



## DATING ROCK ART

### Introduction to the papers from Symposium J, Third AURA Congress, Alice Springs, 2000

Alan Watchman, Guest Editor

The dating session at Alice Springs sought papers that looked into the future of dating rock art as well as from an historical perspective. New ideas and approaches to the relative and absolute dating of paintings and petroglyphs were welcomed. One of the aims of the session was to discuss controversial issues and to raise awareness of the ethics, problems and potential values of dating rock art.

Fourteen papers were received and presented during Symposium J, but not all of these are presented in this volume. Some papers have been published in other media and others were not submitted. Six of the original papers presented at the congress are reported here, and two other papers have been added to provide a suitable number for inclusion as a group focusing on the dating of rock art.

The paper by Valerie Magar and Victor Davila presented new views on the dating work undertaken at the Cueva del Ratón in Baja California, Mexico. It revealed analyses of rock surface coatings and potential problems of contamination from sources of carbon not contained within paints. Details were also provided of the Harris matrix, a means for establishing the superimposition sequence of paintings to control relative chronology across a panel.

Robert Bednarik presented a valuable contribution to the debate on the dating of the Côa petroglyphs, Portugal. His paper followed that of João Zilhão (not included here), who suggested on the basis of archaeological evidence that the artistic tradition in the Côa valley was probably Gravettian. The detailed critique by Bednarik of the arguments for an early rock art tradition in that region substantiate other dating work indicating much more recent production of petroglyphs.

In reviewing radiocarbon dating Marvin Rowe not only described the plasma-chemical extraction technique used in his laboratory, but also reinforced the need for controls over the sampling and reporting of the results. The paper presented examples of the work undertaken and the nature of problems encountered, and estimates of the reliability of the procedures. His paper lists criteria that should be considered when assessing the reliability of accelerator mass spectrometry radiocarbon results obtained for carbon

in paintings and from associated materials.

Paul Taçon has condensed his Congress presentation concerning the dating of beeswax figures in western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. The published article focuses on giving background information about the research, a summary of some of the results and information about the general availability of the results. The outcome of that project was a CD containing all the details of the sites and samples, as well as the radiocarbon results. The paper also gives details as to how people can obtain copies of the CD and in that process help fund Aboriginal scholarship.

The application of microerosion dating to the rock art of China is presented by Tang Huisheng and Gao Zhiwei. Robert Bednarik developed the method of microerosion dating, but few researchers have taken up the challenge of applying it to petroglyphs in different regions. These authors describe the relative ages of the rock art in Qinghai-Tibet Plateau region, and then present analyses of the micro-wane characteristics in selected petroglyphs to arrive at conclusions concerning when the petroglyphs were made.

The paper by Alan Watchman, Josephine Flood and Christopher Chippindale documents the results of fieldwork and dating of rock art in the Victoria River district of the Northern Territory. This work tables analyses of pigments and provides some preliminary AMS radiocarbon results for accretions directly associated with rock carvings. Importantly, the notion of the 'land-in-between' is raised to bring awareness of the geographic location of the region between the well-known rock art provinces of the Kimberley and western Arnhem Land.

Alan Watchman also provides details of two other dating projects: in Maine, U.S.A. and southern Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory. The brief paper about the U.S.A. is a light-hearted look at the dating of faded red pigments on a cliff facing Kezar Lake. It is the first age determination made by the author in North America, and the results are consistent with ages estimated by Mark Hedden for similar-looking petroglyphs in Machias Bay.

The second paper by Watchman examines a remarkable boulder in southern Kakadu National Park. The upper sur-

face of the boulder is carved with animal and human foot tracks, and cupules. A thin oxalate coating covers these petroglyphs and the carbon it contains is used to estimate the minimum age for a cupule. Comparisons are made with other dated cupules and petroglyphs across northern Australia.

Papers presented at the AURA Congress, but published elsewhere include those by Kumar (2000/2001), Mazel and Watchman (2003), Huyge et al. (2001), and Watchman et al. (2000), on the rock art of India, South Africa, Egypt and the Keep River, respectively. They have not been included in this volume.

The proceedings of the conference and the invited papers are a valuable addition to the growing literature on the dating of rock art.

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## GLOSSARY OF ROCK ART RESEARCH: a multilingual dictionary

Edited by Robert G. Bednarik, Mario Consens, Alfred Muzzolini, Jakov Sher and Dario Seglie

This is the first dictionary compiled specifically for rock art research. It follows the publication of an English rock art glossary in the journal *Rock Art Research* in November 2000. To be adopted by the International Federation of Rock Art Organisations (IFRAO), it has been translated by some of the world's foremost scholars in the field into French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian. In a discipline that has hitherto been without an agreed terminology, even communication within a single language has been difficult. The proliferation of idiosyncratic terminologies of often academically isolated researchers, many of which have been used by only one scholar, has not only retarded progress and the transference of knowledge, it has led to countless misunderstandings and even personal feuds. The purpose of this dictionary is to create a single terminological standard as well as a cross-lingual uniformity of usage. It focuses particularly on scientific aspects, technical applications and epistemological rigour. It does not set out to create a terminological straitjacket for the discipline, but a common standard of reference, particularly in areas that have in the past been susceptible to greatly differing interpretations.

This dictionary comprises six sections in six languages, each listing the same terms alphabetically. It contains also a table interlinking all of these languages, listing all terms explained. This translation table is organised alphabetically according to the English terms. The volume is indispensable for scientific translators, rock art scholars, archaeologists and others concerned with aspects of pre-historic rock art, and is also intended for the guidance of students and authors working in this field.

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