

histories of communities whose record she wants to save from loss, unaltered and undistorted.

In spite of these few lapses, *On the Frontline* is an important contribution to the study of the Church and its involvement in the war of liberation in Zimbabwe. This book is a most useful resource for all who are interested in studying the role of the Church in the armed struggle in Zimbabwe.

University of Zimbabwe

PAUL GUNDANI

The Painted Hills: Rock Art of the Matopos By Nick Walker. Gweru, Mambo Press, 1996, 102pp., ISBN 0-86922-638-X.

The prehistoric rock art of Zimbabwe, particularly that found in the Matopos Hills in Matabeleland, has been the focus of both academic and public interest since the early part of this century. Much has been written on it with writers covering such aspects of the art as its authorship, dating, meaning and significance. However, many of the published works on the Matopos art were published over 30 years ago (eg Cooke, 1959) at a time when rock art studies were at a very elementary stage in Zimbabwe and not as many sites had been documented. Interpretation, dating and general understanding of this heritage from the past were very simplistic and in some cases much influenced by the colonial background of the writers. Some of the art was for example attributed to exotic populations (eg Breuil, 1955). Those who saw it as indigenous interpreted it as 'art for art's sake' and therefore of no major significance to the painters (Cooke, 1959). Others, who saw a deeper meaning to it, associated it with hunting magic (Burkitt, 1928).

Drawing from his long experience working on the Stone Age archaeology of Matabeleland, as well as from the developments in rock art studies in southern Africa pioneered in South Africa by such leading scholars as Lewis Williams, Nick Walker, in *The Painted Hills*, provides the most comprehensive and most up to date coverage of the Matopos rock art. The book is divided into nine sections (which are not numbered) in which Walker brings together discussion of most of the questions both members of the public and academic researchers have always asked about this art — By whom, when, why, and how were the paintings executed? Using archaeological evidence from his own, and other researchers' excavations and cross-referencing with work from other parts of Zimbabwe and southern Africa, Walker convincingly demonstrates that most of the Matopos art dates from 9 000 years ago and continues up to after 1 500 years ago. Several thousands of years before and during this period, 9 000 to 1 500 years ago, the Matopos Hills, in common with the

rest of the sub-region, was the home of Late Stone Age hunter-gatherer communities. The art was thus the product of these populations before the arrival of iron-using farmers around 1 500 years ago. These Late Stone Age communities are generally agreed to be the ancestors of groups of contemporary hunter-gatherer people still found in parts of southern Africa, including south-western Zimbabwe. Using a combination of a study of the subjects, themes and content of the art and ethnographic data gathered from historical and contemporary hunter-gatherers in the region, whom he refers to as Bushfolk as opposed to the popular but derogatory name Bushmen, Walker is able to depart from the traditional superficial interpretations of the Matopos art. He of course draws substantially from the ethnographic and quantitative approaches pioneered by Lewis Williams (1981) and Patricia Vinnicombe (1976) and taken up in Zimbabwe by Peter Garlake (1987a; 1987b; 1995). Using these approaches, Walker argues that the consistency with which some subjects occur in the art, the context of the paintings and other considerations clearly show that most of the art had social and economic significance to the Late Stone Age populations. Some of it is linked with rain-making rituals while some is associated with the trance experiences of the shamans in the society. Walker dwells at some length on the importance of the trance model to the Matopos art and provides many examples to illustrate its relevance. He rightly cautions, however, that there are several paintings to which this model cannot be applied. Ultimately, the art is argued to have occupied a central position in the social organisation as well as resource utilisation of the people. In this sense, he concludes that we can rightly see the art as magico-religious.

The Painted Hills, in common with most publications of this nature (eg Garlake, 1995) is lavishly illustrated with good quality photographs and tracings of the Matopos art. This gives the reader good supporting evidence of the issues that are central to the subject of the book. Walker also includes a clear map which shows how to get to some of the more interesting sites. At the end of the book, Walker provides tables of useful statistical analyses of different aspects of the art, including the techniques used, colour combinations (monochrome, bichrome and polychrome paintings), animal, human and artifact representations. The book also provides an extremely useful glossary of technical jargon as well as a comprehensive list of references thoughtfully divided into specific aspects of rock art studies in the region. However, the arrangement of the illustrations is somewhat confusing. There does not appear to be a systematic arrangement of the numerous illustrations. This makes it difficult to relate the illustration numbers provided in the margins of the text to the actual illustration.

The Painted Hills is a very welcome contribution to previous writings on the rock art of Zimbabwe, very nicely complementing another recent

work on this subject, Garlake's (1987a) *The Painted Caves*. That the two books have similar titles should not confuse the reader, as Garlake's book is on the rock art of Mashonaland. Although Walker's book may at the beginning sound like a standard visitors' guide because it starts off with a list of sites to visit, it goes well beyond the normal guide book and offers important academic insights into the subject of rock art. It therefore should be important for both the ordinary visitor to rock art sites in the Matopos and the serious researcher into this rich area of our distant past.

References

- BREUIL, H. (1955) *The White Lady of Brandberg: Rock Paintings of Southern Africa* (London, Trianon).
- BURKITT, M. (1928) *South Africa's Past in Stone and Paint* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- COOKE, C. (1955) 'Rock art of Matebeleland', in R. Summers (ed.), *Prehistoric Rock Art of The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (Salisbury, National Publications Trust, 112-62).
- GARLAKE, P. (1987a) *The Painted Caves* (Harare, Modus).
- GARLAKE, P. (1987b) 'Themes in the prehistoric art of Zimbabwe' *World Archaeology*, XIX, (ii), 178-82.
- GARLAKE, P. (1995) *The Hunter's Vision: Prehistoric Art of Zimbabwe* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House).
- LEWIS-WILLIAMS, J. D. (1981) *Believing and Seeing* (London, Academic Press).
- VINNICOMBE, P. (1976) *People of the Eland* (Pietermaritzburg, Natal University Press).

University of Zimbabwe

GILBERT PWITI