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PREHISTORIC ROCK ART

of the Federation of

RHODESIA & NYASALAND

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FRONTISPICE: Chikupu Cave, Southern Rhodesia (E. Goodall)

RHODESIA AND NYASALAND

Scale in miles

500 OHM RESISTOR

Map of Southern Africa showing the British colonies of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and the Portuguese colony of Mozambique. The map includes provincial boundaries, major towns, rivers, and railways. Key features include the Zambezi River, Lake Shiwani- Ngandu, and the Chilanga Caves. The map is framed by a grid of latitude and longitude lines. A legend in the bottom right corner provides symbols for provincial boundaries, federal boundaries, territorial boundaries, other boundaries, railways, and roads. An inset map in the bottom left corner shows the location of the main map relative to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Legend:

- Principal towns: • SALISBURY
- Other towns and Outstations: ○ Hartley, Bikita
- Boundaries, Provincial: - - - - -
- Boundaries, Federal: - - - - -
- Boundaries, Territorial: - - - - -
- Boundaries, Other: + + + + +
- Railways, Main: - - - - -
- Roads, Main: - - - - -

Chapter Two

ROCK PAINTINGS OF MASHONALAND

by

E. GOODALL

The rock paintings of Southern Rhodesia differ greatly from the well-known rock art in Southern France; while a resemblance to the prehistoric art of North-Eastern Spain has frequently been pointed out.

The impressive rock art of Rhodesia, which began much later, represents a long, unique epoch, of recording events and religious ceremonies of a bygone age upon the granite pages preserved in our country's magnificent caves and shelters.

There is an abundance of evidence on the rocks of great documentary value. The art was closely identified with all the forms of activity known to these early, primitive people. Hunting, the natural means for the maintenance of life, was the essential daily occupation. Animals provided the main incentive for art and were, in the beginning, exclusively painted. This chapter illustrates what is known of this earlier art, and then, more fully, examples of the most productive and descriptive age, the 'classical' period, which developed an unparalleled profusion of scenes.

When the paintings are seen with their forceful human feeling, upon hundreds of rocks over a vast area, it shows that an ancient tradition lies behind the unfolding of this art, which still has its appeal in our modern age.

The Oldest Art

The earliest art is difficult to determine in the rock paintings of this country. The central areas of Mashonaland provide evidence of very large animals in outline; elephant are predominantly drawn in this style; but rhinoceros, large antelope and buffalo are also met with.

Early Art Styles

There are striking occurrences of an art of simpler conception, in which the animals have not the large size of those in outline and the representations are in strict profile, with one

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foreleg and one hindleg only. It is the true Aurignacian attitude that occurs also in the earliest rock engravings. Such examples, although rarely found, constitute an important stage in the study of prehistoric art. It is considered that such primitive animal representations may indeed antedate those of the large outline beasts, which generally measure five to six feet in length, but in exceptional cases have reached a length of twelve feet.

Comparing these two earliest styles, and considering in many instances the condition of the rocks, it is evident that numerous paintings have disappeared during the passage of time, through constant atmospheric action on the rock surface. Walls are frequently observed with only a wide sprinkling of specks, indicating at one time a profusion of paint, but insufficient now remains to perceive any clear picture.

The Domboshawa Cave has several examples of the early style in contours, some sections being shown in the two first illustrations.¹ In Plate 1 is seen the curve of red lines suggesting that these are remnants of elephants, whose upper parts and ears can be visualised, while the rest has disappeared. Four hunters were superimposed, swinging bows and arrows high above their heads, in exuberant mood. The vast lapse of time between the two art styles is easily comprehended from this painting. The four hunters are from a period past the 'classical' style, but they are by no means 'modern'.

The wall of this cave, although well sheltered, has suffered considerable exfoliation of thin surface layers of the rock. In part, this is due to natural climatic causes, but also, unfortunately, to thoughtless destruction by people.

There are other early line drawings painted in the Domboshawa cave. Plate 2 illustrates a large rhinoceros. Although the animal stands stiffly, the outlines are drawn with emphasised feeling, while the head and lower parts have disappeared. Superimposed, is a procession of tall people, men as well as women. At first sight they look as if belonging to a rather geometric style, but they are full of movement and individual character; arms are raised and waved in general excitement. The first tall man on the right looks back to the others, who seem to respond to his command. Only a few carry arms or other objects; nearly all wear a kind of spiky headdress. A striking feature is the unusually long legs. In most figures, the upper legs are longer than the lower ones, while in some, the proportions are reversed or equal. The feet are slender and in some instances the fingers are indicated.

Frequent Superpositions

The large Makumbe Cave has a thirty feet long frieze of six large elephants walking in procession with two calves between them. There are numerous other motifs round this frieze, which is an outstanding example for the study of superpositions. Here, is the veritable stratigraphy of art periods. Whereas on most cave walls three to five layers can be discerned, in this case, up to fifteen different art layers and 'hand-writings' may be counted.

¹ As a means of reproducing detailed sections from cave walls, water-colour copies have been made after carefully tracing the paintings. The value of photographs is realised and some are used; but it has been the intention to give the clearest and most detailed reproductions possible, and only close and lengthy study, required by the drawing of the original, can produce such a result.

The numbers in brackets refer to those in the *Catalogue of Rock Art* in the Queen Victoria Museum, Salisbury, S.R.

PREHISTORIC ROCK ART

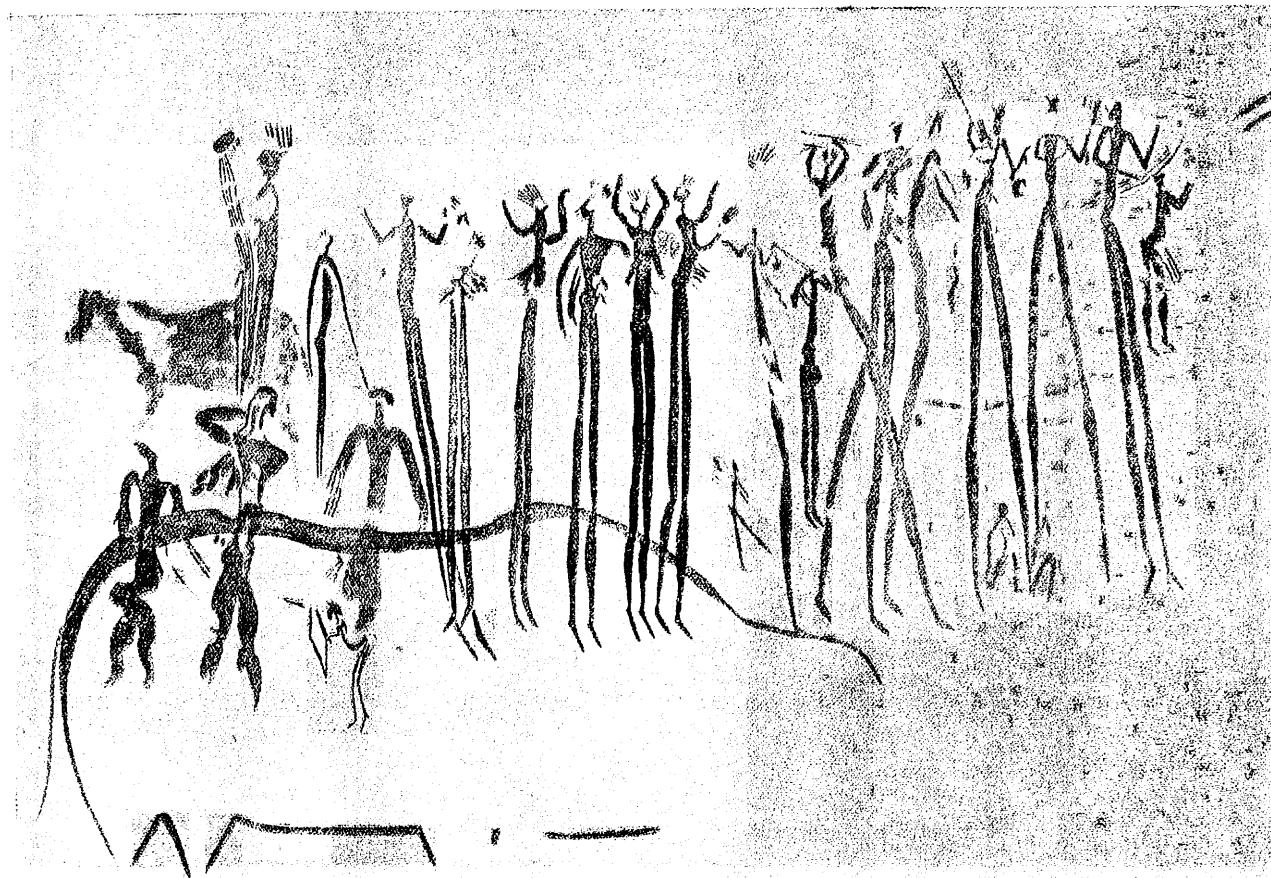


Plate 2 : Domboshawa Cave (No. 422)

Old outlines of rhinoceroses with a procession of men and women of exaggerated stature superimposed later.

40 inches \times 58 inches

PREHISTORIC ROCK ART

A section of this frieze is shown in Plate 3, with one of the large elephants in outline represented. Other artists came and added smaller animals; the various periods slightly overlapping. There are human figures by three different artists, a slender tree, baboons, leaf-like objects and geometric forms, such as long ovals and criss-cross lines. The later styles are rather clumsy, whitish, animal forms, which were not made very lastingly as they almost disappear by the touch of a finger. Some crude black signs are here the latest. This section of the cave shows a pleasant assemblage of finely-drawn antelopes, standing out over the outline of the elephant. It can be observed clearly that the later yellow colour is not as lasting as the dark red and chocolate brown colours.

In the Umvukwes are found well-drawn, large buffalos, of a similar period to the rhinos from Domboshawa; they are the nearest, found in Rhodesia, to the Perogordian bulls of Lascaux, France. Figure 1, heads and legs are painted in full colour and very slightly modelled; other parts are in thick, accentuated outline. This well composed wall has some special points of merit. There are antelopes of the finest art age (as in the Makumbe frieze), with such intimate details as the cloven hooves. A young buffalo is below the neck of the largest beast. A lioness feeding is in the centre. There are a few isolated birds, white striped zebras and humans who, although numerous, are small and seem to fill in the background.

Early Monochromes

Like the Howickvale painting, many walls are scattered with paintings which are drawn by different artists and have little connection with one another. Only the stylistic differences show the various art ages where superposition is absent. Mostly, three or four animals form a group, such as the three kudus in Plate 4. Their nostrils seem to test the air and they follow a game track, shown by a row of ovals. In nature, the warthog is frequently seen in the company of kudus; therefore, this is an example of accurate observation.

Good perception and knowledge are evidenced in the picture, Figure 2, from Goromonzi. The kudu cow, quietly watching her calf, is in the best animal art style, while a more stiffly-drawn antelope and a crane are from an earlier time.

Numerous and scattered Motifs

Seemingly unconnected motifs, a real massing of subjects, can be seen in Plate 5. This fine section of a remarkable cave shows the unusual spectacle of three hippopotamuses, between four eel-like fishes. Other motifs appear to be of a later art showing curious creatures, such as a double-headed man, a man with a large bow and decided negroid features, and thin, jumping people; also, a tree with falling leaves.

Rarer Animals: Fishes, Elands, Birds

Not far from this cave is the shelter at 'Bushman's Point', with important examples of rock art. The section shown in Plate 6, is outstanding for its large fishes of the bottlenose

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The Wounded Animal

Typical of the killing of animals is the spearing of a rhinoceros in Figure 10. Here, the animal is only wounded, not dying. But most touchingly drawn is the dying antelope, possibly an impala, observed and painted at the point of imminent collapse, Figure 11. The elegant, graceful movements are apparent even at the moment of death.

Equally touching is the speared and dead elephant from Mtoko, Figure 12. Rarely have these large pachyderms been represented on the rocks at the point of death. In this well-balanced composition, the small speared buck completes a drama of the veld.

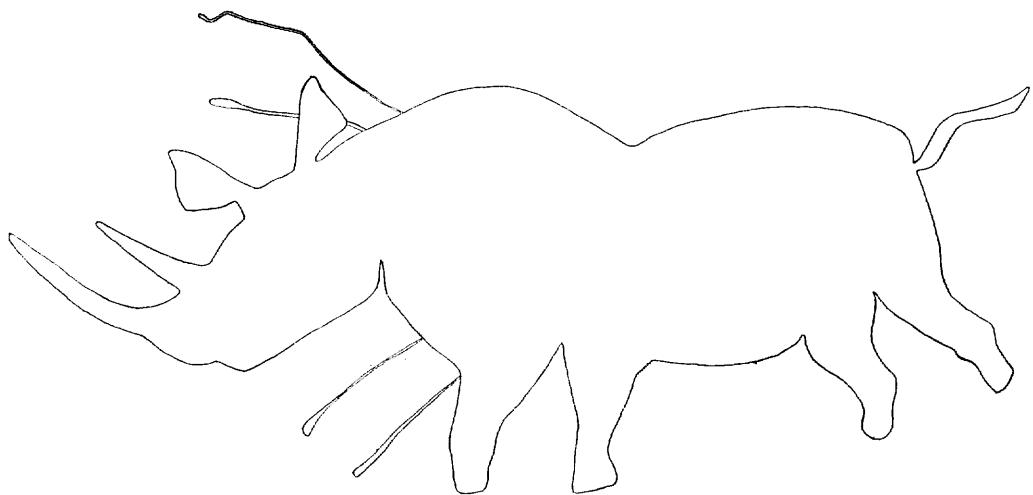


Figure 10 : Lion's Head, Msana Reserve (No. 224). Wounded rhinoceros charging.
Length 19 inches

Such paintings, showing a successful end to the hunt, may surely be regarded as the prayer of the cave man, expressing his wish to be successful in the chase, yet not to diminish the abundance of game, on which these early people's existence entirely depended.

Mythical Animals

In the earlier art phases only the large game was recorded; later, during the best phases, almost the whole wealth of fauna was represented. Birds are quite frequently found within mixed scenes. But the large bird from the Inoro Cave, Plate 10, is associated with mythical conceptions, as in spite of the handsome breast feathers, the jagged back and peculiar beak and ears present a real puzzle. There is a faded but similar counterpart standing in front of this mysterious bird; and one rather similar, also with ears, can be seen in the small Soshwe Reserve (Marandellas).

ROCK ART IN MATABELELAND



Plate 67 : White Rhino Shelter, Matopo Hills

The figures which gave the name to this shelter, the white rhinoceros (*Diceros simus*), one almost complete, one earlier outline, and portions of two other white rhinoceroses. There is no doubt that the animal portrayed is the white rhinoceros, the head and lips are too well drawn for any mistake to have been made. Other figures on this plate are indistinct, except for a human figure in outline which is superimposed on the main figure of a rhinoceros.

40 inches \times 26½ inches

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Plate 68 : White Rhino Shelter, Matopo Hills

Overlaps part of Plate 67, but includes human figures, one partly hidden behind a shield, and one running with what is apparently a shield above his head. These last figures are drawn in outline and filled in with pigment. The outline of a black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) shows clearly the head and lips which differ from those of the white rhinoceros. A small buck and a hippopotamus in filled-in outline are also here.

27 inches \times 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches

ROCK ENGRAVINGS

Wankie District

In the north-western corner of Southern Rhodesia there is a series of engravings of animal spoor; four sites have been located, all on or near the Deka river, other sites have been reported by local Africans but have not been accurately located.

The largest group in this series is at Bumbuzi on the northern boundary of Wankie National Park; these were discovered over fifty years ago by Mr J. M. Kearney and are in a small rock shelter which was excavated in 1947 by the late Dr Neville Jones and others.

The spoor are mainly of game animals — roan and sable antelope, impala, kudu, buffalo, giraffe, zebra, warthog, possibly also wildebeeste and waterbuck (which are indistinguishable from sable) — but spoor of lion (or leopard), baboon and rhinoceros also occur, as does a donkey-like spoor which has been interpreted as being of the recently extinct quagga. All these are extremely accurately delineated in their natural size; there are, however, a few very poor representations of human feet and hands: the poorness of engravings of human spoor when compared with those of the animals can be paralleled by the inaccuracy of drawing of human figures in most Southern Rhodesian rock paintings.

The best engravings seem to have been made by rubbing a hard stone against the relatively soft sandstone and several stone tools suitable for this purpose were found in the excavation.

Some engravings show signs of pecking and it is possible that they were all pecked before being rubbed smooth. A few very fresh engravings look as if they have been made with a metal tool (Plate 111).

A few engravings have been daubed with red colouring matter, although no pigment was found in the excavation.

The excavation at the foot of the engraved surface yielded a small quantity of Iron Age material overlying a thick deposit of Later Stone Age material which has been assigned to an early phase of the Southern Rhodesian Wilton very similar to the Wilton culture found in the Zambezi Valley (Summers, 1950). These carvings, therefore, appear to be at least as early, if not earlier, than any of the existing paintings in Matabeleland.

The Bumbuzi carvings are now (1957) inaccessible but very similar ones at Sunga can be reached by following the Wankie pipeline down the Deka Valley towards the pumping station. They are about fourteen miles from Wankie along a rough track.

It is indeed strange that the spoor carvings are all confined to the south side of the Zambezi. The same cultural remains appear on both sides of the river but the engravings on the Northern Rhodesian bank, although on exactly the same sort of rock as Bumbuzi, seem to be different in character (see p. 241).

Engravings of spoor are rare throughout Southern Africa and although various interpretations have been suggested we have not yet arrived at any really satisfactory explanation for them.