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## The landscape setting of rock-painting sites in the Brandberg (Namibia): infrastructure, *Gestaltung*, use and meaning

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The Brandberg, the paramount rock-art region of Namibia, presents the usual and the challenging problems of observing and recording rock-art in the field. From its richness is here developed a systematics of landscape which uses the idea of *Gestaltung*, the physical acts which bring about tangible change on a landscape endowed with meaning. It intends to capture the essentials of the series of human decisions which led to the painting of certain motifs at certain places on certain panels at certain locations in the landscape.

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### The placing of images into a landscape

Rock-art studies in recent years have moved away from the empirical paradigm, bringing about considerable progress – the main impetus given through Lewis-Williams (1981). Interpretation (the hermeneutic circle) has moved to the forefront. Yet the new approaches have to face the dilemma that the first contact and encounter which a researcher or any other visitor has with a rock-art site is empirical by character. First knowledge is won by experience and observation, not by hallucination, dreaming, divination or any other way of perception one might conceive of. Getting to, or often enough struggling your way to, a rock-art site, means experiencing the landscape along the way, sensing the air, smelling plants and animals, hearing the sounds of nature, and eventually feeling the rock and seeing the pictures. The whole sensory system is involved, sending data to the brain. When you

come back from a site, you are full of empirical data, gained the 'classical way' through experience and observation.

Of course these data are not meaningful just by themselves. They only become so through theoretical considerations under which they are regarded and processed (Lewis-Williams, e.g. 1984), i.e. through a process of cognition. My aim is to combine empirical data with theoretical considerations – to transform the field notes, as it were, into interpretative patterns. The main transformation is from quantifiable data to a qualifying argument.

Rock-art as a field of study within archaeology is very useful, even gratifying, because it has some advantages over all other archaeological sources of information, especially when analysing it at the juncture with landscape. This is based on the following criteria:

- rock-art is highly visible, and immovable at that;

- its place of production as well as place of consumption is unambiguously determinable;
- rock-art can be recorded comprehensively in a given area, unlike other archaeological resources which are hidden in the ground;
- the proof that phenomena are contemporaneous is dispensable at least for the late phases of a rock-art tradition;
- at one level its function is clearly communicative – it is a means but also a result of communication.

It may sound a commonplace, but is true none the less that rock-art is part of a landscape and also that the landscape makes up part of the meaning of rock-art (e.g. Bradley *et al.* 1994; Schaafsma 1997; Ouzman 1998). Perhaps it is this close link between the two which explains why, however naturalistic it may be, there is no rock-art tradition where landscape features form any part of the motif spectrum worth mentioning.<sup>1</sup> In this respect it is quite different from those art traditions which worked on artificial canvases, be they dynastic Egyptian murals, ancient Roman wall-paintings or mosaics, traditional European oil-paintings, or Chinese watercolour paintings. In all these the landscape had to be expressly brought in, whereas rock-art never comes without landscape since it cannot be moved away from it (or at least, it was not meant to be).

The power of interpreting rock-art in close connection to the landscape lies in the fact that the painters not only interacted with pigment and rocky canvas but also worked with the surroundings. Artists had to walk to the site, they had to negotiate the landscape and, if they stayed at a site, they temporarily had to lead their life there. The space around them, the site as well as the wider landscape, had to be categorized and organized mentally – a mental map had to be

<sup>1</sup> But see the chapters by Arcà and Helikog in this volume, as rare instances where landscape appears depicted.

designed (Downs and Stea 1982).

While perception and cognition of space is always based on imagination, spatial entities being illusory (Swartz and Hurlbutt 1994), there is an essential base in physical landmarks which seems to be of cross-cultural significance (e.g. Levinson 1991). The continuum of a landscape as a space is structured by phenomena which western cognition expresses through topographical description (Steinbring 1987a; 1987b; 1992): mountains, hills, ridges, narrow gates, passes, rivers, forests, etc. – everything which either brings about discontinuity (see also Ingold 1993: 156; Bradley *et al.* 1994: 380; Schaafsma 1997: 13) or which constitutes unitary continua themselves such as rivers along their flowing direction, plains, lakes or the sea.

This understanding of landscape together with the human impact acting upon it is the starting-point of my analysis and interpretation. The particular landscape I am dealing with is the central western region of Namibia where the coastal Namib Desert turns into a savannah. The Brandberg (Fig. 7.1), as the paramount rock-art region of Namibia, is located as an *inselberg* just in this zone of transformation. Precipitation in this area is only around 100 mm per annum (which is desert climate) but all kinds of large game animals come to the mountain – although unable to climb it – and the vegetation in the upper areas is of a kind that can elsewhere be found in areas with more advantageous climate. Being essentially composed of granite, the mountain can store rainwater in pans, crevices and pot-holes from one rainy season to the other. This may be one reason for the use of the Brandberg by humans since the Middle Stone Age (Breunig 1989: 26ff.).

The mountain covers an area of approximately 570 sq. km, but only the upper areas between the 1800 m and 2200 m contour lines show widespread traces of intensive human occupation, detectable in hundreds of rock-art sites and masses of artefacts from the Later Stone Age onwards

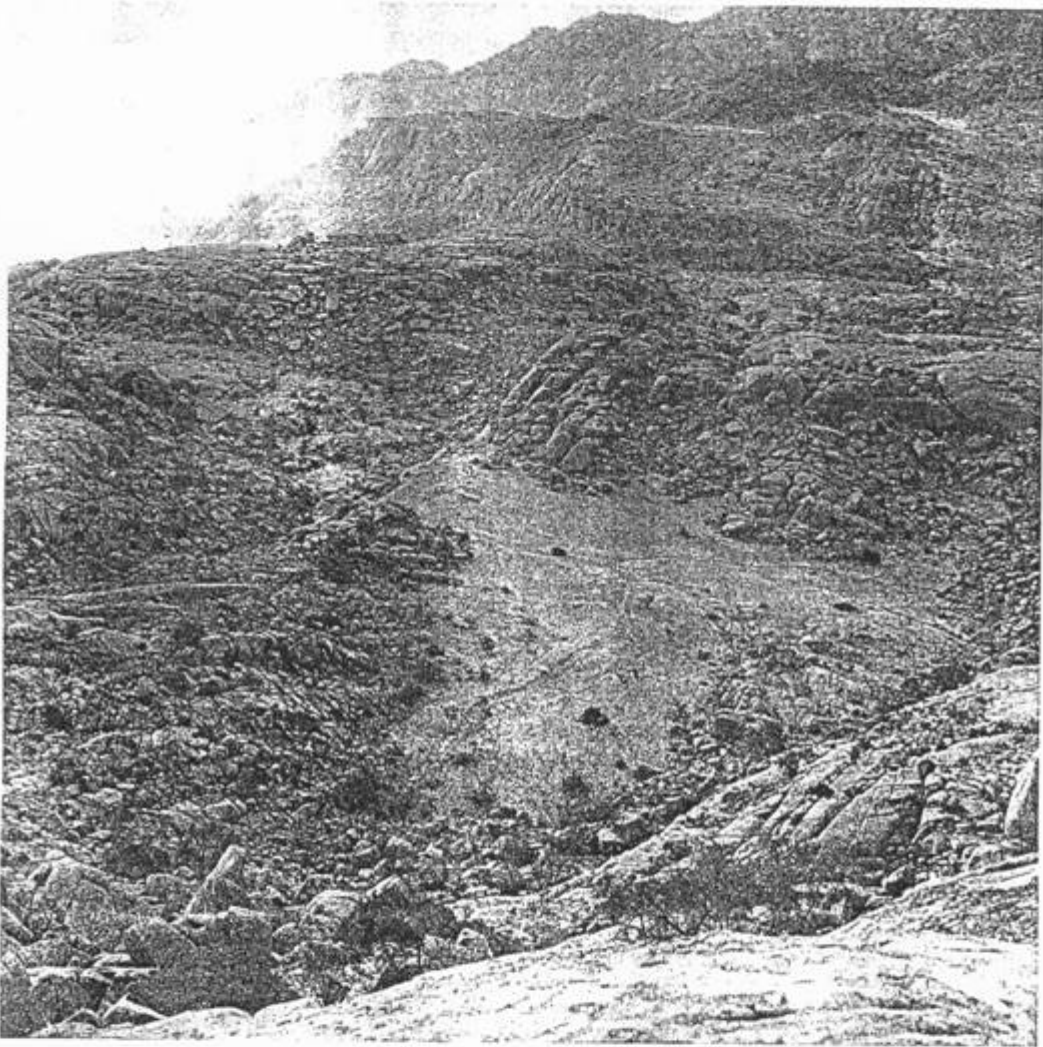


Fig. 7.1. A landscape in the upper Brandberg. The plain in the foreground is about 100 m wide; in the whole area overlooked here one can find twelve rock-art sites.

(i.e. at least from 6000 BP till the twentieth century). In the bottom area of the mountain only the entrance areas of some of the gorges are furnished with comparable traces of human activities. The slopes all around the mountain – which normally can be negotiated within one day on foot – were occupied only in a spotty manner.

Like almost all rock-painting traditions of southern Africa, the paintings of the Brandberg focus on human figures, with large game animals

forming the second-largest group of motifs. A shamanistic tradition has been postulated for the Brandberg paintings (e.g. Kinahan 1991), but this is based on a small spot-check selection of motifs. Rather, social issues (gender relations, social cohesion, etc.), and to some extent ecological issues, seem to be the main concern of the art's meaning (Lenssen-Erz 2001).

The database I am drawing on in the present study embraces exactly 300 sites on the southern

flank of the Brandberg which comprise the almost complete inventory of rock-art in an area of 135 sq. km (Lenssen-Erz 2001; ten known sites missing from the records) (Fig. 7.2). This area includes the basal zone, where the Namib Desert encounters the mountain, as well as the inner parts up to the peaks in the centre of the complex. Since this covers all facets of the landscape and comprises almost one-third of the whole body of rock-art on the mountain, the results may certainly be representative of the entire art tradition.

All sites in this study have been recorded in plan and elevation at a scale of 1:100 (Pager 1989; 1993; 1995; 1998; see also Fig. 7.3). In good archaeological spirit, as much attention has been paid to the context of the artefacts as to the artefacts themselves; in some cases documenting the site has consumed more time than the recording of the paintings.

### Infrastructure and *Gestaltung*

From the perspective of landscape the Brandberg functions on two levels. On the one hand it is the dominant landmark in the wider central Namibian landscape which constituted the life-world of prehistoric hunter-gatherer painters (Richter 1991); this function of the mountain is dealt with elsewhere (Lenssen-Erz 1997). On the other hand, the Brandberg is a complex landscape of its own – one which is large enough and well enough furnished to be a complete, autarkic life-world in itself. This is what the present chapter deals with.

As one principle of understanding landscape I maintain that landscape has a number of given properties which persist without human interaction or perception. Therefore, I disagree with the standpoint that landscape is merely a construction of human attitudes, wholly decided by the values of human culture (e.g. Ingold 1993). Given elements in the landscape are topography, vegetation

and fauna; the landscape is formed by climate and geomorphological processes – all of which exist and develop with or without human interference and independent of human attitude (for elaborate discussions of these issues see Ucko and Layton 1999).

These elements are things which every human being encounters when entering into a landscape. Those parts of the 'Given' which humans can make use or sense of are what I subsume under infrastructure: the natural resources which support mobility, diet, habitation, raw material supply or religious and ritual practice. The human interaction with and action upon them is what I call the *Gestaltung*. This means to give a physical *Gestalt* to something and to endow it with meaning – denoting all acts that bring about some kind of tangible change. This physical change may range from the almost negligible, such as applying a figure on a rock surface, to a change of the whole character of a landscape by

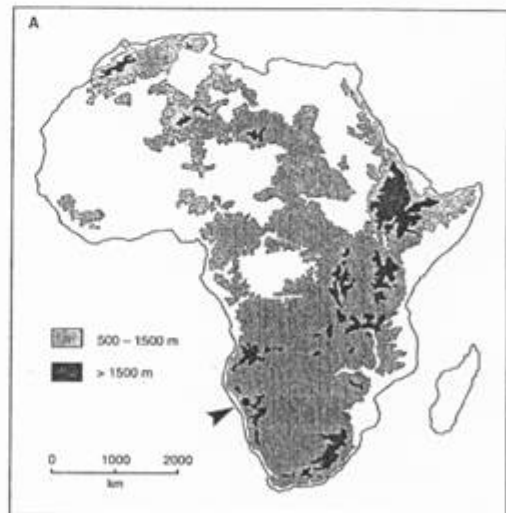


Fig. 7.2. (A) Location of the Brandberg in Africa, and (B) topographical map of the Brandberg. Rock-art sites are marked with dots. The present study deals with the sites marked in the southern part of the mountain. Scale 1: 230,000.



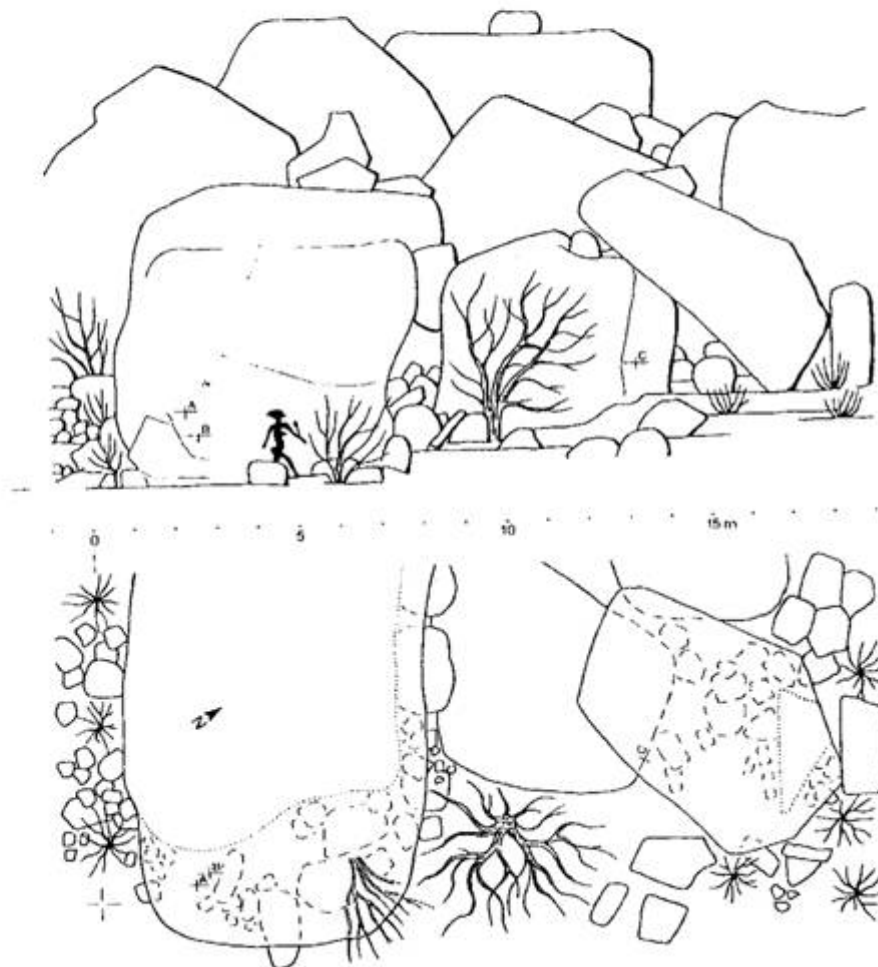


Fig. 7.3. One out of over 800 rock-art sites recorded at scale in the Brandberg in elevation (*top*) and plan (*bottom*). Alphabetical marks help to locate specific panels on the rock since on the reproductions these spots are also marked.

chopping down a forest. Bednarik (1999: 6) defines a *Gestalt* as 'unified symbolic configuration having properties that cannot be derived from its parts'. What we perceive are the physical parts of the *Gestaltung*, while there is also a metaphysical part which, by its nature, is not perceptible to us (thus being analogous to the understanding of the term *Gestalt* in psychology).

In south-western Africa the elements of infrastructure remained practically unchanged from prehistoric times until today – unlike, for

example, the changing landscapes of the Sahara – owing to the relative stability of climate (e.g. Van Zinderen Bakker 1980; Deacon and Lancaster 1988). Therefore, today we have access to the same infrastructure as it was for the prehistoric painters. The features of infrastructure which are relevant to hunter-gatherers in view of their mobility, food and water requirements, need for shelter and access to raw materials are expressed in Table 7.1.

Some of these features are relevant to habita-

Table 7.2 *Places of topographical salience (accents of landscape) at which rock-art sites are found.*

	Place of topographical salience	Description
1	pass	e.g. connecting two gorges or valleys
2	waymark	a conspicuous rock located along a natural travel route
3	water-formed feature	a peculiarity of a dry region like the Brandberg where water is not always available but the surface of rocks shows marks of water-power
4	vantage point	a place allowing wide stretches of the landscape to be overlooked
5	focus of landscape	e.g. centre of a basin, outlet of a valley, hilltop, saddle
6	terrace	especially relevant in some parts of the Brandberg
7	cave	(in the Brandberg) often not real caves but deep shelters, closed on all sides except entrance
8	halfway house	isolated rock-art sites more or less in the middle of a long ascent route

Table 7.1 *Infrastructural features of a landscape or a site and the method of gaining empirical data on them.*

Feature of infrastructure	Measurement
open field	distance from site
water supply	distance from site
place (for dwelling)	space
topographic salience	diverse features
(accent of landscape)	(see Table 7.2)
cardinal points (of site opening)	cardinal points

tion of the landscape (open field, place) or they are relevant to diet (water supply). The 'topographic salience' (or 'accent of landscape') in this list is a collective category by which to grasp various locations in a landscape which are either points of discontinuity or important for mobility or habitation (Table 7.2; for comparable lists see Steinbring 1987a; 1987b; Bradley *et al.* 1994: 380ff.).

Some of the places of topographical salience in Table 7.2 are especially listed because of their relevance in the Brandberg; they might be dispensable in less mountainous areas.

Recognition of the *Gestaltung* of the sites is

focused mainly on rock-art as this is the most reliable and permanent indicator of human activities (Table 7.3).

The items of *Gestaltung* as listed in Table 7.3 need some further explanation:

*Relative location* is assessed in relation to surrounding rock-art sites, linking them to the landscape; therefore, it is broader in scope than other items on this list which only pertain to the site proper.

The analysis of *artefacts* in a study encompassing such a vast number of sites can only take regard of the surface finds. In the Brandberg modern interference by people is negligible, and the microlithic Later Stone Age (which represents the time of the painters: Breunig 1989; Richter 1991) is generally to be found on the surface (as well as in the deposits); so this is a fairly reliable indicator of human activities for the time when paintings were made. The number of artefacts is classified in five categories ranging from single pieces to densely strewn scatters.

The *painting location* is categorized according to twelve positions in a schematized rock-art site

Table 7.3 *Different kinds of Gestaltung which a rock-art site experiences; only the artefacts are of a kind which will not inevitably be detectable since there may be no surface finds at the site. All other items will exist as soon as there is rock-art.*

Item of <i>Gestaltung</i>	Measurement
relative location artefacts	central – marginal – isolated number
painting location	placement categories 1–12
visibility (optical range)	maximum distance
number of paintings *	number, classified in six groups
complexity of action depicted	action index 1–16

(Fig. 7.4; Table 7.4), taking into account the fact that many sites do not provide any shelter at all but exhibit simply a perpendicular rock face (Lenssen-Erz 1989; cf. Kechagia 1995).

*Visibility* expresses the optical range of the pictures at a site by the maximum distance at which they are still perceivable. It is categorized in four classes: up to 1 m; up to 3 m; up to 15 m; and greater than 15 m.

There is a wide range in the *number of paintings* one encounters at a site; it goes from just one to more than 1000 figures (of the latter, there are three sites in the Brandberg, but only one lies in the study area; for the other two see Pager 1998). The numbers of figures have been classified in six ranks (listed in Table 7.5), in which also the weight of each rank for the whole body of art becomes visible.

The last item assessed from the viewpoint of *Gestaltung* is the *complexity of action depicted* (Fig. 7.5). This part of the analysis takes the contents of the art into consideration, its denotational meaning. This complex system can only be outlined here in a very foreshortened manner (Table 7.6; for basic notions see Lenssen-Erz 1994, more detailed in Lenssen-Erz 2001).

The action index, ranging from 1 to 16, allows

Table 7.4 *Definitions for the painting locations as drawn schematically in Fig. 7.4.*

Painting location	Definition
1	on a perpendicular wall without overhang
2	at the back of a boulder where painting location 1 is already occupied
3	on the perpendicular 'forehead' of a rock above a shelter or a cave
4	at the lip above a shelter or cave, where the perpendicular 'forehead' edges back towards the ceiling
5	on the ceiling of a shelter or a cave; also slanting ceilings down to about 60 cm above ground
6	close to the ground on the rear wall or the lowest section of a slanting ceiling in a shelter, less than 60 cm above ground
7	outside a shelter or cave, 'around the corner', the shelter being not visible from this spot
8	outside a shelter or cave on the flanking walls left or right; pictures here are visible on entering the shelter/cave, but they are related to the area in front of it, not to the shelter
9	on the left side of the entrance to the covered space, being the left 'door-post', as it were
10	on the side walls inside the shelter/cave (if side- and rear walls can be distinguished), clearly inside, no relation to the outside
11	on the right side of the entrance to the covered space; the right 'door-post', as it were
12	on several boulders scattered over the site area

one to categorize and encode every conceivable physical action by a numeral. '1' indicates a being (human or animal) which is resting (standing, sitting, squatting, lying) without any further activity. As action becomes more complex by moving and/or by operating the arms, the index rises. It rises in steps until its peak at '16', a human who is moving while displaying some supplementary



Table 7.5 Ranking of rock-art sites according to number of figures. Among the 327 sites which are part of this analysis, twenty-seven are not among those sites which form the database for the study presented in this chapter.

Rank covering	n figures	Number of sites	% of all sites	Sum of figures	% of total of figures
i	> 400	5	1.5	3090	17.9
ii	196-400	15	4.6	4131	23.9
iii	60-195	55	16.8	5750	33.3
iv	19-59	89	27.2	2965	17.1
v	5-18	112	34.3	1199	6.9
vi	1-4	51	15.6	149	0.9
total		327	100	17,284	100

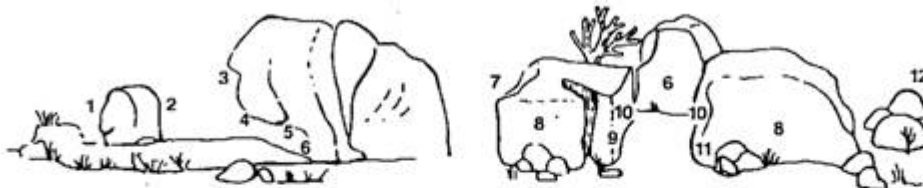


Fig. 7.4. Brandberg painting locations. (After Lessen-Erz 1989; for definitions see Table 7.4.)

body posture (such as bending over) and using an implement directed towards a goal (such as launching an arrow at a target).

Through this measure, it is possible to arrive at average indices for special selections of motifs (e.g. men as opposed to women), or for sites in a comparative perspective. This average can be calculated irrespective of the number of paintings at a site (by dividing the sum of indices by the total number of respective figures); accordingly a site with many paintings has no 'advantage' over another site with only a few paintings as regards the complexity of action depicted at the site as a whole. A very low average action index at a site goes with there being many animals among the paintings, since animals always have a very low action index. A high action index for a site, on the other hand, represents the dominance of humans who are interacting; this more often than not can be some kind of harmonic action which several persons perform simultaneously.

The items of *Gestaltung* listed above constitute the empirical base of my analysis. They provide quantitative data through the respective measurements which, however, remain meaningless if they are not translated into a qualitative statement.

As an example I demonstrate how the elements of *Gestaltung* 'painting location' and 'visibility' can be schematized into a general 'mode of presentation' (Fig. 7.6).

The twelve painting locations are grouped together with the four classes of the optical range of a picture, which grasps the maximum distance from which a painting can still be discerned. The qualitative leap here is that measures of distance and location on the rock are expressed in terms of the praxis of living people; eventually quantitative data are structured into the two distinctive categories 'private' versus 'public' which bear relevance for every social body (e.g. Hartley and Wolley Vawser 1997: 188; for the same conceptual dichotomy among

present-day Kalahari San see e.g. Whitelaw 1994: 224).

The painting locations analysed by these twelve positions were also classified by Kechagia (1995; 1996) who chose the term 'stage' for those modes of presentation which are termed 'private' here. She contextualizes experiencing such pictures with concepts such as security, shelter and family (Kechagia 1995: 112).

As one can see from Fig. 7.6, the range of visibility starts at a maximum distance of less than 1 m – that is classified 'very private' here. This means that depictions of this class were placed in such hidden places on the rock that only one person at one time can view the image or stay in its presence (see Vaccaro 1994: 29 for this phenomenon in the rock-art of the Drakensberg). The contrary is the case with those depictions deliberately placed in locations where they must have been seen by those nearing the site. These pictures have the character of a signal since they can be perceived from a considerable distance. Obviously the private and the public mode of presentation had to do with the addressees of the art; that is, the participants in production as well as consumption of the art were controlled by means of placing it in specific locations (Hartley and Wolley Vawser 1997: 188).

### *Gestaltung* and human behaviour

While the measures given above are concerned with a practical question, issues which are not accessible to measuring and counting should also be dealt with. Therefore, at a more general level the roles should be assessed which infrastructure and *Gestaltung* played for the decisions people made in their praxis of living. In order to understand these people's behaviour some considerations should be made concerning the motivation which led these people to go to the Brandberg and paint there. An activity so clearly structured

in its expressions and so clearly aimed at a certain goal must have been based on essential ways of thinking and perceiving in the social group. Certainly the art is not based on arbitrary decisions of individuals who act *ad hoc* – which would be the case if the paintings were made as 'art for art's sake'. The impulse to paint as well as the selection of the motifs and the location were the results of a decision process guided by a consensual system of values – although decisions are eventually made by individuals (Hartley and Wolley Vawser 1997: 189). It should be possible to detect those basic motivations which were the driving force behind the behaviour of whole groups following a certain rationale.

For a fundamental structure of motivations why prehistoric people went to the Brandberg and painted there, two generalizing and competing hypotheses can be put forward (Fig. 7.7).

According to the materialistic hypothesis, a rock-art site came into being after a decision guided by the search of a group of individuals for a prototypical, suitable infrastructure that satisfied those people's needs for shelter, food and water as well as mobility. The function of the site was subordinate to the general infrastructure; the people utilized the place according to their mundane requirements, wherein the number of previous visitors to the site was irrelevant to them. As a model for such a behaviour one may take the seasonal movements of Kalahari foragers, whose mobility patterns are determined by the availability of the infrastructural elements water, as the most important, and plant food, as the second most important (Tanaka 1980: 79; Silberbauer 1981: 202).

When the prehistoric painter people were staying at a place chosen with a materialistic motivation they were apparently prepared and equipped for painting. It was such a common activity that the necessary implements, and pigments in particular, were always at hand. The



Fig. 7.5. A rock-painting in the Brandberg showing people inside houses with bags fixed to the ceilings. Colour red; width of left group 22 cm.

opportunities to paint seem to have occurred in various contexts, either secular or religious, but apparently developing out of a given situation and not having been planned carefully in advance. Consequently, more or less every able adult may potentially have been a painter. The composition of the group followed the 'ordinary' configuration of a hunter-gatherer band; it was not put together by selecting the members according

to their specializing in ritual (of which painting would have been a part). In the context of the materialistic hypothesis, painting was more or less a by-product or a consequence of being on the Brandberg, i.e. a reaction to circumstances arising during the stay. Only if a fair number of paintings had accumulated at a site might this kind of *Gestaltung* have influenced the further utilization of the site.

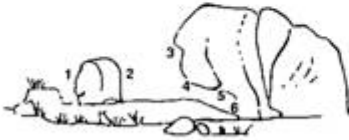
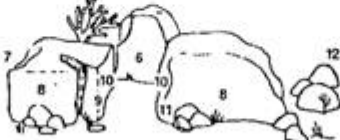






	Painting location involved	Visibility (optical range)	Presentation	
				PRIVATE MODE
	6	<1 m	very private	
				
	5, 10	<3 m	interior-related	
				
	2, 4 8, 11, 12	<15 m	public	PUBLIC MODE
				
	1, 3 7, 8	>15 m	signalling	

Fig. 7.6. The modes of presentation of rock-art assessed by painting position and optical range of the pictures.

Table 7.6 Features of the sixteen action indices (left column). Each mode of action (top line) has a static and a dynamic expression. The modes comprise: basic configuration = different kinds of rest or movement; supplementary body posture = e.g. bending over, twisting around; arms action; object involved = handling, carrying, holding material goods; goal of action = living being at which activities are directed.

	Basic configuration	Supplementary body posture	Arms action	Object involved	Goal of action
1 static	+				
2 dynamic	+				
3 static	+	+			
4 dynamic	+	+			
5 static	+				
6 dynamic	+				
7 static	+	+	+		
8 dynamic	+	+	+		
9 static	+		+		
10 dynamic	+		+		
11 static	+	+	+	+	
12 dynamic	+	+	+	+	
13 static	+		+	+	
14 dynamic	+		+	+	
15 static	+	+	+	+	+
16 dynamic	+	+	+	+	+

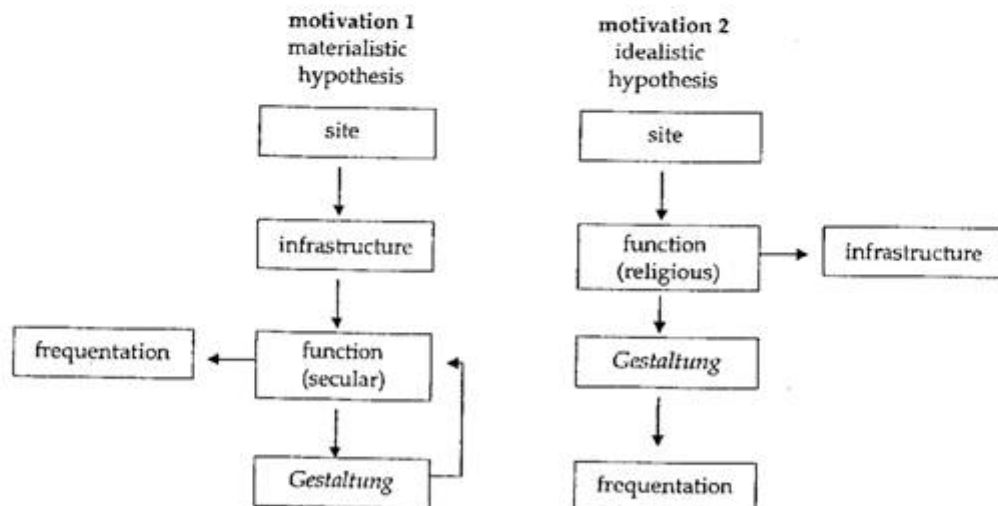


Fig. 7.7. Two competing hypotheses regarding the selection of rock-art sites by prehistoric painters. The term religious in the function of motivation 2 stands for a wide range of metaphysical issues.

If the landscape of the Brandberg was utilized under an idealistic motivation, then a rock-art site was chosen with regard to its specific ritual and religious significance and power. The *Gestaltung* such a place experienced was a direct and planned result of its previously defined function: it did not develop this function through pictures coming into being more or less coincidentally there. In other words, these rocks were meant to be painted because they were particularly powerful or located in a significant location. The ritual and religious power accumulating at a site through the *Gestaltung* with paintings in consequence was the reason which induced further, equally motivated visits. In all this context the infrastructure did not play a substantial role in guiding the choice of the place. One scenario for such a behaviour could be a group of initiates who were guided by some elders to a retreat at which the appropriate rites for initiation would have been carried out.

### Structuring rock-art sites – signifying the landscape

After having briefly set out the 'mode of presentation' and 'basic motivation', I introduce another three categorizations which can be structured as dichotomous relations. Together all five cover basic domains of a human society, the domain of praxis and the domain of ideology (Table 7.7). All these relations can be understood as influencing the utilization of landscape and rock-art sites.

Table 7.7 *Five dichotomic relations structuring the utilization patterns of rock-art sites.*

presentation	private vs. public	domain of
frequentation	minimum vs. maximum	praxis
ritual activity	minimum vs. maximum	
basic motivation	materialistic vs. idealistic	domain of
basic function	secular vs. religious	ideology

In order to establish a basic frame for this structure I use the terms praxis (= practice) and ideology. The former refers to 'meaningful actions of knowledgeable agents... actions which are mundane, conventional and repeated, produced through practical knowledge or knowhow'. 'Ideology' refers to 'a set of ideas held by a group of people' (Hodder *et al.* 1995: 238, 243), which may include a lot of issues pertaining to social structure, power relations, general world-views and religion.

Of the relations listed in Table 7.7, the frequentation can be assessed comparatively easily; a secure indicator for the presence of people at a site can be seen in the artefacts and remains of habitation which they left behind. Of course visits to a site which are rare, short and/or made with few people leave a different pattern of remains than do visits which are intensive, of greater duration and/or iterative. A site with less than the rough average of artefacts lying on the surface can be classed as towards minimum frequentation, while an above-average number of artefacts indicates maximum frequentation.

More intricate is the assessment of ritual activity. As paintings are seen as an important part of such activities, a high number of paintings at a site would seem to be an indicator of relatively frequent ritual activities. Moreover, it is assumed, ritual activity generally is a communal act; whether it involves the whole group or only a part of it, it has certain minimum requirements of space in which people would be able to move about, e.g. in a dance.

A more or less combined assessment of these two relations is expressed in the 'basic function' – either mainly secular or mainly religious. Here, the relationship between the number of material artefacts and traces of use (such as fireplaces, concentrations of artefacts) to that of paintings is rated; if the ritual artefacts paintings dominate above average while the secular

Table 7.8 Matrix for the schematic-structural classification of rock-art sites.

	Function + Presentation: secular-private	Function + Presentation: secular-public	Function + Presentation: religious-private	Function + Presentation: religious-public
Frequencation minimum	<i>class B</i> short-term living site M1 R	<i>class A</i> landmark site M1 R	<i>class G</i> sanctuary, hermitage M2 RR	<i>class E</i> casual ritual site M1 RR
Frequencation maximum	<i>class C</i> long-term living site M1 R	<i>class D</i> aggregation camp M2 RR	<i>class F</i> deliberate ritual site M2 RR	<i>class F/D</i> M2 RR

M1 = Motivation 1: materialistic hypothesis

R = minimum ritual activity

M2 = Motivation 2: idealistic hypothesis

RR = maximum ritual activity

indicators remain below average, the site can be classified as primarily of religious function. A basic assumption here is that secular life has a certain logic which is dictated by basic needs and in part even by physical laws, while the spiritual/transcendent life-world is essentially non-rational (Seymour Smith 1986: 248ff.). A predominance of those remains at a site which matches the mundane logic consequently points to a secular basic function for the place.

The five dichotomous relations presented in Fig. 7.7 are certainly an excessive simplification; they fulfil the purpose of structuring the mass and variety of features and data which we face in a landscape and relating them to human agency. They can be converted into a matrix (Table 7.8) which permits us to proceed from theoretical considerations to models of practical implementation. The joint assessment of all five relations gives rise to seven functional categories of sites indicating the primary use. The determination of the classes in Table 7.8 is also informed by the elaborate ethnography on southern African hunter-gatherers, helping to reduce the vast number of possible combinations to a reasonable selection of likely functions. Places where foragers live temporarily can be distinguished as to a primary function which the respective place served

(e.g. Bartram *et al.* 1991; O'Connell *et al.* 1991). Among the possible functions there are some which it is useless to look for on the Brandberg. For example a large kill site will hardly be found there, since no large game animals can get into higher reaches of the mountain.

Methodologically this deducto-hypothetical approach – defining certain classes of sites in advance and projecting that scheme on to an existing landscape with sites – has been established as the 'settlement pattern concept' of archaeology (Roper 1979: 133).

This matrix of structural classification provides a schema which works essentially with a distinction between secular and religious life. This clear distinction can of course be doubted since both fields form a continuum (e.g. Seymour-Smith 1986: 248); but it serves to give a structural order to activities such as foraging, production of artefacts, communication and mobility (all of which can be but are not necessarily contextualized in a religious/sacred manner) as opposed to rituals, ceremonies or contemplation which are not likely to satisfy basic materialistic needs.

In short these classes have the following characteristics (cf. Lenssen-Erz 2001):

Class A *Landmark site*. These are sites apparently established in order to mark a conspicuous

- spot in the landscape, often in connection with natural travel routes. An expression of the spatial conceptualization of the painters, they are frequently located in bordering places between larger landscape features (e.g. on a pass or saddle, at the foot of a hill). They could perhaps play a role in territorial concepts.
- Class B *Short-term living site.*** These are places which cannot have served as camp site for any considerable time owing to lack of space and poor infrastructure. Likely functions are as a resting place on long journeys or as an over-night station for hunters on a long hunting trip.
- Class C *Long-term living site.*** These provide better infrastructure and more space than class B sites; here a band of 20–40 people could easily camp for a while. There are relatively few paintings but ample traces of secular activities.
- Class D *Aggregation camp.*** These are places for large gatherings and accordingly they are similar to class C sites; in contrast to the latter, here the traces of ritual activities (i.e. mainly painting) clearly dominate.
- Class E *Casual ritual site.*** Sites of this class are in some respects similar to those of class B, i.e. infrastructure and available space would suggest groups of twelve to fifteen people staying for one to four days. They did not visit these sites for ritual purposes or for recurrent ceremonies (*rites de passage*); a stay was part of the usual patterns of mobility, but the focus on ritual is evidenced by traces of rather intense painting activity.
- Class F *Deliberate ritual site.*** Such sites were visited for ritual activity but not as living places. The infrastructure is not particularly advantageous, and the number of paintings stands in a dominant relation to the amount of artefacts and other traces of occupation.
- Class G *Sanctuary, hermitage.*** These two terms are meant to provide associations rather than being ultimately defined concepts; sites of this class

are usually isolated and without any infrastructure worth mentioning, but sometimes they are at a vantage point. Occasionally these are cave-like configurations suggesting contemplative activities and even isolation of those who stayed there; the few but frequently extraordinary depictions relate to the interior of the site, not to the area around as is generally so in other sites.

This classification of sites is comprehensive enough to embrace most aspects of hunter-gatherer life as long as it stands in a context with landscape. Rock-art sites form a meta-space therein, being spatial phenomena that express conceptualizations and cognition of space. Landmarks established through rock-art configure the landscape for the people who use it. The function of the sites, and the weight which certain classes have, stand for the patterned utilization of the whole landscape, indicating whether it was more a resource for material needs or whether its value was mainly a metaphysical one, as a source of power based on ritual/spiritual potency.

In saying all this, it is kept in mind that a distinction under such a functional perspective over-rides the frequent congruence of both fields. However, since we can only have an etic access to archaeological data, it helps us to distinguish fields of activity whose physical logic we can reconstruct and experience; these contrast with those processes having a metaphysical background about which we can only hypothesize – in other words: eating meat only works if killing an animal by force (or by scavenging) while, e.g., healing can take an endless variety of forms.

It also has to be emphasized that the classification is not to establish a mono-dimensional utilization for every site. Each site *can* serve several purposes – yet a small boulder on a steep rocky slope would seem entirely unsuitable for an aggregation camp, to name one example. Generally



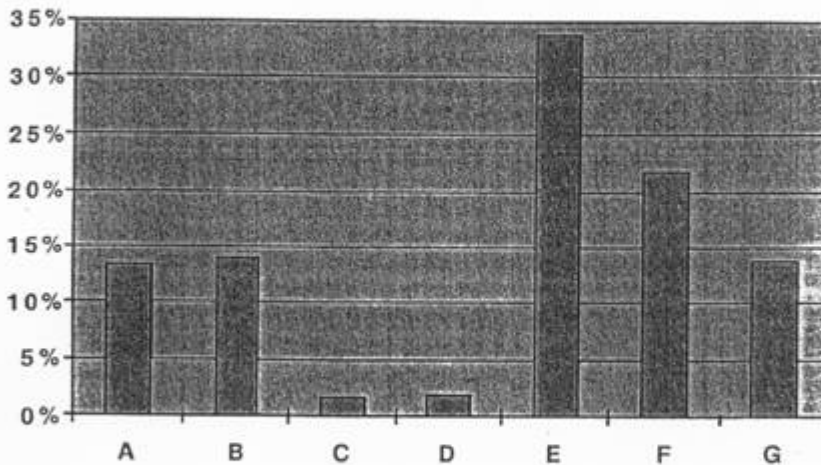


Fig. 7.8. The ratio of classes of sites in the Brandberg.  $n = 300$ .

the allocation of a class to a site means to point out the tendency of the primary use made of the place, mirroring its connection with and position in the landscape. It is mainly sites of class E which one finds in the Brandberg, while classes C and D are quite rare (Fig. 7.8). Obviously the landscape was not an unstructured continuum for the prehistoric hunter-gatherers, but instead was the matrix on which highly rated values such as mobility, religiousness and social interaction were mapped with rock-art. Reading this map gives us an understanding of the prehistoric utilization and cognition of the landscape, thus reconstructing the painters' mental map.

It is difficult to discern a pattern of the utilization of the landscape simply by weighing quantitatively the classes of rock-art sites. It is more comprehensive in perspective if the structural patterns of the five dichotomous relations (Table 7.7) are rated for all sites within this mountain range. Through them all sites can be synthesized into an 'idealized elementary site' (Fig. 7.9). This archetype of a site, combining all characteristics of the sites in the study area, suggests a pattern of how the landscape was used by the hunter-gatherer painters.

Idealized elementary site	
domain of ideology	domain of praxis
basic motivation	ritual activity
materialistic	maximum
basic function of art	presentation
religious	public
	frequentation
	minimum

Fig. 7.9. The 'idealized elementary site', the archetype of rock-art site in the Brandberg, comprises the structural features most often found in the mountain.

The structure of the idealized elementary site can be interpreted in view of the consequences this pattern has for the use of the landscape by the painters. Despite a superficial dialectic, expressed in a materialistic basic motivation as opposed to a religious basic function, this pattern suggests a consistent scenario.

The painters went to the Brandberg in order to satisfy their basic needs (food, water, shelter, raw material = materialistic motivation).

They went infrequently and/or in small groups and/or for short-term durations (= minimum frequentation). Once they were at a spot, the place was used for ritual activities (= religious basic function and maximum ritual activity), although the choice of the place had been made according to its infrastructure (= materialistic motivation). It appears there was usually a strong inclination for ritual activities which were expressed in pictorial art. This points to critical circumstances felt by people, since ritual activity increases in frequency if a group is facing more than ordinary problems (Guenther 1975/76). Finally, the rituals were performed as an act for the whole group (= public presentation of the art); this suggests also that the cause for the ritual afflicted the whole group.

It appears, therefore, that the painters mainly went to the Brandberg because of its advantageous ecosystem; but they often seem to have been in a state of crisis (e.g. in times of drought). Strategies chosen against the crises were high mobility, small group sizes and frequent performance of rituals, presumably to cope with the critical circumstances and to stabilize the social system.

This very general pattern is superimposed over other patterns which find their expression in sites deviating considerably from the pattern of the idealized elementary site. One example for such a deviation is class G, sites subsumed under 'sanctuary, hermitage'. These are places that are distracted from the landscape which usually formed the life-world of the painter people. When staying at a 'sanctuary' they were not in need of a specific infrastructure or neighbourhood. Particularly in class G the very shape of the rock with an enclosed configuration seems to have been important, thus emphasizing the quasi self-referential character of these sites. The place itself and its specific power were the characteristics the painters were looking for, perhaps in search of a place providing the ambience for isolation, contemplation or meditation. The landscape did not

matter because of specific features, but it mattered only as a whole, as the background to the things happening at the site. It was not a resource for the satisfaction of materialistic needs but rather a source of power in a co-operative spirit. The mere presence of the landscape 'out there' was sufficient back-up for the site.

This stands in contrast to the general pattern of the use of the landscape, in which the Brandberg was primarily seen as a resource for materialistic needs. But in this context, landscape was seen not like a giving mother but rather as a thin-skinned diva who demands constant attendance and steady maintenance by ritual means and *Gestaltung*. There was no unanimous co-operation, but rather frequent small fights in which the goodwill of 'mother nature' had to be won always anew ritually. The landscape was not taken as it is (despite numerous unchangeable properties) but it had to be influenced in interactive processes in order to maintain it as a functioning organism.

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