

Report of the International Workshop on Conservation and Documentation of Rock Art in Tanzania, 13–20 January 2002

Introduction

Tanzania claims a sizeable share of Africa's palaeo-rock art heritage. However, the continuity of this ancient symbolic expression bequeathed by our ancestors is jeopardised by deteriorative agents and lack of knowledge. Not only is the nature of the destructive processes unknown, but also knowledge of the whereabouts of the rock art is incomplete. Cognisant of the status quo, the East African Rock Research Association (EARARA), with funds made available predominantly by the Mfuko wa Utamaduni (Tanzania Cultural Trust Fund), organised an eight-day workshop. The workshop featured presentations, visits to rock art sites and practical in-field demonstrations on techniques of recording rock art. Contributions to supplement the grant from Mfuko wa Utamaduni came from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, the Bank of Tanzania and the Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH).

Guest of honour

The opening ceremony was graced by Ms Zakia Meghji MP, the Hon. Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism. In her opening speech, the Minister acknowledged the vision shown by the EARARA in organising the workshop and reaching out to Natural Resources Officers in the regions. She also underscored the much too often forgotten and unexplored touristic potential of the rock art and challenged the stakeholders to work towards changing this status quo. In so doing she did not forget to remind professionals to make sure that the local community inhabiting areas rich in rock art is involved in all programs of conservation and documentation and at all levels, for without this approach, efforts will be met with half-successes. Indeed she challenged EARARA to come up with programs and recommendations for her Ministry to consider. Her speech drew stunning applause when she assured participants that lack of funding should not be an excuse for failing to conceive meaningful and sustainable conservation and documentation programs.

Participants

Contrary to the expectations of the organisers, the workshop was attended by all invitees from Tanzania. These included four representatives from the Ministry of Natural Resources headquarters, one from the Ministry of Education and Culture, four from the University of Dar es Salaam, two from the Open University of Tanzania, one from the Hubert Kairuki Memorial University, three from the National Museums of Tanzania, one from the Commission for Science and Technology, one from Mfuko wa Utamaduni, twenty Regional Natural Resources offices, seven District Cultural officers and two from the EARARA secretariat. Five foreign resource people had been invited from Australia, Portugal, Spain, South Africa and the United States of America, but only the U.S.A. and South Africa were represented. Together with drivers and secretaries, there were forty-eight participants. The organising committee had, on the basis of not receiving a response from the Regional Natural Resources officers (RNRO), budgeted for thirty-five participants. Only eight had confirmed their participation, but on the first day of the workshop, the committee was overwhelmed by all twenty RNROs showing up. It would have been impolite to send them back home since most of them had travelled long distances to get to Arusha. The committee was left with no option except to stretch its meagre resources in order to accommodate everybody. If anything, the attendance shows how interested Tanzanians are in appreciating their heritage.

Papers presented

Altogether eighteen papers covering a range of aspects all related to rock art studies were presented. The keynote address delivered by Professor Jengo underscored various theoretical constructs pertinent to the theme of the workshop. Subsequent papers dwelt on conservation, historical perspective of painting as a humanly innate activity, rock art and religion, the Islamic point of view, new rock art sites and possible connection between medicine men and rock paintings in southern Mbulu, rock art studies and the National curriculum, differences and similarities between pre-Historic and present-day painting, rock art recording in central Tanzania, rock art of the Lake Eyasi basin, recent work on the rock art of Lake Victoria, rock art sites and their other uses, Government policies regarding conservation and documentation of rock art in Tanzania, and the role of the Tanzania Cultural Trust Fund in funding cultural activities. These papers by professionals provoked a lot of interest and discussion, which prepared the participants for the excursions and the field trips that had been planned subsequent to the discussions. The field excursions were followed by day-long recapitulative deliberations on the last day, featuring papers on basic conservation techniques, basic recording techniques, and rock art documentation and conservation in relation with tourism in Tanzania.

Field excursions

Participants visited sites in Ilongero, Mjughuda and Misughaa in Singida and Chiwandi, Pahi, Majilili and Mungumi

in the Kondoa district. For many, it was the first experience with pre-Historic rock art. Having spent as much time at the sites as they wished to satisfy their interest, participants were given practical experience in recording by Jane Kolber from Bisbee, Arizona. Many participated in the exercise and seem to have enjoyed the experience. Problems of conservation were pointed out at every site visited and discussions on how to arrest the problem encouraged.

Resolutions/recommendations

Participants were reminded that the Guest of Honour had requested recommendations from the workshop. They were therefore encouraged to write down their recommendations, which would then be scrutinised by the secretariat and prepared for submission to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism. Participants made recommendations that can be subsumed under eight headings. These are addressed to EARARA, the Antiquities Department, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism:

1. Recommendations about follow up workshops/seminars/conferences
2. Recommendations about the structure of EARARA
3. Recommendations dealing with mass education and awareness
4. Recommendations about the curriculum
5. Recommendations about empowering Regional Natural Resources Officers
6. Recommendations about recording
7. Recommendation about multidisciplinary approach to conservation
8. Recommendations about promotion of tourism

Evaluation

There were a few hitches here and there which could have been avoided. These are discussed below under the following four headings.

Level of participation: invitations had been sent to all twenty Regional Natural Resources Officers (RNROs) in the first week of November 2001, but until the eve of the commencement of the workshop only eight had confirmed participation. Consequently, the organisers had budgeted for thirty-five people, but when the list shot up to forty-eight on account of attendance by the rest of the RNROs it meant, *inter alia*, that resources would fall short and costs would increase. A few people had to wait to get their registration material and the organisers were forced to remove most of the social activities such as the farewell dinner, so that participants could get their per diem. Money ran out and paper presenters were not paid their full honoraria.

Program: the program was a little too ambitious in that there were too many sites to visit, but since most of the participants had not seen the rock art sites, it was thought a worthwhile price to pay to see as many sites as possible. This is something to be borne in mind for future workshops/seminars.

Venue: costs and time could have been reduced if the workshop had been organised in a place like Kondoa and/or Singida, which are close to the rock art sites. This should be kept in mind next time.

Secretariat. The two-person secretariat could not be expected to run the workshop efficiently. As it turned out, they were overworked and could not attend to the needs of the participants adequately.

Despite these shortcomings, the overall objectives of the workshop, i.e. to educate Tanzanians about their rock art heritage and to sensitise them about the conservation threats the heritage is faced with and ways of arresting or minimising the problem were achieved. Some of the participants were seeing the rock art in Singida and Kondoa for the first time. In fact all the RNROs and one district cultural officer from Singida had never seen any rock art sites. As already remarked, the poor state of preservation and the agents responsible (vandalism as well as biophysical agents) were thoroughly discussed during the excursions. In order to minimise the problem, documentation is not an option but mandatory. In addition to documentation efforts, mass education programs aimed at making the community the primary stakeholders have to be generated urgently. Overall the workshop was a great success.

Financial report

Transportation of the workshop participants to the different sites was the most expensive item, taking 90% of the whole budget. Almost all the money for transportation came from Mfuko wa Utamaduni for which the association is very grateful. However, without the Association's own contribution, especially with regards to the sixth vehicle donated by the Chairman, it would have been impossible to transport all the participants. At this juncture it is important to put on record contributions by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, the Bank of Tanzania (BOT) and the Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH).

Follow-up

This was the first ever national and international formal workshop on the conservation and documentation of rock art in Tanzania. Many suggestions were made and recommendations will be submitted to relevant authorities. The proceedings should be published in a format to be decided upon by an editorial board. The society has no resources with which to realise the publication, but it is hoped that the Ministry will find the funds necessary for the publication. To this end, the secretariat is instructed to contact the Ministry about the publication as soon as possible. This workshop

should be followed by three specific seminars/workshops dedicated to documentation and instilling community awareness, especially in the Singida, Kondoa and Mbulu districts. The venue for such workshops should be in the areas with the largest concentration of rock art such as Singida, Kondoa, Mbulu or Mang'ola. If possible one or two foreign resource people should be invited to complement local efforts. EARARA should start planning for these by inviting people to write the proposals. In addition, it is time to start thinking of developing special sites for tourism and multi-disciplinary experimental approach to conservation.

Acknowledgements

As already remarked, this workshop was made possible by a grant from Mfuko wa Utamaduni which paid for over 90% of all the costs arising from the workshop. The Ministry for Natural Resources and Tourism, the Bank of Tanzania and the Commission for Science and Technology also gave small grants, which have helped in offsetting some of the necessary expenses. Aside from the financial resources, without which the workshop could not have been realised, it is fitting to pay tribute to the people who went out of their way to ensure success. Among these is Ms Jane Kolber who used her own resources to travel all the way from the U.S.A. Her contribution in all the sessions was invaluable. Professor Elias Jengo willingly prepared and delivered the keynote address despite short notice. Paper presenters accepted very modest honoraria, while the Secretariat used personal property and other resources towards the cost of the workshop. To all these, the Association would like to record its appreciation and gratitude. We hope they will continue to support this noble cause of caring for our cultural heritage.

Professor Fidelis Masao, EARARA

Open letter to Dr João Zilhão

Director of the Instituto Português de Arqueologia (IPA)

Sir,

Like all others concerned with the study and preservation of rock art, I am appalled by the recent developments in the Guadiana valley of southern Portugal. The Alqueva dam was, I believe, first mooted in 1952, and impact studies in the valley began about 1985. Two years after the 1995 defeat of the Côa dam proposal by IFRAO, your government decided to create Europe's largest man-made lake in the Guadiana valley. As Director of IPA you are ultimately responsible for the fate of Portuguese rock art, and you oversee the work of CNART, the National Centre of Rock Art. Indeed, both organisations were established specifically as a result of the Côa debacle (in which you were involved, and your decision to scrub the Côa petroglyphs with wooden tools and chemicals was already severely criticised in 1996), and to avoid a repetition of such unfortunate developments. Your brief as the most senior archaeologist of your country was clear enough.

As you said yourself, 'when history repeats itself, the first time it's a tragedy, the second time it's a comedy'. But what happened in the Guadiana valley under your jurisdiction is not a comedy, it is an unbelievable tragedy. Even after the painful experience on the Côa, you still allowed the Alqueva dam to proceed without any attempt to check the valley for rock art. You had a large team of archaeologists, a hundred people in your own words, conducting surveys and salvage work in the valley for many years. We are told that they did not find the rock art in all these years, and you yourself claimed publicly that this must have been because the sites were covered by river sand. But, Sir, we are talking about more than 600 sites, one of the largest concentrations of rock art in Europe! Are you saying that for sixteen years, these 600 sites were covered by sand, and in 2001 they were all miraculously uncovered? It was an environmentalist NGO called Liga para a Protecção da Natureza who blew the whistle in April 2001, after receiving an anonymous tip-off that there was a vast corpus of rock art in the valley.

There are two basic differences between the Côa and the Guadiana. First, the latter's rock art body is many times the size of the Côa rock art, and therefore more important to preserve. Yet you, as the country's senior administrator protecting its rock art, have publicly stated that the Guadiana rock art is not worthy of preservation. Second, while we were able to stop the Côa dam after 'only' a hundred million dollars had been spent on dam construction, the much larger Alqueva dam was completed after the rock art was announced, and is now operational. It seems to me that we have two possible outcomes now: either the project is abandoned at a horrendous cost to your country, which means that someone has to accept responsibility for the waste of billions of dollars because IPA and CNART failed in their duties. Alternatively, the dam will be filled and the rock art buried, first under water, then under billions of tonnes of silt and gravel. Someone then has to accept responsibility for the destruction of Portugal's greatest rock art complex. Who, in your opinion, should accept this responsibility? Perhaps António Carlos Silva, who worked under your supervision and has resigned already? Or perhaps the former Minister for Culture, your previous superior who was removed from office a few weeks after the Guadiana rock art was announced? Or perhaps the Director of CNART, Antonio Martinho Baptista, should be the sacrificial lamb?

I think not. Executive responsibility rests squarely with you, Sir, and the honourable thing to do is to accept that you have well and truly failed. Moreover, there is another reason why you need to resign: for the sake of Portuguese archaeology. Ever since you rose to prominence in 1995, through the Côa controversy which you so skilfully used for your own advancement, you have left a trail of bitterness. Your style of academic debate, on so many occasions, has

been a low point in Portuguese archaeology. The personal abuse that you have heaped on every scholar who dared to disagree with you is only exceeded by your vilification of any organisation that dared to question you. When the UISPP, on whose Permanent Council you held a position for many years, wanted to conduct a fact-finding mission in the Guadiana valley, you resigned in disgust and published an angry diatribe against its commission, accusing it of incompetence. Your use of the term 'incompetence' also defines how you feel about any colleague who disagrees with you academically. Consider for instance these extracts from your published response to Professors Tattersall and Swartz, when you discuss their views of the Lagar Velho skeletal remains:

Their paper is replete with mis-information, mis-use of cladistic and anatomical terminology, mis-quotes, mis-representations, poor logic, general incompetence ... which reveal primarily their ignorance ... nothing in this abysmal piece of scholarship serves to refute our basic premise ... is an inappropriate, inaccurate, and unethical critique of our article ... their attempt at refutation of the admixture hypothesis is pitiful ... a serious breach of scientific etiquette ... they are simply ignorant ... they are intellectually dishonest. Any combination of these interpretations reflects a fundamental incompetence and an attitude which have no place in scientific discourse on human evolution.

There is nothing unusual about this characterisation of the work of two debate opponents (who, one needs to consider, are among the world's foremost scholars in their field) by you, the same vocabulary can be found in any published debate you participated in. This is why you are now finding yourself in court with various colleagues accusing you of defamation, and why Portuguese embassies and your government have been bombarded with letters of complaint about your conduct.

IFRAO has long been a prime target of your ire, and in 1998 you publicly described this organisation as 'a bunch of loonies'. We wear the label as a compliment, finding ourselves in distinguished company. As a matter of fact, some of us now sign ourselves as 'your fellow loony', so this is not an issue we are concerned about. What does concern us is the effect of your conduct on Portuguese archaeology: how can your discipline be taken serious if it is presided over by a man of your standards?

Sir, for the sake of Portuguese archaeology, and particularly for the sake of your country's rock art, please make room for someone more suitable for the high office you hold.

Respectfully,
Robert G. Bednarik
President of IFRAO

Program of the EIP Project

The current program of the Early Indian Petroglyphs (EIP, see *RAR* 18: 138-40) Project envisages the following progress in this IFRAO project:

Phase 1: Preparatory work — April 2001 to March 2002 (successfully completed)

Phase 2: Major fieldwork A includes excavations and scientific investigations at

Auditorium Cave — commenced March 2002

Daraki-Chattan — commencing 22 May 2002

Bajanibhat (Alwar) — commencing 5 June 2002

Cupule rocks 1 and 2 (Ajmer) — commencing 10 June 2002

Phase 3: Major fieldwork B includes dating and other scientific investigations of petroglyph pictogram sites — 22 September to 20 October 2002

Phase 4: Analytical studies and submission of reports to project directors — November 2002 to June 2003

Phase 5: Preparation of final report by the project directors — July 2003 to November 2003

Phase 6: Publication of the results of the EIP Project — December 2003 to March 2004.

Giriraj Kumar and R. G. Bednarik

EIP Project Directors

Guadiana update

The Alqueva dam on the Guadiana river in southern Portugal was completed early in 2002, shortly before the defeat of the Portuguese government that had opposed IFRAO's proposals concerning the Guadiana rock art. The Minister of Culture responsible for the Guadiana furore was sacked a few weeks after an environmentalist NGO called Liga para a Protecção da Natureza announced the existence of the rock art in late April 2001. António Carlos Silva, the archaeologist in charge of the failed archaeological survey of the Guadiana valley resigned in March 2002. On 6 May 2002, the newly elected government, after consultation with independent archaeologists and IFRAO, announced the

closure of the Instituto Português de Arqueologia (IPA). Its Director, Dr João Zilhão, immediately resigned after reading in a newspaper that his position no longer existed. The government also mentioned the imminent closure of another agency, declining to name it for the time being. This ends for Portuguese archaeology a short period of six years that was marked by state-sanctioned rock art vandalism, academic xenophobia and obsessive research activities focused essentially on curtailing the influence of science in Portuguese archaeology.

The future of the more than 600 rock art sites on the Guadiana still hangs in the balance, however, and this corpus can only be saved by a miracle now. IFRAO has consistently demanded that if the rock art is doomed to destruction, then it must at least be recorded by the best available methodology (see *AURA Newsletter* 18/1: 7–8). The filling of the reservoir must be deferred until this survey is completed to a standard that satisfies the requirements of independent NGOs, especially UISPP and IFRAO. Ed.