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Review of: Australian Rock Art: A New Synthesis

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The future trend no doubt will be toward popular syntheses of archaeological research, as agencies become more responsive to the public weal. We are obligated to our sponsors and the public to present the results of archaeological research in a useful and informative way. The gray literature of cultural-resource management, as Fontana, Redman, and others have pointed out, does not achieve this goal. We nevertheless must maintain a scholarly responsibility to our discipline, which demands that the data be presented and be widely available. Popular books alone also fail in this effort. *People of the Tonto Rim* is an important contribution to the archaeology of a poorly understood part of Arizona, which makes the absence of a more-detailed professional presentation more sorely felt. The immediate solution to our problem is not apparent. Perhaps writers and archaeologists should collaborate on popular publications. The ultimate solution may be the most expensive: to produce all three types of reports—data base, popular book, and technical report. We need to consider seriously how best to address Fontana's concerns. *People of the Tonto Rim*, in and of itself, is not the best solution.

Australian Rock Art: A New Synthesis. ROBERT LAYTON. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992. xi + 284 pp., illustrations, tables, appendixes, references, index. \$65.00 (cloth).

Reviewed by Paul Faulstich, Pitzer College.

Rock-art studies have now come of age, and are among the most fertile explorations of expressive culture. Through an interdisciplinary approach to its study, we have expanded our knowledge into the realms of aesthetics, belief systems, and social structures. Australian rock art is particularly significant, since it is a visual expression that has been practiced by contemporary as well as prehistoric Aboriginals. Robert Layton's most recent book—his "new synthesis" of Australian rock art—is an ambitious and successful analysis of Aboriginal rock art from across the continent.

Layton's approach embraces archaeology, anthropology, semiotics, and art history. He thoroughly chronicles the development of approaches to rock-art studies with careful and thoughtful scholarship. In this exceptionally well-researched volume, Layton presents a nearly exhaustive history of rock-art studies as developed and practiced in Australia. He emphasizes the need to understand rock art within its full cultural and historical context, and warns against constructing overly specific interpretations of prehistoric art.

Stressing that anthropology helps elucidate cultural particulars while archaeology adds an understanding of variability over time, the author articulates a modified Saussurean understanding of rock art as cultural behavior. The significance of this approach extends beyond the academic study of rock art, relating broadly to such topics as aesthetics, cosmologies, and socialities. Despite the breadth of this survey, Layton takes an admirably conservative approach throughout by avoiding conjecture and speculation.

The text is both theoretically intense and descrip-

tively thick, and hence occasionally cumbersome. It encompasses, among other topics, descriptions by early European settlers, archaeological and ethnographic field data, and critiques of theoretical approaches applicable to rock-art research. Detailed case studies support Layton's analyses, addressing levels of interpretations, aesthetic systems, stylistic conventions, site significance, and issues of sacredness.

Archaeological data are used to demonstrate ways in which rock-art traditions have changed over time in response to environmental fluctuations, new forms of social organization, and the impact of European settlement. Layton asserts that style, artistic vocabulary, and the choice of sites reflect the cultural function of rock art. Rock art, he argues, was part of a cultural strategy that provided indigenous communities with effective adaptations to changing environments. He reasons that permanent art in rock shelters is evidence not simply of climatic change, but of changing socio-cultural systems. Layton sees the upsurge in the use of shelter sites over the last few millennia as a consequence of developing cultural principles for mapping people onto the landscape. This, he suggests, happened as new territorial systems evolved.

Layton makes the point that not all Aboriginal rock art is of a secret/sacred nature—an ideal sometimes embraced by romanticizing dilettantes—but that it is often associated with secular concerns. He takes the perspective that Australian rock art is generally not a private expression, but a public, cultural one. The most significant meanings of rock art, Layton contends, are to be found in its expression of socially based local organization.

The author does not just survey prior treatises on Australian Aboriginal rock art, but offers analyses that present the art with newfound complexities. Chapter Five, for example, ventures to "outline a theory of the relationships between the structure of culture, as a system, and the performance of discourse in a cultural idiom" (p. 115). He applies his theory to indigenous Australian cultures and the art they produce.

Throughout his analysis, Layton utilizes the synthetic framework advanced in Lesley Maynard's influential paper "The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art" (In *Exploring the Visual Art of Oceania*, edited by S. M. Mead, pp. 83-110, 1979). Layton departs from Maynard's position, however, in two important ways. First, he contends that contemporary Aboriginal peoples can be informative about prehistoric rock art, and second, he argues that the evidence does not support Maynard's unilinear sequence of Aboriginal rock art evolving toward increased naturalism. Instead, Layton advances a diachronic model for the development of motifs. He maintains that this diachronic sequence can be partially reconstructed and relates to other changes in Aboriginal cultures and their environments. In repudiating Maynard's sequence, Layton presents recent evidence for dating Australian rock art, along with results of statistical analyses of style distribution.

Layton discusses vandalism as a denial of indigenous rights. Likewise, he is consistently sensitive to the complexities of intellectual property rights and secret/sacred issues; no culturally sensitive photographs or text, for example, are included. Likewise, the author understands the conflicts inherent in reporting on Abo-

iginal cultures, and alludes to the contradictions in his own work: "The European academic tradition which relates authority to the ability to publish knowledge in an open market is a threat to the Aboriginal tradition. It is difficult to convey the web of ideas and associations which help in understanding Aboriginal cosmology without at the same time undermining it" (p. 58). This divulgence is not elaborated, and there is something honest yet unresolved in its admission.

The most disconcerting thing about this volume has not to do with scholarship or ethics, but with illustrations. The book, large in format, is profusely illustrated with maps, tables, figures, and photographs, but many of the photographs are of inferior quality. Poorly focused images, poor contrast, or distorted perspectives mar the book's visual appeal. Additionally, all of the illustrations are black and white, which precludes full appreciation of the richness and detail of the art. At least one image (p. 14) is printed upside down. This is not an inexpensive book; the highest-quality images should have been assured.

Layton omits detailed discussion of the archaeologically and aesthetically important parietal finger flutings of Koonalda and other limestone caves of southern Australia. He does this, he says, because they have no counterpart in recent indigenous cultures (not exactly accurate) and "cannot reliably be classed as art" (p. 3). This posturing forces Layton to exclude some fascinating and significant material.

The index is comprehensive and divided into six sections: Culture Heroes, Tricksters and Legendary Beings; Groups; Persons; Places; Rock Art Subjects; and General Subjects. The glossary is useful, although it is short (28 entries) and of mixed relevance. The bibliography is extensive.

Layton's "new synthesis" is a valuable reference work on rock art and cultural studies. It is important reading for scholars (advanced undergraduate and beyond) with an interest in Australian Aboriginal expressive culture.

Abandonment of Settlements and Regions: Ethnoarchaeological and Archaeological Approaches. CATHERINE M. CAMERON and STEVE A. TOMKA, editors. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993. xv + 201 pp. figures, tables, references, index. \$49.95 (cloth).

Reviewed by Alan P. Sullivan, University of Cincinnati.

With an expanding emphasis on theoretical issues, we have become correspondingly more interested in factors that affect the origins of archaeological phenomena. In *Abandonment of Settlements and Regions*, Catherine M. Cameron and Steve A. Tomka have assembled 13 strong case studies that illustrate how abandonment processes affect variation in the archaeological record.

Cameron's thoughtful introductory chapter frames the scales (region or settlement) and units of analysis (type of abandonment) for the volume's seven ethnoarchaeological and six archaeological studies. Tomka and Marc G. Stevenson's concluding chapter, an extended review of the significance of abandonment pro-

cesses, argues that, because abandonment modes may vary independently of occupation modes, great potential exists for misinterpreting the causes of archaeological variability.

Tomka investigates how type of abandonment (seasonal, episodic, permanent) affects assemblage composition among transhumant agro-pastoralists in Bolivia. He argues that assemblage size becomes depleted as abandonment periods lengthen. The effect, which Tomka terms "delayed curation," appears to be a corollary of Ascher's rule—discarded items in good condition are the first to be reclaimed, thereby increasing assemblage-wide proportions of broken and worn objects.

In an analogous study, Martha Graham explores the consequences of punctuated (episodic) abandonment on assemblage composition among Raramuri (Tarahumara) agro-pastoralists of southwestern Chihuahua, Mexico. She found that the artifact content and occupation spans of agricultural residences and main residences are similar. Further, these two residence types contribute material to winter abodes, which have highly variable occupation patterns and no storage facilities. Lamentably, Graham's call for "developing recognition criteria" for punctuated abandonment assemblages is incompletely developed.

Adopting a regional perspective, Lee Horne examines factors that promote locational and occupational stability. With ethnoarchaeological data from northeastern Iran and a settlement typology remarkably similar to Graham's (villages, summer stations, winter stations), Horne observes that variation in settlement dynamics, especially occupational stability, has clear consequences for adaptation studies (principally, the relation between population and carrying capacity). Horne argues that regional abandonment is more profitably interpreted as an adjustment to unstable environments rather than failure.

In another study of her Basarwa data, Susan Kent investigates how interactions among mobility and abandonment processes affect variation in bone-fragment frequencies. Controlling for wealth, storage, and ethnicity, she found that occupational intensity influences bone fragmentation less than planned (rather than actual) duration of occupation. This finding challenges Yellen's well-known "ring-model," although I worry about the validity of using count data (e.g., number of adults, number of objects) in multiple regression. Also, I am unsure whether archaeologists generally are interested in comparing artifact frequencies rather than calibrated measures, such as artifact density.

Glenn D. Stone analyzes abandonment within the context of farmers adapting to declining agricultural yields. He argues that the Tiv (Nigeria) and the Finnish immigrants to the Delaware Valley (northeastern United States) intensify production by abandoning settlements, whereas the Kofyar (Nigeria) and the Germanic immigrants to the Delaware Valley prefer to stay put and intensify. Stone urges archaeologists to test hypotheses with these observations in mind. If he is right, extensifiers and intensifiers ought to create different archaeological records (e.g., diffuse, unclustered artifact and site distributions vs. dense, clustered artifact and site distributions, respectively).