

In recent decades, the concept of heritage has moved from covering only major monuments and objects of historical-artistic interest to covering architecture, industry and vernacular objects, anthropized territory and the most diverse cultural manifestations. This broader concept allows us to identify any signs which appear to be a natural part of the landscape but constitute extraordinarily valuable heritage, both tangible and intangible. This holistic approach to heritage provides us with a better understanding of the cultures of individual peoples in all their complexity and of the way in which these relate to the environment. This book examines this exact type of heritage, shifting between nature and its subtle transformation by human hands. Through manipulation, this heritage is adapted for human survival, creating a symbiosis with its natural surroundings: this coast shaped by the sea.

This volume is also of major importance for its examination of a highly valuable and unique primeval culture, which dates back to the origins of humanity. This culture has unfortunately also been mistreated and repressed for a long time, like many other archaic cultures of hunter-gatherers which have been replaced by the prevailing agricultural sedentary cultures. This book paves the way for further study of a topic until now unexplored in South Africa, and also to the recognition of the identity of the KhoiSan peoples who, to date, have not received the attention they deserve.

The fish traps created by the KhoiSan peoples on the coast near Port Elizabeth, as they have been ever since these peoples arrived at the southern point of the African continent, are the subject of study, localization, documentation, cataloguing and valorization. They are not the only fish traps, as there are examples scattered around the world and cited by the author, proving the importance of water as a means of survival in these cultures.

The architectural structures studied in this book are simultaneously tangible heritage, as they are made of rocks, and intangible heritage, able to recount the history of the survival of these peoples from remote antiquity. The cultural landscape of this anthropized coast is in such a gentle and delicate equilibrium with virgin nature that it is almost impossible to distinguish the faint brushstrokes made by the human hand.

However, the author has not limited herself to an aseptic study of these historic structures, but rather has expounded on the KhoiSan culture, working with the community, talking to the chiefs of individual tribes and setting up a participatory project, which even further adds to the value of this research. The greatest contribution of this study is its unusual access to the cultural heritage of the



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Fig. 2
The KhoiSan Chiefs and members of the community who took part in the project “The Spirit of Water” and the research that followed

KhoiSan, revealing their ancient secrets. Most important of all, she was able to gather the tribes, creating a feeling of unity despite their apparent diversity.

The author’s multifaceted background as both architect and artist has resulted in this unique approach to the object of study, merging art, architecture, performance and tangible and intangible heritage. As an outsider, not only to the KhoiSan culture but also to South Africa, she has been granted a freedom, perspective, and vision untainted by prejudices or commonplaces greatly benefiting the final result, one we hope readers will enjoy.