

Rock Art research in Namibia: a Synopsis

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Introduction

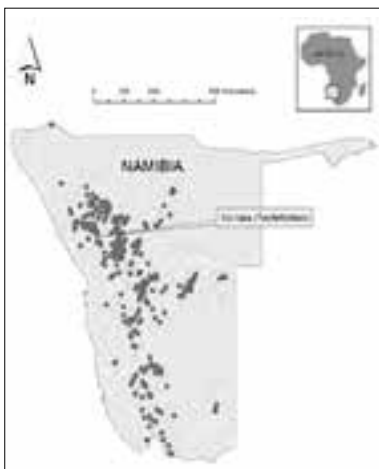
The term 'rock art' used in this paper refers prehistoric art in form of paintings as well as in various physical landscapes. However, their placement in the physical, geological and cultural contexts ranges from rock pavements, boulders, caves, rock shelters, in form of mobilier art as well as the interior of stone structures. Markings in form of pecking, polishing, scratching and abrading of rock surfaces is termed "petroglyphs/engravings" and are produced when a rock surface is chiseled with a sharp object of stone or hammer and punch or combination by grinding, or polishing, possibly with the aid of an abrasive and scratching to depict a desired figure, motif or symbol (the deductive process) while those that are painted using a brush, sticks, feathers or fingers are termed "pictographs" and are produced through the application of coloured substance i.e. 'ochre' to the rock surfaces to depict a figure, symbol or motif (additive process). Africa has by far the greatest collection of prehistoric rock art sites in the world estimated at over two hundreds thousands with diverse styles and affinities with principal regions of Sahara and its adjacent areas as well as Southern Africa (Wilcox, 1963). Southern Africa current database hold an excess of more than two million individual images and many still not formally recorded (Deacon, 2002). Although there are no reliable records to indicate the relative quantity of the paintings over engravings in Southern Africa, paintings sites are undoubtedly dominants over the engravings with various themes representing different rock art traditions of Southern Africa. Namibia boasts one of the renowned prehistoric rock art collection in Southern Africa with its principal sites of highest concentrations found in the Dâureb/ Brandberg Mountains that harbors about 1,000 rock art sites containing nearly 50,000 rock paintings and few engravings (Lenssen-Erz, 2007; Gwasira, 2011) most of which have been published in (Pager, 1989-2006); followed by those found in the Erongo Mountains and its adjacent areas accounts closely to 5300 images found at more than 80 rock art sites (Breuil, 1960; Hollmann *et al.*, 2007; Nankela, 2015) as well as the UNESCO World heritage Site of Twyfel-fontein and its adjacent areas with more than 5,100 figures (Viereck *et al.*, 1957; Scherz, 1975; Gwasira, 2010; Kinahan, 2010; Ouzman, 2010). While the lowest number of recorded sites are found in the Spitzkoppe Mountain central Namibia (Kinahan, 1990) and southern Namibia respectively (Wendt, 1976). Hence the country's current heritage database holds an excess of approximately 62,000 individual images of both paintings and engravings found at more 1200 sites countrywide. However, many rock art sites in both private and public land largely remain known but unrecorded while others have been discovered but still unrecorded.

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However, it is necessary to explain the difference between the known but unrecorded sites and those discovered but still unrecorded. The known site refers to the sites noted in reports about their existence with some photos or GPS coordinates either by the researchers in various disciplines whose main interests was not rock art sites but other archaeological interests such as excavations or faunal and flora studies at rock shelters. In most cases, the level of the knowledge of the art is extremely limited to detailed description of the figures and their current state of conservations. While the discovered but unrecorded sites refer to the large amount of rock art sites that have been discovered through chance finds by persons i.e. landowners and other local informants who provided leads resulting in new discoveries. In most cases the exact geographical location of these sites is not know but the areas where they are found are know. These sites are not reported at the National heritage Council or any government office representative in the region but are found mostly on different Internet websites or through word of mouth from many livestock herders in Namibia.

Distribution, content and tradition

The distribution of the country's art is largely driven by the geology. Paintings are generally confined virtually invariably to the granitic landscapes but wherever there are suitable rock surfaces, one would expect to find rock art in Namibia. The country's engravings occurs out in the open and are usually, bit not exclusively associated with sandstones, volcanic basalts, schist outcrops and pavements while paintings are commonly found in granitic landscapes where rock shelters in outcrops of granites rock formations and open granitic boulders. In Namibia, it is not uncommon to find both rock paintings and engravings coexisting at the same site as observed at Twyfelfontein world heritage site, but its extremely rare to find both paintings and engravings confined on the same rock surfaces as observed by (Gwasira, 2011) in the Dome Gorge of the Daureb/Brandberg Mountain. Moreover, recent discovery of the engraving site within Omandumba East Farm on volcanic basalt exist within few distances from the granitic outcrops where a large number rock paintings sites have been



Map 001 – Shows a general distribution and concentration of rock art sites in Namibia, after Kinahan, 2010.

recorded. One almost would expect that after many years of almost microscopic inspections of the country by surveyors, prospectors, hunters and researchers from various disciplines that many rock art sites would undoubtedly be discovered. Of the largest number of recorded rock art sites in Namibia less than ten rock art sites are the rock engraving sites with majority being found in Kunene, Erongo, Karas as well as in Hardap regions respectively. The rock paintings found generally in different geological and cultural settings. The central Plateau and the Namib Desert areas of present day Erongo and Kunene regions holds the highest accumulation of the prehistoric rock art sites while the lowest concentration has been recorded in Khomas highland and southern Namibia (Map 001).

Namibia, like many other Southern African countries exhibit a high level of variability in rock art traditions across the country but the

relationship between variability and geographic, cultural, and other forms of diversity has resulted in different rock art traditions in the region with distinctive styles and content that resulted in the cosmology and belief system of the Stone Age Hunter Gatherers and herders as well as Iron Age agriculturalists. Despite slight regional variations in surfaces, themes, techniques and styles, there are broad similarities in both contents, placement of the art in the landscapes as well as a persistence occurrences of illustrations of and metaphors in belief systems (shamanism and the altered state of consciousness or trance experience) particularly in the art of the hunter-gatherers (Lewis-Williams & Dowson, 1989) as an indicative of widespread human contacts, shared beliefs systems and temporal continuity with that of Southern African hunter gatherers, herders and agriculturalists belief system over the period in which rock art were produced. Nearly all the known rock art sites in Namibia occur predominantly in rock shelters and the open air. The record indicates a relatively high number of paintings over engravings with anthropomorphic figures being the most dominant depiction of rock painting figures in the Namibian rock art with very limited representation of complete human figures as observed at Grosse Domschlucht Farm near Omaruru (Ouzman, 2002) in the engravings with the exception of human footprints. However, women don't seem to occur very often as opposed to opposite sex and they are in most cases being engaged in gatherings and social activities like processions dances (clapping their hands) to possibly shamans to go into trances, gathering of wild berries and occasionally engaged in coital activities with male counterparts. Male counterparts are often depicted in hunting scenes carrying hunting bags (quiver bag), bow and arrows and shamanistic activities. In hunter-gatherer art human figures are usually depicted in various postures such as sitting, walking, bending from the waists with many human figures showing various dramatic and elaborated hairstyles that are sometimes seen so often in many paintings sites in Namibia. Therianthropes figures are also commonly found both in paintings and engravings in Namibia i.e. the lion man at the Twyfelfontein world heritage site (Scherz, 1975; Gwasira, 2010; Kinahan, 2010; Ouzman, 2010) as well as Apollo 11 art mobilier from the Apollo 11 cave (Wendt, 1976). Differences in the content of the art can be seen in the posture and dress of the people who are illustrated.

Animals are the second most common figures in Namibian rock art. Most popular among the animals of the Namibian Rock Art are antelopes. Nearly, all the prominent depicted animals figures in rock paintings and engravings in the Namibian rock art are antelopes with larger antelopes such as Springbok (*Antidorcas marsupials*), Oryx/gemsbok (*Oryx Gazelle*) Kudu (*tragelaphus stepsiceros*) and Eland (*taurotr*) being dominant while smaller antelopes for example Duiker (*cephalophinae*) and Klipspringer (*oreotragus*) being least presented. Following the antelopes in quantity are Giraffes, Zebra, Elephant, Felines, Kudu, Eland and Rhino and other animal species such as snakes, monkeys and bees. A high percentage of animal spoors are mostly dominant in engravings as oppose to paintings as observed at most engraving sites of the Twyfelfontein, Austertz/Austerigt Omandumba East Farm, Omboru East Farm and Grosse Domschlucht Farm.

As noted above, there are variation in the frequency of certain animals depicted in the rock paintings and engravings of the region. These variations reflects not only the local fauna in their natural inhabitants and distribution but also an indication of the animals that the rock art authors and their societies regarded as significant on their economic, social, religious belief system and ritual practices especially the prominent depiction of the antelopes species in Namibia as well as the powerful animals and felines like elephants, giraffe and rhinos. Most of the zoomorphic figures in the Namibian rock art are represented either in groups or single with apparent regards to their natural habits although there is highly varied manner in which animals are depicted in engravings and paintings. Other

highly represented figures are the schematic designs depictions of entopic phenomena with concentric circles, dots, wavy and straight lines, grinds, nested u-shaped and cupule are widespread and occurs in all for m of rock art but almost exclusively common in engravings of both rock art traditions in Namibia. In rock paintings and engravings, they are nevertheless detected in hunter-gatherers traditions and integrated into the fine line paintings and engravings. It is often emphasizes that in both traditions that the existence of these entopic designs accentuated their connections with altered state of consciousness and, therefore, the link between the art and trance experiences. Very few records of phytomorphic figures has also been recorded in the Namibian rock art as seen in the Brandberg mountains and Omandumba West Farms where quiver trees '*Aloe dichotoma*' or '*Choje*' in San language; a species of aloe indigenous to Southern Africa. It was regarded significant especially in hunter-gatherers tradition for the production of strings, quiver container and carve their arrow from the soft, pulpy branches of this tree.

The most dominant pigments used in the Namibian rock paintings are the red ochre, followed by brown paintings and some exclusively in yellow, black or manganese oxide and white. All painted figures are painted in monochrome, biochrome or polychrome. In some cases, the white, black and yellow colors were used to exclusively complete a painted figure while others are painted only in monochrome of those colors-this is more common in paintings of the Upper Brandberg Mountain. The ethnographic records indicates that the pigments was mixed with varieties of binders such as blood, egg, fat and plant juices but the exact recipe are not known (Lewis-William, 1983; in Deacon, 2012). The techniques applied in the majority of the paintings in Namibian rock art can be summarized as follow. Fine-line paintings are almost exclusively the work of the hunter-gatherers, in red,



Figure 001 – Shows varieties rock painting figures in varieties of painted colors from the Snake rock shelter in the Upper Brandberg Mountain.

brown, yellow ocher, white, black charcoal or manganese oxide, done with a brush of other fine instrument, using techniques such as: outline of the figures with a single line (rare and very few are found in the Brandberg Mountain and Erongo Mountain. Monochrome figures with colour blocked (commonly found in many paintings in Namibia); outline in one colour with figure infilled with another slightly different colors, biochrome in which two blocks of colour are used in the same figure and Polychrome in which three or more colors are used in the same figure is widespread in Namibia (Fig. 001) below.

Interpretation and chronology

The application of ethnographical analogies (Lee, 1979; Barnard, 1992; Molin, 2006; Nankela, 2010) in the Namibian rock art where no direct cultural relationship occurs between the informant (contemporary tribal groups located near rock art sites or whose ancestors are thought to have authored the rock art in Namibia) and the original authors has received mixed receptions in Namibia. The problem resulted in fact that there is no active indigenous group neither producing rock art nor showing any interest in local rock art like the aboriginal in Australia. However, although such problems exists in rock art generally as observed in many countries, rock art legacy continue to widen our general knowledge and understanding of the reason why the art was created, their social, political, religious economic and ritual as well as symbolic contexts in which it was produced.

The Namibian rock art has been interpreted in relation two different schools of thoughts; firstly is the *interpretation theory* backed by a hand full of ethnographic and ethnohistorical as well as historical accounts of pre-colonial society of the people whose ancestors are thought to author the rock art. It is based on the same general explanatory approach used in other parts of southern Africa (Lewis-Williams, 1982; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989; Coulson, 2007; Southy, 1999; Kinahan, 1999; 2001a; 2004 e 2011) suggesting that the rock art symbolic meaning goes beyond than of aesthetic elaborations. That it belongs to a regional cognitive tradition in which the metaphorical potency of certain animals was exploited for the purposes of ritual healings (Kinahan, 2004). By inferring from the ethnographical records (Lee, 1979 and Barnard, 1992) suggests that certain rituals such as of healing among southern African hunter-gatherer communities becomes even greatly intensified when resources are scarcer especially in the dry lands of the Namib where events of irregular rainfall patterns and eventually draught strains not only the hunter-gatherer subsistence life but has a significant ecological consequences. The secondly approach is the *empirical tradition* or realisms or naturalistic ideas whose focus is based on the natural contexts and habitants of the rock art sites (Lenssen-Erz, 1997; 2004; 2007 e 2008). The empirical approach advocates our understanding where rock art artists choose to engage in symbolic behavior considering the social context in which these activities took place also referred to as archaeological landscapes-where both political, cosmological, or phenomenological associations provides more information regarding the creation of rock art. It furthermore looks at how rock art sites are placed in their environments in relations to the elements of landscapes such as economic resources, geographical features, settlement patterns rather than approaching rock art as decoration of a passive surface, greater appreciation of how an artist may interpret and engage with the surface to be painted or engraved may assist in the interpretation of rock art. It further demonstrates that rock art sites are deliberately positioned in different locations that are frequently associated with a range of symbolic meanings and phenomenological associations that may be played upon in rock art production for various reasons i.e. vantage locations to indicates tribal supremacy or from to signal particular social groups or near noteworthy landscape features to which cosmological meanings have become attached.

The chronology of the Namibian rock art like any where else in southern Africa remains largely tentative and relative (e.g. Breunig, 1991: 118f) especially when the art is classified on the basis of stylistic typologies, sequences of superimpositioning and techniques. Establishing the chronology becomes even more a daunting task when the art (paintings) do not contain organic materials for direct dating through scientific methods such as the radiocarbon. Furthermore, the rock engravings for instance are not found within any cultural stratigraphy hence the art will continued to be dated in association with the other archaeological assemblages – a practical example is that of Apollo 11 art mobilier (dated 25 000 BP) from southern Namibia (Africa's oldest paintings) that was dated in association with the Middle Stone Age occupation from the Apollo 11 (Wendt, 1976). However, establishing the chronology of the art in relation to association to archaeological remains has its short comings as it does not necessarily demonstrate the actual age of the art rather, the period from which the art was abandoned (Gwasira, 2011). For instance, Apollo 11 which initially dated 25 000 BP was later upon further scientific analysis, the art was thought even to be older as 28 000 – 30 000 years (Vogelsang *et al.*, 2010 in Gwasira, 2011). Many years of rock art research in Namibia especially in the central Namibia have researchers attributing the rock art tradition to one main broad archaeological period of the Late Stone Age chronology of *Hunter Gathers tradition* in Southern Africa between 4000-2000 years (Conrad *et al.*, 1988; Kinahan, 1990; Breunig, 2003; Lenssen-Erz, 2007, 2010; Richter *et al.*,

2008; Ouzman, 2007; Gwasira, 2011; Pleurdeau, 2012) where intense rock art activities have been observed, the *Khoekhoen Tradition* from 2 000 years ago (Ouzman, 2007; Kinahan, 2010; Lenssen-Erz, 2007 e 2010; Gwasira, 2011) which saw the introduction of domesticated livestock such as cattle (Kinahan, 1990) as well as finger paintings painting abstracts (Lenssen-Erz & Vogelsang, 2005). However, although the traditional stylistic classification have provided relative dates for the rock art in Namibia, further methodologies i.e. content and patina must be used to establish a conclusive chronological sequence, against the background of changing palaeoenvironmental hunter gatherer and herders populations have existed for a long period in Namibia.

Rock art studies in Namibia: An overview

Rock art research in Namibia is relatively limited (see Richter & Vogelsang, 2008; Kinahan, 2011; Gwasira, 1998) and has developed from the determinations of amateur researchers into a large body of scientific discipline (Gwasira, 2012). However, paintings were more preferred than engravings, consequently remaining moderately less investigated compare to paintings (Dawson, 1992 as cited in Gwasira, 2012).



Figure 002 – Shows the infamous ‘White Lady Painting’ of the Brandberg at Maack’s shelter, Tsisab Ravine.

However, it was not until a late 19th century when traveller W. C. Palgrave firstly reported the rock paintings in the Brandberg Mountain in 1879 (Gwasira, 1998; Dierks, 2000; Wallace and Kinahan, 2011). Following the discovery of the “White Lady of Brandberg” (Fig. 002) by the Topographer Reinhard Maack in the early 20th century, rock art research in Namibia became a more deliberate pursuit especially after the German officer Jochmann brought it into an international arena through a popular published journal. Thereafter a number of researchers such as the well know French Prehistorian Abbe Henri Breuil with a collaboration of Mary E. Boyle, Dr. E.R Scherz

and R. G Strey (Breuil, 1959) began programs of exploration of the Brandberg Mountain through documentation (tracing directly from the rock surfaces) with considerable focus in the rock art of Tsisab Ravine of Brandberg Mountain between 1947 and again in 1948. His work were later published in his 1959 paperback titled “Tsisab Ravine and other Brandberg sites” published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation through Trianon Press However, both Maack and Breuil’s interpretation of the Brandberg art particularly that of the “White Lady Freeze’ was not without controversy as they declared art as non-African in its origin but rather the work of advanced Mediterranean people of Phoenician origin-ancestors of European settler community.

His theory was eventually disapproved first in 1970s by the Australian born graphic designer Harald Pager who was commissioned to documents the rock art of Brandberg as well as in the second half of the 20th century, where many archaeologists ultimately dismissed most theories on Mediterranean influences on the prehistory of Southern Africa although the authorship of the art generally provided avenues for new research enquiries among many rock art researchers. The first half of the twentieth century, rock art documentation in Namibia became more formalized, recording the stylistic diversity of sites beyond the Dâureb/Brandberg Mountain. Breuil and his team extended their exploration and documented the rock art sites in the Anibib, Omandumba Farms and

Other Erongo Sites in the 1950s, which were published in his second paperback of 1960. Here, about 40 rock painting sites containing approximately 3000 figures were recorded. Their research however tended to focus on describing the most elaborate and aesthetically attractive aspects of rock imageries and directs interpretation of what rock art imagery might represents. I am now revisiting his earliest research for my 2014-2016 Ph.D project. In the same area, researchers such as Viereck, MacCalman, Berkeley and Sydow conducted archaeological expeditions in the Erongo Mountains firstly in 1962 and later in 1989 with B. Sandelowsky and recorded some of the rock art sites at the following rock shelters stripper giraffe, cymot, bedding place, phillip shelter, Ameib X29, red Indian shelter that were later published in a preliminary report of (Viereck, 1964 and later in a supplementary report of 1989). The worth of discovery made during this period led to the development of systematic, comprehensive surveys and formal documentation of the rock art sites in Namibia. Reinhard Maack who initially discovered the “White Lady” in the Brandberg reported the presence of rock engravings in the Twyfelfontein area in 1921, which was then systematically recorded by Dr. E. R. Scherz between 1930-1970s when he completed his extensive survey at Twyfelfontein. Here, his records consisted of 15 small rock art sites that hosts about 2500 rock engravings on the sandstone slabs (Fig. 003). His survey methodology that involved the use of the GPS to locate rock art sites, the establishment of the site names and numbers as well as recording of the site content gave birth to the empirical traditions of the rock art research in Namibia. Due to the largest concentration of the prehistoric rock engravings of Twyfelfontein in Namibia at a time, the sites received its recognition in 1952 as National Monument site and then in 2007 as a UNESCO world heritage site as a highest concentration of rock engravings in Southern Africa. Scherz’s work at Twyfelfontein was published in 1975 in his book “Felsbilder Südwest-Afrika. Teil 11: Die Gravierungen im Nordwesten Südwest, Cologne: Böhlau Verlag”. Rock art of Namibia was rarely incorporated into a wider archaeological studied. Scherz continued with the survey and documentation of rock sites in Kunene region in areas such as Kamanjab Situated on top of Peet Alberts Koppie farm when he documented about 1,200 to 1,500 engravings comprising mostly animals, but also abstracts like circular forms and a star (Fig. 004). The Historical Monuments



Figure 003 – Shows the varieties of artwork of the Twyfelfontein world heritage site.

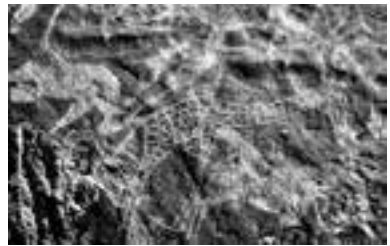


Figure 004 – One of the prominent animal figure depictions of a large giraffe measuring 330 cm in the Peet Alberts Koppie farm, in Ujto-Kunene Region.

Commission declared the site as National Monument on 01.05.1967 for South West Africa (HMC) and the site published in his report titled, “Felsbilder in Südwest-Afrika. Teil III: Die Gravierungen in Südwest-Afrika ohne den Nordwesten des Landes”, Koeln/Wien 1975. The coming of the 1960s oversees Scherz work in the Brandberg Mountain incorporated in the Cologne rock art research program “*Felsbilder im Südwest Africa*” funded by the Deschutes Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), which at a time was also funding the rock art research in South Africa by the Fock’s family and the archaeological excavations of Namibian rock art and non-rock art sites by W.E. Wendt (Richter & Vogelsang, 2008: 37).

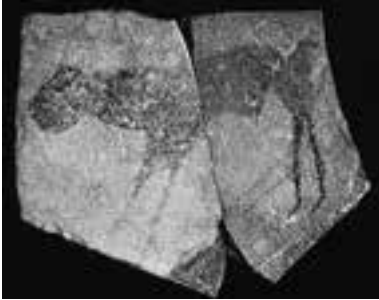


Figure 005 – Shows Africa's oldest rock painting of Apollo 11 slab (Therianthrope) found in the Middle Stone Age sediments from the Apollo 11 shelter in Huns Mountain, southwest of Namibia.

It was during this time between 1968-1970 that Wendt began his work in Namibia to investigate the relationship between rock art and the archaeological deposits (Wendt, 1972). Among the excavated 26 archaeological sites concentrated mainly of South of Namibia, Wendt discovered Africa's oldest painting of Apollo 11 slab "Freeze" (Fig. 005) found in the Middle Stone Age sediments from the shelter of Apollo 11 shelter in Huns Mountain, southwest of Namibia that was then published in 1974 and 1976. Wendt later continued his work in the central Namib and excavated rock shelters in the Erongo Mountains such as the Fackeltrager, Etemba 2, 14, 11a and 12 as well as the later at Ghost Cave in the Klein Spitzkoppe (Wadley, 1979). However, the absence of the organic remains from the excavated rock art shelters made it difficult to date the rock art figure in relation to the excavated archaeological materials. Similar problem was experienced by Jacobson in 1974 who carried out archaeological investigations of the Lower Numas Gorge cave and Tsisab shelters i.e. Ostrich, tiara, Girl's School shelters in the Brandberg Mountain (Jacobson, 1976b). Meanwhile, Scherz work was temporarily abandoned due to the high "demanding logistic requirement of the Brandberg Mountain" (Richter *at al.*, 2008) as well as due to old age and his work was later published in Scherz: 1970, 1975, 1986) when his research work was then continued by researcher Harold Pager in 1977 who intensely, painstakingly and impressively documented over 43 000 individual rock art figures of 879 from the rock art sites of the upper Brandberg Mountain in Amis, Hungorob, Southern Gorges, Umuab and Karoab Naib Gorge (A) and the Northwest, Naib (B), Circus and Dom Gorges of one of the most challenging mountain in Namibia within a period of 7 years until his sudden death in 1985 (Lenssen-Erz, 1997: 4). Ernst-Rudolf Scherz further recorded the lower parts of Brandberg Mountain in areas of the Grosse Domschlucht. Despite this, Scherz visited the Dome Gorge and made some selective recording of the rock art which consists of at least 4 components: rock paintings; rock engravings; the gong rock and Khoekhoen rock engravings which were published in MacCalman H.R."Grosse Domschlucht Brandberg. Furthermore, where engravings and paintings were found on the same panel, Scherz only recorded some and disregarded the engravings perhaps due to different research interest. A new discovery of Prehistoric rock art in South West Africa in 1965 and



Figure 006 – The artwork of the Grosse Domschlucht. Retrieved from SARADA Archive. Photo courtesy, Sven Ouzman.

later documented Sven Ouzman (2002) and later by Dr. Tilman Lenssen-Erz of the Heinrich-Barth Intitut in Cologne and cooperation with Goodman Gwasira who at a time was working for the National Museum of Namibia (Fig. 006) and were later studied and published by Goodman Gwasira in 2011.

Following Pager's passing, his work was continued by Dr. Tilman Lennsen-Erz, an esteemed German rock art archaeologists from the University of Cologne whose work significantly increased the number of known rock art sites within the Brandberg Mountain. Lenssen-Erz did not only

systematically carry out further recording of rock art, but by publishing the Pager volumes (Pager, 1989, 1993, 1995-2006) and in Lenssen-Erz published work (Lenssen-Erz, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2007c, 2008, 2009, 2012). It was during this period that new generation of researcher such as Lenssen Erz began to question the art in relation to their natural terrains. Here, the interpretation draws on a well-established tradition of ecological and landscape archaeology which centred around the *context*, the *physical configuration* and the whole *totality* of its environment where rock art sites are found.

The late 20th century of rock art research in Namibia became more advanced and accomplished by supporting evidences emanating from an inclusion of broader archaeological investigations into the rock art sites studies. For instance, the archaeological investigation of the Brandberg Mountain by Dr. Peter Breunig between 1984 and 1987 established a chrono-logical framework of the prehistoric habitants of the Brandberg Mountain and linked the rock art with its cultural and ecological contents (Breunig, 2003 in Richter *at al.*, 2008). Furthermore, the archaeological excavations in the Hungorob Ravine of the Brandberg mountain by renowned Namibian archaeologist Dr. John Kinahan (Kinahan, 1989) who conducted test excavated a rock shelter in order to establish a chronological framework of the sites occupation revealed a series of sites occupants, from the hunter gatherers settlements who most probably authored the rock art figures until the late millennia to that of the archaeological remains culminating in the adoptions of the nomadic pastoralism emergence in the last millennia supported by the archaeological remains of the excavation. Furthermore, a similar investigation of the Spitzkoppe Mountain (Kinahan, 1990, 2003 a & b) which resulted in an test excavations at one of 37 rock art sites indicated a pattern of not only the hunter gatherers occupations but also revealed a series of subsistence occupants of the Spitzkoppe of pastoral settlements who introduced new subsistence technology (e.g. herds of livestock and pottery as well as possible authored some images of cattle 9 (Fig. 007) observed at the site the author was very prudently in this stance though. There is need to revisit the known work by specifying the chronology of the figure through the study of superimpositions.

During this period, a variety of surveying and recording methodological techniques i.e. photography in rock art were used as studies gradually became increasingly formalized and more systematic. Kinahan interpreted the rock art figures symbolically and broadly relating to ritual activities associated with the hunter-gatherers tradition. He draws the Ethnographic parallels with that of South Africa tribal groups whose ancestors are thought to have authored the rock art in most part of Southern Africa. A number of researchers in the region (Lewis-Williams, 1982; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989; Coulson, 2007; Southy, 1999) interpreted rock art with varying depths of appreciation for the appropriate use of the ethnographic analogies. Other rock art research in Namibia of the late 20th century oversees record of new rock engraving site (Fig. 008) recorded by (Dowson T. A., 1998) and his team from the University of Southampton who engaged in a five year rock art project in Namibia funded by the British Academy and the University of Southampton to investigate the context in which rock paintings and engravings were produced in the Ugab River Valley, of the central Namib



Figure 007 – Shows a partially exfoliated figure depicting what appear to be cattle at one of excavated rock shelter in the Spitzkoppe Mountain.



Figure 008 – Shows different animal spoor engravings on a rock surface in the Okongami Farm of Outjo district, Namibia.

research revisiting the previously recorded or documented sites in Namibia to investigate the rock art in relation to various larger archaeological and anthropological settings offering new methodological approaches to the studies of prehistoric figures and sites i.e. embracing of the contextual approach that includes systematic surveys and records of the rock art sites that incorporate geographic and cultural landscapes, spatial analysis, contextualization and ecology of the Namib Desert settlements patterns research that reflects current directions in the field (Lenssen Erz, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2007c, 2008, 2009, 2012; Gwasira, 2011; Kinahan, 2001a, 2004; Breunig, 2003,) of the upper Brandberg shows that the same general explanatory approach used in other parts of southern Africa. Ethnographic enquiries of rock art and identity formations at Twyfelfontein world heritage sites by (Molin, 2006; Nankela, 2011) challenged the established theory on the ethnic relations between the rock art sites and those living in near the rock art sites as well as general visitors of Namibia's first UNESCO world heritage site. Hollmann and Steyn 2003 revisited the work of Abbe Breuil 1957 and Scherz 1986 in Erongo Mountains particularly in Omandumba East, Anibib, Etemba, and Ekuta farms whose research interest has been strongly reliant of the ethnographical associations of the rock paintings of Erongo built around the shamanistic practices, hunting magic theories and contexts of rock art of the hunter gatherers as well as the current management and conservation of the art. Similar research study was conducted in 2011 by a master student researcher from the Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt Verena Börner who carried out an archaeological research and documentation of



Figure 009 – A fully painted giraffe at "Torchbearer" shelter in Omandumba West Farm, after author.

Desert. Their research focused more generally to archaeological enquiries of the Namib regarding the current debates on the introduction of pastoralism, and interactions between hunter-gatherers and pastoralists, refer to rock art in general terms specifically the data and analyses on the role the production of symbolic imagery had in shaping the prehistory of the region as it is assumed that both paintings and engravings were made by hunter-gatherer peoples.

The 21st century into the rock art research in Namibia oversees a growing number of academic

research revisiting the previously recorded or documented sites in Namibia to investigate the rock art in relation to various larger archaeological and anthropological settings offering new methodological approaches to the studies of prehistoric figures and sites i.e. embracing of the contextual approach that includes systematic surveys and records of the rock art sites that incorporate geographic and cultural landscapes, spatial analysis, contextualization and ecology of the Namib Desert settlements patterns research that reflects current directions in the field (Lenssen Erz, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2007c, 2008, 2009, 2012; Gwasira, 2011; Kinahan, 2001a, 2004; Breunig, 2003,) of the upper Brandberg shows that the same general explanatory approach used in other parts of southern Africa. Ethnographic enquiries of rock art and identity formations at Twyfelfontein world heritage sites by (Molin, 2006; Nankela, 2011) challenged the established theory on the ethnic relations between the rock art sites and those living in near the rock art sites as well as general visitors of Namibia's first UNESCO world heritage site. Hollmann and Steyn 2003 revisited the work of Abbe Breuil 1957 and Scherz 1986 in Erongo Mountains particularly in Omandumba East, Anibib, Etemba, and Ekuta farms whose research interest has been strongly reliant of the ethnographical associations of the rock paintings of Erongo built around the shamanistic practices, hunting magic theories and contexts of rock art of the hunter gatherers as well as the current management and conservation of the art. Similar research study was conducted in 2011 by a master student researcher from the Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt Verena Börner who carried out an archaeological research and documentation of some rock art sites in the Omandumba east and West farms in order to compile a master's thesis about them. Here, the researcher documented approximately 44 sites (Fig. 009) of which about 3 sites do not contain the art but undefined archaeological artifacts made of stone, most likely unspecific Late Stone Age inventories. The sites were schematically documented using GPS-measuring methods; photographic and descriptive means following a fieldwork system of the documentation of Rock Art developed by Dr. Tilman Lenssen-Erz of the University of Cologne. This system is based on collecting data used for an empirical analysis of the rock art and the rock

art sites. The thesis further tested and evaluates the applicability of the shamanistic theory on the basis of selected rock paintings from the Erongo-Mountains, Namibia (Börner, 2013).

Conservation and management issues of rock art sites in Namibia

The late 19th into the early 20th centuries, rock art in southern Africa was regarded as aesthetic object worth collecting. This approach led researchers to believe that effective conservation of rock art could be best achieved by the removal of panels of rock art from sites to museums for safekeeping (Rudner, 1989; Loubser, 1994; Deacon, 1994, 2007; Henry, 2007). Hence, in Namibia, with the 1950s rock art conservation was enforced by legislation that made it illegal to destroy, alter, remove from original site or export rock art without a permit. From the 1950s, declaring certain sites as national monuments such as the Brandberg, Twyfelfontein and the Spitzkoppe sites, enforced the site's protection. Years later, rock art researchers in Namibia have become progressively apprehensive about the state and the rate at which both paintings and engravings are deteriorating triggered by various factors with obvious natural activities i.e. rock weathering, biological agents, animal action, normal geological activity and anthropogenic activities such as artificial factors like lack of public awareness, uncontrolled tourism, acts of vandalism or inadequate conservation strategies that attempt to 'preserve' the site coupled by the absence of community involvements and neglects of the sites by the legal custodians of the rock art sites in the overall conservation and management of the sites despite the existence of the protective legislation – the National Heritage Act No 27 of 2004. During this period, various assessment and documentations systems were developed to record and document motifs, their context & their characteristics within that context as well as their state of conservations. Many rock art sites have been recoded thanks to the 20th and 21st century devoted researchers. These documentations to date serves as a complex methodological model and a practical theoretical structure for the assessment of the rock art sites in Namibia and has over the years amended to fit the currents trends in rock art conservation and management issues. It incorporates not only graphics recording of the motifs but also description of the rock art figures (standardized field note form for the rock) and also complements its description with information about other conditions relative to the alterations to the paintings or engravings with the overall objectives of concurrently evaluate and monitor the conditions, alteration and the agents responsible for deteriorations. Although several rock art sites in Namibia were declared as national heritage sites to safeguard them from possible vandals and destruction, other damage continue to persists, exhibiting the ineffectiveness and weakness of legislation alone to address such problems as keenly witnessed at some of rock art sites in Erongo region i.e. the Spitzkoppe Conservation Area as well as some sites in the private farms of Erongo Mountains.

Furthermore, the conservation of rock art sites as heritage sites in Namibia has shifted from focusing essentially on the material fabric of the site to approaches that includes a broader meaning that make the sites important. This wider perception of the art has enabled the inclusion of tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage to the site therefore sourcing new tools to look after these heritage sites. The management planning was one of the answers, and has become an essential methodology that involves the development of the effective and practical management and conservation plans calling for more effective and sustainable use of such heritage resources.

The 21st century saw some of the Namibian rock art sites ultimately nominated into the UNESCO world heritage sites – the Twyfelfontein and in the UNESCO Tentative List – The Brandberg Mountain for their outstanding cultural and natural landscapes. However, converting such sites into international heritage means maintaining the sites and requires adequate practices to guarantee environmentally sound management of the site and at the same time ensures that local communities benefit from the site's existence. Although tou-

rism offers advantages such as the promotion of cultural values of rock art sites, generate income through visitor's entrance fees and donations funds for restoration and protection efforts as well as supporting of local handicrafts and others stakeholders such as tour operators and lodges chains, the downside of such development is as managing such rapid tourism growth as it's a time-consuming process demanding clear policies, on-going dialogue with stakeholders, and constant monitoring of a heritage site. In Namibia, tourism activities require environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and Heritage Impact Assessment. Since it contributes to protection and restoration efforts, the right balance between economic gain and undesirable impacts can be elusive. In the case of world heritage site, like Twyfelfontein; National Heritage Council of Namibia is fully aware that they are under an international obligation to maintain and restore the site's original values. This responsibility poses difficult questions regarding the degree of change that should be permitted to accommodate tourism growth without stretching scarce resources and push heritage institutions away from protection efforts. Another problem is ensuring that a portion of tourism revenue remains in the community as a means of fostering local protection, conservation and restoration efforts.

Some of the challenges of studying rock art in Namibia

As Chippindale and Nash say in their introduction (1999) "Each class of archeological material has its own character, and with each character come the special strengths and weaknesses of that personality". Rock art unquestionably has its own personality. The examples of difficulties with rock art research in Namibia described in this section are generic problems within the scope of rock art research worldwide, and it would be artificial to discuss them with reference only to Namibia only.

Firstly, it's the credibility of ethnographic analogies in the meaning of the rock art. Rock Art researchers have over the years tried in numerous occasions to deal with the problems of using ethnographic analogy, but there is no consensus of how it would be achieved scientifically. In Namibia for instance, rock art interpretations is often linked to the ethnographic records harvested from neighboring regions. The country offering another partial record of such emic interpretation in Southern Africa rock art is South Africa, as demonstrated by the works of (Lewis-Williams, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1990; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989) which has afforded a general explanatory approach to some rock art traditions in Namibia. While reconciling the indigenous and scientific knowledge is absolutely impeccable and equally challenging in the quest for meaning and functions of rock art. We can enthusiastically accept that there are some parallels, that indeed all symbolic arts are ultimately related to some cultural groups, although we find it hard to define and prove that whole scientifically, and we remain profoundly uncertain about the nature of the relationship between rock art and the present day ethnic groups. Furthermore, much of the ethnographic materials collected among the Hunter-Gatherers groups where not collected under ideal conditions, for instance, often communication between the informant and the recorder is always by means of translation through the use of the third party or an interpreter. What they often obtain is quite literally an interpretation, and not fact. We then construe this interpretation in a way that makes sense in own linguistic and cognitive framework. Moreover, it is well known today that extant traditional cultures do not permit outsider's access to all aspects of their metaphysical world leaving researchers knowledge presented on them intentionally limited in several directions due to various cultural reasons. Other records that have been harvested from regions where there is little or no rock art, while some of the well-known rock art sites are from areas where

little or no ethnography was recorded before the disappearance of i.e. hunter-gatherers. It has therefore been difficult for the non-rock art-producing audience outside the author's cultures and world to accurately interpret the art or even understand their true meanings, their cosmologies and the motivation behind their creation. Because of these limitations, inadequate understanding of these limitations, our interpretation will remain obscured.

Secondary, is the nature of this archaeological material itself. Considering decades and centuries of rock art research in the world, there is still no clear-cut and secure dating technique for rock art in the world. We often speak of specific rock art traditions and relate them to other archaeological entities. For instance, there is no credible dating available for any single motif of hunter-gatherer or herders rock art in Namibia. We hear a lot about 'Hunter Gatherers and Herders art' etc., but the simple fact is that these age attributions are on the basis of stylistic typology hence cannot scientifically proven. They are unproven because not a single rock art motif has been conclusively shown to be, say, hunter gatherers, and there exists simply a degree of consensus that a certain perceived stylistic latitude within an art corpus refers to a particular technological niche in archaeological time. This does not constitute evidence; it is an opinion. Perceived styles are not real styles as (Conkey and Hastorf, 1991) stressed, they are merely what we would like to lump together for the sake of creating order in disorder, in accordance with our conditioned way of experiencing reality. Styles perceived by archaeologists, be they of rock art or stone artifacts, are nothing more than styles perceived by archaeologists. They may well be valid, I am not denying that possibility; but to prove this in a scientific realm would be extremely difficult would require a great deal more work than we are likely to invest in the near future.

Thirdly, the 20st century in the Namibian rock art research had also witnesses a dramatic interest in the interpretations of the rock art in Namibia with particular observation of researches conducted in Southern Africa. In South Africa for instance, rock arts are attributed solely to one tradition, the ancestors of the so-called "Bushmen" are apparently responsible for all rock art except some finger paintings and a very few engravings (see Coulson & Campbell, 2001: 80; also P. Mitchell, 2002). However, such assumption was a 19th century oversight, in its origin, founded on a basis of ethnographic association of the art with San people by travelers who saw the art and registered that San people living around, not knowing at time that that there are other communities in Southern Africa particularly the Khoe Herders and Iron Age Bantu-speaking people have also authored rock art. In Namibia for instance, some research conducted at Twyfelfontein also advocate similar views, that the art is solely attributed to one ethnic group, the "San", such conclusion is drawn on the basis of inadequate evidence and without seeking deeper a comprehension of the rock art traditions. The rock engravings of the Twyfelfontein suggest that besides the San, the Khoekhoen herders also painted and engraved (see Gwasira, 2010; Ouzman, 2007). Therefore, instead of using cultural labels such as San art or the derogative "Bushmen" art, it may be safe to refer to Namibian rock art as hunter-gatherer and herder's art since this economic lifestyle manifests both cultural groups (Gwasira, 2010).

Fourthly, like many countries in the world including Southern Africa, the archaeology discipline or heritage sector in general does not enjoy a high priority in the national agenda, and rock art, when mentioned, often forms part of a larger report about archaeological excavations in a particular region. Thus, most reports tend to treat rock art in a fairly descriptive manner, often laced with fleeting interpretations that are more speculative than objective. Rock art being one of the widespread richest cultural resources in Namibia remains undocumented and to some extent unknown due to various factors. *One* being that the extremely very limited human capacity or specialists in the field of rock art and archaeology in general in the country, *two*, being that most of the rock art sites are located

in private land as oppose to state land, they remain undocumented and unregistered in the country's heritage database. For this reason, they remain unprotected and often vandalized. *Three*, despite earliest research on rock art in Namibia mostly by foreign researchers, the heritage sector still relatively still in its infancy stage, the sector is largely state funded and receives one of the lowest national budget often unable to fund many management and conservations projects. Although Namibia has existing policies and frameworks of rock art research in Namibia, the problem lies within the effective implementations of these programs. *Four* is the ineffectiveness of the legislature responsible for the overall conservation and protection of the cultural resources. Despite years of rock art research in Namibia and existing protective laws, are either ignored or unknown hence many rock art sites are often under constant threat with persistent anthropic actions such as illegal mining activities, fire, vandalism, damage, cultural theft. *Five*, almost all rock art sites in Namibia are in remote areas, Namibia being a desert country means documentation is very difficult, in challenging mountains, in scorching sun of more than 40C heat. *Fifthly*, this factor is related to the academic landscape of the post-colonial present – many rock art reports written in the country are either not published or are journals, but are written in foreign languages (other than English with very limited circulation and which limits further dissemination. Much of these sources are often unutilized academically while some are inaccessible making things even more difficult for the present day rock art researchers to revisit such work.

New approaches, trends and future research perspectives

In recent decades, landscape archaeology has taken center stage in the rock art research (e.g. Tilley, 1994; Ashmore & Knapp, 1999; Ucko & Layton, 1999 and Chippindale & Nash, 2004) as it has proved to be a valuable approach in understanding ways in which prehistoric people experienced their landscapes. Although pragmatic and evidently valuable, it is a subjective approach to the past. In Southern Africa for instance, it is sometimes controversial and regarded as Eurocentric predominantly when ethnographical contexts are not engaged. Smith & Blundell, 2004: 259 have considered the subject of landscape in relation to southern African rock art and have conclude that, without an ethnographic context, researchers' conclusions would be "embarrassingly far off the mark". However, be it that might be, in reality, it is difficult for the non-rock art-producing audience outside the author's cultures and world to accurately interpret the art or even understand their true meanings, their cosmologies and the motivation behind their creation. Furthermore, most of the ethnographical records that have been harvested from the region i.e. the 19th to 21st century ethnographical research on indigenous hunter-gatherers rock art in southern Africa established by Lewis-Williams (Lewis-Williams, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1990; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989) came from areas where there is little or no rock art, while some of the well-known rock art sites are from areas where little or no ethnography was recorded before the disappearance of especially the hunter-gatherers. Therefore, I believe that all spheres of rock art must be investigated and studied scientifically. Of course none of this sounds as easy as deciding what we might think a figure depicts. But science was not meant to be easy nor will it tell us what prehistoric art meant, although it would be nice to know the meaning of the art. But if science cannot provide it we can either find out what else science can do for us, and we can do it properly or we can abandon the long and grueling path of science and take the shortcut to 'meaning', creating and projecting our own preferred interpretation of the art.

The future perceptive on the rock art research in Namibia requires researchers to investigate beyond rock art style; chronology and distribution and deliberate more on the integrated approach that incorporates the evidence of (archaeology, paleoenvironment ethnography, toponymy, geology, GIS and so on) in the overall rock art research in order to understand the complexities and fluid of human origin that have been present in Namibia and generally in southern Africa emphasizing its scientific bearings to global contextual Archaeology.

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