

7. Panoply of Life: Birds and Bags



The images on this heli suggest a panoply of life – antelope, fish (and fishing) the fruits of the trees, the paths along which all walk (and which divide and unite the landscape) birds, and bags. The emphasis is on the birds and the bags.

In communities where there are few things owned, the collecting bag is the central possession of the women and, in the early days, of |kaggen whose bag not only responded to his call but had the power of movement. Bags appear in many rock paintings, apparently hanging in shelters above family groups, suggesting home and hearth and an image of community. Bags were not just leather goods, they were the “children of the hartebeest” or of the springbok -- the fashioning of leather into bag was a process in which the relationship between animal and object was retained and to some extent maintained for the life of the bag. Similarly the arrows that were carried in men’s bags or the quivers made from branches, still maintained their connection to the living tree.

Bags were used for collecting things of various kinds, for storing things and, in historical times for keeping tobacco. In the Bleek and Lloyd archive there is a poem composed by ||kabbo, composed in 1878, after a dog called ‘Blom’ stole his tobacco bag in the night:

*Tobacco-hunger is that which is here
Tobacco-hunger is that which is here
Tobacco-hunger is here
Tobacco-hunger is that which is here
Tobacco-hunger is that which is here
Tobacco-hunger is here
Famine it is,
Famine it is,
Famine is here.
Famine it is,
Famine it is,
Famine is here.*

