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TWO SOUTHERN AFRICAN ROCK ART SITES AS INDICATORS OF ANCIENT MIGRATORY ROUTES

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Abstract. A recently rediscovered rock art site at Farm Hornkranz-South in the Khomas Hochland of Namibia presents a close resemblance to the Fallen Rock site at Bushman's Kloof in the Cederberg of South Africa. This discovery may well point to early San migration up the river systems from the Western Cape via Namaqualand and the Orange River to the interior of Namibia. If a migration hypothesis can be archeologically expounded by means of, for instance, pot shards, lithic assemblage, or by linguistics, then the same should be possible by means of rock paintings, especially in the case of ones so convincingly similar as those from the two sites under consideration. It may here be productive to analyse the two sets of paintings, not only in terms of age, placement, symbolism and orientation, but also in terms of artistic style and aesthetics, in order to explore a cultural (art-historical) connection. Although the aesthetic approach may not solve the symbolic problems of ancient rock art, it may well be of use in indicating relatedness between artistic styles, and time/space. Traces of a cultural relationship, as evidenced through styles of art, would then necessitate a closer look at river systems as possible arteries for migration in pre-Historic southern Africa.

A set of rock paintings was recently discovered by a group of hikers of the Wilderness Therapy Group in a ravine off the Gaub River on Farm Hornkranz-South, No. 201 in the extreme south-western corner of the Windhoek district of Namibia (Van Vuuren 2011) (Fig. 1). The drawings are well-hidden in an inaccessible ravine on the south-western end of the farm. The site was, to all evidence, never known of by recent farm-owners, or other post-pre-Historic visitors to the area. Although Scherz describes rock art on adjacent farms like Weissenfels and Gölschau (Scherz 1986: 327), no mention is, for instance, here made of the Hornkranz-South paintings.

I made a field visit to the rock art site just a week-end after its re-discovery. The paintings consist of anthropomorphs and zoomorphs. The most prominent drawing is of an 'elephant' of dimensions of approximately 180 mm × 230 mm, done in a monochrome

red (Fig. 2). There is some water damage to the 'elephant' painting from rainwater drainage down the rock face, but in general it is still sharp and clear, partly due probably to the protected position within a rock

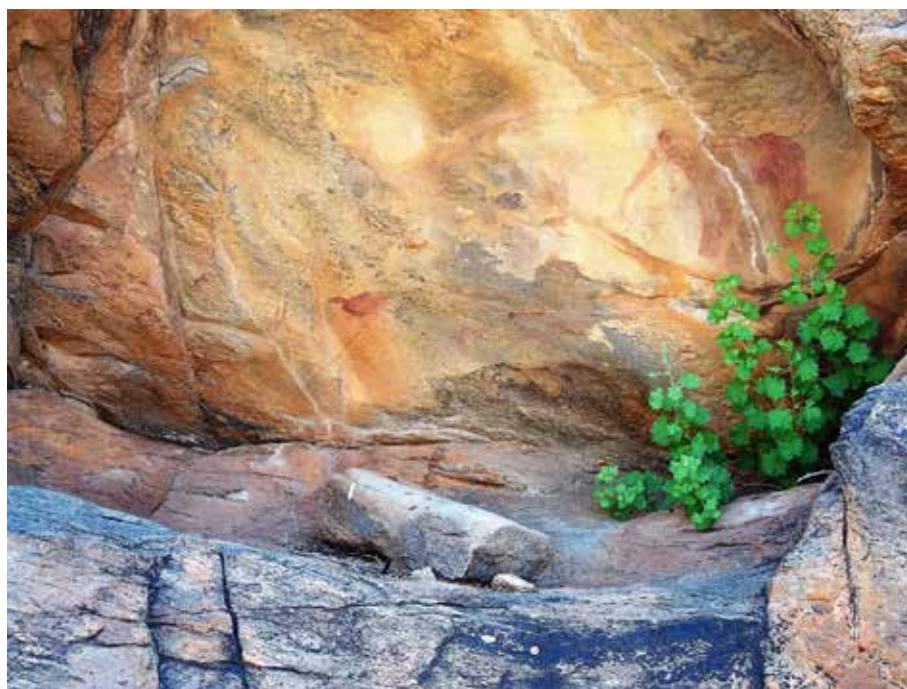


Figure 1. The Hornkranz-South rock art site.

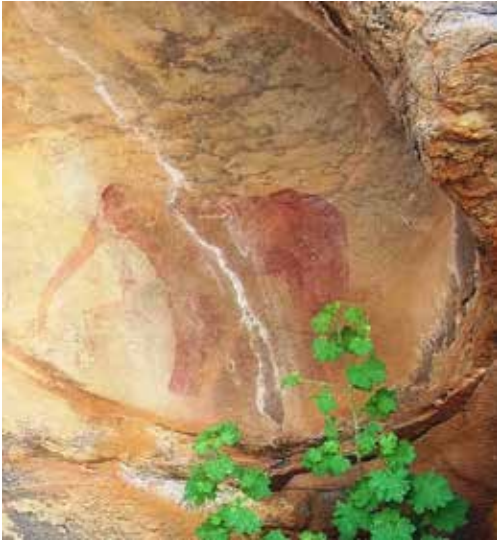


Figure 2. The Hornkranz-South 'elephant'.



Figure 3. Hornkranz-South anthropomorph and elongated 'runner'.



Figure 4. Hornkranz-South rounded blob.

frame. The paintings are adjacent to a non-perennial water source in the form of a small spring, the only water source in many square kilometres of arid terrain.

On the left hand side of the 'elephant' is a red figure of an elongated 'person', with lines connecting to the upper part of the body, and apparently carrying a 'shouldered bag' of some sort. It has been suggested in the shamanistic rock art literature that such anthropomorphs depict shamans (see for instance Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2004: 174). To the right of this figure is another elongated figure in 'running' posture (Fig. 3). More to the left still is a drawing, which looks like a sitting duck (Fig. 4) and there is a figure that could be vaguely interpreted as flying (Fig. 5).

What immediately struck me is the close resem-



Figure 5. 'Flying' figure at Hornkranz-South.

blance to the well-known Fallen Rock paintings in the Cederberg, in the so-called Bushman's Kloof (J. Fourie pers. comm. 2011; also Parkinson 2003).

At the Fallen Rock site is a similar 'elephant' to the one at Hornkranz-South (Fig. 6), as well as a similar

'knapsack-carrying' anthropomorph with long lines and adjacent elongated figure (Fig. 7). Although some other 'human' and 'animal' figures obscure the primary drawings at both rock art sites, and some differences appear in style and presentation, the combination of the features — an 'elephant', anthropomorph with 'attached' lines, and an adjacent elongated figure — is too striking to be accidental.

The Fallen Rock 'elephant' faces to the right — Maggs and Johnson (1979: 95) even suggests this to be a general convention in the Cederberg 'elephant' paintings — while in the Hornkranz-South painting the 'elephant' faces to the left. In the Hornkranz-South site the anthropomorph with attached lines is to the left of the 'elephant', while at the Fallen Rock site it is to its right, but in this sense, the Hornkranz-South site seems to be a mirror-image of the one at Fallen Rock. Furthermore, both Fallen Rock and the Hornkranz-South site have a fourth similarity in blob-like images (Figures 4 and 8), as well as some distorted 'flying' figures (e.g. Figures 5 and 9). There is an absence of bows and arrows in both sets of paintings, and the 'human' figures are not gender-distinguished.



Figure 6. The Fallen Rock 'elephant'.

A summary of rock art databases in southern African countries indicates that there are at least 14 000 sites on record, but that many more exist than have been formally recorded (Deacon 2002: 1). There are probably well in excess of 50 000 sites in the region as a whole, with a conservative estimate of more than two million individual images. With the exception of the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park in South Africa, Tsodilo in Botswana and the Brandberg in Namibia, few areas have been thoroughly searched and recorded (Deacon 2002: 1). These rock art sites are 'everywhere' where a suitable surface for painting exists (Smith and Blundell 2004: 255) and are not clearly associated with specific patterns of landscape, although some researchers indicate certain characteristics for art site preferences (cf. Lenssen-Erz 2004: 142).

Helskog (2004: 271) indicates in his discussion of landscape and rock art in northern Europe how elements of time (and space) can be extracted from changes associated with the fauna represented in rock art. Elephants were never common to the Khomas Hochland or the Namib, even in pre-Historic times, and excavations at pre-Historic sites in the area show no indication of elephant remains. The nearest painting of an 'elephant' is of a headless one at Farm Terra Rosa, No. 359, which is situated 70 km to the north of the Hornkranz-South paintings (Scherz 1986: 329). Beatrice Sandelowsky reports a magnificent painting of an 'elephant' at the Stodelhöhle, north-east of Mirabib. Based on current, Historic and pre-Historic evidence the 'ecological credibility' (Lenssen-Erz 2000: 100; Butzer 1989: 151) of the 'elephant' paintings in this area is thus suspect, and the paintings need to be interpreted as symbolically loaded instead.

Although depictions of 'elephant' in Namibian rock art are not scarce (there are 53 purported depictions of elephant in the southern Brandberg of Namibia alone; Lenssen-Erz 2001: 74, 80, 92), the combination and orientation of the 'elephants' in the two sites under discussion, with elongated figures and other objects in the immediate vicinity, appears to have more than coincidental relevance.

Extremely elongate figures (the so-called type 5 figures in the classification of Lenssen-Erz [2001: 78, 114]) are also not common in Namibian rock art — compare, for instance, the paintings illustrated in the extensive work done in this regard by Scherz (1986).

How does one explain the similarities between the Hornkranz-South paintings and those at Fallen Rock, which are too many to be accidental? A possible explanation seems to be that the artist at Hornkranz-South site *saw* the ones at Fallen Rock, whereby, then, the paintings were used, through their depiction of concepts and motifs, for the preservation of the encyclopaedic knowledge of the world and how it functions (cf. Lenssen-Erz 2001: 45, 59, 334). Vedder (1938: 98–100), with some ethnological support, viewed the role of rock paintings as 'marks of ownership' ('markers of identity' in the language of Smith and Blundell [2004: 253]), in this case transported from Fallen Rock to the new locality at Hornkranz-South, or vice versa. In this regard the rarity of elephants in the Khomas Hochland and Namib suggests that the image has been trans-



Figure 7. Fallen Rock anthropomorph with elongated figure under shoulder.



Figure 8. Fallen Rock rounded blob.



Figure 9. 'Flying' figure at Fallen Rock.



Figure 10. Rock 'embattlement' or 'hunting circle' in the vicinity of the paintings at Hornkranz-South.

ported from elsewhere to the Hornkranz-South site.

In spite of reservations in this regard (cf. Lewis-Williams 1996: 21; Smith and Blundell 2004: 256) it may here be productive to analyse the two sets of paintings not only in terms of age, placement, symbolism and orientation, but also in terms of artistic style and aesthetics, in order to examine a connection. In this regard an 'artistic' rather than an archaeological or anthropological approach may be more productive, in order to fully consider the meaning of the aesthetic and expressive potential of the rock art under discussion (Skotnes 1994: 316). Although the aesthetic approach may not solve the symbolic enigmas of ancient rock art (cf. Lewis-Williams 1996: 21), it may well be of use in indicating relatedness between artistic traditions, and therefore between the two sites mentioned in this article.

In this regard elements like the detectability and stability of a typical (human or animal) contour, its salience, pronounced-ness and planarity should be taken into account (Deręowski 1997: 49). See, for instance, the 'claw-like' feet of both anthropomorphs in the sites referred to in this article; as well as the high, rounded heads, the hollow backs, the absence of tusks, and the prominence of the humps on the elephants. Taking artistic style and type into consideration, Jalmar Rudner in 1957 already referred to relationship between what he called the 'Citrusdal' paintings in the Olifants River valley and some of those in the Brandberg of Namibia (Rudner 1957: 29). Here he took note of the 'triple curved bows', large 'quivers', 'water bags', and the streaming strands forming the shoulders of the human figures in the paintings in both areas. (No bows and arrows, or other forms of weaponry, are evident in the two sites under discussion in this article.) The super-positioning, for instance in the Fallen Rock case of the anthropomorph and the 'runner', may suggest an invocation of the time/space dimension (cf. Smith 1994: 381).

Excavations at Mirabib in the Namib, and at Big Elephant Shelter in the Erongo, indicate a long period of coexistence of hunters and pastoralists in central Namibia up until the 1800s (Wadley 1979: 54; Sandelowsky 1974: 65–72, 1977: 221–295). Hornkranz itself is an important historical site in the Namibian context. The paintings may now give a key to its pre-Historic importance as well. Hendrik Witbooi, the well-known Namibian resistance hero and commando leader, of Khoe (Orlam) stock, established his home base at Hornkranz in 1884 after leaving his father's home in the Fish River (Witbooi 1929; Heywood and Maasdorp 1989; Wallace and Kinahan 2011: 114, 123). This has become an important locality of national prominence in the colonial resistance history of Namibia. A commemorative stone has recently been erected by the National Monuments Commission of the Namibian government in the vicinity of the original Witbooi home

base, which lies about 10 km north of the rock art site. Several rock embattlements for defence purposes – or else hunting hides (cf. Shackley 1984: 24) – can still be seen in the near vicinity of the paintings (Fig. 10). Iron artefacts and spent cartridges occur together with pre-Historic stone tools at several sites in the area. During a visit to the area in the early 1800s James Edward Alexander made a sketch of Khoe huts in the vicinity of the Gamsberg, roughly in the vicinity of where the paintings at Hornkranz-South were discovered (Alexander 1838: 204, copied in Speich 2010: 47).

From historical records it is not clear why Witbooi favoured this position as home base. Divergent opinions have been put forward in this regard: e.g. the Hornkranz-base was near Otjimbingwe, Windhoek and Rehoboth, which enabled him to carry out raids; it was an African-horse-sickness (AHS) free area where he could safely keep the much-important horses needed for his raids; this home base was in a location from which the port of Walvis Bay was accessible, where he could trade rifles and ammunition with the British; it was in a valley well-protected from his enemies; there was a permanent water source in the Gaub River nearby.

None of these reasons, however, stand close scrutiny (Van Rooyen 2011: 60). Why did Witbooi move, as if per preordained route, from Pella at the Orange River to Gibeon on the Fish and eventually settle at the barren Hornkranz on the Gaub? The discovery of the rock art site gives a new dimension to the enigma. It was always expected that the Khoe and the Orlam were the first immigrants from south of the Orange to Namibia (see Barnard 1992; Elpick 1985; Wallace and Kinahan 2011; Inskip 1978). It may, however, well be that these migrants followed an established ancient route already explored by wandering/migratory San bands. Reference by Andersson (1856: 325) to the Topnaars (≠Aonin) of

Walvis Bay at the Namibian coast as the 'First People' (Lau 1987: 6) may indicate that these Khoe were the first Khoe migrants to the interior of Namibia, and also the first to reach the coast.

Evidence of early migration to Namibia from the north-western Cape is reported in historical records. For instance Barnard (1992: 35) presents a map of the probable early migration of Khoe-speaking peoples from the Orange River into southern Namibia and further north (also Wallace and Kinahan 2011: 32, 52). Kinahan denies the assumption that Khoe-Khoen and hunter-gatherer society should have been essentially static until their catastrophic encounter with European settlers in the seventeenth century (Wallace and Kinahan 2011: 32). In this regard the position of the Cederberg as important bio-zone transition between the Western Cape and Namaqualand, and of the Orange River as boundary, but also as artery to the Namibian interior, should be reinterpreted. The lower Orange River sub-basin has several incoming river systems running northwards through Namaqualand, with enough water to support migrants in the vleis, pans and floors (cf. Earle et al. 2005: 8, 22 for an assessment of the pre-Historic and Historic economic role of the basin); see Smith (1995: 301 and elsewhere) on the importance of the Orange River as migratory 'lifeline' for San and Khoe alike.

In historical times, the migration of Khoe (Khoi) and Orlam, like Klaas Afrikaner's people from the Winterhoek Mountains in the Cape to //Khauxa!nas (Schanzen) on the Bak River in the south of Namibia, is, for instance, well-documented by authors such as Dierks (1992: 39, 1998: 28), Wallace and Kinahan (2011: 40) and others. At this site, //Khauxa!nas, the Bak River connects to the Orange by way of the Ham River, which provides a possible migration route. Evidence by means of rock paintings, stone ruins and other archaeological remnants indicates early coexistence between San and Khoe (Khoi) at this settlement.

From the Orange there is a probable route northwards into the interior of current Namibia, up several interlacing river systems that may well have provided migrants with food and water to travel this long distance over a period of months or years. This route goes up the Fish River to Gibeon and further north, interlinking subsequently with the Kalf, the Gamgam, the Goma-Aib, the Kubitsaus and Gaub rivers. All along this route of interlinking riverbeds, water can be found during any normal year, either from standing pools or dug-out gorras (water digs in seemingly-dry riverbeds) (cf. Smith 1995: 11). See, for instance the map opposite p. 242 in Vedder (1938), with regard to the home ranges of the resident Khoe groups in relationship to the prominent river systems of the 1800s. Lindholm (2006a: 70-72, 85, 91 and 100, and 2006b: 20) in this regard compiled maps for the eastern Omaheke and Otjozondjupa regions of Namibia by means of surface interpolation, where he indicates the positions of water points and well sites that have the capacity of supporting dry

season sustenance in years with average and with poor rainfall. From this it is evident that almost all of these wells and water points lie in prominent non-perennial riverbeds.

The same situation would apply for the rest of the Namibian interior. Following Lau (1987: Map 2, opposite p. 7), indicating the cattle posts and settlements of Nama and Orlam groups for the 1820s, it is clear how these all congregate in and around the important river systems mentioned above. From ethnological and archaeological evidence it is clear that migratory hunters preferred arid areas for hunting as the available waterholes offered favourable sites for ambushes (see, for instance, Brentjes 1969: 5).

From Hornkranz-South the Gaub runs into the Kuiseb, from where, eventually, Walvis Bay and the coast can be reached, and where at Sandwich Harbour 'yellow skinned people' were seen by the crew of the *Grundel* in 1670 and by the crew of the *Bode* in 1677 (Vedder 1938: 9-13; Wadley 1979: 8; Wendt 1974/75: 32). Wendt reports that the explorer James Edward Alexander encountered what he called 'Bushmen' north of Remhoogte, at the Gamsberg and near Hornkranz-South, in 1838 (Wendt 1974/75: 32).

According to the Steinbring classification (Steinbring 1987: 8-11, cited in Lenssen-Erz 2001: 261), Fallen Rock is typical of a regionally stable group where the paintings were done with an 'exhibition effect' in mind, while Hornkranz-South is in a small ravine (a short deep cut) typical of a 'seasonal band movement'. This ties in well with the migration thesis expounded above.

It is difficult to date the paintings. The nearest excavated site to the Hornkranz-South paintings is at Mirabib (Shackley 1984: 35; Sandelowsky 1977: 221-295), 110 km due west of Hornkranz-South and just off the Kuiseb River. Here excavations established a date of settlement of about 8000 years BP. Stone microliths, shells and ostrich eggshell beads, now typically associated with San culture, are found. There are rock paintings at Mirabib, 'human' figures and different kinds of 'antelope'. At the Stodelhöhle, north-east of Mirabib, there is a magnificent painting of an 'elephant'.

The age of central western Namibian rock art is generally estimated to be between 2000-4000 years (cf. Lenssen-Erz 2001: 331). Paintings of cattle, people with rifles on horses, wagons and teams and of ships (cf. Inskeep 1978: 89, 91; Wendt 1972: 39; Scherz 1986: 382) indicate, however, that paintings in south-western Africa do not necessarily have to be thousands of years old (Phillipson 1993: 238; Lewis-Williams 1996: 11). There is, for instance a painting of a sailing ship done in white paint at Farm Alt-Tiras in the Tiras Mountains (Hoberman and Hoberman 1999: 61; also Scherz 1986: 382). This site is also adjacent to a tributary of the Fish River, namely the Gamochas.

The distance between Hornkranz-South and Fallen Rock is exactly 1000 km in a straight line, and prob-



Figure 11. Map indicating the placing of the two sites in relation to southern African river systems.

ably about 1500 km up the river system (Fig. 11), a not overly substantial distance for a willing traveller, able to live off the land, to cover in due time — especially a group of San, unencumbered by redundant material-goods, wagons or horses. In this regard historians relate numerous instances where ‘sheer will’ was sufficient to make people migrate over thousands of kilometres to reach more beneficial ecological circumstances, or to escape conflict and tribal antagonisms (cf. Bollig and Gewald 2000: 9).

It may be that San hunter-gatherers followed the first Khoe-Khoe migrants to Namibia as servants, hunters or medicine-men and from here moved further up the river system as their companions settled. Archaeological and historical evidence refers to harmonious relationships between herders and hunters in the past (Widlök 2000: 498; Deacon and Deacon 2003: 178). Widlök suggests that groups of pastoralists and groups of foragers have developed specific dynamic processes of group formation and movement based on exchange relations (2000: 498). In this regard a relationship of ‘clientship’ between San hunters and Khoi herders was al-

ready noted by Governor van der Stel in 1685 (Smith 1992: 208).

On the other hand, however, archaeological and historical evidence also point to the disruption of the livelihoods of hunters and gatherers living in the Cape, where their numbers had been depleted by fighting, disease and emigration (Parkington 1984: 151–174). This migration also took place northwards into the current Namibia. In this regard, as far as the San are concerned, the contact experience with the colonists in Historic times was a rapid and particularly vicious intensification of a process of undermining originating in pre-Historic times (Brink 2004: 97). Parkington (1984: 151–174) found archaeological evidence that there was a pattern of disruption suggested by a change in dwelling site distribution to a shift in favour of rockshelters in mountainous regions (Brink 2004: 95).

Thus, the probable scenario is that dissident San migrants were the first explorers from the Cape to the Namibian hinterland, and that the Khoe-Khoe and Orlam, like Robber Hendrik, Klaas Afrikaner and later on Hendrik Witbooi, occupant of Hornkranz, followed them on the now-established migration route. These San may well have originally come from the Cederberg area, where they may have been familiar with the paintings at Fallen Rock. This premise can be tested by dating at the two sites under discussion.

As Schmidt (2001: 135) indicates, splitting off from an original band and ‘walking away’ was, and still is, an important strategy for releasing social tension among the San. People had to move ‘far enough apart to cool off’ (Marshall and Ritchie 1984: 74). This breakaway probably happened quite regularly in pre-Historic times, leading to bands looking for better life elsewhere. Widlök (2000: 503) develops a model whereby he explains the process of ethno-genesis in terms of the ejection or disengagement of people from the main polity into a group movement away from a static locality, the dissident group then becoming ‘frontiersmen and women’ in their own right. Nigel Penn (in Smith 1995: 23), for instance, reports how the Orange River and surroundings had, in the 1780s, experienced a ‘rule of terror’ and of ‘brigandage’ from which victimised San bands needed to escape. The formation of new social groupings and of an enforced migration across the river into Namibia may have been the result of this ‘chaos of destruction’ (op. cit.). He refers to an early account by Jacobus Coetze which reports deep penetration of Khoe from Namaqualand into the interior of Namibia already in 1740 (Smith 1995: 31).

The paintings at Hornkranz-South are done in a protected niche about two metres off the ground which the artist could not have reached without assistance. There is a flat stone, placed on the floor of the niche, with what looks like some plant material wedged under it. Scherz (1986: 56) mentions the placing of flat stones in front of some of the paintings he recorded and supposes these to be stones where a sacrifice of plant material has been made towards the paintings and the scenes they depict. Since the stone at the Hornkranz-South site has in all probability not been moved since the artist used it (the site lies in a remote area of the farm, far from any form of access-way and very difficult to reach due to the extreme rockiness and steepness of the terrain), radio-carbon dating of the plant material stuck under it could indicate the time the paintings were done. If the migration hypothesis holds true, and the close contact between Khoe migrants and San hunter-gatherers was preserved until the 1800s and beyond, I would suggest that the paintings were done relatively shortly before the first settlement of Witbooi and his people in the area.

If a migration hypothesis can be expounded by means of pot shards (cf. Huffman 1989: 5; Inskeep 1978: 130; Smith and Lee 1997: 57; Phillipson 1993: 225–227), lithic assemblage (Rudner 1957: 21, following Goodwin and Van Riet Lowe 1929), or linguistics (cf. Bollig and Gewald 2000: 14; Möhlig 2000: 137–138), then the same should be possible by means of rock paintings, especially in the case of ones so convincingly similar as those from the two sites under consideration. See here also Cooke (1965: 263–285) with regard to the tracing of human migrations from the distribution of fat-tailed sheep in rock art sites in Zimbabwe. Here, although partially discredited by later authors, I have to reaffirm Wilcox's 'overall picture' where he argues for a diffusion hypothesis supported by features evident from widely distributed rock art sites in Africa/southern Africa. 'If knowledge of the hunting bow and the techniques of making microliths be accepted as having diffused through Africa it can hardly be denied that the accompanying art probably did the same' (Wilcox 1984: 249–250).

In this regard a closer look at river systems as possible arteries for migration in pre-Historic southern Africa could provide an avenue for further exploration. This was not done with enough devotion in former research and excavation, where the emphasis for cultural identification was mostly on broad-based botanical features or sedentary locations, like inhabitable caves and permanent water (see, for instance, Inskeep 1978: 10).

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