

CHAPTER THREE

DESCRIPTION

3:1 INTRODUCTION

The 44 rock art sites in and near the southern portion of Carnarvon National Park are scattered along the confines of the main and side gorges; eighteen are found in the inner gorge (west of Boolimba Bluff) and 26 either in the outer gorge or on the eastern face of the range or plateau (Map II). The majority of sites are located on the southern side of Carnarvon Creek. The most isolated site recorded (M-HE/26) is found at a distance of some sixteen kilometres from the entrance to the main gorge. Sites are generally situated at the base of the tall white sandstone cliffs usually at the top of a steep slope leading up from the creek flat (21 sites), in the low cliff outcrops of the outer gorge (seventeen sites) or on the exposed faces of isolated rock boulders (six sites). A site consists of a discrete physical entity containing art; these range in size from 1.8 metres to 77.5 metres in length; the number of motifs can range from a single example to well over 1900.

3:2 TECHNIQUES

A number of different techniques are used to depict the art in this region. By the term technique I refer to the means by which marks are applied to a rock surface; of necessity this depends on the availability and selection of tools and raw materials together with the nature of the rock surface. Two basic processes are involved one is additive the other subtractive.¹ The former

1. Maynard, L. 1974: Classification and Terminology of Australian Rock Art. pp. 23-4.

will be described as rock pictographs, and the latter as rock engravings.

(i) Rock pictographs:

Generally this group includes all those marks produced by the addition of coloured pigment onto the rock surface. There are two quite different methods by which such marks are made; one involves a simple mechanical process the other a certain degree of manipulative dexterity. Both utilize the same basic raw material, the natural pigments obtainable from ochres.

A. Mechanical Processes:

(a) Stencils: A stencil is simply the mechanical reproduction of the outline of an object placed against a rock surface. This two-dimensional quasi-facsimile is produced by splattering wet pigment around the outer confines of the required object resulting in a blank space completely or partially surrounded by a coloured border, in effect a negative impression. The wet pigment was sprayed either directly from the mouth or blown from the palm of the hand, only a very limited degree of control over the extent of the paint splatter could be achieved.

(b) Prints: Palm prints are the only examples of this process found in the Carnarvon region. The palm of the hand is coated with wet pigment and pressed against the rock surface, resulting in a solid positive impression.

B. Manipulative Process:

(a) Painting: Pigment mixed with water and perhaps a fixative is daubed onto the rock surface by a direct manipulative action

which can be closely and carefully controlled. The paint is usually of sufficient thickness and viscosity to leave a solid opaque mark on uneven surfaces.

(b) Drawing: Dry pigment is scratched or rubbed directly onto the rock surface. The rough and irregular granular surface of the sandstone tends to catch parts of the pigment, giving the resulting mark a streaky appearance.

Pigments are obtained by grinding pieces of ochre and mixing them together with water and perhaps a fixative. Although there is no evidence for the latter save the continuing presence of pictographic motifs. Red, yellow and white pebbles derived from weathered basalt, ferruginous sandstones, laterites and gypsum occur with frequent regularity in the dry bed of Carnarvon Creek and its tributaries. Other pigment sources include the red and yellow-brown siltstone and mudstone extrusions at the base of the Moolayember, Clematis and Rewan sandstone formations. These are often exposed either within the confines of the sites themselves or in close proximity to them.

Eighteen hues of red, six yellow, two whites and a black have been identified at the sites included in this survey. The black colour probably derives from charcoal which is readily available in campfires at the large habitation sites or from dead trees burnt in the numerous bush fires to which the region is prone. The presence on the surface of a grindstone bearing traces of pigment in 'Cathedral Cave' in 1940² together with the occurrence of ochre and ochre grinding implements in all that sites occupation

2. Mitchell, S.R. 1940/41: *Oceania*, vol. 11, p.373.

levels³ coupled with the recent discovery of a vesicular basalt grindstone showing traces of red pigment at the 'Art Gallery' (Pl.67) suggests that pigments were ground and prepared on the site immediately prior to use.

(ii) Rock Engravings:

This group includes all those marks made by extracting or subtracting rock from the sandstone surface. The basic processes involved are friction, percussion and drilling.

A. Friction:

(a) Scratched: A sharp implement is scribed once, horizontally across the surface scoring a fine shallow continuous line.

(b) Abraded: Where continuous grooves are produced by the repeated friction of an implement in the same axis, as it is drawn back and forth horizontally across the surface of the rock. The nature of the rock and the type of implement used will dictate whether the resulting groove is 'u' or 'v' shaped in cross-section.

(c) Rubbed: Where continuous broad bands or solid shallow circular or oval depressions are produced by repeated grinding, either along the same groove or in a circular movement.

B. Percussion:

Where continuous grooves or solid areas are formed by a

3. Personal Communication: John Beaton, Research Scholar, A.N.U.

series of contiguous conjoined pits made by the vertical hammering of the surface.

C. Drilling:

Where holes are produced by the continuous rotation of a sharp implement.

All the techniques referred to above appear in Carnarvon Gorge, although some are utilized to a far greater extent than others.

3:3 MOTIFS

Non-random marks on rock walls which come in a variety of different shapes can be termed motifs. Maynard defines a motif "as a recurrent visual image which has a particular range of components."⁴ The motifs are divided into two groups, figurative and non-figurative. The former includes all those shapes which can be recognized by a viewer as having a tangible physical entity within his own range of experience. The latter includes all those shapes that bear no close relation to natural objects. In the region under review stencils by definition being mechanical facsimile reproductions must be figurative.

Nine motif groups have been categorized for the Carnarvon rock art. Five are classed as figurative; human features, tools and weapons, animal features, plant features and unidentified and indistinct stencils. The non-figurative group includes the cup and ring, geometric designs, linear motifs and solid motifs. The various components of the motif groups are tabulated in the corpus of motifs which follows.

4. Maynard, I, 1974: Classification and Terminology of Australian Rock Art, p.23.

3:4 CORPUS OF MOTIFS

(i) Figurative

(a) Human Features

Motif	Technique	Description	Plate
Figure	Drawing	A frontal view of a solid filled human type figure of no identifiable sex.	Pl.2a
Face	Painting	A bichrome outline schematic face.	Pl.2b
Hand	Stencil	Where a hand is placed palm foremost directly against a rock surface. Four major groups are present:	
		Left	Pl.3a
		Right	Pl.3b
		Indistinct	
		Pairs.	Pl.3c
		The normal configuration is for the hand to be placed with fingers spaced and the thumb splayed out in the open position. Individual hands can be orientated vertically up or down or diagonally in any direction (orientation is recorded in relation to the site floor).	
		Size varies from hands of small children to those of adult males. Only two groups were recorded: hands; above ten centimetres and hands - small; below ten centimetres (from tip of forefinger to base of palm). Variations in configuration include	Pl.4a
		Fingers and thumb in the closed position,	
		Forefinger and thumb touching,	Pl.4b
		Lateral views,	
		Pairs joined wrist to wrist,	Pl.4c
		Mutilated hand with the tip of the forefinger or the little finger missing.	Pl.5a

Print		Where the palm of a hand is placed directly against the rock surface. Two groups are present: Right Indistinct. All examples are orientated vertically upwards and are above ten centimetres in size.	Pl.5b
Finger(s)	Stencil	Fingers are found either singly or in groups, some form the components of more elaborate designs (see Zig-zag). They are orientated vertically or diagonally.	Pl.6a
Thumb	Stencil	Two groups are present: Left Right. Orientated vertically.	Pl.6b
Fist	Stencil	A clenched fist with knuckles foremost placed against the rock surface. The thumb is usually enclosed, one variation shows a left fist with a little finger raised.	
Hand + forearm	Stencil	As for hand stencils with the addition of the wrist and forearm extending towards the elbow. Four major groups are present: Left Right Indistinct Pairs. Normal configuration, orientation and size are similar to hands. Variations in configuration include: Lateral views Pairs joined elbow to elbow. Some form the components of more elaborate designs	Pl.6c Pl.7a Pl.7b Pl.7c Pl.8a

Fist + forearm	Stencil	As for the fist with the addition of the wrist and forearm extending towards the elbow. Orientated vertically.	
Arm	Stencil	The entire arm from immediately below the shoulder to the wrist, hand missing. Orientated horizontally.	Pl. 8b
Foot	Stencil	The sole of the foot is placed against the rock surface. Four major groups are present: Left Right Indistinct Pair.	Pl. 9a
		Individual feet can be orientated vertically and diagonally upwards and horizontally to the right or left. Size varies from the feet of small children to those of adult males. Two groups were recorded: feet, above fifteen centimetres from base of heel to tip of large toe and feet-small, below fifteen centimetres.	
	Engraving	A rubbed solid u-shaped solid area surmounted by five abraded grooves representing toes. The presence of a larger groove to the right or left or the lack of such a marker allowed three groups to be distinguished: Left Right Indistinct.	Pl. 9c
			Pl. 9d
		Generally they are orientated vertically upwards, only a very few examples point downwards. Size generally approximates to that of an adult male.	
Human type track	Engraving	Similar in form to the above, variations include, three, four or six abraded grooves in the toe position	Pl. 10a

Toes	Stencil	The top portion only of the foot is depicted.	Pl.10b
	Engraving	A series of five abraded grooves or shallow drilled depressions, one larger at one extremity, surmounting a small abraded area immediately below.	

(b) Tools and Weapons

Axe	Stencil	They usually appear singly, orientated vertically, horizontally or diagonally. Variations include a probable axe head without haft, and a hafted steel headed axe.	Pl.11-12
Knife	Stencil	A hafted blade orientated horizontally, vertically or diagonally. Variations include the addition of stencilled fingers at the tip holding the knife in place.	Pl.13a
Awl	Stencil	Orientated vertically or horizontally. One variation shows the object being held in place by two thumbs.	Pl.13b
Club	Stencil	Several types are present:	
		(a) A throwing stick orientated either vertically or horizontally (head damaged in plate).	Pl.14a
		(b) A club with a large bulbous head and a short shaft, all examples are orientated diagonally.	Pl.14b
		(c) A club with a semi-bulbous head on a curved shaft, orientated vertically and horizontally.	Pl.15a - 15b
	Painting	A club or throwing stick with a small bulbous head, orientated horizontally.	Pl.15c
Boomerang	Stencil	Boomerangs of two major types occur; (a) A light hunting type with a shallow curve.	Pl.16a

		(b) A heavy hunting and fighting type with a distinct angle at the apex. Both types appear orientated, horizontally, vertically or diagonally in all directions.	Pl.16b
		The former appears singly or in horizontal or diagonal rows or vertical tiers of two to sixteen boomerangs with the same orientation. A pair of opposed boomerangs also occurs. After close examination of each series it is considered that they are repetitions of the same boomerang in each case.	Pl.16c
		The latter type usually appears singly, there is however one example of a row of two.	Pl.17 Pl.18a
Spear head	Stencil	The single example present shows a barb at the point, it is orientated vertically.	Pl.18b
Shield	Stencil	The reverse flat side of a shield is placed against the rock surface. There is some variation in shape and size, generally orientation is horizontal, but diagonal and vertical examples occur. It is also possible that the smaller examples could depict shallow trough like containers (coolamon) or grinding stones.	Pl.19
 (c) Animal Features			
Goanna	Painting	A solid figure orientated vertically with either the head up or down.	Pl.20a
	Engraving	A solid abraded figure orientated vertically with the head up.	Pl.20b
Macropodid hind tracks	Stencil	A macropodid paw or a facsimile has been placed pad foremost against the rock surface. Variations include a single	Pl.20c

track or a pair, they are orientated vertically.

Engraving Abraded solid areas represent pads, with abraded grooves in the appropriate positions representing the smaller appendages and toe nails. Two basic groups are represented:

(a) Naturalistic: those engravings which depict a close imitation of actual macropodid tracks.

Pl.20d

Pl.21a

-21b

(b) Schematized: those engravings showing only the basic outline.

Pl.21c

They appear either as single right or left tracks, or more usually as pairs.

A number of examples appear larger than life size, no attempt has been made to relate size or other characteristics to species.

Generally most examples are orientated vertically upwards, however a few point downwards.

Animal
track

Stencil As for macropodid tracks, they appear singly or in pairs, and are orientated vertically.

Pl.22a

Engraving An abraded solid oval surmounted by five abraded or scratched grooves or small drilled holes representing toes and/or claws. No particular species has been identified, although the group probably includes goanna, bandicoot, possum, dingo and macropodid forepaws. The tracks are orientated vertically or horizontally.

Pl.22b

Animal
type
track

Engraving Variations of the above include those with three, four, six or seven toes/claws. These are orientated vertically upwards or downwards.

Pl.22c

Pl.23a

Emu track	Stencil	A multiple component motif, composed of three or four boomerang tips or leaves arranged to represent a schematized emu track.	Pl.23b
	Painting	A monochrome arrangement of lines resembling a schematized emu track.	Pl.23c
	Engraving	Abraded and some pecked solid grooves arranged to form emu tracks, two basic groups are represented: (a) Naturalistic: those which show a close imitation of actual emu tracks. (b) Schematized: those showing only the basic outline.	Pl.24a Pl.24b
		They appear singly, some are larger than life size, generally they are orientated vertically claw upwards although a few point downwards.	
Bird track	Painting	Three to five painted lines arranged to resemble a bird track orientated vertically upwards.	
	Engraving	Three or four abraded or scratched grooves, arranged to resemble a bird track, the motif is orientated vertically upwards or downwards.	Pl.24c
(d) Plant Features			
Leaf	Stencil	A leaf is placed against the rock surface, variants show the stencilled outline of one or two fingers, holding the leaf into place. They are orientated vertically, horizontally and diagonally.	Pl.25a
Zamia seed pod	Stencil	Orientated vertically and diagonally.	Pl.25b

(e) Unidentified Figurative

Grid	Stencil	A net like object has been placed against the surface, the pigment leaving a negative cross hatched design	P1.26a
Disc	Stencil	A disc like object (possibly a shell pendant) placed against the rock surface. They appear with or without a terminal attachment, and are orientated vertically, horizontally or diagonally	P1.25c
Unidentified object	Stencil	A series of objects whose function and raw material whether organic or inorganic is unknown. A selection from the sites designated is included and illustrated here.	
		M-HE/1, three examples	P1.26b-c,27a
		M-HE/2	P1.27b
		M-HE/4	P1.27c
		M-HE/7D	P1.28a
		M-HE/16	P1.28b
		M-HE/80B	P1.28c
 (ii) Non-figurative			
(a) Cup and ring			
Cup and ring	Engraving	A deep abraded solid oval or circle is enclosed by a shallow oval outline abraded groove; the central solid groove forms the long axis; usually a small drilled hole lies below this, either entirely within or placed on the surround.	P1.29a
		There are a number of variations in the shape of the outline and in size ranging from 48 centimetres by 10.5 centimetres to 40.4 centimetres by 52 centimetres	P1.29b P1.30

		Orientation is generally vertical with the small hole in the basal position. Although some horizontal examples do occur as do some oriented vertically downwards with the small hole at the top.	P1.31a -31b
Cup and hole	Engraving	As for the above but lacking the surrounding outline groove	P1.31c
(b) Geometric Designs			
Grid	Painting	A series of horizontal and vertical or diagonal painted lines criss-crossed to form a net-like pattern. Shape varies, square, rectangular, oval and amorphous examples are present. Size ranges from eight centimetres by eighteen centimetres to 156 centimetres by 76 centimetres.	P1.32 P1.33
	Engraving	A series of horizontal and vertical grooves are criss-crossed to form a net-like pattern.	P1.34a
Cross	Painting	Two diagonal painted lines are arranged to form a cross. One variation shows crossed double lines	P1.35a
Chevrons	Painting	Two painted lines are joined to form a chevron they appear singly or in tiers of five and eight.	P1.35b
	Engraving	Two abraded grooves are joined to form a chevron, they appear singly or in a tier of three.	
Zig-Zag	Stencil	These are multi-component units, a negative zig-zag design is formed by the arrangement of a series of joined finger	P1.35c

		or unidentified stencils.	Pl.36a
	Engraving	A continuous scratched or abraded groove of varying width and length, orientated horizontally or vertically. Size ranges from 0.65 metres to 3.36 metres.	Pl.36b
Meander	Engraving	A continuous abraded or rubbed sinuous groove of varying width and length, orientated horizontally. Length ranges from 2.26 metres to 9.95 metres.	Pl.36c
Outline circle	Engraving	A continuous scratched or abraded circular groove enclosing space.	Pl.37a - 37b
Outline elongated oval	Engraving	A continuous abraded oval groove enclosing space	Pl.37c
Complex	Engraving	(a) A continuous abraded circular groove (outline circle), enclosing a vertical abraded groove, two cup and ring motifs, a pair of macropodid tracks, and a shallow solid elongate oval. Further a pair of macropodid tracks is superimposed over the base of the outline circle.	Pl.38a
		(b) An outline abraded groove semi-circle (inverted -u) enclosing five drilled holes.	Pl.38b
		(c) An outline scratched groove circle enclosing a solid abraded oval.	Pl.38c
Outline designs – unclassified	Painting	Simple arrangement of painted vertical, horizontal or diagonal straight or curved lines.	Pl.39a
	Engraving	Simple and complex arrangements of vertical, horizontal, diagonal, straight and curvilinear abraded and/or scratched grooves.	Pl.39b-c Pl.40a-b

Outline design - Type 1	Drawing	An arrangement of dry pigment lines, one long horizontal line with a series of vertical strokes appended. There are two types present: (a) with short strokes (b) with long strokes They are orientated horizontally.	Pl.40c Pl.41a
Outline design - Type 2	Drawing	An arrangement of vertical curved dry pigment strokes joining at the top. They are orientated horizontally.	Pl.41b
(c) Linear Motifs			
Vertical diagonal lines	Painting	Simple painted lines of varying length, ranging from under ten centimetres up to 40 centimetres. They appear either singly, in amorphous clusters, or in rows of up to twelve.	Pl.41c Pl.42a
	Engraving	Abraded or scratched grooves, which were recorded as short (up to ten centimetres) or long (over ten centimetres). They are orientated vertically or diagonally appearing singly or in rows of up to sixteen.	Pl.42b
	Drawing	A series of vertical wavy lines.	
Horizontal lines	Painting	Similar to above, they appear singly or in a tier of two.	
	Engraving	Similar to above, they appear in a tier of eight.	
(d) Solid Motifs			
Holes	Engraving	Small drilled circular depressions ranging up to four centimetres in diameter. They appear singly or in contiguous pairs.	



a.



b.



a.



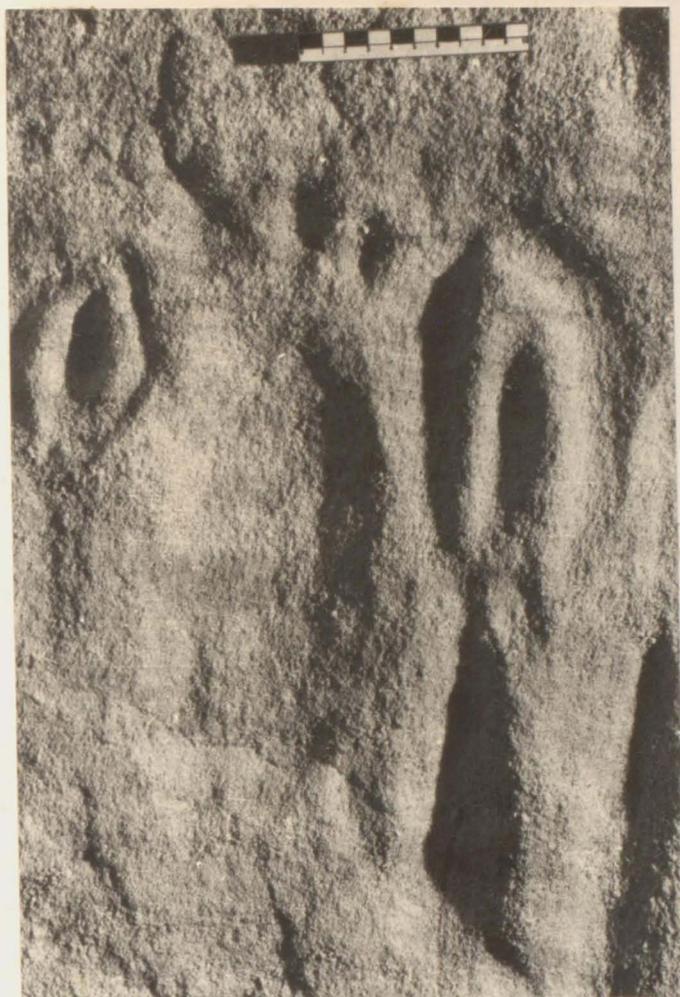
b.



c.



d.



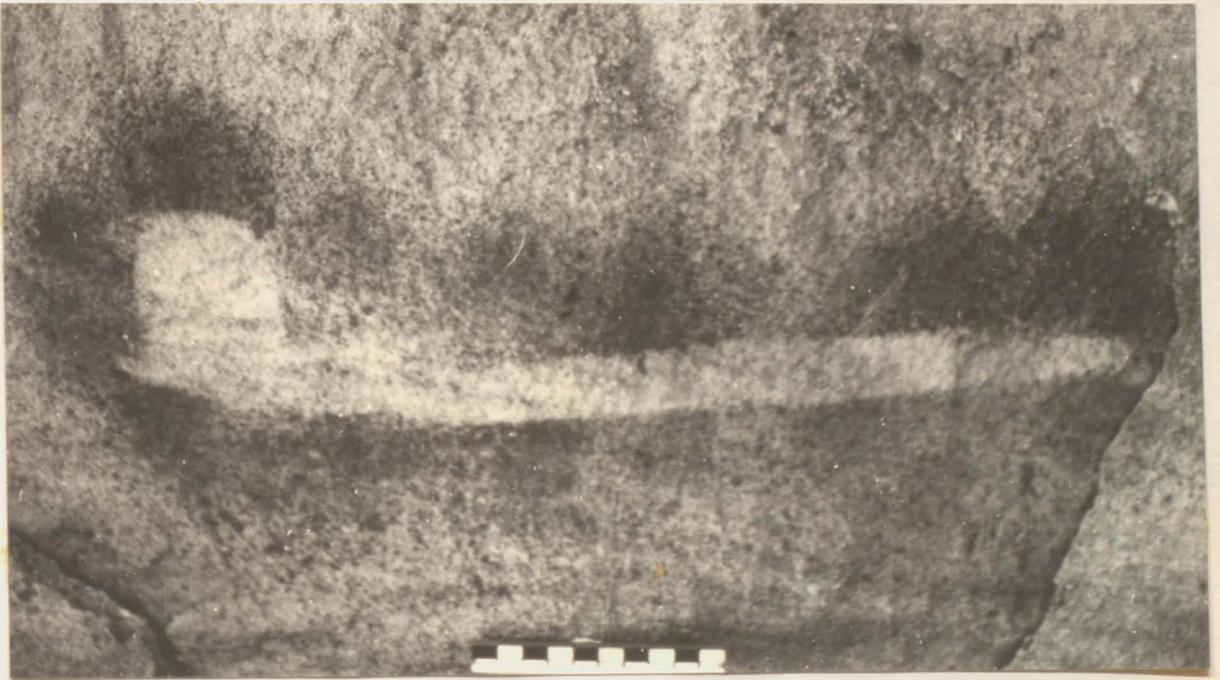
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a.



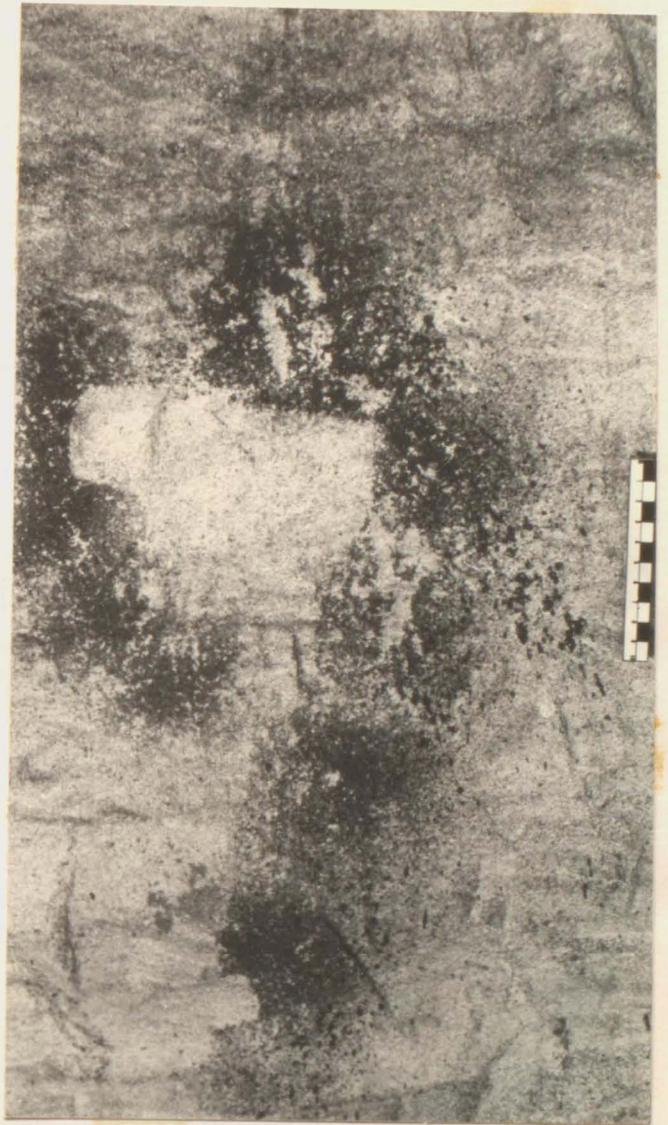
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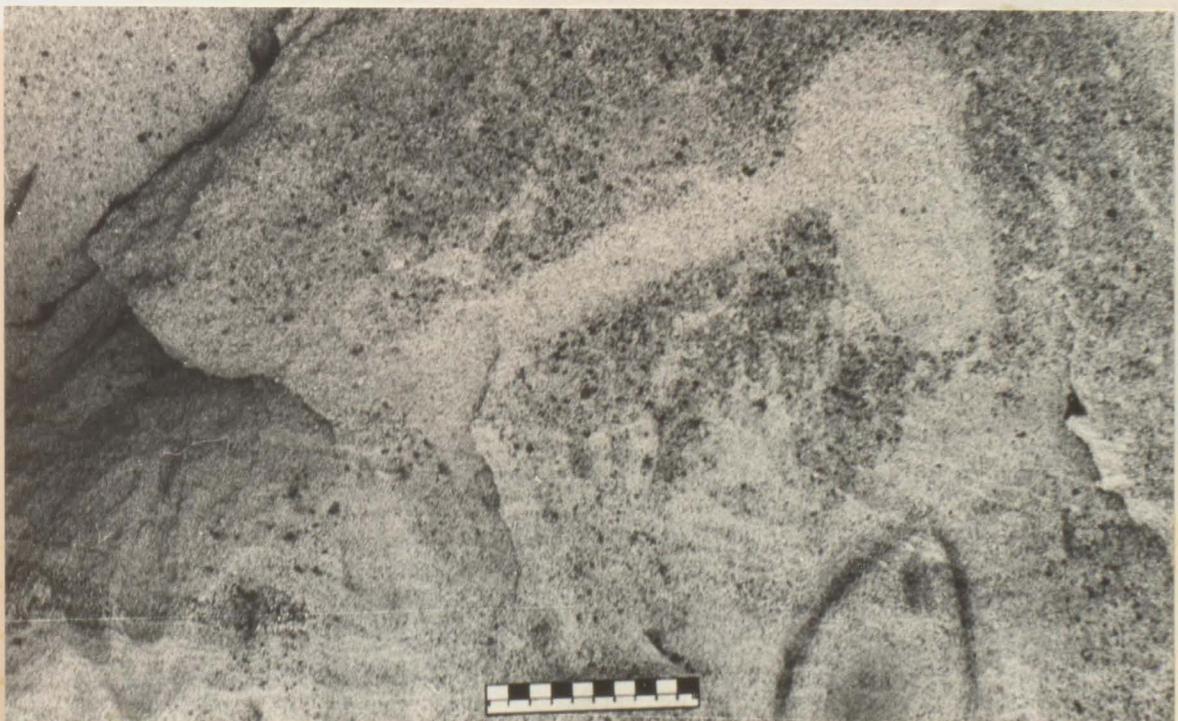
c.



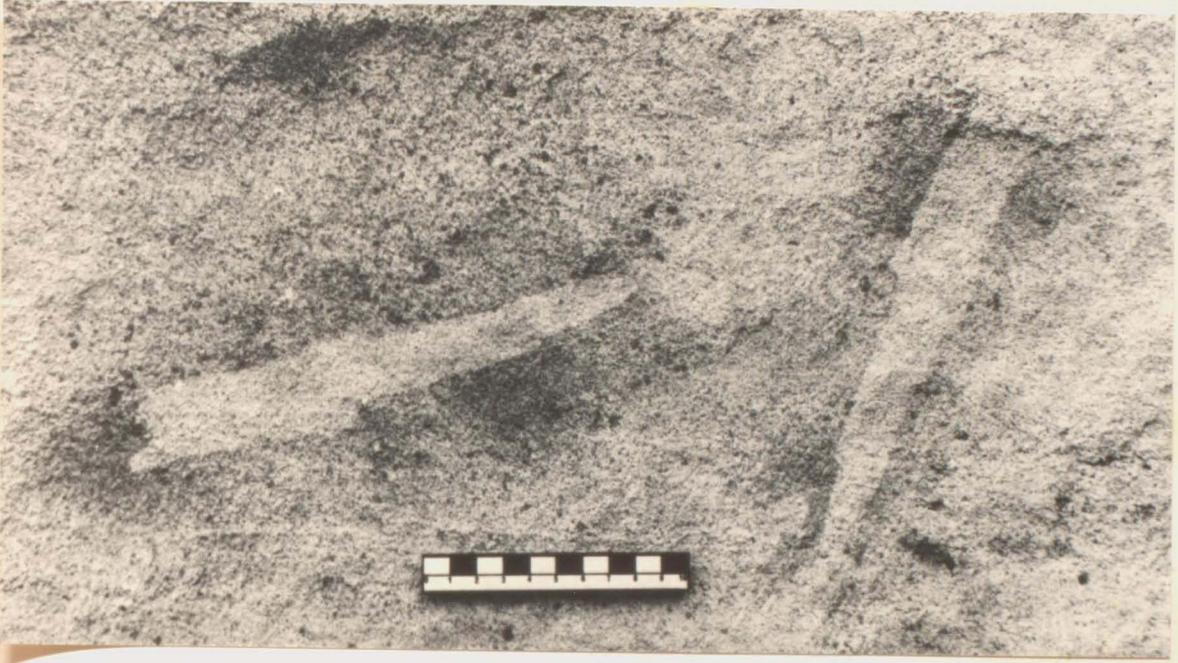
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b.



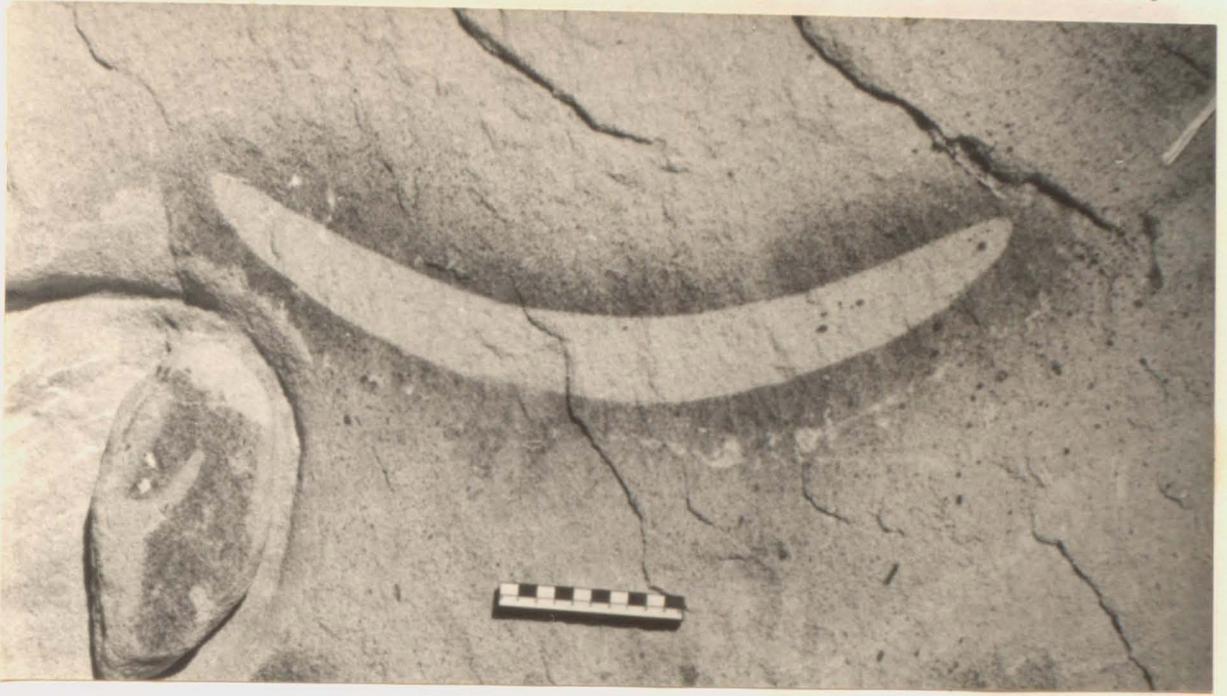
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b.



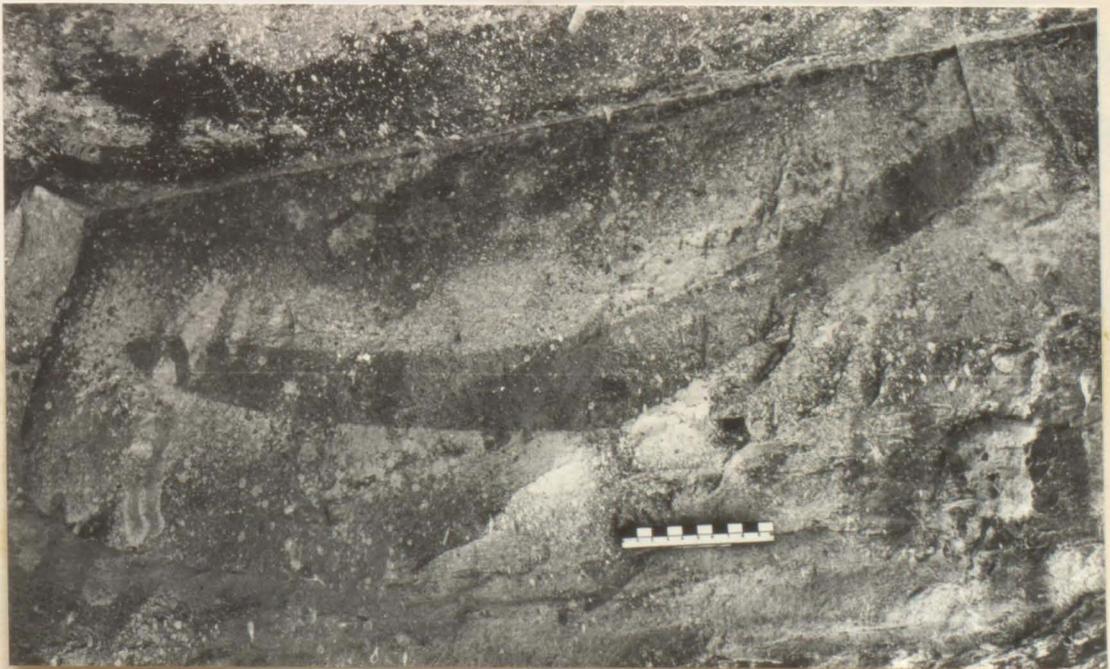
c.



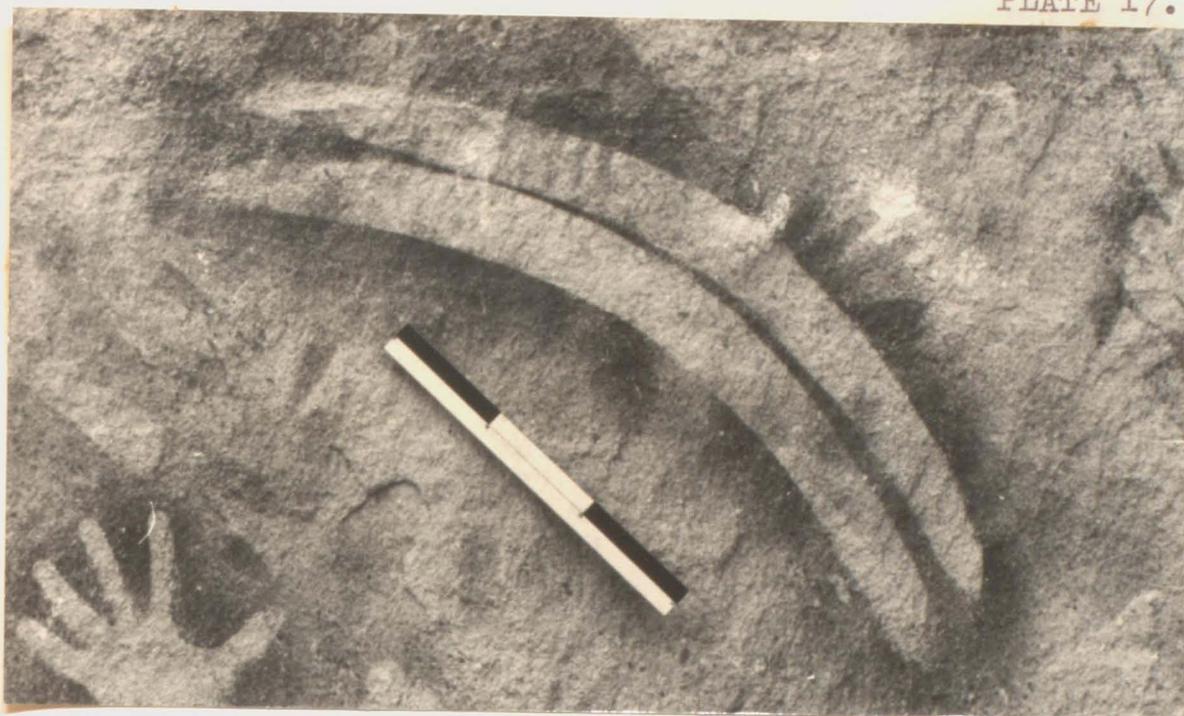
a.



b.



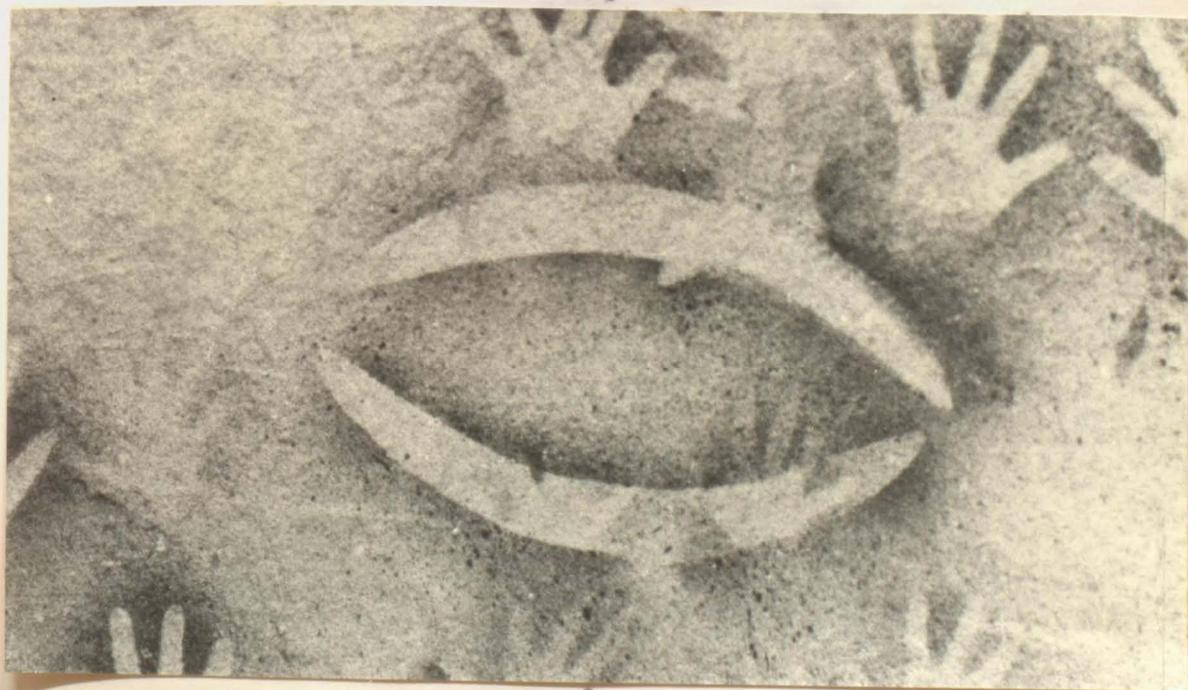
c.



a.



b.



c.



a.



b.