

AN UNUSUAL ROCK PAINTING OF A SHIP FOUND IN THE ATTACKWASKLOOF

Hugo Leggatt and Renée Rust

In July 2003, a Working for Water team came upon a previously unknown rock art site in a wooded kloof on the farm Crane's Crest in the Ruitersbos region of the Western Cape, north of Mossel Bay. The farm belongs to Paul and Joy Crane. Shortly after the discovery, Hugo Leggatt, who had been recording sites in the region, was invited to inspect it. On a first viewing the site appeared to offer little that was unusual. However, on closer inspection a great deal of excitement was generated when he recognised the shape of a sailing ship. On a second visit, a tracing of the image by Renée Rust brought out the details of a charcoal drawing of a three-masted ship with square-rigged sails on the mainmast (Fig 1).

The site is a sandstone overhang, facing east, and measures about 12 m in width and over 4 m in depth. To the right, where a deep and fairly broad crevice leads back into the rock face, black lines on the flat surface form the outline of the ship. Numerous fine-line paintings of human figures and animals in red ochre are present to the left and right of the ship drawing. These are in a poor state of preservation. Some images are executed in yellow while one bi-chrome eland is partially visible. Apart from these, there are 13 red handprints and numerous black finger dots.

The rock art

Three generations of superimposed art are evident on the panel with the image of the ship. The ship is painted on a smooth part of the rock face, which stands out because of deep grooves on either side. Reddish-orange paint was applied to this area and may have been daubed or rubbed to cover the rock surface. This serves as a background 'canvas' on which the depiction of the ship was executed. The charcoal image of the ship was placed over a series of handprints and dots that, in turn, are superimposed on fine-line paintings. The handprints are in red, while

the discernible finger dots are in black. The black pigment of the dots has dissolved in places owing to water seepage and run down the rock face.

The fine-line paintings underlying the two layers include an orange human figure with black stripes, which follow the contour of its torso and arms. The stern of the ship is partially superimposed over this figure. No legs are visible, which may be due to poor preservation. Another possibility is that the legs were not painted since

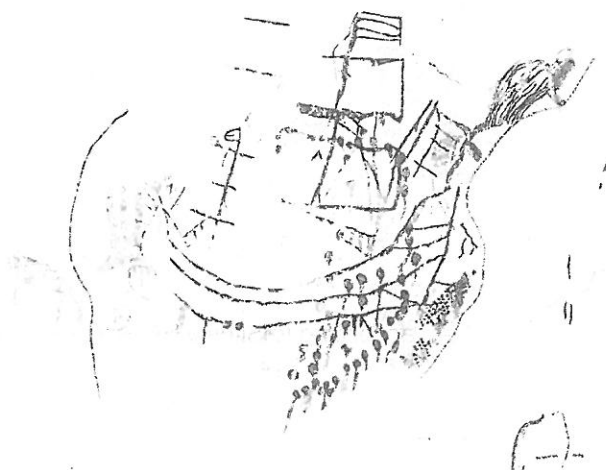


Fig 1: Reproduction of the tracing

the torso may be flowing out of an irregularity in the rock face. The left arm of the figure also appears to be going into the crevice, as if entering the irregularity of the rock face that frames the ship on the right. Only the upper part of the arm is shown up to the crack. Smaller indistinct red paintings are close to the image described above; one of a tiny jackal-like animal with a long tail and the other a grid-like image of approximately 140 small (at times less than 4 mm across) white, yellow and black dots, arranged in rows. The grid has a conical shape.

The ship

After the initial landfall by Diaz in 1488, sailing ships visited Mossel Bay on many occasions during the next 200 years and it is probable that it was there that the artist would have studied the ship. Although the site of the drawing is over 30 km away from the coast, those details of the

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vessel visible above the waterline were executed on the rock face in remarkably clear detail. This attention to detail and the placement of the depiction over older paintings may suggest that some significance was attached to the image.

The image is 410 mm in height, from the hull to the top of the mainmast, and 400 mm from stern to bow. At the top of the mainmast the outline of a black rectangle with two horizontal parallel stripes across it suggests a flag of a tricolour pattern. A flowing line is depicted near this flag on the mainmast. This may represent a cravat, a broad ribbon-like flag, normally attached below the finial (the top of the flagstaff) of mainmasts. Cravats flown trailing near flags were common on Dutch ships of the 16th and 17th centuries (Crampton 1979), as is clearly shown in Fig 2. Another rectangular depiction suggesting a flag is visible at the stern of the ship on, or close to, the mizzenmast. It has an orange-coloured background with black stripes crossed over forming a cross, and may be an ensign of sorts.



Fig 2: The 'Noord-Nieuwland' in Table Bay. Artist unknown. William Fehr Collection, Cape Town Castle.

The image shows a high structure at the stern, on the right of the depiction, which may represent a poop deck, typical of sailing vessels of the 16th and subsequent centuries (Kemp 1976). The poop is the after-most deck, raised above the quarterdeck of a ship, and houses the shipmaster's cabin. Certain lines projecting from the bow on the left may relate to the bowsprit, a spar running out from the front of a sailing vessel. Two black lines run horizontally across the stern of the image while a third line is visible along the full length of the hull. These lines probably represent wales, an extra thickness of wood bolted onto the sides of a ship for extra protection (Kemp 1976; Giggall 1988). At the stern of the ship a rectangular image is visible where a rudder is normally situated on a sailing vessel.

Cultural context

Close study of the rock painting shows detail that tallies with historical evidence about sailing vessels rounding the Cape of Good Hope for 200 years or so from the end of the 16th century. In particular, the probable tricolour design of the flag on the mainmast suggests that the image on the rock face represents a Dutch vessel.



Fig 3: De Houtman's fleet, reproduced from his *Journael* (Raven-Hart 1967)

Prior to 1595 the only European sailing vessels known to have visited Mossel Bay were Portuguese ships, namely at the time of the first landfall by Diaz in 1488 and the next three fleets of Da Gama in 1497, De Ataide in 1501 and De Nova in the same year. Portuguese sailing ships did not fly tricolour flags and also attempted to give the southern African coast a wide berth after the death of d'Almeida in a skirmish with the Khoekhoen in Table Bay in 1510. The first Dutch sailing vessels to round the Cape of Good Hope were those under the command of Cornelis de Houtman. On 4 August 1595 they anchored in the bay of Aguada de Sambras, today known as Mossel Bay. They spent a week in the bay and bartered iron for cattle with local indigenous people (Raven-Hart 1967).

The rigs shown are typical of the period and there are features of the three sailing vessels that are reminiscent of the rock art drawing of a sailing ship. The Dutch East Indiaman was designed for both trade and war and kept its design for about two centuries.

Each of the Dutch East Indiamen has a foremast, a mainmast and a smaller mizzenmast towards the stern. The foremast and mainmast carry two square sails, while the mizzenmast carries a lateen sail, copied from the Arabs. By the mid-1700s the rigging of the mizzenmast was altered to include a second sail above the mizzen sail. The Dutch tricolour flies from both the fore and main masts, as well as from the stern.

For roughly half a century the Dutch made frequent use of Mossel Bay. Johan Wurffbain, writing of a 1632 voyage, mentions Mossel Bay 'where the ships usually touch' (Raven-Hart 1967). After 1652 this pattern changed. With a protective fort and a garrison whose express purpose was to serve as a refreshment station for the Dutch East India Company's ships, Table Bay became the obvious stopping point of choice.

Taking into account both the details in the drawing that tally with the above descriptions of sailing vessels, as well as the historical record, one may guess the date for the drawing as being in the first half of the 17th century.

There are some other instances in the Western Cape where images of ships have been reported. At Valsfontein near Ceres line drawings of three ships appear to have been executed with an ochre 'pencil' (Fig 4). Some 70 km away, in the Skurweberg above Porterville, there is another painting, in red ochre, which may represent a galleon (Fig 5) (Johnson et al 1959)*. This form of rock art imagery is thought likely to be among the most recent in the rock art tradition in the Western Cape and may have been executed by Khoekhoe herders over older San hunter-gatherer art (Manhire 1998; Parkington 2002).

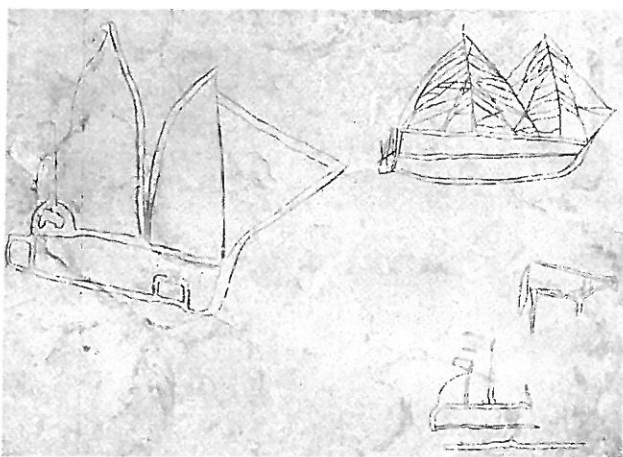


Fig 4 : Valsfontein

Discussion

Trading for indigenous livestock from the 15th century on resulted in contact between Europeans and the Khoekhoe pastoralists of the Mossel Bay hinterland. From the *Diario* of Da Gama's

* The Porterville painting has recently been adapted as the logo of SAHRA's National Survey of Underwater Heritage.

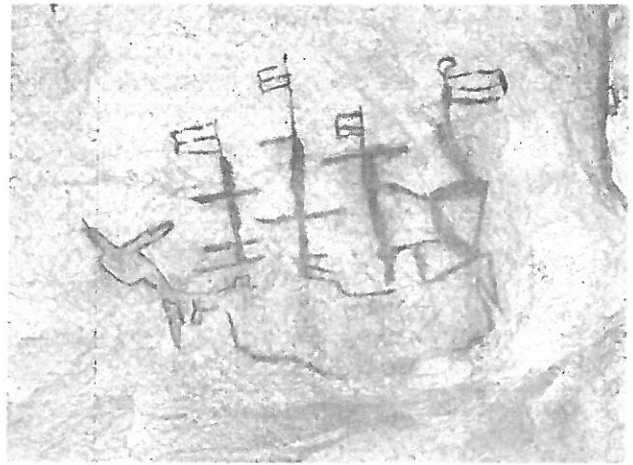


Fig 5 : Porterville

1497 voyage we have the mention of people with sheep and cattle at the bay of Sam Bras. A century later little had changed. De Houtman, as described, also traded for sheep and oxen with the local 'red-brown' folk. The historical references give an impression that a fluidity in land use existed in the area surrounding the Attaqua and Outeniqua mountains. Hessequas, Gouriquas and Attaquas occupied low-lying areas south of the coastal mountains, while the Attaquas are mentioned as the people of the mountainous regions. At this time, people of mainly hunter-gatherer lifestyle were living in the Little Karoo.

Conclusion

The detail of the rigging shown in the drawing of the ship in Attakwaskloof raises the question whether there is an implied understanding of the purpose of the masts, sails and spars. If so, the artist may have been of European origin. This implies in turn that the drawing was done as graffiti over the painted images of indigenous peoples. The location of the site is well hidden and not near any thoroughfare, so that it may have afforded a haven of sorts. The reason why a European would have executed a drawing of this kind and in such a location is enigmatic, to say the least.

If an indigenous artist(s) was involved, the choice of content and placing may infer a non-visual level of meaning and symbolic reification. The site is typical of rock shelters in mountainous areas occupied and utilised by indigenous people throughout the western and southern Cape. The placing of the drawing on a downward-sloping rock face, making it uncomfortable

and difficult to work on for any length of time, further suggests that the artist may have been occupied with more than the mundane. This is inferred from the fact that the superimposing of the ship over layers of finger paintings and fine-line paintings could be a testament to knowledge of the supernatural potency of the site in the rock art tradition of southern Africa. These factors would seem to place the depiction of the ship firmly within the rock art of the Western Cape. The style and content would, furthermore, place it towards the very end of that tradition.

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Roman Paris was not in Paris, but Nanterre

The historic Paris – the Gallic town of Lutetia captured by Julius Caesar in 52 BC – lay not on the island in the centre of the modern French capital but in a suburb 10 km to the west. Recent excavations at a building site in the suburb of Nanterre have brought to light a pre-Roman settlement that far outstrips in density and sophistication traces discovered on the Ile de la Cité – until now regarded as the base of the Parisii tribe. 'Nanterre is the only agglomeration of size identified on the territory of the Parisii. Until now no significant remains from an occupation predating the Roman conquest have been found on the Ile de la Cité,' said Alain Bulard of the directorate for cultural affairs for the Paris area. The Nanterre site, discovered near the bank of the Seine at the end of 2003, has revealed a rigidly planned urban area constructed around two parallel cobbled streets and a market square.

Ditches drained away waste-water and each home, constructed out of wood and a clay-straw mixture, possessed its own stone-lined well. Items found on the scene include bronze brooches, coins and a cooking fork. Taken together with a previously discovered site – also dating from around 200 BC – containing kilns and other evidence of handicrafts, the entire Gallic settlement spread over 15 ha, which is nearly double the size of the supposed Paris proto-capital.

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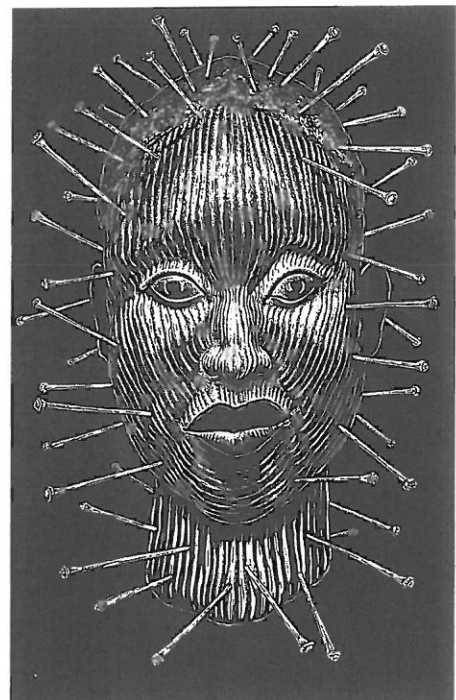
Title: African Renaissance fetish

Artist: Jonathan Comerford

Comment: I have combined art and tradition into one piece. African artists and artisans, at the same time as their European Renaissance counterparts, were producing bronze castings of the same calibre and beauty. Coupled with that, African traditional ways were being adhered to, as religion was in Europe.

As a Euro-African, it is disconcerting that Africa still needs to blame external forces as the major oppressor of Africa. Instead, it needs to focus more on its rich artistic and cultural history to truly emancipate it from mental slavery.

This image portrays the beauty of African artifacts and is a fetish.



The Cape Gallery deals in fine art work by SA artists and stocks a selection of paintings depicting South African rock art.