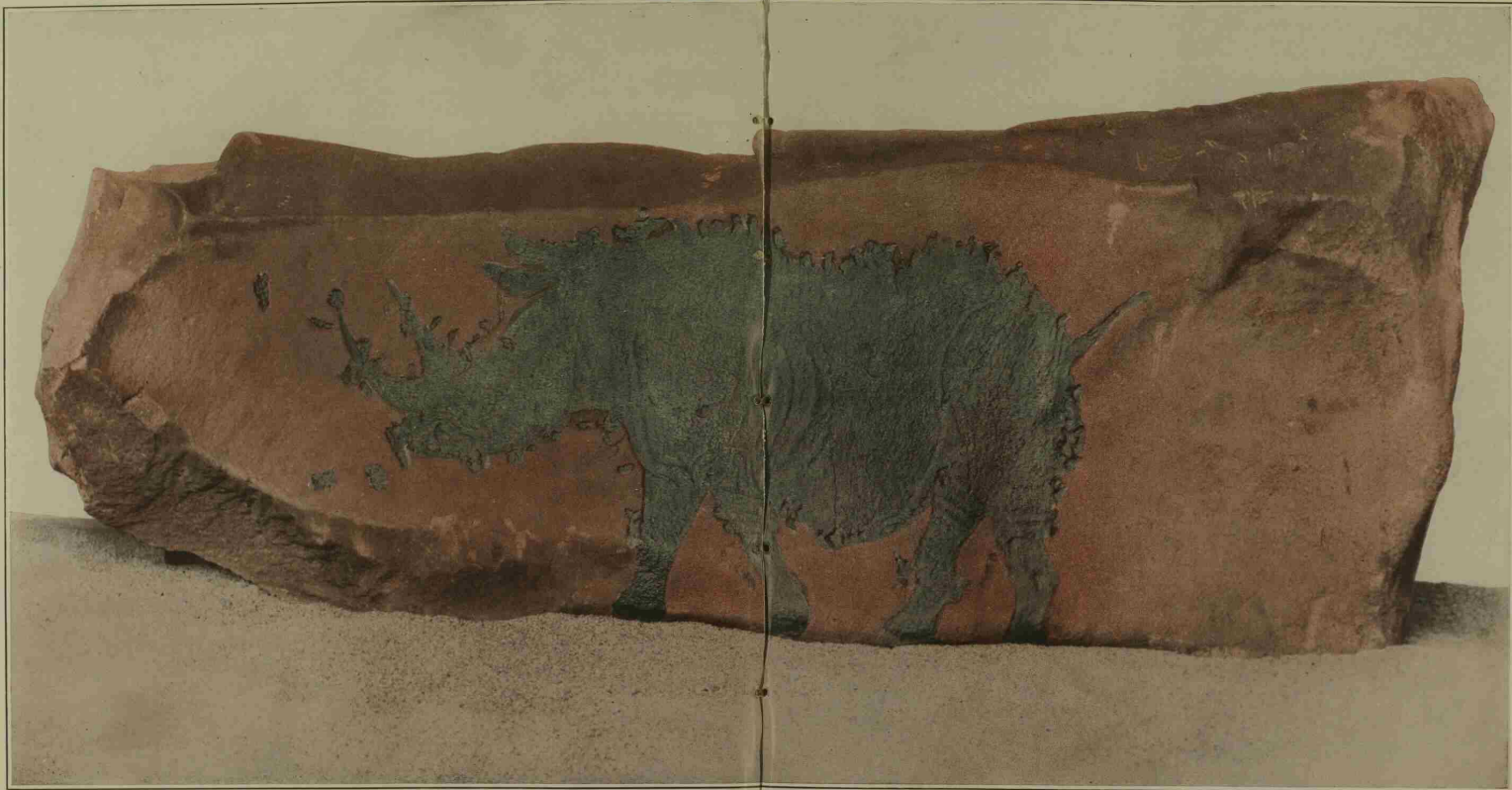


In the Actual Colours of the Natural Brownish Rock and its Slate-Blue Interior: A Prehistoric Masterpiece.



"AN OUTSTANDING MONUMENT IN THE HISTORY OF SCULPTURE"—HAMMERED INTO A SLAB OF BASALTIC ROCK: THE WORLD-FAMOUS SOUTH AFRICAN BAS-RELIEF OF A WHITE RHINOCEROS, WITH A SWARM OF ATTENDANT TICK-BIRDS, FASHIONED, MORE PROBABLY 50,000 THAN 25,000 YEARS AGO, BY A SCULPTOR OF THE STONE AGE.

Our readers will remember the double-page reproduction (in black-and-white) of the above petroglyph of a white rhinoceros given in our issue of July 14, 1928. This unique relic, on exhibition at the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria, has, ever since we first published the photograph, aroused an unusual but well-deserved interest. A view of the complete monument and other fine illustrations from the former art centre of these remarkable Neanthropic craftsmen in the Western Transvaal have now reached us. An excellent opportunity for comparison of the natural animal with this most ancient of sculptures was offered by the splendid photograph of a live rhinoceros, taken, west of the Nile, by Mr. P. C. R. Selous, which appeared in our number for November 17 last. We are glad to be the first to cite Mr. Herbert Lang's more extensive notes on this great work of prehistoric art. "The present picture (the writer) represents the top slice of a rock several tons in weight; this slab measures 47 inches in length, while the rhinoceros, from tip of tail to foremost edge of horn, is 24½ inches long, and at the withers, 12 inches. During the many thousands of years since its completion, sand had covered the secret hammered upon its surface. An exceptional rainstorm caused a heavy wash-out in the depression where an age-old game trail passed between two kopjes. After the tempest, Mr. F. O. Moome, of the Transvaal Museum staff, happened to notice traces of sculpture upon a newly exposed boulder in a horizontal position, and had it immediately cleared. This was discovered this unexampled art treasure, near Schweizer Renske. In the early period of the second Palaeolithic era, when the majority of primitive men were still struggling to produce rude outlines of mystic objects, a South African "Voortrekker" had already mastered the essential concepts of art. Whatever may be the hidden meaning of this white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*), carved into imperishably hard, volcanic rock, as a brilliant achievement it overshadows anything previously known. By virtue of its great antiquity and superb artistic qualities South Africa becomes the birthplace of real art. No finer page could be clipped out of nature's grand volume than this transient rhinoceros, endeavouring to remove some of the all-too-many tick-birds (*Dabagaga africana*) that seem to annoy it. In small flocks they are generally welcome friends. As well-nigh matchless guardians of these unwary monsters they flutter up and announce by short, shrill

notes the coming of danger. A still greater service they perform by disposing of the troublesome ticks about the softer wrinkles of the hide. To select for his masterpiece an exceptionally large, smoothly weathered slab and exactly fit his design to it, shows such foresight and ripe experience as might be expected of this talented and keen observer. To him the harmony of well-balanced proportions, and realistic motion, presented no riddles. Equally remarkable were his patience and perseverance in uniformly sculpturing, by an intaglio process, such careful details upon a stone of metal-like hardness. How many decisive actions are blended into this unconscious thrill of alarm and speed? The head tossed high, ears cocked, lips wrinkled, tail in the air, two limbs in ambling swing and the others supporting the two-ton body weight, seem all to breathe exultant life. Unrivalled skill has added those points that make this South African petroglyph an outstanding monument in the history of sculpture. The realism of texture of the hide and the marking of significant features by a few clear-cut lines contribute much to its fine plastic appearance. Wonderfully expressive is the skillful use of bold, almost 'futuristic' chipping for some of the tick-birds shaken off from the head and limbs. To accentuate their swifter motion and let others cling to the back of the trotting rhinoceros in characteristic positions, shows the touch of genius. Even in the famous exhibitions of modern art, so unique a piece would command attention. As a foundation stone, engraved with the unalterable promise of the forward march of humanity, it will always remain a priceless relic from bygone times. Considering this Stone Age man's pride in accuracy and beauty, have we progressed so much in these many thousand years? What an achievement, when the tools consisted only of sharp edges of splintered rock! What patience, when, at almost every hit, the sharpness of the stone tools turned to dust again and again! Imagine how, with each chip, the artist forced away more of the brownish, well-weathered outer coat, till finally the slate-blue inner tint of this bas-relief gave real emphasis to his design. The Government has lately given definite assurances to the people of Natal to preserve strictly the last remaining twenty South African white rhinoceroses. Visitors to South Africa will thus be enabled to compare the living specimens in Zululand with the monument left by the famous artists of the Stone Age in the Transvaal!"