

Tim Denham ends the thematic section by continuing his commendable efforts of providing more secure chronologies for rock shelter sites in Highland New Guinea; here, redating the Manim rock shelter. The essay is framed around securing an age for ground stone axe technology and an attempt is made to determine the relevance of a Neolithic in the highlands based on the association of ground stone technology with agricultural practices. While the revised dating of Manim is of great importance, defining an alternative “agrarian” model for New Guinea is of little utility given the narrow range of evidence presented. James Flexner in the final essay of the Exchange and Contact section presents a narrative on the social role and cross-cultural appropriation of local foods by 19th century missionaries in Vanuatu by applying physical and microfossil analyses to four excavated mission sites. Missionaries had a large impact on Indigenous Pacific social practices and were often very disruptive, with this paper providing an archaeological perspective to known historic accounts.

The last theme “practice” is opened by Annette Oertle and Katherine Szabo’s informative ethnographic observations of shellfish gathering, processing and discard habits on Malaita in the Solomon Islands. The analysis provides a useful framework for archaeological interpretations of the processes that led to midden formation, which could be used by anyone working with shellfish remains. Frederique Valentin and Christophe Sand examine remarkably preserved late 19th century mummified bodies curated in a rock cavity in New Caledonia, giving fascinating insight into the process and purpose of mummification. Bio-archaeological analyses are central to cultural syntheses, and here it is well demonstrated. Mathieu Leclerc and colleagues continue the theme by presenting a framework to investigate the social use of Lapita pottery. It is based around results from a recently published pilot study on lipid residues and builds on a wealth of studies that have explored Lapita and Pacific Island foodways, setting the stage for further results from this team.

Dylan Gaffney examines the technological process of pottery-making in Madang region of northern Papua New Guinea. In a similar vein to the approach applied by Tim Thomas to axes, Gaffney uses ethnoarchaeological observations and outlines the possible intangible aspects of pottery preparation and use (ritual and magic) that are not immediately apparent in the material archaeological record. Such an approach must be used cautiously when applied to older material records that lack clear “ethnographic parallels”, but consideration of the social processes for pottery use in prehistoric contexts has strengthened archaeological syntheses in the Pacific region. Rounding out the volume is Edson Willie’s excellent perspective of the cultural responsibilities of being ni-Vanuatuan and an archaeologist. It combines insight into his and his community’s obligations to culture and tradition, balanced against the process of undertaking archaeological research on custom land. This essay highlights the responsibility of

any archaeologist working with communities, with particular reference made to human remains, sacred places and cultural beliefs.

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Drawing in the Land: Rock Art in the Upper Nepean, Sydney Basin, New South Wales

By Julie Dibden. ANU Press Terra Australis 49, Canberra, 2019. ISBN: 9781760462581. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22459/TA49.2018> Pp. 211. AUD 55.00 (free digital version)

A core feature of rock art research is the continuing focus on the relationship between rock art and landscapes, namely the spatial and temporal qualities of a specific rock art assemblage. These studies have, for the most part, proven extremely valuable in characterising the nature of rock art assemblages in a variety of geographical locales using formal methods, that is, those focusing on the motifs themselves rather than associated ethnographic data. Julie Dibden’s monograph focusing on the rock art of the Upper Nepean catchment in the Sydney Basin (south-eastern Australia) continues this trend by providing the first systematic analysis of rock art from this region. Given the somewhat lengthy tradition of landscape-based inquiry into the rock art of the Sydney Basin (e.g. McMahan, Officer, McDonald), I was interested to see what the next instalment of rock art research from the area could reveal.

The monograph is a pared-down version of Dibden’s doctoral research originally completed in 2011; the appendices she referred to throughout the volume are listed as being available on the ANU’s online Open Repository site although when I went to find them I was presented with an “Item Withdrawn” message. Dibden’s analysis draws on an impressive suite of data: 110 sites she recorded and field recordings of 810 sites made by the Illawarra Prehistory Group in the region over the last 40 years. She divides her study area into four smaller catchment zones that act as her spatial units of analysis.

The challenge set by Dibden in Chapter 1 is to “explore aspects relating to social geography via an analysis of rock art, other markings on stone, and the stone and land itself” (p. 2). This challenge meant her research was not solely focused on rock art but drew upon spatial patterning with other cultural features most notably grinding grooves and engraved groove channels – something crucial to her analysis that I felt was somewhat underplayed in the description of the monograph. The introductory chapter frames her project as contributing to broader research agendas targeting questions around the relationship between landscapes, social geography, and change.

Dibden provides an extensive background to the volume with Chapters 2–5 devoted to describing the environmental setting, history of Aboriginal occupation in the study area, the theoretical framework guiding the study, and her research methods. There is a lot of valuable information presented here useful to contextualising the study area especially in relation to the distinctive drainage patterning in the region and Aboriginal occupation in the colonial era. The theoretical framework employed here – embodiment, performance, and social practice (Chapters 1 and 4) – is tried and tested, and proven to be extremely useful in characterising rock art assemblages. However, I felt much of this background material could have been significantly condensed to create a tighter synthesis of the essential points needed for the reader to understand her approach. Importantly, her approach to classifying rock art in the Upper Nepean is guided by Rosenfeld’s influential identification of two categories of “gestural” marks – graphic (essentially images of an “artistic” construction) and non-graphic (“mechanically imposed forms such as stencils . . . pitted or rubbed surfaces, and non-graphic applications of pigment”, p. 14). While there are challenges with this approach (e.g. how would you classify hand stencils that have unique designs painted inside the stencil such as those found in western Arnhem Land?) I found it to be a useful one to categorise the region’s rock art as it clearly allowed for a fine-grained approach to the goal of elucidating spatial and temporal patterning.

Chapter 6 presented an in-depth look at the dataset and preliminary patterns observed in terms of site density and presence of grinding grooves which were used “to provide a general context of people’s habitual use of place” (p. 19). Here, variation in the distribution of site types – open versus sheltered – and grinding grooves becomes apparent with open sites and grinding grooves occurring predominantly in the Cataract catchment in the north-east quadrant of her study site. From here, more detailed analyses are undertaken in relation to the rock art. Chapters 7–9 are the heart of the volume and it’s here the book comes alive with a superimposition analysis revealing a three-phase sequence to the region’s rock art with the earliest phase (Phase 1) consisting of a small number of engravings placed at >4000 BP and Phase 3, the most recent phase of rock art, consisting of charcoal motifs and white and cream stencils. Interestingly she notes a “sequence of change that is comparable, in its broad structure” (p. 124) with that identified for other areas within the Sydney Basin. Additional findings included identification of considerable variation in the assemblage as well as the presence of many unique or rare motifs such as an anthropomorph holding a hatchet, and other large anthropomorphs with complex infill. What becomes most apparent with Dibden’s analysis is the incredible variability – spatial and temporal – of the assemblage that she rightly argues to be reflective of people’s complex and changing relationships to their landscapes.

The production quality was good, as is to be expected with *Terra Australis* volumes, with several high-quality

colour plates sprinkled throughout the text, appearing most frequently in the data and results section. The volume is well-priced; however, most interested readers are likely to take advantage of the free online PDF of the entire volume. In terms of drawbacks to the volume there are some, most notably the maps orienting the reader to the geography of the area. In the first instance, the “big picture” map showing the study region isn’t placed into the broader geographical context of Australia. The names of the four catchment zones that were key to examining the spatial distribution of sites and motifs were missing on the maps in the data and analysis chapters – these labels would have been useful to help guide the reader’s visualisation of the spatial divisions in the study area. Despite my comments concerning the background to the book, I felt the volume did a solid job of providing a useful and insightful analysis concerning the sustained interest in, and continually growing body of literature on rock art from the Sydney Basin and its relationship to/with the broader landscape.

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Dark Emu. Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture

By Bruce Pascoe. Magabala Books, Broome, Western Australia, New Edition, 2018. ISBN: 9781921248016. Pp. 278 AUD 19.99.

First published in 2014, reprinted 17 times, and with the new edition reprinted 11 times already, *Dark Emu* has become an Australian publishing phenomenon. It is being read widely, from schoolchildren to politicians: clearly, it is about an idea whose time has come.

The new edition is almost two books. The first, the original, argues that Aboriginal Australians were indeed real agriculturalists. Guided initially by Gerritsen (2008), and based almost entirely on extensive reading of early European explorers’ journals, Pascoe argues that Aborigines “were building dams and wells, planting, irrigating and harvesting seed; preserving the surplus . . . and manipulating the landscape.” (p. 2). This will come as no surprise to many of us who have said similar things, not quite so stridently or covering such an extensive range of material, for several decades (e.g. Hallam 1975; Gammage 2011; White 2011). It is indeed hard to describe these activities as other than agricultural. And, given their complexity, there can be little doubt they were developed over a long time. What Pascoe does, however, is couple his descriptions with an impassioned analysis of how skewed