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SACRED SPACES:

Rock Paintings of the Komati-LiGwa Study Area, Mpumalanga



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WITS
UNIVERSITY

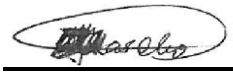
National
Research
Foundation

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Science, University of the Witwatersrand,
in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Archaeology.

Johannesburg, December 2020

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Science, to the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before, for any degree or examination in any other University.

Signature:  Date: 22 December 2020

Abstract

This dissertation identifies 27 painted sites in central Mpumalanga Province, in areas adjacent to the Komati and LiGwa (Vaal) Rivers. It finds that the locations of the painted sites overlap with the social landscape of historically and ethnographically recorded BaTwa (San/Bushmen) in this region, particularly the Tlou-tle (//Xegwi), whose descendants were studied by linguists and anthropologists in the early and mid-1900s. The dissertation also identifies patterns between site placement and places in the landscape that the Tlou-tle attached ritual importance to, and finds that the placement of diverse images in the same spaces, and the continued use of sites by temporally separated painters, shows ideological similarities and continuities in the conception of space. Engagement between diverse rock arts in the Komati-LiGwa Study Area (KLSA) shows that the ritual landscape was characterised by different 'ways of doing'; the extent to which interactions happened between painters of diverse origins cannot be discerned, but the art shows that worldviews met and blended. At some sites, 'geometric' paintings take on the technique of fine-line painting and also appear to 'interact with the rock face'—both aspects predominantly associated with foragers. Figurative paintings are also executed in the finger technique at some sites and, later (as is indicated by the subject matter), a combination of finger and rough-brush techniques is used. Two factors are proposed to explain the variability of the art and its co-occurrence at sites—similarities in the conception of 'place' and the common experience of colonialism. With regards to the latter, historical records show that indigenous peoples in this region were subjected to farm labour since the middle of the nineteenth century, and hence previously independent communities possibly blended on colonial farms, and created new communities. Indeed, some of the rock art shows that it was painted in the colonial period, and from the symbols, and painting technique used for this art, we can see that changes in the art were consistent with changes and increasing complexity in the social landscape. These changes were brought, it is argued, also through responses to contact with multiple waves of 'newcomers', including the painters of 'geometric' art, all of whom contributed to the collective identity of 'BaTwa' in this region.

For B.Z (05.08.41 – 21.12.20), and for Alex

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Mostly, I am grateful to my field team—Anastassiya Kravtsova, Tshegofatso Mangwedi, Nokusho Ngobeni, Jenna Hansen, Stephen van den Heever, and Katlego Moitlhwe—some of whom had never done fieldwork before, but still did an amazing job. Photos herein were taken by RARI, Alex Schoeman, David Pearce, and mostly Stephen van den Heever and Jenna Hansen. Post-field, Stephen further helped with digital enhancement, while Katlego helped with sorting site record sheets, together with Chris Pestana. Ruby-Anne Birin wrote notes at my proposal presentation, Mfundo Hlangani, Sam Challis and David Witelson helped with DStretch; Kate Croll and Alex Schoeman made maps.

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"*I'm not saying I'm gonna rule the world or I'm gonna change the world, but I guarantee that I will spark the brain that will change the world…I don't know how to change it, but I know if I keep talking about how dirty it is out here, somebody gonna clean it up*"

- Tupac Amaru Shakur

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Glossary

Postcolonialism/postcolonial archaeology – a shift in theory and practice from predominantly western and colonial to recognising the diversity of human experiences as the main cause of population variation.

Hybridity – contrary to the biological meaning used by colonial writers, I use 'hybridity' to mean the coming together of cultural expressions. Throughout the text, I adopt a phrase used by Chris Gosden (1999: 181): "society as always in a state of becoming", which is taken from Homi Bhabha's (1994) conception of 'hybridity'.

Therianthropes/therianthropic figures – painted figures with mixed features of human and animal.

Forager – I use the word forager interchangeably with 'hunter-gatherer', to mean people who are predominantly not food producers and generally do not keep stock. In South Africa, these are predominantly 'San' or 'Bushmen' people, which in this text I call 'BaTwa'.

BaTwa – I use 'BaTwa' in place of the pejorative terms 'Bushmen' and 'San', throughout this dissertation. I do, however, also use the term 'Khoe-San' [adopted from Leonhard Schultze's (1928) 'Khoi-San'] as used by David Morris (2002, 2012) and Jeremy Hollmann (2007, 2013, 2014), when citing literature specific to the similar worldviews of foragers and herders as an amalgamated 'Khoe-San' society. Although the primary term I use, 'BaTwa' is not without its problems [e.g. in Botswana, 'Basarwa/Masarwa' (SeTswana equivalent of 'BaTwa') is considered a pejorative term], First Peoples communities in nineteenth and twentieth century South Africa referred to themselves as such. Where possible, I use specific names like Tlou-tle, //Xegwi and /Xam. The term 'BaTwa' has also been used incorrectly in some writings; Korsman & Plug (1992), for instance, use the phrase 'BaTwa San', referring to the Tlou-tle.

Chapter One: Introduction

Southern African researchers have, since the late 1980s, used ethnographic insight to show how past peoples associated certain physical features of the landscape with beliefs about powerful mystical beings, and rituals[1] associated with these (e.g. Deacon 1988; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990; Morris 2002, 2012; Hollmann 2007, 2013, 2014; Lewis-Williams 2010; see Smith & Blundell 2004 for a critique of rock art and landscape). For Janette Deacon (1988: 129), such beliefs were 'an integral part of the landscape itself' (citing D. Lewis 1976: 277). Using ethnography, Deacon (1988) suggested that rock engravings in the Upper Karoo, in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa, were purposefully placed by /Xam artists in places associated with rain-making rituals. These places, she argued, were perceived by the artists as potent. Drawing on this work, other researchers have suggested a link between 'Khoe-San' initiation rites and places associated with a water snake that features prominently in the belief system of these communities (Morris 2002, 2012; Hollmann 2007, 2013, 2014). This notion of powerful places seems to have been held widely throughout southern Africa, possibly for millennia, and it is still held today (see Hollmann 2007). The idea of rock art as occurring in powerful and meaningfully selected places and the ethnography that informs it are what inspired the title of this dissertation and, as shall be seen, form the theoretical basis from which rock art variability in central Mpumalanga can be interpreted.

This dissertation takes preliminary steps in exploring the rock art of the Komati-LiGwa Study Area (KLSA)—a region that lies between the Komati River in the north and the LiGwa (Vaal River) in the south (also called LeKwa), in the interior of the Mpumalanga Province (Fig. 1.1). This region has been described by the archaeologist Frans Prins (1999: 53) as the "last haven" for BaTwa communities in South Africa; it is one of the few places in southern Africa where there were still recognisable communities of BaTwa in the twentieth century (see also Forssman & Louw 2016 for co-operation in the South African War). Whereas most of the BaTwa who occupied this area remain nameless, commonly referred in the literature as 'the Eastern Bushmen' or 'the Bushmen of Lake Chrissie' (e.g. Toerien 1954, 1958, 1961; Potgieter 1955; Lanham & Hallowes 1956a, b), one specific

[1] Following Roy Rappaport (1999: 24–26), I define ritual as 'the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers'.

community is discernible—the Tlou-tle or Ki//kxi:gwi (appears in other literature as //Xegwi[2]), whose recent history (written and oral) is layered on most of the geographic range of the KLSA (see Chapter 3). Some of the rock art in this area is associated with places where descendants of the Tlou-tle and other click-language speakers were still present in the middle of the twentieth century. Moreover, this rock art is often associated with landscape features which feature prominently in the Tlou-tle oral tradition and history—what one might call their memory-scape and mindscape (Ouzman 1998; Yoffe 2007; Meskell 2008; see Chapter 3).

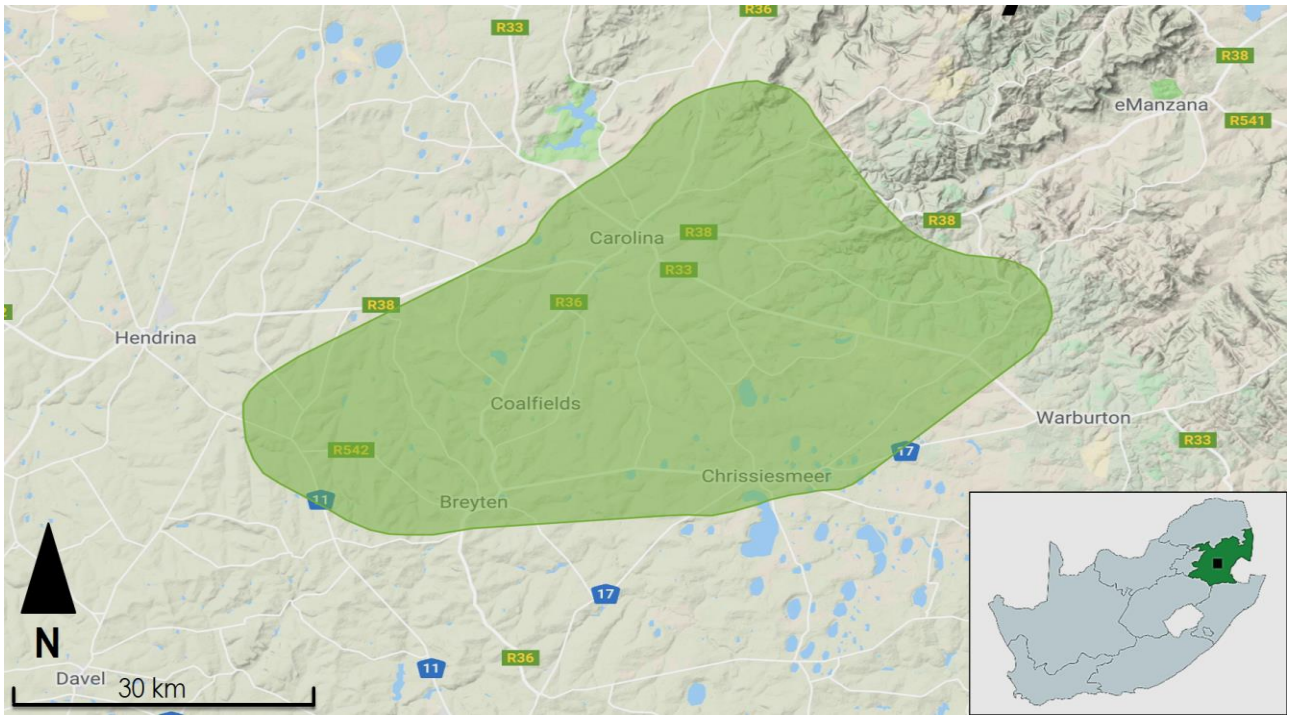


Figure 1.1: Map showing the Komati-LiGwa Study Area in central Mpumalanga.

Forager communities in this region were first brought to academic discourse by Dorothea Bleek, after her 1911–1916 expeditions across southern Africa (e.g. Bleek 1911, 1927; see also Bank 2006); based

[2] It is unclear whether '//Xegwi' refers to the people or the language they spoke (see Traill 1995; Ehret 2008), but according to vowel analysis done by Leonard Lanham and Desmond Hallowes (1956: 106), who refer to the language spoken by hunter-gatherers in Lake Chrissie as 'Eastern Bushman', the suffix -kwi (or -gwi) denotes people. In the language of the ≠Khomani, who Lanham and Hallowes (1956a, b) claim to be linguistically similar to the Tlou-tle, -kwi also denotes people. Therefore, contrary to some linguists' claims (e.g. Traill 1995), it is unlikely that //Xegwi was a language (*cf.* Potgieter 1955: 34). To avoid getting muddled up in these confusions, I use 'Tlou-tle' from hereon, to refer to the people. Christopher Ehret (2008: 19) notes that the word *tl'e* means 'persons'; therefore, the suffix -tle in Tlou-tle means 'people of' (meaning of the Tlou- prefix unclear).

on linguistic analysis, Bleek (1927) suggested that they were related to !Ui hunter-gatherers in other parts of southern Africa (also see Traill 1995). Inspired by Bleek's work, anthropological and linguistic studies were undertaken in the middle of the twentieth century, which attempted to understand the social life and origins of BaTwa communities in central Mpumalanga who, by this time, were residing on farms as labourers (Toerien 1954, 1958, 1961; Potgieter 1955; Lanham & Hallowes 1956a, b; Tobias 1962). These studies were often unethical, aligning with the racist ideology of the political powers of the time (for a critique of apartheid ideology in South African academic discourse, see Dubow 1996, 2019; Shepherd 1998, 2002a, b, 2003a, b, 2019). In the final decades of the twentieth century, more scholarly interest was shown to this area's historical and archaeological past (e.g. Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971; Schoonraad & Schoonraad 1972; Korsman & Plug 1992; Steyn 1994, 1995; Prins 1999), an interest which continues today (e.g. Schlebusch *et al*. 2016; Pearce *et al*. 2019).

Whilst the KLSA region has continued to draw interest, especially from popular writers (e.g. Davie 2011; Sanders 2013), it has not received much archaeological attention. Excavated data is almost non-existent (but, see Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971; Korsman & Plug 1992). Moreover, with the exception of a paper by David Pearce *et al.* (2019), which was published during the course of my research, this dissertation follows a 25-year hiatus since the last rock art publication from the KLSA (i.e. Steyn 1995). The dissertation complements ongoing research led by Dr Alex Schoeman at the University of the Witwatersrand's Archaeology Department, on the Bokoni Farmscapes project, which has thus far largely focussed on the archaeology of farming communities (e.g. Delius & Schoeman 2008; Delius *et al.* 2012; Widgren *et al*. 2016). My research focuses on a region that overlaps with Bokoni, and takes preliminary steps in understanding Mpumalanga's archaeological past from a wider perspective, that considers the social landscapes of foragers and possibly herders. This is an aspect of the Mpumalanga archaeological past that is under-researched (but, see Hampson *et al*. 2002; Smith & Zubieta 2007; Forssman & Louw 2018; Pearce *et al*. 2019).

Linking the KLSA rock paintings to this area's historic and precolonial identities, however, is not a simple task. Rock art is a complex form of archaeological evidence that requires a good combination of formal and informed methods to understand (see Chippindale & Taçon 1998 on informed and formal approaches to rock art; see also Smith & Blundell 2004). The biggest challenge is the lack of a reliable time-frame for the production of the art. Moreover, the lack of a direct account for the

production of rock art in this area poses a challenge to its interpretability, especially if we are to link the art to an identity/identities. I do not offer a clear-cut solution to this problem, and the results I present here are only tentative. However, my engagement with the KLSA material has led me to believe that an exploration of the Tlou-tle ethnographic and historic records, and as the only 'subaltern voice' (Spivak 1988) present for this region, can get us as close as possible to an emic perspective. With the insight offered by these sources, we could understand at least some of the rock art in this region. That the KLSA rock art overlaps with the social history of the Tlou-tle cannot be ignored; as a community that seemingly has long ties to this region (see Chapter 3), there is a possibility that most of the rock paintings were made (if not by their ancestors) by people with a similar worldview. At least some of the paintings would have been intelligible to the Tlou-tle, and they would have been aware of their presence and significance. Therefore, in conjunction with a landscape approach, I consider the Tlou-tle ethnography to be a useful lens through which we can understand the context in which the KLSA rock paintings were made.

By no means do I suggest that *all* (if any) of the rock art in this region was painted by the Tlou-tle; rather, I suggest that the Tlou-tle ethnography (being the only source of informed knowledge we have that is specific to the KLSA) offers insight into the cosmology of BaTwa peoples in this region, and ultimately insight into the significance of the rock art (see Korsman & Plug 1992; Steyn 1994 for previous examples). As such, I view the Tlou-tle ethnography as part of a "regional structure of beliefs and practices" (Barnard 1988: 216). As will be seen in Chapter Three, these beliefs and practices, although originally of the Tlou-tle, also made part of the 'religious structure' (Barnard 1988) of others whom the Tlou-tle interacted with. With regards to chronology, I consider changes in the art to be indicative of changes in the socio-historical context, and pinpoint sites which do offer insight into the chronology of some of the rock paintings in the KLSA.

In turn, I approach the KLSA rock art from a local perspective, and with acknowledgement that "…the rock art of Mpumalanga Province is more prolific, diverse and complex than hitherto suspected" (Hampson *et al.* 2002: 28). Jamie Hampson and colleagues (2002: 28), writing on rock art and regionality in Mpumalanga, warn:

> … it is important to guard against interpreting the art of unexplored regions purely in terms of what is already known about well researched ones. There is a danger

> that new themes and nuances will be reduced to what has already been argued or suggested.

One has to be careful in this 'local context' approach, though. Interpreting rock art purely from a local perspective might carry the same essentialist notions we try to avoid (Hollmann 2007: 129; David Morris, pers. comm. 2020), when we tie identities to specific geographic places (Smith & Blundell 2004: 252). Phrases like 'Bushmen of Lake Chrissie', for instance, can be problematic, because they limit people's histories to one geographic 'context'. The interpretability of the rock art can be limited too, in turn. In pursuit of a local understanding of the KLSA rock art, therefore, I do not assume that similar social processes did not occur elsewhere in southern Africa, or that similar rock art does not exist in other regions. Rather, I suggest that, where possible, local 'voices' should take precedence over sources drawn from elsewhere. It is also in recognition of the limitations of these local sources that I integrate other ethnographic sources to explain some aspects of the KLSA rock art. In this sense, the local ethnographic record can be supplemented, where it is lacking. It is this kind of approach that allows us to get as close as possible to an insider's view of the significance of the KLSA rock paintings.

Rock paintings in the KLSA are variable (in terms of subject matter, pigment colour, pigment texture and technique) between and within sites, incorporating the 'styles' of 'geometric', fine-line, rough brush-painted and finger-painted figures, which sometimes co-occur within sites. What this variability means for the interpretation of meaning (which is not the main focus of this dissertation) is that there is no blanket approach that can explain the subject matter of the rock art at all documented sites. With this limitation in mind, I acknowledge that, rather than specific images, only some aspects of the art can be explained. Even then, it is only to some extent. The paucity of archaeological data for this region means the commentary I offer here is somewhat speculative. I focus on the spatiality and, to a lesser extent, the chronology of the rock art. By 'spatiality', I mean the placement of the rock art sites in the landscape as well as the placement of the rock art within the sites. Considering that excavated archaeological evidence is largely absent from this region, I draw insight from ethnographic, historical, linguistic and genetic literature. These sources are not easy to integrate, but conjointly they present a clearer picture of the KLSA social landscape than they do individually (Wylie 1989; Smith 2010).

Although time-depth is uncertain for most of KLSA rock art, as is the case with most studies, the subject matter of some of the rock paintings allows us to link them with changes in the social landscape, such as the arrival of 'newcomers' (see Whitelaw & Hall 2016 for the dynamic relationship between 'firstcomers' and 'newcomers'; Kopytoff 1987 for theory) who arrived possibly arrived in multiple waves in the last two millennia (see Chapters 5 & 6). The appearance of these later paintings, of which appearance differs significantly from that of the fine-line paintings of antelope that dominate the KLSA (see Chapter 5), suggests that one avenue of explaining the variability of the rock art could be change over time. But, it remains a research concern why temporally separated painters returned to the same sites over time, to make rock paintings. Considering the diversity of the paintings, as they appear, what could have influenced the decisions to pick certain sites over others that appear as equally suited for image making, in the eye of the researcher?

The answers to these questions are not simple, and they tie to a concern that has been of much debate in southern African archaeological research—identity. Whilst it is important to note that the diversity that is inherent in the KLSA rock paintings may speak to a past where people of diverse origins and diverse 'way of doing' (Smith 1998: 218) were present in this landscape, the KLSA rock art should not be viewed as a reflection of 'cultural' or ethnic differences between different painting communities. These terms carry problematic assumptions (see Morris 2002, 2012; Hollmann 2007; Mallen 2008 for discussions on rock art and the problem of ethnicity; Smith & Ouzman 2004; Smith 2006 for an alternative view), where they are equated with biological and cognitive traits, and conflated with identity (Marks 2017). The problem that ensues from this conflation, which is reminiscent of race science (see Chapter 2), is that identity is thought to be signified by pre-determined cultural units, often called 'cultures' and 'traditions'. Differences in archaeological materials found in the same contexts are often explained in relations to these perceived cultural/ethnic differences (see Schrire & Deacon 1989; Schrire 1992 for a critique). These are all key points of this dissertation, which I discuss in the five chapters that follow.

In Chapter Two, I review the literature that is pertinent to the KLSA rock art and the interpretive issues that surround it. I start by reviewing anthropological literature on indigenous people in this region, and connect the paradigms that drove the agendas of this research to how indigenous populations have generally been viewed in the social sciences, in South Africa and other parts of the

world. I then review rock art research, since the times when views of indigenous peoples as 'primitive' were dominant, to rock art research in recent times, and critique the close association between rock art 'traditions' and ethnic/cultural classifications. Following this, I offer a brief history of landscape approaches to southern African rock art, and suggest that site re-use and rock art variability in the KLSA can be interpreted from this theoretical framework. I then consider previous research in the KLSA and point toward new theoretical directions for research in the KLSA, which I follow in the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter Three is a background chapter, and hence puts the objectives of this research in context; in this chapter, I describe the landscape setting, people and known history of the KLSA. I use this known history of this region to establish an occupation sequence, from which we can better understand the social make-up of the KLSA. I also present, in this chapter, Tlou-tle ethnography, which I link to the broader ethnographic record of 'Khoe-San' peoples in southern Africa (e.g. Orpen 1874; Bleek & Lloyd 1911; Silberbauer 1963; Barnard 1988, 1992a), before we consider the rock art in the following chapters.

In Chapter Four, I offer an overview of the method and techniques followed for this research, specifically in identifying, documenting and analysing rock art data from the KLSA. Techniques outlined in this chapter include photography, image enhancement and GPS recording.

Following this, I describe the KLSA rock paintings and the sites in which they occur, in Chapter Five, to show similarities and differences. Importantly, these descriptions also show the complexity of KLSA rock art, which is not easy to assess. In that chapter, I also highlight the placement of rock art on features of the rock face as a possible explanation for the continued use of the same sites, over time. I introduce the conceptual link between spatial and social processes here.

In Chapter Six, I interpret the social context in which the art was made, to show a conceptual link between rock art, ritual and 'the sacred space'. I argue in that chapter that the KLSA rock paintings were placed in powerful, sacred places, which were viewed as such through generations, by painters and non-painters. I also suggest that social processes that occurred in the colonial period accelerated changes in the social landscape, and that these changes are manifested in the art. Based on the subject

matter of some of the art, I offer commentary on the chronology of some of the art, and point to the need to obtain dates for the art, which may aid in the interpretation.

Finally, in Chapter Seven I summarise the key points and findings of this dissertation, and its contribution to southern African archaeology. I end the chapter by pointing out some aspects discussed in this dissertation that need to be researched further.

Chapter Two:
Changing paradigms in southern African rock art research

> For every phenomenon, however complex, someone will eventually come up with a simple and elegant theory. This theory will be wrong.
>
> - Rothchild's Rule

The last five decades of research have seen the study of southern African rock art move from predominantly Eurocentric, prejudiced views to an appreciation of the 'insider's point of view' (a focus on the worldview of the painters). Whereas earlier writers favoured 'gaze and guess' approaches (e.g. Alexander 1837; Walton 1957; see Davis 1990; Lewis-Williams 2006 for a review), art-for-art's-sake interpretations (e.g. Woodhouse 1969; Willcox 1978, 1984), and 'exotic' authorship lunacies (e.g. Van Riet Lowe 1937; Breuil 1948), the late 1970s and 1980s saw rock art interpretation shift towards a reliance on ethnographic sources (e.g. Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams 1981; Campbell 1986, 1987; Deacon 1986, 1988), integrated with a social paradigm. This interpretative social approach not only recognised rock art as having been part of the ritual life of hunter-gatherer communities (Lewis-Williams 1981, 1994), who made most of the rock art in southern Africa, but also expelled previously held misconceptions of BaTwa. Consequently, archaeologists started thinking of BaTwa peoples and their history from a postcolonial perspective (e.g. Campbell 1986; Dowson 1994, 1998; Jolly 1995, 1996, Francis 2009; Blundell 2004; Hall & Mazel 2005; Ouzman 2005; Challis 2008, 2012, 2016; Prins 2009; Morris 2012). Unfortunately, this was not the case for central Mpumalanga; much of the history of this region is still stuck in a colonial narrative, silencing the voices of the people whose social and ritual life was greatly altered by colonialism (Spivak 1988).

2.1 Colonial myths in the KLSA

In particular, Frederick Potgieter's (1955) *Disappearing Bushmen of Lake Chrissie,* a 40-plus page book containing a linguistic section by Dirk Ziervogel, conveys essentialist and racist notions of BaTwa. Like many others in the twentieth century (e.g. Stow 1905; see Skotnes 2002), Potgieter (1955) portrays BaTwa (particularly the Tlou-tle, whom he was studying) as Stone Age relics, whose

'purity' and 'culture' was threatened by neighbouring farming communities (e.g. Potgieter 1955: 4–5; see also Toerien 1961). One might think that Potgieter's (1955) use of the phrase 'disappearing Bushmen' refers to the demise of BaTwa communities as a result of colonial expansion, until it is shown in the contents of the book that the meaning of this phrase, for Potgieter (1955), meant that the people he studied were 'losing their Bushman-ness'. This view is evidenced by repeated remarks about 'half-blood Bushmen' and 'black-Bushmen', rephrases which Potgieter (1955) uses to emphasise differences between people whom he considered to be 'pure' BaTwa because they were 'yellow-skinned', and those whom he considered 'hybrids' (based on biological inferences) because they were "always darker than the tlou-tle[sic]" (Potgieter 1955: 2–3; also Toerien 1961).

Potgieter (1955: 2) claims that such distinctions are made by the Tlou-tle, who "claim to be of pure Bushmen descent" and "regard themselves as an ethnic group"; yet, he contradicts his claims and imposed distinctions when he notes that "the term Batwa seems to be applied indiscriminately to both groups". Potgieter (1955: 5) also notes, contrary to the distinctions he makes, that *all* [my emphasis] the Tlou-tle individuals whom he studied bear siSwati surnames (see genealogical table in Potgieter 1955), such as Mlangeni; yet, he maintains sharp distinctions between the two communities (Tlou-tle and abaMlambo), regarding one as 'pure Bushmen' and the other as 'Bantu people of small size' with 'Bushman blood in their veins' (Potgieter 1955: 2–3). Clearly, Potgieter's (1955: 4–6, 24) distinctions are based on 'physical type' (see also Toerien 1961: 216) and skin colour, holding on to the stereotypical view of BaTwa as 'yellow-skinned people of short stature' (e.g. Broom 1923; Sanders 2013: 7). It appears, then, that Potgieter (1955) manipulated the data to fit his own preconceived notions, and to justify his racist methods of physical anthropology.

It is shocking, then, that writers working in Mpumalanga (Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971; Korsman & Plug 1992; Steyn 1994, 1995) have blindly cited Potgieter (1955) without mentioning these problems. As a front, *Disappearing Bushmen* reads like an historical, anthropological text, but when one reads in the deconstructionist terms of Jacques Derrida (1967), it becomes clear that Potgieter's (1955) main interest was documenting 'scientific' evidence that the BaTwa were undergoing physical alterations, due to their admixture with other ethnicities (see Potgieter 1955: 5–6). And if height measurements were not insulting enough, Potgieter (1955: 24) took nude photographs to show physical characteristics—seemingly, these, too, needed to be preserved, much like Sarah Baartman's body parts stored in a museum (see Lohman & Goodnow 2006). This kind of racist scientific practice

is, unfortunately, not unique to Mpumalanga; it is reflected in the history of anthropology and archaeology (see Dubow 1995; 1996; Skotnes 1996 for southern African examples).

The views of old anthropology contain a lot of "scientific facts", which may have been acceptable in 1950 (although, see Singer 1958), but are, in post-apartheid South Africa, completely unacceptable. For example, a considerable amount of research in the middle of the twentieth century focussed on 'increasing stature' (e.g. Toerien 1954, 1958, 1961; Potgieter 1955; Tobias 1962, 1975, 1990); hardly of any relevance today, but apparently quite important to physical anthropologists at the time. Physical anthropologists' infatuation with the height of 'Bushmen and Negroes' (e.g. Toerien 1961: 125–127; Tobias 1962, 1975, 1990) is difficult to make sense of, but possibly it had to do with their idea of 'pure races' and the supposed 'disappearance' of these. Living individuals were, in this sense, subjected to the same 'scientific' scrutiny as skulls and skeletons (see A. Morris 1987; Kuljian 2016).

It would seem that South African physical anthropologists in the middle of the twentieth century took the supposed correlation between 'race' and physical characteristics quite seriously. How these researchers obtained so many skulls and skeletons of so-called 'Bushmen', 'Hottentots', 'Kaffirs' and 'Negroes'[3] that they would become experts in the cranial features of African peoples, is of significant concern (see Skotnes 1996). But, in a racially divided country (Ndlovu & Smith 2019) where BaTwa identity, for instance, had been eradicated, de-Africanised and replaced with a 'Coloured' identity, nothing is too surprising (see A. Morris 1987; Legassick & Rassool 2000). In Mpumalanga, BaTwa communities had, in the middle of the twentieth century, lost their autonomy and land; most of them lived on colonial farms as servants (Toerien 1954, 1958, 1961; Potgieter 1955), and hence easily accessible to anthropologists. Along with the view that the BaTwa were going extinct, these studies were based on the view of BaTwa as a separate race from other Africans (e.g. Broom 1923; Toerien 1954, 1958, 1961; Potgieter 1955; see Francis 2009 for a critique).

Unfortunately, much of Mpumalanga popular history is still in the narrative of the likes of Potgieter—racist white male scientists who wrote from a privileged position in apartheid South Africa (see Shepherd 2019). Such privilege afforded them power over the dignity of the people they studied (e.g.

[3] The terms 'Bushmen', 'Hottentots', 'Kaffirs' and 'Negroes' were racist terms used by anthropologists/archaeologists in the twentieth century, and continue to be used pejoratively to refer to people of African descent in South Africa and in other parts of the world. I only use these terms here to highlight the level of racism that Africans were subjected to.

see Potgieter 1955: 24; Toerien 1961: 126). One would think that, in post-apartheid South Africa, these narrow conceptions no longer prevail; yet, if you visit the Mpumalanga website (www.mpumalanga.gov accessed February 2020) and read the section under 'The history of the province', you find nothing about the BaTwa. They are later mentioned on that page in passing, as such: "*Later*, San (Bushmen) used ochre both to decorate their bodies and in the manufacture of pigments. Examples of San (Bushman) rock art can be found throughout the province, marking the *passage* of these hunter-gatherers [my emphasis]" (www.mpumalanga.gov accessed February 2020). This is a problematic statement; the word 'later', after descriptions of 'evidence of Man, 46 000 years ago', and then the word 'passage', both imply that BaTwa were not indigenous to Mpumalanga, but only made rock art while 'passing through'. Of course, 46 000 years ago, they would not have been 'BaTwa' or 'San/Bushmen' as we know them in the historical records (see Pargeter *et al*. 2016 for a critique of primordialist arguments), but the way the statement is phrased disregards that the first inhabitants of Mpumalanga were, in fact, hunter-gatherer communities.

It is from such an unfortunate position that I write this dissertation, where much of what we know about central Mpumalanga is in incomplete fragments that often do not match—half-truths often taken at face value (e.g. Davie 2011; Sanders 2013). These issues make up the content of this chapter, and greatly influence the approach I follow, in interpreting variability in the KLSA rock art—a type of material culture that is sensitive to these issues of identity and ethnic classifications. Following the decolonial approach adopted by an increasing number of South African archaeologists in an aim to dispel colonial metanarratives (e.g. Moore-Gilbert 1997; Shepherd 1998, 2002a, b, 2003a, b, 2005: 123, 2019; Gosden 1999, 2001, 2004, 2012; Ndlovu 2009a; Challis 2012, 2014, 2016; Forssman 2019; Ndlovu & Smith 2019), this dissertation is set within the framework of postcolonial theories (e.g. Said 1978, 1993; Spivak 1988, 1996; Bhabha 1994, 2015), and is against racist anthropological interpretations.

The reality of (re)writing history, though, is that sometimes we are forced to drink from poisoned chalices (Alex Schoeman, pers. comm. 2019); such is the nature of archaeology – we sometimes have to work from a fragmentary past, which may mean having to work with problematic sources. What is important is that we don't take such sources at face value. Although Potgieter's (1955) work is set within a narrow, racist paradigm, I cite the work throughout this dissertation because some of his data can be trusted, such as oral accounts and place names (see Chapter 3). This is what makes the work

useful, as compared to other anthropological literature from this region (e.g. Toerien 1954, 1958, 1961).

2.2 Conceptions of identity in a colonised world

The colonial nature of the history of archaeological theory and practice in South Africa is in every sense traumatic (see Dubow 1995, 1996; Shepherd 2019; see Gosden 1999; Schmidt 2009; Marks 2017 for a global perspective). When studying material culture and/or identity, it is important to revisit this past, so that we do not fall back into the same line of thinking, which would undoubtedly be irresponsible. Considering the points mentioned above, it is especially important for archaeological research in the KLSA to redress these colonial views, so that they are not projected onto the art, which was made by people with a similar identity (albeit temporally separated) to those studied by Potgieter (1955) and others (e.g. Toerien 1954, 1958, 1961). For these colonial writers, differences in identity were thought to be biologically determined, a view which was closely related to the concept of 'race' which, in anthropological terminology, evolved to 'culture' and then to 'ethnicity' (Geertz 1973; Kuper 1973; Clifford 1988; Marks 2017). Under the framework of these concepts, writers developed many distorted theories of the past, where Africans were viewed as ape-like beings, with far less intellectual capacity than Europeans, and incapable of any kind of complexity (Marks 2017) (e.g. Fig. 2.1). These disturbing views were justified under a branch of science known as physical anthropology, which was most influential in the twentieth century, across the globe (see Gosden 1999; Hutton 2015; Marks 2017 for overviews).

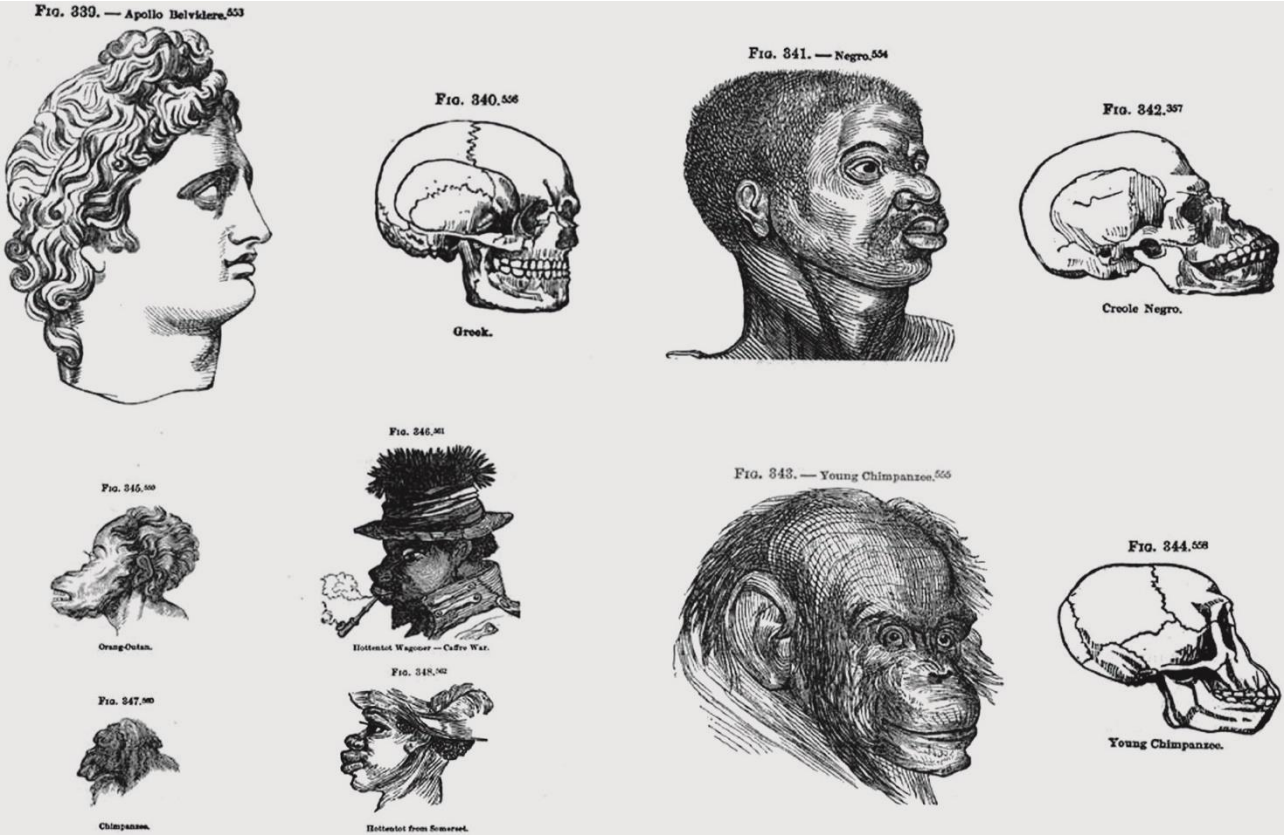


Figure 2.1: Skulls as indication of 'race' in phrenology. The different skulls are used to support a notion of racial differences between 'Negro' (top right), 'Hottentot' (bottom left) and Greek (top left). The 'Hottentot' skull is equated to those of orang-utans and chimpanzees; the 'Negro' skull is equated to that of a young chimpanzee. Illustration adopted from Erica Torrens (2019).

2.2.1 Anthropology and 'race'

An axiomatic view in physical anthropology was that biological variation showed inherent behavioural and cognitive differences between populations (Stocking 1968; Gosden 1999; Marks 2017). This biological framework failed to consider variation *within* populations (Marks 2017, own emphasis). The study of diversity, during this time, had adopted a race typology, viewing diverse identities as 'types of human beings' (e.g. Bean 1926; see Dubow 1996; MacEachern 2012: 39 for reviews). Diverse African identities were also conceptualised as 'races'—that is, in Jonathan Marks' (2017) words, 'naturally partitioned, discrete kinds of the human species, each with distinct properties'; Charles Seligman's (1930) *Races of Africa* identified eight of those (Marks 2017: 29). In South Africa, such views inspired a growing academic interest in the 'Stone Age races', which scholars compared with contemporary (real and imagined) identities (or 'races') (e.g. Broom 1923; Dart 1923; Stern & Singer 1967).

Besides excavated skulls being used to reach these absurd conclusions, the questions that guided physical anthropology were mostly political (Dubow 1996; see also Mallen 2008: 14–17). Seemingly, there was an agenda that drove the research of many writers from different fields in the social sciences—anthropology, archaeology, history and linguistics. This early research was not a genuine mission to 'preserve dying cultures', as it is made to seem; quite deliberately, researchers during this period dedicated their work to "the writing of a racial history" of South Africa (Mallen 2008: 16; also see Dubow 1996, 2019; Shepherd 2019). Indeed, South African archaeology in the twentieth century has been labelled "the most colonial of all African archaeologies" (Trigger 1990: 316; also see Deacon 1990; Schrire 1995; Shepherd 1998, 2002a, b, 2003a, b, 2005: 123, 2019; Forssman 2019; Ndlovu & Smith 2019). It was in this same line of thinking that early rock art research was practiced.

2.2.2 Racial approaches to southern African rock art

The effect of colonial metanarratives to the writing of a South African past is more clearly seen in the early writings of rock art researchers. Consider, for instance, the work of the Abbé Henri Breuil (1948). In the first half of the twentieth century, after World War II, Breuil was invited to South Africa by the then Prime Minister, Jan Smuts (Lewis-Williams 2006: 357). Breuil was, at the time, a well-known draughtsman, having reproduced and studied cave paintings in France, Spain, Portugal and other parts of Europe. Being the renowned man that he was at the time, Breuil's fame put him in a good position to be taken as a credible writer, and apparently with a great work ethic (Dubow 1995, 2019; Lewis-Williams 2006). Shortly after his arrival, Breuil published *The White Lady of the Brandberg*, an analysis of what later came to be one of the most controversial rock art panels worldwide. The timing of the publication—1948—is of interest, and may also not be very coincidental. Breuil's visit to South Africa, and his subsequent publication of the 'White Lady' painting, timed well with the beginning of apartheid, a time of racial segregation.

Breuil's 'white lady' (shown in Fig. 2.2), located in the Brandberg massif in Namibia, depicts a distinctly adorned human figure, carrying, in the right hand, a white object that resembles a flower or cup, and a bow on the left. Around this figure, a number of antelope, some therianthropic figures, and at least eight other human figures are seen. Breuil's (1948) suggestion was that the figures around the 'white lady' were 'her companions and her guards', as suggested by his title. This suggestion came from Breuil's fallacious assumption that this was a depiction of a European woman

'accompanied and guarded' by natives. And, as though that was not already disconcerting, Breuil (1948: 7) further wrote, "The face is very delicately painted and has nothing native about it".

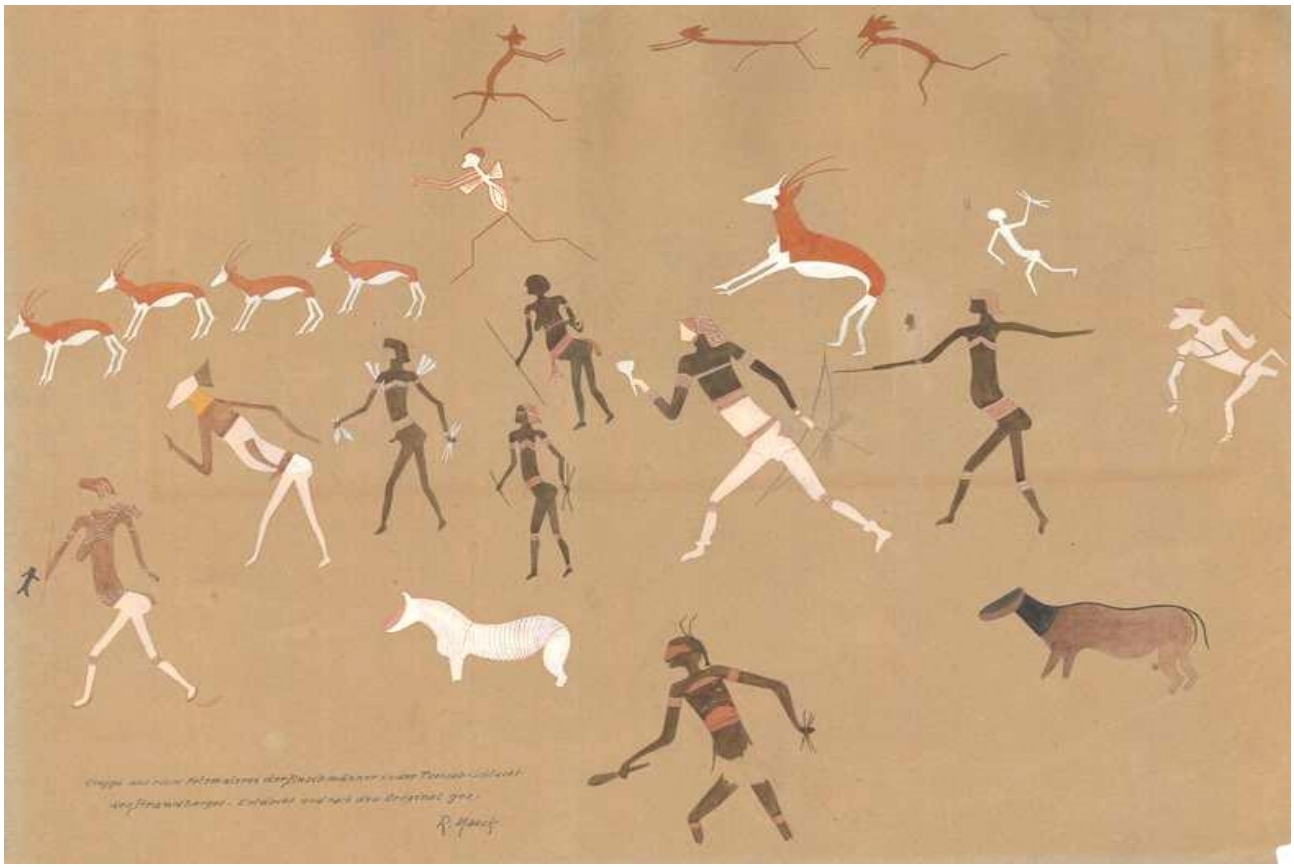


Figure 2.2: Painting of the "white lady" of the Brandberg. Copy: SARADA.

Still, Breuil (1948) went on to deduce 'racial types' from this painting, and suggested a foreign influence and "perhaps even the hand of a foreign artist" (*ibid.*: 11). As it is agreed among researchers today, Breuil's 'white lady' was, in fact, neither a lady nor a European (Harding 1968; Lewis-Williams 2000: 69–71). Breuil (1948) likely was aware of that, but his colonialist mentality took over his imagination (see Dubow 2019), and he deliberately made these absurd claims. What makes Breuil's (1948) interpretations even worth mention here, is that not only did scholars of the time find his interpretation justifiable, but interpretations of this kind—that viewed southern African rock paintings as non-sophisticated hunting scenes, and those which did not fit this narrow view, as foreign—prevailed even for decades to follow (e.g. Woodhouse 1969; Willcox 1978, 1984). Rock art research, like physical anthropology and related sciences at the time, was racialised to extreme levels.

This racial approach was contradictory to what some writers in the eighteenth century were saying about rock art (Lewis-Williams 2006: 350–352); emerging in the early times of apartheid, political motivations were clearly at play (see Shepherd 2019 with respect to archaeological practice during apartheid). With the political climate of apartheid South Africa allowing, all kinds of amateurs and racists could comment on rock art and its (less considered) significance (e.g. Breuil 1948; Woodhouse 1969; Willcox 1978, 1984). Writers like Breuil (1948: 8) found it permissible to use phrases like, "[h]is face was originally 'European'. The straight forehead and long narrow nose had their lower half later painted over with a negro mask, with a thick flat nose, projecting lips and receding chin". Where such appalling claims could not be made, writers would argue that the people who made said rock paintings had all 'disappeared' and their descendants enculturated, thus no recognisable community could have claim to this heritage (see Blundell 2004: 16–27). Such views reflect the racist agenda that the early writers had; to discredit all that ties the South African indigenes to the land, and to reconstruct a past that was in favour of the white South African population. These colonialist imaginations of the South African past brought "certain ways of reconstructing the African reality" (Mafeje 1971: 253). In the process of fabricating a written history for South Africa's white population, indigenous communities were stripped of millennia of history that they wrote for themselves, in the form of rock art (Dowson 1993, 1994).

2.3 Rock art research in post-apartheid South Africa

Today, most archaeologists acknowledge that these preconceptions were flawed (e.g. Forssman 2019; Shepherd 2019). Some researchers have dedicated their work to challenging colonial views of rock art and of the people who made it (e.g. Dowson 1993, 1994, 1998; Morris 2002, 2012; Blundell 2004; Challis 2008, 2014, 2016; Mallen 2008). The works of the postcolonial theorists Edward Said (1978, 1993), Gayatri Spivak (1988), and Homi Bhabha (1994) have been particularly influential in contemporary rock art research's rewriting of history (e.g. see Pinto 2014: 152–153 for explicit use of Bhabha). Said (1978), considered by some to be "the most influential of the post-colonial theorists" (Gosden 1999: 198, 2001), is better known for coining the term 'orientalism', with which he critiques the essentialised and simplified notions of the East maintained by the West, where the East is viewed as inferior, voiceless and backward, contrary to the progressive West. Drawing inspiration from Michel Foucault (1969, 1979), particularly Foucault's interest in the relationship between knowledge and power (Gosden 1999: 198, 2001), Said's (1978, 1993) writings show how academia has aligned with political action in enforcing stereotypes about non-Europeans and, in turn, justifying colonialism.

Spivak (1988, 1996, 1998) and Bhabha (1994, 2015), on the other hand, focus on the deconstruction of knowledge systems, both taking inspiration from Derrida's (1967) deconstructive method of analysis [Spivak wrote the translated version of Derrida's (1967) *Of Grammatology*]. Spivak's (1988, 1996, 1998) work gives more consideration to local and marginalised ('subaltern') voices, counter to a concentration on colonial metanarratives. In this sense, Spivak (1996, 1998) differs from Said (1978), in that she recognises "the variety of colonial experiences and histories" (Gosden 1999: 200), acknowledging gender as one of these varieties. Spivak's (1988, 1996, 1998) writings, which draw equally on feminist, Marxist and deconstructionist literature, show that people's perceptions of the world, and their being in it, are shaped by their histories and experiences (also see Manganyi 1973; Ingold 2000). This premise contradicts the view of identity, ethnicity, and race as being shaped by biology or culture. This contradiction is made even more obvious when we consider Bhabha's (1994, 2015) arguments.

Bhabha (1994, 2015) views culture as fluid and non-essentialised. Central to Bhabha's (1994) thesis is a critique of the coloniser-colonised dichotomy, maintaining that when different cultural forms come into contact, creole cultures are created. But, his model applies to any kind of cultural contact, suggesting that when diverse peoples meet, they do not maintain separate identities, but rather create a new identity. Bhabha (1994: 2) writes:

> Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition (emphasis in original).

Bhabha's (1994) work has had a great influence on writers' recognition that the past has always been characterised by hybridity, where interactions between diverse peoples occur, and they socially integrate in spite of their cultural differences (e.g. Gosden 2001; Challis 2016).

Viewing diversity within the terms of Bhabha, archaeologists in the last few decades have gone on to show these processes of hybridity in the archaeological record (e.g. Hall & Mazel 2005; Ouzman

2005; Challis 2008, 2012, 2016; Mallen 2008; Pinto 2014). Recent studies reflect "a shift in perception from cultures as ready-made, to cultures as *always in a state of becoming*, so that we have now jettisoned a belief in a relatively static 'primitive' which was different and prior to ourselves." (Gosden 1999: 181, my emphasis). Bhabha (1994)'s suggestion that all identities have hybrid origins means no single identity can remain in a static form, as processes of hybridisation actively occur through generations (Gosden 1999: 181, 2001). Most researchers acknowledge this, but archaeological interpretation has not been able to move beyond 'culture' and the implications of it (*cf*. Morris 2012: 112).

'Culture' became widely used as an explanative anthropological concept in the twentieth century, being offered as an alternative to 'race'; so too was 'ethnicity' (Marks 2017: 48; see also Kuper 1973, 1994; Clifford 1988; Gosden 1999; Morris 2012: 99–131). For the Boasian scholars (American cultural anthropologists), 'culture' was conceived as "a distinct historical agency, the cause of variation between populations and the main determinant of consciousness, knowledge and understanding" (Kuper 1994: 539). "Each culture had its particular configuration of values, to be grasped intuitively, guided by art and mythology" (Kuper 1994: 539; see Gell 1998 a critique of art as a reflection of 'culture'). Moreover, it was believed that "culture shaped the being of actors in particular communities. It created distinct modes of experiencing the world" (Kuper 1994: 540). 'Culture', then, came to be understood as an inherent and coherent driving force that shaped action and informed consciousness (Kuper 1994: 540; Morris 2012: 82–92).

Later, 'culture' came to be refined and redefined as "a social system of symbols, located in the mind of the actor" (Kuper 1994: 540, citing Talcott Parsons 1951 and Clifford Geertz 1973: 145). When archaeological research moved to a study of cognition and symbolism in the late 1900s (e.g. Turner 1966, 1967; Lewis-Williams 1981; Hodder 1982), this concept of culture became less problematized, still considered to be closely related to behaviour and thought (Trigger 1990). Some writers offered critique from a structurationist (Giddens 1984) point of view (e.g. Dowson 1994, 1998; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994), emphasising the lack of agency and individuality in archaeological interpretations of the time. However, this structuration theory had its shortcomings, too (see Blundell 2004: 66–68; Smith 2010: 350 for overviews of structuration theory in rock art interpretation). Having now advanced to a point where most rock art research touches on change and continuity, diversity and temporal contexts, the concepts of 'culture' and ethnicity still linger (Morris 2012).

Rock art 'traditions', for instance, are equated to strict ethnic and subsistence labels. This is despite heated debates on past southern African identities.

2.4 Ethnic identity in the Revisionist and Khoe-San debates

In academic discourse, problematic perceptions of southern African identities have mostly been challenged from a 'revisionist' viewpoint, which emerged with the publication Edwin Wilmsen's (1989) *Land Filled with Flies: A Political Economy of the Kalahari*, and his subsequent publication with Jim Denbow (Wilmsen & Denbow 1990; see also Schrire 1992; Barnard 1992b for a comprehensive overview). These works were mostly aimed at challenging views of forager communities as having remained isolated, pristine and unchanged throughout history. Contrary to these views, the premise of revisionism was that two millennia of interactions between foragers and others (farmers and herders) could not be ignored (Wilmsen 1989; Wilmsen & Denbow 1990). Although some writers were against these important points, arguing that there was a lack of evidence to support Wilmsen's (1989) suggestions (e.g. Solway & Lee 1990), a vast amount of research today looks into the various ways in which forager communities interacted with farmers, herders and European settlers (e.g. Dowson 1994, 1998; Jolly 1995, 1996; Challis 2008, 2012, 2016; Mallen 2008; Francis 2009; Prins 1999, 2009; Forssman & Louw 2016; Whitelaw & Hall 2016). Whereas, for the revisionists, foragers were always subordinates in such interactions, research shows otherwise—interactions between foragers and 'newcomers' were mostly complex and differed from place to place (e.g. Solway & Lee 1990; Blundell 2004; Challis 2008; Sinclair-Thomson 2016; Maseko 2017; Skinner 2017; see Whitelaw and Hall 2016 on the changing roles of 'first-comers' and 'newcomers').

Related to the Revisionist Debate is the herder debate, also known as the 'Khoe-San Debate', which is driven by two conflicting hypotheses—one that views foragers and herders as separate and independent identities, and another which argues that differences between foragers and herders are colonial imaginations that lack archaeological evidence (see Schrire & Deacon 1989; Barnard 1992a; Schrire 1992; Sadr 1998, 2008, 2015; contra. A. Smith *et al*. 1991). At the core of this debate is the question of how pastoralists and/or pastoralism first reached southern Africa (A. Smith 1992, 2006; Sadr 1998, 2008, 2015; see also Smith & Ouzman 2004). The works of Andrew Smith (1992, 2006) and Karim Sadr (1998, 2008, 2015) are the most notable contributions to this debate. Contrary to Smith (1992, 2006), Sadr (1998, 2008: 191) notes that it is immensely difficult to separate foragers

from herders, archaeologically, and warns against an essentialist stance that fails to consider how the first pastoralists may have been different from the historically recorded Khoekhoe (see also Schrire & Deacon 1989; Schrire 1992; Morris 2002, 2012; Guillemard 2020).

To add to these debates, Ben Smith and Sven Ouzman (2004) published *Taking Stock*, a paper in which they consider 'geometric' rock art as potentially shedding new light on 'Khoe-San' identities. In this seminal paper, Smith and Ouzman (2004: 514) correlate proposed migration routes of the Khoekhoen to the distribution of 'geometric' rock art in southern Africa to argue that the art was 'predominantly Khoekhoen', mostly relating to girls' initiation rites (also see Eastwood & Smith 2005; Smith 2006; Orton 2013; see Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1988; Dowson 1992 for an earlier interpretation of 'geometric' rock art). Ben Smith's (1995, 1997) earlier work in south-central Africa confirms the origins of the 'geometric' art; however, it has been argued that, at some sites, it is impossible to tell apart the art of herders from that of foragers, and that separating the two is not useful (e.g. Morris 2002, 2012; Hollmann 2007, 2013). This argument is made with the acknowledgement that herders and foragers had lived together for at least 1000 years and in certain cases had similar worldviews (see Barnard 1988, 1992a). The works of David Morris (2002, 2012, also see comment in Smith & Ouzman 2004) and Jeremy Hollmann (2007, 2013, 2014) have been particularly instrumental in conveying these points, showing the difficulty of separating 'geometric' rock art from a forager worldview. These authors argue that, rather than an 'either-or' approach, the 'geometric' rock art should be viewed as a heritage of both herders and foragers, and suggest that the term 'Khoe-San' should be used to ascribe an identity to the art.

Smith and Ouzman (2004: 512) acknowledge changes in the 'geometric' art over time, which they argue were brought on by contact between herders and foragers, and point out sites where the art "took on local developments" and expresses "cross-cultural 'conversations' that challenge and extend our understanding of ethnicity and culture contact". Yet, they argue that, even in such close interactions, foragers and herders maintained separate ethnic identities as they do in the present (also see Smith 2006). This seems contradictory to Ouzman's earlier suggestion that, at least in the last two millennia, all rock art "should be regarded as potentially reflecting and moulding elements of different belief systems: forager, farmer, pastoralist and so forth, however differential the expression may be" (Ouzman 1995: 56, cited in Hollmann 2007: 147). What can be taken from these points, nonetheless, is that associations between archaeological materials and identity should be treated with

caution (see Cruz 2011) and assessed on a case-by-case basis (Sadr 2003: 208; Morris 2016), where the data can be supported by other sources. This has been a challenge taken up by some rock art scholars (e.g. Challis 2008; Mallen 2008; see Mazel 1993; Smith 2010 for a discussion of multiple sources in rock art interpretation).

2.5 Rock art and ethnic identity

Rock art is a form of material culture that is closely related to identity and personhood (e.g. Mallen 2008; Hollmann 2007, 2013, 2014; Challis 2012; Green 2020; Snow 2020). But, because of the complex nature of identity in southern Africa and elsewhere, the way that the two (identity and rock art) are often tied together is not always unproblematic (see Berrocal & Garcia 2007; Mallen 2008). In South Africa, this is mostly because of the manner in which the apartheid regime boxed identities, and at the same time created illusive divisiveness (see Shepherd 1998, 2002a, 2003b; Mallen 2008: 14–17). Scholars in the social sciences were as equally responsible for propelling ideas of ethnic essentialism (see Morris 2012: 94–131 for a lengthy discussion). Morris (2002, 2012: 100, 181) has noted that, at Northern Cape sites such as Driekopseiland, rock art interpretation was previously obsessed with "bounded, primordialist conceptions of 'cultures' and 'ethnic' entities", and ties these notions to the broader intellectual climate of anthropology and archaeology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see also Trigger 1990; Mallen 2008; Shepherd 2019). I have addressed most of the history of archaeological thought that is similarly highlighted by Morris (2002, 2012), in earlier parts of this chapter. But, I have not given enough attention to why a critique of these old categories and ethnic divisions is relevant to rock art research today and, most importantly, why it is relevant to a study of the KLSA rock art.

Three main 'traditions' of rock paintings are recognised in southern Africa today—fine-line rock art, 'geometric' rock art, and 'Late White' rock art, which are commonly associated with foragers, herders and farmers, respectively (e.g. Hall & Prins 1993; Prins & Hall 1994; Smith & Ouzman 2004; Eastwood & Smith 2005; Namono & Eastwood 2005; Orton 2013). Most well-known of these 'traditions' is the fine-line art, which is distributed widely across the subcontinent (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1983). Other rock art in southern Africa has been associated with historically-documented multi-ethnic and/or creolised raider communities (e.g. Campbell 1986; Ouzman 2005; Challis 2008, 2012, 2014, 2016; Mallen 2008; Henry 2010). Most of these raider communities are no longer recognisable, and exist only in memory (poorly) and in the historical and archaeological records.

Recently, research has also looked at ‘graffiti’ markings left by people of European descent, during the South African War (e.g. Ouzman 1999, 2010; Forssman & Louw 2016).

These rock art ‘traditions’ are defined on the basis of ‘style’; individual images or groups of images are recognised as belonging to one of these ‘traditions’ because of their common conformity to a certain set of conventions (Smith 1998; Henry 2010: 30–32). Such conventions “seem to belong to particular times and places” (Smith 1998: 218). “Over time, a convention…becomes the accepted way of doing something” (Smith 1998: 218). It is based on this conformity that later ‘traditions’ of rock art have been identified in South Africa (e.g. Prins & Hall 1994; Hall & Smith 2000; Smith & Ouzman 2004), as separate ‘traditions’ from the fine-line figurative art commonly attributed to forager communities. A combination of colour, image type, technique and spatial distribution is used to group images into one of the rock art ‘traditions’ mentioned above. Moreover, these ‘traditions’ are considered to be directly linked to specific ethnic identities.

‘Geometric’ art, for instance, is suggested by Smith and Ouzman (2004) to be a distinct ‘Khoekhoen herder tradition’ because it is finger-painted, occurs along sources of water, is ‘abstract’ and often depicts symbols and material culture such as aprons which are not generally used by forager communities. These attributes are in contrast to the rock art of BaTwa foragers, which is predominantly fine-line and brush-painted, is representational, and occurs in almost all kinds of environments with rock shelters. The recognition of differences is a good contribution, and it shows the heterogeneity of southern African rock art and the complex social past in which it was produced. However, it has been demonstrated numerous times that not all southern African rock art conforms to these ‘traditions’, that there are bodies of art that were made from unique sets of conventions, where the ‘stylistic’ conventions of ‘fine-line’ and ‘finger-painted’ were broken (e.g. see Blundell 2004; Mallen 2008; Henry 2010 for ‘non-conforming’ arts in the north-Eastern Cape).

The KLSA rock paintings share characteristics of some of these rock art ‘traditions’, but at some sites the rock art blurs boundaries and cannot be ‘pigeon-holed’ into the already-known ‘traditions’. Another noteworthy aspect of the KLSA rock art is its striking resemblance (at certain sites) to rock art in south-central Africa, particularly around the modern-day borders of Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique (see Smith 1995, 1997; Zubieta 2009, 2014). The ‘geometric’ rock art

in this research area resembles Malawian Chewa (farmers) and Twa (foragers) rock art (see Zubieta 2009, 2014) more than it does southern African Khoe-speakers' rock art (e.g. Smith & Ouzman 2004); moreover, at the sites where 'geometric' paintings are found, eland are painted with elongated stomachs, showing similarities to the 'red animal' tradition which has been identified in the aforementioned countries (e.g. Smith 1995, 1997; Mabulla 2014). The significance of these similarities is, as yet, difficult to assess, and may be a topic for future research. Still, these images co-occur with more conventional southern African rock art images, within sites. Classic fine-line images dominate the region, but there are sites where it is completely absent. This co-occurrence of diverse rock art images has many implications for the social history of this region, but the paucity of archaeological data poses a challenge. As such, much of what can be said about the art will be conjectural at this point, and assessing meaning would be a premature exercise.

Nonetheless, it is because of this enigmatic nature (Wylie 2002: 46) of the KLSA rock art that I reject any associations between assumed ethnic divisions and any rock art categories that are used in this dissertation. While, in certain cases, rock art may be used as a 'cultural boundary' between communities, as a statement of identity formation and maintenance, it could also be used to draw boundaries *within* communities (e.g. Smith 2001). Such boundaries, therefore, have nothing to do with 'cultural differences', however defined. Female initiation rock art, for instance, may only speak to women's issues (e.g. Namono & Eastwood 2005; Hollmann 2013, 2014), and therefore implicated in drawing boundaries between men and women within a community. Boundaries may further be drawn between the initiated and non-initiates. We should not, therefore, assume boundaries to always be conceptualised around ethnic or 'tribal' lines (see Hamilton & Leibhammer 2016 for a critique of ethnicity and tribalism). It is important to remember that it is not the classification (analytical procedure) itself, but rather more the thinking reflected by such analysis, that is damaging (Wylie 2002: 46). We need to resist the urge to always 'box' material culture (Tim Forssman, pers. comm. 2018), which in turn 'boxes' people, and consider cultural fluidity to be a norm (Bhabha 1994). Therefore, following Lara Mallen (2008), I use terms like 'fine-line', 'finger-painted' 'figurative' and 'geometric' to describe the rock art, instead of ethnic labels.

2.6 Rock art in 'place' and time

So far, this chapter has been about problematizing misconceptions of identity and especially with regards to rock art interpretation. Identity not being the main focus of this dissertation, I look closely

at literature on rock art and landscape, in the rest of this dissertation, and also consider literature on rock art chronology. I highlight the strengths and limitations of these previous works, and discuss their relevance to the objectives of this dissertation.

2.6.1 Rock art and landscape: a brief history

Landscape approaches to rock art have mostly been attempted by Australian writers (e.g Rapoport 1975; Rosenfeld 1997; Jordan 2003), where it has been shown that people in the past attached spiritual importance to certain parts of the landscape. The rock art found in these places, therefore, is argued to reflect how its makers perceived those places. In South Africa, much of what we know about the relationship between rock art, ritual and landscape perception comes from research in the Northern Cape Province (e.g. Deacon 1988; also see Rapoport 1975; Rosenfeld 1997; Jordan 2003 for Australian examples). Inspired by studies of rock art and landscape in Australia (e.g. Rapoport 1975), Deacon (1988) has shown how the /Xam attached importance to certain landscape features and incorporated them into their cosmology and ritual life (see Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990 for rock surfaces and supernatural potency; Henry 2010 for contestation of space in the north Eastern Cape; see also Schoeman 2019 for ritual and site re-use in northern South Africa). This kind of approach to rock art and landscape, however, has not always characterised rock art research.

In their critique of rock art and landscape, Ben Smith and Geoff Blundell (2004: 239–253) point out how some rock art-landscape studies are “naive”, “seriously flawed” and often from a ‘European perspective’. In so doing, they contrast these ‘western perceptions of landscape’ with how foragers such as the Ju/’hoansi in the Kalahari and the Huichol in northern Mexico perceive their environment, arguing that micro-features of the landscape are more important to foragers. Smith and Blundell (2004) note the dangers of correlating our own perceptions of the landscape with site distribution, even if we can demonstrate a link; they point out studies where researchers were convinced that the patterns they observed were correct, even though they were, in fact, flawed. The best way to work around this limitation, Smith and Blundell (2004) suggest, is to use ethnographic insight. Without a demonstrable link between rock art site distribution and an informed view of how painters attached meaning to landscape, a landscape study of rock art can be “embarrassingly far off the mark” (Smith & Blundell 2004: 259).

It is informed approaches to rock art and landscape that have seen success, where this link has been demonstrated (e.g. Deacon 1988; Morris 1988, 2002, 2012; Hollmann 2007, 2013; Zubieta 2009, 2012). Morris (1988, 2002, 2012) and Hollmann (2007, 2013), for instance, show that the attachment of supernatural potency to certain places was part of an encompassing cosmology shared by foragers and herders (e.g. Morris 1988, 2002, 2012; Hollmann 2007, 2013; see Barnard 1988, 1992a for ethnography). Customs related to female initiation, they argue, 'seem to transcend the divide' between foragers and herders (Hollmann 2007: 147). In other cases, landscape perception has been used to interpret the rock art of multi-ethnic communities (e.g. Henry 2010; also see Mallen 2008). In the north Eastern Cape, rock art researchers have identified rock art 'types' which do not fit neatly within the boundaries of the three main rock art 'traditions' (e.g. Blundell 2004; Mallen 2008; Henry 2010). The works of Mallen (2008) and Leila Henry (2010), continuing from Blundell's (2004) work in the former 'Nomansland', show that rock art can be very context specific, or localised, challenging "more traditional concepts of rock art traditions as produced over long periods of time and over large geographic areas" (Henry 2010: 32–33). Mallen (2008) and Henry (2010) both make some important points about rock art and identity, and the problematic nature of linking ethnic identity with rock art categories. These authors identify an unconventional body of art which Mallen (2008) calls 'Type 3'. Type 3 rock art differs in technique, subject matter and pigment type from the 'classic' fine-line art of the north Eastern Cape, but is always painted in the same spaces. Linking this art to the history of the region in the nineteenth century, Mallen (2008: 136) and Henry (2010) argue that the art reflects a contestation of the painting space, over which the authors of Type 3 used rock art to gain control over the potency of the site.

Importantly, these writers recognise the ideological[4] continuity of 'space' between diverse peoples (as indicated by their rock art and local history)—that 'space' is not a meaningless vacuum waiting to be filled with 'cultural significance', but is actively engaged in social processes (see Barceló 2002; see also Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004, 2009; David & Thomas 2008; Lewis-Williams 2010; Schoeman 2019). By arguing that painting space in the north Eastern Cape was contested, Mallen (2008) and Henry (2010) touch on the quality of rock art panels to act as 'palimpsests', drawing painters across generations (and seemingly across 'cultures') to the same painting spaces (Lewis-Williams 2010; see McCall for a summary of rock art panels as 'palimpsests'; Gell 1998 for agency of art). Painted spaces are, in this sense, places where people "experience a sense of continuity with

[4] I define ideology as 'a set of beliefs shared by a community, which influence their thought, actions and worldview'. I reject the political connotations of the word.

the past" (Mazumdar & Mazumdar 1993: 233). This is what Juan Barceló (2002) calls *attraction* and *accumulation*. In Deacon's (1988) terms, *attraction* and *accumulation* have to do with the power of a place (see Rosenfeld 1997; Jordan 2003 for Australian examples). If Mallen (2008) and Henry (2010) are correct, then we can understand the potency of painted places to have been a significant influence in the contestation of space in the north Eastern Cape.

Considering these points, a landscape approach to KLSA rock art is justified, if a correlation can be shown between the placement of the rock art in the landscape, and the way in which possible authors of the art may have perceived the places in which the art is painted. As Morris (2002, 2012: 188) has suggested, the placement of rock art sites in the landscape may offer fresh insights into their significance and meaning. This is a suggestion that I take up in this dissertation, as I show associations between rock art, ritual and conceptions of 'place' in the KLSA; I highlight these associations in Chapter Three and Chapter Five. Thereon, these art-landscape associations will be a point of discussion in Chapter Six, where I consider how the relationship between rock art, ritual and 'place' may have been a significant part of the decision-making behind the placement of rock art at specific sites in the KLSA. I also consider, in Chapter Six, the relative chronology of some of the rock paintings.

2.6.2 Chronological issues in southern African rock art research

The lack of a clear chronology is the biggest limitation to rock art research (Mazel 1993, 2007, 2007, 2009; Mazel & Watchman 1997; Bonneau *et al.* 2011, 2014, 2017a; Mullen 2018; Pearce & Bonneau 2018). Very few reliable dates have been obtained for some areas (e.g. Van der Merwe *et al.* 1987; Mazel & Watchman 1997; Bonneau *et al*. 2011, 2014, 2017a, b, c) and none for most areas. The KLSA is one of these latter areas. The difficulty in dating rock art using direct scientific methods is that the paints used were seldom made of organic material (Bonneau *et al.* 2011, 2012). Organic material includes charcoal and other natural substances, which contain radioactive carbon (C-14). Given that there are very few sites that could be directly dated, and that direct dating methods are still in their infancy, rock art researchers often resort to relative dating techniques (e.g. Steyn 1995; Mguni 1997; Russell 2000; Pearce 2002; Swart 2004; Mazel 2007, 2009, 2013).

There are three ways in which southern African rock art has been relatively dated—by superposition, by suggestive subject matter and lastly by associated archaeological materials (where demonstrable).

'Suggestive subject matter', as used here, refers to subjects that are traceable to specific moments in history. These could include domestic stock, wagons, or material culture that only appears in the southern African archaeological record in the 'contact period' (e.g. Manhire *et al.* 1986; Sealy & Yates 1996; Henshilwood 1996; Smith & Ouzman 2004; Hall & Mazel 2005; Challis 2008; Lander 2014), beginning at approximately two millennia ago (Mitchell 2009). Superposition, on the other hand, refers to images that have been painted over others; this may include overlapping layers (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1974), which may be equated to 'layers of meaning' (Pearce 2002: 130). The third—associated archaeology—refers to archaeological materials excavated from or documented at a painted site. This alternative, however, only applies in instances where a link between deposits and paintings can be demonstrated, which is rarely ever the case. The most widely used relative dating technique is the examination of superposition, commonly by use of matrices to determine a sequence (e.g. Steyn 1995; Russell 2000).

2.6.3 Dates and debates, superpositioning and sequences

Rock art sequences based on superpositioning have been considered since the early 1900s (Mason 1933: 131). Following on the work of earlier writers around the world (e.g. Mason 1933; Heizer & Baumhoff 1962; Cooke 1963; Willcox 1963), sequences in southern African rock art were widely investigated in the years between the 1970s and early 2000s (e.g. Pager 1971: 353–356; Lewis-Williams 1974; Steyn 1994, 1995; Mguni 1997; Russell 2000; Pearce 2001, 2002, 2006; Swart 2004). This four-decade era of rock art research is concurrent with a wide use of the concept of 'style', where 'styles' were considered to be markers of chronology (Pearce 2002: 129). This view of 'style' has now been abandoned; in contemporary southern African archaeology, 'stylistic' sequences are rarely considered to be of much use, in preference for direct dating techniques.

But, obtaining direct dates for southern African rock art has been a rather challenging ambition. Where direct dating methods are applicable, they are often unreliable (although see Mazel & Watchman 1997; Bonneau *et al.* 2011, 2017a, b, c). With relative dating as a readily available option, researchers have employed the Harris Matrix technique to build rock art sequences, equating layers of paintings in a panel to strata (e.g. Russell 2000; Swart 2004). Thembi Russell (2000, 2012) and Joane Swart (2004, 2006), in particular, have advocated for the use of the Harris Matrix, whereas Pearce (2001, 2002, 2006, 2010), contrary to these writers, has warned against the application of this technique to rock art sequencing. The result of Pearce's (2001, 2002, 2006, 2010) critique has been

an important debate about rock art dating techniques (see Swart 2006; Russell 2012 in response to Pearce 2006, 2010). Of note in this debate, is Pearce's (2001, 2002, 2006: 173, 2010: 152) suggestion that the Harris Matrix technique is only applicable for inferring rock art chronology in "multiple tradition" contexts (e.g. Chippindale & Taçon 1993; Mguni 1997). Given the variability of the KLSA rock art, this may be an available option for sequencing the KLSA rock art (see Chapters 5 & 6).

2.6.4 Associated archaeology as indication for relative chronology

A less common approach to relatively dating rock art is inference by archaeological associations (e.g. Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971; Beaumont & Vogel 1989). This approach is rarely explored, because not many painted sites have been excavated in southern Africa (although see Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971; Korsman & Plug 1992; Will *et al.* 2015; Schmidt & Mackay 2016), as in the KLSA. Also, there is little reliability in this approach to dating rock art (see Thackeray 1983). It is easy to deem chronology based on archaeological associations as purely speculative (Thackeray 1983), because rock art imagery can hardly be argued to be directly associated to other archaeological evidence at a particular site. Direct association between rock art and excavated materials is difficult to confirm; the animals depicted on rock art panels do not necessarily reflect faunal materials identified in the deposits (but see Korsman & Plug 1992). Nonetheless, a tentative date range can be assumed for rock art, based on the chronology of associated artefacts. One such date range exists for rock art at one site in the KLSA—Welgelegen Shelter, and for another site significantly proximal to the KLSA—Honingklip Shelter (see Chapter 3 for the archaeology recovered at these sites and their chronology). In Chapter 3, I consider dates from both these sites, for the occupation sequence of central Mpumalanga, and use these dates in the estimation of a date range for the *practice of* rock art in the KLSA (Chapter 6).

2.6.5 Subject matter as an indication of chronology

As an alternative to 'stylistic' sequences and excavated materials, several rock art studies have relied on subject matter to infer rock art chronology (e.g. Campbell 1986, 1987; Challis 2008; Mallen 2008). This way of rock art dating is always done in conjunction with historical and archaeological evidence, and is hence more reliable than the other two methods. Images of sheep (e.g. Manhire *et al.* 1986; Lander 2014), for instance, are largely considered to have been made within the last 2000 years, based on archaeological evidence (e.g. Sealy & Yates 1994; Henshilwood 1996). Similarly, rock art images of horses, guns and wagons (e.g. Campbell 1986, 1987; Hall & Mazel 2005; Ouzman 2005;

Challis 2008, 2012; Skinner 2017; Sinclair-Thomson 2019, 2020) are known to have been made in the time of European colonisation (17th century onwards), as suggested by historical sources. Chronology of rock art may also be indicated by clothing items which can be tied to a specific period (e.g. Blundell & Eastwood 2001; Mallen 2008: 55–57). Some of the rock art in the KLSA sites depict such items which can be tied to a single timeframe (see Chapters 5 & 6). Most importantly, if chronology can be inferred from the images themselves, then this could also be used to detect changes in the art of the region, and ultimately in the social context of the KLSA. I discuss these possibilities in Chapter Six. These relative methods combined, at least some of the KLSA rock art can be understood to have been made in certain periods.

2.7 Previous rock art research in the KLSA: variation, 'style' and chronology

2.7.1 'Styles' and sequences

The question of rock art chronology is nothing new to the KLSA (see Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971; Steyn 1995). Previous research used site stratigraphy to relatively date rock art at some sites (e.g. Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971), while other research focussed on discerning different 'styles' in the art and using these to come up with a chronological sequence (e.g. Steyn 1994, 1995). Being the first researcher to focus a study on more than one rock art site in this region, Anna Steyn (1994, 1995) identified a sequence of six 'styles' in the KLSA rock art, which, including subcategories, add up to 31. Using these 'stylistic' categories, Steyn (1994, 1995) established a chronological sequence for the sites that had been identified. Add the time, though, only sites with fine-line art were known to archaeologists. To compare Steyn's results with mine, a thorough review of her analytical method is prerequisite.

The categories that Steyn (1994, 1995) identified are:

A. Shaded polychrome

Shaded polychrome figures are mostly paintings of antelope, of which most are eland. This category includes figures whose other detail (such as the head, and white outline on the stomach) has faded. This is because white paint does not preserve as well as other pigments.

B. Bichrome

Steyn's (1994, 1995) bichrome category includes images with two colours, and with two colours as well as sparing use of a third colour. These images are mostly dark-brown or charcoal black. Four variations, or subcategories, exist within this category:

b(i) white contrast is used to accentuate orange.

b(ii) use of perspective (e.g. back leg thinner than one closest to viewer).

b(iii) emphasis on mass and strength.

b(iv) white only on stomach; no outline.

C. Outside line drawings

'Outside line drawings' are paintings, usually of antelope, in which only the outline of the figure is painted, without a fill. No particular features are paid attention to.

D. Monochrome

The monochrome category is a bit vague. It includes six subcategories, based on subject matter:

d(i) two snakes and footprint.

d(ii) antelope – rounded back and stomach; no detail on the body.

d(iii) antelope 107 in the middle of panel IV – stripped of all detail (e.g. tail – body bow shaped, long stretched neck).

d(iv) cluster of images in the same style and same size.

d(v) cluster; not 'set' of images; face in different directions and are of different sizes.

d(vi) loose brush strokes in crumbly paint.

E. Miniature figures

The ‘miniature figures’ category includes stylised images which lack detail. These are in a cluster and include a meerkat; they seem to move, progress or face in one direction – this is more clearly a cluster, as compared to other images on the panel; others cluster but face in various directions.

F. Unidentifiable/faded

The last of Steyn’s (1994) categories includes all unidentifiable and/or faded imagery.

2.7.2 Problematising ‘style’

As mentioned, Steyn (1994) found these categories useful in recognising temporal phases. However, I find Steyn’s (1994) categorisation inconsistent. While she makes an important observation that the paintings were made using different kinds of paint, some paints being fine and others coarse and crumbly, her categories are based on content at times, on colour at other times, while other categories are based on technique or a combination of colour and subject matter, making the guidelines or categories difficult to follow. For instance, her 'miniature figures' could be categorised into Category D (monochrome) as a sub-category. Additionally, the miniature figures only occur at one of Steyn’s (1994) sites, making 'miniature figures' both questionable and redundant as a category. The category 'monochrome' is also not helpful, particularly because of its ambiguity. If the paintings at the sites I have documented (see Chapters 4 & 5) were to be assigned to these categories, fine-line human and animal figures, rough-brush and finger-painted human and animal figures, and 'geometrics' of all kinds would all be clumped into this one category, masking the diversity of the paintings.

The issue here is that Steyn’s (1994) categories are derived from the paintings she recorded, rather than *a priori*. Pearce (2002: 131, emphasis in original) has warned that categories “cannot be derived *from* the paintings; they are, instead, derived independently and based on pre-existing theoretical positions.” (also see Hampson *et al*. 2002: 18). While Steyn’s (1994) categorisation may be valid for the fine-line paintings she analysed, and possibly other sites with fine-line paintings that I have recorded, the categorisation does not accommodate all the new images I identified in the research area.

The problem with creating categories based on what we observe at particular sites (as Steyn has) is that such an approach may lead to the creation of false categories, where we infer that these categories

were, to the painters, of significant distinction (Mallen 2008: 46; Mullen 2018). Unless we can demonstrate that empirically, such an approach is, in fact, etic. More challenging to such categories is the issue of chronology and a weaker 'fit' with ethnographic sources. It is with these reasons that I discard Steyn's (1994, 1995) categorisation, in describing the KLSA rock paintings in this dissertation (see Chapter 5).

I find the concepts of 'style' and 'tradition' to be equally confusing and misleading. Instead of taking subject matter, technique and pigment type as attributes of a pre-determined cultural package into which we can pigeon-hole, I suggest that they should be considered individually, as descriptive attributes (see Chapter 5). If we do so, dividing lines become less rigid, allowing for a recognition of the fluidity and dynamism that Morris [comment in Smith & Ouzman (2004): 518; also see Wallis comments: 519] would ensure we are not blinded to. I acknowledge that we cannot fully understand similarities and differences in the KLSA art, and with rock paintings of other regions, without employing some sort of classification. But, similarities and differences should be approached from within the worldview of the painters (e.g. Witelson 2019; see Joyce *et al*. 2014 for this kind of approach to pottery analysis). Without the direct testimony of the painters, we can only rely on ethnography, a source which allows us better insight than our own common sense (see Chapter 3 for ethnographic accounts).

2.8 'New' questions in Mpumalanga rock art research

The debates touched on earlier in this chapter, with discussions of the dynamic and complex identities of foragers and herders are pertinent to the discussion of KLSA rock art that is the topic of this dissertation. Whilst a critique of 'culture' and 'ethnicity' is nothing new to rock art research (see Morris 2002, 2012; Smith & Ouzman 2004; Smith 2006; Berrocal & Garcia 2007; Hollmann 2007; Mallen 2008), it has not, until now, been a subject of discussion for Mpumalanga rock art. It is particularly significant to talk about identity in opening dialogue about the rock paintings of the KLSA, because the heterogeneity of the images challenges the rigid and simplistic views that previously dominated academic discourse, propelled by the likes of Breuil (1948) and Potgieter (1955). Previous anthropological research in the KLSA subscribed to these simplistic views (e.g. Toerien 1954, 1958, 1961; Potgieter 1955), and this research was never problematized, even in later archaeological works where it is cited (e.g. Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971; Korsman & Plug 1992; Steyn 1994, 1995).

With this dissertation, it is my goal to bring these questions of identity, change and continuity, and diversity into the context of Mpumalanga archaeological research. Until now, conversations about this region's archaeological past have been almost non-existent, and where past communities are acknowledged, it is usually with insight from recent, written history, which can only go as far back in time, and is often tainted with the writers' own preconceptions. The narrative that results from an overemphasis on written historical sources has many implications; for one, it may create a dislocation between possible descendants and the archaeological materials. In turn, the notions of colonial writings continue to prevail, where we would rather acknowledge invisible authors than present the rock art as a heritage that could be accessible to descendant communities, who may find some connection with it. In this, a history that is written for indigenous communities takes precedence over the history that they made for themselves (Dowson 1993, 1994).

These are points that were previously touched on in the works of Aron Mazel (1989a, b, 1992, 1993) and Thomas Dowson (1993, 1994)—a series of publications which sparked a debate between the two authors (see Smith 2010 for a summary). Mazel adopted a contextual approach in his documentation of a 10 000-year history of the Thukela Basin in KwaZulu-Natal (1989a, b) and assessed changes in the social relations of forager society, and with regards to their interaction with farmers in the period between 2000 BP and AD 1800. In doing so, he also critiques South African Later Stone Age archaeology as lacking a social approach. To this work, Mazel added *Changing Fortunes*, a paper in which he considers 150 years of changing views of forager communities in the uKhahlamba Mountains (Mazel 1992). In this paper, Mazel (1992: 766) discusses millennia of forager history in this region, drawing from his previous works (e.g. Mazel 1989a, b) and argues that forager history in this region has either been neglected by professional archaeologists or used to benefit "the ideological projects of others". The paper ends with a call for a new kind of history, one that would "ensure that justice is done to the past" and would "constantly, and critically analyse the implications of the approaches used in documenting and interpreting it" (Mazel 1992: 766).

Notable as these comments may seem, they were harshly rebuked by Dowson (1993: 641–642), who accused Mazel (1992) of presenting a history that was "colonial in character" because it 'marginalised' the rock paintings of the Drakensberg and favoured "early European colonial reports" and "results of excavations by white archaeologists". For Dowson (1993), rock art was a record of

history in itself, one that should inform archaeologists' and historians' constructions of the past. Mazel's (1993) response to Dowson (1993: 890) was that a firm chronological framework for the rock paintings of the Drakensberg "beset[s] viewing rock art as the key to constructing San history", and the paintings would only be "an important component in constructing…historical processes" if and when they have been dated. Mazel would go on to focus his work on the chronologies of the Drakensberg rock art (Mazel & Watchman 1997; Mazel 2009, 2013). Dowson (e.g. 1994, 1998), on the other hand, would follow in the trend of emphasising the place of rock art in (re)writing history, without reliable dates for the rock art. Ultimately, both these authors made notable contributions to the advancement of rock art research.

Smith (2010: 356) considers the role of rock art in reconstructing South African history, since these publications. He suggests that:

> …it is not Dowson's (1993) hope for an insider history written from rock art, but Mazel's (1992) radical call for an archaeology of social justice built upon responsible use of multiple sources, that seems most pertinent today. It is the mix of local oral histories, local written histories, local archaeological evidence and other sources that has proven most effective when used in combination with rock art for reconstructing San histories in the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains.

Smith makes this point by overviewing the works of Blundell (2004), Sam Challis (2008) and Mallen in the north Eastern Cape, which I briefly touched on earlier in this chapter. It is precisely this kind of approach that is needed for rock art research in the KLSA. In the absence of a reliable chronology for the KLSA rock art, I intertwine ethnographic, oral-historic, linguistic and genetic data and then integrate it with the rock art data. Although these sources are different sets of data from the rock art, they are capable of revealing past social relations that rock art and other archaeological materials are incapable of doing (e.g. Sadr 2015; Guillemard 2020; see Wang *et al*. 2020 for genetic data and complex population trends). I highlight the insights which these sources add in the following chapter, and in Chapter Six conjoin them to interpret the variability of the KLSA rock art.

In this chapter I have highlighted the issues that must be taken into consideration before an investigation of the KLSA rock paintings gets underway. Previous research shows a diversity in this research area, which has not yet been fully acknowledged or comprehended. The lack of a localised, contextual understanding of rock art stands in the way of making sense of similarities and differences at a regional level (Morris 2016; see Hampson *et al.* 2002; Eastwood *et al.* 2010 for examples). If we generalise, there is the danger of making fallacious interpretations. Another important point that is highlighted by previous research is that archaeologists should make use of as many sources as available, to get as close to an accurate interpretation of the past as possible (Wylie 1989; Smith 2010; Maseko 2017). This multi-strand approach contradicts colonial writings, which always present a one-sided view. Unlike the early anthropologists, who chose to interpret Darwin's (1859, 1871) words in their own distorted ways, and viewed diversity in pseudoscientific and racist terms—a social scientist in the present era ought to view diversity through a postcolonial lens (Gosden 2001; Schmidt 2009).

One way towards a postcolonial approach is to expect it to be a norm for diversity to be found '*within* groups' [Marks (2017): 52 (emphasis in original), citing Lewontin (1972)] as much as *between* supposedly discrete 'cultures'. I acknowledge that writing archaeology from a decolonial position (e.g. Shepherd 1998, 2002a, b, 2003a, b, 2019; Ndlovu 2009a; Forssman 2019; Ndlovu & Smith 2019), which redresses centuries of colonialism and all its dirty laundry, is not an easy task (Tim Forssman, pers. comm. 2018); we sometimes have to resort to terms like 'culture' and 'ethnicity', or 'Khoekhoen herder' and 'San forager', despite what we already know about their connotations. However, if rock art research makes no effort to avoid imposing ethnic or cultural differences on the material culture we study, even when such differences are not inherent, then how far removed are we from scientific racism (Dubow 1995, 1996, 2019; Shepherd 1998, 2002a, b, 2003a, b, 2019; Gosden 1999, 2001, 2004; Marks 2017; Forssmann 2019)?

Chapter Three:
The Komati-LiGwa Study Area: place, people and history

3.1 Working from a fragmentary past

The history of the KLSA has thus far been told in fragmentary, often-contrasting narratives; only a few archaeologists have worked in this region and, in turn, the KLSA's archaeological past is poorly understood. Murray Schoonraad was one of the first writers to seek the KLSA's past from an archaeological perspective (Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971; Schoonraad & Schoonraad 1972); his work with Peter Beaumont is of note. Likewise, Prins (1999) has written about the history of BaTwa peoples in this province, particularly their involvement in the South African War (1899–1902) (also see Forssman & Louw 2016). These works are in contrast with predominant views of BaTwa peoples as having played no significant part in the making of South African history (see Dowson 1993, 1994 for a critique), and consequently are compatible with postcolonial discourse.

One particular community of BaTwa appears in literature on the KLSA's past—the Tlou-tle (//Xegwi), who were viewed in the middle of the twentieth century as being near 'extinction' (e.g. Lanham & Hallowes 1956b: 97). Having discarded such views in Chapter Two, it should be clear that rather than 'race contamination' and a loss of 'culture', the twentieth-century Tlou-tle were in a constant state of *hybridity*, and what it meant to be umuTwa (singular for BaTwa) in the twentieth century did not fit the stereotypical view of BaTwa as isolated people with a pristine way of life (see Wilmsen 1989; Wilmsen & Denbow 1990 for a critique of hunter-gatherers as isolated peoples; Solway & Lee 1990 for a counter-argument). Contrary to popular use of the term, hybridity is not a physical alteration that happens instantly when diverse peoples interact, but rather a *continuous process* that shapes and reshapes the social and cosmological aspects of an individual's life (Gosden 1999: 181). Hybridity cannot be explained in the terms of physical anthropology, and certainly not in racial terms. Though Potgieter (1955) himself uses the term 'hybrid', his use of the term carries the notion that Tlou-tle and Swati identities were in a static form throughout antiquity, and only changed in historic times, through physical interaction (also Toerien 1961). This is a great misconception, which fails to recognise 'within-group' dynamics, and relies on biological explanations of identity and the flawed notion of 'racial purity' (e.g. Toerien 1961).

Such misconceptions can no longer prevail if we are to recognise the historical agency of the people who made KLSA rock art, and recognise the KLSA rock paintings as national heritage. So far, heritage authorities have taken the importance of the KLSA landscape, its history and its people, lightly. For example, at the entrance of one of the rock art locales discussed in this dissertation is fixed a placard from the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), claiming that the rock paintings were made by "T'Qwa San" (Fig. 3.1), a pseudo-identity, in fact. The "T'Qwa San" appear to be an identity made up by local heritage practitioners who often manipulate BaTwa descendants and their history to serve their own interests. There is no evidence of "T'Qwa San" having ever existed, in Mpumalanga or anywhere else in southern Africa. While the National Heritage declaration is commendable, the lack of research on the significance of this rock art and the historical context of the landscape in which it is located, is disconcerting.



Figure 3.1: 'T'Qwa San Rock Art' placard at the entrance of Kleinbuffelspruit rock art sites. Photo: Jenna Hansen.

The historical and archaeological data presented in this chapter stands as a contrast to imaginary preconceptions of the KLSA's past. Ultimately, this chapter, and the remainder of this dissertation, revolve around the interplay between multiple, independent strands of evidence which, individually, only present a fragmentary past, but conjointly allow a reconstruction of the past that is not based on one-sided, outsider's perspectives (Wylie 1989; Smith 2010). Importantly, we are in a fortunate

position to have these multiple (though scattered) sources from which to reimagine the history of this region; for much of South Africa, it is not the case. I begin to paint a picture of the KLSA's past by describing the landscape, which, as we shall see, is an integral part of the worldview of its past communities (see Ouzman 1998 on landscapes and worldviews; Zubieta 2014 with respect to rock art and sacred landscapes).

3.2 The KLSA landscape

The KLSA is a small region that spans about 2 500 km^2 of central Mpumalanga. It includes parts of the modern-day towns of Hendrina, Breyten, Lake Chrissie, Carolina, and their immediate environs. Despite a high elevation (1 600m to 1 800m), the landscape is mostly flat, with moderately undulating grasslands. The KLSA landscape is also characterised by pans (lakes), mostly in the eastern parts, surrounding Lake Chrissie (the lake, not town). These pans might have been one of the main attractions for hunter-gatherers, and indeed some of them were considered sacred, and feature in the oral and written history of this region (Potgieter 1955: 30, 31; Prins 1999; Amos Simelane, pers. comm. 2020). There has been a claim by a local enthusiast, that 'Tlou-tle' means 'people of rock and water' (Athol Stark, cited in Davie 2011). There is no evidence of such a claim, but, as we shall see throughout this dissertation, this may not be too far-fetched.

Other landscape features that stand out in the KLSA, apart from the pans, are river cuttings and interspersed sandstone rock outcrops (Fig. 3.2). These outcrops—of the Vryheid and Madzaringwe formations, which are equivalent to the Ecca Group in the Karoo Supergroup of the Cape Provinces (Haughton 1969; Brandl & McCourt 1980; McCarthy *et al.* 2013)—were exposed through erosional processes (Partridge & Maud 1987) that occurred between 20 million and 10 million years ago. The antiquity of these landscape features make the KLSA an ancient landscape (Russell 2008; McCarthy *et al.* 2013). Indeed, the geologist Terence McCarthy and his colleagues (2013) have described the KLSA as "a unique geomorphic entity in the South African landscape" (McCarthy *et al*. 2013; also see Russell 2008). On the surfaces of these outcrops, various forager communities (and possibly other peoples) made rock paintings which, like this unique landscape, echo a sacredness[5] beyond the crippling effects of colonialism.

[5] Contrary to imposed Western notions of landscapes as sacred (e.g. Mandt 1995: 278, cited in Smith & Blundell 2004), I use the word 'sacred' throughout this dissertation to emphasise spiritual connections with the landscape, and the rock art made in it. Such spiritual connections are implied by ethnographic sources (see below).



Figure 3.2: The Komati-LiGwa landscape; photo taken from the top of a cliff line, where rock art was recorded. Photo: Jenna Hansen.

Forager communities, such as the historic Tlou-tle and their ancestors, shared this landscape with farming communities (see Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971; Korsman & Plug 1992). Based on some of the rock art, the landscape was also possibly shared with herders. What is of certainty is that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the KLSA was home to multiple small communities of BaTwa, who apparently had diverse origins (Potgieter 1955; Lanham & Hallowes 1956a, b; Prins 1999; Schlebusch *et al.* 2016). It is not expressed clearly in the literature, but the term 'BaTwa' seems to have encompassed various communities in the KLSA who were considered by anthropologists to be 'Bushmen' and 'Bush-Bantu hybrids' (Toerien 1958, 1961; Potgieter 1955). Hence, in the KLSA, the term 'BaTwa' does not apply strictly to forager peoples, but may include others. This was at least the case in the twentieth century. By this time, some BaTwa languages in the KLSA (collectively called by Lanham & Hallowes 1956a, b as 'Eastern Bushmen') also contained some elements (or 'loanwords') of SiSwati, SeSotho and XiTsonga, possibly owing to a long history of interactions with these farming communities (Lanham & Hallowes 1956a; see Schlebusch *et al*. 2016 for genetic admixture; see Chapter 6 for a discussion).

Although we have as yet little insight into the nature of relations between hunter-gatherers and farmers in central Mpumalanga, the linguistic literature (Lanham & Hallowes 1956a, b) leaves little doubt that interactions did happen. For how long these communities interacted is a question for future research, but the earliest available evidence for farmer-forager interactions in this region (Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971) dates to the early second millennium. The KLSA also overlaps with the Bokoni region (north and northeast of Mpumalanga and southernmost Limpopo, between the towns of Carolina and Orighstad), which is dominated by a farming community presence (see Delius & Schoeman 2008; Wright 2010; Delius *et al.* 2012; also see Schoeman 2013). Bokoni is well-known to archaeologists and historians alike, for its terraces and stone-walled settlements—remnants of precolonial farming communities (Delius & Schoeman 2008; Wright 2010; Delius *et al.* 2012; Widgren *et al*. 2016). Little known are the rock engravings in Bokoni, which are widely considered to be schematic representations of farmer settlements (Maggs 1995; Mbewe 2006). The engravings depict idealised layouts of the stone-walled homesteads found across the Bokoni region (Maggs 1995; Mbewe 2006), but they may have been made in an initiation context (Alex Schoeman 2018, pers. comm.). Although Bokoni also has rock paintings (e.g. Pearce *et al.* 2019), little research has been done so far, and sites with rock paintings are not well known (but, see Fig. 3.3). Hence, despite the vast amount of research done in the past decade, virtually nothing is known about the pre-farming communities that lived in Bokoni (but, see Bader *et al*. 2020).

3.3 Towards rewriting the history of the KLSA

While the KLSA past is as yet fragmentary, especially in precolonial times, the known history of the KLSA, accompanied by archaeological, linguistic, genetic, ethnographic and rock art evidence, allows us to link specific people to specific parts of this region (see Fig. 3.3). These independent strands of evidence offer insight into the KLSA's past since Holocene times until the middle of the twentieth century. Unlike most parts of southern Africa, linking past communities to specific places is less difficult in the KLSA; so far, rock art studies linking past communities to specific geographic places have only been done with /Xam art, in north-western South Africa (e.g. Deacon 1988; Skinner 2017) and, to a lesser extent, for rock art research in south-eastern South Africa (e.g. Blundell 2004; Challis 2008, 2012).

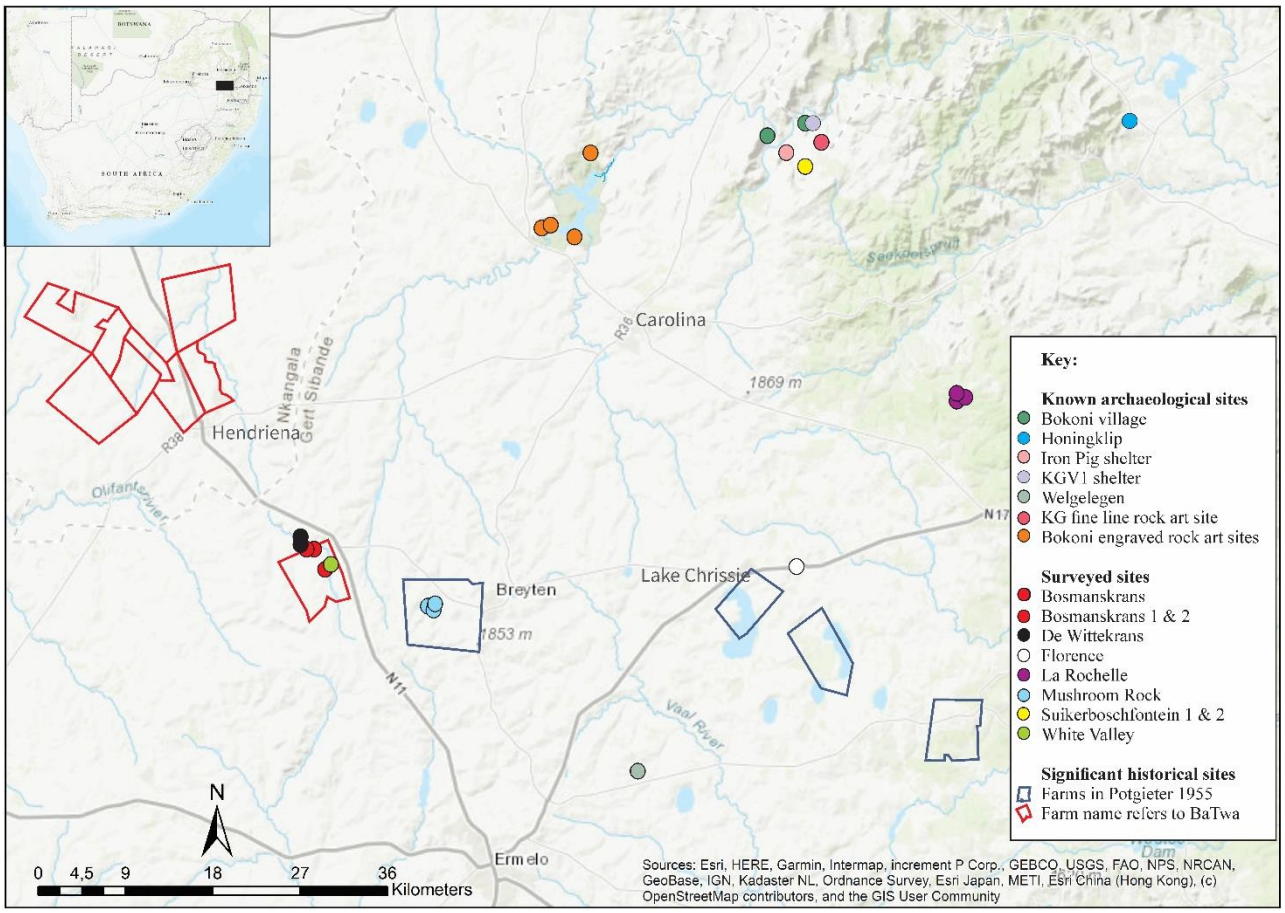


Figure 3.3: The mindscape and memory-scape of the Tlou-tle. This map identifies places which Potgieter's (1955) participants mentioned as having some significance to their history; in most cases, these places have rock art. Map: Kate Croll and Alex Schoeman.

Insight into the early times of the KLSA comes from the Honingklip Shelter (see location in Fig. 3.3), near eManzana, about 30 km to the northeast of Carolina and Lake Chrissie (Korsman & Plug 1992; Lombard 2003). Significantly, Shirley Korsman and Ina Plug (1992) interpret some of the archaeological materials recovered from this site by drawing analogy from Tlou-tle ethnography (they incorrectly use the phrase 'BaTwa San' to refer to the Tlou-tle). According to these authors, archaeological evidence, in the form of stone implements, pottery fragments and fauna, excavated from two shelter sites—HKLP I and HKLP V—indicates that the sites were periodically occupied by hunter-gatherers since the mid-Holocene (4800 ± 70 years BP) until approximately two centuries ago. Korsman and Plug (1992: 123) argue that this material evidence, which includes samples of fauna that are "represented in ethnographic references to San myth" and rock paintings at the sites, shows aspects of ritual and social behaviour, which appear to have been continued into the last few centuries at the HKLP sites. Importantly, this archaeological evidence indicates that hunter-gatherers used some rock shelters in Mpumalanga for ritualistic purposes, since at least the mid-Holocene, and

possibly earlier. Evidence from Iron Pig Shelter, near Carolina, dating >1600 cal. BP to <9000 cal. BP, has not found clear indications of such ritual behaviour in the excavated sequence (Bader *et al*. 2020). Therefore, it should be noted that these interpretations cannot be assumed to apply to all periods in the past (Mitchell 2003; Pargeter *et al*. 2016; contra. d'Errico *et al*. 2012). What this archaeological evidence indicates, nonetheless, is that the presence of hunter-gatherers (not necessarily the Tlou-tle or their direct ancestors) in this region extends way beyond the written historical record.

For the KLSA to be regarded a 'haven' in the nineteenth century, it is likely that it was a landscape which sustained long-term networks with hunter-gatherer communities from other parts of southern Africa (Prins 1999, citing Filter 1925; see also Lanham & Hallowes 1956a). What the nature and extent of such networks was, is yet unclear. Citing Lynn Wadley (1989: 49; also see Wiessner 1982: 66–84), Korsman and Plug (1992: 122), assert that social and economic networks such as *hxaro* gift exchange existed between various bands of hunter-gatherers, during what they call the 'aggregation phase', post 2000 BP. They state:

> The locality of the Honingklip sites, the rock art panels, and the formality and nature of the material remains, suggest that these sites formed part of an aggregation centre. At such a centre it would have been possible to reinforce social alliances with other groups by means of a shared subsistence economy, ritual activities, and *hxaro* gift exchange, and possibly also by marriage alliances with other bands of hunter-gatherers (Korsman & Plug 1992: 122).

If these site features are to be considered an indication for aggregation, then it is possible that such networks happened in other parts of Mpumalanga, such as at Kleinbuffelspruit, where sites are densely painted, have abundant lithic and pottery materials recognisable on the ground, and are located in proximity to each other (see Chapters 3 & 4). However, this kind of speculation and ethnographic generalisation warrants caution (see Parkington 1984; Barham 1992; Mitchell 2003).

Similar to the 3000 years prior, the last two millennia of Mpumalanga history are as yet unclear, particularly with regards to the social and economic life of hunter-gatherers. Although archaeological investigations have been able to pin the settlement of Early Farming Communities in north-eastern South Africa to the first millennium (AD 250 – 450), indicated by Silver Leaves (previously Matola) pottery (Klapwijk 1974), dates for this 'style' of pottery come from outside the KLSA. Apart from Korsman's and Plug's (1992) and Marlize Lombard's (2003) investigations at the Honingklip Shelter, the only dated presence of 'Iron Age people' in the KLSA, and also the earliest, comes from Schoonraad's and Beaumont's (1971: 67–68) investigation of the Welgelegen Shelter, located near the banks of the LiGwa, between Ermelo and Lake Chrissie (see Fig. 3.3). Pottery from this site has been dated to the period between AD 1100 and 1400.

Significantly, the date range AD 1100 and 1400 fits well with the appearance of Moloko pottery in north-eastern South Africa, which is linked to Later Farming Communities (Huffman 2007; Schoeman 2013). According to Schoonraad and Beaumont (1971: 67–69), the occupation of Welgelegen Shelter by "Iron Age people", in the second millennium AD, was concurrent with "a band of dependent Later Stone Age hunters", indicated by the co-presence of stone tools, pottery and iron materials. These dates suggest that farming communities may have occupied the KLSA, concurrently with hunter-gatherers, since the early second millennium AD. Linguistic data suggest 'older contact' with VaTsonga people from southern Mozambique "or possibly even the Inhambane group" (Lanham and Hallowes1956a: 45). L.W Lanham and D.P Hallowes (1956a, b) recorded 'loan words' in the vocabulary of click-language speakers in this region to support this suggestion. They note that the BaTwa use similar words for 'tobacco' and 'dagga' as VaTsonga in southern Mozambique, although the more dominant languages in the region (isiZulu and SiSwati) use a different word for these items. Historical writings also mention contact with people (seemingly foragers) in Mozambique (Filter 1925: 190, cited in Prins 1999: 53). Perhaps this may be an indication of old trade networks between foragers in this region and people on the Mozambican coast, but this is difficult to discern.

If such networks did in fact exist, however, then it may explain the cowrie shells recovered by Schoonraad and Beaumont (1971: 68-69) from the Welgelegen Shelter, which they suggest may have come from the Indian Ocean. That these cowrie shells came from a layer dated at AD 1100 to 1400, suggests that such networks would have been long-lasting, having begun in precolonial times. This

archaeological evidence is mute, however, on what the last 500 years were like for hunter-gatherers in the KLSA; we only know that they occupied this landscape in large numbers, until colonial times (Opperman 1948, cited in Potgieter 1955: 3; see also Prins 1999). Potgieter (1955: 3, citing Opperman 1948) maintains that the first Europeans in this region encountered BaTwa in great numbers. Additionally, according to Prins (1999: 53), "oral tradition suggests that there may have been several hundreds of them [hunter-gatherers] in the Lake Chrissie area when the first Europeans entered the region". These would have been hunter-gatherers who had been in Mpumalanga prior to the documented encounters of European settlers in the late nineteenth century (e.g. Filter 1925, cited in Prins 1999).

European colonists first settled in the KLSA towards the middle of the nineteenth century (Potgieter 1955: 3, citing Opperman 1948). Parts of Mpumalanga were settled by Scottish farmers before the Boers (Afrikaner farmers of Dutch, German and French descent); hence, some parts of the KLSA, particularly Lake Chrissie, became part of 'New Scotland' in 1867 (Prins 1999). This status continued until the death of Scot Alexander McCorkindale in 1871 (Bonner 1983; Prins 1999). There is no evidence that Scottish settlers took in any BaTwa peoples as servants or farm labourers; but, BaTwa people in this region did certainly take on farm labour when Afrikaner farmers started dominating, in competition with emaSwati (Potgieter 1955: 4; Prins 1999). Historical sources suggest that there were quarrels between BaTwa and emaSwati during the latter half of the nineteenth century, leaving BaTwa to choose between being 'employed' as serfs by the Boers, or be killed by emaSwati (Prins 1999: 55–56). One of the painted rock shelters in the KLSA, Murder Rock (Mushroom Rock in Fig. 3.3 below), gets its name from such violent encounters (Schoonraad & Schoonraad 1972; Prins 1999). At another painted site (not located during survey), known as Magageng (Prins 2001; Kevin Davie, pers. comm. 2020), BaTwa were protected by the Boers, from being killed by emaSwati.

The amicable relationship between BaTwa and people of European descent in the last few decades of the nineteenth century speaks to the complexities of interactions between diverse peoples in this region. The colonial period was a time of alliances at times, and resistance at other times. Friendly encounters between BaTwa and people of European descent also appear in pastor P. Filter's diary entries. He encountered, on multiple occasions, BaTwa who were moving to the KLSA in the early 1880s (published by H. Filter in 1925 as *Die Buschmanner,* cited in Prins 1999). Filter is said to have transported his BaTwa acquaintances from Piet Retief in southern Mpumalanga, on his ox wagon

(Prins 1999: 52). Amongst the BaTwa that Filter met, were Kibit and Adons, who had previously been leaders of a stock-raiding group in Natal before moving to the KLSA; ironically, they, along with their followers, later became farm labourers (Prins 1999: 52, 54–56). Like Kibit's band, farm labour was, by the end of the nineteenth century, the fate of many BaTwa communities in the KLSA.

In contrast to their amicable relationship with individuals such as Filter, BaTwa often took on farm labour under hostile circumstances. Shortly after 1880, a BaTwa man detained by a certain Mr. van Zyl on the farm Klipfontein, said that he and his brother [who bore the family name !Olo (pronounced Qolo)] had run from the farm of a man named Danie de Kock, who had "caught them…and had been using them as farm hands" (Potgieter 1955: 5). De Kock's farm was "far in the south, where the white people took their wagons across a big river by means of a big piece of wood" (Potgieter 1955: 5; for use of wagons at the Botshabelo Mission in western Mpumalanga, see Sandeman 1880; Naud 2000; Booth 2017; Swanepoel 2018). Having escaped from there, the two BaTwa men ran towards the Lake Chrissie area, following traces left by their people, and eventually found them days later, on the farm Gemsbokheuvel 282; it seems that circumstances were less unfavourable here. These last few decades of the nineteenth century mark a significant loss of independence for many BaTwa communities in this region.

Much later in the nineteenth century, many BaTwa farm labourers in Mpumalanga assisted their masters and landlords in the South African War (Prins 1999; Forssman & Louw 2016). The Telperion Shelter, near Middelburg in western Mpumalanga, stands as a witness to such co-operation (Forssman & Louw 2016). In the KLSA, Kibit (and possibly others) acted as an *agterryer* (military servant) during the war (Prins 1999: 56). A few decades after the war, a community of BaTwa lived on the farm Florence (see location on map in Fig. 3.3) near Lake Chrissie (Bleek 1927; also see Sanders 2013). Another three decades later, Potgieter (1955) and Lanham and Hallowes (1956a, b) collected ethnographic and linguistic data from BaTwa communities in the Lake Chrissie area (also Toerien 1954, 1958, 1961, for physical anthropology).

It is unclear how many communities or individuals of BaTwa were still present in the KLSA at this time, or if they held the same ethnolinguistic identities, but the community Potgieter (1955) documented, the Tlou-tle, who lived on the farm Bloemkrans 185, numbered to about 32 individuals

and were, according to Potgieter (1955: 9), “the biggest single group”. Others lived on the farm Goedehoop 181, but their number is unclear. Lanham and Hallowes (1956b: 97) collected linguistic data from 20 to 30 individuals who resided on the farm Florence, so Potgieter (1955: 2, 9) might have underestimated numbers. On these farms, BaTwa communities were able to continue some of their ritual practices, though they did not entirely live in the way their ancestors did (e.g. Potgieter 1955: 11, 16, 21). Some aspects of their history and belief system, which point to the significance of the KLSA landscape were, by this time, kept only in their oral traditions (Potgieter 1955: 11, 16, 21; see discussion and references in 3.4.1 below). Significantly, these sources suggest that the ancestors of the Tlou-tle descendants that Potgieter (1955) recorded were indigenous to the KLSA. Genetic research in the KLSA confirms this; Carina Schlebusch and colleagues (2016: 1370) find that BaTwa descendants in the Lake Chrissie area “carry mtDNA haplogroups likely autochthonous to the region (L0d and L0a haplogroups)”.

It should be noted, though, that the Tlou-tle were *not the only* hunter-gatherers in the KLSA, nor did they live in isolation, even in historic times (see Prins 1999). Hunter-gatherer communities who certainly arrived in the Lake Chrissie area in the late nineteenth century, seemingly from the uKhahlamba-Maloti-Drakensberg region, such as Kibit’s and Adons’s band (Prins 1999), are poorly documented, and the extent to which they were in contact with the Tlou-tle and other autochthonous hunter-gatherers in the KLSA is unclear. Significantly, the people from whom Lanham & Hallowes (1956a, b) obtained their linguistic data are not explicitly named beyond ‘the Eastern Bushmen’ and it is unclear how closely related they were to those recorded by Potgieter (1955) and Toerien (1954, 1958, 1961). What were relations like between incoming hunter-gatherer communities and hunter-gatherers who were already present in the KLSA before the colonial period? There is a knowledge gap here. Nonetheless, what is certain is that all previously independent hunter-gatherer peoples in the KLSA were colonial subjects by the end of the nineteenth century. This shift in social structure meant there would be significant changes in the ‘ways of doing’ of the BaTwa (see Chapter 6). Whereas the Tlou-tle were able to maintain contact with BaTwa on other farms (Potgieter 1955: 12), many of their rituals, such as initiation rites had ceased. Oral accounts recorded by Potgieter (1955) detail some of the lost practices (see below).

3.4 Tlou-tle ethnography

Oral accounts from Tlou-tle and European descendants in the middle of the nineteenth century (Potgieter 1955) offer insight into how the Tlou-tle lived and perceived their surroundings prior to and immediately after European colonisation of the KLSA. These accounts suggest that the Tlou-tle (usually associated with the Lake Chrissie area) had previously lived on other parts of the region, and that they gave significant regard to some features of the landscape, particularly rock shelters and water pools (see below). The Tlou-tle built their huts near water and sometimes lived in rock shelters (Potgieter 1955: 19–20). It seems, therefore, that these landscape features—rocks and water—had some significance to the life and thought of BaTwa peoples in the KLSA. Whereas these associations possibly relate to a regional set of beliefs, they correlate well with the broader worldview of 'Khoe-San' peoples across southern Africa (e.g. Barnard 1988, 1992a; Morris 2002, 2012; Smith & Ouzman 2004; Eastwood & Smith 2005; Hollmann 2007, 2013, 2014), which also overlaps, to an extent, with the beliefs of isiNtu-speaking communities (see Hollmann 2007 for similarities between Sotho-Tswana and Khoe-San beliefs; Hammond-Tooke 1955; 1998; Prins & Lewis 1992; Ogana & Ojong 2015; Mlisa 2019 for similarities between Nguni and BaTwa divination). I discuss the implications of these similar worldviews in Chapter Six.

These landscape perceptions have great potential to aid in the interpretation of the rock art from this region. The KLSA, in this sense, is not only a landscape but also makes part of the mindscape (Ouzman 1998) and memory-scape (Yoffe 2007; Meskell 2008) of the historic Tlou-tle who, like other BaTwa in this region, came to be restricted to farms in colonial times (Potgieter 1955; Lanham & Hallowes 1956a, b; see Fig. 3.3 for locations associated with BaTwa). Apart from being stripped of an indigenous identity, the colonial experience was, for the Tlou-tle, particularly damaging to their belief system and ritual life. With much of the land seized and controlled by colonists, the sacredness of the landscape soon became a thing of the past (see 3.4.1 below). Other BaTwa in this area were possibly affected in the same way.

3.4.1 The secret fountain

An old secret told to Potgieter (1955: 31) by the Tlou-tle he interviewed, is one example of such lost sacredness—the story of a secret fountain from which ancestors of the Tlou-tle obtained cattle (with respect to waterholes and access to the spirit world, see Orpen 1874: 7; Bleek 1924: 17; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 214). The story is relayed by Potgieter (1955: 31) as follows:

> Long-long ago, near the farm Goedehoop 131, there used to be a clear strong fountain. This fountain was made by /a'an [creator-god of the Tlou-tle], who built it for the benefit of the Batwa. To this fountain the ancient Batwa used to go when they were in need. The people would simply stand at the fountain and call into the clear waters, calling out whether they wanted cattle, goats or sheep.
>
> After a short while the desired animals would appear from the clear water. Those who asked for stock from the fountain first had to rub their bodies with a certain medicine, the name of which has been forgotten. Those who asked for cattle always saw a big fine bull come out first, followed by a number of cows. Every beast, on coming out of the water, would come up to the caller, lick the medicine on his body, rub his horns against the man and would then start grazing. If the man did not give the animals the chance to lick him they would turn wild and run away. All the cattle were fine animals with long straight horns.
>
> The people who really knew the art of procuring stock in this manner were those who drilled the holes through the big round stones, sometimes found in the pans. Therefore, they had many cattle.
>
> One day a stranger came to the fountain. He saw a big bull down in the clear water. He called his friends and they started digging after the bull. This enraged /a'an and he caused the spring to dry up suddenly, thus taking away from the Batwa this resource.

Many details of this story are of significant interest. Apart from telling us about the belief system of the Tlou-tle, and the god they believed in, /a'an, in the broad sense the story is about 'taming magic', which was used by "the ancient Batwa" to tame "wild" animals from the secret fountain (Potgieter 1955: 31; see Bleek & Lloyd 1911 for ethnography; McGranaghan & Challis 2016 for 'taming magic', with respect to rock art in the Maloti-Drakensberg). Such taming seems to have been a skill possessed by certain individuals within the community – "those who drilled the holes through the big round stones". It is unclear what these big, round stones with drilled holes were, but the description matches that of bored stones used on digging sticks. In the Shashe-Limpopo Confluence Area (SLCA) in northern South Africa, digging sticks appear to have been linked to rain-control rituals

(Schoeman 2019); in the /Xam ethnographic record, the pounding of a digging stick weight on the ground was a way to communicate with the spirits (Hollmann 2004: 263–266).

This taming of animals with medicinal charms, so that they would not 'run' or 'turn, is also similar to accounts in the /Xam ethnography, and to Qing's testimony (wild' (see Orpen 1874; Bleek & Lloyd 1911 for ethnography; see also McGranaghan & Challis 2016: 583 for links to rock art). Although much of the literature on 'hunting magic' has been presented as alternative to shamanistic explanations of rock art (e.g. Thackeray 1983, 1986, 1993, 2005a, b, cited in McGranaghan & Challis 2016), Mark McGranaghan and Sam Challis (2016) have recently shown how ideas of 'taming magic' are consistent with the ontology of southern African hunter-gatherers, and can be viewed from *within* the shamanistic paradigm. The story detailed above seems to speak to a similar worldview. Hence, it is possible that the people who 'drilled holes through the big round stones', and possessed the skill of procuring stock from a fountain without making it 'wild' and 'run away' (Potgieter 1955: 31), were ritual specialists, or, in the language of the Tlou-tle, *nyakazi*.

3.4.2 Ritual and divinity

The ancestors of the historic Tlou-tle had their own diviners and ritual specialists; a person with the skill of divinity or curing was called a *nyakazi* (Potgieter 1955: 30). Initiation into being a *nyakazi* included diving into a deep pool in one of the pans, and catching (taming?) a large snake; because the person who had caught it was a future *nyakazi*, the snake would not struggle (Potgieter 1955: 30). The *nyakazi* initiate would then take this snake to his hut, where he killed it, skinned it and performed a public dance with the skin (Potgieter 1955: 30). This dance was essential for the completion of initiation into being accepted by the community as a *nyakazi*. Thereon, the initiated *nyakazi* possessed the power of divinity and curing disease. In the middle of the twentieth century, there were no longer any *nyakazi(s)* living amongst the Tlou-tle; Potgieter (1955) was told that the BaNtu had taken all the *nyakazi(s)* to work for them. Indeed, a certain BaTwa rain-doctor, whose burial place is on the farm Klipfontein (see Chapter 4), is said to have worked for a Ngqamane (Ngcamane?) chief (Dewald Steyn snr., cited by Potgieter 1955: 4). Importantly, the initiation ceremony of a *nyakazi* is identical to *ukuthwasa* – the initiation of a Nguni diviner (e.g. Hammond-Tooke 1955; 1998; Prins & Lewis 1992; Ogana & Ojong 2015; Mlisa 2019).

The story of the secret fountain and the details of how one became a *nyakazi* are few of many indications of how the KLSA landscape played a significant part in the belief system of the Tlou-tle. One other ritual-landscape association suggests this landscape significance—the ritualistic treatment of a newly born child.

3.4.3 The supreme being, /a'an, and the lightning bird

Newly born children were smeared on the head with a certain medicine, to ensure that all soft parts of the infant skull closed up properly (Potgieter 1955: 9). During this time, the mother and child were secluded for a few days, and no man was allowed to visit her. These few days of seclusion were then followed by a ceremony, which was preceded by the cleaning of the hut. The details of the ceremony were as follows: first, the infant would be taken by its mother, in the company of other women, to a place where lightning has struck the ground. This lightning is said to have come with the "the bird of the heaven", */wi ki ga'a* (Potgieter 1955: 10). Second, the mother would cut the top of the child's navel until blood drops on the spot where the lightning bird has struck. Third, the child would be taken back home and treated with *mozi ki /wi'i* – 'medicine of the bird'. This medicine was used so that "the bird be driven out" (Potgieter 1955: 10). It is unclear whether such medicine is indigenous to the Tlou-tle, but in present day, 'medicine of the bird' (*umuthi wenyoni* in isiNguni) is sold in retail pharmacies in South Africa (Fig. 3.4).



Figure 3.4: mozi ki /wi'i – "medicine of the bird". Photo: https://clicks.co.za.

The lightning bird is closely associated with /a'an. In addition to a similarity in pronunciation, /a'an seems to be similar to /Kaggen (Cagn), the creator-god and trickster deity of the /Xam. /a'an is the creator of heaven and earth; as with the fountain from which the Tlou-tle obtained cattle, he is a giver of many good things (Potgieter 1955: 29). /a'an's place is "somewhere in the heavens where he often plays with the lightning-bird"; a dangerous game, it was thought (*ibid.*). Sometimes, a lesser deity, /a'an 'e la tleni (/a'an the small) assists the supreme being (Potgieter 1955: 29). Significantly, the place where newly born children are taken can be considered to be a sign of the presence of /a'an; such parts of the landscape carried on the ritual life and cosmology of the Tlou-tle, even in colonial times.

3.4.4 Coming-of-age rites

There are some similarities and differences between the puberty rites of Tlou-tle boys and those of girls, as told to Potgieter (1955). One obvious difference is that the boy comes of age when he has his first nocturnal emission, whereas the girl comes of age when she menstruates for the first time (Potgieter 1955: 10–11). The similarity between the two occasions is that, following this first

experience, both sexes have to go wash in the nearest water before dawn, and then inform their parents when they return.

When the boy returns and tells his father, he is given *Ɵmozi ki !inkwezi* (medicine of puberty), which is prepared on an old potsherd or on a hollow stone (Potgieter 1955: 10). The medicine is prepared in the boy's parents' shelter, where it is heated on a fire. This medicine is considered to be essential in protecting the boy "against dangerous results from contact with females", which may be fatal (Potgieter 1955: 10). In the presence of adult men of the community, the boy must dip his fingers into the hot medicine and then lick it off (Potgieter 1955: 10). After he has finished doing this, the boy must rush outside to complete the transition to manhood. From this moment on, he is considered an adult man and is allowed to marry (Potgieter 1955: 10).

For the girl at puberty, she must inform her mother upon returning from the water; the mother then informs the father (Potgieter 1955: 11). After this, the girl is "covered with a kaross while she squats in the mother's hut" (Potgieter 1955: 11). At this point, the mother's sister joins in, and starts to beat the ngungu-drum; if the mother does not have a sister or she is away, then another woman takes her place (Potgieter 1955: 11). At dusk, the women and girls dance, clap their hands and sing the following words: inƟake e n !inkwe, which translate to 'the girl has menstruated' (Potgieter 1955: 11). As from the next day, the girl is now regarded an adult woman and is allowed to marry (Potgieter 1955: 11).

Potgieter (1955: 11) notes that, in the twentieth century, these coming-of-age rituals were no longer practised among the Tlou-tle, because of the absence of young people. Nevertheless, all-together, these oral-tradition accounts point to the significance of the landscape in ritual activities that were practised in the past, and some that were retained in the twentieth century. In addition to this, the similarities between Tlou-tle and /Xam cosmology, and between Tlou-tle beliefs and the broader belief system of 'Khoe-San' peoples across southern Africa, support David Lewis-Williams' (1984) observation that there are ideological similarities and continuities between hunter-gatherer communities in southern Africa—a 'pan San' cosmology, as he calls it, that survived thousands of years (also see Silberbauer 1963; Barnard 1988, 1992a; Morris 2002, 2012; Hollmann 2007, 2013, 2014 on 'pan-Khoe-San beliefs'). Together, these beliefs provide informed sources with which to

interpret rock art. It is important, therefore, that these informed sources be prioritised in the reconstruction of BaTwa history in the KLSA (see Chapter 6).

3.5 Reconstructing the KLSA past

Having assembled the fragments of the KLSA past, three implications of its documented history are of interest: first, the KLSA was occupied by multiple communities of hunter-gatherers, who occupied the region for millennia, and more intensively towards the end of the nineteenth century (Potgieter 1955; Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971; Korsman & Plug 1992; Prins 1999). Second, hunter-gatherers shared the landscape with BaNtu farming communities and, in certain cases, intermarried with them (Potgieter 1955; Lanham & Hallowes 1956a, b; Toerien 1961; Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971; Korsman & Plug 1992; Schlebusch *et al*. 2016). Another way in which hunter-gatherers and farmers in the KLSA kept close contact is by hunter-gatherers performing rituals such as divination and rain-making for their farmer neighbours (Potgieter 1955: 4), following a similar pattern as in the rest of southern Africa (e.g. Prins & Lewis 1992; Hall & Smith 2000).

Due to these close interactions, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the make-up of BaTwa communities no longer fit the stereotypical view of BaTwa as 'yellow-skinned people of short stature'. Third and last, from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, the life of the KLSA autochthones changed dramatically (Potgieter 1955; Prins 1999); yet, despite this, BaTwa from other regions in South Africa regarded the KLSA as a place of retreat (Prins 1999). These incoming groups of BaTwa from the Maloti-Drakensberg—possibly multi-ethnic, because of the social context of that region in the late nineteenth century (Wright 1971; Vinnicombe 1976; Prins 1999; Blundell 2004; Challis 2008; Mallen 2008; Henry 2010; Maseko 2017)—added to an already dynamic and diverse social landscape, and possibly brought with them new 'ways of doing'. Here, they possibly blended with existing communities, before subsequently being colonial subjects, along with the KLSA autochthones (Prins 1999).

It is in the context of these implications that I present and interpret the rock paintings from the KLSA, in the remainder of this dissertation. I acknowledge the problems with tying historical and linguistic sources with rock art; the chronology of the rock art is often disregarded and/or underestimated in the process (see Mazel 1993, 2007, 2009, 2013; Mazel & Watchman 1997; Mullen 2018). It is also

in recognising these problems that I attempt, as best as possible, to put some of the rock paintings in a timeframe (see Chapter 6). Before this, I outline the documentation method followed for this research (Chapter 4), and then describe the KLSA rock paintings (Chapter 5).

Chapter Four:
Identifying and recording rock art on the KLSA landscape

> Certainly, the complexity of San rock art itself has not yet been fully plumbed: many sites remain to be discovered and hitherto unsuspected types of images and interrelationships will come to light
>
> - David Lewis-Williams (2006: 369)

A first step in moving towards a reconstruction of the KLSA past was surveying the region for rock art sites. In this chapter, I outline the field and post-field protocols followed for this research, as well as the results of the field protocols. I offer an overview of the method used, and then an outline of the techniques used, in the order that they were used. Following Hollmann's (2018b: 3) definition of 'method': "the systematic procedures followed in the creation of rock-art data: documenting, recording, mapping, sampling, and analysing", 'method' here refers to the overall plan of action developed for this research, whereas 'technique' refers to the practicalities of *how* the method was (systematically) applied. Techniques then, include the tools and equipment used in the field to document sites, and also the computer programs later used to map site distribution and enhance the rock art images. Each technique used was aimed at achieving the objectives of this research.

4.1 Archaeological potential and rationale for survey

Research done for this dissertation began in January 2018, with the aim of obtaining a more complete documentation of rock art in central Mpumalanga—a somewhat *terra incognita*—and finding ways to make as much sense of it as possible, at a preliminary level. In addition to two painted sites (here SKB1 and SKB2) identified and fully documented in 2016 by the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI) (see Pearce *et al.* 2019), and a further two that I documented in January 2018 (BOS1 and BOS2), a 10-day survey of this region resulted in the documentation of 23 painted sites, between the end of June and beginning of July 2018. This brought the total number of painted sites considered for this research to 27. This number includes sites where the paintings are no longer easily recognisable, but distinguished by remnants of pigment. Some of these sites had already been recorded (Schoonraad & Schoonraad 1972; Steyn 1994, 1995; Ouzman 2009, cited in Fourie 2010; du Piesanie & Nel 2013;

Sanders 2013; Pearce *et al.* 2019) but only less than ten have been academically published. Moreover, some of these survey locations appear in historical and ethnographic texts as having been significant places in the ritual life and cosmology of the Tlou-tle, their ancestors, and other BaTwa peoples who lived on the KLSA landscape (discussed in Chapter 3).

4.2 Survey and documentation method

4.2.1 Identifying sites

Archaeologists use various kinds of surveys to identify sites, depending on the area to be surveyed, the purpose of the survey, and the kind of archaeological material expected to be found (Banning 2002; Banning *et al*. 2006). The protocol followed to locate, and document rock art sites depends on the nature of the landscape (geology, topography, vegetation), accessibility, and historical knowledge (Whitley 2011; Smith 2017a, b). Normally, rock art researchers use purposive, extensive surveys to identify rock art (e.g. Pugin 2016, Skinner 2017). In this way, the survey requires more than two people to be on the survey team (see Fig. 4.1); bigger survey teams are usually more convenient. In the case of rock art surveying, specifically for paintings, one has to walk long distances in the field and inspect every rock in the landscape that looks like it might have some shelter. A challenge in identifying KLSA rock art sites is that they are not always in rock shelters, unlike in the Cape provinces, for instance.



Figure 4.1: The author, with field assistants Katlego Moitlhwe, Nokusho Ngobeni and Tshegofatso Mangwedi, surveying Kleinbuffelspruit. Photo: Jenna Hansen.

Rock art in the KLSA is sometimes painted on vertical cliffs, and at times high up on the cliff, and hence easy to miss (e.g. Steyn 1994; Pearce *et al*. 2019). To carry out an effective systematic field-walking survey and identify the rock art sites I examine in this work, all these challenges were considered. I mentioned earlier that the most commonly occurring rock type that forms outcrops in the KLSA is sandstone. Accordingly, the survey targeted rock outcrops and known rock art sites. The survey team comprised of five students (myself included) and two field/lab technicians. A 4x4 vehicle, driven by one of the technicians, was used to move the team from one survey area to another. This required communication with the landowners of the areas targeted for survey, some of whom may have known other potential survey locales. The known sites within those areas were then used as reference points to locate more sites in the vicinity.

Research for this project started with a desktop survey (Smith 2017a: 98), in which published literature and Cultural Resource Management (CRM) Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) reports that mention rock art sites in the research area were consulted (e.g. Potgieter 1955; Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971; Fourie 2010; du Piesanie & Nel 2013; Sanders 2013). Prior to CRM work and mining activity in this part of the KLSA, Ouzman (2009, cited in Fourie 2010) reported on the rock

art at De Wittekrans; a further survey of this farm by Wouter Fourie (2010) of the CRM company PGS Heritage re-recorded the two sites (here DWK1 & DWK2) and found no other painted sites. Another survey was done by Justin du Piesanie and Johan Nel (2013) of the company Digby Wells at Bosmanskrans, near De Wittekrans, and identified six of the sites documented for this research. These CRM reports were selected from reports written for proposed mining activity in this area. Other sites discussed in this dissertation were previously identified and published by Schoonraad & Schoonraad (1972), Steyn (1994, 1995) and Sanders (2013). I visited some of these sites in January 2018, and completed 'first visit' record forms for the RARI database. The aim of this first visit was to develop an idea of what rock art in the KLSA looks like and in what kinds of locations it is found. The landscape observations made during this first visit would later assist with the decision-making that went behind designing a survey plan.

Having gathered the photographs taken on the first visit, the geographical data and historical background of the research area, a research question was then formulated from these sources. One advantage of having such a historical record, and with the data gathered from previous research and CRM work, was having a geographical database for rock art 'hot spots' within the KLSA. 'Hot spots' were judged by the presence of known sites in the area, as recorded in CRM reports or mentioned in the literature as places previously inhabited by BaTwa. Having some knowledge of where best to look for painted sites allowed for a clear, detailed plan for the field survey in June and July 2018. Accordingly, consideration of the available sources was later followed by a field survey, to identify more sites. With the help of a field team, I led an archaeological survey to identify more rock art sites in this study area (see Smith 2017a for rock art survey). During the survey, we re-recorded, in greater detail, the sites earlier identified by the CRM companies and by RARI, this time with a clear research goal. Keeping in mind the objectives of this research, more purposeful recording techniques were employed (see Smith 2017b). Recording all the sites included i) detailed written descriptions of content, ii) photography, and iii) GPS recording. All archaeological sites (painted or not) were named; in cases where sites had already been named by previous recorders (e.g. du Piesanie & Nel 2013), using a different naming system than by farm name, nearest river or local name and then by number (e.g. Mpuluzi 11/MPL11), sites were renamed. To avoid confusion, old and new site names are here cross-referenced.

4.2.2 Site recording

Different researchers define the concept of 'site' differently (e.g. Gjerde 2010; Di Lernia & Gallinaro 2011). In this dissertation, I define 'site' as a space that contains tangible evidence of human activity. Sites can be indicated by the presence of an abundant number of archaeological materials such as pottery, stone tools or rock art. In the KLSA, sites can be found in rock shelters, overhangs and cliffs (e.g. Pearce *et al*. 2019). Although this study focuses on the rock art, there are also multiple sites that contain other archaeological materials, but no rock art. These were also recorded during the survey. Sites in the KLSA tend to be geographically clustered in 'locales' or 'complexes' (see Chapter 5).

The following procedure was taken to record the rock art:

4.2.2.1 Image and site description

Standard RARI site record sheets were used to record some of the known sites, on first visit—in January 2018 (Fig. 4.2). However, the standard record sheets were not adequate on the second visit in June 2018, because some of the newly identified sites had more than a hundred images in one panel. Record sheets that facilitate more comprehensive recording were required. New record sheets, which allowed for more thorough recording, such as noting every detail of each image, were drawn up and printed during the field trip.

The criteria for recording each individual image on a panel was pigment colour, painting technique, content, and placement on the panel in relation to other images. The painting technique was recorded as either 'fine-line', 'rough-brush' or 'finger painted', of which were either 'monochrome', 'bichrome' or 'polychrome' paintings. Image placement was mainly targeted at recording cases of superpositioning, and any other clear associations between individual images. Content for all the images was categorised into 'human figure', 'geometric', 'animal', 'therianthrope', 'zoomorphic', 'object', 'indeterminate' and 'non-representational'. Non-representational imagery mostly included finger paintings that were too abstract to be categorised as 'geometrics' or any other variation. On the other hand, images recorded as 'indeterminate' were ones of which content could not be discerned, due to fading. Recording these 'indeterminate' images, then, almost always included an additional description, such as 'possible animal figure', 'possible human figure' or some other

variation of that. Some of these indeterminate figures were later confirmed by enhancement (see below).

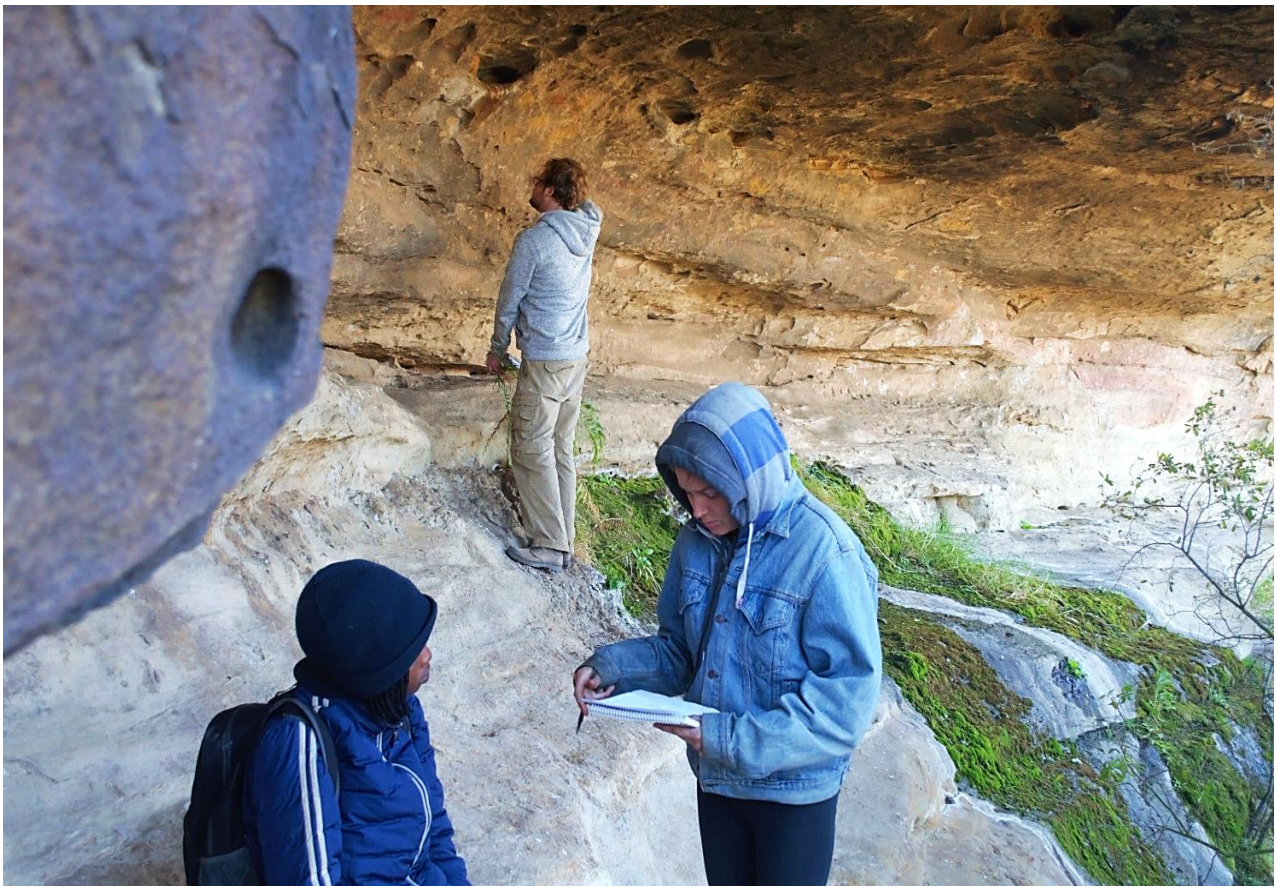


Figure 4.2: Field assistants Stephen van den Heever, Nokusho Ngobeni and Jenna Hansen, documenting DWK2. Photo taken by author.

Recording the sites was both challenging and time-consuming. In certain cases, it took multiple days to record a single site. To counteract this, we divided the panels into sections, allowing one or two people to record a smaller portion of the panel at a time. Panels were divided using an alphabetic order (e.g. Forssman *et al*. 2016), starting from left to right and from top to bottom. The position of each image in relation to others on the panel was recorded, as to ensure that the imaginary boundaries we had drawn to simplify the recording process did not allow for a possibility to overlook interactions between the individual images. This meant we were able to split the panels for the sole purpose of recording, without considering these 'sections' in isolation from each other. This recording strategy, however, was not always feasible, as some sites are densely painted, with multiple, superimposed

layers of images. In such cases, then, three of the field recorders worked on the same panel at a time, each recording paintings of only a certain colour—red, orange, or yellow.

In addition to the rock paintings, all artefacts found on the surface of the sites were noted on the record sheets. Presence of pottery and stone tools was clearly marked as either ‘sparse’, ‘common’ or ‘abundant’ and whether they resembled artefacts of the Later Stone Age, Iron Age or the colonial period. This formed part of the site description. Damages to the art were also noted; this included animal damage, flaking, water damage, vegetation and soot. In particular, water damage and thick vegetation such as trees and thorns in front of the rock face hindered the recording process.

4.2.2.2 Digital Photography

Photographs, GPS co-ordinates and written records were taken not only for the rock art, but also for artefacts associated with the rock art sites. Such artefacts made part of the site description. Photographing the identified sites was not as simple as I had anticipated. Lighting is one of the major challenges in photographing rock art (Smith 2017b: 139; Hollmann 2018b: 10); the visibility of the paintings is dependent on the time of day. Consequently, the process of photographing required a lot of time and planning. The position of the art in the shelter, and therefore exposure of some of the sites to sunlight made this an even more complex process. Because some of the sites are vertical cliffs with no shelter, they are directly exposed to sunlight, making recording a tedious process; it was difficult getting a photo of the art without including a shadow in the shot. A few times we had to leave site and come back the following day, at a different time of day. Apart from this, thick vegetation (trees and thorns) around the site made it difficult to get close enough to get a clear photo. One further challenge with the photography was that some of the rock shelters were either too wide, or had an uneven rock face, making it difficult to take photographs of the whole panel at once.

Site photography was integrated into the site record sheets. In this, one section of the panel was photographed at a time, and the photograph numbers were noted on the record sheet for that section of the panel. In addition, photographs of individual images were taken. All sites were photographed using a Nikon D5100 camera with an 18–55 mm VR lens. One camera was used, and one photographer worked at a site at a time, to minimise error (Fig. 4.3). This included photographing the site, individual images, and the physical features of the landscape where the sites are located.

Artefacts seemingly associated with the sites were also photographed, with a scale. Photographs were taken in Nikon RAW (.NEF) format, and later converted to .JPEG format, because image enhancement software like DStretch is not compatible with higher resolution formats such as .NEF (Hollmann 2018a). In spite of these challenges, photography was the quickest and most convenient recording technique for the KLSA rock art.



Figure 4.3: The author, with David Pearce, taking photographs at DWK2. Photo: Alex Schoeman.

Before digital photography was more widely used than it is today, tracing was the only reliable rock art recording technique (Lewis-Williams 1990). Rock art could be traced directly, in the field, eliminating the need to worry about remembering exactly what the rock art looked like. Although photographic recording is the easier option now, tracing is still done—RARI, for instance, still relies on this technique to produce copies of rock art imagery. Tracing, however, is time-consuming, and consequently not always possible if one has limited time in the field. For purposes of this research, photography was the more convenient option, and was followed by enhancement.

4.2.2.3 GPS and mapping

Site description and photography record only the content; more techniques are required to record the precise location of a site. For this, we used handheld Global Positioning System (GPS) devices, using the WGS (World Geodetic System) 84 datum, and recorded the co-ordinates for each documented site, including the archaeological sites with no rock paintings. These GPS records were part of the site information added on the record sheets. Taking GPS coordinates ensures that the geographic data correlate with other documented data (Smith 2017b), and assist in relocating sites. GPS co-ordinates were also recorded for archaeological remains found near painted sites—stone tools, potsherds and stone walls. This was done so as to later consider any possible associations between these archaeological materials and the painted sites.

4.3 Survey results

Documenting the sites in close detail was especially important because many of the rock paintings in the KLSA are under threat. Due to the wet climate of central Mpumalanga, the sandstone in which the rock art is painted absorbs a lot of water, which damages the paintings. Apart from water damage, graffiti and mining activity are the biggest threats to rock paintings in this region. Moreover, despite recent rock art studies in the Mpumalanga Province (Hampson *et al.* 2002; Smith & Zubieta 2007; Forssman *et al*. 2016; Forssman & Louw 2016, 2018; Pearce *et al.* 2019), not many (academic or otherwise) know of the rock paintings in the central parts of Mpumalanga. This lack of knowledge is perhaps owing to the location of most of the sites, which are in private properties and only accessible to a privileged few (Ndlovu 2009b for a review of rock art site accessibility in South Africa).

Apart from rock art, there are stone tools, pottery fragments and stone walls observable at and near most of the painted sites. These surface finds were recorded, along with the rock art. There are also shelters with stone tools and pottery recognisable on the ground, but no rock paintings. Although the precolonial past of this region is too scant to know specific communities that lived here, these archaeological remains suggest that a blend of cultures and economies lived in the KLSA for thousands of years. Importantly, the number of archaeological sites with no paintings led to a consideration of whether painted sites were purposefully chosen, and what the decision-making behind this would have been. Close consideration of this site selection is what led me to notice a pattern in the placement of painted sites in the KLSA. It is the recognition of this pattern from whence

the notion of ‘sacred spaces’ came (see Deacon 1988: 131, 138; Skinner 2017 for a similar observation in the Upper Karoo).

The KLSA painted sites that I analyse in this dissertation are located in eight geographic locations, or ‘complexes’, that were surveyed, namely Florence, Kleinbuffelspruit, Suikerboschfontein, De Wittekrans, Klipfontein, and three separate sections of Bosmanskrans (including White Valley, as I call it here) (Fig. 4.4). Unlike most regions, KLSA rock art is not found only in shelters and overhangs; vertical cliffs and small open spaces with no ceiling are also painted. But, there seems to have been some preference for certain spaces; while others have multiple layers of paintings, others are unpainted but may contain some archaeological materials. Still, other spaces have no tangible evidence, despite having shelter and in proximity of the painted sites. This is especially true for shelters on the Klipfontein farm in the BaTwa Valley. Here, rock art is only painted at two sites, in the mushroom rock shelter and on a vertical rock surface near a waterfall, although there are multiple other shelters. These site preferences are significant, and I consider them in detail in later chapters. The designated names for painted sites documented for this research are: FLR1, FLR2, FLR3, FLR4, FLR5, FLR6, LRC1, LRC2, LRC3, LRC4, LRC5, LRC6, BOS1, BOS2, BOS3, BOS4, BOS5, BOS6, BOS7, BOS8, WVL2, WVL3, DWK1, DWK2, MSR1 and MSR6.

In addition to these 25 sites, Suikerboschfontein 1 and 2 (here SKB1 and SKB2), below the Komati River, near Carolina, were fully recorded in 2016, and are described in detail by Pearce *et al.* (2019). I visited these two sites during my first field trip to the KLSA, in January 2018, and worked from the data collected by Pearce and others.

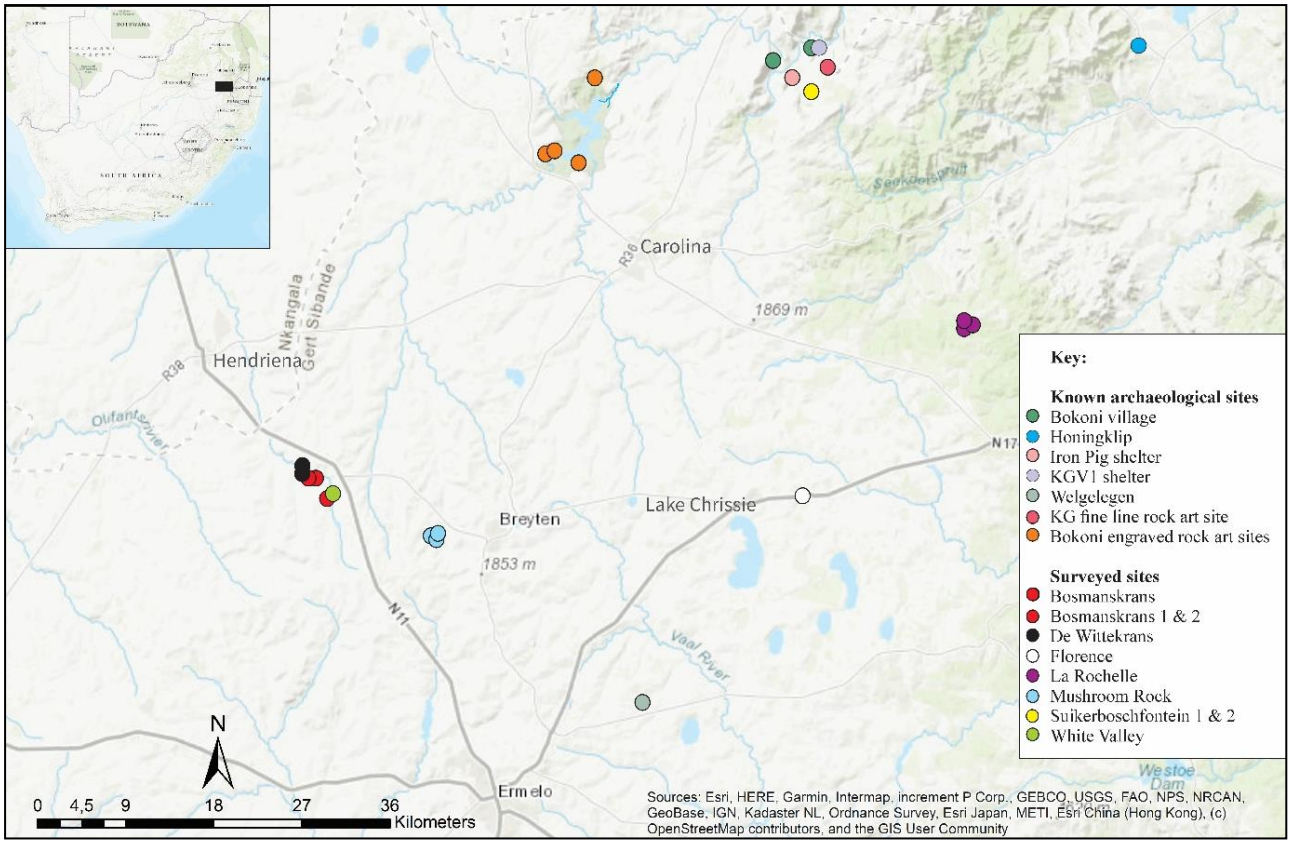


Figure 4.4: Distribution of locations with painted and archaeological sites in the KLSA. Map: Kate Croll and Alex Schoeman.

4.4 Post-field techniques

Post-fieldwork:

(i) All GPS records were exported to the *Google Earth Pro* and *ArcGIS* computer programs, and used to map the geographical distribution of the sites.
(ii) The photographs were enhanced using image-j software with a Decorrelation-stretch (DStretch) plugin;

All these techniques worked as part of the documentation process.

4.4.1 GPS data extraction

Apart from keeping records of the geographic locations of sites, GPS data also aid in the production of accurate maps of the sites in the research area. The spatial distribution of sites (e.g. Figs 3.3 & 4.4) can be analysed from these data. Accordingly, the GPS records of the KLSA sites were exported to

Google Earth Pro software, in order to map out the geographical location of the 27 rock art sites described in this dissertation. This was one of the post-field protocols followed for this research.

4.4.2 Image enhancement

Most of the KLSA rock paintings are faded, and it is difficult to identify some images with the naked eye. Consequently, the images had to be enhanced, so they could properly be analysed. Researchers have, in the last decade, relied on DStretch (Mark & Billo 2002; Harman 2005; Le Quellec *et al*. 2015; see also Gunn *et al.* 2010 for superimposed motifs)—a plugin of the image-j software program—for a quick and reliable technique to enhance images (e.g. Brady & Gunn 2012; Le Quellec *et al*. 2015; see Hlangani 2017; Hollmann 2018a for DStretch case studies in southern African rock art). DStretch is a colour-based plugin that enhances certain colours of motifs while suppressing others; it is especially useful in cases where rock art is faded (e.g. Fig. 4.5) or in cases of unclear superimposition. Accordingly, having converted all photographs to .JPEG format, I used DStretch for faded and superimposed paintings.

The challenge with image enhancement was that each site and each image needed a different decorrelation, because of the differences in pigment colour. I used the colour spaces CB-CRGB (Colour Balance-Colour space Red, Green, Blue), CB-LRE (Colour Balance-Light Red), CB-RG0 (Colour Balance-Red, Green) and CB-YRE (Colour Balance-Yellow, Red) for dark-red paintings, and CB-YBG (Colour Balance-Yellow, Black, Green) and CB-YBK (Colour Balance-Yellow, Black) for black paintings (Mark & Billo 2002: 124-26). The colour space CB-LABI (Colour Balance-Lightness, channels a and b) turns dark red to white, and CB-YYE turns black paintings white (Brady & Gunn 2012: 632). The outline of each image comes out much clearer when the image appears in white (e.g. Fig. 4.5) and this helps with digital tracing, if needed. CB-LAB, on the other hand, separates dark red from bright red. These decorrelations worked best for the LRC3 site, of which some of its images would not have been visible without enhancement.

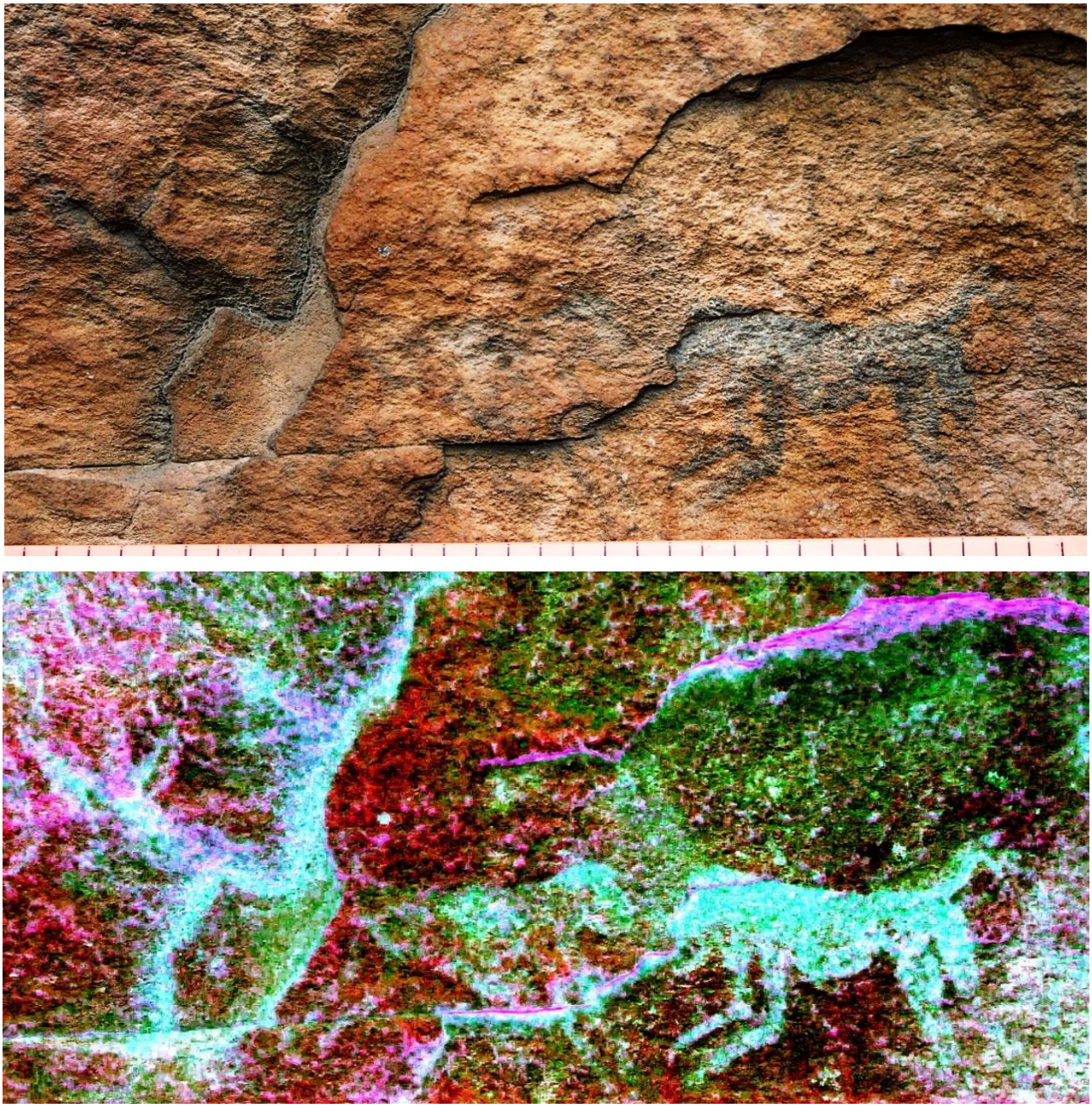


Figure 4.5: DStretch-enhanced image (with colour space CB-YYE) of two baboons facing each other. Original photo above.

Chapter Five:
Order from chaos: making sense of rock art variability in the KLSA

> Rock art provides us with insights into the mind of its makers, and as such, the way we order the art impacts on the way we consider the people who made it.
>
> - Lara Mallen 2008: 46

At this point in the dissertation it should be clear that etic perspectives are not favourable if we are to understand KLSA rock art for what it meant to its painters. I highlighted in Chapter Two, the theoretical and practical issues that should be kept in mind, in approaching the variability of KLSA rock art, and understanding the decision-making behind site re-use for image making. To describe the KLSA rock art sites, in this chapter, I focus on technique, pigment colour, pigment texture, subject matter, site features such as surface finds, and then the placement of images on the panel in relation to other images. These attributes offer an emic perspective to the KLSA rock art – what Rosemary Joyce *et al*. (2014: 413) call "the crafter's perspective", in the making of clay pots in western Africa (also see Rye 1981).

5.1 Site descriptions

The first complex of sites—FLR1–6—is on the farm Florence, near the town of Lake Chrissie (Figs 5.1, 5.2 & 5.3). These six painted sites are located along the same cliff line, and face a pan at a short walking distance. Most of these sites have overhangs, and could been used for shelter. The height of the overhangs is varied, ranging from 1 m to 2.5 m. Thick vegetation grows around the shelters. There are algae on the rock surfaces. Significantly, in the literature the farm Florence appears to have been home to multiple groups of BaTwa in the nineteenth century, and it is where some of the linguistic data that I consider in this dissertation comes from (e.g. Lanham & Hallowes 1956b: 97; also see Sanders 2013: 20).

The images at these sites are mostly of antelope (e.g. Fig. 5.3), and one recognisable human figure. They paintings are very faded and difficult to make out in natural lighting. There are also some graffiti markings in the sites, but fortunately none over the art. These paintings are known to the property owner, who

conveniently hands out a printed guide to site visitors, but the number of images present at these sites seems to have been underestimated. This is possibly because of the fadedness of the paintings, which can easily be missed by the eyes of a non-specialist. Apart from the rock paintings, some potsherds and a few chert micro tools are recognisable on the ground.



Figure 5.1: View of pan at Florence, from one of the painted sites. Photo: Stephen van den Heever.



Figure 5.2: Site FLR1. Photo: Stephen van den Heever.

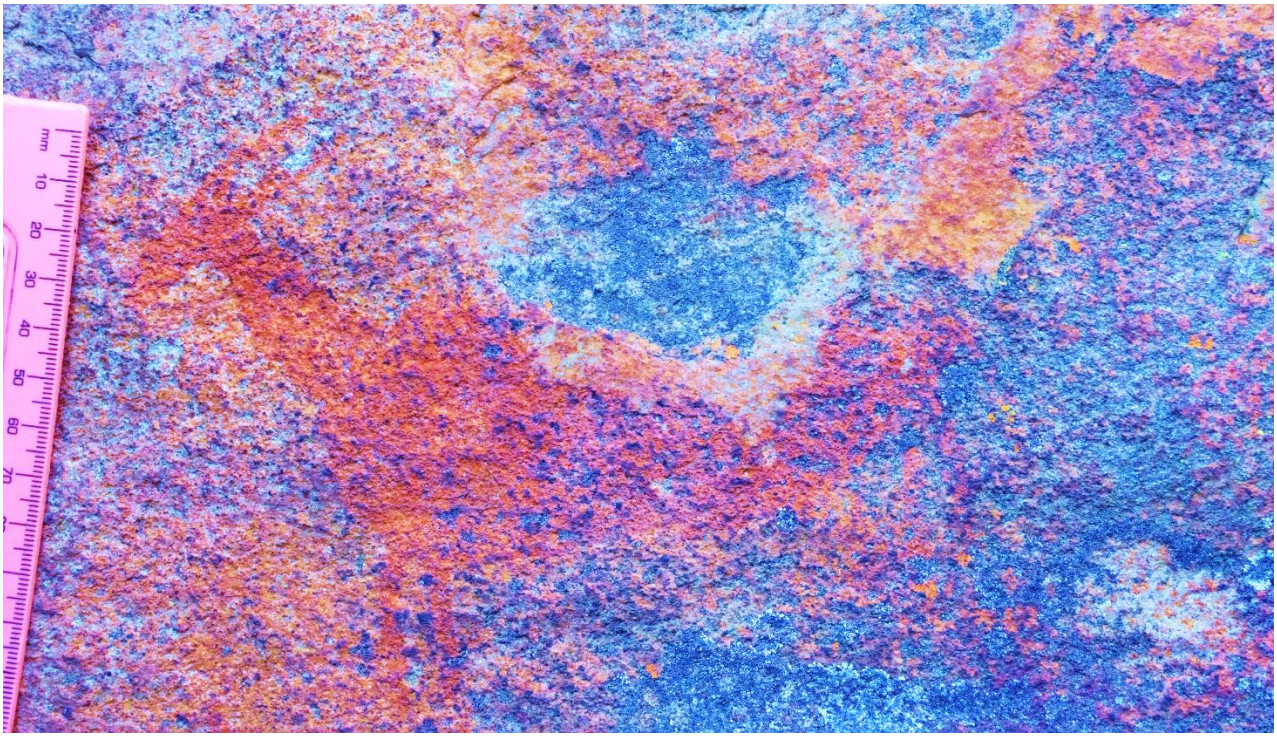


Figure 5.3: Animal figure at site FLR6. Image enhanced with DStretch. Photo: Stephen van den Heever.

The second survey location was on the farm Kleinbuffelspruit, between Carolina and Lake Chrissie, close to one of the Komati River catchments. Here we identified and recorded five painted sites, all about 250 m apart, and an additional archaeological site at least a kilometre away from LRC5, which may have been used to make paint (described below). The names for these sites were derived from that of LRC1 (Fig. 5.4), known to some of the locals as La Rochelle (Sanders 2013: 40). Steyn (1994, 1995) recorded some of these sites. Of particular interest are the sites LRC1, LRC3 and LRC4, which are densely painted with a variety of images.



Figure 5.4: Site LRC1. The shelter is about 30 m wide, and the opening is between 2.0 and 2.5 m in height, from the cement floor. Photo: Jenna Hansen.

LRC1 is one of the biggest rock shelters in the KLSA. The first aspect of this site, as one approaches from a short distance, are rows of wooden benches, arranged as if an event or a class is soon to commence inside the shelter (Fig. 5.4). LRC1 also has a cemented floor, and a commemoration plaque on the backwall of the shelter, with a hidden message to be revealed on December 16th of the year 2038. The benches, cement floor and the plaque were put in the shelter by the local Afrikaner community, for their yearly *Geloftedag* – 'Day of the Covenant' (Sanders 2013: 40). Clearly, the shelter has been given a new cultural meaning from that which it had at the time the paintings in it were made. Fortunately, though, most of the paintings at LRC1 are still in relatively good condition.

Although subjects in earlier layers—mostly eland—are more faded than superimposing imagery, they are easily recognisable by their distinctive features.

The other sites at Kleinbuffelspruit differ significantly from LRC1. LRC2, which is located less than 100 m from LRC1, has an overhang. Only a progression of red eland is painted at this site (Fig. 5.5). The floor of the LRC2 shelter is solid bedrock, and hence there is no deposit.



Figure 5.5: LRC2. Photo: Stephen van den Heever.

Also recorded was the site LRC3 (Fig. 5.6). Although located on the same farm as LRC1 and LRC2, the distance between the location of these two sites and LRC3 is almost a kilometre, and the imagery at this site is unique from the imagery painted at LRC1 and LRC 2. LRC3 has by far the most archaeology of all the KLSA sites. Pottery, faunal and lithic materials are easily recognisable on the ground. Stone-walled structures are also recognisable nearby. More important to this study's focus, however, is the rock art in the shelter. The most densely painted part of the shelter, although also the most weathered, is the middle section.



Figure 5.6: Site LRC3. Photos: Stephen van den Heever.

The LRC 4 shelter (Fig. 5.7), which is about 20 m in length and about 1.2 m in height at its opening, has a large scatter of lithics; there are also pottery fragments of different designs—some with decorations and some with thick walls—recognisable near and inside the shelter (Fig. 5.8). Also found on the surface of the shelter are faunal remains and ochre fragments. The microlithics made with chert and quartz material. Unmodified lithic material seems to also have been brought up to this site. The surface scatter of pottery and lithics extends for nearly 30 m outside the shelter, from the shelter. This is likely because the site is located on a slope, and artefacts in the deposit get washed down. The sediment around this shelter is of high potential for successful excavation.



Figure 5.7: La Rochelle 4, from a distance. Paintings in the shelter cover a space of about 15 m in width. Photo: Jenna Hansen.



Figure 5.8: Pottery and lithic material from LRC4.

The last recorded painted site at Kleinbuffelspruit is LRC5. The paintings at LRC5, nonetheless, are only of antelope. These are all painted in the fine-line technique, but include monochromes and bichromes. The bichromes are red (which is overlaid on yellow), with white outlines, whereas the monochromes are yellow.

Also recorded at Kleinbuffelspruit were remnants of pigment on a rock. This dried pigment appears to have been in liquid form and mixed with fragments of charcoal. Because this pigment looked similar to the paint used on some of the paintings in the LRC sites (although we may never know why and when the paint was made), the site was recorded as LRC6 (Fig. 5.9).



Figure 5.9: A dried, liquid mixture of red pigment and charcoal, preserved on a rock. Photos: Stephen van den Heever.

From the location of the LRC sites, the survey moved to the western part of the KLSA, between the towns of Hendrina and Breyten. There are five survey locations in this vicinity; these include three separate sections of the farm Bosmanskrans (du Piesanie & Nel 2013), surveyed on different occasions, and the farms De Wittekrans (Ouzman 2009, cited in Fourie 2010) and Klipfontein (Potgieter 1955: 4).

The Bosmanskrans and White Valley sites are located on three different sections of the farm Bosmanskrans; the three different locations are geographically spread out, but sites occur in clusters within each location. Significantly, the sites BOS3 and BOS4 are located next to each other and have similar, finger-painted imagery (Fig. 5.10). Of the total 10 painted sites at Bosmanskrans (we identified an additional 4), however, only five are well preserved, namely BOS3, BOS4 [both documented as S.35-021 in du Piesanie & Nel (2013)], BOS7 [S.35-109 in du Piesanie & Nel (2013)], WVL2 and WVL3. Interestingly, BOS1 [S.35-015 in du Piesanie & Nel (2013)] and BOS2, which I recorded in January 2018, are located in a separate section of the farm from the rest of the BOS sites. Most of these sites have no other recognisable archaeology apart from the rock art, but we recorded some decorated pottery fragments near BOS7.

Only one of these sites is located on a high-elevated shelter; the rest of the sites are in flat-ground – small sites with no shelter. The images painted at these sites differ from site to site, but red seems to be a common choice of pigment colour. The 'geometric' paintings are of plus-sign crosses and finger strokes (Fig. 5.28). At one other site, BOS5 (S.35-016 in du Piesanie & Nel 2013), is painted a bovid figure with horns.



Figure 5.10: The BOS4 site. Photo: Stephen van den Heever.

Significantly different from all these painted sites are two more rock art sites in a third, separate section of the farm Bosmanskrans, which I here name White Valley, because of the appearance of the paintings. Four sites were identified in the White Valley; two of these were recorded because of the pottery fragments in them, while the other two were painted sites. At the first of these two painted sites, WVL2, are painted two animal figures, of miniature size—a giraffe and a warthog or bush pig (Fig. 5.11). The paintings are on a black rock surface. There is also some paint applied on a circular hollow in the rock. Apart from this, there are no remnants of paint to indicate that there were other images painted on this panel. The paintings are in a white, coarse pigment, and relatively well-preserved. These are painted in the rough brush technique.

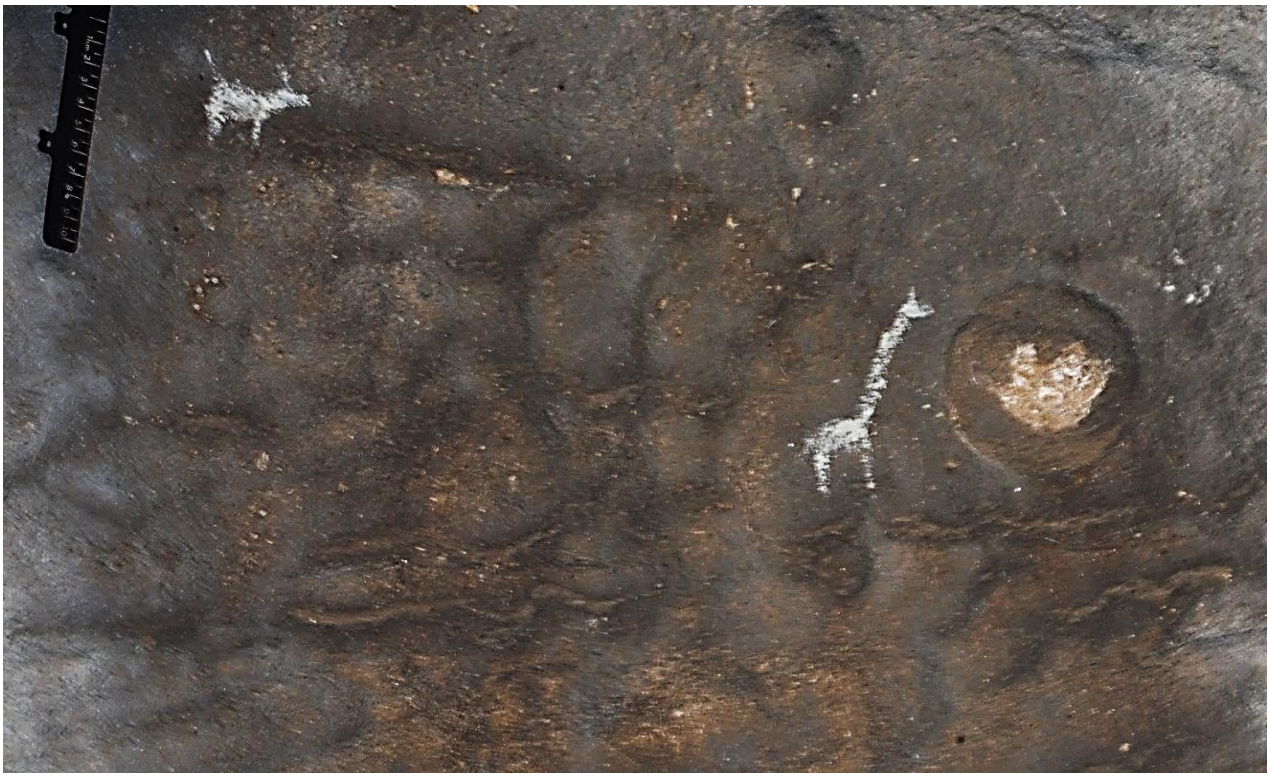


Figure 5.11: Finger and rough-brush painted figures at WVL2.

The second site, WVL3, site is a low-ceiling, small shelter. It contains a range of subjects, including human figures and a wagon (Fig. 5.12). The paintings here are made in a similar white and coarse pigment as that used at WVL2, with the exception of white and red animal figure, which was only visible after enhancement. The images at this site are executed in the finger and rough brush techniques, combined. This is a rare combination of techniques that has been identified for rock

paintings in the Eastern Cape (e.g. Ouzman 2005, Mallen 2008), but also occurs at Ratho Boulder in the SLCA, in northern South Africa (Alex Schoeman, pers. comm. 2020). Some pottery fragments are also visible on the ground, in and near the shelter.



Figure 5.12: Main panel of the WVL3 site. Photo: Stephen van den Heever.

The other location with rock paintings in the KLSA is De Wittekrans. There are two painted sites on this farm. The painted sites, here labelled DWK1 (Fig. 5.13) and DWK2 (Fig. 5.14), are both shelters, each with multiple panels. DWK1 consists of two sections of varying height, at about 2 m and about 1 m. DWK2, on the other hand, has three sections—the first one on ground level, the second about 3 m above ground, and the third about 4 m above ground level. The images painted at these sites are variable, and frequently interact with the geological features of the rock surface on which they are painted (see section 5.2.4.2 below). I consider this aspect closely later in this chapter, and discuss its significance for the interpretation of the DWK rock paintings, in Chapter Six.



Figure 5.13: DWK1 main panel, with ‘geometric’ rock art. Recorder: Tshegofatso Mangwedi. Photos taken by author.

The DWK1 site is one of the most significant sites for this study, because it is one of the most densely painted, and captures the true heterogeneity of KLSA rock art. Painted at DWK1 are 'geometrics', including concentric circles, rayed circles, rows of finger dots, microdots, diamond shapes and crosses. These are painted in various colours and techniques (there are also fine-line concentric circles), which appear to have been placed in multiple layers. Most of the paintings were made in red pigment. All these 'geometric' paintings are superimposed on faded eland images, which were painted in a yellow pigment. Most of the paintings at the site are in an 8-m long shelter, with a 2-m high ceiling at the opening and about 1.6 m high closer to the painted surface. Paintings are also found on a smaller, 1-m-high shelter on the right-hand side of this main panel. Similar to other sites in this research area, pottery fragments are recognisable on the ground, but there are much fewer here. The paintings at this site are described in more detail in Chapter 5.

DWK2 is located about 100m away from DWK1, and consists of multiple panels, some of them with dark red finger dots, sporadically placed, but the site is dominated by animal figures, mostly antelope, painted in fine-line polychrome and rough-brush monochrome techniques. In certain cases, these are involved in superimposition. The site spans across a distance of nearly 30 m, from the first painted surface. It is located near a waterfall. The images on the first two panels are separately placed; the rock surface is sometimes used to emphasise the separate placement of these images.

The more fascinating aspect of DWK2 is the imagery on the main panel, at the far right-end of the shelter. This is where majority of the paintings are. Most of the paintings on this panel are yellow. These depict two feline-like creatures, some indeterminate antelope, and an eland with a tiny head, short legs and disproportionately large stomach. These are painted alongside, and slightly superimposed with, two brownish-red eland, facing the opposite direction. The yellow figures seem to have been added later. Below and to the right of these animal figures is a row of red finger dots, extending to the right. To the right of and above these finger dots, is a dark red bovid (unclear). This bovid is behind two dark red baboons, the one in the front bigger than the other, that are following a yellow antelope. The arrangement of these is almost as if the bovid transforms into a baboon, then into a bigger baboon. In front of these baboon figures is an antelope, painted in yellow pigment (see Fig. 5.22 in section 5.2.3.2, which describes baboon images in detail). This is one of two sites in the KLSA where baboons are painted. The other is LRC3; although, there are therianthropes with baboon features at LRC4, as far as can be seen from the images that are not completely faded.



Figure 5.14: DWK2 main panel. Photo taken by author.

More rock art is located on the farm Klipfontein, painted at two sites, one locally known as Mushroom/Murder Rock (Fig. 5.15), and previously published by Schoonraad and Schoonraad (1972). Other writers (e.g. Potgieter 1955; Prins 1999; Sanders 2013) have described Murder Rock as one of the last resorts for hunter-gatherer bands in the late nineteenth century, who came from south-eastern South Africa. Oral history has it that a massacre of BaTwa people by emaSwati happened here. The other painted site on this farm, which we recorded as MSR6, has been published by Tom Sanders (2013: 54), who observes that the rock art may be related to rain-making ritual (see Fig. 5.16). Painted at this site is an indeterminate figure that resembles a hair brush. Sanders (2013: 54, citing Contemporary San Art. Kuru Art Project, D'Kar, Botswana) observes that the image might depict a rain cloud.

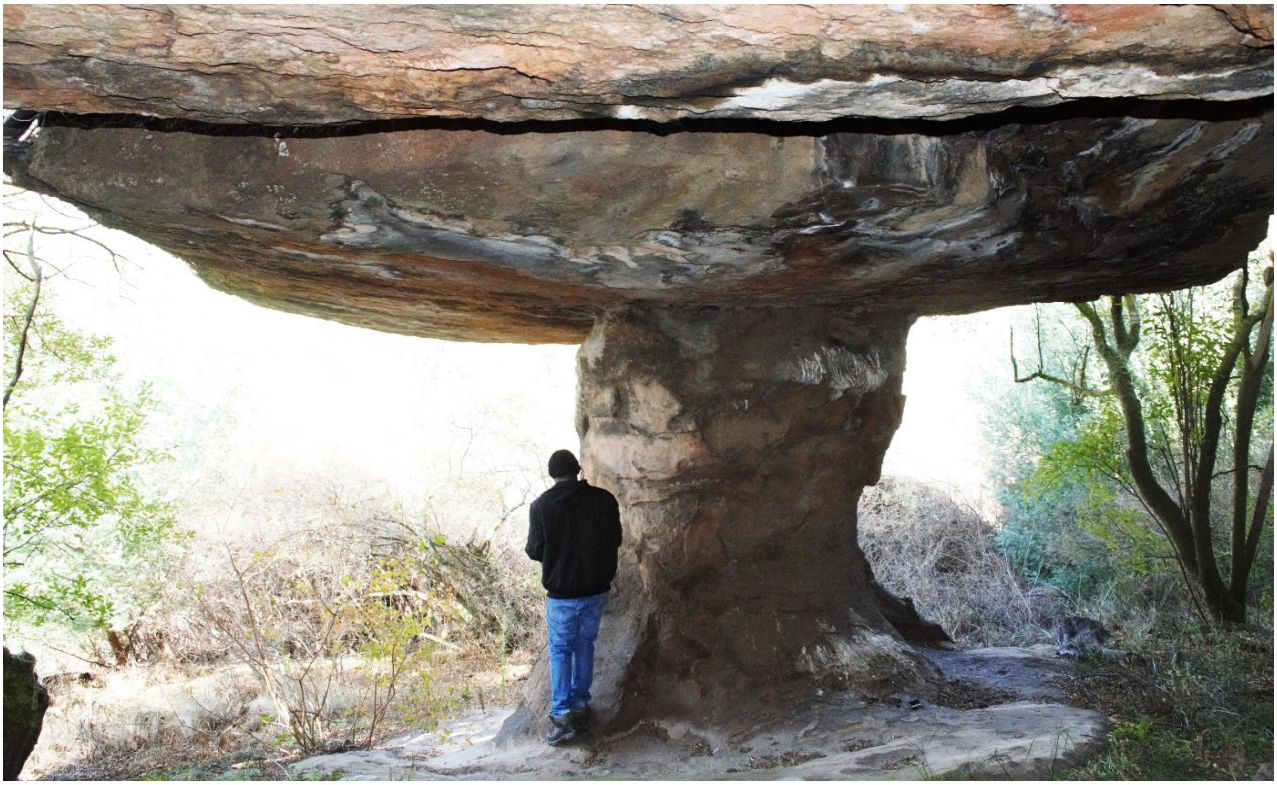


Figure 5.15: Mushroom/Murder Rock Shelter (MSR1).



Figure 5.16: MSR6, at Klipfontein, located near a waterfall. Photo: Jenna Hansen.

In addition to these two painted sites, there are multiple archaeological sites with pottery fragments and stone tools, at this survey location. It is likely that hunter-gatherers first inhabited this area long before the nineteenth century. The name BaTwa Valley, however, likely comes from this place's association with BaTwa peoples in the historic times. For instance, a BaTwa rain maker is said to have been buried on this farm (Dewald Steyn snr., cited by Potgieter 1955: 4). Significantly, one of the two painted sites on this farm is located near a waterfall (Fig. 5.16); this location might have been used as a rain-making place (further discussed in Chapter 6).

5.2 The rock paintings

The KLSA rock paintings differ from site to site, and so description can be challenging. This is especially true because various painting techniques—fine-line, rough-brush, and finger—are observable at the same sites, and sometimes for the same layers. Additionally, various pigments and techniques were used to depict similar subjects at some sites. 'Geometric' motifs, trance scenes and colonial-era imagery all make up the content of the KLSA rock art. Although antelope images are dominant, there is variation in the way they are painted. Fine-line monochrome figures are most common, followed by bichrome and rough-brush monochrome figures. These are painted in various types of pigment, some being thin and watery, some thick, powdery and coarse, while some are shiny and thick. The rough brush-painted paintings are always in a coarse pigment. Finger paintings, which are common in the KLSA, are painted in various colours and are mostly 'geometric'.

Additionally, figurative art in the KLSA is sometimes finger-painted. Moreover, fine-line paintings at DWK1 and DWK2 are painted in the same pigment colours and pigment texture as the 'geometric' paintings at these sites. Furthermore, rough brush-painted images at DWK2 and BOS6 are painted in the same coarse and powdery pigment as the fine-line figurative and 'geometric' paintings. This may suggest that, at least in some cases, the different 'styles' of rock paintings in the KLSA were painted in the same time frame, and possibly by the same communities or communities in contact (see Chapter 6).

5.2.1 Technique

Of significance, there are multiple sites in the KLSA that consist of only finger paintings, of the same symbols, throughout each of the sites. These are painted at the sites BOS3, BOS4 (Fig. 5.28) and

BOS7 (Fig. 5.27b). Finger paintings are found at four other sites in the KLSA—DWK1, DWK2, BOS6 and WVL3 (see Table 5.1 below), but at these latter, they are mixed with other techniques and symbols; at LRC4, only one finger imprint was recorded. At BOS6 and WVL3, the finger technique is coupled with rough brush painting.

Table 5.1: Classification of sites by technique.

Site name	Fine brush	Finger	Rough-brush
FLR1	X		
FLR2	X		
FLR3	X		
FLR4	X		
FLR5	X		
FLR6	X		
LRC1	X		X
LRC2	X		
LRC3	X		
LRC4	X	X	
LRC5	X		
BOS1			X
BOS2	X		
BOS3		X	
BOS4	X	X	
BOS5			
BOS6		X	
BOS7	X	X	
BOS8			
WVL2			X
WVL3	X	X	X
DWK1	X	X	
DWK2	X	X	X
MSR1	X		
MSR6	X		
SKB1	X		
SKB2			

The fine-line technique is the most common in the KLSA, occurring exclusively at 17 of the 27 sites, and at two more sites where it co-occurs with finger painting (DWK1 and DWK2) (see Table 5.1). Significantly at DWK2, fine-line paintings co-occur with finger-painted and rough brush-painted animal figures, in the same pigment. Given the similarity of the yellow-pigment figures in Figure

5.17, in terms of colour and pigment texture, and that they are superimposed on earlier paintings of a different colour, it is possible that they make part of the same layer (also see Figure 5.33; see Section 5.2.4.1 for layers and superpositioning; Pearce 2002 for layers and chronology).



Figure 5.17: Co-occurrence of fine-line, rough brush and finger paintings at DWK2.

At the other five sites where finger paintings occur, they are restricted to 'geometric' rock art; at DWK1, multiple overlapping layers of 'geometrics' are painted over fine-line figurative art; some of the 'geometrics' at this site are painted in brush. In addition to the co-existence of multiple 'ways of doing' (Smith 1998: 218), this co-occurrence of techniques prompts a careful consideration of pigment colour, texture, and image placement as significant attributes that can be considered to have made part of the cognitive system of the KLSA rock painters. Technique appears to have been secondary.

5.2.2 Pigment colour and texture

Among these attributes of KLSA rock art, what makes pigment colour a useful descriptive attribute is that its significance is attested by ethnographic literature, though geographically separated from my research area. For painting communities in the past, certain colours seem to have been preferred

for depicting specific subjects. The colour white, for instance, was recognised in certain cases as symbolic of the 'spirits of the dead' (see e.g. Blundell 2004; Johnson 2016 for spirits of the dead in Eastern Cape rock art) and other malevolent creatures. Other communities, such as the Hananwa in northern South Africa, used white pigment to make initiation rock art. The /Xam in the Northern Cape also seem to have made such distinctions. While the /Xam ethnography may not explain why 'spirits of the dead', for example, were painted in white, there is nonetheless some text from /Xam ethnography, which suggests the significance of pigment type. The story of 'the girl of the early race of people, who married a baboon', which appears in the Bleek and Lloyd archive (Book BC_151_A2_1_093: 7608–25) is one prime example.

The story is as follows:

> Little girls they said, one of them said, "it is ||ha`ra, therefore I think I shall draw a gemsbok with it.". And another said, "it is tò, therefore I think I will draw a springbok with it". Then she said: "it is ||ha`ra, therefore I think I will draw a baboon with it.". Then the baboon sneezed, when the child spoke his name…".

While this story is likely metaphorical, what it suggests, nonetheless, is the potency of certain pigments as relating to specific ritualistic purposes; it also suggests that making rock art was likely implicated in such rituals. The Australian archaeologists June Ross and Iain Davidson (2006) have noted the lack of direct evidence there is for implicating ritual in the production of rock art. They write, "Ritual, by any definition, involves performance of particular types but there are no identifiable depictions that reliably predict ritual activity." (*ibid.*: 309). Perhaps being ignorant of the southern African literature they cite (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1981, 1984), these authors make an incorrect assumption. Southern African rock art researchers have been successful in showing, through the integration of ethnographic sources, the relationship between rock art and ritual (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1981, 1994; Witelson 2019).

The ritual significance of pigment to hunter-gatherers was also recorded by Marion How (1962) who, in the early 1930s, spoke to a MoSotho (singular for BaSotho) man named Mapote, who had learned

to paint as a young man, with BaTwa in their caves. Mapote, after How (1962) had given him a red pigment that she had acquired, confirmed the pigment to be a powerful medicine with supernatural powers (also see Lewis-Williams 1986, 1994: 281). The making of the paint, according to Mapote, also included the addition of eland blood and fat (How 1962). Similarly, Manqindi Dyantyi, a woman of BaTwa descent, who spoke to David Lewis-Williams (1986), Pieter Jolly (1986) and Frans Prins (1990) in the 1980s (also see Lewis-Williams 1994), also mentioned the use of eland blood in making paint. The implication of these ethnographic testimonies, which have no direct relation to each other, further suggest that pigment colour was of significance to rock painters. Unfortunately, there has been no such documented account in the KLSA, but ethnographic analogy can be drawn from these accounts, which can be applied to some (by no means all) of the rock paintings in the KLSA.

Various colours of paintings in the KLSA can be categorised as monochrome and bichrome. Some of the eland images may have originally been polychrome, as recorded by Steyn (1994), but these are difficult to discern now, even with DStretch enhancement.

5.2.2.1 Monochrome

Monochrome paintings are painted in red, orange, white, dark red, yellow, black, and brown. Frequently, some of these colours are combined to paint bichrome and polychrome animal figures. In some cases, these pigments are consistent with the technique used; at the sites WVL2 and WVL3, for instance, a powdery and chalky white pigment seems to have been preferred, along with rough brush painting. But pigment colours are by no means bounded to specific techniques. The variability of the KLSA rock paintings, in terms of pigment colour and texture, is better defined by the manner in which eland images are painted. Although images of eland are commonly painted in bichrome, in the KLSA, there are significant differences in their appearance (e.g. Figs 5.18 & 5.19). At DWK2, for example, not only does the pigment texture of the eland figures differ from those painted at other sites, but also the somatic features of the eland. At this site, some eland figures are painted with disproportionate features – an elongated stomach, a shrunken head and shortened front legs (Fig. 5.18).

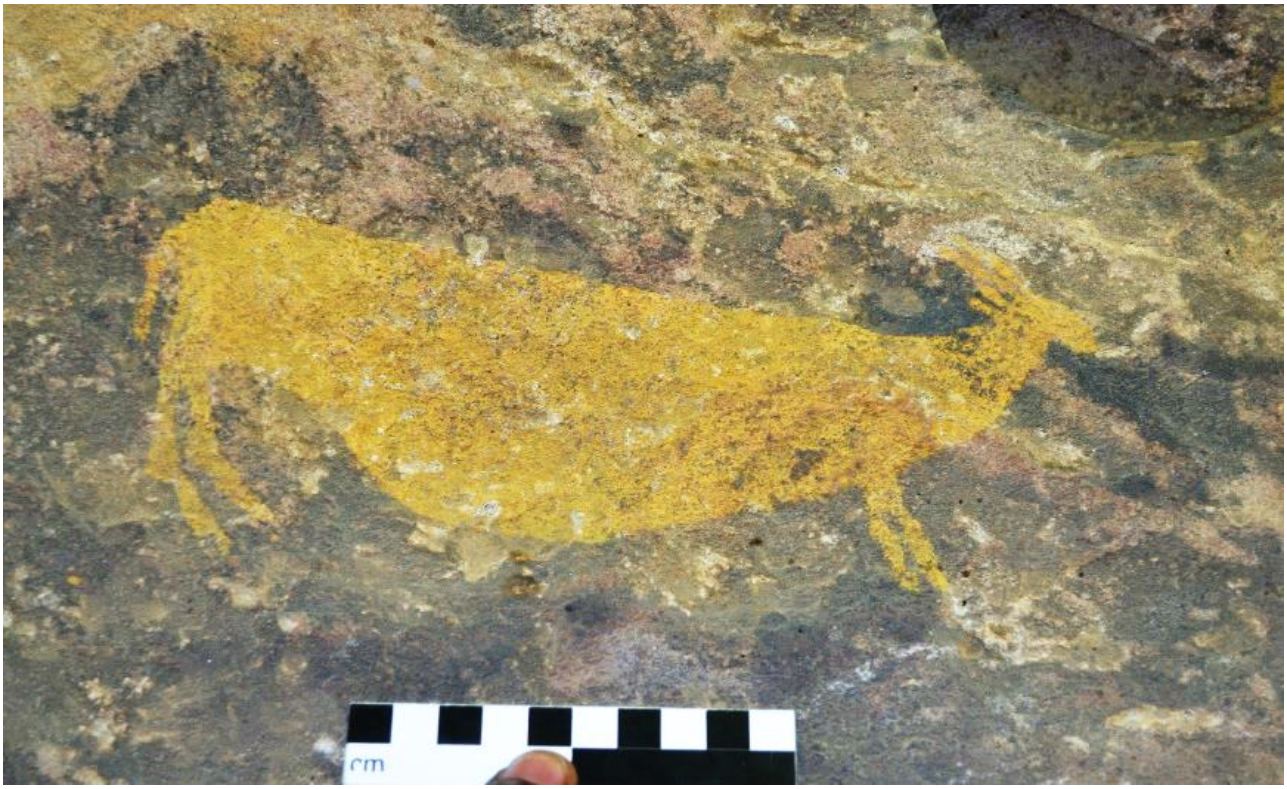


Figure 5.18: Monochrome antelope in yellow, at DWK2.

The texture of monochrome figures often differs depending on colour. Red paintings are mostly in a fine, watery, light red pigment. Some of the red paintings have faded to an almost orange colour, making it difficult, at times, to tell them apart from orange paintings. A few of the red paintings are in a pinkish-red pigment, which is different from the watery red. Red paintings are fine-line and finger-painted, depicting various subjects. There are various shades of red, with dark red being most common. Dark red paintings differ from vermillion red paintings in that the former are made with a thick, almost maroon pigment. Dark red pigments in rock art often contain ochre or hematite (Cook *et al*. 1990; Bonneau *et al*. 2012, 2017a), but, in the KLSA a charcoal and ochre mixture was possibly used (see Fig. 5.8 above) to make dark red pigment. Comparatively, orange images are not as numerous, but are painted at a considerable number of sites. These are also mostly painted in a fine, watery pigment.

White images, on the other hand, are painted in a crumbly, coarse pigment, which is sometimes mixed with a pinkish-yellow pigment (e.g. Loubser & Laurens 1994; Hall & Smith 2000: 39). White paintings in the KLSA are not limited to any one technique or ‘style’, as they are executed in finger,

rough-brush and fine-line techniques. At DWK2, WVL2 and WVL3, the white and yellow paintings were made with a coarse, powdery substance, possibly clay (e.g., see Rudner 1982: 54; Chalmin *et al*. 2003).

Yellow paintings in the KLSA appear to have been made with variable kinds of pigments. At some sites, a watery pigment is used, which blurs the outlines of the figures when it starts to fade, while at other sites a thicker, coarser, powdery yellow pigment is used. Apart from red, yellow is the most common pigment colour used in the KLSA rock art.

Black images in the KLSA, which include a finger dot at one site (LRC4), appear to be restricted to a specific kind of subject matter, that of trance metaphors and performances. These are painted at the sites LRC3 and LRC4, and include baboons, therianthropes and human figures in groups, seemingly in a trance dance (see Lewis-Williams 1992; Lewis-Williams *et al.* 2000; Hollmann 2005; George 2013 for trance postures; Lee 1967; Marshall 1969; Guenther 1975, 1999 for ethnography). I do not offer further comment on these paintings, but they ought to be the subject of future research, which will look at meaning and possibly provide direct dates. However, they are useful for showing material evidence of ritual activity in the KLSA sites (see Chapter 6).

In the KLSA, brown paintings are uncommon and are usually of animal figures, but may include human figures. These are mostly painted in the rough-brush technique.

5.2.2.2 Bichrome

There are multiple types of bichromes in the KLSA rock art, but two are most common—red and white, and yellow and white. Red and white bichrome figures in the KLSA are often made in coarse pigments in which the white is always visible, and at times in a thin, fine pigment. The bichrome paintings made with a thin red pigment are almost always missing the head and legs, where the white detail has faded (see Fig. 5.19). Brownish-red bichrome paintings are made in a fine but thick pigment (Fig. 5.19). Possibly, red pigment was mixed with another colour of pigment to make these. Other than the more susceptible white parts (stomach outline, head and legs), these images are well preserved.



Figure 5.19: Bichrome eland at sites SKB1, LRC3, LRC1, LRC5 and DWK2 (from top to bottom), respectively. Photos: RARI; Stephen van den Heever; final image taken by the author.

Yellow and white bichrome figures, which are mostly eland (Fig. 5.20), occur second-most to red-and-white bichromes. In most cases, they preserve well, and all the details are still visible. In other cases, though, only the yellow part is still visible. Yellow-and-white bichromes made with a coarse pigment preserve better than yellow-and-white bichromes made with a watery pigment. Orange and white bichromes are mostly made with a thick, coarse pigment, and are almost entirely of eland. The making of these bichromes at some sites, particularly LRC4 and LRC5, seems to have included a white layer first, and the orange pigment applied on top on the white.

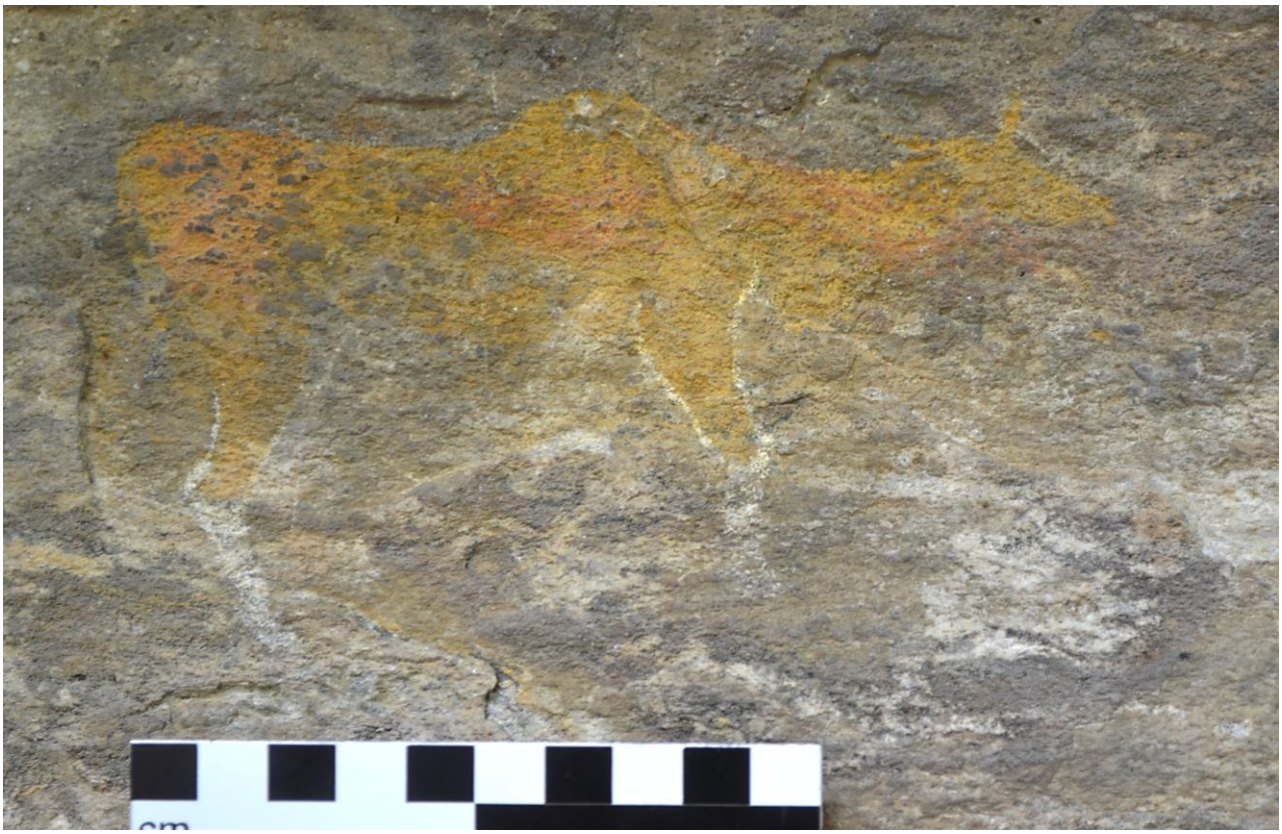


Figure 5.20: Bichrome eland at DWK2. Photo taken by author.

5.2.3 Subject matter

The subject matter of the KLSA rock paintings is as variable as the pigments used. Subjects depicted in the KLSA rock art include antelope (Fig. 5.20), baboons (Fig. 5.22), zoomorphic figures and other animals (Figs 5.23 and 5.24), as well as 'geometric' figures (Fig. 5.25). The 'geometric' figures are identifiable as aprons (e.g. Smith & Ouzman 2004; Hollmann 2007, 2013, 2014), oval-like designs, and other possible material culture. Finger dots (Fig, 5.26), microdots, strokes/smears (Fig. 5.27),

crosses (Fig. 5.28), and other unidentifiable abstract symbols are also recognisable, but I describe these separately from the larger corpus of 'geometric' rock art, because they sometimes occur in isolation. Other subject matter includes human figures and therianthropes (Fig. 5.29), which are sometimes in healing or dance postures (Fig. 5.30, Fig. 5.31), and some kind of engagement between human and animal figures (Fig. 5.21b).

5.2.3.1 Antelope

Antelope are the most commonly identified type of image in the KLSA rock art. As highlighted above, these are painted in various pigments, and range from monochrome and bichrome to polychrome. The exact number of antelope images is difficult to estimate, given the poor preservation, but antelope are painted at 18 (66.7%) of the 27 sites. Eland are the most common species of antelope painted but springbuck (*Antidorcas marsupialis*) and Vaal (or Grey) rhebok (*Pelea capreolus*) (Fig. 5.21a) also occur, commonly alongside eland. Another species of antelope painted in the KLSA is a red hartebeest (*Alcelaphus buselaphus caama*), the only one identified during survey and documentation, at LRC1. Interestingly, there seems to be some parallel between images of antelope and of baboons and therianthropes. At LRC4, a rhebok is painted next to two elongated human figures with rhebok's heads (Fig. 5.21b). At DWK2, three baboons of increasing size, from left to right, are painted in the middle of two, similar antelope figures; all these figures are painted in a progression (Fig. 5.22).

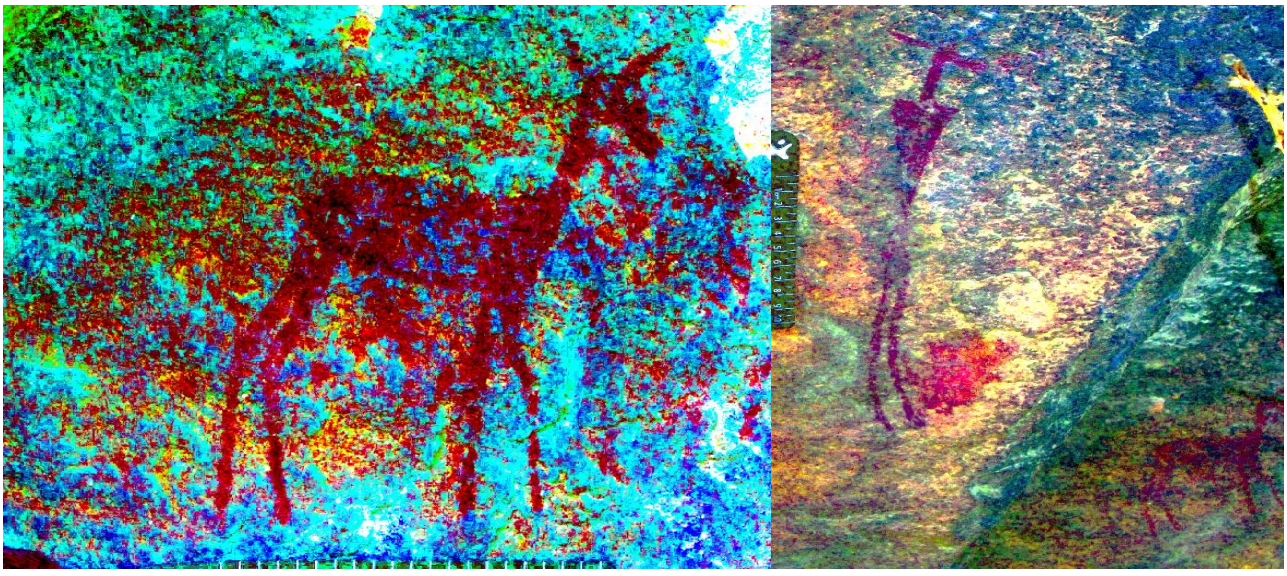


Figure 5.21: a) DStretch-enhanced image of possible rhebok; b) enhanced image of a therianthropic figure with antelope's head, associated with rhebok figure. Original photos: Stephen van den Heever.

5.2.3.2 Baboons

At DWK2, there are other baboons painted in a progression. Baboons also make up the subject matter of rock paintings at LRC3 and LRC4. At both LRC3 and LRC4 are also painted therianthropes with baboon features. Images of baboons are more easily discernible at LRC3 because, despite being painted in a miniaturised manner, they are painted separately from most of the other paintings, and are the only images at LRC3 that are painted in black pigment (possibly washed red). Baboons, similar to antelope, seem to have made up a significant part of the worldview of the painters of KLSA rock art. Significantly, at DWK2, baboons and microdots are painted in the same pigment. These microdots are also directly associated with one of the baboon images (Fig. 5.22).

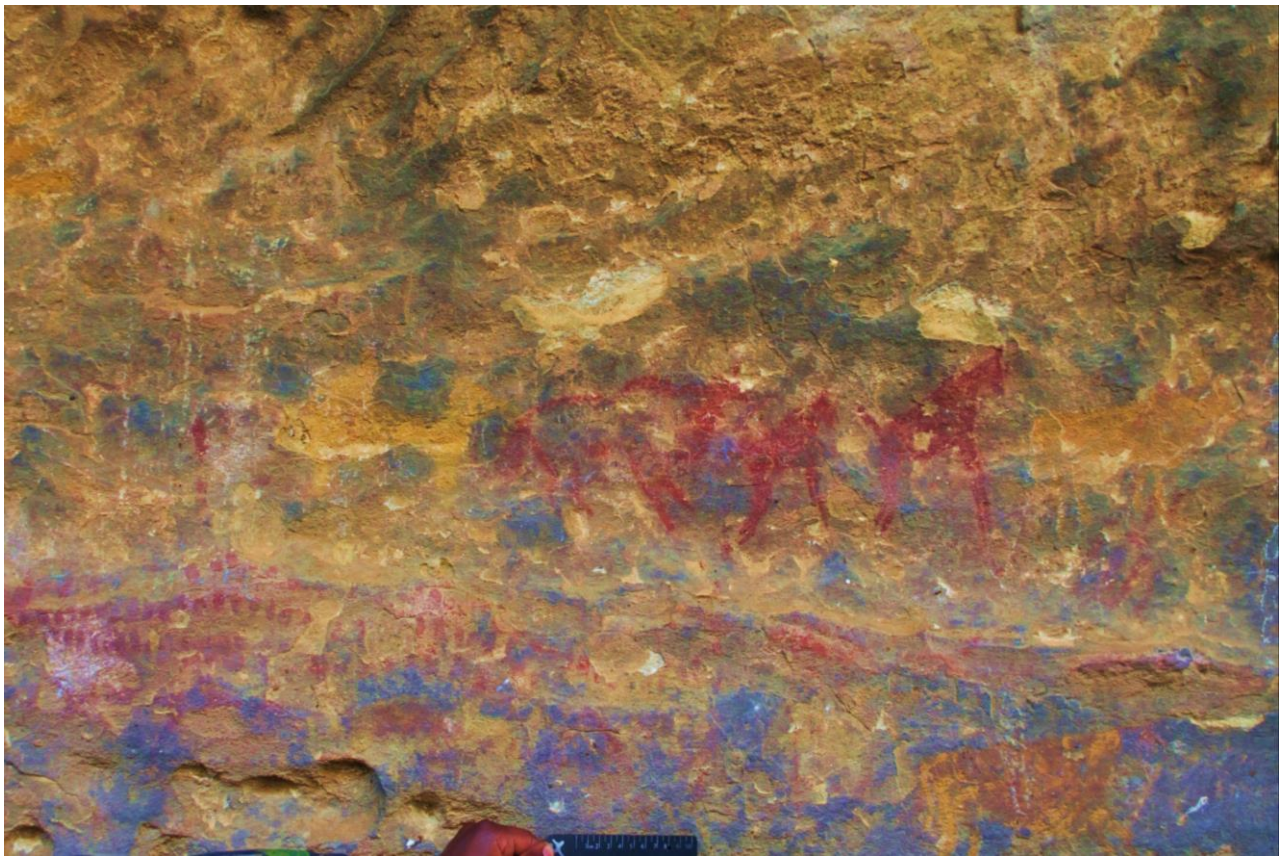


Figure 5.22: Baboons at DWK2, with finger dots and microdots in a similar pigment. Enhanced with DStretch. Photo taken by author.

5.2.3.3 Zoomorphic figures and other animals

Antelope and baboons are not the only animal figures painted in the KLSA. There are some animal figures of unidentifiable species at BOS8, WVL3 (possibly domesticates) and DWK2. Other animal

figures painted in the KLSA are a giraffe and a warthog or bush pig painted at WVL3 (Fig. 5.11; the only images at this site) and possibly an anteater at LRC1. A jackal is also painted at LRC1 (Fig. 5.33). A lot of the other species, especially at DWK2, are difficult to determine, due to preservation and the crude manner in which they are painted.

In addition to these animal figures, there are a few zoomorphic figures painted in the KLSA. At DWK2, there are at least four such images, all painted in yellow pigment. One of these has feline features, but cannot entirely be identified as a particular animal (Fig. 5.17 above). Another zoomorphic figure at DWK2, painted with the feline-like figure, is an animal with a bovid body but three lines (necks?) in place of a head (Fig. 5.17). On the same panel at DWK2, are indeterminate, rough brush-painted animal figures in yellow and brown pigment (e.g. Fig. 5.23). The yellow figures are sometimes superimposed on the brown-pigment figures.



Figure 5.23: Indeterminate species painted at DWK2. Photo taken by author.

Apart from the zoomorphic figures at DWK2, there is a painted figure with horns and a bovid torso, but of indeterminate species, painted at BOS5 (Fig. 5.24). This figure is the only complete image at

BOS5, while remnants of red pigment can be seen in the rest of the site. It is also the only animal figure recorded in its vicinity (a separate portion of the farm Bosmanskrans), while sites within a few hundred metres have finger-painted crosses only (see Fig. 5.28).

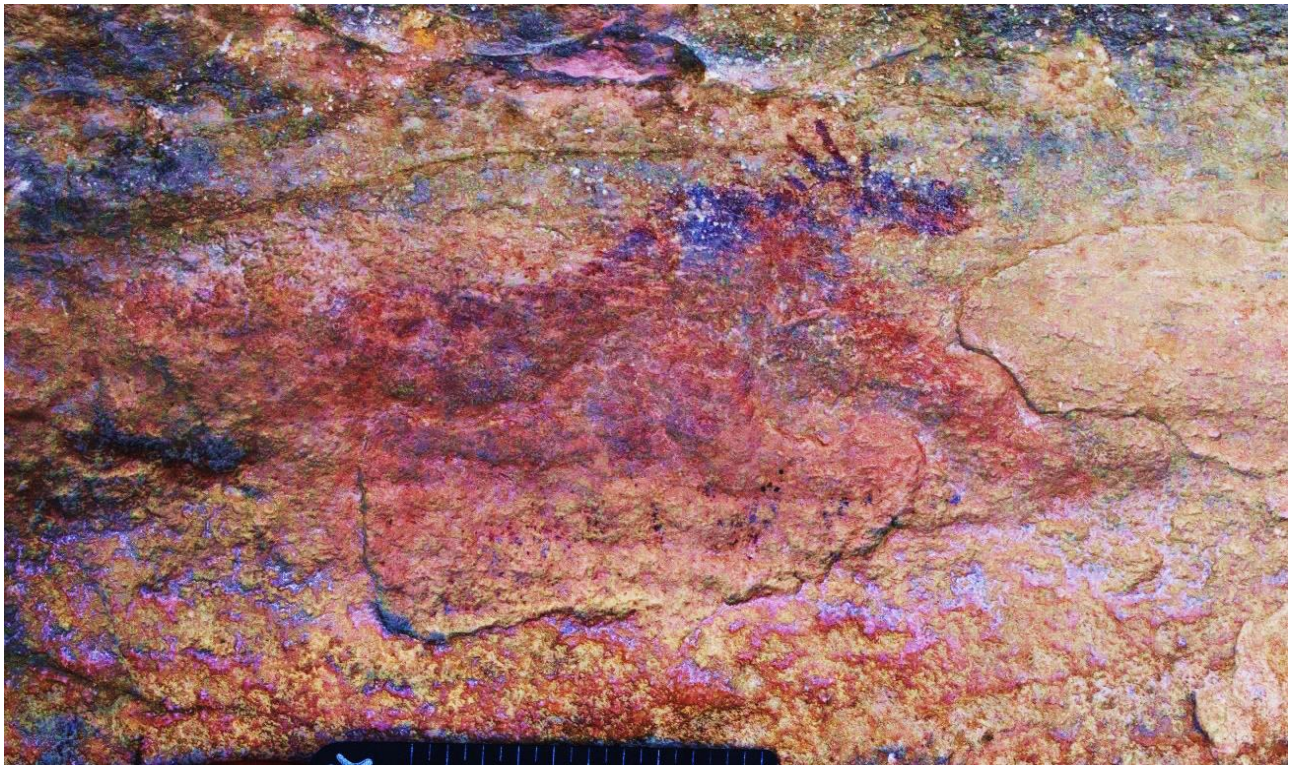


Figure 5.24: Indeterminate bovid figure with horns, at BOS5. Image contrasted. Photo: Stephen van den Heever.

4.2.3.4 'Geometrics'

The 'geometric' motifs are painted in yellow, orange, and various shades of red. The KLSA 'geometrics' include oval-shape designs, possible aprons and headdresses (see Hollmann 2013, 2014), and rarely, rayed circles and concentric circles. In addition to these, there are other idiosyncratic abstract symbols, particularly at DWK1. These include a finger-painted motif that looks like a human figure, vertical lines surrounded by dots, and other indescribable symbols (Fig. 5.25). Interestingly, some of these 'geometrics' are painted in thick and fine brush techniques. This is a unique combination that has not, to the best of my knowledge, been observed anywhere else in South Africa. Apart from DWK 1, 'geometrics' and imagery associated with them also occur at the sites DWK2, BOS3, BOS4, BOS6 and BOS7. Paintings associated with 'geometric' rock art in the KLSA

include finger dots, microdots, finger smears or strokes, as well as finger-painted crosses. I describe these separately because, apart from co-occurrence at DWK1, they are often painted in isolation.



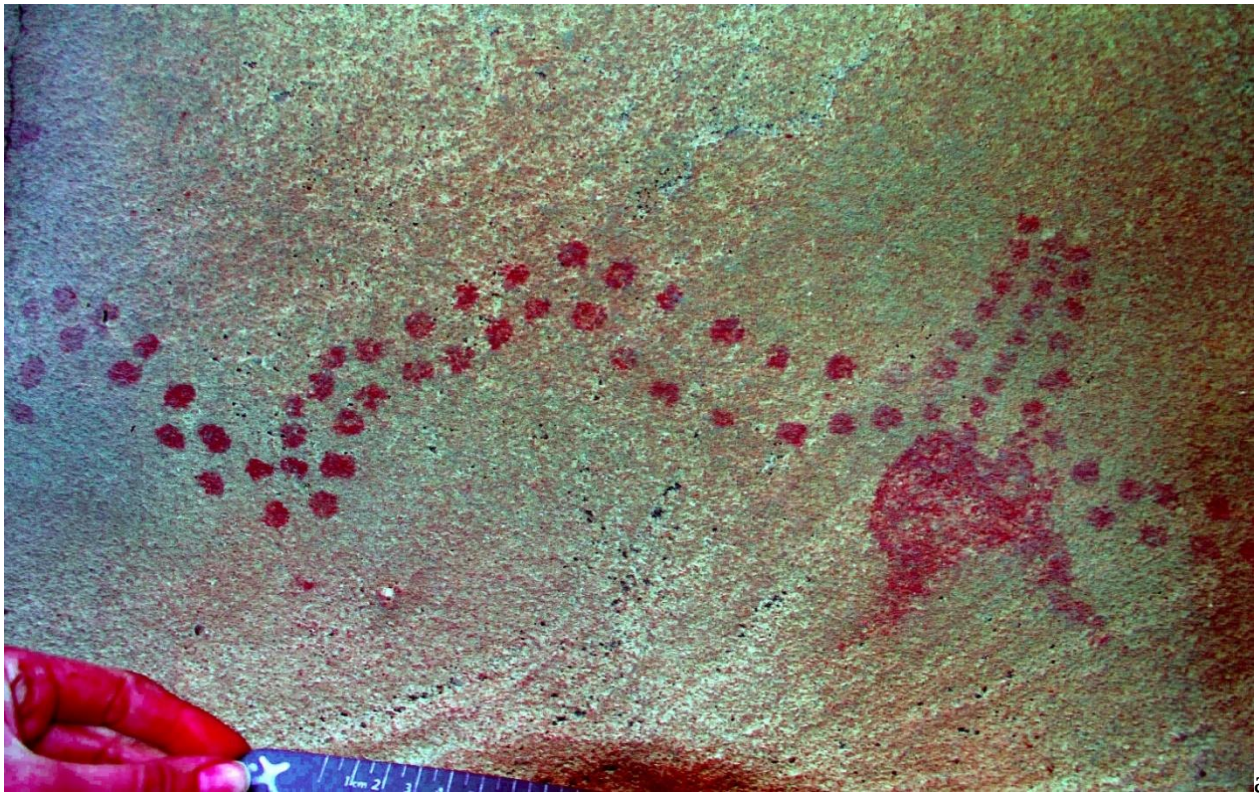
Figure 5.25: Brush-painted ‘geometrics’ at DWK1 (above photo) and DWK2 (below). The image below is enhanced with DStretch. Photos taken by author.

5.2.3.5 Dots, microdots and strokes

Finger strokes/smears are painted at DWK1 and BOS7, but they do not co-occur with any other paintings at the latter site (Fig. 5.27b). They are made in an orange pigment and do not co-occur with any other images. Finger dots, on the other hand, are painted at sites with both 'geometric' and figurative art, and in rows or chains (see Fig. 5.27a). In contrast, microdots often take an almost circular shape. However, in one instance at DWK1, microdots seem to have been used to paint what could possibly be a stretched hide. At WVL3, they are painted randomly, surrounding indeterminate figures (Fig. 5.26).



Figure 5.26: Microdots associated with indeterminate art. Photo: Stephen van den Heever.


a)


b)

Figure 5.27: a) Chains of dots at DWK1; b) finger strokes, at BOS7. Photos: Stephen van den Heever.

5.2.3.6 Crosses

Apart from the dots and smears, one of the interesting features of the KLSA 'geometric' art is a 'cross' motif, usually painted in chains or rows, always in the finger technique and always in red pigment (Fig. 5.28). This motif is found at three sites—DWK1, BOS3, BOS4 and BOS6. At DWK1 and BOS3, this cross motif co-occurs with painted hollows (see 5.2.4.2 below for 'interaction with the rock face). Although there is, at this point, not much certainty with regards to meaning, the number of occurrences of this cross motif—consistently painted in a thick, red pigment—suggests that it was considered significant by its painters, and possibly related to a specific kind of ritual.



Figure 5.28: Finger-painted plus-sign crosses at BOS3 and BOS4. Photos: Stephen van den Heever.

5.2.3.7 Human and therianthropic figures

The least occurring type of image in the KLSA is that of human figures. But where they are painted, they almost always co-occur with therianthropes and other trance-related imagery (described below). Significantly, where human figures and therianthropes co-occur, they are always painted in the same pigment colour (red, and sometimes black). Human figures occur at only six of the KLSA sites, whereas therianthropes occur at 4. At FLR2, there is only one identifiable human figure, seemingly carrying a bow on its back; there are no therianthropes at this site. This is the only site where a sole human figure is identifiable. At LRC1, there are two human figures, crudely painted in a coarse, red pigment. One of these human figures appears to be carrying an object that resembles a staff in one hand (Fig. 5.29). These human figures at LRC1 co-occur with one therianthrope, with bird-like features, also crudely painted in a coarse, red pigment.

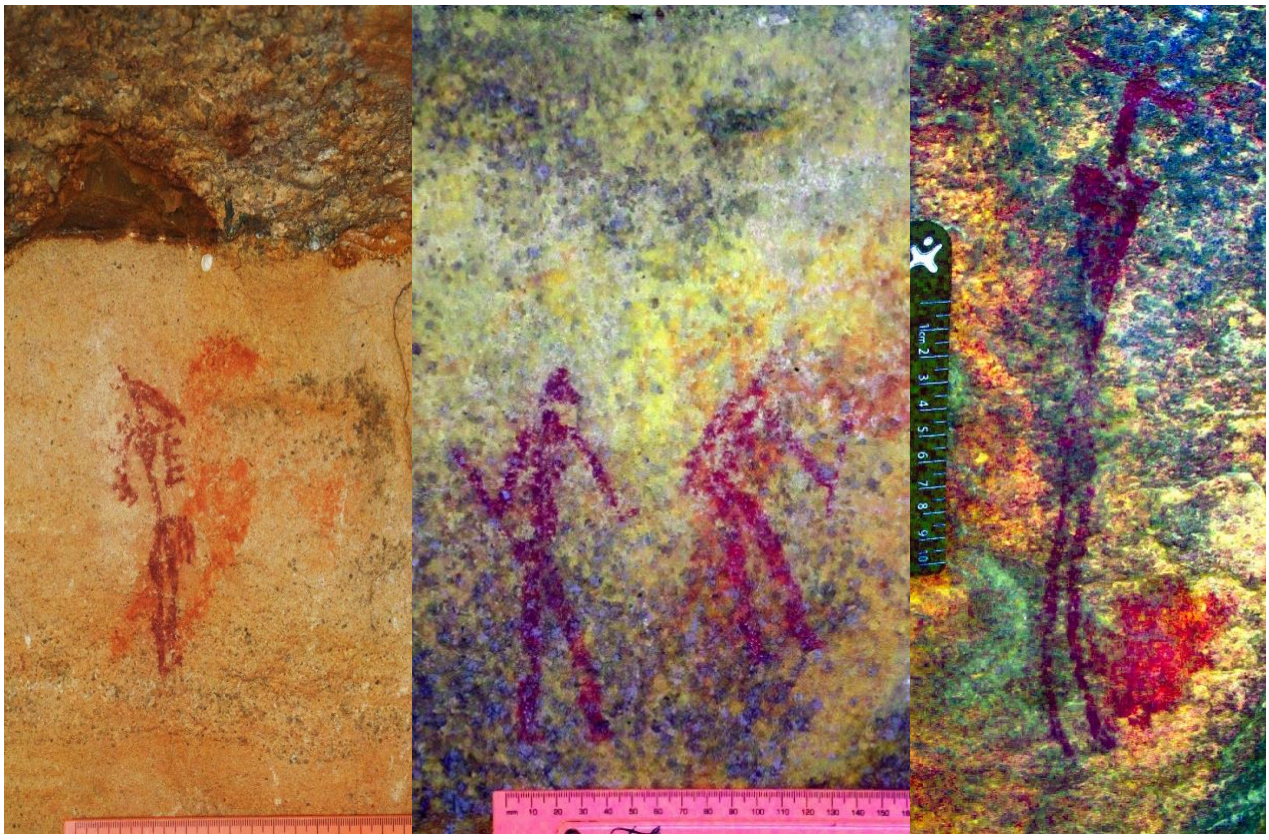


Figure 5.29: Human (in the centre) and therianthropic figures (left and right). Image on the right enhanced with DStretch. Photos: Stephen van den Heever.

Apart from LRC1, bird-like therianthropes, which seem to be a common feature of KLSA rock art (Steyn 1994) are also identifiable at LRC4. The only other place that these bird-like therianthropic

figures have been identified, to the best of my knowledge, is further east, in eSwatini, at the Nsangwini shelter [Masson 2011 (first published in 1961)]. It is possible that the manner in which these therianthropes are painted, and images that co-occur with them, have a geographic span outside of the KLSA, and further east in Mpumalanga. Other therianthropes in the KLSA rock art have baboon and rhebok features, as can be seen in Figures 5.21 and 5.29 (see also Challis 2003 for rhebok in southern African rock art). These therianthropic figures are identifiable at LRC3 and LRC4. The other two sites where human figures and therianthropes occur, are LRC3, DWK2 and LRC4.

5.2.3.8 Possible dance/healing scenes

Although scenes of ritual and healing are uncommon in the KLSA rock art (as are they in most places) two scenes, painted at LRC4 and DWK2, can be identified as relating to trance performance (see Lewis-Williams 1992 for a discussion of ethnographic evidence related to trance and shamanism; see Chapter 6 for discussion of rock art and ritual). At LRC4, a number of human figures is depicted in a circle, seemingly in a dance (Fig. 5.30). Some of these human figures appear to have baboon tails and painted slightly bigger than the rest of the dancers. Painted at DWK2, on the other hand, are three human figures in a red pigment, with less emphasis on bodily and facial features. Two of these figures are standing upright, while the third one, in the middle, may be kneeling (Fig. 5.31). This central figure is smaller and may either be a child or a non-human figure. The other two figures on either side have their arms stretched forward (see Marshall 1969 for arms-forward posture) with three fingers on each hand. It is unclear whether these figures are human or therianthropic, but on this scene is painted in a panel of DWK2 that also has therianthropic figures.

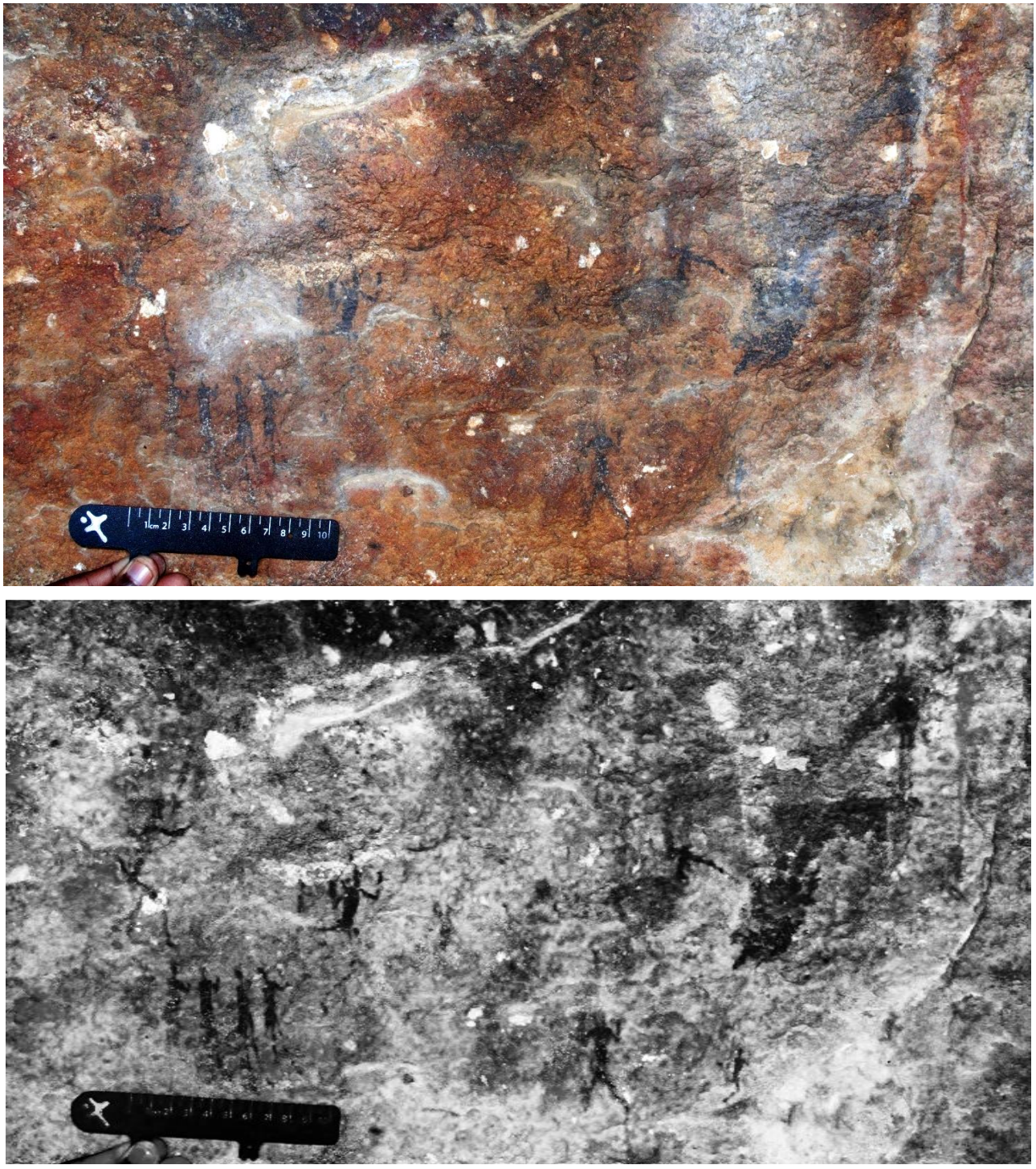


Figure 5.30: Trance dance scene at LRC4. Image below enhanced with DStretch. Original photo: Stephen van den Heever.



Figure 5.31: Painted scene at DWK2. Image below enhanced with DStretch. Photo taken by author.

5.2.3.9 Other

Other motifs painted in the KLSA include a wagon, at WVL3, and a possible human figure or therianthrope (?) with three legs at DWK2 (Fig. 5.32). This latter image is painted in the finger technique, in a coarse, chalky white pigment, which seems to have been mixed with a clay-like yellow. This yellow pigment used to paint eland and other images at this site is similar in texture to the white pigment used at WVL2 and WVL3.



Figure 5.32: Indeterminate white-pigment finger paintings associated with 'geometric' paintings. Photo taken by author.

5.2.4 Image placement

To assess image placement, I consider superpositioning and interaction with the rock face. These are key to understanding site significance, landscape perception and the motives for the continued use of painting space.

5.2.4.1 Layers and overlaps

At LRC1, a group of eland figures and some indistinguishable figures are placed consistently across the uppermost part of the shelter (about 1.5 m from the floor), from left to right (Fig. 5.33), and occasionally on the roof. Paintings on the roof include a possible domesticate, and some unclear smears of pigment. On the left-most end of the shelter, is a finely detailed polychrome eland, facing left, with its head washed out by salts on the rock. To the right of this eland is an indeterminate, earless, orange-brown antelope, with a grey outline, about 16 cm long. Below this figure, is a pinkish-red anteater (?), a faded eland, and a human figure, also in pinkish-red. Further right, is a stencil image of two human figures, crudely elaborated, similar to human figures at WVL3 (see below). Between this image and the next set of figures, is a step/crack on the rock, and the front part of an eland's body is hidden behind it. This may show interaction with the rock face (explained in more detail later in this chapter; see Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990 for interpretation). Superimposed on this eland is a yellow, smaller animal figure in a yellow pigment. To the right of these, is a similar red eland, about 17 cm in height, facing left.



Figure 5.33: Superimposition at LRC1. Notice the differences in pigment colour. Photo: Stephen van den Heever.

In the right-most panel of the shelter, a faded polychrome eland is superimposed by a red jackal and at least three springbucks (Fig. 5.33). This eland is mostly faded; only its yellow body remains, about 40 cm in length. Also superimposed on this yellow eland is a part of one of six, miniature eland figures, painted in progression, above the yellow eland. Similar to the yellow eland, only the orange-brownish bodies of these miniature eland are still visible, though; the (most likely) white heads and legs have faded. To the right of all these is another equally large, headless eland, painted in orange-brownish pigment, facing towards the images on the left (Fig. 5.33). Below all these is another yellow antelope, two monochrome red human figures, carrying sticks (or possibly bows). One of these human figures is in superposition with an additional faded (orange-brownish) polychrome eland. This eland, however, is facing right, and seems to be isolated from the scene above it.

It is not the faded head polychrome eland figures, however, that make this panel most interesting (these are clearly a preference); rather, it is two dark red figures, painted at the far-right end of the shelter—in a thick and coarse pigment—which appear to be a later addition, because they are painted over the faded eland figures. The first of these two dark red figures is a therianthrope, which is almost entirely bird, except for an upright human torso. Similarly painted in dark red and thick pigment, and superimposed on the faded eland, is a red hartebeest (Fig. 5.34). This red hartebeest, the therianthrope, the human figures carrying sticks, and the jackal, seem to be part of a layer that was added to the shelter later than all the other images (see Fig. 5.33).



Figure 5.34: Monochrome red hartebeest, painted over faded eland. Photo: Stephen van den Heever.

This layer of coarse, dark-red images is in contrast with the fine and thin pigments that dominate the shelter. Despite being cruder, their subject matter also differs; whereas the paintings made in thin, watery pigments are of antelope (mostly eland), the subject matter of the cruder, thicker, dark-red paintings includes human and therianthropic figures. The red hartebeest, which is painted nowhere else in the KLSA, is the only other antelope painted in a thick and coarse, dark red pigment at LRC1. These dark-red paintings are the only monochrome paintings at LRC1, and are all superimposed over earlier layers. There are no instances of superposition over or between these dark-red paintings. These crude and thickly painted, dark-red monochromes of humans, animals and therianthropes also appear at the sites LRC3 and LRC4, but placement differs.

Importantly, at LRC3 and LRC4, these thick and dark-red paintings—some of which have turned black due to weathering—are painted separately from the rest of the paintings, and are considerably miniaturised as compared to other images at these sites (Fig. 5.35). At LRC3, these miniature figures include baboons, which are the second-most dominant subject at that site, after eland. At LRC4, a possible trance-dance scene (see Lewis-Williams 1987, 1994; Lewis-Williams *et al.* 2000; Hollmann

2005 and George 2013 for postures; Guenther 1975, 1999; Lee 1967; Marshall 1969 for ethnography) painted in black pigment is painted in this manner, and appears to be related to elongated therianthropic figures with rhebok heads that are painted at the left-most part of the shelter (Figs 5.21 & 5.29). Although cases of superposition do occur at these two sites, the kinds of imagery in the shelters appear to have been placed in parts of the panel strategically; images of baboons and therianthropes are not superimposed on any other images, although there is constant superposition between images of antelope. At the site LRC4, images of eland are painted in the middle section of the panel, while human, baboon and therianthropic figures (Figs 5.21 & 5.29) are painted beyond a step in the rock, which separates the two sections.

Painted in the left-most part of the LRC4 shelter, are dark red miniature animal figures of unidentifiable species, and two elongated human figures (seemingly therianthropic). One of these elongated figures, measuring about 15 cm, faces towards the miniature animal figures and seems to be interacting with them (Fig. 5.35). The other elongated figure faces the opposite direction, isolated from this interactive scene; this other elongated figure is twice as long, and its head resembles that of a rhebok, with long pointy ears and a slim head, similar to the therianthrope in Figure 5.21.

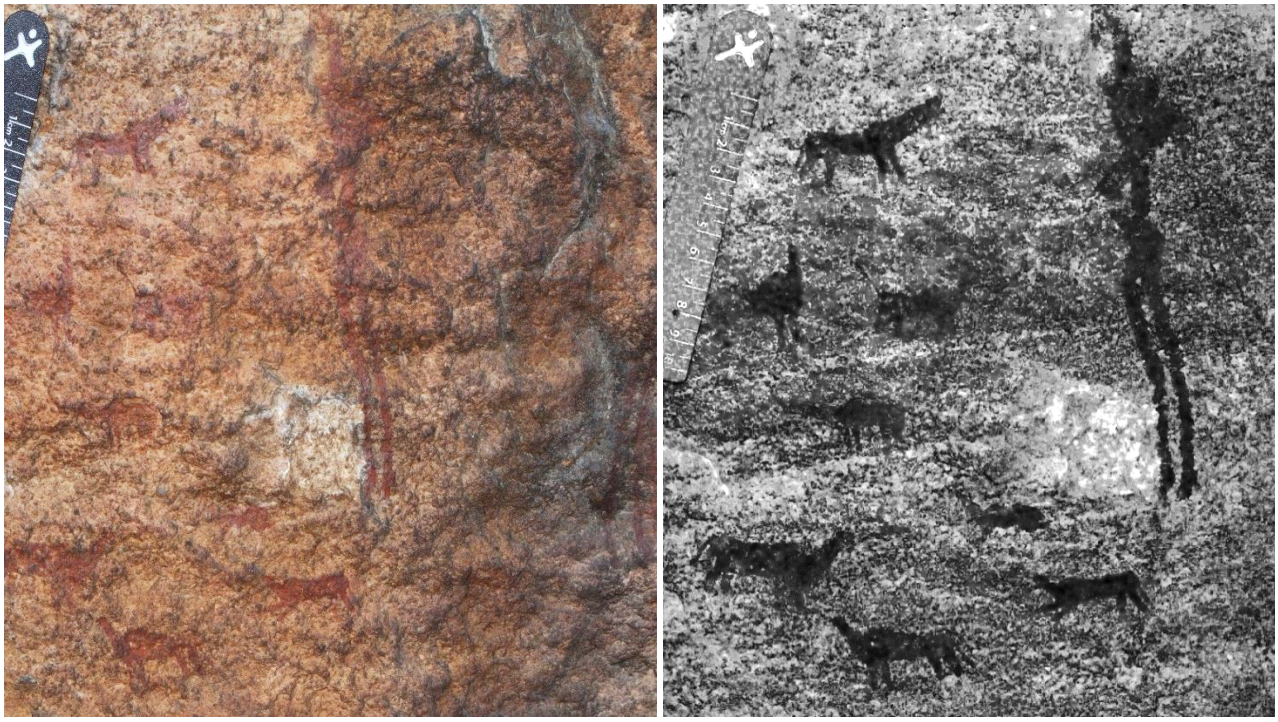


Figure 5.35: Elongated therianthropic figure painted with miniaturised animal figures. Image on the right enhanced with DStretch, and edited to black-and-white. Photo: Stephen van den Heever.

To the right of this elongated therianthropic figure, on a lower step on the rock, is a rhebok, measuring about 11 cm in length, also facing right (Fig. 5.21). Further right of this rhebok is an orange eland, facing left. To the right of this eland, beyond a crack on the rock, is a depiction of at least seven human figures, painted in a shiny black pigment, seemingly dancing and clapping in a circle. One of these figures, painted above the clapping group, has a baboon's tail and is painted slightly larger than the rest (Fig. 5.36).

Next to this circle is a figure with a long bird's beak (possibly stork), almost similar to the therianthrope at LRC1. Next to this bird figure is an indeterminate blob of pigment, also in black, and a finger dot to the right of this blob. Below the bird figure are two more human figures, facing towards the circle of clapping figures. These figures are all painted in black, although, considering the weathering on the rock, they might have been originally painted in red (see Fig. 5.29). Indeed, about 50 cm to the right, are similarly miniature animal figures, painted in a red pigment, but slightly lighter than the dark red rhebok therianthropes. Seemingly, the red pigment used for these paintings darkens after long exposure to water. On this section of the panel, are more elongated human figures, interacting with miniature animal figures, some of which are rhebok. The imagery on this panel is certainly mysterious, but undoubtedly shamanistic. The placement of these images separately from others at the site may suggest that they were painted later, and possibly for a different purpose.

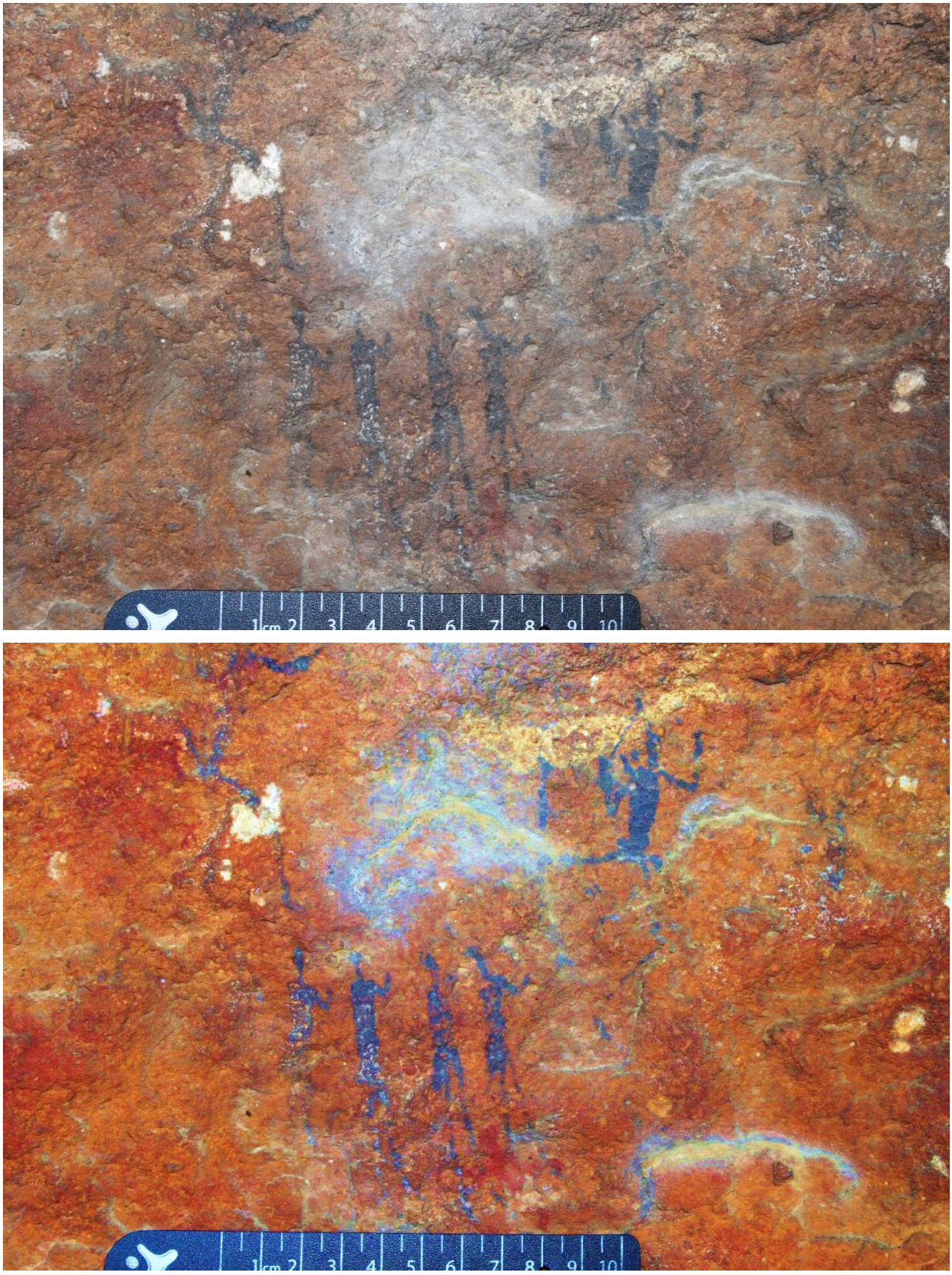


Figure 5.36: Clapping figures at LRC4. Image below enhanced by changing colour saturation. Photo: Stephen van den Heever.

Contrary to this image placement, at DWK1, all of the 'geometric' art is painted over (mostly) faded images of eland. There are also multiple overlaps between the 'geometric' paintings, with brush-painted 'geometrics' appearing to be relatively recent. At DWK1 and DWK2, fine-line images of eland co-occur with and are overlaid by finger-painted 'geometric' images. Overlaying these finger paintings are fine-line 'geometrics', which are mostly restricted to DWK1, although there are some painted at DWK2 as well. Significantly, at DWK2, there are some cases of superpositioning where animal figures are painted over fine-line 'geometrics' (Fig. 5.24). These images that are painted over fine-line 'geometrics' differ significantly from the fine-line figurative art that characterises this region in that they are painted in coarse pigments (of various colours, but mostly yellow) and in the rough-brush technique. As such, there are appear to be four discernible layers of paintings at the sites DWK1 and DWK2. The earliest of these layers is comprised of fine-line figurative images; the second, finger-painted 'geometric' images. The third layer comprises fine-line 'geometrics', and the fourth layer is rough-brush figurative images. The differences in time depth between these layers is not discernible, and some of the layers may be coeval. There is not enough superposition between the fine-line 'geometrics' and the rough-brush paintings to tell whether the latter occurs later or if they are contemporaneous. However, for reasons I discuss in the final chapter, I suggest that these rough-brush, coarse pigment paintings were among the most recently painted images in the KLSA.

5.2.4.2 Interaction with the rock face

Another distinctive feature of KLSA rock art is image interaction with the rock face (see Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990 for examples in other contexts). The rock surface on which the rock art is painted seems to have been considered a significant part of the painted imagery. This is most interesting for the 'geometric' rock art, which is considered by some to have been of a different worldview from that of hunter-gatherers (e.g. Smith & Ouzman 2004, although see Morris 1988, 2002, 2012; Hollmann 2007, 2013, 2014). Examples of 'geometric' rock art interacting with the rock face are at DWK1, BOS3 and BOS4. Here, hollows in the rock (usually in a series of 3) are filled with red pigment, and some sort of image is produced from this (see Fig. 5.37). The painted hollows are associated with the cross motif (Fig. 5.28), as the two co-occur at three sites (DWK1, BOS3 and BOS4). Interaction with the rock face is also seen at other sites, particularly at LRC1, LRC3 and DWK2.



Figure 5.37: Painted hollows as indication of interaction with the rock face. Photos taken by author.

This interaction with the rock face, which is not restricted to any particular 'style' of rock art in the KLSA, suggests that the paintings at these sites were made by people who conceived rock shelters as potent spaces and the surface painted on as an interactive part of the imagery (see Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990: 5). We know as much about forager rock art that it sometimes interacts with cracks and depressions on the rock face, and that this meant the rock surface was viewed as a medium through which shamans could access the spirit world (see Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990). Interestingly, rock art-rock face interaction is an aspect shared by all kinds of rock art images in the

KLSA, including ‘geometric’ paintings (Fig. 5.37). This is significant because, as Morris (1988, 2002, 2012) and Hollmann (2007, 2013, 2014) have shown, the makers of ‘geometric’ art did attach some meaning to the places in which they placed rock art. Morris (2002, 2012: 188) with a great ‘the rain’s magic power’, which is manifested in the form of a great watersnake (see also Lewis-Williams 2000: 273; Hollmann 2007, 2013). Similarly, Hollmann (2007, 2013, citing Silberbauer 1963 for ethnography) argues that, in the Gestoptefontein-Driekuil complex in the North-West Province, wonderstone outcrops on which markings associated with ‘Khoe-San’ girls’ puberty rites occur, were viewed by the ‘Khoe-San’ as the body of a great water snake. Therefore, whereas figurative art and ‘geometric’ art may differ in ‘style’ and belong to distinct ‘traditions’, their co-occurrence at certain sites may suggest that they were authored by people with similar beliefs; such similarities were founded on the significance given to those particular places. This was possibly the case in the KLSA, especially at sites such as DWK1.

Whoever the authors of the KLSA rock art were, what is important to note here, is that the painted images’ apparent interaction with the rock face in which they were placed is key to assessing why painted sites were re-used over (possibly) long periods. An interpretation in this direction counters the relevance of authorship and ultimately ethnic or ‘cultural’ explanations. Whilst ‘interaction of the rock face’ is predominantly an aspect of rock art in the south-eastern region of South Africa, and makes part of the cosmology of foragers communities in that region, it also compliments Tlou-tle and /Xam ethnographies, in addition to other sources, as both these ethnographies offer insight into how past communities regarded certain places as potent (see Potgieter 1955: 31; Deacon 1988; Morris 2002). If, then, rock surfaces and the landscape where paintings occur in the KLSA were given this potent regard, it is also likely that painting space was chosen not at random, but according to how potent it would have been regarded by the painters (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990; see Deacon 1988; Zubieta 2014 for rock art and sacred landscapes).

5.3 Some points to consider

Painted sites in the KLSA appear to have been selected carefully over others; they are concentrated in certain locations. This non-random distribution of sites indicates either land restriction or preference. Different factors, possibly from within the painters’ worldview, likely influenced site choice. Significantly, most of these sites are located near water, an element that formed part of Tlou-tle ritual life (see Chapter 3). One of these sites, which is near a waterfall, is located in a place that is

associated with the burial of a powerful Tlou-tle rain maker (Dewald Steyn snr., cited by Potgieter 1955: 4; Figs 5.15 & 5.16). We know from the Tlou-tle ethnography (Chapter 3) that huts, too, were built near water. Therefore, the spatiality of KLSA rock art is not separate from the social life of forager peoples in this region. Barceló (2002: 237) states that, "The social and the spatial are inseparable; the spatial form of the social has its effects on its subsequent social actions" (also see Bourdieu 1971; Lefebvre 1974: 68; Davison 1988; Soja 1989; David & Thomas 2008). Hence, given the interplay between spatial and social, this spatial distribution of KLSA rock art can be linked to the social history of the KLSA. That rock art in the KLSA occurs in locations which can be tied to the worldview of BaTwa in this region and throughout southern Africa demonstrates the appropriateness of a landscape approach to this study (Smith & Blundell 2004).

By now the reader will have noticed that the sites I have described in this chapter are all different; there is no specific type of imagery that represents what a rock art site in the KLSA looks like. This variability challenges the way rock art imagery is usually classified in southern Africa, and how it has been categorised previously in the KLSA. Given this complexity and variability, it is clear that the rock paintings of the KLSA can offer more insight into the Mpumalanga past than has been previously thought. It is important to note that, while studying rock art allows us some insight into the minds of the painters, as Mallen (2008) points out in the epigraph to this chapter, we ought to not make any assumptions without supporting evidence. One particular assumption that archaeologists should avoid, is that of material culture variability as always representing a divided past, in which material culture was actively used to draw boundaries between communities—a cultural statement, it is assumed. This is a problematic notion, which this study redresses, in part.

Using the attributes detailed above, I have described the KLSA rock paintings, without using ethnic labels, but only attributes inherent in the paintings themselves. These attributes are sufficient to recognise similarities and differences, from a painter's perspective. Most significantly, pigment colour, texture, subject matter, and image placement, as individual attributes, are more capable of diagnosing intra-site variability, than rock art 'traditions' and 'stylistic' categories do.

Chapter Six:
Connecting the dots: rock art, ritual and the sacred space

This dissertation conceptualises diversity, change and continuity to offer explanations for rock art variability, as well as site use and re-use in the KLSA, in central Mpumalanga. This observation comes from a close consideration of the spatial and temporal relationships between diverse kinds of rock paintings in this region. Critical to the discussion of diversity and change, and continuity, is an avoidance of essentialist notions of the archaeological past, which revolve around 'ethnicity' and 'culture'—concepts which can problematically view society as static (Marks 2017; see Chapter 2). Rather than ethnicity and 'culture' being 'reified' and treated as explanative aspects by themselves (Morris 2002, cited in Hollmann 2007: 128; see also Berrocal & Garcia 2007: 678, citing Margaret Conkey 1990, 2006 and Martin Wobst 1999), I suggest that an exploration of the KLSA rock art should focus on the social dynamics in which the art was involved, and be viewed as a product of a regional worldview, which intersects and correlates with the broader worldviews of indigenous peoples in southern Africa (see Chapter 3 for ethnographic accounts).

As such, the KLSA rock art can also be used to explain the processes by which different 'ways of doing' met and were eventually entwined. As Alfred Gell (1998: 4, cited in Gosden 1999: 119) has stated, "in so far as anthropology has a specific subject matter at all, that subject-matter is "social relationships" – relationships between participants in social systems of various kinds". Gell (1998) further argues that art should not be viewed as an element of culture, but rather as a mediator that is effective in maintaining and altering social relations (Gosden 1999: 119). In this sense, it is not only the differences in the rock art that are considered, but also the similarities. A more tenable approach, then, is to consider diversity and change to have been influenced by *internal* social relations (Lewontin 1972; Marks 2017), in which differences in 'ways of doing' are recognised as local developments (Smith 1998: 217), before outside influences are considered (*cf*. Pearce 2008).

In following this line of reasoning, I acknowledge that there are various ways in which 'change' can come about, but reject a notion of change as only being a consequence of outside influence (*cf*. Pearce 2008). It is this kind of perspective—one that views material culture as an adaptable social phenomenon capable of facilitating social relationships between individuals, between communities,

and between people and places—that I suggest is more suitable for studying the KLSA rock paintings. This is because "interaction between different communities, and communities and places, can result in locale-specific interpretations of widely held beliefs about landscapes and sites" (Schoeman 2019: 312). This social approach to rock art variability ties in well with the postcolonial framework that I outlined in the opening chapters. I hence focus this discussion on the thought processes involved in the making and use of the KLSA rock art, and in the continuity of site use. I also consider how these thought processes relate to the wider belief systems of indigenous, rock-art-producing communities in southern Africa.

6.1 KLSA rock art in its temporal context

I alluded in previous chapters that temporal difference may be one explanation for rock art variability in the KLSA. It is difficult to talk about change when we know little about the temporal context of the rock art. But, as highlighted in Chapter Two, dating rock art is no easy task. The difficulty in determining precisely the amount of time it would have taken for one image to be painted over another, casts doubt on whether we can rely on 'stylistic' sequences to determine rock art chronology (Pearce 2002). Most challenging to rock art sequences is that they are based on the premise that 'styles' are sequential, which disregards the possibility that they may be coeval (see Pearce 2006). I suggest that, in order to determine temporal differences between diverse kinds of rock art in the KLSA, changes in the art should be considered to be indicative of changes in the socio-historical context. In this way, it is possible to detect change *and continuity* in the *practice* of rock painting rather than the micro aspects of it. In Chapter Three, I employed archaeological, historical, ethnographic, linguistic, genetic and rock art evidence to give insight into the social history of the KLSA, from as early as the mid-Holocene to the middle of the twentieth century. These multiple sources are helpful in distinguishing 'phases' in the socio-historical context of the KLSA. Of these sources, the rock art is the most significant, because subject matter is capable of showing change.

The processes by which the variability of KLSA rock art materialised are explicable, partly, through the documented history of the region. The enigmatic nature of rock art and the lack of direct knowledge about its production, however, mean that interpretation remains largely speculative. Nevertheless, based on the historical context of the KLSA, which I have highlighted in Chapter Three, and the rock art images themselves, I suggest that change is one of these processes, and aspects of it include contact with 'newcomers' (see Whitelaw & Hall 2016 for an anthropological model of contact

between diverse communities). These ‘newcomers’ were European settlers and multiple groups of BaTwa from the south-eastern mountains, as suggested by historical records (see Prins 1999) and also painters of ‘geometric’ rock art, who were possibly Khoekhoen herders at first arrival (Smith & Ouzman 2004). I suggest that changes in the symbols used and manner in which they were depicted were responses to these changes in the social landscape.

Suggestive images, or ‘contact images’ in the KLSA include ‘geometric’ and colonial-era imagery. The ‘geometric’ art could have been made any time in the last two millennia (Smith and Ouzman 2004), and a specific timeframe cannot be inferred without direct dates, or at least an excavated sequence. The colonial-era images, on the other hand, provide a more positive clue. Colonial-era images in the KLSA are painted in a coarse, white pigment. White pigment in rock art has been argued by some scholars to be of recent age (e.g. Mazel & Watchman 1997; Blundell 2004), although others have shown that this is not always the case (e.g. Bonneau *et al.* 2011, 2012, 2014; Mullen 2018). For the KLSA rock art, nonetheless, the recency of white pigment is supported by the subject matter. A scene painted in the main panel of WVL3—in the same colour and technique—which includes a wagon (Fig. 5.12) suggests that these images were made in the colonial period. The painted wagon painted also suggests a changing socio-historical context, consistent with the historical insight presented in Chapter Three; it is difficult to pin the painters of this imagery to an ethnic or subsistence label. This non-conformity to strict labels is consistent with the societal make-up of nineteenth century painting communities in much of southern Africa (e.g. Campbell 1986, 1987; Hall & Mazel 2005; Mallen 2008; Challis 2012; Sinclair-Thomson 2020).

Although we cannot be certain of the exact chronology of the art, we do know that European-descent farmers started moving into this region towards the middle of the nineteenth century (Potgieter 1955: 3, citing Opperman 1948). This gives a clue as to when in the colonial period the wagon at WVL3 could have been painted. Pastor Filter, who transported BaTwa into Mpumalanga on several occasions, around the year 1880, used an ox wagon (Prins 1999: 52), meaning these were already in use by this time. Another account, from Mr !Olo (detailed in Chapter 3), points to a significant use of wagons shortly after 1880 (Potgieter 1955: 4–5). Importantly, although hunter-gatherers could have obtained wagons from African farmers, such as those at Botshabelo in the present-day town of Middelburg in Mpumalanga (Sandeman 1880; Naud 2000; Booth 2017; Swanepoel 2018), these accounts suggest that wagons were widely used by “the white people” (Potgieter 1955: 4–5). All this

historical evidence indicates that wagons held some significance in the late nineteenth century, around 1880, a time where BaTwa in the KLSA had been reduced to farm labour. Whatever the reasons for making this art may have been (see Hall & Mazel 2005 for paintings of wagons made by Khoe-San peoples in the Cape), it indicates contact with people of European descent.

Significantly, the multiple groups of BaTwa who came into the KLSA in the late nineteenth century were from the south-eastern mountains, a region with a longer history of contact with Europeans than the former Transvaal (see Wright 1971). These newcomer groups of BaTwa, some of whom were previously stock raiders (Prins 1999: 52), were possibly made up of people of diverse origins (see Challis 2008, 2012 for stock raiding and the creation of new communities in the south-eastern mountains). The arrival of these newcomers does not precede, according to historical writings, the arrival of European settlers (see Prins 1999). Therefore, based on this historical insight, I suggest that the painted wagon and associated imagery at WVL3, and their possible contemporaries (BOS8, WVL2, because they are within a short walking distance to each other, and painted in a similar white and coarse pigment, in a finger-and-rough-brush technique), were made in the period after AD 1850, by a small community of BaTwa, who had become farm labourers during this time. These were the last paintings to be made in the KLSA, made by people who had transitioned from being independent hunter-gatherers to farm labourers, restricted to farm boundaries. The identity of these painters was possibly not ‘BaTwa’ in the essentialist sense that they were made out to be by physical anthropologists (e.g. Potgieter 1955; Toerien 1958, 1961), but of a people with diverse origins, and made up of multiple, complex social processes (Bhabha 1994; see Hall & Mazel 2005 for similar art in the former Cape colony).

Apart from the white-painted wagon, there is historical evidence to suggest that rock painting was still a continuing practice in the KLSA in the nineteenth century. Recall that MSR1 is one of two painted sites on the farm Klipfontein, whereas multiple other sites on this farm have archaeological materials but no rock art. These archaeological materials, which include a scraper at one site and clay pots at multiple other sites, do not narrow the occupation of the research area beyond a broad sweep from Later Stone Age times, to the last two millennia. We are more secure about occupation in the more recent past, where we know of at least one unnamed band of hunter-gatherers who occupied this shelter in the late nineteenth century, and were supposedly killed by emaSwati (Prins 1999). It is unclear whether the rain-doctor said to be buried on this farm (Dewald Steyn snr., cited by Potgieter

1955: 4) was killed in the skirmish, or whether he even lived on this farm, but his presence in the vicinity of Klipfontein in the nineteenth century, and that of the people who occupied MSR1, adds to the possibility that the rock art at this location was painted in historic times.

On the farm Florence as well, historical records show that multiple groups of foragers were brought there by the owner, in the late nineteenth century (Sanders 2013: 20); it is from these groups that the linguistic data was collected (e.g. Lanham & Hallowes 1956a, b), almost a century later. Potgieter (1955: 20) notes that the BaTwa used rock shelters as residential spaces when the first European colonists arrived. Having done a survey at this location (see Chapter 4), there is one specific place on the farm Florence, that would have been habitable – the cliff line in which the sites FLR1-6 are located. Apart from the rock art, that forager peoples were once present here is evidenced by scatters of lithic material recognisable on the ground at and near some of the sites (see Chapter 5). Therefore, whereas there are no direct dates to link the art painted at the Florence sites with the multiple groups of BaTwa (see Lanham & Hallowes 1956a, b) who resided on this farm in the nineteenth century, it seems implausible that the paintings would have gone unnoticed, if not painted by them.

Moreover, considering the ideological similarities and continuities between foragers communities across southern Africa (see Lewis-Williams 1984), the paintings would have been intelligible to BaTwa who lived on this farm in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the south-eastern mountains, BaTwa who lived amongst the amaMpondo performed dancing rituals in painted shelters, in which they drew potency from the paintings; touching and/or facing the rock paintings during dance was also considered a way to draw spiritual potency from the art (Lewis-Williams 1986, 1994). In the SLCA, in northern South Africa, historic BaTwa-descendant communities clapped in painted shelters for rain-making rituals (Schoeman 2019: 317, citing Van der Ryst 1998, 2003). These accounts suggest that, even when BaTwa descendants do not carry on the ritual of painting, the paintings continue to play a significant role in ritual activities, because of the potency which they possess. The continued presence of BaTwa and BaTwa-descendant communities in the KLSA suggests a persistence in the BaTwa way of doing things; subject matter such as that at WVL3 suggests that image making was one of these persisting aspects of BaTwa life and thought. I consider the theory behind continuities in the relationships between painted sites and BaTwa peoples below.

6.2 Sacred spaces

In addition to temporal differences, the variability of rock paintings in the KLSA is linked to social processes which are related to ritual practice, and are dependent on the *location* in which rituals were performed (see Barceló 2002). Consequently, they explain site choice and the reasons for site re-use/continued use over time (see Schoeman 2019 for ritual and site re-use in northern South Africa). In Chapter Five, I noted that some of the art may indicate ideological continuities (Lewis-Williams 1984) or 'transference of ideas' (Schoeman 2019: 321) between painters with different ways of making images and between generations of rock painters in the KLSA. It is likely that the painters of KLSA rock art considered the rock face as offering access to an alternate realm (Lewis-Williams 1981; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990; see Morris 2002, 2012 and Hollmann 2007, 2013 for Khoekhoen/Khoe-San conceptions of landscape). If, then, the rock surface was given this potent regard, it is also likely that painting space was chosen not at random, but according to how potent it would have been regarded (Deacon 1988; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990; Morris 2002, 2012; Hollmann 2007, 2013).

The concepts of *attraction* and *accumulation* explain the causal relationship between ritual and the sacred space, between rock art and ritual, and then between rock art and the sacred space (that is, 'place', as per Deacon 1988) in the KLSA. Based on the premise that the landscape context in which rock art is located, is crucial in understanding the meanings and uses of rock art (Mabulla 2014: 44; also see Morris 2002, 2012; Smith & Blundell 2004; David & Thomas 2008), I argue that to understand the decision-making behind making rock art at certain locations that were preferred over others (that is, understand what factors may have led temporally separated communities to be attracted to the same spaces), we need to understand the significance of the place in which the art was made (Morris 2002, 2012: 118), and the beliefs that may have been associated with those places. The questions around this complexity may be answered through a demonstrable link between informed sources and the placement of rock art in the landscape and on the rock surface (Smith & Blundell 2004: 259).

6.2.1 Ritual and the sacred space

One of archaeology's most important contributions to studying the past is the recognition of a symbolic link between 'place' and ritual activities, which are evidenced by archaeological materials. Researchers hold that material culture expresses past people's interactions with sacred places (e.g.

Deacon 1988; Morris 2012; Schoeman 2019), and therefore such places carried cultural significance (Forssman & Louw 2018). This holds true for many southern African communities—hunter-gatherers, herders and farmers—but especially for hunter-gatherers, whose ancestral ties to the land go deeper than all others, and whose rock art is distributed across all parts of southern Africa (see Schoeman 2019 for forager, farmer and herder beliefs about 'places'). In many cases, rock art represents the tangible traces of intangible ritual activities that were practised on the southern African landscape for millennia (see Witelson 2019 for rock art and ritual performance; see Conkey 1980: 610, 612 for a contradictory view to rock art and intangible rituals). The spaces in which such activities were practised, were not merely vessels waiting to be filled with meaning, but also influenced the production and reproduction of rock art (Deacon 1988; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004, 2009; Lewis-Williams 2010). Therefore, in an effort to reimagine the social context in which KLSA rock art was made, the significance of the landscape and the spaces in which these practices were performed, must not be ignored.

Although mute on the practice of rock art, ethnography from this region (Potgieter 1955) hints to the significance of rocks and water sources as being implicated in the ritual activities of the Tlou-tle. The landscape perceptions of BaTwa in the KLSA are consistent with those of BaTwa peoples elsewhere in southern Africa. In addition to ethnography, written and oral sources show that water—specifically the pans and lakes that make the KLSA landscape unique—makes a significant part of the recent history of BaTwa peoples in this region (Potgieter 1955; Prins 1999; Amos Simelane, pers. comm. 2020). These lines of evidence suggest that, "A landscape is not a natural feature of the environment but a synthetic space, a man-made system functioning and evolving not according to natural laws but to serve a community" [David & Thomas 2008: 88, citing Jackson (1986: 68)]. This could explain the placement of rock art near waterfalls at MSR6, on the farm Klipfontein (Fig. 5.16) and DWK2 on the farm De Wittekrans (Fig. 5.14). The rain-doctor who was buried in the vicinity of MSR6 possibly engaged with the art at this site, perhaps even painted it. It is significant that the locations of rock art sites overlap with places that the Tlou-tle considered powerful. This overlap, moreover, challenges a spatial-social/nature-culture dichotomy in the conception of 'space'.

From the content of previous chapters, it may be apparent that I here consider 'space' or 'location' not only in spatial terms, but also in social and temporal terms (see Barceló 2002). Barceló (2002: 237) holds that:

> A pattern existing at one moment of time is the result of the operation of processes that have differential spatial impacts. In the simplest sense, patterns answer the question "where", processes answer the question "why".

I find that the question 'where' is simpler to answer, as this is only dependent on observation; it is the 'why' that is a more difficult question, a theoretical one at that, given the lack of direct accounts we have of the practice of making rock art in southern Africa (Deacon 1988; Witelson 2019; see Ross & Davidson 2006: 308 for Australian rock art). Nonetheless, the processes that are materially evident in the form of rock art at the sites, or locations, that I consider here, offer some insight into the reasons why such processes would have occurred.

One of the indicators of the complex social processes that occurred at the sites LRC1, LRC3, LRC4, DWK1 and DWK2 in the KLSA, is *accumulation*, which is evidenced by the superpositioning of diverse (in colour, content and/or technique) images. The overlapping of various images at sites in the KLSA shows diversity in 'ways of doing' (Smith 1998: 218), through time. The high concentration of rock paintings at these five sites means that some social action was concentrated in and around the sites (Barceló 2002). I suggest that ritual performance was this social action (Hollmann 2007, 2013; Witelson 2019). For Barceló (2002), this 'concentration' is linked to *attraction*; that is, the re-occurrence of similar social actions, such as ritual activities, at a specific place, over time. Researchers are aware of the occurrence of such processes (see Morris 2002, 2012; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2009: 42–43; Lewis-Williams 2010: 5). For example, Grant McCall (2010: 777) notes:

> The palimpsest quality of rock art has implications for long-term processes of landscape enculturation, as early accumulations of rock art strongly influence both the location and content of later accumulations (also see Deacon 1988; Lewis-Williams 2010: 5; Morris 2012: 224).

Lewis-Williams (2010: 5) likens this cumulative aspect of rock art to myth, describing painted panels as open-ended invitations to the participation of generations of painters.

In this respect, we can understand rock art to be not only a product of social action, but also a producer and reproducer of social processes and religious experiences (Dowson 1994; Gell 1998; Barceló 2002: 254; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004, 2009: 42–43).

Densely painted sites, such as LRC1, LRC3, LRC4, DWK1 and DWK2 reflect such processes of continuity, at a local, and even site-specific scale. As Schoeman (2019: 312) notes,

> "the continued articulation of people with sites on the landscape could result in longer-term continuities in beliefs about places. While beliefs are not fixed in such contexts, some form of continuity in inhabitants (whether as individuals or as collectives) can lead to local continuities in ideas and practices".

I argue that ritual was implicated in these social processes and their material consequences.

6.2.2 Rock art and ritual

It is clear from the ethnographic text I have cited here (i.e. Potgieter 1955) that ritual played a significant part of the social life of BaTwa in the KLSA. Hence, it is likely that variability in KLSA rock art is an indication of different rituals that are related to making rock art. The explanation of rock art production in ritualistic terms runs counter to other branches of archaeological research where ritual has been treated with caution, often criticised as a simplistic explanation for enigmatic behaviour (Ross & Davidson 2006: 306). However, of the subject matter of KLSA rock art that I described in Chapter Five, there is sufficient evidence to show that most of the rock art was a consequence of ritual, or at least that it was implicated in spiritual matters. At LRC1, LRC3 and LRC4, we find imagery that is associated with trance metaphors, such as therianthropes and trance-dance scenes (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1992).

At DWK1, some of the symbols, such as rayed circles and apron-like motifs, can be linked to girls' initiation rites (e.g. Morris 2002, 2012; Eastwood & Smith 2005; Hollmann 2007, 2013, 2014; Zubieta 2009, 2014) (see image descriptions in Chapter 5). The accumulation of rock art at these sites support that painted sites in the KLSA were a consequence of ritual (Lewis-Williams 1994 for rock

art and ritual). Much of the description of KLSA rock art in Chapter Five has been dedicated to showing this ritual aspect. By citing ethnographic-based literature on rock art interpretation (e.g. How 1962; Jolly 1986; Lewis-Williams 1986, 1994; Prins 1990), I suggested in that chapter that the making of paint was in itself a ritual, and that the paint from which the images were made, carried spiritual potency.

To this regard, Lewis-Williams and Pearce (2009: 58) have stated that:

> Rock painting was in itself a complex ritual, not to be lightly undertaken; the ritual of painting manipulated substance with supernatural potency…the panels themselves fed back into the pool of shared religious knowledge within the community.

The strength of ethnographic evidence is that it is able to show continuities and discontinuities in social and ritual aspects, over time (see Lewis-Williams 1984). As such, ethnography supplements the subject matter of the KLSA rock art that shows ritual activities. Therefore, there is little uncertainty that KLSA rock art was implicated in a ritualistic context.

6.2.3 Rock art, potency and the sacred space

Besides an historical overlap with the south-eastern region of South Africa, the social life and cosmology of the Tlou-tle (Potgieter 1955: 8–24) was somewhat similar to that of forager communities in other parts of southern Africa. I suggest that other forager communities in the KLSA, including those who made the rock paintings, had similar worldviews. One important similarity between the painters of KLSA rock art and painters of rock art in other parts of southern Africa is the placement of rock art as to show some engagement with the rock face. As seen in Chapter Five, for the people who made KLSA rock art, the rock surface on which rock art was placed was considered a significant part of the image-making process. As it appears, “the rock was as meaningful a ritual element as the paint” (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990: 5).

Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1990) argue that rock art interaction with features of the rock face is a manifestation of shamanistic thought – it shows the potency which painters associated with the surface on which they placed rock art. The rock surface was, for people who made and interacted with rock art, a veil through which the spirit world could be accessed (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990). The placement of rock art in certain parts of the landscape, in this sense, tells us how painters of rock art perceived the painting space, just as the Tlou-tle ethnography tells us about the significance of the KLSA landscape in various ritual practices. The story of the fountain where the Tlou-tle used to obtain cattle is an example of such landscape-ritual associations, and engagement with other-worldly things. Numerous other rituals in Potgieter (1955), such as the initiation of a *nyakazi*, the healing of a child by using medicine from the 'lighting bird', and coming-of-age rituas, stand as examples (detailed in Chapter 3). It is also significant that painted sites in this region are near water. Ethnographic insight suggests that, for the Tlou-tle, water was closely associated with initiation and identity-making. These are both aspects of KLSA rock art. I argue, therefore, that landscape perception played a significant part in the locations in which KLSA rock art was made.

Although the idea of 'interaction with the rock face' and out-of-body travel to the spirit world is commonly associated with forager peoples (Lewis-Williams 1990), that 'geometric' rock art in the KLSA subscribes to this religious idea possibly means that some of the 'geometric' art was made within a shamanistic context. According to Deacon (1988: 137), various themes in the rock engravings of the Upper Karoo in the Northern Cape indicate that metaphors changed through time, but, that "the places [in which the engravings were placed] retained their power and therefore attracted rainmakers/artists over long periods". An important point that Deacon (1988: 138) emphasises, is that, more than the rock art, the power lay in the places in which the art was placed, where it would attract rock art and localize it to a greater extent than if the art alone provided the inspiration and this might explain why rock art often appears as localized concentrations whereas nearby places remain without art (Deacon 1988: 138; also see Morris 2002, 2012). This 'power of a place' makes it possible for material evidence of different 'ways of doing' (Smith 1998: 218) to be concentrated in the same sites (see also Schoeman 2019 for cognitive continuities in northern South Africa).

The important recognition that rock art occurs in potent places, and of changes and continuities in it (Deacon 1988; Morris 2012), can be extended to the interpretation of rock art variability in the KLSA,

and integrated with Barceló's (2002) concepts of *attraction* and *accumulation*. Such an approach is in line with the postcolonial theories I discussed in the literature review (e.g. Spivak 1988), emphasising that interpretation should be guided, as much as possible, by an insider's point of view. The rock art in itself is an accurate record of the history of the people who made it (Dowson 1993); the ethnography that shows its significance is as close as we can get to an insider's view. I argue that it is within these terms that we should view variability in the KLSA rock art – a "phenomenon fixed in place" (Morris 2012: 224), yet interwoven with many facets of a society constantly in a state of becoming (Bhabha 1994; Gosden 1999: 181;). "Above all, society is more of a process than an entity" (Morris 2012: 229). So, too, was the making of rock art in the KLSA – a process that did not end with the painting of an image; far from being finished products, rock art panels were actively involved in the social and ritual experiences of their makers and viewers (Jolly 1986; Lewis-Williams 1986: 11, 1994; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2009).

6.3 Unpacking rock art variability

The view of variability in the archaeological record as reflecting 'cultural disparity' (e.g. Forssman & Louw 2018: 185, 190, 200)—rigid, packaged, cultural signifiers closely tied with ethnic categories (e.g. Smith & Ouzman 2004) is disconcerting, and perpetuates a view of past peoples as essentialised cultural and ethnic entities. This view of society fails to regard identity as being in a "constant state of becoming" (Gosden 1999: 181). That is, it underpays the complexity of the ways in which different peoples meet and interact. As such, I commented in Chapter Two that although an accepted interpretive domain, the notion that people's actions are guided by 'culture' is still problematic. The assumed correlation between 'culture' and cognition aligns more with functionalist conceptions of society, consequently disregarding agency (Giddens 1984) and being less considerate of the diversity of people, their lived experiences (Ingold 2000), and their interactions with each other. At the outset, I rejected any preconceptions of KLSA rock art as being divided into discrete cultural units.

6.3.1 Rock art 'traditions' in the KLSA?

Where it is possible to distinguish possible temporal phases of painting rock art in the KLSA, classifying and/or categorising the rock art is a more difficult task. Three categories of rock art in this region share the conventions of some of the three 'traditions' of rock paintings identified in southern Africa (outlined in Chapter 2); these are figurative art and 'geometric' art. The figurative art is made up of fine-line, rough-brush, as well as finger-and-rough-brush-painted images. Some of the finger-

and-rough-brush paintings are similar to images of the 'Late White' tradition (Prins & Hall 1994), but these are more likely localised, and should not be confused with the rock art of northern South Africa, attributed to BaNtu farmers. 'Late White' rock art was produced in very specific contexts (see Smith & van Schalkwyk 2002; van Schalkwyk & Smith 2004; Namono & Eastwood 2005) and contains symbols of initiation, such as the *koma* in some cases and symbols of protest in some. These symbols are absent in the KLSA rock art, and so is any history of Northern Sotho communities living in this area, or being in contact with BaTwa. The white-pigment paintings in the KLSA, therefore, do not fit the general interpretation of a conflict or initiation context. Some sites in the KLSA comprise brush-painted 'geometric' paintings, which have so far not been identified anywhere else in South Africa, but share affinities with rock paintings in south-central Africa (e.g., see Smith 1995, 1997; Zubieta 2009, 2014; Mabulla 2014), Mozambique (Sam Challis, pers. comm. 2018; Decio Muianga, pers. comm. 2020) and Zimbabwe (Aron Mazel, pers. comm. 2019). The KLSA rock art, therefore, shows an unusual and unique occurrence of image types that do not occur elsewhere in South Africa.

According to Henry (2010: 30), rock art 'traditions' are assumed to have a certain coherence – "conventions that are adhered to and that act as rules structuring a corpus of rock art" (citing Smith 1998; Hall & Smith 2000; Smith & van Schalkwyk 2002; Smith & Ouzman 2004). I suggest that in the production of KLSA rock art, the conventions or 'structuring rules' (Smith 1998; Henry 2010: 30) of fine-line figurative and finger-painted 'geometric' rock art were constantly broken, as a response to changes in the social landscape. The processes which allowed for these conventions to be broken led to the making of finger-and-rough-brush and fine-line 'geometric' paintings. As Smith (1998: 217) suggests, "[i]n recognising the value of norms it is important not to lose sight of the value of local conventions and regional differences in picturing choices". Image making was a ritual in itself (Lewis-Williams 1994; see also Witelson 2019); hence, changes in the 'normalisms' of the image-making process (Smith 1998: 215) ultimately mean changes in the ritual behaviour of the painters. At certain sites, KLSA rock art does not conform to any form of coherence, be it in technique, colour or subject matter. At DWK1 and DWK2, 'geometric' rock art is brush painted and also interacts with features of the rock face (see Fig. 5.37), conventions usually associated with figurative rock art (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990). Also at DWK2, a yellow, powdery pigment was indiscriminately used to paint a scene that consists of fine-line, rough-brush-painted and finger-painted animal and zoomorphic figures (Figure 5.17). Furthermore, there are also finger-painted animal figures and chains of finger dots at this site.

Whilst differences cannot be denied, it appears that, at certain sites in the KLSA, neither figurative nor 'geometric' art were impermeable categories. These two categories of paintings share the same attributes, contrary to the way they have been generally presented (Smith & Ouzman 2004). This mixing of attributes between image categories considered by some (e.g. Smith & Ouzman 2004) to be separate 'traditions' which represent distinct ethnicities, may suggest moments of contact between painters of diverse rock arts. It is unlikely, however, that these painters would have maintained distinct ethnic identities after contact (Bhabha 1994). If any of the multiple groups of painters who made the paintings at sites such as DWK1 and DWK2 were in contact, then it is possible that new communities were created in the process (Bhabha 1994; Gosden 1999: 181), and that the art placed at these sites served the ritual purposes of all who used the sites – the painted panels "fed back into the pool of shared religious knowledge within the community (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2009: 58; see Joyce *et al*. 2014 for the crafting of pottery manipulated in this way). On this note, although most of the art was clearly painted in separate events, it is possible that certain 'styles' of painting coexisted. The co-occurrence of images sharing the same attributes supports this possibility. Therefore, the co-occurrence of rock art 'styles' and/or 'traditions' in the KLSA casts doubt on whether we could consider either 'geometric' art to be a distinct Khoekhoen herder idiom, or figurative art to be a strictly hunter-gatherer idiom.

In essence, these attributes of the KLSA rock art reflect not distinct groups who were ethnically or 'culturally disparate', but possibly 'conversations' (Smith & Ouzman 2004: 514) between painters with diverse 'ways of doing' (Smith 1998: 218). Such 'conversations' would have allowed for the creation of a local set of beliefs, which was made up of elements of the multiple communities' worldviews (Bhabha 1994; Hollmann 2007, 2013; Pinto 2014). This is not to say that the painters of the 'geometric' art had no distinct identity; however, given the available evidence, there is no reason to assume that 'geometric' rock art or colonial-period art were isolated from a BaTwa worldview. The KLSA landscape was, in the past, shared by different peoples (Chapter 3), and each community would have added to the social formation, and in the regional ways of doing things (Barnard 1988). However, to say that the variability of the rock art only exists because of different 'cultural systems' undermines the adaptability of rock art, both as a form of material culture capable of expressing identity and one that is related to people's beliefs—both aspects which are not static. To deny the influence of a forager worldview on the 'geometric' art in the KLSA (against the clear evidence provided by the images themselves), we would have to assume that these 'disparate cultures' existed in isolation to one another throughout history (see Wilmsen 1989; Wilmsen & Denbow 1990 for a

critique). This kind of a scenario supports a case where even these 'cross-cultural conversations' that Smith and Ouzman (2004) speak of would be muted, or simply not exist, because of the unintelligibility of the different painters' cultural idioms to each other. Furthermore, the symbols used in the art would have to be so complicated that, even where worldviews intersect, they would still remain foreign to the other. Such a view would be untenable, and contradict the rock art as a form of evidence in itself (Dowson 1993, 1994).

The deliberate association and possible synchrony of figurative and 'geometric' paintings challenge a notion of rock art in this research area as being a product of disparate cultures, or disparate cognitive systems—finger painting versus brush painting, figurative versus 'geometric' images, hunter-gatherer versus herder. These differences are more exaggerated by the mind of the observer than they possibly would have been by the painters of this art. Considering that the KLSA was characterised by a strong forager presence, even in recent centuries, the KLSA rock art, collectively, should be viewed as an art of foragers, herders and farmers, regardless of 'style' and its assumed associations to ethnicity (Ouzman 1995: 56, cited in Hollmann 2007: 147). Furthermore, if 'geometric' art is predominantly an expression of girls' initiation rituals, as has been suggested (e.g. Smith & Ouzman 2004; Eastwood & Smith 2005; also see Hollmann 2007, 2013, 2014), then the placement of rock art near water sources, which correlates with the Tlou-tle ethno-historical record as well as that of Khoekhoen herders, transcends the forager-herder divide (Hollmann 2007: 147). It would seem, then, that the art fits within the 'Khoe-San' spectrum of beliefs and rituals (see Barnard 1988, 1992a; Morris 2002, 2012; Hollmann 2007, 2013, 2014).

6.3.2 KLSA 'geometric' rock art

Not all the 'geometric' rock art in the KLSA can be confidently attributed to Khoekhoen herders. Whereas the idea of making 'geometric' imagery might have come with later communities in the KLSA, who had a proto-Khoe identity, it became embedded and incorporated into the regional 'ways of doing' and 'took on local developments' (Smith & Ouzman 2004: 512) that were suited to the interactions that the painters of 'geometric' art had with autochthonous foragers. This is suggested by the art's interaction with the rock face, a significant aspect of forager rock art – one that has to do with access to the spirit world and shamanistic practices and beliefs (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990), and by the use of the fine-line technique, dissimilar to everywhere else in South Africa. In turn, this means foragers, and possibly even farmers, might have also been involved in the making of

‘geometric’ art. Interactions between farmers and foragers, for at least 800 years (Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971) characterise the KLSA social landscape. It is unclear to what level herders were part of this societal make-up, but the limited distribution of the ‘geometric’ art—some of which includes symbols such as rayed circles and finger dots, described by Smith and Ouzman (2004) to be ‘predominantly Khoekhoen’—suggests that their presence was either ephemeral (see Schlebusch *et al*. 2016) or that they were here in small numbers. I consider both these options in light of other sources of evidence.

As mentioned earlier, some of the rock paintings in the KLSA, specifically at DWK1 and DWK2, have a striking resemblance to ‘geometric’ art north of the Zambezi River, where similar art is not associated with Khoe-speaking herders, but with forager and farmer peoples (Smith 1995; Zubieta 2009, 2014; Mabulla 2014; Decio Muianga, pers. comm. 2020). The presence of this ‘geometric’ art in the KLSA both confirms and contradicts Smith’s and Ouzman’s (2004) model. On the one hand, the origins of the art cannot be disputed – there a lot of ‘geometric’ paintings in south-central Africa (see Smith 1995; Zubieta 2009, 2014), while their distribution in the KLSA is very restricted. On the other, Smith’s and Ouzman’s (2004) distribution maps show a movement of Khoekhoen herders into eastern Mpumalanga, yet ‘geometric’ art in the KLSA only occurs in the western parts. In parts of the KLSA where a spread of Khoekhoen herders would been likely, according to Smith’s and Ouzman’s (2004) model, the rock art is strictly of the fine-line figurative kind attributed to foragers. Considering that this distribution does not correlate with the proposed patterns of Khoekhoen herder movements, therefore, the idea of a Khoekhoen herder migration does not explain the presence of ‘geometric’ rock art in the KLSA.

Linguistic data taken from BaTwa descendants since the 1950s show no evidence of a Khoe presence, but rather long-term interactions with isiNtu-speaking farmers (Ziervogel, in Potgieter 1955; Lanham & Hallowes 1956a, b). The excavated archaeological evidence does not go beyond an ox molar at one site (Schoonraad & Beaumont 1971: 68), for the possible presence of herders or herding in the precolonial past of this region. Genetic research finds admixture between BaTwa and isiNtu speakers in this region, but no evidence of genetic admixture with Khoe speakers (Schlebusch *et al*. 2016). Schlebusch *et al*. (2016: 1370) maintain that their evidence “does not rule out that Khoekhoe people were present”. Rather, they suggest that either “there were no Khoekhoe groups for long periods in this region” or BaTwa in the KLSA “lived separated from potential Khoekhoe groups” (Schlebusch

et al. 2016: 1370). The latter contradicts the rock art evidence. Fine-line 'geometric' rock art, which superimposes finger-painted 'geometric' art, suggests contact with people who painted in the fine-line technique, and who held the concept of rock art interaction with the rock face (ultimately foragers).

The other suggestion made by Schlebusch *et al.* (2016), that there was potentially an ephemeral Khoekhoe presence in the KLSA may be possible, but it also does not hold when we consider the rock art, because the processes that it would take for painters of 'geometric' art and fine-line figurative art to engage in 'cross-cultural conversations' (Smith & Ouzman 2004: 514) or 'transference of ideas' (Schoeman 2019) that led to the ideological imprint that is fine-line 'geometric' art, could not have happened instantly. Seemingly, there is no evidence to support an ephemeral presence of Khoekhoe herders, but also not enough evidence to dismiss that they were present in this region. More genetic studies need to be done, and integrated with archaeological evidence, to either confirm or contradict Schlebusch *et al*.'s (2016) results. More recent genetic research shows that repeated small-scale movements into southern Africa were more likely than one single migration, and that interactions between foragers and herders happened "with differing degrees of resistance and integration that affected the timing and structure of genetic admixture" (e.g. Wang *et al*. 2020: 10; *cf*. Sadr 2015). I suggest that, if the painters of the 'geometric' art were genetically dissimilar to the autochthonous foragers communities in the KLSA, they were likely present in the KLSA in small numbers, possibly one group.

Further, upon arrival, this group would have merged with existing forager communities in the area, leading to the complex interactions that led to a shared set of beliefs and 'ways of doing' that led to the making of fine-line 'geometric' paintings that interact with the rock face. I suggest that finger-painted figurative art and, later, finger and rough-brush painted images at DWK2, WVL2 were also made by these newly merged communities. I have already suggested earlier in this chapter, that the paintings at WVL3 were made in the context of complex interactions and societal (as well as ideological) changes that occurred in the colonial period. This would explain the very limited distribution of the 'geometric', finger-painted figurative and rough-brush figurative art in the KLSA. The sites in which these paintings occur are all within close proximity of one another (a walkable distance), and on farms that border each other. They are concentrated in one specific part of the research area. This limited distribution of 'geometric' rock art aligns with the finding of small

population movements, as suggested by recent genetic research (e.g. Wang *et al*. 2020). As I mentioned earlier, though, the question of how they came into the region is outside of this project's scope, as it is unexplainable by the current literature (e.g. Smith & Ouzman 2004).

In consideration of these points, I suggest that, although the painters of 'geometric' art would have possibly had a distinct identity and worldview before or at the first moment of contact, in this area they blended with foragers, and adopted some aspects of the worldview of foragers, who would have been present in larger numbers, and hence more dominant. This is seen not only in the adoption of the fine-line technique, but also the filling of hollows in the rock face (refer to Chapter Five for images) at certain sites in the KLSA. That 'geometric' art—even at sites where there is no fine-line art—interacts with the rock face, supports the possibility of close contact and the transference of beliefs and ways of making images between autochthonous communities and the painters of 'geometric' art – be it Khoekhoen herders or not. It would appear, then, that 'geometric' rock art in the KLSA is not 'predominantly Khoekhoen' as has been suggested for much of southern African 'geometric' rock art (e.g. Smith & Ouzman 2004; Eastwood & Smith 2005), but rather an expression of the beliefs and ritual practices of foragers as well.

This process was not unidirectional, however. The transference of ideas and knowledge, and of ways of doing things, went toward the forager communities as well. That figurative finger-painted images appear at sites with 'geometric' art and sites within the same vicinity as those with 'geometric' art supports this point. Whereas painting communities may have had diverse origins and even spoken different tongues, in this landscape they would have blended into the collective identity of 'BaTwa'. Considering the fate of the BaTwa under the socio-political developments of the nineteenth century (Prins 1999), a blend of diverse peoples is more likely than a case of pristine 'cultures' who lived in isolation from one another. The only challenge is knowing how far back into the past these dynamics played out, and to what extent. At present, this question cannot be answered with much certainty. More archaeological research in central Mpumalanga may offer fresh insights in this regard.

6.3.3 Rock art variability and spatial dynamics

The inter-site variability of the KLSA art appears to be related, in part to the farm boundaries. Sites with only 'geometric' paintings such as crosses and finger strokes are all located on one farm.

Similarly, the white-pigment, rough-brush paintings are in a separate farm from the rest. Moreover, sites that are densely painted with various fine-line, rough-brush and finger paintings are also in closer proximity to each other than to the other sites. If this pattern is real, and not coincidental, it would imply that BaTwa and other painting communities who were absorbed into the farming economy made some of the art, and that majority of the art was painted in recent centuries. This is difficult to discern because of the lack of dates, and more so because, unless suggested by the subject matter, we would not know if these communities made rock art in the colonial period to enforce their continuing presence in this landscape (Hall & Mazel 2005). It is possible, nonetheless, that colonisation of the KLSA by European settlers and the subsequent servitude by indigenous communities, was one of the processes that led to closer contact between previously independent communities.

The use of BaTwa as farm labour, likely led to the formation of new communities, where BaTwa who had previously used diverse tongues, came to be in the KLSA under differing circumstances (some arriving in the nineteenth century, and others earlier), and perhaps made different kinds of rock art (or some did not paint), now lived on the same farms under the collective identity of BaTwa (Potgieter 1955). This collective identity would have been based on a number of factors, including similarities in worldview (i.e. importance of water to ritual practices and recognition of the rock face as a potent medium) and the common experience of colonialism. All-together, these social processes are what led to the variability of the rock paintings of the KLSA.

6.4 Connecting the dots

Despite criticism (e.g. Solomon 1997, 2006a, b; 2013; Wessels 2010), it is now widely accepted that most rock art in southern Africa is related to the activities of ritual specialists (e.g. Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2012; see also Pearce 2007; Lewis-Williams 2007). However, it is important to note that the shamanistic hypothesis is not sufficient, on its own, to explain processes occurring at the local level (Morris 2016; Skinner 2017). A suitable theoretical framework is often required to interpret such patterns, one that prioritises and is in agreement with the ethnography, above all other sources of evidence. The landscape approach I use here does this; it offers an explanation for why different painters with different ‘ways of doing’ (Smith 1998: 218) would have used the same spaces, and possibly for different purposes, over time.

Also significant is how the painted sites are clustered in certain parts of the research area, and absent in others; although depicting a variety of subjects and possibly over millennia, there seems to be a relationship between the location in which rock art was placed, and the activities that were performed within the vicinity of that painted space (Barceló 2002). I have shown, in this chapter, that the spatial and the social are inseparable aspects of KLSA rock art. Understanding the socio-historical context of the KLSA, and important moments within that context, aids in understanding the distribution of KLSA rock art, and its temporality, in turn.

Considering that hardly any archaeological research has been done in the KLSA, we are still far from understanding the rock art in this region, especially its chronology. The lack of direct dates for this rock art is limiting to understanding the social history that it is related to. To counter this limitation, I have turned to temporal markers evident in the art itself, and considered these in addition to the relative dates from excavated evidence. I have further supplemented these independent sources of evidence with historical, ethnographic and linguistic sources. Conjointly, these sources offer insight into the socio-historical context of KLSA rock art, especially in the last millennium. Lastly, these various strands of evidence allow for a more informed consideration of the temporality of *the practice* of rock painting in the KLSA.

Although there are still uncertainties on the chronology of most of the KLSA rock paintings, we can be certain that some images, such as the wagon at WVL3, were made in the colonial period, beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century for this region. In light of the evidence presented here, I estimate rock art in the KLSA to have been painted in four phases. The first phase is approximated to the mid-Holocene and continues into the last two centuries. Paintings that are predominantly of antelope, specifically at LRC1, LRC2, LRC3, LRC4, LRC5, SKB1 and SKB2, were painted during this phase. The second and third phases, which overlap, 2000BP – AD 1000 and AD 1000 – 200BP, saw the arrival of farming and possibly herding communities in this region. This may explain the co-occurrence of lithics with thick-walled pottery at some of the sites, particularly at the LRC sites.

‘Contact images’, particularly the ‘geometric’ rock art, were painted from the second phase onwards, in the last two millennia. The rough brush-painted and finger-painted figurative paintings associated with ‘geometrics’ at DWK2 and BOS5 were painted concurrently with the most recent ‘geometrics’,

no earlier than the late nineteenth century. Some of the rough brush-painted antelope at DWK2 were painted later the fine-line ‘geometric’ art, as indicated by superposition. The exact time lapse is difficult to determine, though and these different ‘ways of doing’ (Smith 1998: 218) may be coeval.

Similarly, some of the rock paintings at the six sites at Florence (FLR1-6) were possibly painted in the fourth phase of occupation, beginning in AD 1850. Although it is difficult to support this assertion with rock art evidence alone, because there are no contact images at these sites, the farm Florence is known to have been a resident place to a community of BaTwa, who numbered to between 20 and 30 in the twentieth century (Lanham & Hallowes 1956 a: 45, b: 97). Therefore, it is historically known that BaTwa were present here in the nineteenth century, and as late as the middle of the twentieth century.

Other sites comprising images possibly painted in the late nineteenth century/early twentieth century, with less uncertainty, are WVL2, WVL3 and possibly BOS8. These were painted by a small community of BaTwa, who had become farm labourers. Hunter-gatherer and herder communities in other parts of South Africa who have gone through similar transitions have been reported to make similar rock paintings, which incorporate colonial-period material culture and are painted in various techniques, although maintaining aspects of classic fine-line art (e.g. Hall & Mazel 2005; Ouzman 2005; Mallen 2008). Of all KLSA painted sites, WVL3 is the most significant, with regards to chronology, for it provides a date range for some of the rock art in this region, which ties in well with the documented history.

Importantly, this estimated rock art chronology—and the multi-strand evidence from which it is inferred—suggests a continuity in the practice of making rock art in the KLSA, although the art was subjected to changes through time. The changes in the art were a response to changes in the social landscape and ultimately changes and/or increasing complexity in the ways of making images. At DWK2, WVL2 and WVL3, these changes and increasing complexity are indicated by the use of a coarse white and pinkish-white pigment, which is uncommon in the KLSA, and applied on the rock surface using both finger and rough brush techniques. Yet, the idea of interaction with the rock face appears to have been carried on to the final phase of occupation (beginning in AD 1850), as hollows

in the rock surface of WVL2 were filled with paint, similarly to the painted hollows at DWK1, BOS3 and BOS4, which are associated with 'geometric' paintings.

Genetic research (Schlebusch *et al*. 2016) shows that the genetic identity of BaTwa peoples in the KLSA is one of many histories, which we otherwise would not have imagined were part of the makeup of KLSA society in the precolonial past. Similarly, linguistic evidence (Lanham & Hallowes 1956a) has shown long-term relationships between BaTwa and non-BaTwa communities from across southern Africa. It should be no surprise, then, that the KLSA rock art is as variable as it is; the KLSA past is one of fluidity, complexity and flux. Furthermore, the various changes in the social landscape, fuelled by multiple waves of 'newcomers', some of whom were rock painters as well, partly led to the variability that we see in this region. I argue, therefore, that the KLSA rock paintings, especially those made in colonial times, reflect new social formations *in process.*

The nature of interactions between diverse painters, or between later painters and rock art that was painted earlier at DWK1 and DWK2 is unknown, and it cannot be assumed that such engagements follow the same pattern of 'contestation of space' and of the spirit-world as in the north Eastern Cape (e.g. Henry 2010) or that of temporally *and* 'culturally disparate imaginings' of 'place' as at Telperion Shelter in western Mpumalanga (Forssman & Louw 2018). Rather, the sites DWK1 and DWK2 provide an opportunity for studying site-specific dynamics that may be unique to the KLSA. Unlike other parts of South Africa, at these sites occur fine-line 'geometric' paintings which apparently interact with the rock face. This convergence of 'ways of doing', in the form of symbols, metaphors and idioms associated with herders (e.g. Smith & Ouzman 2004; Eastwood & Smith 2005) with those associated with foragers (e.g. Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990), suggests that painters of 'geometric' art (ultimately Khoekhoen herders, according to Smith & Ouzman 2004) were exposed to the worldview of foragers, and vice versa. By this logic, the images painted at DWK1 reflect a site-specific set of beliefs about the significance of 'place', rather than cultural differences.

If we are to treat this rock art as archaeological evidence of the social context of the KLSA, it would seem evident that the KLSA past was not one of cultural homogeneity, but one of constant change and increasing complexity. In this sense, it important to be mindful of the rigidness that comes with imposing ethnic identity on rock art, a form of material culture that does not conform well to ethnic

stereotypes. This is not to say the painters of the art did not have an identity; that would be a flawed assumption. However, while taking cognisance that multiple ethnicities may have made rock art in the KLSA, it is not possible to tease apart ethnic identity based on the rock paintings, neither does it add any value to this study. Therefore, I suggest that the *accumulation* of rock art in the same spaces over time may be material evidence of ideological similarities and continuities.

I argue that similar conceptions of the sacredness of a place, which were a consequence of interaction and the 'transference of ideas' (Schoeman 2019) across communities and across generations, led to these similarities and continuities in beliefs and practices This may explain why diverse rock paintings were placed in the same spaces. Whilst the rock art was likely made by people with diverse identities, its common presence in these spaces does not represent 'cultural' differences but rather similarities in belief and knowledge systems. It was because of the knowledge of the power of a place, I argue, that specific sites were re-used for painting, while other suitable sites remained unpainted (Deacon 1988). This ideological fluidity occurred, I argue, in a social landscape that was constantly changing, where BaTwa identity (or identities) did not fit the stereotypical racist views that previously dominated the archaeology discipline, as highlighted in Chapter Two.

Based on the literature I have cited, and my own analysis of the KLSA rock art, I argue that the spiritual power that painters associated with certain places is what determined what was painted at what site. The more powerful a painted space was considered to be, the more 'attractive' it was for future painting events, and hence the more *accumulation* there would be within and around that space (Deacon 1988; Barceló 2002). People *deliberately* returned to the same painting spaces for these reasons; this is as true for DWK1 as it is for LRC1, DWK2, LRC3 and LRC4. These sites were painted over multiple times because they were recognised through generations as powerful and sacred spaces.

Similarly, the placement of symbols in such sacred spaces enhanced the power of the place, reinforcing the power already present there (Deacon 1988: 136–37). The fact that painted sites are concentrated in certain parts of the landscape attests to this 'power of a place' (see Deacon 1988: 138). These powerful places, and the art placed in them, continued to play a significant part in the lives of later generations. Whether later generations added more rock art to the panels, used the sites

for other purposes, or just viewed the paintings, there was still a continuity in the meaningfulness of the space—a 'feeling of continuity with the past', in Mazumdar's and Mazumdar's (1993) terms (also see Mallen 2008; Henry 2010). Therefore, the variability that is seen in the KLSA rock art can be considered a result of this reciprocal relationship between potency and accumulation, which both imply ritual intensity. More than this, the variability of the KLSA rock paintings is a product of ideological similarities and continuities in the conception of space.

On the one hand, the co-occurrence of various 'styles' of rock art in the KLSA indicates a diverse past in which forager communities of diverse social histories shared the KLSA landscape (see Prins 1999; Schlebusch *et al.* 2016). Based on the rock art, they also shared this landscape with herders. Such diversity, I argue, was driven not by ethnic differences, but by historical, economic and socio-political circumstances. We should expect variation to be found within communities/ethnic identities than between them (Marks 2017: 52). This is nothing new to rock art research; the ethnographic record that has come to inform many rock art interpretations implies such variation (see Biesele 1978; Guenther 1999 for variations within communities in the Kalahari). But, again, such variation may differ between different contexts, in which case interpretative sources may work better at local level than from a general perspective (Morris 2016); we should not disregard context in the interpretation of meaning (Collett *et al*. 1992). For the KLSA, local histories indicate that various BaTwa communities, in historic and precolonial times, were shaped by various circumstances and underwent changes at differing degrees (Prins 1999; Schlebusch *et al*. 2016).

On the other hand, variability in KLSA rock art indicates change – in symbols, in metaphors and in the 'ways of doing' (Smith 1998: 218) related to image making. In addition to the rock paintings themselves, multiple lines of evidence show that the social, economic and ritual life of KLSA BaTwa was greatly altered by colonial expansion towards the middle of the nineteenth century. Recall Kibit and his band, who went from being stock-raiders to farm servants, to him later becoming a military servant (Prins 1999); or the !Olo brothers who escaped from farm labour (Potgieter 1955: 4–5). In such rapidly changing circumstances, it is unlikely that any individual's or community's worldview could have remained unchanged. Although we cannot be too certain who exactly the authors of KLSA rock art were, and at what point in time some of the changes occurred, there is little doubt that at least some of the art was painted in a context where BaTwa identity was rapidly changing. The intra-site variability may, therefore, suggest that certain places which were previously used exclusively by

autochthonous forager communities later became places of ritual significance to ‘newcomers’ in the KLSA landscape (see Whitley & Hall 2016 for changes between firstcomers and newcomers). Following on this possibility, changes in the symbols used may indicate changes in ritual performance and/or ‘ways of doing’.

Dramatic changes in the social and ritual life of BaTwa in the KLSA eventually led to an end to the practice of making rock art. The expansion of European colonisation meant that BaTwa were dislocated from places of ritual significance. Stories such as that of the secret fountain (Chapter 3) demonstrate this point. Colonial expansion also accelerated the formation of new communities and identities (Bhabha 1994); the paintings at WVL3 may have been made by one of these newly formed communities. The painting of a wagon at WVL3 indicates such changes in the socio-historical context in which BaTwa lived, in the colonial period. So, too, did the symbols that made part of their worldview change. Once a distinguishing part of European identity, as indicated by one of the !Olo brothers (Potgieter 1955: 4–5; also see Chapter 3 of this dissertation), wagons had now become a significant part of the lives of BaTwa – significant enough to be included in the rock art—an aspect of BaTwa identity that was held sacred. Despite this, though, the painters of the more recent KLSA rock art retained the cognitive aspects of earlier generations of painters. That ‘geometric’ paintings, considered to be of recent occurrence on the southern African landscape (Smith & Ouzman 2004), were placed on panels to show interaction with the rock face (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990), attests to these continuities, in a changing landscape, changing mindscape and changing social context.

Chapter Seven:
Conclusion and recommendations for future research

7.1 Summary and conclusion

I started this dissertation by reviewing colonial views of BaTwa in Mpumalanga and then tying these views to the broader literature on perceptions of indigenous peoples in southern Africa and beyond. I then contrasted these distorted views of identity with postcolonial literature, which enforces a view of forager communities as contributors to southern African history, contrary to a view of foragers as 'pristine' people who remained unchanged for millennia. Using this literature, I then focussed on rock art research in southern Africa and then specifically in the KLSA, and pointed out how these issues of identity are pertinent to this study. I suggested that an informed approach is best suitable for studying the variability of KLSA rock art, and pointed out how landscape theories complement such an informed approach. Following this, I extracted ethnographically relevant information from Potgieter (1955) and showed how the ritual behaviour of the Tlou-tle is closely tied to the landscape, which in this work I call the 'mindscape' of the Tlou-tle, drawing from Ouzman's (1998) work. I then considered the rock art of the KLSA and discussed how the art relates to cognitive aspects of the painters, specifically their regard to the rock face as being a spiritually potent medium and the landscape as possibly have been given the same regard. These cognitive aspects of the KLSA rock art, I argued, are implied by interaction with the rock face, which is not restricted to any particular 'style', 'tradition' or time period, and by the placement of sites near water sources – another landscape feature closely related to ritual (Morris 2002, 2012; Hollmann 2007, 2013). Having observed these patterns, I argued the sites in the KLSA were used by diverse and temporally separated painters because of the potency that was associated with those places; that painters with different 'ways of doing' (Smith 1998: 218) used the same spaces for ritualistic purposes shows ideological similarities and continuities in the conception of space.

While I noted that the introduction of 'geometric' rock art came with 'newcomers', and that with this rock art came some change in ritual behaviour, I also cautioned essentialist views that can be tied to this kind of interpretation, and suggested that identities in this region were already fluid and this allowed for better terms of interaction. To this regard, I noted that the 'style' of 'geometric' rock art took on the technique of fine-line painting, and vice-versa, and argued that this showed some level

of engagement between the two kinds of rock art – "cross-cultural conversations" as suggested by Smith and Ouzman (2004: 514). Rather than expecting change to always come from outside, it is this kind of interpretation, one that sees variability as a product of diversity, change and continuity *within* a society, that I conclude is the more critical and more accurate way of interpreting the rock paintings of the KLSA.

Based on this analysis, I have shown that rock art variability in the KLSA does not reflect cultural disparity, but rather suggests that rock art served different ritualistic purposes, sometimes practised in the same spaces, through generations. This overlap of various rituals in the same spaces is explainable in social and ethnographic terms. Social theory suggests that a concentration of rock paintings in the same space indicates a concentration of some social action. I argue that ritual was this social action associated with the KLSA rock paintings. Such ritual activities were likely performed in the vicinity of the spaces where the painted sites are located (Barceló 2002; Lewis-Williams 1994, 2010; Witelson 2019). Ethnography, on the other hand, suggests that painted sites in the KLSA were recognised as potent places, hence drawing painters across generations to the same painting spaces. This, and that various kinds of paintings apparently interact with the rock face, suggests that rituals performed in these sacred spaces were within a shamanistic context (Lewis-Williams 1990; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990). This we can see at sites such as LRC4, where therianthropic figures are painted in trance postures (Guenther 1975, 1999; Lee 1967; Marshall 1969; see also Lewis-Williams 1992; Lewis-Williams *et al.* 2000; Hollmann 2005; George 2013 for trance postures in rock art). The 'geometric' rock art can, at some sites, be tied to girls' initiation rock art (e.g. Hollmann 2007, 2013, 2014; Zubieta 2009, 2014) but its interaction with the rock face suggests that it was not isolated from a forager worldview and/or shamanistic context (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990).

7.2 Contributions to southern African rock art research

The geographic setting of this research, Mpumalanga, is the most under-researched province in South Africa in terms of archaeology. Although ongoing research has recovered some of the history of farming communities in Mpumalanga, much less is known about the hunter-gatherers and possibly herders that farmers shared the landscape with since precolonial times. A few recent studies have investigated painted sites in western and north-eastern Mpumalanga; however, rock paintings in the central region have been less explored, especially in the last quarter-century. This research has aimed

to close that gap, and open dialogue on the neglected histories of Mpumalanga. The rock paintings of the KLSA, as I have shown, are a great case study from which to challenge colonial narratives of the past. There is a lot the ethnographic record is yet to tell us about this art. Perhaps, even, the answers lie not only in the ethnographic record; if more archaeologists excavate painted sites in this region, and integrate these archaeological findings in the interpretation of rock art, we could start to recognise patterns in the symbolic behaviour that was associated with the production of rock art. Of course, the two data sets are difficult to integrate, but there are aspects mentioned in this dissertation that excavations could add more insight to.

7.3 Recommendations for future research

Due to the dearth of archaeological data from the KLSA, many of these points I have raised are conjectural and, consequently, this dissertation offers only a preliminary archaeological view of this region's past. A more focussed study that will consider the meaning of the art, the art's relations to other rock art in Mpumalanga, and also obtain direct dates, will surely reveal more than has been suggested in this dissertation. Confirmed dates for the KLSA rock art have the potential to advance the preliminary arguments I have put forth in this dissertation, and may contribute to a broader understanding of southern African rock art, and of the people who made and interacted with it. Although I have not commented in great length on the ongoing debate around 'geometric' rock art and the advent of pastoralism in southern Africa, the KLSA rock paintings could potentially shed some new light on this debate.

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