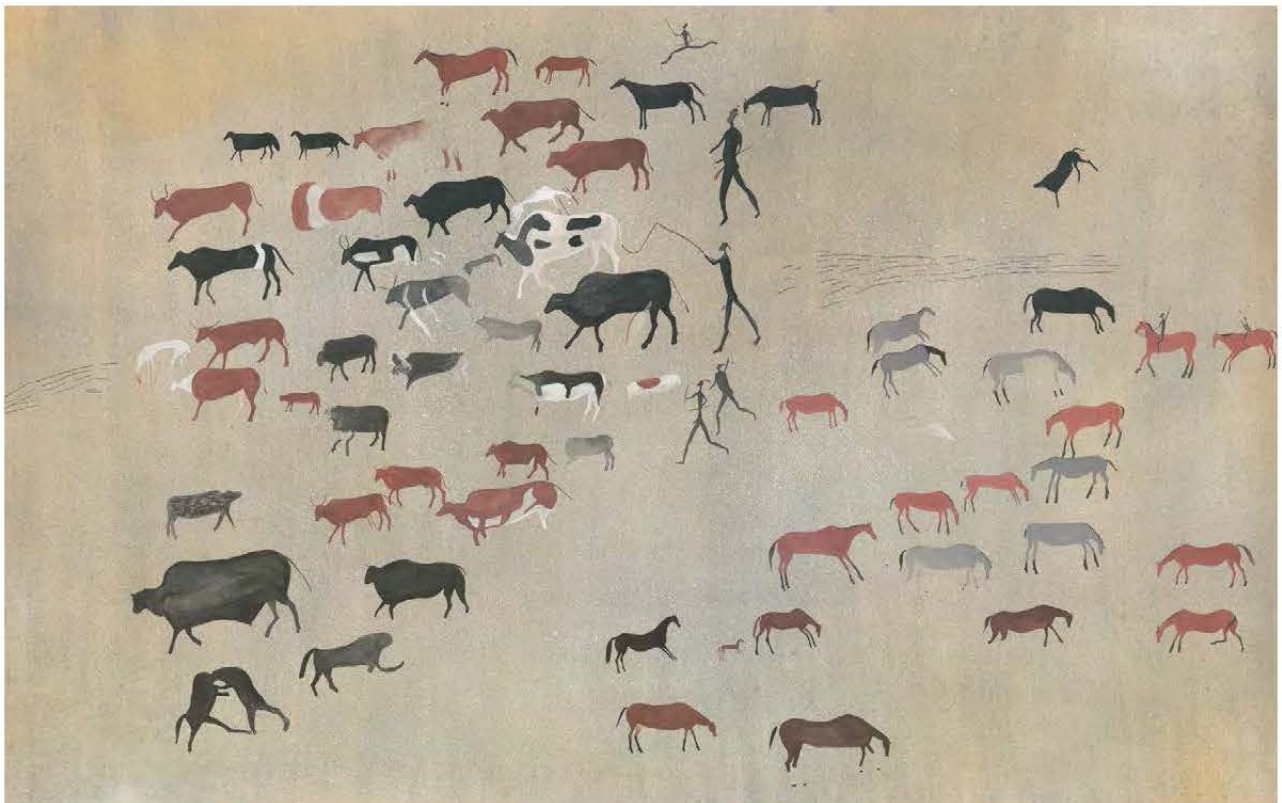


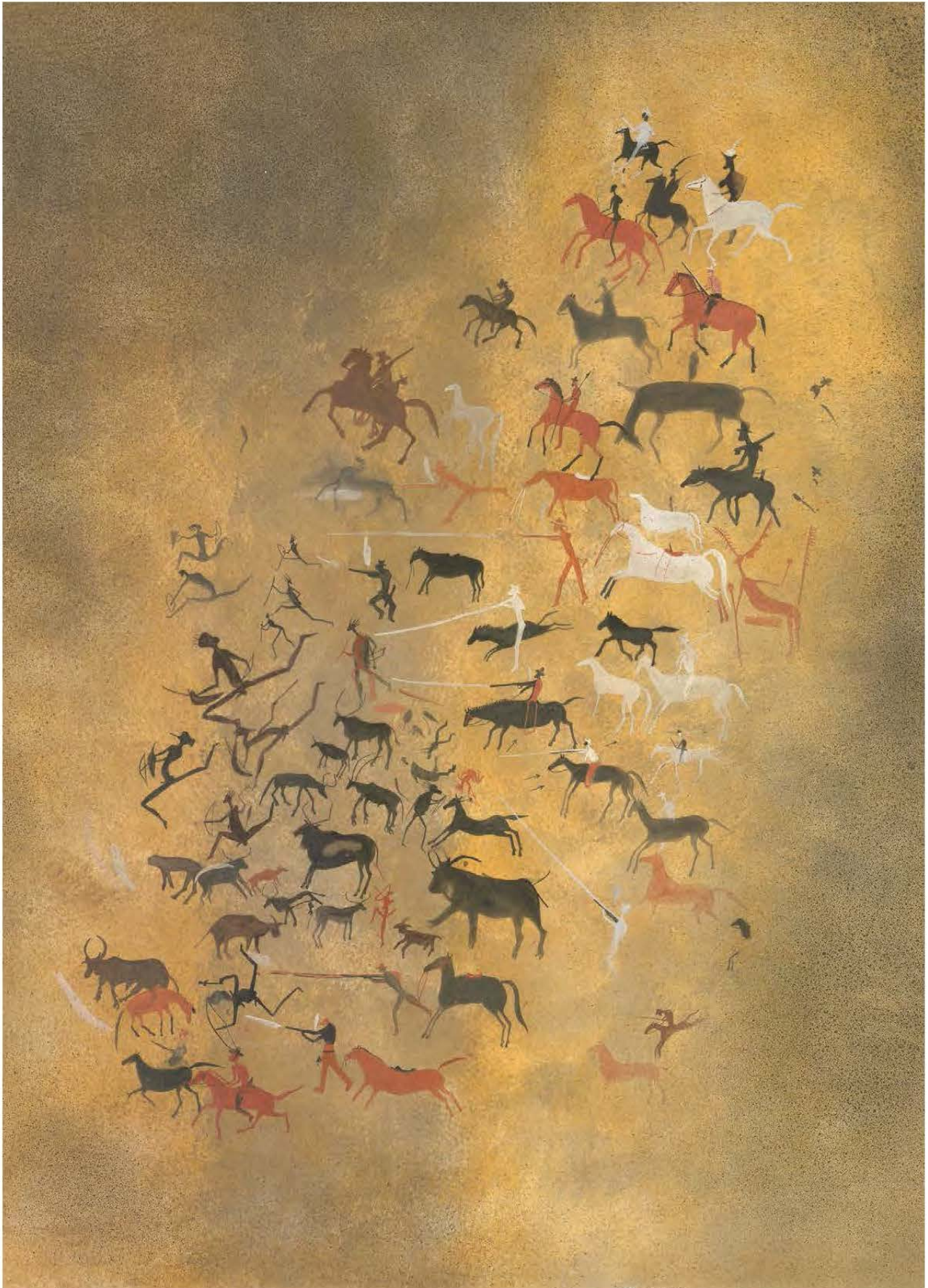
A tracing of a painting of what may be a San raid for cattle and sheep, with rainmaking elements. The fish and the serpent, one end of which touches the nose of a sheep and the other that of the hippopotamus, indicate that trance experience, probably relating to the capture of a rain animal as well as a stock raid, is being depicted here.

Source: National Museum, Free State.



An apparently naturalistic scene of men, cattle and horses, but with the inclusion of two therianthrope (hallucinatory/shaman?) figures at bottom-left. Copy by Patricia Vinnicombe.

Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.



Conflict over cattle. Note the non-realistic therianthropic figure with enormous horns. Copy by Patricia Vinnicombe.

Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.



Cattle in the blocked style, dogs, sheep and a large figure with unusual features - possibly a shaman.

Source: National Museum, Free State.

Another consequence of the stock raids carried out by the south-eastern San would have been that a surplus would have been generated in the form of cattle and horses. The important role played by shamans suggests that they would have controlled this surplus. In other words, the relations of production, the social mechanisms which determine who gets what share of the fruits of the band's labour, would have changed from one that was egalitarian and based on equal sharing of resources, including game controlled by shamans, to one where a certain class of people took a greater share than others.

This suggestion is supported by the observation made by Robert Gordon, who travelled extensively in the Colony in the 1770s, that the "magicians" of the Sneeuwberg San had as much authority amongst them as their chiefs. Indirect evidence also comes from Botswana, where modern-day Nharo San shamans are well paid for their services by the Tswana and are far wealthier than other San. This wealth is not fully redistributed, as occurred in earlier times. It is likely, therefore, that the status and wealth of south-eastern San shamans approached that of the Khoe "sorcerer" encountered by Sparrman in the eighteenth century who, Sparrman remarked, "besides being universally respected (by his fellow clansmen), was in possession of a greater stock of cattle than anyone among them".

If one accepts that this process occurred, we can see the changing role of the San shaman and the development of an embryonic class system reflected in the art. The increased ritual and economic power of the shaman may be expressed, for example, in panels where one person figures prominently, painted larger than the others and often elaborately attired and decorated. In addition, cattle and horses may have been appropriated as a new and powerful source of imagery and incorporated into their art and rituals by shamans as a way of demonstrating their control over access to exotic goods. In terms of this theory, trance elements in certain paintings of cattle can be interpreted as depicting the supernatural activities of game shamans directed towards the raiding of cattle.



A prominent figure, probably a shaman, who is wearing cattle horns on his head.

Source Lucas Smits.



A prominent figure, probably a shaman, painted larger, and more elaborately attired, than other figures in the panel.

Source: the author.

While paintings of cattle and horses may thus have expressed changing social relations within San bands, in some cases they also appear to have substituted for eland as symbols of spiritual power in the art. For some San groups, eland, horses and cattle became closely related, perhaps equivalent, symbols in San thought. This equivalence, particularly between cattle and eland, is expressed in a number of ways in the art. One way to symbolise it was to paint cattle in an explicitly trance context that corresponded closely to the way in which “trance eland” were painted. A painting from the Seapala River valley in Lesotho, of cattle which are depicted in a bizarre “flying” posture and are bleeding from the nose, may well symbolise religious concepts associated with paintings of dying eland, charged with supernatural potency, which also emit a fluid from their noses. The latter feature links both the Seapala cattle and eland to the experiences of San shamans, who, as has already been mentioned, experience nasal haemorrhaging in the “death” of trance. Paintings of creatures that combine physical features of humans and cattle also link the latter firmly to the trance experiences of shamans.



A creature with the physical features of both antelope and cattle.

Source: National Museum, Free State.



A kaross-clad cow/ox/bull therianthrope.

Source: the author.



A cow/bull/ox therianthrope.
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.



A patterned cow/bull/ox therianthrope bleeding from the nose.
Source: Lucas Smits.



"Flying" cattle, some of which are bleeding from the nose.

Source: the author.



One of these "flying" cattle, with blood coming from its nose.

Source: the author.

And the equivalence for some San people of eland and horses is demonstrated through the combining of the physical features of these animals in paintings. Paintings of “horse-eland” at the cave of Melikane in Lesotho are a good example of this phenomenon. The heads and forequarters of these animals are those of eland while their hindquarters are those of horses. They provide graphic evidence for the equivalence of eland and horses in the conceptual system of the San who painted them – an objective correlative to the mix of old and new religious beliefs held by many of the later artists.



“Horse-eland”. The front portion of their bodies are in the form of an eland, while the rear sections are in the form of a horse. Eland and horses, both animals of power, have thus been conflated by contact period San into one being. Copy by Patricia Vinnicombe.

Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.

We can see, then, that some animals associated with other groups, such as cattle and horses, were appropriated by San groups and substituted in their art for traditional symbols such as eland. In the examples discussed above, the traditional San frame of ideological reference was retained. New animals were used to symbolise old ideas. In other cases, however, it appears that newly introduced domesticated animals were used to symbolise new religious ideas drawn from other cultures, specifically the cultures of Nguni and Sotho farmers with whom San groups established close relations and with whom they intermarried. Since some south-eastern San groups maintained close relations with Nguni and Sotho farmers over long periods of time, it is reasonable to expect the cultures of these San groups to have been influenced by those of the farmers with whom they interacted.

This influence would not have been uni-directional, and Nguni and Sotho people would certainly also have been influenced by San cultures. There is evidence, for example, that points to San influence on the rites of Nguni diviners, the name for whom, igqira, is derived either from a San or a Khoe language. Aspects of the mediumistic divination dances of Nguni traditional healers may well, also, have been adopted by these people as a result of their being exposed to the trance rites of San

shamans - although a number of features of their rites, such as the use of fly whisks and ankle dance rattles, have been too easily attributed by some researchers to San influence. Fly whisks and dance rattles are common among some northern Bantu-speakers who appear to have had little or no contact with San groups.

That the south-eastern San would have adopted some of the rites and beliefs of neighbouring farmers with whom they had close ties is suggested by anthropological studies which show that a number of other San groups were strongly influenced by the customs and beliefs of neighbouring farmers. Studies of interaction between hunter-gatherers and farmers in areas other than those occupied by the southern San also indicate that, where these groups live in close association with each other, the hunter-gatherers tend to adopt the customs and beliefs of the politically dominant farmers much more frequently than vice versa. It is quite common, for example, for hunter-gatherer youths to attend the initiation schools of affiliated farmers, where they are versed in the tribal lore and customs of the farmers, and there are reports of San youths attending the initiation schools of Sotho and Swazi groups. Circumcision, which was common among some San groups, was also adopted from Bantu-speakers, although San, like hunter-gatherers in some other areas in Africa, were almost certainly employed by some Bantu-speakers as circumcisers in their initiation rites.



San divining tablets. The practice of using these tablets for divination was adopted from Bantu-speakers.

Source: Museum Africa.



A San man divining with dice.

Source: Museum Africa.

If, as seems very likely, some south-eastern San groups underwent a similar process of acculturation as they were drawn into the ambit of the Nguni and Sotho farmer societies that encapsulated them, we can expect beliefs and rites associated with Sotho and Nguni cultures to be expressed in south-eastern San art. These concepts may sometimes have been combined with traditionally San religious beliefs to form new, syncretic forms of belief - something that commonly occurs when people with different religions interact closely with one another. Certain San paintings, or features of paintings, can be interpreted as depicting Sotho or Nguni rites and beliefs which were adopted in whole or part by the San, and perhaps syncretised with existing rites and beliefs. Some of these are illustrated and discussed below.

A painting from “Upper Mangolong” cave in Lesotho (probably Pitsaneng shelter, about one kilometre from Soai’s cave, Sehonghong) which was described and illustrated in an article in 1874 by Joseph Orpen, may depict a Phuthi initiation rite in which San could also have participated. This painting was copied by Joseph Orpen in 1873 during an expedition into the Lesotho mountains. His copy was initially commented on by a San guide who accompanied the party and later by nineteenth century /Xam San informants staying with the linguist Wilhelm Bleek at his house in Mowbray, Cape Town.



A tracing of Orpen’s copy of the painting from “Upper Mangolong” which was commented upon by his San informant, Qing. Long thought to be San, the figures depicted in the painting are now recognized from their dress and weaponry as being Nguni, Sotho or members of a creolised Nguni/Sotho/San group.

Source: After Lewis-Williams (1981), *Believing and Seeing* (Fig. 9D). London: Academic Press.

MS
1874

A glimpse into the my theology of the Maluti
Bushmen by J. Orpen. Fort Beaufort St. Johnsburg
with Chromolithograph illustrations

The rugged mountain chains called Maluti by the Basutos & Amalindi
by the Kafirs (plural of luti or lunde a ridge) extend from the Brodehouse
& Alinal Districts to near Harriemuth & Maritzburg - They are the highest mountains
in South Africa reaching in some parts 11,000 feet in altitude & are formed of
peculiar brown rock overlying the great beds of sandstone forming the edges
of the great central plateau called in parts the Stormberg & Drakensberg
This sandstone when it crops out among & about the Malutis & elsewhere
forms here & there overhanging rocks sometimes so hollowed as to be caves
Under such rocks Bushmen paintings are frequently found - Mr George
Stowe collected a number of copies of these in the Innesbush district &
at his request I copied such as I found during surveying trips
in the outskirts of the Malutis in the Brodehouse District - Many of the
paintings of animals & men are surprisingly well done - & I may here
suggest the enquiry how far these paintings extend in South Africa
& whether any differences exist between the traditions mythology & origin
of those Bushmen tribes who do not paint & of those who possess a talent
remarkable in a savage tribe & whether its ^{development or loss} may be attributed to cause
facilities & their want or to some other cause - (There are ^{also} Bushmen tribes
in some parts who make no bars) - Dr Bleek could probably suggest
the direction of enquiries supplementing his researches & there are yet
many Bushmen in every part of South Africa who ^{must} retain their traditions &
many gentlemen who could afford a few hours leisure to make enquiries
for him - Mr Stowe & I both found paintings with apparently a mythe-
logical meaning & representing certain quasi religious rites - These are
not always fit for publication - & these ^{conjectured} ~~shrewdly~~ ~~curiously~~ ~~existences~~ with
representations from ancient mythologies - We could not obtain a clue &
one old Bushman questioned by Mr Stowe was obstinately mysterious &
silent - At last I chanced at least upon ^{at least} a ^{partial} clue which
may perhaps lead to others - The rebellion of Langalibalele's tribe
led me to pass through a part of the Malutis generally unknown &
which had been exclusively the haunt of Bushmen - The Portat

The first page of the original manuscript of Joseph Orpen's celebrated 1874 article detailing the religious beliefs and rites of the San of the Maloti - entitled "A glimpse into the mythology of the Maluti Bushmen".

Source: National Library of South Africa.

Orpen's San guide, Qing, was living at the time with Ncatya, a son of Moorosi, and he could speak Sephuthi, the Phuthi language. He appears to have been a member of the San group led by Soai, who, as has been shown, established very close relations with Moorosi's Phuthi. Qing and his fellow San could well, therefore, have been influenced by Phuthi customs, and some of the comments made by Qing on the Upper Mangolong painting appear to fit well with certain Phuthi beliefs related to initiation rites.

Aside from these comments, support for this interpretation of the painting's meaning comes from the body decoration, dress and weaponry of the tailed figures. The "knobs" on the heads of four of them are almost certainly inflated gall bladders. Wearing of this form of headgear was much more characteristic of Nguni and Sotho custom than of the San. The spots painted on the body of one of the figures are the same as the white spots painted on the bodies of *abakwetha*, male Nguni initiates. The long tails worn by the figures are possibly the long woven grass tails worn by the companions of some Sotho initiates at the initiation lodge. Three of the figures, moreover, hold knobkieries, the weapon traditionally associated with Nguni and Sotho youths at initiation and associated to a much greater extent with Nguni and Sotho people than with San.



A Sotho warrior with an inflated gall bladder on his head, like the figures in the Upper Mangolong painting.

Source: the author.



An Nguni man, or a man of mixed/creolised Nguni and San cultures, with an inflated gall bladder on his head and with characteristic knee tassels and knobkierie, bleeds from the nose in trance.

Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.

It may be relevant, moreover, that a nineteenth century /Xam San informant from the Northern Cape who was shown a copy of the painting by Wilhelm Bleek shortly after Qing commented on it, stated that the people in this painting were Bantu-speakers. We cannot be completely sure of the reliability of comments made by San so far removed from the social context of the art in the south-eastern mountains, but some archaeologists have argued that the comments made by Bleek's informants are useful, even critical, for an understanding of the paintings copied by Orpen.

Other San paintings, aside from the one at Upper Mangolong, which probably symbolised concepts associated with the cultures of Nguni and Sotho farmers include many of those depicting cattle. While some paintings of cattle are likely to have substituted for paintings of eland and symbolised older San beliefs, it is very likely that others symbolised religious concepts associated with Nguni and Sotho cultures. Cattle have great symbolic significance in the societies of Bantu-speakers, including those of the Nguni and Sotho people. They represent the ancestors and stand at the centre of many rites directed to these beings.



An Nguni diviner initiand inhales the dying breath of a sacrificed ox.

Source: Broster, J.A. (1981). *Amagqitha*. Cape Town: Via Afrika.

San had become acquainted with cattle through their contact with all of the immigrant groups, and indeed the Khoe came into being about 2000 years ago when some San groups acquired and started to breed sheep, and possibly cattle - probably as a result of their coming into contact with agropastoralist Bantu-speakers. The establishment of patron-client relations between the San and other groups, whereby the San were paid in cattle for herding and other services, allowed some San to build up their own herds of cattle. Shortly after the settlement of the Cape by the Dutch, for example, a number of groups of "Sonquas" were reported by Ensign Schrijver to be keeping sheep and cattle.

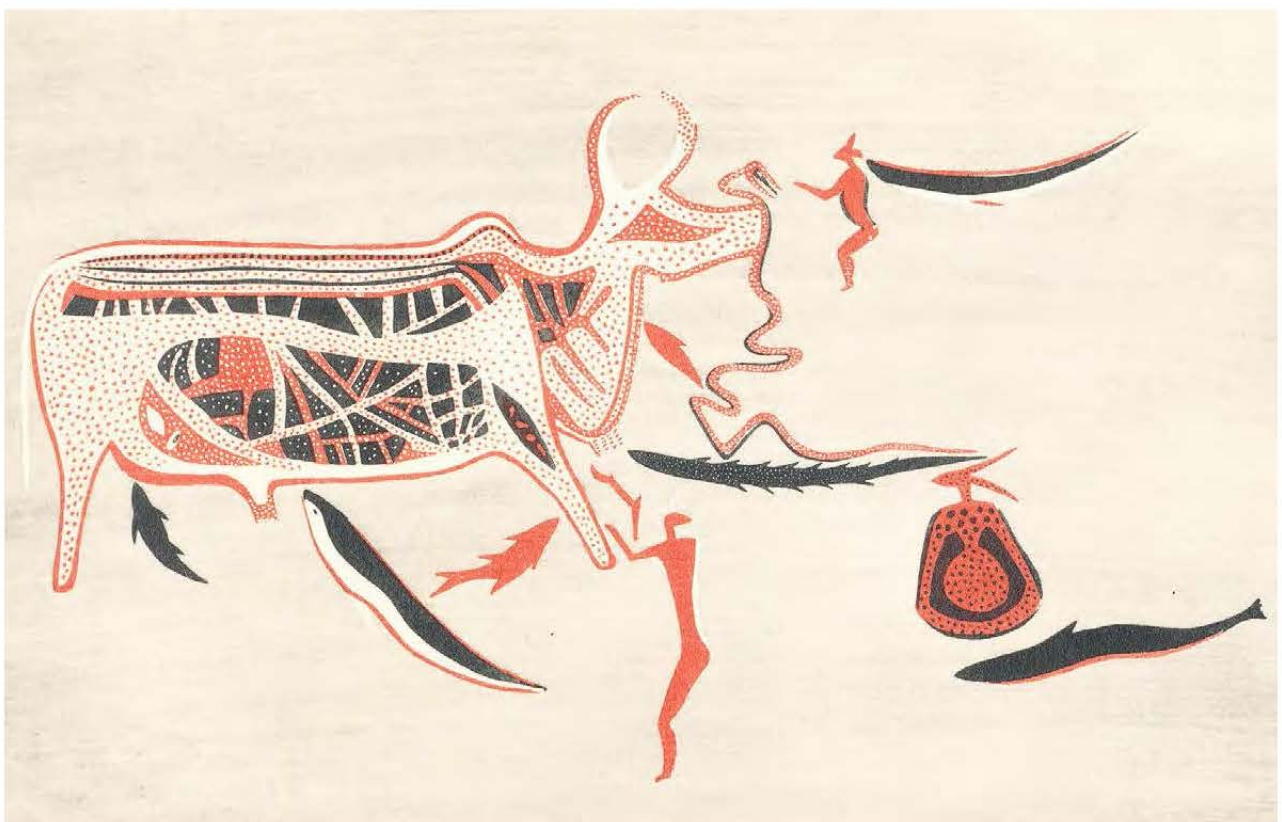


A San leader, or "captain", and his companion on oxback, c. 1811. The "captain" is holding a Colonial staff of office.

Source (original): Burchell, W.J. (1822/24). *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*. 2 vols. London: Printed by Longman et al.

As has been mentioned previously, we know that significant numbers of south-eastern San also kept cattle (in some cases, very large herds), and many south-eastern San lived in close association, or together, with Nguni or Sotho farmers. It is highly likely, therefore, that aspects of the symbolism associated with cattle in Nguni and Sotho society, specifically those connected to the ancestors and animal sacrifice, were adopted by some San people and expressed in their art. In the same way that a painting of an eland symbolised a multitude of religious concepts associated with that animal in San thought, some paintings of cattle executed by San influenced by contact with Nguni and Sotho farmers would have represented religious concepts associated with cattle by those Nguni and Sotho groups with whom the San had developed close relations. It seems probable that, initially, early in the contact period, San painters attributed the ancient symbolism of eland to cattle, but, with time, as San acculturation took its course, paintings of cattle by San, and Nguni and Sotho individuals who had joined up with them, increasingly took on the religious symbolism with which these animals are imbued in Nguni and Sotho society, syncretised in some cases with existing San religious beliefs.

We know, for example, that San who were employed to make rain for their Mpondomise patrons (discussed below) were often paid in cattle for their services, and probably sacrificed these cattle during rainmaking ceremonies for the Mpondomise. In this way, the concept of animal sacrifice, a core feature of Nguni and Sotho cultures, but almost completely absent from “traditional” San cultures, was probably adopted by some of the south-eastern San painters and expressed in their art, including paintings of rainmaking rites involving cattle.



A copy of a painting of a cow/ox/bull depicted with therianthrope beings, as well as fish and a serpent - creatures associated with water and the Rain. It is likely that this ox represents a rain animal, perhaps one sacrificed by San in a rainmaking rite that combined elements of the rites of San and Bantu-speakers.

Source: Stow, G.W. and Bleek, D.F. (1930). *Rock Paintings in South Africa*. London: Methuen.