



Fig. 3: †Aoni memorial stone at Iduseb (near the !Khuseb delta). The stone with flagpole on the left and the board with details about the stone on the right (see footnote 5 for details on the inscription).

culture in its leadership – become expressions of the †Aoni as a cultural group. Short addresses made on the following day again emphasized the importance of the old chief for the †Aoni. A Nama visitor from the south expressed his surprise that the funeral took place in the !Khuseb and not in Walvis Bay, since the coastal town was the central place on †Aoni land and should have a monument for the †Aoni. It is noteworthy that these remarks come from a delegate of the Nama groups in southern Namibia who conduct their central celebration of “Heroes Day” at the graves of their leaders at the cemetery in Gibeon. Nama in southern Namibia have also erected a memorial stone for Hendrik Witbooi (ca. 1830–1905) whose grave is unknown but who himself had pushed ahead the invention of a grave tradition among the Nama-speaking people (Klocke-Daffa p.c.). Consequently, the Nama spokesman demanded that “the graves of the leaders should become as important for the Nama as they are for the Herero.”

The importance of ancestral graves for Herero-speaking pastoralists is well documented (see Bollig 1997). Bollig summarizes the Bantu pastoralist practice as follows: “Death and funeral are central to Herero and Himba culture” (37). In the public image, therefore, “graves seem to embody traditional Himba culture” (47). But there is more to it, because graves continue to play an important role in the everyday politics of making claims about seniority and of contesting the rightful ownership of the land. Recently the dispute over the significance of Himba graves at a prospective dam site on the Namibia-Angola border has enforced the

ancestral grave as a dominant theme in Namibia and beyond.

In the past the white administrators, too, traced and monumentalized graves of members of their ethnic group who died in the Namibian bush (Bollig 1997: 45). And the expatriates of today seem to be no exception since “obviously the image of ‘ancestral graves’ has some emotional appeal to Westerners too” (47). The annual festivities at the graves of deceased Herero chiefs have been at the focus of public attention – also among white Namibians as well as among tourists – for many years. Closer to the home of the †Aoni, the memorial stone for the first missionary in the !Khuseb at Scheppmannsdorf (Rooibank or !Aba!hoas) was erected by the German Pastor Walter Moritz in 1971 (Moritz 1997: 19). This is not a gravestone (Scheppmann was buried in Rehoboth) but it commemorates the site of the first mission station in the !Khuseb area. The little monument has helped to prove †Aoni presence in the area and to support their struggle against expulsion (Moritz p.c.). Not far from this place the current chief and his council have erected the first †Aoni monument in the !Khuseb, a brick structure with a flagpole altogether more than two metres high (Fig. 3) commemorating the installation of the present chief at Iduseb in 1981.⁵ The monument

5 Next to the monument is a board which reads “Eben Esser – ||Haibeb Ged. Steen.” and on which the builder (C. Xamgab), the date (20.4.1982) and the initiator (Chief S. Kooitjie) are noted. “Eben Esser” is a reference to the first book of Samuel (1 Sam. 7.12) and may be translated as “stone of help.” It refers to the stone erected by Samuel