

## Chapter Five

### **Painted Stones**

In my examination of the southern Cape burials in the previous chapter I have shown that there are substantial and significant differences between various ethnographically recorded San burial practices and the Later Stone Age burials known from the southern Cape (although there are also some similarities). This point may at first suggest that San ethnographies are not good analogical sources to use in the construction of arguments about Holocene southern Cape burials.

In this chapter I examine another class of archaeological material from the southern Cape sites that suggests differently: painted stones. A catalogue of the known painted stones from the southern Cape is presented in Appendix B. I begin with a general overview of the stones before moving to an examination of the imagery on them. In examining the imagery I compare it to the various San ethnographies.

Schapera (1930:163), when discussing the painted stones, pessimistically concluded that

It would be unprofitable to speculate upon the significance of such stones, as there is no record of any Bushman having explained them to our authorities; but that they were related to some definite belief can hardly be doubted.

Happily, methods have improved since the 1930s and archaeologists may now construct analogical arguments concerning the painted stones, even though, as Schapera rightly pointed out, direct accounts explaining the stones do not exist.

The practice of using San ethnography as an explicit analogical source to help interpret Later Stone Age rock art (particularly parietal rock paintings) is well

established in southern Africa (e.g., Lewis-Williams 1981a; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004a). Numerous points of close positive analogy have been demonstrated to exist between ethnographically described rituals and parietal rock art iconography. On the basis of these extensive points of positive analogy, further similarities between San ethnography and parietal rock art are induced, most notably that the makers of the art had a cosmology similar to that of various ethnographically known San groups.

The detailed work that has been conducted on parietal rock art makes an assessment of the art on the painted stones easier. As a first step, the parietal and mobiliary art may be compared: if similarities exist between the two bodies of iconography this would strongly suggest that the ethnography that informs the parietal may be largely if not equally applicable to the mobiliary art. On the other hand, if the two bodies of art showed no similarities an important disjuncture between traditions would be uncovered. Such a position does not, of course, negate the possibility that further points of positive analogy may exist between the mobiliary art and the San ethnographies or that other points of difference may co-exist. To disregard the interpretative work on the parietal art and instead focus exclusively on the ethnography would ignore potentially useful existing work, re-inventing an analogical wheel.

Before beginning a detailed analysis of the imagery on the painted stones, I provide a brief overview of the stones under discussion. All the stones I discuss come from the southern Cape, the same region as the burials, and indeed, many come from the same sites (Fig. 5.1). Of the 46 stones so far recorded, 18 (39%) come from three sites on the Robberg peninsula (Cave D: 1; Cave F: 1; Cave G: 16). Why so many of the stones come from so small an area, indeed most from a single site, is not yet known. Considering that in many cases only a small area of the site was excavated, it is also noteworthy that 60% of sites (n=15) have more than one painted stone recorded (Table 5.1).

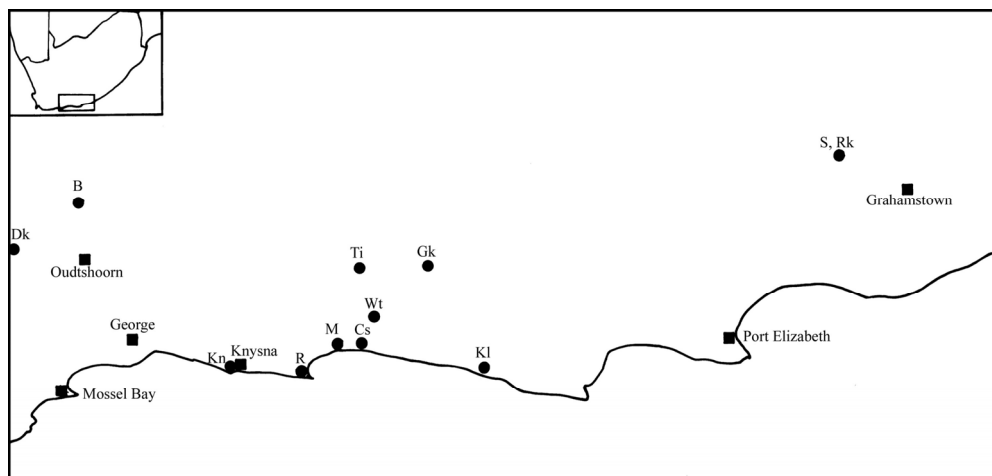


Figure 5.1: Locations of sites in which painted stones were found. B Boomplaas; Cs Coldstream; Dk Danielskraal; Gk Groot Kommandokloof; Kl Klasies River Mouth Cave 5; Kn Knysna Eastern Head Cave; M Matjes River Rock Shelter; R Robberg sites; Rk Roodekrantz; S Spitzkop; Ti Tierkloof; Wt Witcher's Cave.

Table 5.1: Numbers of southern Cape painted stones by site.

Site	Number of stones
Boomplaas	4
Coldstream	4
Danielskraal	2
Groot Komandokloof	1
Klasies River Mouth Cave 5	3 (4)*
Knysna Eastern Head Cave	1
Matjes River Rock Shelter	1
Robberg Cave D	1
Robberg Cave F	1
Robberg Cave G	16
Roodekrantz	2
Spitzkop	1
Tierkloof	2
Tsitsikamma Cave**	4
Whitcher's Cave	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>45 (46)*</b>

\* One of the stones from Klasies River Mouth Cave 5 is described in only one brief report. Whether it did in fact come from the site and what became of it are uncertain.

\*\* Tsitsikamma Cave may be the same site as Coldstream (see Chapter 3). Because of the uncertainty and to avoid further confusion I refer to these stones as coming from Tsitsikamma Cave.

In addition to the southern Cape stones, a number of other painted or engraved stones have been found in other areas of southern Africa. Seven painted rock fragments were excavated from Apollo 11 Cave in Namibia, and dated to about 27 000 BP (Wendt 1976; Table 5.2). Over and above the painted stones, a number

of engraved stones have also been found. At least five were excavated at Wonderwerk Cave, Northern Cape Province (Thackeray *et al.* 1981; Thackeray 1983a:73–74, fig. 43). These pieces date to between 10 200 and 3 990 BP (Thackeray *et al.* 1981; Thackeray 1983a:73–74). In addition to these, thirty-eight portable engraved stones have been recovered from open sites on Springbokoog, also in the Northern Cape Province (Morris & Beaumont 1994). Their dating is uncertain, but probably relates to the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries (Morris & Beaumont 1994). A single painted pebble dated to  $760 \pm 50$  BP is known from the Northern Cape Province (Sampson & Vogel 1989). The two most recently discovered painted stones come from a site called Cascades 2 in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg (Swart & Escott 2003). They remain undated.

Table 5.2: *Art mobilier* from southern Africa, excluding the southern Cape.

Site	Region	No. and type	Date	Reference
Apollo 11	South-west Namibia	7 painted	c. 27 000 BP	Wendt 1976
Wonderwerk	Northern Cape	5 engraved	10 200–3 990 BP	Thackeray <i>et al.</i> 1981; Thackeray 1983a:73–74
Abbot's Cave	Northern Cape	1 painted	$760 \pm 50$ BP	Sampson & Vogel 1989
Springbokoog 7	Northern Cape	13 engraved	Uncertain, probably AD 1300–1800	Morris & Beaumont 1994
Springbokoog 11	Northern Cape	14 engraved	Uncertain, probably AD 1300–1800	Morris & Beaumont 1994
Springbokoog 13	Northern Cape	11 engraved	Uncertain, probably AD 1300–1800	Morris & Beaumont 1994
Cascades 2	KwaZulu-Natal	2 painted	Undated	Swart & Escott 2003

Whilst it is important to acknowledge the existence of these examples of *art mobilier*, in this thesis I consider only those painted stones found in the southern Cape. I do not draw further on the *art mobilier* from other regions.

In discussing the southern Cape *art mobilier* I refer to them as ‘painted stones’ rather than ‘burial stones’, as other writers (e.g., Rudner 1971) have done. Only some of them are known with certainty to have come from burials, and I do not wish to imply that all the painted stones were related to burial. Some clearly were not.

Despite the initial interest shown in painted stones by early writers (especially Péringuey 1911; Hewitt 1922; Haughton 1926), little research has been conducted on them. Indeed, amongst the painted stones, only the famous Coldstream Stone has received much attention. Some writers have considered the meaning of its imagery (Haughton 1926; Woodhouse 1968, 1969, 1987; Rudner & Rudner 1970:125–126), and much attention has been directed to determining whether it is genuine or a fake (Lewis-Williams 1984:241; Wilson *et al.* 1990; Wilson & van Rijssen 1990); the exceptional state of preservation of the paintings has led to questions of their authenticity.

Besides this, there have been two major reviews of the painted stones. In the first of these, Jalmar Rudner (1971) examined all the examples known at the time. His review is important because it is the first (and only) publication of several of the painted stones—up until that time many of the stones in museum collections were virtually unknown. Rudner (1971) considered that the painted stones were primarily associated with burials (he described them as ‘burial stones’). More recent discoveries (painted stones covering ‘storage pits’ for instance; Deacon *et al.* 1976) have clearly shown that this was not always the case.

Lewis-Williams’s (1984) review of the painted stones followed more than a decade later. His account had a different purpose from Rudner’s: it sought to demonstrate the antiquity of the painting tradition and to show ideological continuities between San ethnographies and the art (in stark contradiction, it should be noted, to the Revisionist theme of the edited volume in which it appeared). To this end, Lewis-Williams (1984) identified imagery on some of the stones as associated with San religious practices. Because some of the painted stones were dated, Lewis-Williams was able to demonstrate both the antiquity of the rock painting tradition and the existence of substantial (if not comprehensive) continuities in the ideology that informed the production of the paintings. In doing this, he included all known mobiliary art, not just those stones from the southern Cape. More recently, Binneman and Hall (1993) reviewed the painted stones in

the collection of the Albany Museum, Grahamstown and suggested interpretations for the imagery on them. Their interpretations are similar to, and consistent with, the types of interpretation suggested by Lewis-Williams.

That so little work has been undertaken on painted stones can be explained by research trajectories in southern African archaeology. Rock art studies have tended to focus almost exclusively on parietal paintings, and to a lesser extent, engravings on open sites, whereas excavational archaeology has tended either to pass them over or to reduce them to curiosities mentioned in passing. True, the painted stones are few, enigmatic and, moreover, do not fit easily into the traditional categories used for archaeological remains. They have, therefore, been largely ignored. In contrast, I suggest that it is this categorical ambivalence that makes them of especial interest: they have the potential to be studied as *both* rock art *and* excavated artefacts. Archaeologists' marginalization of painted stones has been unfortunate because it has restricted the range of possible explanations of past societies and social change. Indeed, if the painted stones are approached via the kind of method that I have advocated (Chapter 2), we can fill out our understanding of the societies that made them and, even more significantly, approach the issue of change in the archaeological record from a new perspective.

### **Finding painted stones**

The first reported discovery of a painted stone was made in 1872 by the son of a Mr Chevalier in a cave on the Eastern Head at Knysna (SAM-AA 8386). Since then, about 46 such stones have been found. It is difficult to give an exact figure for the number of stones found because many of them were uncovered in the early years of the twentieth century; as I described in Chapter 3, the techniques of excavation and recording that the early excavators employed left much to be desired by modern standards. Some stones are known only by brief mentions in early reports, others were lost after they were found and reported.

The first person to take a professional interest in the painted stones was Péringuey, then director of the South African Museum in Cape Town. His interest was aroused by the discovery of three painted stones and many burials by Witcher in the Coldstream Cave, near the mouth of the Lottering River. I described in Chapter 3 how this discovery motivated Péringuey to set Drury into an excavation programme in the southern Cape. It was Drury who discovered, the now famous, ‘Coldstream Stone’ (SAM-AA 6008) upon which so much attention has since been lavished.

Drury’s description of his discovery of the Coldstream Stone (quoted in Chapter 3) is the most detailed account, amongst the early records, of the discovery and positioning of a painted stone. Other accounts provide less information. The only mention FitzSimons (1923a:542), for example, made of the painted stones from the Tsitsikamma Cave, whilst describing finds from the site, was “. . . and occasionally indistinct human figures on the flat gravestones.” His description of the painted stones from Witcher’s Cave was equally brief: “On a few traces of crude paintings were seen” (FitzSimons 1926:815). The lack of detailed associations and contexts for many of the painted stones limits their use for part of this study: it is impossible to examine the specific context of an excavated item when this was not recorded by the excavator. Even so, the imagery on some of these stones may still be examined and interpreted.

Despite the gloomy picture I have so far drawn of records of the painted stones, there are a number that have been found more recently. These were uncovered in controlled excavations and are well recorded. I give details of the more important (for the purposes of my argument) of these stones.

Singer and John Wymer (1969, 1982) found two painted stones at Klasies River Mouth Cave 5. The first of these (SAM-AA 29477) is a cobble, some 140 x 95 mm in size. On either side of the stone is painted an oval design in dark red (Singer & Wymer 1969:fig. 4, 1982:plate 49). The bifacial painting of stones, whilst not common, occurs in a number of cases. The stone was found in a shell

midden. The second stone (SAM-AA 29350) is also painted on a cobble, this one 270 x 150 x 80 mm in maximum dimensions. On one face of this stone is painted a human figure and four other images, described as either dolphins or fish (Singer & Wymer 1969:509). The human figure is painted in black; the dolphins are painted in black with white belly lines (Singer & Wymer 1969:figs 2–3, 1982:plate 48). There are also the faded remains of four human figures on the edge of the stone, although Singer and Wymer omit these from their copy. This stone too, was found in a shell midden. I discuss this stone in detail in Chapter 7.

In his review of the painted stones, Rudner (1971) mentioned a third stone from Klasies River Mouth Cave 5. Singer and Wymer (1969, 1982) did not, however, refer to this stone in either of their publications on the Klasies River Mouth Cave 5 stones. The stone apparently has the faded remains of two human figures in red on one side, and a large human figure in black and some red marks on the other side (Rudner 1971:57). No other sources mention this third stone, and I was unable to find it in the collections at the Iziko South African Museum.

A further stone has since been found at the site (Albany Museum excavation number KRM5B/E22/M5). Binneman excavated it from an “undisturbed occupational horizon and [it] is not linked to any other feature” (Binneman & Hall 1993:90). A small antelope, in red, is painted on the 84 x 55 mm long stone slab (Binneman & Hall 1993:figs 2–3).

A further four painted stones were excavated at Boomplaas Cave, Oudtshoorn (Deacon *et al.* 1976). The first of these (SAM, no catalogue number) is a limestone slab, 270 x 190 mm, with an antelope painted on it in red (Deacon *et al.* 1976:fig. 3). The stone slab is weathered on all surfaces, a feature which the excavators suggested indicates that it “detached from the parent rock well before it was painted” (Deacon *et al.* 1976:143). The stone came from pit 9, square N14, at the base of layer BLD3. The pit was also associated with “another large slab and a lining of plant material” (Deacon *et al.* 1976:143). The excavators did not say exactly what the ‘plant material’ in this pit was. They did, however, state



previously that “[t]he pits are lined with the papery leaves of the Boophone bulb (gifbol) and grass” (Deacon *et al.* 1976:142). It seems likely, then, that pit 9 was also lined with *Boophane* bulb scales and grass—as we shall see, a significant point.

The second stone from Boomplaas Cave (SAM, no catalogue number) is a limestone slab, 220 x 140 mm, with a black and white painting of an antelope, possibly an eland (Deacon *et al.* 1976:fig. 4). The stone came from pit 37, square P15, layer BLD3 AM. This pit also contained two other pieces of rock and was lined with grass and *Boophane*. The third stone (SAM, no catalogue number) was also found overlying the contents of a pit (pit 57, square R13, base of BLD3). This stone is a quartzite river cobble, 170 x 110 mm, with a large red ‘blotch’ with legs painted on it (Deacon *et al.* 1976:fig. 5). This pit, too, was lined with *Boophane*.

The fourth painted stone from Boomplaas (SAM, no catalogue number) is the least clear. The entire surface of the stone is covered with red ochre. According to the excavators, it has an “enigmatic red blob” (Deacon *et al.* 1976:145, fig. 6) painted on it. Hilary Deacon, Janette Deacon and Mary Brooker (1976:145) interpreted this blob as being possibly an antelope. After having carefully examined the stone, I suggest that the lines interpreted as legs are merely lines of paint extending from the central blob of paint. I suggest that the painting is not representational, but rather one of the paint patches that are such a widespread feature of the southern Cape painted stones. The stone, a broken river cobble 240 x 155 x 50 mm, was found in a thick white ash band in a prominent depression in the deposit labelled pit 77 in square Q15, layer AL1 BLA (Deacon *et al.* 1976:142). Although the depression was labelled a ‘pit’, it was qualitatively different from the ‘storage pits’ in the overlying layers (Deacon *et al.* 1976:142).

One stone was recovered from Groot Kommandokloof Shelter, Kouga Mountains (Albany Museum excavation number KK1/H11/BCL). A slab of rock about 84 x 52 mm, it was included in a cairn of stones covering a burial (KK1/2) (Binneman & Hall 1993:93). Binneman described the image on the stone as a “possible

charcoal drawing”, possibly of a human figure (Binneman & Hall 1993:94, fig. 7). The burial was that of a juvenile, lying on its right side in an extended position on bedrock. The burial faced in a northerly direction. The cairn covering the skeleton comprised fifteen stones. Besides the painted stone, the cairn contained two grinding stones (one stained with red ochre), ochre stained hammer stones, anvils, flaked cobbles and flakes (Binneman & Hall 1993:93).

The most recently found painted stones are the two discovered by Binneman (1999a) overlying a human burial (TK1) at Tierkloof in the Kouga Mountains. They were lying next to each other above the body in the grave. The burial was that of an adult male buried on his left side in a flexed position against the back wall of the shelter (Binneman 1999a). The body was orientated in an easterly direction and faced towards the wall of the shelter (Binneman 1999a). The body was partly mummified, probably by natural desiccation, and was wrapped in the bulb scales of *Boophane distichia* (Binneman 1999a; Steyn *et al.* 2007; see Lynnerup 2007 on the process of mummification). Some seashell and seed beads were found decorating the body (Steyn *et al.* 2007:4) and it was covered with other plant matter (Binneman 1999a).

The smaller of the two stones (Albany Museum excavation number TKS/V5/Painted stone 2) is a roughly circular quartzite block with maximum dimensions of 240 x 240 x 85 mm (Pearce 2002:45, 2003). It had been used as a grinding stone and has traces of ground red ochre on it. The only painting on the stone is a patch of red paint, about 70 mm across, on the broken edge of the stone. The second, larger stone from Tierkloof (Albany Museum excavation number TKS/V5/Painted stone 1) contains substantially more paintings. It is a roughly rectangular quartzite slab with maximum dimensions of 410 x 275 x 70 mm (Pearce 2002:49, 2003). Both major surfaces are painted. One surface has twelve human figures painted in yellow and two patches of paint, one red and the other yellow. The other surface has the faded remains of three human figures painted in red and two patches of paint, one red the other yellow (Pearce 2002, 2003, 2005).

### **Physical characteristics**

Before moving to an examination of the imagery on the painted stones, I briefly discuss the stones themselves. They have a number of features of interest. Although the significance of some features remains obscure, others become important in following chapters.

The type of stone chosen for painting varies. Most (n=29) are naturally flat rock slabs, although a fair number (n=16) are water-worn cobbles or pebbles. Twelve show signs of having been used as grinding stones before being painted. This breakdown of stone types has several important implications. The most obvious of these is that some (at least) of the painted stones must have been painted as detached pieces; the cobbles and grinding stones must have been painted as detached objects. It cannot therefore be argued that all the painted stones were originally parietal art that had detached from rock walls and been incorporated in the deposit or deliberately placed in certain contexts. Linked to this is the point that a number of painted stones are bifacially painted: they have images on both major surfaces. They cannot be simply detachments from shelter walls. Painted stones were intentionally produced for some purpose. If some painted sections had fallen from rock walls, and were subsequently curated by people living in the rock shelter, they do not negate the fact that other painted stones were intentionally produced as mobile items.

If, for a moment, we leave the painted stones aside and instead examine burials from the southern Cape, we find that many of these were covered with stones (Chapter 4, Appendix A). These 'grave stones' can also be divided into stone slabs, water-worn cobbles and grinding stones (see Wadley 1997 for discussion of grinding stones in graves). Additionally, many grave stones were covered in red ochre, apparently deliberately rather than as a result of their being used to grind ochre (e.g., Hewitt 1922:457, 460; FitzSimons 1926:814; Hoffman 1958:345; Rudner 1971:57; Rudner & Rudner 1973:94, 96). The painted, pigment-smear-

and unpainted stones are all repeatedly found in the same depositional contexts. All that differentiates them is whether they have pigment on them or not, and whether the pigment is smeared or painted on. I therefore suggest that the unpainted grave stones, the pigment-smeared grave stones and the painted grave stones form a continuous class, and furthermore that this class should include painted stones not associated with burials: there is no qualitative difference between those associated with burials and those not. Any explanation of the painted stones therefore needs also to accommodate the unpainted and pigment-smeared stones.

An intriguing feature of the painted stones that has so far received little comment is that many of them (n=14) have flakes removed from their surface. These flakes are typically small, usually less than 10 mm, and often (but not always) struck off the painted surface, that is, a blow was struck to the edge of the stone to remove a flake from the edge of the painted surface. The number of flakes removed varies amongst stones: some have no removals, others a single flake and others have many flakes struck off. The flakes are not fresh. This point argues against their being recent damage caused in excavation, transport or storage. The regular arrangement of the flake scars also suggests that they were not accidental.

Buried painted stones are one of the few items of datable rock art in southern Africa (but see van der Merwe *et al.* 1987; Mazel & Watchman 1997, 2003), and it is for this reason that they are often most noted (e.g., Thackeray 1983b). Dating rock art is, after all, an extremely tricky operation (e.g., Watchman 1993; Rosenfeld & Smith 1997). I summarize the dated painted stones in Table 5.3. The youngest date of a find comes from Robberg Cave D. It was found covering a skeleton (Rudner 1971:54; Rudner & Rudner 1973:94). Four large *Patella* shells also covered the burial. Two of these were submitted for radiocarbon dating, and returned a date of  $1\ 925 \pm 33$  BP (Pta-014) (Rudner 1971:54; Rudner & Rudner 1973:94). Although the determination is not entirely satisfactory, being obtained from shell and long after excavation, it nevertheless needs to be taken into account (Lewis-Williams 1984:238).

Of almost identical date are the two stones from Tierkloof ( $1\,930 \pm 20$  BP, Pta-7908 to  $2\,000 \pm 35$  BP, Pta-8361; Steyn *et al.* 2007:4) and three stones from Boomplaas Cave ( $1\,955 \pm 65$  BP, UW-336; Deacon *et al.* 1976:142; Fairhall *et al.* 1976:226). Two determinations were made on the Tierkloof grave. The  $1\,930 \pm 20$  BP date came from plant material intentionally placed in the grave immediately underlying the painted stones and above the body (Binneman 1999a; Steyn *et al.* 2007:4). A second date of  $2\,000 \pm 35$  BP was obtained from finger bones from the right hand of the skeleton over which the stones lay (Steyn *et al.* 2007:4). The determination for the Boomplaas stones dates the interface between the layer from which the stones came and the one underlying it (Deacon *et al.* 1976:142; Fairhall *et al.* 1976:226) and is thus a maximum age of deposition. Deacon, Deacon and Brooker (1976:142) published an incorrect date ( $1\,955 \pm 75$  BP, UW-306) for this interface. The correct date is  $1\,955 \pm 65$  BP (UW-336) (Fairhall *et al.* 1976:226).

Table 5.3: Dated painted stones from the southern Cape (all radiocarbon dates).

Stone	Date	Source	Reference
Robberg Cave D	$1\,925 \pm 33$ BP (Pta-014)	Determination on <i>Patella</i> shell from same burial	Rudner 1971:54–55; Rudner & Rudner 1973:94
Tierkloof, stones 1 and 2	$1\,930 \pm 20$ BP (Pta-7908) $2\,000 \pm 35$ BP (Pta-8361)	Determination on plant material underlying the stones in the grave hole Determination on finger bones from the right hand of the skeleton	Binneman 1999a Steyn <i>et al.</i> 2007:4
Boomplaas Cave, stones 1–3	$1\,955 \pm 65$ BP (UW-336)	Date for interface between layer from which the stones came and the one underlying it	Deacon <i>et al.</i> 1976:142; Fairhall <i>et al.</i> 1976:226
Klasies River Mouth Cave 5, stone 1	$2\,285 \pm 105$ BP (GX-1397)	Determination on shells associated with stone	Singer & Wymer 1969
Klasies River Mouth Cave 5, stone 4	$3\,900 \pm 50$ BP (Pta-3906)	Determination on charcoal from same layer	Binneman & Hall 1993:90–91
Klasies River Mouth Cave 5, stone 2	$2\,285 \pm 105$ BP (GX-1397) to $4\,110 \pm 160$ BP (GX-1378)	Dates bracketing the stone	Singer & Wymer 1969
Matjies River Rock Shelter	$5\,400 \pm 250$ BP (L-336F) to $7\,750 \pm 300$ BP (L-336E) $5\,600 \pm 200$ BP	Dates bracketing layer from which stone came Carbon attached to stone	Rudner 1971:55–56
Boomplaas Cave, stone 4	$6\,400 \pm 75$ BP (UW-306)	Layer from which stone came	Deacon <i>et al.</i> 1976:142
Groot Kommandokloof Shelter	$6\,430$ BP (Pta-4612)	Layer into which the burial was dug	Binneman & Hall 1993:93–94

The oldest of the dated painted stones came from the burial at Groot Kommandokloof Shelter that I have described. The layer into which the burial was dug has been dated to 6 430 BP (Pta-4612) (Binneman & Hall 1993:93–94). Of similar age is one of the painted stones from Boomplaas Cave. The layer from which the lowermost of the Boomplaas stones came has been dated to 6 400 ± 75 BP (UW-306) (Deacon *et al.* 1976:142).

### **Distinctive imagery**

I now move on to an examination of the imagery on the painted stones. It is not possible to interpret the imagery on all of the stones: many have only a single image, with no distinguishing features. These stones do not provide even an initial interpretation. This is not to say that they were not meaningful to the people who made and used them: they probably were. It is just that it is difficult to interpret the meaning from the minimal evidence available. Still, as I have pointed out, the process of interpretation is not starting anew: there is already a comprehensive body of interpretative work available on the parietal paintings (and to a lesser extent, the engravings). This work may help us understand the imagery on some of the stones. Once the more distinctive paintings are interpreted, other imagery may then be understood within the broader interpretative framework thus established. Most of the painted stones with such imagery have already been interpreted by Lewis-Williams (1984; see also Binneman & Hall 1993). The interpretations of the painted stones I give here are similar to those of Lewis-Williams (see also Pearce 2005), although I re-analyse many of the stones and use new copies of a number of them.

When one is viewing and discussing these stones, the idea of a conceptual vertical axis is useful. The stones are mobile pieces and may, of course, be viewed in any orientation. No one orientation can be said to be unequivocally correct. The conceptual vertical therefore describes the orientation of the imagery I use in my

interpretation (see Skotnes 1994 for discussion of the importance of orientation in the interpretation of Later Stone Age rock art). In some cases I orient stones with a different conceptual vertical to that previously published. On some stones, different imagery on the same face may best be viewed using different conceptual verticals.

The first stone I examine is one of the earlier stones found at Coldstream shelter (SAM-AA 8387) (Péringuey 1911:plate XXVII fig. 199; Lewis-Williams 1984:fig. 9.6). It is a grinding stone of grey quartzite, about 210 x 170 x 60 mm, with four human figures painted in black on a background of ground-in red ochre (Fig. 5.2). At least two of the figures are clearly female, with breasts depicted. The central standing figure is depicted in a clapping posture. This activity is often represented in the same way in the parietal paintings (e.g., Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:38, 42, 105, figs 16a, 28, 67a, 86c). A depiction of a woman clapping is significant: it is they who usually clap the rhythm of the medicine songs at trance dances (e.g., Marshall 1969:365–366, 1999:67, 80, 83; Katz 1982:40).

The second feature of this stone is the small figure on the right in a ‘squatting’ posture. This posture is repeated on another stone from Robberg Cave G (SAM-AA 2822). Rudner (1971:fig. 2) illustrated it with the conceptual vertical along the short axis of the stone. I suggest it is more useful to view the imagery with the conceptual vertical along the long axis of the stone (Fig. 5.3). The human figure is then seen to be in a similar squatting posture to the figure on the stone from Coldstream shelter and to many figures in parietal art. I suggest that this posture is more likely than the “jumping man” suggested by Rudner (1971:55). The figure has a quiver or hunting bag slung horizontally across its body and seems to aim an arrow at two indeterminate figures above it. At the top left is a depiction of a bird.

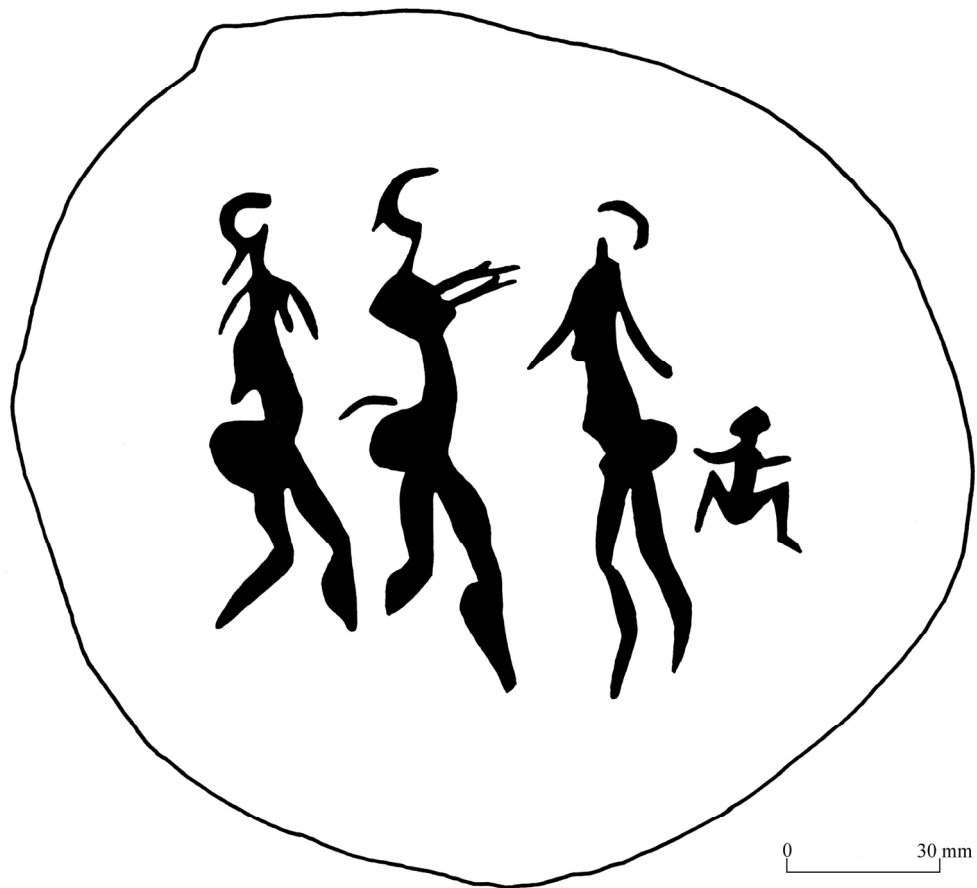


Figure 5.2: Drawing of painted stone Coldstream SAM-AA 8387. Black represents black (after Lewis-Williams 1984:fig. 9.6).

Anne Solomon (1994, 1995) has argued that human figures in similar squatting postures, found throughout southern Africa (Zimbabwe, Drakensberg, Northern Cape and Western Cape Provinces), form a single category of imagery. She labelled these figures 'mythic women'. It is, though, not clear whether all these figures are depictions of women. The figure on the Robberg Cave G stone is a male with a clearly depicted penis and testes. Thomas Huffman (1983:51–52), in discussing the Zimbabwean examples, argued that the mythic women (he used the then popular label 'mother goddess figures') were related to 'trance imagery' and represent complex metaphors of 'potency'. Solomon (1994, 1995) disagreed and suggested instead that the mythic women were related to gender issues and represented particular ideas expressed in myths. Lewis-Williams (1998:91) pointed out that the squatting posture is not distinctive: it may be adopted by



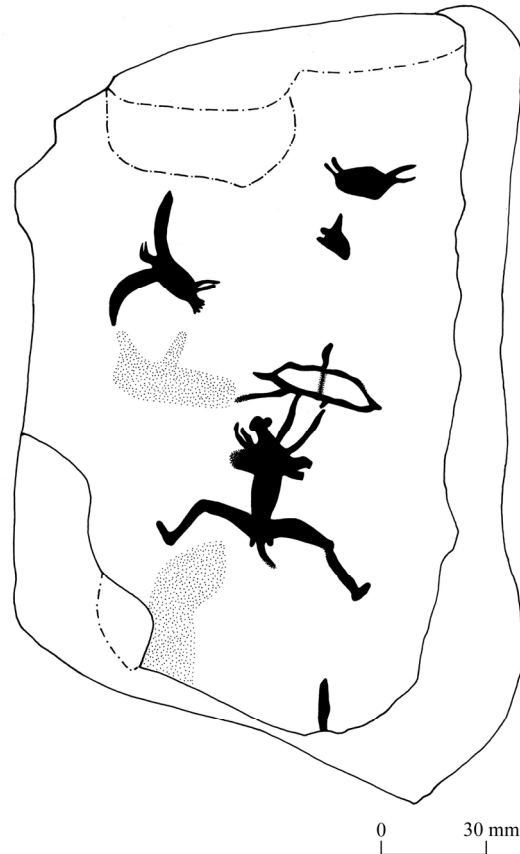


Figure 5.3: Drawing of painted stone Robberg Cave G SAM-AA 2822. Black represents black, stipple represents faded black.

people under a wide variety of circumstances, sitting around a camp fire, for example. All squatting figures may not, therefore, represent a single coherent category. Anatomical evidence suggests that squatting was an extremely common activity in the Later Stone Age, particularly in the southern and Eastern Cape (Dewar & Pfeiffer 2004; Dlamini & Morris 2005). Unfortunately, the squatting figures on the two painted stones, although highly distinctive, cannot be definitively considered as diagnostic of any particular practice or set of beliefs.

Further distinct postures are depicted on the stone from Knysna Eastern Head Cave (SAM-AA 8386). Four human figures are painted in black on a background of ground-in red ochre (Fig. 5.4) on the small (125 x 100 x 45 mm) stone slab. The two figures on the left are sitting and, like the central figure on the stone from Coldstream, clapping. In addition to the clapping figures, the figure at the lower

right is dancing in the distinctive bending-forward posture (Lewis-Williams 1984:240). This posture is well attested in San ethnographies. It is brought about by contraction and cramping of the abdominal muscles after long hours of rhythmically dancing to medicine songs (Marshall 1969:363, 1999:72; Katz 1982:45–46) and is frequently depicted in the parietal art (e.g., Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:40, figs 15, 17, 20, 24, 28, 29, 41a, 49b). It is one of the postures considered to be diagnostic of the San trance dance.

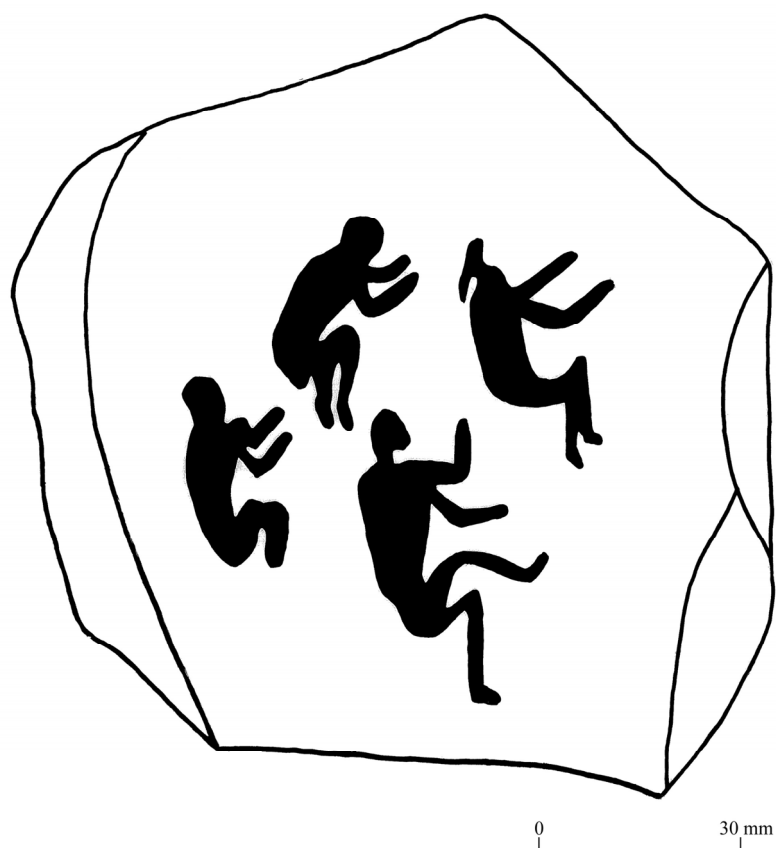


Figure 5.4: Drawing of painted stone Knysna Eastern Head Cave SAM-AA 8386. Black represents black (after Lewis-Williams 1984:fig. 9.7).

The bending-forward posture is again depicted on another of the stones from Robberg Cave G (SAM-AA 2828) (Fig. 5.5). The central figure is standing, bending-forward with its arms hanging down forwards. The figure on the right appears to have collapsed to its knees, but is still bent forward at the waist. A figure to the left also bends forward, but in addition has its arms extended

backwards, behind its back. This is another posture distinctive of the San trance dance. This ‘arms-back’ posture is adopted by Ju/’hoan dancers “when *n/um* is going into your body, when you are asking God for *n/um*” (Lewis-Williams 1981a:88). ‘*N/um*’, now usually spelt ‘*n/om*’, is a Ju/’hoan word best translated as ‘supernatural potency’.



Figure 5.5: Drawing of painted stone Robberg Cave G SAM-AA 2828. Black represents black.

These same features are repeated on yet another of the stones from Robberg, this time from Cave D (SAM-AA 2616). The stone slab (195 x 155 x 75 mm) depicts ten human figures in black and a large patch of black paint (Fig. 5.6). The figure at the top centre is in the arms-back posture. The figure to the right of this one, if the stone is viewed from sideways on to the way it is illustrated, is bending forward. Sideways-on may be the correct orientation of the stone for this particular figure because its legs continue around the edge of the stone; there is nothing to suggest that all figures should be viewed in the same orientation. Another figure on the lower part of the stone also bends forward. One of the human figures on Robberg Cave G, stone 5 (SAM-AA 2822; see Appendix B) also bends forward at the waist.



Figure 5.6: Drawing of painted stone Robberg Cave D SAM-AA 2616. Black represents black.

Another important feature is preserved on the famous ‘Coldstream Stone’ (the one found by Drury; SAM-AA 6008). This stone, 295 x 230 x 85 mm, has three polychrome human figures (Fig. 5.7). Their heads are of the ‘hook’ type (see Vinnicombe 1967:139). In this case, though, the white faces are still preserved. Across each of the faces are several fine red lines. These were initially suggested to “represent the embellishments in use among the members of the clan” (Péringuey 1911:209; see also Woodhouse 1987:540). In interpretations of parietal rock art these fine red stripes across the face are argued to represent blood from nasal haemorrhages, often smeared back across the face. Such nose-bleeds are frequently mentioned in early ethnographies that describe trance dances (e.g., Arbousset & Daumas 1846:246–247; Orpen 1874:10; Bleek 1935:19–20, 34) and

are painted at many parietal sites (e.g., Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:40, figs 15, 17, 18, 19b, 22).



Figure 5.7: Drawing of Coldstream Stone SAM-AA 6008. Black represents red, white represents white, stipple represents black.

My examination of the painted stones has so far revealed that a number of them contain depictions of distinct ‘dance postures’ that are well described in San ethnographies and indisputably common in parietal art. That postures and actions closely associated with ritual trance dances in San ethnography are depicted on some painted stones suggests that other imagery on them may also be understood in terms of the trance dance and other related religious ideas. In other words, details of San religious practice may be useful in interpreting imagery on the painted stones (Lewis-Williams 1984; Pearce 2005).

### Further features

With this thought in mind, I now examine some of the other imagery and features of the painted stones that are not as explicit as the ones that I have so far described. The first of the stones I examine in this section came from Klasies River Mouth Cave 5 (SAM-AA 29350) (Fig. 5.8). I consider this stone in detail in Chapter 7. I therefore make only brief comments here. The large human figure is probably in the bending forward posture I have described, and thus associated with the trance dance. The figures on which I wish particularly to comment here, though, are the four dolphins that are placed alongside the large human figure.

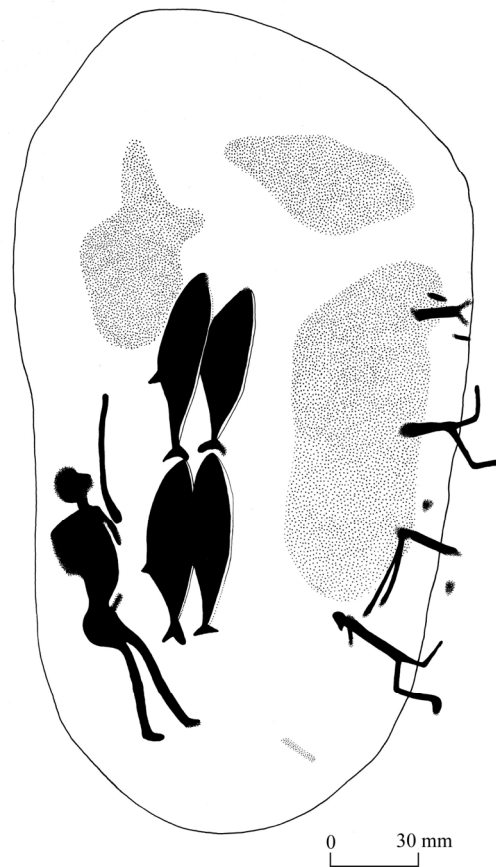


Figure 5.8: Drawing of painted stone Klasies River Mouth Cave 5 SAM-AA 29350. Black represents black, white represents white, stipple represents faded black.

Viewed in the context of the bending forward human figure, and the other figures I have described, the dolphins make sense. If a ritual interpretation of the paintings on the stone is admitted, based on the distinctive postures I have described, the dolphins can be understood within this interpretative framework. Much of the complex San religious experience is expressed in the form of metaphor. A common metaphor, identified from the ethnographies, is the equation of trance experience with being under water. In the parietal rock paintings, this metaphor is frequently depicted in the form of water creatures: eels, turtles and even crabs and tadpoles, but most commonly fish (Lewis-Williams *et al.* 1986; Lewis-Williams 1988:8; Dowson 1988; Ouzman 1995; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:54–55; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004b). Considered in this light, dolphins painted next to a probably trancing dancer make perfect sense. They highlighted the aspects of trance experience that were like being under water. Another stone, from Tsitsikamma Cave, has a clear depiction of a whale painted on it (Rudner & Rudner 1970:fig. 77; Rudner 1971:56), perhaps suggesting the importance of ‘underwater’ for the painters of the stones, possibly in a coastal ‘marine’ variant. I return to this point in Chapter 7.

This explanation can be taken further, if we note another common metaphor. I now refer to the bird painted on the Robberg Cave G stone (Fig. 5.3). Certain aspects of trance are said to be like flight, most notably the sensation of floating that is often described. The flight-metaphor is often depicted in the form of birds (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:56–57; Hollmann 2003) in the parietal paintings. If the other features and postures that I have noted are taken into account, the Robberg Cave G stone is unlikely to depict a person shooting at a bird (Rudner 1971:55) in any literal sense (indeed, the arrow seems to be aimed at two indeterminate figures, not the bird). The depiction is more likely to represent some aspect of religious experience, perhaps involving the enigmatic squatting posture. The flight metaphor may also have been prominent in the thought of the painter who depicted the images.

A feature of five of the painted stones is paint patches. The paint patches are distinct from the smeared and ground-in pigment. They are generally irregular areas of paint intentionally applied to one or more faces of the stones. Patches of red, yellow or black paint have been recorded.

Like the human postures I have considered, such patches are not unique to the painted stones. They are also found in the parietal art, particularly in the Western Cape Province. There they are often described as 'palettes', but the writers who use this word do not intend it to be taken literally. The placing of those areas of paint on vertical surfaces suggests that they were not used for mixing liquid paint. These palettes differ from the paint patches on the painted stones in that many of them have been rubbed smooth (Yates & Manhire 1991). One interpretation of the Western Cape Province palettes is that they "may have represented significant reservoirs from which supernatural power could be drawn" (Yates & Manhire 1991:8).

Paint patches may, though, have additional meanings. It has been shown that paintings often interact with the rock face on which they were painted—images are frequently seen to be coming out of or going into cracks and steps in the rock (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990; see also Lewis-Williams 1995a; Lewis-Williams *et al.* 2000). In this view, the rock surface acted as a 'veil' or 'membrane' between the material human world and the spirit world. Some paintings may be seen as things of the spirit world, coming through the membrane to become visible in the human world (in effect traversing levels of the cosmos).

Such use of the rock face has a further dimension. In a few cases, the cracks from which paintings emerge are heavily smeared with paint (e.g., Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990:6, figs 2, 3a; Lewis-Williams 1995a:fig. 9). In still other examples, paintings emerge from patches of paint without any cracks evident (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990:6, 14, fig. 3b). In these cases it is as if the paint patches were substitutes for cracks in the rock; if no suitable entrance to the spirit world (i.e., a crack in the rock) was available, a painter could simply paint one onto



(through?) the rock face (see Yates & Manhire 1991 for an exploration of this concept in the Western Cape Province). Paint itself was a powerful substance (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990:14; Lewis-Williams 2001a:29–32; see also How 1962:37–38; Jolly 1986; Lewis-Williams 1986), perhaps explaining its perceived ability to ‘dissolve’ holes through the membrane of the rock face and into the spirit world.

I suggest that the paint patches on the painted stones may have fulfilled a similar function: they were entrances through the rock to the spirit world beyond. I explore the issue of moving through stones covering burials in Chapter 6.

### **Ideological continuities**

My discussion of the painted stones shows that the imagery may be understood within the same explanatory framework as the parietal imagery. Several distinctive ‘dance postures’ are repeatedly identified on the stones. In addition to these postures, images depicting certain common ‘trance metaphors’ are found on a number of the stones—aquatic creatures and birds. The ethnographically derived explanation that has clarified parietal paintings from most of southern Africa (e.g., Drakensberg: Lewis-Williams 1981a, 2003; Western Cape: Maggs & Sealy 1983; Yates *et al.* 1985; Manhire *et al.* 1986; Yates & Manhire 1991; Hollmann 1993; Yates *et al.* 1993; Northern Province: Eastwood 1999; Eastwood & Blundell 1999; Laue 2000; Zimbabwe: Huffman 1983; Mguni 2001, 2002), not surprisingly, also explains the imagery on these painted stones. Significantly, no competing explanations have been advanced to explain the imagery on these stones. I suggest that this conclusion should be generalized to include *all* the painted stones from the southern Cape. To do otherwise would be to accept a series of disparate *ad hoc* explanations, each one explaining perhaps only a single stone.

Having highlighted similarities between the imagery on the painted stones and ethnographic San beliefs and parietal rock paintings, it is equally important to note that there are also differences. Besides the obvious difference in scale—rock shelters often contain hundreds of paintings, often in relations of superpositioning—the subjects depicted also show differences. Subjects such as eland and therianthropes, ubiquitous in San ethnographies and parietal paintings, are so-far not recorded amongst the painted stones. If, as I have described, there are both similarities and differences between the imagery on the painted stones and what is known of San cosmology we are left in a situation in which the overall San cosmology is applicable to the period of the painted stones, but much of the specific detail of how people perceived that cosmos is different.

Acceptance of an ethnographically based explanation has important implications. First, it establishes an interpretative framework in which to examine the paintings on stones with less distinctive imagery. More possibilities are now available: not only can distinctive dance postures provide insight, but also other less distinctive imagery (e.g., Binneman & Hall 1993; Pearce 2005).

Second, and more significantly for this study, it demonstrates continuities between San ethnographies and the southern Cape Holocene archaeology. Moreover, the point by point similarities I have shown suggest, by analogy, that the art on the painted stones was informed by a cosmology similar to that of the San. These cosmological similarities are particularly significant in light of the differences I demonstrated between ethnographic San burials and archaeological burials. There are some very clear similarities but equally clear differences between San ethnography and southern Cape Holocene archaeology. The implication of this combination of similarities and differences is that San cosmology, as I have described it in terms of a general model, may help interpret some aspects of southern Cape burial practice even though ethnographically recorded San burials are very different from archaeological ones.