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The socioeconomic life of the rock painters of central Tanzania

H.A. FOSBROOKE

Although no single definitive work exists on the rock paintings of central Tanzania, a considerable literature has built up over the years (Bagshawe 1923; Nash 1929; Culwick 1931; Fosbrooke *et al.* 1950; Fozzard 1959; Sasoon 1965; Fozzard, 1966; ten Raa 1974; and Masao 1976, 1977). Most of this is descriptive and some comparative, but none attempts to deduce from the paintings the type of life led by the painters. It is apparent from the styles, techniques and state of preservation of the paintings that they were executed by people widely separated in time and in culture. A rough breakdown can be made between Kondoa Naturalistic, Kondoa Late Whites, pre- and present Sandawe, and pre-Gogo. For location of the paintings see Fig. 1. Site names and numbers in the figure captions follow Fosbrooke *et al.* (1950).

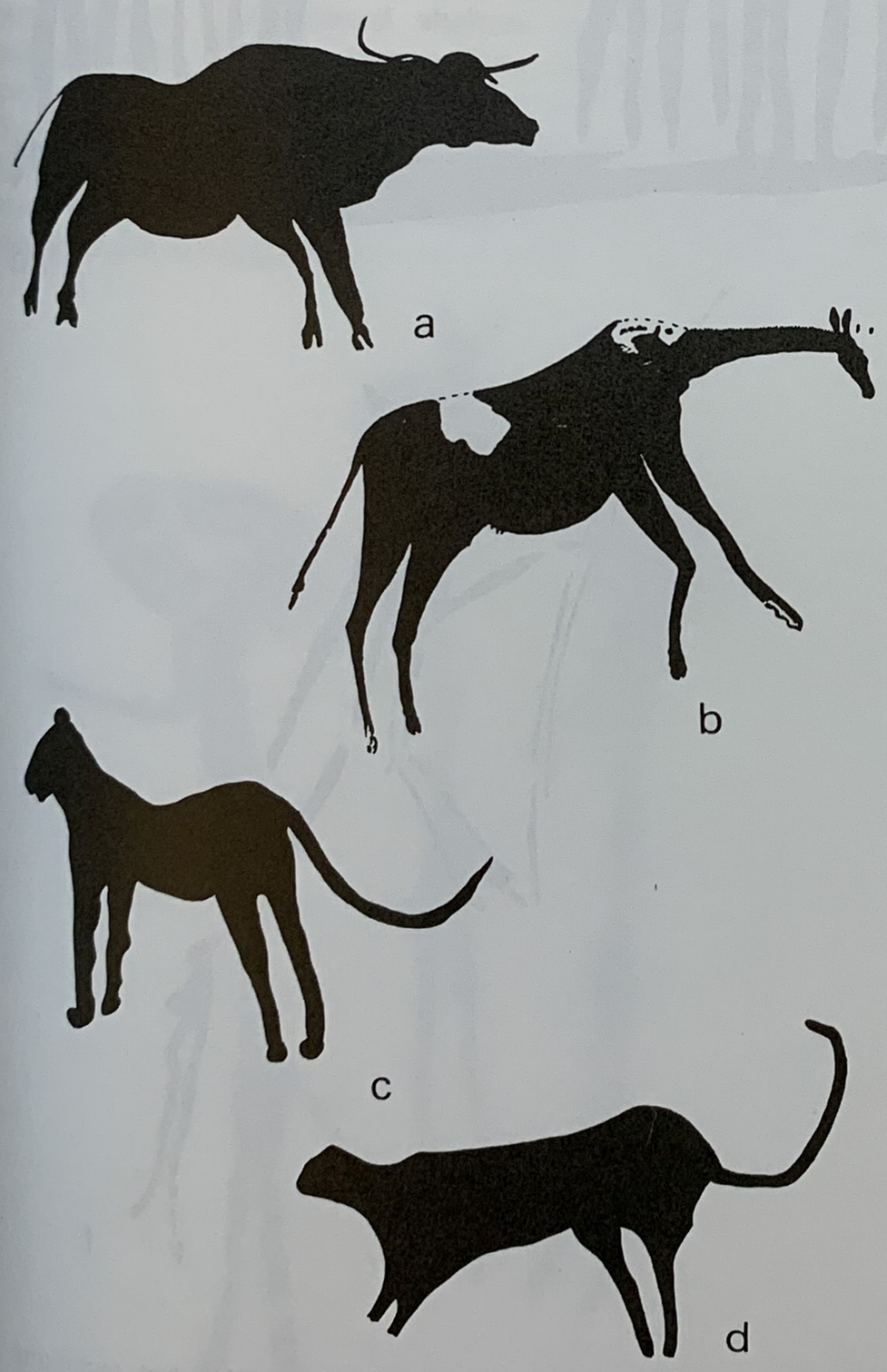

Fig. 1. *a*, Buffalo, in red, from Tlawi II (original size not known); *b*, giraffe, in red, from Tlawi II, D5 (length 62.5 cm); *c*, lioness, outlined in black and filled with red, from Tlawi X, D22 (length 33.5 cm); *d*, cheetah, in red, from Klo, Majilili II, B2 (length 8.1 cm).

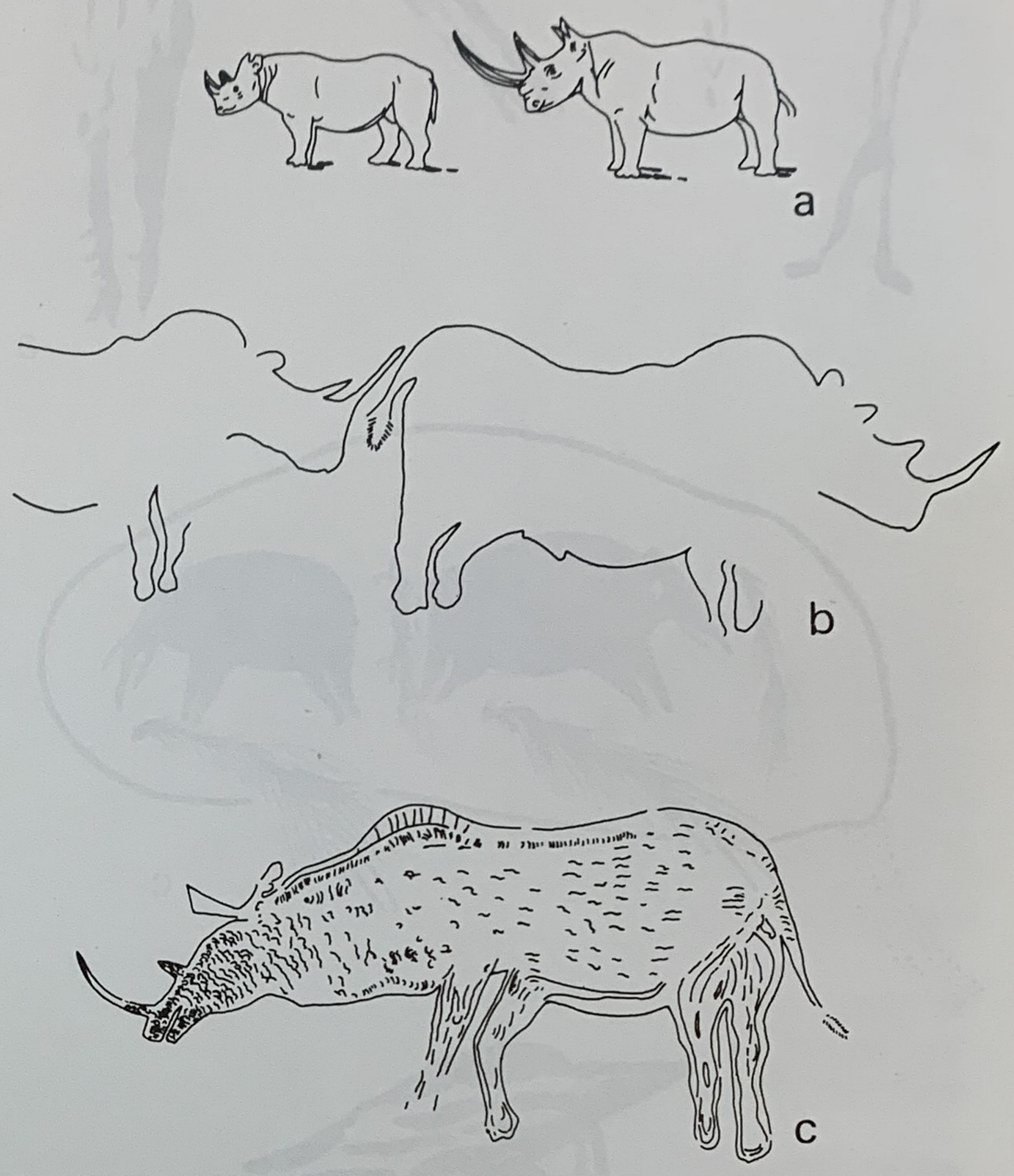

Fig. 2. *a*, Comparative size of black (left) and white rhinoceros; *b*, white rhino, thin red outline (from Leakey 1936: fig. 27) from Kisese I, A3; note the large hump on neck and smaller hump on withers characteristic of this species (length 146.5 cm); *c*, black rhino, in red, from Tlawi I, D4 (upper); note single hump (length 73.5 cm).

Kondoa Naturalistic

The Kondoa Naturalistic paintings are the best known and most attractive of these manifestations of indigenous art. The animals are painted in many different styles, the work of successive groups of artists whose work may be separated by hundreds if not thousands of years, and depict a large range of fauna, mostly animals prized as food: kudu, sable or roan and many smaller antelopes, buffalo (Fig. 1*a*), giraffe (Fig. 1*b*), zebra, elephant and rhino (Fig. 2*a*, *b* and *c*). Predators occur: lion (Fig. 1*c*), leopard and cheetah (Fig. 1*d*) being readily identifiable.

One of the most clearly identifiable animals is the white rhino (Fig. 2*b*), depicted with such economy of line, but yet so accurate as to deserve a place in a modern zoology textbook. This painting is extremely difficult to discern on the rock and it is doubtful if it would have been identified but for the painstaking tracing work of Louis Leakey (1936: fig. 27).

The white rhino is no longer to be found in Tanzania, but survives in South Africa and Uganda and has been reintroduced into Botswana, Zambia and Kenya; the nearest natural recorded occurrence is at Narosura, Kenya, where bones have been found dating from the first millenium BC (Gramly 1974).

Some methods of hunting are clearly depicted, for example the bowman whose arrow has pierced a buck (Fig. 3*a*); see also a similar painting which shows the blood dripping from the wound (Fosbrooke *et al.* 1950: plate IVA). One striking panel, some 2 m long (Fig. 3*b*), shows three or four bowmen intermingled with a herd of buck; the small heads and exaggerated haunches suggest a perspective of animals in flight. There is a possibility that elephant were caught in pit traps, as two paintings (Fig. 3*c*, and Fosbrooke *et al.* 1950: plate IVA) depict elephant encircled by lines; but such encirclement might be symbolic, indicating the practice of sympathetic magic.

Another painting illustrating what is probably a different type of trap has come to light (Fig. 3*d*). Although this might be taken to represent a flat roofed, *tembe*-type dwelling, it seems very improbable that these Stone Age hunters constructed dwellings identical to the present inhabitants of this area: it is indeed unlikely that they constructed any dwellings at all, so the painting is much more likely to represent a trap constructed by baulks of timber implanted in the ground, and roofed over with further timber. Such traps are constructed today to capture lion, leopard and other predators.

A successful hunt concludes with an animal to take home, and this is illustrated by the picture of the bowman with a buck over his shoulder (Fig. 3*e*). One may also assume that the Stone Age hunters cooked their food, as one painting illustrated a human figure with a load on his head very suggestive of a bundle of firewood (Fig. 3*f*).

The choice of site is also associated either with hunting or with defence: the painted shelters invariably present an extensive view over the surrounding country, but favour no particular orientation. Although the artists had the capacity for accurate anatomical representation, it is significant that the human figure is never naturalistically presented. The reason for this may lie in the belief in witchcraft. Even today many people throughout the world believe that it is dangerous to leave nail paring or hair trimmings lying about, lest they should be used to cause one's illness or death. How much more dangerous then to leave an accurate picture of oneself on which a magician can get to work?

The figures, although not naturalistically presented, reveal a wealth of detail about the lives of the painters. They were obviously ardent dancers, as the poses and postures show. They adorned themselves liberally with wristlets, anklets and knee ornaments. Loincloths, doubtless of softened hide or skin (as pegged out hides are depicted), were worn, whilst 'tails' were suspended either from the appropriate anatomical position or from the elbow (Fig. 4).

Hair was worn in the 'mop' style, that is twisted into strings, probably, on today's analogy, reinforced with fibre and held together with a mixture of red ochre and fat. Other head styles may represent masks or more elaborate coiffure, as favoured by the Maasai today.

One interesting scene in which masks are conspicious is the so-called 'Abduction' (Fosbrooke *et al.* 1950: plate IVB), where a central female figure, with bare head and breast and wearing a loin cloth, is grasped by the arms and being pulled in two directions, on one side by two masked figures, on the other by two figures with bare heads. This could indeed be a forcible abduction, or might depict a 'marriage by capture' scene, such as practiced ritualistically by some peoples today.

Another interesting presentation of the human figure is the unadorned body in acrobatic poses, as around the 'trapped elephant'. A more naturalistic style is seen in the squatting figure with a very large mask over its head (Fig. 5). This mask might represent a device to keep off the small objects, possibly bees, all around the head, but it is unlikely that anyone would go honey hunting wearing knee and ankle ornaments. With this possible but unlikely exception, no representation of honey hunting, a subject so popular in southern African rock art (see Pager 1973) has yet come to light.

Symbolism played its part in the lives of these artists as witness the geometric forms at Kolo (Fig. 6), but these are not found in the profusion which characterizes the Late White period.

It is not the purpose of this paper to identify styles of the art, or to unravel sequences, but one interesting case occurs where one artist has obviously copied the work of another.

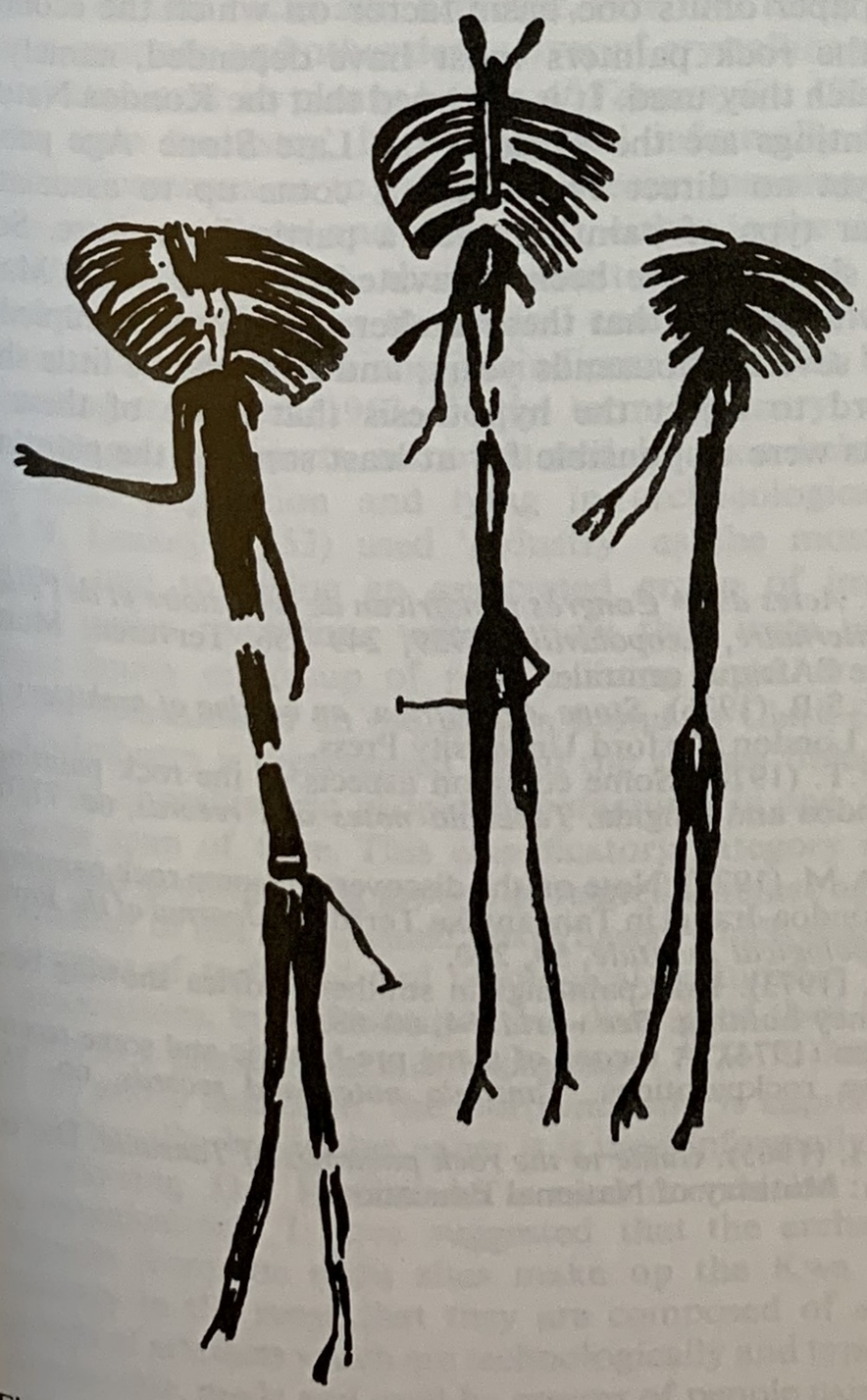

Fig. 4. Three dancers from Kolo, Majilili I, B2; the figures are 60 cm long and are painted horizontally.

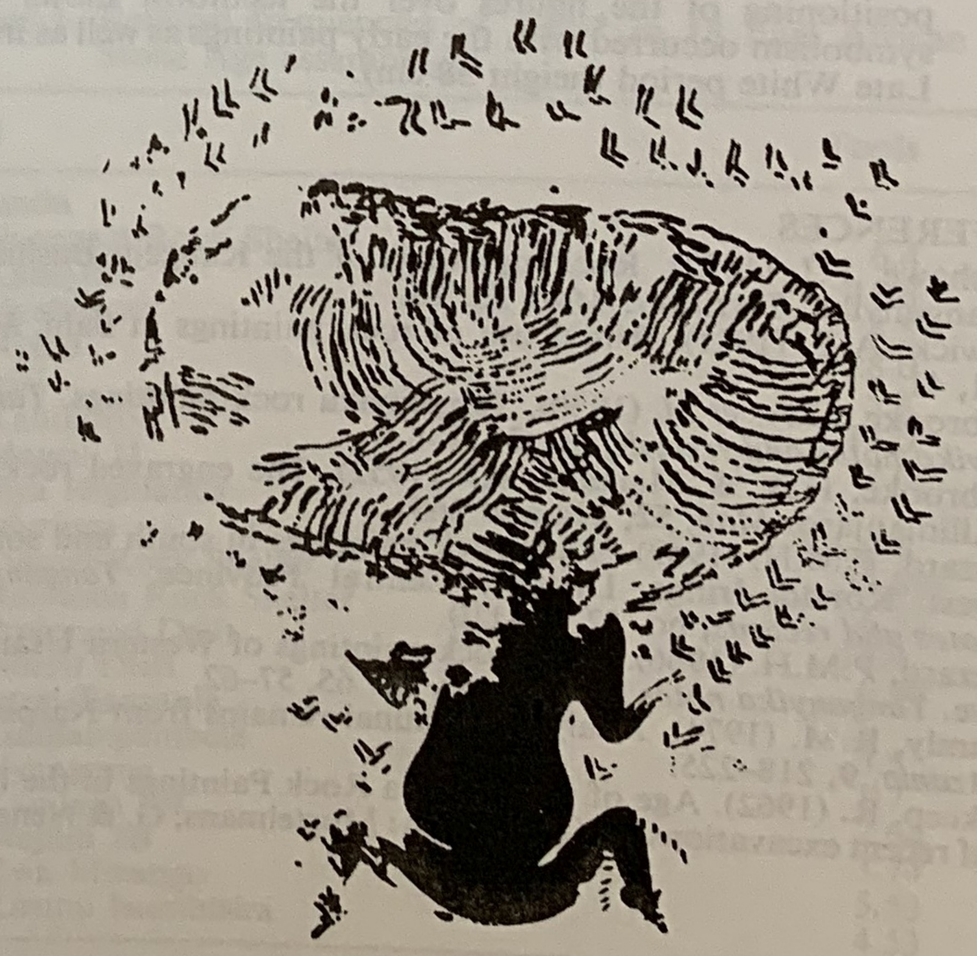

Fig. 5. Squatting figure from Tlawi V, B17; the small objects surrounding the headdress might be bees, but more likely a ritual scene is pictured; note knee and ankle ornaments (width 22 cm).

In two adjacent rock shelters at Kolo a very similar group of three figures occur, but one group shows a heavy bar running across the loins (Fig. 4). It might be interpreted as linking the figures in some way, but here it is suggested that it is a misinterpretation by the original artist. For the other group, which it is assumed is the earlier, is superimposed over the large figure of an animal; the line of the back of this animal cuts across the three figures at just the point as the bar in the other group. It is suggested that the copyist took this line to be an integral part of the painting and reproduced it in his copy.

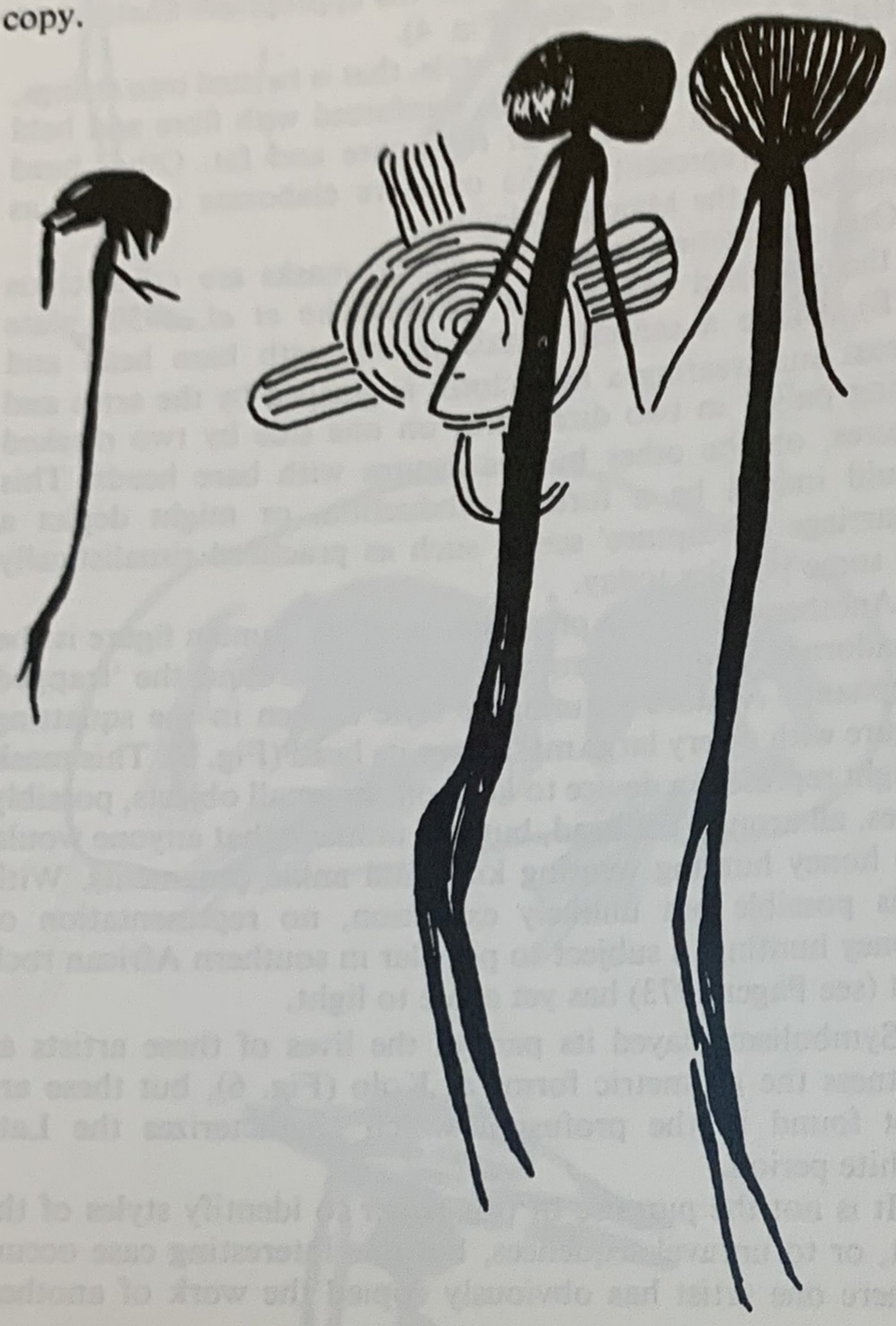

Fig. 6. Figures and symbols from Mungumi wa Kolo B1; the superpositioning of the figures over the tectiform shows that symbolism occurred with the early paintings as well as in the Late White period (height 58 cm).

Kondoa Late Whites

Space permits only brief reference to the other types of pa
ings found in the area. The Kondoa Late Whites presen
plethora of symbols in a profusion not found elsewh
(Fosbrooke *et al.* 1950: plates X, XI). There is no traditi
linking them with the present inhabitants of the area, b
their state of preservation suggests that they were execut
by recent Iron Age people who are known to have preced
today's occupants. There is thus no known interpretati
nor is one likely to emerge. By analogy no one could possib
have interpreted the symbolism and ritual associated with t
engraved rocks in the Chagga country which has fortunat
been recorded from traditional sources (Fosbrooke & Mare
1952).

Sandawe

Sandawe lies to the west of Kondoa and contains a wealt
of painting sites presenting a style or styles complete
different from the Kondoa Naturalistics. Many illustration
are to be found in Fozzard (1959 and 1966), and in ten Ta
(1974). The latter distinguishes between the paintings of th
present click-speaking Sandawe, who make use of the paintin
for religious purposes, and those of their predecessors, o
unknown origin. Sandawe country also contains a unique
feature of prehistoric art in the form of two naturalistic
pecked engravings. The patination when compared with
recent vandalistic copies on the same rock, indicates that these
engravings are of considerable age.

Pre-Gogo

Bahi, about 30 miles west of Dodoma, provides another case
where the ritual use of rock paintings is known. Culwick
(1931) records a detailed account of the traditional use of
these paintings, both by the present inhabitants, the Gogo,
and their predecessors whom they replaced in this area
some 300 years ago.

This paper omits one basic factor on which the economic
life of the rock painters must have depended, namely the
tools which they used. It is assumed that the Kondoa Natural-
istic paintings are the work of the Late Stone Age people,
but as yet no direct evidence has come up to associate a
particular type of painting with a particular culture. Some
painted shelters have been excavated (Inskeep 1962; Masao
1977), which show that these shelters have been occupied by
man for several thousands years, and it would be little short
of absurd to reject the hypothesis that some of these in-
habitants were responsible for at least some of the paintings.

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Summary and conclusions

The Burg-Wartenstein typological classification of African prehistoric flaked stones is now the most commonly used one for determining groupings of industrial complexes in the Continent. This typological framework should, however, be broadened so as to include assessment of economic adaptations; at present it tends to be applicable only to lithic technological factors. For example, at Kadero in Sudan changes in lithic assemblages have been useful in determining how the populations who occupied this particular site changed from a hunting/gathering way of life to that of animal husbandry and crop production. The appearance of grinding stones in addition to flaked stone tool assemblages corresponded with the appearance of domestic stock and cultivation of cereals.

Eland's Bay Cave on the South African Atlantic coast has deposits 2 m deep which cover a period of the past 30 000 years. The lowest assemblage belongs to the 'Middle Stone Age' complex. Between 30 000 and 12 000 years ago the sea level rose and the occupants began exploiting sea foods which resulted into a change in settlement pattern. The uppermost deposits cover the last 3000 years and document the presence of pastoral practices.

The Elmenteitan Industry which flourished along the Mau Escarpment of Central Kenya between around 3000 and 1300 years ago can now be defined typologically on the basis of assemblages recovered from Maasai Gorge and the Remnant sites. The Elmenteitan lithic assemblages are sensitive indicators of specially localized activities. In comparison with other East African Neolithic cultures it is apparent that the Elmenteitan sites were situated in areas that were ecologically and geographically different.

An important cultural event during the Neolithic was a sudden change in the way of life from a mobile to a sedentary existence, which consequently brought about drastic changes in social systems. For example, one of the clearest pieces of evidence for sedentary ways of life among the Bassawa of Kalahari desert is overgrazing in an area. The Bassawa also have to live in places with permanent water, and alternative sources of food in the neighbourhood.

The aquatic way of life in the early post-Pleistocene wet period may be seen as a dynamic cultural change which paved the way for food production in the Continent of Africa. However, a better understanding of boating and waterside living patterns is needed along with dated rises and falls of lakes and rivers in all of the regions involved.

The earliest food-producing cultures in the Upper Nile seem to have appeared within the third millennium BC and probably even earlier. The Upper Nile Neolithic is related to the Central Sudanese (Khartoum) Neolithic tradition. Another related group which lived only a short distance from the Khartoum site, i.e. at Esh Shaheinab, depended mainly on food gathering supplemented to a small extent by the herding of goats and sheep. Further south at Kadera, a Neolithic site with evidence of a pastoral economy heavily dependent on domestic cattle has been investigated. The domesticates were probably introduced from Central Sahara or the Sahel.

Undisputable evidence for the domestication of plants in Africa south of the Sahara has also been obtained from a number of localities. For example, two important food plants, namely, *tef* and *ensete*, were probably brought under cultivation in Ethiopia before the middle of the first millennium BC. Finger millet and other cereals could have been under cultivation in eastern Africa prior to the second millenium BC and it is possible that domestic cattle, goats and sheep were also present at the same time. A stratified microlithic industry going back 15 000 years has been recovered from a site in Sudan which shows signs of use of cereal collection, meaning a possible period of pre-adaptation to systematic use of grain prior to deliberate cultivation of it.

The Neolithic populations of the Sahara region were probably the pioneers in upsetting the balanced economy of the desert margin lands. Domesticated animals of the area originally included cattle although only camels, a few goats and sheep can survive in this vast but denuded area. Given the circumstances, it could be argued that the Nile settlements were probably colonized from the Fezzan region before ecological conditions deteriorated.

Attribute analysis of pottery is as crucially important as that of lithic assemblages when considering African Neolithic cultures. So far only decoration and vessel shapes have been used for establishing meaningful ceramic types but there is still scope for other attributes to be incorporated into the exercise. One area where detailed attribute analysis of ceramics has been carried out is central as well as some parts of southern Kenya. Six major wares have been recognized—Nderit, Narosura, Akira, Maringishu, Remnant and Lanet. It is hoped that more wares will be recognized as a result of further research.

Prehistoric rock art is also a very important aspect of cultural developments in the African Continent. There is already adequate evidence to show that African rock art is as old as that of European and other parts of the Old World. So far only a few regions in Africa have been reasonably investigated and these include parts of southern Africa, parts of central Tanzania, and parts of the Sahara. There is therefore an urgent need for this important aspect of African prehistory to be properly studied.

The study of African Neolithic culture brings up a number of issues which require careful consideration or implementation. These can be summarized as follows:

(1) The lineal diffusionist theory involving movement of ideas related to 'civilization'—such as permanent settlements, crop production, animal husbandry—as all coming from outside the Continent of Africa ought to be scrapped since such assumptions are already adequately challenged.

(2) Terms relating to African Neolithic populations such as 'Cushitic' and the accompanying scenario should be abandoned.

(3) Although the study of modern-day hunter–gatherers of Africa can be useful in reconstructing the way of life of Neolithic populations in the Continent, such an exercise needs performing with uttermost caution.

(4) Introduction of new concepts and terms related to African prehistory, including the Neolithic period (for example 'the Aquatic Civilization') should only be done after carefully studying the archaeological evidence and also after adequate exchange of ideas among scholars engaged in the study of African prehistory.

J.C. Onyango-Abuje, Co-Chairman