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ROCK ART OF THE MATOPOS

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Within the enormous spread of rock art in Southern Africa, the Matopos area of Zimbabwe is a unique concentration. In the area there seem to be more pictures of the "Ancient Hunters" art than in all the rest of the world. Matopos, meaning "hill-tops", is the name applied to the eastern section of the granite mountain range stretching across Zimbabwe. Rock art students and enthusiasts know the Matopos for its rock "domes", which can mean either its enormous outcrops and boulders or its perfectly vaulted caves which house the paintings.

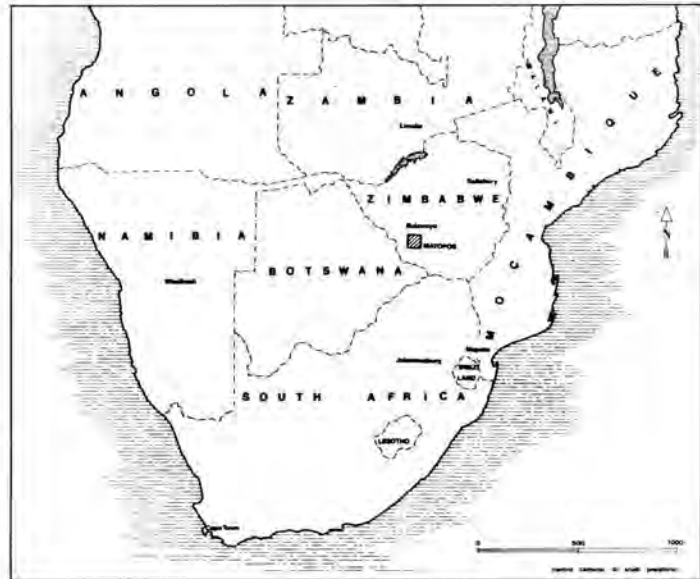
These caves have been carved into the bulging masses of granite by a natural process of subspheroid erosion resulting in the formation of cavities in the outcrops themselves. They offer shelter against the elements to both man and beast. These caves had been occupied by humans long before the hunter's art was added to their walls. Excavations in several sites of the Matopos have demonstrated the sequence of occupation. The earliest excavations, undertaken by Neville Jones and A. Leslie Armstrong, in the cave of Bambata, exposed a long sequence of occupational strata right back to levels with hand-axes. No clear correlation with the beginnings of art could, however, be found. Neither Jones's excavation in the cave of Nswatugi, nor that of C.K. Cooke in the cave of Pomongwe, clarified this matter, since no pictures of painted object were found below surface to prove any connection between the murals and specific occupational strata of the excavations. However, the hunter's art in Southern Africa seems to be connected with human types like those which still roam the more desert-like parts of the country and are known as Khai-San. These "Bushmen" have been observed, till recently, producing works of art like those found in the caves or engraved on rocks in open country. Similarly, they have preserved their Stone Age habits and beliefs in spite of at least three centuries of contact with "black" and a "white" cultures.

The survival of a Stone Age human type proves to be our main advantage in dealing with the rock-art of our special concern, the Matopos, and the rock-art of all Southern Africa, and, as well shall see, even the rest of the Old World. The "Bushmen" explained the significance of their depictions to European investigators. Unfortunately, little use of this unique documentation has been made by art historians. This oversight can be compared to approaching Greek art without paying any attention to Greek mythology or Greek religion.

Neville Jones summarized the task of the prehistorian excavating the Mato-

Fig. 32
Location of Matopos
Hills in southern Zim-
babwe.

Fig. 33
Distribution of rock
art sites at Matopos.



pos caves, stating that his "main concern is with the cultural association of the paintings and their correct sequence." Even if this goal was not attained, we can not discredit the attempts. Several important facts ultimately emerged from the various excavations, especially that of C.K. Cooke in the cave of Pomongwe. Among these, the most significant are: 1. the relatively long duration of the latest phase of a Microlithic Stone Age Culture called Wilton, and generally associated with the Khai-San people in the whole of Southern Africa, and 2. Radio Carbon 14 dating pertaining to the emergence of this culture at the end of what has been considered to be an exceedingly arid period (when dry wood was apparently abundant as it may be indicated by a layer of white ash) dating between $\pm 9,400$ and $\pm 7,600$ B.P.

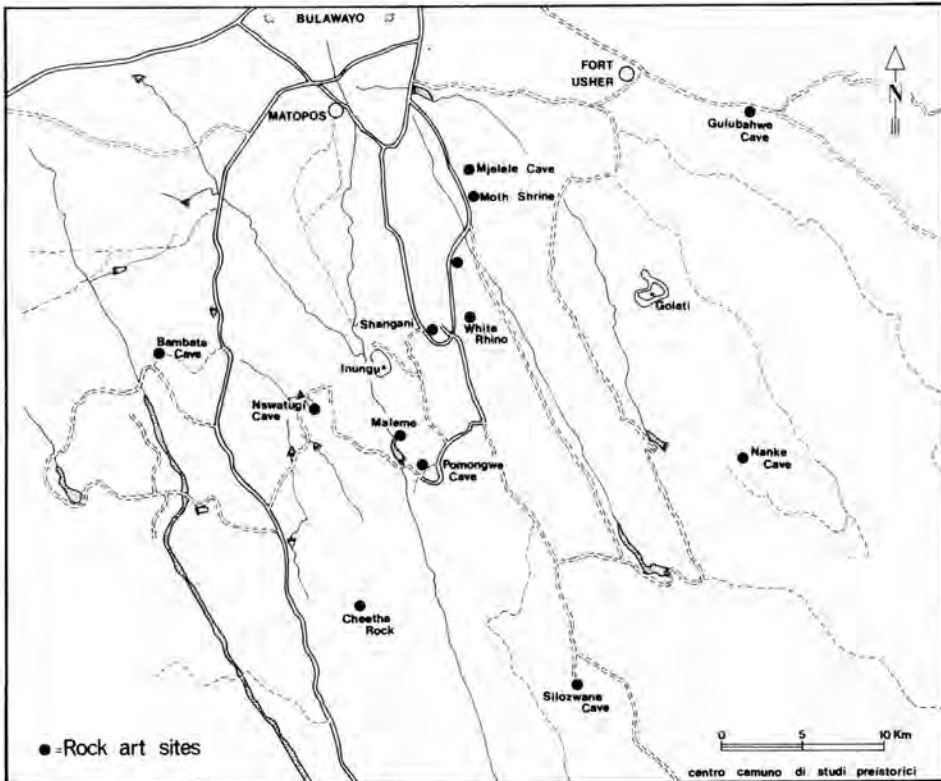
Today we know that these Radio Carbon 14 dates are in no way absolute and should in any case be "calibrated". If indeed this art is connected from the beginning with the Wilton Culture, the Matopos should date back roughly to between 8,000 and 9,000 B.P. C.K. Cooke, among others, who was of the opinion that "hundreds and not thousands of years is the actual age of the paintings still to be seen in Southern Matabeleland," had to change his mind as to the possible age of this art. But the initial date of Matopos cave art still remains an open question.

The actual task of the archaeologist should not be concluded with the establishment of technical data, but should commence at this point, since there is clear evidence of continuous historical development within the art of a single cave, as well as among the separate caves in the small area of the Matopos. Indeed, there is a continuous historical development in the wide distribution of the hunter's art in the entire subcontinent of Africa. This conspicuous phenomenon initially inspired the various excavations which, unfortunately, failed to clarify the sequence. At the same time various attempts were made by leading prehistorians such as M.C. Burkitt, Henri

Breuil and others to solve the problem by distinguishing between the various pigments used at different times by successive generations of painters.

Eventually this somewhat simplistic 'detective' method which, at the time, seemed as infallible as present laboratory methods, also proved unsuccessful. An eminent pupil of Leo Frobenius, Mrs. E. Goodall, stated as much in a letter to Jones: "I have not found any age-group being connected with certain pigments. On the contrary, I have found the same red pigment within various groups, as, quite obviously, the same material was available at all time....." Investigation of the pigments may only have proved an essentially unbroken tradition by people trained to retain proven materials and methods in both art and material culture.

More sophisticated methods are necessary to grasp the historical situation, the spiritual background and the evolution of thought in the art of the Matopos. An interpretation of the pictures as they appear *in their special setting* is most important, since we are concerned with rock-art, which implies that the artist is inspired by the natural structure of a particular setting. For example, in the Matopos and elsewhere we find paintings hidden away in the bush on isolated boulders or in nooks among fallen rocks next to the actual caves, where they are screened by trees and undergrowth and thus even more secluded from common view. We now know that in each case there is a different significance attached to the locality and that, therefore,







Figgs. 34-35-36

Silozwane Cave.

On the right side of the first photograph is the depiction of the hunt. In the central part there is a giraffe which overlaps a

small human figure, and on the left two young hunters can be seen on the march. Many other faded figures appear on the same surface which is just part of the much larger panel with numerous figures.

the substance and aim of the pictures are different.

The "Cheetah-Rock" for example, with numerous leopards (not cheetahs) painted on its unprotected surface, shows one leopard conspicuously walking upside down. Below the leopards there are smaller human figures. To interpreters unaware of the significance of the leopard in Bushman mythology, this can seem a simple hunting scene. To the Khai-San, however, the leopard acts as messenger to the goddess Moon, who sends him to escort those willing to sacrifice themselves for her redemption to the "land of happiness". As a distinction, he is rewarded with a black spot on his yellow coat for each delivery. The human figures in the "Cheetah-Rock" painting are not hunting the sacred leopards, but worshipping them. The upside-down portrayal of the topmost leopard is likely to indicate his journey to heaven.

Another secret abode is hidden from view by fallen rocks. It is so difficult to find that it has remained untouched by the thousands of holiday-makers who use the adjoining picnic place. A large flat slab of granite serves as the floor of an accidental cavity underneath enormous boulders. The cavity is large enough to accommodate six or eight dancers. One wall is decorated by as many figures in violet silhouette. C.K. Cooke took them to represent enormous birds called "shoebills" (*Balaeniceps rex*) on account of their slim stick-like legs and what Cooke took to be open shoebills. This type of bird, however, is not common to Southern Africa. The upper parts of the figures have been obliterated by rain; only the lower half of the drawings are preserved in the hollow of the rock surface. What remains, however, can now be discerned to be female figures: Cooke's shoebills seem to be the women's projecting breasts and lifted arms. In Cooke's defense it should be mentioned that the women seem to be imitating, in dance, large stalking birds like cranes or ostriches. This painting resembles a similar one in the so-called "Maidens' Cave" in the Brandberg. The "shoebill" site appears to have been reserved particularly for a cult-dance by girls imitating and invoking ostriches, their loins and shoulders covered by ostrich feathers and numerous necklaces made up of ostrich egg-shell beads, in symbolic resemblance.

The size of these figures – originally measuring nearly two meters in height – might be surprising, but merely reflects the importance of this special rite. The site may have been chosen for its acoustic qualities as well as for its dancing floor. The main attraction of this Ostrich Dance is the wind-like, moaning sound produced by the *gbura*, a musical instrument which consists of a bow with a gourd attached and is played by blowing onto the bowstring. This explains why the girls' arms are uplifted: to hold the bowstring to their mouths.

But the typical Matopos site is the domed cave. We may start our inquiry by looking at the smallest and the most perfectly shaped cave, that of Gulubahwe. It is situated just outside the Rhodes Matopos National Park which contains most of the Matopos sites. In width and height the Gulubahwe cave measures not more than 6 m. The reason for the almost perfect conservation of the paintings is, in itself, a revealing feature of prehistoric art: a horizontal crack in the posterior vault running from the right almost to the exact center, and of such a height above floor level that the paintings emerging from and

inspired by this prominent feature, were created above the zone which generally was defiled by man or beast or eroded by splashing rain. This fissure in the wall had suggested to the artist the water surface on which a magical or mythical snake-like creature was made to float. Water had stained the surface below the fissure with a white califerous precipitation. The excavations suggest that, at the time of the painting, particularly arid circumstances prevailed in the Matopos area. Thus water was prized and the water-stain, as well as suggesting the color of the mythical snake, would be taken by the Bushmen as a splendid omen. The good omen explains the jubilant attitude of the whole assembly, human and animal – and even figures combining both – surrounding the dominating floating “miraculous” one.

Some prehistorians feel that composition, let alone symmetry, cannot be expected in prehistoric art. But both these factors occur in the complete mural-panel of Gulubahwe. This could be regarded as accidental and attributed to the effect of the existing fissure determining the horizontal frieze-like arrangement of the total depiction. Yet in the very apex of the little cave there appears a dark discoloration of the sky-blue granite vault, suggesting to the hunter-artist perhaps the appearance of a small single rain-cloud in the micro-“sky” of this small cave. Apart from substantiating the “good omen” of the presence of rain-water for the thirsty, this dominating central spot stresses the symmetry of the cave itself, and it seems ridiculous to deny that the Matopos artist was aware of this.

Even more intriguing is the occurrence of a perfect isocephaly on both sides of the composition. The figures at the left have been doubled in size, in order to let their headline correspond with the double row of man and beast in the right half of the composition. This proves the artistic as well as devotional impact of the cave and its structure on the hunter's art in this area, so remote in time and space from the Greek masters who are said to have “invented” these art principles. More still – directly below the cloud-spot and exactly below the turned-up tail of the water-snake, a curious entangled design appears, resembling a whirl of snakes. This reappears in other places, for example in a small hollow rock in a river bed near Beit Bridge on the Limpopo Valley.

This tangled design marks the cave's auricle or acoustical center. Standing with your ear next to it, you will hear the most remote sounds clearly and, correspondingly, whispering may be heard at a considerable distance. During the ceremonial in certain caves – as in the case of the girls' dancing site at Maleme above – effective use most certainly was made of this characteristic of the symmetrically hollowed cave structure. On account of its archetypal importance to the whole area, we shall again refer to this small cave.

To all aboriginal peoples of Southern Africa, even the late-arriving Bantu, a mythical river-snake with a gem in its forehead has great importance. Whenever the snake leaves the water it hides this gem in the reeds. It is believed that he who finds this gem will be happy, but the one who returns the gem to its owner will be happiest of all.

Moving from the northernmost to the southern site of the Matopos, we may now examine the grand cave of Silozwane, situated just outside the bound-

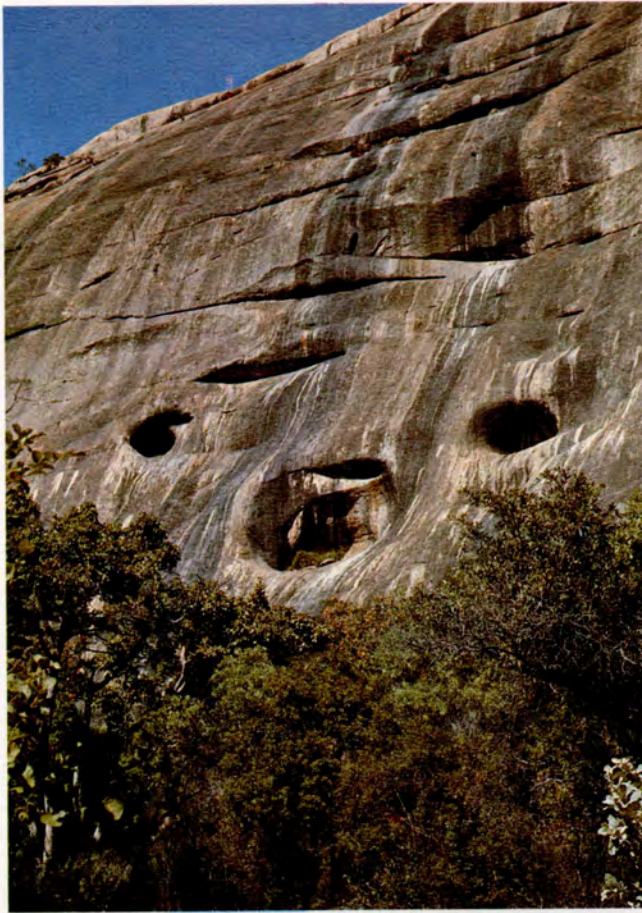


Fig. 37

A group of small rock paintings. This is one of many typical rock art sites in the area.

Fig. 38

Silozwane Cave.

Polychrome depiction of a strange object which has been interpreted as a water gourd.

Fig. 39

Namke Cave

Detail of the panel showing a complex series of superimpositions. The beautiful eland in the middle of the picture is of an earlier date than the superimposed yellow and light brown animal figures. The latest phase, in the lower part of the picture, shows a group of ants.





aries of the National Park. This much larger cave exhibits the process of cave-formation in a more advanced stage. Seen from the front, we recognize a structure similar to that of Gulubahwe. From the side, however, a more advanced process of rock erosion is evident. A side gallery at left has been produced. This cave, rather high up in the granite hill, gives a splendid view over the country-side. Standing inside, one is struck by the portrayal of a smart young hunter in full array opposite the painted backward wall of the cave, as if the artist invites us to enjoy the panoramic view. This is modern sentiment, however. The artist intended this figure to attract the attention of the community to spiritual beings descending from the apex of the cave as though bringing a celestial message. Next to the young hunter and to his right, a painted strange symbol appears, shaped like a water bag made of skin, but also suggesting the breast of a woman. All this is familiar to those acquainted with Khai-San belief. This scene, as a whole, serves as an introduction to the main mural which completely covers the back wall of the cave.

The reproduction has a fairly dark hue and is intended as an illustration of the noticeable changes in light (according to season and time of day) when the shade of the screening trees shrouds the cave in mystic darkness, emphasizing the difference of white- and dark-skinned humans in the same scene. This is less apparent when we look at the left half of the total assembly in bright light, reflected from the cave floor, which makes the large white figure above the giraffe fade into the background. In the lower right corner of the opposite half of the panel we can distinguish another large white human figure, so that the reddish-brown community is flanked by these two strangers.

In the main assembly there can not be any doubt that we are presented with



Fig. 40

Nswatugi Cave.

Two giraffes in ochre colour with their backs highlighted in outline; down below there are several small human figures in dark red which belong to a later phase.

an ordinary group of "Bushmen" hunters in their everyday conduct. One need only to look carefully at a single figure, for instance at the hunter anointing his arrows with poison in preparation for the hunt; or at the woman to his right dressing her water-bag. The clearest evidence, however, is the hut in which a young female bends over her mill-stone to grind some seed or edible root. This scene shows the typical small twig and grass shelters of the Khai-San demonstrating who frequented these caves.

C.K. Cooke's excavations into the deposited bones on the cave floor indicate that these caves could not have served as living rooms for the hunters, since they certainly did not live merely on small animals like rodents, hares, and tortoises, whose bones are all that have been found. It would seem that the caves were inhabited rather by casual occupants: in all probability the painter-priests, either when engaged in the painting or when conducting ceremonies.

This is most clearly demonstrated by the paintings in Silozwane. The depiction of the small grass shelters is curious, since they are the typical abodes of the hunters. Why should these be pictured if the artists looked upon the painted sites as common living places and not as sanctuaries devoted to religious purposes? Upon carefully scrutinizing the whole of the upper part of the painting, containing the assembly of larger human figures in what seems a portrayal of everyday life, one discovers minute natural cavities in a rift of the wall. These were utilized by the artist as miniature represen-



Fig. 41
Nanke Cave.
A row of human figures walking below a small
yellow seated antelope.

tations of the caves in front of and around which the painted humans assemble. In no other way could the difference between profane and sacred abodes be illustrated so clearly. The meaning of this assembly now becomes clear – if one notes the attitude and actions of the individual figures.

At the extreme left we find, first of all, two young hunters (similar to the one pictured above the entrance) approaching the group in great excitement as though carrying good news. The plight of these people becomes evident if we look at the woman and her child immediately below them, plodding along under the weight of their belongings. Further to the right, others are pictured flinging down their burdens or lying down to rest. A mother has her aching back massaged while some children sit about exhausted. It is clear that these people have moved to this sanctuary in utter distress on account of the lack of rain.

Miss Dorothea Bleek, in her discussion of the different forms of magic, has noted the rain-making narratives of the Bushmen. We find that two methods were primarily used: either to provoke the rain-clouds themselves or to extract the rain-bull from the ponds by magical means. In the mural of Silozwane these rites are performed individually by the two white figures; the one at left beckoning the “clouds” (visible as natural white stains on the blue expanse of the cave vault) by hand; the other, descending into the “lower zones” teeming with subterraneous creatures among which the “water-snakes” with different heads dominate. This reminds one of the



Figgs. 42-43
Silozwane Cave.
Lively scene of daily life. In the detail
below a hunter is anointing his arrows
in preparation for the hunt.

white river-snake of Gulubahwe. It is interesting to note that the paintings of the lower zone of Silozwane have a faded appearance, having been effaced by animals or man as well as by rain. To the art-historian this enhances the interest of the paintings in the lower zone because of the possible repainting and overpainting.

In the upper zone one clear example of this phenomenon occurs: a large giraffe obviously painted over a human figure. The human legs still project below the belly of the giraffe. The largest snake in the ponds has a giraffe's head (the others have antelope heads). This is explained by the Bushman symbolism which holds that the red stripe stretching from a giraffe's head to tail is a long snake riding on the animal's back. Since the chequered colouring of the giraffe denotes clouds, this red snake represents the lightning and thereby signifies that the giraffe is a rain-animal as well.

This affinity for the giraffe is thus the reason for introducing it into the picture at a later stage and in an arbitrary fashion. At the same time the head of the water-serpent was changed. The same occurred in the painting of the river-snake in Gulubahwe where a giraffe was added.

Even more fascinating is an object shown projecting from the lower zone of the cave of Silozwane into the area where the people have assembled. This is the sail of a large vessel almost completely erased but still clearly discernible by favorable light. The sub-aquatic snakes in the ponds are smaller replicas of this large vessel which at an early stage must have been part of the main



theme in the painting. As in Gulubahwe, where the snake-ship is accompanied by a congregation of people, we can discern a long line of – curiously enough – white human figures running toward the vessel.

The portrayal of a craft with a large sail in the Matopos, so distant from either open river or open sea, seems inexplicable. Should we associate its presence with the white human figures acting as “priest-magicians” in the mural of Silozwane? And is there any connection between the sailing craft and the white floating river-snake with beast-like prow and up-turned stern in Gulubahwe? If not, what else could the white colour of both the main figures in the rain ceremony signify? There is an alternative explanation: these white figures could signify natural “apparitions” descending from the heaven of the cave. The white figures may have been painted thus to indicate that they descended from the white clouds in the sky and the white body of the river-snake may be a parallel cloud-simile, but the presence of the sailing vessel is not explained. Could the Bushmen have initially arrived from overseas? Or could they have been a seafaring people? Suddenly, we are confronted with a tangle of problems at the root of which lies the question of direct contact between the artists of other continents and those of Southern Africa. Let us therefore keep this question in mind when comparing the other sites of our area. Added to the paintings on the walls of Silozwane, we notice white elephants partly overlapping, painted in the ante-chamber to the left and, among the many other minor scenes portrayed, that of small storks on the wing, reminding us of age-old migrations between north and south existing in nature.

We now turn to the extraordinary cave of Bambata, in the far west of the Matopos. Again this large cave is situated high up and is completely hidden from sight by trees. The main attraction at the back of the cave is a pair of oversized white elephants, a smaller male and a larger female going in

opposite directions.

The caves at the cave's entrance afford natural protection to the paintings, while excavators have added fencing. The elephant theme has curious variations; beginning at the right where there is a mere line drawing beneath some animals and a file of hunters. The curious element about the elephant depicted is that its legs are connected in one swooping line. Still more surprising is the figure further to the left on the same wall. This hardly resembles an elephant or any other animal, since the head is attached to an array of "balloons", an enigmatic symbol found in different variants both in Matabeleland and Mashonaland. Beneath this are the faded remains of a previous painting of an elephant in plain white silhouette across which the file of hunters marches. In the centre of the cave, above the hunters, there are two white elephants among several antelopes, some of which are resting in the shade of trees. Still further down a line of would-be initiates terminates at a scene depicting, in detail, the initiation of youths under the supervision of mature hunters below the heraldic picture of the lion, seen by the Khai-San as the incorporation of the sun and the master hunter. This lion could appear in an archaic Greek sculpture or on a European coat-of-arms. It may have the same heraldic significance of valour and prowess as it does in European art. The lion's presence in the cave where the boys sleep signifies the boy's progress to the state of active hunters.

This depiction of an actual cult-scene starts with the long line of youths filing into the cave and ends in the lower centre of the picture. The elephant depiction is completely separate. In the left part of the cave, the elephant scene is similar to that in Silozwane, where distressed people are seen lying under barren trees. The Bushman story that explains all this goes as follows:

In the beginning there was neither rain nor grass nor trees. The animals ate the flesh and drank the blood of their brethren. The elephant lamented this and promised: "when I die you will have more to eat" "How long will we still have to wait," they complained. Then the snake promised to kill him. When that happened, it rained; grass grew; trees grew. The small animals ate the grass, the large ones the leaves; only the beasts of prey did not stop killing.

This myth, depicted in caves of Mashonaland, explains the white colour of the elephant in Bambata and elsewhere, and also the imitation of the simile of lightning striking the cloud mentioned in the case of the giraffe, thereby proving the Khai-San's association of the latter with rain as a secondary conception. The elephant has always been the "rain-maker" because it literally sprays forth "rain" from its trunk. The white colour used in cave paintings of the elephant all over Southern Africa shows that it is a "cloud-animal". In Bambata we therefore find the same general idea: the cave as a sanctuary for rain magic.

The other two schematic representations of elephants in Bambata have the same underlying idea of an "inflated" animal, which drifts in the sky like a cloud. The "elephant" in the middle appears to be producing drops of rain "as sweet as honey", as the Khai-San would say. We must now turn from these curious representations — so contrary to the common notion that the hunter's art is realistic — to discuss the other caves in this area.

In the cave of Pomongwe there are few pictures, those there to have been inspired by the exceptional interior structure of the cave. Some of the animals were originally in red silhouette but an attempt to preserve them by applying an oily substance has caused them virtually to disappear. Only two line-drawings still show up clearly: a magnificent elephant dominating the whole of the cave, and a curious repetition of the "balloon-elephant" at the entrance to Bambata. In Pomongwe, however, we discover the origin of this "rounded-off" presentation in the cave itself. The cave is a natural mould or hollow form of a gigantic elephant. This is impossible to illustrate with photos, but once pointed out to any visitor, the impression is invariably corroborated.

This example of the link between cave structure and cave adornment may be the finest expression of the early artist's dependence on the *genius loci* of his sanctuary. Another example is in the European cave of Pindal where, as far as is known to the author, nobody has pointed out that the elephant in red outline with the blob on its body is a pictorial "interpretation" of a natural cavity in the cave wall immediately below it. This interdependence of artist and "canvas" to the author seems a more convincing argument for the original conceptual unity of European and Southern African prehistoric art than the similarities cited by leading prehistorians such as Henri Breuil, Leo Frobenius, and Hugo Obtermaier.

The second type of "inflated" elephant simile in Bambata occurs in the cave of Nanke on the opposite, eastern flank of the Matopos area. A view of the cave and its paintings shows, in the centre, another abstract depiction of elephants. The large elephants are in grey "shadowgraphs" on a yellowish background, high up beneath a large rift running across the total width of this exceptional cave. In the case of the cloud symbol, its elephant shape is hardly recognizable without comparison to the cave of Bambata. Not only has the giraffe, as substitute rain-maker, usurped its role, but several of the "balloons" have detached themselves and have become individual "cave-models", occupied by humans in search of the "honey-sweet water" of the Bushman tradition. Bees are drawn swarming around these miniature caves. Significant, however, are the large silhouettes of elephants, this time pictured inside the clouds which were naturally produced by water leaking through the wide crack in the cave wall. The water, as in Bambata, precipitates calcium that suggests the white colour of the cloud- or rain-animal. This is the initial suggestion of the cave, also supported by another visual impression of the vault which shows streaks of "rain" as though pouring down from the grey "rain clouds" which are blown across its granite-blue "sky".

The present appearance of the cave of Nanke (except the scene of the grey elephants) is, as the changes in the large elephant-simile as well as the predominance of the giraffe indicate, of a later stage. An older, and badly faded, version of the elephant simile appears on the right wall of the cave, along with pictures of other animals. The animal figures overlap badly, especially in the lower zone, as at Silozwane. Even in this overcrowded zone, however, a concept which reminds us of the archetypal cave of Gulubahwe is discerni-

ble. At the left, far down, we notice red-brown humans with small antelope heads, walking in a row. The Bushmen believe that these semi-humans are the dead who now live under water. In this way they enter the cave from below, holding hands in a solemn dance. One of them has already reached the centre of the cave where he apparently stands in water with fishing nets spread out on both sides. Looking at the whole of the bottom margin of the mural as at present, we can imagine that, as at Silozwane, much of the painting in this "watery" zone has been destroyed. There may even have been a large river snake like that at Gulubahwe, as suggested by the submerged semi-hunters. The row of animals walking the lower borderline may be on top of the undulating back of a water snake which has now vanished. As at Silozwane, a startling feature is the appearance of flying white ants. To the Bushmen, these ants are a welcome sign of rain as well as a savoury delicacy. Other novelties are strange, long, dark-grey demons with long necks stretching up into the sky just above the elephant symbol in the centre of the cave. Since two giraffes below, one in plain yellow, one in brown, reach out to the demons, one can take them as representations of giraffe shapes or "shadow-graphs", opposed to the elephant at the right. A prominent giraffe points at the elephants, as though to demonstrate that the giraffe rain-maker has taken over.

The second newcomer on the rain-making scene is the ostrich, portrayed in three examples just to the left of the central elephant symbol and surrounded by some fish. One has its head dipped into a pool. Even they have their "shadow-graphs" in the celestial zone, adjoining those of the giraffe on the left. These could be taken for female ostriches without head and legs, but they actually represent four grey ostrich feathers. A myth, related by D. Bleek, explains how the feather of a hunted ostrich is blown up into the sky and falls into a pool, there to become again a live ostrich. As in the maidens' dance of Maleme, the ostrich is a rain-harbinger. All the different characters of rain-making are thus united here to stress the main goal of the cult-pictures in these caves of the Matopos, to emphasize rain, the greatest need of the hunters in this arid period.

In the last of the caves that concern us, Nswatugi, we find that the giraffe as rain-maker has become paramount. It has completely ousted its forerunner, the elephant. The giraffe painting is closely connected with a change in the structure of the cave, a so-called "hare-lip" vault, a rift which partly opens up the cave's roof and divides the cave in two. The right half of the cave became overcrowded with paintings, so that now no clear distinction is possible. The whole of the lower zone was, at one time, apparently covered by a reddish wash under which there are jumbled dozens of layers of paintings.

It is clear that this "burial of the past" was deliberate, so that the new rain-making god, the giraffe, could be introduced. A new horizon was created upon which a row of beautiful kudus, representing the animal world, walk the new earth above which two magnificent giraffes are projected against the blue granite sky as the dominant figures of the rain rites. One interesting fact about the giraffes pictured (and incidentally also the accompanying zebra) is that they sometimes appear without their distinctive chequered skin, as in

the third giraffe, just below the two in the “sky”, and the unstriped zebra next to him. This omission occurs in numerous pictures in the Matopos and elsewhere and is explained by the belief that the giraffe makes clouds appear and rain fall by shedding and then reassuming his skin.

In summary, the Matopos painted sites — of which only the most important have been described and briefly discussed — constitute a separate group of hunter's paintings in the wide distribution of the hunter's art in Southern Africa. The same people and artists frequented the different sites according to their religious needs over a long period, with considerable change in thought and style. At the same time, inherent notions persisted during the period, suggesting contacts with older conceptions.

The deposition of the rain-making elephant in favour of the giraffe and, ultimately, the ostrich, is the most significant sign of the hunter's changing beliefs. It becomes clear that the main goal of the cave rites is the evocation of rain. This from the outset seems to be the main content of the cave paintings, although certain other rites (as for instance the initiation of the youths in Bambata) find expression in the paintings. We conclude from the different excavations in the Matopos caves — especially that of the latest excavator in Pomongwe, C.K. Cooke — that this art emerged in an exceedingly arid period. The want of rain seems to have persisted throughout the hunter occupation of the Matopos caves and to have been a major determinant of their religious and cultural rites.

Riassunto: I siti dipinti, i Matopos, formano un gruppo a parte delle pitture nella vasta serie dell'arte dei cacciatori dell'Africa meridionale. Durante un lungo periodo la stessa gente e gli stessi artisti frequentavano diversi siti secondo le loro necessità religiose, subendo una trasformazione considerevole nel pensiero e nello stile. Le caratteristiche stesse delle grotte procreavano concezioni artistiche. Durante questo periodo, nozioni arcaiche persistevano accanto alle innovazioni.

Il decadimento dell'elefante, quale procreatore della pioggia, in favore della giraffa e successivamente dello struzzo, è un indizio della trasformazione della fede del cacciatore. Lo scopo principale dei riti delle grotte consisteva nell'evocazione di pioggia. Si conclude, specialmente dagli scavi più recenti, che quest'arte apparve in un periodo aridissimo. Durante l'intero periodo in cui gli artisti avevano occupato le grotte di Matopos, la scarsità di pioggia sembra aver determinato i loro riti religiosi e culturali.

Résumé: Les sites peints, les Matopos, forment un groupe à part dans la longue série de l'art des chasseurs dans l'Afrique méridionale. Pendant longtemps les mêmes artistes fréquentaient les sites suivant leurs exigences religieuses, qui ont subi, au cours des siècles des transformations considérables en thèmes et styles. Les caractéristiques mêmes des grottes engendraient des concepts artistiques. En même temps des notions inhérentes persévéraient de manière que l'on supposât des persistences de conceptions plus anciennes.

Le fait que l'éléphant en tant que producteur de la pluie, est remplacé par la girafe et finalement par l'autruche, est une preuve de transformations dans la foi du chasseur. Le but principal des rites qui se déroulaient dans les abris et les grottes consistait dans l'évocation de la pluie. Grâce aux fouilles récentes, nous savons que cet art émergea dans une période extrêmement aride. Pendant la période dans laquelle ces artistes occupèrent les grottes des Matopos, la rareté de la pluie semble avoir déterminé dans une large mesure leurs expressions religieux et culturels.

Resumen: Las pinturas de Matopos constituyen un grupo aparte en la larga serie del arte de los cazadores de Africa meridional. Durante mucho tiempo, los artistas frecuentaron los lugares donde pintaban con arreglo a las exigencias religiosas, que sufrieron considerables transformaciones de temas y estilos en el curso de los siglos.

Las propias características de las grutas daban origen a conceptos artísticos. Al mismo tiempo, se conservaban nociones arcaicas, lo que ha conducido a suponer la persistencia de concepciones más antiguas. El elefante como productor de lluvia fue reemplazado por la jirafa y finalmente por el avestruz, lo que pone de manifiesto las transformaciones de la fe del cazador. Los ritos que se celebraban en los refugios y grutas tenían la finalidad principal de evocar la lluvia. Gracias a excavaciones recientes sabemos que este arte surgió en un periodo de gran sequía. En la época en que estos artistas ocuparon las grutas de Matopos, la escasez de la lluvia parece haber determinado en gran medida sus expresiones religiosas y culturales.

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