The seal of the University of Cologne is a large, circular emblem in the background. It features a central scene with three crowned figures (kings) and a seated woman holding a child. The text 'UNIVERSITAS COLONIENSIS' is written around the top inner edge, and '1165' is at the bottom. A shield with three crowns and a checkered pattern is at the bottom center.

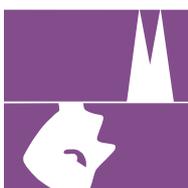
■ **The Giraffe People: Nimibia's Prehistoric Artists**

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Tides of the Desert - Gezeiten der Wüste.

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The Giraffe People: Namibia's Prehistoric Artists

Abstract

For almost four decades, the University of Cologne has been intensively involved with rock art research in southwestern Africa. Thousands of engravings and paintings have been documented, particularly from Namibia. Excavations were carried out which yielded a chronological framework for Namibia's rock art. In Central Namibia, most of the prehistoric rock paintings are between 2,000 and 4,000 years old. The practice of painting stopped during the first millennium AD when domestic sheep were introduced.

Keywords: Later Stone Age, LSA, rock art, chronology, dating, Namibia, southwestern Africa, Holocene.

In terms of prehistoric rock art, Southern Africa is among the most prominent areas on earth. Prehistoric rock paintings and engravings, particularly from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia, have been well-known for a long time.

Since 1963, the Cologne Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology has been intensively involved with rock art research in the southwestern part of Africa. In total, more than 30,000 engravings and paintings from all over Namibia, and another 40,000 paintings in the Brandberg mountain area of Central Namibia have been documented.

Namibia's famous "White Lady" rock painting discovered in 1918, had attracted the attention of professional archaeologists. In 1930, Hugo Obermaier and Herbert Kühn published the first monograph about Namibian rock art. After the Second World War, Obermaier's friend and colleague Abbé Henri Breuil came to South Africa and Namibia (then South West Africa) to conduct his own field research. He recorded a large number of rock paintings and published them in a premium monograph series. Two local amateurs, Ernst-Rudolf Scherz and his wife Anneliese Scherz, were the Abbé's guides to archaeological sites in Namibia. Upon his leaving southern Africa, Breuil encouraged Scherz to develop a systematic and comprehensive survey of Namibian rock art.

Some years later, in the 1960s, Scherz's work became part of the Cologne rock art research programme. The programme, called "Felsbilder im südwestlichen Afrika", was funded by the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) [Fig. 1]. The project also comprised the work of Gerhard J. Fock and Dora Fock in South Africa. Wolfgang E. Wendt conducted archaeological excavations of rock art and non-rock art sites. It was he who discovered the famous painted limestone slabs from the Apollo 11 Cave in southern Namibia, Africa's most ancient paintings.

In the late 1970s, Rudolph Kuper succeeded Hermann Schwabedissen as director of the University of Cologne research programme. R. Kuper fostered the final publications of the rock art surveys conducted by Scherz and Fock and, by 1986 six volumes had been completed. In the meantime, Kuper had felt it necessary to complete the Namibian rock art collection by intensive research in the Brandberg area, Namibia's richest rock art province.

Harald Pager, who had gained international reputation for his Ndedema rock art documentation, started an eight-year fieldwork programme in the Brandberg mountain. Pager's work has since been edited by a team headed by Tilman Lenssen-Erz who has created a systematic rock art

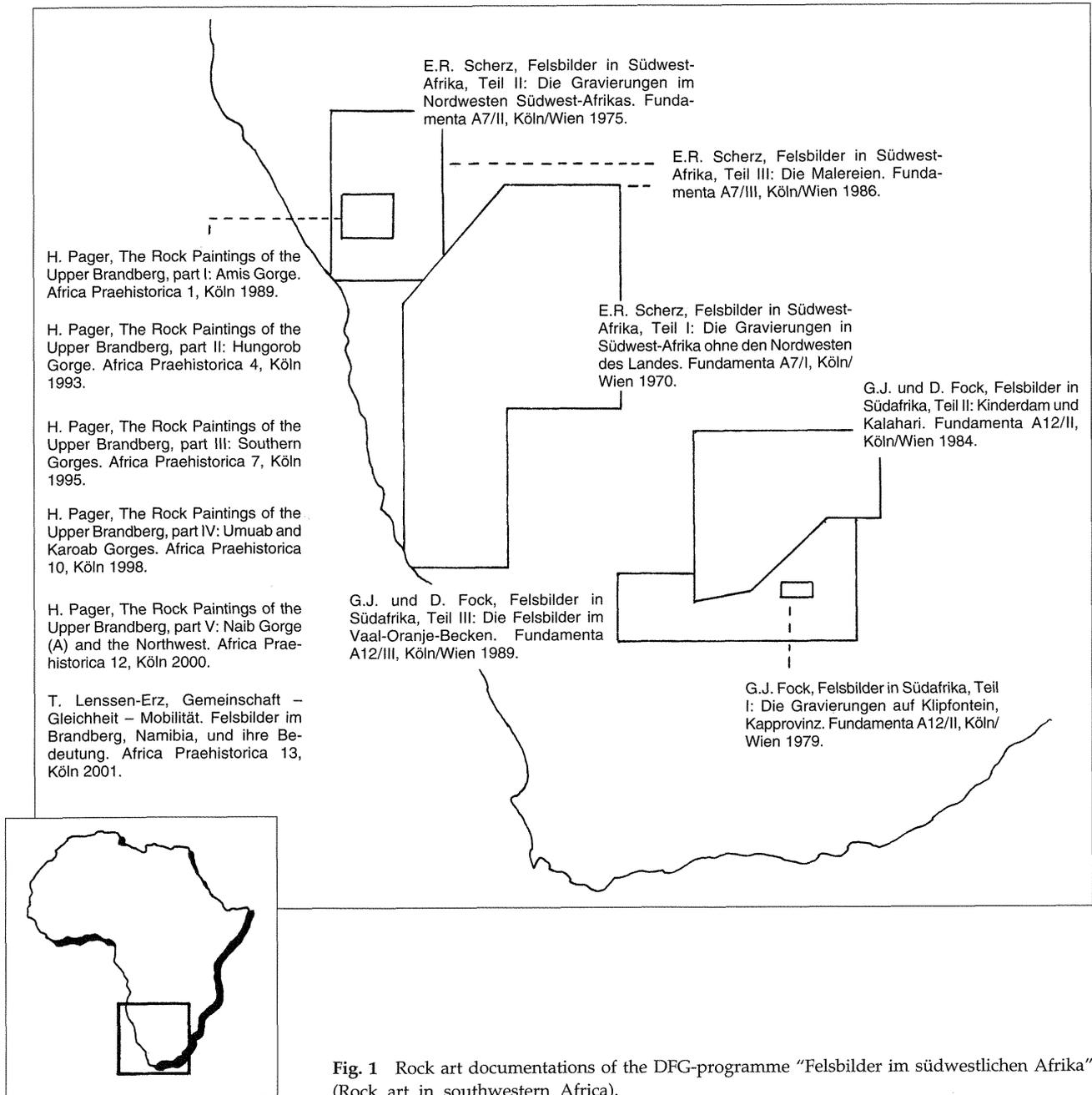


Fig. 1 Rock art documentations of the DFG-programme "Felsbilder im südwestlichen Afrika" (Rock art in southwestern Africa).

database along with Pager's copies. Peter Breunig excavated some Brandberg rock art sites in order to establish a chronological framework of the prehistoric settlement at the Brandberg mountain. Ralf Vogelsang and the present author were in charge of the analysis and publication of several

Middle Stone Age and Later Stone Age excavations conducted by Wendt.

Rudolph Kuper has now overseen the DFG-programme for more than twenty years and most of the principal scientific aims have since been reached.

How old is Namibia's prehistoric art?

Namibia's prehistoric art tradition does not start with rock images, but with several small painted limestone slabs. The tiny paintings display animals and a mysterious being combining both human and animal attributes. They come from an outstanding stratigraphy of several late MSA occupations at Apollo 11 Cave in Southern Namibia. They are between 28,000 and 32,000 years old (WENDT 1974). Recent press releases concerning the world's oldest cave paintings (30,000 to 32,000 years old) from the Chauvet Cave in Southern France have never even mentioned the Namibian discoveries: Paintings of approximately the same age.

Pictures on rock surfaces seem to have developed in Namibia only thousands of years later. The oldest rock engravings could be around 10,000 years old. Settlements of this period from Aar Ranch in southern Namibia have been found closely connected to rock boulders with engraved animal representations of high quality (WENDT 1978).

The predominant part of Namibian rock art, thousands of paintings and engravings in central Namibia [Fig. 2], emerged during the last 6,000

years. In this period southwestern Africa became one of the largest and most complex rock art provinces in the world (RICHTER 1991).

Where to find rock art?

Engravings (nearly always picked) are usually found on horizontal surfaces of sandstone, quartzite and diabase, rarely also granite and other rock types.

Paintings (monochrome and polychrome) are usually to be found on vertical surfaces, under rock shelters or on side panels of boulders. They appear particularly in west central Namibia, where granites (more exactly: syenites) dominate the landscape.

The prevailing kinds of rock and relief forms have a strong impact on the distribution of paintings and engravings as a whole. The paintings concentrate in the central western part of the country, with its abundant vertical panels on syenite rocks. The paintings sometimes occur together with engravings. By contrast, the central eastern area, with its mostly flat quartzite outcrops, displays only engravings. Here, paintings are not present.

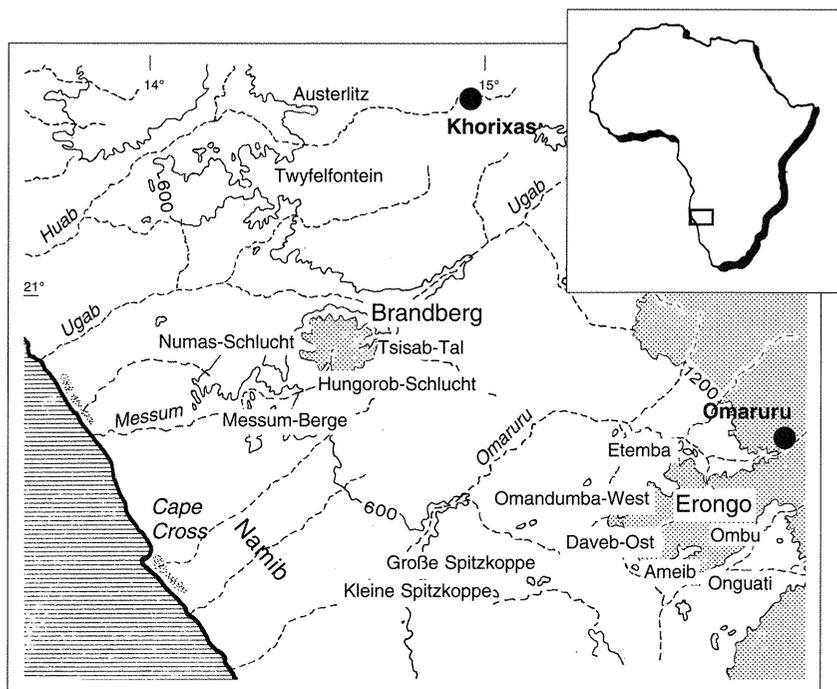


Fig. 2 West central Namibia with the rock art provinces Erongo, Spitzkoppe, Brandberg, Messum mountains and Twyfelfontein.

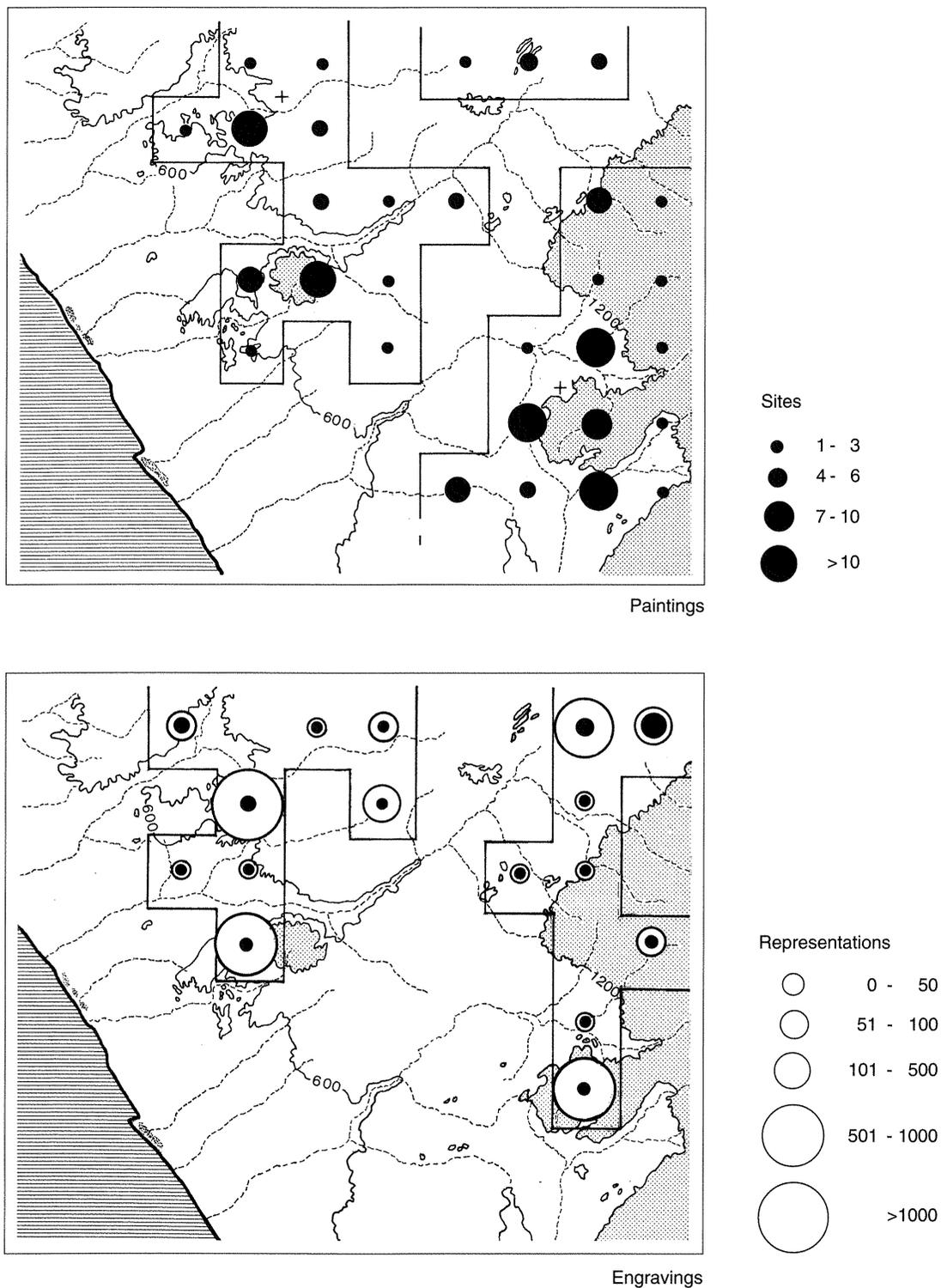


Fig. 3 Distribution of engravings and paintings in west central Namibia. The black symbols show the number of sites within grid squares of 25 x 25 km. Where rock paintings are concerned E.R. Scherz counted a rock shelter or a group of assembled blocks as one single site. However, with engravings he understood a ranch, a farm section or a valley as one site. Therefore the number of individual representations per grid square is additionally indicated (open symbols). The engravings show a stronger spatial concentration than the paintings and are more clearly arranged into a western group and an inland group (counts after SCHERZ 1970. 1975. 1986).

In the central west numerous examples of both kinds are to be found, however, marked distributional differences [Fig. 3] are noticeable: All principal areas of rock paintings are characterized by large clusters of sites. Their distribution denotes centres and peripheries.

All the principal areas of rock engravings do, however, not consist of large numbers of sites, but of only a few sites, some of them with considerable numbers of depictions. The peripheries are less clearly pronounced.

The distance between the inland group of rock art sites and the western group of sites is particularly large if engravings are mapped. The engravings are distinguished by small-scale concentrations of sites – possibly a reference to more continuous settlement of their artists.

Which themes are indicated?

Paintings and engravings differ essentially in terms of their themes [Fig. 4]. Scenic representations are common only to the paintings. These show hunting, dancing, leisure activities, and probably also trance and mythology. Animals often form groups or lines with clear relation to each other. Human figures dominate the paintings, and animal representations are also quite frequent. On the other hand, hand prints, geometrical signs, symbols and other motives are very rare.

Completely different themes prevail among the rock engravings. Animal representations, animal tracks and geometrical signs are equally abundant, but humans, human handprints, footprints and other motives are very rare. Scenes almost never occur. As a rule, the individual representations do not relate to one other.

Which styles, types and modes are to be found?

Since various types of giraffe representations are common to all regions in Namibia where rock art is found, they are a very suitable feature with which one can identify and compare different representation modes [Fig. 5]:

The giraffe figures show that painted animal representations are (with a few exceptions) clear imitations of their living counterparts (representation mode 1). Among such paintings, different styles are obviously present, they differ in their degree of abstractness. There are paintings where specific attributes and characteristics such as details of specific skin patterns (representation mode 1a) are a contrast to more abstract representations (representation mode 1b), where species-related attributes are exaggerated, e.g. the giraffe's oblique body, the embossment between its shoulders and neck, and the long neck itself, and its typical skull shape, with its two horns and two ears designed like an inversed comb.

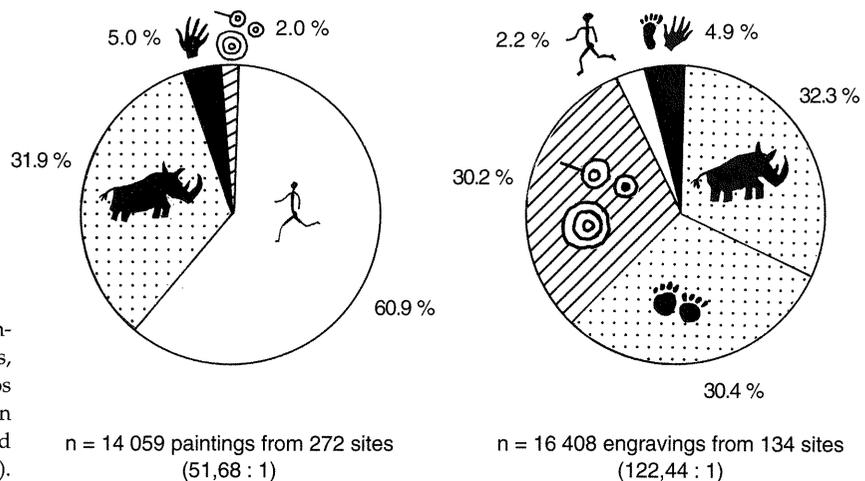


Fig. 4 Themes of Namibian rock art (animals, animal tracks, humans, footprints, handprints, geometrical signs). The ratios of topics are entirely different between engravings and paintings (data compiled after counts by SCHERZ 1970, 1975, 1986).

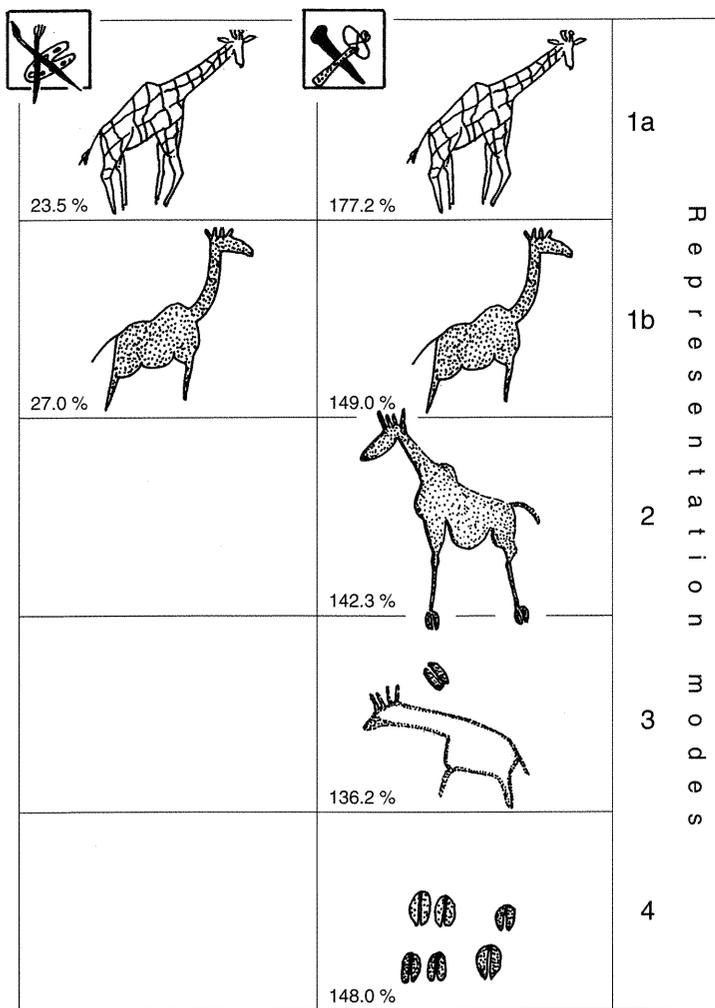


Fig. 5 Representation modes in engravings and paintings of central Namibia. In possible chronological sequence from top to bottom:

- 1 more or less naturalistic animal representations,
- 2 animal representations with linked tracks,
- 3 animal representations with assignable tracks at some distance,
- 4 mere track representations.

Only the succession "mode 4 over mode 1b" is securely proven by superposition. If we accept the spectrum of the representation modes as a chronological development, this would mean that the painting tradition had probably stopped before modes 2-4 became commonly applied. We would therefore have to conclude that the tradition of painting ended considerably earlier than that of engraving.

The representation modes 1a and 1b are also to be found in rock engravings, but here additional modes, either absent or extremely rare in paintings, also occur. These modes conform to special conventions, wherein animal tracks play a major role: Representation mode 2 comprises simplified animal representations (similar to those of representation mode 1b), however, the animal's tracks are linked to the animal's extremities. Representation mode 3 comprises highly simplified animal representations, the tracks are not closely connected to the animal but are indicated at some distance from the animal's body (this mode appears to be very rare). Finally, mode 4 artists have completely omitted the body and make reference to the animal purely by its track or hoofprint.

Is there a chronological style sequence?

The four representation modes can be arranged into a sequence [Fig. 5], beginning with more naturalistic depictions (representation mode 1) and ending with symbolic track representations (representation mode 4). At the site of Twyfontein the mode 4 track representations frequently overlay mode 1b simplified animal representations, mode 4 thus being systematically younger than mode 1b.

Whilst the chronological sequence 1b > 4 is confirmed, the chronological sequence of the remaining representation modes is still purely hypothetical. Using the Montelius principle of type sequences ("Typologische Reihen") representation

mode 2 (tracks linked to animal extremities) is due to the similar way animal bodies are displayed closely related to representation mode 1b. The representation mode 3 with its more abstract animals and disconnected tracks resembles mode 4.

Since paintings are essentially limited to representation mode 1, they might, as a whole, represent a shorter time range than engravings with 4 different representation modes. If this is true, the artists of representation mode 1 both painted and engraved. By contrast, the artists of modes 2-4 were responsible solely for engravings.

The idea that Namibia's prehistoric paintings were produced in a relatively short period is also suggested by chemical investigation of bonding agents (animal blood) used in making the colours. E. Denninger tested their contents of amino acids. Surprisingly, most samples still contained such acids. However, of the 10 amino acids, which fresh blood originally contains, only between one and three kinds were detected. Therefore, the painting tradition did obviously not extend to the recent past. This is confirmed by the fact that no painting activities have been reported from ethnohistoric sources in Namibia. By contrast, compared samples from South Africa contain more amino acids (2-4 amino acids). Some of the samples contained up to 7 amino acids. They obviously date from quite recent times. Again, this matches ethnohistoric sources which report of 19th century painting activities in South Africa (LEWIS-WILLIAMS & DOWSON 1989: 21).

How to date rock art?

While engravings are usually to be found on flat outcrops or on rocky grounds and in no definite relationship to neighbouring settlement remains, the prehistoric paintings, however, are frequently discovered in rock shelters where abundant and more continuous traces of prehistoric occupation can be observed.

Initially, it was hoped to find clues to the age of rock paintings in the archaeological excavation of the occupation layers in the rock shelters. However, neither layers covering paintings nor pieces of mobile art, with designs repeating the paintings on the panels, were ever found. Only after many years, and only once, was a fragment

discovered which had been chipped off a painting (BREUNIG 1989c) and was able to be refitted to the original panel. This was at the Brandberg's Riesenhöhle shelter.

At present, the age of Namibian rock art is therefore based on the general position of rock art sites within the settlement history of Central Namibia.

Excavations, initiated by the Cologne institute, of approximately twenty archaeological sites all over central Namibia (W.E. Wendt, P. Breunig) suggested rock art tradition to be particularly connected to one of six subsequent stages of the Namibian Later Stone Age chronology (LSA phases A - F). The earliest rock paintings date from the stage C (4000 BC - 0 BC/AD) – and within that stage predominantly to its later part (LSA-C2) in the first millennium BC [Fig. 6]. Occupation layers of that specific stage also yielded numerous pigments and a great deal of grinding equipment with adhering pigments thus attesting intensive use of colours.

Most of the Namibian paintings and the corresponding mode 1 engravings must have been completed at this point in time.

The subsequent stage LSA-D (0 - 1000 AD) saw the introduction of domesticated sheep to an economy which remained essentially within a hunter-gatherer system. Likewise, the oldest pottery of the region arises during this phase. Therefore, the few known paintings of fat-tailed sheep must belong to the latest phase of rock painting which dates to the C/D transitional phase.

The modes 2, 3 and 4 engravings might have developed during the stages LSA-D, LSA-E and, possibly, LSA-F. No “neolithic” elements occur with engravings. The representations of animal tracks belonging to the latest style (mode 4) are much more common to the inland group than to the western group [Fig. 7]. This might indicate a shift of settlement emphasis from west to east, towards the more favourable Savannah zone, possibly driven by the slow increase in the pastoral segment of economy. At present, more excavations at open air settlements are needed to test this hypothesis.

The large number of animal track representations particularly distinguishes the central Namibian inland group from the neighbouring regions: In Angola and South Africa track representations are rare.

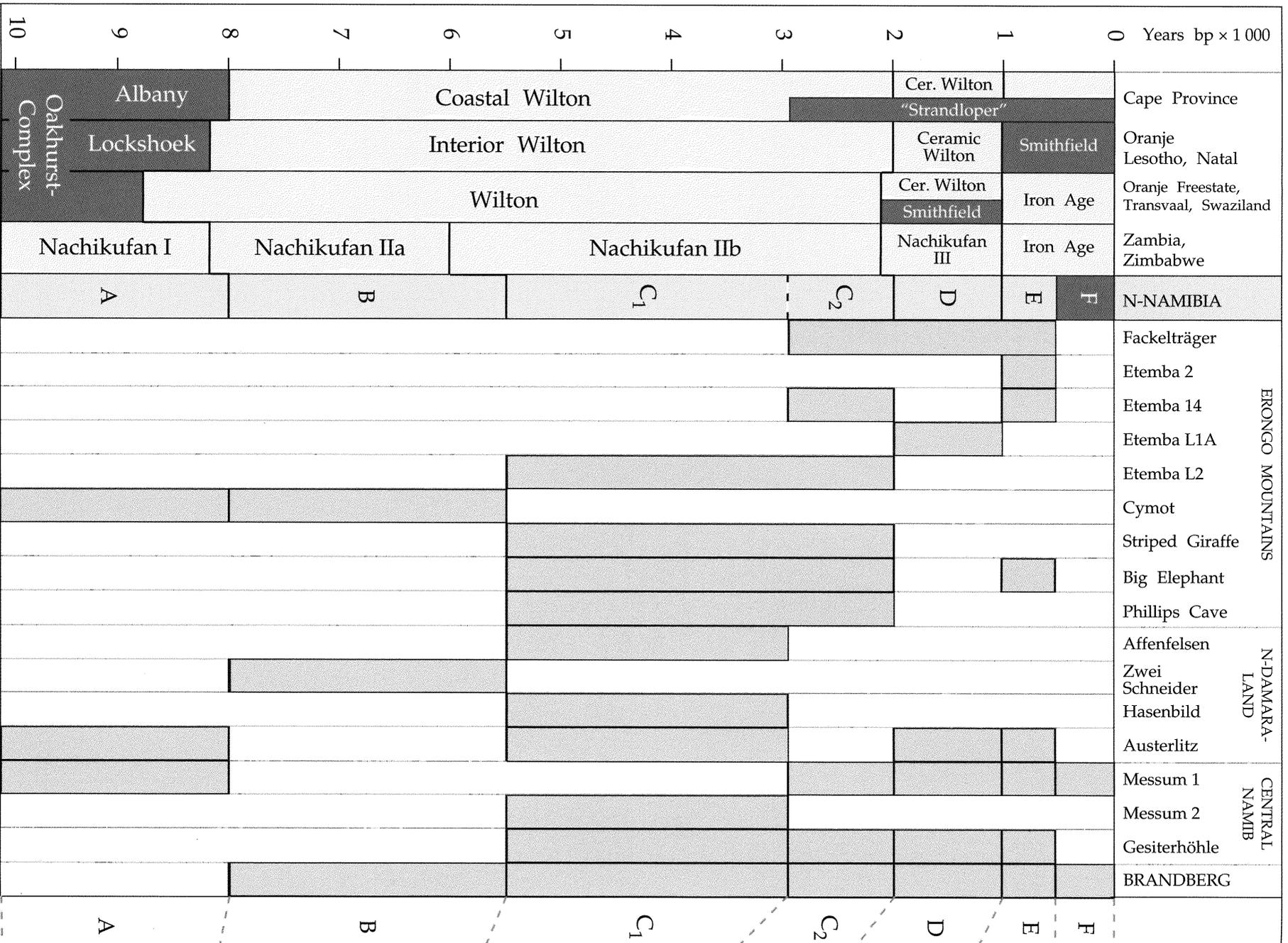
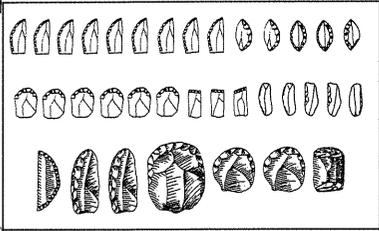
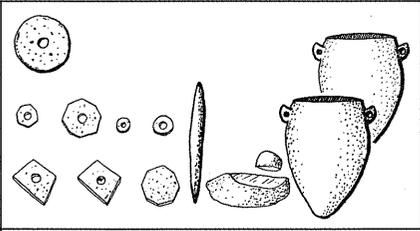
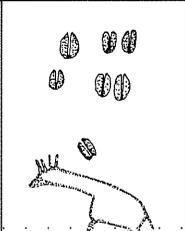
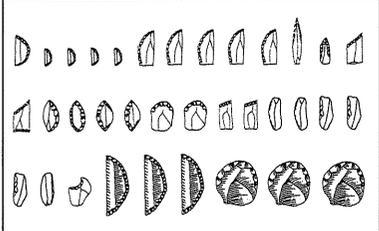
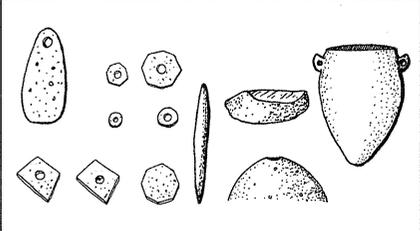
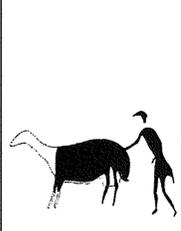
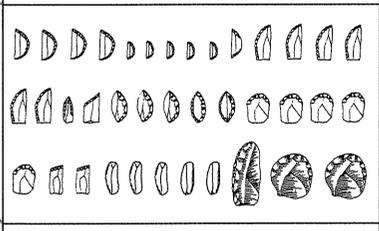
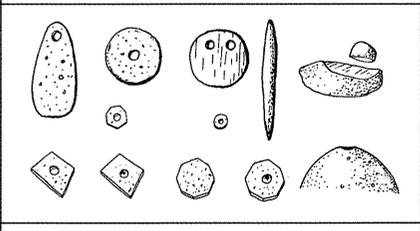
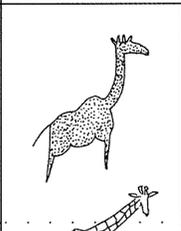
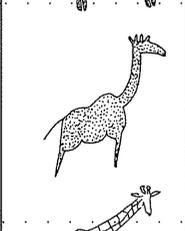
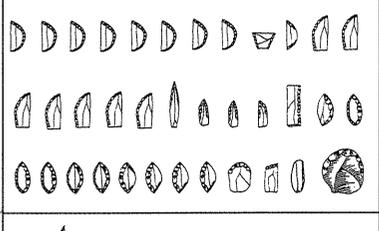
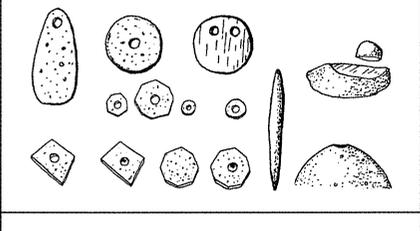
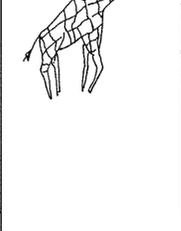
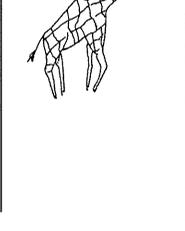
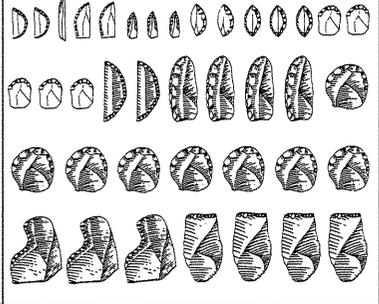
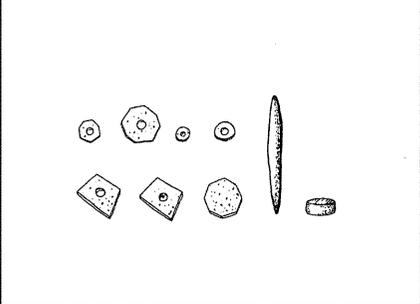
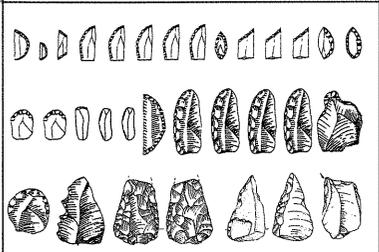
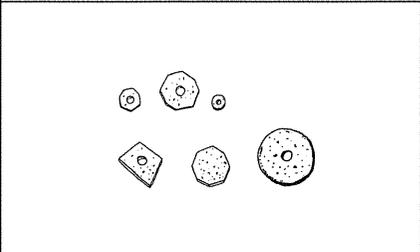


Fig. 6 Overall view of Central Namibia's prehistoric settlements and rock art. The early holocene stages LSA-A and LSA-B are represented at few sites. The numerous inventories of LSA-C are linked, as a rule, with rock paintings. They mark the end of the pure foraging economy in central Namibia. Approximately

□ microlithic
 ■ macrolithic

Stone tools (1 symbol = 2 %)	Ornament made of ostrich eggshell and shale, bone points, ostrich eggshell containers, grinding implements, pottery	Rock paintings	Rock engravings	
"BRANDBERG-KULTUR"				F
				E
				D
				C ₂
				C ₁
				B
				A

2,000 years ago, sheep and first pottery were introduced to the region. Approximately 800 years ago, the rock shelters in the periphery of the Brandberg mountain were mostly abandoned. At the Brandberg itself they were, however, in continuous use. This period is also known as stage LSA-F or "Brandberg-Kultur", studied in detail by Peter Breunig (BREUNIG 1989a, 1989b).

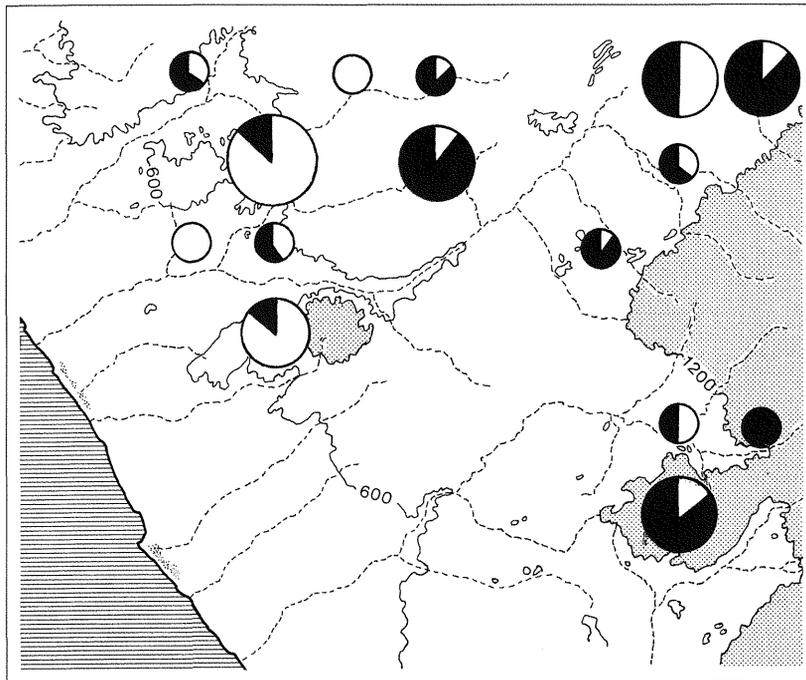


Fig. 7 Engraved animal representations of west central Namibia. The black sectors of the circles show the ratio of the track representations against all animal representations. Track representations arise only rarely in the western group, but frequently in the inland group.

Which way of life and which economy were responsible for the rock pictures?

Occupation layers (see Fig. 6) of the LSA phase C always contain a microlithic stone industry (up to 90 % geometrical microliths), some larger tools (side-scrapers, end-scrapers) and few heavy duty tools. Grinding stones are also common. The bone industry is rich, with various bone points, spatulas and ornaments. Artifacts made from ostrich eggshell (beads, pendants, spoons, water containers) are frequent. Faunal remains are present particularly from antelope. In the mountain regions antelope are less common than smaller animals such as hyrax (dassies). The LSA-C inventories of the phase LSA-C do not show any traces of food production.

Of particular significance is the fact that the many LSA C inventories that have been excavated originate from sites that are spread over three different ecological zones. From west to east this is, firstly, the coastal strip of the Namib Desert (without open water and mostly void of vegetation), secondly, the steppe zone with grass vegetation and, thirdly the inland savanna zone where all-season survival is possible. Archaeologi-

cal mapping of artefact categories can thus give hints on their role within the economic system. As can be expected, most grinding equipment is to be found in the east which therefore indicates activities corresponding the regional vegetation cover (grinding of grass seeds). For example, geometrical microliths (arrowpoints) dominate the desert assemblages. In this area hunting was possible after ephemeral rains. However, in the inland savanna, end-scrapers are more common. The tool diversity of the inventories increases from west to east.

The multiple relations between archaeological findings and landscapes allow for a detailed reconstruction of human land-use in central Namibia during the second and first millennium BC. The individual ecological zones and regions correspond to different functions within the settlement system (see Fig. 2; detailed: RICHTER 1991: 214ff.).

The Erongo area with its thorn shrub and acacia savannas offers a habitable environment all year round. A large number of Erongo sites, of large size and high artefact diversity, reflects the entire activity repertoire of the hunter-gatherer economic system.

The Twyfelfontein area offered a source of water during the dry seasons. The Twyfelfontein artifact spectra reflect hunting activities, meat processing and leatherwork but no processing of plant food. The waterhole at Twyfelfontein is not a "dubious" one as "Twyfel" implies, but a very reliable one which was decorated by thousands of rock engravings and several painted panels. It must have been an important centre of the "social life season" when people gathered around the waterholes.

The Brandberg area served a similar function, since after rainfall it had large amounts of water in the holes of the rocky underground. Such natural basins may contain water for several months. This might well explain the large number of stage C prehistoric settlements on the mountain as well as its richness in rock art. However, in very dry years, survival could become very difficult even for small groups, as Harald Pager and his staff have experienced during their rock art survey campaigns of the mountain.

Man visited the Messum area only rarely to hunt antelope, usually after ephemeral precipitation in March/April. The inventories are highly specialized with hundreds of microliths. The enormous size of some inventories (approximately 50,000 artifacts in Messum 1) might be due to high tool recharge (larger groups, repeated activities, intensive activities) during the hunts. Since water is not available here, long stays are not to be expected. The remainders of many ostrich egg containers indicate that water was brought here from far away.

The annual cycle of humans in central Namibia was determined particularly by the changing vegetation cover and the changing availability of water. The living conditions depended on the intensity of the rainy season which falls in central Namibia during March and April. Before the rainy season (November until March), life was concentrated close to the waterholes ("social life season") and consequently, the mobility was less intensive. In the rainy season, between May and October, water was available in many places and animals were more dispersed. This led to more extensive mobility. People lived in family bands ("private life season"). From time to time, hunting expeditions to the Central Namib Desert were possible, and the Atlantic coast could be reached to harvest Nara plants and seashells.

Compared to the models as outlined above, rock art does by no means just show aspects of daily life: the rock pictures are no mere "reports from the stone age". The paintings rather reflect than describe a society of hunters and gatherers. Women are frequently displayed with digging sticks (indicating gathering activity), the objects of their activity are not mentioned. Men are frequently shown with bow and arrow, and their prey, above all antelope, are abundantly depicted. Nevertheless, giraffe, which is a very common motive to be depicted, was, as faunal assemblages from all central Namibia contest, completely excluded from hunting. It is highly probable that a ban on hunting giraffe protected these animals (RICHTER 1989).

Painting must have played a principal role in the life of prehistoric Namibians for people even painted in places where only short stays were possible such as the Messum mountains in the Central Namib Desert.

Acknowledgement

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