Chapter Seven

Water Symbolism

I have shown, so far, that the general positioning, structure and arrangement of the southern Cape graves related to concepts of entrance to the spirit world. There are, however, a great many other items placed in graves that were undoubtedly meaningful. Whilst it is probably not possible to determine the exact symbolism of most of these items, some general comments may nevertheless be made about some of them. A common theme that seems to hold many of the items together is water. I explore these water connections in this chapter.

In examining the structure of graves, I used a modified version of Lewis-Williams's (1996) model of the San cosmos to help make sense of apparently disparate elements. Hall (2000) also used this model to explain the geographical placement of certain burials in the same region. Clearly, there is some overlap in the scope of these two explanations.

Hall (2000) described temporal differences in the uses of shelters and burial practices at two sites in the region, Edgehill and Welgeluk. At Welgeluk the burial complex was on bedrock and predated the occupational deposits (Hall 2000:140). The site was exclusively a burial ground between 5 000 and 4 600 BP (Hall 2000:138, 140). Occupational deposits began accumulating at about 4 560 BP and deposition continued until about 2 000 BP (Hall 2000:139). The site is located next to a large pool in a river. Throughout the same time span, people lived at another shelter, Edgehill, some distance from the burials. Hall (2000:140–143) explained this spatial difference using the horizontal axis of the bi-axial model of the cosmos: Welgeluk (the burial site) was distant from the camp site and positioned next to water, an appropriate place for the dead to cross over to the spirit world.

After 4 500 BP Welgeluk changed conceptually and became a living site (Hall 2000:143–144); occupational deposits built up and covered the burial cairn. Hall explained this change as a result of population increase leading to pressure on resources: people lived on top of graves to link themselves more strongly with the territory through kinship with the dead (Hall 2000). I am not at this stage concerned with the reasons why people changed their view of their physical relationship to places of the dead. I discuss this question more fully in Chapter 11.

In advancing his argument, Hall (2000:141) concentrated primarily on the horizontal axis of the model, describing the Edgehill site as a 'camp' site distinct and distant from the burial site Welgeluk that is situated in the 'water' position. He argued that next to water is the ideal place to bury the dead because it is there, at the point where the two axes of the cosmos intersect, that the dead could most easily pass from the human world to the spirit world (Hall 2000:141). His argument was, essentially, about why people chose certain points in the landscape to fulfil certain functions, and then, later, why the use of those places changed.

My use of the model focuses rather on the vertical axis. More particularly, I concentrate on the point of intersection of the axes where people may move from the human world of the horizontal axis to the spirit world of the vertical. My use of the cosmological model does not in any way contradict Hall's: we simply concentrate on different parts of the model. There is, though, one area of Hall's (2000:141–142) discussion of the model that bears directly on what I say: his description of water symbolism in the Welgeluk burials.

Two of the Welgeluk burials included items that Hall argued related symbolically to 'water' and 'entrance into water' (Hall 2000:141–142). He used this symbolism to strengthen his argument that burials were placed near water to put them in a cosmological position from which the dead could most easily 'cross-over' to the spirit world. I argued in Chapter 6 that burials were redolent with symbolism relating to entrance to the spirit world, yet the symbols I have so far described do not relate directly to water—the centre point in the original model of the cosmos.

The identification of water symbols in graves adds yet another dimension to the already multi-component symbolism of graves. Hall, though, described only two water-related items from the Welgeluk burials: a turtle carapace and a warthog tusk (Hall 2000:141–142). Before accepting that water symbols were an important part of southern Cape Later Stone Age graves in general, it is necessary to examine other burials to determine whether they included similar symbols.

The warthog tusk that Hall (2000:141–142) described seems to be unique to the Welgeluk burial (although bush pig tusks were found in two graves at Vygeboom, VB1 and VB2, [Silberbauer 1979:185–186] and a hippopotamus incisor in the grave at Snuifklip, SF1 [Morris *et al.* 1987]. The other item, the turtle carapace, appears to be more common in graves. Tortoise and 'water tortoise' or terrapin carapaces are described from many individual burials, indeed they are recorded in 17.5% of graves containing grave goods. The association between terrapins and water is obvious. The fact that they move between water and land may also have been significant: they transcended and potentially mediated an important boundary. I develop this theme in a following section of this chapter. The association between tortoises and water is less obvious. /Xam ethnography describes tortoises as 'things of the water or rain' (the /Xam word '*!khwa*' means both water and rain) (Bleek 1933:303). Whilst one cannot transpose this ethnography directly onto the Later Stone Age southern Cape, a similar belief may have pertained. The high relative frequency of tortoise and terrapin carapaces in graves adds weight to the argument for a more general water symbolism.

Another item commonly found in graves is seashells, either as objects on their own or as body ornaments in the form of beads and pendants (e.g., Rudner 1971:54; Rudner & Rudner 1973:94; Thackeray & Feast 1974; Hall & Binneman 1987:table 2; Binneman 1997:97). Seashells were extremely common in burials; they were found in 41.3% (n=26) of burials with grave goods (in addition, fresh water mussel shells are known from two graves). They also often occurred in large numbers in individual graves. One of the burials at Klasies River Mouth

Cave 5 (KRM5/4), for instance, had an astonishing 1 108 *Nassarius* shell beads scattered over the body (Hall & Binneman 1987:table 2). Whilst ornaments of these sorts can be argued to have been worn by people during life, and then buried with them when they died (even this is doubtful in cases where many hundreds or thousands of beads were found in a single grave), the loose shells cannot. These must have been objects with intrinsic significance that were intentionally placed in the grave with the body. I suggest that the significance of the seashells was twofold. First, they were literally associated with water. I suggest that part of their symbolic value was their relationship with water, specifically the sea, and that they were placed in graves as explicit referents to the sea.

A second significance of seashells may be revealed if we consider the nature of the seashells represented. If, instead of thinking in terms of the categories I have so-far used—based on biological species—we change our scheme of categorization to one that takes cognisance of physical characteristics of the seashells, a different property becomes apparent. Of the wide variety of shells available a small sub-set were chosen for inclusion in graves. They are of diverse species, shapes, colours and nutritional importance. One characteristic, however, unifies many (but not all) of the shells recorded in the graves. Many of them seem to have been chosen for their nacreous properties. This choice is particularly obvious in the modified seashell beads and pendants. Nacreous shells were chosen to make the beads, and then the inner mother-of-pearl surfaces (rather than the outer dull surfaces) were chosen for elaboration—by marginal notching, for instance—and exposure.

Nacreous shells were deliberately chosen over dull shells. Why, though, was this choice made? One answer may be that the shiny, iridescent shells were considered to be attractive and were chosen for reasons of simple aesthetic. Such an answer, however, can go only part of the way to explaining the choice of nacreous shells: it does not answer the crucial question of why the shells and shell beads would have been placed in graves. There must have been additional significance.

Part of this additional significance probably related to the shiny nature of the shells. Shininess was both uncommon and highly valued in many hunter-gatherer societies. The value was attributed not on the basis of rarity, but on a perceived association between shininess and a spirit world (for a review of world ethnography relevant to this point see Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004a:13–19). It is possible that nacreous seashell was chosen for inclusion in graves during the southern Cape Later Stone Age to emphasize a similar relationship with the spirit world. Graves were, as I have argued, places redolent with symbolism related to entrance to the spirit world.

The two significances of seashells were not independent of each other. On the contrary, they were intimately related. Both water and shininess related to the spirit world. This dual association is likely to have compounded the significance and power of seashells as grave goods.

The fact that many of the seashells in graves are in the form of beads is undoubtedly significant. Beads, of whatever material, perform a variety of social functions in societies around the world. Marian Vanhaeren (2005), after a survey of world ethnography, listed fourteen ways in which beads may function in society:

- Aesthetic expression
- Courtship
- Ethnic marker
- Social marker
- Individual marker
- Ritual objects
- Offerings
- Amulets
- Talismans
- Prophylactics
- Exchange media
- Inalienable possessions

- Communication systems
- Counting devices

Beadwork may simultaneously perform more than one of these functions.

Whilst we cannot know the exact function of seashell or ostrich eggshell beads in living communities during the period under consideration, it seems likely that the water symbolism of seashells would have played a role. That such beadwork was interred with the dead suggests that beadwork played a substantially different role in society from that which it played in ethnographically known San societies. In all San groups for which information exists, elaborate beadwork was distributed amongst living relatives, not buried with the dead or disposed of in other ways, as were other classes of material (Chapter 4; cf. Hall & Binneman 1987). Much of the beadwork in southern Cape graves may not have belonged to the deceased. This is particularly suggested by the infant burials that contained large quantities of beadwork (e.g., Hall & Binneman 1987). This too suggests that beadwork played a very different role in society at the time.

Seashells appear in another, so far unique, form that integrates different classes of material. As I mentioned in Chapter 5, questions have been raised about the authenticity of the Coldstream Stone (SAM-AA 6008). In an attempt to resolve the issue, researchers analyzed pigment from the stone using energy-dispersive X-ray (EDX) micro-analysis (Wilson *et al*. 1990). The unexpected results they obtained suggested that the paintings are not modern fakes. The black pigment contained very low levels of manganese, the mineral often used to make black paint. On the other hand it contained high levels of calcium (Wilson *et al.* 1990:fig. 9). The white pigment contained similarly high levels of calcium (Wilson *et al.* 1990:fig. 7). Experimental work led the researchers to suggest that the black paint was made from burnt animal bone and the white from calcined seashell (Wilson *et al.* 1990:201–206). Whilst the use of these materials may simply have been expedient, San ethnography suggests that the process of paint manufacture was commonly ritualized (How 1962; Jolly 1986; Lewis-Williams

1986, 1995b, 2001a). If this was the case, one has to wonder whether the inclusion of seashells in paint was intended to imbue paintings with symbolism relating to water and the sea in a way that was comparable (though not identical) to the inclusion of eland blood in some parietal paintings.

Besides seashells, several other water-related items are recorded. Several burials were encased in the sea-grass *Zostera* (Péringuey 1911:149; Goodwin 1938b:249, 251, 254). *Zostera* is not, to my knowledge, hallucinogenic, as is *Boophane* (Chapter 6). It is, however, an estuarine plant, growing partly in and partly out of the water (Lubke & van Wijk 1988:133, 148), thereby potentially occupying a transitional position in the cosmos. It is the association between *Zostera* and water that is significant. Again, there seems to be a 'water dimension' to the dug 'spirit world' entrances I have discussed.

Zostera had a second significance which may also have been relevant. It was frequently used as a bedding material in coastal sites. A number of sleeping hollows lined with *Zostera* have been recorded (e.g., Goodwin 1938a:238; H. Deacon 1972; Liengme 1987). The association with sleep may have been transferred to the graves. Death-as-sleep is a common metaphor widely reported around the world. A similar concept may have applied in the southern Cape. The idea of sleep would not necessarily have been out of place in the graves. In ethnographic accounts, sleep was a state in which San people may have accessed their spirit world (Lewis-Williams 1987).

Similarly, a number of burials contained water-worn cobbles or pebbles. Stone itself seems to have been significant, as I argued in Chapter 6. The fact that stones were removed from sea shores or river beds and included in graves probably added to their significance.

In addition to these items known from many different burials, there are also a few unique items, recorded from only single burials.[1] Two large fish dentries

(probably *Sparodon durbanensis*) were found in burial 4 at Nelson Bay Cave (Inskeep 1987:190). The marine associations are obvious.

The most complex and intriguing of the grave goods so far found came from grave VIa at Oakhurst Shelter. It is a bored stone, one end of which was plugged with a black resinous substance. The other end contained an unbroken series of fish vertebrae that could not have got there by accident (Goodwin 1938b:251). Wadley (1997:127) suggested that the bored stone and fish vertebrae constituted a 'trance metaphor' relating to underwater travel. Whilst not necessarily relating to underwater *travel*, the fish vertebrae certainly do seem to be related to the 'underwater' theme that can be identified in so many burials from the southern Cape region. It seems to be an idiosyncratic representation of the common metaphor. I discuss this find in greater detail in Chapter 8.

Together, these items (and quite likely others) all related to water in one way or another. The water symbolism Hall identified in the Welgeluk burials is therefore common in many burials in the southern Cape. The recurrence of these symbols in so many burials strongly suggests that 'going underwater' was another important part of the multi-component entrance to the spirit world that graves represented. Indeed, the power and meaning of the burials may be compounded by the many different ways in which the idea of 'entrance' is symbolized in them.

I now explore further these ideas of water and going under water. Insights into the importance of water symbolism may be gained by discussing the imagery on two of the painted stones, one from Klasies River Mouth Cave 5 and the other from Tsitsikamma Cave. Although the Klasies River Mouth stone did not itself come from a grave, it is part of a homogenous group of artefacts that is related to burials. The imagery on these two stones helps us to understand more of the worldview of the Later Stone Age people who made it, particularly as it related to water.

Dolphins and a whale

The stone from Tsitsikamma Cave may have come from a burial, but the details of the excavation are uncertain. It bears a single depiction of a whale painted in black (Rudner & Rudner 1970:fig. 77; Rudner 1971:56; Fig. 7.1). Little other comment has been made on this stone in the literature (Pearce 2005:51).

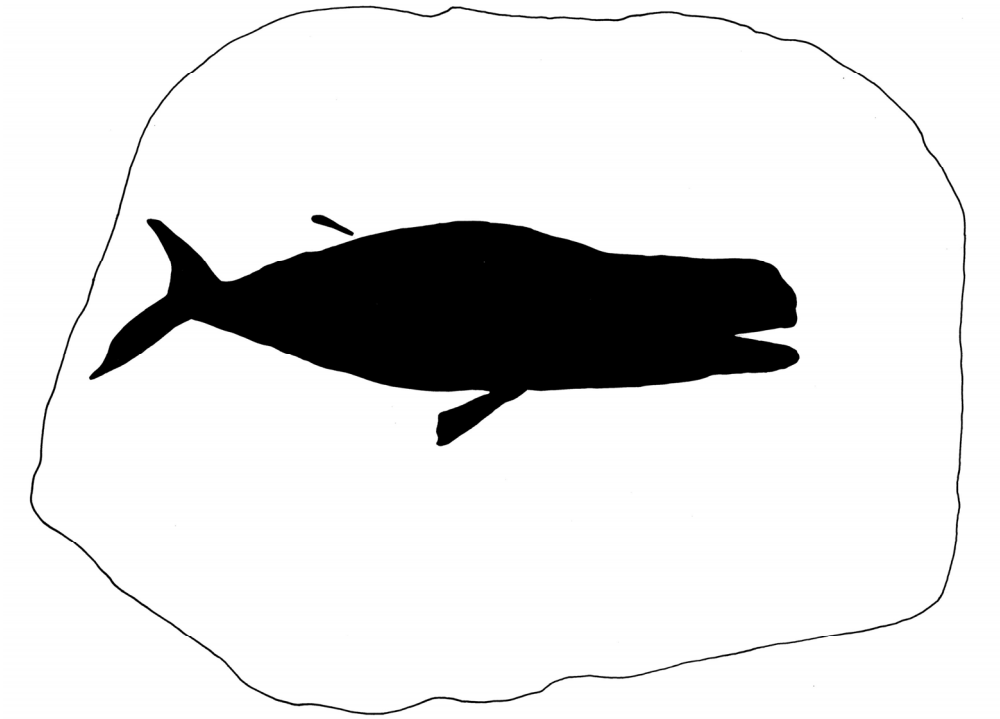

Figure 7.1: Drawing of Tsitsikamma Cave painted stone (after Rudner & Rudner 1970:fig. 77).

In terms of imagery (although, not context) the stone from Klasies River Mouth Cave 5 (Fig. 5.8) is the most interesting of all those so-far recorded. Four different drawings of the stone have been published (Singer & Wymer 1969:fig. 3; Rudner 1971:fig. 3; Lewis-Williams 1984:fig. 9.3; Pearce 2005:fig. 10); all vary in ways important to the interpretation of the imagery on the stone (Fig. 7.2). Singer and Wymer (1969:fig. 3; Fig. 7.2a) illustrated the stone with its long axis horizontal. They showed it as bearing a human figure with one arm held forward and the other behind its back. The human figure is next to four images that they identified

as dolphins: either Heaviside's dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus heavisidii*) or the dusky dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus obscurus*). The distinctive shape of the head with no beak suggested these two species (Singer & Wymer 1969). They suggested on the basis of the shape of the dorsal fin that Heaviside's dolphin is the more likely, but noted that the dorsal fin is incorrectly placed in relation to the tail for either species (Singer & Wymer 1969:509). They also noted that neither species currently occurs in the waters adjacent to Klasies River Mouth (Singer & Wymer 1969:509; see also Ashton & Ashton 2003:54, 56). They did not illustrate the faint human figures on the edge of the stone, although they mentioned that "near the edge of the stone, vague triangular pigmented shapes are just discernible" (Singer & Wymer 1969:509).

Singer and Wymer (1969:509, 1982:138) suggested two possible interpretations of the stone, depending on its orientation. If it is viewed horizontally, as they illustrated it, the human figure is swimming parallel to the four dolphins (Singer & Wymer 1969:509, 1982:137). Alternatively, if the stone is viewed with the conceptual vertical along the long axis, the human figure is sitting, holding a fishing rod (the vertical line), "gazing at a swollen portrayal of his successful catch" (Singer & Wymer 1982:138). They favoured the former interpretation, presumably on the basis of their identification of the four images as dolphins rather than fish.

Rudner (1971:fig. 3; Fig. 7.2b) also illustrated the stone with its conceptual vertical along the short axis. He showed the images somewhat differently from Singer and Wymer. He showed the human figure still as having one arm held behind its back, but what Singer and Wymer interpreted as an arm held upwards Rudner split in two, one part a line coming down from the face, the second a line parallel to the head and extending upwards beyond it. Rudner also omitted the dorsal fins from the dolphins. He did, however, include the faint remains of

Figure 7.2: Comparison of five drawings of Klasies River Mouth Cave 5 stone: a. Singer & Wymer (1969:fig. 3), b. Rudner (1971:fig. 3), c. Lewis-Williams (1984:fig. 9.3), d. Pearce (2005:fig. 10), e. new copy by Pearce 2006.

human figures on the edge of the stone. He offered no new interpretation of the imagery.

Lewis-Williams (1984:236) argued that Singer and Wymer's 'fishing rod' (the vertical line) was an "extraneous stain", not paint and not related to the human figure. He nevertheless illustrated it as a stippled feature in his drawing (Fig. 7.2c). Other than this detail, he followed Rudner's (1971:fig. 3) copy of the stone. Lewis-Williams (1984:236) rejected the ideas of swimming and fishing as following literalist interpretations uninformed by ethnography. He instead pointed to details of the human figure. In his copy, the human figure is standing, bent forward slightly at the waist. At least one of the figure's arms is held out backwards and blood gushes from its nose. This single figure encapsulated at least three characteristics diagnostic of the trance dance, and by extension, a religious interpretation of the paintings: bending-forward, arms-back and bleeding from the nose (Lewis-Williams 1984:236). The dolphins were then seen as indicative of the underwater metaphor of trance experience (Lewis-Williams 1984:241).

In the most recent published version of the stone, I (Pearce 2005:fig. 10; Fig. 7.2d) combined details of the paintings from Lewis-Williams (1984:fig. 9.3) with the shape of the stone and the dolphin's dorsal fins taken from Singer and Wymer (1969:fig.2). I argued there that the large human figure and dolphins are best viewed with the conceptual vertical along the long axis of the stone, and published the stone in that orientation. I interpreted the imagery in a similar way to Lewis-Williams (Pearce 2005).

As can be seen (Fig. 7.2), each published version of the imagery on the Klasies River Mouth Cave 5 stone is different, and these differences have, at least partially, led to differences in interpretation of the imagery. This case illustrates perfectly the need for accurate and detailed copies of rock paintings. The differences in detail on this stone materially alter the possible interpretations. It is for this reason that I have re-copied the stone.

The copy I have made is the only one that was traced directly from the stone; other versions were copied from photographs or sketched. The copy was made over several days using a variety of lighting conditions, some natural others artificial. In addition, I checked certain details on digitally enhanced photographs (see David *et al.* 2001; Mark & Billo 2002 on the use of digital enhancement in copying rock art). The digital enhancements, however, proved only of minimal use. I believe that the resulting copy (Fig. 5.8) is the most accurate yet made of the Klasies River Mouth Cave 5 painted stone.

If this copy is compared with the previous versions, significant differences can be seen (Fig. 7.2). The faint paintings on the edge of the stone can be resolved to be at least four images. At least two of these are definitely human figures; the remaining two are probably the remnants of human figures. The two clearer figures are in a walking or running posture, facing to the left of the stone (with the conceptual vertical along the short axis of the stone). Several patches of faint black pigment are visible on the stone, but I could not resolve them into any distinct figures. These may represent the extremely faded remains of representational paintings or the remains of paint patches as are seen on a number of other painted stones. There are only very minor differences in the depictions of the dolphins.

The most significant differences in the paintings are those relating to the large human figure. Not only is this figure different from previous versions, but the differences are important for the interpretation of the image. The differences in the lower part of the body are minimal. The figure does, however, appear to have an erect penis. The paint in this area, though, is faded. The most substantial differences are in the upper part of the body. The figure does not have an arm held out behind its back. What has previously been interpreted as an arm is the outline of a bulge on the figure's shoulder: the infill is somewhat lighter than the outline. What the bulge is, a thickened torso or a bag of some sort, is not clear. The figure does, however, have an arm on the front of its body. Only a short portion of the arm remains; the distal section has faded beyond recognition. No line of blood

extends from the figure's head. The line previously interpreted as either an upheld arm or a stain is neither. It is a line of black paint, parallel to and extending above the head of the human figure. It does not appear to connect to the human figure.

These details of the human figure significantly alter the possible interpretations. The most likely of the previous interpretations (Lewis-Williams 1984; Pearce 2005), that the figure is in various trance postures (bending forward, arms-back and bleeding from the nose), needs to be re-examined. The figure still bends forward slightly at the waist. He has an erect penis. This is a feature commonly associated with human figures in trance in Later Stone Age parietal rock paintings (e.g., Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:figs 14, 22, 33a, 45, 67b, 76a, 80), although probably not indicative of trance. The figure does not exhibit the other two postures closely associated with trance: arms-back and bleeding from the nose as was previously suggested. Importantly, other features of the painting do not suggest alternative interpretations. On these grounds, I therefore suggest that the previous interpretation still stands, although, the case is less clear cut than previously thought. The dolphins' inclusion as a metaphor of underwater trance experience probably also stands. More, however, needs to be said about the dolphins.

The dolphins

Singer and Wymer (1969) identified, with the help of a marine biologist, the four central figures on the stone as being dolphins, either Heaviside's dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus heavisidii*) or the dusky dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus obscurus*) (I use the more recent spellings for both these scientific names). The distinctive shape of the head with no beak suggested these two species. Singer and Wymer argued on the basis of the shape of the dorsal fin—triangular rather than falcate—that Heaviside's dolphin is the more likely option, but noted that the dorsal fin is incorrectly placed in relation to the tail for either species (Singer & Wymer 1969:509).

In re-assessing these images, there are two questions that need to be asked, the second dependent on the answer to the first. First, are the depictions meant to represent fish or dolphins? Second, if the images are depictions of dolphins, what species are they intended to depict? (A similar question could be posed if they are fish.) These questions are particularly germane considering that other painted figures in the eastern Free State Province, initially identified as dolphins, have since been shown to be fish of the family mormyridae (Ouzman 1995). To answer both these questions we need to examine in greater detail the morphology of the figures.

The four figures are roughly similar, and the points I list are drawn from all four:

- The bodies are roughly ovoid.
- They have white bellies.
- They have pointed, but not beaked, heads.
- The tails are deeply concave.
- The dorsal fins are small and triangular, placed two thirds of the way along the body.
- No flippers are depicted.

Whilst each of these points on its own does not distinguish conclusively between fish and dolphins, taken in combination the shapes of the various body parts strongly suggest that the depictions are of dolphins rather than fish (H. Kempen pers. comm. 2001).

The next question concerns the species depicted. On morphological grounds, the two suggested by Singer and Wymer, Heaviside's dolphin and the dusky dolphin, do seem like the best candidates. These are the only two local species that do not have prominent beaks. Of the two, Heaviside's dolphin seems the more likely: it has a relatively short, triangular dorsal fin, distinctly concave tail flukes and a dark upper body and white belly (Fig. 7.3a; Ashton & Ashton 2003:53–54). The dusky dolphin, on the other hand, has a taller, distinctly curved dorsal fin and less

concave tail flukes. The body colouration, however, is similar with dark upper and light lower parts (Fig. 7.3b; Ashton & Ashton 2003:55–56).

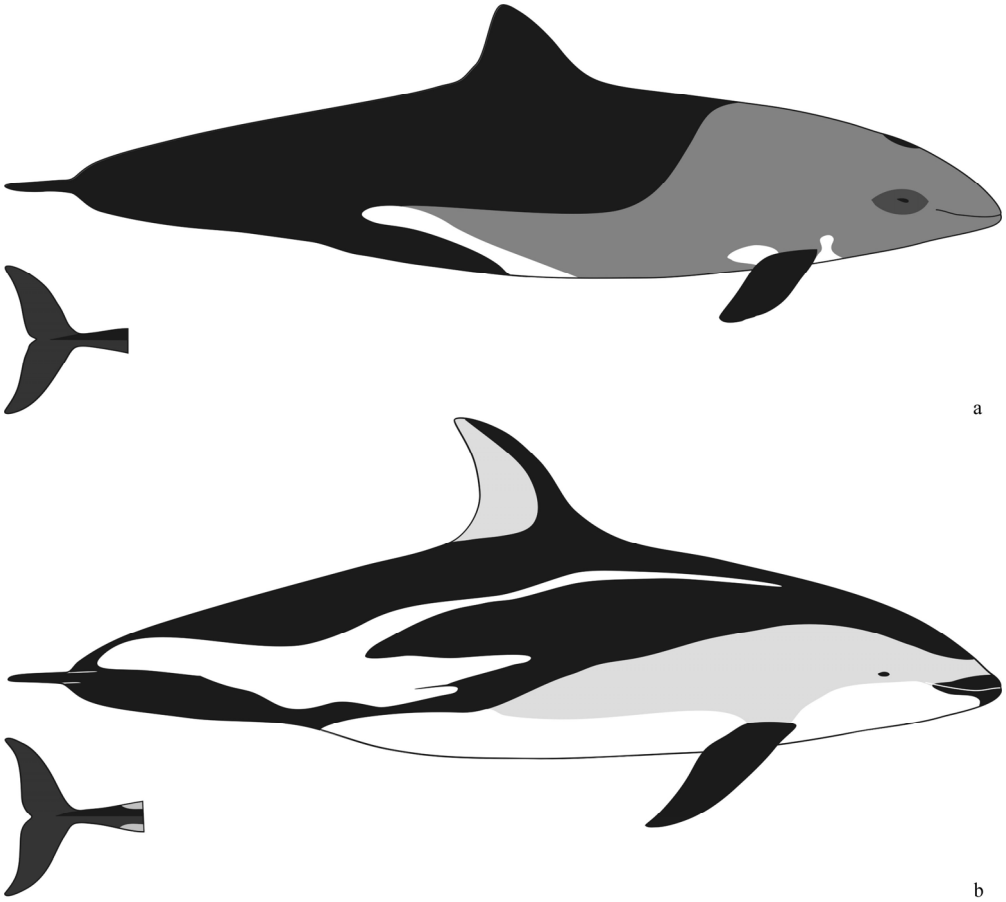

Figure 7.3: Drawing of a. Heaviside's dolphin b. Dusky dolphin (after: Ashton & Ashton 2003:53, 55).

One difficulty with this identification is that neither species is currently found off the southern Cape coast. Both do occur off the Atlantic west coast from Cape Point north to the southern border of Angola (Ashton & Ashton 2003:54, 56). *Lagenorhynchus obscurus* and *Cephalorhynchus* dolphins seem to be restricted to particular limited habitats in the cool-temperate zone and to be depth-limited (Pilchler *et al*. 2001:2216; Cassens *et al*. 2003:1781). Whether they would have occurred farther east, along the Cape south coast, at 2 285 ± 105 BP is not known (although dolphin bones have been identified at several archaeological sites, they are not identified to species).

Both these dolphins are in-shore species and may be seen from land. Heaviside's dolphins tend to spend the days close in-shore, just beyond the breakers (Ashton & Ashton 2003:54). It is uncertain, however, whether their distinctive characteristics would be observed from the shore. It seems more likely that Later Stone Age hunter-gatherers would have become familiar with morphological details of the creature when they occasionally encountered them stranded on beaches.

Now that I have identified the central figures on the stone as dolphins of one of two species, another question arises. Can we say anything about their behaviour? In answering this question, we need to consider first whether the paintings depict them in some distinctive behaviour, or whether it is merely their presence that is important. In other words, were they painted to show a particular, significant action, or simply to evoke ideas of underwater as I have suggested. The ideas of underwater are likely to remain, no matter what additional action is identified.

At first glance, the four dolphins do not appear to be *doing* anything. They are lined up, two abreast, nose to tail. This arrangement may be construed as swimming. Dolphins do, on occasion, swim in close formation like this. I suggest, however, that such an interpretation is unlikely: it is not something that would be seen by a shore-bound observer. Indeed, the only distinct action that a shore-bound observer is likely to see is the porpoising behaviour dolphins often exhibit, leaping either partially or fully out of the water. The Klasies River Mouth dolphin paintings do not appear to be leaping.

Here we must give some consideration to Singer's and Wymer's suggestion that Later Stone Age people swam with dolphins. If they did, they may have witnessed the way dolphins arranged themselves when swimming. Their suggestion, however, is based entirely on Western Romantic notions of dolphins. The idea of swimming with dolphins is a recent Western one, based on constructed notions of

dolphins as friendly, health-inducing, intelligent—even 'spiritual'—animals. It is highly unlikely that Later Stone Age people would have entertained similar views.

The one occasion when shore-bound observers are likely to see dolphins up close is when the animals are stranded on shore. Dead dolphins and whales are occasionally individually washed-up on beaches. On other occasions, live animals, either singly or in groups, may strand themselves. The reasons for such strandings are multiple, and not fully understood. There is evidence that such stranded animals were scavenged by both Middle and Later Stone Age hunter-gatherers around the South African coast (e.g., Klein 1972, 1974; Deacon 1978; Avery *et al*. 1997; Henshilwood *et al.* 2001; Klein *et al*. 2004; Parkington 2006). A curious feature of multiple strandings is that the animals are often lined up in rows next to each other. As the tide recedes, multiple rows of stranded animals may form. If one considers the painted arrangement of the dolphins and that it is in strandings that Later Stone Age people are most likely to have encountered the animals, I suggest that the paintings on the Klasies River Mouth stone depict four stranded dolphins.

Animal taxonomy

Having now identified the probable species and behaviour of the painted dolphins, we need to enquire whether there is any further significance to their depiction other than a general allusion to the underwater metaphor I have discussed. At this point I turn to structuralist theory, the foundation of a kind of enquiry that is less commonly encountered today in anthropological literature than was formerly the case. The shortcomings of structuralism have indeed been well exposed in the literature (e.g., Giddens 1984). I therefore need to state explicitly that I use structuralist theory to address one specific question: Why do societies so often select one creature from the many around them as a focus of ritual and complex symbolism? As I pointed out in Chapter 2, theory should be appropriate to the specific question being addressed, not a rigid mechanism that imposes a specific

interpretation on a set of data. The worldwide examples that I now give show that the limited issue that I deal with in this section can be profitably approached from this perspective. A carefully circumscribed use of structuralist theory can constitute a useful strand of enquiry and so strengthen the overall 'cable' of an argument. I do not in any way use structuralist theory as an overarching framework for this thesis.

I now use this theoretical position to examine the taxonomic systems people use to classify animals. All societies classify animals. The various taxonomies they construct, however, do not necessarily coincide with Western evolutionary schemes (although they may). An important point to note here is that the rules by which animals are divided almost always fit within broader sets of rules governing the division of the cosmos, space and social interactions. Amongst north-eastern Thai villagers, for instance, Stanley Tambiah (1969) found strong relationships between three series: human classes, house classes and animal classes. Although classes in each series were not equivalents, in a Lévi-Straussian sense, there were strong conceptual relationships between classes in the three series, and importantly, the rules linking to the related classes within each series. The animal classes that Thai villagers constructed were based on animals' morphology, location and behaviour, and often cut across Western taxonomic classes: traits different from those used by Western taxonomists were considered important.

An important feature of folk taxonomies is that certain animals do not easily fit into the broad classes (however they are constructed). "No doubt the first essential procedure for understanding one's environment is to introduce order into apparent chaos by classifying. But, under any very simple scheme of classification, certain creatures seem to be anomalous" (Douglas 1957:49). Frequently, these anomalous animals are placed in classes of their own, of which they are often the only occupant. The Karam of the New Guinea Highlands, for instance, do not classify the cassowary (*Casuarius bennetti*) as a bird (Bulmer 1967). They place it in a class of its own. It is considered anomalous because it is flightless, does not have fully developed wings, does not have quilled feathers, has a large bony head, has

human-like leg bones and so forth. Ralph Bulmer (1967) emphasized, however, that it is more than the cassowary's classificatory ambivalence that makes it special to the Karam: it is fitted into wider, interrelated cosmological schemes, mythologies and social relations. It is difficult to decide whether the animal is singled out as 'special' because it is taxonomically anomalous, or it is considered to be taxonomically anomalous because it is thought to be special.

The issue of taxonomically anomalous animals has most famously been dealt with by Mary Douglas (1966) in terms of the concept of pollution. She pointed out that anomalous animals are often singled out as taboo, polluting influences in everyday life, but that these same animals are often central symbols in ritual contexts for the same reasons they are considered taboo. She gave two, now well known, examples. In the first of these she considered the 'abominations of Leviticus', the food taboos of the Israelites (Douglas 1966:54–72). The best known of the dietary rules relate to cloven hoofed animals that chew the cud:

> 4. These are the beasts which ye shall eat: the ox, the sheep, and the goat, 5. the hart, and the roebuck, and the fallow deer, and the wild goat, and the pygarg, and the wild ox, and the chamois. 6. And every beast that parteth the hoof, and cleeveth the cleft into two claws, and cheweth the cud among the beasts, that ye shall eat. 7. Nevertheless these ye shall not eat, of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the cloven hoof; as the camel, and the hare, and the coney: for they chew the cud, but divide not the hoof; therefore they are unclean unto you. 8. And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you: ye shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch their dead carcass. (Deuteronomy 14:3–8, King James version; see also Leviticus 11:3–8).

Douglas (1966) argued that it was because certain animals transgress taxonomic boundaries (either chewing cud but not being cloven hoofed, such as the camel, or being cloven hoofed but not chewing cud, such as the pig) that they were rejected as dietary items and considered unclean. She considered these taxonomic ideas in terms of broader Israelite ideas of purity, wholeness and holiness (Douglas 1966:64–72). Those animals that cross boundaries were considered to be impure, incomplete and unholy. Bulmer (1967:21), in light of his discussion of Karam

views of the cassowary, cautioned that there were probably more factors than just taxonomy at play in the assignment of anomalous status, particularly of the pig.

Douglas's second example is, for our purposes, more useful. She considered the schemes of classification used by the Lele of central Africa (Douglas 1957, 1966:188–210). She stated that "most of their cosmology and much of their social order is reflected in their animal categories" (Douglas 1966:196). As with most societies, there are rules as to which classes of people may eat which animals and which parts of animals. Those animals that are rejected as inedible are ambiguous according to the Lele scheme of classification. "Their animal taxonomy separates night from day animals; animals of the above (birds, squirrels and monkeys) from animals of the below: water animals and land animals" (Douglas 1966:196, parenthesis in original). Flying squirrels, for instance, are not considered to be unambiguously either birds or animals, and are thus excluded from the diet of certain categories of people (Douglas 1966:196–197). Some animals (burrowing, nocturnal or water-loving) are considered to be spirit animals that have a special relationship with the spirits that inhabit the animal world (Douglas 1957:48, 1966:197–198). Humans depend on these spirits for prosperity, fertility and healing.

Also amongst the Lele, a major distinction is drawn between the reproductive capabilities of humans and animals: humans are considered to reproduce with pain and danger, and to produce usually only one child at a time; animals are considered to be naturally fecund, reproducing without pain or danger and producing multiple offspring in a single litter (Douglas 1957:47, 1966:198). Humans producing twins or triplets are considered to be auspicious (Douglas 1966:198–199).

Within the Lele worldview and classificatory scheme, the pangolin or scaly anteater is thus highly anomalous:

> Its being contradicts all the most obvious animal categories. It is scaly like a fish, but it climbs trees. It is more like an egg-laying lizard than a mammal, yet it suckles its young. And most significant of all, unlike other small mammals its young are born singly. Instead of running away or attacking, it curls into a modest ball and waits for the hunter to pass (Douglas 1966:199).

Under normal circumstances, the pangolin is not eaten, it being considered a polluting influence. However, "instead of being abhorred and utterly anomalous, the pangolin is eaten in solemn ceremony by its initiates who are thereby enabled to minister fertility to their kind" (Douglas 1966:199). The pangolin is not hunted; it is said to come to the village. Its corpse is treated by the villagers as a living chief, with due respect being paid (Douglas 1957:54). The ambiguous, taxonomically anomalous animal is therefore singled out for ritual attention specifically because it does cross socially set category boundaries. Indeed, the Lele claim that the pangolin ceremonies are more powerful than any of their other rites (Douglas 1966:201). Anomalous creatures may be considered to be dangerous or powerful, or both.

In southern Africa, the San, as one would expect, have their own systems for classifying animals. No one has yet formally explored any of these classification systems in the same sort of detail as Tambiah, Bulmer and Douglas have done for Thai villagers, Karam, Israelites and Lele (but see e.g., Blurton Jones & Konner 1976). Some brief statements may nevertheless be made about San classificatory systems. Like many other such systems, they often cut across Western taxonomies. In /Xam myths, for instance, /Kaggen's immediate consanguineous family consists of the Dassie (hyrax), the Porcupine and the Eland. Despite their apparent diversity, these animals are unified by all being associated in /Xam thought with fat and honey (Lewis-Williams 1997a; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004a:112–115). In contrast, /Kaggen's affines consist of the Lions and the Meerkats: both carnivores (Lewis-Williams 1997a; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004a:112–115).

The Ju/'hoansi use a number of different classifications of animals, and move readily from one classification to another (Blurton Jones & Konner 1976:336–337). In one of these classificatory schemes animals are divided according to the colour of their meat: red, black or white. "This division bears relationship to hide color in some cases but it is more importantly a taxonomic device grouping together animals of similar body form and habits" (Biesele 1975:153). The 'red' category is considered to be 'real meat' and consists mostly of large antelope (eland, kudu, gemsbok, springbok, hartebeest and tsessebe) but also smaller antelope, such as steenbok and duiker, and giraffe (Biesele 1975:153). Black meat animals are less-preferred and include wildebeest, warthog, bat-eared fox and jackal. White meat is associated with carnivores such as lion and leopard, but also includes leguaans and hares. It is avoided by most people (Biesele 1975:153).

The elephant is said to have all three colour meats, and some people will therefore not eat elephant meat (Biesele 1975:243–245, 1993:149–150). Interestingly, another reason for not eating elephant given by Ju/'hoansi is that elephants share a number of physical characteristics with humans:

> 'You don't eat it [elephant] because it's like a person. The female has two breasts and they are on her chest like a woman's. When she's young they stick out and when she gets old they fall. Also, her crotch is like a woman's with long labia.'
>
> 'The males have penises like people. . . .' '. . . They have an arse like a person's arse.' . . . 'You don't use elephant hide, because it's *tci dore*, like human skin. . . .' (Biesele 1993:150; parenthesis added).

Elephant meat is avoided because it is anomalous in having all three meat types and because elephants have characteristics similar to humans: it crosses at least two sets of taxonomic boundaries.

Marshall (1999:112) suggested that the Ju/'hoansi (!Kung) avoid other foods for similar reasons: they are taxonomically or behaviourally anomalous.

> I believe the korhaans, giant bustards, ostriches, and leguaans are anomalous creatures to the !Kung, outside the proper nature of things, and for that reason may be associated with madness and avoided by the young with special care. The korhaan's strange courtship flight is unlike the behavior of proper birds and suggests madness. The handsome giant bustard, walking about in stately dignity, alert and confident, gives no suggestion of madness, but because it seldom flies, I believe the !Kung see it as anomalous. . . . Ostriches, whose eggs are so strictly avoided, never fly. To the !Kung, birds are "owners" of flying; for a bird not to fly is strange. Leguaans are even more anomalous. They have four legs like the many mammals the !Kung hunt, but they are hairless, they hiss, and they lay eggs—like snakes (Marshall 1999:112).

Another taxonomically anomalous animal is the eland. Eland, particularly the bulls, are well known for having large quantities of fat. Ju/'hoan people say that female antelope have more fat than males; eland are uniquely reversed: males have more fat than females (Lewis-Williams 1981a:72). Eland are therefore somewhat androgynous (Dowson 1988). The characteristic that makes eland anomalous, fat, is particularly significant. In Ju/'hoan thought fat is said to contain large quantities of supernatural potency, *n/om*, which is used to access the spirit world and perform various tasks.

Anomalous dolphins

With a general understanding of the ways in which people classify animals we may now return to the question of how Later Stone Age hunter-gatherers may have perceived stranded dolphins. The suggestions I am about to make should be seen within the context of the models of anomaly and classification I have discussed. It is, of course, impossible to know the classificatory rules used by southern Cape Later Stone Age hunter-gatherers. This is a fundamental point: taxonomic rules are culturally specific and the animals considered anomalous in terms of those rules are equally specific. One may, however, make broad suggestions. This does not amount to an 'if I was a horse' argument (Nagel 1974). It is a proposition put forward in terms of a theoretical model.

With these cautions in mind, I suggest that dolphins would have been considered anomalous by coastal hunter-gatherers. Dolphins cross boundaries between a number of potential classes. We do not know how southern Cape Later Stone Age hunter-gatherers would have classified animals, but I suggest that in the case of dolphins that at least some of the boundary transgressions I discuss would have pertained.

Dolphins are curious creatures that appear in some ways fish-like and in others mammal-like. I list these various characteristics in Table 7.1. Hunter-gatherer-fishers encountering dolphins are likely to have had a good working knowledge of the anatomy (both internal and external) of both mammals and fish. It is probable, therefore, that at least most of the features I list would have been recognized by the hunter-gatherer-fishers.

Table 7.1: Fish-like and mammal-like characteristics of dolphins.

Fish-like	**Mammal-like**
General body plan	Warm-blooded
Tail	Air-breathing
Fins/flippers	Internal anatomy mammal-like
Lives in water	Skin rather than scales
Swims	

If dolphins were considered taxonomically anomalous, I suggest that they would not only have had certain dietary rules applied to them, but, more importantly, would have been considered ‘special’ and singled out for ritual attention. If, as I have argued, ‘underwater’ was an important religious concept, it is likely that anomalous dolphins would have been linked to underwater concepts and rites pertaining to that level of the cosmos.

If we consider the behaviour I have suggested for the dolphins painted on the Klasies River Mouth cave 5 stone—live stranding—and that it is only when stranded that people are likely to have had close encounters with dolphins, another possibility arises. Dolphins in this case would be crossing another, physical, boundary: that between water and land. They would be mediating between the two media. At the same time, the boundary transition would have resulted in death, a

point, no doubt, of metaphorical significance. The whale painted on the Tsitsikamma Cave stone may have been intended to fulfil a similar role.

My proposal about dolphins is strengthened by a recent suggestion by Sealy (2006:583). She described an animal scapula, probably that of a Cape fur seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus*), with several paintings in black on it. The bone was excavated from a cave at Knysna in the late nineteenth century; it is now in the British Museum (catalogue number Af1886.11301). She argued that seals would have been accorded special significance in Later Stone Age cosmology because they transgressed boundaries, living both on land and in the sea (Sealy 2006:583). She also suggested that certain characteristics of seals, breathing air, warm blood and suckling their young, would have been perceived as unusual and contributed to their anomalous status. Her conception of the cosmological status of seals accords well with what I suggest for dolphins.

In terms of the three-tiered model of the cosmos I have proposed, water is a nodal point, a point of mediation and transition. It is through water that people move from the spirit world to the human world. I suggest, therefore, that paintings of stranded dolphins not only refer in a generic way to concepts of an underwater spirit world, but that they would have been far more powerful, active symbols of mediation between the human world and the spirit world underwater.

Water symbolism

The foregoing discussion suggests that the water symbol may have been important not only in a general way, but that it may, in many cases, have referred specifically to the ocean. The ocean would obviously have been a prominent feature to all coastal dwelling people. It provided much of the daily subsistence requirements for many coastal people. It seems that the ocean also provided a substantial symbolic resource to the people who dwelt on its margins, not only a food resource. As such, rituals, beliefs and myths would almost certainly have

developed around the ocean and the ways in which people interacted with it. I suggest that some of this ritual was played out in human burials.

[1] One of the burials at Klasies River Mouth Cave 5 (KRM5/3) was published as containing the beak of a cormorant (Hall & Binneman 1987:142, table 2, fig. 6). I have previously argued that this too was an idiosyncratic representation of the water theme (Pearce 2002). Binneman (pers. comm. 2003) now states that the beak was part of the grave fill and not one of the grave goods (see also Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004a:fig. 3.8).