

# THE MAGICAL ARTS OF A RAIDER NATION: CENTRAL SOUTH AFRICA'S KORANA ROCK ART

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## ABSTRACT

*Until recently, southern African rock art has been thought 'San' authored. But recent research reveals multiple rock art traditions. Khoekhoe herders produced finger-painted and rough-pecked geometric and 'representational' images. Europeans left quotidian names, dates and place markings. Bantu-speakers have initiation-related rock arts with recent political protest iterations. This diversity requires we use multiple sources of evidence to ascribe authorship, meaning and motivation. By paying attention to site preference, pigment, iconography, archaeology, ethnography and historiography another southern African rock art tradition is here identified. This rock art consists of red, white and orange finger and rough-brush painted humans, animals and aprons. A signature motif is the armed horse rider. There are also serpents, geometrics and paint smears. At three of 31 rock art sites recorded so far this rock art physically and conceptually interacts with San rock art. I suggest that this rock art is an 18th–19th century assemblage authored by 'Korana'. Korana were !Kora-descended Khoekhoen into which other frontiers people insinuated themselves. Korana rock art speaks of political and militant concerns underpinned by a magical 'occult economy' and is an excellent case study of contingent identity formation.*

## IMAGE AND IDENTITY

Southern African archaeology draws on a history of complicity with colonial surveillance to imagine people and places past (Shepherd 2002). This imagination is constrained by coarse-grained temporality (Lucas 2005), materiality (Binford 2002), politics and theory. Intrinsically, many artefacts are near-recondite and extrinsically the theory applied to them may not be fully developed. Yet, rock art seems to offer a 'thicker' description of imagined pasts than most artefacts. John Berger (1985) and other visual literates elucidate the greater intentionality of 'imagery' and how it places on its makers an expectation of distilling in visual form their relationships to themselves, other people, places, concerns of the day (Eagleton 1990; Bright & Bakewell 1995). This approach stresses image-making as process (W. Mitchell 2002). Pre-image preparations and materials; non-visual sensoria; intended and accidental audiences; object biographies (Hoskins 1998); and 'conversations' between images, landscapes, events and people are as important as the finished 'product'.

Until recently, southern African rock art was considered 'San'. "In southern Africa it is believed that ancestral Bushmen were responsible for all rock art except some finger paintings and a very few engravings" (Coulson & Campbell 2001: 80; also P. Mitchell 2002: chapter 8). The rock art of the 'San', an exonym I use with respect and caution (cf. Lewis-Williams 2000: 1–2), is indeed great. But thanks to a trajectory of over 200 years of varying but latterly sustained etic research, perhaps beginning with Robert Gordon's copy of a rock painting from central South Africa on 16 November 1777 (Raper & Boucher 1988: 84), we now discern multiple rock art traditions. Frans Prins & Sian Hall (1994), John Masson (2002), and Johnny van Schalkwyk & Ben Smith (2002) independently identify Bantu-speaker's rock arts dealing with initiation and resistance to European

colonialism. Khoekhoen made finger-painted and rough-pecked geometric and basic 'representational' rock art (Smith & Ouzman 2004). Europeans left the names and marked specific events like the Anglo-Boer War or 1930s Depression (Ouzman 1999). We will no doubt add greater historic specificity and more nuanced understandings of authorship and meaning to these rock arts. Occasionally we might 'discover' new traditions.

I focus here on "some finger paintings" that represent a singular rock art tradition in central South Africa. Present at just 31 sites is a unique assemblage of phantasmal militant and magical images that were, I suggest, made by a multi-ethnic amalgam known as 'Korana' (Fig. 1), who were especially adept at exploiting 18th and 19th century frontier conditions (cf. Marks 1972).

## !KORA – KORANA

Before detailing this rock art, a discussion of its putative authors is needed because 'Korana' are an extraordinarily difficult 'group' to pin down. There is considerable debate regarding Korana origins. Foreigners like Jan van Riebeeck observed an originary Khoekhoe group called 'Gorachoqua' (from which 'Griqua' derived in 1813) or 'Inchiqua' near Stellenbosch in the late 17th-century. They had previously had a leader called !Ora, from which '!Kora' derives (Stow 1905: 268–70; Maingard 1932: 108–12; Engelbrecht 1936: x–xii; Barnard 1992: 169). Some decades after the Dutch colonisation, these Gorachoqua were forced or chose to move into the central interior through which



FIG. 1. Photograph of 'Karkab and his wife', Kimberley-Bloemhof area, 1930s (Engelbrecht 1936: plate II).

their ancestors are thought originally to have migrated *en route* to the Cape, and became known as !Kora in the process (Elphick 1985: 18–19). But in 1836 Jan 'Hanto' Taaibosch, a 'Korana' leader, said that the '!Kora' had lived in Namaqualand and at the !Garib (Orange) and Hei-!Garib (Vaal) River's confluence prior to 1652 (Arbousset & Daumas 1968: 24–5; Wuras 1929: 290). This interpretation accords with linguistic evidence (Barnard 1992: 165). Both Cape diaspora and embedded central interior scenarios are accommodated in Maingard's (1932: 114) suggestion that !Kora trickled into the central interior pre- and post-1652 (Barnard 1992: 164). Whichever scenario pertains, the second British colonisation of the Cape Colony and subsequent frontier from 1806 to its closure in 1879 with the costly British defeat of the !Garib River Korana (Ross 1975: 576; Strauss 1979), is key.

The colonial frontier was by turns an exhilarating and uncertain environment (Penn 1995). Freedom from colonial administration was balanced by an often hostile landscape and edgy multi-cultural context (Legassick 1969: 1–22; Penn 1995). Amities and enmities formed and fragmented quickly. A mobile lifestyle was necessary to regulate grazing rights and access dispersed and disputed water sources (Humphreys 1998). It also let people exploit seasonal pasturage, migrating game, and the springing up of new towns and mission stations from 1810 onwards (Campbell 1815; Legassick 1989: 377–8). The oscillation between Dutch and British colonial control meant the Southern African interior was poorly and patchily administered – “for nearly 50 years [1820–1870] the government at the Cape had pursued a policy of neglect with regard to the northern border” (Strauss 1979: 24). This neglect led to laxity in the colonial government's understanding its distant 'subjects' like Korana who:

“generally cross the threshold of historical visibility only when engaging in raids, or when reacting to measures taken to prevent them from indulging in such activities, or when they are being punished for having done so” (Ross 1975: 562).

The freedom and finity of the frontier allowed for economies licit and illicit. Raiding, especially of stock, was a persistent feature of frontier life practiced by most central interior peoples. *Trekboers* were a vital link between the economies, trading horses, guns and alcohol for ivory, slaves and so on (Legassick 1989: 371, 405). It was on this landscape that Korana excelled as a raider nation. Maingard claims 'Korana' is a Nama exonym meaning to “grasp, rob or steal; people that raid, attack” (Grobellaar 1955: 323). /Xam San likened Korana to blood-sucking 'ticks' (Deacon 1994; Lewis-Williams 2000: 121–3, 217–21). The Korana Klaas van Neck countered by stating 'Korana' as an autonym meaning “real people” (Engelbrecht 1936: 1–2). Critically, these definitions of Korana-ness do not rely on race – a category formed by rather than antecedent to colonial contact (Pels 1997) – but on class and lifestyle:

“Although various criteria in terms of physical type, historical grouping and language have been suggested for the !Kora, these do not inspire confidence, and rather it is best to see the !Kora as those who followed a style of life which entailed nomadic cattle herding and raiding in smallish hordes, led by a, theoretically hereditary, *Kaptein* [Captain]. It is highly significant that none of the four most important !Kora chiefs in southern Transorangia, Abraham Kruger, Piet Witvoet, Knecht Windvogel and Jan Bloem, had a hereditary claim to pre-eminence. Rather they were frontier opportunists who flourished in the anarchic conditions of the 1820s and maintained a curious alliance with the emigrant trekboers, who saw them as a market for smuggled brandy and firearms” (Ross 1976: 25).

Exclusive genetic links between pre-colonial !Kora and frontier Korana must be seasoned by history. Korana founding father Jan Bloem was a 'white' Prussian from Thuringa who immigrated to the Cape in 1780, escaping to Namaqualand after accusations of murdering his wife (Legassick 1969: 133–7). Likewise, Adam Kok was a freed 'Bushman' slave who founded the 'Basters' ('bastards') – a name acknowledging multiple ethnogenesis (Ross 1976: 14) – from among what George Stow calls the 'colonial sweepings' (Stow 1905: 319). Similar historical conjunctures produced multi-ethnic 'social bandits' in Asia, the Americas and Europe (Hobsbawm 1969). Despite the impossibility of speaking of 'the' Korana – a people skilled at coherent fragmentation and amalgamation – the British census lists 20 000 Korana in the 1850s (Maingard 1932: 103). When the frontier officially closed in 1879, Korana distinctiveness waned and laminated itself within 'Coloured', Griqua and Nama identity such that less than 300 'Korana' allegedly existed in the 1950s (Grobellaar 1955). They:

“had taken the decision to become so at some stage in their lives, rather than being born to it. At the very least, they had the option of ceasing to 'be' !Kora, by giving up the lifestyle that that entailed” (Ross 1975: 576).

Robert Ross's observation has an axiom: 'Khoe', 'Coloured' and 'Bantu-speaking' individuals became Korana. Even 'whites' became Korana (Legassick 1969: 358).

“Whenever a civilised man wishes to become a plunderer, he separates himself from his own caste and unites himself to the Corannas and takes a wife from among them; he stirs them up to all sorts of mischief” (Andrew Smith 1834 in Lye 1975: 357–8).

Not just cultural selection formed frontier amalgamations. Disease is an overlooked and archaeologically ephemeral aspect of culture contact. Smallpox, haemorrhagic fevers, and disfiguring diseases severely disrupted Indigenous groups: “virulent disease shortly afterwards decimated them, and committed greater havoc in their villages than either the muskets or assegais of their enemies” (Stow 1905: 293; asides in Engelbrecht 1936: 185; Ross 1975: 570; Penn 1995: 29, 41; Alan Morris, pers. comm., 2004). A creeping presence manifest before physical colonisation, disease forces radical physical, social and psychological re-organisation. Larger groups formed from 'fit' survivors of disease provide greater genetic variation, conferring more bio-resistive options. This makes identification *via* human remains highly problematic (Morris 1997).

Thus, for my argument, '!Kora' is an approximately emic designation of pre-frontier Khoekhoen, some of whom subsequently formed 'Korana' that assimilated other frontier people of central South Africa between the late 18th century until the 1879 frontier closure. Given the skill required to manage changing identities, could this multi-ethnic and historically contingent Korana amalgam have produced a discernible material culture 'signature' given that distinguishing macro-categories like 'gatherer-hunters' and 'herders' is problematic (Schrire 1992)? I think so – if one understands artefact assemblages as 'distinct in the aggregate'. Korana, *via* the filter of what I now argue is their rock art, offer a multi-faceted understanding of how people merged, mixed, separated and made do across the frontiers of colonial contact.

#### KORANA ROCK ART

Just as it was necessary to disassemble the aggregate of Korana identity, what I suggest is 'Korana' rock art needs constituent elements examined. Five such elements support

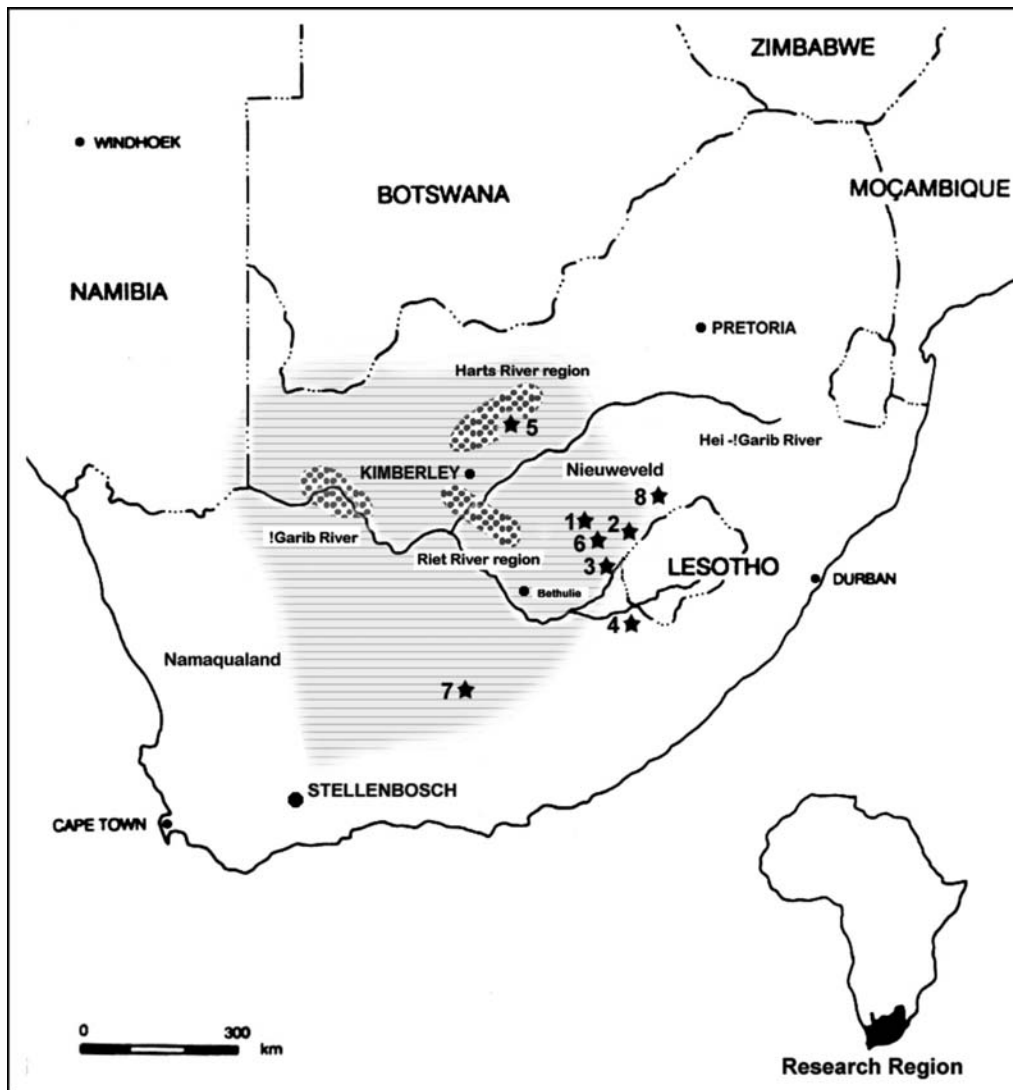


FIG. 2. Research region.

Korana authorship: site preference and distribution; paint and production technique; iconography; associated archaeology; ethnography and historiography. Thirty-one sites have been identified (more Korana engravings may exist west of Bloemfontein) and I pay close attention to eight of these (Fig. 2).

#### SITE PREFERENCE AND DISTRIBUTION

San rock art sites are usually easily accessible (<0.8% of 1856 San sites recorded in the research region are difficult to access). Imagery was placed in visually obvious locations, whatever cultural strictures governed their consumption. In contrast, what I suggest are Korana rock paintings (and one engraved cluster) are less easily accessible; some sites may be categorised 'hidden'. Sites 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 8 are shielded from casual surveillance by unobtrusive river valleys, deep rock shelters, placement on plateaus and low stone walling of uncertain provenance. Sites are often sited near (within 3 km) larger settlements such as mission stations. Thirty of the 31 sites occur within known Korana territory that flexed from Middelburg in the south, Namaqualand in the west, southern Botswana in the north and the eastern Free State/Lesotho in the east (Fig. 2). Site density is greatest in the Harts River Valley and eastern Free State. At six sites, there is also fine-line San imagery. At three of these sites this co-occurrence constitutes an active relationship.

#### PAINT AND PRODUCTION TECHNIQUE

San rock paints use pigments obtained from clays, minerals, rocks that contain ferric and ferrous oxides, goethite, limonite, specularite and even raptor droppings (Kennedy 1964: 13; How 1970: 37–41; Bassett 2001: 23–32). These pigments are ground finely and mixed with carriers and strong but fugitive binders into composite paints. These fine-grained paints are applied with a brush or fine instrument like a quill or reed and are absorbed between the sandstone wall's quartz grains. Khoekhoe rock paints are also usually fine if chalky. In stark contrast, what may be Korana paints have grain sizes up to 20 times larger than San paints and approach the designation 'slurry'. Though visually similar to Bantu-speaker's rock arts, the paints are different compositionally by being somewhat thinner and lack elements like ash. These large-grained paints are applied with a finger, macerated stick or grass bundle. Paint spatters up to 2.5 m long may be left on shelter ceilings. Their composition and application makes these paints weather quickly. At six sites San fine-lines occur beneath rough-brushed imagery with no converse instances. Maybe two dozen of the approximately 350 finger and rough-brush images use finer-grained paints, with one site showing much finer brush-application (Site 7). The single engraved instance comprises stylised horses ground into a soft sandstone boulder at the edge of a deep, tent-like rock tumble (Site 2). This engraving technique is not known among San or Khoekhoen.

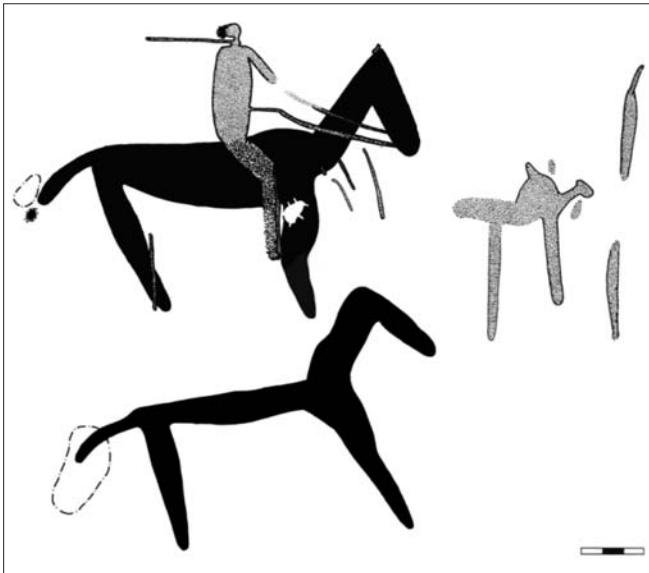


FIG. 3. Horse and armed rider. Free State/Lesotho border. Black represents red; stipple represents orange and lines represent natural hollows. Scale 30 mm.

### ICONOGRAPHY

Not only are the paints and production techniques of this rock art distinctive; so is its iconography. I discuss six matters of subject: horses, guns and hunts; human figures; serpents; image clusters; geometrics; and smears and splatters.

#### Horses, guns and hunts

A signature motif is the horse, often with a rider. Some riders have a thin horizontal line proceeding from their shoulders that may represent a gun (Fig. 3; Site 3). Central interior San rarely painted horses (11 at 1865 sites; Woodhouse 1979). San equine depictions also have signifiers such as human figures holding their arms akimbo, felines, and battle 'scenes' that denote horses 'dangerous' (Fig. 4; Site 4; Ouzman 2003: 31). This is an 'outsider's' view rather than, for example, the exquisitely detailed Drakensberg San horse and rider paintings (Vinnicombe 1976: 9, 26, 35, 253) that reflect those San as horse owning raiders (Wright 1971; Vinnicombe 1976: 64). In the central interior fewer San acquired horses and did so by joining larger Sotho and Korana groups (Sampson 1995; P. Mitchell 2002: 404). Horse imagery provides clues to dating. Roans and barbs were introduced to the Cape as early as 1689 (Thornton

n.d.; Jinny Martin, pers. comm., 2002) but did not reach the central interior in numbers until a century or more later (Maggs 1976: 306). Horse imagery at Sites 1–4, and 6 was probably produced in between the late 1810s until about 1851 when Moshoeshoe I actively chased Korana from the east of the research region.

Similarly, the Harts River sites came under pressure from the late 1840s and especially after the 1867 discovery of diamonds. For more than any other group, horses and guns were central to Korana life. They permitted mobility, supplied drayage and conferred martial advantage that allowed Korana to exert influence disproportionate to their numbers. Thomas Dowson, Geoff Blundell and Simon Hall, correctly cautious in ascribing authorship, reproduce a finger-painting of a horse mounted 'elephant hunt' (Fig. 5; Site 5) from the Hart's River Korana stronghold (Dowson *et al.* 1992). Here Griqua, Bergenaar and Korana hunted elephants for meat, hide and ivory, which they traded for household and hospitality goods like clothing, tobacco and sugar. They also engaged in illicit trade in horses, guns, alcohol and people (Stow 1905: 334; Legassick 1989: 368). But such a lifestyle engenders enmity and instability, which affects choice of residence, allies and targets for raiding

#### Human figures

This distinction between friend and foe may explain the dichotomous depiction of human figures. Some human figures are shown front-on with hands held on their hips (Fig. 6). Human Ethology (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1989: 297–301, 488) and diverse Indigenous artistic traditions (e.g. Lips 1937; Blackburn 1979: 69,107) inform us that arms held akimbo is a possessive-aggressive posture. This posture may reflect an empowered Korana self-image or, more likely, it models aggressive outsiders like Europeans and Bantu-speakers. Support for the latter interpretation is the human figures' generic nature. In contrast, the other type of human figure is depicted holding hands in corporate groups, suggesting a very different self-image (Fig. 7). These latter figures share a distinctive forward-tilting 'knob' atop their heads. This 'knob' differs from San fine-lines of what are thought to be small, circular, sometimes paired 'bladders' worn on the head, especially by horse riders (Vinnicombe 1976: 159, 299). Knobs are larger, standardised, tilt forward and are present on more than one type of human figure. Though possibly non-representational, the simplest explanation is that the 'knob' represents a hat or head

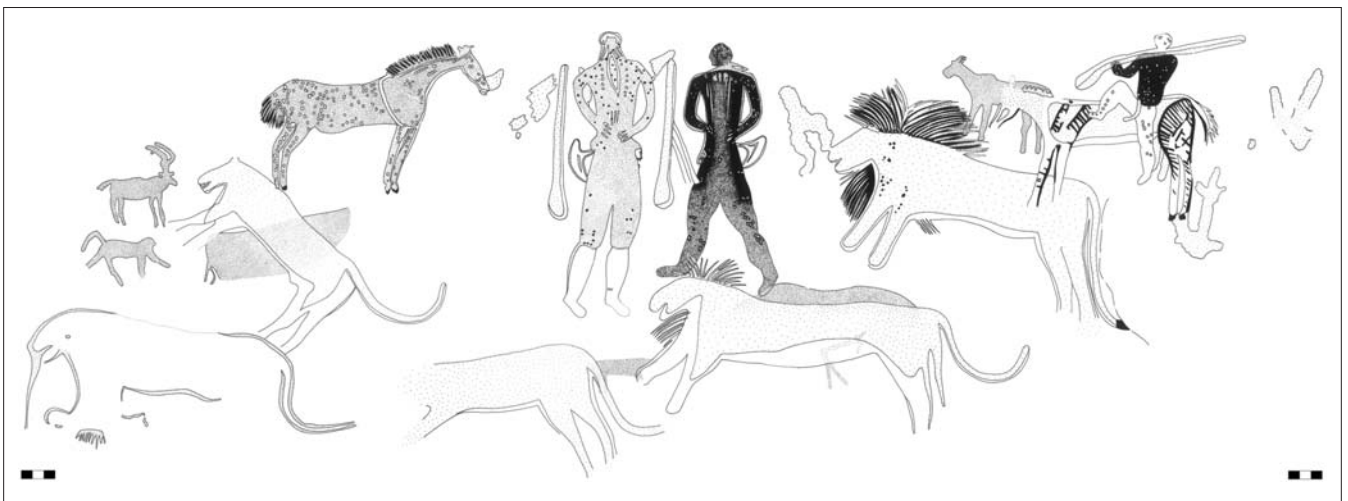


FIG. 4. San fine-line horses and armed hand-on-hips Europeans. Xhariep District, Free State, Black represents black, fine stipple represents red, dispersed stipple represents yellow, white represents white. Scale 30 mm.



FIG. 5. Finger painted horses and riders possibly engaged in an elephant hunt. Black represents red. Scale 30 mm. Redrawing from Dowson et al. 1992.

covering. Photographs of Griqua, Korana and Nama show a turban-like head covering or *doek* “worn by both sexes” (Engelbrecht 1936: 105). In 1805 the missionaries Albrecht and Moffat reported that all Nama ‘hat wearers’ were raiders (Legassick 1989: 412, note 89). In return, Korana named European *huna*, comparing long European hair to a fibrous bush (Wuras 1929: 291). The head was thus an important site of ethnic differentiation, even internally. For example, the Witbooi’s wore white scarves around their hats to mark themselves from other Nama (Weidlich 2005). This distinction between individual *vs* corporate posture and no *doek vs doek* makes sense in a group that, if tried to define itself by constituent members, would fall apart for diversity. Rock art acts as ideology; enforcing group unity by juxtaposition with an outside ‘them’.

*Serpents*

An altogether different subject is ‘serpents’ – species-indeterminate ‘snakes’ that are not strictly ‘representational’. The antelope head of the serpent in Fig. 8a in the same shelter as the engraved horses (Fig. 8b), echoes fine-line San antelope-headed serpents from the same area, but the double, finger-painted black and red body does not. Four partial antelope have been painted underneath the serpent.

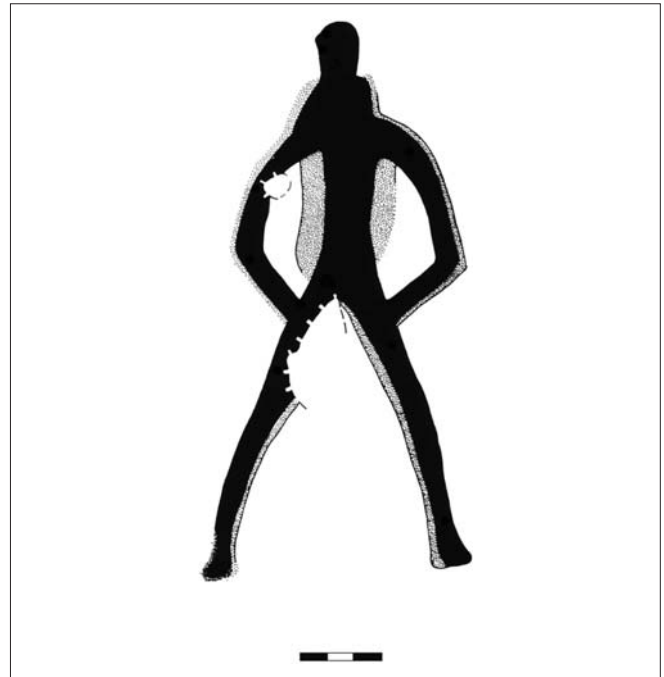


FIG. 6. Human figure in possessive-aggressive stance, Mantsopa District, Free State. Black represents red, stipple represents orange. Scale 30 mm.

*Image clusters*

A notable set of serpentine images are encountered in the first of four image clusters, fertile contexts for determining authorship.

The first image cluster is, appropriately, from the Koranna-berg (Fig. 9; Site 1). This 31 m long bilobial rock shelter with internal spring and collapsed stone walling has fine-line rock paintings pulsed throughout the larger lobe. These include a dozen antelope, about ten human figures and two Spirit World creatures flanking the spring. The smaller lobe houses a 3.5 m<sup>2</sup> cluster of 60 finger and rough-brush images. 26 cm to the left and 61 cm to the right of an extra-ordinary 585 mm tall ‘Michelin Man’ figure are three horse-headed zigzag lines cognate with Site 2’s serpent. Inspection of the Michelin Man suggests he has a horse-headed penis (Fig. 9a). Immediately left are 16 horses – half mounted. Below, a detailed horse-and-rider

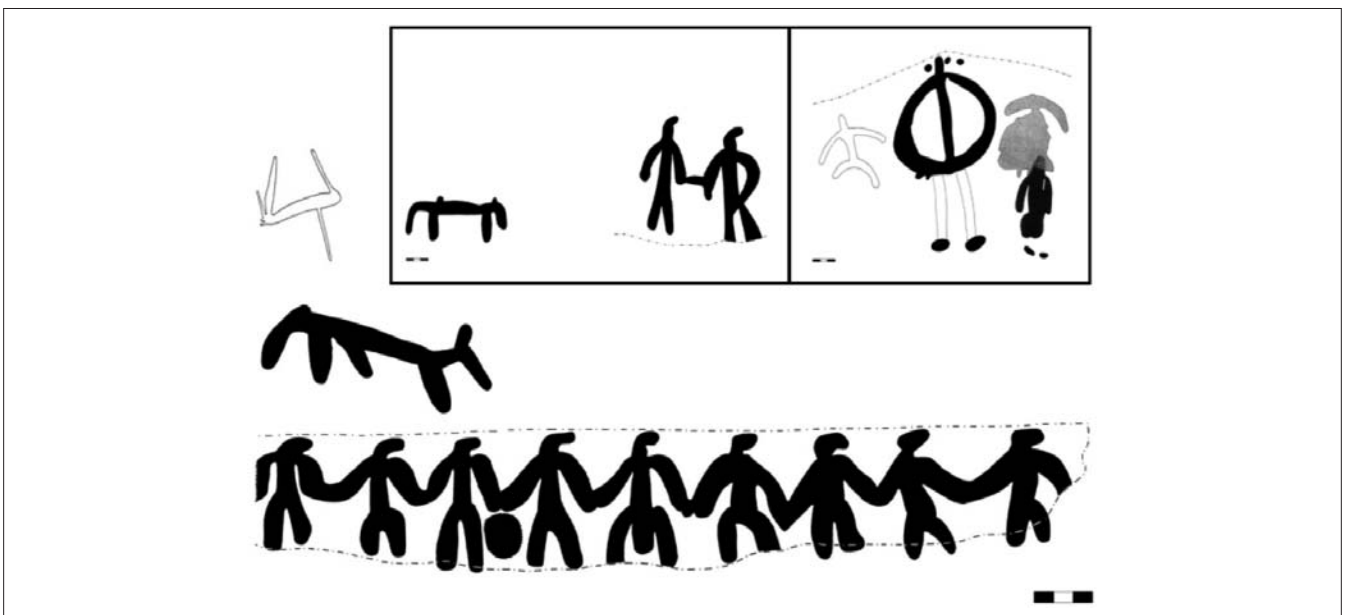


FIG. 7. Corporate vs individual. Motheo district, Free State. Black represents orange, stipple represents light orange, white represents white. Scale 30 mm.



FIG. 8. (a) Animal-headed serpent finger painting. Black represents black, stipple represents red; (b) Engraved horses. Both Thabo Mofutsanyana District, Free State. Scale 30 mm.

shares with the Michelin Man finer application technique (Fig. 9b). At centre-left there is a stretched-out animal skin or apron (Fig. 9c) similar to ones in San (Eastwood 2003), Bantu-speaker's (Pager 1975: 37) and Khoekhoe (Smith & Ouzman 2004) rock art. Michelin Man and a horse and rider are painted on top of the site's largest eland – a 760 mm long masterwork.

The second image cluster (Fig. 10) is also located in the Korannaberg in a deep and dense gorge (Site 6). The site is 19 m long and perched at a steep interstice between cliff wall and valley side. Inside, a thick outer stone wall the site has a near-pristine surface archaeology that includes grain bins, almost complete thick (>50 mm) and thin (<30 mm) grit-and-grass-tempered undecorated, unburnished pots; bone; rusted metal; and large hornfels and opaline lithics dominated by side and end scrapers. Deposit seems shallow. Small natural recesses and ledges in the shelter wall hold over 85 finger and rough-brush paintings. The orange, black, white and yellow paints are chalky and relatively fine-grained. Image isolates include small quadrupeds and humans (Fig. 7), basic angular geometrics, pigment patches and smears. The largest image cluster has stylised human figures with arms akimbo to a body that is, in some instances, a single line (Fig. 10). One image may represent a woman with long dress and shoes whose aggres-

sive posture may further denote her 'outsider'. 'She' is less than a metre from a row of human figures holding hands and with knobs on their heads (Fig. 7). Unlike Site 1, 5 km away, there are no horse depictions. The focus on humans speaks of a particular circumstance where people did not passively hide from their oppressors but used this secure location to posit an 'us' and 'them' identity.

Six-hundred and fifty km to the southwest is Site 7 and the third image cluster. A visually unremarkable shelter (Fig. 11a) adjacent to a prominent tafelberg has an explicitly multi-authored rock art assemblage. An inner cavity disgorges over two dozen horizontal rows of more than 350 red, yellow, black, orange and white fingerdots (Hewitt 1931: plate XV) probably made by Khoekhoen. Outside the cavity faded fine-line antelope (*Antidorcas*) and human figures are in the San manner. Less faded are medium-grained white chalky paints with red accents that include a fat-tailed sheep; two horse-and-riders (Fig. 11b); a black rhinoceros (Fig. 11c); and two stretched-out and spotted animal skins or aprons (Fig. 11d). Interestingly, this site is 30 km from where Franz Taaibosch – a 'Korana' who performed in carnivals as a 'Bushman', 'wild man of Borneo', 'Pygmy', and who later became a United States citizen – was born in the 1890s (Parsons 1999).

Finally, at a small shelter ringed by a stout stone wall and

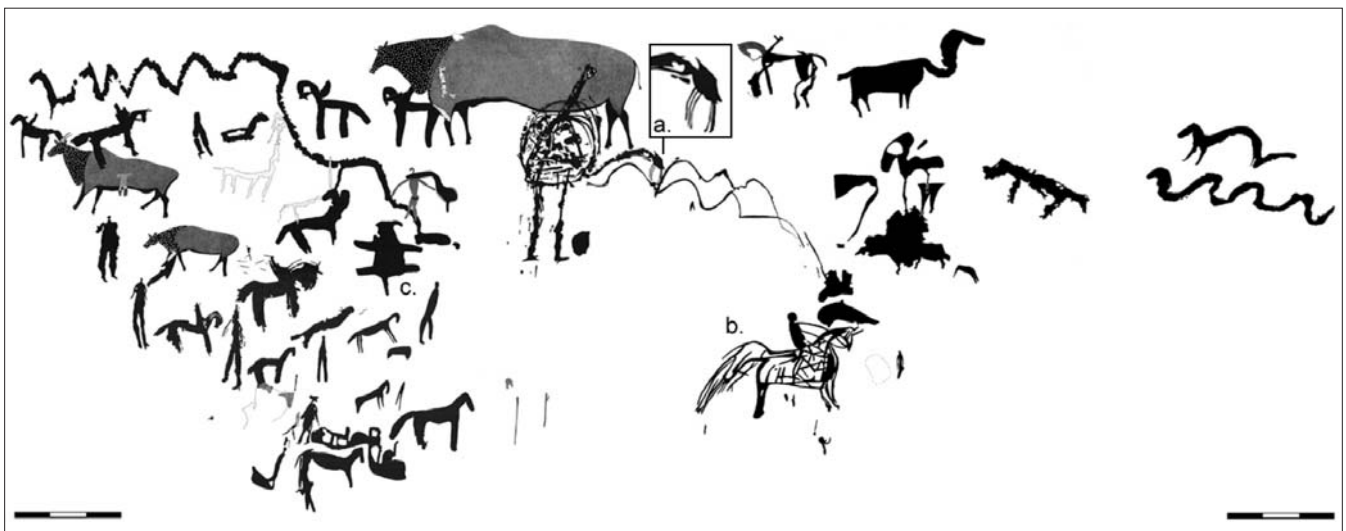


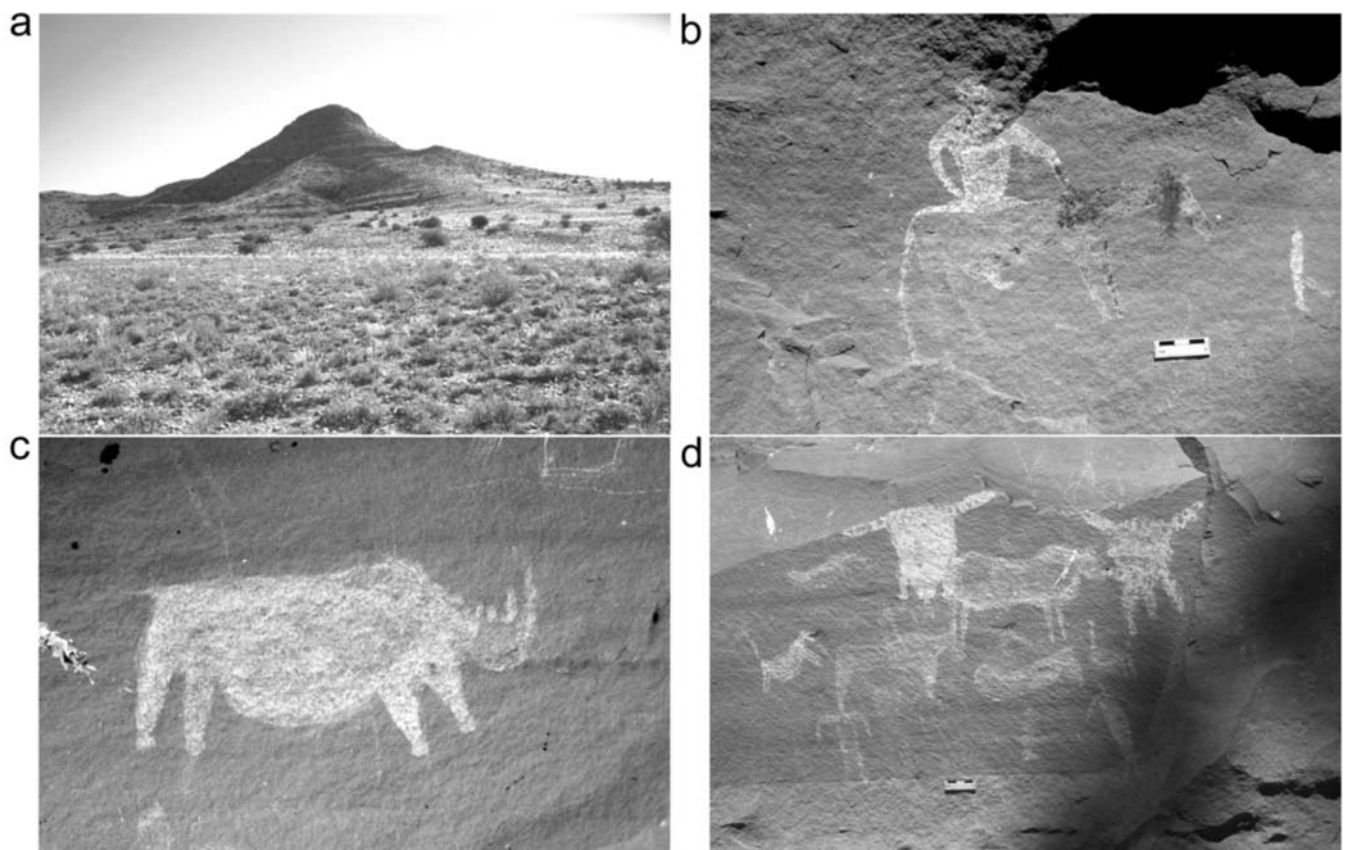
FIG. 9. 3.5 m<sup>2</sup> multi-authored image cluster. (a) Man with horse-headed penis; (b) Fine horse and rider; (c) Animal skin or apron. Motheo District, Free State, South Africa. Black represents slurry white, stipple represents red, fine stipple represents smooth white. Scale 300 mm.



**FIG. 10.** Hand-on-hips posture. Black represents orange, stipple represents light orange, white represents white, dashed lines represent rock ledges. Motheo district, Free State. Scale 30 mm.

tucked away in an unlikely valley in the eastern Free State (Site 8), the fourth image clusters speaks of a cross-cultural conversation rather than simple juxtapositioning. Fine-line eland, a dance-like arrangement of human figures and small rhebuck (*Redunca*) scatter over 25 m of low rock wall. Many images are faded by a spring in the shelter wall. On top of a central boss bearing San fine-lines are slurry paintings of two horses and riders, three lopsided 'V' motifs, and other white splodges (Fig. 12). A 2.5 m paint spray marks the ceiling. Six

metres away an elevated ledge bears weathered but once thick orange fingerdots arranged in a lattice. Seemingly 'crude' the slurry paintings are very precisely positioned. The site's largest San eland has been carefully outlined, while a small rhebuck has been totally effaced with a parsimonious paint splodge. Such differential selection and interaction suggests opinions held about fine-line rock art by the slurry painter(s). More recently, 8 fine-line eland – and *only* eland – have had ~250 mm<sup>2</sup> squares of paint gouged from their torsos by a



**FIG 11.** (a) Site view; (b) horse and rider; (c) black rhinoceros; (d) animal skins. Middelburg, Eastern Cape Province. Scale 30 mm.



FIG. 12. Interactive image cluster. Thabo Mofutsanyana District, Free State. Black represents slurry white, fine stipple represents red, dark stipple represents white, dispersed stipple represents orange, hatched areas indicate pigment removals. Scale 30 mm.

chisel-like object. This site is less than 21 km from Badimong, a valley sacred to Bantu-speaking ancestor venerated who credit San rock paintings with supernatural potency (cf. How 1970: 34–5).

#### Geometrics

Site 8's V-shapes and fingerdot lattice presences a small, restricted component of geometric forms – crosses, finger strokes, zigzags and V-shapes. These images are hard to author. The dictum 'the more general a mark; the greater the range of explanations for that mark' applies strongly. San entoptics are finely painted, display different geometric forms and integrate into larger iconographic images rather than occurring as free-floating isolates painted in awkward spaces. Khoekhoe rock has cognate non-entoptic forms like finger-painted dots, grids, strokes, 'sunbursts', zigzags and handprints (Smith & Ouzman 2004: 505–7).

#### Smears and splatters

Even less representational are paint-smear patches of shelter wall. This paint, usually red, is just like that used for other finger and rough-brush paintings and is spatially associated with them (Fig. 13). Smear edges are not diffuse, suggesting purposeful action heeding rock contours and favouring

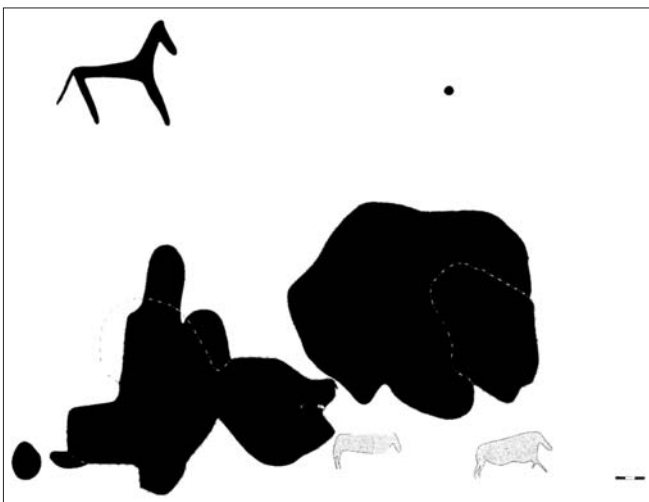


FIG. 13. Red wall smears and horse finger painting. Mantsopa District, Free State. Scale 30 mm.

natural hollows. Smears are not associated with handprints, which are rare in the central interior. Smears' visually prominent paint ridges and particulate appearance suggest they were not smoothed like 'palettes' associated with San fine-lines in the Western Cape (Yates & Manhire 1991) and central interior San rock-engravings. With smears, paint 'splatters' occur in discontinuous linear arrangements probably made by flicking a paint-laden stick/brush at a rock wall or ceiling. These splatters are too extensive and diffuse to represent brush-cleaning residue.

Together with their site preference and production, images of horses, guns and hunts; human figures; serpents; image clusters; geometrics; and smears and splatters form a unique ensemble with diverse influences that is supplemented by excavations at three finger and rough-brush painting sites (Sites 1, 3 and 7).

#### ASSOCIATED ARCHAEOLOGY

John Hewitt's excavation at Site 7 was model; allowing for no  $^{14}\text{C}$  dating and a shallow (<0.6 m) and undifferentiated deposit. Artefacts included: 33 indurated shale scrapers, two adzes, two spokeshaves, a narrow backed blade, seven cores, remains of three grass-tempered pots 5–9.5 mm thick, a bone awl, five bone points, an ostrich eggshell bead, two sheet iron scraps, haematite, tortoise shell, remains of antelope, zebra, freshwater mussel, warthog, a wild rat, an elephant shrew, dassie, a monocotyledonous root, and corm sheaths (Hewitt 1931: 185–90). Hewitt mused the linkage between artefacts and the "varied and crude" rock paintings (*ibid.*: 190–6). Garth Sampson and Janette Deacon (pers. comm., 2003) suggest Hewitt described a Smithfield B assemblage, exemplars of which date to the last 2000 years and 500–1000 years near Site 7 (Sampson 1974: 383).

Shelona Klatzow's investigation detected similar material 'messiness' at a 17 m long domed and hidden cave with a spine of collapsed ceiling blocs culturally disciplined into a stock enclosure (Site 3). Excavations outside the enclosure exposed a 19th-century component over older San "flakes, chips, bladelets and scrapers" up to  $3620 \pm 60$  BP (Pta 6785; Klatzow 1996: 330–31). There were also: ostrich eggshell, a bone fish hook, grog-tempered pottery, upper grindstones, glass, iron, a clay floor, a clay cow figurine, pumpkin seeds, apricot and peachpips (for fermenting?). Surface finds were mixed and amorphous (*ibid.*: 332). A red ochre-smear lower grindstone



was overturned against a back wall. Figures 9 & 12 co-occur with fine-line eland and human figures. Adjacent sites have well-preserved *Mfecane* refuge homes.

Lyn Wadley explicitly considers both the authorship of the assemblage excavated by Helen Domleo and herself at Site 1 (Wadley 2001); and of Figure 9. Seven 1 m<sup>2</sup> squares – four in the larger lobe and three at the lobes' juncture – descended less than 0.5 m to a 3540 ± 60 bp (Pta 5930) layer with an undifferentiated lithic signature until 200 ± 50 bp (Pta 5929, cal. 1669, 1825, 1834, 1878, 1924, 1951; *ibid.*: 162–3). Both layers have fragmented faunal remains of large and small game including a cow bone. 218 grit and grass-tempered sherds may represent bowls and a constricted pot. Other finds include a metal lock and blanket pin, padre and other trade beads (Wadley 2001: 167). 74 formal lithics – 53% scrapers – and 1379 other lithics were recovered. Despite the San depopulation of this area after the 1700s (Loubser & Laurens 1994), lithics increase in more recent layers. This trend suggests that this commodious but hidden site was a long-term refuge. With few 'type fossils' the assemblage may be described as 'mixed'.

### ETHNOGRAPHY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

To understand these 'mixed' archaeological signatures, I consider relevant ethnography and historiography at Sites 1 and 3. This region had three major frontiers over the last 500 years. First, Bantu-speaking farmers arrived in the mid-16th century (Maggs 1976: 308–10, 315), enclaving most resident San to agriculturally marginal areas (Loubser & Laurens 1994). Secondly, the *Mfecane* (c. 1790–1840) radically affected demography, allowing Moshoeshe I's aggregation of disparate Sotho-Tswana into a Sotho nation between 1822–1824 (Coplan 2000: 131–32). Moshoeshe I invited the Harts River Taaibosch Korana to the troubled 'Nieuweveld' (New Fields) as a buffer against other raiders and encroaching British and Boers. This latter expansion was the third frontier that would rename the Nieuweveld a Boer Republic in 1854 and a British 'Conquered Territory' in 1867. During the middle frontier Gert Taaibosch, his brother Jan 'Hanto' Taaibosch and other Korana moved to the Wesleyan's Platberg mission (1833) near Sites 1 and 3 (Maingard 1932: 127). A year later some Korana left for Thaba Nchu to the west because of a disagreement. From 1834 at least 1000 Korana settled at Umpukani. They left when wood ran out; a commodity abundant at their next home Merumetsu ('Dark forest'). Here they remained peripatetically between 1837–1851 when the mission fell victim to a raid (Arbousset & Daumas 1968: 10; Engelbrecht 1936: 35–6). Significantly, Merumetsu was less than 1500 m from Site 1 – "a rock citadel, whence they could conveniently spy upon their unsuspecting victims, and like the vultures which frequented it, they built their shelters on its loftiest ridges" Stow 1905: 312). Traveling through the area a few decades later, geologist and ethnographer George Stow remarked on a "great cavern among the domed rocks of the mountain opposite Tennant's Kop" as the headquarters of a raiding people (*ibid.*: 191). This site is almost certainly Site 3, which faces 'Tennis Kop' three kilometres away. These accounts establish a strong and historically specific Korana presence, ground-truthed by their rock art.

Their specialised finger and rough-brush painted imagery is distinct from San, Khoekhoe, Bantu-speaker and European rock arts. This distinction rests on five factors. First, site preference and distribution reveal 30 hidden sites in areas of known Korana habitation. The sole exception, Site 8, is 50 km east of this range. Second, paint and production technique reveal coarse, slurry-like paints with finger and rough-brush application techniques unlike San or Bantu-speaker's rock arts though

cognate with Khoekhoe rock art. Third, a distinctive iconography of horses, human figures, hunts, serpents, skins, geometrics, smears and weapons. The horses and guns suggest production between 1820–1850, the peak of Korana raiding. This imagery is not as varied as San fine-lines but is more 'representational' than Khoekhoe rock art. It differs from rare southern Sotho initiation rock art that also selects for hidden locations but which has more complex geometric patterns. The lack of European-style literacy or numeracy militates against them as authors. Depictions of skins/aprons also occur in Bantu-speaker, northern San and central interior Khoekhoe rock art and suggest multi-ethnic group composition. Fourth, associated archaeology is also 'mixed' and different from known San assemblages. Finally, ethnography and historiography provide empirical and circumstantial evidence of Korana being at some of the sites discussed. These five factors suggest multiple and historically specific authorship. Finger and rough-brush rock art is a temporal, geographic and cultural singularity. Korana were in the right places at the right times with the right kinds of concerns and are a best fit for authors of this rock art.

### THE MILITANT AND MAGICAL MEANINGS OF KORANA ROCK ART

It is also through a 'Korana' lens that this assemblage of images and image-making practices is best understood. To understand the assemblage, we must again understand its constituent influences. More than simple 'borrowings' from distinct ethnicities, the rock art documents an active ethnogenesis. Outside influences are reformulated to produce an archaeology both new and mindful of tradition. This reformulation is not the product of an all-knowing agentiveness. It also uses chance, circumstance and unintended consequence (e.g. Dobres & Robb 2000) to produce an opportunistic but consistent rock art. I argue that this rock art provided a magical militantism that consolidated Korana identity in the very specific frontier conditions of colonial South Africa. The only explanatory framework that combines identity, frontiers, violence, magic, inclusion and exclusion is what Peter Geschiere (1997) and the Comaroffs (1999) term an 'occult economy'. In a world with vast imbalances of power and wealth, many people feel marginalised. Their alienation is in relation to a larger and spatially distant concept of nationhood and governmentality. Here, an occult economy parallels Eric Hobsbawm's classic treatment of pre-capitalist rural societies resisting class power by redistributing overlord wealth through social banditry:

"When such communities, especially those familiar with feuding and raiding such as hunter and pastoralist, develop their own systems of class differentiation, or when they are absorbed into larger economies resting on class conflict, they may supply a disproportionately large number of social bandits" (Hobsbawm 1969: 14).

Korana and San are thus ideal social bandits. But whereas the social bandit was, in theory, an episodic champion of the marginalised, southern African frontier conditions were less conducive to magnanimity (*cf.* Gordon 1986). Korana, though open to multiple membership, transferred their anxieties about marginalisation into an occult ('hidden') realm that opposed the perceived hidden machinations of government and used "magical means for material ends" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 279). 'Magic' is not prestidigitation or con-artistry, but functions as a pathway to control and virtuosity. Korana understood this and distinguished between morally positive 'magic' and 'witchcraft/sorcery' – a practice for personal advantage at

others' cost (Stow 1905: 180). Magic is a partnership between agency and event where practitioners gauge which occult techniques to deploy to attain a given goal. There is no magic 'formula' in what is a deeply anarchic and unknowable enterprise and elaborate ritual cocoons occult practice. Thus states of powerlessness alternate with states of and possibility with violence often functioning as the inter-stadial catalyst. For Korana:

"firearms not only caused the breakdown of existing social structures but also transformed them. The forms of political organisation which were re-created on the basis of firearms were, as Moorsom has argued, essentially parasitic" (Legassick 1989: 376).

"In these circumstances, there tends to be an expansion both in the techniques of producing value and in the meaning of wealth itself. It is an expansion that often breaks the conventional bounds of legality, making crime, as well as magic, a mode of production open to those who lack other resources" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 289).

Occult economies are not generative but consume material and magical resources. For multi-ethnic Korana, their rock art offers a practice that most comprehensively fixes shifting identity formations and acquisitive strategies. This rock art's seemingly derivative appearance masks a subtly selected assemblage appropriate in a landscape where people pursued multiple and militant techniques to survive and prosper.

#### THE MILITANT

It therefore concords that the most numerous and widely distributed image is the horse (Figs 3, 5, 9, 11 & 13). Any economy needs goods and is often not fussy how goods are got. Guns and horses made goods circulate fast and widely. Salt was an important frontier commodity and Harts River Korana made effective use of horses and violence, even against greater odds, to control access to salt pans (Maingard 1932: 129). Another nominally legitimate frontier activity was hunting for meat, hide and ivory (Ross 1975: 568; Legassick 1989: 368–72; Penn 1995: 58). Martin Legassick, working from Lichtenstein and Barrow says 5981 pounds of tusk were extracted from the western central interior between 1795 and 1798 (1989: 371; also Dowson 1995). Solomon Kok, grandson of the Baster/Griqua patriarch Adam Kok I, traded ivory with Tswana at Griquatown (Ross 1976: 14, 16). Figure 5 is painted in the Korana manner and shows armed horsemen seemingly chasing down an elephant. The site is in the Harts River stronghold of Jan Bloem, Bergenaar raiders and San raider 'Skeelkobus' Kousop (Engelbrecht 1936: 8). The black rhino painted at Site 7 (Fig. 11c) is unlikely to be San-authored – there are only 34 known rhino rock paintings (Ouzman & Feeley 2002) – and more likely presences rhino 'horn' and hide as commodities. Or this rock painting may combine magic and materiality. The important Korana //oro or *gomma* ritual was held "in honour of a man who has killed his first elephant, rhinoceros or other large herbaceous feeding animal" (Wuras 1929: 293; Engelbrecht 1936: 162). Such 'traditional' concerns seamlessly underpin economics with magic.

This salt and big game trade was the approximately legitimate business end of a frontier economy that contained considerable colonial anxiety over supplying munitions to people deemed not yet sufficiently 'civilised' (Stow 1905: 334; Legassick 1989: 369). But Korana desired guns, horses, alcohol and tobacco; all of which were embargoed to varying degrees. They were a microcosm of wider frontier desire. For example, in 1835, Drakensberg San raiders traded "one horse for one gun" (Vinnicombe 1976: 3) and guns and powder for ivory (Wright 1971: 62), seemingly a general rate. Korana used inter-

mediaries like *trekboers* and missionaries to get illicit goods. They traded licit hide, salt, game for these goods. Korana also captured and sold people; especially San children (Legassick 1969: 211) and women (Engelbrecht 1936: 66, 78; also a mechanism by which San became Korana). Such brutalisation is a hallmark of occult economies where the weak and powerless are especially vulnerable (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 281). Hunting, raiding and slaving suited Korana adept at exploiting and creating niches as the shifting colonial frontier made resources move, transform and disappear. Such niche exploitation relied not only on mobility, but also on multiple alliances. Korana-missionary alliances, Korana-San alliances (Stow 1905: 269; Legassick 1989: 377) and Korana-Bantu-speaker alliances (Engelbrecht 1936: 76–7) were common but seldom lasted – Moshoeshe initially favoured Korana alliance but later complains of its destructive impact (Arbousset & Daumas 1968: 311–12). Alliances embody the central contradiction of an occult economy – people who seek advancement through hidden and magical means also seek to destroy others who employ those selfsame means (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 293). This applies to outsiders as much as insiders:

"Such, however, was the innate love of plunder which possessed these Koranas, that they were not content with looting the herds of the rich Bacheoana [Tswana] tribes, but they frequently turned back to rifle the kraals of their own countrymen" (Stow 1905: 279).

#### THE MAGICAL

Korana were not alone in employing violence in a tremendously unstable time in which war, slaving, capital extraction supplemented a 'normal' rural economy. But Korana violence most powerfully combined the material and the magical. Korana magic was an ideal supplement for small bands of raiders who had to use every means possible – speed, surprise, reputation – to engineer success against larger, more powerful foes. For example, the /Xam San man //Kabbo told how Korana combatants used *fo-//oa* – an hallucinogen of the *Rubiaceae* family (Jeremy Hollman, pers. comm., 2003) – to help them in 'fights' to the death. Likewise, the horse-headed penis of the 'Michelin Man' (Fig. 9a) outwardly links masculinity and raiding. Internally, association with the horse as agent of destruction transforms the genitals from generative organs to a life-threatening force. In similar magical terrain lived feared Bantu-speaking *nagloppers* (nightwalkers) who had sex with sleeping people, robbing them of life-essence (Engelbrecht 1936: 77–8, 181).

"Sexuality is inextricably linked to violence and the dissolution of the boundaries of the body and self. The truth of sex and its deadly attributes reside in the experience of loss of the boundaries separating reality, events and fantasised objects" (Mbembe 2003: 15).

This sexualised referent continues visually in the three horse-headed zigzags in Fig. 9. Such bizarre imagery perhaps contains hints of desperation. In the southeast of the research region, some San produced a final, eschatonic rock art that spoke of their alienation and acknowledgement of an end time (Ouzman & Loubser 2000). Perhaps some Korana, acknowledging their time was up as the frontier filled and consolidated from the 1840s tried a similarly desperate invocation of the magical, whose residue is this singular imagery? Or perhaps the zigzags are a more 'traditional' residue of transformation – initiation.

The zigzags are visually similar to the serpents in Fig. 8a. Most southern Africans, however defined, have independent but often interconnected beliefs about serpents (Schmidt 1979;

Hoff 1997). Korana believe serpents captured young maidens for slaves (Engelbrecht 1936: 164). This non-generative aspect extends to the serpent's ability to dry up springs and cause tornadoes (van Vreeden 1955). But serpents and Korana magic may have had a positive affect if one considers site preference. Korana probably did not live in rock shelters, preferring reed, grass and wooden frame houses arranged in an hierarchical stock-enclosing circle (Engelbrecht 1936: 90–6; Barnard 1992: 167). But rock shelters have other uses. They are short-term raider's refuges; places to keep horses that are injured if kraaled with stock; and they are ideal places for witchcraft, which "was one of those things which were [sic] not practiced in full view of everybody" (Engelbrecht 1936: 177). Secluded rock shelters are also ideal spaces to separate neophytes in their 'hot', socially-threatening state from 'normal' society. Korana girl neophytes were kept in seclusion huts or "hiding behind some bush" (*ibid.*: 167), near but separate from settlement. Emerging as women, their first task was to go to sprinkle *buchu* (aromatic plants) on standing water to appease the water serpent (*ibid.*: 164). Site 2 is a tunnel-like site with a double serpent that requires artificial light to be visible. The site is 50 m from standing pools and downhill from the headquarters of Sekonyela with whom Gert Taaibosch lived between 1849 until dying by Sekonyela's hand in 1853 (Thompson 1975: 164–5). Site 1 has a deep inner cavity and is adjacent to the Korana-inhabited Merumetsu mission. Serpent imagery suggests at least some Korana rock art was feminine. Some Korana credited women as having "stronger medicine" than men (Engelbrecht 1936: 182).

Evidence of boy's initiation may be depictions of animal skins/apron (Figs 9c & 11d). Korana boy's *dorob* also included being secluded in a hut, where he had to wear a girl's hind *karos* (*ibid.*: 157), which was discarded after becoming a man. Also, "Korana were known to have entered Bantu circumcision schools" (Engelbrecht 1936: 79). Aprons may thus represent multiple cultural influences. Aprons called *koma* occur among the North Sotho and feature in male and female initiation (Prins & Hall 1994; Smith 2002, van Schalkwyk & Smith 2002). Rock engravings and paintings of aprons occur in northern South African San rock art (Eastwood 2003), Chewa art (Smith 2002) and Khoekhoe rock art in Tsodilo Hills and central interior (Smith & Ouzman 2004). Given Site 1's location, its apron/skin motif may have southern Sotho roots. 'Sotho' is a Nguni exonym meaning 'knotted ones' referring to the knotted *tseha* sheepskin loincloth worn by Sotho men (Ellenberger & McGregor 1912: 34). Skins were integral to stock farming and a natural connection between Khoekhoen, Bantu-speaker, European and Korana. *!Amsakwa* Korana were 'preparers of skins' and the once-San *Bitterbos* or *Ts?oa~//?eina* Korana made the "very best" skin garments (Engelbrecht 1936: 17, 27, also 109–12). Skins were currency by which vassal dues could be paid (Maingard 1932: 122–3). Indeed, Korana settlements were often sited near a tree where men held court and worked skins (Barnard 1992: 167). Skin/apron imagery placed among militant signifiers could mark boys becoming men *via* masculine pursuits like raiding and hunting.

A similar but more explicit transformative interaction involves not an image appropriation, but physical engagement with others' rock art. At Sites 1 and 8 Korana horse-and-riders are placed atop the largest San eland. Selection for the pre-eminent San animal (Vinnicombe 1976: 163–4) intensifies at Site 8 with the careful outlining in slurry white paint of the fine-line eland and the equally careful effacing of a lesser rhebuck with a carefully placed slurry smear (Fig. 12). This emphasis and effacement continues the parasitic Korana raiding

ethic that assimilated what was useful to it and rejected what was not. Of course 'Korana' rock artists may also have been all or part 'San'. Korana credit San with making bored stones, snares, pit traps, poisoned arrows, and tortoiseshell containers (Maingard 1932: 145–7; Engelbrecht 1936: 73, 87–8, 102). In return, Korana shared leather *riempie* furniture and an extensive pharmacology (Engelbrecht 1936: 102, 185) like the '*moerwortel*' that turned honey beer into a powerful hallucinogen (Gordon 1996). Korana dancing, is remarkably similar to San Medicine Dances (Arbousset & Daumas 1968: 54), from where Korana got dance rattles (Engelbrecht 1936: 174). Similarly, rain-making ceremonies involving breaking animal ribs and burning of *buchu* and ochre are too detailed to be coincidental (Bleek 1933; Engelbrecht 1936: 175–7) and speak of ritual interaction:

"Men, as well as women, were also greatly in demand as doctors, and some Korana are stated to have had almost implicit faith in their magical practices and healing powers. The Bushmen, so some say, had the most magic, and very many of the Kora witchdoctors are supposed to have learnt their art from them." (Engelbrecht 1936: 73–4).

Magical influences were crucial in making a potentially incoherent multi-ethnic Babel cohere. Combining licit and illicit trade into a single economy, coping with willful neglect by a distant government, and managing alliances required the deployment of a martial organisation underpinned by a sophisticated occult economy. The former was so successful that it became the basis of the Boer commando system (Coplan 2000: 126) and provides a sharp local link to the phenomenon of 18th and 19th century social banditry (Hobsbawm 1969). Magical sanction drew on a deep and transformative San spirituality and on fundamental matters of initiation from Khoekhoe and Bantu-speaker's beliefs. Perhaps the most destructive militant-magical alliance was furnished by alliances with missions and *trekboers* from whence guns and the Old Testament justification flowed. That this unique Korana assemblage lasted for most of the 19th century, albeit in constantly changing formations, is both remarkable and expected.

## CONCLUSION

These formations utilised and created niches similar to 'broad spectrum resource exploitation' of economically determinist archaeologies. With a punitive rather than protective state, biological, economic, social, economic, political and ritual hybridity is a sound strategy survival. Hybridity returns us to this article's opening thoughts on the genesis, composition, deployment and representation of different identities at specific geo-political junctures. Korana are a useful context to think through how southern Africa's people have come to be imagined, imaged and defined. 'Distinct in the aggregate' is a useful concept when seeking synchronously to analyse material culture signatures of people and attempting diachronic cross-cultural comparisons (Lightfoot & Martinez 1995). Type artefacts blind us to the ordinariness of most assemblages such as "the unvarying nature of stone technology [at Korannaberg] through time" (Wadley 2001: 171). Korana archaeological sites were of short and episodic duration leaving few artefacts; most of which are not distinctive (Stow 1905: 276; Engelbrecht 1936: 145–7). Distinctiveness is easier to discern in an aggregate like rock that has an ensemble of elements presencing emic notions of identity. Some of these elements can be disaggregated and understood in relation to other people/aggregations of identity as a mechanism for "mutual acculturation" (Legassick 1969: 128). Attaching discrete cultural identities to artefacts, assemblages and sites

despite cognisance of multiple identity formations is a more radical ('root') act than we often acknowledge (Said 1989). But need our thinking be ever-trapped into discrete ethnic units versus an endlessly fluid capacity for metamorphosis? Alan Morris's take on biology and ethnicity is apt:

"Biological history gives us a very clear picture of the genetic events of past generations. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is the cultural identity of a group and is not determined by genetic origins. The two are parallel pathways that sometimes interconnect but need not have any direct relationship. Ethnicity may even change from generation to generation and be redefined or entirely reconstructed within a very short period of time." (Morris 1997: 107)

Archaeology has the ability to materially ground-truth guiding theory and subaltern histories and ameliorate and extend Martin Legassick's despair that:

"the resultant tangle of social relationships, exacerbated in the frontier zone period, makes it well-nigh impossible to link Khoisan political groupings in the nineteenth-century to any earlier Khoisan political history" (Legassick 1989: 365).

The multiplicity of archaeological authorship in frontier conditions means that we need routinely and coherently to deploy multiple data recovery techniques while acknowledging human and material ambiguity. The flexibility and archaeological pedigree of Korana and other Khoekhoe-descended people makes us wonder no longer "how, in view of their troubled and variegated history, there come to be Hottentots who have survived the ordeal of civilisation for so long" (Engelbrecht 1936: ix). Korana 'variegation' is what allows them to persist (*cf.* Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Sharp 1997). Homi Bhabha, from a post-colonial margin, suggests that diversity and hybridity are normal human conditions. Uniformity is an aberrant interregnum brought by imperialism and colonialism (Bhabha 1994). This is perhaps why the fluidity of being that was !Kora-Korana continues still. Korana have emerged from sublimation in other groups as a distinct and fully formed cultural and political entity. The magical arts of the raider nation now face the challenge of operating within the post-Apartheid state and of questioning the frontiers of individual, group, national and global identity.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank rock art custodians for permission to record sites. The financial and logistical assistances of James A. Swan Fund (Oxford, U.K.), National Research Foundation (South Africa), National Museum (South Africa), South African Archaeological Society Kent Bequest and University of California, Berkeley (U.S.A.) are acknowledged. I thank the National Khoisan Consultative Council, Chief Frans Kraalshoek and Mr Japhta Dawids for productive discussion. Geoff Blundell, Ed Eastwood, Janette Deacon, Dawn Green, Jeremy Hollman, Martin Legassick, Kent Lightfoot, Alan Morris and Garth Sampson shared invaluable comment. Rentia Ouzman and Gabriel Tlhapu prepared the figures, no small task.

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