

History of rock art historiography: the case of Northern New South Wales

In lines with the issues of marginalization of the rock art studies (Willey & Phillips 1958) in the history of archaeology (Willey & Sabloff 1974; Fagan 1995; Murray & Evans 2008), this paper intends to look at socio-political grounds defining the academic as well as public understanding of rock art. Accordingly, the article is investigating the history of scholarship and understanding of the Aboriginal rock arts in the Hunter region, NSW, Australia. The paper will particularly focus on the evolution in knowing of rock arts in archaeological as well as non-archaeological scholarship and the respective implications on how the rock arts were perceived in the given context.

Analysing the mentioned historiography, the paper takes advantage of the relationship between semiotic (Habermas 2001) and knowledge theory introduced by Habermas (Habermas 1972, 1974). From this perspective, one “knows” on the basis of the already known—that is subject to processes of meaning making and normalization. Therefore, understanding language as the realm of meaning making, that sits in close relation with our knowledge, the paper looks at different forms of language that have been used by scholars.

Interested in such interaction, the paper discusses how the socio-political context has framed/ formed rock art historiography.

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