



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### **Book review: Patricia Vinnicombe 'People of the Eland: rock paintings of the Drakensberg Bushmen as a reflection of their life and thought,' and Benjamin Smith (eds), 'The Eland's People: new perspectives in the rock art of the Maloti-Drakensberg Bushmen. Essays in memory of Patricia Vinnicombe.'**

#### **Citation for published version:**

Barnard, A 2010, 'Book review: Patricia Vinnicombe 'People of the Eland: rock paintings of the Drakensberg Bushmen as a reflection of their life and thought,' and Benjamin Smith (eds), 'The Eland's People: new perspectives in the rock art of the Maloti-Drakensberg Bushmen. Essays in memory of Patricia Vinnicombe.', *Africa*, vol. 80, no. 4, pp. 663-664. <https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2010.0407>

#### **Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.3366/afr.2010.0407](https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2010.0407)

#### **Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

#### **Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

#### **Published In:**

Africa

#### **Publisher Rights Statement:**

© Cambridge University Press. Barnard, A. (2010). Book review: Patricia Vinnicombe 'People of the Eland: rock paintings of the Drakensberg Bushmen as a reflection of their life and thought'. *Africa*, 80(4), 663-664

#### **General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

#### **Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



# Africa

<http://journals.cambridge.org/AFR>

Additional services for **Africa**:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

**Patricia Vinnicombe, *People of the Eland: rock paintings of the Drakensberg Bushmen as a reflection of their life and thought*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press (pb R650, \ \$80–978 1 86814 497 6). 2009, 384 pp.** Peter Mitchell and Benjamin Smith (eds), ***The Eland's People: new perspectives in the rock art of the Maloti-Drakensberg Bushmen. Essays in memory of Patricia Vinnicombe***. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press (pb R400, \ \$60 – 978 1 86814 498 3). 2009, 216 pp.

Alan Barnard

Africa / Volume 80 / Issue 04 / November 2010, pp 663 - 664  
DOI: 10.3366/afr.2010.0407, Published online: 15 March 2011

Link to this article: [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0001972000095292](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0001972000095292)

## How to cite this article:

Alan Barnard (2010). Review of Patricia Vinnicombe 'People of the Eland: rock paintings of the Drakensberg Bushmen as a reflection of their life and thought' Africa, 80, pp 663-664 doi:10.3366/afr.2010.0407

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

## REVIEWS OF BOOKS

PATRICIA VINNICOMBE, *People of the Eland: rock paintings of the Drakensberg Bushmen as a reflection of their life and thought*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press (pb R650, \$80–978 1 86814 497 6). 2009, 384 pp.

PETER MITCHELL and BENJAMIN SMITH (eds), *The Eland's People: new perspectives in the rock art of the Maloti-Drakensberg Bushmen. Essays in memory of Patricia Vinnicombe*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press (pb R400, \$60 – 978 1 86814 498 3). 2009, 216 pp.

Pat Vinnicombe's *People of the Eland* was one of the rarest of many rare and expensive books on southern African rock art. First published in 1976, it was issued in only 1,000 numbered copies. By the early 2000s, even students at the Rock Art Research Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand were forbidden access, because it was deemed too rare for students to examine. The original plates had been lost, so it was impossible to reprint it. Vinnicombe began to explore the possibility of a new edition in 2002, but sadly she died in 2003, before she could start work on the project. Finally, the book has been reissued, with new pagination, new formatting, and new colour reproductions of the rock art and other photographic material. Vinnicombe's text remains the same, but the companion volume edited by Peter Mitchell and Ben Smith fills in with extra material and especially the fresh interpretations of Maloti-Drakensberg rock art that have emerged since the 1970s.

Not only was *People of the Eland* one of the rarest of books on rock art, it was also one of the most influential. One way it became influential was in its attempt to relate rock art to narrative, including both historical accounts from the nineteenth century, when artists were painting scenes of cattle and of conquest, and mythological accounts. The latter were mainly from the myths of the Xam Bushmen of the Northern Cape, whose folklore was wonderfully recorded by Wilhelm Bleek in the early 1870s and by his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd in the 1870s and 1880s. Another way Vinnicombe's book was influential was in its use of statistical analysis. It may seem obvious today, but the Bushman painters of the past were not merely recording what they saw. Otherwise, they would have been painting small antelope in proliferation, or lots of ordinary activities like food gathering, fire tending and so on. What is actually depicted in rock art to a much greater extent is the symbolically and ritually important eland, as well as ritual activity itself. Eland account for 43 per cent of the paintings, while smaller antelope account for only 18 percent. Although Vinnicombe had published on this before 1976, her book-length treatment brought her argument to a culmination and with superb illustration, both textual and visual. *People of the Eland* and Vinnicombe's earlier writings paved the way for subsequent work by David Lewis-Williams and others that focuses on relations between myth, ritual and art. It was among the first publications to argue that Bushmen do not particularly paint what they eat, and it did so with spectacular illustrations, supportive statistics and sound reasoning. What is more, Vinnicombe managed to move well beyond both the statistics and description of images and techniques to give her account vibrancy, with allusions to comparative ethnographic, historical and mythological material, as well as comments on anthropological theory and previous works on rock art. It is wonderful to have it available once again, so well produced and at an affordable price.

*The Eland's People* is equally splendid in its own way. There are ten chapters. The first, by the editors, presents an introduction to the volume, and the

second, by David Lewis-Williams, a memoir of Vinnicombe's life. The third, by Lynn Meskell, offers an interpretation of *People of the Eland* and rock art more generally in social context. For me, Chapter 4 is the most interesting. In it Nessa Leibhammer explores the phenomenological differences between rock art copies and the originals. Like other chapters in the book, this one is well illustrated, as indeed it needs to be. Photography is not neutral, and certainly tracing and re-drawing re-create and embellish elements of rock art in quite different ways. Leibhammer analyses three different copies of the 'White Lady of the Brandberg', as well as famous renderings of other rock art by Joseph Orpen, Walter Battiss and Vinnicombe herself. All of these add or subtract something, and graphic conventions have their own relations to original works, to viewers' interpretations, and to each other. In another interesting paper, David Pearce, Catherine Namono and Lara Mallen look at changes in the interpretation of rock art. They argue that because Vinnicombe was innovative in different if interrelated ways, her contribution is less clearly definable than that of others such as David Lewis-Williams or Harald Pager. Aron Mazel looks at the advances in dating methods of Maloti-Drakensberg rock art over the last 30 years, which of course has implications for the reinterpretation of styles and phases in the art. Peter Mitchell gives an archaeological overview of the area from the time of Pat Vinnicombe's work with her husband Pat Carter (in the 1960s and 1970s) to the present. Gavin Whitelaw examines Nguni interactions with San. Chapter 9 consists of a note by Vinnicombe herself (supplemented by Mitchell's notes), on Sotho oral history about the Maloti Bushmen. The final chapter, by David Whitley, offers a 'rereading' of *People of the Eland*. It focuses on themes such as the tension between quantification and interpretation in Vinnicombe's work, and the relation between the history of the Bushmen, or San, as Whitley prefers, and the chronology of their art. Apart from the main text, there are extended information boxes, sometimes running to several pages and with references, within each chapter. For example, Box 3, within Meskell's chapter but written by Shiona Moodley, looks at the political context of rock art: South Africa's coat of arms (designed in the year 2000) depicts the relation between individual and society and humanity itself through a re-drawn piece of rock art.

It is difficult to find fault with either volume, except that the table of contents of *The Eland's People* incorrectly attributes Chapter 2 to Peter Mitchell and Ben Smith. It is in fact written by David Lewis-Williams. Both books are splendidly produced and copiously illustrated. *The Eland's People* has a good balance of essays, with good coverage of relevant topics and with both senior scholars and newcomers to the field. It makes a great supplement to Vinnicombe's classic study.

ALAN BARNARD

University of Edinburgh

DOI: 10.3366/E0001972010000938

JEAN-LÖIC LE QUELLEC, FRANÇOIS-XAVIER FAUVELLE-AYMAR and FRANÇOIS BON, *Vols de Vaches à Christol Cave: histoire critique d'une image rupestre d'Afrique du Sud*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne (pb €30 – 978 2 85944 633 8). 2009, 176 pp.

The last decade has seen renewed interest in the early history of Southern African rock art research. The book under review takes this trajectory a