

The distribution of rock art in Zululand, South Africa: early analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Southern Africa is well known for its rock art. However, only selected areas have received the attention of rock art researchers for many years, amongst which uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park, Tsodilo Hills and the Brandberg Mountain feature prominently. In contrast, a number of other areas, amongst them Zululand, that have always been known to have rock art, have not for whatever reasons, received the same attention. Some of the rock art sites in Zululand were first recorded around 1949 by the Natal Museum, and in 1970 by the then Natal Parks Board. Even though the localities of a number of rock art sites were known within this region, they have never formed part of any research.

As part of an attempt to consider the variation of rock art within southern Africa, and in particular the spread of the eland motif, a number of factors were considered in choosing the research area. Amongst these, Zululand is an area least researched and within a reasonable distance from the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park (UDP), which is best researched. Its location at about 200kms away from the UDP enables for an informed comparison analysis. For this purpose, I am using five variables in my analysis of the Zululand rock art, and these are: quantity, colour, context, physical stature and action.



The 'Rosetta stone' from Game Pass Shelter in the uKhahlamba Drakensberg park. It is believed that this painted scene communicates the significance of eland amongst the Bushmen and emphasises the religious role of the paintings.

CONTEXT OF THIS RESEARCH

The research conducted in Zululand, an area with rich Iron Age (Bantu farmers) history, is part of my PhD research project and must be understood within that context. Miles Burkitt was the first archaeologist to undertake a stylistic approach in Southern African rock art research in 1928 and he identified what he considered to be major geographical art groups within Southern Africa. Since then, there has been very few research projects looking at the variation of rock art within Southern Africa. Instead, researchers have focused on different localities within the sub-region. This is partly because of the contrasting opinions on the value of looking at the variation and whether style or the subject matter is best placed to understand the differences between different rock art. This has promoted the idea that Bushmen were similar throughout Southern Africa and over time. Based on this Pan-San approach, a blanket interpretation is used, and the whole body of rock art is thus considered to have religious significance. By so doing, various Bushmen bands are denied their history. My broad research questions are:

- Does a Pan-San cosmology exist?
- To what extent are different animals present in the art from different regions?

OBJECTIVE

There are four objectives of my research, and these are to:

- Investigate the distribution of painted and engraved eland in Southern Africa and analyse the reasons for the distribution.
- Assess the existence of a Pan-San cosmology
- Consider the presence of spiritual elements within the painted imagery, using the five variables:
 - Colour, Quantity, Action, Physical stature, and Context



The map of South Africa, with Zululand in the north of the KwaZulu-Natal Province, just below the Swaziland border.

METHODOLOGY

- A site record form was designed based on the research questions, aims and objectives of the research project.
- Using the Natal Museum archaeological database, known rock art sites within the study area were located and visited during fieldwork.
- Visited sites were recorded using the site record form, and following general archaeological principles to record sites and photographs were taken.



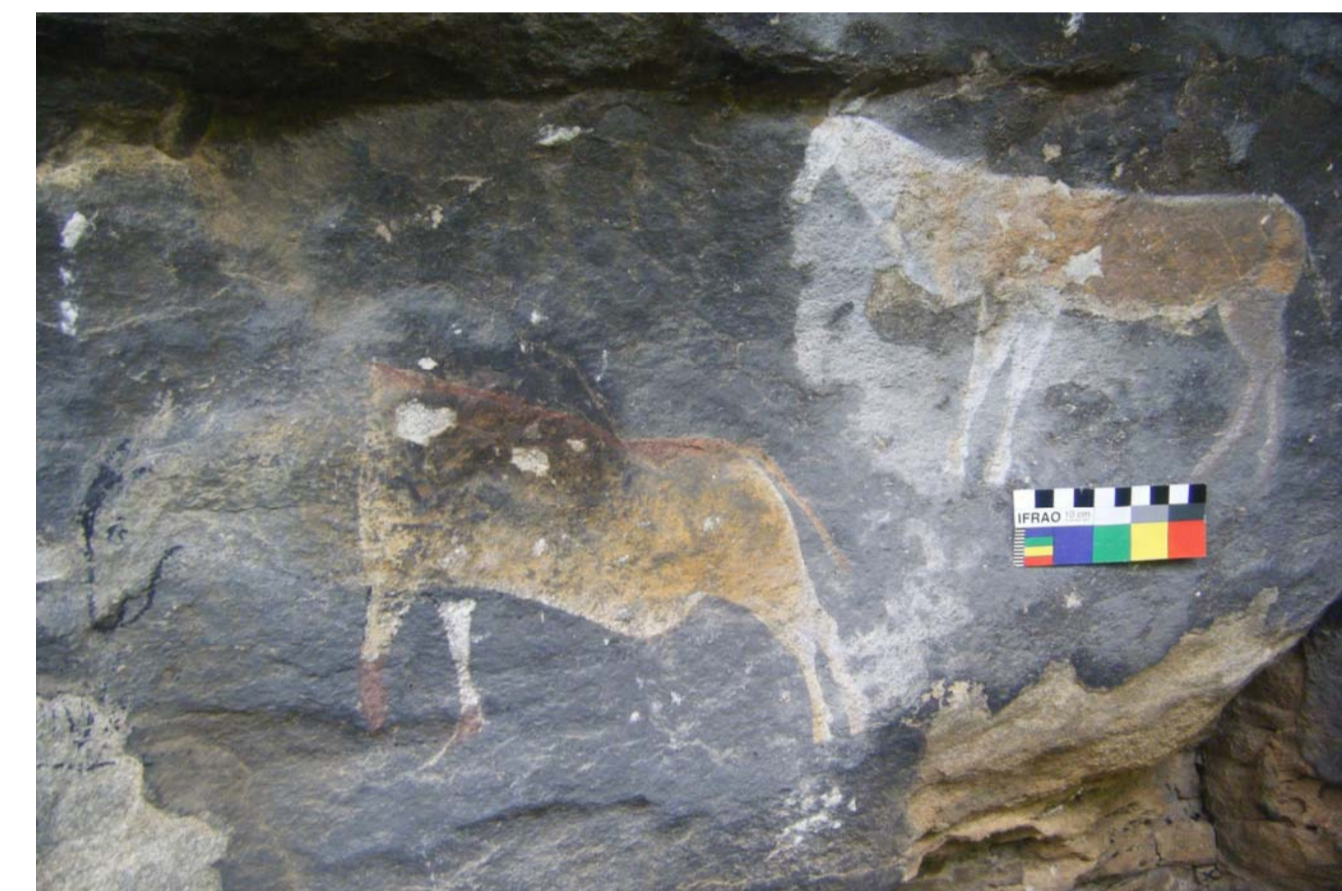
Maqonqo Shelter, one of only two densely painted rock art sites in Zululand. Paintings from the shelter, which has also been excavated, have been dated to about 3640 BP (Before Present). The shelter has yielded a number of animal bones, some of which are painted on the rock face, i.e. eland

FINDINGS

- Generally, there are a number of smaller shelters that could have been painted, but are found to have no art. In some other shelters, there is only a selected number of paintings made.
- Eland, an animal considered spiritually significant amongst the Bushmen, are by far the dominant species within the rock art imagery of Zululand. Amongst the indeterminate antelope, there could be more eland.
- As is elsewhere in Southern Africa, red is the most utilised colour.
- Particularly in comparison to the uKhahlamba Drakensberg rock art, there are only 3 polychromes (more than two colours) & 13 bichromes (two colours).

FINDINGS

- Superimposition (painting over an earlier existing painting), which is a great feature of rock art in the UDP, and elsewhere within Southern Africa, is found in only two rock art sites.
- While the ratio between human figures and animals follows the same trend clearly evident in other painted areas, there are less human figures that with trance related elements, i.e. bending forward, having arms back posture, bleeding from nose.
- There are few trance related scenes, i.e. human figures dancing.
- In terms of the context (relationship of paintings to one another), there is no context that is repeated enough times to note a particular social rule that may have applied to the tradition of making rock art.



Two painted eland from the Pomeroy district. The one eland to the left has an outline of the head done in black, which is as a result of graffiti. It is shaded (no distinction between the colours), which is a unique element in the rock art of the area.

Painted imagery	Quantity	Animal species	Quantity
Animals	118	Eland	30
Human figures	321	Antelope	19
Indeterminate animals	36	Elephants	4
Indeterminate forms	7	Kudu	1
TOTAL	392	Indeterminate animals	36



A faded panel in Rockesdrift. In it are a number of human figures. Some of the human figures are holding hunting equipment, while another is holding what may possibly be a shield.

FINDINGS

- None of the animals identified from the Zululand rock art seem to have the physical postures normally ascribed to indicate religious significance of those particular animals, i.e. stumbling legs (dying animal), bleeding from nose, etc.
- Similar to the physical posture, the action in which the animals are painted indicates no direct religious element.
- Most animals are painted standing, and very few lying down.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Is the rock art of Zululand, by having few trance related symbols, less religious than the one found from other parts of Southern Africa?
- How did the arrival of Iron Age farmers about 2000 years ago influence rock art?
- Why is it that there is a number of unpainted shelters, which had good painting surfaces, but were never chosen?
- Why is there less trance related religious symbols?



An Iron Age piece of pottery found near one of the painted rock art shelters. There is a lot of evidence of the presence of Bantu speaking people in the area, which could potentially explain why this area does not have as much rock art as in other regions.

CONCLUSIONS

- The Pan-San cosmology is brought into question with the absence of trance features in the Zululand rock art.
- It is possible that the influx of Bantu speaking people into Zululand about 2000 years ago could have had an influence in the distribution and the content of rock art in the study area.

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