

BOOK REVIEW

Tribology in Geology and Archaeology

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The observation of rock art is probably almost as old as its production, yet being an objective of scholarly interest has been a quite recent trend of the past two centuries. Researchers have intentionally recorded, depicted and interpreted rock art since the early 19th century, and numerous theories from perspectives about shamanism, fertility worship, symbolism, feminism, infusionism, behaviourism, adaptations, and structuralism have been invented, based on everyone's personal understanding. As a result, a great deal of what has been introduced in the name of 'rock art research' over the past two hundred years has consisted to a great extent of people's self-conscious responses to rock art: what it reminded them of, and how similar it seemed to something else they had seen. To imagine oneself as the original artist cannot make the problem clear, but would possibly create some more modern myths about rock art, just like most of the studies so far presented in this field.

Therefore, we must admit that the majority of our research about palaeoart has never been liberated from static observation, and has made very little progress in the correct direction to the truth, especially when we immerse ourselves in those penetrating views full of wisdom stated by the author of this book.

A dynamic perspective towards the past, I assume, is the most invaluable enlightenment that the author tried to give to the readers. Just like Albert Spaulding said, 'The past can be understood only through the present', the author has made great efforts to build a 'bridge' of interpretation connecting the remaining traces that we can see today and the most probable behaviour of our ancestors. This interpretation, as the author repeatedly emphasized in the book, must be established on the basis of repeatable and falsifiable experimental means. Through such kind of reconstruction, the whole lifespan of palaeoart, from its production to its long taphonomic process, can be hopefully restored from fragments. The introduction of the KEM problem I would like to regard as a milestone in the history of rock art science. It has brought the natural mechanism during the formation of the superficial micro-structure of the pounded grooves of petroglyphs under the spotlight for the first time. Without doubt, it will create infinite possibilities for the development of dating technology and, more importantly, the deepening of understanding of the nature of palaeoart.

Like the occurrence of middle-range theory has influenced the development of archaeology during the late 20th century, the publishing of this book should also bring a lasting theoretical impact to rock art research of the next decades. Actually, it does not mean that the author was inspired by Binford or some other New Archaeologists. I believe that only by analyzing

palaeoart from precise and persuasive scientific facts, and without any presupposition, can the author write such an exceptional academic masterpiece with uncountable thought-provoking discussions on the world's rock art research, reflecting the deep insight of the nature of science. In this sense, *Tribology in Geology and Archaeology* is heralding the coming of a new era of rock art study, and as a reader, I have already started to wonder what surprise the author will prepare for the next book.

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