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**Cover Photo / Umschlagfoto** Adult Bushmanland Tent Tortoise in natural habitat  
by Alfred Schleicher

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# Hunter, Game, and Lords of Animals in Southern Africa



*by Sigrid Schmidt*

**Keywords:** Hunting, Ethics of Hunting, Lords of Animals, Mothers of Animals, Revenging Animals, Khoisan Religion, Belief Legends, *weidgerechtes Jagen*.

## Abstract

This essay is devoted to the study of the so-called lords of animals or guardians of nature, the supernatural beings who, according to ancient Khoisan belief, own certain species of the wild animals. Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century more or less fragmentary statements have been collected. These statements seem to be incoherent and even contradictory. In recent years additional information has been collected. This essay analyses these new documentations and shows how the ideas of these lords, kings and mothers of animals have been fundamental for the Khoisan worldview and Khoisan life. A short comparison with traditions of other African peoples and also of other continents reveals a perplexing sim-

ilarity even of details. Therefore it is accepted that the concept must be very old; perhaps a French Stone Age rock painting might already show a lord of animals. The basic idea is alive up to the present day in Africa as well as among German hunters.

## Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel ist den sogenannten Herren der Tiere oder Beschützern der Natur gewidmet, übernatürlichen Wesen, die nach altem Khoisan-Glauben Eigentümer von bestimmten Tierarten sind. Schon seit dem frühen neunzehnten Jahrhundert wurden darüber verschiedene Angaben gesammelt, Angaben, die zusammenhangslos oder gar widersprüchlich erschienen. Sammlungen in jüngster Zeit brachten wesentliche zusätzliche Informationen. Dieser Artikel analysiert diese neuen Dokumentationen und zeigt, wie die Vorstellungen über diese Herren, Könige und Mütter von Tieren grundlegend für die Weltanschauung, fürs ganze Leben gewesen sind. Ein kurzer Vergleich mit den Traditionen anderer afrikanischer Völker, aber auch anderer Kontinente, zeigt verblüffende Ähnlichkeiten selbst von Einzelzügen. Deshalb wird allgemein angenommen, dass diese Vorstellungen sehr alt sein müssen; vielleicht stellt schon eine französische Altsteinzeit-Zeichnung einen Herrn der Tiere dar. Aber die grundlegende Idee lebt bis heute in Afrika weiter und ebenso auch bei deutschen Jägern.

## Prologue

I was brought up in a forester and hunter household, and one little word belonged to the basic vocabulary of everyday life: *weidgerecht* (or *waidgerecht*), translated in the dictionary as “in accordance with hunting principles”. The meaning of this German word is well illustrated by a little verse which is the motto of German hunters:

*Das ist des Jägers Ehrenschild,  
dass er beschützt und hegt sein Wild,  
waidmännisch jagt, wie sich's gehört,  
den Schöpfer im Geschöpfe ehrt.*

This is the hunter's code of honour  
that he protects and cares for his game,  
hunts in accordance with the hunting principles  
and honours the Creator in the creature.

The hunter has to act according to written and unwritten laws that serve for the protection of the wild animals and nature. He has to honour and show respect to the Creator, nature and the wild animals.

## The lord of animals

This relationship of the German hunter to his game resounds with a very ancient concept found already among early hunters in Europe, Asia, North and South America and Africa, the concept of the “lord of animals”. The basic idea is that the game is owned by a supernatural being. This being protects his animals and does not want them to be killed. The hunter, who has to get food for himself and his family, is only permitted to kill any animals if he keeps to strict rules of hunting. Otherwise he would not get any prey or would be punished, even be killed.

In Africa, the concept of the lord of animals was first traced in detail among the hunter-gatherer peoples, the Bushmen (San) and the pygmies, by H. Baumann (1938). Meanwhile references to lords of animals and related beings have been documented from many more African regions and from additional Bushman groups (Hoff 2011; Schmidt 2013b: 94-97). The descriptions vary much. The !Xam of the Northern Cape told about |Kaggen. The name |Kaggen means “praying mantis”, but |Kaggen seems to have been imagined rather in a humanlike form. There is a strict division which has to be heeded in discussions: the |Kaggen of the tales is the hero of a primeval past, the stories are just stories. But at the same time |Kaggen is a being of present folk belief. He protects the game; eland and hartebeest are his favourites. He tries to hinder the hunter from shooting and suddenly may appear as a hare or other animal to distract his attention. If the hunter has wounded an animal he tries to counteract the effect of the poison. There is a strong sympathetic bond between the hunter and his prey. Only if the hunter behaves like a dying animal will the animal die. Now |Kaggen plagues the man, for instance in the form of a louse, so that he would suddenly scratch himself or would be startled, and the wounded animal would also be able to get up and move around (Bleek 1932: 233-240). |Kaggen would punish any violations of rules in dealing with hartebeest. If a woman who has a young child eats hartebeest meat or jumps over the hartebeest’s head |Kaggen would press down the fontanelle on her child’s head and the child would die (Bleek 1923: 10).

The narrator of these |Kaggen reports also told about another being, the Chaser of Game. Once game was tame and could be handled like oxen. The Chaser of Game made the animals fear men by beating them with a stick because he did not wish the people to kill them (Lloyd 1889: 10 §63; Guenther 1989: 160-161).

Similarly, it was the Penepampooe of the “Kalahari San”, who made game shy. As he wanted to have more excitement in a chase, he told the game to run faster. But he, too, helped people to find game. He threw some tufts of his hair into the air to show the hunter where to find meat. A vulture appeared and took him to a dead antelope. It is stressed that he acted not selfishly but to help human beings, for he told his people that this bird should be their “eyes” (Vialls 1908: 304).

The Cagn of the Maloti Bushmen shares the name with the !Xam |Kaggen; it is just another form of spelling. The characters of the two supernatural beings, however, differ. Cagn’s role as a protector and lord of animals is more conspicuous. When Orpen asked his

young guide: “‘Where is Cagn?’ he answered, ‘We don’t know, but the elands do. Have you not hunted and heard his cry, when the elands suddenly start and run to his call? Where he is, elands are in droves like cattle’” (Orpen 1919: 142). It was Cagn who raised (i.e. created) the first eland but it was he, too, who introduced hunting (Schmidt 2013b: 73-82). |Kaggen of the |Xam folk belief was mainly the lord of animals and was related to hunting. Cagn of the Maloti, however, had much clearer traits of a divinity, of a creator and a deity to whom people prayed. Cagn was both the lord of animals and a deity.

A rather enigmatic being is Qwanciqutshaa about whom Orpen’s guide also told a conglomerate of stories. Qwanciqutshaa sprinkled canna on the ground. All the eland that had died became alive again, and the wounded elands came to him and lived in his place. This was enclosed by hills; the only pass was constantly filled with mist. Outside the enclosure people were left to die of hunger. Only his brother succeeded in following a wounded eland through the mist. Qwanciqutshaa told him to go back and fetch his mother and friends. They stayed with him and had plenty of meat to eat (Orpen 1919: 146-149). Here other traits of the lords of animals are described. Qwanciqutshaa revived elands. He kept them away from the hunters at a secluded place, in a so-called “paradise of animals” (Röhrich 1990: 871).

The protection of animals is by no means restricted to male spiritual beings. Rather, there are references to female helpers, to mistresses of animals or goddesses who have command over animals. In 1822 the missionary John Campbell asked a Bushman of the area south of Taung about their god.

He said they had a name which they gave to God who is above them, and another to God who is under them. The former is male, the latter a female. The male god they call Goha, the female Ko, and her attendants Ganna. When the Bushmen dance, Ko sometimes comes and informs them where game is to be procured; and when any animals are killed, certain parts of them must only be eaten by particular persons. She is a large, white figure, and sheds such a brightness around that they can hardly see the fire for it; all see and hear her as she dances with them. Being asked if he had actually seen her himself – with some hesitation he said he had seen her, and she spoke the Bushman language ... They cannot, he added, feel what she is, but should a man be permitted to touch her, which seldom happens, she breathes hard upon his arm, and this makes him shoot better. She eats nothing but bulbous roots. After Ko comes up from the ground and dances a short time with them, she disappears, and is succeeded by her nymphs, who likewise dance a while with them (Campbell 1822 II, 32).

While this Bushman spoke about a male and a female deity, the Kxoe in Western Caprivi believe in one god, Kxyani, but a god who has a male and a female aspect. The female manifestation is prayed to before the hunt, “Du Herrin, Kxyani, Du Schöpferin” (you

mistress, Kxyani, you creator”), and implored that big game may fall (Köhler (1973: 231-243). Similar ideas were recorded from the G!wi. Again, the wife of the deity seems to be the female form of the deity himself, because N!adisa, the name of the wife, is simply the feminine form of the name of the supreme being, N!adima. He and his wife live above the visible sky. N!adisa’s offspring include at least all of the mammal species in the Kalahari, possibly all species. The deities are vegetarian (i.e. they do not kill to eat) (Silberbauer 1981: 52). We have to add the Hailom “culture heroine” Ises, who, according to Lebzelter, belongs to the “culture hero” Iseb and gave bow and arrows to mankind (1928: 410).

In this connection a supernatural female being of the !Xam descendants should be mentioned. Ansie Hoff reported in her excellent study *Guardians of Nature among the !Xam San* (2011), what she was told about *Heiletjie*, the Water Spirit.

The Water Spirit is a girl whom one can see very clearly in moonlight. She is clothed in white. She is not a ghost, but the Water Spirit. The nearer you get, the further she disappears from you until she disappears in the water. It is her work to protect the *dier tjies* (literally – little animals) of the water, such as frogs, so that they will not be hurt and so that people will not take too many shells. She drives you away from her things which you want to take – she is a guardian. – All the water things are around her: frogs, otters, water-tortoises. They are her friends, medicine of her (2011: 41; 44).

This Water Spirit reminds one at once of Campbell’s white goddess Ko. Ko protects but also allocates game; Heiletjie protects water animals. Other animal species have their lords as well, for the concept of lords and guardians of nature is fundamental to many areas of the animal world.

## **Kings and mothers of animals**

There seems to be a tendency that lords of animals imagined in human form are somehow related to deities and particularly deities who are the main deities of the group. They are first of all lords of game and particularly of antelope and game that is the most valued and even religiously connected with hunting life and initiation. But there is no sharp division between the lords imagined in human form and the lords of animals who are represented as animals. Frequently, the latter appear in mixed human-animal forms. As they are usually lords of one animal species only, they combine human and animal characteristics of their particular species. Ansie Hoff describes such a guardian of porcupines of the descendants of the !Xam.

There was a porcupine guardian at Springbokpan. He looked like a porcupine, but walked upright on feet, had thin quills and was hairy. He guarded the por-



cupines at their hole. He whistled through his beard and hit his stick to drive them towards their holes. The guardian does not eat porcupines (2011: 41).

The guardian was like a human person, whistled through his beard and drove his animals along like a human herdsman of livestock, even hitting with a stick. But he looked like a porcupine. He walked upright, was somewhat bigger than the animals of his “herd” but had an animal head.

José de Prada-Samper learned from the !Xam descendants that they called these guardians kings or guards and reproduced a literal translation of a fascinating narration of how two porcupine kings punished two men who killed porcupines to excess.

The two men kill lots and lots of porcupines though other people warn them. “They are so stupid, they didn’t know that the porcupines have a king. They have a king who rules over them. Just like the baboons have a king so the porcupines also have a king. Now wherever those [...] porcupines are, there their kings are, their kings are there. One king or two kings are where they are, deep in the hole. They are there inside, they are not outside.” But the men go again to the place and fill their cart with porcupines. “Then one porcupine guard appears ... one king appears. He’s this big (about 60 cm). He has big quills, too, but he looks like a human although he also has quills. Looks around like this now, walks over to the other one [other porcupine king], the other one also appears from the hole. Looks around like this.” Now one porcupine king flings one man against the other man so that both men are dead, “... then the porcupine guard takes the other man and he flings him against that man. Stone-dead, stone-dead he flings him.” “Then that porcupine king shouts after them: this is your last chance [the last time] that my people are killed like this, so many, so this is your last chance.” The people at home wait and wait and search for the two men. At last they discover them. “Then they still had to fetch those dead people from there. But it’s now too dangerous, because those two things just stand there and shout after them.” They could fetch them only later “while those porcupine things are now in the holes again” (De Prada-Samper 2016: 242-249).

Not only male kings and guardians but also female animal beings control and guard groups of their species. I class Mother Proteles of the !Xam among them. In the stories of the primeval time, !Kaggen, the fool, and his family visited Aunt Proteles, the aardwolf. Mother Proteles gave !Kwammang-a a young proteles; he roasted and distributed it and they ate it. Then they all went home. Greedy !Kaggen, however, returned to the Proteles, made a fire in front of the hole and asked for another young proteles. Mother Proteles held a young one out to him but then seized him and pulled him into the fire. !Kaggen, in great pain, managed to flee. At home he learned that Proteles generally acted like this when one asked for more than one little one (Bleek 1923: 21-23).

At first sight this animal mother seems to be rather strange. When visitors come she hands them one of her young ones to roast and eat, but when asked for a second one she punishes the visitor severely. Can we ever find examples that mothers or animal mothers act in this way? I rather regard this Mother Proteles as a guardian of her species who

allots a small portion of her “family” to the hunter but punishes excessive killing (Schmidt 2013b: 61-64). Probably we have to add the Jul’hoansi “Mother of the bees” to this group; Khwova!na, the elder wife of #Gao!na; the men pray to her when they go to look for honey (Marshall 1962: 225-226).

Though at first the descriptions of these supernatural guardians seem to be of a perplexing variety, the underlying ideas, which are common in the Khoisan area, stand out clearly. A supernatural being, male or female, god or goddess, spirit, king, guard or mother, is guardian of certain species of animals, the species that man has to kill as his food. This being is visualized either in a humanlike form, in a human-animal form or as an animal of special size or colour; it might be white or bright (Ko, Heiletje). In the majority of examples it is stressed that it does not eat meat or the meat of the species it protects. It regulates the relations of the hunter to his prey. It introduced hunting (Cagn), gave weapons (Ises), strengthened the arm of the hunter (Ko), but on the other hand, it does not want its animals to be killed (/Kaggen); therefore it makes the game shy and wild (Chaser of Game) or heals wounded animals (Qwanciqutshaa). Before the hunt or before collecting honey the hunter or collector prays to it, that he may succeed (Köhler, Marshall). It allots some of its “family” to the hunter but punishes him severely when he kills many (Mother Proteles). One characteristic is striking: it is described as a herdsman of his flock like a herdsman of cattle (Hoff 2011: 41), similarly Köhler (1973: 231-243) and Orpen (1919: 142). This, of course, seems to be contradictory to the hunter-gatherer world of the Bushmen. But the concept must have been connected with the world of the hunter-gatherers since very early times, for as we’ll see, it is to be found in other hunter-gatherer societies as well.

## Avenging animals

My Damara narrator in Okombahe had herself an experience that is related to these traditions. When she was a child she lived on a farm in the Gobabis area. One evening they were sitting in front of the house. “Then we hear something moving along, tkan-tkan-tkan, tkan-tkan-tkan! It’s porcupines going to the water. The dogs give a bark, kou-kou, kou-kou, kou-kou!” Her uncle jumps up and calls his dogs. “Come along my dogs, come! Oh, this very day we’ll eat meat!’ I’m standing next to grandmother. Now we see the little black things, the porcupines. They were five, a heap of little things, little black ones. We see where they are running ... Suddenly it is to be heard: ‘Fritz! Do you always want to eat nothing but meat? Leave us in peace that we may go to drink water! This is not only your land, this is the land of all of us!’ When the man hears these words he gets a terrible fright. He rushes into the house. Here are ghosts! ... ‘Help me! Help me!’ ... ‘We told you again and again: you must not kill everything!’ his brother said. And now we hear tkannu-tkannu, tkannu-tkannu! It is the ghosts who go back again ... The man pants: ‘hhh-hhh. I never have heard anything like this. Porcupines can talk like people! Hhh-hhh. I never have heard anything like this!’ ... Since that day the man did not go into the veld and stayed at

home ... Yes, and these things had called his name! They even knew it, 'Fritz, Fritz!' Since that day he did not hunt any more. He was afraid. He got a shock. He was not quite right in his head any more. He left his work, too, and went to the other side of Gobabis. Since that day I, too, was afraid: if somebody wanted to kill something the thing also might start talking. But the grown-ups said: 'No, this was just this once. And God let it happen that the man got frightened.'" (Schmidt 1997: 82-83, Vol. 5 No. 44)

This report is certainly related to the traditions of the /Xam descendants in the Northern Cape region. But here there is no lord of animals, no king of porcupines who punishes the greedy hunter. Here it is the animals, the porcupines themselves who frighten the hunter, *hulle het vir hom bang gemaak*, so that he gives up killing their kind. These animals, however, are special porcupines. They just look like normal porcupines. But they talk like humans and even know the name of the hunter.

I did not hear about lords or kings of animals in Namibia, at least not in recent times, but learned similar stories in which greedy hunters were punished by animals themselves. The same narrator told about another uncle (tellers of belief legends like to attribute the extraordinary events to various members of their own family!) who killed many birds with a sling. One day a bulbul fell down near the house, and a multitude of birds came, little ones, doves, all the birds, and chirped: "This is the man who throws stones! This is the man who throws with the sling!" He fled into the house. Grandmother shouted that the birds should forgive them. "We did not know that you are people. We thought it is only things that we eat!" Then they rushed away. Uncle never shot birds again. He fled into the house. Grandma shouted that the birds should forgive them. (Schmidt MS; 2013a: KH 1855,4)

In a similar vein, even more ominous, is another Damara report from Okombahe:

Jacob worked for a German farmer. But he also liked to go hunting; kudu, all kinds of animals he hunted and ate. Every day he went into the veld, and every day there was wart-hog meat, there was kudu meat. One day the farmer asked him to watch at night in the garden because he had seen tracks of warthogs. While Jacob was watching, a warthog, his wife and two children came. The smallest child asked (in German): "Dad, what is this? What is this?" – "This is just a big tomato. You may take it but you mustn't throw it away!" The other one came with a big sweet potato. "Dad, I found something. What should I do with it?" – "Eat it, eat it, but you mustn't throw it away!" Jacob got frightened that the animals which he used to eat talked like humans. He rushed into the house and told the farmer that he wanted to leave the place at once. The farmer agreed, the next day he would take him back to his home in the horse cart. In the morning Jacob went into the veld to look for the horses. He met two kudu. They shouted (in Afrikaans): "Jacob, Jacob! You always eat us! Here we are! Take and eat us!" Jacob was frightened and ran in the other direction. He passed a warthog hole. He had already killed a young one of them before. The warthog pushed its young ones into the hole and remained sitting in front of it. When Jacob tried to catch it, the warthog shouted (in Herero): "Now I am fed up with you! Today I'll get even with you!" It pulled Jacob down. Later the farmer found the dead man at the hole. (Schmidt 1996: 80-81, Vol. 4 No. 36)

Another “true event” starts in the same way: a hunter killed kori bustards again and again. In this version the lesson is not stressed; the audience has to draw a moral from it themselves. The uncanny, frightening core of other versions now becomes central. “Then the fatal day came.” The man checks his traps as usual and finds a kori bustard. “But this kori bustard is no real kori bustard, it is not a real one. The man does not suspect it,” takes it home, his wife prepares it and they eat it. “But when they eat this kori bustard, it is their last meal.” They all go to bed. “And now the kori bustard, which they had eaten, started to talk and to sing. In the stomach. And it sang: ‘Ko-eh-eeh, ko-eh-eeh! You ate me. I want to fly out into the veld, I want to be in the veld!’ It sings in the stomach of the man.” They wonder where the voice comes from. The bird sings in the woman, then in the children. ‘Ko-eh-eeh, ko-eh-eeh! You ate me. I want to fly out into the veld, I want to be in the veld!’” The man falls from his bed and is dead, then his wife and his children. They are dead. “For the kori bustard which they had eaten had not been a real kori bustard. This last kori bustard which he had caught probably was a kind of ghost. It was no bird for it had talked in the stomach.” (Schmidt 1997: 83-84, Vol. 5 No 45)

It must be left open whether this story has to be counted among the stories of avenging animals or, rather, among the popular stories about ghost animals (Schmidt 2013a: II, 811: KH 2045). It has a special significance anyhow, for the words which the eaten bird sings in the stomachs of the hunter’s family were actually sung by the narrator.

The key motif in these stories is that the maltreated animals suddenly start to speak like humans and thereby show how closely wild animals are related to humans. They are not just meat but demand to be treated face to face as partners in nature.

Folklorists would classify these texts of the speaking animals as belief legends. Such legends are of special importance for the study of old traditions. They show the supernatural forces alive. Belief legends reveal what the supernatural forces actually mean to the narrator, reveal the narrator’s worldview, his ethics. These belief legends tend to have a certain structure. First, they describe and exaggerate the blameworthy actions of the “hero”, especially his pride at these deeds. The hunter kills more animals than he should. He does so, though he is warned. Then, “one day”, these forces of nature penetrate into his everyday world, they attack him and defeat him. He either breaks down psychologically (folktales verbalize this as turning mad) or he is even killed. Frequently it is said that, after this experience, he gives up hunting and, in addition, moves to another place.

These legends not only stress that the hunter killed too many animals but also that he killed beings that are creatures of nature just as he is himself. “We did not know that you are people. We thought it is only things that we eat!” Indirectly, this is also shown when animals are depicted like humans. The warthogs that come into the farmer’s garden are described like a human family. “A warthog, his wife and two children came. The smallest child asked: ‘Dad, what is this? What is this?’” As all members of the hunter’s family had eaten of his prey, they had all become guilty. Grandmother – the person who is best suited to speak to supernatural forces – therefore asks forgiveness for all of them.

In tales of magic it is a matter of course that animals speak, and that they speak the same language as the human heroes. In legends, however, speaking animals break all rules of the existing world order. The world order of the hero breaks down. The hero is upset that the porcupines even know his name. If we remember the importance of the name, starting in early religions and creation myths, the many stories about guessing names, up to Rumpelstiltskin and Tom Tit Tot, the underlying idea is often that the knowledge of the name includes a certain power over the person. In this legend it illustrates the complete defeat of the hero.

The speaking animals are called ghosts. It is hard to interpret this term without further discussion with the narrators and their families. At any rate it is not to be seen in the same sense as the ghosts of haunted castles. Perhaps we should rather speak of spirits, and we have to think of the spirits which are mentioned in connection with lords of animals. We remember the *lawas*, the souls of dead ancestors of the Kxoe, who are the servants of the god and the goddess and have to herd the game, their “cattle”. We have to think of Campbell’s goddess Ko, and her attendants, the Ganna, and the *grootjies* of the Xam descendants (Hoff 2011: 44). How far the individual animals, whom the legend heroes meet, are interlinked with this spiritual world I must leave open. At any rate, any animal that just looks like a normal animal might be a representative of the supernatural world.

Different, again, in development and character is the story of another famous young hunter, told to me at Usakos. This hunter lived with his old mother out in the veld and killed even lions and elephants by himself. One afternoon they were visited by three young women, handsome women whom they did not know. The young man invited them into the house, while his mother sat outside but listened to their conversation. The young women asked about his life and he told about his hunting. Proudly he told that he also killed elephants and lions with his bow and arrows. When the women protested that this was impossible, he led them to the little room where he kept his trophies, the elephant tusks and skins. The women were amazed. Then one of them said: “If I had been that animal I would rather have killed you!” – “You couldn’t have done it. I would have killed you right away with my bow and arrow!” – “Well,” she said, “imagine I were an elephant. What could you do at all against me?” – “I could kill you easily.” – “But if I chased you?” – “I would turn into a wild dog and would be able to run incredibly fast!” – “And if I ran as fast as you, what would you do?” – “I would turn into water!” – “Then I would suck up the water!” – “Then I would turn into clay!” – “Then I would stamp on the clay until it was dust!” – “Then I would ...” In the middle of the sentence his mother called him. He went outside at once. She whispered: “You do not know these women at all. Don’t tell your last plan! They seem somewhat dubious to me!” He returned to the women but in spite of all their attempts to learn his last plan he kept silent. The young man accompanied them on their way home. In the bush they suddenly turned into three huge elephants – their true nature – and started to attack him. He ran, and during his flight he used his magic abilities in the way he had betrayed to them. But before turning into clay he turned into a frog, his last magic ability, hid in a cleft, and waited until they had given up the pursuit and gone

back into the bush. He returned home safely and praised his mother who had saved him at the very last moment. They decided to move into the village, where he looked for work (Schmidt 1994: 11-14, Vol. 2 No. 1).

This is a variant of a popular story widely spread all over Western Africa. It is told in many different forms. The game animals decide that one of them should turn into a young woman, seduce the hunter and kill him. In addition, the story resounds of the laws of West African hunter societies, their magic hunting practices and strict prohibitions against betraying their secrets to women. The emphasis in this Namibian version of the game-as-woman story is no longer on the punishment of a hunter who killed to excess, but rather on the blessing effect when even a grown-up son obeys the call of his mother without delay. Mrs Erika Schiefer, a splendid narrator of magic tales, told the story in the context of other magic tales. It probably was for her, too, nothing but a thrilling story with the expected happy ending (Variants and literature see Schmidt 2013a II, 612-613, KH 945).

## **Lords of animals, a world-wide phenomenon**

The lords of animals are by no means known only among hunter-gatherer peoples. Cattle raisers and agriculturists usually go out hunting, too, to add meat to their diet. But they, too, regard the wild animals not just as meat but as special creatures with special powers. The neighbours of the Khoisan peoples, the Bantu-speaking peoples, tell of lords of animals who show close relationships and frequently add remarkable characteristics to those known of the Khoisan lords and kings.

David Lewis-Williams quoted Arbusset's 1846 Sotho account of Unkonagnana (little nose) who was said to be an imaginary shepherd who tended herds of eland (1981: 107). The Ila of Zambia told about Luwe. Luwe is a one-legged goblin who rides about the forest mounted on an eland. He prevents people from killing game but is himself a great hunter. They say the antelope are his cattle (Smith/Dale 1920: 131). Similar is the Kaaluwe of the Lamba in Zambia whom Doke described. He was never seen but believed to be like a little baby, was said to carry two sharp wooden lances, and to travel on the backs of the animals in the herds of big game, but did not frequent the herds of elephant or schools of hippo. Kaaluwe watched over them, and if he saw any people coming he uttered a hissing sound, and off raced the animals (Doke 1931: 321-327).

In the communities of the Bantu-speaking peoples, there are frequently specialists for the hunt, the professional hunters. They belong to societies and try to increase their hunting success by magical practices and "medicines". These magical practices and "medicines" have a dual effect like the lord of animals himself: they are gifts of the lords to support the hunter and, on the other hand, they work against the lord who tries to protect his animals. Great hunters, Doke reported, had charms for restraining Kaaluwe from protecting the animals and instead making him bring them. During the young hunter's initiation there were a special dance and songs in honour of Kaaluwe, and each hunter had his shrine in

his honour. Before leaving for a hunt he prayed there to Kaaluwe: “Help me, I am going hunting. Quickly give me meat!” If continual ill-success attended hunting the hunter suspected that Kaaluwe was angry and brewed beer for him. There were many Wakaaluwe in all the different herds of animals (Doke 1931: 321-327).

Related and often surprisingly similar ideas have been recorded from other continents as well. I pick out a few examples at random. The hunting peoples of the extreme north of Eurasia, in northern Finland and Siberia, tell about guardians of wild animals who are always guardians of a specific species. They are powerful beings who protect the animals of their species but who may also give luck in hunting to the hunter. Reports on guardians refer usually to species that are economically most important for the group or that attract the people’s special attention because of their strength or manner of life. The descriptions of the manifestations of the guardians vary. Usually they have the character and form of the animals which they protect and rule. They keep their animals as their herds like cattle. All over Eurasia the guardians are often called “father” or “mother”. They punish the hunter who kills too much game at a time or more than he needs (Paulson 1962: 73).

In Europe, the guardians of the chamois in the Alps are best known. They appear in different forms and under different names: dwarves, mountain-girls, wild people, also in the form of a particularly big or white chamois. There are numerous reports of hunters who have met them. The city clerk of Luzern wrote as early as the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century about the “Herdmännlin”, the dwarves, who care for the wild animals, especially the chamois. They keep the chamois like tame livestock. They warn the hunter before he shoots but also make a pact with him about the number of animals which he may kill. But if he kills more they push him over the rocks. The city clerk himself knew a man who liked to hunt. When the dwarves had warned him to stop hunting he had mocked them because of their small stature. He was found thrown down the rocks. – These guardians increase the chamois, which have been reduced by hunting, in a marvellous way; they feed them in the winter and keep them in underground cowsheds. When a chamois is shot, the mistress of the animals mourns its death, and angrily shows the hunter the empty place in the cowshed where her “cow” used to stand (Röhrich 1976: 148-156).

In 1954, Otto Zerries published a detailed study of the very rich traditions of the indigenous populations of South America. As early as 1550 a Spanish writer gave the first report on Corupira (or Kaapora), the central lord of animals in Brazil and the Amazon regions. Corupira is the guardian of game as well the woods and punishes those who intend to destroy game and rewards those who obey him or for whom he feels pity. It is he who hides game from the hunter or who leads it to him. He can appear in various forms. Usually he appears as a little man, about three feet high, bald headed, with bones without joints, feet always turned back and having incredible physical strength. Often he rides on a stag, at other places on rabbits or wild pigs, carrying a twig as a whip. He is the herdsman of droves of wild animals. He tries to hinder the hunter from shooting by distracting his attention. One can win his favour by gifts of tobacco or food. In some regions there is a mistress of the woods, a small nearly black Indian woman. Corupira, too, was

occasionally described as a feminine being, as the “mother” of the woods and the game (Zerries 1954: 9-15).

## **The age of the lord-of-animals concept**

The similarity of the descriptions of the lords of animals on the different continents, even the striking similarity of individual traits, suggests the great age of the concept. As it is so deeply rooted in the world of hunter-gatherers, it might go back to the Palaeolithic Age. On the other hand, the far-spread motif of the lord of animals as a herdsman and keeper of his animals like a herd would point to later periods when animal husbandry had been introduced. It was also pointed out that hunter-gatherers did not yet know about riding on animals, another central motif of the lord of animals (Röhrich 1990: 873). In literature, the earliest datable reference seems to be the Ancient Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh of the 13th to the 10th centuries BCE. Enkidu, the friend of Gilgamesh, was a wild man living in the wilderness with herds of animals. He ate nothing but plants and destroyed the traps of hunters to free the animals (Röllig 1987: 1248).

History of art also interprets a very popular motif of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt as a lord or master of animals. It shows a human between and grasping two opposing animals. The figure is normally male and may have animal elements such as horns, or an animal upper body. In the Gallo-Roman period, the “horned god” of Celtic polytheism, called Cernunnos, might have been a lord of animals as well. He is depicted as an antlered figure seated cross-legged among animals. The most famous example of his imagery is on the Gundestrup cauldron in Denmark (200 BCE-300 CE) (Maier 2004: 99). In the Cave of the Trois-Frères in southwestern France, there is an enigmatic painting, dating back to 13,000 BCE: the figure stands on two feet but has features of several different animals, has a tail and antlers. The Abbé Breuil, the first rock art researcher of the site, named it “The Sorcerer”. Other interpretations are: a dancing shaman, a horned god or a lord of animals.

## **Khoisan lords of animals in a world-wide context**

At first sight, the descriptions of the lords of animals by the Khoisan peoples seem to be a strange conglomeration of statements. A juxtaposition of these statements, however, reveals that they are parts of a whole, of a worldview, of a religion, that regulated life. A short juxtaposition of the Khoisan documents and examples from other countries and continents not only confirms the individual variations as traditional elements of the system but also underlines their importance and hints at a possible deeper, symbolic meaning. The descriptions of the lord as a herdsman, for instance, frequently mention his shouts and whistling by which he drives along his animals. Is this only an equivalent of the calls of the actual herdsman to his animals? It is conspicuous how often he is described with a whip



in his hand. This whip or stick or lance or other object in his hand is also an attribute of the figures in prehistoric art. Is it just the whip which the herdsman uses in everyday life or is it a symbol of power like a royal sceptre? How shall we interpret the statement that he himself does not eat meat?

I would like to point to the surprisingly identical prayer of the hunters: "Please give me meat!" The hunter shows that he does not want to kill for the pride of killing but out of dire need to feed his family. It is striking how on different continents the size of the guardian, if he is depicted in a humanlike form, so often is given as a dwarf of a metre or less in height. This comparison underlines, too, the importance of female guardians because of their worldwide existence. Next to male lords of animals there are mother goddesses who gave birth to animals or particularly to game. There are female guardians and mothers who regulate the use of their species as food. This is best illustrated by the !Kaggen tale about Mother Proteles, a tale that has been unnoticed and underestimated in its importance in the ancient belief system.

This belief system first of all regulated the hunting of game and the animal species that locally were used as the main source of food but it also included minor species that only occasionally might be hunted or caught, like aardwolves or "little animals of the water, such as frogs and shells". Therefore it was important that each species had its lord, guardian or mother. There were frequently kings of fishes and birds as well. In other areas lords of animals were more distinctly related to plants. Corupira in Brazil was lord of animals but at the same time lord of the woods who punished the cutting of healthy trees. Man not only has to treat animals as partners but also nature in general, for man is but a part of it. Probably since the Palaeolithic Age this idea has characterized man's way of life, his thinking and his relations to nature. It lives on in modern life under Christian cover: "And God let it happen that the man [who killed too many birds] got frightened!" And it lives on among German hunters as *weidgerechtes* hunting.

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Sigrid Schmidt studied English and German literature at the Free University of Berlin and in the USA. After completion of her Ph.D. degree she lived with her family in Namibia and turned to the study of Nama and Damara traditions, particularly folk narratives, customs and pre-Christian religion. Between 1972 and 1997, living again in Germany, she returned eight times to Namibia for collecting further material. This was published in “Märchen der Weltliteratur” (1980), “Afrika erzählt” (10 volumes 1991-2009), in “Tsî i ge ge hâhe” booklets and “Haiseb and the man who cooked himself” (2008). She edited the Hailom and !Xû stories of the late missionary Terttu Heikkinen (2011) and published a two-volume “Catalogue of Khoisan Folktales of Southern Africa” (2013) as well as numerous essays in periodicals in Germany, England and Southern Africa. She is also interested in general folktale research and contributed articles to the “Enzyklopädie des Märchens” and contemporary legend studies.



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