KEYWORDS: ***Contact rock art – Indigenous archaeology – Social action – Historical inscription***

PASTORAL PLACE-MAKING: ROCK ART AS A SOCIAL AGENT IN COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS

Claire Smith

Abstract. This paper traces the role of rock art in the process of pastoral place-making on Ngadjuri Aboriginal lands in the mid-north region of South Australia, from initial invasion by British settlers in the 1860s to the present day. A combination of archaeological analysis, archival research and ethnographic insights facilitates a deeper understanding of how rock art has played an active role in triggering particular kinds of colonial encounters between settlers and Ngadjuri people. I argue that the affective presence of rock art in the landscape invites human action and interaction through its very existence. In a sense, rock art is the agency of dead people. Other forms of material culture may also be interpreted as agents of the dead. In the first stages of settlement, British settlers inscribed their names, initials and other images adjacent to Aboriginal rock art as a form of memorialisation and as one way of embedding their identities on unfamiliar and often hostile landscapes. In recent years, rock art has played an active role in motivating contemporary pastoralists (sometimes the descendants of early colonisers) to reach out to Ngadjuri people to obtain a greater understanding of an Indigenous past that has been largely erased from the region. The overall movement is from existential disquiet and heritage erasure to acknowledgement, respect and reconciliation.

Introduction

In this paper, I explore the relational and affectual experiences that rock art can generate within colonial encounters between Indigenous and settler peoples. As Brady et al. (2016: 28) point out, anthropologists have rarely engaged with the relational and affectual experiences that rock art generates for Indigenous people today. In Australia, this 'largely neglected' area of research can be attributed to the perception that rock art is peripheral to core Indigenous artistic and aesthetic practices (Morphy 2012: 296), itself partly due to the rarity of creation of rock art being viewed or recorded by non-Aboriginal people. This inattention that the affective power of rock art within an Indigenous context is compounded by a failure to consider the relational and affectual experiences that rock art can generate for settler societies. While there have been numerous studies of contact rock art in Australia, this is usually within the context of Aboriginal people responding to the presence or incursions of Europeans (e.g. Cole 2010; O'Connor et al. 2013; Paterson and Wilson 2009; Paterson and van Duivenvoorde 2014; Taçon et al. 2012; Taçon and May 2013; Wesley et al. 2012), though several significant studies have analysed cross-cultural interactions (e.g. Clarke and Frederick 2006; Frederick 1999; McDonald 2008) and historical inscriptions by settlers (e.g. Fyfe and Brady 2014; Winchester et al. 1996). There have also been important studies on the affectual and relational aspects of rock art for Indigenous populations (Bradley 2008; Bradley et al. 2021; Brady et al. 2016; Cole 2011; Porr 2018; Kearney et al. 2019) and of the health and wellbeing aspects of rock art that connects to the ancestors (Taçon 2019). However, there has been no dedicated study of how rock art can generate relational and affectual experiences for settler populations or influence interactions between settler and Indigenous populations. This paper takes up that challenge.

Rock art as a social actor

The theoretical framework for this research was initially developed in my (Smith 1996a; 1996b; in prep.) ethnoarchaeological study of the style of the interlocking artistic systems of the remote Aboriginal communities of Barunga, Manyallaluk and Beswick, Northern Territory, Australia. I argue that all forms of art, including rock art, contain information encoded by the producer and decoded by the interpreter, both with and without intentionality — that is, at both a conscious and an unconscious level. The approach taken in this paper is embedded in agency theory (Dobres and Robb 2000; Robb 2010) and, more particularly, in the work of Gell (1998) and Morphy (2009, 2010, 2012), who moved beyond the notion of art as communication to argue that art has an inherent capacity to affect the mind of the viewer and, through this, has agency to mediate

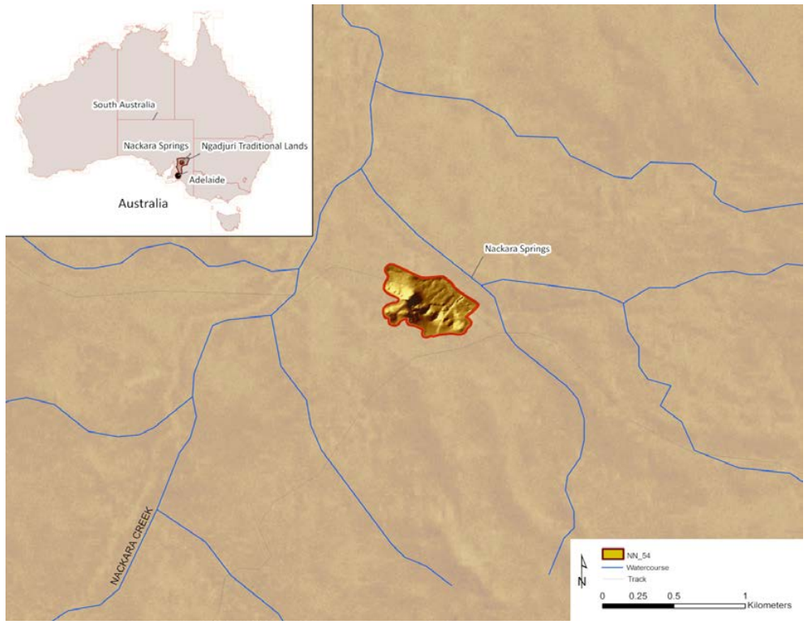


Figure 1. *Location of Nackara Springs, South Australia.*

social relationships (see also Layton 2003). As Robb (2010) argues, agency is a characteristic of relationships. Agency is pre-figured on a dynamic between one individual or entity and other individuals or entities. This conceptualisation of art as having social agency was extended by Sapwell (2017: 353), who argues that 'a key, cross-cultural definition of art includes its status as a form of acting in the world'. In his study of palimpsest rock art site of Nämforsen, Sweden, Sapwell developed the notion put forward by Gormley (2004: 131) that it is impossible to interpret an art object without reference to the relationships between people and objects involved in its production and reception. It is this referential relationship that gives rock art an embedded capacity for social action.

The notion of rock art as a social agent articulates with developments in emotional and affectual human geographies that are embedded in ethnographic methods (Pile 2010) and more recent theorising in archaeology and rock art studies around emotion, affectual experiences and the relational power of place (e.g. Goldhahn 2002; Tarlow 2012; Balme and O'Connor 2015; Díaz-Andreu and Benito 2015; Lydon 2019). These include especially the work undertaken by Martin Porr (2018) in the Kimberley and by John Bradley, Amanda Kearney and Liam Brady with Yanyuwa Aboriginal people in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria, Northern Territory, Australia (see Brady et al. 2016; Kearney et al. 2019; Bradley et al. 2021). This fundamentally semiotic approach is deepened by the 'post-human' turn in archaeology (e.g. Harris 2016; Brown 2018), itself part of a wider movement across the humanities and social sciences that rethinks interactions between humans, animals, objects and the environment (e.g. Kohn 2013). Post-humanism includes a concern with multispecies archaeology (Birch 2018), the impact of human behaviours on the Earth's biosystems in the Anthropocene (Crutzen 2006; Adenle 2012), robotics and enhanced humans (Braidotti 2013), the relationships between place, knowing and being (Kanngieser and Todd 2020) and Indigenous epistemologies (Bignall et al. 2016).

This study draws on seminal anthropological work undertaken by Stewart (2007) regarding emotion and affect. Stewart and Lewis (2015: 237) define affect as 'the capacity to affect and be affected', while Seigworth and Gregg (2010) muse on whether affect is a forceful or subtle phenomenon:

> Affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*. The term 'force,' however, can be a bit of a misnomer since affect need not be especially forceful (although sometimes, as in the psychoanalytic study of trauma, it is). In fact, it is quite likely that affect more often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the minuscule or molecular events of the unnoticed. The ordinary and its extra-. Affect is born in *in-between-ness* and resides as accumulative *beside-ness* (Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 2; italics in original).

The ethnographic aspects of this research faced a major constraint. The views of the people who produced the rock art at Nackara Springs were not recorded and there was no possibility of interviewing them. However, people alive could provide views and understandings that could inform contemporary interpretations of the art, especially in terms of the active role played by rock art in mediating contemporary social relationships. Historical inscriptions can also be a tool for ethnography:

> Another new development in the ethnography of rock art is the realisation of the possibility of accessing the motivation and cognitive world of rock art producers through the presence of accompanying rock inscriptions making direct reference to the rock art. Where these can be deciphered, they can become messages illuminating the world in which the rock artists existed. Such messages are up to a few millennia old and they are as valuable to science as the accounts of living consultants. They provide a new form of access to the ethnographic interpretation of rock art not defined before (Bednarik 2021: 70).

The approach taken in this paper does not seek to obtain the emic meaning of Indigenous rock art, which, as Bednarik (2021: 71) states, 'is simply unfathomable without the help of a culturally very well versed advisor' (see also discussion in Layton 1992: 186). Rather, the aim is to obtain a greater understanding of the active role that rock art may have played in shaping social relationships between colonial settlers and Ngadjuri people, past and present.

Figure 2. *Example of the 'Panaramitee rock art tradition' at Nackara Springs.*

The location

The focus of this study is the mid-north region of South Australia, the traditional lands of Ngadjuri people (Tindale 1974). While some of the rock art sites discussed in this paper range across all of Ngadjuri country, I particularly focus on Nackara Springs on Mount Cone Station, as this is where the historical inscriptions that I have analysed are located. Nackara Springs is located in a semi-arid zone in the northern reaches of Ngadjuri country, about 320 km from Adelaide, the capital of South Australia (Fig. 1). Situated in a semi-arid zone, it is an important source of permanent water in the Manunda-Yunta Creek drainage area. The ownership of Nackara Springs by European pastoralists under British law commenced in the 1850s, transforming the region from an open area to pastoral leases. Since then, Nackara Springs has seen successive pastoralists and a government department take ownership of the parcel of land, chiefly used for agriculture and conservation of native flora (Figs 2 and 3).

The Aboriginal occupation of the broader Nackara Springs region generated a tremendous body of rock art. Located in an outcrop of dolomitic siltstone, Nackara Springs contains a vast gallery of petroglyphs in what is usually characterised, with some reservations, as the Panaramitee 'style' (Rosenfeld 1991; Bednarik 1995; Mott 1998; Franklin 2011). The highest point of this rock art complex is 474 m. These petroglyphs occur primarily on the eastern and northern ridges of the outcrops, although suitable surfaces are available in other areas. They are distributed along a frontage of around 700 m and occur across the slope from base to summit. They are part of a series of rock art sites along the Manunda-Yunta drainage system, located where

Figure 3. *Landscape view from the top of Nackara Springs rock art complex.*

Figure 4. The remains of a stone hut at Nackara Springs with the rock art outcrops in the background.

there are suitable rock surfaces and adjacent water supplies. Rock art sites that have been identified in this area include Panaramitee, Tiverton, Yunta Springs, Twelve Mile, Porcupine Range and Winninnie (Edwards 1964: 168, Fig. 4; see also Mountford 1928, 1929, 1935; Mountford and Edwards 1962), while long-distance trade in ochre that included Ngadjuri lands in the mid-north was recorded by Tindale (1953-1954; see also McBryde 2000). Academic interest in Aboriginal rock art at Nackara Springs occurred in the early 1960s with visits made by various South Australian Museum researchers, including Charles Mountford, Paul Hossfield and Robert Edwards (Sawers and Sawers-Diggins 2010: 121).

Aboriginal occupation and European settlement

Indigenous occupation of South Australia's arid zone extends from the late Pleistocene to the modern era. Radiocarbon and OSL dates from the Warratyi rockshelter in South Australia's Flinders Ranges places the occupation of the mid-north of South Australia as early as 49000 BP (Hamm et al. 2016). The Warratyi shelter is on Adnyamathanha country, which borders Ngadjuri Lands, within 250 km of Nackara Springs. Radiocarbon dates obtained from charcoal associated with hearths at Plumbago Station — within Ngadjuri Country — to the north of Nackara Springs have shown that the occupation spans from at least 3500 BP (Nobbs 1983) to within the last 200 years (Smith 1980: 268).

Rock art is one of the most common forms of archaeological evidence for Aboriginal occupation in this region. Predominantly, the art produced in South Australia's Mid North is Panaramitee style petroglyphs (cf. Basedow 1914; Edwards 1964, 1965; Franklin 2011; Mott 1998). Painted art is rare in this region. Various methods have been employed to directly date the petroglyphs of Ngadjuri Lands; however, this has proved elusive. Nobbs and Dorn (1988) famously sampled petroglyphs at Karolta using the cation-ratio method, which returned dates of 30000 BP. However, these dates have now been rejected due to the high potential for contamination of rock varnishes, making calibration near impossible (Watchman 1992). Conversely, Smith (2013: 234) has argued against assigning a late Pleistocene age for the art, positing it was produced probably during the mid-Holocene. Mike Smith's own attempt at direct dating Panaramitee-style art in central Australia has returned dates of 5000 years ago (Smith 2013: 238).

While the Aboriginal initial occupation of northern South Australia has been dated to 49000 BP (see Hamm et al. 2016), the presence of European people is relatively recent. South Australia was established as a British colony on 26 December 1836. Explorers, and then pastoralists, quickly moved inland from the township of Adelaide, reaching the mid-north in the 1850s. At the time of European settlement in the region, the Aboriginal population around Nackara Springs appears to have been low (Edwards 1965: 9–10). Towards the end of the 19th century, it seems that Ngadjuri people slowly dispersed from remote areas, turning to larger towns such as Burra or settling on missions and reserves located outside of their traditional country. My understanding of this comes from the oral history of Barney Warrior, a Ngadjuri man born at Orroroo (Warrior et al. 2005). More importantly, his discussions with anthropologist Ronald Berndt in the late 1930s recalled ceremonial activity still being performed around the turn of the 20th century in the Burra / Mount Bryan region (Berndt 1987: 23).

The presence of Europeans at Nackara Springs is documented not only in historical records but also in archaeological material. During site visits in 2014 and 2017, a field team from Flinders University and Ngadjuri Elders Heritage and Landcare Council Inc. recorded a portion of the rock art located on the adjacent outcrop. This included several engravings from the contact period, mainly names and illustrated figures, interspersed among Panaramitee-type petroglyphs. Moreover, at the base of the outcrops adjacent to Nackara Springs lie the remains of a stone hut (Fig. 4), which was built as part of improvements to the Nackara Run (now Mount Cone Station) surveyed in 1880 (Scandreth 1880).

The most notable condition of early colonial times in the mid-north of South Australia is that of an absence of Ngadjuri people in the landscape. Records of British colonisation offer little testimony of the presence of Aboriginal people. Edwards (1965) investigated the journals of explorers, including those of Governor George Gawler's 1839 and Colonel Edward Frome's 1843 expeditions to the north of South Australia for records of signs of life such as campfires. He determined that little was found in this area and concluded that permanent occupation of the area was unlikely at the time of European settlement (Edwards 1965: 12). He states:

> Significantly, the owners of sheep stations in the Manunda-Yunta Creek drainage area do not recall any mention of aboriginals living in this particular region at the time their properties were first settled. The journals of the explorers were consulted for references to this north-east district and it was found that encounters with aboriginals were limited to the fringe of the country described as 'dreary', 'waterless', 'wretched', 'barren' and 'sterile' (Edwards 1965: 9–10).

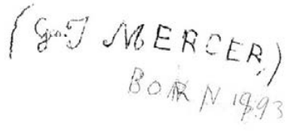
While a sparse population may be partly due to the harshness of the environment, it is also likely to be due to frontier violence. The memoir of John F. Hayward (1926: 92), who held the lease of the property of Black Rock near Nackara in the 1840s, is illuminating. He describes his daily routine as 'visits to flocks and stations and occasional hunts after niggers' (Hayward 1926: 89), which he also refers to as campaigns. He further states that: 'Each petty tribe on all sides of Pekina, and these were a number, had to be terrified before their depredations ceased' (Hayward 1926: 89). During this period of warfare between Aboriginal people and settlers, the most notorious event in this region was a massacre of people at Mount Bryan, around 100 km from Nackara Springs. A letter on 7 October 1844 to the Colonial Secretary by Matthew Moorhouse, the Protector of Aborigines, reported his investigations into 'a daring outrage upon a group of Natives', in retaliation for the stealing of sheep for food. According to Moorhouse:

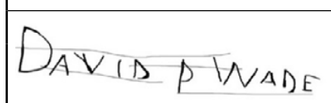
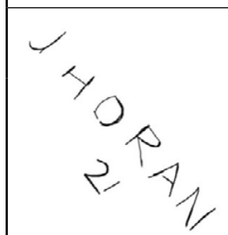
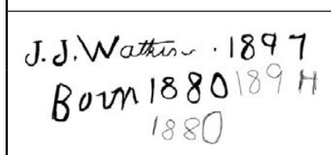
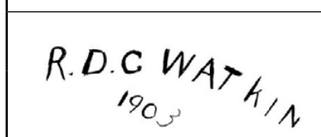
> **171**
> 6th December 1844
> Col Sec
> Sir,
> I have the honor to report for the information of His Excellency the Governor, that a Native named Pare Kudnutya was this day charged before the Commissioner of Police with stealing sheep, the property of John Hallett Esqre, at Mount Bryan, in July last. The Native admits that he was present and he has supplied the information which I failed in obtaining when at Mount Bryan. He says that Hallett's men wounded four Natives – three men and one woman. One man and one woman died; the former was wounded in four places with a sword only, and the latter was wounded with a gun. Two men were wounded with a gun only, one received two wounds, the other one, but they have both recovered. The Natives buried the dead bodies and not the Europeans as was formerly suspected (Moorhouse 6th December 1844).

It is against this historical background that this study sought an understanding of how rock art as a 'sentient and active social agent'(Brady et al. 2016: 28) may have triggered particular kinds of colonial encounters between pastoralists and Ngadjuri people.

Nackara Springs: historical inscriptions

Many of the colonial inscriptions at Nackara Springs in South Australia were created between 1886 and the early 20th century. Eight of the fifteen historical inscriptions are dated between 1886 and 1903 (Table 1). At an overt level, these historical inscriptions and motifs at Nackara Springs can be interpreted in terms of the conscious meanings, the memorialisation of self and personal biography. However, there is a deeper, more covert level of interpretation to be obtained, one that emerges from largely unconscious motivations. This is the level that activates the capacity of rock art to be a sentient, active social agent with the power to inform colonial encounters (Brady et al. 2016: 28). To

Inscription	Translation	Notes
	JOHN BYRNE BLACK ROCK 1886 Stylised script partially engraved with linear cuts and abraded	The identity of John Byrne is unknown. However, he was most likely in the area working as a stockman or shepherd. Black Rock is a small village northwest of Peterborough.
	(Geo. T MERCER) Born 1893 Heavily engraved into the rock. The stylised font coupled with the parenthesis around the name may suggest that the 'BORN 1893' was added as an afterthought. The 'BORN 1893' is not as deeply graved into the rock.	George Thomas MERCER, Born 4 July 1893 at Oodla Wirra, a small village approximately 20 km from Nackara Springs. His father, John Mercer, was an original owner of grazing land around Mt Cone.

	David P Wade Lightly engraved and lined out, effort has been made by the author to stylise the letters 'D' by giving them a heavier Weight. If written by David Wade himself a *terminus ante quem* date of 1894 has to be considered.	David Pitt Currant WADE, born October 1875 in Black Springs. He died in 1894 aged 19 and is buried in Nackara cemetery.
	David P Wade Engraved with some weight into the rock, however, contrast between rock cortex and extracted rock is only slight. As with the other DAVID P WADE it too has been lined out, albeit these lines are superficial and appear to be made with a rock chalk effect and have not graved into the rock face itself.	
	J HORAN 21 Lightly engraved with very few striations within the lettering. The narrow weight of the font suggests that a knife or a blade was used in the graving.	Most likely John HORAN, formally a butcher at Dawson, a small village 14 km west of Nackara Springs.
	S.H.WILKINSON Deeply engraved into the rock face.	Possibly Stuart Hartley WILKINSON, born at Boarder Town 1906. However, no evidence has been found that places him in the area.
	AOM BAILEY Alt: RON BAILEY? Lightly engraved, the first letter is ambiguous with characteristics of both A and R. The 'M' is also vague as the last stroke of the letter is not joined; this may be the result of the author struggling to control the writing implement and giving up on writing his full name.	No record has been found of an AOM Bailey. However, there was a Ronald Naish BAILEY living in the region during the late 1940s and 1950s.
	J.J Watkins. 1897 Born 1880 Heavy engraved and stylised font. It appears that below the numbers, an attempt has been made to mimic these. This has been done by abrading the rock as opposed to engraving into the rock face.	Possibly James John WATKINS, born 1880 at Woodville, Adelaide. A Watkins family lived in the region. However, a familial link between the two Watkins families has not been found.
	R.D.C WATKIN 1903 Lightly engraved with multiple striations adding to the weight of the font, the 'S' is not visible; additionally, the last numeral appears faint and almost unreadable.	Most likely Robert David Cecil WATKINS, born at Dawson on 13th September 1888.

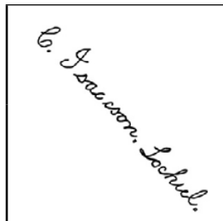
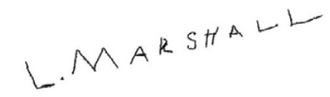
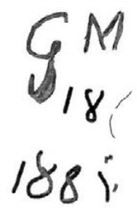
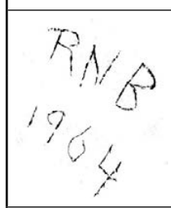
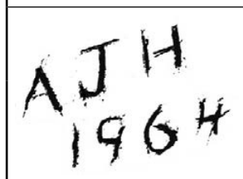
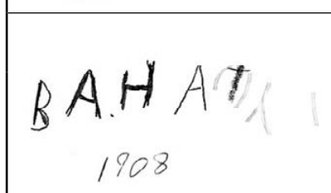
	C. Isaacson. Lochiel. Engraved copperplate font.	Most likely Charles ISAACSON. Born at Lochiel, South Australia, in 1883. He died in Queensland 3 August 1959.
	L. MARSHALL	Identity unknown.
	GM 18 188 Evidence of shallow engraved striations, but primarily the image is made by heavy abrading of the rock surface. The rock is quite angular, and it appears that the author could not finish writing the date.	Possibly George MERCER Born 1869. The uncle of George Thomas MERCER, he died in a hunting accident at Nackara in 1916.
	RNB 1964 Lightly engraved with very few striations, suggesting an expedited and opportunistic 'tag'.	Possibly Ronald Naish BAILEY, elected councillor for the Nackara ward in 1949.
	AJH 1964 Applied to the rock with pigment, which is seen as beige today.	Identity unknown
	BA.H AT 1908 Lightly abraded onto black-colour rock. Three illegible letters after the AT. Perhaps 'Atkins'?	Identity unknown
	Various examples of illegible writing written horizontal and vertically.	

Table 1. *List of names, initials and dates located at the site.*

Figure 5. *Adjacent historical inscriptions: 'David D. Hart' scratched out, 'Geo T Mercer born 1893'.*

obtain such an interpretation, it is important to understand the social, cultural and economic conditions of British/European Australians living in that region during the early colonial period.

The earliest historical inscription at an Australian rock art site dates to the late 18th century (Bednarik 2000). At Nackara Springs, dated inscriptions range from 1886 to 2014. The inscriptions of names, initials and/or dates recorded in this study are shown in Table 1. It was possible to identify several individuals through archival research of birth, marriage and death databases and newspaper articles. This information is recorded in Table 1, column 3. All individuals who were identified were of European or British origin. All of the images appear to have been created using a metal tool, though the range in image width and depth suggests a range of tools. While they are of varying depth, all of these inscriptions were produced by scratching the rock's surface. Motifs were depicted in a continuous outline, sometimes through the joining of individual lines. Elsewhere (Smith et al. 2019), I have argued that this combination of stylistic characteristics suggests that Europeans produced these images rather than Aboriginal people. Three images — or attempts at images — have been scratched out, including one name, David D. Hart (Fig. 5).

Rock art as memorialisation

At Nackara Springs, historical inscriptions as a form of memorialisation occur in two ways: (1) memorialisation of the individual through the inscription of their initials, and (2) the memorialisation of important events, what Clarke and Frederick (2012) call 'inscriptions as objects of biography' (see also Goldhahn 2015). Inscriptions of this kind would usually be interpreted as the memorialisation of an individual by their own hand (e.g. Winchester et al. 1996). Such an interpretation seems reasonable in the case of Nackara Springs historical inscriptions. Given that the biographical information obtained for each inscription is limited (Table 1), it was necessary to seek other avenues of information. Were the inscriptions produced by individuals working alone, or were some produced in the company of another? Such questions can be addressed by analysing writing styles, spatial analysis, the colourimetry of rock varnish accretions and the relative patination of motifs (see Bednarik 2009).

The approach taken to the question of individual or shared created events is exemplified in the analysis of the inscriptions 'G. Burden' and 'C. Isaacson. Lochiel' that are located close together on a small, separate vertical rock face. However, it appears that these inscriptions were produced by different people, perhaps at different times, as they have different writing styles and patination. G. Burden is written in a slightly blocky script, with each letter separated from the others. In contrast, C. Isaacson is written in a flowing Copperplate script, popular in the late nineteenth century, a time when penmanship was taught to an increasing number of working-class people and 'writing was itself a hard-won act of human agency' (Howard 2012: 3). C. Isaacson has been inscribed with some care. Not only are the letters joined, but there are full stops after C, Isaacson and Lochiel. The latter is almost certainly a reference to the township of Lochiel, located some 150 km from Nackara Station. In addition to differences in writing style, the two inscriptions have different depth and patination: this suggests that they were produced at different times. While differential weathering of motifs can be related to the micro-environment (Rosenfeld and Smith 1997), these inscriptions are about 8 cm apart on the same rock sheet, facing fundamentally the same direction. Accordingly, it makes more sense to attribute the differences in depth and patination to the manner and timing of their inscription than to variation in weathering.

Though several people with the family name Burden are buried in the Dawson cemetery close to Mt Cone Station, none are associated with the name G. Burden. However, it was possible to identify three potential identities for C. Isaacson. The first is Clara Isaacson, born at Undalya, South Australia, in 1860 and died in 1925 (Genealogy South Australia 2021). Given Nackara Springs's remote location, it is unlikely Clara Isaacson inscribed C. Isaacson herself unless she was living in the shepherd's hut. A second possibility is that C. Isaacson refers to Clara Isaacson, born 30 July 1875 in Lochiel, South Australia, and died at the same place on 29 December 1875. It could be commemorating either her birth, as with George Thomas Mercer, discussed above, or her death. I favour the latter interpretation as the shape of the upright, standing stone on which C. Isaacson is scratched (Fig. 6) is reminiscent of a gravestone. It could have been interpreted by the person who wrote her name as an appropriate place for a memorial. There are two deep incised lines across the top, possibly indicating an attempt to square off the top of the rock. A third possibility is that C. Isaacson commemorates the birth of Charles Isaacson, who was born at Lochiel on 2 November 1883. Alternatively, it is possible that Charles Isaacson inscribed his own name, in which case the image is likely to have been created at the very end of the 19th century or early in the 20th century since the writing is not the hand of a child.

Figure 6. *Historical engravings of a man in a frock coat. C. Isaacson etched nearby.*

The second form of memorialisation, that of recording a biographical event, is apparent in two inscriptions that record a child's birth. The first of these is the inscription 'J.J. Watkins. 1897 Born 1880'. This likely refers to James John Watkins, born at Woodville to Annie Maria Manley and John Watkins in 1880 (Genealogy South Australia 2021). It was probably inscribed by James Watkins, who worked as a ranger in the district around this time (South Australian Register 23 July 1892, p. 3). A second inscription in the Watkins name is R. D. C Watkins, which corresponds to Robert David Cecil Watkins, the son of James Watkins. Robert was born in Dawson in 1888 and died there in 1960 (Ancestry 2021). A second inscription relating to birth is 'Geo T Mercer Born 1893' (Fig. 5). This refers to George Thomas Mercer, born to Jane and John Mercer at Oodla Wirra on 4 July 1893 (Ancestry 2021). This inscription is likely to have been created by George Thomas Mercer when he was an adult, though it may also have been inscribed by his uncle, George Mercer, a pastoral worker on Nackara Station. In February 1916, George Mercer (the uncle), aged 40, was killed accidentally by his brother-in-law, Thomas Charters, who mistook him for a kangaroo when the two were shooting kangaroos on Erudina Station (*The Register*, 16 February 1916). Ironically, Thomas Charters was the brother of Jane Mercer (formerly Charters, thence Lamming), who was the mother of George Thomas Mercer (the nephew of George Mercer).

Affective and relational rock art

The historical inscriptions are most simply interpreted as forms of memorialisation; it is difficult to interpret them in terms of embedded relationships with other places or people, though these meanings may well be encoded in the art. However, there are two figurative motifs that can be understood more deeply through calling upon affective and relational theories of place. These motifs are a man in a frock coat and a square-rigged sailing ship.

Man in a frock coat

The motif of a man in a frock coat appears to have been created with a sharp metal tool that allowed precise control over the lines. The figure has been identified as male, given that it is dressed in male clothing of the colonial era. Figure 6 shows three images scratched on a vertical rock of a man in a frock coat, trousers, hat and shoes. He is in a walking position with legs apart and carries a long, thin object in each hand. The top image appears to be the final work. Below it is a similar image, scratched into the rock more lightly (to the right), and what appears to be a very faint first draft that was scratched out (to the left). Given that the same technique was used for all three images and that they appear to be part of sequential studies, the three depictions of a man in a frock coat seem to have been created by a single author. The fact that his legs are in motion seems important since this is depicted in two of the images.

The question that arises is whether the author was Aboriginal or European. Application of the theoretical framework that I have developed elsewhere (Smith et al. 2019) would argue that the combined stylistic characteristics (content, mode of execution) indicate European authorship of this motif. While Aboriginal people are known to have created images of Europeans in many parts of Australia, including the close depiction of the clothes, hat, shoes and hand-held objects such as guns (see Wesley 2013; May et al. 2017), boats (Paterson and Wilson 2009; May et al. 2009; Wesley et al. 2012; Balme and O'Connor 2015) and knives (May et al. 2013a: 131), non-Aboriginal people also have created rock art images of Europeans. More particularly, the image of a person in Winchester et al. (2000: 2, Fig. 3) has some stylistic similarity to the frock-coated man depicted at Mt Cone.

The objects held in the frock-coated man's hands are intriguing. It is possible that the objects are related to building practice, that they are being proffered to someone or are *wirri*, a form of Aboriginal fighting or hunting stick, though the latter seems unlikely to have been carried by someone in a frock coat. Alternatively, if the C. Isaacson referred to is the infant Clara Isaacson, who was born and died at Lochiel in 1885 (Genealogy South Australia 2021), these objects could be funeral wands, which were carried in funeral processions during the Victorian era (Puckle 1926: 126). This would be consistent with the location of the inscription on

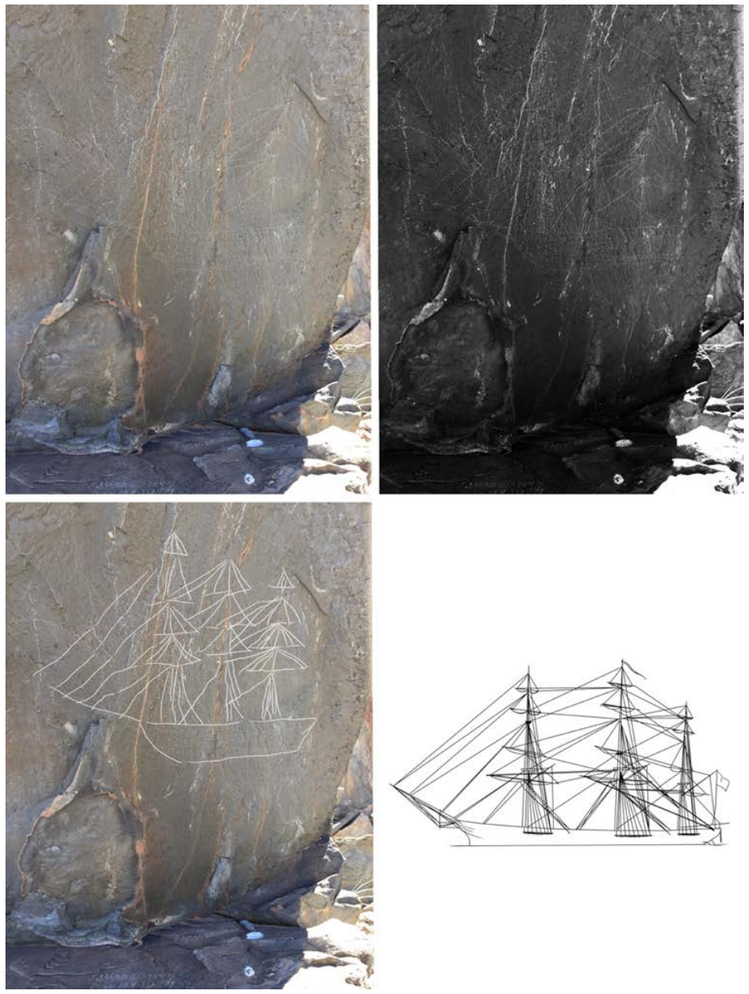


Figure 7. *Engraving of a three-masted, square-rigged sailing ship. Drawing of a square-rigged sailing ship redrawn from Luce (1981: Pl. 2).*

a free-standing stone around two metres apart from outcrops with Aboriginal petroglyphs. The result is reminiscent of a tombstone (Fig. 6) and the depicted attire is consistent with that worn for funeral directors in the 19th century (Brian Parsons, email 15 February 2017). The Isaacson family has English and German heritage through the 1851 marriage of William Isaacson and Johanna Kriebal (Genealogy South Australia 2021). However, an important descendant of three C. Isaacsons was Waanyi man, Ken Isaacson, who worked closely with archaeologists for over 30 years (e.g. Isaacson and Ford 2005): his father, Edwin Alfred Isaacson, was born at Lochiel on 14 August 1990. In 1930 at Camooweal, Queensland, Edwin Isaacson married an Aboriginal woman, Grace Camp, from the Waanyi people the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland. An interview with Ken Isaacson in 2017 provides insight into changes in attitudes to relationships between Aboriginal people and European Australians through time. As part of a discussion of the rock art at Nackara Springs, he stated:

> Dad was a ringer on May Downs Station. He went there with his brother, George, in 1920, three years before Mount Isa even started. He met mum at Camooweal. Dad was so shy. He wrote mum a letter saying 'I want to marry you' and then he jumped back on his horse and rode 100 miles back to May Downs. We don't think he even waited for mum to say 'yes' or 'no'. Dad was very, very shy. That was the era in Australia when people said 'How dare a white man marry a black woman.' They went against the odds and they stayed together for 45 years before Dad passed away.
>
> Even growing up and going to school there was big shame because my dad had married a black woman. It was a huge shame. Kids swore at you. Mum never worked out why Dad didn't go back to see his family in South Australia. He went only once. He waited a huge amount of years. Many years later, mum and I went to a reunion of Isaacsons in South Australia, and when the family met her they just laughed! They treated her like a Queen (Ken Isaacson, pers. comm. 20 February 2017).

A three-masted, square-rigged ship

The second figurative image at Nackara Springs is of a three-masted, square-rigged sailing ship with fore, main and mizzen masts. Comparison with historical examples suggests that this motif is of a full square-rigged ship (Fig. 7). The image is lightly scratched onto the rock, using either a sharp rock or some form of metal implement, and is very difficult to see. It was created in continuous, unbroken lines instead of the pecking technique employed in the creation of Aboriginal petroglyphs at Nackara Springs. Application of the theoretical framework that I have developed elsewhere (Smith et al. 2019) would argue that the combined stylistic characteristics (content, mode of execution) indicate European authorship of this motif. This image is located on a separate panel about five metres from pecked rock art, in an area immediately above the stone hut.

If a British sailor produced this motif, as is assumed here, it can also be interpreted as a form of memorialisation, as an object of biography (cf. Clarke and Frederick 2012), or what Goldhahn (2015) calls an engraved biography. The level of detail in this depiction indicates an intimate knowledge of the ship, suggesting that it was produced by a sailor who was familiar with this particular vessel. Standing and running rigging is evident with shrouds, backstays, braces, and lower, top and topgallant stays. The bow feature(s) below the jib boom could represent rigging for the jib sails or a figurehead (Jennifer McKinnon email 3 May 2021). The level of detail about the stays and rigging is significant and seems to indicate that the artist had good knowledge of the vessel(s) through seeing and studying it day after day. There is a small mistake in the fore and mizzen topsail royal lift attachment points which suggests that this is not the result of drawing from a picture (Jennifer McKinnon email 3 May 2021). This detail suggests that the artist had travelled on such a ship or visited a nearby large port that could accommodate full-rigged ships, possibly at Port Adelaide or Port Victoria, and/or regularly viewed the ships at anchor, recreating one based on memory. Such an interpretation is consistent with analyses of contact art in other parts of Australia, in which the intricate detailing of objects is equated with familiarity with those objects (e.g. May et al. 2017; Balme and O'Connor 2015).

Nevertheless, it would be premature to discount the possibility that the artist may have been an Aboriginal person who visited the sea or a port and returned inland to engrave the image of the ship at Nackara Springs. Given that Nackara Springs is located about 90 km from the sea, Aboriginal authorship of this image would not only speak to Aboriginal interest in the subject matter but also indicate acute visual memory. Aboriginal authorship could be indicated by the lines the looseness of the lines depicting the stays, rather than being taut as in a working vessel. This is not an error that a sailor would be likely to make, but it may also be a reflection of the technical difficulties involved in engraving straight lines on a vertical rockface. If this motif *was* produced by an Aboriginal person, it can be interpreted as representing individual identity, in a similar way to that described by Balme and O'Connor (2015) for a depiction of a European object in 'port scene' panel at Mimbi, within Gooniyandi country in north-west Western Australia, within an overall rock art landscape that responded to invasion by a rejection of European motifs and greater emphasis on rock art motifs that express group identity.

Figure 8. *Vince Copley senior and Kathryn Sutton discussing an ochre provenance project with landowners Andrew and Patsy Weckert, Clare, South Australia (March 2020).*

Contemporary experiences

Ethnographic research can provide insights into the role of rock art as a social actor in the present. In contrast to the violence of colonial times, recently, the rock art at Nackara Springs and other parts of the South Australian mid-north has played a role in reconciliation between pastoralists and Ngadjuri people, as observed by Ngadjuri Elders Vince Copley senior and Vince Copley junior:

> Our association with Mount Cone [Nackara Springs] was due to the conference we had at Burra in 2006. Mainly because of a cricket game. The mayor of Goyder Council, Peter Mattingly, came across to me and said 'I played cricket against you. You were bowling. It was so wide that I let it go and it took my leg stump'. After that we met with Jackie, his wife. We went to meet them at Mount Cone and they took us out to see some rock art sites. They showed us some small sites at first, to see whether we had any idea of what it was and any idea of who had put the art there. We continued to have discussions with Jackie. We took a group up later for a field trip, a field school. That was when we visited the big site with the shepherd's hut and the four-masted schooner on the rock art. So, that was all good (Vincent Copley senior, 20 April 2021).
>
> Landowners want to see something tangible. They are interested in the stories but they want to see evidence of occupation. You can give them that tangible evidence through the rock art. When you take away the black and the white, art in any form has always been a universal language. Art communicates across cultures. Art can be acting, music, dance and so on. The sculpture of David by Michelangelo or cubist paintings by Picasso are easily identifiable. They are recognised for the quality of the artwork, not their cultural background. The meaning doesn't matter,

> really. The artwork communicates. It breaks down barriers between cultures. In a similar way, rock art sites or ochre quarries motivate farmers to contact Ngadjuri people to try and get cultural information. Landowners are interested in knowing about the archaeological sites that are on their land, particularly rock art sites, which can't be removed. They take a great interest, not only in its meaning, but also in its protection.
>
> Landowners are more aware of tangible cultural heritage. Once they might have ignored it, but now it has become a point of pride with some landowners, that they have Indigenous sites on their land, and they go out of their way to protect. In their own way they are protecting Aboriginal history (Vincent Copley junior, 1 May 2021).

These observations beg the question: what role did rock art play in prompting pastoralists to engage with contemporary Ngadjuri people? If there was no rock art on Ngadjuri lands, would pastoralists still be contacting the Ngadjuri, seeking deeper cultural understandings of the lands they inhabit?

Discussion

This paper fills a gap in research on contact rock art by focussing on how rock art might influence interactions between settler and Indigenous populations. This study extends post-humanistic studies in archaeology (e.g. Harris 2016; Brown 2018) and adds a material dimension to anthropological studies of the affective dimensions of everyday life (e.g. Stewart 2007). While Aboriginal rock art has been considered by many researchers as a place making device (David and Wilson 2002; McNiven and Russell 2002) few studies have considered the role of historical graffiti as a colonial place-making strategy (but see Clarke Frederick 2006, 2012; Fyfe and Brady 2014; Winchester et al. 1996). Moreover, it is only recently that attention has focused on the capacity of rock art to generate relational and affective experiences for Indigenous peoples (e.g. Brady et al. 2016; Porr 2018; Bradley et al. 2021) and the relational power of place (e.g. Kearney et al. 2019) as part of dynamic living Indigenous landscapes. A logical next step is to consider the relational and affectual experiences that rock art may generate for settler societies. Accordingly, this paper uses the notion of rock art as a social actor that generates relational and affective experiences to interpret the stylistic characteristics and placement of historical inscriptions and figurative motifs at Nackara Springs. Using archaeological, ethnographic and archival research, it interprets these inscriptions within the context of the values, attitudes and concerns of the populations that created this material. The violence of colonial times (Foster et al. 2001) is not easily forgotten. It permeates for generations (O'Neill et al. 2018). Consequently, interpretations of the historical inscriptions and motifs produced by Europeans at Nackara Springs are evaluated against a lived experience infused by a history of frontier violence and an uneasy sense that settlers and pastoralists were living on occupied territory. However, rock art also acts to prompt contemporary pastoralists to reach out to Ngadjuri people and, through this, contributes to reconciliation in the present.

The question that arises is: what relational and affectual experiences were generated by the rock art at Nackara Springs for occupying pastoralists? Firstly, it seems that rock art begets rock art, perhaps due to the 'inescapable reality that it is, firstly, an emplaced phenomenon' (Alberti and Fowles 2018: 139). The sheer volume of Indigenous rock art at Nackara Springs is stunning. By its very existence, it engages the viewer in a relationship with the creators of the art. Consequently, it has an inherent capacity to inform social relationships and, given specific circumstances, prompt action and the changes in the understanding of the world or in relationships brought about by that action.

It is clear that the pastoralists who created the historical inscriptions and motifs at this site chose to do so in a rich cultural landscape that spoke of generations of Aboriginal people. They were consciously marking their identities on an Aboriginal cultural landscape and, through this, engaging in a relationship with the many generations of Aboriginal people who had come before them, as well as the people who produced earlier dated inscriptions in what Sapwell (2017: 373) might interpret as the digesting of isolated and lonely individuals into some form of community. Notably, the historical inscriptions and motifs were placed on outcrops that already had Aboriginal petroglyphs but were not placed directly adjacent to Aboriginal petroglyphs. In a complex with several thousand rock art motifs, these European inscriptions and images were located in discrete areas a little apart from the Aboriginal petroglyphs or, as in the case of the frock-coated man, on a free-standing stone slab. None of the Aboriginal petroglyphs was defaced in any way, signalling a level of respect for Aboriginal culture. Given that scholars have often observed that 'graffiti begets graffiti' (e.g. Wright 2018), it is not surprising that the historical inscriptions and motifs are all located in one area of the rock art complex.

By highlighting how rock art is an animate aspect of living landscapes, this study takes a small step in a wider 'move toward ways of attuning that are more appropriate to the places and environments' with which people engage (Kanngieser and Todd 2020: 393). Considered from the perspective of rock art as a sentient social agent, it can be argued that the Aboriginal petroglyphs at Nackara Springs prompted some pastoralists to inscribe their identities on this rock art complex as one way of asserting their right to be in this landscape. The historical inscriptions and motifs at Nackara Springs were produced without Aboriginal people being present in the landscape and against a backdrop of frontier violence (Foster et al. 2001). Indeed, in 1878 J. D. Wood stated that the Ngadjuri people had become extinct, and this was adopted as a general view well into the 20th century (see discussion in Smith et al. 2018: 11). Given such a history, one imagines some poignancy, even guilt, infused into the experience of creating historical engravings in the imposing Aboriginal cultural landscape of Nackara Springs. It seems reasonable to assume that a level of recognition and respect for Aboriginal culture, given the pastoralists' careful placement of their own marks upon the landscape, near but not directly adjacent to or over, the Aboriginal petroglyphs. However, the creation of biographical inscriptions and motifs helped to transform a foreign, Indigenous landscape into something more personal, more known and more knowable. This form of pastoral-placemaking was part of a broader process in which European control over Aboriginal artefacts symbolised European control over uncharted worlds (Smith 2021). More recently, rock art has acted to enhance reconciliation between pastoralists and Ngajuri people. In addressing neglected aspects of rock art sites, this study records an interesting effect of the attention now given to rock art in Australia: pastoralists have become proud to have sites on their properties and they contribute significantly to site protection. This is important as landowners tend to be the first line of defence against site damage, most of which is by people or animals.

Affectual relationships are context-specific, determined by the particular configurations of individual settings (people, material culture, animals, locale, environment) (see Stewart 2007; Stewart and Lewis 2015). It follows that different circumstances are likely to engender different interpretations or engagements with rock art. How might pastoralists have acted if they were engaged in warfare or intense conflict with Aboriginal people? Would they still have been respectful of Ngadjuri rock art? Or would they have chosen to deface it or superimpose this rock art with European images? It may be useful to include such an interpretation as a possibility in the analysis of rock art in other places.

This paper explores how the idea of rock art as action can help interpret historical inscriptions and motifs produced by pastoralists in settler societies. It presents interpretations of the historical inscriptions and motifs at Nackara Springs at two levels. The first level of interpretation focuses on historical inscriptions as a form of memorialisation, keying into the conscious, overt meanings likely encoded by the author. The second level of interpretation focuses on the capacity of rock art to be a 'multi-vocal, sentient and active social agent' (Brady et al. 2016: 28) with the power to inform colonial encounters. This approach keys into covert meanings encoded unconsciously by the author (Smith 1996; forthcoming) and extends studies of the affectual and relational qualities of Indigenous rock art (Brady et al. 2016; Kearney et al. 2019; Porr 2018; Bradley et al. 2021) to the analysis of rock art produced by settler societies. Through this lens, I argue that the affective quality of rock art in the landscape invites human action and interaction through its very presence. In the wide, open plains occupied by the British invasion of the mid-north of South Australia, pastoralists inscribed their names, initials and other images on rock outcrops adjacent to Aboriginal rock art. The engraving and juxtaposition of settler identities amongst the motifs of an almost monumental Aboriginal rock art complex was one aspect of pastoral place-making. In creating historical inscriptions and motifs, these settlers transformed unfamiliar and often hostile terrain into known and named landscapes. In inscribing their identities on the land, they also engaged in relationships with a people who had been wronged by their very presence. More recently, rock art has prompted pastoralists to reach out to Ngadjuri people to obtain a greater understanding of an Indigenous past that has been largely erased from the region. The overall movement is from existential disquiet and heritage erasure to acknowledgement, respect and reconciliation.

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