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ROCK ART AND ETHNOGRAPHY

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PART 2

This is the second of two special issues of *Rock Art Research* deriving from the 20th International Rock Art Congress of the International Federation of Rock Art Organisations (IFRAO), held in Darfo Boario Terme, Valcamonica, Italy, in 2018. The conference theme was 'Standing on the Shoulders of Giants'. Our session, 'Rock Art and Ethnography', built on the ethnography symposium convened by Mike Morwood at the First Australian Rock Art Research Association (AURA) Congress, held in Darwin, Australia, in 1988. Hence, in this introduction it seems apposite to consider developments in rock art research and ethnography over the last 33 years. In his introductory chapter to *Rock Art and Ethnography: Proceedings of the Ethnography Symposium (H)*, Australian Rock Art Research Association Congress, Darwin 1988, Morwood challenged researchers of the time:

By itself archaeological evidence is mute unless there are established principles for interpreting its significance (i.e. for bridging the gap between the data and its behavioural implications) ... There are very few ethnographic studies which have examined the way artistic systems encode social and economic information, but none have been undertaken with an archaeological perspective or on the ethnographic significance of boundaries between rock art areas ... Such work is now urgently required on the few extant hunter-gatherer art systems (Morwood 1992: 1, 5).

What progress has been made over the last 30 years? The articles in the 'Rock Art and Ethnography' issues of *Rock Art Research* address Morwood's call for more ethnographic studies of rock art. Taken together, they provide evidence of major developments in rock art research since the AURA conference in 1988. New approaches that have broadened the conceptual frameworks of rock art research include a greater emphasis on Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies and on contemporary Indigenous engagements with rock art sites; studies of agency, affect and emotion and of how experiences at rock art sites shape people's interactions with each other and with non-human beings; the life-biographies and legacies of known artists; rock art as part of the ethnographic present of Indigenous lives; how communities of practice can shape the development of regional styles; and the analysis of historical inscriptions to obtain insights into pre-existing petroglyphs. Moreover, a florescence of studies of contact rock art have embedded the analysis of historical and archival data into the methods of rock art research. Today, this research often elides historical, archaeological and ethnographic data in multi-pronged efforts to obtain rich

interpretations of the art. Nevertheless, while studies of rock art and ethnography have flourished over the last 30 years there are still significant gaps in research. Though there are some notable exceptions (including Laue's paper, this issue), there has been little progress in ethnoarchaeological studies of rock art, in which ethnography is used to develop theoretical frameworks that can be applied to understanding societies of other times and places. In 2021, this aspect of Morwood's challenge remains largely unaddressed.

We thank the organisers of the IFRAO conference, especially the IFRAO 2018 General Secretary, Angelo Eugenio Fossati; the Scientific Coordinators, Mila Simões de Abreu and Andrea Arcà; Local Coordinator, Tiziana Cittadini; IFRAO President, Hipolito Collado Giraldo; and IFRAO Convener, Robert Bednarik. We thank Robert Bednarik for supporting two special issues of *Rock Art Research*. His outstanding lifelong commitment to rock art research in Australia and internationally has been critical to the successful growth of this area of study. As founder of the Australian Rock Art Research Association and convener of the 1st AURA Congress in Darwin in 1988, he provided a major impetus to rock art research in Australia. During his time as IFRAO Convener and as Editor of *Rock Art Research*, he has encouraged the growth of rock art research globally. Robert Bednarik's efforts have been crucial to the growth of rock art research, in Australia and globally, over the last three decades.

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Marlene Lee at Doria Gudaluk (Beswick Creek Cave), Northern Territory Australia. Photo: Claire Smith, 2014.



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ROCK ART, REGIONALITY AND ETHNOGRAPHY: VARIATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICAN ROCK ART

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Abstract. The identification of regional differences and stylistic boundaries has long been a topic of interest for rock art researchers. However, understandings of the social processes that underpin concepts of regionality and regional difference have been elusive. This paper approaches the problem by examining aspects of the San ethnographic material related to learning, territorial behaviour, and exchange networks to identify the possible processes through which rock art zones arise. Three spatially distinct rock art zones — the Groot Winterhoek Mountains (Eastern Cape, South Africa), the Maloti-Drakensberg (Lesotho and South Africa), and the Cederberg (Western Cape, South Africa) — are examined as a case study. Drawing on the ethnographic data, suggestions are given on how social processes may account for similarities and differences in motif selection and image production between widely separated bodies of rock art. Strong similarities in the rock art of the Groot Winterhoek and the Cederberg and corresponding differences between these two zones and the rock art of the Maloti-Drakensberg were identified. The concept of communities of practice, informed by the ethnographic data, indicates possible information exchange mechanisms across vast distances that help explain both the similarities between certain areas and differences between others.

Introduction

Until the 1970s, regional differences were a major focus in southern African San hunter-gatherer¹ rock art² studies (e.g. Burkitt 1928; Van Riet Lowe 1952; Rudner and Rudner 1970). The realisation that this rock art was essentially religious in nature prompted researchers, beginning with Patricia Vinnicombe (1976) and David Lewis-Williams (1981), to interrogate the ethnographic record for information on San rituals and beliefs. This work led to southern African rock art being one of the best understood in the world. This shift to an interpretative approach has meant that many tacit assumptions about regionality, based on older culture-historical approaches, remain. Research has highlighted how beliefs were variously expressed in rock art across the

¹ While it is generally accepted that the ancestors of the ethnographically described San hunter-gatherers made the fine-line rock art of southern Africa, they are not Stone Age relics, and there are problems with projecting the term San back in time (see Gordon 1984; Pargeter et al. 2016). In this paper, I use the term 'San' when discussing ethnography and 'hunter-gatherer' when discussing rock art.

² The use of the term 'art' to describe non-Western image-making is a loaded term that has been much debated (e.g. Lewis-Williams 2002: xv; Nettleton 2007: Ch. 1). I thus try to avoid the word where possible and substitute 'images' and 'image-makers' (see Lewis-Williams 2019: 2).

sub-continent (e.g. Challis 2012; Mguni 2015). However, consideration of regional differences in rock art and what these can say about the groups that made the images is an undeveloped but emerging research area (Laue 1999, 2019; Hampson et al. 2002, 2015; Nhamo 2012; Ndlovu 2013). In this paper, I look beyond San cosmology to aspects of San ethnography that can help inform on why we see similarities as well as regional differences in the rock art of the sub-continent.

Many parts of the sub-continent in which rock art is found lack direct historical and ethnographic material on San beliefs and lifeways. This absence has led rock art researchers to turn to nineteenth-century accounts of the !xam San, from the northern Karoo, recorded by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd (e.g. Bleek and Lloyd 1911; Digital Bleek and Lloyd n.d.), and various accounts from the Kalahari from the 1950s onwards (e.g. Lee 1968; Katz 1982; Marshall 1999). Despite some concerns (e.g. Solomon 2011: 113), similarities in belief across the sub-continent suggest a 'pan-San cognitive system' (McCall 1970: 18; Lewis-Williams 1984: 227). These similarities extend into aspects of San daily life, including territorial organisation, kinship and gender relations, which were shared 'across economic, cultural, linguistic, and "racial" boundaries' (Barnard 1992: 3). The pervasiveness of these features and studies of Later Stone Age stone tool technology that show widespread similarities in artefact manufacture across

the sub-continent (Deacon 1984; Lombard et al. 2012) suggests these commonalities also extend back in time. Evidence for widespread similarities in worldview and the successful application of the ethnographic approach means that, while not unproblematic, San ethnographic information obtained in the nineteenth and twentieth-century may be used as a source to understand past lifeways in other parts of the sub-continent.

I have chosen to investigate areas of the San ethnographic³ record related to learning, territorial behaviour and the movement of peoples and ideas. By considering these aspects, we can better understand interaction and information exchange across the landscape and how these influenced the production of rock art. Through a comparative study, I investigate how this historical and ethnographic evidence can help us understand and interpret regional similarities and differences in southern African rock art.

Learning

In any investigation of regional difference, it is worth considering the social and contextual framework within which learning occurs. By learning to paint and taking part in this activity, a painter would become a member of a community of practice (see Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). Learners would participate in the greater 'process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities' (Wenger 1998: 4, original italics). Learning influences how one appreciates what is significant in the world, how one performs certain activities, the relevance of an activity to the community and finally shapes how one sees oneself in the world (Wenger 1998: 5). By understanding the likely routes of cultural transmission, we can discern, in a general way, the various factors that would have influenced how and what motifs were depicted by hunter-gatherer image-makers in the past.

Unfortunately, there is no direct ethnographic evidence on the learning and apprenticeship process of

³ Since most of the ethnographic sources are from the twentieth century and many of the practices discussed in this section still happen today, I mostly use the present tense.

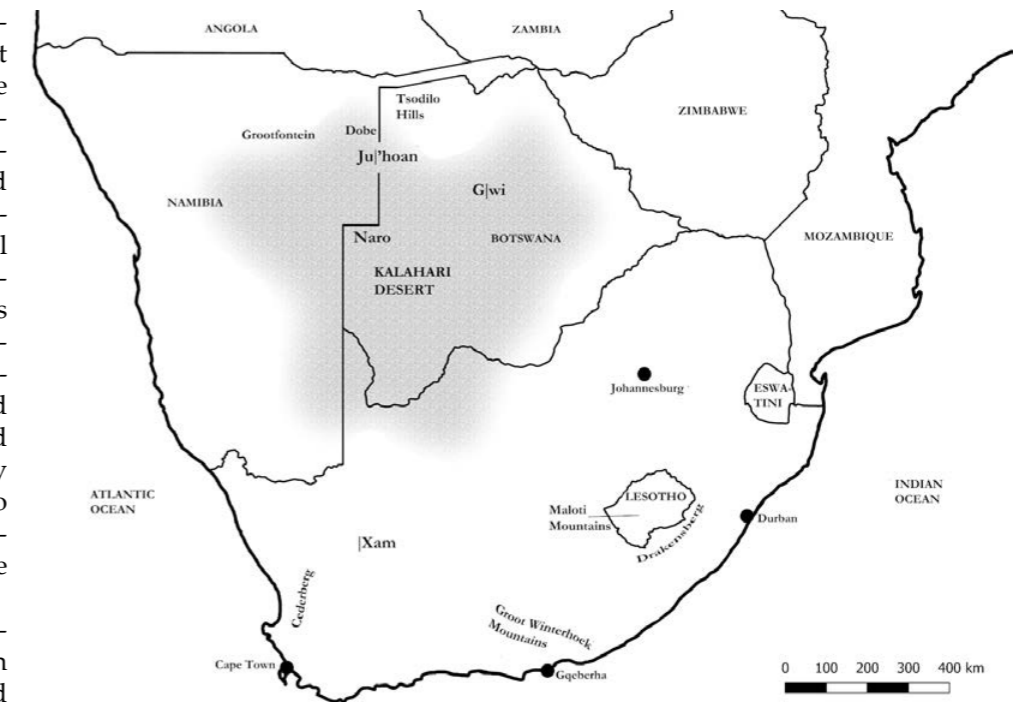


Figure 1. Location of ethnographically documented San groups discussed as well as places mentioned in the text.

Later Stone Age image-making. One of the few insights into San painting comes from Mapote — a Baputhi man — in Lesotho in the 1930s. He learned to paint in shelters with the San during the late nineteenth century. He described how the 'true' San painted on one side of the cave while he and his half-San brothers (sons of his father's San wives) painted on the other end (How 1962: 33). One take-away from Mapote's account is his description of the paint-making process. Other members of the group, not necessarily painters (one community of practice), also participated in preparing the pigment (How 1962: 34), indicating a second community of practice that would have impacted the outcome of the final painted images. There are many accounts of possible pigments used in paint recipes, but unfortunately, these are nearly all second or third hand, and the paint-making process is not discussed (see Rudner 1982 for a synthesis of the literature related to pigment and paint making).

In the absence of specific information about how individuals acquired the skills to paint, I investigate other aspects of learning amongst ethnographically documented San societies, specifically the accounts of the Ju'hoan⁴ people (see Fig. 1). These groups do not produce rock art, and there is scant information about

⁴ Some ethnographers have used the term !Kung or Ju'hoansi for the San groups living in northern Botswana, north-eastern Namibia and south-western Angola, but I use Ju'hoan. !Kung is an outdated spelling of !Xu(u)n, which is a more general term used for a variety of people of the large dialect cluster, which linguists either call Ju or !Xu(u)n. Unless specified, the ethnographic accounts are of Ju-speaking San who use the term Ju'hoan for themselves, meaning 'real person/people' (Güldemann, pers comm. March 2020; see also Güldemann 2014).

the significance to them of the Tsodilo Hills images, the only rock art in their immediate area (Campbell et al. 1994: 155). Nonetheless, studies have argued persuasively that there are significant overlaps between the beliefs held in the Kalahari and those of San groups further south (Lewis-Williams and Bieseles 1978; Lewis-Williams 1992).

Indications are that not all San people in a particular community were image-makers. Stow (1905: 200, 230) states that image-making was done by specific people. The subject matter of the paintings points to aspects of religious rites, practices and the spirit world, the domain of ritual specialists or shamans⁵ (Lewis-Williams 1995: 145). The exact reasons for painting are unknown, but one likely reason was to communicate visions of the spirit world. The use of metaphors in the images would thus have helped the novice shaman prepare for the trance state and reduce the sometimes terrifying experiences to manageable terms (Lewis-Williams and Loubser 1986: 280; Lewis-Williams 1988: 142). The painters were likely themselves shamans (Lewis-Williams 2019: 96–98). It is even possible that, along with ‘shamans of the rain’ and ‘shamans of the game’, another overlapping category ‘shamans of the paint’ was also recognised (Lewis-Williams 2019: 97). I, therefore, concentrate on how ritual specialists acquired the abilities to enter trance and to heal.

The central ritual in ethnographically observed San societies is the trance or healing dance (Lee 1968; Marshall 1969). As the dance intensifies, the spiritual energy of the ritual specialists is activated, and they enter a trance state which brings them in contact with the spirit world (Katz 1982: 34–36). Through this dance, many aspiring healers (i.e. ‘shamans’) learn to enter trance (Katz 1976, 1982; see also Lee 1968; Marshall 1969). As with other aspects of San life, children are not separated from the adult world (Draper 1976). The dance includes the entire village, including babies (Katz 1976: 286; Marshall 1999: 50). Thus trance is part of normal socialisation, and most Ju’hoan people, even if they never learn how to enter a trance state, can describe what it is like (Katz 1976: 289–290). Children learn about the dance from observation and participation rather than through formal instruction (Marshall 1999: 50; Lee 1968: 46), but it is only in adulthood that actual training and attempts to enter trance usually begin (Lee 1968: 47).

Even though inducing trance is difficult, scary

⁵ Ritual specialists were known as *n|lum* ‘*kausi*’ (Ju’hoan, northern) and *!gi:ten* (!xam, southern). The term *n|lum* ‘*kausi*’ can be directly translated as ‘masters, or owners, of *n|lum*’, translated in English as supernatural energy which, when activated, leads to trance (Katz 1982). *!gi:xa* (plural *!gi:ten*) was translated as ‘sorcerer’ (Bleek 1956: 358), but the root word *!gi:* can be translated as ‘magic power’ or ‘potency’ and *-xa* translated as ‘full of’ (Holmman 2004: 199). Thus, these terms translate as ‘owner of supernatural energy’ or ‘full of magic power’, but the word shaman is widely used in the literature for both (Lewis-Williams 1992: 58–59).

and sometimes painful (Lee 1968: 49; Katz 1976: 290), nearly all young Ju’hoan men desire to be shamans (Lee 1968: 46; Katz 1976: 289). Becoming a ‘shaman’ is not the domain of a few individuals, and in Ju’hoan society, about half the men and a third of the women⁶ learn how to enter a trance state (Katz 1976: 285; see also Lee 1968: 51).

Those who want to learn how to attain a trance state ask an experienced shaman for help (Katz 1982: 118–140). During the dance, the novice holds their elder by the waist as they dance. Assistance is usually given for three to five nights of dancing, after which the novice is, in most cases, able to go into a trance without help (Silberbauer 1965: 99). Similarly, when acquiring rain-making skills, an activity within the province of the ‘shaman’, novices undergo an apprenticeship in which they assist the rain-maker (Hewitt 2008: 214). Learning is experiential rather than instructional (Lee 1968: 51; Katz 1976: 294). Over time the ‘novice shaman’ moves from the ‘observational’ and, through participation, becomes absorbed into the ‘culture of practice’ (see Lave and Wenger 1991: 94–95 for discussion of these terms). A person watches the dance and participates as a novice, but once learning begins, the novice becomes a part of that community of practice through engaging in the dance and entering a trance state. Ritual specialists freely share their trance experiences with others. Although elders help students attain a trance state, the visions and experiences of the spirit world are the student’s own and idiosyncratic views are accepted (Bieseles 1978: 937–938). Individualism is seen both in storytelling and in accounts of religious revelations (Bieseles 1978: 937; Guenther 1979: 106; 2006: 252).

When new ‘shamans’ can enter a trance state, they also ‘acquire’ the imagery that would later be fixed to the rock walls (Lewis-Williams 1994: 279–281; 1995: 149), but they would still need to learn how to paint. The apparent lack of any traces of fledgling attempts to paint has puzzled researchers (e.g. Rudner and Rudner 1970). One explanation could be an apprenticeship where the young learner first helps with simple tasks such as mixing the paint and then moves to filling in images before progressing onto the more complex task of the outlines, as in Renaissance art workshops. In Renaissance workshops, the apprentices would learn to paint in the style of their master, to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to tell who painted the work (Koestler-Grack 2005: 34). Previous image-making practices (and images already on the rocks) would also influence the final look of the paintings giving paintings in the same area a similar ‘look’. Although learning the practice of image-making took place at an individual level, this learning was situated within the community’s worldview in which the learning was taking place, also contributing to similarities in rock

⁶ While the following ethnographic accounts focus on men learning to trance, Katz points out (1976, endnote 4: 401), the ‘process for educating for *!kia* [trance] is fundamentally similar for men and women’.

art in an area.

The rock paintings likely served a similar purpose to storytelling; it was a means of transmitting the trance experiences to others (Lewis-Williams 2019: 77–79). What people saw in a trance was informed by what they expected to see. Seeing rock art images would have given ‘shamans’ insights and expectations about trance experiences; these could then have become part of their own repertoire of practice. There was, therefore, probably a feedback loop between trance visions and the rock art images (Lewis-Williams 1995: 145). In this way, the trance dance and the paintings would have acted ‘as ... mechanism[s] for instilling a sense of collective identity’ (Guenther 1999: 196). Idiosyncratic images (Dowson 1988), as well as regionally specific images (e.g. Hollmann 2005), could point to individual religious revelations. Regionally specific images may have been particularly powerful in a specific area and spread within that community of practice.

Territorial behaviour

An investigation into how the San viewed territories can give insights into the movement of people, and thus ideas, through the landscape and how boundaries were seen. Writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, George Stow (1905) and Isaac Schapera (1930) offered some scant information on San social organisation based on historical, missionary and early traveller reports. Although this was not commonly understood at the time by Europeans and colonists, the San were not directionless nomads but rather had a very strong connection to place:

The tenacity with which isolated survivors of once powerful tribes of these Bushmen stuck to their old caves is astonishing. They preferred to linger out their lives in abject misery, so long as they could remain in their neighbourhood, rather than follow those of their race who had removed to a distance, a step which would have forced these unhappy outcasts to abandon them forever, an idea which they could not endure (Stow 1905: 228).

Schapera (1930) writes that the members of each hunting band lived communally, but interaction through intermarriage, trade and visitation was routine and frequent. Each band had control over a restricted hunting territory, usually around a waterhole, with its extent defined by natural landmarks. Schapera (1930: 78) has one reference to the size of these hunting territories. In the Grootfontein district in Namibia, it was estimated to be 700 km², which he felt was an exaggeration. Other ethnographic sources indicate that territories were probably not as large as this.

Deacon (1986), based on unpublished data from the Bleek and Lloyd archives, identified three different groups of !xam San living in the Northern Cape in the 1870s, the Flat Bushmen, the Grass Bushmen and the Mountain Bushmen. In the nineteenth century, these groups occupied less than 600 km² with at least three reliable waterholes (Deacon 1986: 152). There is evidence that although individuals from these groups

travelled great distances, the places they considered as home were all within a day’s walk (Deacon 1986: 152–153). The !xam teachers detailed differences between these groups’ material culture and practices (Deacon 1986: 151; Deacon 1996). These included the types of animal skins worn, the eating of baboons (one group was said to eat them while others did not), ostrich eggshell beads (one group made them and the other did not) and differences in arrow tips (Deacon 1986: 151; Deacon 1996: 257, 259). There is also evidence that marriage took place amongst people from these groups, indicating fluid boundaries with movement and interaction across them (Deacon 1986: 151). Nonetheless, religion and worldview were essentially the same, and the different groups knew and respected the same medicine men (Deacon 1986: 153). Moreover, the content and style of rock art are similar across these three territories (Deacon 1986: 153). This consistency suggests that ‘[b]eliefs are more enduring than technology’ (Deacon 1996: 247).

In the recent past, there was little tension between Ju’hoan groups in the Kalahari as they moved on their annual hunting and gathering rounds. Boundaries of subsistence areas were recognised, but these were vague, not defended and highly flexible (Lee 1965: 136, 1972: 130, 1979: 351). The movement of band members was fluid, with families acting independently. Amongst the Ju’hoan people, a core area rather than membership in a family or group, made up a band (Yellen and Harpending 1972: 246). The term band referred to a loose assemblage of families using an area, but individual family’s movements did not always correspond to the outline of the territory (Yellen and Harpending 1972: 246; Sampson 1988: 17). Young men especially would travel great distances to visit and seek marriage partners. Archaeological evidence indicates that Later Stone Age people in the Kalahari had very similar land-use patterns to those ethnographically observed (Yellen and Harpending 1972: 250). It seems that there were two types of boundaries, spatial and social, and how groups acted in space was not the same as the cultural conception of their territory (Lee 1972: 126).

Waterholes, ‘owned’ by related siblings, formed the heart of territories (Lee 1972: 129). Figure 2 plots nine territories in the Dobe area (Lee 1965: 134). In the early 1960s, when this ethnography was recorded, these nine territories were home to 15 independent camps. All groups had access to permanent water, but some shared waterholes. The sharing of territory by two or more camps happened when there was a close kinship between the two groups. In Dobe, the leaders of the two groups were brother and sister, while those of the four camps at !goše were descendants of one woman (Lee 1965: 136). Similarly, the G!wi recognised territories whose ‘owners’ were descendants of those who first settled there. The ‘owner’ was the one that visitors greeted first and asked for permission to remain, but this did not mean that the rest of the group did not have a say (Silberbauer 1965: 71).

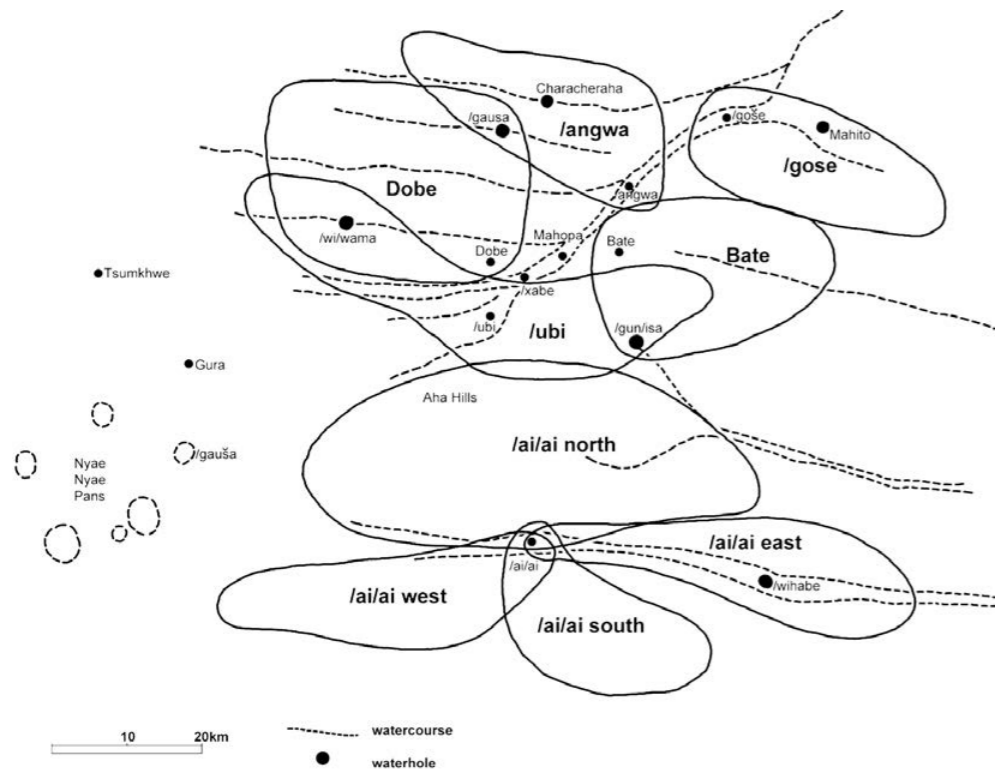


Figure 2. Nine territories shared by fifteen groups in the Dobe area of the Kalahari (after Lee 1965: 135).

Cashdan's (1983) study considered resource availability and how this might have impacted territoriality amongst San groups in the Kalahari. Territoriality is the maintaining of control of an area and restricting access to one or more resources (Cashdan 1983: 47). The San used social boundary defence rather than perimeter defence. This means that they did not control access to the territory itself; rather, access to the social group with rights to the territory was controlled (Cashdan 1983: 49). The San had a bilateral territorial inheritance, with the principal affiliation being with the territory in which the individual decided to live, but this could change through their life. Thus the movement of people between groups was not uncommon as people typically had access rights to more than one territory (Cashdan 1983: 53). Natural features defined the boundaries of territories.

In the Kalahari, ethnographic evidence indicates that territoriality increased in areas where resources were scarce (Cashdan 1983). If this model holds for San societies in different parts of the sub-continent and further back in time, we might expect to see less territoriality in areas where resources were more predictable. Current research using isotope analysis suggests the opposite to be true (Sealy 2006; Sealy and Pfeiffer 2000). Two archaeologically identified groups living less than 14 km apart show very different isotopic signatures, one pointing to a diet rich in marine food while the other points to a more terrestrial diet. It is posited that such distinct dietary differences point to little interaction between these groups (Sealy 2006; Sealy and Pfeiffer 2000). Rock art, however, tells a different sto-

ry. Similar images and manners of depiction in hunter-gatherer rock art across large areas of the sub-continent point to knowledge exchange across territories. This could either indicate less territorial behaviour or that the sharing of ideas had a different dynamic to sharing food resources. Since dating the images is complex and few direct dates have been obtained (but see Bonneau et al. 2011; Bonneau et al. 2016; Bonneau et al. 2017), some of this blurring across wide areas may be due to population movements over time, but not all similarities can be accounted for in this way. It may be that, as with the groups studied by Deacon (1986,

1996), differences in eating habits did not stop the interaction, including intermarriage.

It is clear from the ethnographic record that the level of interaction influences the spread of ideas. Common underlying kinship structures tend to be seen in peoples belonging to the same language group (Barnard 1988: 32). The kinship structures of the G!wi are very different from the Ju!'hoan while the Naro fall somewhere in-between. This is because although the Naro are linguistically more similar to the G!wi, they have a long history of contact with the Ju!'hoan people (Barnard 2007: 109) and thus, ideas were shared. Fluid boundaries and the movement of people between groups suggest that it is unlikely that hard boundaries would exist between different rock art areas. The differences are more likely to be due to the extent and intensity of information exchange rather than conscious decisions to make images differently in different areas.

Exchange networks and movements of people

Hxaro and similar gift exchange practices are another avenue for information exchange over vast areas. Wiessner (1977) documented the practice of *hxaro*, a regional system of delayed gift exchange for reducing risk among the Ju!'hoan people. Rather than one-to-one partnerships, *hxaro* exchanges operate in a chain-like manner (Wiessner 1977: 188). These *hxaro* chains can extend for hundreds of kilometres (Wiessner 1986: 109) and encouraged the movement of people through the visitation of *hxaro* partners, sometimes up to 200 km in distance (Wiessner 1986: 107–108, 2002: 421).

Exchange partnerships also allowed young men to travel widely in search of a spouse. Young men needed to complete bride service after marriage. These young men would go and live with their bride's family, sometimes for as long as ten years (Marshall 1959; Wiessner 2002: 418). There is also evidence from the myths and stories of the !xam, a southern San group, that bride service was also practised (Lewis-Williams 2015: 84, 2018: 145; Thorp 2015: 167). These young men could have acted as conduits for information exchange and brought new ideas to and from distant places.

Exchange networks and bride-service would have opened opportunities for long-distance travel. There have been criticisms (see Mitchell 2003, 2005: 160–161) of using the idea of *hxaro* exchange networks by archaeologists (e.g. Wadley 1987; Mazel 1989). *Hxaro* is not practised by all Kalahari San groups (Barnard 2007: 75), and thus there are problems extending this idea through space and back through time. However, there is evidence of systems that served similar functions amongst other groups; for example, groups in the central Kalahari have a system of long-term lending (Kent 1993: 496–497): 'Sharing is a mechanism that structures, maintains and perpetuates social relationships' (Kent 1993: 498). Even if the exact mechanisms of *hxaro* were not the same in Later Stone Age hunter-gatherer societies, there is evidence for movement of objects over great distances (up to at least 200 km) in pre-History (e.g. Wendt 1976: 39; Deacon 1984: 171; Mitchell 1996: 37; Ouzman and Wadley 1997: 393–394; Stewart et al. 2020). It was likely that ideas were also passed along these exchange networks. Bieseles (1993: 67–70) tells the story of the spread of the giraffe medicine song in the Kalahari. Although there are different versions, it seems that this song came to an individual, Beh (who died only in 1992), and the medicine song's power helped it spread quickly east from Namibia to Botswana. There is even evidence that it spread hundreds of kilometres south to speakers of other click languages (Bieseles 1993: 69).

Evidence for itinerant 'shamans' in the ethnographic (Kinahan 2017) and archaeological records dating back more than 2000 years ago (Kinahan 2018) reveals

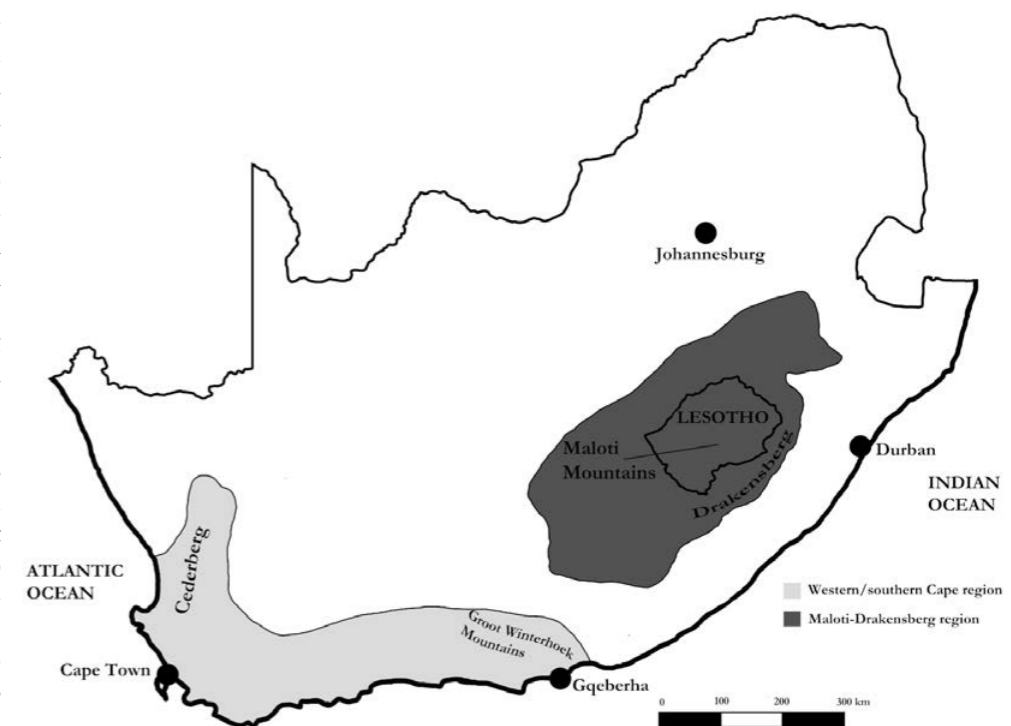


Figure 3. The extent of the Maloti-Drakensberg and the western/southern Cape regions based on previous research (van Riet Lowe 1952: areas 2 and 3; Willcox 1984: areas 3 and 4). These regions seem to form two distinct rock art areas with differences in both the motif choices and manner of depiction.

another conduit for information exchange. Kinahan (2017: 562) summarises unpublished data from Wiessner on the movement of four Ju!'hoan 'shamans' through the Kalahari. These ritual specialists had a range of between 25 and 225 km, visiting ten or more camps separated by distances of up to 100 km, covering an area of over 14000 km² (Kinahan 2017: 562). This extent of 'shamanic' activity could approximate the size of the social network of groups involved in exchange networks (Kinahan 2017: 564). If similar practices occurred in other areas, this is another explanation for the seeming uniformity of the rock art over large areas. These 'shamans' could have brought ideas and possibly even painted with the different groups they visited.

Case study: comparison of the Groot Winterhoek Mountains with the Maloti-Drakensberg and the Cederberg

If, as I have supposed, learning to paint and learning to enter a trance happened similarly, this ethnographic information provides a basis for examining similarities and differences in southern African hunter-gatherer rock art. Initially, the 'shaman'/image-maker would become part of a small community of practice, in a single band, influenced by one or more elders as well as the paintings that were already on the rock surface. Due to the fluid nature of San society and interaction across vast distances, different ideas about what and how to paint would spread over much broader areas than a single territory. With this in mind, I examine the images of the Groot Winterhoek Mountains and



Figure 4. Examples of landscapes, shelters and painted surfaces in the Groot Winterhoek Mountains (A–C), Maloti-Drakensberg (D–F) and Cederberg (G–I).

compare them with two areas of rock art, the Maloti-Drakensberg and the Cederberg. Although the conclusions reached here are based on the images in the case study, they are more widely applicable to both the hunter-gatherer paintings and petroglyphs in other parts of the sub-continent.

The Groot Winterhoek Mountains lie at the eastern extremity of the Cape Fold Belt, in the southern Cape about 40 km northwest of Gqeberha (Fig. 3). Until recently (Laue 2017), little research had been undertaken in this area. The mountain range lies almost equidistant between the two well studied areas of the Maloti-Drakensberg and the Cederberg in the Western Cape (Fig. 3) but seems to have more similarities with the latter (Laue 2016, 2017).

Previous studies proposed that the rock art extending from north of the Cederberg and along the southern Cape coast forms a western/southern Cape region, while the images found in the Maloti-Drakensberg were thought to form a second region (Fig. 3) (e.g. Burkitt 1928; Van Riet Lowe 1952; Rudner and Rudner 1970; Willcox 1984; see also Laue 2020). This earlier analysis of southern African rock art was

based on vague notions of style. The rock art of the whole southern/western Cape region was described as inferior (e.g. Burkitt 1928) or more primitive (e.g. Willcox 1984) to that of the Maloti-Drakensberg (Fig. 4). In the western/southern Cape region, the smudgy red background (Burkitt 1928) and predominance of bright red monochrome images (Burkitt 1928; van Riet Lowe 1952; Rudner and Rudner 1970; Willcox 1984) were noted. These images were argued to be more stylised (Rudner and Rudner 1970), with action poorly depicted (van Riet Lowe 1952).

In contrast, the imagery of the Maloti-Drakensberg was noted to contain abundant bichromes and polychromes. Many of the animals were shaded and shown in different aspects with 'spirited action'. Little formalism and the absence of handprints were also mentioned (Willcox 1984: 203). To these early researchers, the reason for the differences in rock art was obvious; different styles equalled different peoples (see Laue 2019: 5–17).

The Groot Winterhoek Mountain rock art, at the eastern edge of what was previously defined as the western/southern Cape region, fits within the 'pan-San

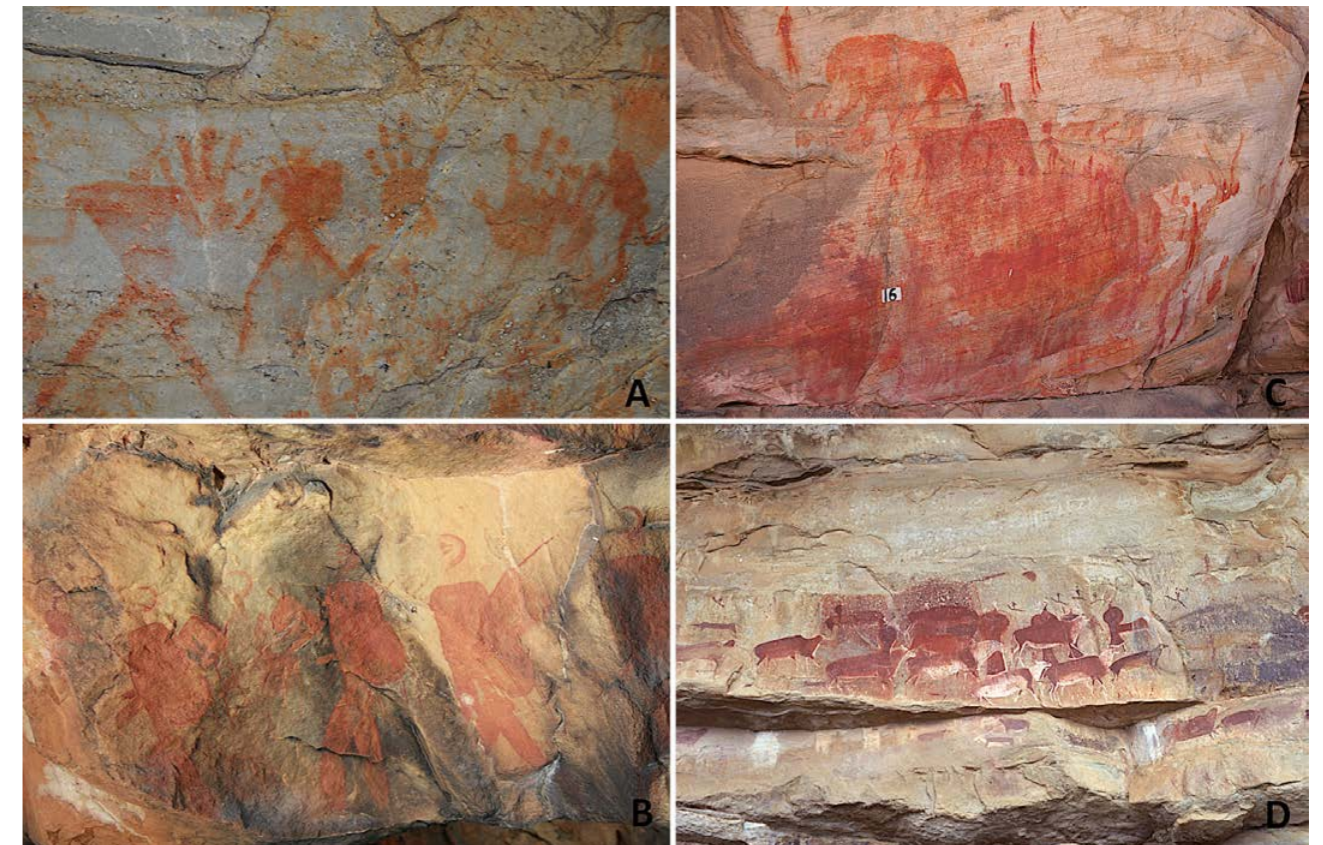


Figure 5. A and B are images from the Groot Winterhoek Mountains, C is a site in the Cederberg, while D is from the Maloti-Drakensberg area. Note the brighter red pigment and mostly monochrome images in the Groot Winterhoek Mountains and the Cederberg compared to the more maroon-red and shaded polychrome images from the Maloti-Drakensberg.

shamanic world view' (Laue 2017). Although imagery that relates to trance, such as 'bleeding from the nose', arms-back-posture, 'hand to nose' posture and therianthropes (Lewis-Williams 1998: 87; Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2004: 99–100) is rare or not present at all, there are many other image categories which place the images from this area firmly within the 'shamanic' arena (Laue 2017: Table 5). The rarity of these 'fragments of the dance' images is consistent with what has been found in the rock art of the Cederberg (Yates et al. 1985). Depictions of the trance dance and processions, which have been argued to represent a side view of the dance, are found in the area along with 'metaphors of trance' such as 'flight', 'underwater' and 'death'. The use of the rock surface with images coming out of or disappearing into cracks and steps in the rock face is consistent with what is seen in other areas of the sub-continent. The rock face was seen as a veil between this and the spirit world; therefore, incorporating natural features of the rock into the rock art gives it a further 'shamanic' context (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1990).

A striking difference between the Groot Winterhoek Mountains and the Maloti-Drakensberg is the manner of depiction. By 'manner of depiction' I mean how the images were made, including colour, technique (monochrome, bichrome, polychrome), whether the images are shaded, and the way the images are represented, e.g. are the figures running or standing and are the

antelopes depicted from the side or other angles (Fig. 5)? The Groot Winterhoek Mountains have a higher percentage of monochrome images: 89% versus 64% in Vinnicombe's (1976) study in the Drakensberg. This proportion is more consistent with the Cederberg, where Wiltshire (2011) has put together an extensive database of rock art sites in the area. Wiltshire found that out of the 2426 rock art sites analysed, all had monochrome paintings while just under 13% had bichrome or, even more rarely, polychrome images (pers. comm. 2021; see also Hollmann 1993: 16). The dominance of monochrome paintings is further strengthened if the unpublished eastern Cederberg rock art dataset for sites recorded on SAHRIS (South African Heritage Resources Information System) between 2014–2020 is included (Deacon and Wiltshire pers. comm. 2021). It needs to be noted, however, that the high predominance of monochrome images in the Western Cape might be partly due to differential weathering where the more fugitive black and white has faded away with time. The predominance of bright red pigment used in the western/southern Cape images has been commented on (Burkitt 1928; van Riet Lowe 1956; Rudner and Rudner 1970; Willcox 1984). Although red is the predominant colour in the Groot Winterhoek Mountains and the Cederberg (Laue 2017) as well as the Maloti-Drakensberg (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1981), the latter is more often a deeper maroon red com-

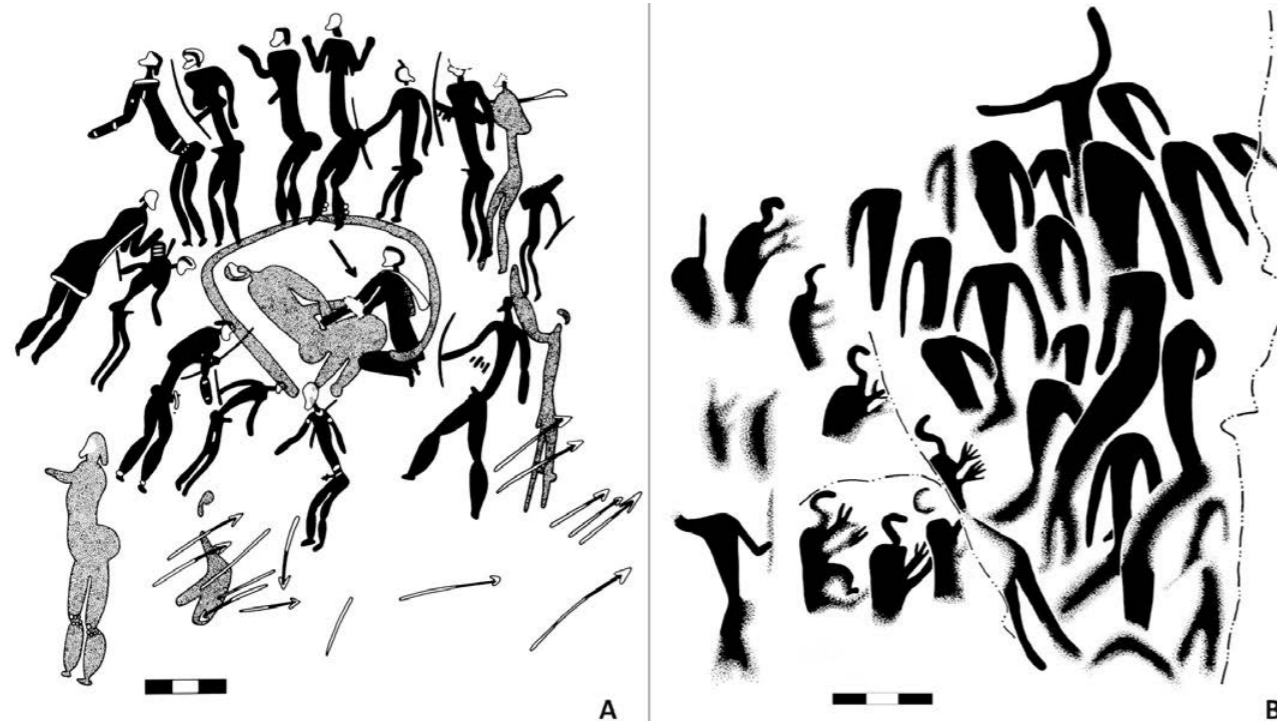


Figure 6. Re-drawings of paintings of a trance dance from the Maloti-Drakensberg (A) and the Groot Winterhoek Mountains (B). Note the very different manners of depiction.

pared to the bright orange/red of the former (Fig. 5).

Lateral representations of animal figures are most common in hunter-gatherer fine-line rock art, but in the Maloti-Drakensberg, other perspectives such as front, rear and top-down views occur (e.g. Pager 1971: 330). The paintings in all three areas are executed in a fine line technique, probably with a brush, but finger dots and handprints are far more common in the Groot Winterhoek Mountains and the Cederberg (Laue 2017). The images in the Cederberg and Groot Winterhoek Mountains show a more restricted range of body postures and activities and have been described as more 'stylised' (Fig. 6; Rudner and Rudner 1970: 179). While the Rudners (1970) use the term 'stylised' to describe the Groot Winterhoek Mountains and Cederberg images, this does not get to the heart of the differences. In the 'dance scene' from the Groot Winterhoek Mountains (Fig 6B), the images are monochrome, with little detail and much uniformity, while those from the Maloti-Drakensberg (Fig 6A) are polychrome and painted with more detail. The latter image shows the 'groove made in the sand' by the dancers, 'healing' taking place in the centre and the 'arrows of sickness' that 'shamans' described seeing in a trance. While I believe the intentions of both painters were similar to depict the trance dance, the manner of depiction is quite different.

Another notable difference is the lack of superpositioning in the Groot Winterhoek Mountains and Cederberg. In the Maloti-Drakensberg, up to seven layers of superimposed images (Russell 2000: 68) are seen while superpositioning in the Groot Winterhoek Mountains and the Cederberg is very rare and more

than two layers of painted imagery are seldom evident.

I have highlighted only a few of the similarities between the rock art of the Groot Winterhoek Mountains and surrounds and the Cederberg and how these differ from the rock art of the Maloti-Drakensberg. The question is, how the ethnographic record can help to inform on why these similarities and differences are seen? Some similarities in types of imagery can be attributed to the broad pan-San cognitive system, but other images are so specific, either in what they depict or how they are depicted, that information exchange across broad areas needs to be assumed (e.g. Laue 2021).

Discussion

In Later Stone Age hunter-gatherer society in southern Africa, children would have grown up seeing painted images on the walls of shelters and possibly even the image-making process. This means that even before an individual learned to paint, they would have had a concept of how the images were supposed to 'look'. Once learning or apprenticeship started, the 'novice shaman' would become part of the community of practice of painters in a specific group. It is then that ideas about how images should be made and what motifs should be painted would be reinforced. However, if this were the only influence, the expectation would be that there would be many similar paintings in neatly bounded areas relating to past group territories. This is not what is seen. Across the whole western/southern Cape, including both the Cederberg and Groot Winterhoek Mountains, very similar motifs, painted in similar ways, are found. Many motifs are so similar

Due to fluid group structures, interaction and knowledge exchange, it is probable that image-makers belonged to many overlapping communities of practice.

The overlapping communities of practice result in a constellation of practice spanning thousands of kilometres and possibly thousands of years. This results in similar 'ways of doing' over wide areas

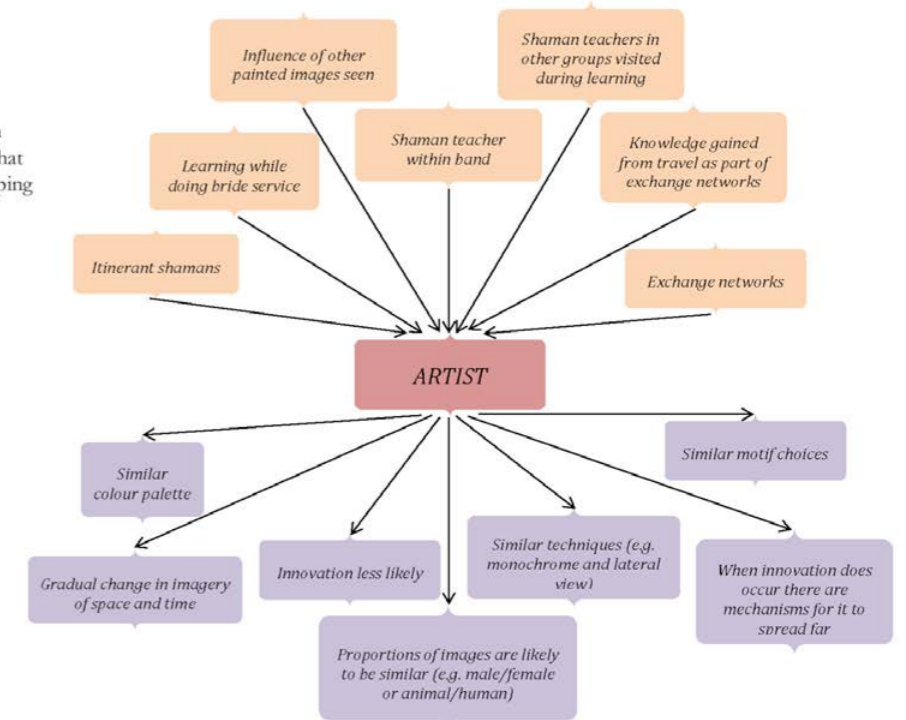


Figure 7. The many proposed influences gleaned from the ethnographic record on image-makers and how these affect the final images produced. Although discussed here in the context of the rock art of the Groot Winterhoek Mountains, Cederberg, and Maloti-Drakensberg, this figure can be seen as a general model to explain similarities across wide areas in other parts of the sub-continent.

that independent conception is extremely unlikely (e.g. Laue 2021). In order to understand these similarities, I turn to ethnography regarding territoriality and the movement of people.

As we have seen, the San did not have strict notions of territory, but instead, boundaries were fluid and there was much movement between groups. When a painter moved to a new group, they would bring ideas on how to paint as well as what motifs to paint. This would lead to overlapping communities of practice that would have extended over large areas, leading to similarities over even larger regions.

Based on ethnographic information, Figure 7 proposes the various inputs that image-makers would receive and how these would affect the 'look' of the images they produced. Information exchange across vast areas and movement of people can explain similarities, making all the smaller communities of practice into a much larger constellation of practice across the southern Cape and northwards to the Cederberg. Initial learning would likely have been confined to 'shamans' or possibly a single 'shaman' within the group. Nevertheless, what the image-makers painted would be directly influenced by the paintings in the shelter they were working on and the images they had seen in other areas. As 'apprentice shamans' would move from camp to camp to learn how to dance, they may have also learnt to paint or seen people painting. Exchange networks, visiting and bride service would also mean that people would travel and participate in life

in distant camps and during this time, information and image-making practices could have been exchanged. The ethnographic evidence indicates that similarities over vast distances should not only be expected but should be the norm.

While the ethnographic data explain the similarities between the images of the Groot Winterhoek Mountains and the Cederberg, they are not as helpful in explaining the distinct differences seen in the Maloti-Drakensberg. There is limited evidence for information exchange between the Maloti-Drakensberg and the Groot Winterhoek Mountains, in the form of one depiction of a shaded polychrome eland and one instance of a 'thin red line', an image typically thought to only occur in the Maloti-Drakensberg (Laue 2016: 269-270). The question is, why was there less information exchange between these two areas?

Painters would be subject to both natural (geology, climate, raw materials, fauna, weathering) and cultural (motivation, learning, social expectations, the images already painted) constraints (Laue 2019: Ch. 8). Similarities in belief and the meaning of the paintings mean that the motivation to paint was probably similar between all three areas, but a lack of information exchange would mean that the rock art the image-makers in the Maloti-Drakensberg were seeing, how they learnt to paint and that some of the specific motifs painted were different. These differences in motifs and the execution of the paintings point to different communities of practice with little or no overlap. To

explain the paucity of information exchange, we need to move beyond the ethnographic data.

Possible explanations are temporal and/or ecological differences. Dating of the rock art in the Maloti-Drakensberg points to the tradition extending back over at least the last 3000 years (Bonneau et al. 2017) and continuing into the early 20th century (Lewis-Williams 1986). No dating has been undertaken in the Groot Winterhoek Mountains, but the lack of contact imagery may indicate that the images are older and show a difference in motif choices. Nhamo (2012) has proposed environmental differences as one factor contributing to regional differences in Zimbabwe, which is very likely a factor in this case study. The predominant biome of the western/southern Cape region is the Fynbos Biome draped over the Cape Fold Mountains, while the Maloti-Drakensberg is found in the cooler, more elevated Grassland Biome (Rutherford et al. 2006: 32). Exploiting an area with different animals and plant resources would have possibly required different hunting and gathering strategies and thus hindered movement.

Although more research is needed to explain fully the broad variations seen, the ethnographic information indicates that similarities and differences cannot be explained by culture-history approaches that put the difference down to simplistic explanations such as language differences or ethnicity. Variation was probably not due to boundary-making or territory demarcation but can instead be explained by information exchange or lack thereof, leading to discrete or overlapping communities of practice — both in space and time. The results obtained here are key to both spatial and temporal variation. We cannot expect to find specific correspondence to the ethnographic material, but rather a model to understand similarities in the images and image production and the identification of factors that might lead to difference. In comparisons of widely separated images, distance could also play a factor in limiting the exchange of information. However, I am confident that the above model based on the ethnographic data can explain variation in the hunter-gatherer rock art in other parts of southern Africa as well.

Conclusion

Facets of San ethnography related to learning, territorial behaviour and exchange networks — previously neglected by rock art researchers — can help us understand aspects of the images beyond meaning. Underlying the diverse linguistic San groups, a common structure explains both diversity and uniformity in these cultures (Barnard 1992: 298, 301–302). In southern Africa, there is a wide similarity in Later Stone Age lithics south of the Zambezi (Lombard et al. 2012). There are comparable similarities in the rock art of the sub-continent. People were probably drawing on common ideas with different emphases and different ‘ways of doing’ in localised contexts (see Cummings

2007: 507–508).

Ethnographic information points to how cultural transmission of image-making may have happened and how San groups may have seen boundaries and territories. We cannot assume that what we see in the present is as it was in the past, but we can at least use ethnography as a starting point to understand similarities and differences in the imagery. Major differences in motifs and manner of depiction point to either temporal or spatial disconnects where information exchange did not take place as freely. Differences in rock art do not necessarily point to cultural differences, territoriality or linguistic differences. Rather, they may point to different communities of practice with little or no overlap.

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