

# Tanganyika Notes and Records

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## Section 4: The Archaeological Aspect of the Tanganyika Paintings

(With Tentative Notes on Sequences)

By Dr. L. S. B. Leakey

The many examples of primitive art in Tanganyika described in this guide and elsewhere have a very considerable importance for the prehistorian, not only because the art in itself is interesting, but because geographically this region is a link between the art of Rhodesia (19) (3) (6) and South Africa and that of North Africa and the Libyan Desert (14) (25).

There was a time in South Africa when all the rock paintings were loosely spoken of as Bushman Art, because it was known that these little people were responsible for the later stages of the paintings, but detailed study has shown that some of the art is of greater age, and can be linked with Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic cultures.

In Tanganyika the fact that there are still small tribes such as the Kangeju, also known as Kindiga, Tindiga or Hadzapi, who have linguistic and cultural affinities with the Bushmen led to the local art also being attributed to the Bushmen, and it is doubtless true that some of the more recent art styles in Tanganyika were the work of these people.

Much of the art, however, is much older, and as in Rhodesia and South Africa, some of it certainly dates back to the closing stages of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic times.

So far a minimum of thirteen superimposed styles of painting have been recognised, as shown in the tentative list at the end of this section. But a great deal more work remains to be done before it will be possible to attribute for certain any particular style to any given stone-age culture, and before it will be possible to distinguish individual or local variations within a style from the styles which are truly distinct and of different ages.

Even in France, where Prehistoric art has been studied for over a century, much detailed work remains to be done, so that it will be appreciated that in Tanganyika we are only at the beginning of the study. At the moment, only a small proportion of the known sites have been carefully examined for sequence of superpositions, and it is to be hoped that any reader of this article who comes across rock paintings will record in detail the various styles represented and the superpositions. This is not always an easy task and it is first of all necessary to become sufficiently acquainted with the various styles in order to be able to recognize them reasonably well. While it may be easy to distinguish between outline drawings and filled-in wash paintings, it is much less easy to differentiate between the different styles using the same basic technique.

We know, for example, that there are several distinct styles of outline drawings to be found in the Tanganyika paintings, and where these can be seen and studied on a single rock-face it is evident that they are not only different in style but also of different periods.

Naturally, too, within a given style, the individual artists and the artists at different sites had their own variations in style. Thus, paintings in Style 5 at Kisese (sites A 1—4) differ to some extent from paintings in the same style at, shall we say, Kolo; (sites B 1 and 2) and yet both fall easily into that particular style and both are to be seen consistently overlaid by a different style at the two sites.

When superstitions are being studied it is often very difficult to be absolutely certain as to what is above and what is below and it may often be necessary to examine the evidence a number of times with a high-powered lens before a definite opinion can be formed.

Very meticulous excavation at some of the sites with paintings will have to be carried out before any positive answer can be given as to what stone-age cultures are associated with the various styles. There is always the possibility that in one horizon of the deposits in a rock-shelter smaller rocks with paintings in one of the styles seen on the walls might be found, which would help to link the culture of that horizon with that particular style. Comparison of pieces of pigment found in the deposit with the colours used for the paintings can also prove valuable.

It will be appreciated that the tables of sequence which follow are purely tentative; the first comes from my "Stone Age Africa," published in 1936, whilst the second was drawn up after a visit to the Kolo site in 1949. It has not yet proved possible to spend sufficient time in the field to correlate these two sets of data.

### **Notes on the Sequences observed in the Kisese — Cheke Area**

#### **(Sites A 1—17' as recorded in "Stone Age Africa," 1936'.**

- (1) The earliest to be found are figures of animals in red and in every case the whole figure is coloured, except for the face, which is drawn in thick outline only and the middle left blank. Where the animal had a mane it is shown by a series of short dashes.
- (2) Very curious human figures in an unusual purple colour, rather badly drawn animals in the same purple, and large areas of concentric rings of dots apparently drawn with the finger tip dipped in the colouring material.

(Note: the relationship of (1) and (2) is not absolutely clear, but both groups are older than any of the others, which, in all cases of superposition, are over them).

- (3) A number of figures in which ostriches and giraffes predominate, drawn in outline in a purplish red; the technique of applying the colouring material was different from that in style (5) (in which also the drawings are even more naturalistic) but at the same time

style (3) seems to be related to (5) and is probably only a little earlier than it.

- (4) A few very indistinct black outline-figures are always under style (5) and seem to come in here. They may possibly belong to style (3), but the difference in colour as well as an improvement in style suggests that they should be classed alone.
- (5) In this style the art is at its best. Figures of animals are drawn in outline with very thin lines of paint. The animals are very naturalistic and details such as sex organs, manes, &c., are very carefully shown. The colour used is a claret-red.
- (6) Some curious yellow and orange human figures and animals rather badly drawn are found overlying animals in style (5) and underlying style (7) so that they are placed here. They are comparatively rare, and not to be confused with the much later orange and yellow figures.
- (7) This style consists of animals in a dark claret-red colour in which the whole body is coloured. The animals are sufficiently naturalistic to be easily recognizable, but the detail is not good. Sex organs are not shown, nor are the manes of giraffes, &c. Animals in this style are common. There are a few human figures which may belong to this group but which were not found under conditions which gave any direct proof of this.
- (8) Overlaying style (7) at several sites are animals drawn in a thick red outline. These animals are not nearly as naturalistic as those of stage (5), and the commonest animals figured are elephants. In one case an elephant in this style is nearly 10 feet long and 5 feet high. The wrinkles on the trunks of the elephants are always carefully shown, although little attention is paid to other details.
- (9) A series of animals drawn in outline in a brick-red colour. Very stiff and conventionalized drawing quite unlike any of the earlier outline styles. Often the tails of animals are omitted.
- (10) A series of very curious orange human figures and badly drawn animals in solid colour.
- (11) Figures in a dirty yellow and dirty white, apparently very recent indeed, including white hands.
- (12) Orange-coloured lines and hands.
- (13) Black human figures very conventionalized indeed.

The last three groups are very recent and are probably not of Stone Age date at all.

In addition to this series of thirteen distinct superimposed styles, several other styles were noted, but no evidence was found to show where in the sequence they belonged.

**Notes on the Sequence observed at Mungomi wa Kolo. (Site B 1)**

- (1) Very dark red filled-in human figures.
- (2) Animals drawn in this outline, filled with colour wash. Cf. Cheke two-headed animal.

- (3) Thick, dark claret tectiforms. Equals 2, Stone Age Africa.
- (4) Animals in outline, slightly angular appearance caused by outline not being continuous. In giraffes, marking shown by spots. Equals 3, Stone Age Africa.
- (5) Very thin outline, well drawn except for feet. Where hairs of mane or tail shown, no continuous outline. Includes tectiforms. Equals 5, Stone Age Africa.
- (6) Animals in thick outline. Elephants with well-defined ears common. Equals 3, Stone Age Africa.
- (7) Human figures, no tails, no spurs to heels, completely filled-in heads and streaky bodies.
- (8) Thin outline, crude. Usually no manes to giraffes, sometimes no tails. Also rectangular euphorbias. Colours various shades of red. Equals 9, Stone Age Africa.
- (9) Rusty and orange reds, outline not very naturalistic.
- (10) Late crude whites. Equals 11, Stone Age Africa.

There are also the following styles not in superposition at this site:—

- (a) Human figures with tails, spurs to heels, lined head-dresses.
- (b) Yellow-white thin outline figures, under 8, see above.
- (c) Elephants, thin narrow heads, ears not shown, streaky filling to body. Over 3.
- (d) Well drawn animals in outline, bodies filled-in with bold brush-marks. Colour: purple.
- (e) Round and turnip-headed human figures in flat wash. No indication of clothing, probably equals 7 of S.A.A. "Grass-hopper" and masked figures also probably belong.
- (f) Bright red animals and trees, including euphorbias, over 3.
- (g) Outline animals with parallel-line filling. Over 7.
- (h) Animals in thick outline, filled-in except for centre of body.

#### **List of Above Styles Illustrated in this Article.**

To avoid overlapping, most of the illustrations in this paper have been drawn from sites not previously recorded, but reference to the following reproductions illustrates certain of the styles listed above:—

**Plate I. The Buck Hunt.** Compare with Stone Age Africa style 7. Note the hunters in the herd, to which reference is made when Plate IV A is commented on hereunder.

**Plate II. Human, Animal and Geometric Forms.** Kolo style 3 is represented by the upper tectiform and style 5 by the lower tectiform and the pig, whilst the two humans on the right are Kolo style 7.

**Plate III. The Rhino.** In many respects this resembles S.A.A. style 5, as both are in thin red outline, the rendering of the tail of the Rhino from Kisese in S.A.A. Fig. 27 is identical to that here illustrated, and the feet very similar. But the proportion of head to body is more naturalistic in the Kisese

example. The filling-in here shown correlates this with Kolo style (d) which also occurs at Megeani group F 1-7.

**Plate III. The Trapped Elephants.** This corresponds in style and subject to S.A.A. Plate IX (style 7) where a single elephant surrounded by interrupted lines and a group of human figures give the same impression of the beast being in a trap as does our illustration. The elephants in both cases are cruder than the antelope rendered in this style.

**Plate IV. The Hunter.** This, as Plate I above, illustrates S.A.A. style 7. There is no doubt about the association between the animal and the human figure; as the latter is of the same style as the human figures inter mingled with the buck in Plate I, one can conclude that here again the association is not fortuitous but that the human figures carrying bows are in fact depicted by the one artist as hunting the buck.

**Plate VIII. Superimposed Animal Figures.** The large crudely drawn rhino in thick outline is S.A.A. style 8 (c.f. S.A.A. Plate X). The two spotted giraffe in the lower right corner are S.A.A. style 9, i.e. Kolo 8, whilst the euphorbia between the forelegs of the large giraffe is an example of Kolo (f).

**Plate VIII. Prancing Giraffe.** In respect of naturalistic movement and in attention to detail in the drawing of the teats and hooves this resembles S.A.A. style 5 but it is filled in and thus more nearly approximates to Kolo style (d).

**Plate IX. White Animal Figures.** These are in S.A.A. style 11, and are thought to be Bantu rather than of Stone Age origin.

**Plate XI. White Symbols.** This photograph from Kandaga illustrates the hand prints mentioned in S.A.A. as a characteristic of later style.