

**Driekopseiland  
and  
‘the rain’s magic power’:**

**history and landscape  
in a new interpretation of a Northern Cape  
rock engraving site**

by

David Roger Neacalbánn McIntyre Morris

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Supervisor: Professor A.J.B. Humphreys  
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declare that

“Driekopseiland and ‘the rain’s magic power’: history and landscape  
in a new interpretation of a Northern Cape rock engraving site”

is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated  
and acknowledged by means of complete references.

## Abstract

The rock engraving site of Driekopseiland, west of Kimberley in the Northern Cape, is distinctively situated on glaciated basement rock in the bed of the Riet River, and has a wealth of over 3500 engravings, preponderantly geometric images. Most other sites in the region have greater proportions of, or are dominated by, animal imagery. In early interpretations, it was often considered that ethnicity was the principal factor in this variability. From the 1960s the focus shifted more to establishing a quantitative definition of the site, and an empirical understanding of it within the emerging cultural and environmental history of the region. Concern about the theoretical positioning of research has since come increasingly to the fore.

Results of this more recent work shows that the evidence of social groupings here in precolonial times is not easily resolved in simple ethnic or techno-economic terms. It is suggestive more of a complex 'mosaic' of cultural responses to changing social and environmental circumstances. Significant cross-cultural continuity in key beliefs and rituals of more recent times within Khoisan society, and even beyond, can be demonstrated, so that indeed, in some senses, the 'traditional' ethnic debate over Driekopseiland is of questionable relevance.

The placement of sites in the landscape, it is argued, is a fundamental feature that has been generally overlooked in the interpretation of Driekopseiland. Drawing on the concepts of 'topophilia' (Deacon 1988), of dynamic landscape temporalities (Ingold 1993), and the construal of places and rock faces as meaningful supports mediating spiritual realms in Khoisan beliefs (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990), it is suggested the placement of the engravings on expanses of rock that are submerged when the river rises may be a key to their interpretation. In this light, the variability between engraving sites in the region could be a reflection more of different metaphoric understandings of place and of landscape, than of the discrete cultural, ethnic or techno-economic contexts that much previous writing on Driekopseiland implied. Furthermore, a dynamic interplay between history, rock art and the local environment can be shown to account for the differences between apparently older and younger spreads of engravings at Driekopseiland itself (the older art here being distinguished by a greater proportion of figurative imagery).

Following a critique of past approaches, a theoretical framework is developed that considers the art as part of cultural practices (specifically the female puberty rites) in particular places, that would have been negotiated by people who thereby invoked meanings which, while 'full of the past', were not a fulfilment merely of 'ulterior structure'. These processes constituted a making and re-making of individual and collective histories. Important strands which both reinforce and constrain the argument are derived from a range of rich nineteenth and twentieth century Khoisan ethnographies. The interpretation is a challenge to the ways that variability in rock art, and in other archaeological traces, in the wider region are approached, and expectations arising from this study may be tested in future work.

IN MEMORIAM

Dr Gerhard Fock  
1907-1990  
and  
Mrs Dora Fock  
1912-2002

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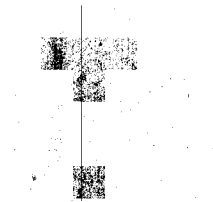
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Lastly I pay tribute to, amongst others, ||Kabbo, |Hanǀkass'o, Dia!kwain (whose mother ǀKammi-an's reference to "the rain's magic power" provides part of the title used for this study), !Kweiten-ta-||ken, and Ou-oupa Moos, along with the likes of Wilhelm Bleek, Lucy Lloyd and Barend van Vreeden, who, together with many anthropologists of more recent years, helped to transmit the indigenous perspectives, which serve as much to enrich as to challenge our ways of imagining the past. What follows is an empirical encounter with rock engravings, archaeological traces, the evidence of palaeoenvironments, landscapes, and beliefs, with debates past and present; and a consideration of the ways these might be woven together in a new interpretation of Driekopseiland.

## Introduction

### Background

Driekopseiland is one of South Africa's most extraordinary and renowned rock engraving sites (Stow 1905; Wilman 1933; Battiss 1948; Van Riet Lowe 1952; Slack 1962; Butzer et al. 1979; Fock & Fock 1989; Morris 1990a; Lewis-Williams & Blundell 1998). Well known as it is, it has puzzled researchers for more than a century. The site consists of over 3500 engraved images, on exposed glaciated andesite basement rock in the bed of the Riet River, which is submerged when the river rises. More than 90% of the engravings are 'geometric' motifs. Such images are present, and often common, at a significant number of engraving sites in the region (Fock 1969; Fock & Fock 1989), but nowhere in the area do they occur in such numbers and density relative to figurative engravings, nor in quite so singular a locality (Fig. 1, Plate 1).

There has been no dearth of interpretive possibilities put forward for the site, including those entertaining ancient exotic involvement. Van Riet Lowe (1952) hypothesised that some of the engravings, evincing a 'feeling for writing', were more than mere pictographs, and Willcox (1964) wondered about resemblances to child art; but most early accounts were concerned with the issue of authorship. At base, many writers displayed a preoccupation with ethnicity and the reified art-making capacities and aesthetic sensibilities of respective cultural groups - 'Bushmen', 'Korana',<sup>1</sup> and sundry interbred combinations (not to mention foreigners). These approaches were very much in the "traditional" mode of archaeological explanation as characterised by Renfrew and Bahn (1991:407). A yardstick implicit in much of the debate was articulated most explicitly by Cooke (1969) in what he termed the "true art of the Stone Age Bush people." Against this measure, Driekopseiland was, for him at least, no match. There is as yet no agreement on the identity/ies of those



Plate View of Driekopseiland from the south east

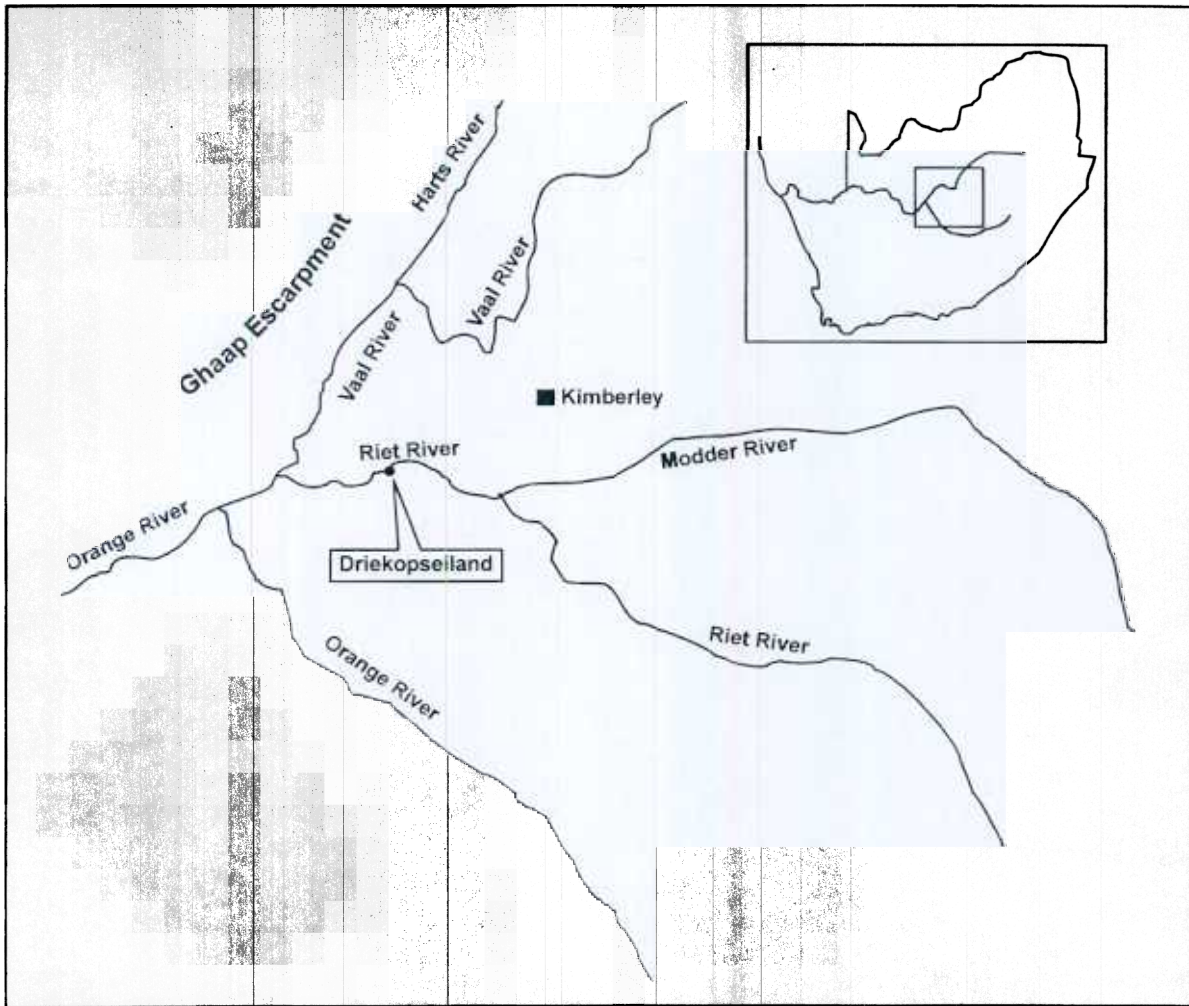


Figure 1. Driekopseliland and its regional context.

responsible for the engravings at Driekopseiland

Research from the 1960s was increasingly concerned with a quantitative definition of the site, and to appreciate it within the emerging cultural and environmental history of the region (Butzer *et al.* 1979; Fock *et al.* 1980; Fock & Fock 1989). The engravings at the site do appear to span, in part, the last two thousand years, a period of widespread change, when new trajectories become apparent in the rock art traditions of other parts of southern Africa (Parkington 1996; Dowson 1998; Jolly 1998; Denbow 1984:183). In this context it is relevant to enquire in what ways existing art traditions might have been influenced by the appearance of new life-styles and social groupings. It is even possible that an immigrant group might have produced a subset of the art - perhaps a tradition quite distinct from that generally referred to as 'San art' (Smith & Ouzman *in press*). But the nature of interactions between groups, and the archaeological signatures of this across the landscape (e.g. Humphreys 1988), suggest that some past questions and characterizations in this respect were simplistic. Interaction between different subsistence modes and cultural groupings in the last 2000 years have resulted in a complex 'mosaic' of responses in the region that are not easily resolved in ethnic or techno-economic terms.

### **A new interpretation**

Against this background, significant cross-cultural continuity in key beliefs and rituals within Khoisan society, and even beyond, can be demonstrated (e.g. Wilmsen 1986; Barnard 1992; Guenther 1999), rendering, in some senses, the ethnic debate at Driekopseiland irrelevant. Ethnography on these rites and beliefs, spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, suggests ways for building on earlier tentative speculations regarding the significance of 'place' at Driekopseiland (Morris 1988; 1990a; cf. Parkington 1980) and of 'topophilia' (after Deacon 1988), as the basis for a new interpretation of the engravings here (first proposed in a shorter paper, Morris 2001, *in press*). It is argued that concepts developed by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1990; Lewis-Williams 1996), on the construal of places and rock faces as

meaningful supports, and insights from Deacon's (1986; 1988; 1997) work in the Upper Karoo, are germane to a consideration of metaphoric perceptions of landscape features at Driekopseiland and other rock engraving sites in the Northern Cape (cf. Ouzman 1996; 1998). Temporal variability in the rock art suggests that engraving practices, and, perhaps, their local social contexts, were by no means static; that different expressions possibly of similar beliefs may account for the engravings at Driekopseiland of different character and seemingly earlier period. The approach has the potential to explain aspects of variability between engraving sites of the wider region without having to invoke different ethnic authorships - while not ruling out the possibility of processes of interaction and a dynamic flow of ideas involving different communities in the landscape.

### **The hypothesis**

The hypothesis being proposed is that the unique combination of geographical features at Driekopseiland, and the way it is marked with rock-art, is a key to its interpretation; and that the variability between engraving sites in the region is a reflection more of different metaphoric understandings of place and of landscape, than of the discrete cultural, ethnic or techno-economic contexts that much previous writing on Driekopseiland implied

The concepts of "topophilia" (Deacon 1988), of dynamic landscape temporalities (Ingold 1993), and the construal of places and rock faces as meaningful supports mediating spiritual realms in Khoisan beliefs (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990), are to be drawn upon in the development of the model. It is the intention to assess this new interpretation of Driekopseiland against archaeological and rock art records from the region, and a wide range of relevant nineteenth and twentieth century ethnography and contemporary remnants of indigenous knowledge.

### **Some thoughts on theory**

Anticipating some of the discussion in Chapters 3 and 4, one of the primary



concerns of this thesis is that bounded, primordialist “ethnic groups” and Durkheimian conceptions of “culture” have not served as appropriate units of study in rock art research in South Africa, and with reference to Driekopseiland in particular. This is not a new observation: Inskip (1971) implied it clearly enough three decades ago in his paper on “The future of rock art studies in Southern Africa” when he referred to the hazards of an “either or” approach to the authorship issue: “it tends to condition the mind to a narrow field of possibilities, whereas the truth may be very complex” (1971:101)

It will be noted that from the beginnings of South African historiography (Ross 1993) race, ethnicity and culture have been mustered persistently in the representation and explanation of the past; even where the evidence was pointing loudly and clearly to other possibilities (as shown for instance in an archaeological context by Parkington 1984a:96). Accounting for this, in large measure, has been the elaboration, in the colonial era and beyond, of a “literary lattice” (Humphreys 1998: cf. Pluciennik 2001), in terms of which people and phenomena have been typed and ordered in space and in time. Of concern is perhaps not so much *that* this happens (though, more on this presently), as the *way* in which it happens, in historically contingent fashion (Boonzaier & Sharp 1988; cf. Hall 1999; Ellis 1999), and where some of the foundational but imperfect concepts in twentieth century anthropology arguably played into the hands of ascendant political philosophies of the day. That some such thinking may continue, in new guise, is cause for concern (Ellis 1999:89; Rassool 2000:20; cf. Wright 1998) - notwithstanding recognition of the “emancipatory potential of cultural identities and struggles” (Robins 1996:342; 2000) and of “strategic essentialism” (Robins 2001). Wright points out that “old” conceptions of culture no longer considered tenable in anthropology have “percolated out from academic discourse” and are in “widespread use in public parlance” (1998:8). Ironically, the ways in which colonial stereotypes of primordial ‘Bushmen’ (also ‘Korana’, ‘Griqua’, etc) have been articulated, indeed, ‘from below’ in struggles over ‘authenticity’ and access to limited resources in the 1990s (Waldman 1996; 2001; Robins 2001 cf. Engelbrecht nd; 2002) are, in no small measure, consequent upon the very fixing of these identities in the colonial era

One does not deny that people in groups do actively mobilise and shape (and one must add reshape) their cultural repertoires and identities relative to others (e.g. see Cronk & Dickson 2001 for a recent take on active identity construction amongst hunter-gatherers usually characterised as being passively marginalised at the edges of pastoralist society in East Africa. A further instance of contacts with neighbours being “managed and negotiated shrewdly”, to their own advantage, by hunter-gatherers is cited by Guenther 1999:134-5; cf. Wolf 2001 cited in Koerner 2001:66). Rather, approaches to identity construction need to recognise these processes as being, by their nature, dynamic, negotiated, and contested (e.g. Wright 1998; Waldman 2001), and not likely to conform to essentialising tropes that present distinct ethnicities or cultures in terms of self-contained, self-regulating, bundled and/or unchanging entities (e.g. Gatewood 2000; cf. Wilson & Thompson 1969:vii-viii)

Much of the documentation classed as ethnography that is of relevance to this study was drawn through that mesh which recognised distinct ethnic groups across the landscape (Humphreys 1998; cf. Sharp 1980; 1981). This clearly raises difficulties where recourse is to be had to it for ideas and models to interpret patterns observed in the historical or archaeological record. It is an “awkward reliance”, as Hall 1999:60) has put it in the South African context, on an “inappropriate” body of observations which had isolated people(s) in an artificial ‘ethnographic present’. But also, beyond questions about the nature and integrity of the records themselves - further highlighted by the Kalahari revisionist debate of the last two decades (e.g. Shott 1992; Kent 1992) - the archaeological use of these data boils down to the classic problem of proceeding by ethnographic analogy (Stiles 1977; Wobst 1978; Wylie 1989; Sadr 2002).

A comparative ethnographic method of assembling contemporary observations to interpret ancient remains came into its own in the late nineteenth century when it was widely held that existing primitive societies represented examples, as living fossils in an evolutionary sense, of past stages of human life and culture. The most influential example of the genre was Sollas's *Ancient hunters: and their modern*

*representatives*, published in 1911. By emulating this approach, Meltzer (1983, cited in Schrire 1984) suggests, one branch of American archaeology virtually “forfeited its claim to time” in its compression of the past into “a mirror image of the ethnographic present.” In South African rock art studies, up to the 1990s, Willcox persistently linked “Palaeolithic man” in this way with “his modern representative the Bushman” (cited by Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994:205; cf Bleek 1869:284, cited by Schoeman 1997:30-31; Theal 1919:9-10).

Such rampant extrapolation as Sollas promoted provoked a reaction. Boas and others in North America and Australia pioneered a more considered and particularistic “historical method” of analogy, for working backwards from the ‘ethnographic present’ in a given region. This “direct historical approach” was consolidated by Steward in the 1940s, and while Hawkes and others in the 1950s nagged over the logical connections being alleged between present-day behaviours and those of the ancient past, there was substantial acceptance in archaeology for “judicious” use of ethnographic analogy (Stiles 1977). Much, though, of the existing ethnography was - as Stiles suggests - “inadequate for use in archaeology”; a realisation that stimulated a range of new archaeologically orientated ethnographic - or ethnoarchaeological - projects, for building up what Binford advocated under the term Middle Range Theory. Not the least of these was the Harvard Kalahari Expedition, with various related studies, from the 1960s, which sought explicitly to identify and research isolated foragers, *inter alia* as exemplars of the “way of life that was, until 10 000 years ago, a human universal” (Lee 1979; Howell 1988 cited by Schrire 1990 and Wilmsen 1990; Kent 1992). This was the kind of research focus and objective that would be strongly criticised by the Kalahari revisionists (Schrire 1984; Shott 1992; cf. Kent 1992 for an even-handed review), who raised questions about the history and the regional and wider contexts of the people being studied and about the positioning of the research itself.

Yet, for all these difficulties, the nineteenth and twentieth century histories and ethnographies to hand in this project do represent a voluminous body of information which, with due circumspection, has been drawn upon in ways that have greatly

enhanced interpretations of the archaeological record and rock art in Southern Africa. Indeed, one of the great opportunities in rock art research here has been heralded as precisely that there *is* such a wealth of ethnographic sources that potentially give insight to an emic view of the art. Testimony to this potential - its realisation by no means a trivial matter - is the broad advancement in understanding rock art, since the 1960s, with two major books, *People of the eland* (Vinnicombe 1976) and *Believing and seeing* (Lewis-Williams 1981), in particular, marking the breakthrough.<sup>2</sup> This was not by “any game of ethnographic ‘snap’” (cf. Inskeep 1971), but by the careful<sup>3</sup> citing of these sources where wide correspondences in specific areas of belief were found to exist, and in light of critical theoretical modelling (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994). In the early 1970s Lewis-Williams recognised that “the only possibility of classifying the themes which most deeply moved the mind of the prehistoric Bushmen lies in the, albeit fragmentary mythology” (1972:64). Of concern to researchers was how much of the Southern African forager ethnography - variable regionally and temporally, and across language boundaries - could be accepted within the canon of usable material in this endeavour (Lewis-Williams & Bieseke 1978; Lewis-Williams 1980; 1981; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994). What was remarkable indeed was the way these distinct ethnographies appeared to complement one another, with striking “structural equivalences” (Lewis-Williams & Bieseke 1978) leading to acceptance - “with confidence” (Lewis-Williams 1984a:229) - of McCall’s 1970 suggestion of a “pan-San” cognitive system (cf. Lewis-Williams & Bieseke 1978:130; but see Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994; Lewis-Williams 1998). In terms of content the myths and narratives differed, yet obscure aspects of the nineteenth century collections from the Karoo and southeastern mountains, it was found, could be clarified by reference to the Kalahari material.

The crucial link, in turn, between the ethnography and the art - for long considered out of reach - was the recognition of key metaphors in the comments of Qing and Dialkwain upon J.M. Orpen’s copies of rock paintings shown to them in the 1870s. In the art - research had indicated - eland had been given strong numerical emphasis in many regions, while, symbolically, it featured in widely practised rites as described

in the ethnography: boys' first-kill, girls' puberty, marriage, and in rain-making.<sup>4</sup> At this stage it was clear to Lewis-Williams (1980:479) that the ethnography could be used, in direct historical fashion, "to provide a cognitive dimension to the final stages of the southern African Later Stone Age in a way hitherto thought impossible." In applying the analogy, however, the direct historical method necessarily graded into a general comparative approach as, "over millennia, the postulated relation [between ethnography and art] grows more tenuous" (Lewis-Williams 1984a:229). For interpretation further back in time (or where much of the art was of uncertain age), this obstacle came to be seen as in fact more apparent than real - as Lewis-Williams was to argue - in a development of the model beyond that originally set out in *Believing and seeing*. The key was to articulate a structuralist understanding of a pan-San cognitive system by recourse to appropriate social theory - notably that derived from Friedman and Godelier - where San kinship and rituals could be implicated in social relations (Lewis-Williams 1982; 1984a). It followed that this structural understanding - and a linked model for symbols and metaphors - would have direct relevance in the past where continuity in relations of production could be demonstrated. For as long as relations of production remained unchanged - as was claimed was the case in the South African Later Stone Age - there was "no reason to suppose changes in ideology" (Lewis-Williams 1984a:234). By this formula - extended to some two and a half millennia BP - it was suggested that key metaphors and diagnostic details in the art would usually be found to recur, as principles indicative of conceptual unity, cross-cutting, and lying beneath, the variable content and differing regional emphases, for instance, in the ranges of animals depicted (ibid.:229). The suggested ideological continuity was found to span and be "compatible with diverse environments" (ibid.:233).

Models of a structuralist nature have been applied in other fields of archaeological enquiry in Southern Africa, most notably in relation to the Central Cattle Pattern in Iron Age studies (e.g. Huffman 2001). The major criticism of these approaches has been of their tendency towards ahistorical interpretations (e.g. Mazel 1989; Murray 1989; Hall 1985; 1987; 1997; 2000; Solomon 1999:52); a charge which Huffman dismisses in terms that are germane to this discussion. Huffman characterises the

Central Cattle Pattern as a generalised, normative model derived from the ethnography and applied by the direct historical approach. It is an overview, he stresses, that does not obviate lower scale, more particularistic historical analyses, and in this sense does not preclude the detection and analysis of change at a different scale: "as a normative standard," he suggests, "[the model] helps us to recognise, not miss, unusual cases that require further investigation" (2001:31). Huffman also makes the point, with reference to what he suggests is a mis-reading of evidence in a recent study in Botswana, that "we need models to understand the past because it is simply not possible to induce answers from data" (2001:32). So also in rock art studies, this was a position strongly argued by Lewis-Williams (1983, 1984b) in his critique of the "empiricist impasse" - of that expectation that if only enough data were accumulated a true understanding would somehow emerge.

Mazel's (1989) assessment of Lewis-Williams's approach acknowledges his "very significant contribution to the understanding of hunter-gatherer paintings" - but it does raise concerns over his uncritical adoption of the structural-marxist theory of Godelier and Friedman. Their perspective is noted for its tendency to periodise history in terms of static 'characterisations' that do not account for the way such entities came into existence or underwent change. Mazel further calls into question Lewis-Williams's tacit acceptance of the view that changes in the archaeological record of the last 26 000 years in Southern Africa are caused by environmental change - and not by shifts in social relations or ideology - even where it had previously been postulated that diverse forms of social organisation may have pertained at different periods (e.g. H.J. Deacon 1972; 1976, cited in Mazel 1989:33-34). Following Godelier, Lewis-Williams had reduced social relations to kinship structure - in which there appeared to be continuity spanning the Later Stone Age; for Mazel it seemed possible that other features of the social relations of production in the Later Stone Age hunter-gatherer past might have altered, causing ideological shifts. In processes of intensification, for example, kinship relations could have been re-rationalised relative to changed social and economic circumstances, so that although "there might have been continuity in the manner in which kinship informed social relations of production. it does not automatically follow that the social

relations of production, kinship or ideology remained fixed, unchanging entities” (Mazel 1989:35). Mazel suggested that “while not wanting to create the impression of a static hunter-gatherer past, Lewis-Williams has done just that” (ibid.:35).

In structuralist analyses, moreover, there is a danger that the cognitive templates, worldviews or mindsets that inform the structures may - and often do - result in kinds of culture-boundedness that verge on reifications not unlike those in Durkheimian, functionalist conceptions (Bloch 1977; cf. Guenther’s 1999:140 remarks concerning Godelier’s notion of ‘symbolic labour’, fulfilling merely instrumental and adaptive functions, as part of a system rendering production more efficient). Just as for Huffman cultural signature, language and worldview form a package (2001:21,30), so for Lewis-Williams there was - at least initially - an acceptance of that construct termed the “pan-San cognitive system” (see above). Significantly, Lewis-Williams and Dowson have since retreated from defending the phrase, questioning the usefulness of considering, as a ‘system’, the “commonalities” in beliefs and rituals in the ethnography, and doubting indeed the legitimacy of the term ‘pan-San’ (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994:207; cf. Lewis-Williams 1998). They observe that the citing of common beliefs “obscured regional and temporal complexity” and that it “tended to separate Bushmen too rigidly from their Bantu-speaking and Khoekhoe neighbours” (ibid.:207). Lewis-Williams rephrases these qualifiers in a more recent paper, arguing that “some beliefs are pan-southern African in that they are held by people other than the San”, while the word ‘system’ “implies too great a coherence, a fixed ‘package deal’”. The fit between the ethnographies themselves, and between the ethnographies and the art, remains demonstrable; but the question of “how far, geographically and temporally, this fit extends is another matter” (1998:86-87).

This conceptual progression is just one of the important elaborations in the shamanistic model beyond Lewis-Williams’s original formulation in *Believing and seeing* (1981). If there was a certain structuralist rigour in some of its early development, this has been ameliorated by shifts in theoretical positioning and in consequent qualifiers<sup>5</sup> - as noted - that are “essential,” as Lewis-Williams (1998:87) comments, “if we are to avoid being driven into an unnuanced monolithism that

conceals the allusiveness (and elusiveness) of San thought.” The model has been augmented in three major areas (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994). Firstly, there has been a re-characterisation of the polysemy initially posited for the eland as symbol, now seen as an accented or focused polysemy, underpinning an understanding of San rock art as *essentially* shamanistic (Lewis-Williams 1998 - the emphasis is his).<sup>6</sup> In a second significant area linked to the first, neuropsychological aspects (Thackeray *et al.* 1981; Maggs & Sealy 1983; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1988; 1990 1994) have been investigated with one major result being the argument that the paintings and engravings are not mere depictions, but “things in themselves”. Thirdly, the social context of the art has been addressed, deriving an explanatory device at first from the structural-marxist approaches of Friedman and Godelier since acknowledged as marginalising for the individual social actor - and, in its developed form, incorporating elements of structuration theory (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994; Dowson 1994; Lewis-Williams 1995; cf. Lewis-Williams 1999:142)

The confusion by structural-marxists of the notion of structure with *structuralism* is one of the central points of criticism by E.P. Thompson (1963; 1978:147-153), who shows (as does Bloch 1977) that the resultant reification of structure in fact mirrors functionalist conceptions, whereby men and women end up “not thinking or acting, but being *thought* and being *performed*” (1978:148 - Thompson’s emphasis). In one of his more temperate analogies in a somewhat passionate polemic, Thompson draws on the difference between ‘playing a game’ and being ‘gamed’, to illustrate the “difference between rule-governed structuration of historical eventuation (within which men and women remain as subjects of their own history) and structuralism. in which individuals “are *structured* by social relations, *spoken* by pre-given linguistic structures, *thought* by ideologies, *dreamed* by myths, *gendered* by patriarchal sexual norms, *bonded* by affective obligations, *cultured* by *mentalités*, and *acted* by history’s script” (1978:153 - his emphases). Operative here is an “ulterior structure of which men are not the makers but the vectors” (*ibid.*:46); and disallowed by such a system of closure, argues Thompson, is a necessary historical and empirical engagement with human experience and consciousness. For Thompson, a structure (such as class - and the same might apply to culture, ethnic group or any other



objectified group - cf. Sharp 1988) is not a *thing*, but "something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships" (1963:8): "...If we stop history at a given point, then there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences. But if we watch these men over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions. Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition" (1963:10). The existence of groups cannot be asserted *a priori*, Sharp suggests in the South African context: the extent to which they may have collective values and obligations is "a question for historical enquiry" (1988:16).

Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration, which has informed much recent writing in archaeology (e.g. Hall 1985; 1987; M. Hall 2000; and in the elaboration of the shamanistic model for rock art, already alluded to: Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994; Dowson 1994; Lewis-Williams 1995), expresses in sociological terms ideas not dissimilar from those advocated in Thompson's critique.<sup>7</sup> Giddens emphasises that "all human action is carried on by knowledgeable agents who both construct the social world through their action, but yet whose action is also conditioned or constrained by the very world of their creation" (1981:54, cited by Hall 1985:13). This formulation echoes that dictum from the opening of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* - that people make their own history, but not just as they please - which, as Bundy has remarked, has been cited so often as to be almost a cliché - and yet "it serves still as a precise, pithy and daunting shorthand of what historians must contend with" (Bundy 1994). Giddens indeed characterises his book, *The constitution of society*, as "an extended reflection upon [this] celebrated and oft-quoted phrase" (1984:xxi). In his theory of structuration Giddens contends that there is a duality of structure - as both medium and outcome; production and reproduction - which requires that the sociologist, anthropologist or historian holds simultaneously, in the same analytical frame, both the micro-level of individual agency, and the macro-level of constraining rules, social forces and structures. (See also Comaroff 1982:172; M. Hall 2000:52). By their everyday actions people recursively reproduce the rules and expectations (normative principles following from the habitual 'routinisation' of daily life, as well as

symbolic orders referred to as 'signification') that constitute the social forces and structures. It follows that the reproduction of society "is at every moment a contingent phenomenon which requires explanation" (1981:64, cited by Hall 1985:12). Giddens further posits that "in constructing and reconstructing the social world, human beings at the same time are involved in an active interplay with nature in which they both modify nature and themselves" (1981:54, cited by Hall 1985:13).

Integral to social activities or practices are their intersection with - or their "biting into", or becoming "'stretched' across", as Giddens (1984:xxi) has it - space and time; not as detached dimensions but in the form of a key concept of 'time-space'. Time-space 'positions' individuals (and this can happen in a 'multiple' way) relative to 'locales' - settings of interaction more than just places - and to the flow of day-to-day living, to their own life-spans, and to the duration of the 'institutional time' of social structures. Also germane, as will be seen, to questions of time-space, is yet another of the primary concepts "clustered around the relations of action and structure": that of power. To act, Giddens suggests, is to exercise power; and one consequence of this is that the resulting power relations are signified - made concrete - in the symbolic orders, which include material symbols (Hall 1987:3).

Hall has shown how archaeological analyses based on structural-marxist modes of production faced a profound methodological problem where identification of relations of production remained "disconcertingly elusive without recourse to the circularity of ethnographic analogy" (Hall 1987:2-3). Giddens's concept of 'signification' - the way that power relations are made concrete - appears to provide a way forward that finds substantial support in Hodder's study of the active symbolic role of material culture in forming and giving meaning to social behaviour. Hall cites Hodder on the particular relevance of material culture in the study of power relations since, "unlike much action and speech, it has duration. It lasts, and so in a very direct way it channels and organises perception and behaviour" (Hodder 1984 cited by Hall 1987:3). Through material culture in this temporal aspect, and in its spatial organisation, individuals become naturalised to meanings and power relations, and to their regeneration, in society.

Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1994; Dowson 1994) introduce these insights in relation to rock art of the 'contact' period, arguing at a general level that "rock paintings and engravings were...not just a 'backdrop' to social action, as the structural-marxist position suggested, but items of material culture that were actively implicated in the reproduction and transformation of social relations" (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994:219). As an instance of this, the prominence given to apparently "pre-eminent shaman" figures in paintings in one region of the Cape Drakensberg has been interpreted as showing that "painters were not ineluctably governed by conventions and structures"; rather it seemed that 'structure', as rules and resources (Giddens 1984) - such as design elements: size, colour, detail - could be drawn upon by individual artists to be manipulated for social or political purposes (Dowson 1994:339-340). The particular historical context of the region, resonating new understandings from the Kalahari, is seen as one of interaction between foragers and farmers where there was "a subtle dialectic between chiefly and ritual power" within transforming San communities; who were, in turn, but a component of a broader, more complex social collectivity where "the foragers and the farmers were not separate entities trading across a defined frontier" but instead formed "variously changing" elements of a much larger social fabric that eventually also included expanding Western capitalism (ibid.:340-341).

Here was, in part, recognition that in the construction and application of ethnographic analogy one was ill-advised merely to conflate "ethnographies from different times and from different parts of the Kalahari" (Dowson 1994:335) - a point similar to that made earlier by Parkington (1984b:172) when advising that "what we must do is 'de-!Kung'...our efforts by using the historical accounts critically as a challenge, not a model, of the past." Sadr (2002:43) has cautioned that where analogies are allowed to "masquerade as description and explanation of the archaeological record, we will never find out more about the past than we already know about the present." Parkington (ibid.) had added that, "until we expect that things were different, we will always discover that they were the same."

Increasingly recognised, too, was that prior expectations based on certain static

analytical concepts - this time of essential difference - could also be challenged, as indeed they were in 'mode of production' analyses which ventured that the hypothesised 'primitive communist mode of production' may have spanned the "conventional divide" between Stone Age and Iron Age. In the arena of relations of production, it could be argued (Hall 1987:4-5) that "patterns of distribution and the consequent relations of obligation may have been structurally more similar than dissimilar, allowing in turn patterns of interaction across open frontiers rather than the rigid distinctions between technological ages, or indeed between discrete cognitive systems" as stressed in other interpretations.

A central point to be distilled from this review is that the question of the relationship - the necessary *engagement* - between abstractions, however these are derived, and the empirical 'stuff' of the past is a critical one. Thompson (1978:37-50) sums up historical practice as consisting in, "above all", a dialogue: "with an argument between received, inadequate, or ideologically-informed concepts or hypotheses on the one hand, and fresh and inconvenient evidence on the other; with the elaboration of new hypotheses; with the testing of these hypotheses against the evidence, which may involve interrogating existing evidence in new ways, or renewed research to confirm or disprove the new notions; with discarding those hypotheses which fail these tests, and refining or revising those which do, in the light of this engagement" (ibid.:43).

Against a relativist position, Thompson (ibid.:40-43) argues persuasively that there *is* a 'real' past out there that is the object of enquiry (historical *reality* does not change from epoch to epoch as some philosophers of history have claimed), but that our *interpretations*, and the *meanings* which we attribute to that reality, do change according to the shifting questions put to the evidence (or deriving from fresh levels of evidence) in each new age or in the approaches of each new practitioner (cf. Jenkins 1991).

Illustrative of this very point are the changing interpretations in rock art research, and in the Kalahari revisionist debate - out of which, in turn, have come other important

theoretical and methodological insights: those pertaining to appropriate units of study. Wobst (1978) alluded to this matter in his criticism of the 'parochial model of hunter-gatherers'. Ethnographic sources ought to have been "a veritable gold mine of information on regional and interregional process, among hunter-gatherers and between hunter-gatherers and other populations," he suggested; yet there was remarkable silence in the literature on such articulations "within larger social and spatial entities" (1978:303-304). In a prescient observation, he saw this "parochial model" as the "next candidate for revision" following the then recent critiques of approaches based on 'tribe' and the 'nation-state'. In Wobst's view it was in large measure ethnographic practice itself (including academic segmentation of subject matter relative to practical fieldwork constraints - cf. Pluciennik 2001) that was at fault. Where insights derived from informants could tend "to dichotomize the continuum of space into a bounded unit with predictable behavior on the inside and unpredictable behavior on the outside", the resultant spatial construct was all too often translated, "automatically" and uncritically, "into a bounded social unit ('society') circumscribing a finite set of individuals with shared behavior patterns ('culture')." Anything but useful for archaeology was what Wobst characterised as a consequent "tyranny of the ethnographic record" in which "spatial variability is reduced, pattern and homogeneity are artificially produced or exaggerated, and 'cultures' and 'societies' are created" (ibid.:306).

It follows that entities inherited in such manner (as they are through much Southern African ethnographic and historical writing) and linked implicitly or explicitly with given ranges of material culture (cf. Hammond-Tooke 2000 for a relevant critique), or styles of art - are likely to be problematic if mustered as the primary units of study in any interpretive endeavour as regards rock art (or any other archaeological phenomenon). Comaroff (1982:172) argues in terms consonant with those, for instance, of Giddens - and by way of a detailed case-study - that the appropriate units of analysis lie necessarily in "the internal dialectics of the local systems and, simultaneously, the dialectics of their articulation with their total contexts" (Comaroff 1982:172; cf. M. Hall 2000:52). "Local systems," he contends, "are so constructed that they have the capacity, in the course of the internal dialectic, to produce a wide

range of surface forms. Whichever of these is *realized* at any historical moment will mediate the effect of external forces upon it. This indicates why similar local systems, sharing the same total context," he adds with reference to his analysis of Barolong history, "may, in relation to the outside world, generate dramatically different structural, ideological and political responses. It also explains how endogenous social and cultural systems may influence the historical processes in which they are involved, and yet be transformed by them" (ibid.:171). In Barolong history, Comaroff shows, "the internal workings of the system were constantly affected by events and conditions outside it, and *vice versa*," such that "the very point of demarcation between the internal and external, and hence the boundaries of the local system have been shown to be the product of precisely this" (ibid.:171).

Relative to these observations, it is suggested that the appropriate units of analysis for this study, translated into archaeological terms, must be a combination of the spatial and the temporal, taking cognizance of different scales of space-time interaction across the landscape, linking, crucially, the local into the regional, and beyond

As to that necessary dialogue between concepts, ideas or hypotheses and the strands of empirical evidence gathered in the course of the study, Wylie's (1989) now oft-cited reference to Pierce's 'strong cable' metaphor articulates an appropriate operational approach that has been alluded to in numbers of projects (e.g. Dowson 1994; Ouzman & Wadley 1997:387; Chippindale & Taçon 1998:92-93; M. Hall 2000:10). Pierce was critical of that view of scientific reasoning that indicates a linear chain from premises to conclusions, or from individual facts to generalisations. Instead he conceived an approach emphasising multiple strands and different types of evidence, data, hunches and arguments that are routinely used to support scientific hypotheses. If any given strand is in itself weak and unequal to the task of upholding a proposed viewpoint, then, laid together, he suggested, as in a strong cable, many strands can provide a better warrant for holding to an argument (Bernstein 1983, cited by Koerner 2001:78-79). "Theoretical commitments," Wylie has since argued (1994, cited in Koerner 2001:77-8), "do not *monolithically* control

both the interpretation of archaeological data as evidence and the generation of reconstructive hypotheses which these data might be expected to test. In any given reconstructive-evaluative argument," she continues, "it will be necessary to exploit a range of different *independent* sources to accomplish these diverse tasks. It is the independence of sources, and therefore the constituent arguments about evidential significance, which ensures that the strands of the resulting cables are not just mutually reinforcing but are also, and crucially, mutually constraining" (cf. Trigger 1995).

At Driekopseiland - to restate the view to be set forth in this thesis - one strand of argument derives from the archaeological and environmental contexts of the site which earlier (Morris 1988) had seemed to suggest that significance of 'place' (Parkington 1980) and of 'topophilia' (Deacon 1988) possibly explained something of the singularity of the site in its local and regional setting. A second strand weaves in concepts developed by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1990; Lewis-Williams 1996), on the construal of places and rock faces as meaningful supports. The further work by Deacon (1986; 1988; 1997) on the infusion of meaning in landscape features provides support to the idea that locales such as Driekopseiland might have been considered as similarly 'powerful' places (cf. Ouzman 1996; 1998). That such meaning was understood not just horizontally across the landscape but also in the vertical dimension, for instance linking the rain and the waterhole, is consistent with a structuring principle that permeates much Khoisan ethnography (Lewis-Williams 1996). In a third strand, a range of such ethnography is drawn into analytical focus to suggest particular ritual and belief contexts within which Driekopseiland may have come to be imbued with singular significance and power. That it 'came to be' thus is a deliberate allusion to the evident temporal variability in the rock art, regionally, and even within the site of Driekopseiland, which may be read as suggesting that engraving practices, and, perhaps, their local social contexts, were by no means static through time.

Ingold's concept of the 'temporality of landscape', it will be argued, indicates ways in which these strands come together such that they appear mutually reinforcing - in

Wylie's sense - and, equally, mutually constraining.

### **A wider significance**

Citing Becker (1938:25) Trigger asserts that "by helping to expand our temporal and spatial frames of reference, archaeology has irreversibly altered 'the range and quality of human thought'" (Trigger 1989:410). In a South African context, President Mbeki has lent some recognition to this idea in successive speeches, at the annual Opening of Parliament, which make reference to archaeological findings in this country. The present project is a very modest contribution in this respect - yet it is hoped that, in its way, it may add to an expansion and deepening of historical frames of reference and perspectives on landscape in one region of the subcontinent.

It is extraordinary to note, as Humphreys (1999) does, that, after three decades, there remains a need to give substantive redress (at least insofar as "history" and related disciplines are organised and practised in Africa) to some of the "misleading assumptions" in South African historiography that Wilson and Thompson (1969) identified in the Preface to the *Oxford History*. These included the notion that our history was short, and that, if "men existed" in the "dark centuries" preceding the advent of the Portuguese, they fell more within the province of anthropology than of history (Wilson & Thompson 1969:vi-viii, and citing Trevor-Roper). That these subject fields were necessarily distinct was indeed another of the misleading assumptions (cf. Comaroff 1982:172; M. Hall 2000:16). Thurston Shaw responded to historians such as Shula Marks, who were dubious about archaeology's contribution to history, by suggesting that in fact "there is much more information about the African past waiting to be revealed by archaeological methods than historical"; and that "there ought to be more archaeologists in African universities than historians" (Thurston Shaw cited in Smith 1988:141). Nevertheless, the oppositional stance and priorities of revisionist historians since then, as Humphreys (1999) observes, have resulted in a focus essentially on the colonialism and exploitation of the last four centuries. Not without irony, Lewis-Williams (1993:50)



has pointed out that this actually “reproduces the colonial hegemony over the past”. His plea on behalf of an authentic African history is that the current emphasis on engaging oppression should not become “an obsession that blinds historians to the subcontinent’s extremely long and dynamic history” (1993:50). The consequence, for now, of this focus through “the wrong end of the telescope” (Van der Merwe 1976:14), is that students in South Africa are still being “singularly disadvantaged”, Humphreys warns, where frames of reference, both geographical and in terms of time-depth, remain limited: “a true historical renaissance - quite apart from the one anticipated by Thabo Mbeki - is long overdue” (1999:68)

The present project does not deliver a renaissance; but it does seek, most substantively, to enlarge some of the frames of meaning in terms of landscape and of history in one corner of the Northern Cape, South Africa. Where appropriate, it will seek to engage some of the still entrenched positions and disciplinary demarcations in South African historiography (Lewis-Williams 1993; Humphreys 1999; cf. Ingold 1992), and some of the other conceptual assumptions that continue to bedevil the writing of history in its broadest sense (Wilson and Thompson 1969; Comaroff & Comaroff 2001). Of no less importance, it is hoped that this project would provide the basis to make this history, and the debates surrounding it, more widely appreciated, and thereby also to help conserve the fragile traces from which we can hope to know it in years to come (cf. McManamon 2000; Appendix 1).

## Notes

1. I use 'Khoisan', the term coined by Schultze and popularized by Schapera (Barnard 1992), for the cluster of socio-cultural groupings historically referred to as 'Bushman' and 'Korana' (amongst others). The latter terms recur in the debate over authorship of the engravings at Driekopseiland where, generally, 'Bushman' is understood as hunter-gatherer, while 'Korana' is the name of one of the Khoekhoe-speaking herder groups in South Africa. 'San', for 'Bushman', is a pejorative description in the Nama (Khoekhoe) language that gained anthropological acceptance and currency in the twentieth century. Where appropriate specific group names such as !Xam, !Kung, Nama, and so on, are used and explained.
2. Other important publications include Maggs (1967), Vinnicombe (1972), Pager (1971), and work on the engravings by G.J. and D. Fock (Fock 1979; Fock & Fock 1979; 1984).

3. Lewis-Williams has observed that “it is not enough simply to state that San ethnography should be used with great caution, as some writers do (what could be more obvious?); it is necessary to explain exactly how one exercises ‘caution’ and to identify the specific areas of belief and ritual in which the ethnographies can be brought together” (1998:86).

4. While the quantitative data were suggestive, Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1994:209) make the point that “it is the ethnography, not the numerical data, that provides evidence for the importance and symbolic centrality of the eland in Bushman thought.”

5. Not absent, though, in the earlier formulations (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1981)

6. Respecting the term ‘shamanism’, Kehoe (2002:384-5) has noted how loosely the concept has been used. Its continued deployment potentially perpetuates “primitivism”, she charges, which dichotomises “Us, mired in civilization and its discontents, from Them, the simple, spiritually fulfilled, distant nomads” (cf. Pluciennik 2001). While one cannot imagine Lewis-Williams as a promoter of ‘primitivism’, it is well to be aware that the term ‘shamanism’ as often applied masks a greater diversity of religions than the term might appear to imply, including commonalities in beliefs and practices often bridging hunter-gatherers and their neighbours (cf. Lewis-Williams 1998:86-87).

7. Giddens challenges the disciplinary divisions between history, geography and the social sciences which “actively inhibit the tackling of questions of social theory” (1984:286) - just as Thompson appeals on behalf of a “total history” in which “all other human disciplines meet” (1978:70).

## II

### Driekopseiland and surrounds

*"The question of space is too important to be left exclusively to geographers.*  
- David Harvey, 1989, cited by Rodman 1992:643.

*"The landscape tells - or rather is - a story.*  
- Tim Ingold, 1993:152

Driekopseiland is strikingly different from other sites in the region in that it is situated on glaciated andesite pavement, between high silt banks, in the very bed of the Riet River. Its content, too, is singular - more than 3500 engravings, 90% of which are geometric designs. The environmental setting was first considered in some detail when Karl Butzer, with Gerhard and Dora Fock, investigated it in the hope of teasing out some broad chronology of palaeoenvironmental change, in order to suggest periods when it would have been possible to make the engravings (Butzer *et al.* 1979).

One consequence of the site's placement is that when the river rises, in the wet season, the engravings are submerged (see Coulson & Campbell 2001:121). But during years of drought, almost a defining feature of local geography, the site is left high and dry for most of the year, an impressive expanse of rock, stretching virtually from bank to bank, in two main exposures and extending, together, some 160 m along the riverbed. In the elaboration of a new interpretation it is to be argued that this unique setting, with the engravings seasonally exposed and submerged by that most potent of symbolic elements, water, had become a locus of particular cultural and social significance. The natural had become 'super-natural' (Tilley & Bennett 2001), in a process of incorporation rather than simply inscription (Ingold 1993:157); and in this sense the environmental features must be fundamental in any discussion of the meaning and significance of Driekopseiland

#### Landscape

This Chapter presents, then, more than mere scene-setting. The environmental

context is not simply an introductory backdrop, and the tendency to treat it as such in much archaeological writing has been criticised (e.g. Tilley & Bennett 2001). In South African Later Stone Age studies, in particular, Mazel (1989; cf. Lewis-Williams 1993) has found deficient the practice of situating explanations relative to a constraining environment at the expense of social factors. Questioning what he characterises as the “people-to-nature” framework of much research of the 1960s to 1980s, he advocates a shift from ecological terms of reference towards “people-to-people” perspectives for documenting and explaining the human past. Not that the environment would be cast out in such an approach; Mazel’s important point is that its role would be viewed differently, as just one of a number of variables influencing the course of human history (*ibid.* 25-26). Different questions would be asked of the environmental and palaeoenvironmental data. Arguably a number of important studies had been moving in that direction already, as Sampson (1988) and Wadley (1989) suggest.

In this project a focus on the temporality of the landscape (Ingold 1993) places the ‘environment’ in a primarily social register - with reference to Xam and other relevant ethnography - such that, indeed, the “dichotomy between nature and humanity” (*ibid.*) falls away. The conceptual distinction between nature and culture is part of what Ingold refers to as an “insistent dualism” in modernist epistemologies - which he rejects. He indeed seeks to move beyond the “sterile opposition” between the naturalistic view of landscape as “neutral, external backdrop to human activities and “the culturalistic view that every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space” (*ibid.*:152). Tilley and Bennett (2001:335) write in similarly radical vein that “in thinking about, describing, and interpreting cultural landscapes we need to spend as much time and effort considering ‘natural’ form as ‘cultural’ form...if we ignore the former, it is not possible to provide an adequate understanding of the latter.

For the present, a baseline description of the site and its surroundings is presented in which some sense of the temporality of landscape, as a dynamic totality, should begin to be apparent: this feature is pursued in ever greater depth in the Chapters

that follow.

## River

The principal environmental feature is of course the river itself. Two rivers, the Modder and the Riet, forming part of the Vaal River drainage basin, have their sources in the Southern Highveld, in the vicinity of the Free State towns of De Wetsdorp and Smithfield, about 250 km to the east (Fig. 2). Draining the semi-arid to sub-humid plains of the central and southern Free State, these rivers converge near the settlement of Modder River, 57 km upstream along the river from Driekopseiland. From that confluence the river flows westwards to the Vaal, 53 km downstream from Driekopseiland. This lower section of the river is today known as the Riet, but prior to 1860 it was called the Modder, which is a translation from an older !Kora name, †*Gama-lab*, rendered as “Gmaap”, “Maap” or “Gumaap” in the early literature (Burchell 1822-24:I:391; Stow 1905; Van Vreeden 1961)

## Geology

With time, the river has cut through, and laid bare, evidence of some of the geological history of the area (Helgren 1979) (Fig. 3). Incised down between surface soils and calcretes of Quaternary age, the Riet flows across near-horizontal Karoo sedimentary rocks, represented in the research area by the basal shales and tillites of the Karoo System. But, in places, the river has exhumed relics of pre-Karoo topographies, dropping, below the Modder-Riet confluence, through a re-excavated pre-Karoo gorge, and emerging downstream of Schutsekama. From there, glaciated basement rocks of the Precambrian Ventersdorp Supergroup remain close to the bed of the modern Riet channelway and outcrop repeatedly. The pre-eminent exposure is at Driekopseiland itself, where the scoured and striated andersitic lavas are laid bare in the bed of the river over an area of about a hectare

Beyond the river, the topography is characterised by broad low-angle plains. These

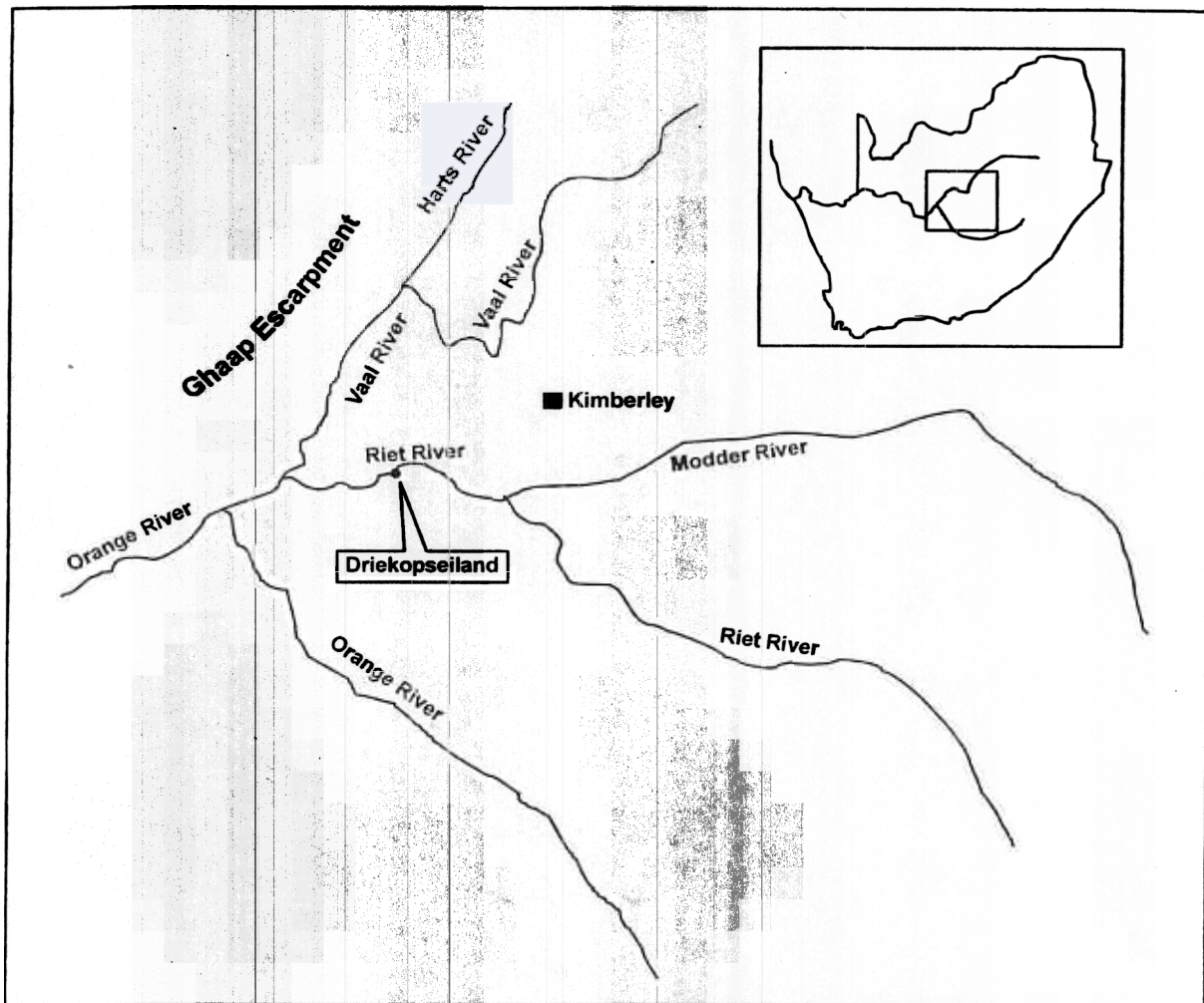


Figure 2. The Riet River and Driekopseiland relative to other rivers and features in the landscape.

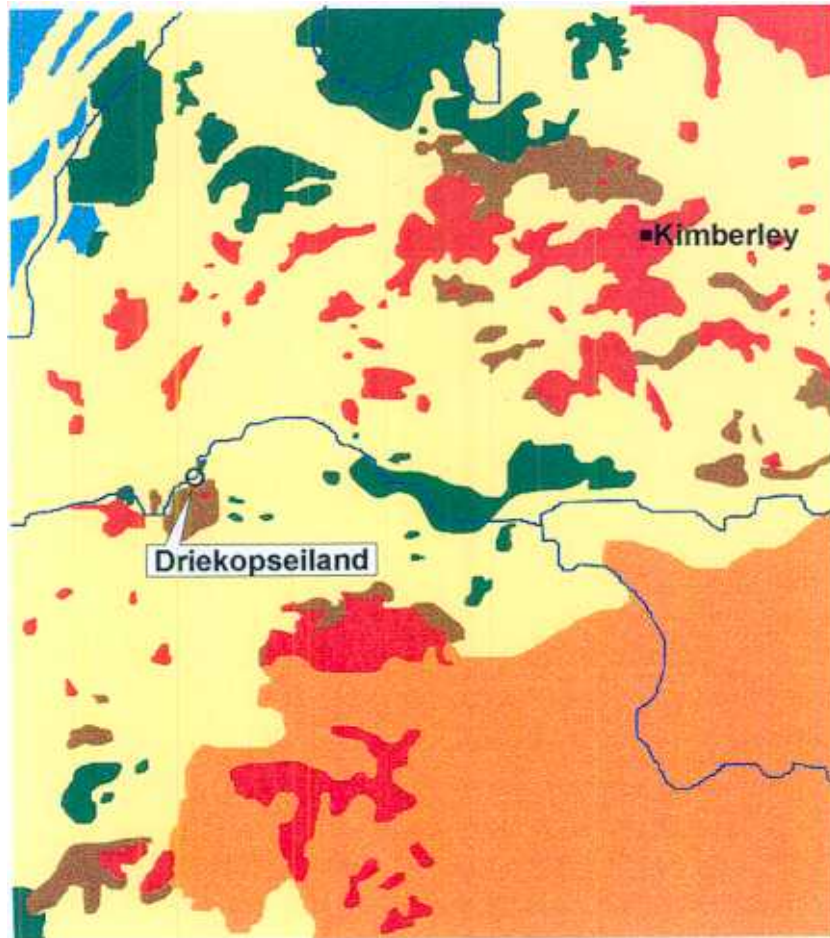


Figure 3. Regional geology. Pre-Karoo Ventersdorp (andesite) outcrops and Karoo Sequence rocks (including dolerite) predominate. Engraving sites tend to occur on andesite and dolerite exposures in this region.

are studded with clusters of dolerite koppies - buttes and mesas - resulting from intrusive dykes and sills of late Karoo age, being more resistant to erosion than the surrounding shales. The hills tend to rise some 90-100 m above the plains.

Calcretes form a resistant crust across the plains, having been produced by chemical weathering of igneous rocks and shales. These, in turn, are mantled by Quaternary soils that include alluvial sediments fringing the rivers; aeolian sands across the plains, sometimes over 12 m deep, that are now essentially stabilised by vegetation; and the heterogeneous soils that have formed on the footslopes of hills and on the margins of pans. The aeolian Hutton Sands, in particular, soften the topography and give the landscape some of its distinctive colouring.

Pans occur as broad shallow depressions in the landscape, forming localised drainage basins, where run-off water accumulates - before being evaporated - following good rains. Erosional in origin, the mechanism in their formation appears to be dry season deflation coupled with subaqueous weathering in the wet season. Some sediment may also have been removed from the alternately muddy and dusty pan floors on the hoofs of ungulates. The large, older pans can be more than 10 km across.

## **Climate**

“The place of great dryness”, is the apt meaning of the Khoekhoe term Karoo (Nienaber & Raper 1977:663-664), applied to the semi-arid interior plains of South Africa (Fig. 4). The research area lies beyond what is commonly thought of as Karoo, but it does in fact fall at the point of transition between the Nama-Karoo and Savanna biomes (Cowling *et al.* 1986; Cowling & Roux 1987; Low & Rebelo 1996).

Experiencing dry, cool winters (with frost) and warm to hot summers (Fig. 5), the area receives in the region of 300 mm of rain annually, with stochastically variable precipitation occurring typically as isolated thunder storms. While unpredictable, the hottest months may often be dry, with rains tending to fall in the autumn and spring



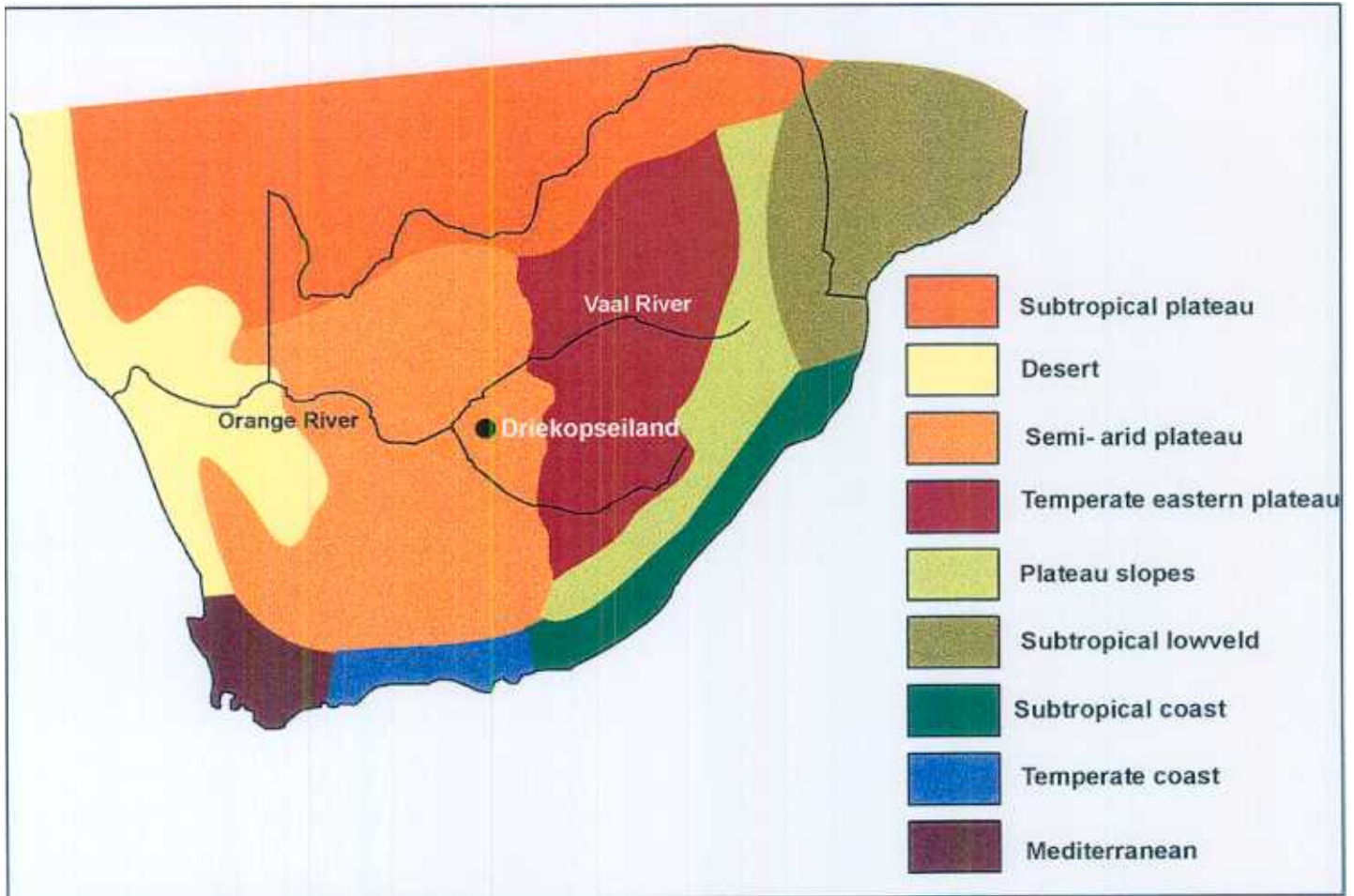


Figure 4. Climate zones. The interior - including the region in which Driekopseiland is situated - is a semi-arid plateau with cool dry winters and hot summers with variable rainfall. (After *Atlas of Southern Africa* [Reader's Digest 1984:19]).

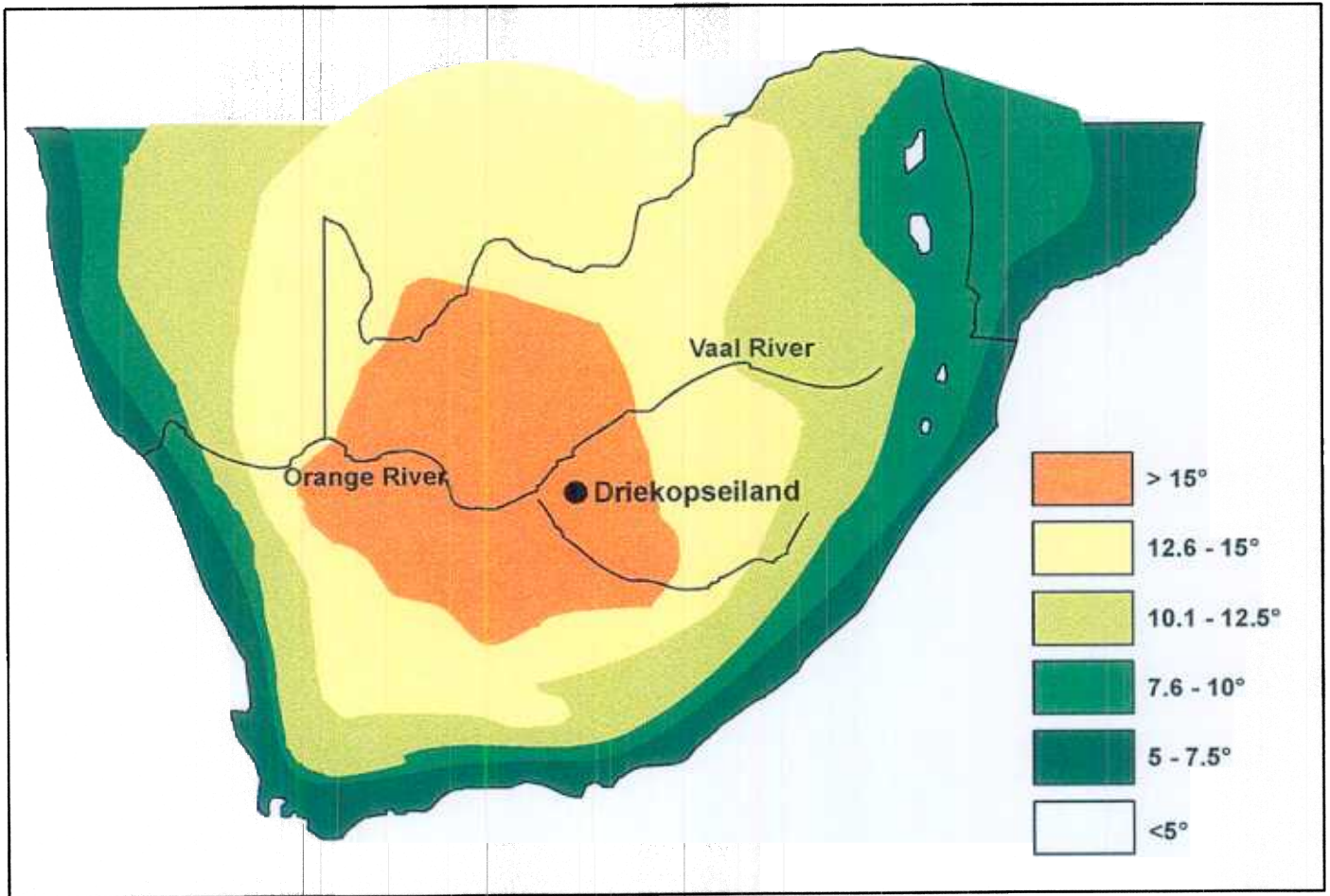


Figure 5. Temperature ranges (measured in °C). Driekopseiland falls within the interior region where ranges between the mean monthly temperatures of January and July exceed 15°C. (After *Atlas of Southern Africa* [Reader's Digest 1984:19]).

(Hoffman & Cowling 1987). Given the area's location in the subcontinent, potential rain-bearing air masses - whether as summer or winter systems from east or south - tend, as Helgren (1979:21) observes, to be largely drained of moisture before they reach this far inland (Figs. 6-8).

Run-off from storms, when they come, is rapid, feeding pans and streams. Potential evaporation greatly outstrips precipitation, however, at around 2500 mm annually. Hence pans do not hold water for long, and natural river flow is episodic (Figs. 9-10), with ephemeral waters in tributary streams often evaporating or percolating into the ground before they reach the major courses (Helgren 1979).

Yet, as Hoffman and Cowling (1987:2) point out with reference to the impacts of precipitation patterns on vegetation, "a single large-enough rainfall event or sequence of events at any time of the year can alter the composition of and processes within a [plant] community for years or even decades'

The mean annual run-off in the combined Riet-Modder catchment is 398 million m<sup>3</sup>/a - as compared to 3.5 billion m<sup>3</sup>/a for the Vaal-Harts catchment to the confluence of the Vaal with the Orange; and 6.6 billion m<sup>3</sup>/a for the Orange-Caledon catchment to the Vaal-Orange confluence (DWAF 1999). In the early 1930s, prior to the implementation of major water-flow management (by way of dams and canals), run-off from the Modder River dropped to around one third of the average annual run-off for the whole catchment, while the section of the Riet above its confluence with the Modder often ceased to flow (Humphreys 1972:30). When Andrew Smith travelled along the Riet in December 1834 it was evidently not flowing, as he recorded that "the waters of the river were...scattered in deep pools. ." (Lye 1975:135). At the other extreme, flooding occurs periodically (typically in late summer/autumn), sometimes rising, at Driekopseiland, to more than a metre above the top of the +15 m silt bank (as it did in February-March 1988 - Ben du Plessis pers.comm.).

In 1935-40 the Riet River Irrigation Scheme was brought into existence, with a system of canals fed by the new Kalkfontein Dam - which changed the face of the

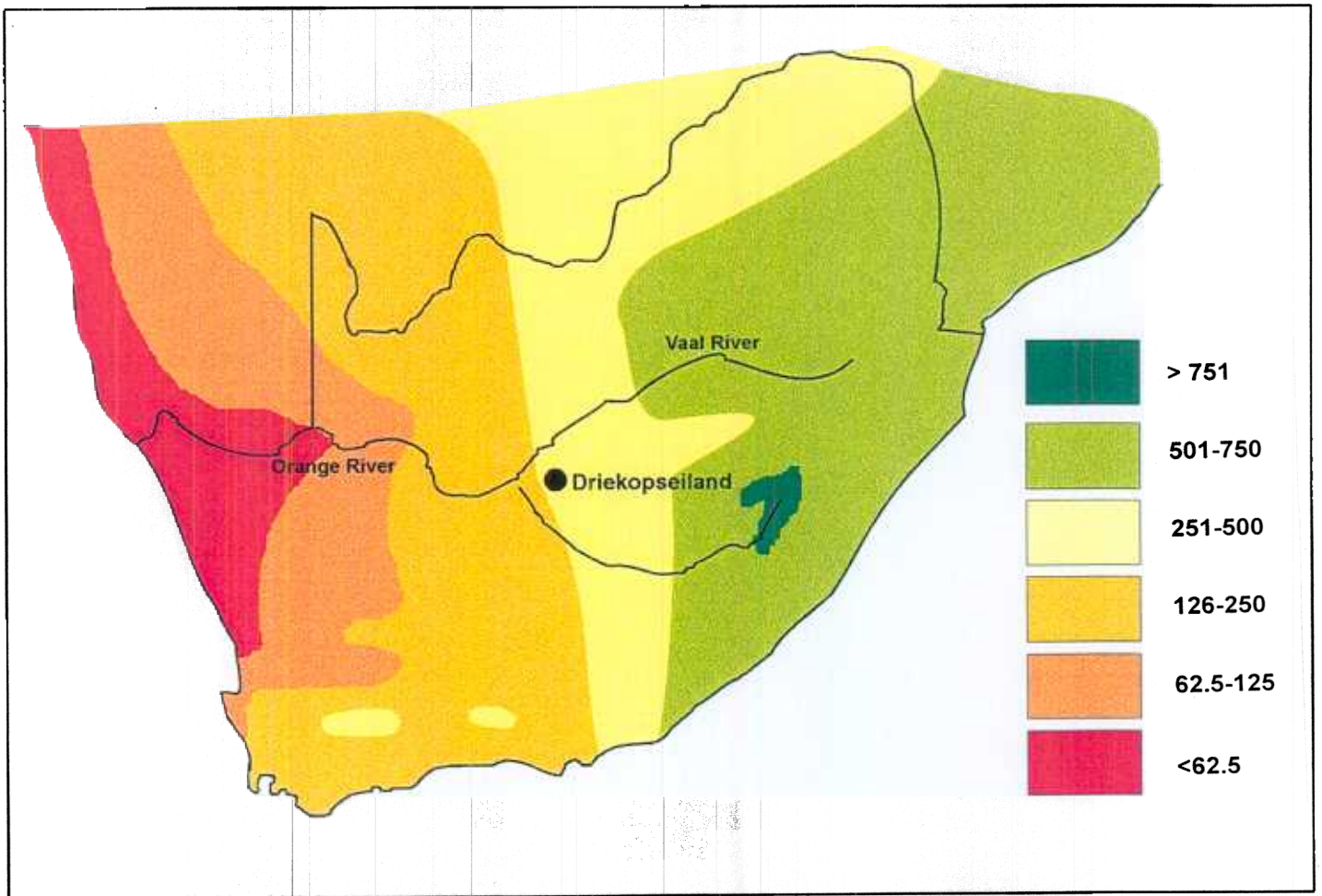


Figure 6. Summer rainfall (measured in mm). The central interior falls within the summer rainfall region, with precipitation declining to the west and becoming more variable (see Fig. 7). (After *Atlas of Southern Africa* [Reader's Digest 1984:19]).

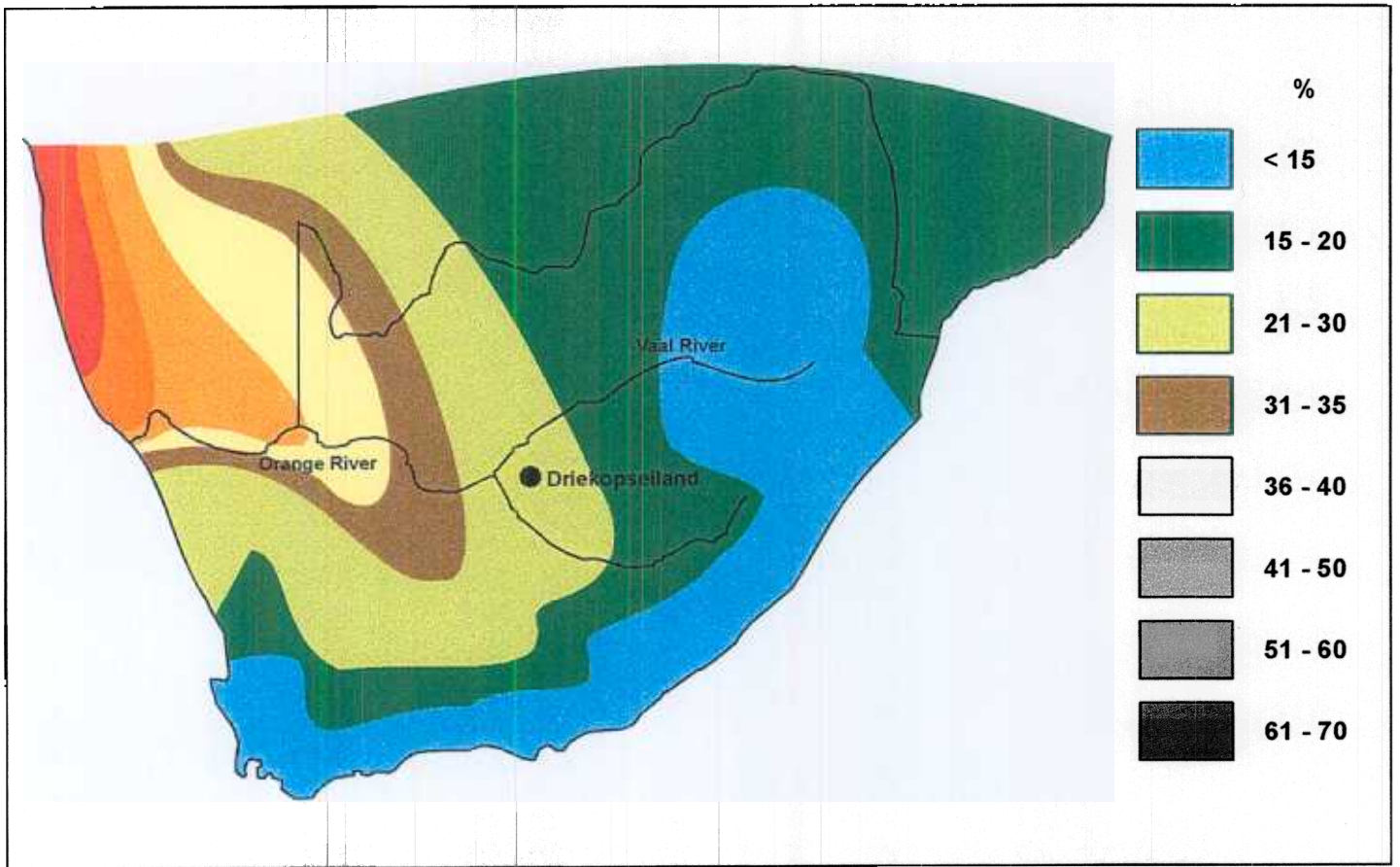


Figure 7. Rainfall variability. Percentage deviation from normal annual rainfall - at around 25% in the region around Driekopseiland. (After *Atlas of Southern Africa* [Reader's Digest 1984:19]).

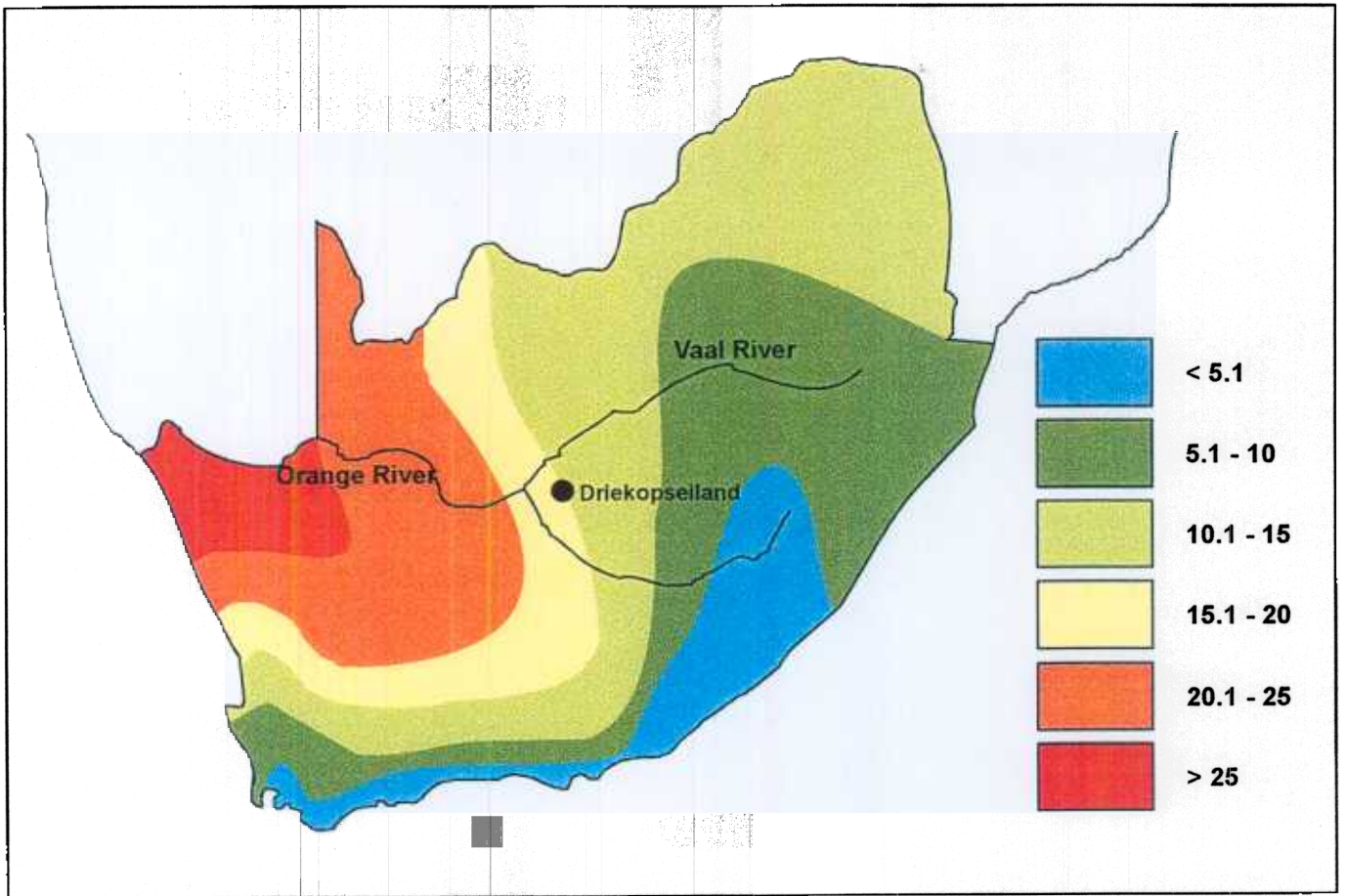


Figure 8. Drought. The map indicates the percentage period of a year when rainfall is less than 75% of the average. The frequent failure of summer rains to reach the west-central interior accounts for its susceptibility to drought. (After *Atlas of Southern Africa* [Reader's Digest 1984:21]).

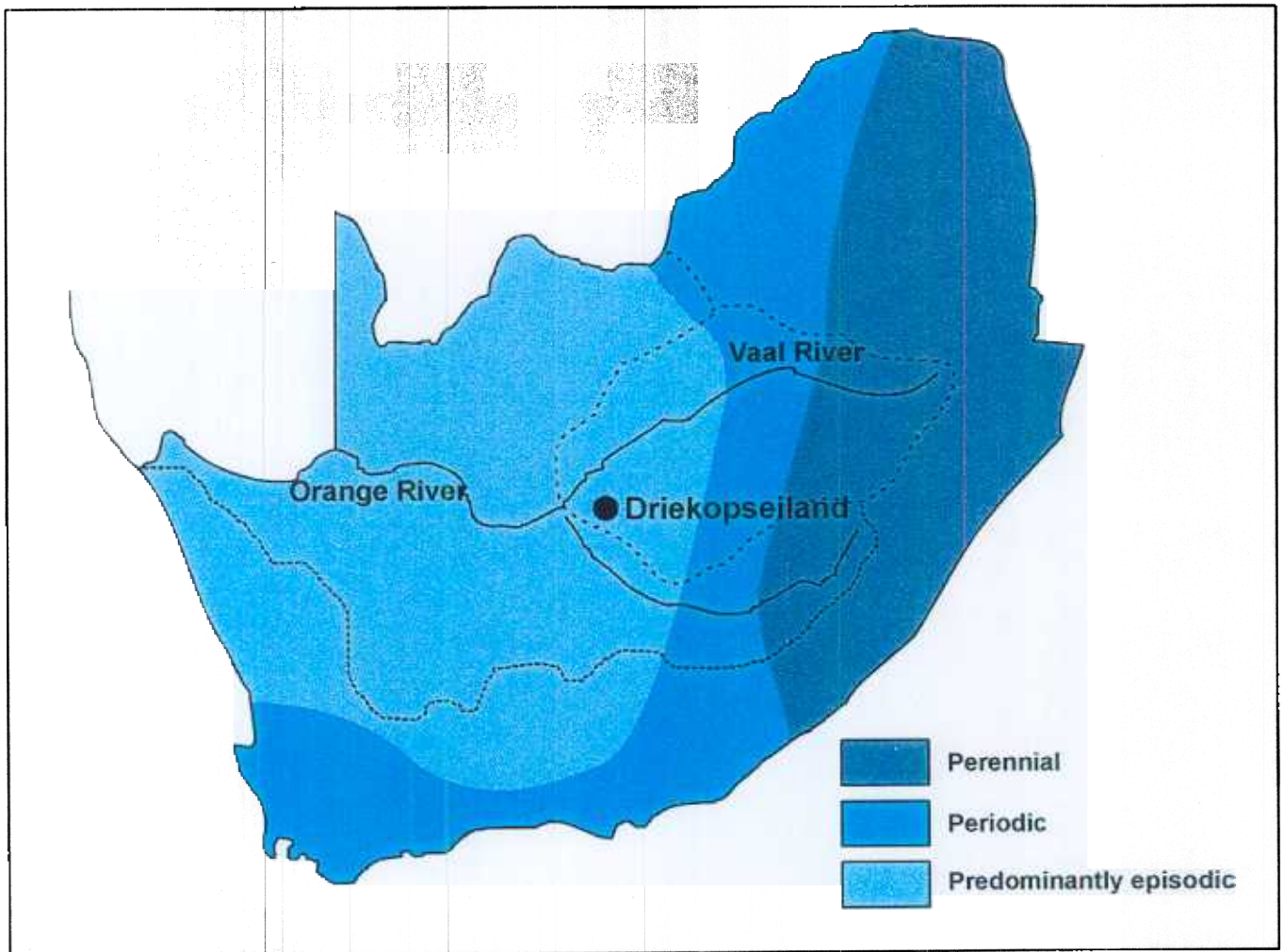


Figure 9. River flow characteristics: the Riet River in the vicinity of Driekopseiland, under natural conditions, would be predominantly episodic (as was observed here by Andrew Smith in 1834 - Lye 1975). The stippled lines demarcate the Orange and Vaal River drainage basins. (After *Atlas of Southern Africa* [Reader's Digest 1984:20]).

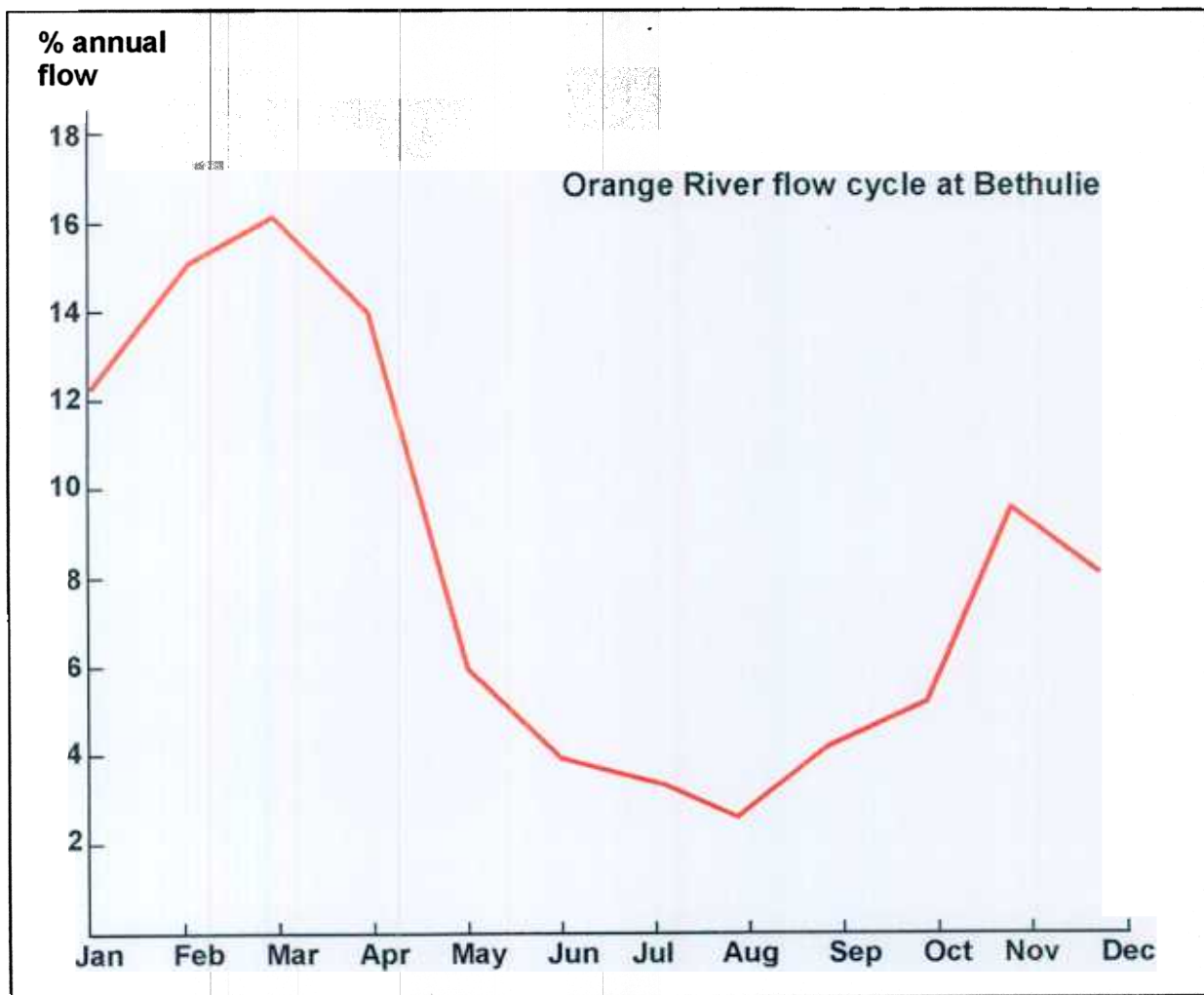


Figure 10. The flow cycle of the Orange River at Bethulie reflects a pattern probably close to that of the Riet under natural conditions. Response to autumn and spring rains (cf. Hoffman & Cowling 1987) and significant flow reduction in the dry months is clearly reflected. (After *Atlas of Southern Africa* [Reader's Digest 1984:20]).



landscape in the Jacobsdal-Modder River area (Humphreys 1972). A low weir was constructed at Driekopseiland in 1944 (see Appendix 1). When, half a century later, the Kalkfontein Dam was no longer able to meet the demands of irrigation farming on the Riet, the 112 km Sarel Hayward Canal was built (completed in 1987) for the transfer of water from the Orange to the Riet - as an extension to the Vanderkloof Canal system. Subsequently, centre-pivot irrigation was extended somewhat downstream from Modder River (Plate 2). The consequences of these developments for the conservation of Driekopseiland, and their impacts on archaeological resources in general, are addressed in Appendix 1

Beyond the reach of the canals and pumping points further down the river, ground water is tapped by way of windmills and pumps as the principal source of water for farms and settlements (DWAF 1999)

## Vegetation

Together with climate, soil type and topography exert strong influences on the vegetation of this transitional zone between the Orange River Nama Karoo and Kimberley Thorn Bushveld components of the Nama Karoo and Savanna biomes (Low & Rebelo 1996; Fig. 11). Like other aspects of the landscape, vegetation is dynamic (cf. Hoffman & Cowling 1987, cited above; palaeoenvironmental evidence is reviewed in Chapter 4), and it has responded to changing human land-use patterns. Acocks (1953) proposed that a northward migration of karoid vegetation had occurred in the last half millennium, and there is clear evidence of vegetation, environment and water-quality degradation - including "appalling erosion" along the lower Riet (Kokot 1948:67) - relative to farming practices of the last century and a half (Roux & Theron 1987; DWAF 1999; Armour & Viljoen 2000).

The narrow gallery forests such as those flanking the Vaal and Orange Rivers are not greatly in evidence along the Riet in the area under consideration, where, however, the reed *Phragmites communis* is clearly a historical feature, remarked upon by Burchell (1822-4:1:408, who reported that "mat rushes" were said to "grow in

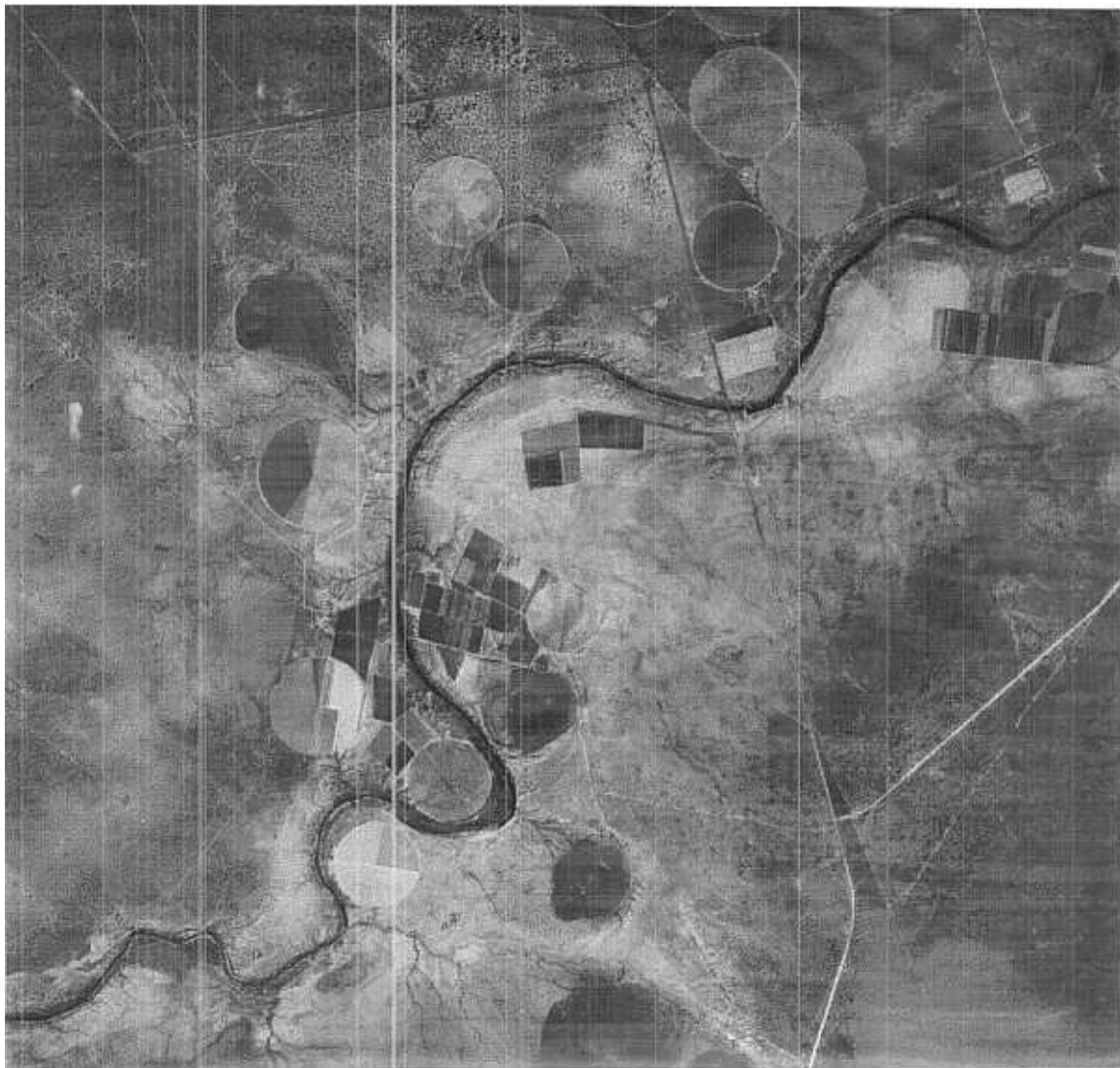


Plate 2. Aerial photograph (1993), scale approximately 1:60 000, showing the extent then of irrigated land along the Riet River in the vicinity of Driekopseiland. The older of these irrigated fields are rectangular in shape, while the more recent centre-pivot irrigation lands have in places incorporated older fields. Since 1993 substantially more river-side veld has been converted for irrigation farming.

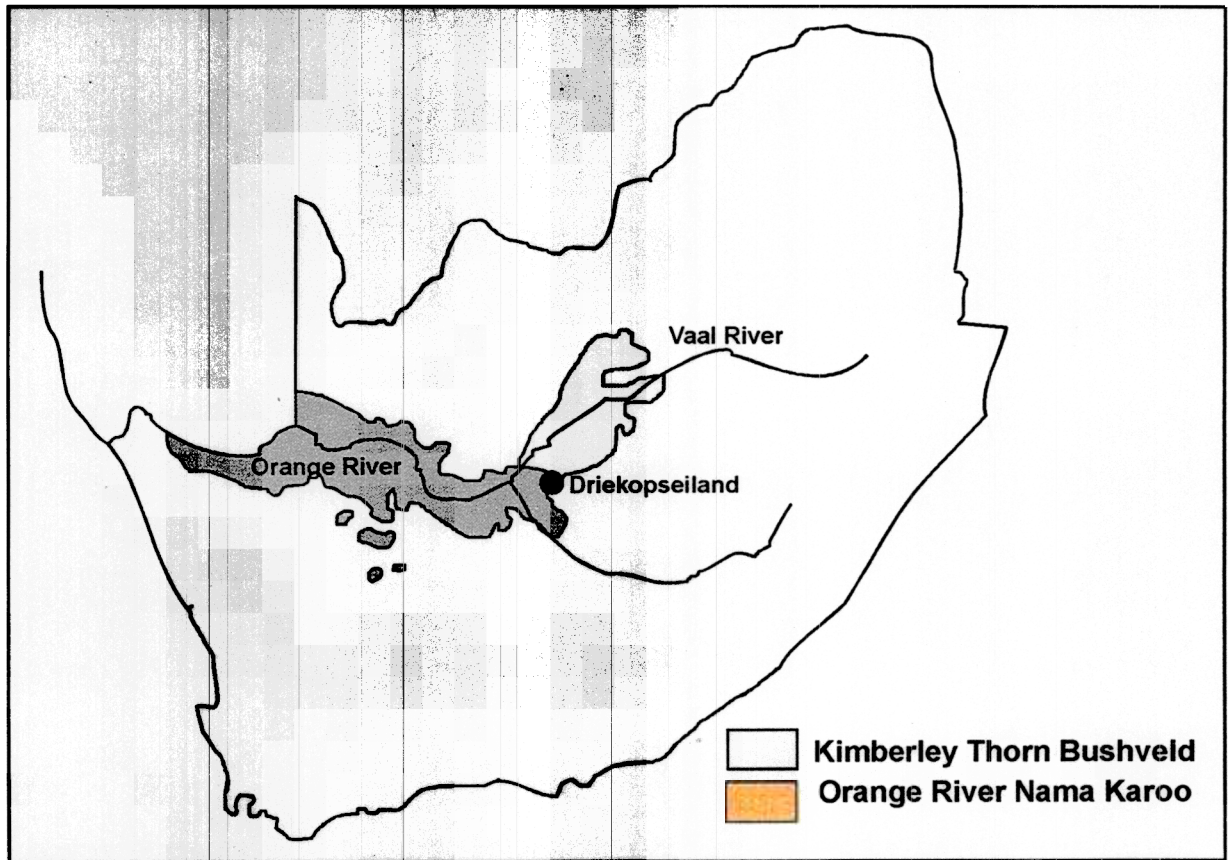


Figure 11. Vegetation types. Distributions of the Orange River Nama Karoo (Nama Karoo Biome) and Kimberley Thorn Bushveld (Savanna Biome). (After Low & Rebelo 1996:36, 54).

great plenty along the Maap.”

The shallower soils and calcrete lithosols adjacent to the river support karoid elements, while the deep Hutton Sands upslope of this promote a savanna parkland vegetation which is typical of the Kimberley Thorn Bushveld and includes *Acacia erioloba*, *A. tortilis* and, in places, *A. haematoxylon*. *A. mellifera* is found, particularly on koppie slopes and on degraded surfaces. Other species that occur are *Ziziphus mucronata*, *Boscia albitrunca* and *Grewia flava*, with grasses *Themeda triandra*, *Eragrostis lehmanniana*, *Cymbopogon plurinodis* amongst others.

Exotic invaders include *Prosopis* and *Eucalyptus* - the latter having infested the immediate vicinity of Driekopseiland itself (comparison of photographs spanning part of the twentieth century [Plates 3-4] demonstrates the rapidity with which this has happened). The sides of the river are clogged with *Phragmites communis*. Stabilised water-flow since the building of the dams, and particularly since the completion of the Orange-Riet Canal (see Appendix 1), has promoted the growth of reeds and of exotics such as *Eucalyptus* in the bed of the Riet. Other changes in plant and animal life include water weed settlement and encroachment, and increases in populations of blackfly and red-billed *Quelea* - now also having negative feedback in terms of agricultural losses (DWAF 1999). Large areas alongside the Riet have been stripped of their natural vegetation to make way for centre-pivot irrigation. This has been the fate of the banks adjacent to Driekopseiland itself. Vastly increased irrigation has had adverse impacts on water quality in the lower Riet and Vaal Rivers (Armour & Viljoen 2000).

Appendix 1 outlines the impacts of these processes on Driekopseiland and other archaeological resources in the region.

## **Fauna**

Records of the nineteenth century travellers and hunters here provide some idea of the “multitudes of game” found across this “boundless landscape” (Skead 1985).



Plate 3. Extent of exotic tree invasion between 1973 (above) and 2002 (below).





Plate 4. Extent of exotic tree invasion between c. 1942 (above) and 2002 (below).



Table 1. is derived from historical mammal sightings reviewed by Skead (1985), alongside the listing of ungulate mammal observations in the Kimberley and Herbert Districts from a survey of the early 1960s compiled by Bigalke and Bateman (1962). Clearly neither list is exhaustive - but they serve as indicators. In addition to the larger mammals there were of course micro-mammals; a rich avifauna, including ostrich; together with tortoises, lizards, snakes and so on.

**Table 1. Incidence of fauna based on Skead (1985) and Bigalke & Bateman (1962).**

Species	19th century	Mid-20th century
Pangolin - <i>Manis temminckii</i>	Y	
Jackal - <i>Canis mesomelas</i>	Y	
Wild dog - <i>Lycaon pictus</i>	Y	
Hyaena - <i>Crocuta crocuta</i> and <i>Hyaena brunnea</i>	Y	
Aardwolf - <i>Proteles cristatus</i>	Y	
Caracal - <i>Felis caracal</i>	Y	
Lion - <i>Panthera leo</i>	Y	
Aardvark - <i>Orycteropus afer</i>	Y	Y
Elephant - <i>Loxodonta africana</i>	Locally extinct?	
Dassie - <i>Procavia capensis</i>	Y	Y
Black Rhinoceros - <i>Diceros bicornis</i>	Probably	
White Rhinoceros - <i>Ceratotherium simum</i>	Probably	
Zebra - <i>Equus burchelli</i>	Y	
Warthog - <i>Phacochoerus aethiopicus</i>	Y	
Hippopotamus - <i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	Y	
Giraffe - <i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>	Probably	
Duiker - <i>Cephalophus monticola</i>	Y	Y
Steenbok - <i>Raphicerus campestris</i>	Y	Y
Klipspringer - <i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>		Y
Rhebuck - <i>Pelea capreolus</i>	Y	Y
Springbok - <i>Antidorcas marsupialis</i>	Y	Y
Gemsbok - <i>Oryx gazella</i>	Y	Y

Roan - <i>Hippotragus equinus</i>	Y			
Sassaby - <i>Damaliscus lunatus</i>	Y			
Blessbok - <i>Damaliscus dorcas phillipsi</i>	Y	Y		
Red hartebeest - <i>Alcelaphus buselaphus</i>	Y	Y		
Black wildebeest - <i>Connochaetes gnou</i>	Y	Y		
Blue wildebeest - <i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>	Y			
Kudu - <i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>	Y	Y		
Eland - <i>Taurotragus oryx</i>	Y	Y		
Grysbok - <i>Raphicerus melanotis</i>	Presumably	Y		
Cape buffalo - <i>Syncerus caffer</i>	Y			
Hares - <i>Lepus</i> sp.	Y			
Porcupine - <i>Hystrix africaeaustralis</i>	Y			
Springhare - <i>Pedetes capensis</i>	Y			

It is to be noted that it was in the nineteenth century that the fauna of these parts came under greatest pressure, and the demand for ivory had probably already driven elephant to local extinction - before the more literate of hunters and explorers came to chronicle their exploits. Plug and Sampson (1996) provide an archaeological perspective on this process, as it unfolded in the Karoo. There they show, from the evidence in rock shelters, farmers and professional hunters were not the sole agents: indigenous people with access to firearms “participated energetically” in the slaughter. Moreover, the likely articulation of these predations beyond the confines of local archaeological residues is hinted at in Schrire’s observation, in a related context that looks to the still wider historical reality, that “the pianos of Leipzig rang to the tune of ivory hunted by Kalahari San”: until, that is, “there were no more elephants left in the pans” (1994:20; cf. Gordon 1984). In the north eastern Karoo game populations finally crashed under these impacts in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

By the twentieth century, then, but a remnant of the former “multitudes” of animals remained, though the rise in game farming at the end of the century resulted in considerable (albeit incomplete) re-stocking, and even the introduction of species that may not have been here two centuries before. Often predicated as a return to



“pristine” conditions (see Butzer & Butzer 1997 for a critique of this idealist notion given that Holocene environments and human land-use have co-evolved), and while generally with a genuine and commendable commitment to conservation, game farms and reserves are yet in large measure an “eco”-commercial artefact of our own time. Lodge decor - with the severed heads of stuffed animals mounted on walls supporting roofs of thatch - often, ironically, bespeaks a certain nostalgia for the days of the big game hunters - who had brought so many species to local extinction (see Schreiner 1891: writing from the Karoo, hers was an early call for conservation in reserves, while anticipating some of the commercial aspects). Given that animal migrations are constrained by the division of the landscape into fenced farms, reserves, and parks, it is doubtful that anything approaching precolonial faunal patterns will ever be reconstructed (Humphreys 1972).

### **Cultural features**

At a general level, the spectrum of resources that this environment can yield have been drawn upon by people in different ways at different times, up to the present day. By way of their access to, use of, and control over resources, people have elaborated social, cultural, economic and political dimensions to the landscape, which will be considered in a later chapter. Suffice it for now to note the presence of Pleistocene material within the silt sediments alongside the engraving site, and late Holocene lithics with limited pottery and organic remains, as well as probably associated burials, at the top of the sequence. In addition there is an outlier of the Type R stone-walled settlements nestled against one of the nearby hills (see Chapter 4). The task presently to hand is to introduce the situation of the engravings at Driekopseiland, their nature and content, relative to their setting and to the broader corpus of rock art in the region

The regional survey of rock engraving sites in the Northern Cape carried out by Gerhard and Dora Fock in the 1960s-80s (e.g. Fock 1969; Butzer et al. 1979; Fock 1979; Fock & Fock 1984; 1989) provides much of the background to this study (Fig. 12). It was as a part of that survey, moreover, that Driekopseiland was recorded and

mapped in some detail in the late 1970s (Fock & Fock 1989; McGregor Museum reports).

The engravings here are spread in two main clusters, a greater (eastern) part on an expanse of exposed glacial pavement about 120 m upstream from a second smaller (western) part (Fig. 13, Plates 5-8). These areas differ in thematic and temporal definition: more than 99% of the 2004 engravings in the upstream part are geometric images, while, amongst the 1543 engravings downstream, a little under 75% are geometrics (Fock & Fock 1989:142).

The “density and intractability” of the engravings and their unequal preservation posed “special problems” for recording and analysis, it was suggested. Given these constraints, spatial analysis indicated striking clustering of certain motif forms: concentrations of designs with dots in some parts of the site, 'grid ovals', 'crossed circles', concentric circles, rectangular forms, 'fish-spines', and cellular motifs, in others. Similarly, the 'T'-shaped designs, unique to this site, are quite locally confined (see Fig. 22 on page 174)

Nor was relative sequencing of the engravings on the basis of patination or wear as straightforward as had been implied by earlier writers (see following Chapter). Rather, their height and distance from the modern river channel determined the patination pattern for the bulk of the engravings; “contrasts in patina can only be applied to relative dating on small surface segments, where exposure to water or sun are identical” (ibid.: 141). Similarly, water abrasion was “noticeably accentuated” close to the channel or on convex surfaces facing upstream; again, significant differences in abrasion could be observed in directly juxtaposed or superimposed engravings.

As to content, “only about a third of the geometric designs in the Western sector [Plate 7] correspond in theme, style and quality with those in the Eastern sector [Plate 8]; the remainder [in the Western sector] are thematically distinct, often more

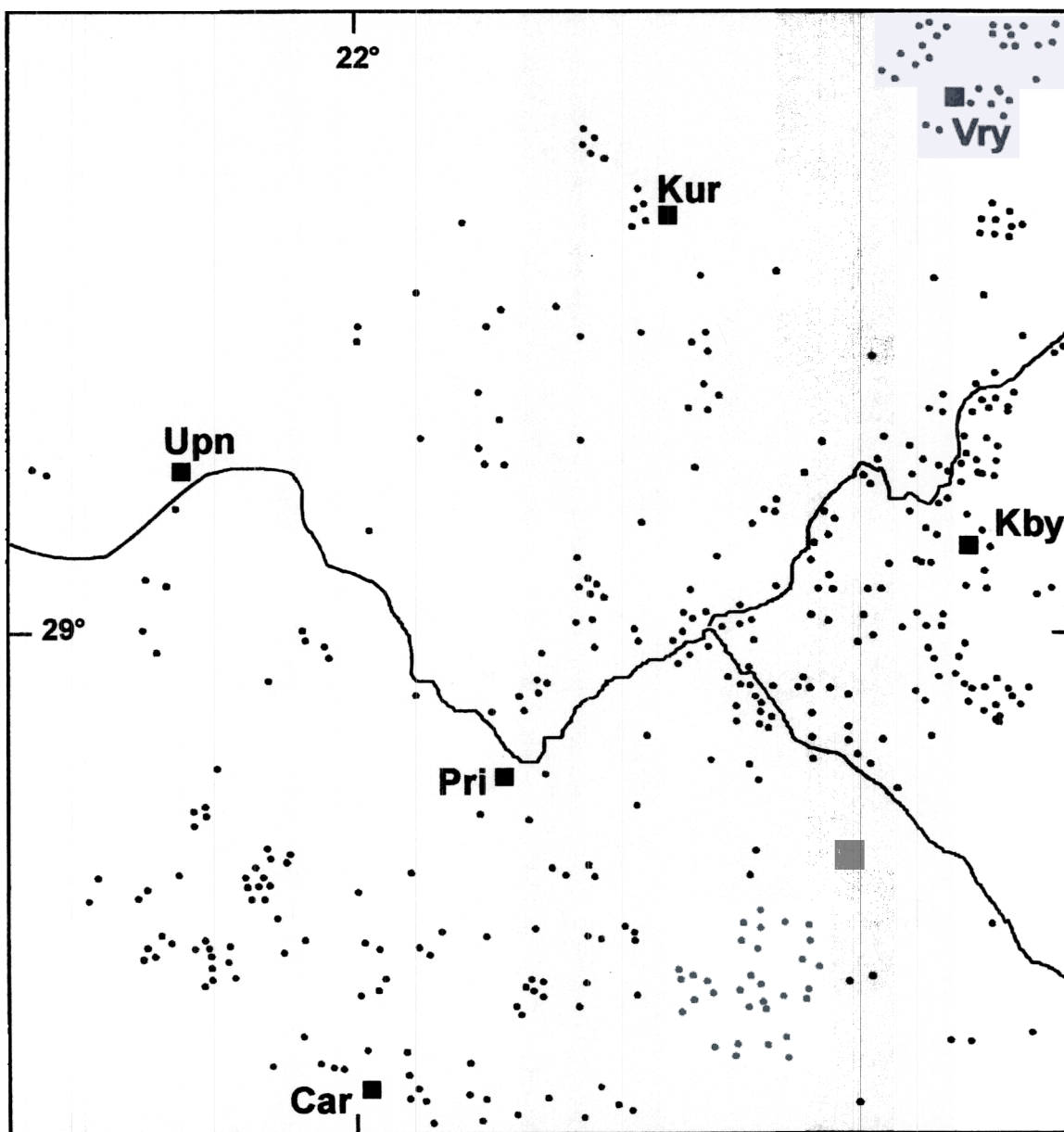


Figure 12. Distribution of rock art sites in part of the Northern Cape (based on records principally of G.J. & D. Fock). Many areas of the province remain to be systematically surveyed. Upn: Upington; Kur: Kuruman; Vry: Vryburg; Kby: Kimberley; Pri: Prieska; Car: Carnarvon

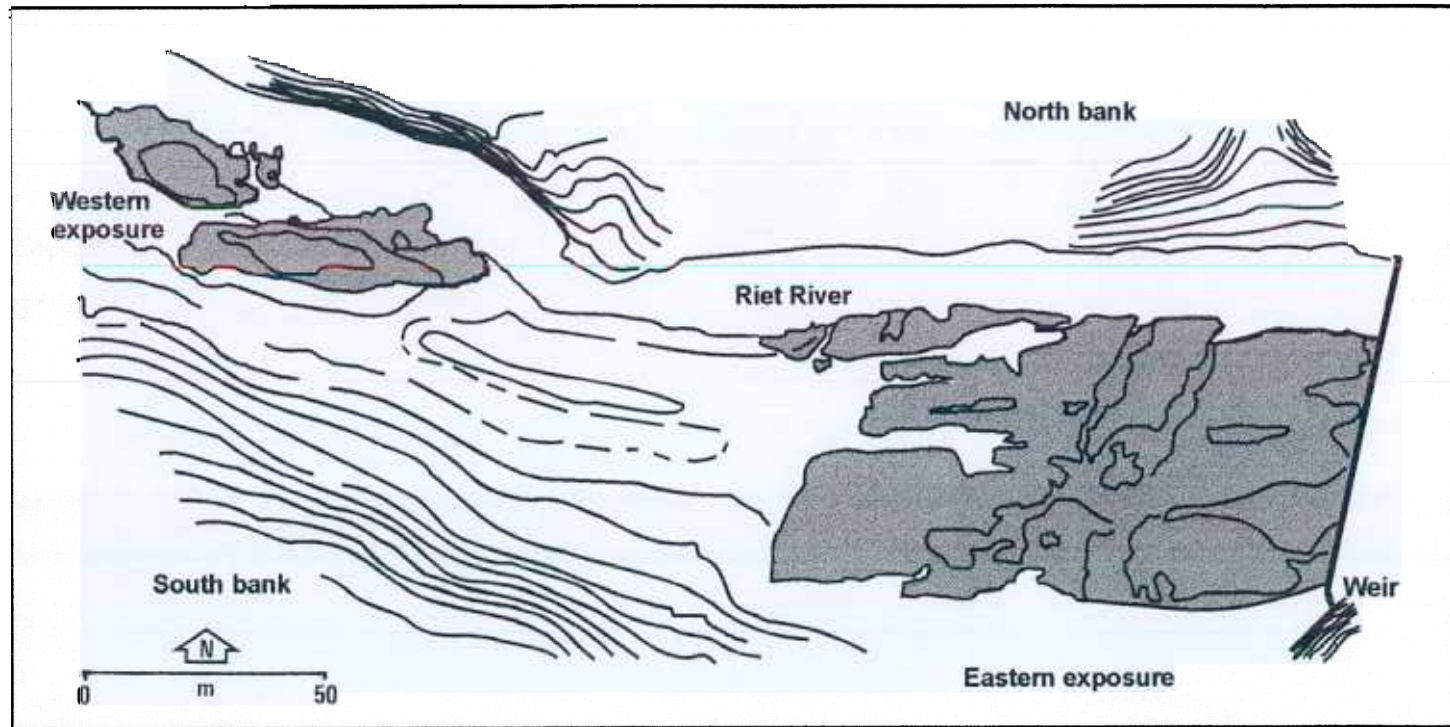


Figure 13. The distribution of glacial pavement exposures at Driekopseiland, showing engraving concentrations (after Fock & Fock 1989).



Plate 5. View of Driekopseiland prior to construction of the weir (pre-1942).



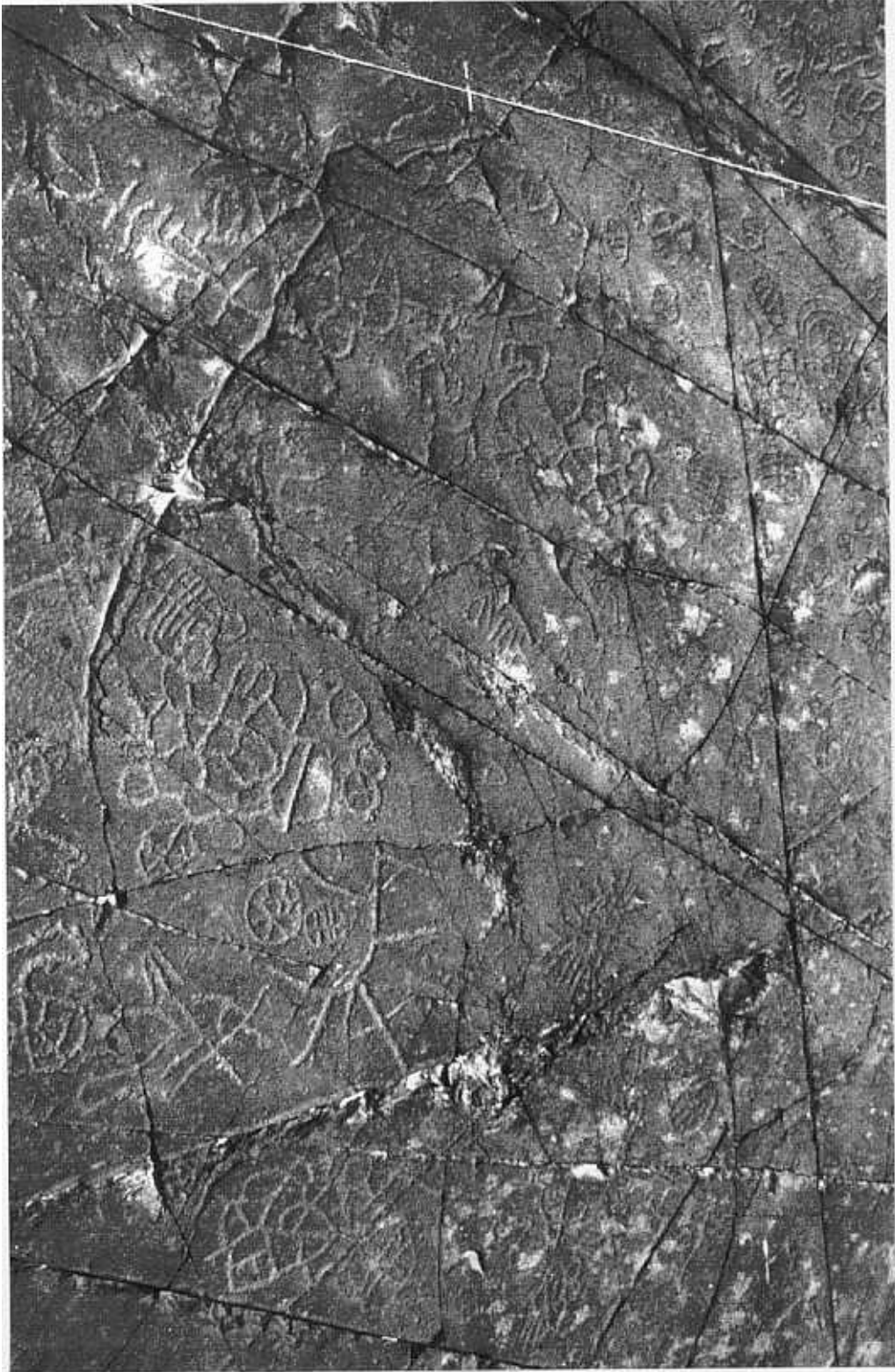
Plate 6. View of Driekopseiland showing the western exposure.



Plate 7  
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ngs  
th western part  
Driekopseiland

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elaborate or better done and, on the whole, slightly to somewhat more worn" (ibid.: 143). Few animal motifs and one human figure were found in the eastern part, while 325 animal and 19 human depictions, "moderately to strongly abraded by stream action" (ibid.: 142), occurred in the western portion of the site.

This upstream-downstream variability, it was suggested, was a factor of history which could be related to the recent geology of the site. A study of the sediments flanking the engravings (Butzer *et al.* 1979) yielded evidence of alternate depositional and down-cutting episodes (Fig. 14). Bedrock was exposed to varying degrees at different times. A chronology was derived from a suite of palaeoenvironmental studies along the Riet and Vaal Rivers and in local pan deposits ( Butzer *et al.* 1979; Helgren 1979; Fock & Fock 1989).

This evidence will be interrogated in more detail in Chapter 4. For now, the interpretations of Butzer *et al.* are briefly stated. It is suggested that, while buried for most of the Holocene, bedrock began to be exposed in places as a result of rapid channel-cutting, from a moist flood-plain at +7 m, after 2500 BP. Renewed aggradation of flood silts and sands took place between about 2200 and 1300 BP, stabilizing as a mainly dry flood-plain 2-3 m above the present river level, with little or no bedrock exposure. Channel cutting recommenced after 1300-1200 BP, resulting in considerable bedrock exposure - with relatively minor silt build-up and erosion since then. "As a general framework," Butzer *et al.* argued, "the Driekops Eiland engravings could only have been executed c. 2500-2200 BP or after 1300 BP" (Butzer *et al.* 1979; Fock & Fock 1989:141).

Reading together the environmental history and the evidence of the engravings, in this scenario, the animal images and the older geometric designs restricted mainly to higher, convex surfaces in the western part of the site probably date from the earlier period, c. 2500-2200 BP, when only portions of bedrock were exposed. The predominantly geometric engravings in the flatter eastern part of the site, by contrast, were probably made from perhaps the end of the first millennium AD onwards, after much more of the glacial pavement was exposed (ibid.: 86).

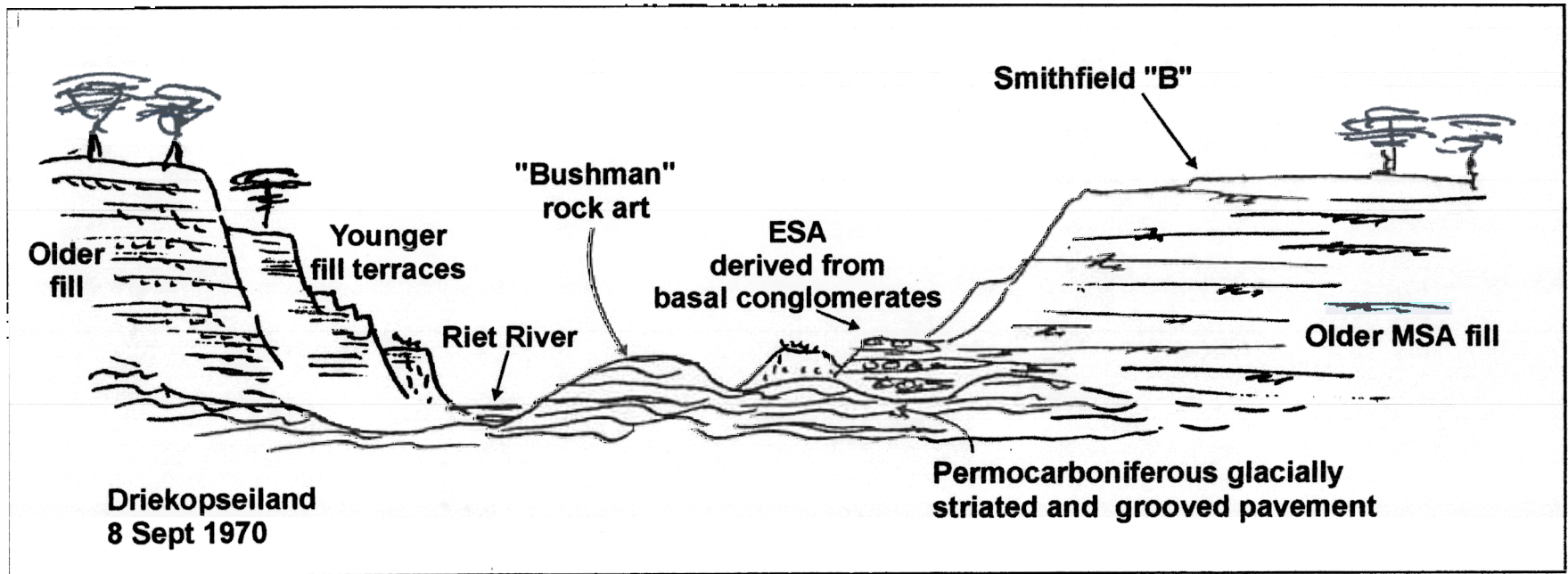


Figure 14. Section showing sediment units at Driekopseiland, from a sketch by K.W. Butzer (from correspondence with A.J.B. Humphreys). See Figure 17 on page 107.

The Focks' survey showed that, while the preponderance and number of non-figurative engravings here make this site unusual, several features are nevertheless consistent with other sites in the region. For example, of the animal images, the largest proportion of those that can be identified to species level are eland (10%), a central symbol in San beliefs and in the rock-art of many Southern African regions (Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams 1981; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989; Hampson *et al.* 2002). At least sixteen other species occur, reflecting the range commonly seen on other engraving sites of the region

The geometric engravings, too, are part of a regional pattern, and they predominate at 28% of engraving sites north of the Orange River (Fock 1969). The major site of Klipfontein 1 (nearly 4600 engravings) has 29% geometrics to 52% mammals: 29% of identifiable mammals are eland to 3% humans (Fock 1979). The average percentage presence of geometrics at lower Vaal River sites is 23% and at Riet/Modder River sites, 35%. Intersite variability is often marked, however, and some sites have far fewer geometric engravings than these figures suggest.

This variability is not as yet well understood, but it does appear that geometric images are an integral part of the engraving genre, from at least the 'Intermediate Phase' in the Focks' and Butzer's scheme (*ibid.*), judged to be greater than 2000 but not more than about 2500 years old, and from the 'Younger' and 'Youngest' Phases, estimated as dating from within the last two millennia. If any doubt be cast on these dates, the evidence does at least indicate that some geometrics are relatively older and others younger. What is clear is that, as regards the relative frequency of geometric engravings at sites in the area, Driekopseiland defines one end of a regional spectrum.

### III

#### **A history of ideas and the interpretation of rock engravings at Driekopseiland**

*the present - which is where all history starts from and returns to.*

- Keith Jenkins, 1991:68

*"Science, since people must do it, is a socially embedded activity.*

- Stephen Jay Gould, 1981:21

#### **Approaching a history of ideas and interpretations**

Stow remains one of the few observers to hint that the singularity of the rock surface at Driekopseiland might itself have had some significant role in the choice of this locale for the placement of the engravings and hence in their meaning. It seems almost obvious that this was so, yet most other assessments of the site's significance all but gloss over the point and move quickly to the debate that has revolved mainly upon explanations of the particular imagery engraved here (different as it appears from that at other sites in the region); and much of this writing has resorted to a familiar trope - where difference is concerned - namely, ethnicity and the relative explanatory merits of different authorships.

To understand and assess these and other perspectives, it is necessary to examine the history of rock art interpretation at this site - and in South Africa as a whole - and the intellectual contexts within which ideas have been developed. This is an approach famously advocated by the philosopher and archaeologist R.G. Collingwood, who believed "no historical problem should be studied without studying....the history of historical thought about it" (Collingwood 1939:132, cited by Trigger 1989:2). It stands to reason that the existing literature in a field will set strong constraints on how a problem might be conceived, suggests Young in his critical study of the scientific and ideological perspectives in the nineteenth century debate on man's place in nature; he stresses further (1973:369-70) that "science is a social activity, born of society, and mediating its structures and values, at least as much as it is born of nature.

David Clarke has characterised archaeology as an adaptative system “related internally to its changing content and externally to the spirit of the times” (1979:85). Trigger, moving to some extent beyond the internalist-externalist dichotomy that Young (1985:245-6) has criticised in the historiography of science, arrives at a perhaps more subtle characterisation in his wide-ranging history of archaeological thought. He finds that while archaeological evidence acts as a constraint on interpretation and is significantly enhanced, in the history of the discipline, by advancements in archaeological method and practice, “subjective factors clearly influence the interpretation of archaeological data at every level” (1989:407). These are not prone to being eliminated simply by a commitment to “neutral” science and proper procedures, as argued by the “more ardent positivists”; nor are subjective influences necessarily negative, having functioned at times in the history of archaeology as a creative element spurring research. Trigger (*ibid.*:410) asserts that archaeology is “neither separate from society nor a mere reflection of it, but has a role to play in a rational dialogue about the nature of humanity, which a better understanding of the relationship between archaeological practice and its social context will facilitate. Perhaps implicit in this is a point made more explicitly by Jenkins (1991) in his distinction between ‘history’ and ‘the past’, in which the present is “where all history starts from and returns to.” Jenkins adds the significant insight that “the past’s hold on history is really the historian’s [in our case, the archaeologist’s] hold on history”, since “evidence...as opposed to traces, is always the product of the historian’s discourse” (1991:49-50). The one sure thing in ‘history’ is that it is constructed *in* the present, a point made in the South African context by Parkington and Smith (1986) when they insisted that “archaeological facts, far from speaking for themselves, are created and marshalled consciously or subconsciously by archaeologists for a variety of purposes” (*ibid.* 1986:43). The constructedness of archaeologists’ ‘data’ is emphasised, too, by Chippindale (2000), who warns that with the greater ease by which data are manipulated today, so also it becomes easier “to treat the data as given things rather than to enquire after just what these given things are, just where they come from, just what uncertainties, assumptions, classifications, and concepts their created existence depends upon” (*ibid.*:609; cf Aunger 1999). Chippindale argues for use of the term ‘capta’ rather than ‘data’ as a more accurate

reflection of the class(es) of evidence in question

This chapter offers a critique of the ideas previously advanced - and the problems conceived - respecting the rock art at Driekopseiland, relative to the “spirit of the times”, and the way researchers have construed as evidence the engravings and archaeological traces they found. The critique is extended through Chapter 4 as part of a characterisation of the archaeological and environmental contexts of the art as these may presently be understood

### **Stow's account**

The first account of Driekopseiland is that of geologist G. W. Stow (1905:28-29), who knew it, in the 1870s, as 'Blaauw Bank' or 'Bloem's Homestead', on what was then still known as the 'Gumaap River - more properly ꞆGama-lab, !Kora for Modder or Muddy (Nienaber & Raper 1977:419-420) - now the Riet.

“At Blaauw Bank...rocks are found perfectly polished and striated...proof of a remote glacial period;...their wonderful and unwonted appearance had evidently produced a strong effect upon the Bushman mind, for, struck with their unexplained smoothness, he has covered the space with mystic symbols... There is very little doubt but that many of them conveyed a mystic meaning to the initiated; this seems confirmed by the frequency of certain forms, and the repetition of particular numbers.”

Leaders of the last independent 'Bushmen' of this area are named by Stow (1905; cf Arnot & Orpen 1875), and it is in his account of their struggle (under 'Kousopp) against white settlers, in the 1850s (Morris 2000), that he again mentions Driekopseiland. According to Stow, 'Twa-'goup, the father of 'Kousopp, ruled over the clans along the ꞆGama-lab and its tributaries, and 'Kousopp, after his father's death is said to have had his headquarters at 'Kun-'kgoap, two prominent hills near the ꞆGama-lab and about half way between modern Kimberley and Driekopseiland. It is in the context of this struggle that Stow - having characterised as “fraud” the manner in which Trekboer pastoralists gained access here (1905:394-5) - mentions rock-engravings as “the ancient title-deeds of their race to the wide-spread plains

around them, which had been occupied not only by themselves, but by their remote ancestors” (1905:397). (More than a century after Stow’s visit to Driekopseiland this episode in local history would feature in an Afrikaans novel by Dolf van Niekerk, called *Koms van die hyreën* (1994). In a tale set in the late twentieth century, rock engravings become a key factor in a bid to claim back ancestral land).

For Stow, Driekopseiland constituted evidence of an ancient and aboriginal Bushman presence in South Africa (ibid.:398):

“...the grand testimonials of the great antiquity of their occupation are to be found...recorded on the polished and striated rocks of the Blaauw Bank [Driekopseiland]...a spot that must have been, during the time of their undisturbed sovereignty, a place memorable to their race, where thousands of square feet of... rock surface are covered with innumerable mystic devices, intermingled with comparatively few animal figures. This must have been a palace residence of the most highly mystic of their race...a high place, where they gathered for their festivals of dancings and mysterious rites or counsel, a place where for generations their leaders who were the most skilled in the emblematic lore, the symbols of which were engraved around, awed their less initiated brethren with frantic orgies, or vehement recitals of the traditions of the renowned and daring hunters from whom they themselves had sprung, or still more ancient myths of times yet more remote, when, as they believed, men and animals consorted on more equal terms than they themselves, and used a kindred speech understood by all!”

Stow was struck by the “mystic” symbols from this site, commenting in a letter to W.H.I. Bleek on their “astonishing” diversity. Anticipating a strand of future speculation, he added that “what is more surprising is the great similarity which some of them bear to the religious symbols used - by some of the most ancient, but more civilized nations” (letter to Bleek, Vaal River, 12 December 1874, cited by Fock 1970)

Stow’s letter accompanied to the Cape a first batch of “cartoons” and “rubbings and sketches” he had made of rock paintings in the Eastern Cape and of “Bushman pictures chipped into rocks in Griqualand West” (Bleek 1875:155; Fock 1970) - some of the copy work that was to earn him recognition as a pioneer in the documentation

of South African rock art. Upon receipt, Bleek (1875:155) expressed his excitement, declaring:

“They are of the greatest possible interest, and evince an infinitely higher taste, and a far greater artistic faculty, than our liveliest imagination could have anticipated, even after having heard several glowing descriptions of them from eye-witnesses. Their publication, which we hope and trust will be possible to Mr Stow ere long, cannot but effect a radical change in the ideas generally entertained with regard to Bushmen and their mental condition.”

In a letter to Lloyd, Stow cited one he had received from Bleek (W.H. Bleek, cited by Stow 21 June 1876, in Schoeman 1997:67) with regard to the “pictures”, which were:

“a subject of the highest interest, and shews us the Bushmen at once in a thoroughly different light from the commonly adopted view of regarding them as the lowest of mankind, whilst as regards poetical and artistic [gifts?] frequently they are no doubt far nearer to us than all the Kaffir and negro races.”

Further on in the same letter, Stow remarked with reference to correspondence from Bishop Callaway that “he is quite right in his idea as to some of the emblems [possibly those from Driekopseiland, which Stow had designated as “emblems”] foreshadowing the germs of an ancient faith. I have in my possession even more conclusive proofs to those he saw in your care” (cited in Schoeman 1997:69).

Stow’s views, including his extended thoughts on Driekopseiland, and his copies of rock art would reach a wider audience only later, following posthumous publication of his (edited) work under the title *The Native Races of South Africa* (1905). Not long after, Frobenius published illustrations, in *The childhood of man* (1909), based on Stow’s copies, though wrongly attributed to “missionary Bleek” (sic, *ibid.*:131). The kind of publication of the copies that Bleek probably had in mind was brought out only much later, by Dorothea Bleek, in *Rock paintings in South Africa* (1930), a book which was later supplemented by Rosenthal and Goodwin’s *Cave artists of South Africa* (1953).



Stow had had some of his correspondence on his researches published in the *Cape Monthly Magazine* (Stow 1872) and the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* (Stow 1873). At the Cape, the copies of rock art that he had sent from the interior aroused much interest. Lloyd's letters indicate a steady stream of influential personages visiting the Bleek home to examine them (Schoeman 1997).

A fascination with South Africa's rock art was growing at this period. Articles in the *Cape Monthly Magazine* and elsewhere bear witness to this, as do the deliberations of the Philosophical Society in Cape Town. Stow's copies and short notes from beyond the Cape Colony's borders doubtless inspired this interest not a little. There was a current sense that 'Bushmen' were declining rapidly towards extinction, and while this notion has been characterised as a trope that would recur to punctuate and spur anthropological work down the years (Legassick & Rassool 2000:3), indigenous hunter-gatherers, particularly, in South Africa had indeed sustained devastating impacts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Wright 1971; Penn 1995). Stow himself considered that his work would "rescue from oblivion many most interesting points in the history of this most primitive but fast expiring race" (Stow, 1876, in Schoeman 1997:67). Whatever the future prospects for descendant communities, Stow was equally concerned that the art itself was fragile and susceptible to impacts of various kinds; and were "becoming obliterated fast" (Rosenthal & Goodwin 1953:10)

Recent assessments affirm Stow's historically significant contribution as a rock art copyist (e.g. Dowson *et al.* 1994), but his reputation is somewhat tarnished by the findings of Tobias and Dowson (Dowson 1993) that the famous 'blue ostriches' copy is probably a forgery. Stow copied rock engravings at just a handful of sites near Kimberley, including Driekopseiland and Wildebeest Kuil. Images recorded at the latter site include an engraving not now on the site - but found subsequently in the collection of the British Museum, having been taken from South Africa in the 1880s (Fock 1965). Stow's copy was used to identify and provenance the engraving.

In other respects Stow's contribution deserves more credit than it has tended to receive. In an important sense, his position on the San relates back to an acrimonious debate of half a century previously, in which the political stakes were high; and out of which, it has been said, the historiography of South Africa was born (Ross 1993). One side of the debate was defined by Donald Moodie's response, by way of *The Record* (1838-41), to the *Researches* of Dr John Philip, which had been published in 1828. In sentiment, much of what Stow recounted on the history and plight of the "Bushmen", and the wrongs they endured, resonates strongly with the campaigning rhetoric of Philip (though Stow was sharply critical of the missionaries for their role in the subsequent history of 'Bushmen', particularly in Griqualand West). It is ironic, therefore, that it was Moodie's intellectual heir at the Cape, the Colonial Historiographer George Theal, who would prepare Stow's "Bushman work" for publication, appearing as *The Native Races of South Africa* in 1905. As Wright (1978:3, cited in Mazel 1992:762) has said, Theal, "more than any other single figure...set the pattern of writing - or rather, of not writing, San history" - a pattern that was to endure beyond the middle of the twentieth century. By contrast, the writing of San history was one of the avowed concerns of Stow who, in addition to recording the art, compiled written sources, collected oral testimony, and looked into questions of antiquity. Moreover, Stow, with C.S. Orpen, conducted what was one of the earliest reported archaeological excavations in the interior of South Africa, implicitly recognising the importance of material evidence where written or oral sources were unequal to the task, and, in writing it up, providing a remarkably detailed account of their findings (Stow 1905:63-64; Humphreys 1975a).

Particularly noteworthy for the time, Stow was conscious of the contingent constructedness of current versions of the past. In 1880, when penning the extant preface for his book (Stow 1905), he noted discrepancies amongst the historical traditions of various groups in the interior, where some were much modified "to suit the altered conditions of the nation or tribe" (1905:xi-xii).

While much of Stow's writing on the history of the San runs counter to conventional sentiments of the day (his approach to rock art verged on one of reverence - Dowson

*et al.* 1994:177), and while in the preparation of his manuscript for its 1905 publication Theal may have given it a twist unintended by its author, the suggestion of sequential migrations of different peoples and of the existence of distinct painter and engraver clans provided much of the raw material used in support of later racist accounts of South Africa's past.

### **Characterising the colonial “other” and the rise of anthropology: background to ways of seeing at Driekopseiland**

The Moodie-Philip argument alluded to is not irrelevant to this project as it revolved in some measure on the way the indigenous people of South Africa - principally the 'Bushmen' and 'Hottentots' - were coming to be characterised in colonial discourse (cf. Humphreys 1998). It has relevance, further, to the place of subsistence-based categories in post-Enlightenment thinking, which has not been without consequence in the division of much intellectual labour (Pluciennik 2001). In the Kalahari revisionist debate of the last two decades these arguments have been revisited. The various positions taken up in debates about Khoisan through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are reflected, directly or indirectly, in the changing views on the rock engravings of Driekopseiland.

Philip's *Researches* contributed “a direct political intervention on behalf of the oppressed Khoisan” in South Africa in the 1820s (Ross 1993). It was not the earliest challenge to derogatory stereotypes - the difference was that Philip could carry his campaign to a far wider audience (Keegan 1996). His perspective was a missionary one, where the treatment of the Khoisan was regretted principally as a hindrance to their conversion and salvation. But the importance of the polemic lies in his assessment of Cape history. Its “principal thrust” on colonial impacts on the indigenous people of the Cape interior summed up, in general, Ross observes, “the most plausible explanation for the destruction of Khoisan autonomy” (1993:200-201; cf. Elphick 1977; Eldredge 1994). Political consequences there would be, for in 1836-7 his work was the primary source behind a scathing judgment of colonial policies here, handed down by the influential British Parliamentary Select Committee on

Aborigines. It was this that served as the immediate backdrop to a careful Cape government-sponsored sifting of archival sources - by Moodie - to counter the claims that Philip - and, through him, the Select Committee - had made.

Prefiguring a viewpoint that would be entertained in some of the arguments of Elphick (1977) and of the Kalahari revisionists (Ross 1993:201,207), Philip had posited that the *bosjesmans* - 'Bushmen' - were actually a colonial creation: that 'Hottentots' (Khoekhoe), once deprived of their stock, retreated to the mountains to live by the hunt.<sup>1</sup> In response, Moodie marshalled evidence showing that the *Bosjesmans-Hottentotten* were "a very different people" from the "Hottentots", and were - and remained - "the scourge of every people possessing cattle".<sup>2</sup> Whatever the merits of the former claim, the second of these assertions effectively extended ideological justification to continuing assaults on the San in the subcontinent. In the Drakensberg, these would last for another three decades after 1840 (Wright 1971).

There was another facet to the Moodie-Philip clash, which Ross illuminates, namely the emerging racist discourse by which Philip's opponents distinguished *bosjesmans* as possessing - as a *defining* group characteristic - an unchanging evil and savage disposition. This notion that "Bushmen" were "bold, thievish, and not to be trusted" (Marks 1981) indeed had a history reaching back to the first encounters between European mariners and the Khoisan along the South African coastline (Guenther 1980). It is to be observed that Philip, having characterised the Khoisan as the "wretched victims of European avarice and cruelty" (cited in Smith 1988:14), himself then drew on the conventional imagery of barbarism in order to contrast those Khoisan who were mission converts against those who were not. This was symptomatic of a widespread ambivalence in Cape liberalism which, as Keegan (1996) argues, led to the ultimate failure of the humanitarian challenge here in the nineteenth century.

But by the 1870s, when Stow was visiting rock engraving sites in Griqualand West, and pioneering their documentation, the Khoisan in particular, amongst the indigenous people of Southern Africa, were coming to be regarded in a different light.

What was new was - in a word - anthropology. Thornton (1983a) sees 'ethnography' - itself a new word of the 1830s-1860s - as having its roots in two traditions in the mid-nineteenth century. Growing out of earlier genres of travel writing and the chronicles of missionaries, the first ethnographic and linguistic studies had, he shows, two distinct audiences: that comprising persons of academic and literary bent, the emerging 'mainstream' within which modern anthropology would come into its own; and that consisting of the church and mission fraternity. The result was - at that point - a duality of genres in which a given writer might address the same subject matter: the one often in subjective first person reportage; the other in the guise of an objective scientific report. Thornton's account refers to a stage in a process which Young (1985) has called "the fragmentation of the common context". In early nineteenth century Britain a relatively homogeneous natural theology had held sway in the periodical literature, in monographs, lives and letters, and other writings that could be seen as defining a 'common intellectual context'. As the century progressed, however, the impact of scientific findings increasingly challenged this coherent view as to the linkages amongst God, man, and nature - until, eventually, it fell apart, fragmenting into a range of separate intellectual endeavours. These were pursued via ever more specialist and secularised societies, with a corresponding spectrum of new periodicals. Self-conscious professionalisation led ultimately to a re-drawing of disciplinary boundaries. "Let the scientific men stick to their science," said Gladstone of the parting of the ways, "and leave philosophy and religion to poets, philosophers, and theologians" (Gladstone 1881, cited by Young 1985:160-161).

As anthropology was consolidated as a discipline, an articulation developed between metropolitan scholars and theoreticians at the universities of Europe, Britain and America, and what Frazer called the 'men on the spot' - the colonial compilers of raw ethnographic data (Thornton 1983a). This division of labour would be collapsed in due course as university chairs were created and occupied by the likes of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, who combined roles of fieldworker and synthesiser and so established the "research tradition" of modern anthropology (Thornton 1983a:516). Anticipating this tradition by several decades, at the Cape, was the philologist W.H. Bleek, who pioneered important studies of Zulu, Xhosa, Nama and Bushman

languages, from the 1850s, on a scale perhaps not matched until the first of the classic ethnographic monographs here of the 1920s (Thornton 1983b)

Anthropology's head-start here received more than a nod from High Commissioner Sir Bartle Frere, who delivered a Presidential Address before the South African Philosophical Society, in 1878, on the topic of "The Native Races of South Africa" Cited at some length was the work of Bleek, and the philologist's concern that, with few exceptions, little attention was being paid to "the mental life of the aborigines," and of preventing it "from becoming quite effaced without our making an effort to preserve any image of it, fixed in the truest manner in their own words" (Frere 1878:xx). Bleek (and Stow, whose work was alluded to by Frere) was in a position to appreciate first hand the devastating impact of colonialism on Khoisan society - which, by the mid-nineteenth century, as Dubow (1995:66) says, "had been decisively smashed." Frere's brilliant administrative career came somewhat unstuck in South Africa, and his concern for "preservation" sounds empty and ironic against his government's policy of "disarming hostile and rebellious tribes" (Davenport 1971:244).<sup>3</sup> The years 1877-80 saw war and conquest on almost every front in South Africa. Yet his Presidential Address reveals Frere to have been in some respects an uncommonly sensitive observer. Doubtless he would have held Spencerian views as to progress and the role of Empire, yet he could see a parallel to the South African situation as regards loss of culture in the colonisation of his native Wales, and of Cornwall, Scotland and Ireland; he indeed deplored the prospect that South Africa's 'native races' should be "destroyed and rooted out utterly and...their fertile lands [made] simply a refuge for white men from the uttermost parts of the earth" (1878:xxiv). Frere in fact had a genuine interest in what one might call matters anthropological, dating from his days in India, where in addition his daughter, Mary Frere, pioneered the collection and publication of Hindu folklore, and challenged, as Marvin (1999) shows, certain British-held stereotypes. Frere himself cautioned against "indiscriminate generalisation" and allowed Africans a *history* (1878:xii-xv, xx-xxi) that a future historian such as Theal would essentially deny.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, if there was to be a writer who would fix in place a racist paradigm in South

African historiography (with influences far beyond it), it was Theal - “conservative, pro-white...anti-missionary and anti-black” (Smith 1988:36). His characterisation of the indigenous people of South Africa, developed over a period of time from 1892, was steeped in ‘Social Darwinism’ and contributed to a justification for white rule here. From Stow (whose manuscript he trimmed and prepared for publication) Theal borrowed a model of sequential migration (“imparting...a slant,” suggests Dubow (1995:68), “to which its original author did not necessarily subscribe”), and elaborated upon it to produce an evolutionist framework of successive stages represented (not without reference to Sollas’s work - see Chapter 1 above) by ‘Bushmen’ ‘Hottentots’ and ‘Bantu’. Each stage - distinguished sometimes in a barely suppressed pejorative turn of phrase - was defined by a bundle of attributes as to physical type, language, subsistence mode, and material culture (Table 2).

**Table 2. Selected attributes in terms of which Theal defined “Bushmen”, “Hottentots” and “Bantu”.**

	Physical type	Language	Subsistence	Cultural attributes
Bushmen	<p>“Frame dwarfish, colour yellowish brown, face triangular or fox-like in outline, eyes small and deeply sunk, root of nose low, and the whole organ extremely broad, jaws very protuberant, but upper part of face almost vertical, head dotted over with little knots of twisted wiry hair not much larger than peppercorns” (Theal 1919:42).</p> <p>“Cranial capacity (cubic centimetres)...1288”...“all...recorded measurements place these people among the extreme microcephalic or small-skulled races” (ibid.:46).</p>	<p>“Language abounding in clicks and in deep guttural sounds” (ibid.:43).</p>	<p>“Pursuits those of a hunter” (ibid.:43).</p>	<p>“Weapons chiefly bow and poisoned arrow; habitations caverns, rock shelters, holes scooped in the ground...; demeanour that of perfect independence” (ibid.:43).</p>
Hottentots	<p>“Frame slight but sometimes tall, better formed than Bushmen...head scantily covered with little tufts of short crisped hair, occasional marks of beard, cheeks hollow, nose flat, eyes far apart and often to appearance set obliquely” (ibid.:43-44)</p> <p>“Cranial capacity (cubic centimetres)...1407”...“the Hottentots are mesocephalic” (ibid.:46).</p>	<p>“Language abounding in clicks, but less so than that of the Bushmen, and without the croaking sounds of the wild people” (ibid.:44).</p>	<p>“Pursuits pastoral and to a very limited extent metallurgic” (ibid.:44).</p>	<p>“Weapons assagai, knobkerie, bow and arrow, shield; government feeble; habitations slender frames of wood covered with reed mats...; demeanour inconstant, marked by levity” (ibid.:44).</p>

<b>Bantu</b>	<p>"Great variety of form and feature in the different tribes, but, generally speaking, frame of those on the coast robust and as well formed as that of Europeans, of those of the interior somewhat weaker, head covered closely with crispy hair...cheeks full, nose usually flat but occasionally prominent" (ibid.:44).</p> <p>"Cranial capacity (cubic centimetres)...1485"...the Bantu, like Europeans, are megacephalic" (ibid.:46).</p>	<p>"Language musical, words abounding in vowels and inflected to produce harmony in sound" (ibid.:44).</p>	<p>"Pursuits agricultural, pastoral and metallurgic" (ibid.:44).</p>	<p>"Weapons assagai, knobkerie, shield, and among the northern and interior tribes battle-axe and bow and arrow; government firmly constituted with perfect system of laws; habitations strong framework of wood covered with thatch...; demeanour ceremonious, grave, respectful to superiors in rank" (ibid.:44).</p>
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If Theal's break-down can be read as 'stages' in an evolutionist sense (and quite clearly they can be), then the obvious follow-on (elaborated in the remaining ten volumes of his 11-volume *History of South Africa*) would be the advent of European civilisation - with Great Zimbabwe as a possible precursor, a 'mystery' explicable by reference to foreign influence (1919:410-425). Such speculations concerning Great Zimbabwe were to have impacts on the interpretation of rock art (e.g. Dart 1925) and of Driekopseiland itself.

Not that Theal was the inventor of the above terms of classification: a paper by Bank (2000) points out that the system of distinguishing 'Hottentots', 'Bushmen' and 'Bantu' as primary types had been pioneered by Bleek - who indeed coined the last of these terms in a linguistic context. An earlier classification of 'Bushmen', 'Hottentots' and 'Kafirs' dates back to at least the eighteenth century, and the idea that "progress from savagery to civilization [was] evidently first from the hunting to the pastoralist stage" (Coleridge 1836, cited by Pluciennik 2001:743) was not new either; but Bleek was, Bank (2000:163-4) suggests, the first "serious thinker" and "systematic theorist" in South Africa to deploy the terms in a coherent and hierarchical way.<sup>5</sup> He applied the classification primarily in a linguistic rather than a biological racial sense, and while latterly he anticipated "a radical change in the ideas generally entertained with regard to the Bushmen and their mental condition" (Bleek 1875:155), it would be misleading, Dubow suggests, to conclude that he had freed himself entirely from the social evolutionist preoccupations of his day (1995:79).



But it was in drawing together such earlier schemes and classifications within a grand narrative - at once overtly racist and singularly lacking in any probing or questioning (Saunders 1988) - that Theal, as archivist, colonial historiographer and prolific writer, effectively stamped his authority on the study of South African history as no-one else had done (Smith 1988:31). His major influence in the fashioning of histories, especially school history texts, continued into the 1960s-70s (Saunders 1988; Smith 1988). As a summation of received wisdom at the turn of the twentieth century, Dubow (1995:68-74) shows, his constructions were cited, or embellished, in works as diverse as Harvard anthropologist Roland Dixon's *Racial history of man* (1923), S.M. Molema's *Bantu: past and present* (1920), and those of the Afrikaner nationalists of the 1930s including Gustav Preller. In dismissing 'Bushmen' - in the very last line of Volume 1 of the *History of South Africa* series - as "pure savages" who were to be found "in all parts of the country not occupied by the others," Theal (1919:425) added substance to the 'myth of the empty land' (the first suggestions of which occur in Moodie<sup>2</sup>) - an idea that would endure as a central historical and ideological 'given' in South Africa through most of the twentieth century.

Khoisan were engaged - in this view - in a Spencerian struggle for survival in the face of migrations by 'stronger races'. Theal had in fact declared Bushmen, "though gifted with artistic tastes", to be "an almost unimprovable race...[who] had become inert and stagnant": a condition "not sufficient to satisfy God's law of progress" (1919:19). In consequence, they were seen as teetering at the brink of extinction - a notion that became something of a *leit-motiv* in various commentaries from the late nineteenth century onwards - when indeed many aspects of Southern African and particularly Khoisan culture and society *were* changing and crumbling (or had long since done so). In the new discipline of anthropology this perspective, coupled with ideas such as Sollas's, that the 'Bushman-Hottentot types' were "living survivals of humanity's infancy" (as it was later put by Dart,<sup>6</sup> cited by Dubow 1995:46), gave to the Khoisan "novelty value" as the subjects of burgeoning academic speculation (Dubow 1995:66). "The field is large, but the opportunities are fleeting," said Haddon (1905:525), spurring on a nascent anthropology here, in a presidential address before the British Association for the Advancement of Science, meeting in South

Africa in 1905. (It was the same year in which Stow's book saw the light of day). Of the Khoisan, who were "doomed", and the "Bantu peoples", being modified by "new social conditions", those most needing investigation, Haddon urged, were 'Bushmen' and 'Hottentots' who represented "very primitive varieties of mankind" whose numbers were "rapidly diminishing" and who were likely to "disappear first" (ibid. Much Khoisan research in the twentieth century would be mobilised on this "driving agenda" (Dell, cited by Legassick & Rassool 2000:3; cf. Dubow 1995:35), with 'Bushmen' - the very epitome of "otherness" - becoming eventually some of the most-studied people in anthropology's history.

In relation to this, Rassool (1998) notes that the extent to which any given 'Bushman' group was perceived as being near extinction became itself integral to the very definition of what it was to *be* 'Bushman'. This question was, for instance, part of the rhetoric surrounding the presentation of "Bain's Bushmen" at the Empire Exhibition in 1936-7, and the associated campaign for a "Bushman sanctuary" (on which occasion it was also argued, by the National Parks Board, that these "Bushmen were not *really* Bushmen, and therefore not worth preserving" - cited by Rassool 1998:77, my emphasis). Rassool shows how this thread in the discourse about 'Bushman' identity has recurred. Wilmsen (1995) has studied van der Post's influential take on 'Bushmen', and its role in the formation of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in the 1950s and in the renewed, soon competitive, academic interest in the people of that region. Primordialist conceptions of what it is to be 'Bushman' have come to the fore most recently in land claims of the 1990s where, indeed, what Robins (2001) calls "strategic essentialism" has been articulated 'from below' in struggles over 'authenticity' and access to limited resources. "Anything but extinct, only endangered" is how Engelbrecht (2002:242-243) rationalises the status of the Griqua as "one of the aboriginal South African tribes...much later...known as the Khoisan."

Such, broadly, was the position at the opening of the twentieth century, when Stow's (1905) ideas on Driekopseiland became available to a wide audience in the book that Theal had prepared for publication. It is in the further elaboration of these ideas in the fields of archaeology and rock art studies, and with reference to racial or ethnic

'types', relative to developing epistemological frameworks, in the first half of the century, that are to be found insights into most of the more specific assumptions and expectations that underlie interpretations of Driekopseiland's rock engravings. It will be no surprise that most authors would display a preoccupation (grounded more or less in culture theory) with ethnicity and the reified art-making capacities and aesthetic sensibilities attributed to respective racial, ethnic, and/or culture groups - whether Bushman, Korana, or some 'hybridised' combination of these. The influence of foreigners, as already noted in Theal with respect to Great Zimbabwe, continued, for some, to be a surprisingly real possibility (e.g. Dart 1925; 1959). A yardstick implicit in much of the resultant debate about rock art and its authorship was to be articulated most explicitly by Cooke (1969) in what he termed the "true art of the Stone Age Bush people." Against this measure, Driekopseiland was, for him at least, not a match.

#### **"Who were the engravers?" The framing of the question**

By 1933, when Wilman posed this question, not only had there been considerable advancement and consolidation in anthropology in South Africa, but the project of publishing a "comprehensive survey" of what was then "known about the racial characters, cultures and languages of the native peoples of Africa" (Driberg & Schapera 1930) had begun. The introductory note to Schapera's (1930) groundbreaking monograph, *The Khoisan peoples of South Africa*, acknowledged an "increasing public interest in all things African" and noted the importance of making African ethnology known "to the administrator, the missionary, the economist, and the educationist" as each in his own way was "moulding the life of the Native into conformity with the standards of European civilization" (Driberg & Schapera 1930:v) This book and the other works of its kind were not produced in a social or political vacuum. With co-opted chieftaincies operating inside reserves under state control, Keegan (1996:291-292) suggests, African traditionalism, codified native law and the chieftaincies themselves - all served by the new science of anthropology - were becoming instruments of racial supremacy (Giddens [1995:273] cautions, though, that as "the connections between anthropology and colonialism were complex," bald

assertions of the discipline's complicity in colonial expansion and administration overlook how it "became in some part the defender of non-modern cultures in the face of the Western onslaught"). The notion of culture as something that was more or less static, innate and inherent in defined racial or ethnic categories - as impermeable and mutually exclusive entities - was given some substance in these ethnographies (and in their theoretical underpinnings as noted in Chapter 1), although by the end of the 1920s the critique, from within anthropology itself, which ultimately would undo such conceptions, had in fact begun (Dubow 1995:53-65).

The critique was formulated by Schapera himself, amongst others, who in as early as 1926 called into question the view - so monolithic in Theal - that race, culture and language were ineluctably linked. "It seems so evident a fact," suggested Schapera. "that [race and culture] need not necessarily be correlated, that peoples of the same physical structure may differ considerably in culture and that peoples with the same culture may yet belong to different racial types" (1926:835).<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless this was "often...overlooked by writers on the Bushmen and the Hottentots." Rather, Schapera regarded "racial affinity" and "cultural affinity" as calling for "separate treatment", where conclusions drawn from the one could not be applied to the other. Nor, he added, did language necessarily correlate with other elements of culture. That Wilson (e.g. Wilson & Thompson 1969) and Inskip (e.g. 1971) should need to raise precisely these points more than half a century later is proof of the resilience of an idea which, after all, was in line with, and gave intellectual legitimacy to, race segregation and Apartheid.

The ascendant paradigm was given 'scientific' grounding in the work of physical anthropologists in particular, who sought to measure and establish objectively, as 'types', the kinds of population entities with which received wisdom had peopled the sub-continent. Some of the worst excesses of racist science were perpetrated in this endeavour when, particularly in the period 1907 to 1917, atrocious practices attended the procurement of 'typical' skeletons - especially for the definition of the "Bushman" racial type (Legassick & Rassool 2000).

As Dubow has observed, an important lead in this work was provided by Péringuey, director of the South African Museum in Cape Town, on whose staff Wilman then worked - prior to her appointment as director of the new Alexander McGregor Memorial Museum in Kimberley in 1908. Wilman undertook fieldwork in the Northern Cape on Péringuey's behalf in 1906, looking, *inter alia*, at rock engravings at sites around Kimberley (including Wildebeest Kuil but not, as it happens, Driekopseiland) and at Kinderdam near Vryburg.<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 15). Wilman (1933) would in due course publish this and subsequent work on the engravings (including Driekopseiland), but the first accounts were by Péringuey (1906; 1909) who was concurrently synthesising his observations on the Stone Age in South Africa - a significant adjunct to which was Shrubbsall's analysis of skeletons from the museum's collection (Péringuey 1905; 1911). In 1905 Péringuey summarised his views on the Stone Age for that watershed British Association meeting, suggesting that there had been "two, if not three" Stone Age periods, each linked, by implication, with a different race. "Bushmen and Hottentots", associated with a "very 'Recent Stone-age Period'", exhibited "distinct traces of retrogression" relative to "a most powerful race" who were the makers of an earlier "Palaeolithic" (Péringuey 1905).

A process of "conspicuous retrogression" was for Péringuey a defining feature in the art, too, particularly the engravings, and in light of which he rejected Stow's view that the Bushmen were the original 'sculptors' and 'painters', the "true aborigines of this portion of the continent" (Stow 1880 [1905]:ix). The "better finished" engravings, he emphasised, were "*probably the most ancient; the decadent art set in with the arrival of the new-comers or new races*" (Péringuey 1909:418, his emphasis). Hence, for Péringuey, various groups could be linked with the art: some engravings - those at Mahakane and near Kuruman, for example - could be associated with the Tswana (1909:413-415); others, indeed, with Bushmen; while at Kinderdam, where the art was "superior in finish and artistic merit" (ibid.:401), he found "no evidence that the Bushmen of the present time were the original authors" (ibid.:418). It appeared most likely that the "better finished" and older engravings were produced by the makers of his "Palaeolithic" (which, unlike other writers of the day, Péringuey did consider to be of African origin - albeit within a broader context of "intercourse or migrations" from

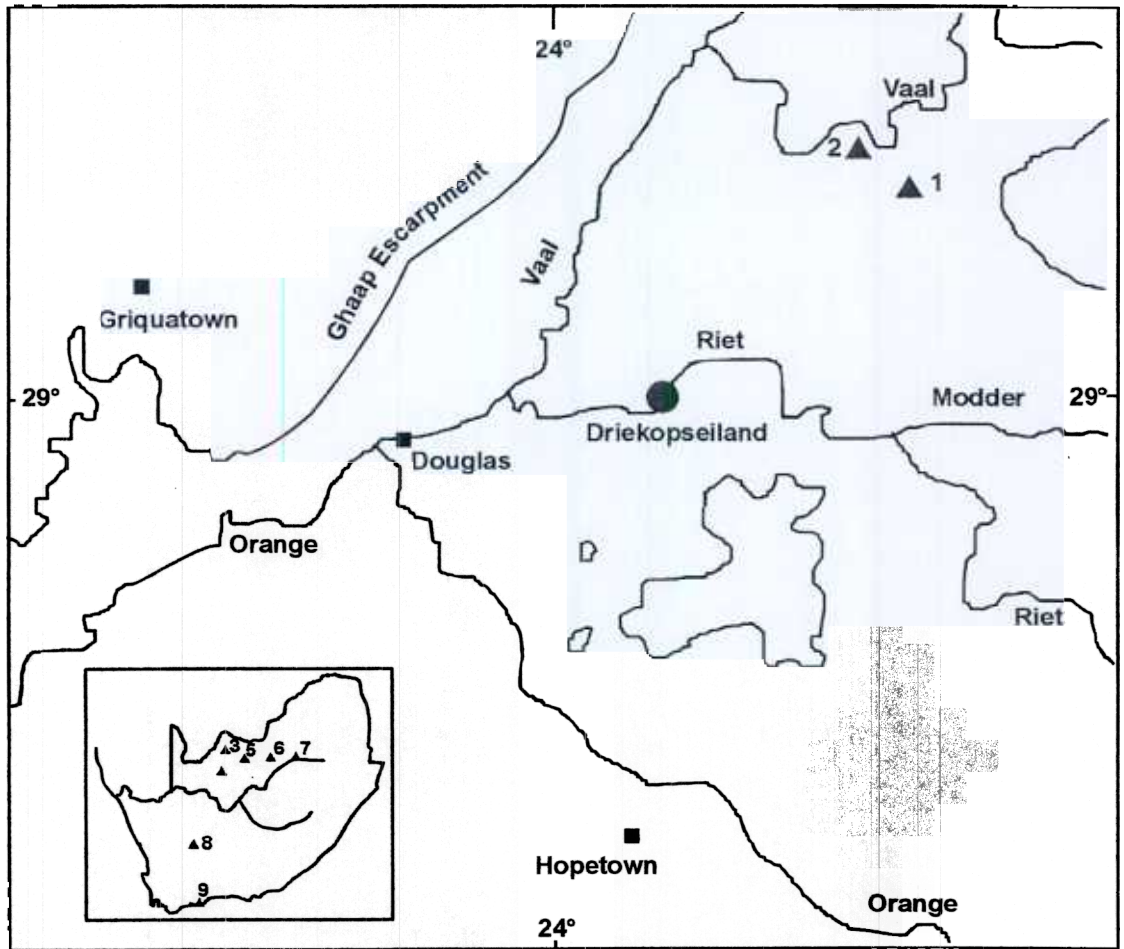


Figure 15. Sites and places mentioned in Chapter 3. 1. Wildebeest Kuil  
 2. Pniel; 3. Mahakane; 4. Wonderwerk Cave; 5. Kinderdam; 6. Klerksdorp  
 7. Redan; 8. Keurfontein/Vosburg; 9. Coldstream Cave.

Northern Africa to the south). With reference to what are plainly Acheulean bifaces from Kinderdam (1909: Plate VII), he argued that “the presence of these stone implements found close to the sculpture themselves, or in the immediate neighbourhood justifies . . . the assumption that the two must be associated” (ibid.:408). Where Péringuey grappled over the matter of age, he surmised simply that “if the celts of palaeolithic type are very ancient, so are many of the rock engravings; if they are not, the evidence drawn from their association with these implements settles the question of their antiquity” (ibid ). Somewhat naive, one might suggest, in his assessment of this evidence (juxtaposition may ‘justify’ a hypothesis, to be tested but it can never justify, as he insisted, “the assumption that the two must be associated”), Péringuey (1911) subsequently went even further in arguing that the handaxes, linked with a particular racial type, were ultimately coeval with (i.e. survived alongside) the seemingly later forms of stone artefacts.<sup>9</sup> This extraordinary conclusion was based in part on Shruballs’s having distinguished Strandlopers (also referred to as “Cavemen”) from Bushmen and Hottentots, as “the most primitive race of South Africa” (Shruballs in Péringuey 1911:208); and on Drury’s alleged finding of “palaeolithic style” lithics throughout the sequence at Coldstream Cave (Péringuey 1911:210)

Stow’s idea of successive waves of immigrants coming to inhabit South Africa had been adapted by Theal, who speculated further on pre-Bushman episodes in the process. Péringuey’s and Shruballs’s work appeared now to support such a scheme with hard evidence in stone and in bone. While Péringuey’s reading of the evidence would soon be superseded, the notion of southward migrations by people of differing racial stock, and with corresponding material culture baggage, was to be consolidated in the 1920s, together with a coherent theoretical perspective that was now not so much evolutionist as it was diffusionist and functionalist.

Thus for instance, in 1928, Burkitt - who envisaged a Lower Palaeolithic “trek” (1928:167) and a Neolithic “invasion” (ibid.:168) - would conclude his book, saying (ibid.:174): “we see the story of South Africa as a series of migrations from the north drifting slowly into the country one after the other, and, having arrived,

intermixing with each other and sometimes forming new local developments.” There was an echo of Sollas in the very last line, where Burkitt declared: “the whole country, although the cradle for a number of autochthonous growths, is in its broad aspects one gigantic, wonderfully stocked, museum of the past.”

Goodwin, at whose invitation Burkitt - his mentor - visited from Cambridge in 1927 to peruse Southern Africa’s archaeological bounty, characterised Africa as “a pocket from which nothing tangible returns”: “higher cultures,” he suggested, “can pass from north to south and survive, but lower cultures passing from south to north are immediately subdued and assimilated...” (Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929:3). In similar vein, Schapera stated that “South Africa by virtue of its geographical situation forms an ethnological cul-de-sac: the ocean on three sides bars all further progress” (1930:25). “Hence,” added Schapera, “invading peoples must either wipe out their predecessors completely or live side by side with them, the latter a condition likely to result in intermingling and the formation of hybrid races and cultures.

What was significant was that ‘culture’ had become a key concept. Burkitt’s definition of it, Kleindienst (1967) shows, proved to be highly influential throughout British Africa, and was in some measure responsible for the crisis in archaeological terminology in Africa in the 1960s. Burkitt (1928:3) stated that “culture denotes an assemblage of industries made by people of the same stock...[as well as] something more abstract that gives us an idea of the way of life and mental outlook of the people we are dealing with. it is necessary to take into account not only the various industries which occur, but also any other factor, such as art, burial customs, etc, which will help us to discover anything of the life and minds of the people.” The engine of change in such a perspective was essentially diffusion. Goodwin developed a more detailed regional model, where “intermingling” by immigrant peoples appeared indeed to have resulted in “hybrid races and cultures” (*à la* Schapera, above). He introduced temporal and spatial qualifiers to the concept of culture which, for him, was “a group of objects, techniques, ideas, words and beliefs normally associated together at a single time and in a single area”; “To the prehistorian .culture presents as closely as possible the pattern of typical tools.



artefacts, paintings and engravings used by a single people at a particular period in their own area" (Goodwin 1953:21-22; cited by Kleindienst 1967:825).

Trigger (1981) traces the rise of a more Durkheimian outlook (evident in these conceptions of culture), and the corresponding decline in the late nineteenth century obsession with progress and evolution, to the social and economic realities of the day. European commerce had slackened, and the consequences of the industrial revolution had turned out to be less than universally beneficial. Human nature, so it now seemed, preferred it that things remained as they were: instead it was stability, welded by 'social conscience', that made for a healthy society (Trigger 1981:144). Beyond Europe, 'primitive' societies had seemed in any case to be dominated by - if not total inertia, as Theal would have it - then at least by 'tradition'. For anthropologists or archaeologists, the Durkheimian construction of a functioning society provided a particularly defined reality with integrated and often observable parts; an adequate description of a society would be detailed in terms of its formally distinctive customs, language, and so on, together with a type list of conventional material artefacts. In such a scheme, Binford and Sabloff (1982:141-142) have said in their critique of Old and New World culture models in archaeology, "the seat of both causes and perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness is the internal, 'collective' characteristic of each society."

It is precisely this conception of society, of 'culture', that has determined much of the debate about Driekopseiland - framing the kinds of questions that would be asked. The site's distinctiveness, making it something of a 'misfit' against other engraving sites in the region, was read - by this logic - as evidence that more than one 'culture' was responsible for the art. An opportunity was missed for putting other sorts of questions, relative for instance to the site's singular landscape setting, where relevant insights were not lacking in the published ethnography, some of it available as early as the 1870s.

Part of the legacy of Goodwin and van Riet Lowe, in the appreciation of South Africa's past, was their concerted work from the mid-1920s towards publication of the

first systematically archaeological take on “The Stone Age Cultures of South Africa”, published in the *Annals of the South African Museum* in 1929. It would have a long-lasting influence, establishing a new terminology for South Africa; and although its theoretical underpinnings have long since been rejected, its basic outline still holds good (Deacon 1990:43; Deacon & Deacon 1999:5-6). It also honed some of the parameters for the on-going discussion on rock art here.

An implicit ‘given’ in their work was the continued acceptance of southward migrations as the primary harbinger of change. Indeed, Goodwin (Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929:4) included in his introductory chapter a map “showing desert barriers and mountain masses” to illustrate the “probable effects of these on an immigratory people approaching from the North.” North-south linkages were proposed in relation to each of the Earlier, Middle and Later Stone Ages (Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929:6-7) - which, in terms of stratigraphy, now showed the error of Péringuey’s view of coeval ‘Palaeolithic’ and later elements. It could still be stated in light of the new scheme - as Schapera (1930:27) did - that “the stone industries associated in South Africa with the Bushmen were not indigenous to the country, but constitute an invading element which penetrated into it from the north-east and superseded the two pre-existing stone cultures

In defining cultural entities within the Later Stone Age - which was held to be ‘Neo-anthropic’ in character and of North African origin - stone implements were sorted into types; and associated types into industrial groups. The resultant classes were called Smithfield ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’ (occurring essentially in the interior), and Wilton (coastal and adjacent). As regards rock art, Goodwin and van Riet Lowe saw that the Smithfield ‘A’ and ‘B’ were “now definitely associable with the rock engravings of the dolerite areas,” while Smithfield ‘C’ and Wilton were “as definitely associable with the cave paintings of the Union. The Later Stone Age folk,” they added, “were thus the artist race of South Africa and physically can be regarded as belonging to the ‘San’ or so-called Bushman race” (ibid.:6-7). A cultural separation in line with Stow’s ‘sculptor’ and ‘painter’ tribes thus persisted. There remained, moreover, a hint of Péringuey’s conviction that the engravings were more ancient, with Van Riet Lowe

approving the view (given by Schapera 1925) that the engravings belong to a “more primitive and earlier period” than the paintings - “an illuminating and important conclusion,” he added (ibid.:175)

Wilman, in her book on *The rock-engravings of Griqualand West and British Bechuanaland, South Africa* (1933), provided a commendably comprehensive review of the existing literature on the engravings, as a baseline against which she presented her own observations, and a range of conclusions and suggestions which in some respects departed from the conventional view. As to whom the engravers might have been, Wilman commenced - as had Stow - from a review of their distribution relative to paintings, and, importantly, relative to areas where neither paintings nor engravings were to be found. While granting Stow the benefit of not having revised his manuscript for the press, and expressing particular confidence in his sources (Wilman 1933:58), she criticised his “dividing the Bushmen into two branches according to their artistic talents (and incidentally in ignoring those devoid of them).” Where there was evidence of earlier and later engravings, she was inclined not to ascribe different styles to different races (as Péringuey had done and as Goodwin and van Riet Lowe were clearly willing to do), as “they tended to merge into each other.” There was “a certain unity” in the engravings, “in spite of differences in the details and in the quality of the work” (ibid.:59). Nor did she go along with Stow in regard to “a small clan of painters” introduced into the engraving area as explanation for the finger paintings at sites such as Wonderwerk Cave and numerous shelters in the scarps and hills of the Northern Cape. Rather, Wilman proposed (ibid.:59-60) that “we are inclined to think - though we cannot of course prove this contention - that the engravings, using the work in the widest significance of the term, were the work of one and the same tribe who, while specialising in this form of art, nevertheless occasionally daubed their walls with paint in the form of animals and scribblings. That these people were the Bushmen,” she added, “who formerly were in possession of much of this area, and whose scattered remnants may still be found in Griqualand West and Bechuanaland, seems extremely likely.” She speculated further, with reference to work by Dorothea Bleek, that the ||n-!k'e or ‘home people’, known to have occupied areas north of the Orange River, were the

particular group responsible for the art in the areas surveyed in her work.

At the end of her book Wilman went so far as to pose the “probability of the engraving practice having developed *in* South Africa, among certain Bushman tribes’ (ibid.:66, her emphasis). This was a matter, she suggested, for future investigation, but in entertaining it she effectively challenged the assumptions of the prevailing diffusionist orthodoxy.

### **Driekopseiland: “a state of confusion worse confounded”**

As to the engravings at Driekopseiland, Wilman was in broad agreement with Stow in ascribing the art to ‘Bushmen’. Van Riet Lowe (1952), in his turn, did so on the basis of their apparent association with nearby occurrences of “Smithfield ‘B’” and overlapping “Wilton” phases of the Later Stone Age. But beyond this point interpretations diverged and descended into “a state of confusion worse confounded” - a phrase from Wilman, originally applied not so much to conflicting views on the engravings as to the “tangle” of opinions over the types and races alleged to have populated South Africa’s past. It was in some measure this tangle of types, as Wilman implied, that was confusing the debates on rock art.

Wilman’s immediate exasperation was with Broom, one of the originators of a contrary view on the authorship of the engravings. Broom was emphatic that it was the Korana who were responsible for the engravings at Driekopseiland; that indeed they were the makers “probably of all engraved stones” (Broom cited by Wilman 1933:62). Broom even felt that “the Middle Stone Age Culture” was “due to a Korana-like native” (ibid.). This conviction stemmed from his work on the Boskop skull and subsequent speculations on an extinct ‘Australoid’ race - clear traces of which Broom had detected in a number of ‘Korana’ skulls. Broom, whose ‘type Korana’ specimen was the skull of a single !Kora man whom he had known in life at Douglas (Morris 1992:18), provided an ultra-typological classification of a sample of Riet River skulls, distinguishing fifteen “pure Korana”, nine “pure Bush” and eight “Korana-Bush hybrids” (ibid.:18). The same population has since been characterised

as “morphologically homogeneous” and Khoisan-like by Morris (ibid.:102). As to the rock engravings of the Douglas area (which included Driekopseiland), Broom expressed the view that they could not be “more than a limited number of centuries old” and that he was “strongly of the opinion that they were engraved by Koranas and engraved by metal tools” (cited by Wilman 1933:62 - who declared this to be a “surprising statement” from one such as Broom!).

Contributing to the fray, Battiss (1948) meshed these opposing opinions. He recognized the engravings of animals as the oldest and linked them to 'Bushman'. But what he identified as later episodes of geometric symbols were, he believed, distinguishable, the “meandering serpentine motifs” being “replicas of the designs found on modern Bushman bags, karosses and knapsacks”; whereas those featuring “dots in a crescent shape, and resembling picks and anchors” he had not seen elsewhere in Bushman contexts, and for this reason ascribed them “to other engravers, most probably the Koranas” (1948:59). (Frobenius [1909:131] earlier illustrated an engraving from Driekopseiland which he interpreted as a “leather travelling bag”).

Interesting in Battiss's formulation is his linking of engravings of animals with 'Bushman', in which the implicit reasoning seems to be that these were what hunters hunted. (Frobenius, again, had it that 'Bushman' were “remarkably inexpert in the use of vegetable foods. Hence he must almost daily go a hunting” - 1909:134). Goodwin (1936:205) proposed 'sympathetic magic' as one possible motivation for some of the engravings at Vosburg. Later, in the 1960s, the same argument evidently lies behind Willcox's correlation of the animal engravings at Driekopseiland with 'Bushman'; an association which seemed further supported by the local occurrence of an “abundance of Smithfield B” artefacts. But Willcox then ventured that “the later Korana, moved to experiment by what they found there, but without artistic skill, made the geometrical peckings” (1963:59). What puzzled Willcox were the instances, at Klerksdorp and Redan, where associations of Khoekhoe or Korana with geometric engravings were less readily made; he concluded, “no single people could it seems have made all of the sunburst type of petroglyph in the Republic

unless it were a Korana-Bantu mixture" (ibid

A further twist to these interpretations, developed furthest by Willcox, was the attribution to 'Bushmen' of child-like characteristics. It is found in the work of Dorothea Bleek (Barnard 1989), but was compounded and given a decidedly racist 'scientific' basis by some of the physical anthropology of the 1930s. Willcox (1963:59; 1964; 1972) drew not so much on these earlier instances but on the work of Kellogg, to support a suggestion that there was a resemblance between the Driekopseiland engravings and the pre-representational drawings of children. A clear predisposition towards such thinking is nevertheless to be found in his earlier remarks, for instance that "Palaeolithic man and his modern representative the Bushman remained, in their capacity for abstract thinking, always young children" (Willcox 1956:85). A "child nature" was a characteristic of the Nharo, in Dorothea Bleek's view (Barnard 1989:109), which later fuelled the notions of 'harmlessness' and 'fragility' that would underlie some of the most pervasive 'Bushman' myths of the twentieth century (Guenther 1980; Barnard 1989). A stamp of apparent authority was provided by Drennan in his analyses of what he saw as 'infantile' characteristics in 'Bushman' skeletal morphology, which were couched in the terms of newly revived evolutionary recapitulation theory. Adults of the so-called 'child races' could be compared, in this view, to the children of supposedly 'superior' races. The South African "paedomorphs" documented from skeletal remains, and the "still infantile Bushmen" were to Drennan part of an evolutionary path separate from that of the white races; the Bushmen, to him, were indeed "a retarded form that has bridged the gap between the apes and man" (Drennan 1931, cited by Dubow 1995:50). To Frobenius (1909:132) they had represented "the last lisping utterance that reaches us from the childhood of mankind. This image of 'Bushmen', as "morphological Peter Pans", and as "human fossils" was popularised by no less a figure than Smuts, whose almost mystical treatment anticipated a van der Postian child-like reminder of a noble innocence that Western civilisation had long since lost (Dubow 1995; cf. Barnard 1989; Wilmsen 1995). This is not to imply that Willcox held the racist views of Drennan, but it is clear that the notion of "little yellow people" who were "essentially children" - and, in relation to the animal world, "often more animal

than man" - has had a role way beyond the popular portrayals and stereotypes as are found in recent tourist literature (Mazel 1992:764; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994:202-3, both citing Pearse's (1973) *Barrier of Spears*).

The implications of Kellogg's arguments led Willcox to revise earlier conclusions regarding Driekopseiland, and to propose that it was "unnecessary to suppose that there is any cultural connection between the sites at which rock-art of this kind occurs, or that any meaning as pictographs or ideographs [a reference to van Riet Lowe - see below] need be ascribed to these glyphs" (1963:59). The engravings could have been "the work of people of any age and race who are still in the 'young child' stage of artistic development," he suggested (1964:58; 1972:167). Cooke (1969:73, 100) was to concur. In this new light, Willcox believed that the Driekopseiland engravings could be the work of any of the precolonial populations here, and that "of the Korana and the Bushmen, the latter race is the more likely to have been the artists" (*ibid.*; Willcox 1965) - presumably on the basis of the apparent association with 'Smithfield B' artefacts, though this is not stated. Here, however, Cooke (1969:97) would differ, for it implied, to him, a degeneration amongst Bushman artists to a more primitive stage, and it was more likely that the Korana had been the engravers of the geometric images at Driekopseiland. Alternatively, interbreeding between Bushmen and "Hottentot or Negroid invaders" might have resulted in a form of art bearing "little or no resemblance to the true art of the Stone Age Bush people" (*ibid.*: 100).<sup>10</sup>

Thus not only endorsing the 'young child stage' hypothesis, and reifying what he considered to be "true" Bushman art (which clearly excluded geometric imagery), Cooke - like Willcox - also entertained "interbreeding", mixing or hybridisation as part of the framework within which variability in Southern African rock art was to be understood. In another instance of this, Cooke suggested that the "series 5" late white paintings in shelters in Zimbabwe were probably made by "late Bushmen artists rather than negroids" or "perhaps...by hybrid Bush/Bantu who did not have the inherent skills of their mothers or forebears" (1975:25). This mix made for a strong brew that betrays not just a committed conflation of race, ethnicity and culture; but

which also smacks of eugenics, that doctrine (deepening the political anxiety of the majority of whites in South Africa at that time) which held that the mixing of races necessarily led to degeneration or deterioration (Dubow 1995).

### **Influences from afar**

Ideas that developed parallel with these particular debates entertained somewhat more exotic scenarios. Assumptions of cultural diffusion, present in many of the perspectives reviewed above, assumed hyper-diffusionist proportions in some of the work of Dart (1925; 1959), Breuil (e.g. Breuil 1949a, 1949b; Yates *et al.* 1990:23-26) and others. Glancing back in 1959, Dart was still prepared to cite his extraordinary 1925 paper, suggesting that “the mines, ruins, Bushman paintings, foreign coins, historical facts, exotic plants, foreign place names and oriental hats demonstrated an age-long succession of cultural impacts upon Southern Africa, not only from the Near East, but also from the Far East, before Europeans arrived here” (1959:26). “The pictorial art of the Bushmen,” he had earlier suggested, “has preserved through the lapse of centuries unassailable evidence of the impacts of ancient civilizations of the Eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamian areas upon a Bushman South Africa which betrayed in their day no evidence of Bantu contamination”(1925:426).

Nor was a prehistorian of the stature of van Riet Lowe (1952) reticent, on occasion, about suggesting long-distance links, and in consequence his paper on Driekopseiland continues to be cited by the lunatic fringe. He observed that the geometric engravings at Driekopseiland represented a type of image to be seen throughout the African continent, and even beyond (1952:769); and he distinguished a “special group of figures” here that were to him utilitarian rather than aesthetic. These, he urged, suggested “a ‘feeling for writing’, an anxiety to convey a message in a symbol, i.e. an ideograph rather than a pictograph” (*ibid.*: 770; cf. Power 1949). Van Riet Lowe was constrained in his conjectures by the apparent Later Stone Age context of the Driekopseiland engravings, but argued that the Bushmen “may well have reached a stage of culture in which their mental development enabled them to devise and use symbols to which specific meanings were attached” (*ibid.*: 775).



Slack (1962) republished van Riet Lowe's paper as an appendix to - and springboard for - her own more extravagant speculations. She had recorded much of the site in 1938, at van Riet Lowe's invitation, and it was hoped that the Abbé Breuil, here in 1943, might publish a monograph using her copies. But the "difficulty of his working in the area at his age" prevented this (van Riet Lowe 1952:769), and it was only later that Slack's work appeared, in a volume intended to popularise the engravings (1962:11). Bent as she was on making representational sense of every engraving (Willcox 1964), she made inherently improbable connections that involved links with "an Egyptian or even Mediterranean civilization". No less a scientist than Dart - it is to be remembered - was still making similar claims just three years previously.

Not unexpectedly, Driekopseiland features (with a van Riet Lowe illustration) in Hromnik's *Indo-Africa* (1981:100-102); and in Fell's equally bizarre pursuance of, in his case, Libyan explorers using Ogham script (Willcox 1984:210; cf. Du Toit 1967). The idea of foreigners being subjects and even the makers of southern African rock art continues to attract a following at the start of the twenty first century: members of the Johannesburg Von Däniken Society recently visited the site;<sup>11</sup> while a farmer in the district advertises visits to Driekopseiland to see "rock etchings...believed to be from the pre-San era," the "symbolic etchings" having "some spiritual or religious significance from an ancient civilization" (<http://www.fortrichmond.co.za/attractions/index.html>). In similar vein, tourism officials in the 1970s had been eager to link the site with Great Zimbabwe (MMK: Letter Winchester-Gould to Humphreys 26 Oct 1973).

### **Summing up**

In the characterisation of South Africa's social and historical landscape, taken-as-given categories crystallised through the nineteenth century and were codified, by such influential writers as Theal, as evolutionary 'stages' in terms of physical type, subsistence mode, material culture and language. By the 1920s these categories had become synonymous with the anthropological concept of 'culture', which came to be treated as "the most definitive trait of human beings", as Koerner (2001:59) has

put it, with 'race' as the "mechanism for its biological transmission." The "naturalising of racial distance" in a wide range of anthropological studies, alongside a search for origins and/or exotic influences to the north or even beyond Africa, were two key aspects that found expression in rock art research in particular (Lewis-Williams 1995:70). The empiricist framework within which research was carried out is, for Lewis-Williams, a third major theme of the period, and one which he has subjected to a sustained critique (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1984b;1995; Lewis-Williams & Loubser 1986). Typologies evolved, but the methods impressed upon the fledgling discipline of archaeology in South Africa by Burkitt proved decisive. In rock art studies, these resulted in a focus on discerning 'styles' and sequences (Davis 1990:280) that were explicable relative to the cultural and ethnic entities that were moved in from the north to populate the local past. In functionalist mode, Burkitt (1928:110) required purposes and meanings for artefacts, but for rock art he was content to have it as "the result of an innate artistic tendency...not essentially necessary to the actual business of living." Fleetingly he allowed that "motives of magic or ritual in some cases underlay its production," but he was more interested in the similarities (read indications of diffusion) between the paintings in eastern Spain and in South Africa "a strong argument for a connection between the parent cultures" (ibid.:110).

This empiricist preoccupation with styles and sequences - and their relationships to 'cultures' - enabled researchers to write volumes about the art while making little if any progress towards elucidating its meaning (Lewis-Williams 1995:71; Lewis-Williams & Loubser 1986). This is clearly apparent in the case of Driekopseiland. There was minimal awareness of the way assumptions, classifications, and taken-for-granted concepts might operate as an "invisible sieve surreptitiously sorting the data" (Lewis-Williams & Loubser 1986:255). Later, quantification all too easily gave to this enterprise a "deceptive aura of objectivity" (ibid.:258; cf. Chippindale 2000).

From Stow onwards, data collection had become a rock art worker's *raison d'être*: seldom, Lewis-Williams and Loubser have charged, with the recognition that this was but a starting point: those taking the art "at face value as self-evident records of hunter-gatherer life are all too frequently deceived by appearances" (Lewis-Williams & Loubser 1986:260). Stow himself (in a letter published in *Nature* in 1870) had

famously anticipated a book documenting “a history of the manners and customs of the Bushmen as depicted by themselves” (cited in Schoeman 1997:48). The figurative imagery of San art undoubtedly lent itself to this treatment by Western observers, whose own artistic tradition had privileged the human form and the overt narrative that these writers believed they could see in San rock art (Megaw & Megaw 1994:293). The diversity of interpretations applied to Driekopseiland reflects in part, perhaps, the converse of this, where non-representational forms were prone to being dismissed as mere ‘ornament’, as Megaw and Megaw (ibid.) have suggested in another context, and hence, in the opinions of some, falling beyond the range of typical ‘Bushman art’. Art-making capacities and aesthetic sensibilities were readily reified in ethnic terms, given the prevailing culture model in functionalist anthropology and archaeology.

As has been seen, the “spirit of the times” impinged on these various interpretations in ways that only confirm that “science, since people must do it, is a socially embedded activity” - as Gould (1981:21) has put it. The “twin myths of objectivity and inexorable march toward truth,” he adds, must be given up if science is to identify its cultural constraints (ibid.:23). Echoing Ranger and Murray (1981:12-14), we, whether as archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, or scientists, need to be responsible for the knowledge we produce; to seek in humility to understand the work of our predecessors; and to be sensitive to the constraints under which we ourselves work.

## Notes

1. As the relationship between colonists and indigenous people declined, in Philip’s analysis - the latter being relieved of land and stock - the choice for many Khoisan was famine, or retreat to the mountains - or to sink “into servitude as the herdsmen and domestics of the boors [sic]”. With the frontier expanding, “colonists, after having deprived the poor natives of their springs of water, now penetrated into the deserts and mountains to seize their women and children, and to reduce them to slavery on the lands which their husbands and fathers had occupied as a free and independent people.” As they took to defending themselves and their possessions, so their reputation for savagery increased. Spiralling conflict reached a point, in the 1770s, when, as Philip put it, “the whole race of Bushmen or Hottentots, who had not submitted to servitude, was ordered to be seized or extirpated; the privilege of slavery was designed exclusively for the women and children; the men, whose habits disqualified them for the purposes of the colonists, and whose revenge was probably

dreaded, were destined for death” (cited by Ross 1993:199)

2. If Moodie was correct that there was indeed a distinct cultural grouping of what would today be referred to as San hunter-gatherers, then he did not allow the possibility that pastoralists on occasion lost their stock and “became” hunter-gatherers - as Elphick (1977) has shown they did. Moodie also sought to dismiss Philip’s charge relating to the order for the extirpation of Khoisan in the 1770s, exploiting a technicality and a softened translation of the Dutch command *uijt roeijen* to counter Philip’s argument (Ross 1993). It is also worth noting of Moodie’s historiographic work, that it was he who first mustered records (again in response to a disapproving dispatch from London) to imply that Xhosa were as recent arrivals as were whites in part of the eastern frontier (Ross 1993:206); and, in so doing, gave substance to what would become another of the long-lived myths in South African historical writing.

3. Frere’s was not the last South African administration that would take an interest in anthropology, a field that was clearly “useful” in the formulation and exercise of “Native Policy”. Half a century on, Smuts - a strict advocate of the kind of institutional and territorial segregation that was being pioneered in Frere’s day - said of the Kriges’ *Realm of the Rain Queen* that, “this is the kind of realism that will go far towards making the conclusions of social anthropology more acceptable to practical men and more useful to the administrator” (Smuts 1941, in Krige & Krige 1943:xi).

4. See note 7

5. But see W.H. Bleek, cited by Stow, 21 June 1876, given on page 61 above.

6. Bleek (cited by Schoeman 1997:30-31) had expressed this idea at the Cape as early as 1869: “It is to me a wonder that in our times, when so much diligent application is bestowed upon the mute remains of those races who lived in the so-called prehistoric age, the living nations in which the mind and character of probably still older times have to so great an extent been preserved should receive such scanty attention.”

7. Frere’s earlier comments on “nomenclature”, back in 1878, are remarkable for their recognition that not “every yellow skinned native is a Hottentot or Bastard”; and not “every black or brown man is a Negro of Kafir” (1878:xiii-xiv). Frere asserted, too, that identity was contingent: that while people might call themselves one thing and be known as something else by their neighbours, self-identifications could sometimes be misleading, as “smaller and broken tribes are apt to claim affinity with the powerful and the well known” (ibid.). Nevertheless, it was in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Schapera (1926) shows, that distinctions between “Bushmen” and “Hottentots” were beginning to be made on a systematic basis with reference to physical type and language, in addition to mode of life.

8. Wilman’s wide brief evidently included the collecting of insects and plants for the South African Museum, while her correspondence from the field reported on Khoisan graves and discussions about their being ‘unearthed’ at Pniel Mission: “On the

station there are buried Koranas and Bushmen," she wrote, "but these the missionaries will not touch because they think their natives will not like it. However Mr W[estphal] says he quite sees that it might be of interest to us to unearth some of them and if the government wishes it he would make no objection. But he has always refused them to others." She added: "Then there is living - but she may die any day - a Bushwoman whose bones have already been bespoken by Prof v. Luschan, but Mr W. refused to do anything in the matter for the reason above given. However he hinted that should we want the skeleton, it might be secured through the District Surgeon. The woman is friendless and the government may do what the missionary dares not." The subsequent obtaining of skeletons in this kind of way is documented by Legassick & Rassool (2000).

9. Burkitt (1928:4) would later emphasise the diffusionist principle that where material, say, in Europe and South Africa, belongs to the "same" culture or industry, "*no similarity in age is implied*" (his emphasis).

10. A point to which this thesis will return is made by Megaw & Megaw (1994:293), that the Western artistic tradition privileges the human form and overt narrative over non-representational 'ornamental' forms. This may well render much figurative San art appear more accessible, and even self-evident in its imagery, to western observers, while, in contrast, geometric imagery such as at Driekopseiland is perhaps more prone to being dismissed as mere 'ornament' and hence lacking in significant meaning - or taken, conversely, to represent ideographs or forms of writing and hence implying the influence of 'ancient civilisations'.

11. Unlikely claims are not uncommon at the fringes of archaeology, and include even the alleged involvements of beings from beyond our planet. Archaeology's take on this kind of thinking is addressed by Trigger (1989:406) when he suggests: "Archaeologists cannot rule out the possibility that extraterrestrial visitors have influenced the course of human development to some degree, any more than they can exclude the biological existence of purple unicorns. Yet, clumsy, inadequate, and uncertain as our present scientific understandings of cultural change may be, they account for what is observed in the archaeological record in both its totality and individual features, while extraterrestrial salvationism keeps alive only by making speculative and always inconclusive claims about isolated phenomena."

## IV

### Rock art, history and environment at Driekopseiland

*“Ultimately what is of primary relevance about dating in archaeology is not the age as such, but the temporal positioning of the thing dated in relation to other archaeological material.”*

- Andree Rosenfeld & Claire Smith 1997:409

In the 1960s-80s G.J. and D. Fock, in their study of the rock art of the Northern Cape (with significant inputs from the work of Butzer and colleagues), built on the foundations in particular of Wilman’s work, producing a new baseline regional survey (e.g. Fock 1969; Butzer et al. 1979; Fock 1979; Fock & Fock 1984; 1989). It was as a part of this survey that Driekopseiland was recorded and mapped in some detail (Fock & Fock 1989). Their findings, already summarised in Chapter 2, took the Driekopseiland debate forward in the sense that they established more clearly the nature, and possible age, of this extraordinary site

In the previous Chapter a greater awareness was gained of the assumptions, classifications, and taken-for-granted concepts that lay behind past interpretations of the engravings here. Sensitivity to the workings of that “invisible sieve surreptitiously sorting the data” is crucial, in terms of which an ascription of the engravings to this ‘culture’ or that was frequently taken to be a sufficient explanation. It is no less appropriate now to review current archaeological and palaeoenvironmental evidence - starting with that assembled by the Focks and their colleagues - which defines, empirically, our present understanding of past local and regional patterning. The articulation of rock art, archaeological and palaeoenvironmental histories is central to the analysis being developed here.

#### **Temporal linkages**

The argument proceeds from a proposition that at the same time that the physical landscape at Driekopseiland itself was changing (Butzer *et al.* 1979) - in the sense

that the glaciated rock surfaces were becoming exposed in the river channel - the social landscape was also far from static (e.g. Humphreys 1988).

This, with the details that are to be elaborated, presupposes that temporal linkages can be sustained, and so highlights the central significance of dating. Dating, and the development of a regional chronology - what Trigger (1989:409) refers to as archaeology's "first problem", and one which it "can never outgrow" - is a key feature here, and a principal objective for longer term research, given that temporal resolution, as will become apparent in light of present limitations in rock art dating, must for now remain somewhat coarse. Trigger adds that "only insofar as archaeologists understand the order in which cultural factors change, do they have a basis for beginning to understand the causal relations linking them" (ibid.:409 citing Wylie 1985:77-8).

In rock art studies, the teasing out, and reliable documentation, of a relevant chronology has been notoriously difficult. Three decades ago Inskip (1971:104) observed that South Africa's rock art was "a source of wealth not easily tapped." In the 1930s and 1940s the place of rock art studies at the core of archaeological endeavours here - notwithstanding their empiricist bent - seemed almost secure (e.g. Goodwin 1936; van Riet Lowe 1937; 1945); but, after the war, priorities were shifting. Other questions were being pursued by archaeologists, where new techniques such as radiocarbon dating could be applied; while a distinct pessimism was growing as to the future of rock art studies, in which there appeared to be no similar progress. "We find that at every turn we may take but a few steps," lamented Inskip (ibid.:103), "before the path becomes too treacherous to tread." The impasse, where the lack of temporal control was a primary obstacle, was summed up in his remark that "on the shelter walls, and in their floors, we have two worlds which cannot yet be brought together" (ibid.:102). The art in its "flat manifestation" (Humphreys 1971) had somehow to be separated out through time if its study was going to proceed beyond a "pre-stratigraphic" stage and be integrated fully into a broader archaeological perspective. This was a matter of basic empirical (not empiricist) concern.

Mazel (1993) was making the same fundamental point a little over two decades later in answer to a critique of “chronocentricism” - the suggestion that “much of the art can be sufficiently dated to allay the misgivings of all but the most incorrigible chronophiles” (Lewis-Williams 1993:49). In fact paintings (and engravings) of domesticates, that potentially linked associated art into limited time-spans, are found only within restricted spatial distributions; while the number of direct dates for art of earlier periods was minimal. Against this, “educated guesses” (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1992:18) were based on paper chromatography dating of the late 1960s (Denninger 1971), considered unreliable (Mazel 1993). “In essence,” suggested Mazel, “we are no nearer to dating the majority of the Natal Drakensberg paintings...we are not yet in a position properly to integrate the rock paintings with the 8000-year-old Natal Drakensberg hunter-gatherer historical record known from surveys and excavations, except perhaps in an uncertain way for the *ad* 1830-1870 paintings” (ibid.:891). Russell (2000:61) recently commented that the absence of a relevant chronology effectively consigns nearly the entire corpus of rock art to the same status as a heap of unprovenanced artefacts. Indeed, at Driekopseiland a sequence of cultural material of Pleistocene to late Holocene age flanks the site; and it remains to be proven which assemblage (if indeed any of those directly alongside the site) best matches the engravings (which may themselves be of variable age).

### **Ways of dating rock engravings**

Instead of focussing primarily on the difficulties of rock art dating, the main advancements in rock art research in South Africa since the 1960s have been made along different trajectories, revolutionising thinking beyond the “game of ethnological ‘snap’” of which Inskeep had disapproved, and elucidating much concerning the meaning of the art (see Chapter 1). There has nevertheless been some progress with dating the art, or with determining its broad archaeological contexts - both in South Africa (e.g. Butzer *et al.* 1979; Thackeray 1981; 1983; Thackeray *et al.* 1981; van der Merwe 1982; van der Merwe *et al.* 1987; Morris 1988; Beaumont 1989; Morris & Beaumont 1994; Yates & Jerardino 1996; Mazel & Watchman 1997; Ouzman & Wadley 1997; Jerardino & Swanepoel 1999) and internationally (see



reviews by Rosenfeld & Smith 1997; Rowe 2001). Indeed the number of dates obtained, together with the development of new instrumental dating methods, from the 1980s, has invigorated research (Rowe 2001); even if the initial promise of direct radiocarbon dating techniques (e.g. van der Merwe 1982; van der Merwe *et al.* 1987; Loy *et al.* 1990) has proven often to be illusory because of continuing technical difficulties (Nelson 1993; Rosenfeld & Smith 1997; Rowe 2001; Dorn 2001; Whitley & Simon 2002a, 2002b; pers comm David Whitley). Spectacular claims, as were made initially at Jinmium in Australia, have given way to revised estimates (e.g. Owen 1999); while claims for a recent age, based on more than one technique, were refuted in the politically charged case of Foz Côa in Portugal (Zilhao 1995). Tempering his review of “substantial and exciting progress” (2001:5), Rowe suggests that “rock art dates in general should be considered provisional pending further research” (*ibid.*:10); while Whitley and Simon (2002a:13; cf. Whitley & Simon 2002b) stress, in the context of the AMS petroglyph dating controversy, that “substantial basic research must be conducted to determine when it is working, and why, as well as when it does not work, before it is applied to empirical cases.”

Prospects (or present constraints) for dating Driekopseiland and other sites in the region are assessed by way of a review of the major current techniques.

Several dating techniques are based on measuring the time it takes for rock coatings and varnishes - commonly referred to as ‘patination’ - to form or grow on the surface of an engraving. Indeed one of the oldest relative dating techniques was based on the notion that the deeper the colour of patination, the older the engraving. Today a detailed understanding of the way rock coatings form shows that ‘patination’ colour is not a reliable indication of relative age, since many factors other than time are involved. Apart from technical aspects of rock coating formation itself - the variety of potential such coatings, their chemistry, and their possible interdigitation on a single surface - other variable factors include underlying rock type, water flow and water ponding dynamics, presence or absence of organisms such as lichen, corrosion, surface roughness, and proximity to soil (Dorn 2001: 74-175; cf. Butzer *et al.* 1979:1201-1202).

But this understanding has contributed to the development of other potential dating techniques based on the stratigraphic principle that the minimum age of an engraving may be determined by dating that which covers it. Conversely, knowing the time when the support rock became available for making engravings can, in some instances (of which Driekopseiland may well be one), provide a useful maximum possible age. It is critical that the substance (or event) to be dated should relate as closely as possible in time to the engraving event; and, as obviously, that there be a means of calibrating measurements against a time scale.

Numerous methods have been proposed, but none is by any means universally applicable. Biofilms, for instance, formed by organisms such as lichen, may have growth rates that can be calibrated (e.g. Joubert *et al.* 1983) - as has been shown in Arctic and alpine settings - but such calibration has proven far more difficult in temperate and arid regions, where most engravings occur (Dorn 2001:172-173). Some success has been reported with direct radiocarbon dating of calcium carbonate coatings over engravings (Dorn 2001:173); and Thermoluminescence (TL) dating was applied with informative results to stalagmite-derived samples covering Palaeolithic engravings at Venta de la Perra in Spain (Arias *et al.* 2000). The greatest snags have emerged in relation to AMS (Accelerator Mass Spectrometer) dating of organic aggregates encapsulated within rock coatings or varnishes (Dorn 2001:173-182; Whitley & Simon 2002; in press), with Dorn's retraction of the technique in 1995 - "an unfortunate set-back to a decade of petroglyph research" - sparking a controversy that continues in the present. Apart from difficulties inherent to radiocarbon dating itself, such as irregularities in the atmospheric production of  $^{14}\text{C}$  isotopes and their differential absorption in the biosphere, it was found that the organics within a rock varnish might be "heterogeneous in nature, age and therefore origin" (Whitley & Simon 2002) - some potentially far older than the engraving to be dated, and some far younger. Taken in 'bulk', samples of material in cases where such heterogeneity pertains would produce entirely spurious results - as they did in the Foz Côa dating projects (Zilhao 1995; Dorn 2001). By an odd chance the AMS radiocarbon rock varnish technique was first tested in a situation that inadvertently yielded valid time signals: its trial run was under geological conditions untypical of

most empirical settings. One of the lessons, as Whitley and Simon (2002) stress, is that accidental 'false positive' results must be eliminated by running trial applications of new techniques in a wide range of contexts and conditions.

Another dating technique based on changes within a rock coating that can be calibrated against time is cation-ratio dating. The theory behind it is that the mobile elements Potassium and Calcium in rock varnish leach at a steady rate relative to the immobile element Titanium. Applied to geomorphological and rock engraving contexts in Australia, China, Peru, Russia, USA and South Africa, a key to its success is establishment of a reliable local leaching curve. Critics have pointed to factors other than time that may influence leaching rates in some environments. Dorn (2001:175) nevertheless suggests that its low cost and performance in blind tests lends it utility for preselecting samples for radiocarbon or cosmogenic nuclide (see below) analysis; and as an inexpensive cross-check on other methods. Cation-ratio dating was applied to rock engravings at Klipfontein, near Driekopseiland. The results of that analysis (Whitley & Annegarn 1994) will be examined in detail presently.

Layering that results from rock varnish deposition under differing palaeoclimatic conditions is the subject of a new technique that distinguishes orange-yellow (Manganese-poor) layers, reflecting drier periods, relative to black ones (Manganese-rich) that signal wetter regimes. Correlated with palaeoenvironmental data for a given region, these microlaminations over engravings - visible in ultra thin sections under a transmission light microscope - have been used to separate out rock art of Pleistocene and Holocene age in the western USA, while the identification of a mid-Holocene wet pulse in Tunisia shows further promise for this low-cost technique (Dorn 2001:175-178; pers.comm. David Whitley). It may well have future applicability in the Northern Cape.

A further technique that may have some utility at Driekopseiland is one based on changes in a rock surface following its exposure - although the technique may not be able to resolve dates relevant to the engravings here *per se*. The principle behind it

is that cosmic ray bombardment produces cosmogenic nuclides in minerals, which can be measured and calibrated to yield maximum possible ages for engravings in certain situations. Its value was demonstrated in the Côa valley debate when it showed that the rock was geomorphologically stable enough to support engravings of Palaeolithic age - in the face of arguments to the contrary (Dorn 2001:169-170). Applications of the technique, comments Granger (1998), "are quickly diversifying to include estimation of erosion rates and soil formation rates, and to tackle more complicated problems of landscape development." At Driekopseiland it has been suggested that the glacial pavements first became available for the engravers at around 2500 years ago (Butzer *et al.* 1979), which may be too recent an event to register in terms of this method. A gravel unit at the base of the flanking +15 m deposits containing Acheulean artefacts indicates that the pavements were probably previously exposed, and hence cosmogenic nuclide readings on bedrock could possibly reflect evidence pertinent to other aspects of the site's history.

Controversy surrounds the method known as microerosion dating (Bednarik 1992; 2002; cf. Willcox 1984:8-9). The key to the technique is the assumption that minerals such as quartz and feldspar weather and erode at rates that can be measured and calibrated. In its application in the Côa valley - yielding age estimates of not greater than c. 6500 years - Zilhao (1995:891) suggested it was, as a means of dating, "at best...an interesting possibility" that remained to be tested, even at experimental level. Dorn (2001:171-172) identifies several inherent difficulties. The first is that it cannot be applied in any situation where rock coatings are present, or have been present, since these, by virtue of their chemistry, potentially accelerate or retard development of erosion phenomena; a possibility not factored into the method. Secondly, different varieties of quartz and feldspar may weather differently, and hence a locally relevant calibration curve would need also to be based on comparable varieties of these minerals. Thirdly, it is assumed that the minerals exposed by the engraving were not previously weathered, which, Dorn suggests, is almost never the case, unless the engraving was made in a new lava flow. At a macro level, geographers have used microerosion rates to arrive at qualitative assessments from many readings over extensive areas of rock (Dorn 2001;

Rosenfeld cited in Zihlao 1995:891 but the type of quantitative information necessary for the dating of a specific rock art image, resolving many variables that may operate at any one spot, continues to elude weathering researchers (Dorn 2001 citing Dove 1995). Bednarik (2002) continues to experiment with the technique.

Beyond these dating techniques, rock engraving researchers must fall back on the more traditional methods of sequences based on superimposed images, stylistic correlations, and the archaeological or geomorphological associations of particular engravings or sites.

Superimposed images can be a basis for constructing relative dating sequences, which have often then been extrapolated within and between sites in terms of stylistic characteristics. The principle in question is essentially that of stratigraphy - the upper layers of art being younger relative to those below - although it is impossible on the basis of superpositioning alone to say whether the interval separating these events amounts to minutes, years, or centuries (cf. Lewis-Williams 1974). Many writers caution against extrapolation even within a single site, let alone between sites, suggesting that sequences based on superpositioning are reliable only where specific individual images are in direct contact (Dorn 2001). Chippindale and Taçon (1993:35) introduced use of Harris matrices - originally developed for bringing order to complex excavated stratigraphies - to resolve possible sequence in complex painted panels in Arnhem Land. Apparent similarities between images in their analysis, which lacked, however, demonstrable linkages, were expressed as 'affinities' and indicated in the matrix as 'relations of equivalence' - a form of reasoned extrapolation. Harris matrix analysis has since been applied to painting sites in South Africa (e.g. Loubser 1993; 1997; Russell 2000). But its utility on engraving sites - where panels are usually far less complex and images, or restricted image clusters, are usually isolated on separate rocks - might not be as impressive. Linkages across a site would be correspondingly dependent upon 'relations of equivalence' that boil down to stylistic and other subjective judgments. At Driekopseiland, where the engravings do occur across vast sheets of rock, there are remarkably few superimposed images, and other potential criteria for assigning

images within a matrix are compromised by variables such as differential exposure to water abrasion (Butzer *et al.* 1979).

Stylistic dating was recently brought under the spotlight - again, by the Côa valley rock art controversy - and given a degree of renewed respectability (Zilhao 1995). The debate prompted Rosenfeld and Smith's (1997) review of radiometric and stylistic methods of dating, and their argument, anticipated by Chippindale and Taçon (1993), that rock art researchers should recognise the two approaches as being complementary: "radiocarbon to probe and anchor stylistic sequences, and stylistic observations to identify problems and inconsistencies in radiocarbon dates" (Rosenfeld & Smith 1997:409). There is a need to move beyond simple correlations, they add, and to face, critically and determinedly, the problems and complexities inherent in both radiocarbon and stylistic methods of rock art dating.

In an important sense the question of style relates back to the issues of reification and the 'culture model' discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, since the notion of 'style', in some of its classic applications - not least at Driekopseiland itself - has often been equated uncritically with a distinct 'people' in a particular place and/or time, producing a distinctive form of art. It was partly because of this kind of approach, but also in that 'style' had come to have "so many contradictory meanings" (Chippindale & Taçon 1993), or had lost analytical precision (Davidson 1996 cited in Rosenberg & Smith 1997), that it came to be rejected as a useful concept in rock art studies, and was replaced by what was heralded as a "post-stylistic era", in the early 1990s. Bednarik (1995:91), in most explicit, positivist posture, has dismissed style as "iconographically guided intuition", irreconcilable with objective scientific procedure. But that the need remains for some concept of style, suggest Chippindale and Taçon (1993:39), is apparent from the very re-invention of it by its critics: the difficulty, they contend, lies more in its definition, and chiefly in the way it has tended to bundle together distinct characteristics. "A figure has many traits - of subject, of size and scale, of pigment, of technique, of manner, of convention in perspective. By studying these separately and at the same time noticing which of them covary," they suggest "we can better explore similarity and difference than under an all-embracing and ill-

defined 'style'" (ibid.:39). Indeed, with Comaroff and Comaroff (2001:153), one might suggest, it is in the tendency to conceive of style as noun, rather than using it adjectivally, that an untenable structuring device emerges. For, as Rosenfeld and Smith suggest, 'style' is dynamic, and bound up in the historicity of social practice. Such a characterisation is strongly borne out in the anthropological literature on style in contemporary settings, notably in the Kalahari (e.g. Wiessner 1984) where it is seen *inter alia* as being part of an on-going negotiation and, potentially, contestation of personal and social identities.

Finally, archaeological excavations may provide clues to the age of rock art by association, such as in instances where engravings or paintings have been buried beneath datable deposit (Thackeray 1981; 1983). In other instances, probable associations between engravings and adjacent occupation/activity debris have been posited on the basis, in some instances, of consistent co-occurrence at many sites (Morris 1988; Beaumont & Vogel 1989). Erosional geomorphological settings may represent, as Dorn (2001:169) remarks, the inverse of excavation into sediments and where it is possible to date erosion history, it is theoretically possible to arrive at maximum possible ages for engravings on surfaces exposed by that process. These more 'traditional' archaeological scenarios for the dating of rock art remain all-important, Dorn (ibid.) has stressed, as yielding independent test data for assessing other newer dating techniques.

### **The age of Northern Cape rock art**

Rock art in South Africa has been a feature particularly, but not exclusively, of the Later Stone Age, with several secure associations with Oakhurst and, more commonly, Wilton Complex contexts (e.g. Thackeray 1983; Deacon & Deacon 1999). But, whereas perhaps most of the surviving art is of late Holocene age (cf. Jerardino & Swanepoel 1999), and some of the most recent art has been linked to the Iron Age and colonial eras (e.g. Maggs 1995; Ouzman 1999), the origins of rock art can be traced back into at least Middle Stone Age times (Wendt 1976; Thackeray 1983; McBrearty & Brooks 2000; d'Errico *et al.* 2001; Henshilwood *et al.* 2002;

Beaumont in prep.), from which period there is also indubitable evidence for pigment use, most likely in ritual circumstances (recently reviewed by Watts 2002; cf. Beaumont 1992 for earlier possible instances).

In the present case, at Driekopseiland, the only systematic attempt to date the engravings thus far has been that of Butzer *et al.* (1979), who posit a late Holocene age for these engravings. On present evidence this seems not implausible; although on the face of it there are other possible archaeological associations, given the spread of Pleistocene to Holocene lithics in sediments immediately abutting the engravings (pers. comm. Peter Beaumont; cf. Whitley & Annegarn 1994). It is unlikely that any direct dating technique could be applied here - in view of the site's situation in an active river bed - but future work at other sites in the region may well provide closer circumstantial or supporting evidence on the age of the engravings.

Such age estimates as exist for the rock engravings of the Northern Cape are based mainly on 'traditional' archaeological and geomorphological associations. The excavations at Wonderwerk Cave near Kuruman (Fig. 16) yielded five "certain" and six "probable" small engraved stones bearing 'hairline' or 'fineline' images, mainly of a geometric nature, but with some figurative motifs, which came from layers dated to between about 2000 and 10 200 BP (Thackeray 1981; Thackeray *et al.* 1981). Previously, it had been deduced from superpositioning and differences in patination that 'hairline' engravings (stylistically distinct from a category of recently incised art) were older than 'pecked' engravings (Butzer *et al.* 1979), a conclusion that was essentially supported by subsequent work on the archaeological associations of rock engraving sites in the Upper Karoo (Beaumont *et al.* 1985; Morris 1988; Beaumont & Vogel 1989; Beaumont *et al.* 1995: though Busby *et al.* 1978, cited by Whitley & Annegarn [1994:190], suggest from replicative experiments that the stratigraphic relationships between fully pecked and fineline engravings may be difficult to ascertain empirically). The Karoo study indicated repeated associations, by contiguity, of mid-Holocene Wilton Complex and, in some cases, Oakhurst lithics with 'hairline' engravings; while relatively younger 'scraped' and 'pecked' engravings appeared by similar associations to be at least partly coeval. There was a suggestion



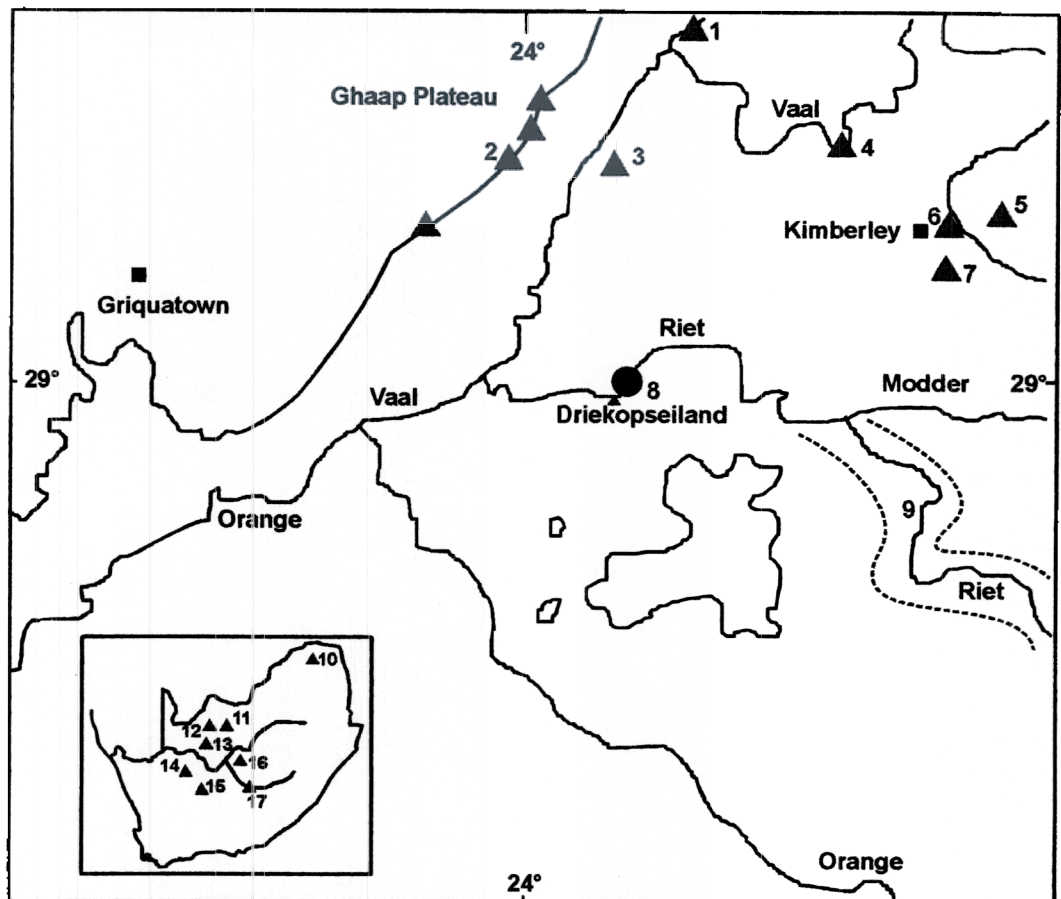


Figure 16. Sites and places mentioned in Chapter 4.

1. Harts River; 2 Ghaap Escarpment sites; 3. Klipfontein; 4. Pniel 6;  
 5. Susana; 6. Uitzigt; 7. Alexandersfontein; 8. Weltevrede; 9. Type  
 R settlements; 10. Makapans Valley; 11. Wonderwerk Cave; 12.  
 Kathu; 13. Blinkklipkop & Doornfontein; 14. Swartkop; 15.  
 Keurfontein/Vosburg; 16. Voigtspost; 17. Orange River Scheme  
 sites.

in the art itself of some formal link between 'hairline' and 'pecked' engravings, the latter often made directly on 'hairline' outlines (Morris 1988:117): theoretically, indeed, the two techniques might sometimes have been part of a single engraving event. A major pulse of 'scraped' engraving activity (lightly patinated) was found consistently to appear alongside sites, in the Upper Karoo, of a blade-dominated 'Swartkop' industry, dated to some 250-700 BP; but other 'scraped' engravings looked older than these and could in some instances be associated spatially with earlier 'Swartkop' assemblages (Beaumont & Vogel 1989). What distinguished this study was the large number of radiocarbon dates obtained for surface lithic scatters associated with rock engravings. Many of the readings, which were based on the carbonate fraction of ostrich eggshell samples, require to be adjusted in light of an initial deficit of 2.2% in  $^{14}\text{C}$  caused by the large intake of fossil limestone during egg laying (Vogel *et al.* 2001). On average, the readings appear to be some 180 years too old; and while dates based on ostrich eggshell now seem more reliable than those on bone, since the former material is less prone to contamination, the ostrich eggshell derived datings will always have an uncertainty of about  $\pm 120$  years (*ibid.*)

Previously, the combined criteria of superpositioning (particularly in relation to technique) and associations (both archaeological and geomorphological) were applied by the Focks and their colleagues (especially Butzer *et al.* 1979; Fock & Fock 1989) to assess, in a broad multidisciplinary framework, the age and context of the engravings of South Africa's central interior. As with the Karoo study, elements of the methodology employed could be traced back to the 'typological' work of Burkitt (1928) evident in his writing, *inter alia*, on the engravings at Keurfontein, Vosburg. Goodwin's (1936) analysis of Keurfontein elaborated somewhat upon Burkitt's 'Series I - III', proposing no less than eleven "styles" grouped into seven "general phases" (*ibid.*:173). These were linked chronologically with 'Vosburg', 'Smithfield B' and 'Smithfield B-C' "folk", while the most recent styles originated in "the age of metals" (*ibid.*:208-209). Though "tentative", Goodwin was confident that the relative order of styles based on patination<sup>1</sup> was in accord with that obtained from palimpsests (*ibid.*:168). Such sequences of styles were not readily applied from one area, or even site, to another, however, and rock art 'zones' or 'regions' came to be

defined in the literature (e.g. Willcox 1984). Part of the strength of the study by the Focks and Butzer *et al.* (1979) was the recognition that the causes of spatial and temporal variability should be sought not so much in terms of regional styles and sequences in themselves, but relative to a more holistic framework that saw the art as a complex and dynamic tradition influenced by a number of potential social factors including those relating to environmental resources. Some of these remained to be counted in, or eliminated, by future contextual archaeological research (Butzer *et al.* 1979:1211).

In general the research programme of Fock and Butzer demonstrated that there was distinctive patterning in rock art distributions both within and between sites (which was not determined by macroenvironmental constraints); and that while the variability could reflect, in some instances “the presence of functionally discrete sites or site segments” and, in others, potentially distinct identity-conscious groups, there were also temporal “trends” and “shifts in emphasis” in engraving techniques and content. Subject matter in some instances - for example, depictions of domesticated cattle and ovicaprines - reflected the appearance of farming in the landscape (not that the ‘embedded’ meanings of this contact art are by any means self-evident, as Loubser and Laurens [1994] have shown). In other cases, the range of semi-tropical species depicted in what is today a semi-arid environment appeared to be compatible with pollen evidence of palaeoenvironments that would have supported such faunas at certain periods in the past (again, the meanings of motifs were not what Butzer *et al.* addressed; but, as Manhire *et al.* [1985:162] have said, “it is possible to refer to what a painting is as well as to what it means, in the sense that many or almost all symbols are objects or activities selected from hunter-gatherer life”).

The geoarchaeological contexts of key sites were used to argue that: the “main geometrics phase” most likely belonged to a period of stream down-cutting and drier climate after 1300 BP; that “classical” engravings “most probably coincided” with an era of more abundant water some 3200 to 2500 BP; while animal engravings of a “classical and related” category might fall between these periods. Earlier hairline engravings, it was suggested, could be linked with earlier phases of ‘Smithfield’

settlement following an apparent mid-Holocene hiatus in parts of the region (cf. Deacon 1974), or even with earlier Oakhurst or terminal Pleistocene occupation (Butzer *et al.* 1979:1211). In sum, Butzer *et al.* (*ibid.*) saw “the several rock art genres of southern Africa [as forming] part of the archaeological record of the flexible cultural system represented by the Southern San. Systematic temporal and spatial variation of the engravings appear to reflect processual change and distinct identity-conscious groups within that system.”

Finally, in this review of efforts to establish the age of Northern Cape rock art, the only direct dating attempt on engravings here thus far has been that by Whitley and Annegarn (1994). Their cation-ratio analysis produced some surprisingly early dates, with a temporal spread spanning the entire Holocene for a range of individual engravings in each of the sampled “pecked representational”, “outline-pecked representational” and “geometric” types. Forty four engravings at Klipfontein and two at Susana were sampled. Varnish development was found to be only moderate, the coatings “relatively thin”, so that the technique favoured selection of engravings that were more heavily varnished and hence probably older (Whitley & Annegarn *ibid.*). Twenty of the Klipfontein and one of the Susana samples yielded enough varnish for bulk chemical analysis using PIXE; and none had sufficient varnish for replication and assessment of error margins. Apart from these limitations, a further constraint identified by the authors concerned the derivation of a leaching curve. This was based on just two points in time, namely on aeolian deposit on the modern surface at the site, equivalent to approximately 100 BP, and an upthrust varnished cobble embedded in the top of Member IV of the Riverton Formation flanking the Vaal River nearby. For purposes of the study Member IV was estimated to have been laid down by 8000 BP (Helgren cited in Whitley & Annegarn 1994), “with the embedded cobble dating to some time after that point.” The resulting age-assignments could not be considered as other than “maximum-limiting ages”, Whitley and Annegarn (1994:193) suggest; and they caution further (*ibid.*) that “the cation-leaching curve (and numerical ages on engravings calculated therefrom) should be considered preliminary.”

Two points have been drawn by Whitley and Annegarn from the results of the cation-ratio dating at Klipfontein. The first is that the spread of dates for geometric engravings in particular was consistent with expectations based on Lewis-Williams and Dowson's (1988) neuropsychological model, namely that such geometric motifs, as entoptic phenomena, were indeed 'signs of all times'. The second is that, considering the mean dates for each style, the results were still to some extent in line with the chronological synthesis of Butzer *et al.* (1979). Possible sampling error (including small sample size) remains as the major constraint limiting the value of these dates, which have been calibrated against a leaching curve of uncertain reliability (the Riverton Member IV estimate of "a little after 8000" [Helgren 1977:306] is based on an unspecified suite of radiocarbon dates known in places to be problematic [Butzer *et al.* 1973:355]). Moreover, minimal information is given on the particular engravings that were dated, so that where there may be 'stylistic' trends, or indeed significantly distinct cultural subdivisions - within, for example, the 'geometric' corpus (e.g. Smith & Ouzman in press) - these cannot be evaluated on the basis of the published results.

### **Dating the engravings at Driekopseiland**

Driekopseiland was one of the key sites on which the synthesis of Butzer *et al.* (1979) was based. The site offers a singular opportunity for geomorphological age estimation for rock engravings, its flanking sediments reflecting recent geological history and human activity in Pleistocene to Holocene times. Its detailed stratigraphy (Butzer *et al.* 1979), which now requires a degree of re-interpretation, is summarised in Fig. 17 and Table 3.

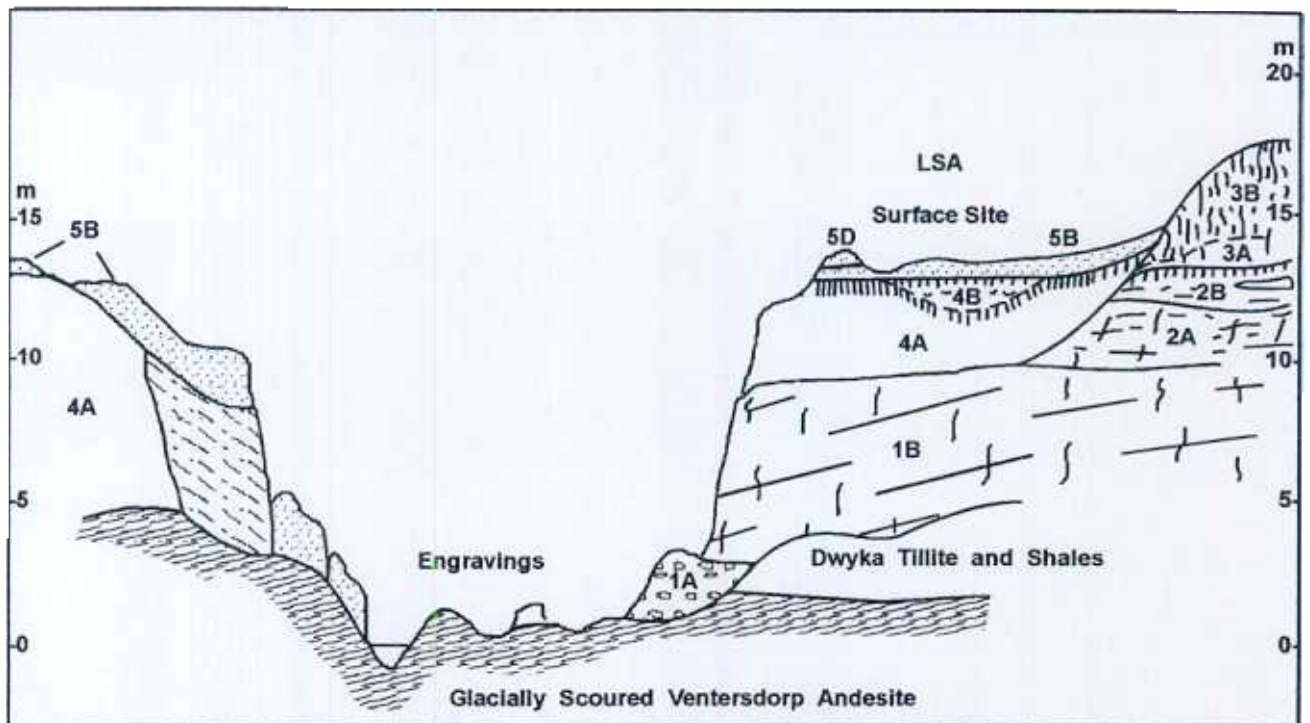


Figure 17. Composite stratigraphy and generalised geomorphology of the Riet River in the vicinity of Driekopseiland (after Butzer *et al.* 1979). Stratigraphic Units 1-3: alluvium overlying bedrock (contains Acheulean); Unit 4: terrace embanked against older alluvia (contains MSA); Unit 5A: alluvial terrace at +10 m, of inferred terminal Pleistocene/early Holocene age; Unit 5B: colluvial 'Drab Sand' regional marker horizon (contains LSA); Unit 5C: minor + 5 m alluvial terrace; Unit 5D: widespread 'Pale Cover Sand' marker of aeolian origin (containing Late Holocene LSA); Unit 6: sub-recent bedload augmented by flood surges of recent decades.

**Table 3. Summary of the stratigraphic interpretation of the geomorphology at Driekopseiland by Butzer *et al.* (1979). Re-interpretation of some aspects of it is suggested in the text, below.**

Unit	Regional correlates	Dating
Units 1-3 Alluvial sediment forming + 20 m terrace. Contains fresh Acheulean artefacts. Unit 1A consists of locally preserved 'Younger Gravels' with rolled Acheulean lithics and occasional fossil fauna.	Gravels = Rietputs C? (Helgren 1979)	Middle Pleistocene Interglacials
Unit 4 Embanked against Units 1-3, forming a terrace at +13-15 m. Consists of flood silts separated by episode of channel cutting and soil formation. Contains MSA artefacts.	Riverton Formation Member III	Late Pleistocene [Most likely Oxygen Isotope Stage 5e] (Minimum shell bed-based date of 38 500 ± 1150 BP (SI-3381) is suspect - see discussion in text)
Unit 5A Alluvial terrace at +10 m. No known associated artefacts.	Other alluvial fills of terminal Pleistocene or early Holocene age; Riverton Formation Member IV	Terminal Pleistocene - Early Holocene. Unit dated about 5 km upstream from Driekopseiland: 13 740 ± 110 BP (SI-3384). It is believed to correlate also with a unit at Alexandersfontein dated on carbonaceous soil: 14 670 ± 270 (SI-3563).
Unit 5B A 'Drab Sand' regional marker horizon, colluvial in origin, over the 5A +10 m flood plain. It grades locally into gray vertisols.  "Smithfield occupation is verified midway in the related sediments" (Butzer <i>et al.</i> 1979:1207).  The Weltevreden burial dated to 3360 ± 60 (Humphreys 1974) probably relates to LSA occupation at this period (Butzer <i>et al.</i> 1979 note 92).	Drab Sand marker at Alexandersfontein	About 4500-3000 BP Alexandersfontein: Site MS-D100: on intact ostrich eggshell 4475 ± 60 BP (SI-2022); on mix of ostrich eggshell fragments 3040 ± 70 BP (SI-2587); on soil carbonates from subsequent Aca-horizon 3805 ± 75 BP (SI-2586). Site Uitzigt: on ostrich eggshell 3290 ± 75 BP (SI-2580); on organic spring mucks 4075 ± 300 BP (SI-2232); on ("less satisfactorily") correlated seepage slope carbonates 2520 ± 65 BP (SI-2582). Site BF-2: on organic spring mucks 3450 ± 60 BP (SI-2049). (Butzer <i>et al.</i> 1979 note 88). Near Upper Riet: on soil carbonates below vertisol 2665 ± 65 BP (SI-1114). (Butzer <i>et al.</i> 1979:1207).
Unit 5C Alluvial terrace at +5 m  Apparently lacking artefacts.	Riverton Formation Member V	About 2250 to 1300 BP. Riverton Formation Member V at Harts River: on hippo bone 960 ± 425 BP (SI-1954). (Butzer <i>et al.</i> 1979 note 91).
Unit 5D 'Pale Cover Sand' regional marker horizon of aeolian origin. Overlies Units 5B and 5C.  Commonly includes 'Smithfield' occupation debris.  'Smithfield' sites on top of this unit		About 1220 and 800 BP  Voigtspost: on ostrich eggshell 1220 ± 50 BP (Butzer <i>et al.</i> 1979 note 90).  Alexandersfontein MS-D100: on wildebeest horn core 805 ± 100 BP (SI-2024). (Butzer <i>et al.</i> 1979 note 89).

Unit 6 Loose sands up to +3.5 m representing sub-recent bedload. Augmented by flood surges of recent decades. Contains no in situ artefacts.		Sub-recent, with augmentation by recent flooding.
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Interpretation of this evidence in terms of environmental and human history by Butzer *et al.* (1979), supplemented here with new evidence, provides for the following scenario:

Bedrock - and the exposed surface of it that came to be festooned with rock art at some point in its history - consists of glacially scoured Ventersdorp andesite, in places overlain by Dwyka tillite and shales.

Three alluvial sediment Units (1-3), containing fresh Acheulean artefacts, overlie bedrock, forming a terrace 20 m above the Riet River low water. Preserved discontinuously at the base are Unit 1A 'Younger Gravels'/river floor conglomerates (Helgren 1979:274) which contain rolled Acheulean lithics (*ibid.*; Butzer *et al.* 1979:1207) and occasional fossil fauna (pers. comm. Juri van den Heever to E.A. Voigt, 1991<sup>2</sup>). Helgren (*ibid.*) Tentatively equates these conglomerates with Rietputs C along the Vaal. It appears that the glacial pavement here was probably exposed in places in a riverine setting where gravels accumulated in Unit 1A times, at some point in the Middle Pleistocene. The impressive silt sediments of Units 1-3, with Unit 4, indicate subsequent long periods of "aggradation or floodplain stability" contemporary with Acheulean and subsequent Middle Stone Age presence in the landscape (Butzer *et al.* *ibid.*). These accumulations undoubtedly represent Pleistocene Interglacials, one of which may well have been the Holsteinian/Oxygen Isotope Stage 11, at around 405 000 years ago - generally regarded as the warmest of the Pleistocene Interglacials (Beaumont *et al.* 1992:495, citing van Coevering & Kukla) - which may well have promoted the conditions that resulted in the highest +20 m terrace at Driekopseiland.

Unit 4, which is embanked against the older alluvia, forming a terrace at +13-15 m



consists of two generations of flood silts separated by an episode of channel cutting and soil formation (Butzer *et al.* 1979). The authors (*ibid.*: note 86) relate this Unit to Member III of the Riverton Formation. The younger of these channel beds has an associated minimum date, based on shell, of 38 500  $\pm$  1150 years BP (Table 3) - which, being close to the limits of radiocarbon is probably tantamount to an infinite  $^{14}\text{C}$  reading. It is also to be noted that high degrees of younger carbonate contamination pertain in these settings and were earlier acknowledged by Butzer *et al.* (1973:355; cf. Humphreys & Thackeray 1983:273) to be "a serious liability in all samples." In fact it may be suggested that the unit in question more likely relates at least to Oxygen Isotope Stage 5e (at around 125 000 BP), as has been proposed for the similar overbank 'Older Silts' at Pniel 6, which are also characterised as Riverton III (Butzer *et al.* 1973), also contain freshwater shell, and, like the Driekopseiland Unit 4, have associated Middle Stone Age (MSA 1) artefacts (Beaumont 1990a; Beaumont *et al.* 1992).

There is evidence both at Driekopseiland and at Pniel 6 for a decline, after this, in human occupation; and following MSA 3a times along the Vaal (Beaumont 1990a) there is indeed a total lack of archaeological traces for the remainder of the Late Pleistocene (Beaumont *et al.* 1992). This drop in archaeological visibility is matched by pollen evidence to indicate that the Pleniglacial period was cooler and drier than at present, with increased desert in the west and grasslands with fewer trees in the central and eastern parts of the subcontinent (Beaumont *et al.* 1992).

Unit 5A is an alluvial terrace at +10 m, containing no artefacts, which Butzer *et al.* (*ibid.*) see as correlating with other alluvial fills of terminal Pleistocene or early Holocene age; with its equivalent in the Riverton Formation being Member IV (Butzer *et al.* 1979). Given that the datings obtained by Butzer *et al.* (*ibid.*) (see Table 3), may well be problematic, further work is needed to interpret the palaeoenvironmental correlations and implications of this unit. It is not clear, for instance, whether there is an equivalent at Driekopseiland of the 'Younger Silts' at Pniel 6, which date most likely from Holocene Climatic Optimum times, c. 8000-5000 years ago.

Unit 5B is a 'Drab Sand' regional marker horizon that is colluvial in origin, having been swept down onto the Unit 5A +10 m and exposed Unit 4 flood plain. It grades locally into gray vertisols. The dating of this unit relies on regional extrapolations (Table 3). Dates based on ostrich eggshell may be more reliable than those based on soil carbonates (Vogel *et al.* 2001; cf. Butzer *et al.* 1973:355; Humphreys & Thackeray 1983:273). Butzer *et al.* (1979:1207) remark that "Smithfield occupation [at Riverview] is verified midway in the related sediments" (Butzer *et al.* 1979:1207) while the Weltevreden burial dated to 3360 ± 60 (Humphreys 1974) probably also relates to the LSA occupation contemporary with Unit 5B (Butzer *et al.* 1979 note 92).

Unit 5C is a +5 m alluvial terrace, apparently lacking artefacts, and estimated by Butzer *et al.* (*ibid.*) to be about 2250 to 1300 years old. They equate it with Riverton Formation Member V.

Unit 5D is a 'Pale Cover Sand' which, like the 5B 'Drab Sand', is another widespread regional marker horizon, of aeolian origin that overlies Units 5B and 5C. It dates between 1220 and 800 BP and commonly includes 'Smithfield' occupation debris.

Unit 6 consists of loose sands up to +3.5 m, which represent sub-recent bedload. This unit has been augmented by flood surges of recent decades, and includes secondary deposition of sediments derived from Unit 1B which was significantly cut back in places in the late 1980s-early 1990s, when the river by-passed the weir at its southern end during flood events.

On the basis of their reading of the geomorphological evidence, it appeared to Butzer *et al.* (1979) that bedrock, having been buried for most of the Holocene, began to be exposed in places as a result of rapid channel-cutting, from a moist flood-plain at +7 m, after 2500 BP. Renewed aggradation of flood silts and sands took place between about 2200 and 1300 BP, stabilizing as a mainly dry flood-plain 2-3 m above the present river level, with little or no bedrock exposure. Channel cutting recommenced after 1300-1200 BP, resulting in considerable bedrock exposure - with relatively

minor silt build-up and erosion since then. "As a general framework," they predicted, "the Driekops Eiland engravings could only have been executed c. 2500-2200 BP or after 1300 BP" (Butzer *et al.* 1979; Fock & Fock 1989:141).

Reading together the environmental history and the evidence of the engravings themselves, the highly abraded representational (animal and human) images and 'older' geometric designs (75% of 1543 motifs) restricted mainly to higher, convex surfaces in the western (downstream) part of the site probably date from an earlier period, most likely (in terms of the above scenario) c. 2500-2200 BP, when, seemingly, only portions of bedrock were exposed. The less abraded predominantly geometric engravings (99% of 2004 motifs) in the flatter eastern part of the site, 120 m upstream, by contrast, appear younger, exhibit some formal differences from the 'older' geometrics, and were probably made (in terms of this model) from perhaps the end of the first millennium AD onwards, after much more of the glacial pavement was exposed (Butzer *et al.* 1979; Fock & Fock 1989).

Since the late 1970s progress has been made in defining the environmental history of South Africa's interior, so that the interpretation of Butzer *et al.* (*ibid.*) can be, if not yet fine-tuned, then certainly qualified relative to new data.

The climate proxy record based on shifting oxygen and carbon isotope values and the grey index of a well dated stalagmite from Cold Air Cave in the Makapansgat Valley (Lee-Thorp *et al.* 2001) provides the most remarkable high-resolution indication so far of Holocene climate change in the Southern African interior. The evidence derived from it of lower  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ , high humate (grey index) and positive  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values before 5200 years ago suggest warmer more humid conditions than today, with denser vegetation-cover, during the Holocene Climatic Optimum (Lee-Thorp *et al.* 2001:4508). Independent pollen data from Wonderkrater, with temperature proxy data in the Uitenhage aquifer, and Mozambique Channel sea surface temperatures similarly suggest warmer (which in the summer rainfall region also means wetter) conditions in the period approximately 8000 - 5000 years ago (*ibid.*). In the Northern Cape, the coprolite-derived pollen spectrum from Stratum 1a (lower) at Equus Cave

shows that after about 8000 BP a tree-rich savanna, indicative of warmer and wetter conditions than now, replaced a 12 000-9000 BP karroid open *Acacia* grassland (Beaumont *et al.* 1992; cf. Scott 1987). This pattern is mirrored in the terminal Pleistocene-early Holocene levels at Wonderwerk Cave where both pollen evidence and that from micromammals shows that Strata 4c-4b, dated about 8000 - 5000 BP accumulated under warmer and wetter conditions that climaxed at circa 6000 - 5000 BP with a woodland savanna setting (Beaumont *et al.* 1992; cf. Avery 1981). There is further corroboration at Kathu Pan 2, also based on pollen evidence, while the 'Younger Silts' at Pniel 6 appear to reflect the impacts of the same phenomenon in a riverine setting (Beaumont 1990a; Beaumont *et al.* 1992). The contention that bedrock at Driekopseiland was buried in the first part of the Holocene seems plausible in light of this evidence, the more so if Unit 5A can be confirmed as relating to this time.

The Cold Air Cave stalagmite indicates that a more variable moist/warm climate prevailed from 4300 to 3200 years ago; but this was followed by a rapid high amplitude shift, marked by a sharp vegetation change that is evident in  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values and the grey index series. The trend thereafter was towards increasing aridity and cooling, with two clusters of Oxygen isotope minima at 3100 and 2600 years ago respectively. In this period  $\text{C}_4$  grasses became widespread, their abundance peaking about 2100 years ago. However,  $\text{C}_4$  grass abundance dipped after 1400 years ago, at which time there is evidence for a marked drying and cooling trend which culminated in the strongest Oxygen isotope minimum 247 years ago [AD 1750]. "The cooling phenomenon generally known as the Little Ice Age," comment Lee-Thorp *et al.* (2001:4509) "was manifest in southern Africa as a long-lasting low-rainfall anomaly, accompanied by cooling." This trend was, however interrupted by the highly variable Medieval Warm Epoch between AD 1000 and AD 1300 (Tyson *et al.* 2000).

Partly because temporal controls at sites relevant to this period are not generally adequate for resolving palaeoenvironmental variables, the matching of Cold Air Cave data with trends noticed in other sites is more difficult. However, at Wonderwerk

Cave from 5000 to 3000 BP there is evidence - both from climate-sensitive small mammals and pollen spectra - of dry savanna grassland conditions; and some indication of oscillating wetter and drier periods thereafter (Avery 1981; van Zinderen Bakker 1982; Beaumont *et al.* 1992). A similar scenario is apparent at Kathu Pan 2 The colluvial Unit 5B 'Drab Sand' at Driekopseiland could well reflect such an environment of correspondingly increased aridity, following the wetter Holocene Climatic Optimum

Beaumont *et al.* (*ibid.*) suggest that there were wetter spells at Wonderwerk Cave at about 1900-1400 BP and 900-800 BP, evidenced by travertines in the sequence (Beaumont 1990b). These dates show remarkable concordance with evidence reviewed by Tyson and Lindesay (1992), Huffman (1996) and Vogel and Vuls (1999), who posit warmer, wetter events in the first half of the first millennium AD, and again in the Medieval Warm Epoch (Tyson *et al.* 2000) - which is now quite accurately dated (suggest Vogel & Vuls 1999:100) by way of Iron Age dates in the otherwise eschewed Limpopo-Shashi region - from AD 890 to AD 1290. Similar warmer/wetter conditions could have led to a degree of renewed aggradation at Driekopseiland as posited in Unit 5C (the Medieval warming has also been found to be reflected in the sedimentary record of Namibian rivers - Tyson *et al.* 2000:122).

Finally, the "marked drying and cooling trend" of the last millennium evident at Cold Air Cave (Lee-Thorp *et al.* 2001) is matched by signs of increasing aridity at the same period in the micromammal evidence at Wonderwerk Cave (Avery 1981:269). The Unit 5D 'Pale Cover Sand' regional marker horizon of aeolian origin noted at Driekopseiland would seem to correspond well with such a "long-lasting low-rainfall anomaly" - one of "some consequence throughout the subcontinent of southern Africa" (Tyson *et al.* 2000:125) - when channel cutting is reckoned to have exposed bedrock and left open the expanse of rock on which the second major episode of engraving activity took place. The culmination of this trend at about AD 1750 was followed by a rapid shift from dry/cool conditions to wet and warm, in a period of less than 50 years (Lee-Thorp *et al.* *ibid.*)

In summary, this review of the model of Butzer *et al.* (1979; Fock & Fock 1989) relative to subsequent palaeoenvironmental research (Fig. 18), shows that, in all probability:

\* All the engravings at Driekopseiland were made during the Holocene, given that environmental conditions here were largely unfavourable for human occupation for several tens of millennia before that. Indeed the last episode of high archaeological visibility locally, prior to the Holocene, was seemingly during Oxygen Isotope Stage 5e, some 125 000 years ago, when up to 15 m of sediment filled the river bed here.

\* Aggradation of silts, up to +10 m, took place during warmer and wetter conditions which peaked at the Holocene Climatic Optimum, probably obscuring bedrock until after the mid Holocene.

\* Downcutting may have commenced after 5000 years ago, possibly becoming more accentuated after about 3000 years ago, resulting, at an uncertain point in the later Holocene (possibly including the second half of the first millennium AD), in the partial exposure of the higher convex surfaces of bedrock, where engravings were then made that included geometric and animal imagery.

\* Warmer/wetter interludes, possibly those known from the early first millennium AD and/or the Medieval Warm Epoch, may have resulted in renewed aggradation of silts to about +5 m in the Riet River channel.

\* The marked low-rainfall anomaly associated with a somewhat drawn-out Southern Hemisphere Little Ice Age evidently led to the exposure of a far greater extent of bedrock, upon which the 'younger' geometric engravings were then made. Some of the engravings are below the modern low-water level, suggesting that "the river was prone to drying up almost completely at the time the bulk of the geometric designs were produced" (Fock & Fock 1989:143).

Inskeep (1971:102) had written that "...on the shelter walls, and in their floors, we

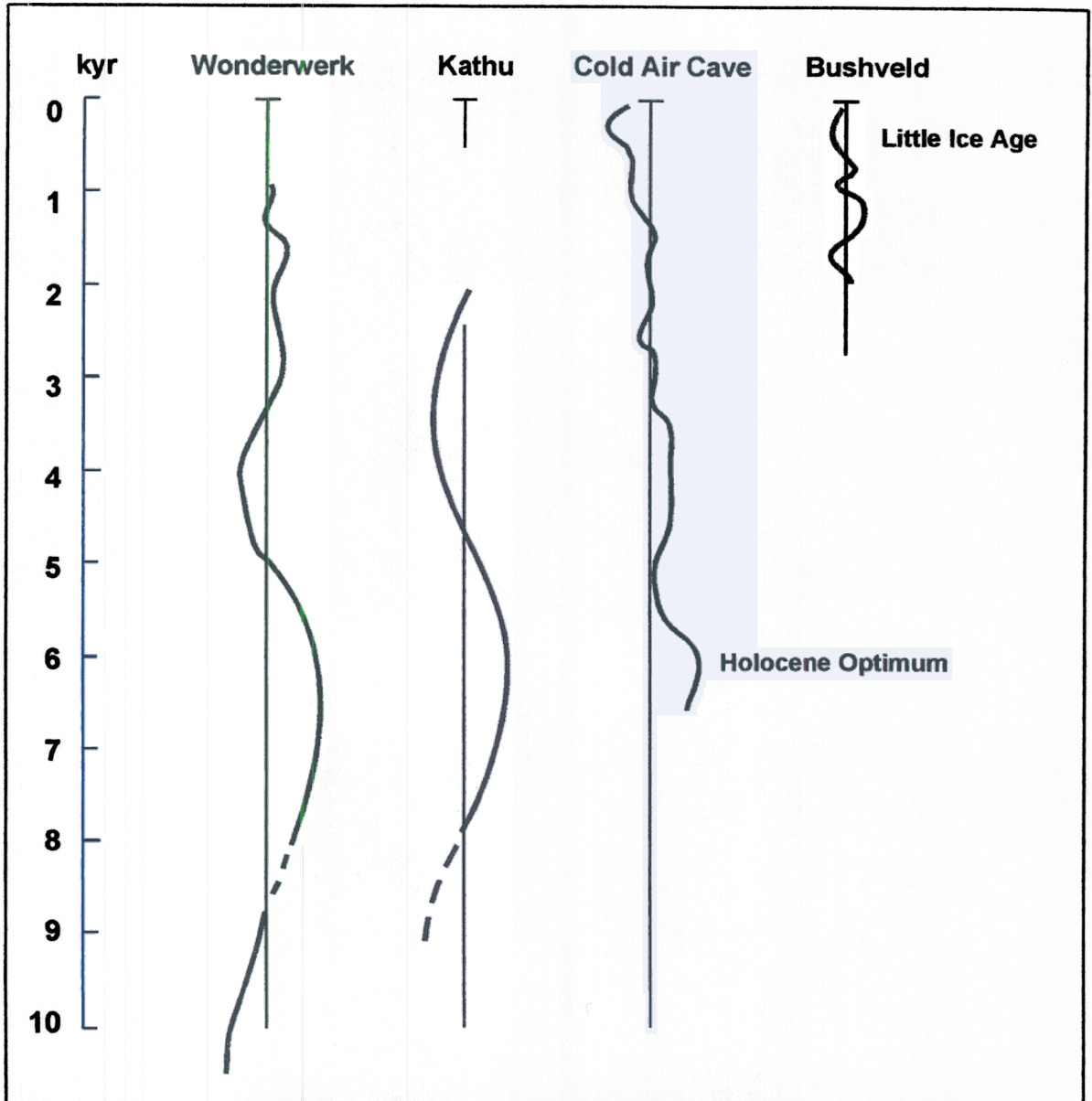


Figure 18. Inferred relative temperature and rainfall shifts plotted against time for: a) Wonderwerk Cave (after Beaumont *et al.* 1992); b) Kathu Pan (after Beaumont *et al.* 1992); c) Cold Air Cave:  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  (~500 year running mean) (after Lee-Thorp *et al.* 2001); d) Bushveld spring sediment pollen analyses (after Scott cited in Tyson & Lindsay 1992).

have two worlds" which could not yet be brought together. Several projects since the end of the 1960s have enabled the beginnings of an engagement of these 'two worlds' - with work at Driekopseiland showing that a geo-archaeological approach in some relevant situations has the potential to yield useful results - even if the dating itself remains for now somewhat coarse-grained.

### **A changing social landscape**

Still further data require to be integrated, however; for, at the same time that the physical landscape at Driekopseiland was changing - the glaciated rock surfaces becoming exposed in the river channel - indications are that the social landscape was also in a state of flux (e.g. Humphreys 1988). In this history the environment plays no doubt a significant role, but is just one of many variables (cf. Mazel 1989:25-26).

A first detailed approximation of the Holocene archaeology of the Northern Cape has been derived from research projects of the 1970s-early 1980s, the findings of which were synthesised by Humphreys and Thackeray (1983) in their monograph *Ghaap and Gariiep*. It was based on studies of sequences from shelters along the Ghaap Escarpment (Humphreys 1979) and Wonderwerk Cave in the Kuruman Hills (Thackeray 1981), and assessed with reference to material from the Orange River Scheme, and in relation to other Holocene syntheses from the subcontinent. The major focus was on identifying trends and patterns in lithic artefact and related technologies, as a necessary initial step towards elucidating a history of the Holocene in the region. Humphreys and Thackeray (1983) show that in the early Holocene, from before 10 000 to about 8500 years BP, the cultural sequence is represented by a Kuruman Industry, a regional expression of the wider Oakhurst Complex, typified by large scrapers. (The 'Smithfield A' of earlier literature would be broadly its equivalent). The earliest of the Wonderwerk Cave engraved stones is associated with this part of the sequence. Material that is characteristic of the Wilton Complex, but with local industries as yet awaiting definitive differentiation, replaced the Kuruman Industry and persisted through the middle and late Holocene to



protohistoric times. Distinguished by the use of a wider variety of raw materials than in the Kuruman Industry, and by the presence of a range of retouched artefacts such as scrapers and backed tools, its features change gradually through time and exhibit continuity in stone tool manufacture after the introduction of pottery in the west and south west some 2000 years ago. Humphreys (1979) had found no evidence to warrant the separate definition of a Smithfield Complex for Orange River Scheme material dating from the last 500 years (Sampson 1974), and this material is subsumed by Humphreys and Thackeray (1983:281) within the Wilton Complex pending future possible temporal and spatial differentiation.

All the material described as 'Smithfield', 'Smithfield B' or 'Smithfield C', or indeed as 'Wilton', in the earlier literature on Driekopseiland, is effectively part of this Wilton Complex of middle to late Holocene age. In chronological terms it represents the period in which the engravings at Driekopseiland were made. As mentioned, the industries in question are by no means static (indeed, a "very variable feast", is how Parkington has characterised the Wilton - 1980:83); their variability through time and space signalling processes that are as yet not fully understood. Two recent assessments of the diversity in post-8000 BP lithic assemblages in South Africa (Mitchell 1996; Wadley 2000) identify essentially two kinds of variability: inter-regional stylistic variability; and intra-regional, inter-site activity or functional differences, with one scenario being a site undergoing a change of 'place' (*sensu* Parkington 1980) in relation to changing social or environmental contexts. Latterly the practice of a herding life-style was emerging in the wider region, and ceramic technology appeared during the first millennium AD (Beaumont & Vogel 1984; 1989). A distinctive pattern of Type R stone-walled sites evolved later along the Riet River, dating between about AD 1380 and 1780, and distributed mainly further upstream, but with isolated settlements along the lower Riet (Maggs 1971; Humphreys 1972; 1988; 1997; Brink *et al.* 1992). During this period, apparently after 350 BP [AD 1640] (Vogel & Fuls 1999), there was a significant expansion of Late Iron Age settlement onto the Southern Highveld (Maggs 1976; Vogel & Fuls *ibid.*). Frontier complexity was considerably augmented by the early nineteenth century and following the upheavals of the Difaqane period: the historical records indicate that 'Bushmen',

Griqua, 'Bastards', 'Bechuana', Xhosa ('Caffers' in contemporary sources), Boers, and travellers from the Cape and between missionary centres, lived in, or passed through, the valley of the Riet (Humphreys 1972; 1997).

Pertinent evidence on the ground at Driekopseiland consists of late Holocene lithic scatters on the banks overlooking the engraving site (Battiss 1948; Van Riet Lowe 1952; Willcox 1963; Butzer *et al.* 1979); at least two burials (Battiss 1948; Mason 1954; Butzer *et al.* 1979; Humphreys 1987); and a Type R stone-walled settlement unit at the foot of the hills some way off (Du Toit 1964; Humphreys 1972; 1987; Fock & Fock 1989). Van Riet Lowe and others characterized the lithic scatters as 'Smithfield B' and Wilton - in other words, Wilton Complex (Humphreys & Thackeray 1983). Associated with these scatters, in places, are relatively rare sherds of fine grit-tempered pottery. Substantial assemblages of probably comparable ceramics occur (along with evidence of livestock) at Blinkklipkop and Doornfontein near Postmasburg from at least c. AD 790 to around AD 1630, after which time the pottery becomes coarser (Beaumont & Vogel 1984:82, 92; Beaumont *et al.* 1995). By contrast, much thicker sherds from essentially undecorated pots and bowls are associated with the Type R stone walling (Humphreys 1972; 1988).

Whereas ceramics on Later Stone Age sites may signal a herder presence, it is not clear to what extent (and when) pottery and livestock remains in a site reflect true pastoralism (Sadr 1998). Debate revolves equally now on the question of whether migration of pastoralists (e.g. Smith 1990a; Boonzaier *et al.* 1996), or diffusion of ceramic technology and herder practices (Sadr 1998; Sadr & Smith 2001; Sadr & Plug 2002), account for the emergence of these elements in Later Stone Age sites in the last 2000 years. In Sadr's (1998) view, the seemingly unsynchronised first appearances of sheep remains and of pottery, together with the lack of a clear 'stylistic chain' linking the Cape ceramics with those in a putative area of migratory point of origin, count against the migration theory. So, too, might the formal continuity in Later Stone Age lithic artefacts after the appearance of sheep and pottery (Sadr & Smith 2001). But there is evidence, which Sadr (1998) reviews, for a possible later migration by Khoekhoe speakers at the end of the first millennium AD. A major

obstacle to the spread-by-diffusion scenario has been the theoretical contention that the sharing ethic amongst hunter-gatherers would tend to prevent the adoption of herding. But Sadr shows that one of the few traits common to all Kalahari San groups is that of flexibility - in social and political spheres as well as in lifestyle (cf. Guenther 1999) - and that such fluidity and opportunism would have enabled hunter-gatherers to adopt and maintain livestock if circumstances made this desirable. Evidence from south-eastern Botswana (Sadr & Plug 2002:5) indicates a situation where foragers may well have considered livestock as "equivalent to socially unimportant smaller game, rather than to the meat of 'significant' large and medium game", suggesting that the sharing ethic would not need to be compromised by herding on this scale. Indeed, Sadr (1998) questions the extent to which true pastoralism generally arose in South Africa, in the light of evidence of usually less than substantial quantities of livestock on 'herder' sites. To what extent, he enquires, were Later Stone Age groups with livestock and pottery, in fact, real herders? Schrire (1980) had previously pointed to repeated paradoxical references in the literature of the Cape interior to so-called 'Bushmen' hunter-gatherers keeping stock.

The Type R settlements along the Riet River have been accounted for by Humphreys (1972; 1988) in broadly these kinds of terms; of erstwhile hunter-gatherers having adopted pastoralism, and being engaged in trade and cultural exchange with other groups, probably Sotho-Tswana to the north (see Brink *et al.* 1992; Humphreys 1997). An analogue for the process resulting in the form of their stone-walled settlements is given with reference to twentieth-century stock-keeping Dobe !Kung (Humphreys 1988; cf. Yellen 1984) whose settlement organization underwent change, with similar eventual spatial layout, after the incorporation of herding into their lifestyle.

But there may be indicators for immigration of a distinct identity conscious group at some sites in South Africa dating from about 900-1200 BP, where there is evidence of new elements of ceramic style (lugged pots), changes in lithic technology (more macrolithic, a drop in formal tool percentages, coarser raw materials; also grooved grinding stones), and in the sizes of ostrich eggshell beads (Sadr 1998; cf Kinahan

1986; Jacobson 1987a; 1987b; Smith 1990b:11; Yates 1992) . Even here, though, *in situ* cultural change cannot yet be ruled out (Sadr 1998). In the Northern Cape some assemblages with ceramics are distinguished by these features (Morris & Beaumont 1991; Beaumont *et al.* 1995).

The evidence of burials along the Riet River could have a bearing on the question as to whether changes in local Wilton Complex industries, and the introduction of ceramics, reflects some degree of population replacement, or the kind of process that Humphreys has posited. Numbers of such burials, having various features in common, are linked in several instances with the Type R sites, by virtue of their placement, their dating and the nature of grave goods (e.g. copper objects). But these conform to a burial pattern noted in a grave from Weltevreden, near Driekopseiland, dated to  $3360 \pm 60$  (Humphreys 1974), prompting Humphreys (*ibid.*:271) to suggest that the Riet River burials represent “a relatively stable aspect of a cultural system extending from at least 3000 years ago.” The human remains themselves cannot be distinguished morphologically beyond the level of 'Khoisan' but Morris's (1992:102) analysis of the Riet River sample - including the Weltevreden burial - indicates that they do constitute a morphologically homogeneous population with a certain amount of anatomical distinctiveness: “the Riet River population as a whole experienced a degree of genetic isolation from other South African groups,” he concludes. It is also to be noted that mortuary data for the Riet River sample are consistent with what Morris distinguishes as San burial practices - and none with those linked specifically with Khoekhoe (*ibid.* 70)

Against this background, it would appear not only simplistic, but indeed unwarranted, to suggest - as some earlier writers have done - that the animal engravings and 'older' geometrics at Driekopseiland were made by 'Bushmen', linked with the 'Smithfield B' sites, while the 'younger' geometric motifs were the work of Korana [Khoekhoe] or Korana/Bush hybrids (see discussion in Chapter 3). Rather, it seems likely that a complex 'mosaic' (Beaumont & Vogel 1984; Humphreys 1988) of economic, technological and ideological responses became manifest in the region through the last 2000 years, characterized by a variety of social and cultural

interactions between differing subsistence modes (Humphreys 1988; cf. Denbow 1990; Maggs & Whitelaw 1991; Lewis-Williams & Blundell 1997: note 17). Pottery or stone tool assemblages, rock art, or other aspects of material culture are, in this view, unlikely to be a straightforward reflection of social entities such as ethnic or even techno-economic groupings (Jacobson *et al.* 1994a; 1994b; cf. Deacon & Deacon 1999:184). In fact, it has been shown that the ethnic groups recorded in the colonial era might well be of uncertain time depth and perhaps even of doubtful relevance (Humphreys 1998). In the nineteenth century, 'Korana', for example, became something of a catch-all frontier category - at least in colonial literature; different from 'Korana' herders along the middle Orange River in the previous century (Barnard 1992; cf. Legassick 1979:251). The term 'Bushman' as a clearly identifiable group with its own culture, languages and physical type likewise became fixed in that era; and even terms such as 'Sonqua' and 'abaThwa', previously having more diffuse significances, were glossed in the colonial literature as the equivalents of 'Bushman' (Wright 1996).

Quite how the changes outlined may have impacted on rock-art traditions and beliefs locally is not clear. It has been suggested that regional differences in rock-art repertoires of the last two millennia may reflect different trajectories of change and forms of interaction between hunter-gatherers and other social groups in their respective areas (e.g. Prins 1991; Parkington 1996; Jolly 1998). Referring to such interaction, Wilmsen has pointed to the way the content of mythology "transcends time and tribe and ethnicity", indicating a complex history of social relations, through which elements of cosmologies "were constructed and transmitted in a less segmented social environment than presently exists" (Wilmsen 1986:358; cf. Schmidt 1979; Dowson 1998; Jolly 1998). In their relations with others, foragers may have been particularly receptive to outside ideas, suggests Guenther (1999:87), who also believes it is nearly impossible, in the Khoisan context, to sift imported beliefs and rituals from those that are not: "the 'Common Bushman' core of beliefs that constitutes the benchmark for differentiating indigenous from derived items is too varied and fluid," he adds, "to serve as a standard for evaluation." Schapera (1930) and Barnard (1992) have both noted "striking resemblances" in religion across the

Khoisan spectrum, while Biesele (1993:34-37) finds San and Khoekhoe 'traditions' to be "practically indistinguishable." In his study of *Tricksters and trancers: Bushman religion and society*, Guenther (1999:87-88, 128-129) cites both San and Khoekhoe sources, noting how histories of contact will have resulted in myths permeating and blending across boundaries. One particular example is the story of the moon and the hare, which Bleek (1875:10, cited in Guenther 1999:128) characterised as a 'veritable Hottentot myth' because of its apparent preponderance in Namaqualand (in fact, an artefact of missionary linguistic work in that region) - notwithstanding his having collected nine versions of the same myth from the |Xam San. Moreover, Bleek was unable to differentiate Khoekhoe from San elements in these latter versions. Lewis-Williams has similarly drawn attention to the close correspondences between Korana rituals and beliefs and those of the |Xam (Lewis-Williams 1981:105-106; Prins 1991). Guenther (1999:86-93) demonstrates that Khoisan were receptive also to the myths and even rituals of other neighbours including both Bantu-speakers and Europeans, with whom their interactions have been as substantial as they have been varied (e.g. Wright 1971; Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams 1981; Campbell 1987; Prins 1990; 1991; Prins & Lewis 1992; Mazel 1992; Jolly 1992; 1996a; 1996b).

It is in relation to this contact period reality of "profound commonalities and extensive social relations" that Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1994:207, 220) have moved away from considering a 'pan-San cognitive system' as an appropriate unit of analysis for rock art, recognising rather a "subcontinental cognitive set" (ibid. 220); one where 'some beliefs are pan-southern African in that they are held by people other than the San' (Lewis-Williams 1988:86-87).

Remarkably, aspects of the beliefs in question have been sustained to this day in the lives of some descendants of Khoisan in the Northern Cape, with a degree of regional variability (Van Vreedon 1955; 1957; Waldman 1989; 2001; Prins & Rousseau 1992; Hoff 1993; 1995; 1997; 1998; Lange 1998).

## **Environment, history and rock art**

What emerges from this review of the environmental and archaeological settings of Driekopseiland and the wider region is that the historical context(s) of the engravings here probably have a measure of complexity commensurate with the array of processes that were unfolding in the region in the last 2000 years and more. Precise answers to the question of authorship remain elusive, with the options being, at most, between Khoisan groupings, where the influence of emergent pastoralism and contact with Iron Age groups may have played a role. But insights with respect to significant cross-cultural continuity in the sphere of beliefs and ritual, mean that the pertinent questions on diversity in the engravings here may in fact relate more to changing emphases in the expression of widely shared beliefs (cf. Lewis-Williams 1988), and including dynamic landscape temporalities (Ingold 1993) and variable contemporary uses of places, than to the relative merits of different ethnic authorships.

Establishing the temporal linkages between rock art and its archaeological and environmental contexts has been a key objective in this Chapter. If the dating itself leaves much to be desired, at least some understanding has been gained of the parameters involved. "Ultimately what is of primary relevance about dating in archaeology," suggest Rosenfeld and Smith (1997:409), "is not the age as such, but the temporal positioning of the thing dated in relation to other archaeological material." A broad contemporaneity between certain kinds of environmental processes, historical trends and rock engraving events has been suggested for this site. This temporal positioning hints at a dynamic interplay between history, rock art and environment, where Driekopseiland, more than a mere location in space, has represented for people at different periods rather different kinds of opportunities and intersecting contingencies (Morris 1988:117; cf. Parkington 1980). It is suggested that one may look afresh at this engraving site by drawing upon what Ingold (1993) refers to as a 'dwelling perspective', where relevant ethnography may provide important insights. This will be a major theme in the remaining three Chapters.

## Notes

1. Goodwin (1936) was not unaware of this, devoting a section of his paper to a review of the diverse processes involved in weathering and patination. He cautioned that "it is not time which produces patina, but the various factors...acting alone or together, and more or less intensely over varying periods" (1936:166). See also Goodwin 1960.

2. A letter by J.A. van den Heever, Zoology Department, University of Stellenbosch to E.A. Voigt, McGregor Museum, dated 8 Aug 1991, and brought to my attention in June 2002, referred to the finding of a fossil elephant occiput at Driekopseiland by a Mrs Edith Schwenk. The accompanying sketch indicates a "sand bank" which is most likely in fact the alluvial conglomerate at the base of the Pleistocene sequence. A search in the vicinity in June 2002 revealed no further similar material.



## V

### Placing art in a landscape

*“A landscape is the most solid appearance in which a history can declare itself. It is not background, nor is it a stage...there it is, the past in the present, constantly changing and renewing itself as the present rewrites the past.”*  
- F. Inglis 1977, cited in Bender 1992:736.

*‘I think nature is made by the artist, and that nature does not exist until the artist creates it in his own way. It is possible that the artist, in defining the reality around him, makes a new kind of reality, a reality that the generation after him will understand.’*  
- Walter Battiss, 1960, cited in Berman 1983:58

Constructing the landscape and making of it a new reality - to paraphrase Battiss (cited by Berman 1983:58, cf. Skotnes 1994:319) - is patently one of the more obvious, yet until recently often overlooked, aspects of rock art, as pointed out by Whitley (1998) and Heyd (1999), amongst others: Skotnes (1994), Bradley (1991); Bradley *et al.* 1994), Solomon (1997), Ouzman (1996; 1998; 2001), Hartley & Vawser (1998) touch on this in various ways; while Ross (2001) argues that the placement of rock art be considered as basic to the very definition of the art. Unlike markings placed on other materials (mobiliary items such as wood, hides or small stones, or stationary but transient ones such as trees or sand), as Heyd remarks, the fact that rock art is made on *rock*, on a geological substrate (Whitley 1998), and is fixed in a determinate relation to its surroundings (Heyd 1999:454), points to a fundamental aspect of its context deserving of analysis. Such analysis, in relation to available ethnography in the South African context, appears, moreover, to be pregnant with potential (e.g. Deacon 1986; 1988; 1997; 1998; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990), where the surfaces on which images were placed, constituting a ‘most fundamental part of the context’, were, in Lewis-Williams and Dowson’s (1990) significant paper on rock paintings, “in some sense a veil, a ‘painted veil’, suspended between this world and the world of the spirit” (*ibid.*:15; cf. Lewis-Williams 1988; cf. Skotnes 1994). Such surfaces were indeed, in this view, places where the spirit world was immanent. If fresh insights are to be had on the significance and meaning of the Driekopseiland site and its engravings, it is suggested that a useful start could be a

consideration of the placement of rock engravings in the landscape.

Since rock art is *in* a place, Heyd (1999:454) argues, it is “utterly dependent on, and hence in dialogue with, the place it is in.” Schaafsma (1985, cited in Hartley & Vawser 1998) emphasised that the positioning of rock art in a landscape was likely to relate as much to the landscape itself as to other cultural remains. Bradley (1991) pursued much further the potential of considering the changing contexts of rock art relative to topography and the cultural landscape as a way of moving beyond “excessive subjectivity” in the interpretation of Neolithic/Bronze Age rock engravings in Britain. It is proposed that at Driekopseiland an approach that focusses on these aspects, of rock art’s placement relative to regional, cultural and environmental features and stratigraphies, could go some way towards elucidating changing emphases in its positioning, nature, content and significance, at this site and others through time (cf. Parkington 1980). As Heyd (*ibid.*) has put it, each rock art site “constitutes a very particular perspective, or window, on the surrounding land” - an appreciation of which can inform reciprocally our understanding of the historical dynamics of the period(s) the site represents.

An analytical focus on space and place in anthropology is today far more widespread than it was a few decades ago. Foucault, cited by Rodman (1992), had remarked upon the “devaluation of space that has prevailed for generations.” “Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile.” But, he went on to say, “to trace the forms of implantation, delimitation, and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organisation of domains meant the throwing into relief of processes - historical ones, needless to say - of power” (1980:70 cited by Rodman 1992:640). Rodman herself saw “place” as inadequately conceptualised in anthropology: often it was seen as little more than the physical setting or locale, the stage, or the “passive target for primordial sentiments of attachment” flowing from what Geertz called life’s “assumed ‘givens’” (Rodman 1992:641). Yet, Malinowski had long ago appreciated the “enlivening influence of myth upon the landscape,” where “the mythological world receives its substance in rock and hill, in the changes in land and sea.” And just as myth becomes “tangible and permanent,” so it “re-acts

on the landscape, fills it with dramatic happenings, which, fixed there forever, give it a definite meaning" (Malinowski 1922:330). Subsequently, though, Kahn suggests, anthropologists' acknowledgement of language as the "communicative vehicle of culture par excellence" - coming, as anthropologists had, from literate societies - led them to overlook landscape features and stones as "significant data": "other than granting it the briefest mention, [anthropologists] seem to neglect the very ground over which they stumble while recording ancestral myths" (Kahn 1990:53).

This may certainly be said of rock art research at Driekopseiland where, but for a study of the geomorphology (tightly focussed on obtaining a handle on age) and a few undeveloped observations by Stow and Battiss on the singularity of the glaciated rock here, the placement of this extraordinary site, as a defining feature, has indeed been overlooked.

A cursory glance, moreover, at the area around Driekopseiland reveals a landscape that is far from fixed and immobile; one that indeed throws into relief historical and social processes, as Foucault envisioned. Even seemingly 'natural' processes, far from reflecting a 'pristine' state, may be influenced by these histories, as Butzer and Butzer (1997) suggest; Holocene environments and human land-use having co-evolved. The advent of farming in South Africa, for example, effected clear 'anthropogenic' shifts that can be detected in changes in, for instance, microfaunal populations (Avery 1992). Through the history of this landscape people have interacted with, and latterly often abused, it. From the spectrum of resources this environment can be made to yield, many have been exploited - from animals, veld foods and firewood; to water, from springs and rivers; fish (downstream along the Riet, Willcox [1965] reported stone fish traps); pasturage and soils for irrigation farming; salt from salt pans (see Lye 1975:147 for a protocolonial instance); and diamonds from river gravels (the devastation of the landscape - including heritage resources - at Schutsekama and Kudusbergdrift is on-going). Technologies of the Stone Age utilised different rock types in stone tool manufacture - from Ventersdorp andesite cobbles, to quartzite in the Dwyka tillites, to the fine-grained Karoo hornfels, and chalcedonies from river gravels - which also reflect changing strategies through

time. Rock art was placed on particular andesite and dolerite outcrops across this landscape

What Ingold (1993) refers to as the “temporality of the landscape” may be reflected in place names which express emic perspectives on an environment by people living in it. That this is so in the Northern Cape is shown by Humphreys (1993), in a paper dedicated to the work of van Vreeden (1961) on local place names and their origins. Amongst toponyms of Khoisan origin there was a particular emphasis on water (a trend echoed in Dutch/Afrikaans place names as well - cf. Van der Merwe 1987), suggesting that it was a commodity afforded high priority. What Humphreys shows, in order to indicate the potential of place name analysis, is that there is significant geographic patterning to the different kinds of water sources (river/spring/water-hole etc) reflected in these names, implying, generally, that more reliable sources were to be had in the east (via springs and rivers) than in the west (where, the names suggest, it was generally necessary to dig for this vital resource). As the colonial frontier reached stages of closure, and a ‘literary matrix’ (Humphreys 1998) came to define all aspects of the land and its people, these were amongst the few indigenous place names that were fixed on maps. Many others were lost. How this happened is illustrated by Burchell (1822:II:19) in connection with the Brak River south of Prieska so known to the “Klaarwater Hottentots” on account of a few brackish pools. “This name, at length,” he related, “was taken into common use by our party, and occasioned us totally to neglect inquiring of the natives its proper name: a neglect which I the more regret as the name of *Brak Rivier* has already been given to too many streams in the colony.” Not as insensitive as many another chronicler, Burchell added that “As a river of this length bears, doubtlessly, some distinctive appellation among the Bushmen, I have not presumed to give it one of my own; but leave this blank in my map to be filled by some traveller who may hereafter discover the name by which it has been always known to the aboriginal inhabitants of the country.” Clearly no subsequent traveller bothered; for Brak Rivier it remains to this day.

More robust manifestations of colonial hegemony, of the power relations to which Foucault refers concerning the landscape, are the impositions of which *Kimberley*

and *Douglas* - as place names - are examples. These had superceded the earlier senses of 'place' asserted by Trekboer and diamond digger interests. Lord Kimberley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, had "declined to be in any way connected with such a vulgarism as 'New Rush', and as for 'Vooruitzig' ...he could neither spell nor pronounce it". When proclamation came, an editorial in the *Diamond Field* newspaper, reflecting local digger sentiment, remarked famously: "we went to sleep in New Rush and waked up in Kimberley, and so our dream was gone" (Roberts 1976:115-6). Issues of (changing) land ownership - a further facet of the closing frontier - come through in other place names, for example *Magers Kuilen* (named for a Griqua of that name), and *Plooyburg* (named for the du Plooy family white farmers in the area). In the nineteenth century, many Griqua place names in Herbert District were superceded by English ones (e.g. *Courasie's Pan* = *Leinster*, *Uithaaldersfontein* = *Belmont*; *Jantjes Dam* = *Ottawa*; *Slypsteen* = *Summerhill*) in the period of the Albania settlement (Kurtz 1988).

In and through local usage, there are yet other names with deeper genealogies, some of them in translation (van Vreeden 1961). Such is the case with *Modder River* - derived from the !Kora  $\text{†}Gama\text{-!}ab$  [*Gmaap/Maap* or *Gumaap* in early accounts], meaning 'muddy'. (There is an erroneous ascription by Bleek [1923:67] of the name ||Xu||*kumwe* to the Modder River: but this in fact refers to Mottels Rivier near Kenhardt - James 2001:159). *Schutsekama*, upstream from Driekopseiland, is a corruption not, as was once suggested, of "Skotse Kamer" (with implied Anglo-Boer War links) but from the !Kora name *Khoese* ||*ganadi*, meaning "nine camelthorn trees" (Levi Namaseb pers.com. 18 Jul 2000; van Vreeden 1961). *Gannahoek* refers similarly to a 'corner' of the landscape with camelthorns. *Ka-aub* [probably !a |aub] is another example, translated into the Dutch *Klip Drif* (van Vreeden nd; 1959) - although it possibly translates better as "stony [place along a] river" - which was an early name for the locality now known as Barkly West (which also went at various times by the name of Parkerton and of Nieuw Boshof [van Vreeden nd; SESA 1970:2:177]). The older Khoisan names bespeak a different sense of 'place' that prevailed before the contestation for land and resources that accelerated through the nineteenth century.

The Driekopseiland engravings - in the middle of the river bed - straddle two farms. Biesjesbult West and Kaffirs Dam (also called Landsig) - although officially only those on Biesjesbult West were declared by the National Monuments Council (indeed the administrative difficulty is compounded by the fact that they straddle two magisterial districts, now under two separate district municipalities. See Appendix). In the 1870s, when Stow recorded the engravings, however, the place was known as *Bloem's Homestead* and as *Blaauwbank* - the former a reference to the Korana leader Jan Bloem; the latter probably to the 'bank' of bluish andesite glacial pavement exposed in the river bed here. Given that some Dutch place names were translations of earlier Khoisan toponyms, it is possible that the designation *Blaauwbank* has an older indigenous origin; but this cannot be ascertained on present evidence. Blaauwbank ["Bloy-bank"/"Blue-bank"] was mentioned by Andrew Smith on his journey through the area in 1834 (Lye 1975:144-145), and it is thus one of the older known names of the area, though no longer in use.

Place names are only one manifestation of experiences of 'dwelling' - one of the key concepts in Ingold's (1993) characterisation of the "temporality of the landscape". It will be argued that the engravings at Driekopseiland are partly to be understood in terms of these concepts, which resonate with other approaches that recognise as significant the particular placement of rock art in a landscape, as alluded to above (cf. Solomon 1997).

Advocating a 'dwelling perspective', Ingold expressly rejects the notion of 'layered' histories *upon* the landscape; of a cultural veneer *covering* a natural substrate (in stratigraphic terms, after all, deposition is often less than half the story). Rather, by way of a progressive collapsing of conventional dichotomies - "insistent" dualisms as he calls them - Ingold arrives at what he terms a *landscape* (which is not merely 'land' nor 'nature' nor 'space', but a qualitative, heterogeneous 'enfolding' of processes, both living and non-living, and the relations between these) and a *taskscape* (neither 'chronology' nor 'history', but again a qualitative, heterogeneous resonance of activities that carry forward the processes of social life). Where Ingold likens the taskscape to an orchestral performance, the gestures of individual players

resonating with each other, for the landscape he uses the analogy of a painting - not in its finished form, but in the act of being painted (Western thought, he notes, tends to privilege form over process). The temporality of the landscape, ultimately, consists in the merging of these two concepts of landscape and taskscape.

In these terms a place might owe its character “to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there - to the sights, sounds and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience” (Ingold 1993:155). “And these, in turn,” adds Ingold, “depend on the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage. It is from this relational context of people’s engagement with the world, in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance.

Parkington’s (1980) Time and Place paper prefigured this kind of approach to some degree in recognising a site, as a ‘place’ that is more than “simply the latitude and longitude of an assemblage location”, but rather “the set of opportunities offered by the location and thus the likelihood of particular activities taking place there” (ibid.:73) Since stone tool assemblages are located in both time and place, they “must reflect both tradition *and* activity” (his emphasis). The same might well be said in some senses of rock art sites. More than this, Parkington recognised that “a site may change its place (set of opportunities) without changing its physical location” and this could influence the scheduling of activities there, and the resulting range of artefact debris. Environmental change clearly could have led to resource changes at a site; but ultimately it is the social response to this (Mazel 1989), what Ingold refers to as an “attentive involvement in the landscape” (1993:171), that leads to the fashioning and refashioning of ideas about a place, and its significances in the widest sense.

### **Rock engravings in landscapes**

When Heyd (1999) asks, “Should the fact that rock art is made on rock be considered? Should the relation of the panel to the surroundings be noted?” - the answer must clearly be in the affirmative. But whereas it might well be said, as McLuhan has done, that “the medium is the message”, this can surely apply only

within tolerable epistemological and ethnographic constraints. This matter is highlighted by Barrett and Fewster (1998) in response to a recent study of Stonehenge (Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998) which alludes to McLuhan's adage: the analysis draws upon Madagascan ethnography to propose 'structuring principles' "linking the ancestors with stone and the living with wood" (ibid.:308) - such that Stonehenge could be interpreted "as belonging to the ancestors." Problematic here is the identification and use - without qualification - of 'universal', and hence ahistoric, structures to explain processes that will have pertained in historically specific conditions, suggest Barrett and Fewster. Relational analogies of this nature are, as they point out, vulnerable since, actually, neither the ancestor cult nor the "analogy of materiality" can be said to be universal. In the latter case an evocative argument links softness with flesh and hardness with bone, but in the further elaboration, linking specifically the hardness of stone with maturity, maleness and ancestors, the idea is embedded in specific Malagasy cultures. In the fixing of this as a *universal* structural relationship, Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina "have made a by-passing link," Barrett and Fewster (1998:849) charge, "between material culture and social meaning that does not actually address the human agency by which that meaning was constructed." The symbolic system is not only taken as existing independently of practice, but also as indeed determining practice, whereas, whether in Madagascar or Stonehenge, there would have operated a "practical and strategic interplay by which the inhabitants constantly reworked and manipulated an essentially ambiguous set of symbolic relationships; a constant process of using, dismantling and patching up systems of signs which is never finished" (ibid.:850). Barrett and Fewster (ibid.:851) call for an archaeology not of ahistoric meanings and closed systems of signs, but for one of "inhabitation and practice which explores the ways in which meanings were constructed and symbolic systems reworked and adapted to viewpoints, experience and the passing claims of social convention

The present study seeks to elucidate one instance - at Driekopseiland - where, it is suggested, meanings were indeed thus constructed and reworked in a setting - a place - where "temporality of the landscape" is particularly palpable. But it needs to be demonstrated, first, that the placement of rock engravings in the landscape can,



at an empirically suggestive level, be regarded as a meaningful aspect in the art - that the rock face was more than just a "silent support" (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990); and, if so, it needs to be determined, secondly, what those meanings might be, in terms that are more explicit and pertinent in a regional context than the mere allusion that the support is fundamental to the context. What follows here is a review of instances where landscape or landscape features appear tangibly linked to images or senses of place; and a survey of ethnography (and interpretations of it) that might inform such perspectives. In doing so one steps onto increasingly insecure ground. Tilley and Bennett (2001:335) make the point that "what we understand to be nature tends to be ignored precisely because it is not culture and is therefore considered to be relatively unimportant in interpretation"; and they argue that more time and effort should be invested in "considering 'natural' form as 'cultural' form." Where this has the potential of leading to substantial subjectivity, our own encounters with the physicality of the landscape impinging on our interpretations of how, say, a Stone Age person might have experienced it (cf. Brück 2001b:766), we do fortunately have rich ethnographies to constrain the analysis

At the level of individual images, there are in the engravings, as in the paintings, many examples where it is clear that the rock support is no *tabula rasa* (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990:15). Rock and image often interact so that the former is integral to the latter. One of the first writers to make this observation in the South African context was Battiss (1948:36) who referred to "the most intriguing use being made of natural rock contours" - though, with the exception of a single mentioned engraving, he had seen no instances of this other than amongst paintings here. Woodhouse (1990; cf. Woodhouse & Lee 1978) and Solomon (1997) cite examples of it in rock paintings; and Skotnes (1994) looks *inter alia* at orientation and "dynamic viewing" in a formal approach that sees "the visual as a site of meaning." One of the most detailed analyses of the phenomenon in rock paintings is that of Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1990), who also note that this feature of the art is not absent in engravings. They explain the significance of these paintings, which give the impression, *inter alia*, of entering and leaving rock surfaces, in a shamanistic context that suggests that the rock itself was a meaningful ritual element. A universal aspect

of trance experience (since it is neurologically determined) is the feeling of being engulfed in a vortex. This in turn is given cultural specificity according to local idiom. The funnels, tunnels, cones or corridors of Western contexts become, in other settings, holes in the ground, a “road down through the earth”, a “pathway of the spirits”; they could entail following the roots of a tree, or being underwater in the sea or in a river (ibid.:9-10). Waterholes, and water that was “alive”, feature in the ethnography of trance from the Kalahari in the twentieth century and from the nineteenth century [Xam myths as recorded by Bleek and Lloyd, and by Orpen (ibid.:11). Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1990:15) argue that in these terms paintings that show animals and therianthropes seemingly emerging from cracks or steps in the rock face are highly suggestive of the idea that the painted walls of rock shelters, possibly enhanced by flickering firelight, were *themselves* understood as gateways, in trance contexts, to the spirit world. In this sense, and of such places, they go so far as to say that “even unpainted rock may have been as pregnant as silences in music” (ibid.:15).

It follows that in engravings one would expect instances similarly suggestive that rock faces were more than neutral surfaces. A few examples are considered. An engraving of a flamingo at Klipfontein (Fock 1979) (Fig. 19), in the side of a hollowed rock surface where rain water collects, has its head bent low, as if feeding, as flamingos do in shallow water (Plate 9). The support here is clearly integral to the image depicted upon it. The particular case is not conclusive of a shamanistic perspective; but one notes the water connection. There are numerous further examples of an engraving being placed to ‘fit’ the surface it is on, indicative of an assimilation of image and rock. A famous geometric engraving, again from Klipfontein, suffices to illustrate the point (Plate 10).

In Plates 1-13 the intent is perhaps less obvious than in the Klipfontein flamingo. but the natural hole has clearly been incorporated as part of the image (Fock & Fock 1989), reminiscent of the so-called ‘nodule figures’ at Drummer’s Rock (Gxalingenwa Rock 1) in the Drakensberg foothills (Solomon 1997) - although in the latter case it is human figures that are painted around the holes. Holes in the rock surface, in

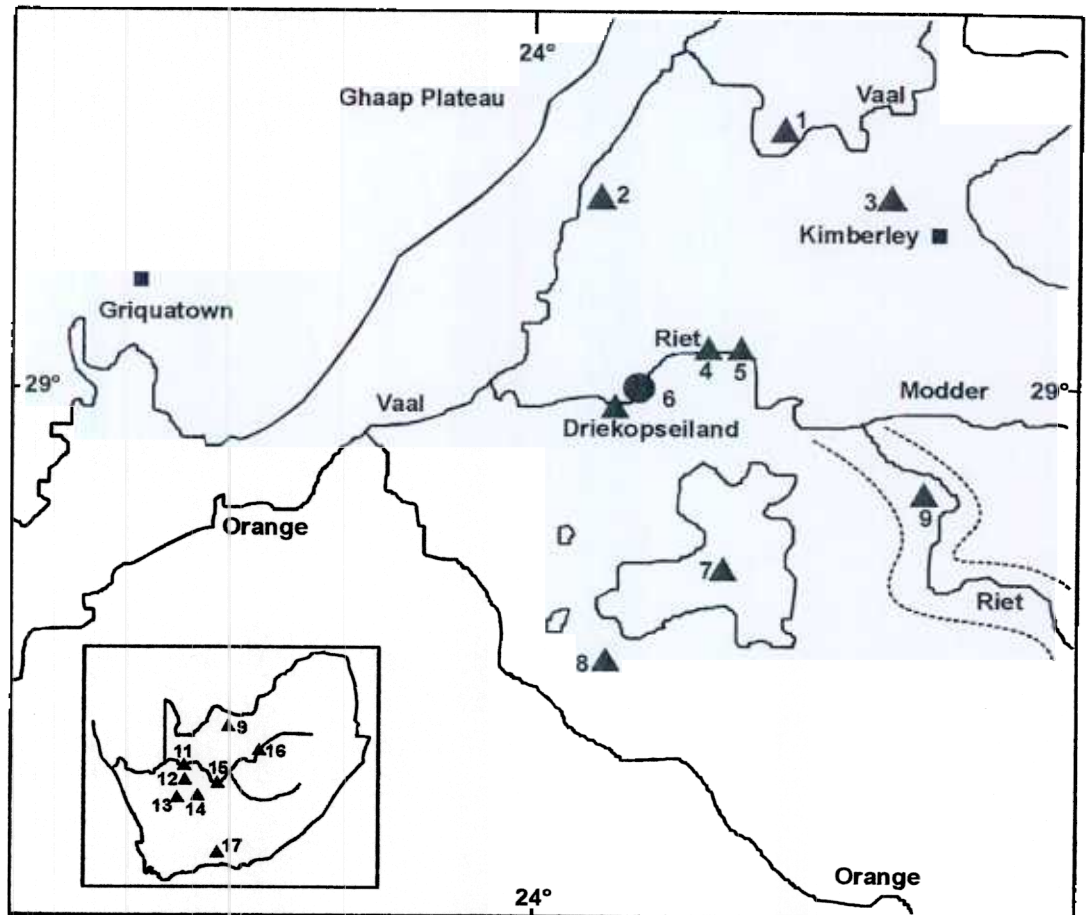


Figure 19. Sites and places mentioned in Chapter 5. 1. Barkly West; 2. Klipfontein; 3. Wildebeest Kuil; 4. Kudusberg Drift; 5. Schutse Kamma; 6. Plooyburg; 7. Magers Kuilen; 8. Herbert District; 9. Thaba Sione; 10. Stowlands; 11. !Nawabdanas; 12. Kenhardt; 13. Varskans; 14. Strandberg; 15. Prieska; 16. Brak River; 17. Fish River Basin.

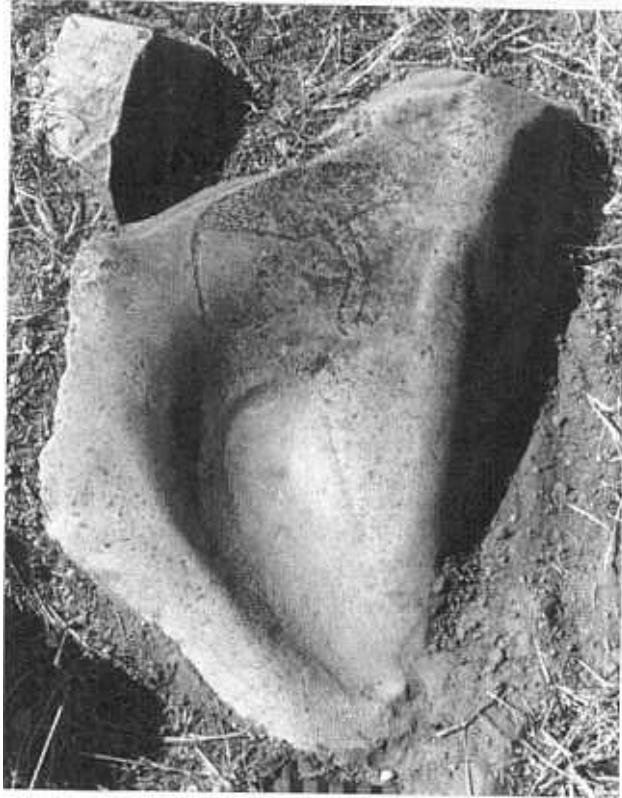


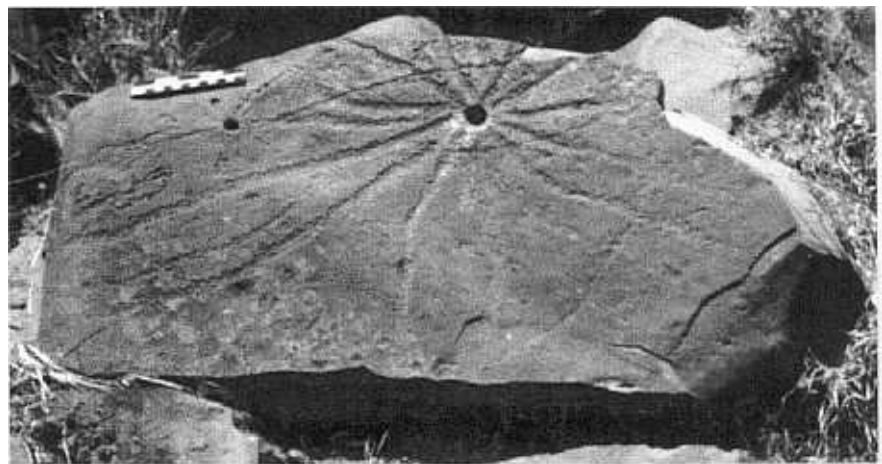
Plate 9. Flamingo, Klipfontein, in side of hollowed rock surface, head bent low, as if feeding.

Plate 10. The complex geometric image is integral with the rock surface in this engraving from Klipfontein.





Plates 11-13. Natural holes in rock are sometimes (but not always) incorporated into engraved images, as in these examples from Klipfontein (above) and near Hopetown (left and below).



particular, may have been perceived as portals to the spirit world (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990:12); a contention strengthened in this case by Lewis-Williams's (1988) suggestion that geometric engravings may have brought to mind the act of plunging into water - a metaphor for trance - and hence signifying entry into non-reality. Geometric engravings in general have been interpreted as entoptics inspired by the sensations of the first stage of altered consciousness (Lewis-Williams 1988; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1988; Dowson 1992; but see Smith & Ouzman in press: not all geometric engravings, in their view, are entoptics or even of San hunter-gatherer context).

In a third set of examples, several engravings at Wildebeest Kuil (Plate 14), previously interpreted as 'unfinished' (Fock & Fock 1989:62), are arguably images of antelope and a rhino that *emerge* from the rock onto its surface; the 'invisible' parts not shown in these images imply that the remainder of the animal in each case still resides within, or behind the 'veil' (Morris 1996). Similar instances of this (Plate 15) have been recorded at Stowlands (Morris & Mngqolo 1995). Lewis-Williams and Dowson refer to the act of art-making as in a sense the luring of images from within the rock (1990:15). There is also, at Wildebeest Kuil, an ostrich whose neck ends (where the head should be) in a small fold in the surface of the rock. Eland heads are engraved at the edges of two rocks at sites on the same property, one of which could be said to 'emerge' from a crack (Plate 16) (it needs to be noted that in some cases 'cracks' [e.g. Ouzman 1996] associated with engravings possibly post-date the engraving event). In one last example, there is a finely engraved eland at Wildebeest Kuil which is headless (Plate 17) and positioned such that it appears to *leave* the rock, from the 'real' world, as it were, into the spiritual realm above (Morris 1996). An interaction between image and support (and in this last example, more than merely the support is implicated) is demonstrable in the engravings, as certainly as it is in the paintings, and is consistent with the idea that the support itself has meaning.

That this 'logic' in the cosmology of the engravers extended to landscape features is less easily substantiated. But important evidence that it was has been engaged by Deacon (1986; 1988; 1997; 1998; see also Ouzman 1995;1996;1998; Walker 1997).

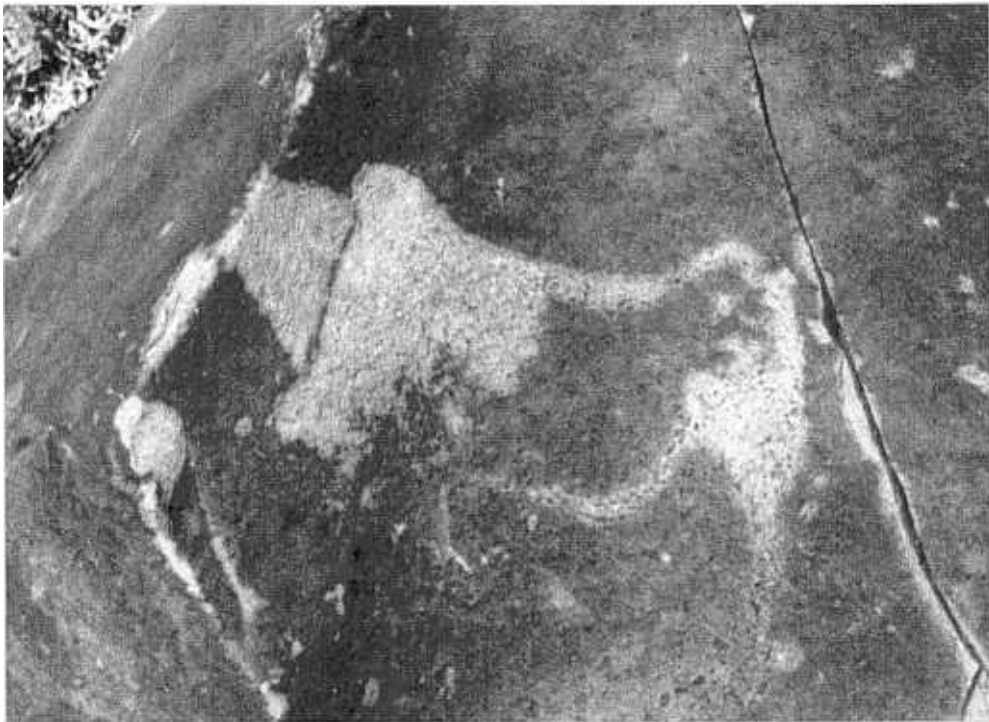


Plates 14 & 15. Engravings from Wildebeest Kuil (above) and Stowlands (below), depicted such that the animals (rhinoceros and eland) appear to emerge from within the rock.





Plates 16 & 17. Eland at Wildebeest Kuil: one showing only the head of the animal, positioned at the edge of a rock at a gaping crack (above); the other depicting a headless animal such that it may appear to be leaving the surface of the rock (below).





Once again one ventures with Tilley and Bennett (2001:335) into “considering ‘natural’ form as ‘cultural’ form”, and treading all too easily into realms of subjectivity: but the ethnography serves to curb indulgence. A key instance is the nineteenth century |Xam legend, “The Death of the Lizard” (|Hanǀkass’o in Bleek & Lloyd 1911:214-217), which is linked directly to the Strandberg hills in the Upper Karoo. It tells of the !*khau* (Agama lizard), who was a man of the early race before people and animals were differentiated, and who, walking across the dry plains, was caught by the mountains and squeezed. Broken, his upper body became the hill called !*guru-na*, his lower body and legs, the hill |*xe-!khwai*. The Agama lizard may have been a metaphor for a rainmaker, for its habit of mounting a rock and facing, motionless (as the hills now lie motionless), in the direction of the rain when rain is imminent (Deacon 1997; van der Merwe 1987:26). The symbolic linkages implied by this personification of Upper Karoo geographical features, in myth and legend, were evidently enhanced by those places being marked with rock art, probably as part of rain-making or other rituals (Deacon 1986; 1988; 1997; 1998; cf. Schmidt 1979:206). In explaining this, Deacon builds, in part, on the geographer Tuan’s concept of ‘topophilia’, itself not dissimilar from Ingold’s idea of ‘dwelling’. The probability specifically of a ritual link follows from remarks made by Dia!kwain to Lloyd that his father had made ‘chippings’ of various animals at a place called |*kann* - which Deacon identifies as being the present farm of Varskans (meaning “fresh water”). It is not far from the Strandberg (itself marked with rock art). Engravings at Varskans not only match the description, but the large antelope are especially evocative of the ‘rain-bull’ drawn in a sketch by Dia!kwain in Mowbray in 1875 (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:224-225), which is captioned: “An animal which is said to live in the water, and to be captured by the sorcerers and led about the country by them when they want to make rain.”

Ouzman (1996) develops an analysis of what he terms cynosuric image clusters - the prominent placement of engravings that feature, particularly, ‘rain animals’ in the form of impressive rhino images - at Thaba Sione near Mafikeng. He suggests a degree of multivocality in these images that bespeaks shamanic transformation, gender relations and rain-making rites. Into this interpretation he also weaves the

physicality of the hill, the nearby Tlhakajeng River, and the behaviour of rhinos (evidently over centuries) in moving between pools in the river and rubbing stones at the base of the hill. It is a persuasive synergistic drawing together of different aspects, including iconography, belief and ritual, that is consistent with an all-encompassing shamanistic worldview.

Landscape symbolism is difficult to show in the absence of oral testimony, but many place-names of Khoisan origin hint at similar connections. For example, *Renosterkop* near Kakamas is a direct translation of *!Nawabdanas*, meaning 'rhino head' (Morris & Beaumont 1991); and in the same vein many other Dutch-Afrikaans place names such as *Kudusberg* or *Boschduiven Kop* may well represent the traces of earlier Khoisan understandings of place and of topophilia - of dwelling. Naming of places was sometimes relatively quotidian - as in the grove of bushes named after the woman *|A!karken* who was dragged into it and devoured there by a lion (James 2001:157 citing Bleek & Lloyd L.VIII.15.7364-75); although Lloyd (*ibid.*: L.II.28.2541) was told by *||Kabbo* that it was believed that place names were given by *|Kaggen*, the trickster deity, as "the Bushmen did not give the places names." *|Han#kasso* (Bleek 1923:67) provides an account of this, where *|Kaggen* named "three places of water", namely *||Xu||kumwe* (now Mottels Rivier), *||Xabba* (now Zout Rivier) and *|Hil!hoa* (now Rietfontein), all to the south and south east of Kenhardt. The meanings of these names are unknown (James 2001).

Smith (1994:378) observes that a topographic context is a frequently immanent feature in the *|Xam* stories, whether the subject matter be people, animals or phenomena such as rain or wind. It serves as more than a mere horizontal plane for the enactment of myths or the inscription of symbolism. An animated landscape - its waters "alive", its hills expectant as the agama awaiting the rain - additionally was traversed (when it came) by the destructive 'he-rain' or the more gentle 'she-rain', which left distinctive 'footprints' as they 'walked' on 'rain's legs' - the columns of rain precipitating from the clouds that were their actual embodiment (Bleek 1933a) Hence meanings were incorporated - to use Ingold's (1993:157) concept in preference to 'inscription' - not only *across* the landscape, and *inwardly* through

'portals' at rock shelters or at waterholes, but also *upward*, into a realm over the landscape. This has indeed been modelled in an analytical device developed by Lewis-Williams (1996) to describe a bi-axial structuring that is apparent in !Xam cosmology, where opposing ends of a horizontal axis are the camp and the hunting ground, with the water-hole mid-way. At the water-hole is the point of intersection with a vertical axis associated with the supernatural, the spirit world, the extremities of which are the realms over and under the surface of the earth. They are mediated by water, welling up in waterholes, and falling from clouds (Lewis-Williams 1977:168; 1996:124-127).

The heuristic potential of this model, argued in Lewis-Williams's (1996) exploration of the myth, *A visit to the Lion's House*, has been shown in an archaeological application of it by S. Hall (2000) as part of an interpretation of the cognitive use of place evident in mid-Holocene Fish River Basin settlement patterns. It resonates specifically with the different spatial foci of the Edgehill Shelter (in a setting some distance from water), as camp, and the Welgeluk Shelter (overlooking a large placid pool), as burial ground. Hall argues that the Welgeluk burial complex was "literally and figuratively placed at the intersecting centre of the !Xam bi-axial scheme", between camp and hunting ground, where water "transformed, cooled and mediated the passage of the dead as spirits through into the underworld" (ibid.:141). A turtle carapace amongst the associated grave goods (which also include seashells) has an obvious reference to water (see further discussion on the significance of tortoise shells in Chapter 6). In like manner, warthog tusks - found in several graves - may refer to the behaviour of these animals, including their habitual movement between contexts, from underground, across open terrain, and into a waterhole (ibid.:141-142). These findings underscore the view (e.g. Wadley 1997) that one should not expect grave goods to reflect the life status of a buried individual in any explicit or unproblematic way.

### **Structure - spurious or not?**

It will be argued that Lewis-Williams's (1996) bi-axial model of !Xam cosmology has

explanatory value for an interpretation of Driekopseiland. But Guenther (1999) refers to a pervasive fluidity, an “abiding aura of ambiguity”, characterising San religion - and society as a whole - which potentially confounds analyses presupposing the kinds of structuring that such a model might represent. Skotnes (1994:327) wonders, too, about use of the metaphor of a ‘veil’, a Western construct, she asserts, implying a boundary between ‘this world’ and ‘the world of the spirit’ which may barely exist in San life. (Lewis-Williams has made it clear that in his view “all realms of San cosmology interdigitate” [1996:124]; and that to the extent that the bi-axial schema, as analytical construct, might represent a ‘structure’ in a structuralist sense, it was “not ineluctable”, but indeed better seen as a “resource” that could be manipulated in performance [1996:137-141]).

Barnard (1992:251-264) identifies fluidity as a defining feature of Khoisan religion (as does Guenther), but he has yet discerned broad structural elements as well. He notes, like Guenther, the enormous diversity of beliefs, myths and rituals both within and between groups (and within the “idiosyncratic belief systems” of individual people), which also vary through time. Dorothea Bleek’s (1928) description, amongst the Nharo, of a “wonderful muddle of religious beliefs” is paralleled in Gusinde’s assessment, in the case of the !Kung, of “a complex [of practices and beliefs] tied up in knots”, and in Heinz’s suggestion that there were “more differences than resemblances” in the beliefs of the !Ko (Gusinde 1966 and Heinz 1975 cited in Guenther 1999:59-61). Amongst the G|wi, Silberbauer found beliefs to be “casual, confused and very difficult to obtain and put into any sort of order” (Guenther *ibid.*) Lewis-Williams (1981:124) notes the same quality in |Xam religion, referring to the “shifting and elusive nature of Bushman thought” which defies expression “in single English words without serious distortion.” Barnard (1992:263) nevertheless finds that certain religious ideas have wide currency, “even between hunters and herders” (cf. Guenther 1999:128). These include concepts of God, the spirits, and the dead, as also some myths and ritual practices. In conclusion he suggests that Khoisan religions are characterised by, indeed, a fluidity of belief and religious discourse “which is sometimes difficult to define in purely structural terms,” but also that “structures” do feature and “may be held constant, transformed, or inverted, through

time or across ethnic boundaries.

What distinguishes Guenther's approach from Barnard's is that, in 'realist' as opposed to 'idealist' terms (Aunger 1999), he faces squarely what he describes as the "challenge of ambiguity", considering the implications of this for analysis and methodology. This relates to what D'Andrade (cited by Aunger *ibid.*:S94) terms "a minor scandal at the heart of the study of culture", namely the finding that while the traditional concept of culture implies substantially shared knowledge and belief, there is in fact, amongst people in groups, "considerable disagreement concerning most items." As Guenther suggests (1999:243-244), it could be that those studies that isolate aspects of Khoisan religion which are readily analysed (with 'traditional' anthropological tools), bracketing out the 'noise', amount to "all that can and should be done"; it could be that "to go beyond those recognizable elements on which we have a fix is to be cast adrift in an analytical sea of unsignified signifiers." But *not* to take research "beyond what the spotlights of functionalism and structuralism reveal, Guenther adds, is to gain understanding that is as limited as it is misleading." It is possible to see structure and structures; and, as Guenther also points out, there *are* periods, under circumstances of change and upheaval in San society, when the "looseness and amorphousness of social and political organisation gives way to tightness and structure" (*ibid.*:246); but the challenge is to determine when any apparent structure is spurious or not; and, where the former applies, to attempt rather to gain an understanding of the ambiguity that prevails. Guenther (*ibid.*:245) sees a way of doing this in grounding the fluidity of belief and myth within social reality - itself ambiguous and open. Developing a musical analogy, he suggests that 'the two cultural domains are variations on the theme of ambiguity, religion playing the melody, society the accompanying harmonies, on many instruments.' Part of Guenther's conclusion (*ibid.*:246) is worth citing in full for the sense it gives of this dynamic, which is situated and negotiated at every point - manifest more in process (as Ingold might put it) than in finished form or structure.

"The reason the Bushmen are not perplexed by the ambiguity of their beliefs, nor driven by any 'need' to put order into their mythological and cosmological realm, is this prevailing contrapuntal relationship between religion and society. In form and substance their religion

defines for them a perception of nature, the cosmos, and divinity that is in concert with a life of nomadism and hunting and gathering, of close attachment to nature, of individualism and equality, of loose social attachment to a small community to whom each is morally tied through bonds of reciprocity, and whose company each seeks in the interest of physical survival and aesthetic gratification. With its qualities of ambiguity and interpersonal and regional diversity that attach to all of its supernatural elements, and its tolerance toward and interest in the beliefs, stories, and songs of others, Bushman belief can be regarded as an ideology consistent with the mobility, openness, fluidity, flexibility, adaptability, and unpredictability of the foragers' life."

It could be said that Guenther speaks of "form and substance", diffuse as these may be, where Barnard refers to "structure": but the conceptual divergence is deeper, and concerns the kinds of issues addressed in Chapter 1 - particularly those relating to structure *versus* structuration. It was noted there that 'structures' exist only in the patterns in people's relationships, in their ideas and in their institutions, as observed *in action*, over a period of time: these patterns are defined by people - as individual agents at the local scale - as they live their history - constrained more or less by macro-level social forces. The 'pattern' in this sense is not a thing; not, as Thompson (1978:46) put it, an "ulterior structure, of which men are not the makers but the vectors." The difference between "playing a game" and being "gamed", as in another analogy from Thompson's (ibid.:148) critique, illustrates what happens when 'structure' is reified. It is the difference, one could say, between 'singing' and being 'sung' by some external, ideal and essentialising template (cf. Auger 1999). One might also say that insofar as 'taskscape' is collapsed into landscape in Ingold's concept of 'dwelling', it is also the difference between the idea of 'incorporation' (process) versus symbolic 'inscription' (by pre-existing form or structure) upon the landscape.

The spirit of individual agency in the San world, in relation to a wider social context, is captured particularly well, as observed by Guenther (1999:82), in a remark by Dorothea Bleek (1928:22) in an account of the women's role as singers in trance dances amongst the Sandfontein Nharo. "The time is perfect," she observed, "but no two in a chorus seem to hit the same note, though the general burden of the tune is kept up." The singers "go up together, and all go down together, each hitting any

note they please.” In his commentary, Guenther suggests that “the performance style of the women’s trance dance song expresses in crystalized form the nature of Bushman expressive culture.” The imperatives of individual freedom of expression find a balance, somewhere between harmony and dissonance, against the collective constraints that pertain in this particular group context. England (cited by Guenther 1999:138) would echo Bleek’s example, describing how !Kung men joined another man playing his musical bow, imitating, adding to, and embellishing the melodic motifs. England opined that “this interchanging of melodic phrases...epitomizes the Bushman way in general: it clearly reflects the Bushman desire to remain independent...at the same time that he is contributing vitally to the community life.”

Lewis-Williams’s formulation of the ‘structure’ of the myth, *A visit to the Lion’s House*, is in fact quite consistent with these characterisations and is by no means so rigidly ‘structuralist’ and ‘idealist’ as it might at first appear. He is explicit (1996:137) in suggesting that an emphasis on “the actual performance of myths at specific times by specific people, and the execution of specific rock art images by specific artists” would represent a departure from Levi-Strauss’s view that “myths think themselves through the minds of people.” Just as the numerous different versions of myths indicate “a diversity of circumstances” and “diverse personal and sectional interests”, their performance being recursively implicated in those social and personal contexts, so also “each artist drew upon and manipulated the received resources of rock art for his or her purposes” (ibid.:138; cf. Dowson 1994). Variability in rock art, considered by Dowson (1994:339-340) in one region of the Cape Drakensberg where prominence is given to apparently “pre-eminent shaman” figures, is interpreted in relation to this kind of conscious manipulation of “rules and resources.”

Guenther argues that the central dynamic of foraging in the social organisation of San society is extended well beyond the purely economic/ecological realm into the sphere of ideas. The foraging for ideas, passed between individuals and groups, and even “across linguistic, cultural and environmental boundaries” (Barnard 1992:261), accounts for the gathered diversity of myths, and the nuances and even contradictions in their performance in any given context. Ideas, beliefs and stories

are “locally adapted and newly interpreted and recreated, so that they fit the ‘current emotional needs and imaginations of the people who are now living’” (Guenther 1999:87, citing Marshall 1962:233). Manifest here is what Lewis-Williams refers to as the “shifting and elusive nature” of San thought. The implications of this for the regional and temporal variability in rock art should be clear, and have been pursued to some extent (e.g. Dowson 1994; Jolly 1996a; Parkington 1996; cf. Hampson *et al.* 2002). The processes at work are illustrated, Guenther suggests, in the work of contemporary artists at Dekar and Schmidtsdrift/Platfontein: their paintings and prints “depict a shreds-and-patches collage of foraged motifs” which range, in these late twentieth century contexts, from veld animals to helicopters, army tents, letters and numbers and even a dinosaur! (Guenther 1998;1999:92). In his analysis of the work of the artist Qwaa Mangana at Dekar, Guenther (1998:133) shows how a reconstitution of tradition is brought about through a recasting of “select elements...from the remembered past with select elements from the lived present, drawn from the economic, political and religious spheres of the wider society.” Referring to the work of Hobsbawm and Ranger, he continues that “in so reformulating and reinventing tradition, Qwaa’s art gains new relevance, as well as assisting in the (re)production of the world order today that, for all its disconcerting, confusing impact on people’s lives, does make some sense after all.” Similarly, of rock engravings and paintings, Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1994:219) have said they were “not just a ‘backdrop’ to social action...but items of material culture that were actively implicated in the reproduction and transformation of social relations.

### **Implicating place**

It was noted in the previous Chapter that variability in the engravings in the Northern Cape (Morris 1988) clearly has a temporal component. Equally, for any given period, there is very likely a synchronous spatial diversity such as might reflect ‘social regions’ (cf. Mazel 1989; Smith 1994; Mitchell 1996). As Hampson *et al.* (2002:17) suggest, however, delineations of rock art regions are by no means self-evident. They are indeed, of necessity, constructs, that are based on whichever of the “informing and cross-cutting factors” one selects to define them from amongst style,



content (motifs), technique, cultural tradition or change through time (cf. Lewis-Williams & Loubser 1986). It is argued here that there are, in addition, further facets to spatial (and temporal) variability, that would have been operative both between and, potentially, across other kinds of boundaries (including those based on population distributions defined in dialectal or cultural terms) that relate - as suggested here - to factors such as topophilia - to the meanings attached to landscape features in the context of 'dwelling'. Stoffle *et al.* (2000:23) point to the way in which "contextual cultural landscapes may transcend notions of bounded traditional territory, expanding, contracting, and shifting with the context within which places, events, and people are interconnected." This would not be inconsistent with Khoisan ethnography, one Kalahari analogue being Wiessner's (1984:208) findings with respect to the distribution of beaded headbands - which she suggests "are contrary to what generally would be expected" if one assumed "that stylistic variation over space should give some indication of either the existence of group boundaries or the amount of interaction over them" The historical development and spread of what Guenther (1999:81) refers to as "religious dialects" that can cross-cut other boundaries is well illustrated by Bieseles account of Beh's song - the giraffe medicine song - which was originated by an individual woman and, proving popular, spread over a period of some decades "over vast areas of the Kalahari" straddling Namibia and Botswana, and virtually replacing the earlier 'gemsbok' singing and dancing (Bieseles 1993:67-70). Guenther (*ibid.*:81) comments that "individuals and groups may range widely, taking people to different regions and even different linguistic groupings, as well as to non-Bushman groups, adding yet different elements to a person's or group's religious brew."

It has been shown how myth is actively (and, in the ethnography, repeatedly) embodied or incorporated in landscape features in the recent past, and it may be expected that this will have pertained in the periods when the engravings under consideration were being made. In relation to this, one may note that if, as Lewis-Williams and Dowson insist, rock engravings were "items of material culture that were actively implicated in the reproduction and transformation of social relations" then the places where they were made must be similarly implicated. Deacon

(1998:136) makes this very point in relation to the ethnography of place, noting how the earth-boundedness of |Xam symbolism (unlike some other traditions that treat landscape as a 'mirror of heaven'), link people to the land in ritual contexts. These arguments will be the main focus of the next Chapter.

Driekopseiland, it is true, stands out as being 'different' from other sites in the region. Geometric engravings overwhelmingly dominate the site and are almost the exclusive element in the generally younger eastern part of the site. Such massive preponderance is unusual for sites in the area, but this category of imagery is nevertheless common and even predominant at a significant number of other sites regionally. In these terms Driekopseiland could be said to define one end of a regional spectrum. Furthermore, in that part of the site where animal images occur, the bulk of those identifiable to species level are eland. The central significance of this antelope in San beliefs and in the rock art of many parts of Southern African is well attested (Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams 1981; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989), and it occurs as a common and significant "widely distributed intelligible motif" (Hampson *et al.* 2002) in Northern Cape rock art sites (Fig. 20a). Another sixteen species are reflected in animal imagery at Driekopseiland, including rhino and elephant; and in this, too, the site mirrors regional trends (Fig. 20b).

What is singular at Driekopseiland is its *particular* placement in the landscape; and it is the implications of this that are taken up in the pages that follow.

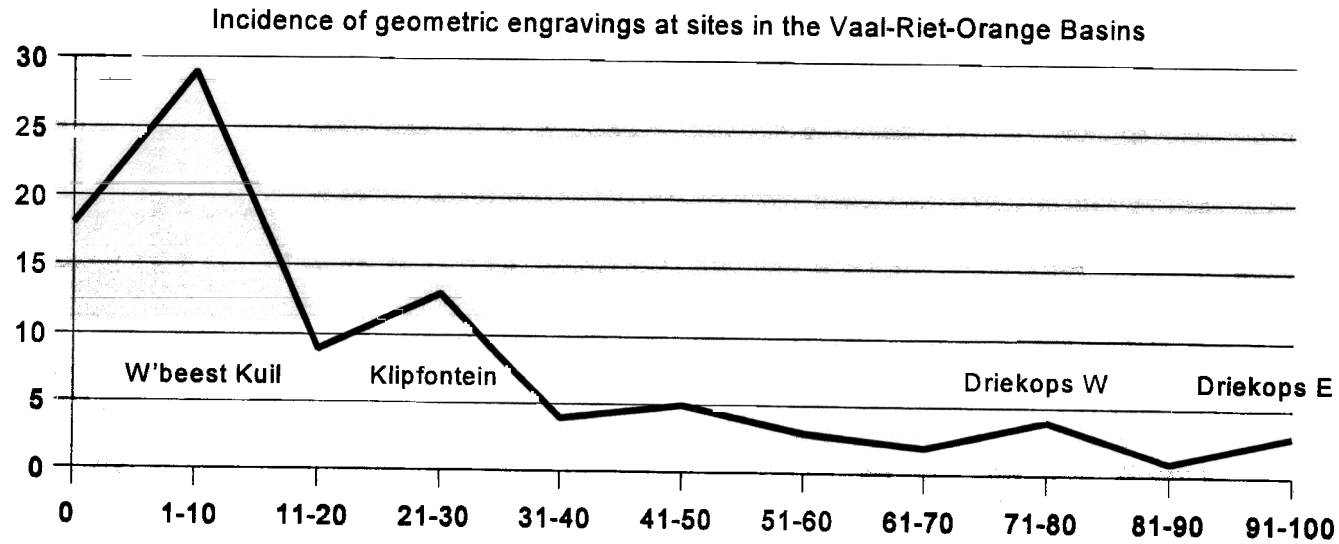


Figure 20a. At 20% of sites in the Vaal-Riet-Orange River Basins there are no 'geometric' engravings. But in more than half the sample of 91 sites surveyed (Fock 1979; Fock & Fock 1989) a mix of up to a third of the engravings are 'geometric' motifs. In the remaining 24% of sites in this sample the proportion of geometric imagery rises to between a third and more than 90 percent.

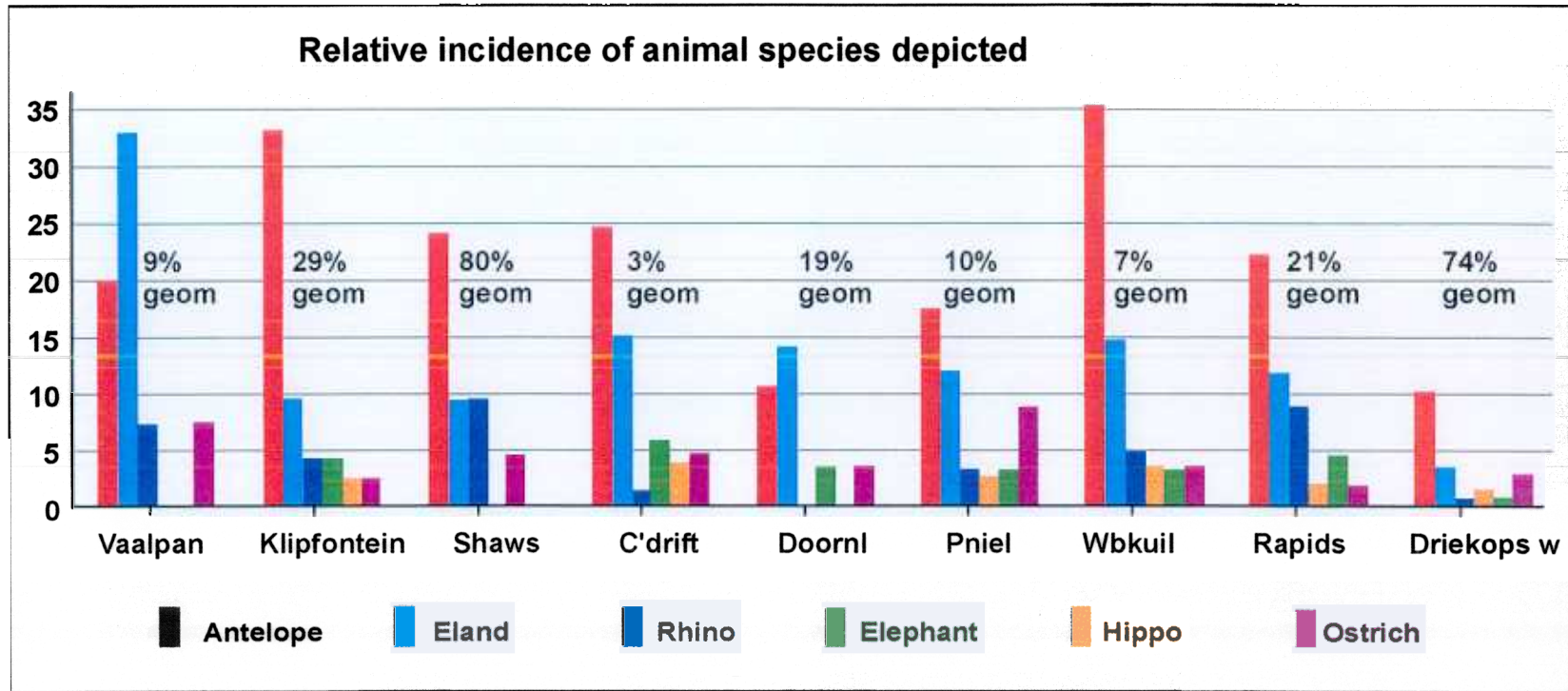


Figure 20b. Profiles for antelope, eland, rhino, elephant, hippo and ostrich, amongst other species depicted, are remarkably consistent irrespective of the proportion of geometric imagery present [percentages of which are given for each site].

## VI

### Driekopseiland - a powerful place

*“Who turneth the floods into a wilderness:  
and drieth up the water-springs...  
Again he maketh the wilderness a standing water:  
and water-springs of a dry ground...’  
- Psalm 107:33-35.*

If places in this landscape came to be imbued with meaning and power, then, it is argued, Driekopseiland, in its remarkable setting, and marked with more than 3500 rock engravings, was certainly such a place. The argument now draws together the strands of what is understood of the environmental history here; the archaeological presences; and the way rock art and landscapes may have been implicated together in processes of ‘dwelling’, in the “reproduction and transformation of social relations” (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994:219), and in linking people to the land in ritual contexts (Deacon 1998). Specifically, it is suggested that, as the striated blue-grey glaciated andesite was exposed by geomorphological processes in the last two and a half millennia, so these striking expanses of smoothed rock, lying length-wise in the bed of the river, came to be identified, not quite as the “great whales lying in the mud,” as Battiss memorably described Driekopseiland, their backs “decorated with innumerable designs” (1948:58), but indeed as !*Khwa*, the 'Rain/Water' in the form of an immanent giant Great Watersnake (Schmidt 1979). As such it appears to emerge from the depths in the channel of the †*Gama-lab*, and to dip down beneath the riverbed again a few hundred metres further downstream. Stow, too, had sensed that the “perfectly polished and striated” rocks, with “their wonderful and unwonted appearance” and “unexplained smoothness” might, in terms of these qualities, have moved the Stone Age engravers. Beautiful stripes, fat, and smoothness are amongst the celebrated attributes of a fecund python, the subject of Jul’hoan tales (Bieseles 1993:97,121,134,137). Mythic snakes and watersnakes feature widely in Khoisan repertoires, with particular prevalence in the Northern Cape, at least during the last century (e.g. “OSC” 1874; Engelbrecht 1936; Green 1948:126-128; Van Vreeden 1955; 1957; 1959; Carstens 1975; Schmidt 1979; 1998; Waldman 1989; 2001; Hoff 1995; 1997; 1998; Lange 1998 - although some of these authors, such as “OSC.

and Green, sought to explain the myths in terms of real snakes or large fish swimming in shoals)

At Driekopseiland, the river swells and sometimes floods in response to summer rains, and the engravings are temporarily submerged, but in the dry season the somewhat reduced flow is confined in a narrow side channel or ceases altogether, the engravings 'rising up' on the rock surfaces that bulge up out of the river bed. The combination of geological features and riverine processes - in a semi-arid region often parched by drought - make for a potent congruity with beliefs associated with !*Khwa* and the watersnake. Imagery engraved at Driekopseiland arguably reinforced an inherent power of place, directly at the intersection, one might suggest, of the structural axes in relevant Khoisan cosmology.

To the extent that Stow's account of Driekopseiland (see pages 59-60, above) might have been an embellishment upon some form of late nineteenth century oral testimony relevant to this idea, his use of the word 'palace' to describe the site could well be significant. When van Vreeden collected folklore in the region in the 1950s, one of his informants told him that it was in a 'palace', underwater, that the watersnake dwelt (Van Vreeden 1959:15; Schmidt 1979:210):

*"Doer bo die eilandte ees deep seekoegat. Dat ees Keinaus sa blyfpleek. Deep, deep oender die water by die groot kleepgate deet ees aand-donker (skemer). Daar ees hy-se paleis an die lekkewaan ees hy-se badiener...Hy soek an soek die beesmis an hy smeer die vloer van die paleis"*

[There above the islands is a deep hippo pool. That is where Keinaus (the Watersnake) lives. Deep, deep under the water at the deep stone pools it is gloomy like dusk. That is where his palace is, and the leguaan is his servant...he searches and searches for cow dung to smear the floor of his palace].

Van Vreeden's account (which has the narrator make two further references to the word 'palace' - for additional such evidence, see van Vreeden 1955) is noteworthy additionally for capturing in print something of the local idiom and performance style of story-telling by one Ou-oupa Moos, a Griqua, apparently at Barkly West (Fig. 21).

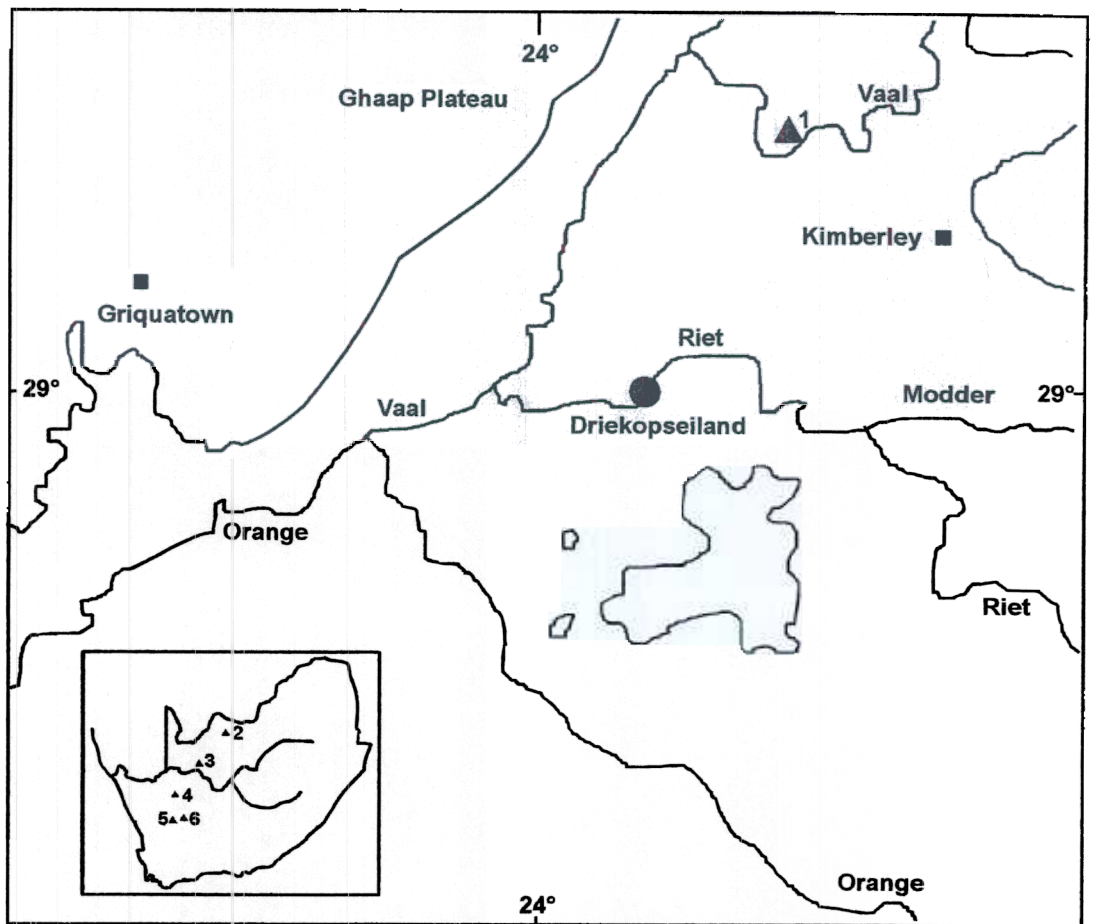


Figure 21. Sites and places mentioned in Chapter 6. 1. Barkly West; 2. Thaba Sione; 3. Upington; 4. Kenhardt; 5. Varskans; 6. Brandvlei.

Although the |Xam from the Upper Karoo interviewed by Bleek and Lloyd spoke only of !*Khwa*, the 'Rain/Water', and of !*Khwa*:-*ka xoro*, the 'Rain Bull', and did not mention !*Khwa*'s personification as the Great Watersnake, other sources affirm a link. 'Kou'ke, an informant quoted by Stow (1905:131-132) in the eastern Free State referred to an animal "of enormous size" named '*Kou-teign-'Koo-rou*, which meant 'Master of the Water'. There was also a horned serpent of former days - depicted in rock art - which 'Kou'ke named '*Koo-be-eng*, "a monstrous creature" more than 20 or 30 feet in length, "that lived in the water, and sometimes lurked near its edge in the reeds." Von Wielligh's (1919; Schmidt 1979) stories showed that the Great Watersnake played a prominent role in San folklore in the western regions of the Northern Cape, while |Hanʔkass'o (Bleek 1933a:303) spoke of snakes, along with the tortoise and terrapin, as being the "rain's animals". The attributes and power of !*Khwa* given by the |Xam, and the rituals and related symbols linked to !*Khwa*, correlate exactly, as Schmidt points out, with those associated with the watersnake in other Khoisan accounts. Van Vreeden's view, from the ethnography and his own enquiries, was that indeed the water, the water bull and the watersnake were but three expressions of a single spiritual concept (1957:175). Ou-oupa Moos, the old Griqua cited above, said of Keinaus, the Watersnake, that (Van Vreeden 1959:15):

*"Hy ees groot. Hy ees die groot bul van die slang-goet. Hy ees sterk...aihetse! Hy ees bul-ollefant van die waters, an hy ees reyk, baja reyk. Keinaus ees koning van deeske ravier"*

[He is big. He is the big bull amongst snake-like things. He is strong...Oh! He is the bull-elephant of the waters, and he is rich, very rich. Keinaus is the king of this river].

Hoff (1997:33) has found that, for people in areas of the Northern Cape where the |Xam once prevailed, "the Water Snake *is* the water" (her emphasis). As Schmidt (1979; 1998) suggests, it is these equivalences that resolve the conundrum of Dia!kwain's identification as a water bull that which Qing had said was a snake. In some contexts the position of the watersnake was evidently occupied by the eland - an association hinted at in Hahn's (1881:81) observation that amongst the Nama the snake called ||*Huitsibis* was said "to live on the forehead of the eland-antelope." In one of the |Xam *Kukummi*, |Hanʔkass'o told of !*Khwa* taking the form of an eland



(Hewitt 1986:86). !*Khwa*:-*ka xoro*, the water bull could be represented in rock-art by other large mammals or mammal-like creatures such as those described by Stow (1905:131-132; cf. Schmidt 1979).

The watersnake is linked specifically with rivers in several instances. Hoff (1997) records that perennial rivers were believed to have enormous resident snakes, that would travel upstream and down, and had the power to withhold water (cf. Schmidt 1998:274). Van Vreeden (1955:6) reports similar beliefs amongst the !Kora, of the watersnake controlling the water, sometimes causing a *kuil* or a spring to dry up, or a river to come down in flood. In addition to making rivers rise, the watersnake could supply the springs in the surrounding landscape, ensuring a good year (Van Vreeden 1957:187-8). Qing, in the previous century, indicated to Orpen (1874:5) that snakes could “fill the country with water.” As one of Hoff’s informants explained, “it is because of this snake that we have water to drink” (1997:23). Appeasing !*Khwa* was thus crucial: Hewitt notes that at the conclusion of !Xam menarcheal rites, ochre was sprinkled on to the surface of the water, as an act of association, lest !*Khwa* should cause the water source to dry up (Bleek 1933a; Hewitt 1986:281; cf. Van Vreeden 1955:6; Schmidt 1979:204; 1998).

One !Kora legend (van Vreeden 1955:6) relates how, long ago, a river had dried up so that only a few pools of water remained. Suddenly, it is said, the great watersnake stirred and took to moving upstream, churning the water and pushing it along as it went. Within days the river came down in flood: it began to rain, and the river rose so high that even the biggest trees were submerged.

At Driekopseiland, the greatest exposure of arguably potent, glacially smoothed rock coincided with the river sinking to its lowest level - defining a moment approaching maximum material - and spiritual - stress. Some of the geometric engravings in the western part of the site are well below the modern low-water level, suggesting that “the river was prone to drying up almost completely at the time the bulk of the geometric designs were produced” (Fock & Fock 1989:143).

## Dimensions of cognition

While the ideas presented here are to be developed further, certain of the theoretical issues for framing the discussion, relative to belief, 'nature' and history, have yet to be taken into consideration. The possibility that place could be implicated in meaning was addressed in the previous Chapter with reference to regionally relevant ethnography, and in the context of shamanism and - more broadly - with reference to Ingold's (1993) concept of 'dwelling'. The matter of the relationship, in human cognition, of people to animals and of the animate world to the inanimate - often implicit in the way dwelling perspectives become 'embodied' in landscapes - has been subject to wider debate (spilling beyond single disciplinary fields) and includes recent discussions provoked by a study by Bird-David (1999 - with comments). Her paper looks at 'animism' amongst the Nayaka foragers in south India, as one of the ways in which these people understand "how things-in-situations relate to the actor-perceiver and, from the actor-perceiver's point of view, to each other" (Bird-David 1999:S79). As a legitimate way of knowing, she urges - and not just a "simple religion and a failed epistemology" - she examines 'animism' in relation to a history of anthropological thought and what some post-modernists term, as something of a bogeyman, the 'Enlightenment project'. Insights deriving from this debate are of relevance to the interpretation being developed in this study of the engraving site of Driekopseiland.

The historian Etherington (1996) characterises as 'truth claims' some of the statements concerning a uniform 'modernity' - one which is reduced, for instance, to a rigid, all-embracing dualist outlook, and often opposed as a "western objectivist epistemology" against the "relational epistemologies" of non-western peoples. Part of the current debate on 'animism' concerns the modernist dualism of 'culture' to 'nature', in particular, and the ways "primitive" people were said to "mistake" the distinction. The terms of the debate invite some unpacking. For starters, modernity is not necessarily so monolithic a juggernaut, suggests Etherington: in the history of the Enlightenment "the certainties of Descartes are balanced by the scepticism of Hume. For every pig-headed Condorcet...there is a mocking Voltaire. " As regards the

relation of 'nature' to 'culture' in 'Enlightenment discourse', moreover, Ellen (1996) shows how the very idea of 'natural history' in scientific taxonomy was embedded initially in the *cultural* context of curiosity cabinets - the fore-runners of museums, herbaria, and botanical and zoological gardens (see also Young [1985] on "nature's place in Victorian culture"). There, furthermore, in static displays, 'natural history' was concerned "as much with minerals (which have never lived) as with life," Ellen (*ibid.*) adds; "and equally with dead plants and animals, and the ambiguous classificatory material presented in the form of bones, fossils and the mineral extrusions and excretions of living things (e.g. coral)." Nevertheless, there *is* a sense in which nature-culture dualisms have come to dominate western perspectives. As Ingold (1999) notes, "relational ways of knowing" are not absent from these perspectives - but, assuredly, they "have lost much of their authority" in the hegemonic institutions of modern nation-states. It is broadly in relation to these dualism-dominated discourses, moreover, that the concept of animism in anthropology was defined - Bird-David shows - as a product of the "primitive" mind, cast in a "long waged contest" with science, to which, Tylor asserted, animism was fundamentally antithetical. Tylor believed that the "primitive", like a child, was unable to distinguish animate from inanimate (Bird-David 1999).<sup>1</sup>

Onto Tylor's formulation, Durkheim was to graft a dualist body:totemic primitive self-model (a version of the conception of body:mind), retaining Tylor's view that attribution of life to the inanimate was an erroneous, child-like mental operation. Lévi-Strauss (1962) rehabilitated the Durkheimian primitives - as Bird-David puts it - by suggesting that anthropology's subject peoples indeed perceived a discontinuity between nature and society - in conformity with a supposed universal structure - and saw nature as a world of discrete objects; but that they then used nature as "something good to think with" in the often exotic culture-specific "totemic thought" analogies of the *bricoleur* (as distinct from the analytical thought of the modern engineer).

But concepts of nature - far from representing a basic, universal category - have been historically and culturally contingent everywhere, and are hence, as Ellen

(1996) puts it, "intrinsically cultural". Collingwood, a half century previously, had characterised nature as an "idea" that was inseparable from history, while Leach, in a 1964 paper, similarly suggested that nature was no more than some topological grid imposed upon a continuous world (ibid. With relativists and deconstructionists, Ellen argues, one could demonstrate how any given 'society' or 'culture' (these themselves being constructs) has variable and potentially even contradictory conceptions of nature - as to some degree Guenther has shown in relation to Khoisan notions of the world (see the preceding Chapter). In his interesting argument for a contextual approach to "the cognitive geometry of nature", Ellen suggests a form of analysis based on "three cognitive axes or dimensions" that appear to play a role in generating and constraining such variable "pragmatic schemata and symbolic representations" by which people - in 'situations' and in processes of 'dwelling' - conceive 'nature'. The first of these is that by which people construe nature *inductively* - in terms of the 'things' they include within 'nature' and the characteristics they assign to them. The second is that by which people define nature *spatially*, in "some realm outside humans or their immediate living (cultural) space." Ellen's third axis is that by which people define 'nature' in *essentialist* terms - "as some force which is exogenous to will but which can to varying degrees be controlled." The second and third of these axes or dimensions correspond broadly with those in Lewis-Williams's (1996) model of !Xam cosmology.

In diverse cultural and historical contexts, constructions of 'nature' would resemble or diverge from that notion of it which is most familiar in the West, Ellen suggests, according to the way these three axes might be configured and emphasised in any particular instance. The ideas about 'nature' that pertain at any given time and place would be represented (as such a 'geometric' analogy implies) by a more or less characteristic spread of co-ordinates - very likely overlapping others in some respects through time and space - within a *continuum* or spectrum of variation. It would be difficult to expect, in this view, conceptions of 'nature' that are (in the 'geometric' sense) tight and entirely discrete clusters - such as may readily be reified as culture-specific 'cognitive systems' - in part because the constructions would themselves be *intrinsically* multi-faceted and ambiguous (as Ellen suggests), since

these would *vary* between the different practical and symbolic/ritual realms in any given historical context. This last observation is important since, contra-Durkheim and all of anthropology that has followed him on this point (Bloch 1977), while in some dimensions different 'cultures' may have distinct ways of construing, say, time, space, animal species, causation and so on, there are other senses in which people generally employ similar classifications, with similar criteria, producing similar classes, "varying only in degree of elaboration" (Bloch 1977:279-282). Bloch (*ibid.*:285) challenges that when anthropologists study ritual communication and myth alone - Ellen's third dimension - what they find is not *the* cognitive system of the people being studied; only part of it. "It has always been, and still is, a recurrent professional malpractice of anthropologists," Bloch charges (cf Argyrou 1999), "to exaggerate the exotic character of other cultures. Only concentrating on the picture of the world apparent in ritual communication may well be due to this tendency, and it obscures the fact of the universal nature of part of the cognitive system available in all cultures

Taking Ellen's first axis, which is an inductivist (nature of 'things') model, there is a level at which Khoisan clearly differentiate a domain that can be characterised as an objective 'nature', with inventories, for example, of 'animals', approximating the everyday practical categorisations that Bloch suggests are universal, with cross-cultural variability resulting from relatively low degrees of local elaboration. Guenther (1999:70-71), for instance, points out that while in San society, and that of hunters generally, relationships with animals can be seen in terms of encounter, sympathy and intersubjectivity, they are equally and ambiguously also of exploitation, distance and object-otherness: "the game animal encountered on a hunt is, in short, both a significant other, and, simply, an other." The "bloody business" of killing, butchering, cooking and eating, however, is aligned quite squarely with Ellen's first axis, where the focus is on the "other-than" side of the relationship of hunters with animals. Such a focus is indeed somewhat crucial, to preclude "any cosmologically and symbolically generated qualms" about this subsistence activity - though, as will be seen, such qualms may impinge upon it. Blurton-Jones and Konner (1976), who saw "non-rational beliefs" as belonging in a quite separate "domain of the mind" (*ibid.*:343-

344), were struck by the analytical approach of hunters in discussions about animals in these hunting contexts, in which their “observational method” was marked by attention to detail, a sifting of “data from hearsay”, and a “general freedom from inference” (ibid.:333).<sup>2</sup> Evans-Pritchard (1965:87-88, cited in Argyrou 1999) pointed out, in another part of Africa, that people could not live a life enveloped in mysticism all of the time, as the harsh realities of nature “permit survival only to those who are guided in their pursuits by observation, experiment and reason.” Guenther (1999:72) notes that San hunters “know animals inside out, they can read their tracks with uncanny accuracy, and they know an astonishing number of things about the behaviour of a wide range of animal species.” Blurton-Jones and Konner (1976:348) remark that “the sheer, elegant logic of [their] deduction from tracks would satiate the most avid cross-word fan or reader of detective stories.”

In similar objectifying manner, the mantis, a trickster protagonist in !Xam beliefs and tales,<sup>3</sup> could in some everyday contexts be considered as no more than a *xoxo*, a bug, treated with indifference. Likewise, the moon, fabled and implicated in ritual appeared in some cases to be appreciated mainly for the light it gave for dances at night: a “prosaic and profane explanation” given to Gusinde was that the moon was no more numinous - as provider of light - than the headlights on the anthropologist’s truck (Guenther 1999:64-65)! Usefulness as a criterion of classification, implicit here was found by Tanaka (1980:49) to be an aspect of G|wi and G||anna conceptualisations, evident in their distinguishing those resources which were edible from those that were not. Amongst animals, some were edible, others taboo, while still others were harmful. The word used for *inedible* plants and animals is also the word meaning ‘useless’, and is applied “not only to food but to anything worthless, including people and tools” failing to match expectations.

The sense of ‘nature’ as an objective inventory of things (Ellen 1996) is given legitimacy and order in myth (as, in Europe, in the pre-Darwinian ‘great chain of being’, and, in the Judaic tradition, in the enumeration of animals entering Noah’s Ark). There are many examples in Khoisan ethnography of the names of ‘creatures’ being ‘called’ - including the lists of animals in texts from ||Kabbo and !A!kunta in the

Bleek and Lloyd collection (Guenther 1999:76-77; James 2001:175-178). But, in these, one is soon aware that a great deal more is involved than just the inductive objectification of the world - as in Ellen's first axis, now clearly in articulation with other dimensions of meaning. There is a palpable shift away from the purely matter-of-fact style noted above, of the everyday business of meat procurement and preparation, and the sphere of ethno-ethological knowledge that Blurton-Jones and Konner (1976:344) examined. This comes across well in a description by Biesele (1993:61) of an "almost rhapsodic" Ju|'huan 'performance' concerning animals:

"They count graphically and visually, putting successive fingers up to their lips as each animal's name is called. There is a certain way of stressing the syllables that appears in no other context. 'N!hoansi,...|aosi,...n!angsi,...ǀoahsi', and so on. The list becomes a singsong. Almost, the eyes glaze over. The first syllable goes way down in tone. The second, the pluralisation, goes up high and then comes down again, trailing off from near-singing into silence. People love to do it, and they count off the animals at every opportunity. The effect it conveys is of a dream landscape dotted with an impossible plenty of 'kudus,...buffaloes,...eland,...giraffes..."

Such naming, in myth, extended beyond animals to, for example, stars, whose names were 'called' - as Dialkwain (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:78-81) said - by the Great Star, !*Gaunu*: "the stars possess their names; while they feel that !*Gaunu* was the one who called their names." As was noted in the previous Chapter, the naming of places, too, features in the myths; although, again, geographical information was also conveyed, when appropriate, in a matter-of-fact way and with remarkable 'objective' accuracy, as is evident in the Upper Karoo map that Bleek compiled from the descriptions by ||Kabbo of places, features and their relative positions in the landscape (Deacon 1986).

Ellen's second axis - that by which people define nature in terms of the spatial 'other', relative to their own social space - corresponds with the horizontal axis in Lewis-Williams's (1996) model of |Xam cosmology. In Khoisan ethnography its extremities are the camp and the hunting ground. The first is the social realm of closely related kin and familiar people, and the place where meat sharing and healing rituals are performed. By contrast, the hunting ground is where strangers

might be encountered and hence is a place of “essentially anti-social associations” (ibid.:124-125). Safety, dependability and co-operation characterise the camp whereas the hunting ground is a dangerous zone of unpredictability, inhabited by wild animals including lion. Lewis-Williams (1996) shows that the waterhole, situated midway between these ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ extremities in his schema, was a place of intermediary ambivalence: regenerative and providing life for both people and animals; but equally a place where dangerous encounters could occur with strangers and animals. Furthermore, where the relationship between camp and hunting ground could literally be that between ‘culture’ (controlled) and ‘nature’ (uncontrolled), this configuration was considerably nuanced and even contradicted by the particular articulation of different dimensions (axes) that might pertain - in Ellen’s terms - in any given situation. Animals as “object others”, on the one hand, were exploited, killed and butchered in the hunting ground, yet fulfilled a significant social role in meat sharing in the camp. On the other hand, animals as “significant others” into which shamans transformed in healing dances at the camp, were then also encountered, with marked bonds of sympathy, in the hunting ground (e.g. Dia!kwain in Bleek & Lloyd 1911:270-283). Sensations by which a hunter could ‘feel’ with his prey made for practices of respect and sympathy which the !Xam called *!nanna-sse*. When the hunter’s quarry was the eland - God’s favourite animal (Lewis-Williams 1981:117-126) - specially elaborate taboos were observed and hunting rituals performed. To identify with his eland, a hunter would smear a stripe down his forehead and nose, to ‘feel’ the coarse red tuft of hair there on the eland. In these practices, Lewis-Williams and Biesele (1978) have noted striking correspondences in the ethnographies from the Karoo and the Kalahari.

Such ambiguities and contingencies within the ‘spatial’ dimension in Khoisan conceptions were matched by ambivalences with respect to linear time, which could be suspended or reversed in relation to the primal time of the Early Race (cf. Lewis-Williams 2000:207). Stow (1905:398) gave some account of this primal time in his interpretation - as it happens - of Driekopseiland (see page 60-61, above), referring to the “ancient myths” of the San, of remote times “when, as they believed, men and animals consorted on more equal terms than they themselves, and used a kindred



speech understood by all!" In his study of shamanism, Eliade (1964:99) suggests that in many traditions there is a belief that "in the beginning, that is in mythical times, man lived at peace with animals and understood their speech." And, in about as many traditions, a primordial catastrophe comparable to the 'Fall' in the Judaic canon, ushered in the present order of human mortality, with separation of male from female and humans from animals. (The myth of the Moon and the Hare and the origin of death is a corresponding example from Southern Africa - Guenther 1999:126-133). In those contexts where Ellen's third dimension of inner essences comes to dominate the articulation with objective classifications and social spatialities, ordinary reality is suspended, giving way to states of liminality - inchoate and fluid. As a feature of human ritual behaviour, particularly in rites of passage (van Gennep 1960), such states of liminality are a universal element of social life, yet are highly variable in outward cultural expression (as is to be expected in terms of Ellen's model; cf. Bloch 1977). Amongst the San, in Guenther's (1999) view, immersion in the "ancient myths" (the *kukummi*, in the case of the !Xam), with their emphasis on the 'First Order' and the Early Race, meant that people were especially attuned to the "strange and dreamlike ways" recounted daily in story performances. The *Kukummi* themselves, as tangible 'things', had this quality of misty transcendence the "stories", said !|Kabbo (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:299-305), are "like the wind...[and]...float out from a distance...I hear the stories following my feet's heels feel them because a story is like the wind. It is wont to float along to another place. Ordinary reality was thus diffracted by conceptualisations of the world, and about animals in particular. Any semblance of objective materiality is nowhere more transfigured than in ritual - particularly in the healing dance - where, as Guenther (1999:70) puts it, "ambiguity becomes palpable...human becomes animal, and present and linear time converge on the mythic past."

In the nuancing of camp and hunting ground spatialities and of temporal relations, together with the conflation of human and animal identities, the third dimension in Ellen's (1996) model of the cultural construction of 'nature' is clearly similar to the vertical axis of Lewis-Williams's (1996) !Xam cosmology. Physical manifestations of 'inner essence' or 'vital energy' that are the resources for cultural construal, Ellen

suggests, are often the fluids associated with living things, such as blood and sweat, and, in the environment, the flow of water, wind, and so on. In the Khoisan context, the intermediate position of water in the spatial sense (as in Lewis-Williams's model) has already been alluded to; in the 'vertical' dimension, water and the waterhole become an *axis mundi* mediating the realms over and under the surface of the earth. As Lewis-Williams (1996:126) points out, the !Xam word !*Khwa* means both rain and water, which comes down from clouds, and wells up in springs and waterholes. The wider ramifications of this for the interpretation of Driekopseiland will be taken up shortly.

For the present, it may be noted, as Ingold (1994:9) has done in a general summing up of hunter-gatherer perceptions of the environment, that "over and over again we encounter the idea that the environment, far from being seen as a passive container for resources which are there in abundance for the taking, is saturated with personal powers of one kind or another. It is alive. And hunter-gatherers, if they are to survive and prosper, have to maintain relationships with these powers." The point returns us to the debate over animism - that human proclivity to animate what, in objectivist terms, is inanimate or other than human. As Bird-David (1999) shows, writers from Tyler through Durkheim, and on up to Guthrie, relegate animistic beliefs as arising from error - whether (as in some early writers) because primitive people were thought to have only child-like perceptive capabilities and, at best, tinkered as do *bricoleurs*; or because (as Guthrie has argued) it is a universal biological mechanism, a "good perceptual strategy", in situations of uncertainty in encounters in the environment. Guthrie sees animistic interpretations as "reasonable" errors that could be found out 'after the fact'. For Bird-David (1999:S79), in contrast, animistic beliefs are characteristic of what she terms a relational epistemology, "nested within culture and practice", and representing, in some historical situations, an authoritative, but not the only, way of "getting to know things." A review of Khoisan material relative to Ellen's (1996) model on "the cognitive geometry of nature" shows, inter alia, that a relational epistemology, rather similar in key aspects to that of the Nayaka foragers (Bird-David 1999), and occupying a position of similar authority, pertains in the Southern African context. And, likewise, there are other altogether more analytical ways of knowing

that operate alongside it - those which Blurton-Jones and Konner (1976) characterised as an “observational method” having a “general freedom from inference” - but which carry much less authoritative weight at the broader level of meaning. It has also been shown that such epistemological contradictions and inconsistencies that these different ways of knowing imply are entirely to be expected in any society, as Ellen (1996) points out, since “nature is simultaneously an abstract symbolic and a non-basic cognitive category” which, in the articulation of different contextual emphases, in any given place or time, will always be intrinsically variable and historically contingent.

Ingold (1999) comments approvingly on Bird-David's concept of a “two-way responsive relatedness” as epitomising Nayaka and other animistic epistemologies (including those relational ways of knowing in “the West” that, as Ingold (1999:S81) remarks, have generally been relegated to a position of reduced authoritativeness by the institutions of modern nation-states). Ingold (ibid.:S82) extends Bird-David's critique of the ‘rationalist’ explanations of animism by examining the thinking on the evolution of social intelligence that lies behind Guthrie's arguments. In terms of that approach the “error” of animism is “put down to evolved predispositions that have a rational foundation in the calculus of selective costs and benefits.” But this notion assumes - as Ingold insists - a world divided, *a priori*, along dualist lines: between animate and inanimate; human and non-human; social and natural. It assumes further, Ingold suggests, “that life and mind are interior properties of individuals that are given, independently and in advance of their involvement in the world.” The mechanics of perception and action that follow from such a formulation are that people use sensory information to construct internal representations of the world as it appears to be; and then carry out plans derived from strategic manipulation of those representations. By casting intelligence as a “computational device responsible for processing the data of perception and pulling the strings of action”, this conception overlooks the fact, Ingold argues, that “to perceive at all [human beings] must already be situated in a world and committed to the relationships this entails.” Bird-David's notion of a “two-way responsive relatedness” by which people interact in and with their environment, a kind of ‘dwelling perspective’ (Ingold 1993) grounded in

people's histories of intimate engagement with their environment and the various components of it, presents an alternative view of perceiving and acting that does not assume that life and mind exist independently of, and prior to involvement in, the world. "Responsiveness, in this view," comments Ingold (1999:S82), "amounts to a kind of sensory participation, a coupling of the movements of one's attention to the movement of aspects of the world." Foragers, particularly, are keenly aware of their environment (to reiterate a point already made) as anything but a 'passive container' of resources available for the taking. Their world is, as James (2001:151) has put it, a "geography...alive with sound and interaction." Saturated with life and movement and powers, there is a kind of 'intelligence' immanent in the total system of perception and action (Ingold 1999) that is constituted by the co-presence of people and animals; of trees that are men, fastened to the ground by the glance of a "new maiden" (||Kabbo in Lewis-Williams 2000:271-2); of mountains behind whose back a man's name passes, floating, as a story, like the wind (||Kabbo in Bleek & Lloyd 1911:302-5); of rain that loves buchu, and water that glides quietly along when it smells things which are unequalled in scent (|Hanǀkass'o in Bleek 1933a:300); of the stars that would sound *Tsau! Tsau!* in the summer (|Hanǀkass'o in Bleek & Lloyd 1911:83); of the Moon who returns alive (Dia!kwain in Bleek & Lloyd 1911:57); and of the rustling of the bushes as the springbok come, and the "springbok sensation" the hunters feel - an inner trembling - as the springbok seem to approach (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:330-339)

### **Driekopseiland and 'the rain's magic power'**

In his review of the "non-representational" engravings and finger paintings of the Northern Cape, Fock (1969:126) suggested that some of these kinds of geometric images might "indicate water or rain or have some connection with puberty ceremonies." His observation was based on a reading of Silberbauer's (1965) account of G|wi girls' puberty rites. As it turns out, it is argued, Fock was probably close to the mark, at least for some of the sites in question.

In perhaps most instances where any particular rite might be linked with engravings,

however, there is reason to suggest that the context was rain-making. In part this is because of a tendency for engravings to occur on hills, landscape features associated with rain-making in at least some of the ethnography (e.g. Bleek 1933a:310; Deacon 1998:139). In part, too, it is because of the specific subject-matter of the engravings. In the latter connection, it will be recalled from the previous Chapter that engravings of large antelope images at Varskans, identified by Deacon (1988; 1998) as the place called *!kann* where Dia!kwain's father made 'chippings', are remarkably evocative of Dia!kwain's own sketch of the 'rain-bull', the animal used by rain-makers "when they want to make rain" (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:224-225). Furthermore, in the same way that the rain-bull, *!Khwa:-ka xoro*, was central in *!Xam* rain-making practices (Bleek 1933b), so, too, was the rain-animal identified by Qing as a snake (Orpen 1874; Bleek 1933b); and in like manner, some of Hoff's (1997:26) informants in the twentieth century suggested it was possible "to work with" the watersnake - in ways that may have included rain-making. The behaviour of snakes and tortoises, said to have been amongst the "rain's animals" (*!Hanǀkass'o* in Bleek 1933a:303), provides some insight, it may be suggested, into how these creatures came to be associated with rain. Some of their movements are noted as portentous, to this day, in the farming communities of Bushmanland (the Upper Karoo region including Brandvlei and Kenhardt): rain is imminent, it is said, when the tortoises and snakes move out of the *laagtes*, the plains, and up into the hills (van der Merwe 1987:26). This in itself could have been construed as making hills more powerful, and hence a focus for ritual and for rock art. In a Tswana context in which comparable beliefs prevail (cf. Wilmsen 1986), clouds hovering over Modipe hill are attributed to a large and "wonderful" rain-snake "lying on top of a very large flat rock drawing down water from the clouds and thus causing rain" (Schapera 1971:36).

Engraved hill-tops, such as Thaba Sione near Mafikeng (Ouzman 1996), have been interpreted as powerful places in terms of these kinds of beliefs about the rain (see also Morris 1990b). At Thaba Sione, in addition, Ouzman has noted the evident movements of rhinos between waterholes and the rubbing stones at the hill, partly on account of which, he suggests they seem to have been construed as 'rain-animals' and depicted in prominent images amongst the engravings (see Chapter 5 above).

While Driekopseiland does not match this particular pattern, being situated not on a hill but in the bed of a river, it might nevertheless be suggested that an almost completely dry riverbed there, at particular periods in the past, may well have prompted determined rain-making activity. Indeed such rituals are known sometimes to be enacted beside rivers (Schapera 1930:379; Prins 1991; Prins & Rousseau 1992); and this clearly makes for one possible context for the engravings at Driekopseiland.

But the argument is not entirely compelling; not least because the kinds of images associated with rain-making at, for example, Varskans, or indeed at most hill-top sites in the region around Driekopseiland - images, that is, which would fit the bill as 'rain-animals' - hardly occur, at all, amongst the younger engravings here. Some animal imagery, it is true, is to be found at the seemingly older western end of the site; but even there it constitutes a less than predominant subset of the engravings and none of those animal engravings would conform with the kinds of 'cynosuric' focus of which Ouzman (1996) has written. Short of proposing that the art here was part of some totally different tradition - as some have suggested - it is argued instead that Fock's idea, of "some connection with puberty ceremonies", deserves fuller consideration. Rather than appealing to 'culture' difference - where in fact there is much evidence that Driekopseiland falls within a regional spectrum of variation (see Chapters 1, 3 and 4 for the theoretical and empirical reasons for seeking an alternative interpretation to a 'culture' model invoking different authorships) - it is possible that the causes of variation between sites within the region include differences in the ritual uses of places in the landscape, which were not static through time. In this view, both spatial and temporal variability would reflect the fact that meanings are invoked in multiple and possibly contested ways - that are historically constrained, but never given - through the actions of individuals in processes of dwelling.

Within a shamanistic context, Lewis-Williams and Blundell (1997:53) have addressed the possibility that "gender- or age-differentiated responses to image making and the supernatural" are implicated in some painted images - specifically

finger dots. They allude to a direction of research pioneered and elaborated by Solomon (1992; 1994; see also Parkington 1996; Anderson 1997; Manhire 1998; cf. Morris *et al.* 1994), who notes that female initiation is “an extremely prominent feature of San ritual and particularly prominent in narrative collections such as the Bleek/Lloyd corpus” (Solomon 1994:345-6). Just as the place of female initiation - its symbols and meanings - is clearly to be situated at the very intersection of the axes in Lewis-Williams's (1996) |Xam cosmological model, so Solomon links it centrally in social and political relations and power, critical to the material well-being of the group; and to both female and male production and reproduction (Solomon 1994:349; cf. Lewis-Williams 1981).

Onset of menarche in |Xam and other Khoisan societies was regarded as a dangerous condition. Its resonances in ethnographies link the female initiate with the rain, water, blood, and with snakes. Hahn (1881:78-9) records that the same Nama root word is shared for “snake”, “waterhole”, “rain”, “blood”, the colour “red”, as well as “to flow” and “to milk”. In the |Xam context, Hewitt observes that !*Khwa*'s name was used (in one recorded instance) to mean “menstrual fluid” (1986:284; cf. Guenther 1994).<sup>4</sup> Taboos in relation to the “new maiden” (Lewis-Williams 1981) were to be respected lest the wrath of !*Khwa* be incurred. Her menstruation placed her in the conceptual no man's land, between culture and nature (Hewitt 1986); she occupied a place of ambiguity along the horizontal, camp to hunting-ground, axis. There, !*Khwa*, as water, or watersnake - or looming up as the angry “male rain” - operated as an impersonal force, greatly feared, that mediated and required to be appeased. The proper ritual observances and respect for taboos (failure in which would affect also the male domain and the hunt) would restore the balance. For violation of taboos, a girl and her family and female elders could be swept up by a whirlwind and deposited, transformed as frogs, in a pool; their material possessions reverting to the raw materials from which they were made (karosses to springbok; arrows to reeds). Lightning could strike people down; they could be turned to stone - or into stars; a glance from the “new maiden” could fix men to the ground as trees. Springbok could similarly be made “wild” (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:77; Lewis-Williams 2000). Ju|'hoansi tell of men being killed by elephants after failing to observe taboos

relative to menstruating girls (L. Marshall cited in Biesele 1993:92). In the century after the |Xam myths were recorded, some cautionary tales even permeated into the white farming community of the Upper Karoo, as evidenced by a farmer from Brandvlei recounting the proscription against looking up at the water-bull in the clouds, lest it should strike one down with lightning (van der Merwe 1987:28).

Significant at the conclusion of female puberty rites, in a cross-section of Khoisan groups, were the uses, variously, of tonsure, tattoos and scarification, and of ochre, buchu (two potent substances sometimes employed interchangeably - Rudner 1982) and mud, to mark, paint or daub - or to sprinkle over - the body, objects, and water (e.g. Hoernlé 1918; Bleek 1928a; 1937; Maingard 1932; Engelbrecht 1936; Silberbauer 1963; 1965; 1981; Hewitt 1986; Schmidt 1979; Waldman 1989; 2001; Hoff 1995; 1997; Lange 1998). These practices ensured protection, and the 'cooling' of dangerous potency, in various rituals to associate the "new maiden" with !*Khwa* or its equivalent manifestations, following her period of seclusion. As regards the engravings at Driekopseiland, on a glaciated rock support that is pregnant with symbolic possibilities, a case can be made for a link with the beliefs surrounding menarcheal rites. These are themselves bundled together with beliefs about rain and the weather, if not rain-making *per sé*; and the "new maiden" is said to possess "the rain's magic power" (Dia!kwain in Lewis-Williams 2000:273). Given the role of marking or image-making in these rites, the engravings could have been part of the rituals, constituting, perhaps, a "residue of a ritual sequence", as Lewis-Williams and Blundell (1997) suggest in a potentially analogous instance. It could even be, in these terms, that clustering of certain image forms on different parts of the site at Driekopseiland indeed represent discrete events of ritual performance, the practices of perhaps several generations, that invoked ritual meanings in this extraordinary setting (Fig. 22).

In the Western Cape, Manhire (1998) sees the production of hand-prints as primarily the work of sub-adults, possibly in the context of rites of passage. For Anderson (1997) a connection between hand-prints and related imagery with the practices that conclude female initiation is also compelling, but he reads these rites as being



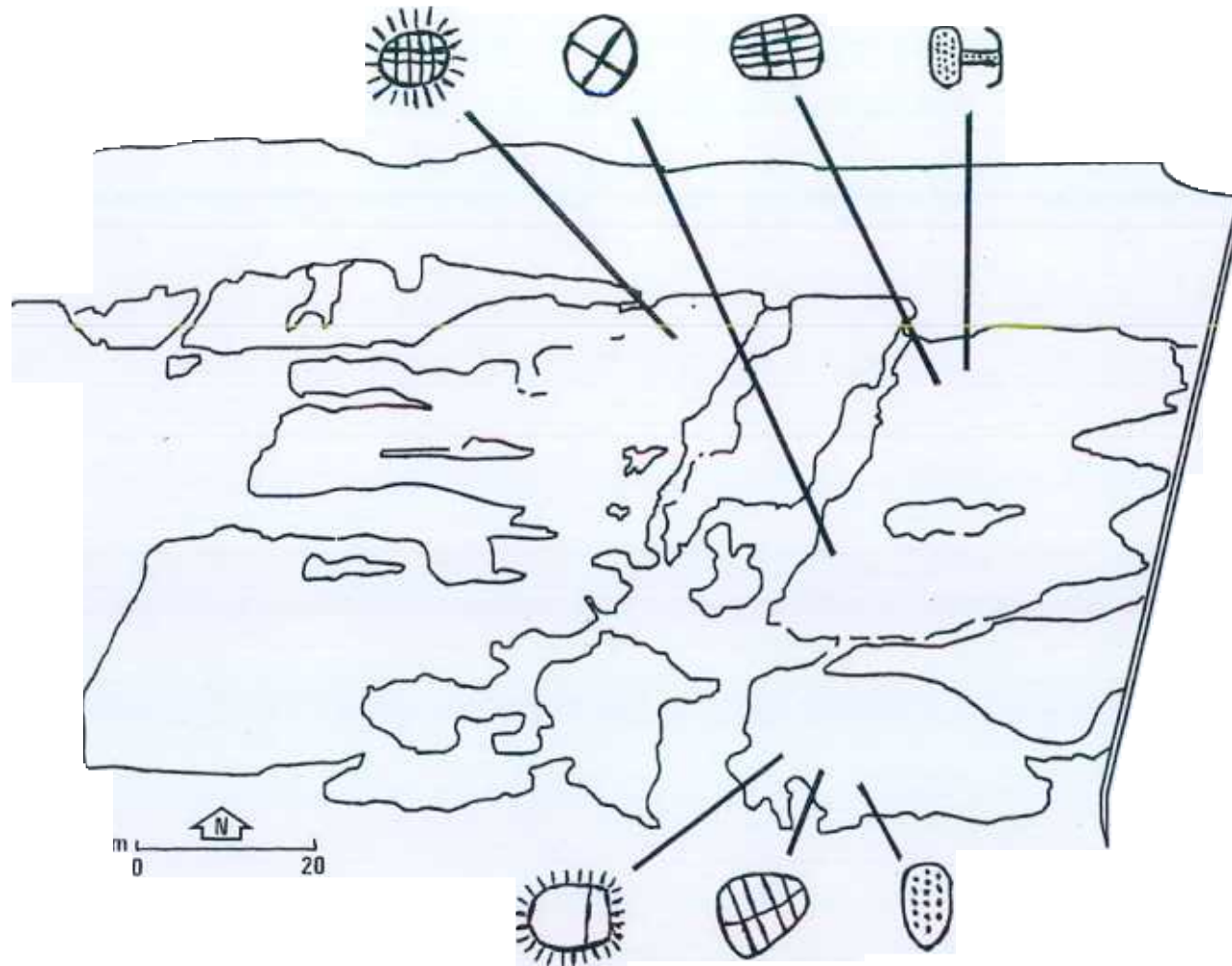


Figure 22. Diagram showing areas of motif clustering. Quite marked clustering of similar (but not identical design forms - including the selection indicated - occur in different parts of the eastern portion of Driekopseiland.

specifically Khoekhoen, whereas - as has been shown - the beliefs and practices in question were, and are, widespread amongst Khoisan societies (including !Xam) and beyond. The distribution of hand-prints in the Western Cape, moreover, indicates that authorship issues are not easily resolved in ethnic terms (Manhire 1998; cf. Yates *et al.* 1994:58-9). To reiterate, it could be that processes of “time and place” (Parkington 1980; Parkington 1996:289) may be more germane to this debate - and specifically, here, to the interpretation of Driekopseiland - than ones of culture difference.

### **Menarcheal rites, the rain and the rain's things**

The menarcheal rites themselves, while varying considerably at the level of detail and elaboration in different Khoisan contexts (cf. Engelbrecht 1936:163; Waldman 1989), conform more or less to the classic form, as a rite of passage (van Gennep 1960; Turner 1967), expressed in phases of separation, 'liminal' transition, and reintegration (Hoernlé 1918; Bleek 1928a; 1937; Schapera 1930; Maingard 1932; Engelbrecht 1936; Silberbauer 1963; 1965; 1981; Rudner 1982; Hewitt 1986; Schmidt 1979; Lewis-Williams 1981; Waldman 1989; 2001; Hoff 1995; 1997; Lange 1998). They commence when a young girl experiences her first menstruation - a condition considered dangerous, as noted above, potentially compromising the safety of the band and the prowess of hunters, by, for example, provoking anger in the rain. Observing the proper rituals and proscriptions, the menstruating girl goes into seclusion (in recent forms of the ritual amongst Afrikaans-speaking Khoisan descendants, she is referred to as the *hokmeisie* - meaning “enclosure-girl”<sup>5</sup>). Typically her mother would build or prepare a small grass hut for this purpose, or a partitioned area within a hut, sometimes with separate entrance (in the late twentieth century, a room or partitioned area in a house is set aside for this rite of separation - Waldman 1989; 2001). Attended by female kinswomen, she is fed on a reduced diet (various foods become taboo). She may also be rubbed with ochre and buchu (e.g. Engelbrecht 1936:163; Waldman 1989) for their ritual 'cooling' properties; and she is allowed out of seclusion only to relieve herself, and that accompanied by necessary precautions: in some San groups she is carried out or must wear sandals since her

condition is a danger not only to society but even to the ground (Guenther 1999:166). This sense of being ritually unclean and a danger to the group was summed up by one of Waldman's (1989:26) informants when she said: "*Kyk, jy's nou mos vuil*" [Look, you are now dirty].

The |Xam *Kukummi* include several cautionary tales concerning the "new maiden" - "things that old people tell the maidens about the doings of the rain" (Dia!kwain in Lewis-Williams 2000:274). A portion from one of these, which comes to us through †Kammi-an, who told it to her son Dia!kwain (it was she who referred to the "new maiden" as "the rain's magic power"), is worth citing in full (Lewis-Williams 2000:274)

When a maiden takes care of her people, the rain is not very angry with the people. The rain agrees with the man when he speaks to it; the rain does not spit at him. When a maiden takes care of her people, the rain will not become angry with them, if she takes care of them. This is what she does when her father talks to her: she speaks gently with her father when he speaks to her. When her mother talks with her, she also talks gently with her mother. She wishes that the rain will do this: even if the rain has become angry, it may become cool when her father has spoken to it. It will gently [sic] and not make a noise of rattling thunder.

If a maiden scolds her people, the rain (will not listen) if one of her people speaks to it, when they think that they will speak to the rain so that it will sound gently as it falls, so that it will not make a rattling noise of thunder. A place is not nice if the rain makes a rattling noise of thunder; for the rain is fighting if it makes a rattling noise of thunder. When the rain comes down gently, then it is not very angry. The rain feels that it is not displeased. For the rain resembles what the maiden did. The rain is also afraid of our scolding; the rain falls gently on us when it is not displeased with us. The rain does this when we speak to it: it consents to us.'

In Griquatown in the 1980s similar views were expressed as to the importance of the initiation rituals for a girl at her first menstruation (Waldman 1989:43):

*"Weer is altyd swaar bo-op haar. Dus as sy nie skoongemaak is nie, sien jy, dus die weer altyd kwaai. Daarom sit ons hom in die hok in."*

[Weather is always heavy on her. Therefore if she is not cleansed, you see, then the weather is

always bad-tempered.<sup>6</sup> For that reason we place her in seclusion].

Amongst the Ju|'hoansi, *n!ao* beliefs (Bieseke 1993; Parkington 1996) echo very similar concerns (see also the conception of *!nao* amongst the Nama - Hoernlé 1918), "linking," as Bieseke puts it, "men's and women's great 'procreative' powers childbirth and hunting - to the vitally important polarities of the weather." Weather and its control is of special relevance to foragers whose very survival, especially in arid environments, may be dependent on propitious combinations of conditions. From a 'dwelling perspective', the weather can be a rich source for metaphors and construals in the cultural sphere,<sup>7</sup> and it is not surprising that this is so in Khoisan thought. A hint of it has already been noticed in the water-relatedness of their place names (cf Hoernlé 1923; Humphreys 1993 - see Chapter 4). In Ju|'hoansi beliefs, men are thought to cause weather changes by their interactions with the great meat animals they hunt, while women can influence the weather by their giving birth alternatively to rain-bringing or sun-bringing children. These gender roles - of men and women, as opposed to children and older people (Parkington 1996:289; cf. Hoernlé 1918:67) - are taken on at the time of their first kill or menarcheal, i.e. "first spilling of blood", ceremonies (Parkington 1996:285). These roles are given prominence in Bieseke's analysis as being "at the core of social reality" (1993:191; cf. Solomon 1992:292). The symbolism associated with them and their attendant rites resonates with a range of rhythms of regeneration and transformation in the biological and environmental spheres in ways that - as one would expect - challenge the conventional division of nature and culture (cf. Strang 1999 for a similar argument in another context). Blood is central to the metaphorical linkages in question; and large meat animals, especially eland, are involved as a significant conceptual element in the associated myths and rituals. The concepts that hold all these elements in relation to one another in the Khoisan context are those of heat and cold - corresponding with male and female gender - and the processes that mediate between them (Bieseke 1993:79-81). In terms of these concepts, arrow poison (in the 'hot' male sphere) which is weakened (by age - or as a result of hunters eating foods that are taboo) becomes 'cold' (cf. Bleek & Lloyd 1911:66-71 271-275). The sun is hot and male; the night is female and cold, as is the moon. In

the trance dance, the 'hot' role of men as healers (where the word for "to cure" is the same as "to burn") complements the 'cold' influence of the women, protecting against too much heat. Just as water and medicines are dormant when 'cold', they become powerful when 'hot': the metaphor of 'boiling' also applies to the ripening of plants, becoming nutritionally potent (Bieseke *ibid.*). Amongst the Nama, cold water and raw meat are both a source of great danger to a person who is *!nau* (Hoernlé 1918:69). A mediated state of 'coolness', of well-being which is neither 'hot' nor 'cold', may be the desired condition in some contexts. For instance, fire is said to be 'good' when it cooks; but may be 'bad' if it burns.

A similar conception pertains in relation to the weather: a 'cool' state is when rains are gentle, as opposed to times of great heat and 'angry' storms, or dryness, low night-time temperatures, or when the wind blows dust.<sup>8</sup> For people dependent upon the resources of the veld in this kind of landscape, the absence of rain would mean not only a decline or absence of surface water, but, more critically, the drying up and disappearance of the tender above-ground portions of such juicy plant foods as 'gambro'. |Han#kass'o (Bleek 1933a:301) refers to this when he says, of a time of drought, "the plants vanish, only the gambro is there" [below the ground]. "The rain does not fall...the locusts vanish, the springbok also vanish..."

Mediation may also occur in the interaction of men and women (Bieseke 1993:87): the attributes associated with each are considered dangerous and antithetical to one another (as for example menstrual blood or breast milk to semen; or the accoutrement of gatherers to the arrows or arrow poison of hunters); but while kept apart in daily life, Bieseke notes, they often interact in myths in the resolution of dilemmas and in a forward movement to new syntheses. Indeed, new human life is seen as following from the mingling of menstrual blood and semen (L. Marshall cited in Bieseke 1993:93). Relative to these beliefs, the secluded menstruating girl becomes particularly a source of powerful potency - possessing simultaneously the negative capacity to cause the rain to withdraw (Bleek 1933a) or to 'cool' the 'hot' effective bows, arrows and hands of young male hunters (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:77-79), as well as the enormous positive potential, by virtue of right ritual observances

to influence and renew the world. Lewis-Williams (1981:52) shows that the term used for her by the |Xam, the “new maiden”, aptly expresses this regenerative power - where the word translated as “new”, which can mean fresh, raw, or uncooked, is equally used for falling or freshly fallen rain. As the new rain in a “giving environment” (Bird-David 1992:39) provides not only for the thirsty, but also causes plant foods to flourish, locusts to come out, and springbok to appear in abundance (Bleek 1933a:301), so also the “new maiden” had, for humankind, and in a world throbbing with the rhythms of life, indeed, “the rain’s magic power”.<sup>9</sup>

In |Xam accounts, appearance of a new moon signalled the end of a “new maiden’s” seclusion (Hewitt 1986; see also Bleek 1928a:122) - although her confinement in many instances might not have lasted more than four to five days from the start of menstruation (Solomon 1992:296). The new moon has masculine affinities (Bleek 1928a:122) - in contrast to the feminine associations of the full moon (Bleek *ibid.* Solomon *ibid.* Silberbauer 1981:126-7). The “new maiden”, emerging from her seclusion when the moon is new, waxes fat with the moon. Power and Watts (1997) note that the waxing phase of the moon is believed also to bring hunting luck, and that the full moon may be associated with satisfaction; but the moon itself, in one |Xam account, was “not to be looked at when game has been shot” (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:66-71). Like other feminine attributes, “Moon’s water” [dew] which resembled “liquid honey” could “cool the poison” and cause an injured animal to arise and live. The widespread association of the moon with women, of course, follows from its cycles proceeding nearly in rhythmic unison with the ovulation cycles of adult women; and in this sense the moon may be symbolic of transformation - where, indeed, even gender may be mutable (Power & Watts 1997). Being “cut off from the moon”, breaking with that rhythm, as it were, was a phrase used by Nisa to refer to her pregnancy (Shostak 1981:376, cited in Solomon 1992); and other expressions such as those recorded amongst the Ju|’hoansi (Biesele 1993:93) - “to see the moon”, meaning “to menstruate”; or “the moon torments me”, meaning “I have menstrual cramps” - further substantiate these connections. Insofar as women could be a threat to society, so the moon, while itself returning, in one of the most widespread of Khoisan stories (Guenther 1999:128-133), also ultimately ordained

mortality for animals and humankind. "As a man [the moon] comes; as a woman it dies away" (Bleek 1928a citing !Xun informants).

Ritual cleansing is one of the preludes to the girl's reintegration into society, when either cow dung (e.g. Engelbrecht 1936:164,167), or the chyme from a slaughtered sheep (Waldman 1989), is used to scrape off the 'dirt' and the ochre that had been rubbed onto her body - what the Nama referred to as '*axa |urip*, literally "boy dirt" or "child dirt" (Hoernlé 1918:72; 1923:524; cf. Waldman 1989:32). For the first time since the commencement of her seclusion, too, the maiden may now come into contact with water (Engelbrecht 1936:164) - although this might require special rites of reintroduction (Hoernlé 1918). Other rites of protection in some Khoisan contexts include the ritual preparation and eating of a slaughtered sheep - where the pelvic bone is kept intact, denoting ideas of fertility and well-being (Waldman 1989; Rudner 1982:149<sup>10</sup>), and the meat off it eaten only by old, post-menopausal women. Ochre is then smeared onto the pelvic bone, and it, with all other by-products of the feast and of the cleansing rituals, are disposed of in the same way - sometimes buried (Engelbrecht 1936:164, 167), or taken down to the water source and "offered" to the watersnake (e.g. Waldman 1989:38). Griqua informants told Waldman (1989:38) that the pelvic bone of the sheep belonged to the watersnake, who would eat it, while he "worked" with the buchu and other items offered. It is significant that *beesmis* (cow dung) - used in the ritual cleansing and hence included amongst the substances offered - was sought, according to Ou-oupa Moos (van Vreeden 1955:15) for smearing the floor of the watersnake's underwater 'palace'. In some contexts these practices (e.g. burial of the pelvic bone) could result in an archaeologically visible residue.

Other forms of association and protection followed, in which the girl's potency was distributed and brought into harmony with the group and their world. Amongst the !Xam the initiate shared ochre with the other women, for painting their cheeks and decorating their karosses, while she herself painted ochre stripes "like a zebra" on the young men of the band to protect them from !*Khwa's* lightning (!Kweiten-ta-||ken cited by Hewitt 1986:76, 281). Buchu, aromatic herbs that countered the odours (of

sweat and blood) that potentially roused !*Khwa*'s aggression, was given to all members of the household. It also restored the girl's father's capacity in the hunt. Finally, ochre or buchu was sprinkled or "adorned" at the water source to appease !*Khwa* - the rain/water - lest the water should "depart" (ibid.:281; Bleek 1933a:300; cf. James 2001:118-119, 230-232).

Indeed, a key element in these rites across a spectrum of Khoisan contexts, which, it is argued, provides important insights into the beliefs and *practices* that may lie behind the rock engravings at Driekopseiland, was this appeasement of, or association with, !*Khwa*, or its equivalent, at a river or water hole. The "new maiden's" ambivalent linkage with water is underscored in |Xam and other Khoisan texts that refer to her influence on the weather and as one who was told "about the doings of the rain" (Lewis-Williams 2000:274). Her power - positive and negative - in this respect continued throughout her adult life, moreover, when proper precautions were constantly to be observed. Amongst the Korana (Engelbrecht 1936:176-177), when an icy cold wind blew out of the south, it was said that a San woman had dressed indecorously - indicating one of the consequences believed to follow failure to observe taboos respecting rain and the weather. These ideas correspond with the !*nau* beliefs of the Nama (Hoernlé 1918), and explain Vedder's (1928:137) remark that "there are still women who hideously paint their faces with a blackish red salve during the period of menstruation, or early pregnancy, and on cold winter days." In Jul'hoan tales, Biesele (1993:97) demonstrates, similarly, a consistent association between women and water (cold) - in contrast to the link between men and fire (hot) - and a concern to maintain conditions of 'coolness' when the rhythms, as it were become 'dangerous' or off-set, or new ones start up, in events such as menstruation. or, in the male domain, in certain hunting situations. |Hanǀkass'o (Bleek 1933a:300) indicated in one of the cautionary tales, that "when a girl approaches the water and it is raining gently, she grinds buchu. Then as she approaches the pond, she scoops out the buchu and strews it on the water...because the rain loves buchu very much for buchu is what it smells. It glides quietly along when it smells things which are unequalled in scent.



## Marking and dancing at the river

Bleek (1928a:115,122) describes how, amongst the !Xun, tattoos applied to female initiates, in honour of ||Gaua, at the end of their period of seclusion, were referred to as t|ɔ. The term means “to mark”. The brief account by an |Auni woman named ||Klon!ki (Bleek 1937:257-258), of a girl’s initiation, also refers to tattooed markings as being an apparently significant element - along with a dance - in the rite of re-aggregation: “People dance,” she said: “youths [dance], ‘come from the hut floor, let us dance to influence the child.’ Men dance for the child. The maiden’s granny tattoos (her).”

The practice of marking, already noticed in the |Xam context, where women decorated their cheeks and karosses with ochre, and the initiates painted zebra stripes on the young men to protect them from lightning, has occurred in a cross-section of Khoisan groups, with a time-depth in written sources extending at least as far back as the seventeenth century or earlier (Raven-Hart 1967; 1971<sup>11</sup>). It is frequently associated, in the ethnography, with dances that conclude the female puberty rites; and this may include a ritual visit to the water source. These elements are all present, for example, in the !Kora |Habab rite (Maingard 1932; Engelbrecht 1936) when the initiate, sometimes anointed with *blinkklip*, or specularite (Engelbrecht *ibid.*:167), was led to a river or spring where she was ritually splashed with water. The moment this happened, she threw buchu into the water “to protect her from the ‘great snake’ which especially attacked young girls when they went down to the riverside” (Engelbrecht *ibid.*:164). In festive dancing, the initiate distributed buchu to others in the group - much, it seems, as this was done in other Khoisan settings.

Amongst the !Kung and other Kalahari San the dancing takes the particular form of an Eland Bull dance. Lewis-Williams (1981) shows that the kinds of metaphoric associations made between the initiate and the eland that are symbolised in this dance, while not made explicit in the |Xam texts, in all likelihood existed for the “new maiden” in the Southern San context as well. The ethnography as well as rock art

together suggest, all the same, that in different regional and historical settings animals other than the eland could and did assume central significance (Vinnicombe 1972:198). Maingard (1937:291; cf. Bleek 1928b:23), for example, writing of certain of the San in the Southern Kalahari, remarked that for them “the Gemsbok pervades every aspect of their communal activity, and forms as it were, the focal point of their lives, the centre round which hinges all their philosophy, all their habits and customs. The Bushman’s horizon, one might say, is bounded by the gemsbok.” Where these differences occur, a common thread is often that the animals featured are the “great meat animals” - but other animals may also be a focus and in one instance an unspecified bird occupied the position more usually held by the eland in the female puberty rite (Guenther 1999:172). Emic symbolic associations and equivalences link, after all, the water, the rain, water bulls and snakes in Southern San beliefs (cf. Schmidt 1979), and within the same weave, no doubt, would be found the “interconnected set of ideas,” as Lewis-Williams (1981:52) puts it, “at the centre of which are both the powerful ‘new maiden’ and the eland.” Nuances and emphases amongst these (and other) symbolic elements, one should expect, especially where foraging extended beyond the economic realm into that of ideas (Guenther 1999), would be various and historically contingent, and would account, in part at least, for some of the variability in rock art.

One of the elements referred to in relation to the Eland Bull dance by San informants is fat, which, like honey, is a symbolically loaded substance (as has already been noticed in its associations with the waxing moon). !Kun|obe, an old !Kung woman interviewed by Lewis-Williams (1981:48), explained that the dance was danced because “the eland is a good thing and has much fat. And the girl is also a good thing and she is all fat: therefore they are called the same thing.”<sup>12</sup> Honey and fat, as liquid solids that unify wet and dry, hot and cold, are also, as Biesele (1993:86) points out, “symbolic of the great mediation between men and women”: to “eat fat” or to “drink honey” can be euphemisms for sexual intercourse. Given fat’s transformative nature, like that also of water, in response to heat and cold, it is not surprising that it has metaphorical cogency in the ethnography in relation to changes occurring at puberty. Amongst the Nama, Hoernlé (1918:71; cf. Waldman 1989:27)

found that "one of the chief things required of a girl in the hut is that she should get fat, with smoothly shining skin." *!Naop*, a mixture of ground ochre and fat is used as body paint (ibid.:73), and at her emergence from seclusion as an *'oazais*, or young marriageable woman, the initiate's face is "painted in curious patterns" with *!naop* and *!quasab* ("ground white stone") - containing fat (Marshall 1959:365). Similarly, while in seclusion, a *!Kung* girl is rubbed with a mixture of eland fat with buchu; and the same mixture is given to her when she emerges, to be taken about the camp and a little of it placed in each of the hearths in the camp (Lewis-Williams 1981:50-51), to transfer the potency.

In the Nama rite (Hoernlé 1918), the young woman is fetched out of the hut, via a back entrance, and, richly decorated with painted designs, wearing new garments, and loaded with presents of beads and ear-rings, is re-aggregated into the community in a reed dance - during which she would throw *sāp*, a form of buchu, over men and boys. Hoff's (1995) description, in what she characterizes as a Khoekhoen context, much later in the twentieth century, refers to the forms of facial decoration for an initiate's "dancing-out" at the end of her period of seclusion: springbok and gemsbok 'patterns' were popular (cf. Tjougoed Dousap's testimony in Rudner 1982:146), as were linked eyebrows (believed, along with beauty spots, to mimic the watersnake), and zigzag designs painted on the arms and legs. The rituals of reintroduction or association that Hoff records that followed the "dancing out" included a smearing of ash from the hearth, dung from the kraal, and mud from the water source. Hoernlé (1918:74) mentions that the girl would be taken (by the old kinswoman who attended her during seclusion) to the kraal to strew buchu on all male animals, while also sprinkling it on trees and bushes as they went. At the spring, the old woman used a branch for splashing water over the girl. She would also rub the girl's legs and arms with clay, or *ǀgoab* - and after this she was free to draw water from the spring as she pleased. Hoff's (1997:30) Northern Cape informants mentioned that at the water, a cross was made in the middle of the girl's forehead, between the eyes, or on the knee; a vertical line was made on the shin; and a horizontal smear placed under the nose.

In Griquatown in the 1980s (Waldman 1989), the initiate and her handmaid each had their faces made up at the end of their period of seclusion: “several large red circles surrounded by small black dots; situated on their foreheads, noses, chins [and] on each cheek [with] a line of small black dots [from] cheek to ear” (1989:33). Strings of beads crossed their chests and backs,<sup>13</sup> and tortoise shells containing buchu hung from their dresses. The significance of the tortoise shells - items which can occur in archaeological contexts (cf. S. Hall 2000) - was explained to Waldman (2001:205-206) by Maria Pieterse and Mietha Amos, Griqua women in Griquatown. They indicated that the same kind of association as is drawn between a woman and her house is said to exist between a woman’s vagina and a tortoise: young men referred to “frigid” women as “dead tortoises” while to have sexual intercourse with a woman was to “see” her tortoise. The tortoise is an anomalous animal which carries its ‘home’ on its back; and it shrinks within its home at the approach of danger. The parallel with the *hokmeisie* withdrawing into seclusion, and hence the symbolic relevance of the tortoise, is clear.<sup>14</sup> Tortoise shells - used ubiquitously by Khoisan as buchu containers (Rudner 1982) - were employed at various points in the Griquatown puberty rites, but were especially important when the girl was prepared for coming out of seclusion. Two such shells, filled with buchu, were attached to her dress and placed adjacent to the ovaries. Buchu from them was rubbed on the sheep’s sexual organs before it was slaughtered; and placed on young boys’ testicles as a ritual protection (this rite occurs also amongst the Nama - Hoernlé 1918; and the Hai-||om - Fourie 1928:90-91). Dancing and singing, the initiate was led to the spring where buchu (again from the tortoise shells) and other items (including the ochre-smeared pelvis bone referred to above) were offered to the watersnake - but not before she was anointed with mud, on forehead, abdomen and knees (Waldman 1989:38)

Beliefs about water/rain as a spiritual entity that needed to be appeased by way of ritual marking and dancing are explicitly affirmed in another late twentieth century account from the Northern Cape. Martha van Rooi (Lange 1998), who grew up in a location community in Upington, suggested that beliefs about the watersnake in particular were still strong in her youth, when the *Hokmeisie* rituals were still performed. After a period of seclusion, lasting ten days, she reported, the *Hokmeisie*

had her face decorated with a sweet-smelling mixture of buchu and ochre or 'nou' (daai rooi ding...so 'n klip wat gemaal word - that red stuff...a stone that was ground) This was applied to her face in the form of 'beauty spots' (moeisiese).

*“Dan word daar musiek gespeel, die oupas speel musiek en die ouma-se dans, die Namastap, nou gaan hulle voordagmôre. Nou word dit gedans, die oumas dans rivier toe en daar op die rivier word die oumas gepraat op die taal, op die Namataal oor en hulle gooi daai boegoe in die rivier in. En ek vra toe nou waarvoer is dit nou goed, en hulle sê nee, daais hulle dit werk, saam met die Waterslang. Nou as hulle klaar gedans het en die goed is so op die rivier gegooi is, en daai meisies staan nou daarso - partykeer is daar meer as een meisie, en daar is so drie of vier, nou kom dans hulle weer so terug van die rivier af huistoe, na lokasie toe, en daai tyd was die meisie verskriklik pragtig as sy daar uitkom. Maar as sy by die rivier kom, het ek gesien dan het hulle 'n lang stok, dat slat hulle die water. Die water moet oor haar val, bo oor haar lyf. Dis 'n bewys dat die Waterslang haar nie kan intrek nie.”*

[Then music would be played, the grandfathers [old men] play music, and the grandmothers [old women] dance, the 'Nama step', and now they go through to the following morning. Now it is danced, the old women dance to the river, and there, at the river, they speak the language, the Nama language, and they throw that buchu in the river. And I asked, what was the purpose for doing that [for what was that good], and they said, no, those things work with the Watersnake. Now when they had finished with the dancing, and the things had been thrown on the river, and those girls were standing there - for sometimes there were more than just the one girl, it could be three or four, they now would come dancing back again from the river, back home, to the location, and at that time the girl was extremely beautiful, coming out like that. But while she was still at the river [as she got to it] I saw that they had a long stick, with which they hit the water. The water had to splash [fall] over her, from her head all over her body. That's a sign that the Watersnake cannot drag her in.]

Waldman (1989:38-41) describes the use of an ochre-smeared *kierie* for splashing the girl, noting that “great emphasis is placed by the Griquas on the watersnake and on the water splashing over the initiate.” If it was expected that the watersnake might not easily “accept” a girl, the splashing might be continued for some time even though she was drenched. An informant explained:

*“Hulle moet die water slaan. Kyk, die slang is partykeer so, sê nou maar daai meisie gaan nou soontoe, die hokmeisie, daai meisie, is nou reg vir daai water, is daai water vreeslik los, hulle*

*kan net so tik op daai water dan is daai meisie papnat, maar as dit 'n meisie is wat nie reg is, lyk dit vir my of dat moet daar 'n fout by hom is. Daai water kom nie, sy word nie nat nie...*"

[They must hit the water. Look, the snake is sometimes like this, say now that girl goes there, the initiate, [if] that girl is now ready [right] for the water, then the water becomes extremely 'loose', they just need to tap the water lightly and that girl will be sopping wet; but if it is a girl who is not ready [right], it seems to me that there is a problem with [her]. That water will not come, she will not become wet.]

Enquiries in Griquatown suggested that, while "acceptance" by the snake (and recognition thereby as a Griqua woman) was not always an easy process, there was no indication that anyone, in the end, had ever been rejected

### **Driekopseiland: a powerful place**

Ethnographies from a wide cross-section of Khoisan contexts point, then, to striking similarities both in the rationale behind the ritual forms of the female puberty rites and in the rituals themselves - even though there is great diversity at the level of detail. Guenther (1999:174) comments that in these rites, "all of the symbolic and affective stops - of liminality, inversion, celebration - that accompany the transition phase generally are pulled out, creating a ritual performance of great emotional intensity and symbolic density, akin in this regard to the trance dance." Common to almost all recorded accounts of the rites are the ritual markings (with pigments, tattoos, cicatrisation, scarification, tonsure, mud or ash) - of the initiate, of her group, and also of objects - and the strewing of ochre or buchu on persons, plants, animals and/or the water source in rites of reintroduction or reaggregation. As common an element is a "dancing out" which, in various Northern Cape examples, is a "stap" or "step dance" directly to the water to seek the acceptance and protection of/from the great watersnake. In this, these rites echo strongly the rationale behind the !Xam observances respecting !*Khwa*, and "the rain's magic power" of which the "new maiden" was an embodiment.

The ethnography is generally silent on the *places* where these rites may have been focussed, and in highly nomadic contexts they may well have been various. It is possible that in certain kinds of environments, such as the Kalahari, having a fairly generalised geography, rituals were, perhaps, not as constrained by particular physical locales as they might have been in regions of higher geographic diversity. Not that environments such as the Kalahari or the Karoo were 'unstructured' in terms of named places and 'waters': the Khoekhoegowab place names project (Kleinman *et al.* [2001]) shows the contrary in recorded ǀKhomani and other San place names in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, as do the known names of places, landscape features and waterholes of the !Xam (Bleek & Lloyd 1911; Deacon 1986). It has been argued (Deacon 1988) that 'topophilia' in the Upper Karoo resulted in specific places being construed as 'powerful' and hence being favoured as foci of such ritual activities as rain-making. This said, it could be that the "symbol- and sentiment-laden" eland (Guenther 1999; cf Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams 1981) in, for example, the Eland Bull dance, was and is an appropriately 'mobile' vehicle for almost any ritual context, whereas those symbols that revolve around water, the water bull, or the watersnake, as parts (alongside the eland) of a highly flexible and nowhere constant constellation of ideas, may have been fore-grounded in the lives and practices of men and women, in situations where historical conditions, including environmental opportunities in a relational sense, favoured this.

With regard to Driekopseiland, it is suggested here that, in the first instance, the glaciated rock which came to be exposed in the bed of the river, was pregnant with symbolic possibilities relative to the known ways in which landscape features could be imbued with meaning (see Chapter 4). That the site is so richly festooned with rock engravings is strongly suggestive of the view that the place and the rock surfaces themselves came, indeed, to be construed as meaningful. In particular, this choice of placement within the landscape converges in a remarkably coherent way with Khoisan ideas about water and its metaphoric manifestations. Whether the context for the engravings would have been, principally, rain-making, as appears to be the case at many other rock engraving sites in the region, is open to debate. Here, the engraved surfaces appear to sink and rise above the water with the

seasons and the vicissitudes of climate, and it is argued that the more potent congruity is between culturally mediated natural processes - including the place of water and the water-hole in the cosmology of the !Xam (Lewis-Williams 1996), and in a wide cross-section of other relevant ethnography - and the beliefs and practices of the female puberty rite. Differences in the ritual contexts of marking the landscape, between, say, rain-making and the rites of the "new maiden", it is argued, may account better for the kinds of modalities that have previously been attributed to different ethnic authorships.

As a powerful portal between spiritual realms, a point of breakthrough perhaps second to none in the area, Driekopseiland would have been the kind of place where !*Khwa* was appeased, where protections were sought, so that "the rain comes down gently." It is a particularly palpable instance of what Ingold (1993) refers to as the "temporality of the landscape" - "the world as it is known to those who dwell therein" (ibid.:56) - where people arguably invested, in the changing geology and the seasonal rhythms of the river, metaphorical and ritual significance relating to some of the central concerns of their society. That the extraordinary, smoothed rock bulging out of the riverbed, and seeming to regulate the flow of the water, came to be identified as a literal manifestation of the great watersnake, concerning whose "doings" such ritual care was necessary, is entirely consistent with understandings of landscape features in the !Xam myths. That the engravings represent a "residue of ritual sequence" (Lewis-Williams & Blundell 1997) in relation to this appears very plausible, where a certain degree of clustering of image forms on different parts of the site is suggestive of perhaps several generations of ritual performance. At a different scale, there appear to be differences in the age of the thematically distinctive western and eastern parts of the site, relating in part (it may be suggested) to the different 'feel' the site would have had as it was being transformed by geomorphological changes in the river channel. The following, final Chapter returns to a consideration of these issues, by examining the implications of changing emphases in the engravings relative to the archaeology and environmental history of the region. It will attempt to understand the archaeological contexts of a ritual practice, the rich recent ethnographies of which have provided substance for the



alternative interpretation of Driekopseiland that has been advanced here.

## Notes

1. As an aside, it might be noted that in Tylor's appointment as a reader at Oxford in 1884 anthropology became a recognised academic discipline whose field of study was *mankind*: before that the British Association for the Advancement of Science classified anthropology under natural history (Argyrou 1999:S31) - a point underscoring the fact that in Western discourse the relation of culture to nature has been by no means 'given' nor clear-cut.

2. There is a playing-down of "non-rational beliefs" in Blurton-Jones and Konner's paper; but part of their aim was to challenge views on "western man's...intellectual rise from the Stone Age" which were "deeply ingrained in the mind of the layman and...in the minds of serious academic writers" (ibid.:326, 348). If one senses an imperative to shoe-horn San thinking in beside "Western" positivist science, its focus on the objectifying ways of knowing amongst hunters was, in part, a then necessary corrective to show that (ibid.:348) "just as primitive life no longer can be characterized as nasty, brutish, and short, no longer can it be characterized as stupid, ignorant, or superstition-dominated."

3. |Kaggen's manifestation as a mantis or an insect is, however, rare. Except in one or two episodes in the |Xam *Kukkummi*, |Kaggen is a man (Lewis-Williams 2000:143).

4. As previously noted, !*Khwa* also refers to "waterholes" welling up, and to "rain" falling from clouds, with various further nuances (e.g. |Hanʔkass'o and ||Kabbo in Bleek 1933a) distinguishing "liquid rain", "drizzle", "he-rain", "she-rain" and so on.

5. Possible literal translations of this could be "cage-girl" or "coop-girl" - with reference to the small place of confinement which the Griqua refer to as the *hok*.

6. Waldman (1989:43) translates "kwaai" as "overcast" - but "bad-tempered" would resonate with the |Xam texts.

7. Examples familiar in English idiom include there being "something in the wind" "blowing hot and cold"; having "fair weather friends"; being "under a dark cloud"; having "a sunny disposition"; responding "frostily"; having "a face like a gathering storm"; "a bolt from the blue"; "thunders from the Vatican" - and the list is readily expanded. (Thanks to Maureen Brady who suggested some of these).

8. "The wind blows dust" is a metaphor for death (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:396-9): "The wind does thus when we die, our own wind blows...we make clouds when we die...the wind makes dust, because it intends to blow, taking away our footprints."

9. The "luck" brought to the world after a girl came out of her hut, Hoernlé (1918:74) was told by an old Nama man, meant that it was sure to rain the following day, and

there would be plenty in the land: “now the white men have come,” he added: “the rain has ceased, and the people are miserable.” A similar linking of “weakness” in the rain, and land degradation, with broader socio-political anxieties - where the question is put: “*How can the rain fall in this chaos?*” - is documented by Sullivan (2002) in a twenty first century context in north-west Namibia.

10. Including protection of the woman’s own pelvis during childbirth (Engelbrecht 1936:162; Pastor A. Albat in Rudner 1982:149).

11. Wouter Schouten, in 1665 (Raven-Hart 1971:84), reported: “I could notice little or no signs of religion among them [Khoekhoe], except that indeed sometimes a whole assembly of men, women and children, each clad in a stinking beast-skin, appear in a large pit, cave or other terrifying place, where these wild people made many strange antics, with singing, leaping and dancing, as also with continual hand-clapping. Meanwhile they sometimes turn their eyes to heaven, and then with a red stone write stripes and crosses on each other’s foreheads, after which each of this lovely brotherhood goes his way.” In 1679 Johann Wilhelm Vogel (Raven-Hart *ibid.*:218) repeated much the same information.

12. Given the further association of fat with the waxing and full moon, Power and Watts (1997:545) note that “the eland and the moon appear to be interchangeable symbols in |Xam narratives.”

13. See Jolly (in press) who suggests that the ‘bandolier-style’ of wearing strings of beads criss-crossing the chest was a form of dress brought with black farmers as they moved from West and Central Africa, introducing this feature to some “south-eastern groups” of San with whom they came to be in close contact. To the extent that ‘bandoliers’ feature in rock paintings, this process of interaction between farmers and foragers “contributed to regional diversity in San rock art.”

14. Chief Josiah Katz, a Korana leader in Kimberley, born in c 1942 and brought up at Rooipoort farm, made remarks concerning *veldkos* during a visit to Wildebeest Kuil on 27 Aug 2002: when he failed to track down a particular plant he was expecting to find, he said “*as jy hom soek dan kruip hy in - die natuur is só - hy kruip in as jy vir hom soek*” [if you specifically seek the plant it creeps in - nature is like that - it creeps in if you look for it]. This figure of speech resonates with the ideas widely held concerning tortoises.

**“Not without dust and heat”**

**- conclusions on landscape and history**

*.to the question, ‘what is archaeology the study of?’, I believe there is no better answer than ‘the temporality of the landscape’.*

- Tim Ingold, 1993:172

*“The paucity of landscape features in San art is partly illusory: art and landscape are inseparable”*

- Anne Solomon: 1997:71

Martha van Rooi of Upington added to her 1998 account of the *hokmeisie* rituals (Lange 1998) that, while there was evidently still much folk knowledge of the watersnake in her community, the rites themselves “are not done today, as they were done in earlier years when we were still young girls; the children of today do not appreciate these unnecessary things.” By contrast, in Griquatown in the late 1980s-1990s, Waldman (2001) shows that the *hokmeisie* rituals were still current. There, they occupied a significant place, particularly for local Griqua women, for whom the rites lay at the core of Griqua identity. However, that identity, Waldman finds, was deeply complex, multi-dimensional, fluid, ambiguous, often indeterminate and consisted in the interactions, at various scales, of individuals with others within and beyond their community. Indeed, contrary to expectations, the rituals of the Griqua people at Griquatown (*hokmeisie* - initiation; *mokweli* - betrothal; and funerals) - as an inter-related complex - were not ethnically exclusive. People had been living “across” the locations - across apartheid boundaries - and the rituals, which are interpreted as being “both Tswana and Griqua” (ibid.:143), and blend together ‘traditional’ Khoisan features with Christianity, “easily incorporated and accommodated people of various cultural backgrounds” (ibid.:142). Yet, as occasion demanded, the *hokmeisie* ceremony could serve to demonstrate Griqua ‘apartheid-style’ exclusiveness. Presented for television crews and visiting academics, it has increasingly been performed in official and public gatherings (as ‘re-enactments’ with young initiates having already been initiated), such as at the opening of the 1997 Khoisan Identities and Cultural Heritage Conference in Cape Town (Waldman 2001:227). In Kimberley, members of the United Griquas of Griqualand West, a

local cultural organisation operating at the periphery of (and to some extent contesting) the National Khoisan Consultative Conference structures, performed the *stapdans* as an overt cultural and 'indigenous' symbol - almost as a presentation of credentials - at Museums Day functions in 2001 and 2002, and at the International Indigenous Peoples Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Kimberley in August 2002 (Smith 2002; Aspeling 2002).

This bringing of the ethnography up into the twenty first century, where it is clear that the contexts of these 'traditional' practices are complex, uneven and situational, serves as a signal reminder, firstly, that past contexts may be expected to have been equally variable; and, secondly, that as an *analogy*, reference to the Khoisan female puberty rites does not, and cannot, reconstruct the past. As Sadr (2002:43) observes, "time's arrow" is such that the way things are today is because of events and conditions in the past, and not the other way around. Sperber (1985:31, cited in Ellen 1996) has noted likewise of the realm of ideas - which would be mirrored in the production of artefacts and rock art, as also in ritual performance: "mental representations have a basically unstable structure: the normal fate of an idea is to become altered or to merge with other ideas; what is exceptional is the reproduction of an idea." Analogies can be no more than "food for archaeological imagination," Sadr (2002:43) insists - and can only "begin, not end, the investigation": "they are only hypotheses for testing against the archaeological data." The inadequacy, for archaeological purposes, of the ethnographic record - whose potential "tyranny" Wobst (1978) envisioned - has been demonstrated by the existence of past practices for which there is no non-archaeological documentation, as Mitchell and Plug (1997:149) point out in a Southern African context. Examples they cite are the use of nets and of triple-curved bows in hunting (Manhire *et al.* 1985). Similarly, "in the ritual sphere, as well, many practices and associated beliefs may have gone undocumented or, perhaps more likely, may no longer have been current at the time of European contact" (Mitchell & Plug *ibid.*). In the same vein, Trigger (1995) has referred to the misapplication of ethnographic analogies in Mesoamerica where cultural continuities, it is now known, were seriously overestimated in the deployment of the direct historical method. In other instances, particular beliefs may

manifest themselves in material culture (and hence in the archaeological record) in variable ways; while, conversely, continuity in material symbols does not necessarily imply continuity in meaning (Trigger 1995:454; cf Morris 1988:117; Jolly 1998 note 9).

There is no record in any “ethnographic present” of people making rock engravings on expanses of rock in a river bed, such as at Driekopseiland (Stow’s 1905 account is possibly as close as it gets: see also Stow 1873 and Bleek & Lloyd 1911 for remarks concerning people’s near ancestors having made rock engravings). Nor is there any record of engravings serving as parts of rituals connected with female puberty rites. Even the connection with rain-making is merely hypothesised, and supported by arguments such as those rehearsed in the preceding two chapters.

But what the ethnographic sources drawn upon in this study do indeed provide is a series of strands of evidence, relating to the way ‘special’ features in the landscape have been imbued, historically, with meaning, on the one hand (see Chapter 5); and to ritual practices which, on the other, could have a geographical focus at the water source, in the context of which marking - as part of the ceremonies of association in female puberty rites - appears to have been a consistent feature, at least over the last century and a half, or more (see Chapter 6). A third strand is the bi-axial cosmology that is evident in !Xam and other ethnography: the nearly palpable ‘power of place’ at Driekopseiland, the hypothesised ritual practices, and the rich field of social meanings in Khoisan beliefs, appear to converge at precisely the intersection of those schematic ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ axes, which are mediated by water (Chapters 5&6). The ‘objective’ geography of the place (Chapters 2&4) is a unique sequence of events that led to the exposure here, probably in late Holocene times, of glacially smoothed basement rock, aligned with the flow of the river - which ‘bulges’ and ‘dips’ above or below the water according to the season. As such, the site resonates with other environmental rhythms, and these, in turn, have been resources for cultural construal in ways that are consistent with the ethnographic instances already cited. Upon this great undulating surface, more than 3500 rock engravings are densely placed such that they become submerged when the rains

come in the wet season, but equally are left high and dry when it is cold and the river flow dwindles, or ceases altogether. These several strands of evidence are brought to support the kind of scenario that is being advanced.

A further insight from the ethnography, and one that was alluded to at various points in the preceding Chapter, is that the use of ochre/buchu for marking - or sprinkling upon - persons, places and things occurred as but a *part* of practices or rituals. Waldman (2001) has examined such practices in relation to places - specifically houses - in Griquatown in the *hokmeisie*, *mokwele* and funeral rituals, where one obvious theoretical springboard was the literature on houses (places) being the symbolic reflections of aspects of wider social realities. Carsten and Hugh-Jones (cited by Waldman 2001:192), for instance, refer to houses (and this can apply generally to places) as “the loci for dense webs of signification.” Volumes of anthropological work have proceeded from the premise that spatial arrangements reflect: kinship, social groupings, economic practices, rank, and means for understanding structure and history (various sources including Levi-Strauss cited by Waldman 2001; Kuper 1980 being an influential case for Southern African Iron Age studies). If these approaches have been criticised it has been on the grounds that houses - or places - do not have single monolithic meanings, since people connect with them in multiple ways, which are themselves always open to contestation. The point has been made by M. Hall (2000) in relation to the rich material world of the early colonial era, and equally by Bender (1992:735) respecting Stonehenge, where she notes that “at any given moment and place landscapes are multi-vocal.” Brück (2001a:651), writing on monuments, power and personhood in the British Neolithic, argues similarly that “monuments cannot be said to sustain one dominant discourse, but are the medium through which several different forms of social reality may be constituted.” Symbolic associations, Waldman importantly observes (2001:193), are not *intrinsic* to material objects, nor to their spatial organisation: rather, it is in, and through, the actions of people that symbolic meanings are invoked in material objects or places. This point echoes positions adopted in Chapter 1, where it was noted (with Thompson and Giddens) that people are the knowledgeable makers of their histories, not the mere vectors of “ulterior structure” - although, to be sure, their

action is also conditioned and constrained by the world in which they dwell. In such a context - while there may well be “deep, long-term underlying assumptions” resulting in similarities in imagery (Biesele 1993:77) - it would indeed be exceptional for any idea - or action - to be reproduced precisely. Symbol systems may be “full of the past” as Biesele (ibid.:202) has remarked in relation to folklore, but “in ways,” she adds, “very complexly related to the present.”

This underscores the fact that ethnographic analogies can be no more than a starting point. But the more important implication for the study of Driekopseiland is the stress on action - the agency of people - as the context in which meanings are negotiated, constructed, and potentially contested, forcing a focus, again, but now with more pertinence, on the question of the engravings being what Lewis-Williams and Blundell (1997) referred to as the “residue of ritual sequence.”

### **Considering ritual sequence:**

Biesele (1993:51-62) shows that, in the absence of written forms of communication the expressive medium of folklore can have, as she defines it, a mnemonic role in the reproduction of social life. As such, myth ‘performances’ entail, as she stresses, a great deal more than might be suggested by their transcription simply as texts. Even as prose narratives, the tales exhibit rhythmic patterns, partly conveyed by way of non-verbal bodily emphases, such that the telling often assumes dramatic effect. The highly stylised counting off of the names of animals referred to in the previous chapter - a graphic, visual form of expression that shades from speech to singsong as the tellers gesture each animal’s name, their eyes almost glazing over as the naming proceeds - illustrates a blending of myths almost with ritual. Simultaneously the myths themselves may bridge other kinds of boundaries (Guenther 1999), such that, not only human-animal distinctions become blurred, but natural phenomena like the rain, the wind, or even landscape features, become embodiments of spiritual presences that are not passive. The rain and its “doings” in !Xam tales, as was noted in the previous Chapter, is specially responsive to the proper observances - or lack thereof - by the “new maiden”. A girl collecting !koa roots (veldkos), in one of

the tales (Lewis-Williams 2000:273-276), does so before she has been ritually cleansed, and the rain becomes angered: clouds loom, a storm breaks, with lightning, and the girl is swept up as dust in a whirlwind. "The maiden truly became dust, while she felt that she was a snake. Whirling, she ascended...the rain is now the one who takes her away." Equally responsive is Keinaus the watersnake, in the account of Ou-oupa Moos (Van Vreeden 1959), who speaks of Keinaus taking the form of an enticing head scarf, lying beside the river where Sara, a lazy girl, goes to drink. Reaching for the scarf, she is snatched in: "*Sja! Dat ees Keinaus wat lap-deng ees. Hy lê-vat Sara-goet by die arm saam en lê-lê-loop by die deep water. Hy lê-doeik af...af...af...an Keinaus vat Sara-goet by hy-se paleis*" [Phew! For Keinaus is that scarf. He grabs Sara by the arm and takes her to the deep water. He dives down...down...down...and Keinaus takes Sara to his palace]. Thus folklore, recounted with a sense of mnemonic drama and sometimes verging, in performance style, on ritual, gives substance to supernatural presences in the landscape. The myths have a role in setting the terms for people's engagement, in a relational way, with their world. The earth-bound symbolism in the ethnography, as Deacon (1998) has argued of the |Xam myths, links people to the land in ways that included ritual performance, and the marking of places with sprinkled ochre or buchu - and, apparently, rock art.

Flux being a defining feature of the world, people's "attentive involvement in the landscape" (Ingold 1993:171) would be anything but static: the open-ended, situational flexibility of the folklore and cautionary tales in Khoisan contexts (Biesele 1993; Guenther 1999) is a reflection of this. Life cycle changes, however, have called for more intense rites of passage (Guenther 1999:174), as a universal cultural feature (e.g. van Gennep 1960), for the re-framing of individuals' relational being in the world. In the Khoisan context, as noted, this transition occurs at the "first spilling of blood" (Parkington 1996), when childhood is left behind and young adults prepare or begin to fulfill their 'procreative' roles as child-bearers and hunters (Biesele 1993). Houseman (1998) argues that places in the landscape can be powerful adjuncts to these rites. He suggests that in the process by which participants' relations with their "lived-in environment" are renewed and transformed, the places where the rites are



enacted may cease being mere objects, and indeed become virtual subjects themselves. Whereas the attention-directing quality of place has been a focus in some analyses (e.g. J.Z. Smith 1987, cited in Houseman 1998:464), as an organising property in ritual enactments - and clearly Driekopseiland could be approached in such terms - Houseman's study seeks to approach "place, and more generally space, ...as one of the terms of the relationship which these enactments may be held to bring about." It is not that rituals *create* links between individuals and places, he argues: participants in rites of passage do have prior knowledge of, and are linked by relational bonds with, the landscape in which they live. Rather, the rites *re-contextualise* such pre-existing links, so that "particular locations are instituted as the depositories of people's social personhood" (ibid.:461). Personhood in different societies or contexts is not necessarily as bounded, nor as fixed a concept as it is in the Cartesian subject-object sense, notes Brück (2001a:654-655), who refers to the 'complex, kaleidoscopic web of social relationships' in which a person may be embedded, such that part of one's self might - in some societies - always lie "outside of one's own physical body" (cf. Ellen 1996). It is this embeddedness that Houseman sees as being re-contextualised in rites of passage.

The mechanism whereby people 'connect' with places - and, in general, the way they orientate themselves spatially - tends not to be at an abstract level, Houseman suggests: spatial 'knowing' takes root far more meaningfully through the physical feelings, the bodily experience, of being in a place. In rites of passage such experiential elements are sustained in "intentionally and emotionally laden" rituals involving bodily activity where additional "expedient measures" (such as imposition of pain) are often an integral part. Bodily experience, thus heightened, can forge connections between people and places while at the same time embedding these within wider relational networks that link "persons and features of the environment, between such features, and between persons themselves" in ways that are felt to be mutually responsive. The instances that Houseman cites - the English custom of 'beating the bounds', the Gisaro ceremony of the Papuan Kaluli, and Australian Arandan initiation rites - can be multiplied easily, and Southern African examples of initiation rites involving physical ordeals spring readily to mind. Upheld by circuits of

recursive reference, Houseman (1998:462) suggests, the relationships acted out in such rituals, and the integrative contexts they imply, “confer a measure of indisputable authority,” so that linkages between people and place can acquire degrees of stability over time.

In the Khoisan context the kinds of institutional imposition of pain to which Houseman refers are not as consistent a feature as they are in some other societies, although certainly there are instances of it, such as scarification, cicatrisation, and tattooing (e.g. Bleek 1928b:11; Bleek 1936:144-145; Bleek 1937; Raven-Hart 1967; Silberbauer 1981:151; Rudner 1982; Biesele 1993:116-123). Ritual body modification evidently has a role in the construction of individual, gender and group identities, as Mitchell and Plug (1997) show; and in the light of Houseman's argument, one could expect place to be an embedded aspect of these constructions.<sup>1</sup> Another Khoisan instance involving pain, but where roles are reversed, is recorded amongst the !Kung, where a girl, after emerging from seclusion, is given an ochre-coated *moretwa* stick with which she playfully hits the adolescent boys of the camp - as a way of distributing protections (Lewis-Williams 1981:51). The dusting of buchu on young boys' testicles in the Nama rite (Hoernlé 1918; cf Waldman 1989), and a similar practice amongst the Hai-||om San (Fourie 1928:90-91), make for variations on this theme. But pain as such is not the only manner of affording bodily experiences of places: the splashing of water onto initiates in the rites of reintroduction in some Khoisan contexts described above<sup>2</sup> is clearly an analogous form of experience with the same capacity to embed places as “depositories of social personhood.” Elsewhere in the initiation rites, several specific kinds of bodily experience would be associated with, for instance, the place of seclusion, including the proscription to lie down, the observance of taboos, and to be silent: “girls must be silent when they are hiding from the rain,” said |Hanḥkass'o (Bleek 1933a), “they lie hidden, for the rain would be angry with them if they walked about in front of it.” Waldman (1989) noted a similar rule for Griqua initiates to speak in no more than a whisper while in seclusion. The general suppression of sensation at this stage of the rites gives way to the greatly heightened bodily experiences of the re-aggregation phase, when initiates are ritually marked and re-introduced, in

mutually responsive ways, not only with the group but also with tasks, places and things (e.g. Hoernlé 1918). The bodily experiences of initiates include their making of ochre patterns on others of the group to protect them from lightning; their daubing of mud from beside the water source; and their sprinkling of buchu as an offering to !*Khwa* or the watersnake - which splashes up as a sign of acceptance (Waldman 1989) - or which, darkened by the red ochre, “glides quietly along when it smells things which are unequalled in scent” (|Hanǀkass’o in Bleek 1933a:300).

Olfactory sensations played no insignificant role in the rites, where buchu often served to ‘cool’, or counter, potentially harmful potency, including body odours.<sup>3</sup> It was on account of a young woman’s scent that the Rain went to her, in one of the |Xam myths (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:192-199 - reminiscent in some senses of the story [see page 197 above] told by Ou-oupa Moos - Van Vreeden 1959), desiring to take her away: in the event, the young woman persuaded the Rain to set her down at a place where she calmed him to sleep - with buchu - while she “stole softly away.” The Rain returned to his spring while she burned buchu, concealing her scent of ||*khou* ; and “old women were those who came to burn horns [desiring the smell to go up] so that the Rain should not be angry with them.” In other sources, the burning of aromatic herbs is described, for their curative powers (Bleek 1928b:29): to placate spirits during childbirth (Bjerre 1960:139); and as offerings on a grave following death (Passarge 1907, cited by Rudner 1982:216; cf Bleek 1928b:35). Buchu was also provided for a sorcerer (!*gi:xa* or shaman) to smell, so that he could ‘sneeze out’ ‘harm’s things’ (|Hanǀkass’o in Bleek 1935:2-3); likewise, “when he [a !*gi:xa*] returns from the place to which he has gone on a magic expedition [altered state of consciousness],” said Dialkwain (Bleek 1935:22-23), “he trembles. Then people let him smell buchu, for they want his veins to lie down...the people by singing make his cerebral artery lie down .for he would turn into a lion if they did not by singing make it lie down....so they quickly make him smell buchu...” Weather, which threatened angry storms and lightning, or drought, could similarly be controlled by means of “smoke”: rain-making was carried out by burning hair, finger nails, fat, or antelope horns (Hahn 1881:83; Engelbrecht 1936:175; Marshall-Thomas 1959:161); while, in the Kalahari, “smoke medicine” was made by dropping

a hot coal into a buchu mixture inside a tortoise shell container (Marshall 1969:360). Of all scents, however, there was “no scent as sweet” as Rain, |Hanʔkass’o explained (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:192-193): and, in the puberty rites, a common feature would be the re-introduction of the “new maiden”, freshly decorated with buchu, to !*Khwa* or its equivalent, at the water source. The waterhole, or the riverside, itself, with its mud and dampness, together with the increased vegetation such places would support, would no doubt have its distinctive aroma, adding to a heightened bodily experience of this powerfully mediating place.

Even the sounds at such a place, and of the ritual event, might serve to embed themselves mnemonically - the rippling water of a riverine setting and the sounds of nature teeming at its edge; and, if there is a dance, the song, “full and low in tune” (Bleek 1928b:23), the rhythmic clapping, the swaying step (*ibid.*) and the firm thudding of feet. In the Eland Bull Dance of the Ju|’hoansi (Bieseke 1993:197), which has been described as “heavier and more deliberate than any other” (England 1968, cited in Bieseke *ibid.* cf Bleek 1928b), there is a clinking of the |’*aisi* adzes, deliberately conjuring up - it is said - the sounds of eland, grandly muscular and fleshy, trotting unhurriedly. In the Kalahari, in the twentieth century, the clinking sounds of metal bangles - equally bringing to mind the characteristic clicking sound of eland leg bones - were associated in tales with animal fat and women’s reproductive ripeness, Bieseke notes (*ibid.*:198; cf. Lewis-Williams 1981). “An eland will come to where the people are singing...when people sing the Eland Song” - and “!a=*ain* !a=*ain* !a=*ain*” is the clinking sound it makes: “that’s how the eland arrives.” The rain, too, was said by the |Xam to be like an animal which could hear (Lewis-Williams 2000:273-274). In the more distant past, bone ornaments, strings of beads, and even stone bangles could have produced comparable sounds

Driekopseiland itself is a place, a locale, that is “wonderful and unwonted” in appearance, as Stow (1905:28-29; 398) aptly described it, the extraordinary rock “perfectly polished and striated”: to the San, he suggested, this “unexplained smoothness” would have made it “a place memorable to their race.” It indeed exudes ubiety. It is the kind of place that Tilley and Bennett (2001) would call ‘super-

natural' - one that, in a phenomenological, 'dwelling' perspective, people of the past would undoubtedly have regarded as anything but natural. In terms of the bodily experiences that Houseman considers, the sensation of the place alone, even without any ritual elements - of being bare-footed on these surfaces, of feeling the rock's glacially and water-washed smoothness (and of feeling the engravings through the soles of one's feet) - is an extraordinary one. Tilley and Bennett urge that, as archaeologists, we should "spend as much time and effort considering 'natural' form as 'cultural' form" - a course that is clearly open, as already noted (Chapter 5), to substantial subjectivity (cf. Brück 2001b:766). Thomas (2000, cited in M. Hall 2000:51), indeed, has characterised the approach as "something of a craze for experiential archaeologies which assume that past people's encounters with landscapes and architecture would have been much the same as our own." The importance of the ethnography in the present study is that it serves to constrain the analysis

What makes the 'super-natural' thesis about Driekopseiland plausible is ultimately neither the 'phenomenology of the landscape' nor the burden of ethnographic allusion (though these both hint strongly, in their respective ways, about the possibilities). Rather, it is the very material presence of the engravings. Where the experiential approach of Houseman in respect of rituals in places, and the ethnography brought to bear, do have value is that, together, they provide ways for thinking about the possible contexts in which rock engravings were made at Driekopseiland, over a period of time, to survive as the "residues of ritual sequence. The thesis being advanced is that, relative to these various observations, the numerous engraved images at Driekopseiland, particularly those in the eastern part of the site, represent ritual acts of marking - produced, most probably, in rites of reintroduction - on surfaces of rock at the water source. The rock and the engravings upon it were thus instituted - it may be argued in Houseman's terms - as "depositories of people's social personhood." The chipping out of an engraving, by implication in this scenario, was itself a ritual act - and as such the *making* of each image, enhancing still more the sensory experiences of vision, sound and rhythm (cf. Ouzman 2001), would have had a significance possibly far greater than that of

the “enduring material product” (Bender 1992:748).<sup>4</sup> The interaction with the rock surface was a kind of entering - by engraving, quite literally, ‘into’ - the spiritual realm (Lewis-Williams & Blundell 1997). As clearly, though, the images left behind, as “things in themselves” (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994), would have served in some mnemonic sense, in “circuits of recursive reference” (Houseman 1998:462) in terms of which a linkage between people and the place acquired stability over time. Part of the process would have been a growing, and no doubt changing, sense of what the rock support (and the general setting) at Driekopseiland ‘meant’, as it was emerging, in the first instance, when the river cut down through the local sediment exposing ever greater expanses of glacially smoothed pre-Karoo surface. Simultaneously the rock support was imbued, as this thesis suggests, as an active, responsive element, in a relational sense - and as itself a metaphor with multiple referents, relative both, it is suggested, to the “new maiden” (who was known as “the rain’s magic power”) and to the water or !*Khwa* - welling up and falling from the clouds - or the great watersnake - ‘bulging up’, to hold back the river, or ‘dipping down’ to permit it to flow. The cycles and seasons with which these elements resonate find expression in metaphors in Khoisan beliefs that link the weather to women - including heat, the angered male rain, dust, drought, the cold wind out of the south; and, more positively, the gentle wind that blows softly, blowing “rain’s hair” like a “great skin along the horizon”, putting out rain legs “that they may stand and advance raining...so that the water flows. it flows into the waterpits, to lie in them and fill them up” (Bleek 1933a:310-311). In |Xam myths, this gentle rain is the female rain. A further referent could well have been the sentient moon (James 2001:194) “who made water [dew] upon the ground” (Lewis-Williams 2000:250) that resembled “liquid honey” (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:66-67), and whose coming and going had clear temporal associations - of transformation - with the menstrual cycles of women. At full moon, in particular, the stark almost lunar surfaces at Driekopseiland would shine softly like the cool “liquid light which drips from the moon” (Bieseke 1993:98).

Amongst the striking citations in Hahn’s study, *Tsuni-||Goam: the Supreme Being of the Khoi-Khoi* (1881:36) is a seventeenth century report of Khoekhoe women at a place “where a great stone lay. Each woman had a green branch in her hand, laid

down upon her face on the stone, and spoke words” - this being reputed to be “an offering to God.” He also (ibid.:37-38) included part of a letter written (in Latin) by Nicolas Witsen, in 1691, portions of which are given in translation by Rudner (1982:134): the Khoekhoe had informed Witsen “that they worshipped a certain God...who was possessed of giant proportions...it was a custom that their wives spread on the head of this deity a kind of red earth, buchu or other sweet-smelling herbs. ” What these instances seem to imply, again, is a focus of rituals at *places* - in one case “a great stone.

An earlier point bears reiteration, that insofar as places like Driekopseiland became ‘the loci for dense webs of signification,’ and, in consequence, were festooned with rock engravings, this would have occurred not because the settings were *inherently* meaningful, nor because people were the mere vectors of some pre-existing cognitive template, but because they, through their actions, including ritual actions and the making of images, invoked, negotiated, and possibly contested beliefs and significances, giving “local twists to general ideas” (M. Hall 2000:197). In this view, the spatial variability between engraving sites in the region, it is suggested, is a reflection of different metaphoric understandings of place, of landscape, and of spatial opportunities and ‘uses’ (both economic and ideological), as these were being attentively constituted and, as Ingold (1993) would put it, ‘enfolded’ in the landscape by “those who dwell therein.” It is suggested that such a view finds more support in the available evidence than the explanatory appeal to discrete cultural, ethnic or techno-economic contexts that much previous writing on Driekopseiland implied

As clearly as there was variability in the engravings in contemporaneous space, so there are temporal trends at engraving sites, evident in changes in engraving practices - in shifting forms of expression and emphases - through time; and some sense of this can certainly be discerned at Driekopseiland

If the scenario presented here is correct, then one may entertain the idea that perhaps each of the engravings represents a ritual act by a different individual as

part of her rites of reintroduction to *!Khwa* at the water source. Each engraving - or engraving cluster - may therefore indeed be a residue of a ritual sequence.<sup>5</sup>

If each of the engravings was the work of an individual, then each additionally evinces a sense, at Driekopseiland, of independently negotiated meaning - or at the least of an independent decision as to its form. Insofar as no two images at Driekopseiland are identical, each engraving represents, in this view, an assertion of individuality, a quality that Guenther (1999:135) sees as characteristic of a 'foraging ethos', explaining, in his view, something of the "dynamic, nonconservative bent of Bushman religion and art." The idea is well illustrated in a metaphor for the 'foraging way' that Guenther derives from Bleek's (1928:22) description of a trance song, alluded to earlier (Chapter 5). "The time is perfect," wrote Bleek, "but no two in a chorus seem to hit the same note, though the general burden of the tune is kept up." Guenther (1999:138) remarks that Bleek's account of the women's performance conveys the group's "collective expressive endeavour," allowing the ritual [in Bleek's description, the trance dance], through joined voices and rhythms, to reach its "numinous climax", while simultaneously accommodating - not drowning out - the individual singer "who hits her notes as she will, either in or out of tune with the rest."

The clusters of similar - but not identical - forms of images in different parts of the site at Driekopseiland (Fig. 22 on page 174) show instances of near conformity, perhaps from ritual events that were close to one another (or coincident) in time and/or in a social sense; whereas the full spectrum of image forms across the site - the 'grid ovals', 'crossed circles', concentric circles, rectangular forms, 'fish spines', cellular motifs, 'T'-shapes - is an indication of "great latitude" not unlike that granted for "individual artistry", as noted by Biesele (1993:66) in the context of folklore amongst the Ju|'hoansi. However, such tolerance was not likely to be limitless, Guenther (1999:137) has observed with reference to Nharo storytellers: and, correspondingly, there is a broad unifying similarity in the geometric imagery at Driekopseiland, hinting that the "general burden of the tune", as it were, tended to set bounds beyond which the "local twists" people gave to "general ideas" were constrained.<sup>6</sup>



## A “tangle of ambiguity” - and change in the longer term

The “shifting and contextual nature” by which space is given meaning has not been satisfactorily theorised and accounted for in much recent writing in landscape archaeology, asserts Brück (2001). Approaches that derive insights from the ideas of, for example, Foucault on the organisation of space and the reproduction of institutional power structures, she suggests, overlook the relational ways in which identities and personhood are constructed. The resultant focus of these approaches is on dominant discourses - on their production and maintenance - that then are held often to prevail in ways reminiscent of reified ‘cultures’, ‘structures’ and ‘cognitive templates’ (see Chapter 1). To account for change, “sporadic restructurings” are called for, whereas, as Brück shows, it appears more usual for there to be a “continuous production and negotiation of spatial meanings” - and even ‘an entanglement of roles and values’ (Edmonds cited in Brück 2001:660) in which different aspects or qualities of a place may be “pulled in and out of focus over

It is well to be reminded that landscapes and sites are “multi-vocal” (Bender 1992:735) and it follows that ‘meanings’ invoked at any given moment will be contingent and may even be ambiguous. Indeed, Guenther cautions that “when coming across what appears to be a structuralist’s structures within Bushman myth and belief, one must balance what one finds against the tangle of ambiguity that runs through and around Bushman religion” (1999:145). Paradoxical reversals of gender, and flux between human and animal categories, would have characterised aspects of this ambiguity in Khoisan belief and practice (Power & Watts 1997). As Bender (1992:745) notes, while one might “ponder a gendered landscape and gendered substances,” one should be “wary of making invariant correlations.” Indeed, it is very unlikely that Driekopseiland would have been exclusively a female preserve, and many activities other than female puberty rites will have occurred in its vicinity. There are scatters of artefacts on and within the adjacent over-bank silts indicating that people were spending time carrying out a variety of other tasks there,

and that they were probably encamped nearby, at periods in the late Holocene that almost certainly overlapped the times when the engravings were made. It is known also that burials were placed in the banks alongside the site, as well as further up- and down-stream of there.<sup>7</sup> Put another way, the engraving site is not likely to have been “segregated off” (Bender 1992) within the landscape: there would have been everyday comings and goings, relative to which the site would have meant different things to different individuals. To some, as this thesis contends, it could have been central to a recontextualising of personhood; to others it was probably less central (but not necessarily less significant) in this respect. In a quotidian sense Driekopseiland may simply have been a convenient crossing point (as it is today for farm-workers who ford the Riet at this point) - in much the same practical and prosaic way that the moon was said by Nharo trance dancers to provide light for dancing at night (Guenther 1999:65).

Bender (ibid.:749) has written of sites not being “fixed and bounded”; that one should envisage a site - and this could be said of Driekopseiland - as “a landscape that concertinas inwards and outwards, depending on who you are, and *when you live*” (emphasis added). Neither the historical context nor indeed the natural setting at Driekopseiland was constant through time, as was shown in Chapter 4. When these two aspects are considered together - as time *and* place; indeed, as a ‘temporalised landscape’ - it becomes possible to see how a longer term aspect of change, which arguably resulted in the differences between the engravings in the western and eastern parts of Driekopseiland, may reflect some kind of shift in focus. In this sense the site was becoming a different ‘place’ though time, where different roles and values were becoming pertinent, and where the significance of the place - the burden of the current tune, as it were - indeed depended on *when* you lived.

The geomorphological reconstruction by Butzer *et al.* (1979) suggested that the western part of the site, with its more heavily abraded engravings and distinctive component of animal and human images on higher convex surfaces, was exposed at a period somewhat earlier than the rest of the site. Here not only do the engravings differ in terms of figurative content (325 animal and 19 human images

compared with just a few animals and only 1 human depiction in the eastern part of the site), but many of the geometric engravings were distinguishable by theme, style and quality, with only about a third of the geometric designs in the western part of the site corresponding with those in the east. The remainder of the geometric engravings on the higher downstream exposures were found to be “more elaborate or better done” while also being “on the whole, slightly to somewhat more worn” (Fock & Fock 1989:143).

Assessing the geomorphological evidence of age against subsequent palaeoenvironmental studies, it appears that the processes of downcutting (that would have resulted in the exposure, initially, of the western part of the site, as per the Butzer hypothesis) most likely became accentuated after 3000 years ago. But the precise timing in the later Holocene when portions of bedrock became exposed cannot as yet be determined with any certainty: Butzer *et al.* suggested c. 2500-2200 years ago, while the options could include a cooler, drier episode as recently as the second half of the first millennium AD (see Chapter 4). In conformity with the model of Butzer *et al.*, warmer/wetter conditions, possibly those known from the early first millennium AD and/or the Medieval Warm Epoch, seemingly resulted in renewed aggradation of silts to about 5 m above bedrock in the Riet River channel, obscuring bedrock (and the ‘older’ engravings already made there). But this was then followed by cooler, drier conditions, possibly correlating with the marked low-rainfall anomaly, the somewhat drawn-out Southern Hemisphere Little Ice Age, leading to the exposure not only of the higher, ‘older’ part of the engraving site, but also of a far greater extent of bedrock - the flatter surfaces of the eastern part of the site - where the ‘younger’ geometric engravings were then made.

People, as “embodied individuals immersed within a meaningful three-dimensional landscape” (Brück 2001:650) may be expected to have responded not only to changes in their social environment but also to have negotiated changing meanings and ways of enculturating space, as particular places blended and transformed, not only seasonally, but also in longer-term geomorphological processes. An active engagement with nature would be expected to be part of the process of constructing

and reconstructing the social world in which people would “both modify nature and themselves” (Giddens 1981:54, cited in Hall 1985:13 - see Chapter 1). At extraordinary sites such as Driekopseiland a nearly tangible ‘power of place’ and of transformation - enhanced by the placement of engravings - may easily have been construed as itself responding, almost historically, around some of the central concerns in Khoisan life and belief.

In such a “dwelling perspective” the dynamic interplay between history, rock art and environment that this evidence implies shows Driekopseiland indeed to have been more than a mere location in space. For people living here at different times this quite palpable succession of different ‘places’ - or “settings of interaction” (Giddens *ibid.*) - provided rather different kinds of opportunities (Morris 1988:117; cf. Parkington 1980). If, as one might expect, there was some change in metaphoric understanding of space here, then this may well have influenced the kinds of ritual or modes or art-making practised at the site. That this was so may be reflected in the shift in emphasis between the ‘older’ and ‘younger’ engravings - animal images all but dropping out of the repertoire in the later art. Considering Bender’s metaphor of a site that may ‘concertina’ inwards and outwards in the course of its history, it could be said that the ‘earlier’ Driekopseiland resembles (in its marked component of figurative animal and human motifs) other engraving sites in the region to a much greater degree than does the ‘later’ Driekopseiland, which is arguably more ‘inwardly’ focused. One may also speculate that the earlier engravings (where a certain prominence is given to eland amongst the animal images) may reflect a locally older emphasis in which !*Khwa*:-*ka xoro* - the rain-bull - was linked with eland. By the same token, there is a possible association of eland - as *animal de passage* (Lewis-Williams 1981) - with the female initiate.

To account for such temporal differences - as with contemporaneous variability considered above - there is no need, again, to resort to reified cultural difference. Just as Wilmsen (1986:358) and others (e.g. Barnard 1992; Guenther 1999) have found with regard to mythology - that its content often “transcends time and tribe and ethnicity” - there are no grounds for assuming *a priori* that *change* in rock art

repertoires signifies a change of cultural 'package'. Longer-term changes in rock art expression may well have been a consequence of processes essentially 'internal' to a local community (cf. David *et al.* 1994), and could include changing perceptions of landscape (more especially if the landscape itself was undergoing geomorphological transformation), or change in the way existing beliefs came to be expressed and/or practised. Where environmental factors exerted an influence, of course, it would have been in social terms that any shifts in meaning and practice were negotiated.

In their study of rock art in Northern Australia, David *et al.* (1994) attempt to understand the art there relative to evidence for widespread transformation in Aboriginal societies in the late Holocene, and identify processes of intensification, including territorial concerns, as driving change at that period in rock painting traditions. In the Northern Cape, an increase in archaeological visibility in the later Holocene points to population increases; and in the last 2000 years indications are that the social landscape was becoming much more complex. There is evidence of the development of a 'mosaic' (Beaumont & Vogel 1984; Humphreys 1988) of local responses to changing circumstances that, as in the Australian example, suggest intensification of inter-personal relations - in what Denbow (1990:170; cf Maggs & Whitelaw 1991) characterises as "regionally integrated" systems of "mutually supportive forms of production and exchange." Those changing circumstances included the emergence of herding and agriculturist modes of subsistence, represented by communities with whom foragers variously articulated. In relation to these interactions, identities would have been especially fluid (Humphreys 1988; Beaumont & Morris 1990; Morris 1992; Jacobson *et al.* 1994a; 1994b; Morris *et al.* in prep.; cf. Denbow 1990; Reid & Segobye 2000). Interlinking exchange networks are indicated by the introduction of metal items into the valley of the Riet River during the last millennium from areas of pastoral-agriculturist settlement to the north (e.g. Humphreys 1970; 1982; Humphreys & Maggs 1970; Maggs 1971; Morris 1981; Miller *et al.* 1993; Morris *et al.* in prep.). Other items including sea shells were also being traded in. Shell species found in the same Riet River archaeological contexts (namely *Cypraea annulus*, *Haliotis midae*, *Oxystele sinensis* and *Pecten sulcicostatus*) - of south and east coast derivation (Humphreys 1970) - include cowrie

shells (*Cypraea annulus*), often with their backs cut away, probably for attachment to clothing (Maggs 1976; Voigt 1983). These occur sometimes in abundance on Iron Age sites such as Mapungubwe and on the Highveld, and are known for “reaching inland localities with remarkable regularity” (Voigt *ibid.*:122). At the forager end of these transactions, such as at shelter sites along the Ghaap Escarpment (Humphreys & Thackeray 1983 - Fig. 23), there are hints of increased ostrich eggshell bead production in the upper units which it is tempting to suggest was meant to meet the requirements of more intensive exchange with people or groups beyond local social spheres. That the beads are not uniformly small, as they tend to be in earlier or more exclusively hunter-gatherer contexts (e.g. Jacobson 1987a; 1987b; Morris & Beaumont 1991; Smith *et al.* 1991), and that larger beads are present in these upper units, lends credence to this suggestion. The larger beads may well reflect production specifically for trade with Iron Age groups (Mitchell 1996:71), with a modern analogue being recent Ju’|hoan manufacture of larger beads for external trade, and smaller ones for internal *hxaro* exchange (Jacobson 1987a:56, citing Wiessner)

Mazel (1989:144) has drawn attention to the potential impacts of forager-farmer contacts on gender relations amongst foragers. Again, the elaboration of beadwork is germane and could reflect a response by women to decreasing social status in these interactions during the last two millennia (Mazel, citing Wiessner 1984). These same social processes could have spurred change in ritual practices (Prins 1991). It is relevant here to note Waldman’s (2001) observations on the status of women in Griquatown vis-a-vis the *hokmeisie* ceremonies. She shows that these rites support ideologically, the significant role of women in their houses and in respect of household matters - appearing to corroborate the suggestion by Carstens (1975) that beliefs concerning the watersnake were particularly prevalent in societies (or strata of societies) where there was “an egalitarian tendency in male-female relations” (*ibid.*:91), and where the rites ‘functioned’ to reproduce that status quo. Waldman (2001:223) demonstrates, however, of the historical moment in Griquatown in the late twentieth century, that “these rituals reflect only an ideological position.” In reality “women were seldom in control of their houses and households”.

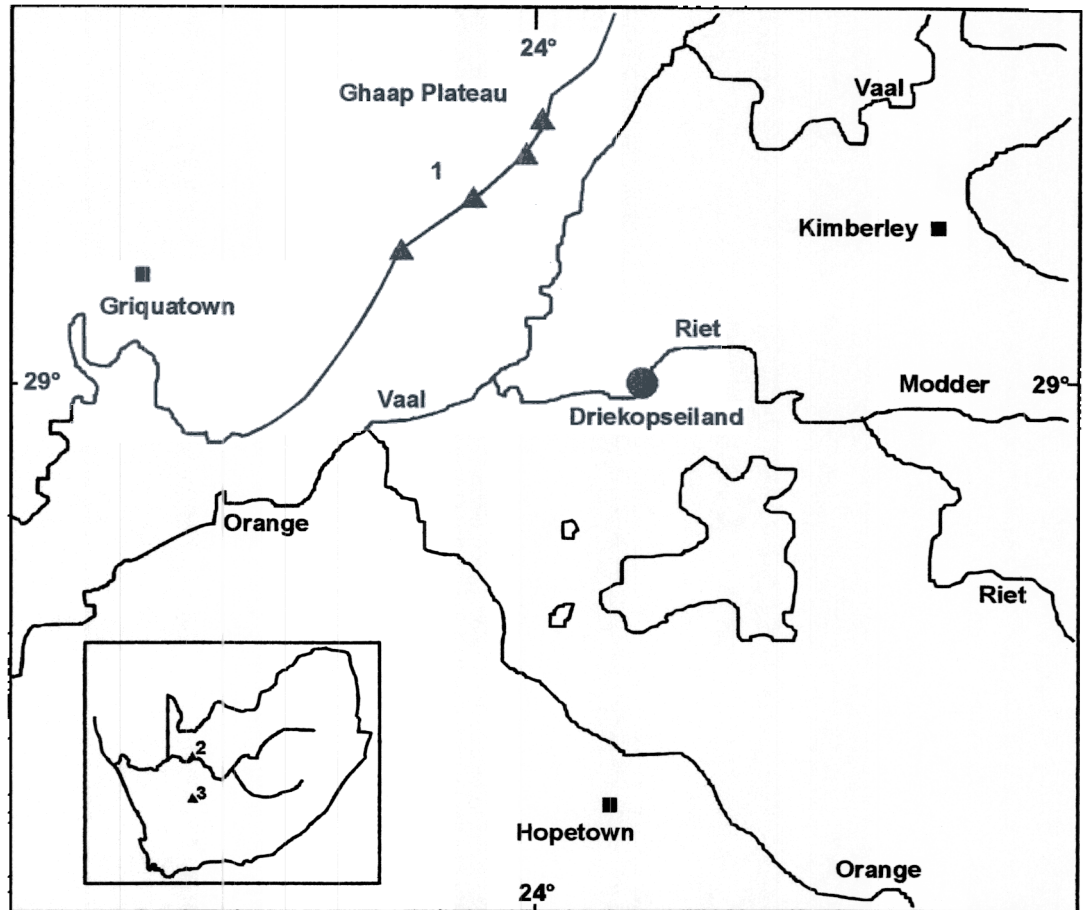


Figure 23. Sites and places mentioned in Chapter 7. 1. Ghaap Escarpment sites (including, from north to south, Limerock 1 & 2, Dikbosch, Burchell's Shelter); 2. Upington; 3. Strandberg.

Rather, as “mis-statements of reality”, she argues, (citing Bloch and Connerton), the rituals served as a form of “social memory” facilitating “a continuity with the past” (ibid.:226). Where decline in the social status of women has occurred, one might expect that as the gap widened between the ideal expressed in these rites, on the one hand, and the reality beyond their performance contexts, on the other, so these celebrations of women’s autonomy in periodic rituals, in their space, could have become more intense. Such rituals could contest the status quo, with perhaps the most likely resolution being, as in the Griqua case, the rituals themselves becoming core symbols of continuity and/or of identity. If threats to the social status of women were a feature of the late Holocene history in the Riet River valley (which undoubtedly they were), and if the link between particularly the later rock engravings at Driekopseiland and female puberty rites can be sustained, then in terms of such a model this may well have led to heightened assertiveness and intensification in women’s rituals.

In these politics of gender it is relevant to note, again, the significance of *place* which is underscored in the Griquatown ethnography, as women re-negotiate their roles in these rituals relative to domestic spaces as well as at the water source (cf. Hoernlé 1918). Equally noteworthy is the way that the rituals are situated relative to a wider set of politics surrounding what the Griqua call *boorlings* and *inkommers*<sup>8</sup> (local people and people coming in). Waldman (2001:205) shows that, relative to the *hokmeisie* ceremonies, the *places* any individual could enter in the course of the rites depended not only on gender but also on whether he or she was born of the town or was an *inkommer* (from whom the women were “sheltered” during the ceremonies). Some intensification in this sphere of the rituals might be expected to have occurred in the precolonial past as *inkommers* came to include ever expanding circles of social distance through contact and exchange, as is hinted at by the evidence reviewed above. Morris’s (1992) model of interaction based on a morphological study of skeletal remains (including those from along the Riet River) indicates an essentially uni-directional gene-flow from the low-status (one could say, *boorling*) San/Khoisan in relation to incoming Sotho-Tswana farmers to the north - which is supported by historical evidence of tolerance by the latter, at the fringes of



their expansion, to the acceptance of Khoisan women as wives.

There is a suggestion that changes in rock art repertoires in other parts of the subcontinent in the last 2000 years may have come about through the complex social interactions between - to use the Griqua idiom - *boorlings* and *inkommers*. Parkington (1996:289) has urged that in order to further an understanding of the art relative to these historical processes in the sub-continent as a whole, a more careful examination of geographic and, where possible, temporal trends in "the kinds of imagery favoured" is called for, that is "as alert to the differences as to the supposed similarities." In the rock paintings of the Western Cape there is a shift which indeed may parallel, in a sense, that at Driekopseiland: in the former case the depiction of human and animal images gives way to the production of hand prints and finger paintings (Yates *et al.* 1994; Parkington 1996; Manhire 1998). Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989:108) have stated that "it seems probable that making hand prints in a rock shelter was, at least in some ways, akin to painting eland. Both practices fixed potency on the walls. Some shelters are crowded with eland paintings, others with hand prints." While "in some ways" this is so, the shift away from fine-line painting in the Western Cape represents a conceptual and technical departure from earlier conventions. The later paintings reflect an altered attitude towards wall painting; a "change in the role of painters and painting" (Parkington 1996:289; Manhire 1998:106-107; cf. Yates *et al.* 1994). Of relevance is the evidence of the timing of this change, which corresponds in an albeit complex way with the regional appearance of pastoralism. In contrast to the later art in the Western Cape, that in the Drakensberg, "where the recurrent imagery seems quite different and perhaps more hallucinatory" than the paintings of the Western Cape, could equally be consequent on "the arrival or emergence of powerful neighbours with competitive world-views" which then spurred or created more complex opportunities for change (Parkington *ibid.*). Dowson (1994) and Jolly (1996a; 1996b; 1998) - and Campbell (1987) for a still later phase - have delved into some of the ways that this could have happened in the south-eastern mountains. The development from fine-line painting to hand prints and finger paintings in the Western Cape, however, evinces a regionally distinctive kind of "evolutionary shift in expressive forms and even

performance context” (Parkington 1996:298). The distribution of hand prints in both coastal plain and mountain settings - notwithstanding distinctive patterning in the spread of *decorated* hand prints - shows that their authorship, relative specifically to the emergence of pastoralism, cannot readily be resolved in purely ethnic terms (Manhire 1998)

Diverse personal and sectional interests are a feature in the performances of myths (Lewis-Williams 1996:138) and it may be expected that this was so also of rock art (ibid as each artist gave a local, social and personal, spin to the received resources as these - both practices and contexts - changed or evolved from place to place (cf. Biesele’s account of Beh’s song - 1993:67-70). Comaroff (1982:171-172), it will be recalled from Chapter 1, indicated the need for holding “local systems” and their ‘total contexts” in simultaneous focus. The former have the potential to “produce a wide range of surface forms” according to specific internal dynamics; while, “whichever of these is *realized* at any historical moment,” he argues, “will mediate the effect of external forces upon it.” In this way “similar local systems, sharing the same total context, may, in relation to the outside world, generate dramatically different structural, ideological and political responses.

This study of the engravings at Driekopseiland shows that much remains to be done towards achieving a fuller understanding of the rock art of this region. Better dating controls would allow the testing of some of the ideas put forward here. The historical processes of the last two millennia undoubtedly influenced the making of rock art in the Northern Cape as it did in other parts of the sub-continent. In the wider region, engraving site distributions provide some hint of a change in focus, as Fock and Fock (1989) have shown, where sites with ‘classical’ animal representations are most commonly ‘high and dry’, while those with ‘younger phase’ geometrics are located not only on higher ground but also in river channels and floodplains. That some contemporary variability resulted from different authorships cannot, on present evidence, be totally discounted. But the suggestion here is that scenarios - other than those of the past that made explanatory appeal to discrete cultural, ethnic or techno-economic contexts; to what Inskeep (1971:101) characterised as a

potentially limiting “‘either or’ approach” - bear investigation. One such alternative position is that being advanced here: that at least some of the variability, both in time and place, is a reflection of different - and historically changing - metaphoric and socially negotiated understandings of place, of landscape, and of spatial opportunities and ‘uses’, that then came to be ‘enfolded’ in the landscape by “those who dwell therein.” This view - in which “art and landscape are inseparable” (Solomon 1997:71) - is consonant with a range of independent ethnographic sources and models relative both to the region and to the kinds of relational ways that people interact in landscapes through time.

A broadly shamanistic context is not contradicted by this line of interpretation. If, on the one hand, the engravings at Driekopseiland do relate to female puberty rites, it is noted by Biesele (1993:81) that rites of passage, at least amongst the Jul’hoasi, have “close connections...to the great curing dance” - and hence to altered states of consciousness. On the other hand, if, as is suggested, there is a connection between the engravings here and the constellation of beliefs surrounding the rain and the “rain’s magic power”, where *!Khwa* could also become manifest in the great watersnake, there are resonances in the ethnography between snakes and shamans (Lewis-Williams 1981; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990; Dowson 1998) Suggestive statements by Hoff’s (1997:25) informants in the Northern Cape in the twentieth century indicate that the watersnake could be a “doctor” - echoing Ou-oupa Moos’s (Van Vreeden 1959:15) earlier statement that “*Keinaus ees groot toordnaar an hy ees kwaai meens-goed ok*” [Keinaus is a great sorcerer and he is also a mischievous human-like being]. Potgieter (1955, cited in Schmidt 1998:272) referred to the initiation of a Lake Chrissie healer who is said to have dived into a pool to retrieve a large snake which then had to be taken and killed in a hut. Hahn (1881) previously mentioned snake “sorcerers” in Namibia. The watersnake was itself imbued with trance metaphors (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990) such as subterranean travel and movement through clouds, rain, wind and even the rainbow (Schmidt 1979; van der Merwe 1987:28; Waldman 1989; Morris 1990b); it would leave the water to graze at night - a feature recorded also of the rain bull in !Xam ethnography (Bleek 1933b:379). An elderly woman in Namibia told Schmidt

1998:270) of how she had seen a watersnake “sailing from one cloud to the next one, sinking down and down, and then [it] disappeared in the fountain.” In the 1950s van Vreeden (1957:175) recorded an appeal made to the watersnake for guidance, to “creep under the ground, where our footsteps should go.” Entrance to the spiritual realm was described by a !Kung shaman in analogous terms: he went in “to travel through the earth and then emerge at another place” - “I enter the earth. I go in at a place where people drink water. I travel in a long way, very far” (Biesele 1980:56, 61). The great, undulating surface of rock at Driekopseiland, emerging from beneath the bed of the river, and carpeted with engravings, ‘bulges’ and ‘dips’ above and below the water according to the season: it ‘behaves’ just as the watersnake is said sometimes to do, blocking up a river or causing it to flow (e.g. Orpen 1874; Van Vreeden 1957; Hoff 1997 - see Chapter 6). And just as !*khau*, the lizard, could be broken and become the hills at the Strandberg (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:215-217; Deacon 1986), so it is possible to conceive of !*Khwa* as watersnake manifest in the rock at Driekopseiland, literally ‘breaking through’ and mediating spiritual realms.

#### **“Not without dust and heat”**

‘Heat’ and ‘dust’ could be said to stand for the palaeoenvironmental conditions of warmer=wetter and cooler=drier (see Chapter 4) when the glaciated bedrock at Driekopseiland would have been alternately buried under accumulated sediment, or laid bare by erosion or wind deflation. Extremes either way would have subjected people living here to considerable duress, and there are periods for which there is no apparent evidence of human occupation. ‘Heat’ also could stand for summer; ‘dust’ for that season of cold when the veld becomes dry. In Khoisan beliefs the blowing of dust, cold, and great heat - both literally and figuratively - defined negative or dangerous circumstances. It was remarked of an initiate in Griquatown (Waldman 1989:43) that “*weer is altyd swaar bo-op haar*” - [weather is always heavy on her]; and the same correspondences are clear in many other ethnographic instances cited above. To “cool” the dangers or consequences of these states, the “new maiden” in particular, and adult women more generally, needed to observe the proper rites - such as sprinkling buchu or ochre at the water source (Bleek

1933a:300) - in a metaphorical system (Hoernlé 1918; Biesele 1993; Parkington 1996) which also included the male hunting avoidances referred to as *!nanna-sse* by the |Xam (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:270-283). Resonant with the rhythms of, and nested within the life-process of the world (Ingold 1993) - the cycles of the moon, the seasons of the year, the coming of the rain, the rising and falling of the river - people lived out their biographies balancing the positive and negative energies. The “doings of the rain” were specially respondent to the “new maiden” - who was called “the rain’s magic power” (Dia!kwain in Lewis-Williams 2000:274).

In these dynamics the ideological sphere is no mere epiphenomenon to material concerns, but is entirely ‘enfolded’ into them and into the landscape in relational ways in the practice of everyday life - where meanings are nowhere intrinsic but are invoked in people’s histories. It has been argued that it was in relation to such an understanding of the world that Driekopseiland was comprehended and, as a place where material and spiritual concerns appeared to converge powerfully in the late Hlocene, it was marked with engravings, perhaps, as Houseman would have it, as “a depository of social personhood”, in terms of which the engravings remain today as the residues of ritual sequence.

The reference to “dust and heat” at the head of this concluding chapter ‘fits’ with Khoisan concerns and the enumerated environmental factors only coincidentally - for it comes from a context far removed from the history of Driekopseiland. It was chosen, however, for its ‘double fit’ against both those concerns, and matters epistemological, to which it is more relevant, and to which the focus of this thesis is now shifted one last time. “Not without dust and heat” is a citation from John Milton’s *Areopagitica* of 1644 (Visiak 1969), his “speech for the liberty of unlicenc’d printing” - a work concerned with the pursuit of truth. Central to the endeavour as Milton saw it was a free and willing dissemination of, and debate over, diverse views and conjectures. “I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister’d vertue,” he wrote, “unexercis’d and unbreath’d, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where the immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. That which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary.”

Probably the most rigorous application of the principle of “triall...by what is contrary” is that of Popper (1972:261) who wrote of a quasi-Darwinian “natural selection of hypotheses” as the way in which knowledge, in strict deductivist fashion, advances. American processual archaeology tended to take up this line, seeking to predict and to establish general laws concerning the past. But since history cannot be re-run for the testing, it was inevitable that this programme tended to privilege various forms of ecological, technological and economic determinism, as Trigger (1995) argues, which were more amenable to this form of reasoning than the more intractable ideological aspects of the past - which were relegated to the status of epiphenomena. This “premature theoretical closure”, Trigger asserts, “inhibited the development of archaeological understanding” for over a decade. Post-processual trends from the 1980s have provided a “humanistic antidote” to this rather limiting perspective, expanding the range of archaeological concerns to take seriously issues such as belief, gender, ethnicity and other ‘cultural’ matters in interpretations of the past. But, suggests Trigger, an extreme cultural determinism at one end of the post-processual backlash has taken the pendulum to a point where it does not correct but in fact duplicates the “strategic error” which was the dogmatism of the New Archaeology.

What Trigger pleads for is an expanded middle-range theory in which he takes his cue from the geologist T.C. Chamberlin’s 1890 paper on “The method of multiple working hypotheses.” Trigger argues (1995:456) that “if archaeologists are to progress in understanding the past, they must be willing to make use of all possible data sources and to expand and develop middle-range theory to provide methodological rigour to a broader range of techniques for attributing human behaviour and ideas to archaeological data.” This position is akin to that of Pierce (Wylie 1989; Koerner 2001, citing Bernstein 1983), touched upon in Chapter 1, who was critical of the reduction of scientific reasoning to a linear chain from premises to conclusions, or from individual facts to generalisations. As Chippindale and Taçon (1998:93) suggest, “neither archaeological observation nor archaeological deduction is usually secure with any real certainty; a lengthening chain of reasoning accumulates the weaknesses in its numerous links.” Statistically - with archaeology’s

“probables” and “may wells” - just two steps of chained reasoning could result in a “deduction” having less than 50% certainty - that is, more likely wrong than right (ibid.). Instead, Pierce conceived an approach emphasising the multiple strands and different types of evidence, data, hunches and arguments that are routinely at work in the investigative enterprise. Laid together, as in Pierce’s metaphor of a strong cable, many strands can provide a better warrant for holding to an argument. Wylie (1994, cited in Koerner 2001:77-8) adds that “different *independent* sources” need to be exploited to ensure that “the strands of the resulting cables are not just mutually reinforcing but are also, and crucially, mutually constraining.”

Ingold’s concept of a ‘dwelling perspective’ relative to the ‘temporality of the landscape’ has been a theoretically apposite means for bringing together several different strands - archaeological, palaeoenvironmental, ethnographic, structural, phenomenological - that variously reinforce and constrain one another (not without some ambiguity and fluidity - these qualities being part of the history in question and the multivocal ways that places are imbued with meaning), to produce a coherent interpretation for the rock engravings at Driekopseiland. “Every feature [in the landscape] is a potential clue, a key to meaning rather than a vehicle for carrying it,” argues Ingold (1993:172). “This discovery procedure, wherein objects in the landscape become clues to meaning, is what distinguishes the perspective of dwelling.” Echoing Trigger’s (1995:456) striving after that “vital and creative middle ground” between the extremes of ecological and cultural determinism, Ingold (ibid.) suggests further that “by temporalizing the landscape” it becomes possible to “move beyond the division that has afflicted most inquiries up to now, between the ‘scientific’ study of an atemporalized nature, and the ‘humanistic’ study of a dematerialized history.”

Introducing the edited volume, *The archaeology of rock-art*, Taçon and Chippindale (1998:2) have remarked on rock art research as “rather an archaeological study apart” whose methods will be different from those deployed in other archaeologies - say lithic or faunal analyses, or archaeometry - where indeed more exacting standards of measurement and “triall...by what is contrary” may be within reach.

Rock art is “easier to see and harder to make sense of” (ibid).

The dating of rock art is of fundamental importance: it is archaeology’s “first problem” (Trigger 1989) - if not indeed its “defining purpose” (Chippindale & Taçon 1998:107). The absence of any sense of temporal positioning amongst archaeological phenomena would be exactly akin to a heap of unprovenanced stuff about which little can be said. Hence one focus of this thesis (Chapter 4) has been an attempt to firm up the evidence of dating at Driekopseiland where, together, the geomorphological and the archaeological data make at least for a fair working hypothesis - although there is still much ‘play’ in the system. The temporal linkages have been central to the interpretation which seeks to explain change in the engravings relative both to a transforming physical landscape feature and to a wider social context which itself was not static.

‘Formal methods’ (Taçon & Chippindale 1998) that seek out information immanent in the rock art itself - its content, distributions, techniques, style and so on - are crucial to the study in a descriptive sense and in the interpretation of variability. ‘Style’ - in terms consistent with the ideas being developed in this thesis - is not just a means of conveying information about identity, suggests Wiessner (1984:194), but is “an active tool used in social strategies” which could “reproduce, disrupt, alter, or create social relationships.” “Context and history” would be “critical to stylistic interpretation” (ibid.:227). ‘Informed methods’ (Taçon & Chippindale ibid.) whereby insights are derived directly or indirectly from the makers or users of rock art are limited by the fact that the rock art tradition in South Africa was all but extinct by the time that interest was growing in noting down such information. Qing’s and Dialkwain’s commentaries published by Orpen (1874) and by Bleek and Lloyd (1911) are unique exceptions, while other fragments of information exist, such as on pigments (Rudner 1982) or the mere fact that people’s ancestors painted or ‘chipped’ (Stow 1873; Bleek & Lloyd 1911). In Stow’s embellished description of Driekopseiland there is a faint echo of some late nineteenth century oral testimony (Chapter 6) - but little more than that.



Use of analogy, then, has inevitably been a major feature of this study. Since there is no way of putting events of the past to the test in anything more than a very limited sense, analogies - like the kinds of re-enactments that Collingwood deems as valid (cited in Parkington *et al.* 1996:214) - are in fact indispensable (Sadr 2002). With experimental archaeology being the "most explicit field of re-enactment," as Parkington *et al.* (*ibid.*) suggest, use of ethnography may also "constitute an attempt to assume the identity of past actors." The "imagined attempt" - alongside the more meaty empirical engagement with the evidence of the past - has its place in the formula on which archaeological knowledge depends (Chippindale 1995:441). The "main weakness of many post-processual interpretations," however, in Trigger's (1995:455) view, is its excessive reliance on "sympathetic imagination," the deployment of loose analogies that blur the distinction between argument and assumption, and a "rampant" use of untested generalisations. Vital, therefore, are the constraining tendencies of the empirical record, and of culturally-specific bridging arguments that are drawn from as many independent sources as possible the means, in this case, of "triall...by what is contrary." Consideration of 'natural' form as 'cultural' form has been an aspect of this study. While it is an approach that is susceptible to the conflation of observer and observed, potentially denying the possibility of change (M. Hall :2000:51), the analysis has been kept within the bounds set by a cross-section of ethnographic sources and analogues, which are also drawn upon to suggest processes or mechanisms that might have brought about change as is evident in the empirical substance of ancient engravings and landscapes at Driekopseiland

When, a few years ago, Chippindale (1994:6) referred to a deep and intractable dispute amongst archaeological scientists at the more 'objective' end of the discipline - which showed no sign of being ended early "by indisputable facts" - he remarked: "perhaps the obvious insecurity of our knowledge makes those of us at the 'soft' (in fact more difficult and therefore more truly 'hard') end of the business less inclined to certainty that just one view must be right." Indeed, where there is no universally agreed understanding of the role and meaning of art in modern societies the difficulty of establishing meaning and social context in the art of non-literate

societies of the past, Megaw and Megaw (1994:293) have noted, is likely to be even greater; and the ranges of possible interpretation wider. What has been attempted here is but a start that provides some hint of the possible significance and context of the engravings at Driekopseiland. In a recent review on emerging trends in rock art research, Ross (2001:547) has suggested that “we will never perhaps be able to decipher the exact meaning of these paintings and markings on stone, nor perfectly recreate the cultures and environments in which they were made, because those times have disappeared. But the places remain. Let us begin there.” This has seemed to be a sensible way - in this case - to proceed. Subject to widely varying explanations in the past, it has been suggested that possibly the most outstanding feature of the engravings at Driekopseiland has been all but ignored: their placement, and the implications of this in terms of their meaning. An appreciation of the temporality of the landscape, building on earlier considerations of time and place and the ways that landscape features have been imbued with meaning, has provided pointers to fresh ways for approaching variability in the engravings. In this light, relative to a cross-section of ethnographies, it has been suggested that changing metaphorical understandings of place may be more germane to a history of Driekopseiland than would be appeals to ethnicity, to cultural difference or to changing techno-economic contexts. Rather it was in places like Driekopseiland that cultural practices were negotiated and acted out by people who thereby invoked meanings that, while “full of the past”, constituted a making and re-making of individual and collective histories - of which the art and its settings survive as the now fragile material traces.

## Notes

1. Megaw and Megaw (1994:294) refer to body painting in Australia where the individual so painted “not only represents, but to some extent becomes, the land.”
2. By some accounts this can itself be quite an ordeal - see Waldman 1989:38-41
3. Maingard (1932:142) records the ingredients of *sāb* - a sweet-smelling “buchu” - as *|kaep* (unexplained); *|ui sāb*, a green lichen growing on stones; *|hareb*, the roots of ‘veld biesies’; *!hu !kub* (unexplained); *!gwabeb*, which grows in vleis near the Vaal River and was said to be found only near Warrenton, in winter; and the

!konabab root, which has the colour of the earth and is reduced to small pieces  
When mixed, *sāb* had to smell !gāi ham, i.e. sweet.

4. It can be expected that very little material evidence relating to rites such as are considered here will have entered the archaeological record. As Mitchell and Plug (1997:165) point out, practices such as scarification “may never be recoverable from purely archaeological sources”; but the ethnography can alert archaeologists to the possibilities and to be vigilant for any hint in the material record. One might speculate that ochre was applied to the engravings at Driekopseiland: Wilman (cited in Péringuey 1909:417) reported that people taking her to see engravings near Warrenton had said they “used to be coloured. This might account for the habit people have in these parts of speaking of the engravings as paintings.”

5. A directly comparable - if equally circumstantial - instance, already mentioned, is that of hand prints that occur at many sites in the Western Cape, and which Manhire (1998) suggests were produced primarily by sub-adults, and possibly in the context of some special event or occasion, such as rites of passage (cf. Anderson 1997).

6. It is interesting to note that where hand prints in the Western Cape may well have been made in a similar ritual context, very definite constraints (the hand form) prevailed; yet the genre was not without counterpoint as some individuals contrived to vary, to nuance, perhaps even to contest the form by way of decorating their prints. The spatial restriction of decorated hand prints, on the coastal plain and mountain fringes, may have been a feature of group, rather than merely individual, identity construction, however, and, as such, could have some bearing on questions of authorship. But plain hand prints are distributed in both coastal plain and mountain settings and their authorship cannot readily be resolved in ethnic terms (Manhire 1998:106).

7. See S. Hall (2000) who has referred to Lewis-Williams's (1996) bi-axial model to explain the placement of burials at Welgeluk Shelter “literally and figuratively at the intersecting centre of the |Xam bi-axial scheme” where water in an adjacent pool “transformed, cooled and mediated the passage of the dead as spirits through into the underworld.”

8. In Griquatown these terms are used to distinguish those “born of the town”, from “newcomers” who have come into town and into the Griqua community by marriage or acceptance (Waldman 2001).

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## Appendix

### Against the stream: A brief history of conservation at Driekopseiland

Interventions along the Riet River from the 1940s have had successive serious impacts on the site and its engravings at Driekopseiland, and on other archaeological resources in the region. This Appendix places on record some of the major features of the history of conservation. It is hoped to lobby for support for managing, particularly, the current encroachment of *Eucalyptus* and *Pragmites* on and around the site.

#### The struggle over a weir

Up until the end of the first third of the twentieth century, the major economic activity of the region flanking the lower Riet and Modder Rivers was stock farming. There was also some small scale alluvial diamond digging at Schutse Kamma (Wagner 1914). A major shift in farming focus, albeit somewhat upstream from Driekopseiland, commenced when the Riet River Irrigation Scheme was developed in 1935-40, and a system of canals was fed by the new Kalkfontein Dam. This, as Humphreys (1972) has remarked, changed the face of the landscape in the Jacobsdal-Modder River area (Fig. 24). At Klipfontein near Modder River, an engraving site, and adjacent Type R stone walling - noted by van Riet Lowe (Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929:map following page 206) - appear to have been fed in their virtual entirety through a stone crusher, probably for canal construction. By coincidence, almost exactly a century previously, and in the very vicinity of Driekopseiland ["Blue-bank"], Andrew Smith (Lye 1975:144-145) had opined on the "good soil" thereabouts, "so that if it ever prove profitable for the natives to raise the water in any quantity from the bed of the stream, rich crops of grain might be procured sufficient for the supply of a large population." He envisaged the Cape government setting the example by encouraging "wealthy speculators to change the course of rivers or do it themselves

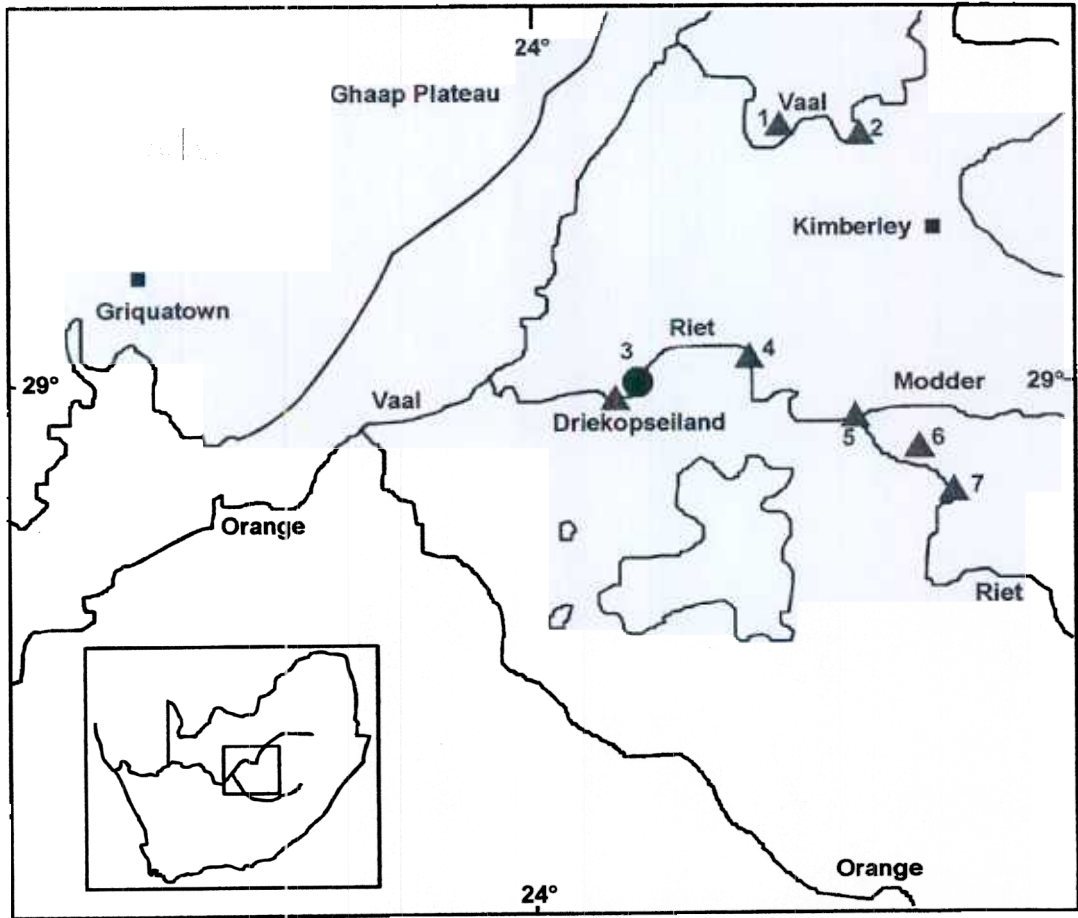


Figure 24. Sites and places mentioned in the Appendix. 1. Canteen Kopje; 2. Nooitgedacht; 3. Mierkraal; 4. Schutse Kammas; 5. Modder River; 6. Klipfontein; 7. Jacobsdal.

No doubt inspired by the Kalkfontein Dam and irrigation project was the subsequent construction, in the early 1940s, of a low weir at Driekopseiland. This project came close to flooding the engraving site, with the placement of the weir being adjusted in a compromise reached between local farmers and the heritage authority of the day. Prompt action by the indomitable Maria Wilman, Director of Kimberley's McGregor Museum (MMK), who alerted the then Historical Monuments Commission (HMC), saved the site from being completely submerged

Wilman noted that while the glacial pavements and engravings at Nooitgedacht (adjacent to the Vaal River near Kimberley) had been declared a protected site (in 1936), Driekopseiland (Plate 18) was "not in any way protected..." Writing to the HMC on 3 June 1942, she reported that:

"a young farmer from the neighbourhood came in to warn that two neighbouring farmers were making a dam that would flood the exposure. He explained that it could be avoided, without loss to the farmers, were the dam situated at an adjacent spot. But, if anything were to be done, it must be done at once...within the matter of a fortnight or less it would be too late.

In the meantime, some of the precious rock is being used, so far, only from the outskirts. But there is nothing to prevent this (*as I have so often told the Commission, farmers do not read the Govt Gazette*) from being carried much further.

It seems to me a case for just making friendly representations to the farmers concerned, on the spot; I am sure they are acting in ignorance. Therefore I telegraphed: "Cannot you come down", *but* at once. Yours, as you see, in great haste - up to the eyes in visitors and work. M. Wilman."

Wilman sent off a second letter the same day expressing the expectation that the Commission would "attend to the matter": "*I could not go down in my Baby Austin; and anyway it is the business of the Commission. I would again stress the urgency of the matter. Once flooded, nothing more can be done*

The response of Prof C. van Riet Lowe (4 June 1942), who was Secretary of the HMC (and Director of the Bureau of Archaeology in Pretoria), was that the

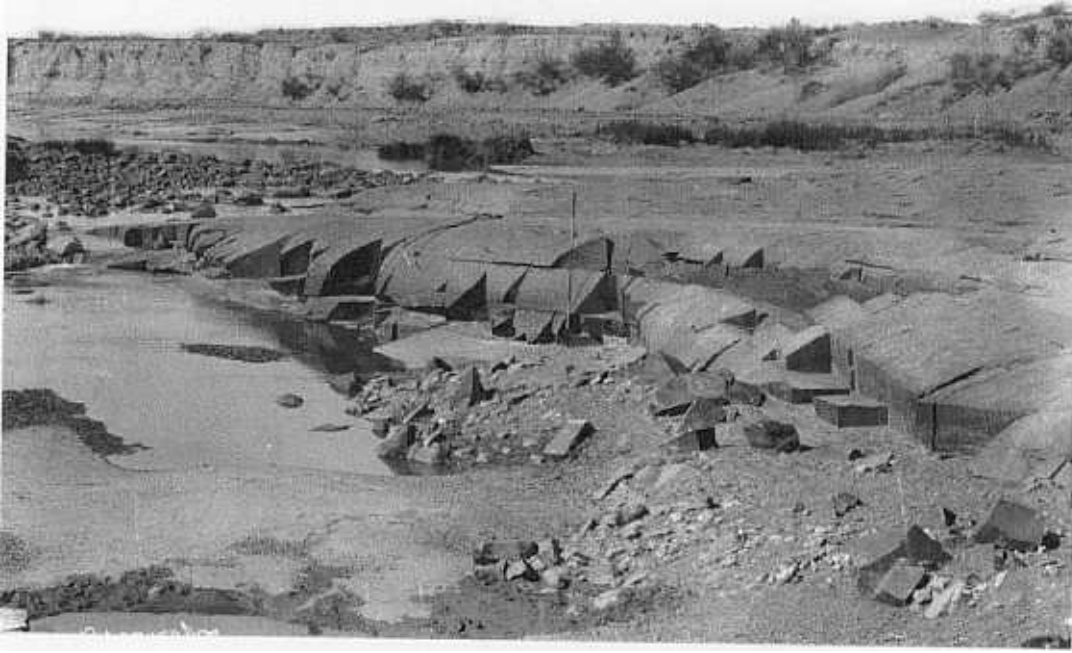


Plate 18 (top and bottom). The site as it appeared prior to construction of the weir. (McGregor Museum collection).



information submitted was “too vague to justify the expense of a visit to Driekops Eiland immediately.” He wished to have the contact details of the persons concerned so that they could be sent “an urgent but friendly appeal to do nothing that will impair the engraved, glaciated pavement.” He added that “it is a most important site and we must do everything in our power to preserve and protect it.”

Copies of Wilman’s subsequent correspondence are not on file at the Kimberley S.A. Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) office (nor at the museum), but some sense of her increasing frustration - and her willingness to go right to the top - is apparent in other letters respecting the matter. Van Riet Lowe’s initial hesitation to intervene personally is apparent in a letter of 9 June: “Dear Miss Wilman, Thank you for your post card of June 6<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately my military and civil duties combine to make it impossible for me to go to Kimberley immediately and Mr Malan [van Riet Lowe’s assistant] is also tied to this office for this week at least.” His hope was that she would agree “to act for the Commission and naturally, at the Commission’s expense...we are convinced that knowing the area and people as you do, an appeal from you would carry the greatest weight.” It was also noted that “Driekopseiland is not a proclaimed site and we have no power to act before proclamation. Until it is proclaimed we can literally do nothing more than appeal...If therefore you could go out yourself, we feel sure you will meet with greater success than I possibly could. If however, you cannot visit the site I shall do my best to go to Kimberley sometime next week - just before I take my battery to camp for intensive training.” This last piece of text and that which follows is scored out in the copy of this letter which is on the Kimberley SAHRA office file: “In addition to my ordinary duties, I command a battery of artillery and we are just due to leave for camp - so if you can help us, I would personally be most grateful.” Whether this was deleted as being possibly classified information on troop movements, or because van Riet Lowe decided that Wilman was not the kind of woman to be impressed by it, is not known

The next item of correspondence is a letter from van Riet Lowe to the Secretary for the Interior in Pretoria, dated 12<sup>th</sup> June, headed: “Itinerary: DRIEKOPS EILAND”.



A contingency has arisen that necessitates my leaving for Kimberley on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June 1942. I expect to return to the office on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> June 1942 - i.e. after an absence of two full days. The work is purely in connection with the Historical Monuments Commission and all expenses in connection with the visit will be paid by the Commission.

It would appear that the Director of the McGregor Museum in Kimberley is gravely concerned over the possibility of the submergence of an island in the Riet River in the vicinity of Kimberley. This island, known locally as Driekops Eiland, contains an exceptionally valuable exposure of a glaciated pavement or *roche moutannes* on the smoothed surface of which prehistoric man engraved many hundreds of figures that are of great archaeological interest and value.

Dr Wilman, the Director referred to, sent urgent telegraphic appeals not only to this office (to me in my capacity as Secretary to the Historical Monuments Commission) but also to the Prime Minister and Minister for the Interior. Mr Hurter consulted me over the 'phone and I assured him that I had the matter in hand in that I had already been in communication with Dr Wilman. I gave similar assurances to the Prime Minister through his secretaries.

The site referred to has not been proclaimed in terms of Act No 4 of 1934 and actually the Commission has no jurisdiction. In consequence I appealed to Dr Wilman to act for the Commission and to issue an urgent but friendly appeal to those who [sic] work threatens the submergence of the island. A copy of my letter to her is attached. Mr Joubert of the Prime Minister's office informs me this morning that Dr Wilman has not been successful and I therefore have no option but to visit the site and do what I can myself.

I shall report further in due course. Meanwhile I shall be glad to have your authority to visit the site as outlined above. I shall submit my claim for Subsistence and Transport marked "recoverable" in the usual way

have sent a copy of this letter to the Secretary to the Prime Minister.

CvRL: Director

On 18 June, following his return from Kimberley, van Riet Lowe addressed letters to the Prime Minister's office, to the Secretary for the Interior, and to the two farmers, Messrs B.J. du Plessis [of Driekopseiland] and P.S. Mason [of Mierkraal -

downstream of Driekopseiland]. "The settlement...is satisfactory in that all but the entire engraved glaciated rock pavement is to be preserved," he reported to the Prime Minister, adding that he planned to propose proclamation of the site, as well as "to compensate the owners of the land affected for the additional expense they are to be put to to meet the wishes I expressed on behalf of the Commission." He also noted that "before I left Kimberley I understood from Dr Wilman, the Director of the McGregor Museum there, that she will address a further appeal to the Prime Minister. Incidentally we owe her a debt of gratitude for having drawn our attention to the possible loss of an exceptionally interesting and scientifically valuable site - a loss that her appeal enabled us to avert in the nick of time."

To Mr Mason and Mr du Plessis, respective letters confirmed an agreement that if they:

...kept the dam wall between 10 and 15 yards upstream of a line drawn from the willow-tree on the right bank to the small green thorn bush on the left i.e. where the engraved glaciated pavement first appears, I would strongly recommend the presentation of 100 pockets of cement...you may rely on me to leave no stone unturned to see that you are compensated for the extra trouble and expense...

(In the event the wall was built a little way downstream from where the glaciated pavement "first appears" and some 100 engravings are known to be submerged behind the weir [Fock & Fock 1989:142]). Van Riet Lowe further appealed:

I do hope you will also give emphatic instructions to your boys not to disturb, damage or in any way deface the rock surfaces downstream of the dam wall. This is particularly important please. They may remove loose-lying rocks and fragments of the old surface but *please* not any portion that is still in position. This is the least duty we owe to science and posterity.

In a report to members of the Historical Monuments Commission, dated 19 June 1942, van Riet Lowe mentioned that "because this outcrop [Driekopseiland] lies in the bed of the Riet River, the possibility of its proclamation" had never been "seriously considered," but that the recent developments had "rivetted" the

Commission's attention to it "and immediate action had to be taken." "In response to appeals from the museum and the Prime Minister," he had visited the site where he secured a decision from the farmers "that they would meet my wishes if the Commission would contribute towards the extra cost involved...the farmer financing the scheme [Mr Mason] very modestly suggested 100 pockets of cement. As this is the only way of saving the site, I wish to recommend that the Commission contribute £20 toward the cost...I have not committed the Commission, but if we act at all we should act quickly. Building operations are about to begin..." It was suggested that indebtedness to Mr Mason should be expressed "in some tangible manner [i.e. payment of the £20] before we meet to consider recommending the proclamation of the site." "In conclusion I need only stress two facts: (1) the occurrences would have been lost for all time had I not visited the site this week and (2) to spend £20 on the safeguarding of such a site is indeed a fortunate experience."

Smuts for his part congratulated van Riet Lowe for the good work. His private secretary wrote (24 June 1942) that "the General feels that if [preservation of the rock pavement] can be assured by the contribution of so reasonable a sum as £20 by your Commission, it can be regarded as an excellent piece of work." Van Riet Lowe, in turn, thanked Wilman (25 June 1942): "Your timely action led to the preservation of one of the most important archaeological-cum-geological occurrences in the Union and both the Commission and the Nation are in your debt."

### **The proclaimed monument - "Estate Biesjesbult West"**

Apparently the money was paid over and the weir was built upstream of its originally intended location, saving almost all of the site. A little over a year later, on 30 July 1943, proclamation of Driekops Eiland as a Historical Monument was gazetted (Government Notice No 1388). The proclamation was subsequently amended by Government Notice No 419 of 10 Feb 1948, when the description of the site was altered to read:

"The engraved glaciated rock outcrops in the bed of the Riet River on the remaining extent

of certain piece of perpetual quitrent land known as the Estate Biesjesbult, situate in the Division of Herbert, measuring as such 2,978 morgen 282 square roods.”

As will be seen, the geographical definition - which would be revisited in the 1970s - in fact provides protection to only the southern half of the river bed, while by far the bulk of the engravings occur on the northern half!

In December 1958 Driekopseiland appears to have been the first rock art site in the Kimberley region to be visited by Gerhard and Dora Fock after their arrival in the Northern Cape. Dr Fock had been appointed as the McGregor Museum's first professional officer in archaeology in November of that year. He and his wife visited the site, taking back with them to Kimberley, for repairs, the sign originally erected by the Historical Monuments Commission (MMK Annual Report 1958). At this time they also recorded 100 engravings upstream of the weir, the level of the river having dropped particularly low (Fock & Fock 1989:142).

In 1960 the McGregor Museum was asked by the Monuments Commission to accept more formal responsibility in the way of inspection and supervision at Canteen Kopje, Nooitgedacht and Driekopseiland. Mr B.D. Malan, who had succeeded van Riet Lowe, felt that at Driekopseiland “there is not much that can go wrong”, suggesting nevertheless that “an occasional visit” could encourage the farmer to take an interest in preservation. The then Director of the Museum, Dr R.C. Bigalke, duly reported on conditions, noting that the access gate here was kept locked, the farmers being “interested in the site and anxious to control access, particularly of anglers” (MMK: Letter Malan to Bigalke 18 Nov 1960; Letter Bigalke to Malan 28 Nov 1960).

Rumour had it in late 1971 that the Department of Water Affairs was poised to commence dam construction that would submerge the engravings at Driekopseiland (MMK: Letter Liversidge to Malan 22 Nov 1971). On enquiry, however, J.F. Preller, Chairman of the National Monuments Council (by then renamed), was assured that “the rock engravings at Driekop Eiland will not be endangered by the dam which is going to be built” (MMK: Letter Preller to Liversidge 2 Feb 1972): the number of dams that had been planned for the area, moreover, had been reduced owing to

budgetary constraints. For the present, noted Preller, there seemed to be no danger; but the possibility of a future threat no doubt lay behind the National Monuments Council seeking once again to define the legal extent of the site. In a letter to the Director of the McGregor Museum, by then Dr. R. Liversidge, NMC Secretary Mr B.D. Malan noted that "this represents the third attempt at describing the site (it was twice previously proclaimed and amended!)" (MMK: Letter Malan to Liversidge 24 Feb 1972). The name "Driekops Eiland", moreover, had disappeared as official designation when the land was consolidated with adjoining farms and subsequently re-subdivided. The matter of redefining the site was to be discussed by museum officials with Mr Du Plessis, owner of the property on the south bank, who would assist in marking off "a suitable area which will contain the majority of the rock engravings" and point out boundaries to a surveyor. Malan feared that "the survey might be somewhat complicated since the engravings are in the bed of the river...not only the boundary of the farm but also the boundary between the Kimberley and Herbert districts." There was some urgency "in view of talk of new dams in the vicinity" (MMK: Letter Malan to Liversidge 26 Apr 1972). Delays there were, however, since the river had since come down in flood! (MMK: Humphreys to Malan 15 Jun 1972). A.J.B. Humphreys, archaeologist at the McGregor Museum, submitted a recommendation in due course, with a sketch showing a proposed demarcation. The most important suggestion was that the potentially contentious north-south extent of the site should be defined "more or less along the existing steep banks of the river" - to include all the glaciated outcrops that bear engravings (ibid.). When the surveyor set about this task, however, he ran up against the very problem that Malan had anticipated: the Director of the company owning Kaffirs Dam (the property on the north bank, otherwise known as Landsig), not having been consulted by the NMC, would not agree to a portion of that farm being proclaimed. Without his consent it could not be expected that the Surveyor General would approve the diagram (MMK: Letter Sadie [surveyor] to Malan 30 Apr 1973).

In the event the NMC fell back on van Riet Lowe's earlier compromise, noting that in both the proclamation notices of 1943 and 1948 he had "avoided the complication of straddling two farms and a district boundary by proclaiming only that portion which

lies on Drie Kops Eiland." Malan added that he supposed "some engravings on the other side of the centre of the river were left out, but unless they are in some way outstanding, this seems a wise thing to have done" (MMK: Letter Malan to Humphreys 15 May 1973). Humphreys was requested to reconsider his earlier recommendation: "this will not only make it unnecessary to involve the owners of the opposite bank, but might also make it easier to solve the problem of a dam in the future if we do not proclaim the whole river bed, allowing for a possible deviation of the river in the future - as diamond diggers are so fond of doing to the Vaal!" (ibid.). The compromise was agreed to since it seemed unlikely that "any future development activities would come plumb onto the boundary" and the engravings north of the line running along the middle of the river bed "should be reasonably safe" (MMK: Letter Humphreys to Malan 18 May 1973). The surveyor duly furnished the NMC with an amended diagram indicating an area from the "left bank of the Riet River" to "Middle of Riet River", representing 1,5059 Hectares of land, "being a National Monument Area on consolidated farm Biesjes Bult West No 96" (MMK: copy of diagram in letter Malan to Liversidge 19 Oct 1973). With hindsight, one may judge it remiss of the NMC not to have gone to the extra trouble of negotiating with the owners of Kaffirs Dam, to proclaim sections of both farms.

### **Extensions to the weir**

In fact hardly had the ink dried on Malan's letter when a report came through to Kimberley that "heavy vehicles" were being driven over the engravings (MMK: letter Winchester-Gould to Humphreys 26 Oct 1973) - which turned out to be "associated with certain construction work being carried out by Advocate M.D.J. Steenkamp" [the Director of the company owning Kaffirs Dam, referred to above] (MMK: Letter Humphreys to Winchester-Gould 30 Oct 1973). A site inspection by Humphreys, with G.J. and D. Fock, revealed that the owner of the northern part of the site was extending the low weir across the *full* width of the river bed, and was mixing concrete on the engraved surfaces, on the southern, proclaimed, part of the site, where there were also piles of rubble, together with ample evidence of large vehicles being driven down onto the site via a new access road from the north bank (MMK: Letter

Humphreys to Steenkamp 30 Oct 1973; Plates 19 & 20). The situation was, “to put it bluntly, a disgrace,” said Humphreys in a letter to the Advocate in which he sought clarity on the matter (ibid.). Steenkamp responded to Humphreys, not in writing but by telephone, saying that “he didn’t like the tone of my letter’(!)” and saying that “he was going to clean up the site anyway” (MMK: Letter Humphreys to Malan 15 Nov 1973). In a separate letter to the NMC Humphreys questioned the legality of the extension of the weir. The response from Cape Town - in which one must wonder whether the NMC was now beginning to realise the error of its earlier compromises - indicated, rather limply, Malan’s hope that “this matter will solve itself.” Ignoring the evidence that damage was occurring *on the proclaimed portion of the site*, Malan went on to reason (MMK: Letter Malan to Humphreys 19 Nov 1973) that:

It would be difficult to (a) interfere with what Mr Steenkamp does on his own (unproclaimed) property - even if it does damage some of the engravings, and (b) to extend the proclamation to cover his land to protect the engravings on the adjacent farm. Frankly, I doubt if it would be possible to persuade the National Monuments Council or the Minister to take any action against Mr Steenkamp, and one must presume that an Advocate is fully acquainted with the law, at least as far as it affects himself!

In 1979 the site was mapped by D. Ross-Watt and comprehensively photographed by T. Smith (both of the McGregor Museum), with Dr and Mrs Fock (Fock & Fock 1989:140), providing, inter alia, a comparative means for assessing site deterioration over time. Juxtaposing photographs taken then and in the 1930s (by Lina Slack), of engravings in the area where concrete was being mixed and heavy vehicles driven in the 1970s, indeed reveals marked disintegration in the intervening period (Morris 1994) (Fig. 25). It is also to be noted that the upward extension of the weir altered flood dynamics and would have resulted in flood-borne debris being dumped with force onto parts of the engraved surface (ibid.).

### **Floods, *Phragmites* and front-end loaders**

In 1988 there was severe flooding along the Riet that eroded the south bank of the river flanking the weir at Driekopseiland, resulting in vast quantities of silt being



Plates 19 & 20. Impacts documented at the time of the construction work in 1973. Note the wheel barrow and mixing of cement on top of engravings in the foreground, in Plate 19.





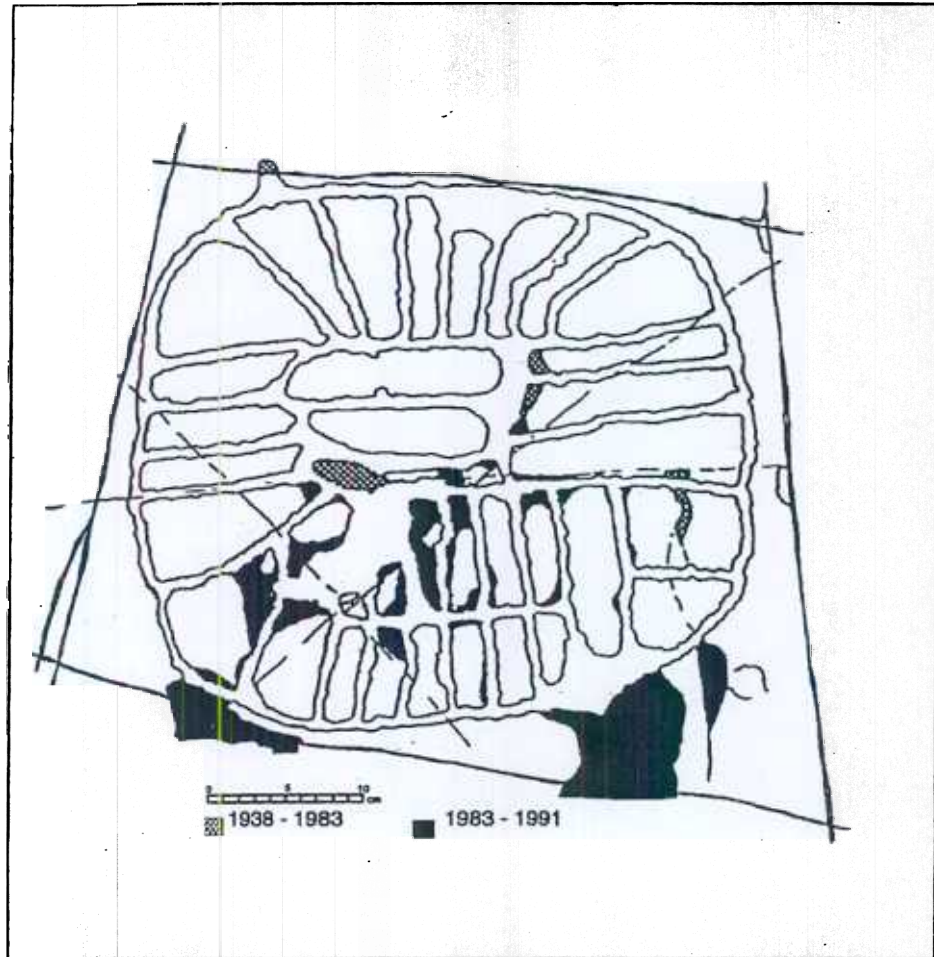


Figure 25. (One of the Driekopseiland engravings showing natural cracking and surface exfoliation documented from photographs taken in 1938, 1983 and 1991 (From Morris 1994:10).

washed across the site. This happened again the following year after adjacent river-side sediment was bulldozed down to fill the breach.

There was in addition a new threat. When, half a century after its construction, the Kalkfontein Dam was no longer able to meet the demands of irrigation farming on the Riet, the 112 km Sarel Hayward Canal was built, as an extension to the Vanderkloof Canal system, for the transfer of water from the Orange to the Riet River. It was completed in 1987. For agriculture, this provided a more reliable, year-round river flow pattern, and centre-pivot irrigation was subsequently extended somewhat downstream from Modder River. A significant consequence of this stabilised water flow pattern at Driekopseiland was that whereas, previously, any build-up of flood sediment over the engravings was washed away by rains in the longer period of intervening dry years (Dora Fock pers. comm.), the wetter regime now quickly promoted plant growth which consolidated the built-up sediment. *Phragmites communis* took root, while, more seriously, *Eucalyptus* saplings sprang up across the site. The latter had previously been infesting the north bank of the river, but now posed a significant threat to the site itself (see Plates 3-4 on pages 42-43).

As noted in Chapter 2, other changes in plant and animal life consequent on the building of dams and canals along the Riet include water weed settlement and encroachment, and increases in populations of blackfly and red-billed *Quelea* - now also having negative feedback in terms of agricultural losses (DWAF 1999). For agricultural development, large areas alongside the river, including the banks adjacent to Driekopseiland, have been stripped of their natural vegetation and put to the plough, with centre-pivot irrigation fed from the river (the aerial photograph in Plate 2 [page 39] reflecting this dates from 1993 - the impact is today much more extensive). Vastly increased irrigation and use of fertiliser has had adverse impacts on water quality in the lower Riet and Vaal in particular (Armour & Viljoen 2000). In the context of this report, the impacts of large-scale river-bank modification on archaeological resources cannot be overestimated. Further upstream along the Riet, another major impact is being effected by mining, with at least two rock engraving sites having been damaged at Schutsekamma (far more extensive damage by



Plate 21. In October 2000 a front-end loader was used to scrape mud off the engravings on part of Driekopseiland, resulting in serious bruising of the surface (as seen in the foreground in this Plate), and further breakages in areas already subject to exfoliation (top of Plate 21). Fortunately only a relatively small portion of the site was damaged.

alluvial diamond mining has occurred along the Vaal, where attempts even to mine away the proclaimed National Monument at Canteen Kopje made headlines in the late 1990s - Morris 1997; Turkington 2000).

Finally, in this chronicle of latter day onslaughts on the engravings of Driekopseiland, history recapitulated itself in late 2000 when, as part of constructing a more solid south end to the weir - where floods repeatedly broke down the bank - a front-end loader was used to clear sediment from the engraved surfaces. This resulted in severe scraping, bruising and, in places, breaking of the engravings and surrounding rock surfaces (Plate 21). This work was carried out by the son of Judge M.D.J. Steenkamp, who, when confronted on-site, said that he hadn't had time to obtain permission from SAHRA (formerly the National Monuments Council) to do work on the site, and that the clearing of the sediment was part of his cleaning up operation. The damage - all on the proclaimed portion of the site - was shortly afterwards inspected by officials of SAHRA, and the matter was discussed with Judge Steenkamp when approached by representatives of the Rock Art Research Institute, University of the Witwatersrand and the McGregor Museum. As a former member of the museum's Board of Trustees (MMK: letter Humphreys to Steenkamp 30 Oct 1973), the Judge professed a concern in matters of preservation - but the actual history has been one of carelessness, compounded by the compromises of the heritage authorities from the 1940s onwards, and a law that until recently fatally exempted agricultural activities from its provisions.