

Rock Art and the National Curriculum in Tanzania

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Abstract

Tanzania is among those countries in the world blessed with rich rock art sites with extraordinary prehistoric rock art creations. Dodoma, Singida, and Bukoba are presently the best-known places with the highest concentrations of these precious creative works of Tanzania's long gone ancestors. Research on the history and cultural relevance of Tanzania's rock art has been ongoing since the 1920s. Despite such research undertakings and frequent visits to the sites by foreign tourists, it is surprising that very few Tanzanians even know of the existence of such rock art sites. Rock art does not have a place in the curricular of Tanzania's institutions of learning, and hence its history and its present cultural relevance are not taught in schools and colleges. This article questions this situation, and goes on to suggest possible ways of making this art heritage be known and valued by Tanzanians and the world at large. It suggests the introduction of comprehensive rock art curricular in Tanzania's institutions of learning to enable meaningful teaching and learning of the various disciplines that are related to rock art. It concludes by recommending ways through which the general Tanzanian public can be introduced and informed of the presence and social, economic, and cultural importance of their country's vast rock art sites and incredible art treasures.

1. Introduction

The ancestral inhabitants of Tanzania, many of whom lived more than 40,000 years ago, were great creative thinkers. A trace of their creative thinking and immaculate practical rendering is still evidenced in rock art compositions that are found in many parts of Tanzania. Despite the presence of such precious inherited treasures, very few Tanzanians are aware of their existence or have ever visited and seen them. These rock art sites and their incredible creative masterpieces receive minimal promotions for both local and external tourism. This article advocates and stresses the urgent need for serious study, and promotion of these priceless ancestral treasures. It suggests methods through which rock art and their sites can receive meaningful and effective study together with aggressive local tourist promotion. Serious study of rock art and their sites in schools and colleges will promoter their value in society, and hence underline the reasons for their protection and preservation. Promoted tourism will as well help in raising the needed funds for conservation for the benefit of future generations worldwide.

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2. Overview of the Problem

The human being is created to be creative. And through such endless creative involvement this being struggles to tame the environment for a safe and meaningful leaving. In the process of this relentless struggle for a meaningful living, human beings find the aspirations, inspirations, and reasons for meaningful artistic rendering.

The pre-historic inhabitants of Tanzania developed complex means, manner, and style to paint and in rare cases engrave pictures on rather very hostile surfaces of rocks (Anati, 1986; Masao, 1982). These rock art works which age several millennia, still survive to the present date, proving the intelligence and artistic mighty of their creators. Trust for African Art (2005:7) relates: "The rock art of Tanzania is more extensive than that of any other East African country and second only on the continent to the prehistoric art of the Sahara and of Southern Africa." In Tanzania, rock art was apparently first seen and reported by Europeans about 110 years ago. Anati (1986) reports "The earliest European to have reported Tanzanian rock art appears to have been Karl Peters about one century ago (1891)." However, Cole (1963) relates that Europeans first saw Tanzanian rock paintings at an earlier date: "One of the first discoveries of rock paintings in Tanganyika was made by missionaries in 1908 near Bukoba" (Cole, 1963). Of these earliest documentations, the most significant was that made by Bagshawe in 1923 when he first reported of the Kolo rock paintings near Kondoa, and those of Kangeju Bushment, west of lake Eyasi. Cole adds that other earliest documentations of rock art sites in Tanzania were those near Dodoma by Culwick in 1931.

From the time of these early studies, Tanzanian rock art has attracted many researchers who have come out with significant information. To date, around 370 rock art sites have been identified (Anati 1986). Some of the notable researchers who have contributed towards the analysis and promotion of Tanzanian rock art are Arundell, (1936), Bower (1973), Chaplin (1974), Collison (1970), Fasbrooke (1950), and Kohl-Larsen (1938). Other researchers include Leakey (1936; 1950), Fozzard (1959), Odner (1971), Boas (1955), and Masao (1974; 1982).

Reading through these studies on Tanzanian rock art one is amazed to note how intelligent and creative these pre-historic people were! The drawings and photographs of rock artworks vividly portray the dynamics of the day-to-day lives of these ancestors. The precise depiction of human beings and animals such as elands, elephants, giraffe, rhinoceros, lions, and cheetah help us to visualize the type of environment these people lived in, and struggled against. As Kofi Annan once remarked, "The rock art of Africa makes up one of the oldest and most extensive records on earth of human thought. It shows the very emergence of human

imagination" (Annan, 2005: 3). These artworks harbour a lot of history and cultural information that is yet to be deeply tapped, studied and understood. Among the very fascinating creative achievements of these Stone Age ancestors is the so-called 'Abduction scene' found at Mungoni wa Kolo, near Kondoa (Cole, 1963). Mungoni wa Kolo is among many of Kondoa Rock art sites in Dodoma region that on the 13th of July, 2006 were added to the UNESCO's world heritage list of cultural sites (Magola, 2006). Fosbrooke (1980: 5-10) describe the abduction scene as:

One interesting scene in which masks are conspicuous ... shows a central female figure with bare head and breast and wearing a loin cloth is grasped by the arms and being pulled in two directions, on one side by two masked figures, on the other by two figures with one mask.

....
This could indeed be a forcible abduction or might depict a marriage by capture scene, such as practiced ritualistically by some people today.

As it can be noted, Fosbrooke's interpretation of the scene is essentially centred on speculation. Any other person looking at the scene could still present a differing reading. For instance, looking at the artwork, one can see two unmasked males, possibly relatives of the girl at the centre who is being grabbed and pulled away (by her hand) from two masked aliens. The two masked aliens, standing on the opposite side are pulling the same girl (at the centre) by her other hand. The interpretation could be that the two masked men appear to have the desire of raping the girl, as they seem to already have their phallics erect and ready for the act. The aliens conceal their identities purposely by the use of masks. On the other hand, the same scene could be read as portraying a ritual display during an adulthood initiation ceremony. This could be so, since in many African cultures masks are usually used in ritual and initiation dance ceremonies.

Interpretations of artworks are always bound to differ. And this is especially so when they lack significant backing of historical cultural knowledge. Much more extensive research is called for so as to come much closer to any meaningful understanding of pre-historic rock art. Studies that can help to establish the social, economic, and cultural links between the drawings, paintings, and engravings on rock surfaces and the type of life the Stone Age people lived is essential. But these links are very difficult to establish in the absence of intensive research undertakings.

As such, this calls for research that can carefully combine scientific studies of rock shelter excavations; interpretations of mythologies, legends, norms, and values of past and present rock site community cultures; together with an in-depth artistic eye analysis of the artworks. Cole (1964: 225) stresses that "Only systematic excavation of the hundreds of rock shelters where paintings have been found will enable the art to be linked with cultures." Masao (1982; 32) also acknowledges the incompleteness of

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rock art interpretations in the absence of substantial cultural based data. Hence what is known about Tanzanian rock art is neither enough nor conclusive. The knowledge so far gained through laborious work of past researchers is important for paving the way for more culturally grounded studies. Anati (1986: 17) emphasizes the essence for continued in-depth research by contending:

The data acquired through rock art must be integrated into a general cultural frame and compared with other information provided by the material culture, i.e. linguistics, ethnology, and other disciplines.

The urgency for a more comprehensive rock art research in Tanzania, and Africa at large, requires the devotion and intellectual ability of the present and future societies. But then how do this intellect, devotion, and appreciation for rock art come about? How do people become conscious of the existence of such a precious human heritage? This adherence to the study, understanding, and preservation of rock art cannot come on its own. Tanzanians need to be well informed of the presence and value of this precious gift from their long gone ancestors. The majority of Tanzanians of today know very little, if any, about rock art. Many people, especially those living outside regions with rock art sites, do not even have a slight clue of the existence of such heritage. In such circumstances, how can someone love and appreciate something that s/he does not know?

Some researchers have rightly come to the point of saying that this art has not even been well-valued by the Tanzanians themselves! Writing on this, Anati (1986: 24) comments:

The rock art in central Tanzania has not yet been fully discovered. Only now are we beginning to grasp its significance in relation to world history and to the world's cultural heritage. It is still almost ignored in the general history of Africa. Often it is seen as an undateable 'curiosity' by old fashioned archaeologist and until recently was considered unimportant by most Tanzanians themselves.

Tanzanians, therefore, need to be introduced to comprehensive study of rock art. A curriculum that positively instigates and opens people's minds towards appreciating and learning about rock art is long overdue in Tanzania. Here, the term curriculum is used to refer to the systematic design of specified courses of study leading to the meaningful teaching and learning of rock art, including its social economic and cultural history and related research.

3. The need for meaningful rock art education

As already noted, Tanzanians need to be suitably educated concerning prehistoric rock art and other activities that went along with it. This education requires to be based on a well-designed curricular which provide the teaching and learning experiences that are suitable for all-round scholarship on prehistoric Stone Age

cultures. To date, rock art education is not provided in schools. Going through the syllabi of subjects taught in primary, secondary and high schools—including key subjects like history and fine art—no trace of rock art education appears to be offered. For example, the history curricula for primary, secondary, and high schools teach about stone age cultures while systematically excluding the study of rock art. On old, middle and late Stone Age cultures, secondary and high school history courses only cover the making and use of stone tools, traditional means of lighting fire, and other activities that went along with hunting and gathering. Rock art is not even mentioned (TIE, 1996).

The other area of study that would, without doubt, offer rock art education is art and art history. But, likewise, this course (in primary, secondary, and high school) is completed without even a slight acknowledgement of pre-historic rock art. The Fine Art syllabus for secondary schools have several clear objectives, including that which states that students, at the end of the course, should be able to "... recognize the artistic heritage of Tanzania and to promote it because of its cultural importance" (TIE, 1996). But how can this cultural objective be achieved without the study of historical art works like rock art? Even the teaching and learning strategies of art and art history for both secondary and high schools do not emphasize the essence for students' and teachers' educational visits (whenever possible) to rock art sites. The proposed places to visit are "... like museums, curators, archives, memorials and folk artists" (TIE, 1996: 32).

It seems, with reference to the above, rock art does not, as yet, qualify as an important national heritage to be promoted and extensively studied in schools. However, this cannot stand as a fair conclusive statement. Rock art is important for Tanzania's history and cultural heritage. The history of Tanzania cannot be complete without comprehensively including the study of prehistoric human activities. Excluding rock art studies in schools creates an unbridgeable educational gap.

3. What needs to be done?

3.1 Hints on Curriculum Design

As for now, Tanzania needs to make deliberate efforts to design curricula that will include serious rock art studies. Rock art education needs to start right from primary school level, where students will be introduced to the prehistoric Stone Age creative venture. At primary and secondary school level, rock art can be taught alongside history and fine art subjects. This subject can be introduced in the teaching (where possible) with the aid of both audio and video presentations. Photographs and drawings from rock art sites should also be used to reinforce understanding. At all levels of education students require to be given an overview

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of what is seen in Tanzania's rock art sites. Whenever possible deliberate efforts have to be made for students and teachers to visit these sites and have the opportunity to see, touch, and sense the feeling of the surroundings and rock textures over which these artworks were executed. Additionally, teachers assigned to teach this area of study should be provided with adequate sources of material and information on rock art. Relevant books, pamphlets and flip charts need to be prepared specially for specific educational levels. Special seminars and workshops should also be planned for teachers so as to occasionally update them on specific issues. Without provision of suitable teaching and learning materials and strategies, this ambitious objective could simply turn into a wishful thinking.

To enable meaningful teaching and learning at lower levels of education, teachers' colleges and universities in Tanzania should make substantial coverage when teaching rock art. Meaningful teaching and learning of rock art at college and university levels will enable graduating teachers to teach the subject with confidence and pride. To reinforce university and college teaching and learning of rock art, efforts should also be made for respective students and teachers to visit the sites. This will enable the graduates to know, appreciate, and talk convincingly about rock art. Comprehensive education, supported by well-planned visits to rock art sites could also inspire some of the graduating students to think of undertaking careers in rock art research, conservation, and documentation in the future.

3.2 Research and Information Dissemination

Institutions such as the National Museums of Tanzania and the Department of Antiquities in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, universities and research organizations – such as the East African Rock Art Research Association – have to make their rock art research findings well known both within and without the country. In Tanzania, apart from academic presentations, research findings have to be communicated to other institutions of learning such as schools and colleges so that this vital information is put into use – especially in educating the younger generation. This is the information that will be included in books, pamphlets, charts, and other materials designed specifically for teaching and learning of rock art and Stone Age cultural history. Research findings written in understandable, non-academic language, should as well be conveyed to the Tanzanian public through the media and other possible means.

But, then, how do we get this meaningful rock art information in the absence of extensive and serious research? Rock art research need to be fully supported and undertaken by researchers who are dedicated to putting into life a world heritage that is almost unknown to Tanzanians, and which could be near to extinction without proper care.

3.3 *The Media and Public Education*

Formal education and research deliberations alone cannot fully inform all Tanzanians about the existence and importance of rock art as an indispensable national heritage. Other sectors of information delivery need to be fully involved as well. The media such as radio, television, newspapers, audio and video presentations, and public talks should be encouraged to offer information concerning pre-historic cultures; with due emphasis on rock art and other related social, economic, and cultural activities. Media coverage like this will bring rock art information to many people—especially to the ordinary people who are now not in school, and who would not even have the chance to visit rock art sites. Similar television coverage is nowadays done on other cultural issues. Examples of this coverage are the Toyota World of Wildlife, and travel coverage of information on tourists and historical sites both within and outside Tanzania. Rock art education and promotion could be given a similar treatment.

4. *Concluding remarks*

Comprehensive education on rock art in schools, colleges, universities, and to the public at large will enlighten and sensitize people towards taking keen interest and responsibility in the preservation of these rare creations of prehistoric Stone Age cultures. Tanzanians need to be made to know, appreciate, and value what they ought to take care of and preserve for present and future generations. Rock art is a priceless treasure and it is irreplaceable. The Swahili saying that "someone who doesn't know you won't value you" rightly explains the fate of rock art in Tanzania. In the absence of public knowledge and keen interest on rock art, this human heritage is bound to perish in the near future. But if this indispensable national gift from our prehistoric ancestors is well-kept and preserved, all Tanzanians and the world at large stand to gain. The rock art sites will be there for present and future generations to experience the intellectual ability of prehistoric Stone Age people. If rock art sites are well-kept, they will have a longer life, a thing that will allow for more culturally based scientific research—research that could bring scientists closer to meaningfully uncover and explain the social economic and cultural lives lived by these prehistoric ancestors.

More importantly, it is the Tanzanians themselves who can make rock art attract more tourists so as to generate added national income earnings that will in turn help to preserve the artworks themselves. It is the actual state of well-kept and preserved rock art, its sites and the entire surroundings that will sell this national heritage within and outside Tanzania. For promotional purposes, Tanzanians require to understand well about rock art and its sites so as to be able to talk about it with confidence and dignity to the outside world. Proper and meaningful knowledge on rock art will help Tanzanians know more about their history and help them to believe more in themselves, and realize that they too have much to contribute towards the making of world history.

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