VISION, POWER AND DANCE:

THE GENESIS OF A SOUTHERN AFRICAN ROCK ART PANEL

VEERTIENDE KROON-VOORDRACHT

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J. D. LEWIS-WILLIAMS

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

GERRIT HEINRICH KROON
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One of the most striking and daunting features of southern African Bushman (San) rock art is the complexity of many panels. Artists often added layer after layer with seeming disregard for the work of their predecessors. In some sites the oldest layers are no longer clear, the paint blurring into an obscure red background to the more recent additions. Yet in other cases only two images, one painted on top of the other, appear in an otherwise unpainted expanse of rock face: there seems to be no reason why the images could not have been placed next to each other.

The earliest reaction of rock art researchers to the painting of depictions on top of one another derived from Western notions of art and vandalism. Stow (1905: 26-7), for instance, believed that artists would not 'deface' the works of a predecessor 'as long as any recollection of him was preserved', but, once that memory had faded, a subsequent artist 'unceremoniously painted over the efforts of those who preceded him'. Following Stow, numerous writers took over-painting as evidence for a considerable time lapse between painting episodes and used the phenomenon to construct stylistic sequences in the same way that Breuil (1979: 37-38) exploited 'direct superimposition of figures' to construct his two-cycle chronology of Upper Palaeolithic art.

Vinnicombe (1967), on the other hand, found superimpositions in the southern Drakensberg inconsistent and concluded that the layers 'are roughly contemporaneous within the area surveyed' and that this 'does not argue for a development of various painting styles and techniques in succession over a lengthy period' (cf. Willcox 1956: 58-60; for the Drakensberg and other places mentioned in the text see fig. 1). In other words, something other than the passage of time lay behind the painting of one image on top of another. In the context of Upper Palaeolithic art a similar understanding led Leroi-Gourhan (1968) to believe that the superimposition of a second figure was a direct, meaningful comment

on the first, a graphic statement derived from the binary cognitive system of the artists.

Accepting Vinnicombe's conclusion and trying to see if Leroi-Gourhan's view that superimpositions were often intentional also held in southern Africa, I undertook quantitative analyses in two regions (Lewis-Williams 1972, 1974). Some patterns emerged. Once the initial element had been painted certain rules of syntax seem to have guided the selection of the second and subsequent elements. For instance, in the Giant's Castle and Barkly East areas there appeared to be a predilection to involve kaross-clad human figures in superpositioning rather than naked ones (see also Pager 1976). These conclusions did not, of course, pass unchallenged (for debate see Willcox 1978; Lewis-Williams *et al.* 1979), perhaps because they cut across the then widely held belief that Bushman rock art was a simple record of events and activities in the lives of its makers, the result of a desire to 're-see' what had been observed out on the African veld (e.g. Willcox 1984).

During the two decades that have elapsed since this work on superpositioning the tide turned, and today most researchers agree that Bushman rock art was not *art pour l'art* or even the product of hunting magic; rather, it was, at least in large measure, associated with the beliefs and rituals of Bushman shamanism.[1] Unlike some of the shamanistic societies of Asia and North America, Bushman groups have a number of shamans: as many as half of the men and a third of the older women in a camp may be shamans.[2] They do not enjoy any special privileges; like everyone else, they hunt or gather plant foods. In the Kalahari Desert today shamanic activity takes place principally at large curing dances during which the shamans enter trance, though 'special curings' involving only a few people are also common. Verbatim ethnography from the nineteenth century shows that the last of the southern painters held similar beliefs and practised

similar rituals. In trance, the nineteenth century shamans of the areas where much of the rock art is found cured the sick, influenced the weather and the movements of antelope herds, and went on out-of-body journeys to see how people in distant camps were faring (see, for example, Orpen 1874; Bleek 1933b, 1935, 1936). Most researchers are no longer approaching the art from a purely Western art-for-art's sake perspective: we are now using authentic Bushman beliefs (as far as we can understand them) to explain Bushman art (as far as any art can be 'explained').

In the light of these new understandings about the shamanistic 'meaning' of the art and its social role, we can examine complex rock painting panels layer by layer, not only, as in the past, from a quantitative or stylistic perspective, but trying to understand a few of the 'meanings' that the artists and their viewers would have seen in the panels as they evolved through time. We can thus move from quantitative generalizations that sum up the art in many sites to a more particularist position that takes each painted panel as a developmental statement in its own right.

In this way we can isolate and consider each panel's idiosyncratic features. Bushman religion is highly idiosyncratic: people accept the revelations that shamans bring back from the spirit world even if they appear (to us) to contradict other revelations (Biesele 1978). This tension between widely held, overarching beliefs and the insights of individuals is the key to understanding southern African rock art as it is found in individual sites (Dowson 1988b; Dowson and Holliday 1989). We should not allow the widely held belief system, important as it is, to obscure or swamp the idiosyncratic but no less valuable insights painted in specific rock shelters. It is specific paintings rather than quantitative generalizations that bring us closest to the authentic Bushman religious experience as it was lived out by real, individual people, some of whom were shaman-artists and left a painted record of their visions, insights and spiritual struggles.

The examination of a complex panel, layer by layer, encounters at least two methodological problems. In the first place, it is not always easy to discern which of two layers of paint is uppermost. Some paint, especially white, fades more quickly than red and leaves only faint traces which do not seem to adhere to older layers of paint as well as to the adjacent rock. A false impression of the chronology of layers can thus easily be created. Secondly, it is impossible to gauge the time that elapsed between the execution of the various groups making up a panel. Owing to differential fading of paints, degree of preservation is seldom a reliable guide. The time lapse may have been anything from a few hours to some decades.

These two points lead me to write, in very general terms, of panels, episodes and sets, three categories defined by different kinds of criteria (fig. 2).

A *panel* is defined spatially. I use the word to refer to an area of painted rock face that may be densely covered with superimposed images or more lightly embellished with only a few depictions. Ideally, each panel is separated from other panels by unpainted rock face, but in practice one often finds scatters of paintings throughout a rock shelter that are virtually impossible to separate into panels. I do not argue that panels, as I have defined them, constituted an emic category.

An *episode* is a temporal category. In a complex panel episodes are distinguished by superpositions, although it would be wrong to assume that all the images comprising an episode were done at exactly the same time. An episode was terminated, or sealed off, when a new 'wave' of painting extended across a panel. 'Episode' thus does not imply a single artist. More importantly, 'episode' does not imply complete conceptual disjunction. Instead I em-

phasise that aspect of the word's meaning that connotes each episode's being part of a series; painted episodes were in some ways like the linked episodes of a television serial that develop, vary and repeat the themes of earlier episodes, or like accumulating graffiti on a subway wall, each new addition being a comment on earlier graffiti. At the same time, we must acknowledge that there will inevitably be images that we shall not be able confidently to assign to a particular episode, as well as entire episodes that will be hard to place in the chronology of the panel as a whole.

By contrast to spatial panels and temporal episodes, *sets* are conceptual entities. I prefer 'sets' to the culturally loaded and tendentious 'compositions'. The complexity and density of some panels make it very difficult to provide a rigid definition of a 'set' that will work in all instances. Instead of attempting a definition I suggest five criteria, one or more, but not necessarily all, of which need to be present; the more of them that are present, the greater one's confidence in the integrity of the set. The criteria are: shared action (e.g. human figures walking in a file); linking action (e.g. a running man shooting at a standing eland); similar paint; similar 'style'; and similar subject matter (e.g. a herd of eland). Even given these criteria, the sets that make up an episode are often difficult to establish. For example, where human figures are scattered across a panel, it is not always clear which figures belong to which sets. We cannot assume that every set was painted with only one mix of paint or that only one artist participated in the creation of a set. Moreover, we must allow that a single mix of paint could have been used by two artists to produce two distinct sets of depictions. Chemical analysis of paint samples cannot thus provide unequivocal answers to the question of 'what goes with what', itself a prejudicial enquiry that assumes that a panel comprises discrete sets of images rather like framed pictures in an art gallery.

Despite all these problems, the panel to which I now turn (Plates 1, 2, 3) does have clearly defined superimposed episodes and identifiable sets. Figure 3 carries a line drawing of the portion of the panel I discuss; the tracing omits paintings to the left and below which we do not have time to consider. Figures 4a, 5a, 6a, 7a, 8a show single episodes and sets extracted from the panel so that they may be assessed individually. Each introduces a major theme in Bushman thought and art.

EPISODE 1: VISION

The oldest episode comprises only one set: a curious animal, the hind legs of which have faded away, and five elegantly painted human figures, three of whom are in front of the animal and two, more elongated ones, are below (fig. 4a). All three of the upper figures look towards the animal, while one of them, looking back over his shoulder, runs away from it. He seems to be luring it in the direction of his companions. They all hold spears or sticks, one of which has an enigmatic triangular form near one end; a similar 'spear' appears to be embedded in the animal's snout. All the figures have white bands at their wrists, and one has a white band across its chest. The coherence of this set is thus well established by shared action, linking action, similar style and similar paint.

Although the fantastic nature of the animal seems to render interpretation difficult, such groups are in fact among the best understood features of the art because nineteenth century Bushmen explained similar paintings. In 1873 a young Bushman named Qing took J. M. Orpen to a site in what is now southern Lesotho where there is a painting of four men leading a fantastic quadruped by a rope, or thong, attached to its nose (fig. 4b). Orpen paraphrased Qing's explanation thus:

> The *animal* which the men are catching is a *snake (!)*. They are holding out charms to it, and catching it with a long riem [leather thong]. They are all underwater, and those strokes are things growing underwater (Orpen 1874: 10; emphasis in original; parenthesis in square brackets added).

Orpen made a copy of the painting and sent it to the editor of the *Cape Monthly Magazine* who in turn gave it to Wilhelm Bleek, the German linguist who was in Cape Town studying Bushman languages. He showed it to /Xam Bushmen from the central Cape Colony (now Cape Province) who were assisting him with his researches. Their comments complement and help us to understand Qing's rather more opaque remarks. They explained that certain people were known as *!khwa-ka !gi:ten*. A literal translation of this phrase is 'the rain's men-of-power'. When the land was suffering from drought, these shamans attempted to capture a *!khwa-ka xoro*, literally a 'rain's animal', that was believed to live in a waterhole. They threw a thong over the animal's horns and led it to a parched place where they killed it so that its blood and milk would fall as rain. People asked shamans of the rain to capture a rain-cow rather than a rain-bull because the rain-bull was associated with devastating and dangerous thunderstorms and the rain-cow with soft, soaking rains that revived the dry veld. A thunderstorm seen in the distance on the African veld was likened in a number of ways to an animal. The columns of falling rain were spoken of as the 'rain's legs' on which it walked across the land. Light whisps on the underside of the cloud were called the 'rain's hair' (for verbatim Bushman accounts see Bleek 1933a, 1933b).

Qing's identification of the rain-animal as a snake prompted Orpen to add a parenthetical exclamation mark. Qing's apparent error may be explained by at least two stages of translation being involved. Orpen did not speak Qing's Bushman language, and the stage before English was a Bantu language. Some Bantu-

speakers describe a large mythical snake that lived in deep pools. Qing may have said 'rain-animal', and the interpreter, in terms of his own understanding, may have translated this as 'water-snake'.

Orpen and Bleek seem to have been unsure whether the catching of this creature was a 'real' event; neither researcher had the opportunity of actually observing Bushman rituals. Bleek did, however, note that he thought the account should not be taken literally: 'the sense is apparently the reverse' (manuscript page B.XXVII.2540 rev.).

Other parts of Qing's explanation of the southern Lesotho painting help to situate that 'reverse' in the hallucinations of shamans;

> They are all underwater, and those strokes are things growing underwater. They are people spoilt by the —— dance because their noses bleed (Orpen 1874: 10).

Qing's remark about the '—— dance', the Bushman name for which Orpen says he did not note, explicitly links rain-making to trance experience. I return to this point in my discussion of Episode 3. But now I consider Qing's statement about 'underwater'. Being underwater has a number of features in common with trance experience: both states involve a sense of floating and dissociation coupled with affected vision, sounds in the ears, difficulty in breathing and, finally, unconsciousness.

Bushman shamans therefore spoke of diving into waterholes and travelling underwater when they were recounting visits to the spirit world. For instance, old K'xau, a Kalahari !Kung Bushman shaman, told Biesele (1980: 55) that God took him to a wide body of water: 'The two halves of the river lay to either side of us, one to the left and one to the right... Then I entered the stream and began to move forward.' His subaquatic journey took him to the spirit world where he saw God and all his animals.

The sense of being in another world is further linked to a feeling of rising up and attenuation of one's limbs. Another Kalahari shaman pointed to a tree and said that he was that tall when he was in the spirit world. Many rock paintings of shamans are very attenuated and so convey this sensation. The lower two figures of the rain-making group are of this kind (fig. 4a). Moreover, their postures, by comparison with many paintings of trance dances (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1981a: figs 18, 19, 20; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989: figs 14, 15, 16c, 17, 28, 34b, 39a), suggest that they are dancing. This is particularly so of the one on the right whose arms are raised and who bends forward in a way that can still be observed at trance dances in the Kalahari (e.g. Lee 1968; Marshall 1969).

In sum, we can say that the two lower figures imply a trance dance, even though no other participants are depicted. Above them is the vision generated by their altered state of consciousness: a rain-animal is being enticed from its waterhole by the running shaman who looks back at it over his shoulder, while the other two men dispatch it with spears. The episode is thus an imaginative bringing together of different kinds of experience (dancing, hallucinations) rather than a straightforward narrative: the unities of time and space have been dissolved, as indeed they are in trance experience.

EPISODE 2: POWER

This episode comprises two paintings, a quadrilateral form with three ochre panels and a large ochre eland (fig. 5a). The eland is painted on top of and partly obliterates the legs of the two lower human figures in the rain-animal episode. The white paint which was used for its upper neck and head, as well as the lower parts of its legs, has disappeared, leaving only the massive body and pendulant dewlap (cf. fig. 5c). Unlike the images in Episode 1, it is not entirely clear what the relationship between the quadrilat-

eral form and the eland is. All we can say is that superpositioning shows they were painted between Episodes 1 and 3 and that the use of ochre paint in both may suggest a link between them; ochre paint is not used elsewhere in the panel. It is not clear if they constitute one or two sets.

The eland is the most frequently depicted animal in many parts of southern Africa (Maggs 1967; Vinnicombe 1976; Pager 1971; Lewis-Williams 1972, 1974). Although it must have been desired as a source of food, Bushman ethnography and the art taken together show that the artists were principally concerned with its symbolic associations: it was a polysemic symbol that resonated in a number of ritual contexts, three of which were rites of passage (Lewis-Williams 1981a).

In one of these rites a boy passed from childhood to adulthood and so became eligible for marriage when he shot his first large antelope, preferably an eland, though today those Kalahari Bushmen who still observe the rite make do with a smaller antelope if an eland cannot be found. Having killed an eland, the boy was scarified with a substance that contained the animal's fat; the resulting tattoo marks were believed to ensure good hunting. After the eland's skin had been removed in its entirety, the boy sat on it while an older man, using one of its legs, left if it was a female, right if it was a male, made a circle of hoofprints in the sand around the skin. At the end of the ritual the boy had to cross this spoor: so, it was said, would he come across eland spoor in the years ahead and be esteemed a good hunter and husband.

Girls at puberty were also associated with eland. At her first menstruation a girl was isolated in a hut while the older women performed the Eland Bull Dance, during which they mimicked eland mating behaviour. An older man tied eland horns to his head and played the role of the eland bull. The singing, dancing and clicking of axes that accompanied the Eland Bull Dance were

so intense that the young girl wept in the darkness of the hut, overcome by the wonder of it all. Then, at the climax of the dance, an eland bull was seen to approach the hut. The people were terrified, but the old man assured them that it was a good thing sent by God. The performance of this ritual bestowed rain, plenty and harmony on all the people in the camp, not just on the girl herself.

At marriage, the third rite of passage, eland fat was again used when the bride was anointed with it. Having passed to adulthood through the power of the eland, both she and her husband benefited from the wonderful and diverse associations of the eland as they entered upon married life.

In the art, however, it is another facet of the polysemic eland symbol that is highlighted; the associations of the three rites of passage are still present, but as a penumbra, a rich background resonance that contributes to the symbol's unique power. That power was, above all, the supernatural potency that shamans harnessed to enter trance. Shamans are said to 'own' or to 'possess' the power of various animals, but the most desired is eland power. It is this power that the singing and clapping of the women at a trance dance are said to activate. Shamans describe how it 'boils' up their spines until it 'explodes' in their heads and catapults them into the spirit world, or, as we believe, the hallucinations of trance. In some ways it is like electricity: in intense concentrations or out of control it can kill a person, but harnessed by shamans it can be used for the benefit of all.

Closely linked to this aspect of eland symbolism are beliefs about rain. The southern nineteenth century Bushmen had a myth in which the rain in the form of an eland is shot by a man of the Early Race. As he cooks the meat, it evaporates, and the rain is deeply angered (Lewis-Williams 1981a: 106). This myth suggests the possibility that, on some occasions, shamans of the rain used

an eland to play the part of the otherwise hallucinatory rain-animal and thus acted out, at least in part, what was usually a trance vision.

These remarks merely scratch the surface of eland symbolism, but they do show that a painting of an eland was much more than a depiction of potential food: its polysemy summed up the whole value structure of Bushman beliefs (Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams 1981a). We can now see that the large, faded ochre eland in the rock art panel alludes to the group on which it is partly superimposed; it represents not only the supernatural power that the five shamans of the rain in the first episode were harnessing to control the rain-animal, but it may, in another but simultaneous sense, actually *be* the rain in eland form. The power of the eland symbol resides in this sort of ambiguity.

The quadrilateral form (fig. 5a) to the left of this eland, the other component of Episode 2, raises a number of the problems one encounters in trying to isolate episodes and sets. It comprises a white background with three ochre panels, while the top is fringed with a series of small red strokes. A white and ochre line emerges from the right edge but soon fades out; on the left, the red line of Episode 3 (set 4) ends against the side of the bag at a similar position. The ochre panels seem to link the form to the ochre eland; on the other hand, the white paint seems to suggest a connection with numerous other white paintings faintly visible in the panel rather than with the eland, the white paint of which has not been preserved at all. To complicate matters further, the paint of the fringe along the top suggests a connection with the similarly coloured human figures which constitute the next episode. But because both the white paint and the ochre panels are clearly beneath figures of this later episode, I tentatively suggest that the form was originally painted at more or less the same time as the ochre eland and then added to at later stages.

The roughly quadrilateral shape, the coloured panels, and the line emerging to the right suggest that it may depict a leather bag. Bushman bags are often painted in various ways and have thong handles. Some are further decorated by the addition of fringes, though these are usually along the lower edge, not the upper as here. Figure 5b compares the form with an elaborate and well-preserved painting of a bag from southern Lesotho. On the other hand, the depiction is reminiscent of the so-called 'formlings' found in Zimbabwean rock art, large patches of paint that have been interpreted as honeycombs (Pager 1971). The presence of the fringe along the top and the fact that the line to the right does not appear to loop over the top like a handle leads me to suppose that it depicts some non-realistic entity, but we cannot be certain.

EPISODE 3: DANCE

The next episode may be divided into five sets of paintings that seem to be closely related and may have been virtually contemporaneous. First is a group of animated figures that stretches horizontally across the panel (fig. 6a); second is a set of three slightly smaller figures (fig. 6a); third is a set of still smaller figures, mainly to the lower left of the first group, that have been fitted around and between the figures of sets one and two (fig. 6a); fourth is a meandering line associated with two kneeling figures and, possibly, with two black baboons that I do not discuss here (fig. 7a); fifth is the large human figure (not separately illustrated) painted over the centre of the ochre eland of Episode 2. Some other figures are hard to assign to any of these sets, but their presence or absence would not materially affect an understanding of any of the sets, which we now examine in turn.

The larger of the two sets of animated figures is symetrically 'composed' (fig. 6a). At each side, left and right of the group, is a pair of digging sticks weighted with bored stones. Next, again on each side, come a few female figures, each with a hand raised in

front; one on the right holds a stick. In the centre and apparently the focus of the other figures' attention are three men in dancing postures. The coherence of the set is suggested by paint colour, linking action, 'style' and subject matter.

This group of human figures takes up and expands on a theme implied by both the rain-animal of Episode 1 and the ochre eland of Episode 2. To understand it we return to Qing's remarks. He said that the people in the painting he showed Orpen had been 'spoilt by the —— dance, because their noses bleed'. He then went on to attribute the origin of this dance to Cagn ('/Kaggen' in Bleek's orthography), the trickster-deity known as the Mantis, and to describe one of the forms that the dance could take:

> It is a circular dance of men and women, following each other, and it is danced all night. Some fall down; some become as if mad and sick; blood runs from the noses of others whose charms are weak, and they eat charm medicine, in which there is burnt snake powder. When a man is sick, this dance is danced round him, and the dancers put both hands under their arm-pits, and press their hands on him, and when he coughs the initiated put out their hands and receive what has injured him – secret things (Orpen 1874: 10).

This description has many elements in common with a Bushman trance, or curing, dance. In the Kalahari today two forms are used: one is a circular dance during which the women sit around a central fire singing and clapping the rhythm of 'medicine songs', while the men and an occasional woman dance in a circle around them. This is the kind of dance Qing described in 1873. At other times, one or two shamans dance in the centre while the women and spectators stand in a circle around them. It is the second of these two forms that is depicted here (cf. fig. 6b).

During dances of both kinds, shamans who have achieved a controllable level of trance lay their trembling hands on people and draw out what has been harming them. All those present at a dance are 'cured' in this manner, even if they are not manifestly ill, because sickness, so Bushmen say, can be in a person without that person knowing about it. After the shamans have 'received' the sickness into their own bodies they are said to expel it through a hole in the nape of the neck, the *n//au* spot, so that it returns to the *//gauwasi*, the spirits of the dead, who sent it in the first place. The shamans thus sort out confusion in the cosmos, banishing intrusive sickness to the spiritworld and re-establishing health and harmony in their community.

In the accounts of curing that Bleek and Lloyd obtained in the 1870s the shamans were said to bleed from the nose, or as Qing put it, 'Blood runs from the noses of other whose charms are weak'. About thirty-five years before Bleek's and Orpen's interviews, Arbousset and Daumas (1846: 246-7) learned that 'it is not unusual to see some one sink to the ground exhausted and covered with blood, which pours from the nostrils'. Shamanic nasal haemorrhage seems to occur very seldom in the Kalahari today, though Bushmen do speak about it. Nasal blood is, however, frequently depicted in paintings of trance dances (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989), though none can be detected in this panel.

When a shaman falls down in deep trance, the modern !Kung say that he has been 'spoilt' (Biesele pers. comm.), and this is no doubt what Qing meant when he said that people were 'spoilt by the —— dance', though Orpen may have taken the word more prosaically to mean something like 'incapacitated' because some trancers become deeply unconscious. Another of Qing's statements revealingly links the concept of 'spoiling' to two other elements at which we have already looked. Asked about paintings of men with antelope heads (therianthropes), Qing said:

> They were men who had died and now lived in rivers, and were *spoilt at the same time as the elands* and by the dances of which you have seen paintings (Orpen 1874: 2; original emphasis).

This is very likely a conflation of a number of Qing's remarks (Lewis-Williams 1980). It seems that during the difficult process of multiple translation, Qing used three ways of speaking about trance experience (to die; to be underwater; to be 'spoilt'), and Orpen wove them as closely as he could into a kind of narrative or myth; he says he made Qing's 'stories' 'consecutive'. Be that as it may, Qing's statement links the therianthropic paintings to eland, a source of supernatural power, and also to the dance, the activity that harnesses and manipulates that power. Unfortunately, Qing did not clarify the exact nature of the link or in what sense the eland were 'spoilt'. Such clarification will, I believe, eventually be obtained from Kalahari Bushman shamans.

After this set of dancing men and peripheral women had been completed, two other sets of paintings were added (fig. 6a). Their generally smaller size, slightly different paint and somewhat different 'style' suggest that they may have been the work of other artists, but their orientation (their attention is also focused on the dancers) shows that they are none the less part of the same principal set. This is a clear example of communally produced, related sets.

The figures in the two auxiliary sets appear to be chiefly spectators to the dance; the artists seem to have concerned themselves with this component of a trance dance, possibly in co-operation with the painter who did the main and slightly larger figures. Nevertheless, the figures are not all passive observers. Two of the small seated ones are in a highly significant posture: they have their arms held rather awkardly behind their backs (fig. 6a, enlarged and marked A). This widely painted posture puzzled

researchers for many years (e.g. Lee and Woodhouse 1970: 101; Woodhouse 1979: 96). Then, on an occasion when Megan Biesele and I were discussing shamanism with some !Kung Bushmen, a man stood up and thrust his arms out behind him. This, he said, was what some curers did when they were asking God to put more supernatural power into them so that they could pass into the spirit world.

This is, moreover, the posture adopted by the two kneeling figures in Set 4 (fig. 7a), though their arms are in a more extreme position that is closer to the one adopted by the !Kung man with whom Biesele and I were talking. There are numerous such kneeling, arms-back figures in Bushman rock art; some have antelope heads and are therefore linked, in terms of Qing's statement, to 'spoiling', eland and the trance dance (e.g. fig. 7b). Therianthropic transformation is in fact a common feature of trance experience. For instance, a Westerner in an altered state of consciousness described how he thought of a fox and was instantly transformed into that animal: 'I could see my long ears and bushy tail, and by a sort of introversion felt that my complete anatomy was that of a fox' (Siegel and Jarvik 1975: 105).

The thought of the animal triggered the hallucination of transformation. This report helps us to understand how the Bushmen's very powerful concepts about animals must have triggered similar transformations in the hallucinations of trancing shamans.

The sort of red line with which the arms-back figures in Set 4 are associated is fairly common in Bushman rock art. In some instances it is fringed with tiny white dots. Sometimes it simply loops around the rock face, as it does here; sometimes people are depicted walking along it as if it were a path; sometimes it is held as if it were a rope; sometimes it enters and issues from depictions of eland and human beings; and sometimes it enters and

leaves cracks in the rock face. It has been variously interpreted as the power that shamans use to achieve their ends (Lewis-Williams 1981b) and a transformation of the shaman himself (Dowson 1988a). Given the ambiguity of many Bushman beliefs, these are not necessarily mutually exclusive explanations. Whatever concept or set of concepts it represents, many of the painted contexts in which it appears show that it is part of the constellation of beliefs about trance.

Finally, the large figure painted over the ochre eland's body seems to constitute a set of its own. Unlike any of the other figures it is rather static and has numerous white dots painted on its legs. At first one may suppose these dots to represent body-paint, but the ways in which they are positioned in some other depictions suggest that they may be a complex fusion (synesthesia) of the prickling sensations sometimes experienced by people in trance and the luminous geometric forms that may be seen in an early stage. Painted dots of this kind probably represent the supernatural power that shamans harness to enter trance and that was believed to be in their own bodies (Dowson 1989). From each of its hands comes a number of short lines which may depict arrows; none of the other figures in the panel are holding similar items.

THE WHITE PAINTINGS

Scattered throughout the panel are numerous white paintings of animals and people. Because of very poor preservation, it is not easy to tell where they fit into the chronology; indeed it seems unlikely that they belong to only one episode. Because of their poor preservation, it is hard to say anything about most of them; in some cases, it is impossible to tell exactly what they depict. But two of them do merit comment: they are a large ox immediately below the rain-animal of Episode 1 and a human figure that appears to be driving it (fig. 8a). Cattle were not, of course, traditionally owned by hunter-gatherer Bushmen.

Although Bushmen had been in contact with Bantu-speaking farmers for centuries, they do not seem to have painted cattle until fairly recently (Dowson 1992b). Destitute of their traditional sources of food, Bushmen were driven into closer relationships with farmers, some Bushman women marrying into black families. Historical records also show that, despite a certain amount of raiding (fig. 8b), black farmers employed Bushmen to make rain; in the final decades of the nineteenth century and, in the southern Drakensberg, the first decades of the twentieth century, families of Bushman rain-makers lived with the farmers and enjoyed their protection. The rain-makers were given cattle in return for their services. These cattle no doubt became a valuable source of food as the vast herds of game that had formerly swarmed across the African plains were annihilated by well-armed European invaders.

But it is also probable that, as the herds of eland disappeared, cattle came to be regarded as a source of shamanistic power (Campbell 1987). It may even be that some shamans, given cattle by the farmers, used the animals in rain-making rituals before eating the meat. The last part of the /Xam Bushman word for rain-animal, *!khwa-ka xoro,* can in fact mean an ox. Some rock paintings show cattle carefully superimposed on eland as if a link of some sort was intended (e.g. Hall 1990).

EPISODE 4: ELAND

The fourth episode comprises three eland, only two of which are shown in figure 3.

It is not clear just where the two lines that look like the dorsal lines of eland fit into the sequence. Nor is it clear whether the three eland were painted by the same hand; certainly, the largest of the three is better preserved than either of the smaller ones. The hair along the back of its neck has been painted, as well as the

folds of skin on its shoulders (pl. 3). Its large, pendulant dewlap shows that it is not merely an eland bull but, moreover, one with a great deal of fat, that powerful and highly prized ritual substance. By adding more eland to the developing panel, the final artist (or artists) was adding more power.

ACTIVE ART

The interleaved paintings of visions, dance and power in this accumulating palimpsest were more than a passive pictorial record or even a symbolic affirmation of religious beliefs. They were themselves active participants in shamanistic rituals. They achieved their independence in two ways, first as reservoirs of power and, secondly, as images that generated, or triggered, the next level of insight.

The power stored in the art derived, at least in part, from some of the substances used to make the paint. Ethnographic evidence shows that at least some paints were made with eland blood (How 1962: 32-40). After an eland kill, the fresh blood of the animal was mixed with a glistening haematite known to the Bushmen of the Drakensberg as *qhang qhang* and obtained from the high basalt ramparts of the mountains; other pigments were not mixed with blood. The supernatural power of the eland was thus carried by means of its blood into the paint and then onto the walls of the rock shelters. When shamans dancing in the shelters wished to increase the level of their power, they turned to the rock face, and the power imbuing the images of eland flowed into them (Jolly 1986; Lewis-Williams 1986b). Power was not just pictured: it was immanent.

To understand what those dancing shamans actually experienced we turn to neuropsychological research on altered states of consciousness. When a Western subject in an altered state of consciousness looked at a photograph of a waterfall that was hanging

on the wall, he saw 'a remarkable brilliance' and a 'three-dimensionality'. 'The picture appeared to have a depth found in stereoscopic pictures' (Cohen 1964: 133). At the same time that subjects see pictures coming to life in this way their own hallucinations are projected onto walls or ceilings (Klüver 1926: 505, 506; Knoll *et al.* 1963: 208; Höffer and Osmond 1967: 13). They describe the experience as 'pictures painted before your imagination' (Siegel and Jarvik 1975: 109) or 'a motion picture or slide show' (Siegel 1977: 134).

Because all human beings have the same nervous system, we can confidently assume that trancing Bushman shamans would have experienced something very similar, though the content of their hallucinations would, of course, have derived largely from their own way of life, the animals that surrounded them, the rain that revived the parched veld and the tensions of living in a small encampment. In their altered state of consciousness they would not have distinguished clearly between paintings and their own projected hallucinations; the two kinds of image, one painted, one mental, would have melted into one another. Paintings themselves were, in this sense, hallucinations, contributing to and inducing the shamans' visions. This and other effects of the trancers' altered states of consciousness would have transformed the walls of rock shelters into animated screens of powerful imagery (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1990).

This conclusion leads me to argue that, for trancing shamans, the rock face was a veil suspended between this world and the spirit world where they fought for the lives of the sick, killed rain-animals and were themselves transformed into animals. To change the metaphor, the rock-shelter was a gateway to the spirit world, the paintings reservoirs of the power that enabled shamans to journey through that gate and into the transcendent realm (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1990).

We can now see why the rock face became a repository for the accumulated insights of generations, why episode piled up upon episode: the superimposed images on the rock echoed and, in a very real sense, *were* the crowded, kaleidoscopic images that constituted the spirit world. The effect created by superpositioning came out of the shaman-artists' own religious experience; it duplicated the tumult of the spirit world. Each shaman-artist added his or her unique, often idiosyncratic, insights to a communal pool of religious knowledge and power on which all could draw.

Broadly speaking, the conceptual trajectory of the panel we have been discussing developed as follows. First came a reification of a shaman's vision of life-giving rain in the form of a fantastic animal being controlled and killed in the spiritual world. What happened in another realm thus became real on the veil that separated the two dimensions. Then, in the next episode, a painter took up one of the themes implied by the vision: the supernatural power that made all the activities of the shamans possible and was itself intimately associated with rain. The ochre eland thus manifested the power that informed the vision. Whereas the first episode was principally associated with the spiritual realm that lay behind the rock face and the second with the power that afforded access to that realm, the third episode was more concerned with the 'real' event that launched shamans on their spiritual journeys – the dance that drew the whole community together in a single, emotionally charged ritual. The final shaman-artist to contribute to the panel added more eland, the symbol and hallucination that gathered up in its manifold associations all that had gone before in the earlier episodes – rain, power, and the kind of harmony that was the essence of Bushman belief and values.

The 'composition' of Bushman art was thus not just two-dimensional, as in Western paintings: it was also three-dimensional.

The art calls upon us to look not merely at the painted plane of the rock face but to penetrate that plane and to see into the spiritual realm. In addition to the right-left, up-down axes of composition with which Westerners are familiar there is another that runs at right angles to these. It starts in the world in which we stand and leads us through the piled up episodes of vision, power and dance into another world behind the rock face. In this way the very 'composition', or structure, of the art forges a link between the mundane and the spiritual, actively drawing the viewer into overpowering experiences. When the final artist and his or her people contemplated the panel, they were not simply looking at pictures of vision and power but at visions and power themselves.

As we speak of the final artist, we must remember that the episode that he or she added would probably not have been the last had the Bushmen of the area continued to live undisturbed by colonial expansion. All complex panels must have had a beginning, but, had history not intervened so decisively, they may never have had an end. The art is a tragically arrested accumulation of religious visions and power that must have spoken to the last Bushmen of a time past, an age redolent with eland power. Today these same piled-up images speak to us in southern Africa of harmony and a reaching out towards a better life, one free from the strife, violence and racial tensions that diminish our humanity. Bushman rock art is as active today as it was in centuries past.

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NOTES

1. Although some writers still adhere to the art-for-art's sake view, continuing research in various regions shows that shamanistic elements are virtually everywhere present (see, for example, Lewis-Williams 1980, 1982, 1986a; Maggs and Sealy 1983; Huffman 1983; Yates *et al.* 1985; Lewis-Williams and Loubser 1986; S. Hall 1986, 1990; M. Hall 1987; Garlake 1987a, 1987b, 1990; Deacon 1988; Mazel 1989; Kinahan 1989; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989; Yates and Manhire 1991; Dowson 1988b, 1992a. Debate now centres on questions such as: How much of the art is shamanistic? What other meanings did the art encode? What were its social and political roles in Bushman society? (Lewis-Williams 1981a; Dowson 1992b; Dowson and Lewis-Williams in press; Solomon 1989).

2. I use the Tungus word 'shaman' to mean a ritual practitioner who enters trance to cure the sick, control the weather, guide the movements of animals, foretell the future, and so forth. Because there are many Bushman languages there is no universal indigenous word. The Kalahari !Kung Bushmen of today speak of *n/um k'ausi,* literally, owners of supernatural power; farther to the south the nineteenth century /Xam used the word *!gi;ten,* literally, people filled with power. This power is the supernatural essence that Bushman shamans activate when they wish to enter trance. For more on Bushman shamanism see Lee 1968, Marshall 1969, Biesele 1978; Lewis-Williams 1981a.

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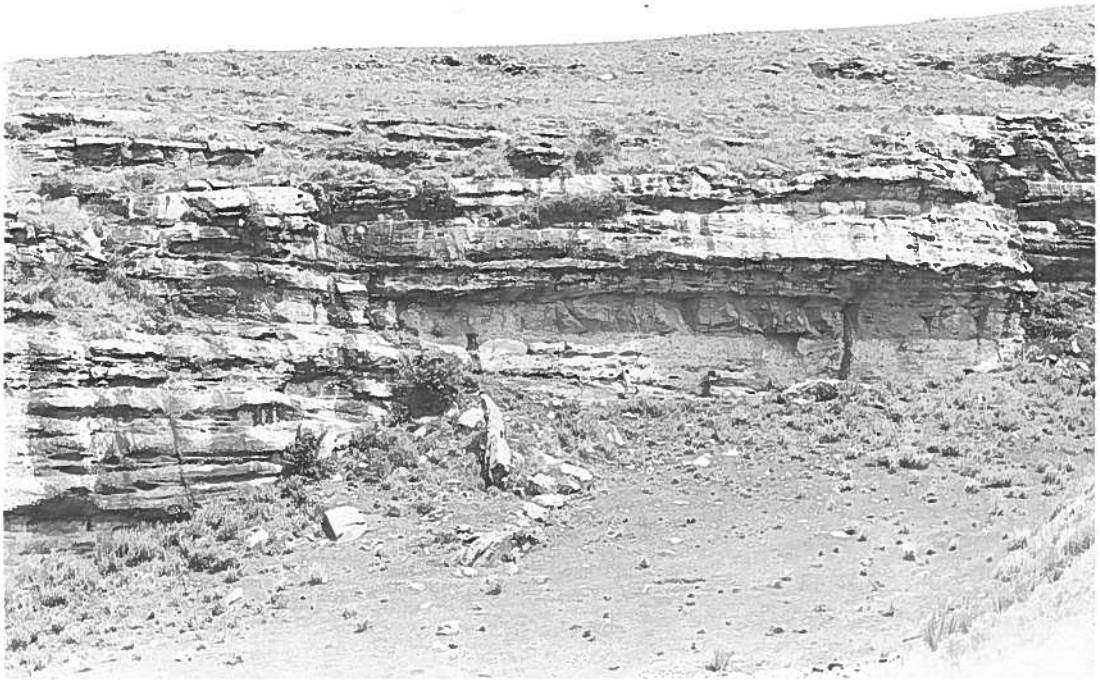

Plate 1

The eastern Orange Free State rock shelter in which the painted panel discussed in this lecture is to be found.

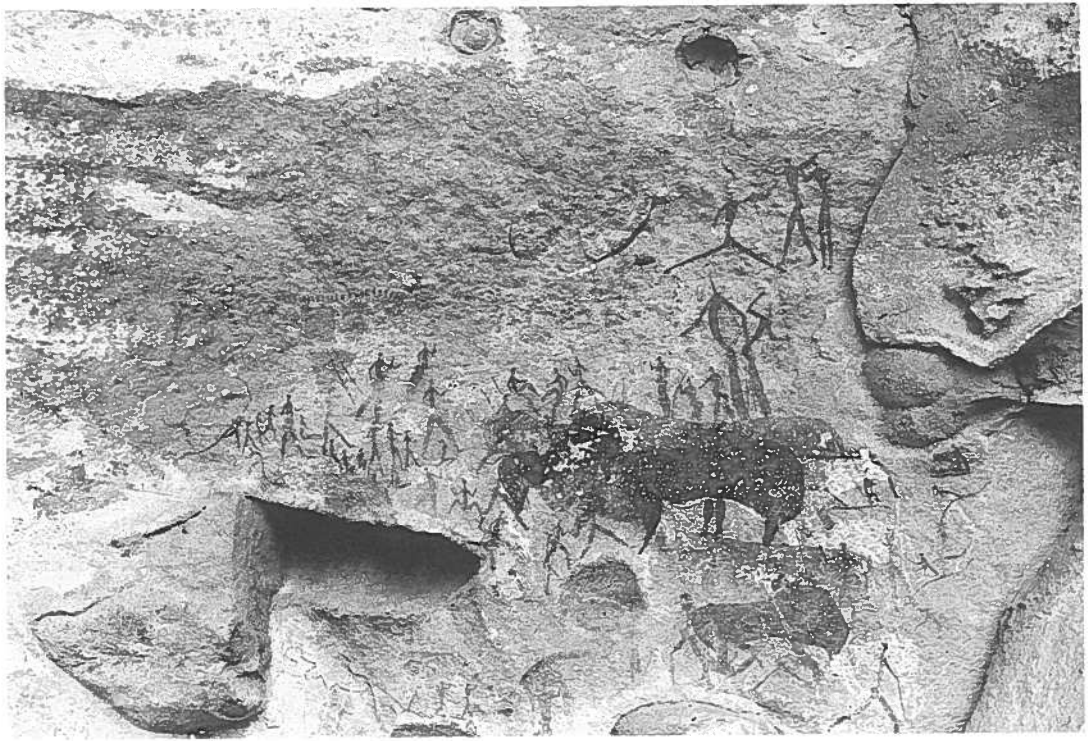

Plate 2

A general view of the painted panel.

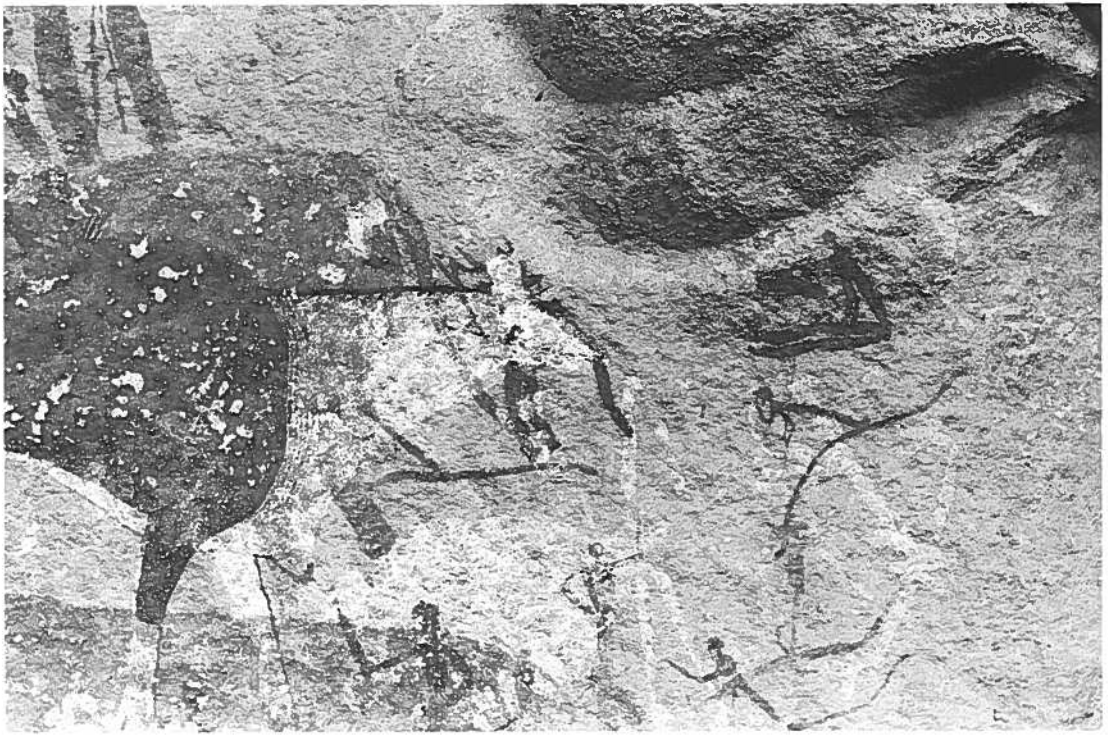

Plate 3

A close-up photograph of the lower right part of the panel.

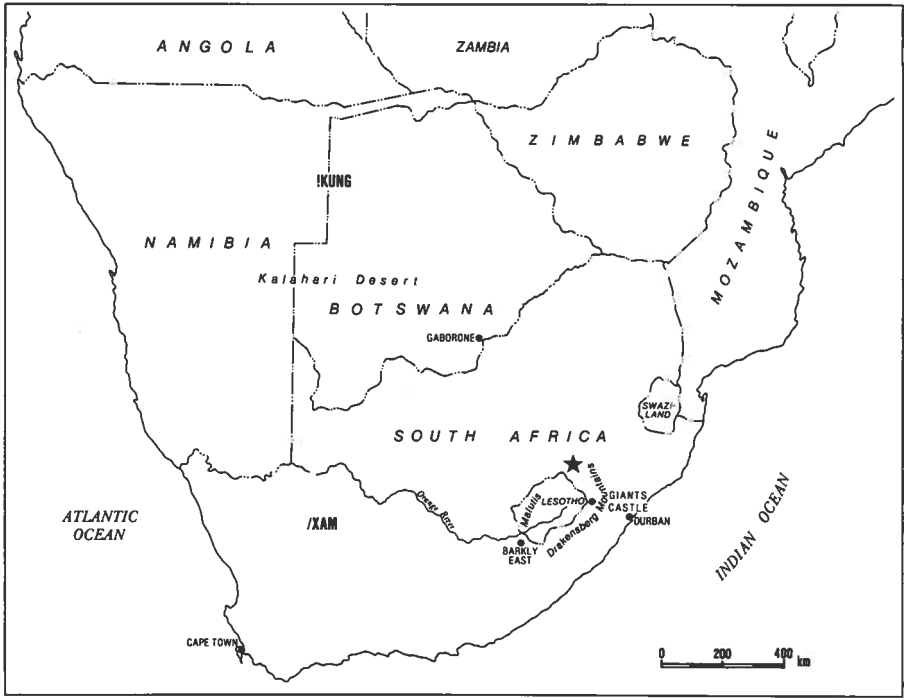

Figure 1

Map of southern Africa showing places mentioned in the text.
The star indicates the location of the site from which the panel discussed in this lecture comes.

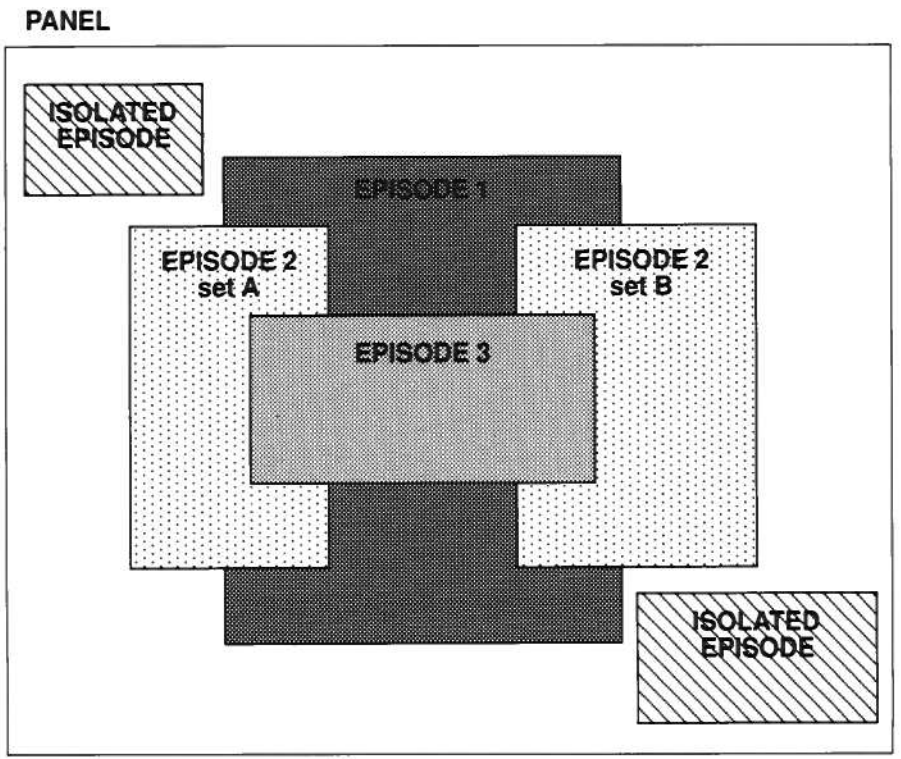

Figure 2

Diagram showing idealised relationships between a hypothetical panel and its episodes and sets.

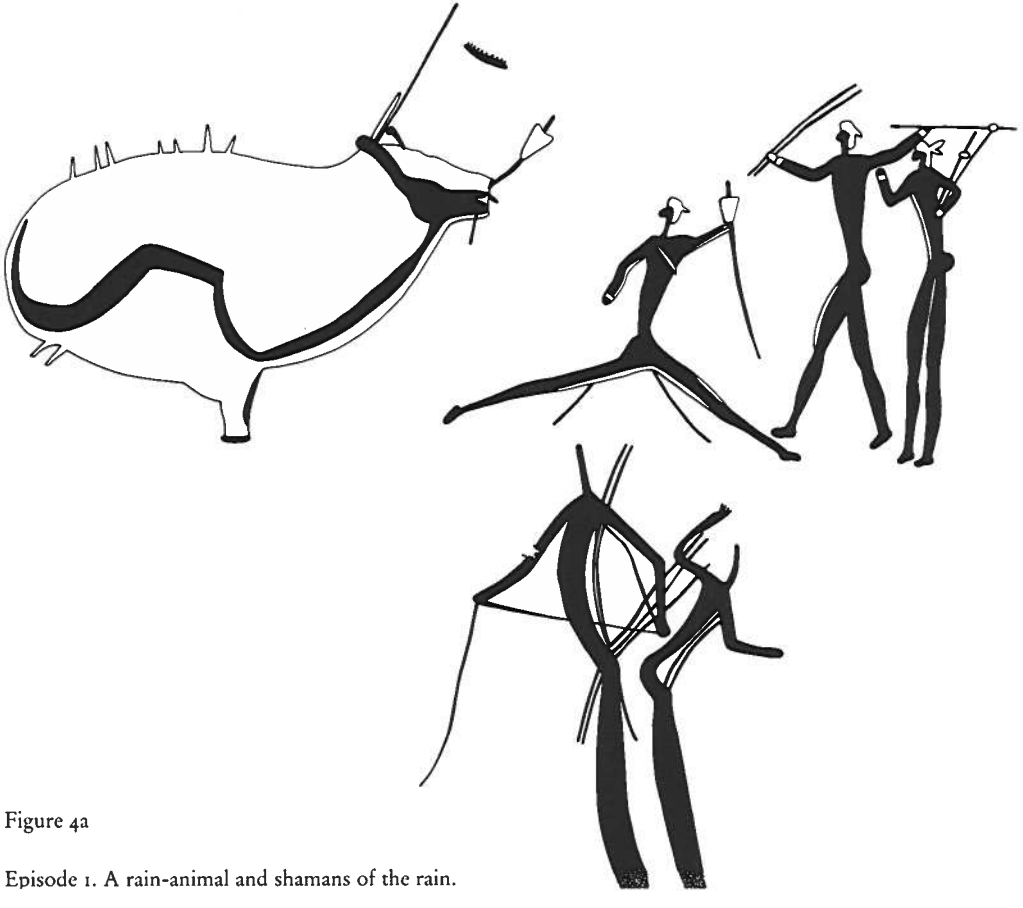

Figure 4a

Episode 1. A rain-animal and shamans of the rain.

Figure 3

Black and white tracing of the panel discussed in this lecture.
Scale here and in subsequent figures in centimetres.

Figure 4b

J.M. Orpen's copy of a southern Lesotho rock painting showing shamans of the rain capturing a rain-animal (first published in 1874).

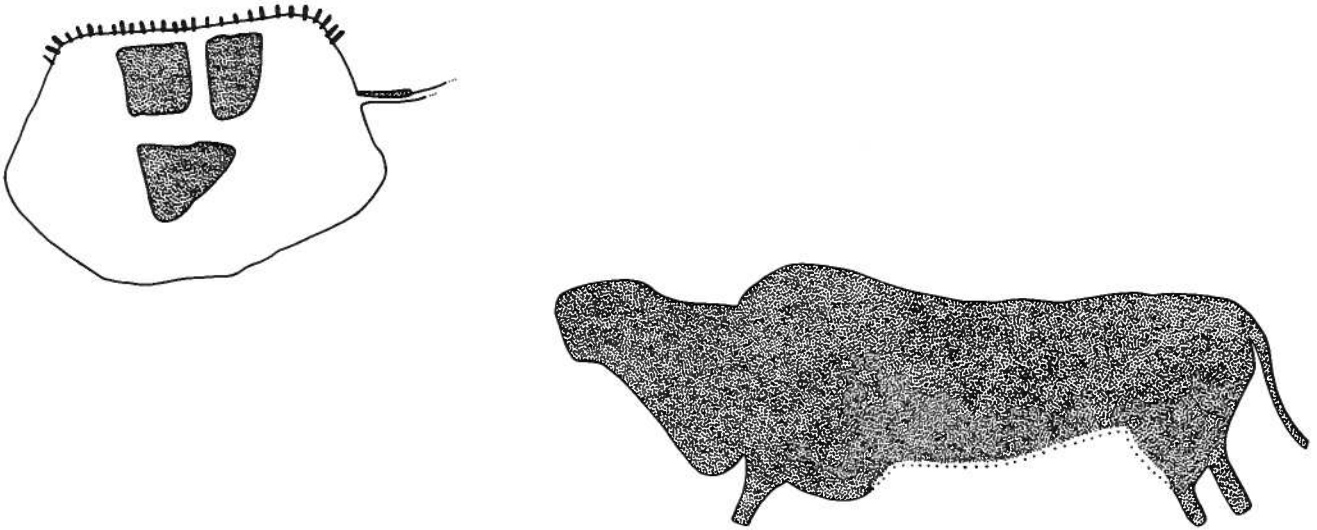

Figure 5a

Episode 2. Roughly quadrilateral form and ochre eland from which the white paint has faded.

Figure 5b

Southern Lesotho rock painting of a bag with a handle, panels and a fringe along the lower edge.

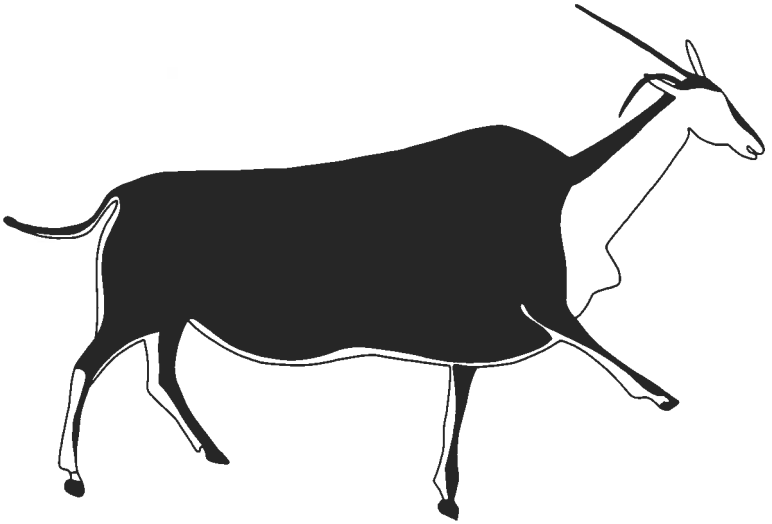

Figure 5c

North eastern Cape rock painting of an eland in red and white.

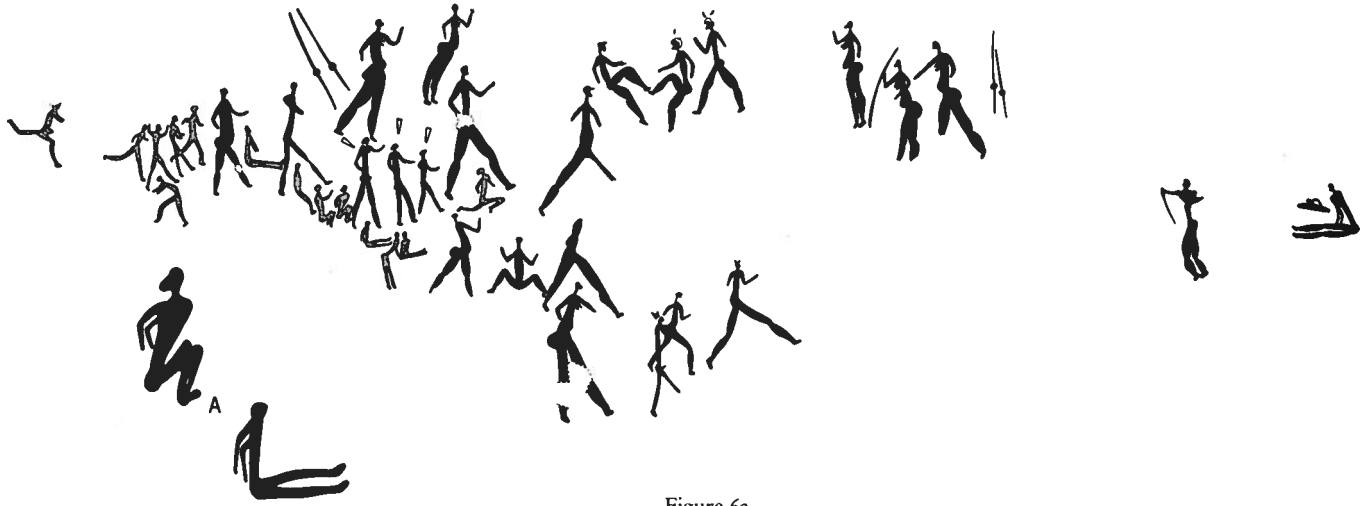

Figure 6a

Episode 3. Dance group.

Set 1: Solid.

Set 2: Dense stipple and indicated by means of arrows.

Set 3: Light stipple, with two arms-back figures enlarged (solid) and marked A.

Figure 6b

Dance group from eastern Orange Free State.
Women clap while five shamans dance with sticks in the centre. The dancers are wearing shamans' eared caps.

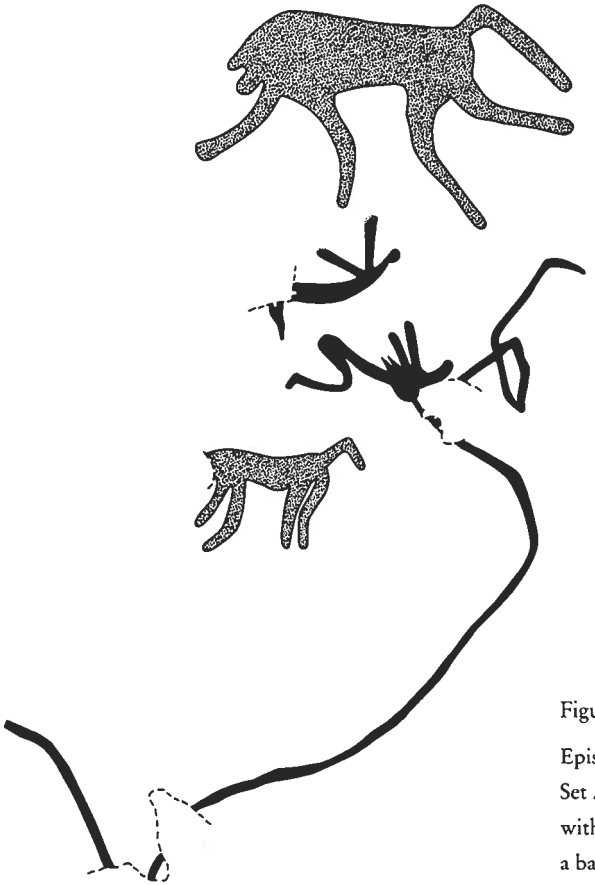

Figure 7a

Episode 3.
Set 4: Line painted in red and associated with kneeling arms-back figures and a baboon painted in black.

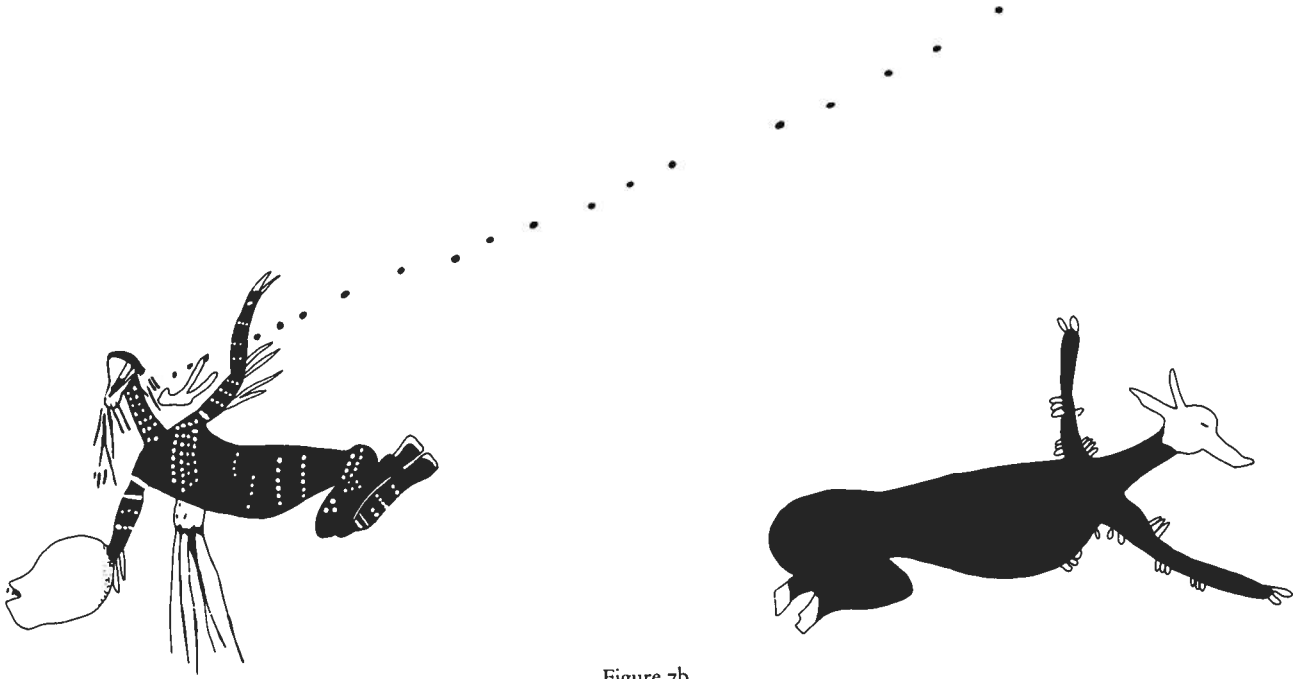

Figure 7b

North-eastern Cape rock paintings of kneeling, arms-back figures, one with distinct antelope head. The other bleeds from the nose and has emanations from the back of the neck. These paintings probably record the hallucinations of Bushman shamans.

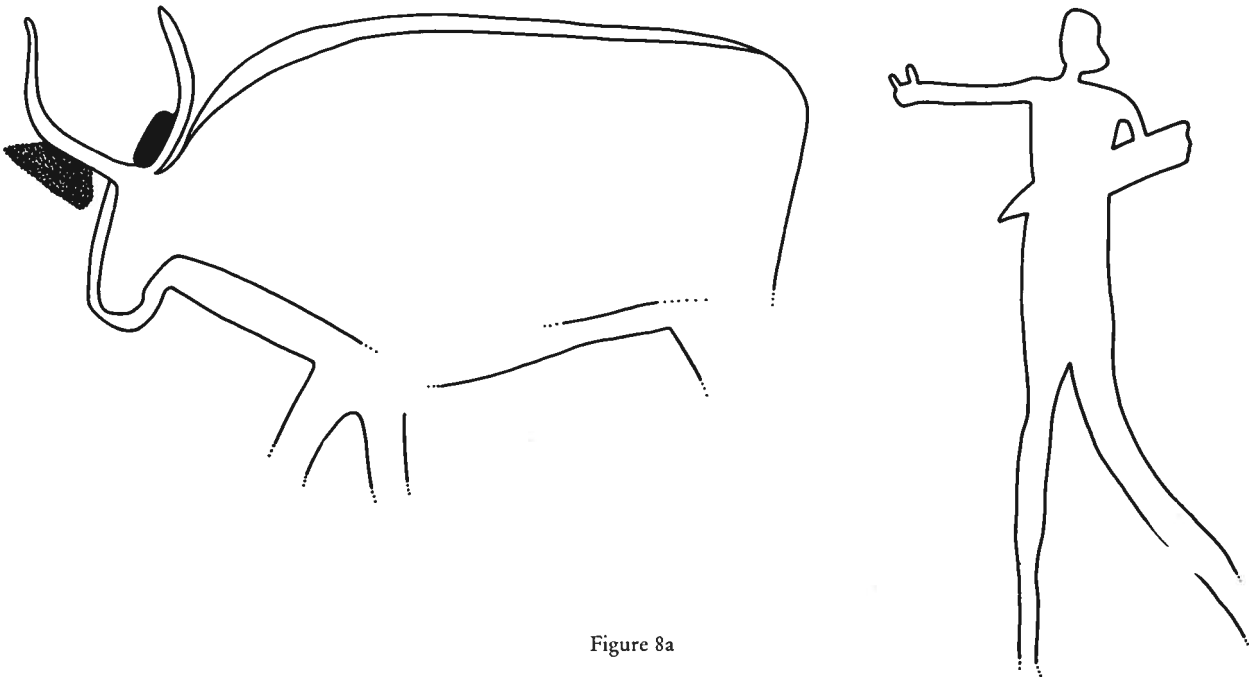

Figure 8a

White painting of ox and human figure.

Figure 8b

North-eastern Cape painting of clash between Bushmen, armed with bows and arrows, and a seated farmer with two iron bladed spears and a shield; an ox moves towards the left. Above is a seated figure in the trancing, hand-to-nose posture.

KROONVOORDRACHTEN

REDACTIE: W. H. DE VRIES-METZ
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