of archaeologists and that only one stout traditionalist was present. In West German archaeology as a whole, the numerical relationship is the other way round: the members of the Unkeler Kreis and colleagues with a similar point of view are a very small minority, and they meet with a lot of suspicion and opposition from influential sections of the establishment. But whilst a conference on the Theoretical Archaeology Group model might not work in Germany (where there is no tradition of thematic conferences in archaeology), symposia of this kind should help to keep going what looks like the beginnings of a debate. A full publication of the Fifth Unkel Symposium is planned.

References Cited


Rock-Art Research: World Congress in Australia

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The Australian Rock Art Research Association (AURA), founded in 1983, has grown from its inception had an international character. This character is clearly reflected in its membership and even more vividly in the diversity of regional interests of the participants in its first congress, held in Darwin, N.T., Australia, August 21–September 2, 1988. In view of this diversity and the many different approaches to the study of rock art, it had been decided not to restrict the thematic direction of the congress. Initial proposals had finally crystallised into 11 symposia:

1. Rock-Art Studies in the Old World—conveners Michel Lorblanchet (Cajarc, France) and Chen Zhao Fu (Beijing, People's Republic of China)

2. Rock-Art Studies in the Americas—conveners Jack Steinbring (Winnipeg, Ont., Canada) and Niède Guidon (Paris, France)

3. Rock-Art Studies in Australia and Oceania—conveners Josephine Flood and Josephine McDonald (both Canberra, A.C.T., Australia)

4. The Rock Art of Northern Australia—conveners Hilary Sullivan and Ivan Hascev (both Jabiru, N.T., Australia)

5. Recording and Standardisation in Rock-Art Studies—convener B. Swartz (Muncie, Ind., U.S.A.)

6. Rock Art and Prehistory—conveners Paul Banh (Hull, England) and Andréé Rosenfeld (Canberra, A.C.T., Australia)

7. Rock Art and Ethnography—conveners Michael Morwood (Armidale, N.S.W., Australia) and Patricia Vinnicombe (Perth, W.A., Australia)

8. Archaeopsychological Interpretation of Rock Art—convener Whitney Davis (Berkeley, Calif., U.S.A.)

9. Pictures and Human Behaviour—convener John Clegg (Sydney, N.S.W., Australia)

10. Conservation and Site Management—conveners Colin Pearson and Alan Watchman (both Canberra, A.C.T., Australia)

11. Retouch: An Option to Conservation?—convener Graeme Ward (Canberra, A.C.T., Australia)

With a membership of more than 340 and nearly 200 papers presented, the congress ran on a very tight programme of three concurrent symposia throughout the week. Inevitably some conflicts arose in the choices available at any one time. Also inevitably, this report must to some extent be dependent on comments and conversations during intermissions as well as on active participation in selected symposia. It will be neither exhaustive nor balanced.

The three regional symposia concentrated on papers concerned with new discoveries and recent developments in their respective continents. These potentially offered an opportunity for participants to explore the local preoccupations of colleagues from other regions of the world, but taking full advantage of it was hampered by the fact that the symposia ran concurrently. By and large participants felt committed to participate in the debates of relevance to their own regional interests, and to some extent the Australian and New World symposia drew together memberships not significantly different from those of national conferences. The Old World section, comprising a far larger slice of the world, covered more varied ground and apparently included some very lively debate.

The Australia-and-Oceania symposium included reports on bodies of rock art which have previously received little or no attention: Bruno David presented new data on the Chillago region, Elizabeth Hathe on the Burdekin River, and Hillary Sullivan on engravings (petroglyphs) among the art sites in the Kakadu National Park, raising questions of the relationship between the well-documented sequence of painting styles of the area and the very different repertoire of engraved motifs. Sullivan was unable to resolve the chronology of the engravings, except that they do not appear to relate to the recent and present-day artistic systems that operate in the region.

Kelvin Officer's paper on the little-known and dispersed rock-art sites in southeastern Australia explored the question of the artificiality of the stylistic regions which we define in rock-art studies. He pointed out that
the boundaries determined on this basis are geological and not necessarily cultural. He has developed a method for the spatial analysis of artistic traits to attempt to overcome both the effects of proximity within a geologically characterised region and the negative evidence across areas devoid of suitable rock formations. This and other work-in-progress papers such as Josephine McDonald's work on the relationship between the two contemporary art systems of the Sydney-Hawkesbury sandstone and John Clegg's distribution-and-correlation analyses of motifs at Sturt's Meadow provided insights into the issues of current interest in Australian rock-art studies. These have clearly moved from a preoccupation with pancontinental development and chronologies to more in-depth analyses viewing rock art as the visible remains of systems of meanings that mark the cultural landscape and bind social groups or mediate in inter-group relations.

A most welcome addition to regional perspectives on rock art was a series of studies in Western Oceania, where rock art has by and large been neglected by archaeologists. Papers dealing with mainland New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and New Zealand reinforced previous impressions of the richness and diversity of rock art in these regions and its potential for meaningful integration into the archaeology of the region. In particular, Chris Ballard's discovery of coastal rock-painting sites in northern New Guinea and in the Bismarcks which appear to show a high degree of stylistic unity is very exciting. His suggestion that they correlate closely with the distribution of Austronesian-speaking communities has important implications for the question of the origins and spread of Lapita.

The North Australia symposium focussed on the rock art of Arnhemland. One of the more difficult issues to emerge from this session was that of correctly assessing the current and past cultural roles of rock-art sites. The complex and often very subtle Aboriginal gradation of sacredness and of secrecy-versus-openness of rock art and its associated meanings can be difficult to classify in terms of Western analytical units. The problem is exacerbated when such classifications are required for purposes of site management and the control of access. The danger of imposing a rigid framework on a fluid and dynamic system may be inherent in all ethnographic classification, but the potential for political manipulation of the classification of rock-art sites is one that site managers and environmental-impact assessors clearly need to remain very wary of.

The Prehistory symposium included two papers by anthropologists: Robert Layton examined the relationship between anthropological and archaeological perspectives on rock art and suggested that it is the partial nature of rock art within the wider cultural context that constitutes its major limitation. Anthony Forge also queried the analytical validity of the category of rock art as a fragmentary aspect of a wider artistic system. These papers to some extent echoed Officer's attempt to overcome the constraints of partial cultural material. Forge's questioning of stencils and particularly the worldwide motif of handstencils as belonging to an artistic system raised some debate. He argued that since stencils are by their nature devoid of style, they differ qualitatively from other artistic symbols, being personal rather than corporate. Counterarguments pointed to choices of pigment colour, location of stencils, and choice of object stencilled. Several papers concentrated on the analysis of formally simple or amorphous motif assemblages, particularly problems of motif identification. The very similar problems faced in defining such assemblages as the panaramitae complex in Australia and the Great Basin abstract style in the States made interesting comparisons and highlighted the inadequacy of contact between workers in widely separated regions. Finally, Claire Smith's paper on the role of women in the production of rock art highlighted the importance of women's art sites—an aspect previously often neglected or even denied.

The Conservation symposium drew relatively little attention from those not actively engaged in rock-art management or conservation. The neglect of this important aspect of rock-art studies is regrettable if for no other reason than that the correct evaluation of rock art must, as with any other archaeological material, take into consideration questions of "taphonomy"—bias in preservation and condition. The papers included technical papers such as John Clarke and Neil North's work on pigments in Kakadu rock paintings and François Soleilhavoup's paper on the importance of microorganisms in rock-surface alteration processes. Discussions of practical management plans emphasised the necessity for holistic analyses of rock-art site environments, which, at least in Australia, include the requirements of traditional site custodians.

Conflict between Western and indigenous perceptions was the focus of the symposium on retouching of rock paintings. Graham Walsh presented a very critical account of the recent retouching of several rock-art sites in the western Kimberleys, claiming that much of this work did not comply with what were traditional standards or practices. David Mowaljarlai, who directed much of the retouching project, explained its significance in maintaining traditional knowledge and values and particularly transmitting them to younger members of the community. He was emphatic in his claim to the right of Aboriginal cultural expression according to Aboriginal values—irrespective of Western interests or value judgements on the quality of such work. The right of an indigenous people to its cultural heritage is a principle which many archaeologists and anthropologists uphold. It is when this right comes into direct conflict with our own interests and values that the depth of our commitment to it is put to the test. The intensity of some of the debate in this symposium reflected fundamental differences among those concerned with the study and preservation of our rock-art heritage.

The proceedings of the congress will be published, contributors have been asked to take discussion of their papers into consideration when preparing them for publication. Details will be announced in Rock Art Research.