Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports 17 (2018) 163–172

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jasrep

Second-hand? Insights into the age and 'authenticity' of colonial period rock art on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia

Jillian Huntley[a,b,*], Steven George[c], Mary-Jean Sutton[b], Paul Taçon[a]

[a] Place Evolution and Rock Art Heritage Unit, Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Gold Coast Campus, Griffith University, Qld 4222, Australia
[b] Virtus Heritage, Pottsville, NSW, Australia
[c] Dept of Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Science & Engineering, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
pXRF
Pigment characterisation
White hand stencils
Titanium pigment
Authenticity
Rock art
Southeast Queensland

ABSTRACT

The materials used to create rock art preserve information regarding how and, in some instances, when it was made. Here we outline the field based, geochemical study of three white hand stencils on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland, Australia. Portable X-ray fluorescence analysis determined that all hand stencils were made using a titanium based pigment, almost certainly commercially produced white paint. Significantly this helped us assign a chronology, inferring that the rock art must have been produced in the colonial period. The amount of titanium in the paint likely reflects a mid-twentieth century recipe, specifically > 1960, rather than a modern, twenty first century paint. The manner in which the stencils were made and their arrangement upon the sandstone boulder is consistent with Aboriginal rock art across the continent, and chemical indicators of post-depositional weathering suggest the stencils have been in place for many decades. Rather than 'second-hand copies' of Aboriginal art made by European descendants, we suggest that these stencils provide rare insight into the continuing cultural traditions of the Indigenous peoples of southeast Queensland during the mid-1900s, a time of significant socio-political change for Aboriginal Australians.

1. Introduction

Post-colonial rock art is a window into the complex interactions that occur during cross-cultural exchange, preserving important perspectives from endemic societies. However, the identification of colonial period rock art is not straightforward (Taçon et al., 2012). Rock art sites are notoriously difficult to pin-down chronologically due to the scarcity of related, datable materials. Identifying 'the exotic' has therefore become the most prevalent evidence in support of 'contact period' rock art around the world (Taçon et al., 2012; Frederick, 1999; Klassen, 1998; Ouzman, 2003). Here we report the identification of a mass produced, titanium based paint during the in-field, geochemical analysis of three white hand stencils in southeast Queensland (SEQ), Australia. To our knowledge these are the only examples of white pigment rock art in the region.[1] Indeed, pigment rock art is conspicuously scarce in SEQ, with only one other site, Maidenwell Shelter, reported in the interior extremity (McBryde, 1968; Morwood, 1986). The chemistry of the stencils we document in this study suggests they were made shortly after 1960 and consequently represent a rare glimpse into Aboriginal people's response to a socio-political watershed in colonial Australia.

This year marks the 50th anniversary a referendum that finally saw Aboriginal peoples recognised as citizens in their own land. This significant political shift began in 1961 when a parliamentary committee recommended that indigenous Australians, of age, be given the right to vote in state elections. In 1965 Aboriginal Australians were granted the same federal voting rights as the rest of the population. 1965 was also seminal for political activism, with the equivalent of a 'freedom ride' departing Sydney University. A bus of black and white activists led by (the late) Charles Perkins visited regional areas where physical segregation was still occurring in public pools and hotels, drawing national and international attention to these arcane practices through protests. This wave of social momentum culminating in the 1967 referendum where > 90% of voters agreed Aboriginal people were Australian citizens. The archaeometric study of hand stencils we report here suggest that the only known examples of white pigment rock art SEQ dates to this period and was executed in an 'authentic' fashion.

Sadly, the impetus for our analysis was site vandalism. The site, known colloquially as the Kabi Kabi Hand Stencil Site, was inspected by elders from the local Aboriginal community, land managers (Unitywater), regulatory officials (then DATSIMA) and a rock art specialist (PT) in August 2013 because fresh, white, sprayed 'tags' (graffiti) had been noted on the eastern end of a rock art panel (Fig. 1). The hand

* Corresponding author at: Place, Evolution, Rock Art Heritage Unit, Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Gold Coast Campus, Griffith University, Qld 4222, Australia.
E-mail address: j.huntley@griffith.edu.au (J. Huntley).

[1] Excluding those commissioned by the Brisbane City Council in 1993 – see Jacobs (1995).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2017.10.009
Received 16 March 2017; Received in revised form 20 September 2017; Accepted 7 October 2017

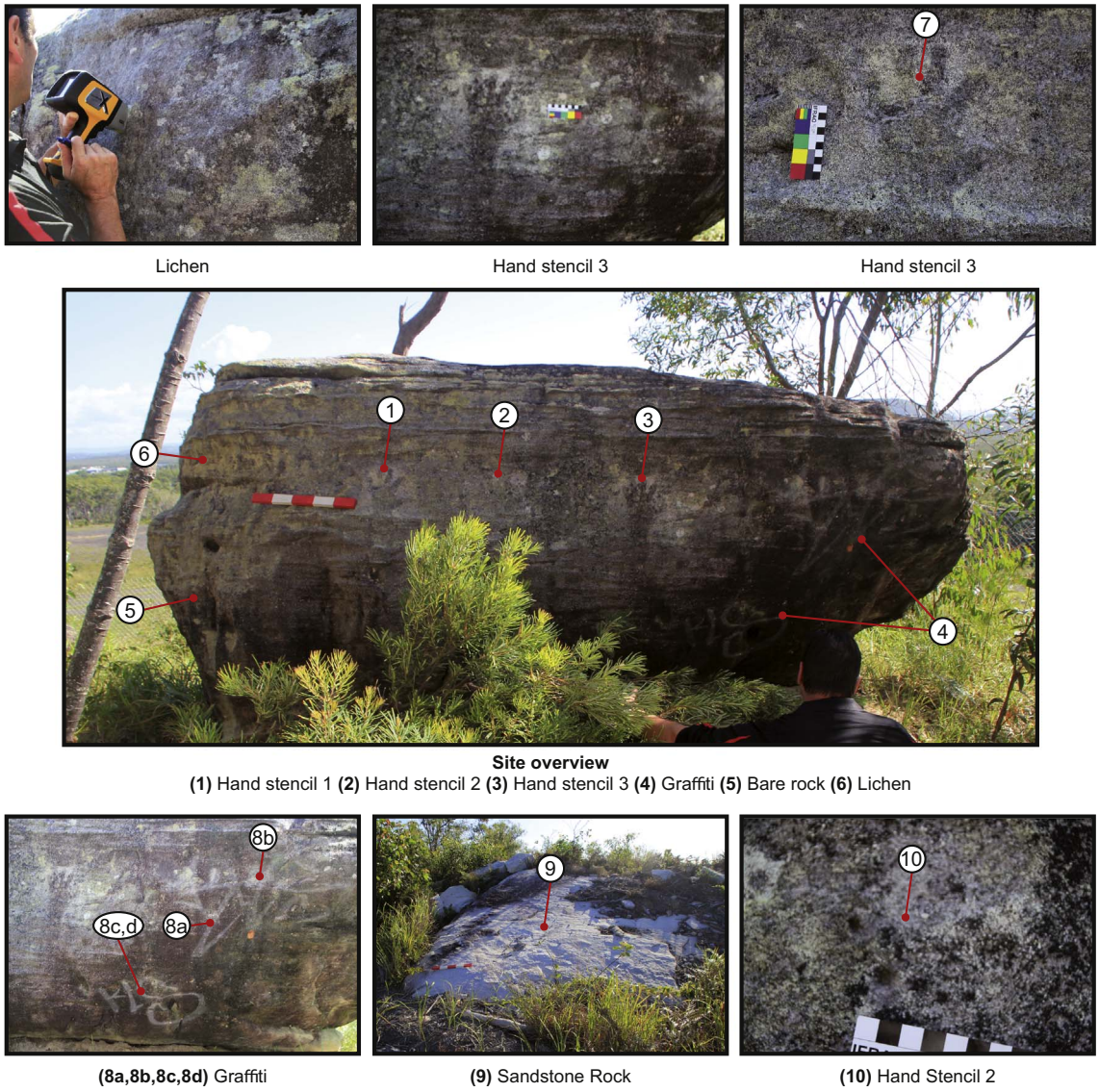

Fig. 1. The Kabi Kabi hand stencils showing the location of pXRF spectra collected during this study (Table 1). Note that replicate spectra for Hand Stencils 1 and 2 were taken at the same location, whereas the replicate spectra on Hand Stencil 1 (b) in Table 1 and (7) in this Figure, were moved slightly from the location of the initial spectra (a) in Table 1 and (1) in the figure above.

stencils sit on a sandstone boulder, within a water reservoir compound near the town of Peregian Beach, on the Sunshine Coast of SEQ (Fig. 2). In 2012 the south-western slope behind the site had been freshly cleared of vegetation as part of a housing subdivision. Non-invasive chemical analysis using portable X-ray fluorescence (pXRF) spectrometry was undertaken on the stencils and associated site fabric[2] to inform a significance assessment by Aboriginal stakeholders[3] that would subsequently dictate the site's management.

The scientific investigation of rock art pigment has a long history with the first geochemical characterisations undertaken in Europe in the early twentieth century (Moissan, 1903). Australian research has been undertaken with the chief aim of informing conservation and management, the primary motivation of work throughout the 1970s to the 1990s. Initially undertaken as part of museum duties such studies subsequently formed the basis of dedicated strategic funding such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Rock Art Protection Program (Clarke, 1978; Clarke and North, 1989; Hughes and Watchman, 1983; MacLeod and Haydock, 2008; MacLeod et al., 1991; Charton et al., 1992; Sale and Watchman, 1993; Ford et al., 1994; MacLeod et al., 1997 - see Ward, 2011). The philosophy behind these scientific studies was that in order to implement adequately conservation and management of sites, you must first understand the rock art's material properties (Huntley and Freeman, 2016). Inevitably, studying these material properties has become an integral part of establishing what is, and is not, rock art.

1.1. Authenticity

A principal motivation for analysing the material properties of pigments has been the concept of 'authenticity' in relation to Aboriginal art. Indeed, analytical procedures for studying pigment geochemistry have been designed with the express purpose of producing a method for authenticating Aboriginal artworks (Green and Watling, 2007). Here

[2] We use this term after ICOMOS Australia 2000 and Marquis-Kyle and Walker (2004) – fabric meaning the physical material of which the site is made.

[3] The Queensland Cultural Heritage Studies Guidelines, August 2011 part 1.6.2, states that Aboriginal parties are responsible for assessing the 'level of significance' of an area or object(s) and that "the assessment must be consistent with authoritative anthropological … and archaeological information". http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/CURRENT/A/AborCultHA03.pdf – accessed April 27, 2015.