

## The Depiction of Species in Macropod Track Engravings at an Aboriginal Art Site in Western New South Wales

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**ABSTRACT.** The research reported in this paper investigates variability in a motif type. The material used consisted of engraved macropod tracks from a Panaramitee style Aboriginal engraving site in western New South Wales. The analysis consisted of two experiments – one on zoological specimens and the other on an archaeological assemblage. The zoological experiment investigated macropodid taxonomy on the basis of pes morphology, while the archaeological experiment searched for patterning within the engraved macropod track assemblage. Principal Component Analysis and Cluster Analysis were the statistical methods employed. A major proportion of the variability observed within the track engravings was explained in terms of macropod species differentiation.

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This paper is a summary of research (McDonald, 1982) undertaken at an extensive Panaramitee style site with well over 20,000 individual engraved motifs (Clegg, 1981, 1987). The main aim of this research was to identify variability within a motif class (the macropod track) and to investigate possible causes for that variability.

In Australia it has long been held that prehistoric art is beyond the explanatory capabilities of archaeologists. Aboriginal art has been considered culturally conventionalised and 'unfettered in respect to detail' (Davidson, 1936:13). It has been recognised as having a highly symbolic content, whereby the communication of ideas depends on a complicated structure of symbols (Morphy, 1977; Munn, 1973). It has also been considered intrinsically bound to the 'religious' component of

Aboriginal culture (Spencer & Gillen, 1904; Mulvaney, 1969), containing an ideological element which no archaeologist would attempt to interpret. These considerations have resulted in art contributing little to the more commonly pursued questions in Australian prehistory, even though art can be viewed as an artefact assemblage like any other studied enthusiastically by prehistorians.

All aspects of the archaeological record can be seen as manifestations of the mental constructs or ideologies of their respective cultures. Regardless of this, in all other areas of prehistory the research continues, seeking structure in artefact types and patterns in their structure and distribution within archaeological assemblages. For art studies to achieve their potential for cultural interpretation, similar analytical goals (i.e., description