

CREATURES WITH TUSKS IN THE ROCK PAINTINGS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

H.C. WOODHOUSE
Johannesburg

From time to time writers on the rock paintings of South Africa have drawn attention to the depiction of tusks on animals that do not have them in real life and also to tusks on snakes and therianthropic figures. The known examples are collated and tabulated together with a brief description of the main features of the printed contexts in which they appear. The relevant zoology and ethnography are examined and two possible hypotheses for the meaning of the tusks are considered as a basis for future study of this interesting artistic phenomenon.

In die literatuur oor rotskuns in Suid-Afrika word daar verskeie male verwys na afbeeldings van groot slagtande by diere wat dit nie in die werklikheid het nie en ook na sulke tande by slange en dieragtige mensfigure. Die voorbeelde wat tot dusver bekend is word in hierdie artikel oorsigtelik in 'n tabel geplaas en 'n kort beskrywing word gegee van die verband waarin hulle in die literatuur verskyn. 'n Ondersoek is gedoen na die betrokke dierkundige en volkekundige verbande en twee hipoteses word voorgestel vir die betekenis van die tande as 'n basis vir verdere navorsing van hierdie interessante artistieke verskynsel.

INTRODUCTION

The study of rock paintings in Southern Africa has made great strides in recent years with the recording and publication of more examples and the application of knowledge gained from the study of Bushman ethnography and folk-lore. A particularly interesting feature of many of the paintings is the depiction of tusks on animals that do not have them in real life and also on snakes and even human figures.

In 1970 a photograph of a painting from the Bedford district was published with the caption: "A fearsome hunter with small tusks to complete the effect" (Lee & Woodhouse, 1970: pl. 147). In the same publication was a photograph (pl. 52) of part of what appeared to be a hunting scene of which it was said: "The animals have the general appearance of lions but they have tusks". Some years later Vinnicombe drew attention to the striped tusk protruding from the snout of a kaross-clad figure in the Mpendle district, and also to the tusks on the whiskered snout of a seated anthropomorphic figure in the Qacha's Nek district of Lesotho (Vinnicombe, 1976: Fig. 232 & 233).

In 1983 Lewis-Williams remarked on "tusks" on the therianthropes (partly human, partly animal figures) at the well-known site of Game Pass in the Mooiriver district and on the "intertwined serpents" at Qacha's Nek in Lesotho. Although accepting that we cannot at present say what the "tusk" represents, he wrote that it seemed possible, "that it is an expression of another, as yet unknown, belief about trance" (Lewis-Williams, 1983: 57-58, Fig. 22). Shortly afterwards I wrote: "Just as

there are buck-headed people among the paintings, there are also people with the upward-pointing tusks of warthogs" (Woodhouse, 1984: 105).

With this continuing, if sporadic, interest in paintings of tusks brought to a head it may be useful to consolidate and review the information about paintings which include tusks in what seem "un-natural" situations. It is not proposed to include tusks on representational paintings of warthogs, bushpigs or rhinoceroses where one would obviously expect to find them.

DISTRIBUTION

I am aware of 31 sites (Table 1) where there are paintings which include tusks in "un-natural" situations. With the exception of one site near Rusape and two near Mtoko in Zimbabwe, all are between the parallels of 28° S and 33° S and the meridians 26° E and 30° E, i.e. between Bethlehem in the north and Bedford in the south and Bethulie in the west and Bulwer in the east (how convenient that they all begin with B!). There are probably more of which I am unaware, particularly in Zimbabwe and there may well be others awaiting discovery in places outside the main area defined by present records. The greatest concentration of sites is in the Qacha's Nek district where I have six sites recorded. The remainder are distributed over twenty magisterial districts (Lowe, 1952) with two sites in the Fouriesburg and Maclear districts and one each in the other eighteen. Ten of the sites are in Lesotho and the balance are in the districts which surround it, except, of course, the three sites in Zimbabwe. The greatest

concentration of painted figures with tusks is at a site in the Bedford district.

CREATURES AND CONTEXT

There are three broad categories of un-naturally tusked creatures in the paintings. The first consists of therianthropic figures of predominantly human appearance, the second of snakes and the third of creatures that are predominantly animal in appearance.

Three of the 36 examples in the first category, represented at 19 sites, appear as singletons but the remainder are in the company of other therianthropes in groups varying in size from two or three to 23 (Vinnicombe, 1976: 335). In general the tusked figures are spread one or two per group but there is a notable exception in the Bedford district where there are six tusked figures out of a total of 10 therianthropes in the group.

Sixteen of the 36 are wearing karosses, many of them elaborately decorated and beaded. The remainder are apparently naked but, except for the three at Mtoko, none have sex organs visible. Some are also decorated and beaded.

Five sites have tusked snakes which constitute the second category, including that at Qacha's Nek mentioned by Lewis-Williams (1983) where the two snakes are in the mating position.

At the seven sites in the third category one of the creatures is dog-like (Woodhouse, 1979: Fig. 4), one is eland-like (Vinnicombe, 1976: 351), one is considered to be "seal-like" (Willcox, 1963: pl. 26), three, at two sites are lion-like, two, at one site are rain animals (Orpen, 1874), one is a combination of

baboon and warthog (Pager, 1975: 23) and one is a "boar-like monster" (Battiss, 1948: 216). Of the two sites with lion-like creatures one has been published (Lee & Woodhouse, 1970: 44) and the other is published here for the first time (Illustration 1).

The main features of the context in which all three categories are painted varies very considerably as will be seen from the summary in the table. Virtually every activity depicted in the rock art is represented, such as standing motionless, dancing — in particular dancing the trance dance and leading, driving or hunting the rain animal (Woodhouse, 1984).

RELEVANT ETHNOGRAPHY

I am unaware of any reference to the use by the Bushmen of tusks for the purpose of personal decoration, disguise or the simulation of a tusked animal in dance or ceremonial, but there are several recorded instances of the use of animal horns for such purposes (e.g. Stow, 1905: 118) and there is a photograph of the practice in the Fourie collection at the Africana Museum, Johannesburg. It cannot, therefore, be ruled out that such uses may have been practised, particularly by medicine men, in the same manner as the Zulu *inyanga* illustrated by Tyrrell (Tyrrell, 1968: 125) and by the Duruma witch doctor of Southern Kenya illustrated by Adamson (Adamson, 1967: 317). Both these traditional doctors specialised in the curing of snake bites so their tusks, which are not large, may be regarded as symbolising the fangs of snakes rather than the tusks of larger animals.

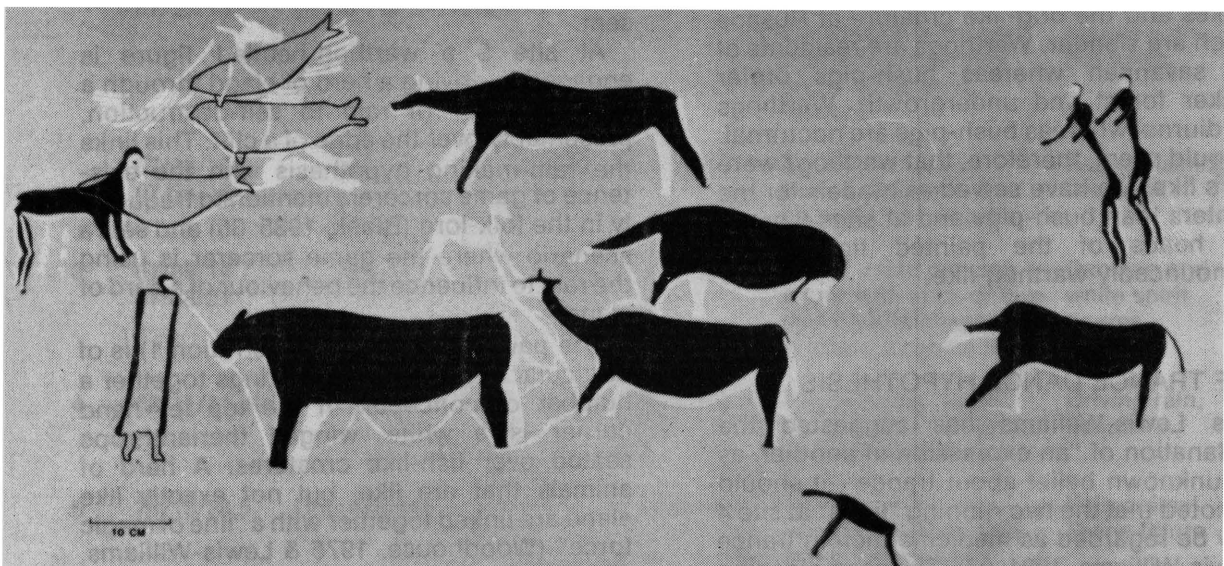


Illustration 1: Painting of lion-like creature at site 30, Clocolan.

When describing the activities of the painter Mapote, Marion Walsham How wrote: "He said he would paint an eland, as the Bushmen of that part of the country were of the eland", (How, 1962: 38). Patricia Vinnicombe recognised the importance of this statement when she used the words, "people of the eland", as the title for her book (Vinnicombe, 1976) but, by implication, the statement indicates that there must have been people of other animals, e.g. the warthog, the elephant, etc. This is supported by Dornan's reference to Bushmen calling themselves the Zebra and Duiker clans in addition to the Eland clan (Dornan, 1925: 161), although he probably used the word "clan" somewhat imprecisely. It is notable that the tusked figures, with the exception of those at sites 13, 25 and 28 in Zimbabwe, are all in the same region as frequent paintings of eland-headed and rhebok-headed therianthropes and in several cases are even at the same sites which seems in conflict with Mapote's qualifying phrase "that part of the country". There may, however, have been many occasions when the "people of the eland" and the "people of the warthog" were to be found together or there may have been areas where they lived together.

RELEVANT ZOOLOGY

In view of my use of the phrase "people of the warthog" it is appropriate to consider the other possible candidate for tusked people, the bush-pig. The tusks of bush-pigs are short (Dorst and Dardelot, 1980: 178) whereas those of the warthog are longer and more directly comparable to the tusks in the paintings except for the ones on the rain snakes and the dog-like creature at Rusape which are slender. Warthogs are residents of the savannah whereas bush-pigs prefer thicker forest and undergrowth. Warthogs are diurnal whereas bush-pigs are nocturnal. It would seem, therefore, that warthogs were more likely to have served as models for the painters than bush-pigs and at sites 8 and 9 the heads of the painted figures are pronouncedly warthog-like.

THE TRANCE DANCE HYPOTHESIS

As Lewis-Williams has suggested the explanation of "an expression of another, as yet unknown belief about trance", it should be noted that the two running "lions" at site 4 may be regarded as medicine men in trance (Lewis-Williams, 1981: 97). The nose-bleeding at sites 14, 21, 22 and 25 reinforced by the arms-back postures of two figures at site 21,

and the prone figure at site 5 all support an association with trance. Thus at six sites there are strong trance elements. It is not considered that the representation of therianthropes of itself alone is necessarily indicative of trance as there is the alternative hypothesis that they express the concept of "when animals were people" (Bleek, 1923 & Woodhouse, 1984).

A RAIN-MAKING HYPOTHESIS

A second possible hypothesis for the representation of tusks is that they are concerned with rain and rain making — a major preoccupation of the artists as has been demonstrated (Lewis-Williams, 1982 & Woodhouse, 1984).

Seven of the sites have positive associations with rain animals or showers, five with rain snakes, five have animals that may well be rain animals, one has streams and ten have no positively identifiable rain features.

There is no incompatibility between the trance hypothesis and the rain hypothesis in that a dance leading to trance states on the part of some or many of the participants may well have been part of rain-making ceremonies (Woodhouse, 1984), but it may be thought that the rain hypothesis stresses the major objective rather than part of the procedure for reaching it.

At certain sites therianthropes in elaborately beaded karosses stand in long static lines. This is particularly true at sites 18 and 20. If one accepts the concept that they represent the time "when animals were people" they are, in effect, ancestral figures whose presence at a rain-making ceremony would have been a strengthening factor that artists would have found desirable to represent.

At site 9 a warthog-headed figure is engaged in driving a herd of eland through a heavy shower of rain to self-destruction, presumably over the edge of a cliff. This links the rain-making hypothesis with the existence of game sorcerers mentioned frequently in the folk-lore (Bleek, 1935: 35) and sets a scenario where the game sorcerer is using the rain to influence the behaviour of a herd of eland.

The painting at site 30 (Illustration 1) is of particular importance as it brings together a number of concepts. In the top left-hand corner is a white, winged therianthrope seated over fish-like creatures. A herd of animals that are like, but not exactly like eland are linked together with a "line of magic force" (Woodhouse, 1975 & Lewis-Williams, 1981) which also includes a lion-like creature with a tusk. There is also a bending forward figure of the kind frequently associated with

dancing groups and a somewhat similar white "spirit figure". In Table 1 it is noted that the tusked lions at site 4 may be considered to be "rain lions" but they may also be interpreted as medicine men in trance. By the same token the tusked lion at site 30 may be regarded as a rain lion or a rain medicine man who has brought a violent, destructive rain — represented by the herd of eland — rather than a more desirable soft rain.

CONCLUSION

This paper does not purport to do more than to move the study of this aspect of rock art a step forward by drawing attention to a significant theme which merits further research and by suggesting explanations for some hitherto unexplained paintings. The table gives an indication of the various aspects of creatures with tusks depicted in rock art in South Africa.

TABLE I
CREATURES WITH TUSKS — DISTRIBUTION AND CONTEXT

Site	Photo No (HCW)	Publication	Page	Magisterial District	Description of Creature	Main Features of Context
1	65/42/5	<i>Art on the rocks</i> , Lee & Woodhouse	94	Bedford	Red, white face, 2 red lines on cheek. Carries bow & arrows & feather wand. Arrows? in hair. Bends forward.	Similar: standing.
	65/42/1	Unpublished		do	Standing in kaross with beaded collar.	
	65/42/18	do		do	Therianthrope with white face do. Beaded collar to kaross. Wings on head in white.	
	do	do		do	red lines on cheek.	
	65/42/14	do		do	as for 65/42/18.	
	65/42/26 65/42/30	do		do	Has kaross with beaded collar arrows and furry cap.	
2	67/33/11 67/33/13	<i>Art on the rocks</i> , Lee & Woodhouse	89	Maclear	Broad-shouldered, apparently not clothed but spotted & fringed. Cap with 5 bladders and 4 quills bent forward.	Rain animal. Other similar figures without tusks.
	67/33/12 67/33/16	do	90	do	Seated, in fringed kaross. Cap with 5 bladders and 2 quills.	Bag containing two buck.
3	67/38/14 67/38/21	do	112	do	Red & white dancing figure with stick or bow and 4 white shapes like feathers. Leonine head.	Dancing and white spirit figures.
4	68/11/11 etc.	do	44	Fouriesburg	Two running "lions", orange. One has arrow embedded in back.	Driving rain, lions?
5	71/13/24,5	Unpublished		Estcourt	Black & white "man" with 2 stripes on face leaning forward.	Rain animal. Prone figure.

Site	Photo No (HCW)	Publication	Page	Magisterial District	Description of Creature	Main Features of Context
6	72/24/27	<i>People of the Eland</i> , Vinnicombe.	327	Qacha's Nek Lesotho	Orange & black therianthrope with eland head seated on haunches. Hooves & whiskers below chin.	Man with assegai blade. White spirit figures.
	72/24/18	<i>Bushman Art of S.A.</i> , Woodhouse	91			
7	73/20/6,8	<i>Rock art of Southern Africa</i> , Lewis-Williams	58	Moorriver	3 Similar karossed creatures standing. Beaded collars & line across karosses. Caps with fringed tails at back. White concave faces.	Eland as rain animal.
	73/20/9	Unpublished		do	Black figure with white somewhat pig-like head and bristles bending forward.	
8	76/4/4 & 5	do		Matatiele	Red figure in kaross leaning forward.	Herd of Eland, comet, dancing.
	76/2/5	do		do	Standing figure with lion-like legs holding stick upright. Head very worn.	
	76/4/12	<i>When animals were people</i> , Woodhouse	106	do do	Black, white & red warthog-headed figure in kaross with white edging.	Seated "The rianthrope".
9	82/11/9 & 19	Unpublished		Indwe	Yellow warthog-headed figure carrying staff driving herd of eland over cliff.	Herd of eland, Rain.
10	85/31/29	<i>Rock paintings in S.A.</i> Stow & Bleek	58	Smithfield	Yellow & red figure standing with hands raised. Tusks project forward like beak.	Lightning, rain animal.
	do	do	do	do	Yellow & red figure with spots on legs and arms extended forward.	
11	78/60/37	<i>Bushman art of Southern Africa</i> , Woodhouse	108	Aliwal North	White figure holding artefact somewhat like bow. Fringing & other decorative features.	Eland, winged figure.
12	69/24/9 62/23/33 & 34	<i>S.A. Outdoor Life</i>	8/8/64	Harrismith	White figure walking with feet turned backwards & "ribs" showing	White spirit figures.
13	63/10/34	<i>Art on the rocks</i> , Lee & Woodhouse	124	Rusape — Zimbabwe	Dog-like creature with straight mane & white lines on muzzle. (Copies of 3 similar creatures from Marandellas have been received from C.E. Thornycroft.)	Feasting, dancing.

Site	Photo No (HCW)	Publication	Page	Magisterial District	Description of Creature	Main Features of Context
14	68/2/19 & 27	<i>Art on the rocks</i> , Lee & Woodhouse	127	Butha Butha — Lesotho	"Rain snake". Tusks not shown on published drawing but clearly there on photo. Rearing. Rudimentary wings, fringed.	Eland herd, nose bleeding.
15	67/23/10	do	136	Fouries- burg	"Rain snake". Published drawing somewhat inaccurate. Tusks more prominent on photo.	Eland, lion.
16	66/30/37 66/30/28	Unpublished		Qacha's Nek Lesotho	Two snakes, possibly "rain snakes" apparently mating.	Eland emerging from crack.
17	67/14/2	<i>Art on the Rocks</i> , Lee & Woodhouse	119	Queenstown	"Rain Snake" rearing above other paintings.	Winged figures.
18	85/54/8	<i>People of the Eland</i> , Vinnicombe	326	Impendle	Kaross. Fringing down neck & kaross. Spots or beads on neck. Elaborate headdress.	Similar standing.
19		do	232/3	Mount Currie	Spotted Snake.	Women standing.
20	68/47/22	<i>People of the Eland</i> , Vinnicombe	335	Qacha's Nek Lesotho	Figure in white kaross, legs together, bending at knees.	Leading eland.
21		do	346	do	Figure standing in spotted kaross.	Nose bleeding. Trance-dance postures.
22		do	351	do	Eland with lines on face & neck and fringing.	Nose bleeding.
23	6904/29 69/5/1	<i>Rock art of S.A.</i> , Willcox	26	Leribe — Lesotho	"Animal" with open mouth exposing ± 12 formidable teeth.	Herd of eland. Wavy-line kaross.
24	65/7/15 & 16	<i>Mountain Bushmen of Basutoland</i> , How		Quthing	Elaborately printed & equipped "man" with horns. "Tusks" not sharply pointed.	"Playing with eland".
25		<i>Prehistoric rock art of Federation of Rhodesia etc.</i> Summers (Ed.)	87	Mtoko — Zimbabwe	Therianthrope figure with arms extended sideways, running. Penis additament.	White elephants.
26	73/22/13	<i>Stone age myth & magic</i> , Pager	23	Bergville	Painted in white although reproduced in black. Baboon-like tail and body warthog-like head.	Other therianthropes & allies.
27		<i>People of the Eland</i> , Vinnicombe	336/7	(Mango- long) Sehong- hong	Two rain animals being led/driven by apparently unclothed "hunters".	Leading rain animals.
28		<i>A distinctive mythical Figure, etc.</i> , Goodall	404	Mtoko — Zimbabwe	3 similar walking figures, "Source naked except for fringing figures" & Elaborate hairstyles. on arms.	streams.

Site	Photo No (HCW)	Publication	Page	Magisterial District	Description of Creature	Main Features of Context
29		<i>Artists of the Rocks</i> , Battiss	216	Barkly East	"Chimerical creature".	Elaborate fig. Winged fig.
30	81/12/6	Unpublished		Clocolan	Lion-like creature.	Eland-like creatures. Winged fig., line.
31	66/30/14	Unpublished		Qacha's Nek	Therianthrope standing & wearing kaross.	Similar: standing.

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