Picturing Pacific Prehistory
The rock-art of Vanuatu in a western Pacific context

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Text

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Except where otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents the original work of the author

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Abstract

This thesis examines similarities and differences between rock-art sites in Vanuatu and the broader western Pacific region, and situates the results within the framework of Pacific prehistory. Prior to this thesis, regional models of rock-art in the western Pacific were founded on corresponding distributions of non-motif variables, such as technical classes (painting or engraving), topographic location (boulders, caves etc), and local geology. One of the outcomes of these previous studies was the identification of a region-wide distinction between engraved and painted rock-art, referred to in this thesis as the ‘Austronesian engraving style’ (AES) and the ‘Austronesian painting tradition’ (APT), respectively. The aim of this study is to examine the merits of the AES and the APT as analytical entities, and to determine how they articulate with one another in time and space. This is achieved in two ways. First, an unprecedented statistical comparison between motifs is conducted across the region, the results of which are compared with the outcomes of an examination of non-motif variables. Second, an intensive examination of the spatial and temporal variation within the rock-art of Vanuatu is conducted in order to elicit broad patterns of similarity and difference between painted and engraved rock-art on a local scale. The results of the regional western Pacific and local Vanuatu analyses are then combined in an attempt to address the ultimate goal of this thesis: the development of a model of rock-art transformation for the western Pacific region.
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