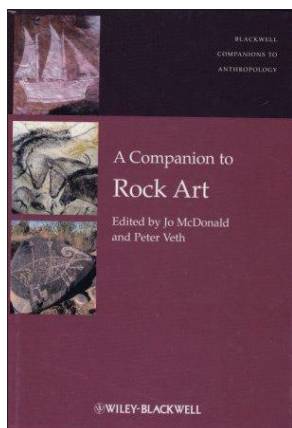


## ***A Companion to Rock Art*** edited by Jo McDonald and Peter Veth

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This is a book of essays edited by Jo McDonald and Peter Veth, two leading scholars in contemporary Australian engagement in archaeological fieldwork and Indigenous involvement. It provides an artistic and archaeological *précis* of selected rock art studies and thematic research, and the list of contributors is a who's who of international rock art intellectuals. The inclusion of 'Notes on Contributors' is a sensible

addition for such a publication, affording insight into the intellectual foundation of each author. At near 550 pages of text with figures, it is a weighty tome (17.78 x 25.4 cm and 3.8 cm thick) and many of the articles include extensive reference lists. In addition there are 16 pages of colour plates and 51 pages of front and end matters.

One of the values of this book is that it offers a range of international examples on the current thinking and methodologies employed in the field of rock art studies around the world. It includes case studies from Africa, Australia, the Pacific, India, North and South America, Siberia and Europe. The inclusion of entries based on research in the Indian subcontinent (Blinkhorn et al.), New Caledonia (Sand), and Puerto Rico and its neighbouring islands (Hayward and Cinquino), are particularly useful in a global book, for they are rarely considered.

The contributions are arranged into themed groupings, offering both a useful packaging of articles and a sense of the issues covered. They include subjects on landscape, gender, identity as ownership, understanding and management, as well as technological and methodological advances in rock art analyses. Each contribution is referenced as a chapter; although there is some thematic grouping of articles, there is not a linking flow between book chapters. The over-arching themes are:

- Explanatory Frameworks: New Insights (three papers);
- Inscribed Landscapes (three papers);
- Rock Art at the Regional Level (four papers);
- Engendered Approaches (three papers);

- Form, Style and Aesthetics in Rock Art (four papers);
- Contextualising Rock Art (four papers);
- The Mediating Role of Rock Art (two papers);
- Rock Art, Identity and Indigeneity (three papers);
- Rock Art Management and Interpretation (four papers);
- Dating Rock Art: Technological Advances and Applications (three papers); and,
- Rock Art in the Digital Age (three papers).

The foreword, written by Meg Conkey, places rock art studies within the history of archaeological research and thought, and sets the context of rock art research in the framework of paradigms and theoretical approaches. The Editors' opening chapter positions rock art studies within current conceptual constructs and activities, arranging them, as they say, to fit university teaching structure. The book is thus primarily designed as an educational aid, with the selection of themes and authors evidencing the particular bias of the Editors. This by no means detracts from the book's overall value to general readers interested in rock art. The opening chapter in particular provides a useful introduction to rock art research methodology and a guide to specific chapters containing discussion of the relevant subject. If possible, read this chapter before investing in the book; it may help in deciding your reading focus.

Students and practitioners alike will benefit from the diverse aspects covered by this book. There are many excellent papers, providing models for approaches to the discipline and offering theoretical frameworks that examine ways of understanding the cultural context and production of rock art. Not all may agree with a specific research approach or results presented in this book, nevertheless their arguments are well presented and it will aid students when it comes to essay writing or tutorial discussion.

As Meg Conkey observes in the foreword, the value of Lewis-Williams' paper (Chapter 2) is that shamanism is only one explanation for a component of rock art, not that all rock art is produced within a shamanistic context. This is a reality that many Australian scholars have long recognised, but it is little acknowledged in other parts of the world. Yet this erudite discourse on the subject is useful.

A variety in the quality of writing is evident, which is not unexpected in a book covering such a wide geographic range and authorship. Some of this results from the mundane reporting of information rather than strong analytical constructs. The value of many individual articles is that they provide useful analytical tools and hypothesis testing which may be applied to other places and rock art corpora. Other papers provide an historical slice through rock art studies, highlighting how the discipline has changed and developed over time through theoretical and analytical approaches.

This is less a technical book on rock art and more a timely collection of articles highlighting the diversity of the subject and ways to understand the past. It is not a technical book per se, rather it provides insight into how things are being recorded and interpreted around the world and what might be of interest. This book establishes that rock art studies are as diverse in their approach and research methodology as any other branch of archaeology or anthropology.