

ROCK PAINTINGS FROM PORO BANGUMA I AND BANGUMA I FROM THE USANDAWE AREA (KONDOA DISTRICT, TANZANIA)

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SUMMARY

The paper will refer to newly discovered sites with rock art in Kondoa region in Tanzania. They were identified during field research conducted in December 2014. Both sites are located on the hills nearby Kwa Mtoro village. The first of the sites is characterized by representations of several geometricized human figures, spiral signs, as well as an image of an animal. They were made with red pigment. The paintings from the second site are considerably better preserved. They include several dozens of images of animals (mostly elephants) and human figures made with white and yellowish pigment.

RIASSUNTO

L'articolo fa riferimento a siti con arte rupestre recentemente scoperti nella regione Kondoa in Tanzania. I lavori sul campo si sono svolti nel dicembre 2014. Entrambi i siti sono ubicati sulle colline vicine al villaggio di Kwa Mtoro. Il primo dei siti è caratterizzato da rappresentazioni di diverse figure umane geometriche, segni a spirale, un'immagine di un animale. Le immagini sono realizzate con pigmento rosso. I dipinti del secondo sito sono molto meglio conservati. Essi comprendono diverse decine di immagini di animali (soprattutto elefanti) e figure umane realizzate con pigmenti bianco e giallo.

We can assume that 1907 was the year when the research on the rock art in Tanzania began. At that time, a Polish ethnologist Jan Czekanowski documented the paintings near Bwanja village at Lake Victoria (CZEKANOWSKI 1911, pp. 25, 52). In later years, among others was Bagshawe who conducted there his pioneering research and described the paintings from the East part of plateau Iramba (BAGSHAWE 1923, pp. 146-147); Nash, who discovered a few sites in the Kondoa region (NASH 1929, pp. 199-206); and Kohl-Larsen conducting his research in Kondoa during the years 1934-1936 (LEAKEY 1983, p. 14). The biggest research have been carried out by Louis and Mary Lakey who discovered a number of sites in Kondoa (LEAKEY 1983). Another researcher whose activities made huge contribution to the knowledge about Tanzanian rock art is Anati who e.g. established the stylistic division according to the economic, social and cultural base and also campaigned for adding the Kondoa area to the UNESCO World Heritage List (e.g. ANATI 1984; 1986). One must not forget about Masao's achievements who conducted excavation and documentary research of rock art both in the Kondoa region and in the neighboring Singida region (MASAO 1986). Among research conducted at the turn of millennium and at present, we must mention the ones by Lim (e.g. LIM 1996, 2010), Mabulla (e.g. MABULLA 2005; 2014), Bwasiri (Bwasiri 2008) and Itambu (ITAMBU 2013).

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Fig. 1 - Banguma I, general view (photo by the author)

As seen above, the rock art in Tanzania was the subject of a number of research but certainly the possibilities of research work are still significant.

This paper concerns the paintings from the area located south of Kwa Mtoro village in the Kondoa region. This area is today inhabited by the Sandawe people whose ancestors created the paintings in the central part of Tanzania. As they admit “we no longer create rock art and these cave paintings were made by our ancestors”¹. However, this state of affairs is rather new as the last example of creating a cave painting was documented in the 1960s (TEN RAA 1971; 1974). More than a dozen of rock shelter centers are located in the Usandawe area. Those described below were found in December 2014.

The Poro Banguma I site (fig. 1). This is a rock shelter located on a hill south of Kwa Mtoro. There are 116 paintings of humans and animals and a few which meaning is unidentifiable. Their conservation state may be evaluated as good but in some cases there is a graphic processing needed in order to notice the paintings. Particularly poorly visible is one of the scenes depicting human characters and a few likenesses of animals. The likenesses were made of yellowish and reddish pigment with the addition of white one. One can notice a few examples of superimposition and by using this site multiple times in the time periods, this have become a sort of palimpsest.

There are 86 likenesses of people visible. Most of them are males which can be evaluated by the presence of penises and only one well-visible character does not have this added.

¹ Oral information (28.12.2014).

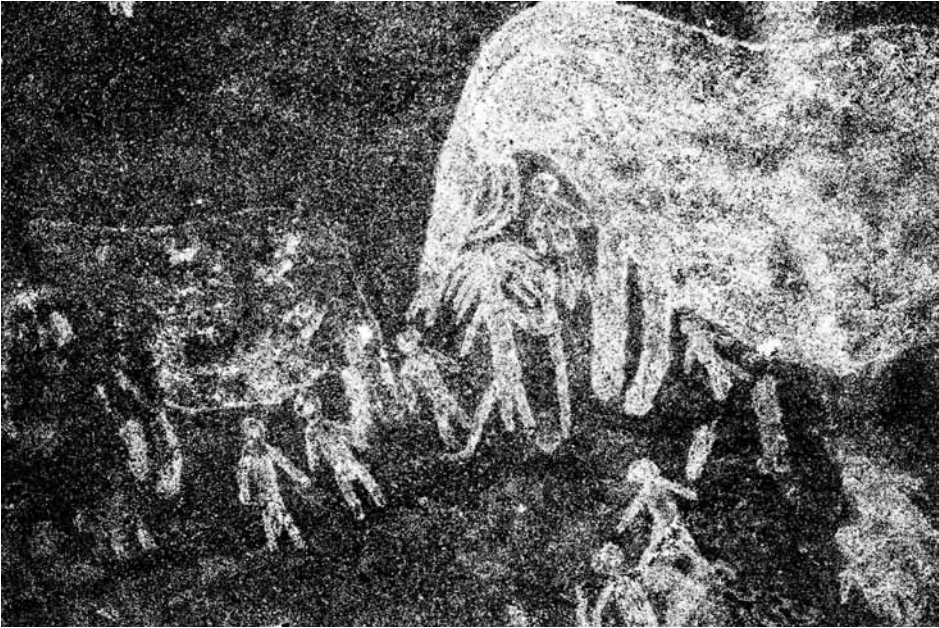


Fig. 2 - A character with lines branching of the head; after use the Dstrech (photo by the author)

We can identify a way of depicting human characters which statistics looks as follows:

1) 65 of the characters were made in the most schematic way e.g. by marking the body without any further elements which became indicators of the following subsections of the division

2) 9 of the characters are depicted with lines branching off their heads, which may be interpreted as haircut or head decorations (see below). In this group we should distinguish:

2.1) 1 character with four fingers on both hands

3) 2 characters with lines branching off their heads and falling on their shoulders (fig. 2). Similar stylistic can be seen at e.g. Kolo B2 and Kolo B1 sites.

Regarding the paintings in Kolo, the lines branching off a head were interpreted as a haircut. However, it is questionable that this haircut was popular due to its practicality in the contemporary environment. Based on Lewis-Williams' works we can claim that these may be paintings of people who were experiencing altered states of consciousness (LEWIS-WILLIAMS 1987). Trance states may be accompanied with the feeling of growing hair and the depiction like the one mentioned above may be interpreted as a lion's mane which in turn connects with the *simbo* ritual practiced even today by the Sandawe people where its participant "becomes a lion"².

4) 9 of the characters cannot be assigned to any of the groups because of their conservation state or different stylistics.

² Seppo Hallavaino based on John Cavallo's theory: <http://ractz.org/page43/page63/index.html> (access: 29.03.2015).



Fig. 3 - A giraffe and a human with a bow and arrow; after use the Dstrech (photo by the author)

The relative chronology of these paintings can be assessed based on superimposition and the conservation state of the individual likenesses (which of course does not have to be the main determinant as it could depend on the smaller quantity of a pigment or its “worse” quality). However, in this case the differences in the conservation state correlate both with superimposition and with the differences in stylistics. As an example of differences in stylistic I would like to present dissimilarity in the way of depicting elephant’s trunks. In my opinion, at this site, we can distinguish at least three panels which have been created in different time periods.

There are 30 images of animals and their division into individual species looks as follows: 10 giraffes, 10 elephants and 10 antelopes and difficult to identify/imperceptible.

It is worth drawing attention to the scene with a giraffe and a human character below who seems to be aiming a bow at the animal (fig. 3). As for the interpretation of the above described paintings, in my opinion they could have had different purpose but most of them seems to be correlated with e.g. the Beseto 1 (LIM 2010, pp. 114-115) site connected with the rainmaking ritual.

THE BANGUMA SITE

The paintings made of red pigment are very poorly visible on the walls of this rock shelter and the general composition is barely noticeable without applying a graphic processing (fig. 4). In the foreground we can see 10 likenesses of characters depicted in the typical bones-like stylistics (fig. 5). Apart from them, we can notice two spiral and two geometrical likenesses and one of them may be in-



Fig. 4 - Rock paintings from Banguma I; before use the Dstrech; (photo by the author)

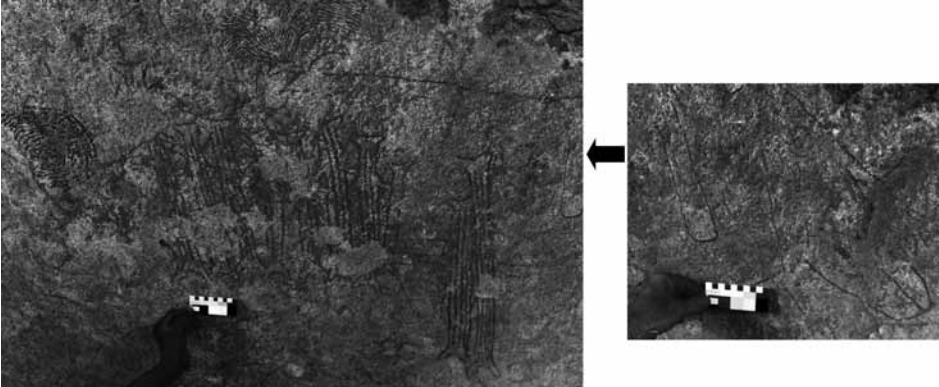


Fig. 5 - Rock paintings from Banguma I; after use the Dstrech (photos by the author)

terpreted as a baobab tree in my opinion. The tree which symbolism refers to the womb and the beginning of existence among the Sandawe people. The whole seems to be “inscribed” within a bigger painting, part of which is destroyed. Typical human likenesses along with the set of geometrical motifs (including spiral ones) seems similar to the Twa style. Although the possible connotations between the paintings from Banguma I and the Twa style need further analysis and separate discussions, I would like to propose the possibility of this hypothesis.

Certainly, it can be concluded that both of the above described sites are parts of different stylistics and also the aim of them was different. The Poro Banguma I site seems to be a typical example of a rock shelter used multiple times and connected with the rainmaking ritual. The age of the paintings from there, judging by very good conservation state, seems to be close to the present time and is no older than few hundred years in my opinion. The second site presents itself as a site with red geometrical likenesses that seems to be made earlier than the paintings from Poro Banguma I.

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