof 15	1	White	3(1)	3	10 meters
Tuins Kloof 16	1	White	1(1)	1	10 meters
Tuins Kloof 17	5b	White	1(5b)	1	10 meters
Tuins Kloof 18	1, 2b, 5a	Red, White	2(1), 4(2b), 2(5b)	8	12 meters
Tuins Kloof 19	1	White	1(1)	1	14 meters
Tuins Kloof 20	1, 5a	Red, White	6(1), 2(2b), 6(5a)	14	16 meters
Tuins Kloof 21	1, 2b	Red, White	1(1), 1(2b)	2	18 meters
Tuins Kloof 22	5b	White	1(5b)	1	20 meters

Note that the site Grootfontein 4 is not given in detail, this is because of an error during the fieldwork. The site was not investigated, but given as a map coordinate to us by Nico Hogdson, the farm owner. For the site of Leeuw Krantz only an X is given when it comes to the number of faded images. This is because of the vast amount of paint on the cliff walls at this site, such that it proved impossible to discern one image from another, because of superimpositions and faded paint.

Summarized we can total up the sites into table 4.3, where the percentages show how each of the different image groups is represented in the total number of recorded sites (43):

Table 4.3

IMAGE-GROUP	% of 43 sites	Number of sites
Group 1 (Aprons)	58 %	25
Group 2 (Lines)	49 %	21
Group 3 (Dots & Smears)	30 %	13
Group 4 (Circles)	28 %	12

Group 5 (Miscellaneous)	53 %	23
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As we can see, the apron group is the largest group, followed by the miscellaneous and lines-groups. Of the 23 sites that have group 5 images in them, only nine have the unique image type, type 5a. The difference between the faded and the unique images will be discussed further later. The next table shows the number of image-groups found together at each site.

Table 4.4

Number of Groups	Number of sites
1	12
2	19
3	7
4	2
5	3
	SUM: 43

Clearly, sites with only one or two different types of images are the most frequent, and they can of course be grouped in many different ways. Table 4.5 shows the variations that occur. Of the three sites with all groups in them, Leeuw Krantz 1 and Ongeluksfontein 3 are both quite unique sites, in the number of images that are found. The site of Leeuw Krantz 1 however, is even more outstanding, in that it contains over 200 images within one long panel. This site is also connected closely to the nearby water stream that is located only 5 meters from the paintings. The third site that has all the image-groups, Koega 3, is actually a very small site, with mostly white painted aprons in it. It does not compare to the complexity and variety of Leeuw Krantz 1 and Ongeluksfontein 3, and is a site that might even have been used only once, judging from the number of images and the level of fading of the paint.

The different variations of image-groups together are many, and in the following table I will show what kind of combinations occur. I include only the combinations that are found. In this table I have not divided image-group 5 into a and b, to keep this table from getting overly complicated. But the occurrences of group 5 images are mostly of faded images,

this can be seen in table 4.2. There are nine instances of unique imagery, and they are always near one or more other image-groups. I will return to the discussion of these unique images later in the chapter.

Table 4.5

Combination of image-groups	Occurrences
1	5
2	4
5	3
1, 2	4
1, 3	1
1, 4	3
1, 5	6
2, 5	1
3, 5	2
3, 4	1
4, 5	1
1, 2, 3	1
1, 2, 5	1
2, 3, 4	1
2, 3, 5	2
2, 4, 5	2
1, 2, 3, 5	1
2, 3, 4, 5	1
1, 2, 3, 4, 5	3
19 Combinations	43 Sites

4.3 Analysis

From the data presented above, there are a couple of main points I would like to highlight under each of the table-sections. First is the use of color. In spatial distribution, red is the

most frequent color, found in 27 sites. However, if we simply look at the number of sites that red figures occur in, it is actually less than white figures, which has 33 sites. The difference in spatial distribution and quantity of sites can be explained with the locality of Tuins Kloof, which holds 21 of the 33 sites with white paint. White is found in all but one of the sites from this locality. If we look at the image groups, it is especially the apron and miscellaneous groups that has images painted in white. If Tuins Kloof represents a different group of people with different sets of painting practice, or perhaps a difference in resource availability for the paint itself, is of course too early to make any assumptions about, but it is certainly worth making a note of.

Black color occurs only twice; One site is Leeuw Krantz 1, and the other is Koega 1, a site that has over forty well-preserved images from two of the image groups, including sixteen aprons. For Koega 1 the black color is very varying in quality, and many of the images are more grey-bluish than black in color. A possible explanation for this coloring can be different stages of faded black paint. The types of images painted in black in Koega 1 is exclusively apron-motifs. In Leeuw Krantz 1 black is also used to paint aprons, along with some nearly unidentifiable line-figures, belonging to group 2. An assumption can be made already here that black painted figures only occur at sites which hold a large number of motives and which were likely used for a long time. The color seems also only to be representing apron-motifs. Obviously, this conclusion is only based on two sites, and is therefore not a well-tested hypothesis, but from the material given here, it holds true.

Apart from the extensive use of white paint in Tuins Kloof, and the black images reserved to aprons and lines, not much can be gathered from the color data alone. There is one site with blue paint outside of the map used here, but it is highly possible that this color is very recent, and since it occurs only once I will not pay it further attention.

From the number of image-groups found at each site, table 4.4, we see that sites with only one or two groups are the most frequent. If we look at the table 4.5, we see that most of these groups are aprons, lines and images belonging to group number 5. The circles group and dots group never appear alone, but always in connection with other groups. I will return to this table shortly. A question that I raised was if there was a connection with the number of figures painted in a site, and how close that site is to the water. If we look at number of images at each site, we see that many of the sites hold a limited amount of images, some only having a single image. The sites are different, topographically, in that

some are found inside shelters and some are on the side of the cliff walls, the kranses. The closeness to water is apparent in almost all the sites, and all of the sites are found within 100 meters of a water stream. This should in itself indicate a relation between the paintings and the water. Even more so, 39 are within fifty meters, and 16 basically right next to the riverbed. In the landscape, this means that some are found right next to water, while others are further up hills or fast rising ledges. The two largest sites, Leeuw Krantz 1 and Ongeluksfontein 3, are both very close to the riverbeds. They are also both painted on the side of the cliff-walls. In contrast, Koega 1, which is also holds a large number of images, is found approximately 60 meters up a hillside from a riverbed. The site is found within a small shelter, which is almost completely covered with painted figures. Based on these sites, there seems to be no immediate connection with closeness to water and number of images in a site. There are also numeral sites which are found very close to water, which does not have a large number of imagery found in them, like the sites of Banksfontein 1 and Ongeluksfontein 1.

The proximity to water must be treated with some caution, because of the heavy rainfalls that occur during the rain-season. Also, the riverbeds that we see today, may have changed since the days when these paintings were made, due to the effects of climatic change, water-erosion and human impact. Nonetheless, all the sites that were found had a close topographical relationship with the water, a fact that will be further explored in the following chapter.

The three sites of Ongeluksfontein 3, Koega 1 and Leeuw Krantz 1, are the three largest sites. If we look at the map, they are marked with the labels, respectively, 3, 12 and 17. These sites are found quite far apart from each other in the landscape, and there are no large sites close to them. A small exception can be made to Koega 1, which is not very far away from the Tuins Kloof locality, but the Tuins Kloof sites are not big sites, but rather many small ones, clustered together. The geographical distance between the large sites is one aspect to be considered, the fact that they represent somewhat different topography is another. Leeuw Krantz 1 (fig. 4.3) is found next to the water in a very flat area, with no immediate hills or valleys. The site itself is almost lost in the view of the landscape itself, as one has to stand very close to the cliff walls before they can be seen. It is located right next to a small riverbed, with water in it some places. The site of Ongeluksfontein 3 (fig. 4.4) is located also very close to a riverbed, but this riverbed is more like a small

floodplain, in which there is a rich variety of vegetation. The paintings are found right next to a dense concentration of the reed *Phragmites australis*, called *Fluijtiesriet* in Afrikaans, and I will return in chapter 5 to the connections this type of reed has to the paintings and the ethnography. The last site, Koega 1 (fig. 4.5), is again different from the other two sites. This site is found within a very small shelter, which is more than 5 meters long, and there is under one meter from the floor of the shelter to the overhanging stone ceiling. In the innermost corner of the shelter it is so narrow that sitting down is almost impossible, and a lying down position is best suited for examining the paintings. The shelter is found approximately 60 meters up the eastern side of a narrow valley, with a small stream running along the bottom of the valley. The stream emanates from an underground stream, a so-called *syfer*.



Figure 4.3: Leeuw Krantz 1. Paintings are found in the kran to the right of the water.



Figure 4.4: Ongelukfontein 3. The paintings are located along the shadowed part of the kran to the right.



Figure 4.5: Koega 1. The site is the small shelter which is shadowed in the middle of the hillside, to the right of the immediate centre of the picture.

The different types of landscapes that these three large sites are found in, suggests that there is no criteria in landscape features, except for the nearby water and a suitable rock face to paint on, that can be found in the different sites. Judging from the distance between these large sites, there might be an indication that these sites have served as ritual gathering sites for larger groups of people, perhaps following the grazing grounds of their sheep herds.

From the different image-group combinations, we can see that combinations involving the apron group is most frequent. It must be noted that some of the combinations involving group 5, the miscellaneous group, is in combination with the faded images, type 5b. Type 5a, the unique images, are usually not found in combination with only one other image-group, the unique images seem to occur only where there is both a large amount of imagery and a variation in groups. This might indicate that the unique images were not painted on sites that were used for a short time, but on larger gathering sites. If we look at the image-groups 3 and 4, dots/finger-smears and circles, we see that none of those groups are found alone. The reasons for this is unclear, but it strengthens the position of the apron motif as the base motif, from which other categories of paintings are painted around.

Mentioned above is the locality of Tuins Kloof and its extensive use of white paint. Interestingly enough, this locality also holds the largest number of sites that belong to the miscellaneous group. These images are however mostly faded white paint, with some unique images, and the often occurring faded white paint can be discussed further. The

reason for these faded, white images can be because the pigment of the white paint fades faster than that of other colors. It may also be simply because this site is older than the other sites, or most likely; a combination of both. If we follow this assumption, and seen in relation to the large number of panels that has been painted here, we can see how Tuins Kloof is a locality that has been used by a large number of people, over a relatively long time-span.

The locality of Leeuw Krantz can also be seen in this respect. The large number of imagery, the widespread use of different colors, the variation of types of images and the different levels of faded paint, are all indicators of a site that has been used for a long time. With their immediate proximity to water, Leeuw Krantz 1 and 2 serve as perfect arenas for which to continue the exploration of the rituals in the landscape. In the next chapter I will again turn the attention towards these rituals. With the understanding we now have of the data, and with the historical and ethnographical sources presented in chapter three, we can take the next step, by merging these sources of knowledge with the theoretical aspects discussed in chapter two. In the following chapter I will be looking at why this rock art has been made, and propose a possible scenario of a painting practice.

Chapter 5: Incorporating Rituals and Rock Art in the Landscape

5.1 Introduction

In the following discussion I will present a frame and setting for interpreting the rock art of the Williston district. I intend to show how the paintings are connected to rituals, landscape and people. By doing this, I will bring in the theoretical aspects presented in chapter two, the ethnography and historical sources from chapter three, and the rock art-data from chapter four. Together, these components will be used to construct a possible scenario of how the paintings were created. The destination of the discussion is a shelter along a kran in the Karoo, near the edge of a small river, where a ceremony is taking place. To reach this destination, which is far away, both in time and in space, I will take us through the different stations on the way, and show how finger-painted geometric figures found in small shelters can be interpreted with a rewarding and renewed understanding.

5.2 The taskspace and the ritual process of initiation and its liminality.

In chapter two I discussed different ways of regarding landscape. I found Ingold's use of the term taskspace to be a useful term when discussing the spatial and temporal aspects of places in the landscape (Ingold 2000). Taskspace includes temporality, social life and landscape, into one understanding of a place and its past and present activities. The actions of people living, or dwelling, together, make up the foundations for understanding taskspace. The understanding of taskspace in this thesis is concentrated on the area in which the rock art is located. In using taskspace as a foundation for my interpretation, we can imagine the people who created these paintings, we can hear them talk, we can hear the sounds from their nearby sheep herd, we can see the process of a ritual taking place. The people are engaging the landscape, and acting along with it. The ritualistic practice is something that we can understand better when applying our knowledge of rites of passage.

Rite of passage is a very broad term that includes the different rites that accompany the changes we experience in place, state, social position and age (Van Gennep 1960, Turner 1969: 94). These changes are marked, in general, by three different stages; separation, margin and aggregation. In other words, the before, the between, and the after. When a

subject goes through these different stages, she/he also passes through them as a liminal entity. This means that when the subject goes from separation to aggregation, he or she is at one stage neither here nor there. The subject is, in Turners word's, "betwixt and between" the different sets of cultural position (1969: 95). Liminality is something that can be used not only when describing a subject going from one stage, or position, to another, but also when discussing special places. A liminal place can be something that holds departures and arrivals, like airports and ports. They are places that hold different dimensions, or spaces, in them (Falck 2003, Myhre 2004). These places are liminal in the sense that people here are always between places, they are in a state of transition, often at a loss of both time and space. They are in some sense of the word, in a state of *nothingness*. Airports are also places we must be in before we leave land, and travel to the sky. In that sense, they are similar to the middle part of the three stages of a rite of passage, a stage found in our consciousness to be somewhat disturbing and fleeting. Another example of this can be a church, temple or mosque, which are places that we use as gateways between this world and the world of God. If we take this thought further, we can imagine a site with rock art as a special place, a place set apart, that holds a liminal character to it, where perhaps people communicated with another world. I will return later to the concept and discussion around the liminality of the rock art sites.

In my thesis I am concentrating on the rites of passage connected to initiation, as the ethnographic sources discussed later give extensive information on these ceremonies, and the rock art points to a connection to these, especially through the apron-motif.

5.3 The ethnographic sources

As mentioned in chapter three, there is no direct ethnography connected to my area of study. The regional historical sources start with the settlements of whites, and give little mention of the customs of the native people. However, if we follow the historical sources which tell of where the Khoekhoen lived, -and the general consensus in the rock art research that the geometric fingerpaintings are made of Khoe-people, we can use what we know of initiation rites from ethnographic sources and Khoe-informants in this study. There is also validity in applying some of the ethnography we know from certain San peoples, Schapera pointed out already in 1930. There are close connections with the puberty rites of San and Khoe-tribes, which actually was one of the reasons he used the

collective term Khoisan peoples (Schapera 1930). This term put the different native tribes and peoples under one umbrella, and illustrated that they shared a variety of characteristics and customs. Another result of this study was that it offered an alternative name, a contemporary more political correct name for the native people of South Africa, Khoisan, instead of Bushmen and Hottentots.

The ceremonies performed in the tribes are all in some sense connected, and the ethnography can thus be used, in broad terms, across South Africa. There are also close connections within the different Khoe-peoples ceremonies, as was observed by Hoernlé between 1912 and 1913. Studying four different transition rites, in different tribes, only very small differences between them were observed (Hoernlé 1985:57). The Khoe-tribes she visited in this period lived in different parts of the northwestern part of today's South Africa; some were remnants of the little Namaqua, who lived around the current Namibian border, on the southern banks of the Orange River. The most detailed descriptions concern girls puberty rites, since the boys initiation ceremonies seemed already in the beginning of the last century to have lapsed. This was mainly because of the end of big game hunting, and thus one of the main rites of boys initiations, the first kill, was to a great extent no longer possible. The ceremonies recorded by Hoernlé were remnants of the Khoekhoens past culture. As she memorably recounts in one of her essays, when one of her main informants, a woman, reproached her bitterly for encouraging her to think of the old ways she had spent half her life trying to forget; "You have made me live the old life once more; soon you will be going, and what shall I do then?" (Hoernlé 1985: 58). The sadness of this woman and her peoples' loss of their culture is apparent in the texts written, and needs to be remembered and considered when discussing these sources. The various reasons as to why she was feeling sad could be discussed thoroughly, but I will not venture further into these questions.

Essential in the ceremonies Hoernlé describes is the power and attributes of the !nau. The !nau is the initiate, the person being secluded from the others when he or she is entering a new state, acquiring a new characteristic or changing in other ways. With thoughts back to Turner and Van Gennep, the !nau is the person entering liminality. The power this person is imbued with when in this liminal state is best illustrated by his or hers relation to water. The !nau cannot touch water before or during the rituals, and must be reintroduced to the water afterwards. In the girls menarche ceremony, the girl is taken through many rituals,

while being kept in a small hut, clad in karosses and aprons. Morris (2002:175), notes that in the more recent forms of this ritual among Afrikaans-speaking Khoe-descendants, the girl is referred to as the *hokmeisie*, which translates as “enclosure-girl”. Again, segregation and seclusion is a very common part of rites of passage, and prepares the subject for the expectations and physical behaviour of the coming trials. At the end of this seclusion, which can last from two or three days, up to one month, the girl is taken outside and reintroduced to the world. Among other things, she is painted in “ (...) various curious patterns with red and white mineral powder mixed with fat” (Schapera 1930: 275). The reference here to “various curious patterns with red and white” is an unmistakable clue to the geometric rock art. I have unfortunately not been able to find any visual documentation of these body-paintings, but the information serves us nonetheless well. As we know from the rock art, red and white are the colors used to paint the rock art, with two exceptions of black paint. Perhaps these patterns painted on the body of the initiate, were symbols of the life she was leaving behind, shapes that represented different aspects of the life of a child. Then, on the last day, she is taken to a waterhole by older women, and splashed with water, and washed with cow dung or other substances. In doing this she is cleansed from childhood to adulthood, and reintroduced to the water. The purpose of cleansing in these rituals is connected to the liminality of the subject (Leach 1976). One can say that going from child to adult requires a breaking-down, and then building-up of the subject, in both physical and psychological terms. The cleansing is thus the final step in the process of “re-creating” this individual. The symbols and shapes mentioned by Schapera could be washed away as well, leaving the girl free of her childhood. Even further, the symbols could perhaps then have been transferred from her body, onto a rock wall by the waterstream, to mark the transformation of another individual into the adult social life.

There are also stories of the ritual slaughter of a sheep where the pelvic bone is kept, and treated in a special way, to ensure fertility and the well being of the group (Engelbrecht 1936: 164). In all of the different descriptions of these rites, a sweet smelling powder called *buchu* is always a part of the ritual. Either strewn on the water, smeared on the body of the initiate, or sprinkled over a group of dancers, it has an important relevance in the puberty rites. Its function is usually that of a protective sort, when strewn on the water for instance, it is to keep the Watersnake happy, and prevent it from attacking young girls (Engelbrecht 1936, Hoernlé 1985). Another relevant substance is ochre, which is often used in combination with *buchu*. Its red colour is closely connected to the first period of

the girl, and indeed the language of the Khoe-group called the Nama, was recorded as having the same root word for “blood”, the colour “red”, “rain”, “snake” and “waterhole” (Hahn 1881:78-79, in Morris 2002:172). As we saw in chapter four, the red color is the most frequent color in the paintings, and it is not unlikely that both ochre and blood were used in making this red paint. This small piece of linguistic information thus provides an important link between both the paintings, the use of color, the use of certain landscape characteristics, and the mythology. The physical reference of blood in the red paint can also be interpreted as connected to the first menstruation of the girl. If we take this thought further, the white paint can be seen as a reference to semen. If this is to be the case, then white paintings could represent masculinity, and perhaps boy’s initiation. The dualism of red/white and menstruation/semen, is however hard to identify in the material from Williston. There are two main reasons for this. First, there exists too little information concerning boys initiation ceremonies to find references between the rituals and the rock art. Second, if we assumed that white paintings are connected to semen, and thus masculinity, one could expect to find white paintings representing different types of images than red paintings. This is not the case, as I discussed in chapter four, we find all types of figures painted in both red and white. There are nonetheless interesting differences between white and red paintings in the rock art from Williston, and especially in the locality of Tuins Kloof. As I discussed in chapter four, this locality holds mainly white paintings, and the sites are clustered along two kranes, only a few meters from a large waterhole. The nature of this locality, its landscape and its rock art, proposes a difference from the rest of the material I have discussed. Whether the extensive use of white color, divided up in sites of one or two paintings in each site, is related to gender differences, is too soon to speculate on. But a possible explanation could be that this locality represents a place where perhaps both girls and boys were initiated.

The ceremony of the introduction to the Watersnake was recalled by a woman who grew up in Upington, a town to the north of the Williston district. In this fairly recent piece of ethnography, she reminisces back to the days when she was a girl, and these rituals, *hokmeisie* rituals as she calls them, were still being performed (translated in Morris 2002 from Afrikaans). The girl is at this point taken out from a ten-day seclusion, and painted with buchu and ochre.

“Then music would be played, the grandfathers [old men] play music, and the

grandmothers [old women] dance, the 'Nama step', and now they go through to the following morning. Now it is danced, the old women dance to the river, and there, at the river, they speak the language, the Nama language, and they throw that buchu in the river. And I asked, what was the purpose for doing that [for that was good], and they said, no, these things work with the Watersnake. Now when they had finished with the dancing, and the things had been thrown on the river, and those girls were standing there – for sometimes there were more than just the one girl, it could be three or four, they now would come dancing back again from the river, back home, back to the location, and at that time the girl was extremely beautiful, coming out like that. But while she was still at the river [as she got to it] I saw that they had a long stick, with which they hit the water. The water had to splash [fall] over her, from her head all over her body. That's a sign that the Watersnake cannot drag her in".

(Lange 1998, in Morris 2002:185-186)

As we learn from this text, there are reasons to assume that some of these rituals became congregations for the entire community, and that many girls could be initiated at the same time. One of the reasons for a collective initiation could be unavailability for suitable waterholes, as Hoernlé points out, that if a girl would get her first period while being in the veldt, the bush, the group would turn about, and she would be carried home to be initiated (Hoernlé 1985:63). There are certain precautions that must be adhered when I here use the word "home". The Khoe were a herder folk, and in the harsh climate of the Karoo they would most certainly follow the water resources. Thus home is a term that might have something greatly different than what we connect with the word. As the majority of sites are sites with one to three types of images in them, and a clear majority of sites have less than ten images in them, there are reasons to believe that these were only used once. When we look at the fact that there exists four large sites, this further enhances the notion of some sites being used only once, while others were used several times, and perhaps by larger gatherings of people. The locality of Tuins Kloof, with its 22 sites spread along two ridges right next to a large river, can serve as an example of a location that have been used several times, but by small groups each time. This locality may have held a special place in the landscape of the Khoe, and were thus used by several groups as a common initiation ground. As I will discuss in the following paragraph concerning the Watersnake, not just any waterhole could be used, there were (perhaps) certain criteria that the ceremonial place needed. Although not mentioned anywhere in the ethnographic texts, perhaps the painting of symbols on suitable kranses was one of these.

The initiation introduction to the water is closely connected to the widely shared beliefs of the Watersnake, also called Waterbull among some groups (Schapera 1930, Engelbrecht 1936, Hoff 1997, 1998, Morris 2002). As mentioned in chapter three, this is a mythical being that is considered to live in the water, in some cases it is the water itself. Hoff identifies two types of snakes, one that lives in the water, the other lives outside it. Most accounts today however, involve the first one, often called the River snake, or Fountain snake (Hoff 1997:23). It is considered to live in rivers and waterholes, and if it is killed or moves away, the water dries up. Therefore it is only found in permanent water sources. What it looks like is very diverse, in some accounts it is as big as the river itself, in others it is small and brown, much like a normal snake. Places where reeds and other vegetation grow are places where the Watersnake lives, where it “lived in the water, and sometimes lurked near its edge in the reeds” (Stow 1905:131-132, in Morris 2002:157). Stow's informant here, `Kou`ke, described the Watersnake as being more than 20 or 30 feet in length, and it was called `Koo-be-eng. No translation is available here. There are also stories of how the reeds are its favourite food (Letitia Pietersen, Pers. Com.). Another connection to reeds is found in the name of the dance that is performed when the secluded girl comes out of the small hut she has been staying in. The Reed dance is danced as re-introductory ceremony for the girl, to welcome her back to the society (Hoernlé 1985:65-66). Reeds may have held a natural ecological symbolism for rain and good grazing grounds for the Khoe, based on its occurrence in these stories. The site of Ongeluksfontein 3 (fig. 4.4) is a good example of where a Watersnake might have lived, with the tall reed *Fluijtiesriet* growing in abundance, some only meters from the rock art itself. Hoff notes that since the Watersnake was known to wander around its home, people never lived very close to a water source (Hoff 1997:24). This could be an interesting note to follow in later archaeological investigations around these waterholes.

The thought of a mythological snake that lives in, and sometimes *is*, the water, challenges aspects of the nature-culture dualism discussed in chapter two. The Water snake can be seen as giving a place special meaning, a meaning that is embodied in the landscape, bringing culture and nature into understandings that merges rather than separates the two. In the challenging climate of the Karoo, where the presence and availability of water can mean the difference between life and death, it is not difficult to understand why the Khoekhoen went to great lengths to ensure a good rain season. The choice of the symbol of a snake in this sense can be widely discussed, the fact that the Watersnake is in many

instances a violent and dangerous animal that can not be trusted, has led some researchers to see connotations of the Christian snake, and its similarities. However, the creature here called the Watersnake is not always portrayed as a snake, in many cases it is a bull, eland, or the water itself (Hoff 1997, 1998). The Watersnake represents a lifegiver, with its rainmaking powers, but also an immediate danger. This danger is directly connected to the liminality of the initiate girl, who can anger the snake because of her powers of menstruation. The presence of a dangerous being connected to people in a liminal state, has been discussed by other researchers, and it is a common trait in many rituals (Olsen 1991). The Watersnake represents a dangerous force, perhaps as a metaphor of the girls menstruation, which must be overcome before she can enter society again.

5.4 Interpretations of the rock art

So far I have only briefly mentioned the rock art itself when discussing the ethnography. The use of ethnography to interpret rock art is a common approach among South African rock art studies, and in the next part of this chapter I will use a modern example of a rock art study which combines ethnography to discuss the possible meanings of the different groups of paintings discussed in chapter four. Catherine Namono in her study “Dikgaatwane tsa Basadi: a study of the link between girls’ initiation and rock art in the Makgabeng Plateau, Limpopo Province South Africa”, used both old ethnographic sources, and her own interviews, in an interpretation of Northern Sotho rock art (Namono 2004). The Northern Sotho belong to the Bantu language-speaker tradition in South African rock art. Her investigations were conducted in an area in the northeastern part of South Africa called the Makgabeng, in the Limpopo province. The rock art of this area has some interesting commonalities with my material from Williston. As mentioned in chapter three, the geometric and Bantu speaker traditions both have geometric motives in them, and they are both fingerpainted, but there are some differences. A different use of colour and the lack of naturalistic motifs in the geometric tradition are some of these, but what I will focus on now is the apron motif. This is the main motif in Namonos thesis, and has been pursued by other researchers as well (Eastwood and Blundell 1999, Eastwood 2003). The apron motif holds meanings that are directly linked to the initiation ceremonies for girls. In the ethnography, aprons can tell us the cultural status of a woman, they are social markers as well as ritual symbols.

There are differences in the front and back aprons, and in Namono's area of research she noted that a mature woman's front apron was rectangular, while the back apron was triangular. The same shape is true for girls' aprons, except for some different shapes of the tips of the aprons. A sexually mature girl has a small tail hanging from the apron, swinging between her legs or thighs to signify this. When a woman reaches menopause, she turns this tail to the side of the apron (Namono 2004). These aprons can be recognized in some rock art panels in the Bantu-speaking areas. These triangular Y-shaped motives are however not like anything in my material, as they are more naturalistic. The shapes I have characterized as aprons are much more rectangular in shape. These shapes are also found in the area of the Makgabeng, and two of Namonos informants said that these were also aprons. They even had a name for this type of apron, *lehabe*, and it was made from twigs of a fig tree, boiled, then strung and woven together. Often it was smeared with red ochre mixed with cow fat. The *lehabe* is worn during the *bjale*, the girls' initiation ceremony among the Northern Sotho. The use of red ochre for coloring leads us back to the discussion surrounding the red color and the aprons. There can be little doubt of the connections between the red color, aprons and girls initiations. The pictures that I argue represent aprons, do not, however, clearly resemble actual aprons. The stylistic representation is, at first glance, foreign to western eyes. In our early fieldwork, before the apron theory was discussed, we referred to them as "radiators", because of their resemblance to car radiators. As Namono suggests, the representation of these images may differ because these aprons are represented in the material they were made from. For these images the rectangular, simplistic form were perhaps of greatest importance (Namono 2004).

Another image that is similar between the Northern Sotho and the paintings from Williston is the circle. The images of circles, which I have characterized as group four, are found also in the Northern Sotho rock art both with, and without crossing lines inside. According to Namonos informants the crossed circles are: "(...) said to teach girls to conceal all things in their hearts" (Namono 2004:83). They are patterns decorated on the back aprons, thus again a reference to something representational, something actually found in the physical world. The images that are presented in Namonos thesis are very similar to many of the circles found in Williston. The comments given by Namonos informants are however, cryptic at best, and could be interpreted in a number of ways. The representation itself may very well be an actual ornament of some kind, but the symbolic meaning this

ornament represents seems to be more important than its pure physical reality. A circle is perhaps the most universal symbol one could hope to find, and the multitude of diverse meanings it can hold are many. Leach uses the image of a circle when discussing ambiguity between different social spaces, also that of seclusion (Leach 1976). If two circles are placed partially on top of each other, each representing different places, the area that they both share becomes ambiguous, sacred or taboo. With this thought in mind, in my study, the circle could thus perhaps represent the enclosure and liminality of the initiate girl.

The last type of images I would like to comment upon is group two, the lines group. The type of image that has a horizontal line with several vertical lines going down from this line (fig. 3.7, also section 2 in table 4.1) has recently been discussed by Jeremy Hollmann (Hollmann 2006). If we have identified an apron motif in the material from Williston, and have identified the circles to be designs decorating these aprons, there is reason to believe that other images may as well represent ritual clothing, or non-ritual clothing, or other physical manifestations. In this train of thought, the headdress worn by some initiate girls in many ethnographic photos, show striking similarities to the lines from group 2 (fig. 5.1). As Hollmann points out, the headbands probably had a potency and symbolic meaning of their own. The fact that they often occur with circles at each end of the main line, can point to further decorations, perhaps ear-decorations.

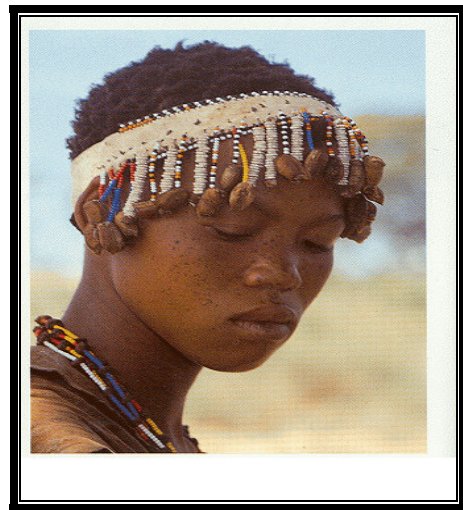


Figure 5.4: Lines motif from Leeuw Krantz 1 and initiate girl from Central Botswana wearing headband.

From all the ethnography I have gone through, there is no mention of a Watersnake being painted on the side of a rock wall. There can be many explanations for this, since the creature was considered to be potentially dangerous, and could kill people, there were perhaps restrictions as to what was allowed to be painted, or even talked about. The presence of a mythological snake in the rock art, whose proportions and physical attributes are many, is of course a question of interpretation. A possibility here can be that a few of the images I have identified as aprons, could perhaps be a snake. These are long, thin rectangular square shapes, that looks like a row of train-carts seen from above, with segmented lines dividing up the rectangle. In some sense, these could be interpreted as the scales of a snake, as it twists across the ground. However, given that they are very few images, and given their obvious likeness to the rest of the apron motifs, I see these images as only variations of the apron motif. There are no apparent differences in the spatial distribution across the landscape of these images, the motives are found in small as well as large sites, a further indication that they are apron motives.

5.5 The ritual and rock art in practice.

To end this chapter, I would like to summarise what I have discussed and give an example to illustrate this discussion. As I said in the beginning of this chapter, the aim of this discussion, is to take us to a place in the Karoo, several hundred years ago. The place is what we now call the locality of Leeuw Krantz (fig. 3.3). It is in the middle of summer and the rain season. A small group of herders have put up a camp near a stream, not far from a large water hole. Right next to this water hole is a line of rock wall dug into the side of a hill, and on this kran there are many geometric symbols in mostly red and white, but also with some black figures. A herd of sheep is drinking water from the side of this sheltered place. According to the people who herd in these areas, there lives a giant Watersnake in this water, and it has been living here for many years. Not far away, inside the camp, a young girl has had her first menstruation, and has been secluded inside a small hut for several days. Only the old women have been allowed to see her. On this day however, she is taken outside, and along with the rest of the community, she is being taken to this water hole. She is wearing a red apron across her waist and a headband in her hair. Her body is smeared with fat and the sweet smelling powder buchu. She is also painted with different geometric images, this red ochre paint covers her upper body. The people are dancing, and the old women are singing a special song that is always sung during this procession. When

they approach the water, buchu is thrown across it, so that the giant Watersnake that lives in this hole is not to become angry. The girl is then splashed with water, and washed with mud and water, to symbolise that she is no longer a child. Then she walks to the side of the krans, and paints the same symbols that she is no longer wearing on her body, on the wall. Underneath her paintings are traces of the same types of images, paintings made by her foremothers. The group takes the girl back to the camp, where she now must adjust to a new life, with different sets of rules and guidelines. The life of an adult.

In this scenario, the thoughts concerning Ingolds concept of taskspace can be illustrated. The ritual activities of the people creates the movement and interaction between agents in the social and geographic space, that is needed for taskspace to exist. The place, the water hole, is the center of these activities, and the girl is the main agent of interaction between the landscape and the people. Between them, the rock paintings exists as a mean of communication, and it is in the *process* of painting the people express unison with the landscape. Together, the girl, the rock art and the water create a collective memory, a temporal “opening”, on to activities past and still to come. This “opening” creates, or rather, reveals, the aspect of time in the landscape. This time is, like the example of the orchestra in chapter two, based on rhythm, a rhythm that goes back and forth like a pendulum, but also with certain breaks and stops in it. Also, there is not only one rhythm at play here, there are many. The ceremony that is taking place holds a certain process in it, accentuated perhaps by the singing and dancing. The girl represents the rhythm of life, with childhood, puberty, and adulthood, and the presence of rock art in the same place, with the same symbolic images, shows that these rhythms have been repeated many times. The task of making rock art at designated places at certain times also bears in it an element of seasonality. As the people used the site of Leeuw Krantz for instance, because of its water-preservation qualities, they were perhaps bound to this site because of its ritualistic importance, but also because water could be found here in the dry seasons. In the rain season they were moving around with the sheep, and could thus more easily find places where the Watersnake lived. Perhaps this is one of the reasons we find large sites and smaller sites, as the people would perhaps have lived longer around sites with water in the dry months, and thus creating larger amounts of rock art at these sites. In the rain season there would be many places that could be used, and the traces we find today of these are in sites that hold only a few number of images.

Chapter 6: Summary and thoughts around future challenges

In this thesis I have tried to answer some questions in relation to the rock paintings of Williston. The three main questions I raised in the introductory chapter was:

- Who made the paintings
- Where in the landscape are they found
- Why were they made

To summarize, I will briefly try to answer each of them. First of all, *the 'authorship' of these paintings can with a high degree of certainty be said to be acknowledged to the Khoekhoen*. The geometric paintings seem to carry influences both from the San paintings and the Bantu-speakers rock art, especially with regards to the much discussed apron motif, but in general they carry within them a different culture than that of the hunter-gatherers and the farmers. The Khoekhoe were mainly a herder people, and their rock art can be said to carry in it, traces of a partly nomadic people. This is both because of the occurrence of many small rock art sites, but also because of the answer to the second question. This question is the one we can answer with almost definite certainty; *the geometric rock art follows the rivers and water ways in the Karoo*. It is linked to waterholes, and in many cases to places that hold water the year round. As I discussed, there can be both ritualistic/mythological, and natural meanings to this, the presence of the Water Snake and the importance of water, both for the people and for their sheep herds, are factors to be considered when we turn to the last question. The third question remains to be further discussed by other researchers, but I hope to have offered here a justifiable interpretation, a layered view of the landscape on which more layers can be built or others stripped away. *The paintings seem to have been constructed in relation to initiation rituals and to have carried meanings we cannot yet comprehend, in them*. The complexity of the ritualistic rock art painting is no doubt great, but if we try to engage the rock art with its place in the landscape in mind, we will be greatly rewarded. There are of course certain traps one can fall in, as I discussed in chapter one, it calls upon an awareness and reflexivity from the archaeologist before he or she can input subjective 'landscape understandings' into the interpretation. I do not pretend to understand the landscape in the way the people that made these paintings did, but by trying to strip away the built-in

diversion between nature and culture that I, as a Westerner have, I can gain more rewarding insights to the past. The thought and metaphor to rock art of 'starting with a clean slate', comes to mind when trying to approach this.

There are, without a doubt, a vast amount of rock art still to be found, both in my research area, and in the Karoo in general. This is the first study of rock art from this area, and hopefully, and most certainly, not the last. As with research in general, what we are left with in the end is even more questions. The future holds promise of many new paintings to be discovered, and with them comes new questions and challenges. With an approach towards these that includes the landscape, in all its levels and dimensions, we can hope to gain a respectful and rewarding understanding of them.

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