

On the hoof

As a boy growing up in Texas I always looked forward to the arrival of the annual rodeo and livestock show, not just for the circus-like excitement of something out of the ordinary but also for the chance to admire the cattle and other carefully groomed animals on display. Don't get me wrong, I wasn't a hick from the sticks, but you don't need straw in your teeth to appreciate a well tended side of beef on the hoof. Those proud owners displaying their living wares were often teenagers not much older than myself who had invested so much time and emotional energy in their animals. Why weren't they doing the more normal adolescent things, such as chafing against the yoke of parental authority? I never really thought to question why these kids were different, but I just know that I still enjoy a good agricultural show which features livestock. Taking pride in what you produce, whether an ear of corn or Holstein heifer, seems a natural extension of the effort invested in life's essentials and, from the critical eye of costly signalling theory, a way of showing off your credentials as a potential provider and mate. Maybe those teenage cowhands weren't wasting their precious youth after all.

The element of display combined with practicalities of managing and sharing livestock has been discussed previously in *Before Farming* in the context of the arrival of sheep in southern Africa 2000 years ago, before other forms of food production (see Sadr 2004/3 article 2 & Smith 2005/1 article 2). Paths of discussion weave around issues of demic diffusion versus down-the-line exchange, feasting as competitive display or bonding rite, and the ideological challenge of livestock ownership on social mechanisms for maintaining equality. These discussions are ongoing and two papers in this issue contribute to the material evidence for the process of social change linked to acquisition of livestock by hunter-gatherers in South Africa. Pieter Jolly integrates imagery of cattle from later Bushman rock art with historical, archaeological and ethnographic observations of interaction between hunter-gatherers and cattle-breeders. He proposes a gradient of acculturation, evident in the rock art, of increasing ideological integration of hunter-gatherers into the beliefs and rituals associated with neighbouring pastoralists. The transition to pastoralism, which Jolly argues was widespread among hunter-gatherers in southern and eastern Africa, also involved an exchange of beliefs with elements of shamanism persisting in the later, essentially pastoralist rock art. Rock art provides fertile ground for contested interpretations and I'm sure that Jolly's elegant argument will generate a fruitful response. We will carry this debate forward in coming issues of *Before Farming* as it transcends the boundaries between anthropology and archaeology.

The archaeological signatures of pastoral communities are often difficult to distinguish from those of hunter-gatherers in the same landscape given they share a strategy of mobility, leaving few diagnostic traces. The once assumed association of pottery with agropastoralists no longer holds in South Africa, as hunter-gatherers in Lesotho and the Northern Cape in particular are now known to have used pottery. The odd scrap of domesticated animal bone in an assemblage isn't enough either to attach a socio-economic label, especially during periods of social and economic transition. Isabelle Parsons steps into this methodological muddle with a fine-grained analysis of five archaeological assemblages from the Northern Cape where two largely lithic-based industries have been identified as the products of separate communities of hunter-gatherers (Swartkop) and herders (Doomfontein). For those anthropologists interested in the region, these industries are arguably physical legacies of the historic /Xam and Khoekhoen respectively. Parson takes a critical look at these linkages and in doing so draws attention to the inevitable frustrations that bedevil those who play the game of ethnographic snap with the archaeological record.

In an earlier editorial I had called a halt to the circular and overly personal debate on the recognition and interpretation of shamanism in rock art. That ban still applies. Ben Watson neatly sidesteps the prohibition by looking at dreams as an additional source of imagery in other states of altered consciousness, such as – but not exclusively - shamanic trance. This isn't a diatribe for or against the role of shamans in the production of rock art,

but a consideration of dream related imagery in the production of art among hunter-gatherer societies, particularly in North America and Australia. Sleep rather than trance may be a neglected source of conceptual inspiration. Patterns and images 'seen' in dreams and during the transition from sleep to wakefulness may contribute to some of the geometric imagery attributed to early stages of trance states. The methodological challenge, of course, lies in attributing images to their contextual origins and this has been a source of considerable contention. Watson suggests a line of research in which cross cultural analyses identify a core of 'universal dreams' and these could be used to assess the content of prehistoric imagery irrespective of the cultural context of its production. Dream derived imagery may be part of shamanic art, but not all hunter-gatherer imagery need be shamanic. I have a nightmarish feeling that this paper will stir some not-so-dormant demons.

From dreams to death. Leore Grossman and Natalie Munro look in detail at the archaeological deposits in a small cave in the western Galilee of Israel where Natufian hunter-gatherers both buried their dead and seemingly carried on with life as normal. The range of stone tools found in the cave is interpreted as evidence of routine activities linked to making and maintaining tools for hunting, butchery, and harvesting wild grasses. They are the kinds of tools found in Natufian living sites elsewhere. The faunal remains reflect a diet dominated by gazelle and tortoise, a pattern also seen at Natufian camps. But the fauna shows an intriguing pattern of remains associated with the human burials with cattle preferentially found in the burials. What makes these more than just accidental infilling of graves with rubbish or leftovers is the rarity of cattle bones outside the burial pits, the cutmark evidence of human consumption (perhaps linked to feasts), and the inclusion of complete (uneaten?) tortoises within some graves. The coexistence of the sacred with the mundane may seem odd to those of us living in societies which physically separate the dead from the living, and conceptually separate culture from nature. I suspect the Natufians would find our treatment of the dead equally odd if not disrespectful, but when it comes to a reverence for cattle we're on common ground.

The Editor

Liverpool, March 2008