

ASC-CODESRIA Master's Thesis Award 2005

***Awarded to Leslie Francis Zubieta Calvert
for her thesis on
THE ROCK ART OF
MWANA WA CHENTCHERERE II
ROCK SHELTER, MALAWI: A SITE-SPECIFIC
STUDY OF GIRL'S INITIATION ROCK ART***

Report by the Jury

This is the first time the joint ASC-CODESRIA Master's Thesis Award has been awarded. After two years of being an 'ASC only' award, cooperation between the two institutes gives the award a stronger African foundation. The ASC-CODESRIA Master's Thesis Award hopes to encourage student research and writing on Africa, and to promote the study of African cultures and societies. To be eligible for submission, a Master's thesis has to have been completed on research conducted on Africa and must be based on independent empirical research and thematically related to socio-geographical, economic, political, historical, juridical or anthropological issues, or focus on the humanities in Africa.

The award consists first of all of a prize of €1,000. In addition, the winner will have the opportunity to present his/her work during a seminar at the African Studies Centre in Leiden, the Netherlands. The thesis will be published by the ASC, and CODESRIA will publish a long article by the researcher about the project.

In 2005 the jury received 24 theses, only one of which was not eligible for inclusion because it did not meet the stated criteria. About half of the theses were submitted by African students. They covered a wide variety of topics including trans-nationalism, genocide and local tribunals, yam cultivation, international economic relations, human-rights violations by a former rebel movement, rape, rock art, identity, the theory of ideology, witchcraft and HIV/AIDS, the press and democracy, environmental education, primary education, participatory forest management, and neo-ethnicism.

The high quality of the theses impressed and pleasantly surprised the jury and they enjoyed reading them. The authors of these theses have all dealt with relevant subject matters and have applied and developed concepts, insights and methodologies in highly

appropriate ways in their respective research projects. Some were considered to be highly original in their approach to the topic being researched. The theses were well written and all were on subjects with a certain significance to development-related issues and would be of interest to the general public.

In accordance with the rules and the agreement on cooperation and exchange between the ASC and CODESRIA, the Jury first met to study the 23 theses and to draw up a shortlist. The following three theses (in alphabetical order) were selected for this shortlist:

- **Leslie Francis Zubieta Calvert**, *The Rock Art of Mwana wa Chentcherere II Rock Shelter, Malawi: A Site-Specific Study of Girl's Initiation Rock Art*
- **Thokozile Madonko**, *The Puzzle of Domination in Society: Seeking Solutions in the African Context*
- **Sam van der Staak**, *Trade Liberalisation and Financial Compensation: The BLNS States in the Wake of the EU-South Africa Trade, Development and Co-operation Agreement*

On 2 September and after careful deliberation and consultation, the Jury discussed the nominated theses and decided to present the 2005 ASC-CODESRIA Master's Thesis Award to **Leslie Francis Zubieta Calvert** for her thesis *The Rock Art of Mwana wa Chentcherere II Rock Shelter, Malawi: A Site-Specific Study of Girl's Initiation Rock Art*.

Leslie Francis Zubieta Calvert's thesis on Rock Art in Malawi offers an insight into the meaning of rock art in the life of the people who lived in the Mwana wa Chentcherere area for a long time. The thesis describes in great detail the rock paintings at this specific site in Malawi that bear testimony to the different societies that have inhabited this region in the past and whose cultures are still relevant for the understanding of present-day social and ritual life. This made her decide to enrich the existing archaeological interpretation of these rock paintings by turning to a study of girls' initiation rituals and their symbolic objects so as to include ethnographic evidence in her analysis of this art. Until recently, Mwana wa Chentcherere was also a site for the performance of these ceremonies and the researcher collected detailed information about the objects and figures that are used during the ritual performances, which show a marked resemblance with the rock paintings. In so doing, the author went beyond existing archaeological interpretation, which by including historical data and ethnographic information provides for a new and original dimension in the understanding of the paintings. She takes her place in a long tradition of writing about this rock art and the peoples in the area, and has found a way of making this study become relevant for the understanding of women's identities and gender in present-day Malawi. The thesis adds to the debate on identity in Malawi, a country which, belonging to the ten poorest in the world, is in search of cultural riches which it also finds in its pre-colonial and even pre-historic past.

The reasons that made the Jury decide to present the 2005 ASC-CODESRIA Master's Thesis Award to **Leslie Francis Zubieta Calvert** are the following:

1. The author combines in a concise way several disciplines, i.e. ethnography, social history, gender studies and archaeology.
2. Her arguments are convincing.
3. She has succeeded in gaining entry to local women's initiation ceremonies and living memory, which has never before been included in an interpretative framework of the rock art by the researcher's male predecessors.
4. The thesis is a mature, colourful piece of work and a pleasure to read.
5. The thesis makes an important contribution to the study of African history.

In conclusion, the Jury of the ASC-CODESRIA Master's Thesis Award felt that **Leslie Francis Zubieta Calvert's** Master's Thesis *The Rock Art of Mwana wa Chentcherere II Rock Shelter, Malawi: A Site-Specific Study of Girl's Initiation Rock Art* represented a rich and original piece of work. It is, therefore, very pleased to be able to present her with the 2005 ASC-CODESRIA Master's Thesis Award.

On 12 October 2005, Professor Leo de Haan, the director of the ASC, will present the award to Leslie Francis Zubieta Calvert during a ceremony at the African Studies Centre in Leiden.

Chairman of the Jury

Mr Jos van Beurden,
Leiden, 10 September 2005

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