

CHAPTER 4 THE PAST 2000 YEARS

THE HISTORICAL, ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC RECORD

In the previous chapter the hypothetical beginnings of visual expression on the southern Highveld were explored; a Later Stone Age date of between 8400 – 100 BP was suggested for the rock engravings of Redan. In the light of the recent discoveries of *art mobilier*, the 8400 BP date for Redan is a possibility; however, there is consensus that the vast majority of rock art in South Africa was produced more recently, probably during the past 2000 years (Mason 1962:341; Mitchell 2002:194). If the engravings of Redan were produced more than 2000 years ago, they are probably the unadulterated perceptions of the Later Stone Age ancestors of the San. If on the other hand they were produced during the past two millennia, particularly after 1550, they were probably co-authored by both San and Khoekhoen, or by a community of Khoisan descent. The influence of Bantu-speakers during this period must also be considered.

In this chapter three sources will be explored: historical accounts of early travellers and missionaries; the archaeological record; and contemporary ethnographic research relating to the cultural practices of the three groups. The section that follows is an attempt to synthesise this information, and re-create the social and cultural context within which the aesthetic/symbolic activity of each group took place; and ultimately to determine their ability to give pictorial form to ideas and experiences. During this 2000 year period, the relatively peaceful lives of the Later

Stone Age hunters would be changed under the impact of two major events: the first was the appearance of Khoekhoe herders with their livestock; the second was the arrival of Bantu-speaking agropastoralists from the north in c. AD 202 (Hall 1987:13). Mason (1962:371) captures the essence of this change:

Over a thousand years ago the silence of the Limpopo lowlands was broken by the sounds of moving people and the cries of men herding cattle and sheep or goats. In all the millennia of its Stone Age the Transvaal had never seen more than a few dozen people gathered together in times of good hunting, but now the horned game fled before hundreds of humans clearing bush, building new villages and planting grain. Before long men sweated over small furnaces to fuse metal ores for weapons, tools and ornaments. Women dug into smooth clay near streams and made thousands of pots for meat, plant food or water. The Iron Age had begun.

The Khoekhoen kept domesticated stock and made pottery, but were also foragers like the Stone Age hunter-gatherers. The Bantu-speakers practiced an economy that combined stock-keeping, the manufacture of pottery, and the cultivation of the land with mining and metal-working. This meant that there were three different economic and cultural groups interacting with each other. It was inevitable that this social and economic interaction over a prolonged period of time should lead to intermarriage and acculturation.

In the past it was believed that the vast majority of rock art was produced by the San, and that the contribution of other cultures was minimal (Stow (1905) 1964;

Wilman (1933) 1968; Van Riet Lowe 1952; Mason 1962; Hall 1996). Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989:8) state unequivocally that 'today no professional archaeologist doubts that the vast bulk of southern African rock art was made by the Bushman'. Since these words were written, ongoing research has been revealing a much more complex picture. The genetic and cultural exchange between the three groups probably commenced very soon after they first made contact. While some groups of hunter-gatherers retained their cultural autonomy until the early 1900s (Smith *et al.* 2000:17-18), others were assimilated by their more dominant neighbours; the women were taken as wives and the men worked as herders and rain-makers (Deacon & Deacon 1999:179). Rock art continued to be produced during this period of interaction and continued well into the nineteenth century (Deacon & Deacon 1999:165-166). It is now recognised that two millennia of interaction between the hunter-gatherers, the herders and the agropastoralists inevitably impacted on the rock art: 'The overwhelming majority are the work of hunter-gatherers, though both engravings (Beaumont & Vogel 1989; Maggs 1995) and paintings (Prins & Hall 1994; Manhire 1988) were also made by pastoralists and agropastoralists' (Mitchell 2002:192). Deacon and Deacon (1999:163-164) concur: 'Although most of the rock paintings and rock engravings were done by San, not all South African rock art was the work of hunter-gatherers'. They acknowledge the distinctive 'finger painting' and site-plan engravings of Bantu speakers, but express some doubt as to the contribution of the Khoekhoen: 'The Khoekhoe herders in the Northern, Eastern and Western Cape may also have contributed "finger" paintings and some engravings ...'. Smith & Ouzman (2004)

contest this belief in the limited contribution of the Khoekhoen; they base their argument on geographic distribution, dating, site preference, technique, iconography and associated contents, and conclude that the rough-pecked, predominantly geometric (non-representational) engravings of southern Africa were executed by Khoekhoe herders.

The first comprehensive written accounts of contact between the white settlers and the indigenous peoples of South Africa date from the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in Table Bay (Smith *et al.* 2000:26). These historical accounts are extremely useful in reconstructing the past lives of peoples long since dead, and they are frequently the only source of information regarding their dispersal, their settlement patterns and their cultural practices. Deacon and Deacon (1999:133) caution that these ethno-historical accounts must be approached circumspectly as they are invariably written from the biased perspective of Europeans of the colonial period. Smith *et al.* (2000:37-43), in reviewing the various accounts of the San written by European travellers, point out that in the majority of these accounts, the traditional hunter-gatherer way of life is described in extremely derogatory terms. The extreme contempt in which the San were held is summarised in the words of the traveller Lichtenstein:

... there is not perhaps any class of savages upon the earth that lead lives so near those of the brutes as the Bosjesmans; - none perhaps who are sunk so low, who are so unimportant in the scale of existence; - whose wants, whose cares, and whose

joys, are so low in their nature; - and who are consequently so little capable of cultivation. (cited in Smith *et al.* 2000:40)

Towards the end of the nineteenth century these harsh sentiments gradually began to change. This was largely due to a new brand of scholars who believed that the unique culture of the San was worthy of closer study. The most notable was the philologist W.H.I. Bleek and his collaborator Lucy Lloyd, who conducted interviews with a small group of /Xam San from the Northern Cape; their folklore and life narratives were recorded verbatim in their own language (chapter 1). These accounts are widely used by scholars today, particularly to substantiate the shamanistic interpretation of rock art; however, there is some disagreement on the correct interpretation of these accounts (chapter 5). Deacon and Deacon (1999:133) state categorically that the Bleek records are 'the most detailed descriptions we have in South Africa on the technology, economy and beliefs of the San ...'. George William Stow was a contemporary of Bleek and shared his passionate interest in the San. He also conducted interviews with the San regarding their life narratives, their dispersal, and particularly their beliefs regarding the rock art (chapter 1). His contribution was acknowledged by early writers (Wilman (1933) 1968; Schapera (1930) 1963; Engelbrecht 1936; Wilson & Thomson (eds.) 1969), but is largely overlooked today. The selective use of historical sources to substantiate a specific theoretical viewpoint, and its implications for rock art studies will be discussed more fully in a following chapter.

The work of Bleek and Stow laid the foundation for modern ethnographic studies in South Africa. According to Deacon and Deacon (1999:130) the 'best source from which to conduct an archaeological history of the San and Khoekhoen is drawn from Khoisan ethnography'. The bulk of ethnographic information comes from contemporary studies conducted with the !Kung of Botswana and the Ju/'hoansi of Namibia. Extensive research was conducted by a team of international experts between the 1950s and the 1980s, and included living with the San for long periods, and conversing with them in their language. Information obtained in this manner is then extrapolated to prehistoric communities. This approach is widely used in South Africa, particularly in rock art studies; it has been variously praised and censured. Barnham (1992:49-50) cautions against the application of 'top down' theories of history, such as historical materialism:

This is not to say that a social approach should be abandoned or fire held until the proverbial 'more data' are in. Such conservatism would be stifling to the development of southern African archaeology. Equally damaging however is the temptation, overzealous I would say, to apply theory without fully testing alternative interpretations of the data.

Mitchell (2002:223) questions the lack of archaeological data, and argues that new approaches, particularly in rock art studies, should be supported by empirical data obtained from archaeological research: '... it is precisely those studies which deliberately combine art and excavated evidence that have been most successful'. Mitchell (2002:225-226) further suggests that the quite extensive social and

economic changes that took place in several areas of the sub-continent in the second half of the Holocene (the past 10 000 years), as well as the relationships that hunter-gatherers developed with pastoralists, farmers and European colonists, demonstrate the need for a broader, comparative approach.

Mitchell (2002:223) also expresses some reservations regarding the use of ethnographic models. He raises the important point that only a few San communities, notably the /Xam (now extinct) and the Ju/'hoansi have been studied, and that this limited research does not reflect the diversity and cultural variability among surviving groups. Mitchell (2002:224) points out that Kalahari ethnography fails to explain the presence of Later Stone Age artefacts in Iron Age village sites, and Iron Age pottery and the bones of cattle in Stone Age contexts; and that this indicates two millennia of interaction between hunter-gatherers and agropastoralists. This sharing of resources and beliefs among the Khoekhoen and the San, and the San and Bantu-speakers is increasingly being revealed by archaeological research. It is now accepted that Later Stone Age hunters did not live in isolation during the past 2000 years but were greatly influenced by regular and sustained contact with Iron Age agropastoralists, by Khoekhoe herders, and later by European settlers. This led to what has been termed the Great Kalahari Debate; the central issue is whether inferences derived from studies of isolated groups of twentieth-century San, can be used to interpret Later Stone Age behaviour, including the rock art (chapter 3). Mitchell (2002:225-226) emphasises that this debate, and the sharing of beliefs

between the various cultural groups add to the range of ethnographic evidence on which rock art researchers can draw.

The majority of historical reports dating from the colonial period relate to the Khoisan and Bantu-speakers of the Cape Province. With the exception of a few isolated instances, the area across the Vaal, the transVaal, remained virtually unknown and unexplored territory until the Truter-Somerville expedition crossed the Orange River and penetrated the north-western part of the country in 1801; this was followed by a number of similar expeditions further west (Mason 1986:797-799). Although the areas covered are some distance away from the southern Highveld, valuable information can, nevertheless, be gained from these historical accounts. The first white people to settle on the south-western Highveld were the pioneer missionaries Hodgson and Broadbent. After the *Difaqane* the entire southern Highveld was depleted of its once thriving communities, and only small pockets of survivors remained. The first white *trekboers* moved into the southern Highveld from 1836 bringing indentured Khoisan with them (Wilson & Thompson (eds.) 1969:411) and influxes of Nguni and Sotho people also gradually returned to what they regarded as their homes (Wilson & Thompson (eds.) 1969:409); however, the characteristic cultural composition of pre-*Difaqane* years was irrevocably and permanently destroyed. When George William Stow explored the geological potential of the Vaal-Klip area for the first time in 1878, he found only small communities of the Korana branch of the Khoekhoen on the banks of the Vaal. As a result of these radically changed circumstances, modern ethnographic

research, similar to that conducted with the modern San of the Kalahari, was not feasible and has consequently seldom been attempted.

The archaeological record remains as an important source of information. After the departure of Hodgson and Broadbent from the modern Klerksdorp area in 1825, more than a century would elapse before anything of significance would be written about the indigenous communities who inhabited the southern Highveld during the past two millennia. Mason's classic *Prehistory of the Transvaal* (1962) included an introductory chapter on the Iron Age in the transVaal. A number of isolated archaeological research projects by various researchers followed (see Mason 1986:11-18), but it was Tim Maggs' *Iron Age communities of the southern Highveld* (1976) that finally established the presence of Bantu-speakers on the southern Highveld during the past 2000 years. The publication of the Hodgson diaries in 1977 fueled Mason's interest in the historical archaeology of the transVaal, and led to a remarkable occasional paper in which he combined his extensive archaeological experience and knowledge of Iron Age archaeology with historical archaeology, *Origins of black people of Johannesburg and the southern western central Transvaal AD 350-1880* (1986). In the introductory chapter Mason (1986:11) acknowledges his debt to early nineteenth century explorers for providing written evidence of terminal Iron Age people: 'Their writing commences the development of scientific research aimed at uncovering the unwritten Iron Age past of the Southern Central Western Transvaal ...'.

A CULTURAL MELTING POT

From about two thousand or more years ago, erratic cultural and physical contact ... seems to have taken place over millions of square miles north and south of the equator. ... Different Iron Age groups met and fused; there was contact between Iron and Stone Age people too; the whole process creating a mobile series of communities in steady expansion towards the southernmost limits of Africa. (Mason 1962:373)

The precise nature of this early cultural interaction has not been established. The first European travellers in the Cape Colony met a wide spectrum of indigenous peoples, frequently co-existing within one community; inter-group relationships were particularly difficult to define. At one extreme were isolated groups of hunters who succeeded in maintaining their traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle; at the other extreme were the wealthy cattle owning Khoekhoe herders. In the middle was an intermediate group consisting of impoverished Khoekhoen who had lost their livestock: San wives of Khoekhoe herders, and San who worked for the Khoekhoen as servants. Further afield, in the unexplored interior north of the Orange River, there were also Korana-Khoekhoe groups who had established trading relations with Iron Age Bantu-speaking agropastoralists; tobacco and beads were exchanged for cattle, and the enterprising Khoekhoen then sold the cattle in the Cape Colony. At the end of the eighteenth century the colonial government dispatched the Truter-Somerville expedition to the north of the Orange to establish direct trading links with these cattle-owning peoples. In 1801 they reached the Tswana-speaking

Thlapin-Rolong settlement near the modern town of Kuruman. This historic first meeting between Europeans and Bantu-speakers in the transVaal, would be followed by more expeditions, culminating in the Hodgson-Broadbent party of 1823 (Mason 1986:795-797). Maggs (1976:306) describes the veritable cultural melting pot on the southern Highveld:

The southern Highveld population at the beginning of the nineteenth century consisted of seven main groups each with its subdivisions. San hunter-gatherers, clients and sometimes herders, known to the Sotho as Baroa, lived mainly in the drier western and southern parts. Several Nguni groups ... The Fokeng had been established from an early date ... the mainstream Sotho-Tswana ...

Inevitably, as the Khoekhoen herders and the Bantu speaking agropastoralists surged into the hunting grounds of the San, geographic and cultural boundaries became blurred. According to archaeological and historical evidence, a large number of diverse socio-cultural groups cohabited on the southern Highveld until the 1800s. Previously held beliefs in the cultural autonomy of the three main ethnic groups are increasingly being questioned. The authorship of the rock paintings and engravings is directly affected by these changing perceptions. In order to determine the authorship of the rock engravings of Redan, the nature and extent of each group's cultural contribution, must be defined more closely.

ORIGIN, DISPERSAL AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

When the first Dutch settlers arrived in Table Bay in the seventeenth century, they found two groups of indigenous peoples, the San (Bushmen) and the Khoekhoen (Hottentots) (Smith *et al.* 2000:26-28). A third group, the Bantu-speakers would only be encountered much later when the interior was penetrated. The cattle-owning Khoekhoen immediately established friendly relations with the settlers, leading to the mutual exchange of goods. The San appeared wild and untamed; they avoided direct contact with the settlers and lived in remote mountainous areas where they maintained the same hunting and gathering lifestyle as their Later Stone Age ancestors. The early settlers believed that the Khoekhoen and the San were one race, but that the San, who were referred to as *Bosjeman Hottentots*, were vastly inferior because they collected their food off the land and had no domestic animals (Elphick 1977:4; 24). This perception gradually changed and by the nineteenth century they were recognised as two distinct groups.

THE SAN

According to the earliest historical reports dating from the fifteenth century (Smith *et al.* 2000:35), the San lived throughout the length and breadth of southern Africa, from the coastal areas to the more arid parts of the interior, although they appear to have given preference to areas where surface water was available. Their skeletal remains, material culture deposits, and place names have been found scattered

throughout the entire country, testimony to their widespread occupancy of the land.

Smith *et al.* (2000:10) confirm their ancient lineage:

Hunting people have existed in southern Africa continuously until the present time.

We can therefore be quite confident that the Later Stone Age people who lived here

20 000 years ago were the direct ancestors of the modern Bushmen.

Maggs (1976:36) confirms the continued presence of the San on the southern Highveld throughout the Stone and Iron Ages:

Well into the nineteenth century San hunter-gatherers still occupied large areas of the southern Highveld ... and their way of life was extinguished only when white settlers became established in numbers following the Great Trek. As the Late Stone Age population, their presence on the Highveld extends back many millenia ...

Writing more than 100 years ago, Stow ((1905) 1964:3) believed that in ancient times the San were the sole inhabitants of the entire country. According to the testimony of the 'South African tribes' he interviewed, their early ancestors immigrated to the south, where they found the land without inhabitants and only the wild game and Bushmen living in it, classing the Bushmen in the same category as wild animals. In marked contrast to the Khoekhoe language that is spoken throughout South Africa with small variations, different San languages are spoken in different areas, and the languages even vary from band to band. According to linguists this is a strong indication that the San occupied southern Africa long before

the Khoekhoen, and they can therefore be considered the original inhabitants of the country.

The hunters lived together in small kin-related groups. They led a nomadic life, hunting wild animals and collecting vegetable foods from the veld. Although the San are revered for their exceptional hunting abilities, the plants the women gathered provided the greater part of the diet (Deacon & Deacon 1999:143); they collected 70 different specimens of plants, some for medicinal purposes (Smith *et al.* 2000:12). Poisoned arrows and bows, spears and traps of various kinds were used for hunting and they were skilled in the manufacture and use of poison. Fossil remains show that Later Stone Age people successfully hunted very large animals like hartebees and elephant; from approximately 4000 years ago, smaller browsing species were hunted (Deacon & Deacon 1999:157). The San displayed great ingenuity in the design and manufacture of their arrows; they used a variety of materials and the arrows were sometimes decorated with geometric designs burnt, scratched or painted on the shaft. The form and size of the arrow, particularly the arrowhead, was adapted to different functions (Deacon & Deacon 1999:158-159). Hunting beliefs and practices were an important part of the hunting culture and were prescribed: the wife of the successful hunter would be given the tail of the slaughtered animal, and this could be exchanged for red ochre, specularite and arrows. The former was used for body paint; the latter was also an important *hxaro* (gift) item that could be exchanged, ensuring the sharing of resources. An important activity was the manufacture of ostrich eggshell beads. Numerous ostrich eggshell

beads have been retrieved at Later Stone Age sites in the Cape (Deacon & Deacon 1999:121-130). Strings of ostrich eggshell beads were also recovered at Later Stone Age sites in the Suikerbosrand area, indicating a San presence on the southern Highveld (Mason 1986:611).

Each group had a series of water sources within a defined territory; the limits of each area was defined by natural landmarks such as hills and trees. Upon request these water sources were available to other bands (Deacon & Deacon 1999:135). Deacon and Deacon (1999:135) emphasise that the hunter-gatherers are particularly dependent on natural resources, and that consequently a close bond develops between the people and the landscape. Elements of the landscape are frequently included in the folklore. This attachment to the land includes the animals that inhabit the land, and animals are considered equal to man and treated with respect. They are frequently the characters of stories and myths, particularly the eland. Patricia Vinnicombe (1976), working in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg, found that the eland was the animal most frequently depicted in rock art. Studies have also revealed that the eland was central to several rituals and is an essential presence at both male and female initiation rites. The male rite revolves around the young man killing his first eland; this included scarification administered to parts of his body to increase his power. The 'eland dance' is performed at the girl's first menstruation, the older women mimicking the mating behaviour of the eland (Smith *et al.* 2000:80). While this veneration of game animals, particularly the eland, is a frequent occurrence in ritual and art, mythology deals with animals that are

man/animal hybrid beings, or small non-game species. Many myths revolve around a pre-cultural period and the San belief in an 'Early People' who preceded them, their eclipse, and the dawn of a new order of humans and animals (Guenther 1994:260-261). Guenther (1994:261) further argues that while ritual and art are pervaded with male symbolism such as hunting and trance, the mythology is pervaded with female symbolism and themes. Women are depicted as strong and elemental, as against men who appear weak and ineffectual. The heavenly bodies, particularly the stars and the moon, are frequently featured in the myths (Stow (1905) 1964:19-20; Schapera (1930) 1963:172-175). A representative selection of San myths relating to the moon (and other themes) was published recently (Lewis-Williams (ed.) 2000). The moon was more than a mythological character and the San practised special observances to honour it; for example, the moon must not be looked at after game has been shot, for fear of losing the wounded animal (Schapera (1930) 1963:173). According to Schapera, prayers were also addressed to the moon requesting success in hunting and the gathering of plants. Their keen powers of observation enabled the San to distinguish certain stars: Canopus, known as 'bushman rice' (ants' larvae), was honoured with specific ceremonies, and Sirius was associated with the onset of Spring. Stars were believed to have once been animals or people of the Early People, and the constellations were given the names of animals they resembled (Schapera (1930) 1963:114). Schapera, writing in the 1930s emphasises that these beliefs and observances had largely disappeared by that time.

Unlike the Khoekhoen with their structured hierarchical system, the San were essentially egalitarian, believing all people equal, although the rainmakers and healers in a community had some stature. Smith *et al.* (2000:78-80) describe the trance dance and its central role in reinforcing the concept of sharing and egalitarianism in the community. The entire community takes part, assisting the healers amongst them to receive power or potency, which is used mainly to cure sick people and to control game animals. Trancing is induced by monotonous clapping, singing, and stamping of the feet; the healer's body becomes rigid, arms extend backwards and *n'num* (power) rises up the spine, to 'explode' in the brain. The healer then collapses and while in this altered state of consciousness he may transform himself into an animal and enter the spirit world (see Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:82-94). The trance dance is frequently depicted in the rock art; its central role in the shamanistic approach will be discussed in a following chapter. The San did not appear to have any political structure and a system of chieftainship. Stow ((1905) 1964:32-33) however, considered it an erroneous idea that they were without government and even listed the names of chiefs. He also believed that previously they had tribal emblems, conspicuously painted in some central part of the great cave of the chief of the clan in the form of a specific animal. Stow believed that he had identified a number of these caves and he made copies of the few surviving examples:

The writer has been informed by several old Bushmen that all the great caves, that is those that were the residences of the head chiefs, were at one time, thus distinguished. (Stow (1905) 1964:33)

In spite of the fact that he obtained this information from San informants, it has always been rejected. This contentious issue was recently revived by Smith *et al.* (2000:41-43) who conclude that some form of chieftainship was possible. The probability of painted 'tribal emblems' as part of a San rock art tradition, has however been dismissed.

The most enduring proof of a pervasive San presence throughout southern Africa is the rock art. The art is found throughout southern Africa, as far as Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Namibia, KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg, southern and eastern Cape – and ostensibly on the southern Highveld. A survey in 1996 of all officially recorded sites showed that South Africa had over 10 000 sites; according to Deacon and Deacon (1999:163) this figure is a gross underestimation as new sites continue to be discovered. There are two art forms: engravings which are either incised or pecked by hammering and occur on rocks in the open and paintings which occur in caves or overhangs. Stow ((1905) 1964:42) believed that there were two distinct branches of San which he dubbed the 'painters' and the 'sculptors'. He argues that the sculptors moved southward through the central portion of the country, crossed the Zambesi and upper Limpopo, and from there moved to the Gij Gariep (Vaal). They probably settled close to the Great Riet River (in the vicinity of modern Kimberley), where they dwelt on hills in order to obtain exclusive views of the surrounding country; from this base they spread in several directions. The painters moved along the western coast, settled in the mountainous areas of the Cape where their rock shelters

abound, and along the Nu Gariep (Upper Orange). In support of this theory, Stow ((1905) 1964:42) refers to the testimony of a San informant who also informed him that the two groups spoke entirely different languages. Mitchell (2002:193) points out that this theory of two separate painting and engraving groups is no longer tenable and that this distinction depends largely on the availability of rock shelter walls on which paintings could be executed, as opposed to the free-standing boulders used for engravings. Deacon and Deacon (1999:163) concur and argue that the divide between painting and engraving is a geographic one only. This argument does not take into account that there are marked stylistic and iconographic differences between the two art forms. These differences will be addressed in a following chapter.

Smith *et al.* (2000:56-57) trace the history of the San in historic times and emphasise that successive governments and the treatment meted out to them, span more than two centuries of conflict. During this period there were efforts to hunt and exterminate the 'Bushman-Hottentots' on the northern frontier, and efforts to befriend them in order to make them useful servants. Ordinance 50 of 1828 gave them equality before the law. Some trekked from the Cape Colony with pioneer Voortrekkers and settled in the two new republics of the Orange Free State and the South African Republic with their masters; others entered a life of servitude on the farms; and some joined those San bands who were long established beyond the Orange River. Here their struggle to survive included confrontations with the various Khoekhoe tribes – the Korana, the Griqua and the Bastards (Smith *et al.*

2000:57). Engelbrecht (1936:67-70) describes the numerous incidents of conflict between the San and the Korana, but emphasises that differences were resolved and the San continued working for the Korana as herders and healers, invariably in a subservient position. Relationships with Bantu-speakers were equally precarious. Boonzaaier *et al.* (1996:31-32) refers to the contemporary !Kung of the Kalahari and the ethnographic research done by modern researchers. The !Kung have become sedentary serfs and squatters around settlements of Tswana-speaking people. In exchange for herding their cattle, they receive food and shelter. They seldom gather, and hunting is even more rare. Boonzaaier *et al.* (1996:31) sum up the historic and present situation: 'Thus the !Kung are very much on the periphery of the dominant society'.

THE KHOEKHOEN

The combined presence of the bones of cattle, sheep, goats and pottery is accepted as indication of a previous Khoekhoe settlement. A study of this trail of bones and pottery shards led early researchers to believe in a northern source of origin and a gradual movement southwards in search of water and pastures (Mitchell 2002:227). Elphick (1977:7) disagrees, and argues that based on an analysis of languages spoken by hunters '... it seems that Khoikhoi originated in or near Botswana, and not in distant parts of northern or eastern Africa. Their ancestors were southern African hunters, not intrusive pastoralists'. He concludes that there are only two possibilities: either the Khoekhoen and the San had a common origin or there was a profound genetic and cultural transfer between the two groups, and continuous and

intimate interaction. Klein (1986:5) concurs and emphasises that the two groups have much in common: they are biologically similar, both speak Khoekhoe languages, both lead a nomadic lifestyle and move seasonally in search of grazing and water, and they are mutually reliant on their combined skills of hunting and herding (see also Smith *et al.* 2000:32-33). Mitchell (2002:227) points out that a southern African origin for the Khoekhoen is supported by similarities in kinship systems with those of the San, genetics, and shared beliefs connected with procreation, trance and rain-making. Smith and Ouzman (2004:511) add a further dimension to this debate; they emphasise the striking similarity between Central African 'geometric' art and southern African Khoekoe art, and suggest a Central African, Pygmy-related origin for the Khoekhoen:

North of the Zambezi is Clark's Central African 'schematic' rock art zone (Clark 1958), belonging to foragers ancestral to modern Pygmy groups (B. Smith 1995, 1997) that seem to have spoken a clickless language (Ehret 1982). These people and their languages constituted the proto-Khoe ... Central African geometric art uses the same basic repertoire of forms found in southern African Khoekhoen art.

Elphick (1977:11-12) traces the dispersal of the Khoekhoen through southern Africa and suggests that one or several San hunter bands in or near Botswana acquired domestic stock from Bantu-speaking Iron Age neighbours, and became by that very act the first Khoekhoen. This must have occurred before 1488 as Diaz reported the presence of domestic stock with the Khoekhoen he encountered. Elphick sees the major movement as along the Botswana/Zimbabwean border and then south towards

the confluence of the Orange and Vaal; some groups moved downstream to enter Namibia; others moved south through the Karoo and spread east and west along the coastal plain. At the time of the first meeting with whites in the seventeenth century there were Khoekhoe population densities in each of these areas; the chief settlement was close to the junction of the Orange and Vaal. As a result of dissent they split, one part leaving in the direction of Cape Town, the other east down the Orange in the direction of the Free State. Engelbrecht (1936:29-30), working in the 1930s, was in a position to interview some Korana informants who informed him that the Korana (a branch of the Khoekhoen) crossed the territory between the Orange and the Vaal probably before 1775. Engelbrecht (1936:40-45) describes the different tribal divisions that settled along the banks of the Vaal, Vet, and Harts Rivers. Mason (1962:373) confirms an ancient Khoekhoe presence in this area and suggests that they entered the transVaal at approximately the same time as the Bantu-speakers. While small, isolated bands of San in South Africa continue to maintain a traditional lifestyle, enabling researchers to do detailed and reliable ethnographic studies, the Khoekhoen who were rapidly absorbed by other cultures, lost their language in the process, and have ceased to exist as a unique cultural group. For the purposes of this study valuable information was, nevertheless, obtained from one of the earliest researchers (see Schapera (1930) 1963), from more recent research (Boonzaaier *et al.* 1996), augmented by information obtained from a remarkable unpublished doctoral thesis (Hoff 1990).

In contrast to the egalitarian lifestyle of the San, the Khoekhoen lived in a hierarchical society with a chief who was usually also the wealthiest stock-owner in the village. Cattle was an integral part of their lives and they kept large herds of sheep, cattle and goats; oxen were frequently used as pack animals. Ownership of cattle defined your place in society and wealthy cattle-owners had impoverished people in their service – these were frequently their San neighbours (Deacon & Deacon 1999:178-182). The lifestyle and dispersal of the Khoekhoen were almost entirely defined by the need for pastures and water for grazing stock. Kraals were therefore invariably located near a substantial water source. Stockposts were established away from the main kraal where the cattle could roam freely during the day. Smith and Ouzman (2004:510) concur:

Early herder evidence is, as we have seen, found not in site clusters but in extensive linear bands along water-courses. This pattern suggests an early herder presence in the central interior, continuing beyond the 600-mm isohyet into winter-rainfall regions (Sadr 1998) ... the rivers of the central interior that herders are thought to have followed have a dense concentration of predominantly engraved geometric imagery ...

Boonzaaier *et al.* (1996:31) emphasise that the ownership of cattle was synonymous with wealth and control, and could therefore acquire symbolic meaning: 'In herding societies, stock has real symbolic power. The herds become metaphors for the family and important ritual activity revolves around the cattle'. Political and social alliances became possible through exchange and bartering, including the dominance

over hunter-gatherer neighbours, and the transfer of cattle during marriage negotiations. In spite of their nomadic lifestyle dictated by the need for new pastures, the Khoekhoen lived in organised settlements, generally consisting of over 100 persons, and several villages were frequently united into a larger unit.

Deacon and Deacon (1999:183) describe the material culture of the Khoekhoen living in the Western Cape at the time of the first European contact as 'transitional elements between the Stone Age and metal technology'. Their housing structure was a dome-like framework of green branches covered with reed mats; this simple *matjieshuis* was dictated by their mobile lifestyle, and could be easily lifted and transported to the next encampment (Boonzaaier *et al.* 1996:36-38). Although the Khoekhoen did not mine and smelt iron, they acquired iron nuggets from Bantu-speaking agropastoralists and learned how to heat and beat it into metal spears and arrowheads. Copper was also very highly prized, and it was particularly sought after for the manufacture of jewellery; copper earrings incised with geometric patterns were particularly popular and they were widely worn by both men and women (Schapera (1930) 1963:67-69). This love of personal adornment was extended to the clothing they wore. An important item of clothing for both men and women were front and rear aprons of animal skin; the aprons of the women were frequently skillfully decorated with shells and beads. Small, decorated leather pouches hung round the neck, and contained valued items and sweet-smelling buchu powder. Hoff (1990) writes about the important role of buchu not only as a sought after toiletry item, but of its essential symbolic function during various rituals. Both

the San and the Khoekhoen made pots, but there were noticeable technical and stylistic differences. A long-term study undertaken in the Karoo in 1996 revealed these differences: pots made by hunters were tempered with grass and were bowl shaped; herder pots revealed greater sophistication, had pointed bases and legs, and were tempered with quartz (Deacon & Deacon 1996:185). Pots generally served a purely practical function as storage vessels, particularly to store fat which was very highly prized for cosmetic and ritual purposes. Most rituals included the application of animal fat to the body of the person at the conclusion of the ceremony. The animal fat was mixed with various pigments and applied liberally to the body and to the face; the most widely used pigments were red ochre and black charcoal. At Kasteelberg, a well-known Khoekhoe archaeological site in the Western Cape, huge amounts of ochre were found, and many grooves in the bedrock where the ochre was crushed (Boonzaaier *et al.* 1996:21-22). The symbolic and ritual use of crushed ochre as a facial and body paint is described in great detail by Hoff (1990:169-171). Facial decoration was an accepted and essential part of ritual, and symbolised the changing status of the person, particularly women. Small, symmetrically placed red spots were painted on the forehead, cheeks and chin; these designs were not purely decorative but were associated with specific animals.

A central theme in Khoekhoe ritual was the idea of transformation, the transition from one state to another, such as during the various rites of passage – birth, puberty, adulthood, marriage and death. The celebration of these events was marked by ritualistic behaviour and the use of symbols. During these celebrations

the person was extremely vulnerable and experienced *!nau* (danger). This state of vulnerability was associated with cold and cold water had to be avoided; heat was associated with healing and strength, and at the end of the ceremonial period heat was administered together with buchu powder, crushed ochre, and the ritual slaughtering of livestock. Khoekhoe ceremonies invariably involved periods of seclusion, usually in a hut or enclosure set aside for this purpose. Scarification was frequently also part of the ritual, and the cuts administered to various parts of the person's body or face, were rubbed with a mixture of charcoal and buchu leaving permanent scars (Boonzaaier *et al.* 1996:45). Hoff (1990:332) writes incisively about the cosmology and religious beliefs of the Khoekhoen, and emphasises that normative values, religion, art, ritual, language, and other forms of symbolism were all part of the cosmology of a particular group and could not be rigidly separated: 'Die Khoekhoen het dus 'n beskouing van 'n kragbelaaide heelal wat in 'n hiërgie van krag georden is'. ('Basic to the cosmology of the Khoekhoen is the belief in a powerful cosmos, and structured hierarchically according to a higher and lower order or power field'.) (my translation). Within this all-encompassing and powerful universe, all people, animals, plants, stones, and even the heavenly bodies, were endowed with power. There was a constant interaction, both positive and negative, between these various forces. The two most powerful entities in this universe were Tsui//Goab, the supreme creator of the earth and all living creatures, and his protagonist //Gâunab, the bringer of death and destruction. A third mythical hero-figure was Haitsi Aibeb, believed to have been resurrected many times, and revered for his bravery. Entities that were also considered particularly powerful were the

various part snake/part animal creatures associated with water and rain-making, *Veldslang*, *Rivierslang*, *Grootslang*, and *Turus* (Hoff 1990:59-87). This recognition of the powerful forces present in the natural world, was extended to the heavenly bodies; the moon was particularly revered as the bountiful provider of food, and new moon and full moon were celebrated with dancing and singing (Schapera (1930) 1963:375-376). The sun and the stars also featured prominently in their belief system; stars were believed to be the eyes of the souls of the dead. Celestial phenomena were feared: the eclipse of the sun and the moon were considered a bad omen, and shooting stars indicated sickness and death.

THE BANTU-SPEAKERS

The rapid spread of farming, ceramics and metallurgy is generally accepted as the result of the expansion of the Bantu-speakers in South Africa. Various models have been proposed for the origin of these agropastoralists (see Hall 1987:20-31). Although there is a lack of agreement on dates and dispersal routes, linguistic research shows that Bantu languages in South Africa are closely related, and originated to the north of Zambia on the Cameroon/Nigeria border (Hall 1987:20-31). Davenport (1989:9) points out that the Iron Age people moved away from the Tsetse fly belt in the central and eastern Limpopo valley, in the direction of the transVaal, where settlements were rapidly established.

The evidence suggests irregular movement from the north for perhaps more than 1000 years, with the stream flowing onwards across the Vaal in a spasmodic

process that scattered thousands of settlements across the province ... (Mason 1962:371)

Maggs (1976:308-309) provides a detailed description of Iron Age settlements on the Highveld during the nineteenth century, and the lineage of each group. According to tradition, the Fokeng group were the first Bantu-speakers to settle on the southern Highveld; they were followed by Sotho-Tswana speakers that entered from the Bankenfeld axis of the south-central transVaal, the Magaliesberg, the Marico and extending into the south-eastern part of Botswana. Other groups rapidly followed, notably the Koena, the Kgatle and the Taung. A full review of these and other groups that entered the southern Highveld is beyond the scope of this project. Maggs (1976:322) sums up the situation:

Relatively large, orderly settlements were already established by the time of the major voyages of discovery, sent out by the maritime European powers, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By about the seventeenth century Iron Age expansion was reaching the limits of suitable areas for settlement on the Highveld.

Mitchell (2002:262) cites Huffman (1980) and emphasises that ceramic typology is currently the preferred approach to tracing the expansion of iron-using agropastoralists across southern Africa. In this multidimensional approach three stylistic 'variables' – vessel profile, motif, and decoration-layout, are used to reconstruct and identify different groups and the routes they followed. According to this model three separate streams are discernable: the Kwale branch extended along

the coast from Kenya to KwaZulu-Natal; the Nkopi branch extended inland from southern Tanzania through Malawi and eastern Zambia into Zimbabwe; and the Kalunda Tradition stretched through western Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe into South Africa. A group of the Kwale branch, the Mzonjani has been identified; people making Mzonjani-derived ceramics settled at Broederstroom near Pretoria between 550 and 650 and rapidly spread to the interior (Mitchell 2002:264). Mitchell (2002:270) further points out that ceramic typologies remain a useful tool for tracing the expansion and dispersal of agropastoralists, but that other anthropological and historical sources must also be considered. Between 1949 and 1986 Mason (1986:7) completed over 62 excavations of Iron Age sites in the southern, western and central transVaal in areas adjacent to the Vaal-Klip valley. Conclusive proof of Iron Age occupation on the southern Highveld was obtained when Tim Maggs (1976) identified a large number of Late Iron Age settlements in this area. The discussion that follows is largely based on this research.

According to Mason (1986:145) the archaeological site of Broederstroom in the Magaliesberg valley, dated c. AD 350 - 600, represents the earliest trace of Sotho/Tswana people in the southern, western and central transVaal. From this secure base these Early Iron Age people probably transmitted their basic culture and technology to succeeding generations, culminating in the historically identified Sotho/Tswana. Mason (1986:135) suggests that this valley was deliberately chosen because of its advantageous geographical position between savanna woodlands and high grassland biomes, its proximity to the Oori (Crocodile) River, and its abundant

game. Mason maintains that was precisely why the Voortrekker Andries Pretorius settled here in the 1830s (see Carruthers 1990:270). Excavations revealed that the site was probably intermittently occupied by small bands of people, following the dictates of grazing for their herds. A large number of excavated huts revealed that walls were made of plaster (*daga*) reinforced with sticks and grass. Floors were raised and moulding was applied to doors. Some huts had fireplaces and tent-like skins may have been used for roofing (Mason 1986:155-165). Faunal remains found at the site show that more hunted animals than domestic animals were slaughtered, and that the latter consisted only of goats and sheep; cattle were only introduced later. Plant food remains found at nearby sites indicate that only wild plants were eaten, and that no grain was cultivated. Clearly these Early Iron Age people still relied heavily on their hunting- and gathering skills. The presence of stone tools, arrow points, grooved stones and ostrich eggshell beads, suggests that there was close contact between Stone Age people and Iron Age people at Broederstroom (Mason 1986:136). It is particularly the grooved stones that point to a Stone Age origin; the diameter of the grooves exactly match the diameter of the ostrich eggshell beads. The grindstones found at Broederstroom are similar to those found at Stone Age sites (Mason 1986:211-213).

There is no trace of iron mining in the southern, western and central transVaal. The Broederstroom people probably collected iron ore in the form of ferricrete exposed in an erosion gully at the site, and also from the nearby Daspoort formation. Two furnace clusters identified in the settlement area, suggest that iron and copper

artefacts were manufactured here and supplied to neighbouring settlements (Mason 1986:71; 138). There are indications that iron also acquired symbolic significance: a large iron ore 'pillar' appears to have been deliberately placed on the summit of one of two iron ore mounds, suggesting a symbolic use (Mason 1986:138). Iron was also prized for its decorative potential and fragments of iron (and copper) jewellery were found at the site. It is, however, in their pottery that the Broederstroom people excelled. While the majority of pots and other containers were made primarily to serve the practical purposes of storage, transportation and cooking, the motifs with which the pots were decorated, attest to an aesthetic sense (although even an undecorated pot can be considered beautiful because of its perfect profile (form)). The majority of the motifs on the Broederstroom sherds consist of incised, vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines, frequently arranged as chevrons round the rim of the pot (Mason 1986:195-204). A number of sherds have pronounced, raised edges similar to the 'scarification' ridges on the famous sculptured terracotta heads that were found at Lydenburg in 1962 (Hall 1987:41). Mason suggests a possible relationship and artistic tradition between the Broederstroom culture and the Lydenburg heads (Mason 1986:195; 204). Mason also argues that Broederstroom ceramics provide an 'ancestral model' for the ceramics of the 'Southern-Western Transvaal Middle and Late Iron Age and Modern Sotho-Tswana pottery assemblages' (Mason 1986:210). Pottery was also used in burials at Broederstroom and the remains of a human skull were found in a large ceramic jar pointing to its symbolic use (Hall 1987:31). At Broederstroom the

traditional boundaries of 'functional', 'decorative' and 'symbolic', imposed on objects of material culture, become blurred.

The period AD 350 - 600 has not been accounted for archaeologically and no sites have been identified for this time-span in the southern, western, and central transVaal. Mason (1986:229) speculates that the Early Iron Age settlers withdrew from the Magaliesberg valley, possibly due to climatic changes and drought, only returning in about AD 1200 to re-occupy their ancestral hunting grounds (Mason 1986:229). The ensuing period, traditionally referred to as the Middle Iron Age, is less easy to define as the various stages are not clearly demarcated. It is characterised by several technological advances in building, increased mining activities, and the introduction of cattle and the cultivation of the land nearly 1000 years after the beginning of the Iron Age. Two sites that have Middle Iron Age characteristics as defined by Mason (1986:221-225) are Olifantspoort in the Magaliesberg Valley, and Melville Koppies in Johannesburg. At Olifantspoort, dated AD 1500 - 1800, building structures advanced to a remarkable degree, with sliding doors, fireplaces, verandahs and separate embayments dividing the boundary walls into separate bays; walls were made of *daga*. The remains of an iron smelting forge and a variety of iron artefacts were found, including those associated with cultivation of the land (Mason 1986:383-422). Although large amounts of pottery sherds were found, decoration was rare and pots were relatively simple. Olifantspoort people were, however, also concerned with less practical matters; substantial amounts of cosmetic iron ore (*sebito*), a pigment used for body paint and

the decoration of pottery and walls, and a number of ceramic cattle figurines and Tswana 'shields' were found at the site (Mason 1986:461).

The most remarkable feature of Olifantspoort, and of significance for the present study, is the fact that engravings occur on the dolerite boulders at the site. These engravings consist of groups of irregular circular shapes enclosed by smaller, tightly packed circular shapes. These engravings have been identified as site plans, indicating the various settlement units and boundary walls of Late Iron Age settlements, adjacent to Olifantspoort. A number of Tswana shield motifs and goat-like figures are also engraved on the rocks. These site plan rock engravings bear a superficial resemblance to the non-representational engravings at Redan; however there are some marked stylistic and technical differences. The Olifantspoort engravings are executed in a fine line technique; at Redan all the engravings are pecked and the circular ones are characterised by symmetry and centricity, and each one is unique. The Olifantspoort engraving site is nevertheless of some importance, as it demonstrates that the Bantu-speakers had the ability to convert large stone-walled structures in plan form on a much reduced scale, and to use different graphic symbols to depict walls and interior spaces. These engravings could not be dated, but they are probably contemporaneous with the Late Iron Age settlements dated of c. AD 1500 - 1800, also found at Olifantspoort (Mason 1986:477). Similar site plan rock engravings have been found in Bantu-speaking Iron Age settlements in other parts of the country, notably in KwaZulu-Natal. This neglected area of rock art is the subject of an insightful paper by Tim Maggs (1995:132-142). Maggs

emphasises that these site plan engravings can be seen as the earliest form of mapping, but of even more importance is 'the recognition that such images may represent abstract or symbolic spatial arrangements reflecting the cosmology of the society that made them' (Maggs 1995:133). Maggs (1995:134) argues that in order to understand these 'agriculturist engravings', we should examine the religions and symbolic system of the Sotho-Nguni-speaking people who made them. He lists the three most important elements: a strongly patriarchal kinship system, the central cattle pen which serves as a shrine or altar; and mediation with the deceased male ancestors. In this system, the homestead with its carefully allocated spaces for various members of the family, functions as a microcosm for both the material and spiritual world. He concludes that the settlement pattern (and the engravings) are the visual manifestation of this traditional spiritual and social order (Maggs 1995:134). These site plan rock engravings at Olifantspoort also demonstrate the ability of Late Iron Age people to give pictorial form to an idea, concept or belief.

Approximately 500 years after the Early Iron Age farmers left Broederstroom, they settled on the crest of the Witwatersrand at Melville Koppies. According to the historian M. Legassick (cited in Mason 1986:345) there were two centres of Sotho-Tswana dispersal and development before the 1800s: the Kwena in the western transVaal, and the Kgatla nucleus in the Pretoria district. Lineages developed from these two nuclei dating before AD 1500 - the Rolong lineages in the western transVaal, and the Fokeng lineages west of modern Rustenburg and in the upper Vaal River basin. The c. AD 1000 Late Iron Age site at Melville Koppies is mid-

way between these two dispersal areas. Two intact iron furnaces were found at Melville Koppies, indicating that this was an important iron smelting centre (Mason 1986:603). Late Iron Age furnaces and forges were also discovered at Lonehill and Panorama, both in the Johannesburg area. Mason (1986:604) suggests that these sites may indicate specialist iron smelters linked by trade with the cattle herders of the Klipriviersberg. The Klipriviersberg is a vast area consisting of an area north-east of Alberton, an area south of Soweto, and the largest area between Alberton and Baragwanath. One of the larger tributaries of the Vaal River, the Klip River, drains the western Klipriviersberg (Mason 1986:557). The Klipriviersberg was densely populated during the Late Iron Age, probably due to the great quantity of surface material that was available for building purposes. Excavations yielded large amounts of iron and copper artefacts, including well-preserved copper jewellery. The presence of relatively intact pottery suggests that the occupants were forced to leave their settlements in a great hurry. This is further confirmed by the fact that the huts had obviously been destroyed by fire, baking the plaster surfaces and ensuring their preservation. Faunal remains give ample proof of cattle farming (Mason 1986:597-602).

The Klipriviersberg is within one day's walking distance from Vereeniging and the Redan engraving site. Late Iron Age settlements, dated c. AD 1700 - 1800, were also located at Suikerbosrand, half a day's walk south of the Klipriviersberg sites, and adjacent to the Vereeniging area. The isolated hills and steep valleys of the Suikerbosrand provided the ideal environment for these Late Iron Age farmers; the

Klip River about eight kilometres west of the Suikerbosrand probably provided the reeds used in the mud plaster of the walls of the settlement. The Suikerbosrand settlements resemble the adjacent Klipriviersberg settlements in many respects. Artefacts are also generally similar to those found at Klipriviersberg. Intact strings of ostrich eggshell beads suggest that there was a strong San presence at Suikerbosrand during this period (Mason 1986:609-625). Conclusive confirmation of Iron Age occupation of the southern Highveld was obtained with Maggs' detailed research of stonewalled structures and settlement patterns in the Vaal-Klip valley:

The earliest Iron Age communities of which there is yet archaeological evidence is concentrated along the Vaal and Klip Rivers extending north and southwards to areas of prominent hills. (Maggs 1976:140)

At Ntsuanatsatsi, a prominent flat-topped hill near the confluence of the Klip and Wilge Rivers, Maggs has identified Type N settlements. Ntsuanatsatsi is also the subject of a local creation myth. In the 1960s, S.F. le Roux of Vereeniging managed to salvage some Iron Age artefacts from a cave site on the farm Zeekoefontein No. 21, about four kilometres north-west of the Vaal River barrage. The artefacts included a heavily oxidised iron adze, a copper ring, a leather bag containing specularite (used for body paint), and shards of pottery decorated with chevron designs. According to the paper that was subsequently published (Le Roux 1966:88-91), these artefacts were of the Uitkomst Culture as defined by Mason (1962:378). These artefacts (or what remains of them) were located by the writer in an unmarked drawer in the Vaal Teknorama museum in Vereeniging.

'HISTORY FROM THE HANDS OF INTREPID MISSIONARY-EXPLORERS'

An account of the past achievements of the ethnic groups that lived on the Highveld during the past 2000 years would be incomplete without some reference to the unique contribution of the pioneer missionaries. Their acute observations frequently complement and reinforce the archaeological and ethnographic record, and their day-to-day experiences with the people they tried to convert to Christianity, give a sense of reality to this dramatic period in the history of the Highveld. In Mason's (1986:847) words: 'History from the hands of intrepid missionary-explorers in the early nineteenth century Transvaal brings a sense of reality to the pages of Late Iron Age archaeology'. The Hodgson-Broadbent mission deserves special mention. In 1823 Thomas Hodgson and Robert Broadbent of the Methodist Missionary Society, tried to reach Platberg in the Vaal-Vet valley in order to start mission work amongst the Seleka-Rolong, a Tswana group. On 15 November 1823 Hodgson wrote:

We are now beyond the limits of the Colony, literally in a heathen land, where men roam about at large, uncontrolled by human and divine laws, doing that which is right in their own eyes. Even here, however, the gospel is little known, as Corannas and Bushmen hear its joyful sound. (Cope (ed.) 1977:66)

These words would prove prophetic. They travelled in a north-easterly direction up the Vaal River; due to the *Difaqane* - the name given to the series of conflicts and forced migrations that resulted from the expansion of the Zulu kingdom (see

Davenport 1989:15-20) – the planned meeting could not take place at Platberg, the ancestral home of the Seleka-Rolong. More than a hundred years later Mason's (1986:629-651) archaeological excavations confirmed that Platberg was a typical Late Iron Age settlement, and that it had been occupied by a prosperous community. Hodgson and Broadbent finally established their mission at Matlwase (Maquassi) near modern Klerksdorp, becoming the first white people to settle in the transVaal (Cope (ed.) 1977:3-6). Hodgson worked here intermittently for a three year period. *The journals of the Rev. T.L. Hodgson*, published for the first time in 1977, provide a detailed account of events on the southern-western Highveld between 1823 and 1825. It also records the complexity of human interaction before and during the *Difaqane*, and the diverse ethnic groups he came into contact with. A close reading of his journals reveals that in the course of his travels and evangelical work, he encountered no less than 10 different ethnic groups: the migrating groups from other areas caught up in the *Difaqane*; the Tswana-speaking Seleka-Rolong that had fled their ancestral Platberg homes and with whom Hodgson developed a close relationship; and finally the two nomadic groups that had lived on the Highveld for thousands of years, the Korana branch of the Khoekhoen, and the San. Hodgson developed friendly relations with all these groups and faithfully recorded his impressions. From time to time there were rumours of other Khoekhoe tribes in the area, such as the Bastards, a group of mixed Khoekhoe and European descent, and the marauding Bergenaars; Hodgson encountered them infrequently.

On several occasions Hodgson encountered small, nomadic bands of San; without exception they were extremely impoverished, invariably begging for food and tobacco. Their only means of survival appeared to be that of menials in the service of Tswana agropastoralists and Korana herders (Cope (ed.) 1977:67). In spite of the servile status of the majority of San, small isolated groups insisted on retaining 'ownership' of their traditional hunting grounds. On one occasion Hodgson was requested to pay compensation to a group of San who maintained that Hodgson was infringing on their personal fountains and stretch of land (Cope (ed.) 1977:354). After the required compensation was paid, Hodgson's cattle were allowed to continue grazing and drinking freely from the water sources. Hodgson recognised their skill in hunting and snaring with their traditional bows and arrows; he also saw some with iron spears - obviously obtained from their Tswana neighbours in exchange for ostrich eggshell beads, and for services rendered as rain-makers. Hodgson makes frequent references to 'Bootchuanna Bushmen':

The Bootchuannas here are principally in the service of the Corannas as cattle-watchers etc., and, being styled Bushmen, are I presume, of the lowest class of that nation. (Cope (ed.) 1977:105)

According to Cope (1997:105) the 'Bootchuanna' were impoverished Tswana who possessed no cattle, and who either led a nomadic life, or were servants. He adds that the term 'does not refer to the San, or Bushmen proper, it probably refers to the Kgalagadi, who are believed to be earlier inhabitants of the Tswana country who were reduced to serfdom by the Tswana tribes that arrived later'. The explorer

Andrew Smith also encountered these impoverished people in the course of his expedition into the interior in the 1800s, and referred to them as 'Poor Barolong' (Lye (ed.) 1975:313).

The group most frequently encountered by Hodgson were the Korana. In contrast to the reclusive and poverty-stricken San, he found them friendly and co-operative, eager to be of assistance and anxious to develop trading relations. The Korana were the descendants of Gorachouqua, a Khoekhoe chief originally resident in the Cape Peninsula. During the seventeenth century they moved into the interior and settled at the junction of the Vaal and Harts Rivers; from here they dispersed in various directions along the Vaal (Schapera (1930) 1963:47; Engelbrecht 1936:233-236). The Korana that Hodgson encountered travelled on ox-back and horse-back, owned guns and spears, and appeared to lead prosperous lives. Hodgson disapproved of their belief in rain-making, and the all-night dancing and singing which usually accompanied these rituals (Cope (ed.) 1977:362). They lived together in villages, but had numerous *werfs*, outposts where they herded their cattle, invariably close to water sources. They were generally on good terms with the Tswana agropastoralists, but treated their San servants and the 'Bootchuannas' with contempt; San and 'Bootchuanna' women were, however, frequently taken as wives. During the *Difaqane*, the previously densely populated Highveld became rapidly depleted as entire communities fled before the marauding groups. Powerful Tswana chiefdoms were disrupted and the few surviving San were thrown into greater poverty and isolation than before. The Korana, known for their adaptability,

appeared to survive best, frequently changing alliances and finally becoming assimilated by other culture groups, including the Bantu-speakers (Schapera (1930) 1963:47). Throughout this period of unrest, Hodgson continued his evangelical duties, but was frequently called on to assist in some dispute between the Korana and other ethnic and tribal groups.

Throughout this period of conflict and bloodshed, ritual activities continued to be practiced by all the groups. Hodgson noted that the impoverished San continued to paint their faces with red ochre and wear copious amounts of beads (Cope (ed.) 1977:69; 71). This was the one communal activity shared by the San, the Khoekhoen and the Bantu-speakers. Each of the expeditions that crossed the Vaal, testified to the extensive facial and bodily decorations of the various ethnic groups they encountered (see Mason 1986:803). In order to secure the desired red ochre and *sebito* (haematite), extensive trade relations were conducted with neighbouring tribes, and cattle were frequently required as payment. This trade also included the bartering of beads, ivory and the various metals; large copper ear plates were particularly popular, and were considered a mark of royalty in the Tswana community. Facial and bodily decoration was not purely decorative, but acquired pronounced ritual and symbolic connotations. Hoff (1990:169-171) attests to the significance of facial painting during the various rites of passage, particularly during initiation of the Khoekhoe girl: the natural symmetry of the face was emphasised by symmetrically placed dots and lines, and zigzag patterns were painted on the arms and legs. As we saw in the previous chapter, these patterns were associated with

animals that were particularly venerated. The practice of scarification - cutting into the flesh and rubbing pigments into the incised areas leaving permanent scars, was also widespread. Schapera ((1930) 1963:70-72; 124; 138; 307; 356) reports extensively on this practice amongst certain San groups and the Khoekhoen, and the belief that these cuts would endow the hunter with the qualities of certain animals and ensure success in the hunt.

It is but a step away from these painted and incised designs to the painted and engraved images on the rock face; both attest to a highly developed aesthetic sensibility; and the ability to express ideas and experiences in abstract pictorial form. These widespread practices could have been the practical incentive that led, imperceptibly, to the discovery that the rock surface could be 'marked' in a similar manner, leaving a permanent record of beliefs, ideas and experiences. No mention is made in the Hodgson diaries of rock engravings, and yet the Bosworth rock engraving site is situated in the Maquassi/Matlwane area close to modern Klerksdorp where Hodgson and Broadbent conducted their evangelical efforts (chapter 3). Understandably, the missionaries were primarily concerned with the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the people they hoped to convert to Christianity. Rock engravings, particularly the enigmatic images that occur at Bosworth (and Redan), and bear no resemblance to the natural world, would have been dismissed as of no consequence.

Further west near modern Kuruman, the missionary Robert Moffat established the Kuruman Mission in 1829 (Davenport 1989:177). In his account of his evangelical experiences, *Missionary labours and scenes in South Africa* (1842:15), he refers to the 'Great Bechuana family', and to the many 'Bechuana names' that attest to their previous widespread occupation of the country south of the Orange River, and adds, 'even the Lokualo* of the Bechuana is to be found on stones ... but this may have been done by herdsmen taken or escaped from other tribes'. His description of 'Lokualo*' is undoubtedly a reference to the non-representational rock engravings that abound in the Kuruman area:

*Lokualo, from which we derive the word writing or painting, is formed generally by herd-boys, who with a stone make various figures on stones with a flat surface, without any reference to shape. Marks are made by striking the stone on another till curved lines, circles, ovals, and zigzag figures are impressed on its surface, exhibiting the appearance of a white strip of about an inch broad, like a confused coil of a rope. (Moffat 1842:15)

This intriguing observation by Moffat regarding the authorship of the non-representational rock engravings in the Kuruman area, has never been adequately explained. His description of the various indigenous peoples he came into contact with does not necessarily coincide with later ethnographic studies; his reference to 'Bechuana' and 'herdsman', could indicate indigenous people of mixed Bantu-speaking and Khoisan heritage, and he is obviously referring to the ethnic group Hodgson describes as 'Bootchuannas'. Stow ((1905) 1964:27), did not agree with

Moffat and cites evidence obtained from Korana and Griqua informants, who maintained that the 'Bachoana' (Bechuana) were relatively recent arrivals in the area. Stow states categorically: 'In these deductions Mr Moffat is clearly mistaken, for there can be no question but that these relics (non-representational engravings) are of undoubted Bushman origin'. In a letter dated May 1915, the geologist E.J. Dunn refers to his excursion through Bushmanland in 1872 - 1873, and describes San people executing engravings on dolerite:

The Bushmen with sharp siliceous stones (quartz, chalcedony, agate etc.) scratch the outlines of animals, men, etc., on the smooth surface, and rub away on the contour lines until quite a deep groove is produced. The profile is often excellent and the artists imparted action to the etchings. (cited in Wilman (1933) 1968:2)

Both Moffat and Dunn are reputable witnesses; if their reports are to be believed, it means that both Bantu-speaking Bechuana herd boys ('Bootchuannas'), and San were observed engraving on the rock face.

Following Stow and Dunn, there was consensus among earlier researchers that the rock engravings had been executed by San (Schapera 1926:852; Wilman ((1933) 1968). However, a clear distinction was made between the two categories: the representational engravings of animals and people; and the non-representational engravings with their predominantly geometric configurations. The former was greatly admired, and the genus of the animal was frequently described in detail (Wilman (1933) 1968:35). The latter was generally glossed over (Johnson 1910:49;

51) and dismissed as meaningless scribbles. Stow, ((1905) 1964:27-30) was the exception to the rule. Long before these enigmatic images were acknowledged as worthy of attention, he recognised them as meaningful, and speculated on a possible symbolic interpretation. He encountered them for the first time in the 1870s while he was doing geological reconnaissance in Griqualand West (North West Province). In a letter written to Dr Wilhelm Bleek on 14 December 1874 (McGregor Museum Archives Depot. MMKD 2650/1) he could not contain his enthusiasm and expressed great excitement:

That there are mystic drawings and chasings to be found there cannot be the least doubt. I have found some most wonderful examples of them ... These emblems and symbols have astonished me more than anything else I have previously discovered - for amongst them we find the circle, the crescent, the cup - and several others that appear like mystic phallic emblems ...

Using his considerable geological knowledge, Stow attempted to date the engravings, becoming the first person to apply scientific knowledge to the rock art. He made a clear distinction between what he considered to be the more ancient and original engravings at Blauwbank, the unmistakable work of Bushmen, and the more recent 'copies of Bushman chippings' which he considered to be inferior and therefore the work of other indigenous races. Stow also noted the stylistic characteristics of the engravings and concluded that the more ancient engravings 'can be distinguished by the boldness and correctness of their outlines'. He was less complimentary about the more recent engravings and estimated them to be

approximately 50 years old, '... the perfect caricature of the thing represented, and the crudeness of the materials ... the want of meaning and design at once show their spurious origin ...' (Stow (1905) 1964:27-28). Stow's qualitative judgement of the different engravings at Blauwbank (Driekopseiland) is not necessarily valid today; all prehistoric visual expression, regardless of its 'correctness of outline', is valued equally. However, of importance is his observation that the same rock surface was utilized by different culture groups over a vast period of time; and that a stylistic/formalistic analysis can augment the archaeological, ethnographic and geological record, and provide information that is not available by any other means. Compared to other areas in South Africa, the southern Highveld is under-researched. Although the archaeological, ethnographic and historical records provide some pointers, there is little hard core data available regarding the authorship of the rock engravings of Redan. The historical record (Cope (ed.) 1977) has confirmed that the three main ethnic groups, the San hunter-gatherers, the Bantu-speaking agropastoralists and the Khoekhoen (Korana) herders co-existed on the southern Highveld during the early 1800s. There is also conclusive archaeological evidence of long-term occupation of Bantu-speaking agropastoralists (Mason 1986; Maggs 1976). Hypothetically speaking, each of these three groups, or their subdivisions, could have produced the rock engravings. In order to arrive at a conclusion regarding the authorship of Redan, this paucity of data is augmented with information gained from direct observations of the engravings and the site (to be discussed fully in chapters 7 & 8).

Of the three groups the agropastoralists appear to be the least likely candidates. Although their material culture contribution is considerable, their contribution to pictorial form is limited to engravings of site plans and 'late white' finger paintings, both found in areas a considerable distance away from the southern Highveld (see Mitchell 2002:341, 355). Traditionally, the vast majority of rock art, both paintings and engravings, were ascribed to the San. However, a comparison of the two art forms reveals some fundamental differences. Rock paintings occur in mountainous areas on the walls of caves and overhangs; the imagery is predominantly representative of people and animals. Non-representational imagery occurs infrequently, and invariably in conjunction with representational imagery. Redan does not confirm to this pattern in any respect. The images are predominantly non-representational and less than 4% represent animals. This small percentage of animal images includes one life-like representation of an eland; unlike the other more rudimentary and simplified images of animals, this single image (since removed) is stylistically similar to the typical depictions of eland frequently found in rock paintings. This suggests some contact between the authors of the two different rock art traditions at Redan. Was Stow possibly correct in his belief of two separate branches of San artists, the 'painters' and the 'sculptors', each with their own unique rock art tradition? Stow may, however, have been incorrect in ascribing both these traditions to the San; consideration must also be given to a possible Khoekhoe authorship. The historical record attests to a strong Korana presence on the southern Highveld during the early nineteenth century; other factors at Redan, such as the proximity of a water source (and its central role in the cosmology of the

Khoekhoen) support this supposition. This assumption, admittedly based on incomplete evidence, was further confirmed (after the main body of this study had been completed) by the publication of an important paper by Benjamin Smith and Sven Ouzman, *Taking stock. Identifying Khoekhoen herder rock art in southern Africa* (2004).

Relying heavily on the geographic distribution of rock engraving sites along watercourses and sources, and on the stylistic uniformity of the geometric images found at these sites, the authors define a further rock art tradition, hitherto only hinted at:

... we add Khoekhoen rock art, a nonentoptic geometric rock art tradition with its own origin and meanings. This tradition is an indicator of a Khoekhoen herder presence that archaeological, ethnographic, linguistic, and genetic research can substantiate. (Smith & Ouzman 2004:515)

The authors (2004:506) argue that the geometric forms used by the Khoekhoen 'fall outside of the criteria for entoptics established by neuropsychological research'.

They define these forms as follows:

Northern South African sites without forager art repeat a limited and distinctive set of geometric forms: circular outlines (sometimes with internal division), crosses, lines, concentric circles and oblong forms with vertical and/or horizontal divisions. (Smith & Ouzman 2004:503)

A table is included, illustrating the range of geometric images in southern African herder rock art (2004:505, fig. 5). Although Redan is not mentioned in the text, at

least eight of these images are from Redan - a further indication of a Khoekhoe origin for the engravings.

This overview of the past 2000 years on the southern Highveld provides an essential context for the discussions that follow. The archaeological, ethnographic and historical records confirm that the southern Highveld was cohabited by each of the three main ethnic groups during this period. Although no conclusive proof is provided, these records indicate a Khoekhoe authorship for the rock engravings of Redan. Compared to sites further north such as Driekopseiland, which has over 3500 engraved images (Morris 2004:10), Redan is relatively small, and has less than 300 images. It is therefore possible to isolate individual images and do a stylistic and comparative study. However, in spite of this obvious advantage, Redan has other disadvantages. The engravings at Driekopseiland were engraved on extremely hard and durable igneous rock, capable of resisting extreme atmospheric changes; although complete re-oxidisation has taken place on a large section of the engraved surface, and in spite of seasonal flooding, the images are clearly visible and remain virtually unchanged. The position at Redan is completely reversed. The sandstone rock face is extremely friable and exfoliation is rapidly destroying the rock face and the engravings. The site is not ear-marked for conservation (chapter 2) and in years to come this graphic record of the burgeoning human capacity for pictorial symbolisation will be completely obliterated. These issues are addressed in the next chapter.



Figure 30. *'Bushman Hottentots armed for an expedition' by Samuel Daniell, 1801 (Skotnes (ed.) 1996:199, fig. 1).*



Figure 31. *'Khoi (with painted faces) dancing against the background of their village and cattle' (Steyn 1990:64).*