



Community or representation of self: hands and feet in rock art

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SUMMARY

Are the existence of hand and feet depictions in rock art around the world indicative of an archetypal use of the motif? This does not suggest an equal ontological view or socio-cultural role of the symbol. Rather, the symbols themselves, in being representational of a hand or foot may point towards an associated use of marking of place or a more personalised or ritualistic role at times termed proprio-performative. The motifs' temporal and physical distribution in many countries around the world indicates its socio-ritualistic importance with at least some shared elements of creation and use. This paper focuses on the representations of feet and hand figures from Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland, Australia, and draws on examples from other areas such as the Americas, as a basis for contrast and comparison. The quantitative and relational aspects of hand and feet engraved images found at rock art sites such as Carnarvon Gorge offer new insights into the hand and feet figure's use in these areas and internationally. Given this area in Australia benefits from contemporary Indigenous connections to its sites some elements of interpretation can be obtained that feed into the site's use and importance, both in the past and present. As such, this paper explores the broader question: can ethnographic interpretation from one continent offer insights into sites on another continent with an unrelated cultural expression?

RIASSUNTO (COMUNITÀ O RAPPRESENTAZIONE DI SÉ: MANI E PIEDI NELL'ARTE RUPESTRE)

Le raffigurazioni di mani e piedi sono diffuse nell'arte rupestre di tutto il mondo, possiamo quindi ipotizzare un uso archetipico del motivo? La semplice diffusione non suggerisce una visione ontologica sempre uguale né un significato socio-culturale standard del simbolo. Piuttosto, le impronte, rappresentando una mano o un piede, potrebbero indicare un uso associato di marcatura del luogo o un ruolo più personalizzato o rituale a volte definito proprio-performativo.

La distribuzione temporale e fisica del soggetto in molti paesi del mondo indica la sua importanza socio-ritualistica con almeno alcuni elementi condivisi di creazione e uso. Questo articolo si concentra sulle rappresentazioni di piedi e mani di Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland, Australia, e attinge ad esempi provenienti da località americane, come base di contrasto e confronto. Gli aspetti quantitativi e relazionali delle incisioni di mani e piedi trovate in siti di arte rupestre come Carnarvon Gorge offrono nuove intuizioni sull'uso della figura di mani e piedi in queste aree e a livello internazionale. Questo sito australiano beneficia della presenza indigena contemporanea, quindi le aree rupestri sono ancora vive e frequentate.

Qui, è possibile ottenere alcuni elementi di interpretazione che alimentano l'uso e l'importanza del sito, sia nel passato che nel presente. In quanto tale, questo articolo esplora la domanda più ampia: l'interpretazione etnografica di un continente può offrire spunti su siti di un altro continente con un'espressione culturale non correlata?

INTRODUCTION

Hand and feet motifs are an archetypal form of rock art expression with extensive manifestations around the globe and have a long temporal presence in the history of human expression. They take the form of stencils, engravings, paintings, prints and the physical impressions directly into surfaces that are easily marked, such as finger fluting. We find these motifs in diverse locations around the world including Europe, Australia and the Americas and within a variety of site contexts, both grouped and as singular figures. The meaning of such images has received the attention of various theories (e.g., BAHN 1998; DOBREZ 2013; 2014; LEROI-GOURHAN 1986; MOORE 1979; MORWOOD, WALSH 1979, 1983; WRIGHT 1985). The motifs, in being representational of a hand or foot may point towards an associated use of marking of place or a more personalised or ritualistic role. In the research of these motifs in Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland, Australia, it

is possible to have some insight into their significance through contemporary Indigenous community knowledge as well as archaeological research. The aim of this paper is not to list a descriptive catalogue of forms and permutations aptly covered by authors such as Dobrez (2013) and Morwood (2002) but explore some other aspects of understanding human expression and communication through rock art especially pertaining to Carnarvon Gorge.

Are the existence of hand and feet depictions around the world indicative of an archetypal use of the motif? This does not suggest an equal ontological view or socio-cultural role of the symbol. The symbols themselves, in being representational of a hand or foot may point towards an associated use of marking of place or a more personalised or ritualistic role. The motifs' temporal and physical distribution in many countries around the world indicates its socio-ritualistic importance with at least some shared elements of cre-

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ation and use. This paper focuses on the representations of hand and feet figures from Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland, Australia, and reflects on some sites in Europe and the Americas as a basis for contrast and comparison. The quantitative and relational aspects of hand and feet engraved images found at rock art sites such as Carnarvon Gorge offer new insights into the hand and feet figure's use in these areas and internationally. Can ethnographic interpretation from one continent offer insights into sites on another continent with an unrelated cultural expression?

DEFINITION

Hand stencils, and prints have elements of commonality with those of the human foot created in the same manner as they are direct impressions of the individual. As such the finger fluting can also lie within this category. Hand stencils are also termed negative handprints and those created by printing a handprint onto a surface by applying paint to the underside of the hand are termed positive handprints. Engraved hand and foot motifs and those painted or drawn representations of hands and feet can be considered as representational and have a less direct connection to the individual involved in their creation (DOBREZ 2013, p. 273). This will be further addressed within the discussion. The process of stencilling is generally carried out by mixing pigments such as ochre, clay and charcoal with water and/or saliva in the mouth and spitting or blowing the mixture onto the surface of the rock to create a negative image or outline of body parts or objects. There are some variations in application within some cultural groups involving different admixtures and application processes such as using a tube for spraying. The most common stencil in Australia is the human hand (this is true of many countries around the world).

In regard to the techniques of engraving, direct and indirect pecking also abrasion and scratched (ANATI 2011, ABREU 1990), there is more invested time depending on the hardness of the rock surface. Finger fluting such as those found in Gargas (Aventignan, France, LEROI-GOURHAN 1986) and Rouffignac (DELLUC & DELLUC, 1993; VAN GELDER *et al.* 2010), due to the less individually representational forms these will not be focused on.

The hand and foot images and stencils can range from just the imprint of a few digits to a whole-body stencil (WALSH 1999, pp. 122-123; BAHN 1998). On occasion there may be surface preparation (see Figure 2A, the area underneath the boomerangs was abraded to make it smoother) or noticeable framing through the selection of a particular depression (see Figure 3A). Some hand motifs are decorated, e.g., the Levi range in central Australia (GUNN 1998) and Canyonlands National Park, Utah, USA (See Figure 5A). These different forms of rock art are located on surfaces that range from shelters and caves to open air sites.

AROUND THE GLOBE

The diffusion of hand motifs is dependent not only on

the cultural propensity for image creation but also on the availability of ochres and suitable surfaces. Whether first created through cultural diffusion (DOBREZ 2014, p. 367) or impulsive behaviour, they are found around many regions of the globe.

Some famous sites include the French sites of Rouffignac (Dordogne) Cosquer, dating around 27000+ BP (VAN GELDER 2010), and Chauvais. An example from Portugal for the finger paint imprints or partial hands include Pego da Rainha (Tejo) (ABREU 2008, p. 83) and also Mão do Homem. Spain has some of the oldest stencils at around 37.3 thousand years in El Castillo (PIKE *et al.* 2012).

The Americas have several sites including the famous Cueva de los Manos, Argentina (see figure 4 and GRADIN *et al.* 1976); Several Mayan sites (STRECKER 2013); Vallegrande, Santa Cruz, Bolivia; Trinidad, Baja California Sur, Mexico (SCHAAFSMA 2010); Seminole Canyon Texas, USA; Central Montana (GREER & GREER, 1999, KEYSER 1979, p. 159). And several sites around the world (e.g., North Africa in LE QUELLEC 1993 and India, DUBEY-PATHEK & CLOTTES 2013).

Australia has many areas with both large compositional content and singular examples such as Carnarvon Gorge, the Palace (formally known as Blacks Palace in Central Queensland), Kakadu, Red hand cave New South Wales and in the Kimberley region, Western Australia.

The oldest known hand stencil in the world is currently from Maros (Borneo), with a minimum age of 39.9 kyr, (AUBERT *et al.* 2014, p. 223). Though there is a recent problematic claim of older hand and foot impressions on a rock in Quesang, high on the Tibetan plateau, but lacking in robust dating it may still help to stimulate the debate of what is intentional hand and footprint creation and its potential implications (BENNETT, REYNOLDS 2021).

THE SITE

Carnarvon Gorge, known in Bidjara as Kooramin-danjie (HUGGINS 1995, p. 166), is located in the Southern Central Highlands of Queensland (See figure 1). It has many sites that have both single and compositional hand stencils as well as engraved hands and feet. Culturally Carnarvon Gorge is primarily identified as *country* by the Karingbal and Bidjara Indigenous groups. Other groups such as the Brown River people, the 'Kairi, Nuri, Longabulla, Wadja and the Yiman' (HUGGINS 1994, p.7) also identify with the gorge. Thus, Carnarvon Gorge is viewed as a gathering place for various Indigenous groups. Stencil research has largely been carried out by Quinnell (1971), Morwood (1979), Walsh (1979, 1983, 1988) and Gunn (2006).

DISCUSSION

Handprints as signatures

Handprints have been considered as signatures (DOBREZ 2013, p. 227, Bidjara 2017 pers. comm. May (F 280)) as indicated by the recognition of individuals ethnographically when members of a community recognise individuals related to them or their own prints

within the rock art. Stencilled feet can also act as signatures and appear to be more common in Australia than other parts of the world. During work in the Kimberly Elkin was informed that any member of the tribe could instantly recognise a particular hand stencil's author (MOORE 1977, p. 322).

In regard to left hand stencils, 78% of stencils at Art Gallery are hand stencils (QUINNELL 1976, p. 145) 94% at Cathedral Cave, with a preference for left-handed stencils 70/30 (QUINNELL 1976, p. 146) and 65/35 at Cathedral Cave (QUINNELL 1976, p. 168). As such left hands in both Carnarvon Gorge and internationally have a higher incidence in stencils, e.g., in Gargas (ABREU 2008, p. 71) of 158 hand stencils 86% were left hands and only 13.9% right hands. This is probably due to right-handedness rather than symbolism.

Rock art as a signalling tool of expression

In Carnarvon Gorge a number of single hand stencils are situated on the approach to a site. It has been indicated that many of these have the role of signalling motifs to indicate what sort of site you are approaching so as to understand if certain behaviour or cultural protocols are to be observed such as approaching a burial location (BIDJARA 2017, pers.comm. May (F 280)).

Hard to reach

On occasion the motifs are placed in locations that are difficult to reach, both for the artist and the observer. This may be due to changes in the ground levels, but on many occasions, it is thanks to the ingenuity of the artist in attaining these heights either by climbing or the use of large limbs of trees to reach the areas required (BIDJARA 2017, pers.comm. May (F 280) see figures 6 and 7). Children's stencilled hands and feet are found in Carnarvon Gorge, often at height. Children's hands are also located in Gargas and Rouffignac supporting the idea that children were assisted in the process.

Superimpositions

The superimpositions of hand motifs can either be incidental or for other communicative processes. In Carnarvon Gorge the images of 4 hands with forearms are said to be indicative of the alliances between different language groups using the gorge (BIDJARA 2017, pers. comm. July (C 150)). This thus indicates a use of superimposition to establish cultural connectivity and the sharing of the use of the gorge (see figure 2B). Another example of forearms is also found at Cueva de los Manos.

The extreme palimpsest of layered hands in many sites such as Cueva de los manos, the panel of 200 hands in Canyonlands National Park, Utah, USA, Whitetail Bear site, Montana (KEYSER & KLARKSEN 2001, p. 159) and Cathedral cave in Carnarvon Gorge are suggestive of a long temporal period of creation. Cultural impetus may have also been guided by previous motifs. These diverse sites are also indicative of the widespread phenomena.

Compositional billboards are creations that started as

individual handprints usually over an extended period of time. This is indicative of a continuity of creation and non-static 'art' not predetermined arrangement at early stage. This also indicates a multi-level meaning which includes the individual within the larger compositional form.

It is hard to establish whether stencilled compositional elements are contemporaneous or created at different times. This does not take away from the compositional elements. An example is found in a cascade of red hands around an opening interpreted as a vulva form (see figure 3B) at the Art Gallery site and those around a burial niche set high on the wall of Cathedral Cave (see figure 6A). The compositional hand stencilling at Cueva de las Manos, through its layered effect and size of the composition as well as the use of different coloured ochres, not only indicates a long temporal tradition but one that includes layers of cultural variation in ochre usage. There is clear intent in the association with other images within some compositions, as such there is probable 'coded symbolic meaning in association' (DOBREZ 2013, p. 296).

MISSING DIGITS AND EXTRA DIGITS

Carnarvon Gorge is one of the places that has engraved and stencilled motifs with 6 digits. Ethnographically a propensity for cases of six digits on hands and feet within the community is recorded on a postcard held at the John Oxley section of the State Library of Queensland which shows a community member (living in Springsure but with strong links to the Carnarvon area) with six digits (see negatives 23106 and 107837 John Oxley archives and Kerkhove, 2010, p. 13 who lists four families with a propensity for extra digits). This trait has also been used in Native Title claims in the area which includes stencils with six fingers and therefore suggestive of direct genetic connection to the stencil art and that of descendants with the same trait (GODWIN & L'OSTIE-BROWN 2004, p. 194). Kerkhove's (2010, p. 13) ethnographic research indicates this as a regional art signature for the Bidjara especially in relation to the engraved feet depicting six toes (see Figure 6B).

There are many examples of extra digits or polydactylism in hand stencils and engravings in other countries such as the Chaco Canyon in the USA and all the way down to Argentina (CROWN *et al.* 2016). Some communities have a genetic propensity for this anatomical feature, in other cases it is due to pressures on genetic diversity within the population.

Given that spiritual beings in a number of cultures are on occasion depicted with polydactyl hands, extra digits (see Figure 5B) it is likely that this anatomical anomaly was not necessarily viewed in a negative light. Conversations with the Bidjara community have indicated that from a contemporary view of the rock art these individuals were seen with additional respect (BIDJARA 2017, pers.comm. May (F 280)) and occasionally with extra powers (KERKHOVE 2010, p. 13) and Pueblo ethnographic research by Crown (2016, p. 427) also reflected a higher perception or status of individu-

als with polydactylism. See Figures 8A, B, C, D, and E and 6B for polydactyl forms in Carnarvon Gorge and USA.

There are cases of people missing or having damaged fingers through accident, disease or cultural mutilation (ROTH 1897, p. 184). The removal of digits has occurred culturally in countries such as the USA and Australia. In Australia the practice was regionally variable. Quinell (1976, p. 146) only found two possible mutilated hands in Carnarvon gorge the rest being hand manipulations. The majority of stencils originally thought to depict missing digits (e.g., SALHY 1969) have achieved this through the bending of fingers. At Maltravieso Ripoll López *et al.* (1999) undertook an exhaustive analysis which definitively concluded that there were no mutilations in the stencilled hands at Maltravieso.

Opinion changed in Australia on the amputation debate given the limited practice of ritual amputation in Australia (DOBREZ 2013, p. 80) though some academics persisted for many years with the mutilation theory (e.g., HOOPER 1980). Such bent finger stencils are also found in Gargas (France) of which 91.9% are missing digits in the stencils (SIMÕES DE ABREU 2008, p. 71). Maltravieso (Spain) and Chauvet (France) have less examples. There are also motifs of unrealistic hands such as in the impressive hand focused engravings in New Mexico (see figure 5B).

Feet

Pecked feet are iconic to the Panaramitee 'tradition' (the term 'tradition' is used in the sense of propensity of symbols) within Australia and represents an early spread of rock art around Australia but are also present in later styles (FRANKLIN 2016). Carnarvon Gorge has a large number of feet engravings (see Figure 10 A and B) compared to other engraved areas of Australia. Some are present extending below the ground level (see Figure 6B) indicating early use of the symbol within the gorge. The foot symbol, especially exhibiting polydactylism, may even translate as a regional marker for the art style of the Bidjara (GODWIN & L'OSTE-BROWN 2004, p. 201).

Stencilled feet are found in Carnarvon (see Figure 3A) and regionally (up to the Palace site, previously known as Blacks Palace). Many of these are children's or toddler's footprints probably requiring the assistance of an adult to execute the motif as often they are situated at chest height. Also, at Baby's Feet Cave in New South Wales, Australia, a pair of stencilled feet is situated at height within a panel of hand stencils. Overseas foot stencils are not as abundant but found in areas such as Patagonia (DOBREZ 2013, p. 299).

Sign or gestural language in hand motifs

The use of modified digit expression in rock art appears to achieve the codification of symbolic meaning (DOBREZ 2013, p. 287). This is supported by the wide use of sign language in Indigenous Australian communication and this possible codification being transferred onto the rock art. Several hand stencils in Carnarvon Gorge have the digits adjusted so as to

distort the stencil created. In some cases, this appears to be carried out so as to imitate certain animals such as emus and in other cases this appears to represent other coded forms of communication. One such series of handprints is located at the Art Gallery site within Carnarvon Gorge. This has been interpreted by one Indigenous representative as representing the death of many children (see Figure 2A, KARINGBAL 2017, pers. comm. March (C 150)). This interpretation has been contested by other Indigenous community member of other language groups, but are viewed as symbolic exchange.

Morwood (2002, p. 166), Leroi-Gourhan (1997) and Walsh (1979, p. 40) were confident that the manipulation of fingers in stencilling was for the purpose of coded information communication such as that evident in the sign language (see figure 9A, ROTH 1987). This was considered both gestural but also imitative such as the bird's head stencil. Recent studies by linguist researchers such as Etxepare (2021) point to sign language as well for the European examples. It is also possible that some subtleties or compositional context are not easily detectable to the viewer today but may have had significance based on the orientation of the hand stencil and possibly even the distention of the fingers.

Many cultures use gestural language in addition to spoken language in different circumstances. Native American tribes have used sign language to assist in communication with different language groups, and they are often used at times when speech is forbidden, such as during silent rituals or periods of mourning and hunting and traditional storytelling (ETXEPARE 2021, p. 1). The use of sign language during hunting or periods of enforced silence was widespread throughout Aboriginal Australia (ROTH 1897).

Significance in obtaining ochres

The research into the use of ochres from different areas is becoming less of a challenge with the use of hand-held XRF (X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy) devices directly on the rock art to identify the chemical signatures of the ochre to match them to ochre sources. The story of a groups of Indigenous people traveling long distances to reach certain culturally significant ochre sources as a form of initiation illustrates the important not only of a motif made with pigment but the pigment source itself.

At sites such as Cueva de las Manos (Argentina) there is such variety as to include red, yellow, white, black, violet, and a less frequent green colour. At Gargas (France) the percentages are as follows: of two hundred and thirty-one hands, 143 (61.9%) are made in black, 80 (34.6%) in red ochre, 5 (2.1%) in brown ochre, 2 (0.8%) in of black and only 1 (80.4%) is white (Simões de Abreu 2008, p. 69). At the Art Gallery in Carnarvon Gorge 70% are red the rest yellow and white and small percentage of black (QUINNELL, p. 148) at Cathedral Cave 88% red then yellow and only 1% white (QUINNELL, p. 168).

Agency of maker and viewer

The agency of the artist and that of the viewer may differ not only at the time of creation but also over time. The use and symbolism may not be static. The framing of hand stencils at Carnarvon Gorge indicate the accentuation through its position on a panel, the shape of the rock and the rock features (see Figure 3A and 6A). This is evident at other sites such as Gargas in a framing niche (HOOPER 1980, GROENEN 1988)

Cultural effacing or damage of hand stencils is reported by Elkin (1952) in southern Arnhem land. It also occurs on other types of motifs and may serve to reduce the power of the figure represented as such possibly the spirit of the author of the hand stencil. Whether hand stencils can be termed 'art' is explored by Forge (1991). Given their use in compositions the aesthetic value is probably secondary to the role in cultural processes.

Modern performative cultural stencilling as continuation of culture and community enabling

The modern performative art creation both on rock and within contemporary expression such as on walls or canvas can be viewed as a continuation of cultural expression (GIORGI & HARDING 2021). This is aptly illustrated by a contemporary artist that has used the cultural expression of stencilling and the act of community involvement in creating hand stencils within his art (see figure 9B). Harding carries this out using culturally safe practices by consulting with elders (GIORGI & HARDING 2021, p. 79). Changing perceptions of rock art can recognise the continuation and contemporaneous relevance of knowledge that prioritises education and the strengthening of cultural bonds to land through the medium of rock art. Contemporary interpretations and connections to the gorge and the rock art sites in question must be acknowledged and validated. Culture continues and cannot be frozen in time.

As such, these art practises that embrace the cultural expression of rock art are strengthening connection to country; reinforcing community connections; creating inter-generational appreciation; creating appreciation by the wider community; embedding respect for elders past, present and future and are a demonstration of opportunities to members of the community. Within some Australian communities there has also been contemporary creation at rock art sites (TAÇON 1989, and pers. comm. 2021 Kuku-yalanji pers. comm. September (G 120)).

Beyond proprio-performative

Beyond the *proprio-performative* (DOBREZ 2013) the hand and footprints appear to often embody elements of community expression and meaning and therefore have a community representational platform as well. Dobrez's brilliant paper (2013, p. 312) on 'Proprio-performatives' discusses hand images as a combination of a sense of 'ownership' with an act of communication. Dobrez argues that a hand stencil can be both a territorial marker as well as a symbol of self. The proprio-

performative being embedded even within possible hand signs. Their primary meaning being the declaration of self, *proprio-performative*, to which further meaning can be attached (DOBREZ 2013, p. 313). Beyond this concept lies the signalling stencilling mentioned above, which perform the task of warning those approaching of certain behavioural protocols due to the site's significance (e.g., area of sepulchre). These signalling stencils are likely to have very low *proprio-performative* impetus given they are driven by a primarily communicative agenda. Whereas a ritualistic or bereavement stencil embeds a direct expression of self in connection to the act.

The large panels or palimpsests of stencils may embody both and offer a strengthening bond to cultural identity and continuation of culture in the visible additions to the whole (see Figure 7). Engraved hands and feet are more representational and less of a direct expression of self and not considered by Dobrez (2013, p. 277) as *proprio-performative*, though the act of engraving can in itself be viewed as performative. As such the engravings, such as those in New Mexico created by Jornada Mogollon people (see Figure 8A) and in Carnarvon Gorge (see Figure 6B) are not considered to be *proprio-performative*.

Meaning

The challenges of evaluating the spatial, temporal and cultural dimensions of the hand and foot rock art expressions in Carnarvon Gorge and extending that more broadly to other cultural manifestations is a complex task. By focusing on some aspects of the expression we can glean some insights into meaning. Moore (1977, pp. 318, 322) listed the uses of stencils as individual signature/marking a visit; memorialization of the dead; to address ancestor spirits; communication with others; a historical record; storytelling or myth recording; Totemic ancestor prints or for sorcery. As such hand and foot motifs could have fallen into one of these categories or multiple categories given that rock art may have multiple uses, multiple levels of understanding and is not temporally static.

The rock art can also be considered a mnemonic form of recall through motif use. By viewing the rock art in context, the culturally associated viewer has triggered recall of individual or community embedded myths, symbolic behaviours, initiations or connections to country.

The act of stencilling according to Schaafsman (2010, p. 29) within Pueblo culture was to receive a blessing such as abundance. This has many crossovers in Australian rock art traditions and the act of securing abundance through rock art creation (KARINGBAL 2017, pers. comm. March (C 150)).

One of the characteristics of stencil use within Carnarvon Gorge and likely a regional style marker is that of the hand and forearm stencils (see Figure 2B) as they appeared at all major sites in Carnarvon Gorge. Franklin (2016, p. 156) aptly explored the regional style changes in Australia and outlined the theory that 'style distinctions could represent boundary emphasising

expression by highlighting cultural distinctions. This contrasted with the more homogeneous Panaramitee 'tradition' for emphasising cultural similarities and thus cohesion of individual groups to wider cultural expression. Given this broader concept, the hand and forearm stencils are regionally distinct and therefore delineating territory within the wider corpus of motifs. As mentioned in the superimpositions section these motifs were used to create cohesion between different language groups, symbolising alliances of groups using the gorge. In a sense rather than delineating territory they widen the inclusion of territorial use. These regional projections of corpuses of motifs can be observed within the Americas as well, such as the regionally distinct handprints with internal decoration from the Canyonlands National Park (see Figure 5A). Taking the etic (outsider's) and an emic (insider's) perspectives together in observing rock art patterns can provide insights into patterns of expression in rock art in various sites internationally. The contemporary cultural insights into rock art meaning are invaluable in such research.

CONCLUSION

With cultural specificity taken into consideration we can still observe what appears to be a diverse use of hand and foot motifs in Carnarvon Gorge and internationally as both the *proprio-performative* and representational of a wider symbolic motif use. The stencil itself appears to reflect *proprio-performative* expression at its initial creation and subsequently form palimpsests and compositional panels with extended and possibly temporally fluid meanings. Some of these have specific cultural meaning such as the connecting forearms. With increases in panel compositions these represent increasingly community focused meaning and less individualistic expression, at times as a tool of signalling and specific communication such as the hand signs with finger manipulations in stencil making.

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Engravings of hands and feet also have a long temporal use like stencils but appear to fill different roles in expression. Unlike the more *proprio-performative* hand stencils, they initially form part of the Panaramitee 'tradition' of creating regional cultural homogeneity and connections and later are an element of the corpus of regional Bidjara motifs.

Comparisons with international hand and foot motif expression, in this case some sites in Europe and the Americas, can offer cross cultural insights into graphic behaviours. By intersecting archaeological and ethno-historical information it is possible to have more robust insights into the rock art meaning. Contemporary Indigenous knowledge and historical ethnographic records are invaluable in understanding meaning and generating patterns of graphic behavior. Temporal distance in the creation of images does not preclude their compositional intent which may continue over time or experience changes in cultural interpretation and use. Contemporary Indigenous use of rock art assists in the continuation of culture without restricting it to a temporally static function.

Further research of sites with hand and foot motifs can extend the understanding of patterns of graphic traditions and the broader question of projecting such patterns onto other cultural expressions internationally. The socio-ritualistic importance of hand and feet motifs have at least some shared elements of creation and use.

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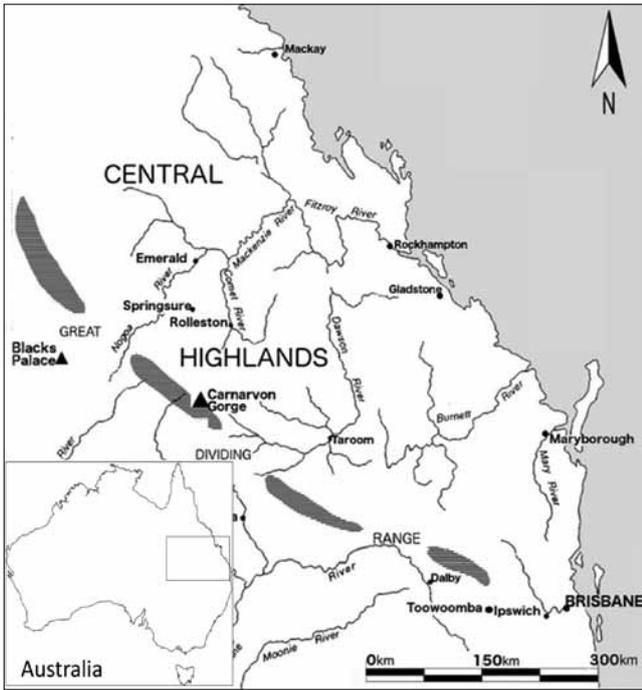


Fig. 1 - Carnarvon Gorge in the Queensland Central Highlands



Fig. 2 - Art Gallery site Carnarvon Gorge. Photo M. Giorgi.



Fig. 3 - Art Gallery site. A, Framed hand stencil in a man-made depression. B, Cascade of red hands below an opening. Photos M. Giorgi.



Fig. 4 - Cueva de los Manos. Photo M. Giorgi.



Fig. 5 - A, Canyonlands National Park, The Needles District. Devils pocket, SOB hill. Photo Keiko Tsukamoto USA. B, Exaggerated hands, possibly 2 with 6 fingers. East of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Photo William Frej.



Fig. 6 - Cathedral Cave, Carnarvon Gorge. A, hands surrounding a sepulchre niche high on the wall. B, multiple toes or overlapped feet. Photo M. Giorgi.



Fig. 7 - Cathedral Cave. Photo M. Giorgi

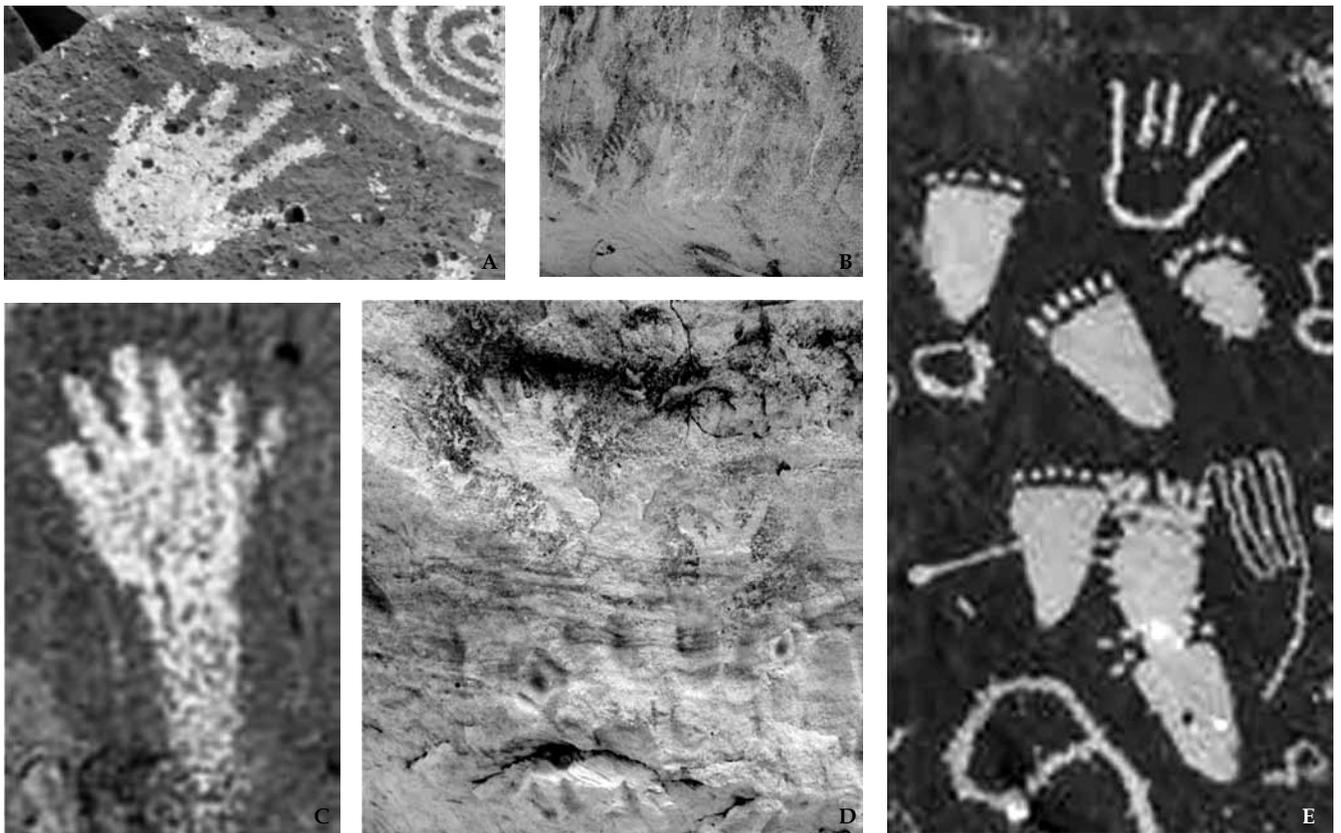


Fig. 8 - A, La Cienega, New Mexico, USA. B and D are Possible six fingered stencils, Carnarvon Gorge. C, Three Rivers, USA. E, Newspaper Rock, Canyonlands National Park in Utah, photo Michael Boyle.

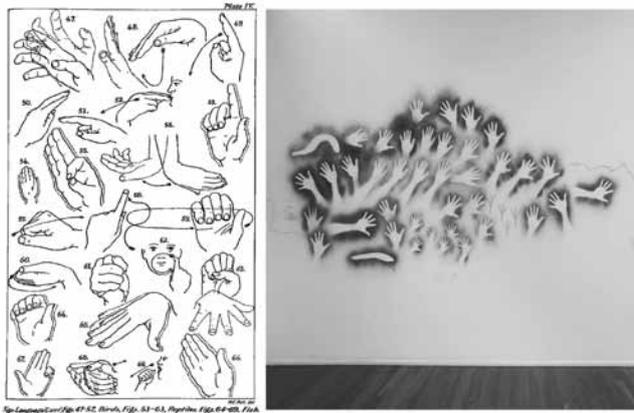


Fig. 9 - A, Samples of gestural signs denoting birds, reptiles and fish, as illustrated by W. E. Roth, Plate IV, *Ethnological Studies among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines*, 1897. B, Modern expression of rock art, continuity of culture, 'I refuse you my death', Milani Gallery, Dale Harding.

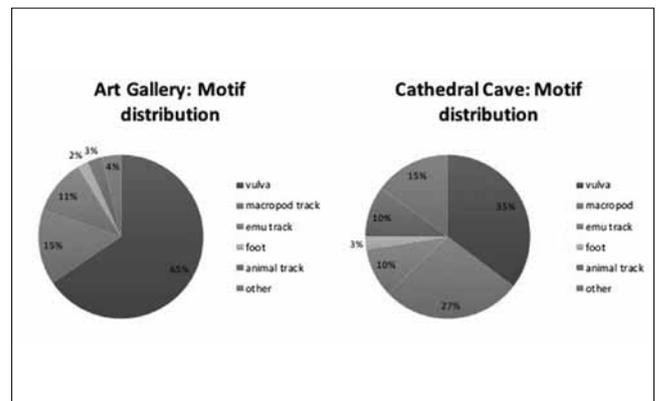


Fig. 10 - A, Motif distribution at the Art Gallery site highlighting the proportion of motifs. B, Motif distribution at Cathedral Cave the site highlighting the proportion of motifs.