EASTERN AFRICAN ROCK ART

Rock art can be either of two forms: painted or engraved (pecked) figures. In both cases, the "canvas" for the art is a rock surface. Engravings tend to be on boulders whereas paintings are found in a variety of rock shelters, from straight-faced to well-defined overhangs to those providing a cavelike setting. The art itself depicts a range of motifs from anthropomorphic to abstract or geometric. In eastern Africa (Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda), rock art has two loci: around Lake Victoria and the central region of Tanzania (Kondoa and Singida Districts).

Although there has been much interest in rock art worldwide, in eastern Africa the study has not seen the florescence as it has in southern Africa where research units at the Universities of Witwatersrand and Cape Town have provided much of the impetus. This will hopefully change with the East African Rock Art Research Association at the University of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania. The majority of published works date from the 1960s and 1970s, and there is no one standard work for the whole area. Eastern African rock art tends to be identified with Tanzania where a more substantial body of research exists. E. Anati, in 1986, provided one of the most extensive bibliographies for eastern Africa, primarily on Tanzania. Because of J. H. Chaplin's focus on the Lake Victoria region, his bibliography includes references to sites in all three countries. Generally, eastern African rock art is known by the work in Tanzania of Mary and L. S. B. Leakey. In 1983, Mary Leakey produced a well-illustrated book on sites documented in the 1950s in central Tanzania. It is an excellent companion volume to the articles, including one by L. S. B. Leakey, presented in *Tanganyika Rock Paintings: A Guide and Record* edited by H. A. and J. Fosbrooke, L. S. B. Leakey, and P. Ginner in 1950. Both these latter references focus on an area of rock painting at Kolo, north of the town of Kondoa. For those interested in the rock art of central Tanzania, the most current bibliography is Imogene L. Lim's work produced in 1992. Since there is no one comprehensive reference to the rock art of eastern Africa, researchers are advised to peruse the journals *Azania, Tanzania Notes and Records,* and *Uganda Journal.* Some of the earliest works are in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* and *Man.* In addition, scholars who find themselves in these countries should visit the respective national archives. Many of the early colonial administrators and officials provided the first documentation of rock art in their areas. This is the case for A. T. Culwick's 1929 note and another by William Aitken in 1948 in the *Kondoa District Book* on microfilm in the National Archives, Dar Es Salaam.

In any discussion of rock art, the questions of "when," "who," and "why" arise. The answers are neither simple nor easily revealed. In eastern Africa, painted representations are much more common than engraved ones. Unlike the paintings found in southern Africa, they are monochromatic—that is, various hues and values of red, black, and white. Reseachers have classified paintings on the basis of color and style in order to establish relative chronologies. F. T. Masao recently attempted to place the art in a general chronological relationship with other African sites. He did this by correlating known archaeological data with that of the paintings to produce four broad phases:

1. Red conventionalized schematic human figures and naturalistic filled-in animals
2. Naturalistic animals painted in outline with in-filling of various motifs
3. White seminaturalistic silhouettes
4. Abstract and geometric styles

Other researchers have dismissed the use of style in linking the art of sub-Saharan areas. In southern and eastern Africa, the art shows similar categories of subject matter, but as David Lewis-Williams notes, the careful selection of features can show almost any two artistic styles to be similar or dissimilar.

In such stylistic chronologies, there is a tendency toward site-specificity. Their utility is, therefore, limited. The database in eastern Africa is comparatively small, and there are noticeable differences in the rock art from area to area. The chronology established is relative to other sites, so the precise age of any particular site is still

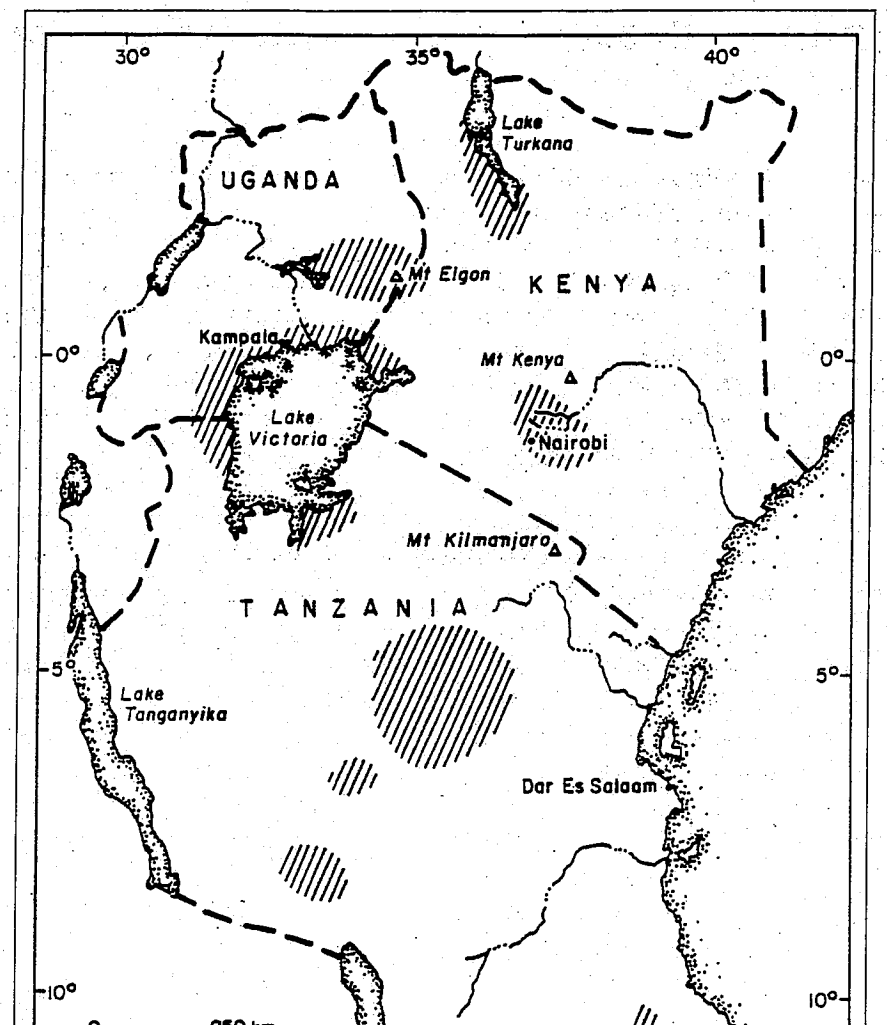

Fig. 42 *Distribution of rock-art sites in eastern Africa*

unknown. The oldest date associated with rock paintings comes from the excavation of Kisese II rock shelter in Tanzania by Ray Inskeep. Ochre pencils were found in deposits dating to 19,000 years ago. Unfortunately, no geophysical nor chemical dating has been done on the paintings themselves, as has been the case in North America, Europe, and Australia. Another issue affecting the devising of relative chronologies is color. Since there are a number of variables (natural and cultural) that affect the paint, judging its "freshness" is difficult. Radiocarbon dating by accelerator mass spectrometry illustrates the fallacy of the assumption that paintings using the same color (and style) are from the same time. This question was discussed by L. Dayton and M. McDonald in 1993.

The dating of engravings is equally difficult. Ascribing age according to the kind of motif depicted is a method used for both engravings and paintings. Anati used this method in his analysis of eastern African rock art. Suggesting that rock art is a reflection of the regional distribution of economies, he describes four horizons that illustrate a chronological succession from the oldest to more recent times: (1) early hunting and gathering, (2) classical and late hunting and gathering, (3) pastoral, and (4) farming and mixed economy. This evolutionary perspective is based on the migration of Bantu, Cushitic, and Nilotic speakers into eastern Africa. In 1982, R. Soper discussed the issue of whether the artists of the engravings found at two sites west of Lake Turkana were Cushitic or Nilotic speakers. Art attributed to pastoralists is based on the identification of motifs associated with meat feasting and cattle brands.

This discussion of dating returns us to a primary question of researchers: who are the artists? It is one that has created much debate. Given the extensive rock-art findings in southern Africa, Anati's characterization of one horizon as hunters and gatherers is well founded. The art in southern Africa has been attributed to the click-speaking San Bushmen. In eastern Africa, there are also extant click-speaking populations: the Hadza of Lake Eyasi and the Sandawe of southwestern

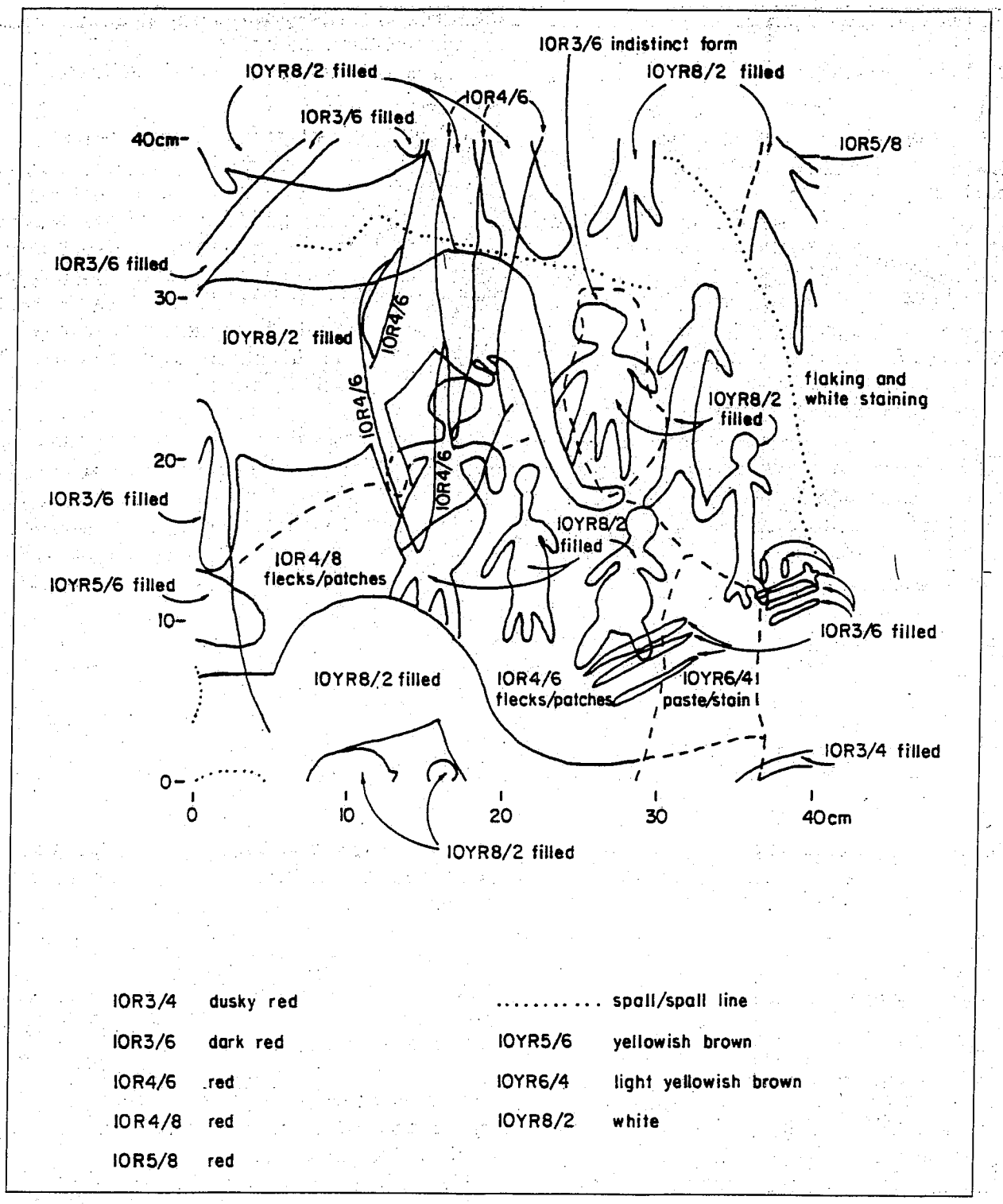

Fig. 43 *Section of painting from Baseto I*

Kondoa District. Both have been identified as sharing linguistic and physical similarities with the San Bushmen. They are also hunter-foragers. Whether there is any historical or cultural relationship between these southern and eastern African populations is unclear, but researchers agree

that the rock art located in the vicinity of both the Hadza and the Sandawe resembles the art of southern Africa more than that of the Sahara.

In exploring the meaning behind the act of painting, some early researchers in Tanzania were progressive in their methodology. In particular, A. T. Culwick, a British colonial administrator, recognized that local peoples might have some knowledge of rock paintings even if they no longer painted. He did what has become common practice—seeking the knowledge of local informants. In this case, he noted their current and prehistoric cultural affiliation. For the latter, he sought out archaeological remains associated with known prehistoric industries. In a 1931 investigation of a site at Bahi, he questioned a local chief about the site's use. The chief provided information on how the current peoples (the Gogo) maintain the site's sacredness by repainting images formerly created by the Wamia. By tracing the genealogy of the Gogo's arrival in Bahi (12 generations), Culwick estimated a minimum age for the paintings. Such use of ethnography did not continue until several decades later.

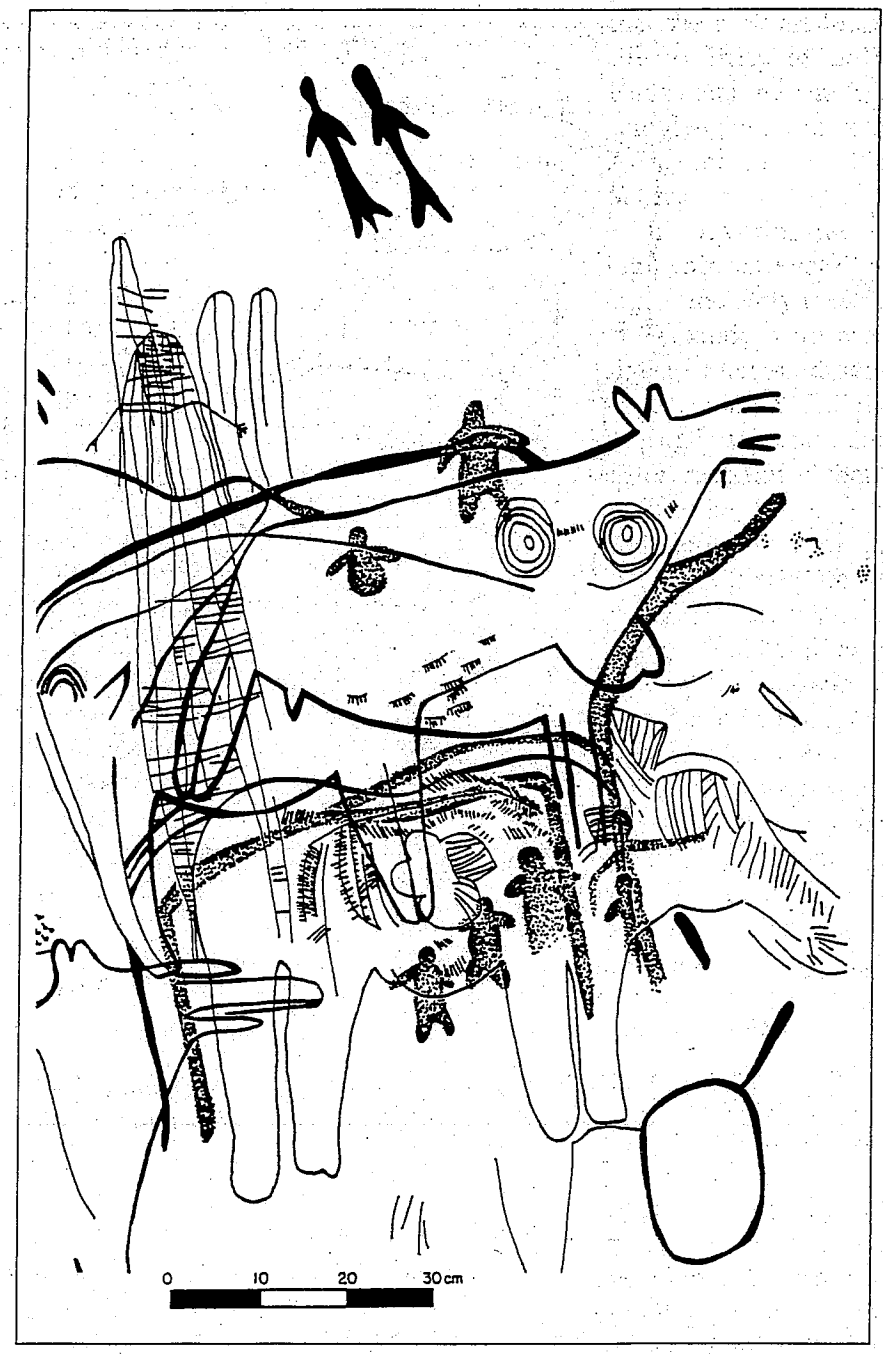

Fig. 44 *Portion of red-colored paintings at Tambase II*

Since much of the early documentation of rock art was conducted in the process of German and British colonization, information accumulated gradually without any specific plan. Only in 1950 was there an effort to consolidate and make accessible this information as in previously mentioned guide produced by the Tanganyika Society. This was the first time that rock-art sites within one area were presented as a cohesive work. It provided the closest approximation of a survey, since all other documented efforts were of sites located in a piecemeal fashion within a larger region. As noted by L. S. B. Leakey, this was the beginning of the study of rock art in Tan-

zania. *The Guide* offered few answers to the "who," "when," and "why" of rock art, but it did provide the best descriptive information then available. H. A. Fosbrooke provided three motives for rock art: paintings as commemorative acts, doodling, and sympathetic magic. The last was interpreted on the basis of figures identified as the object and means of the hunt, followed by anthropomorphs (stylized human shapes) adorned with paraphernalia associated with magic and ritual.

More recent rock-art interpretations are by F. T. Masao, Mary Leakey, and Imogene L. Lim. Except for Lim's work, the interpretations offered are basically identical to those mentioned above. Leakey's perspective, though, is influenced by the work of southern African researchers—that is, she applies ethnographic evidence to her interpretation. Masao, purely speculative on his part, offers one other interpretive possibility for figures that defy description—that they are communicative signs to indicate economic resources. Research in northwestern Spain suggests that this is indeed a plausible explanation, as explained by R. Bradley, F. Criado Boado, and R. Fábregas Valcarce in 1994. Landscape archaeology is another perspective to explore by considering the relationship of rock art to its natural surroundings. The test is to catalog these indeterminate figures to establish their locations and their relationship to sites of economic pursuits. Masao submits that these signs might be band- or tribe-specific. If this is the case, these figures will appear as regional clusters. Research in this direction requires intensive, systematic regional survey and sampling strategies rather than the stumbling upon sites as in the early days.

After a lull of decades in the use of ethnography, Eric Ten Raa once again sought the knowledge of local informants in 1960. In this case,

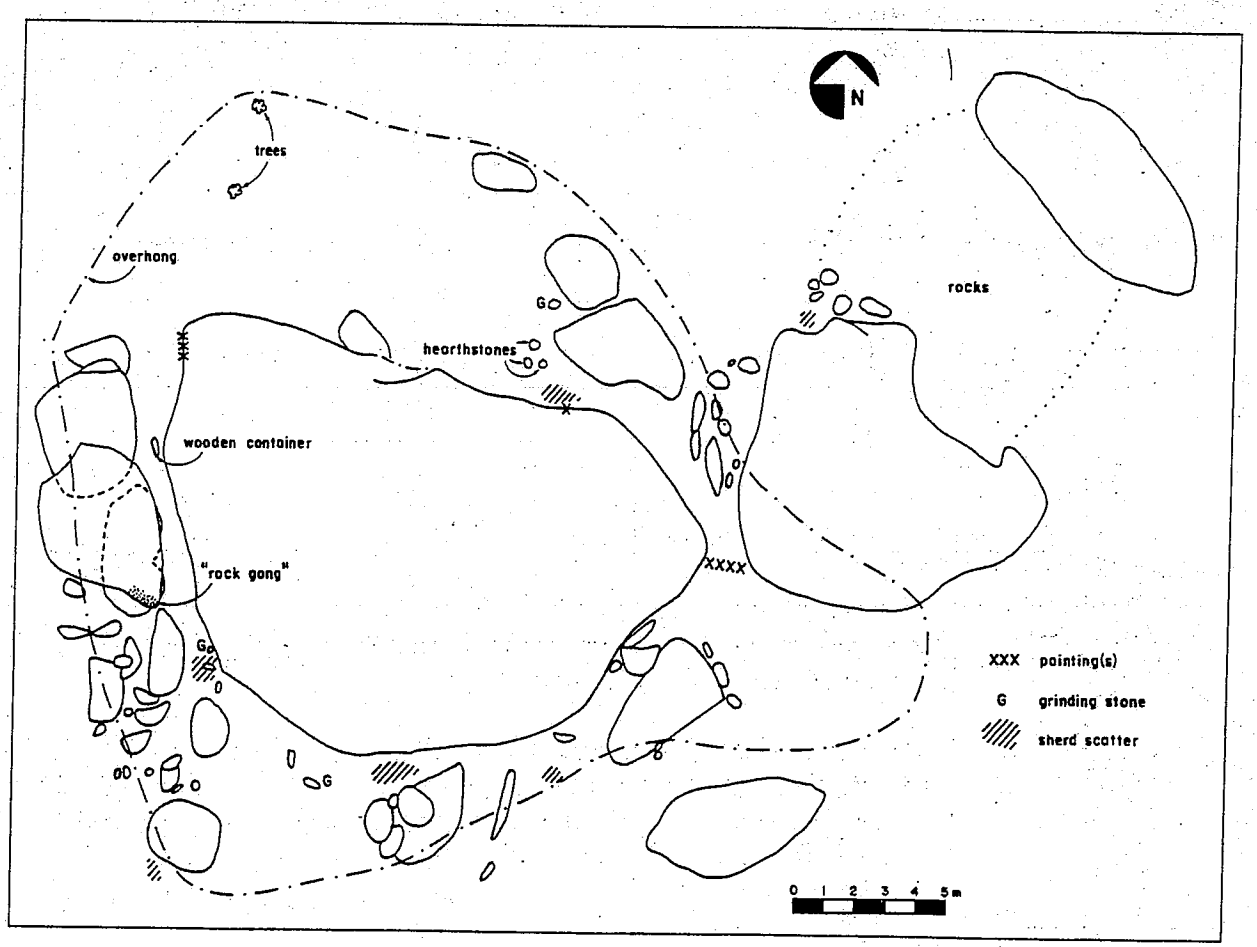

Fig. 45 *Site map of Kimau IA (note the painted areas and the rock gong)*

the Sandawe acknowledged that their ancestors had painted. As a full participant in Sandawe life, Ten Raa witnessed a hunter paint a giraffe on a rock before a group of hunters continued on their trip. The focus of Ten Raa's work was to provide the social context and significance, where possible, of painted sites. He outlined a number of linkages between Sandawe activities and rock-art sites, including hunting and ritual sacrifices (clan spirits and exorcism). For Ten Raa, the essence of rock art was the underlying belief system of the Sandawe. This aspect of his position anticipated that of David Lewis-Williams in southern Africa. Ten Raa also suggested that the art indicated not only multiple motives but possibly multiple uses of sites as well, a position advocated by Lim.

Ten Raa's work is important because through his recording and analysis of Sandawe texts, he demonstrated the historical continuity of the Sandawe to the painters of rock art and the antiquity of the Sandawe in the region. Although he discusses the social context, nothing is mentioned about the context of the physical site or sites that Sandawe use but do not paint.

Lim builds on this foundation of Sandawe ethnography and takes the next step in understanding the rock art by considering the relationship of the paintings to the site and the site within its natural and cultural landscape. She distinguishes two types of paintings: mural and nonmural. The latter is notable for its lack of superposition or overlap. Figures tend to be singular. Mural painting, as the name suggests, is a "canvas" of multiple images overlapping one another. Lim believes the foundation for understanding mural paintings lies in the analysis of ritual behavior, specifically, in *iyari,* the dance of twin births. *Iyari* is one painting tradition still practiced among the Sandawe. It embodies the complexity of meaning found in objects, actions, and the landscape. In Usandawe ("the land of the Sandawe"), meaning and potency of the place is reproduced through ritual—that is, the meaning is in the doing (the process), not in the object (the painted figure). For the Sandawe, rock shelters and baobab trees are metaphors for the "aboriginal womb" where all life, human and animal, was created. These meanings are found in Sandawe cosmology and rain rites. This suggests that further work in Usandawe will reveal more mural-type paintings directly associated with rain sacrifice. Lim believes that nonmural paintings have multiple associations similar to the motives described by earlier researchers.

With Ten Raa's and Lim's work, caution must be taken in drawing comparisons between hunters and gatherers of eastern and southern Africa and the art of these regions. Lewis-Williams undertook one such comparison before Lim's research. If comparisons are to be made, Lim's study should be the focus. Ten Raa's study was a by-product of his research into the oral traditions of the Sandawe, while Lim's investigation concentrated directly on the meaning of rock art. Lewis-Williams selected illustrations from both Mary Leakey's and Ten Raa's work and incorporated Sandawe ethnography to support his perspective of trance and shamanism as the motive behind rock art. The Kondoa paintings studied by Mary Leakey lie outside the modern boundaries of the Sandawe and differ in their depiction of animals and humans. While the Sandawe admit that their ancestors were painters, more importantly, they note that they were but one among many hunter-forager groups in the region. To assume that all hunting and gathering people painted for the same reasons or that the Sandawe occupied the whole of this central region is presumptuous.

Given the earlier discussion of viewing rock-painting sites within their physical context, this article should mention rock gongs. Rock gongs are natural occurrences that produce a metallic sound when struck. Some are so well defined that there are cup marks or indentations where the rock is to be struck. Gongs have been documented at eastern African sites with rock art, as well as in southern Africa and Nigeria. In some cases, they are also associated with rock slides or chutes and are distinguished by their polished or grooved surfaces. The suggestion is that rock paintings, gongs, and slides are parts of a cultural complex. Rock slides are found in the Lake Victoria region, while none is recorded for the central region of Tanzania.

In many respects, the study of rock art in eastern Africa is still in its infancy. The emphasis

here on Tanzanian rock art is indicative of this. In view of the methodologies and analyses touched upon in this essay, eastern Africa is primed to advance the next wave of rock-art research. Ethnographic studies indicate the strength of people's ties to the past and offer new perspectives on the meaning of rock art. As such, rock-art research is a means of exploring the complexity and dynamic nature of human society in eastern Africa.

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Imogene L. Lim

CENTRAL AFRICAN ROCK ART

The rock art in central Africa is not visually spectacular, and given the lack of suitable ethnographies, most early studies were largely descriptive. Various stylistic analyses have been undertaken, but as with many rock-art studies worldwide, these prove to be rather meaningless without an understanding of the social context within which the art was produced and consumed. Recently Peter Garlake has extended and developed the interpretative framework used in southern Africa for the rock paintings of Zimbabwe, and Nic Walker has linked the rock art of the Matopos (southwestern Zimbabwe) to other archaeological results in the region in an attempt to flesh out the social context of rock-painting production. Together these two researchers have moved the study of rock art in central Africa beyond description and misguided notions of style.

The study of rock art in central Africa has been somewhat eclipsed by studies of Saharan and southern African rock art. However, the rock art

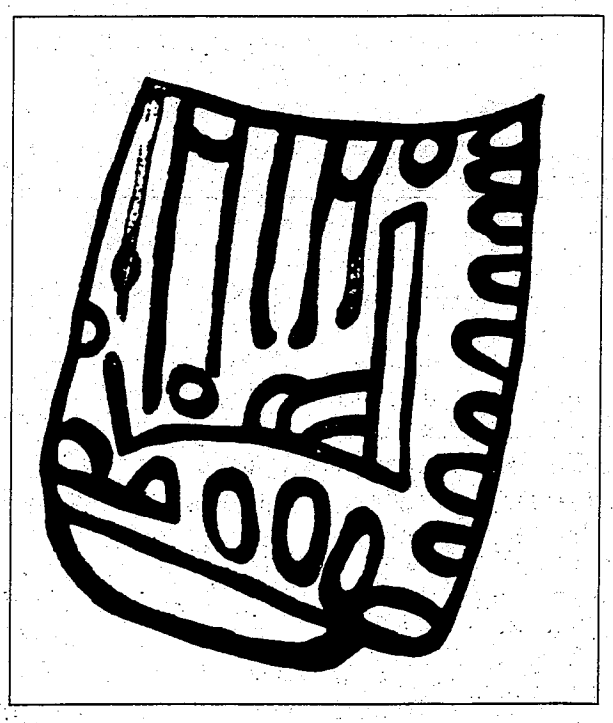

Fig. 46 *Red schematic painting from northern Zambia*