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*A Remarkable Ritual Gallery of Cave Paintings in
Eastern New South Wales*

By

FREDERICK D. McCARTHY

Pages 115-120 Plates 7 and 8 Figs. 1-71

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A REMARKABLE RITUAL GALLERY OF CAVE PAINTINGS IN EASTERN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Australian Museum

(Figs. 1-71)

(Plates 7-8)

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The rock shelter containing this extraordinarily fine set of drawings and stencils is situated in the Hawkesbury district on Crown land. Because of the need to protect the gallery from vandals its precise locality cannot be disclosed. For this reason, also, the Cumberland County Council has erected a thick wire screen across the entire front of the shelter.

The shelter forms part of the vertical face, about 8 ft. high, of an extensive sandstone rock surface which runs across the base of a marsh. A dozen potholes, 3 ft. to 4 ft. in diameter and up to 2 ft. deep, have been formed in the bed of the main flow of water, which runs in rainy weather and is usually seeping over the rock. Beside some of these pools are, in all, several dozen axe-grinding grooves.

The rock shelter is one chain west of the potholes. It is 60 ft. long, 9 ft. deep and high, and runs south-east to north-west. The sandstone is hard, dry and durable, and the drawings are in perfect condition. The front of the ceiling is blackened by fire-smoke, due mainly to bush fires burning scrub at the entrance to the cave. The shelter was not used by the natives as a camp site, but was of ritual importance to them.

The shallow loamy floor deposit contains specks of wood ash, and from it were recovered several small chert waste flakes, a quartz bipolar flake and a jasper microlithic side scraper, but none of these pieces is a specialized type of implement that can be assigned to a specific culture period. Pieces of ferruginous sandstone were also found, but none of them shows any signs of rubbing or use as red pigment. No ochres were present in the deposit.

The stencils were done with a water-mixed paint, but all of the other figures were drawn with dry pigment and are therefore referred to as drawings, not paintings. The series is described in six periods, revealed by a study of the superimpositions.

I. STENCIL PERIOD

There are 26 white, 19 red and one yellow human hand stencils the great majority of which are opened left hands. None was observed with the little or other fingers turned down. Most of the red hands are stencilled along a higher level than the white hands, but both occur along the full length of the frieze. Five stencilled boomerangs (Figs. 20, 29, 34, 38, 66) belong to this period, most of them being long and shallow curved types, 2 ft. to 2ft. 6in. long, but one is sharply angled with two distinct arms. A red line design has been drawn in dry pigment within the stencil of Fig. 20.

Other stencils comprise two hafted ground-edge axes (14, 58) 9 in. long, a club 13 in. long (19), and six small crescents from 5 in. to 8 in. long (67) of a kind not previously recorded.

All of these stencils were done with the splash method, in which paint was blown from the mouth over the object placed against the wall.

II. RED AND WHITE PERIOD

The forepart of a large kangaroo (22), and the complete figure of a short, broad man (30), both 3 ft. 6 in. long, apparently represent a hunting episode. When they were drawn the wall between them was blank. The kangaroo has a well poised head, and the drawing of one forepaw upwards and one downwards is exceptional, the usual style in the central coastal area being to show them as a pair at one angle or as a single limb.

Red Outline

A woman 2 ft. 3 in. long (60) and a faint human figure 3 ft. 6 in. long (69) are at the northern end of the shelter. Both lie horizontally in relation to the main frieze. There are also an oval line figure (24) and the hind portion of a kangaroo (65). Faded lines of other indeterminate figures in this style are to be seen in various places.

Red Silhouette

A partially shaded kangaroo, lacking tail, 3 ft. long (10). There is a smaller one in red outline below its neck.

Remarks

The broad heavy man, with well-marked penis, is probably a spiritual being, and the kangaroo one of mythological and ritual importance.

The association of stencilled boomerangs in the drawings and outline boomerangs in the engravings, with the kangaroo and other animals, is characteristic of the art of the central coastal area of New South Wales, and indicates an ancient usage of the boomerang for hunting in this well-forested and rugged country. Another link with the engravings is the drawing of a woman (60) in the outline style.

III. BLACK AND WHITE PERIOD

All of the black and white outlines and silhouettes belong to this period, and comprise the majority of the drawings in the gallery.

White Outline

Line figure (8); oval (13); tanged outline 18 in. long (35); mammal 17 in. long in upright posture (37); forepart of a wallaby (44); emu-like bird 2 ft. 9 in. long (47); human figure 21 in. long, holding weapon in one hand (50); koala 15 in. long (51); bladed club of Lil-lil type (52); white oval drawn around a faded emu (55); pair of conical objects (56); portion of conical figure (61); upper part of tortoise (62); elongate human figure 18 in. long (63); possum 3 ft. 7 in. long (64).

White Barred

Upper part of a man (21) and a conical figure (41).

White Stripes

Most of these figures are covered with longitudinal lines drawn closely together, and some of them have faded into pale, white silhouettes.

Human foot 9 in. long (6); koala, facing frontwards, 8 in. high (7); two human figures 18 in. and 21 in. high (16, 17); boomerang, with broad end (26); human figure wearing rayed head-dress, portion of the figure being under 30 and 32 (31); echidna 18 in. long (49); a neatly drawn bird, like a goose, 15 in. high (55); oval (53); kangaroo 2 ft. 6 in. long, with thin hind limbs and a thick tail (59).

Black Outline

Throwing dart, commonly called the *weet-weet* (9); small kangaroo 21 in. long, lacking its tail, beside a larger red and black one (10); ornaments, probably of kangaroo teeth, worn across the forehead and chest and around the neck—they appear to be too long, and the fringe too short, to be the fur-skin pubic aprons worn in this area (23, 54); line design, incomplete (28); seven of these ovals or circles are drawn around small weathered pits from 4 in. to 6 in. in diameter and up to 1 in. deep—they probably represent a clutch of emu eggs (42, 57); portion of mammal (40).

Black Stripes

Two eels about 3 ft. long, and portions of two others (1-4); portion of oval (11); portion of mammal of echidna type (15).

Black Silhouette

Human figure 21 in. long (27); possum partially infilled, 16 in. long (36); man (45); upper portion of man holding shield (46); man (48).

There are several other faded and indeterminate figures in the same style which are probably men also. Some of these black silhouettes are faded and may originally have been black striped figures.

Black and White Outline

A rock wallaby, almost 2 ft. high, in an alert standing pose (12).

Black Silhouette with White Outline

A beautifully drawn little mammal, with long hind legs and tail, 21 in. long, like a rock wallaby in a leaping pose (18).

Black and White Stripes

A short thick-set man, 3 ft. 6 in. high, drawn with a white infilling on the head, arms, legs and very long penis, and a thick black outline (25). His stomach is mainly black, and although he is drawn over the stencilled boomerang (29) the white colouration around it has been left as the white infilling on his body. He is decorated with a double band of white lines, probably kangaroo-tooth chest ornaments, and is a figure of considerable power and strength, obviously more than of simple human significance.

Red and Black

A kangaroo 3 ft. 6 in. long (10) appears to be a red silhouette with a black outline, but it is now so faded that it is impossible to decide whether this is so or whether a red silhouette kangaroo has been drawn over a black outline one.

Remarks

The figures drawn in this period are mostly single and unrelated motifs, and among them several of the mammals and birds are well portrayed artistically. With the exception of the eels, they are forest creatures typical of the locality. The outline figures are identical in style with the outline rock engravings of the Sydney-Hawkesbury district in which the shelter is situated.

IV. POLYCHROME PERIOD

The only figure drawn in this style is an anthropomorph (32) 8 ft. high. Although it conforms in general style and striped technique with other human figures in the central coastal area, it possesses characteristics which make it unique among these pictographs. It is the first four-colour polychrome drawing to be recorded in the central coastal area. The figure is portrayed from the front. It is covered with white and bright-red stripes, and has a double black and yellow outline on the head, arms and right side of the body, black fingers and hand on the right arm, and a black outline on the hand and fingers of the left arm. Across the chest are two rows of short white vertical lines, similar to those on 25, which probably represent kangaroo-teeth ornaments¹. The head is that of an indeterminate mammal, with two ears and eyes and a rounded face. In colouring the head, the artist has simply applied the red in several forward and backward movements to produce a series of loops. The end of the legs and thick penis are lacking, having been obscured by a layer of dust which has discoloured a concave ledge extending the full length of the shelter. This hero is holding a large boomerang or phacoid-shaped club in his left hand. The artist was forced to narrow the shoulders, because the concave area of rock wall on which he drew the figure decreases in width at this point and the figure had to be shaped to fit into it. Shoulders and arms are separated by a thick line.

The power and strength of this composite being are emphasized by the thick limbs and penis, the broad body and the large weapon with which he is armed. He is a striking example of the culture-heroes and spiritual beings holding a weapon, usually a boomerang, in the left hand, who are prominent in the mythology of Australian tribes (Elkin, 1950, 126-7).

This hero is depicted in the guise of a composite human being with a mammal's head, a type of ancestral totemic being featured in the *bora* mythology of south-eastern Australia generally (Howitt, 488-508). While no other figures of these composite beings are known among the central-coast drawings, a number of them has been recorded in the Sydney-Hawkesbury rock engravings. They include a combination of man and emu, and of man and mammal, in Kuring-gai Chase National Park (McCarthy, 1944, Pl. R, Fig. 10, 1946, Pl. Z, Fig. 3), man and emu on the Peter Howe Trust Reserve at Somersby (McCarthy, 1947, Pl. AD, Fig. 1), man and bird in the Berowra district, and snake-headed heroes at Calga. They represent both the totem and spiritual ancestor of a clan, and are depicted at sites at which historical and totemic rites were enacted. These rites included incidents in the lives of the spiritual ancestor, and possibly those for the increase of the totem.

There is the possibility that the three large human figures—in red outline (30), black and white (25) and red, black, white and yellow (32)—all represent portrayals of the same hero which became more elaborate in each succeeding period from the earlier red and white to the late polychrome periods.

¹ A similar ornament is shown on the culture-hero in the Mt. Kuring-gai group of rock engravings (McCarthy, 1959, Fig. 1, Pl. 23). The design suggests a string of kangaroo teeth rather than a painted design.

V. BORA GROUND PERIOD

Fig. 5 is a remarkable design drawn in red across the full length of the gallery and over all of the figures in its track. It stretches for over 31 ft. and then turns back another 8 ft. 6in., so that it is almost 40 ft. in total length. Although the reversed end may be an integral part of the design, it is possible that the artist misjudged the length of the shelter and found himself without sufficient wall-space to extend the figure to its full length. At the northern end of the figure is an oval from which a long band, with a narrower one joined to it along the middle portion, extends for 28 ft. to a second oval joined to a third oval from which the band continues to a fourth oval at the end of the reversed portion. There is a second figure (39 and 68) of this type at the northern end of the frieze; it was 15 ft. long, but the band connecting the ovals has either weathered away or been obscured by the dusty layer which covers the ledge. These designs are coloured-in as red silhouettes by overlapping lines of dry pigment drawn thickly enough to merge into one another.

The designs probably represent *bora* initiation grounds, as described by Howitt (1904, Ch. ix), and by R. H. Mathews in his many descriptions of *bora* ceremonies in south-eastern Australia. The *bora* ground consists of two cleared and circular spaces, one for assembly and corroborees, the other for tooth-avulsion and other secret rites, joined by a path from a quarter to over a mile long. Thus we could interpret the two later periods, IV and V, of drawings in this shelter as representing a *bora* ground visited by a culture hero or spiritual ancestor in the guise of a mammal totem. Howitt said that a supernatural being, known as Daramulan on the southern half of the New South Wales coast, Koin on the north coast, and Baiami, Nurrundere, Bunjil, Nurelli, Mungan-Ngaua and other names elsewhere in south-eastern Australia, was represented by his native informants as having at one time dwelt on the earth, from where he went to live in a land beyond the sky to observe mankind. As Daramulan, he could go anywhere and do anything, become invisible and appear in the form of an old Aboriginal man. He is eternal and has existed from the beginning of all things, which he created. Elkin (1938, 201) said that this sky-hero was often pictured as the one who led the tribe to its present habitat, and made the natural features as they are today; he bestowed on men their material culture, gave them their social laws, and, above all, instituted the initiation rites. He was, as Howitt said, full of knowledge and tribal wisdom, all-powerful in, and the source of, magic. The medicine-man alone could see him on earth or visit him in his heavenly home. One of his important functions was to take the young men away and return them as initiates.

It is apparent that Fig. 32 in this shelter represents a sky-hero of the above type. Howitt (op.cit.) stressed the fact that the sky-hero or All-Father was always described by his informants as possessing human form. However, the examples given above of composite human and animal anthropomorphs among the rock engravings, and Fig. 32 in this shelter, prove quite clearly that such heroes could also appear, and were actually represented by the artists, in composite form varying with the totem concerned.

This cave would, therefore, have been a site of the greatest possible importance in the ritual and mythology of the local tribe.

VI. POST-WHITE PERIOD

Stencils of a boomerang (33) and of a hand (between 44 and 52) have been made in a series of circular daubs done with a rough brush or thick stick teased out at the end. They are unlike any other stencils known to me in the central coastal area, and were apparently the last figures added to the gallery, probably after white settlement by one of the full or mixed bloods familiar with the site. They indicate that the site was functioning in the life of the Aborigines living at the beginning of white occupation, and for some time afterwards.

COLOURS

Three basic colours—white, red and black—used by the Aborigines are well represented, the white in all periods except the fourth, the red in all periods except the second and fifth, the black in the second and third periods. Yellow was used on one hand stencil in the first period and on the sky-hero in the fourth period. Bichromes occur in black and white, red and white, red and black, and four colours in the sky-hero.

SUPERIMPOSITIONS

Examples of the superimpositions among these drawings are as follows: (1) Modern stencil of boomerang (33) over red *bora* design, which is over polychrome sky-hero, which is over white striped and red outline men, which are over yellow and white hand stencils; (2) red *bora* design (5) over red and white hand stencils, white outlines, striped and silhouette figures,

black silhouettes and striped figures; (3) red *bora* design over white silhouette, and man which is over white stencilled club; (4) black kangaroo tooth ornament (23) over red outline kangaroo (22) which is over white stencil; (5) black and white man (25) over red and white outline man (3) which is over white stencil; (6) white outlines and other styles, black outlines and other styles, over stencils in various places; (7) white striped boomerang (26) over black and white man (25) which is over yellow stencil boomerang.

The stencils are limited chiefly to the first or earliest period of painting, outlines and silhouettes occur in the second period, the widest range of styles are in the third period, striped in the fourth period, silhouettes in the fifth period, and stencils in the last or modern period.

SUBJECTS

The artists and other tribesmen concerned with this shelter were interested in a varying range of motifs in the different periods of stencilling and drawing. These motifs are human hands, boomerangs, clubs, axes and crescents by those who did the stencils; a human being (which might be a spiritual ancestor), kangaroo and oval in the second period; a spiritual ancestor, human beings, a wide range of animals which include the kangaroo, rock wallaby, koala, echidna, possum and other mammals, turtle, emu and its eggs, goose, eels, boomerang and club, throwing-dart, kangaroo-tooth ornaments and various simple designs in the third period; and a sky-hero and *bora* ground in the fourth and fifth periods.

DISCUSSION

This site confirms the interpretation of colours and superimpositions in the Conjola rock shelters (McCarthy, 1959), where stencil, red, black and bichrome periods were distinguished in that order, the stencils being the earliest phase. Although the stencilling is probably as ancient as any other technique and style of pictograph in south-eastern Australia, it must be remembered that stencils of hafted axes prove clearly that this technique was also practised in the Eloueran as well as in the Bondaian and probably earlier culture periods in this region (McCarthy, 1948). The two hafted axes (14 and 58) are not over or under any other figures to which their relationship can thus be decided, but one club (19) in a similar technique is under a white silhouette figure of the third period. The axe-grooves nearby indicate that the site was frequented in the Eloueran period.

Much more detailed investigation of superimpositions in cave paintings and drawings is necessary before relationships between the various cave art periods and the archaeological cultures such as the Eloueran axe period, Bondaian point and microlithic period, Kartaun uniface pebble period and any other hitherto unknown culture period, may be established.

I have drawn attention above to similarities between outline drawings in this shelter and those in the outline rock engravings of the Sydney-Hawkesbury district generally, particularly in respect to the sky-hero (32). These massive heroes, with huge bodies and limbs, are well represented among these engravings, as shown by Campbell (1899, Pls. 6, 12, 16, 20, 22, 25) and McCarthy (1941-1959). A number of them are striped on the body and limbs. This kind of hero was fashioned in earth figures throughout the area of the *bora*-type of initiation, and is similar to that of the Lightning brothers (Davidson, 1936, Pl. 1; McCarthy, 1958, frontispiece), and the Wandjina of the Kimberleys (Elkin, 1930). Thus, the depiction of heroes in a similar style, in both engravings and paintings in such widely distributed localities in northern and eastern Australia, indicates that the concept is of considerable antiquity and, further, that the decoration of the head is probably the main change that has taken place in the Wandjina style. This change in head form and features may have been due to introduced ideas, but more evidence has yet to be assembled before this point can be decided.

ROCK ENGRAVINGS

A fish (70) is engraved in a narrow conjoined puncture technique on the sloping base of the wall at the southern end of the cave. It is $21\frac{1}{2}$ in. long.

In the western end of the expanse of rock above the shelter is engraved a group of five figures, which comprise a koala 3 ft. 6 in. long (71, top left), an oval, two human or koala figures engaged in sexual intercourse (middle) and, 30 ft. away, a kangaroo 8 ft. long. The grooves consist of weathered conjoined punctures now from $\frac{1}{2}$ in. to $\frac{1}{8}$ in. wide and $\frac{1}{16}$ in. to $\frac{1}{8}$ in. deep. Its state of preservation indicates that this is an old group compared with others in the Sydney-Hawkesbury district.

It is notable that both kangaroos and koalas are included in the cave paintings at this site, in this group of engravings, and in another group a quarter-of-a-mile away. The shape of the head of the great hero (32) suggests either one of these mammals.

The similarities between the outline figures of animals and people, and between the sky-hero figures, in this shelter and the rock engravings of the Sydney-Hawkesbury district make it apparent that the people who practised the latter art contributed some of the paintings to the shelter, possibly a considerable proportion of them.

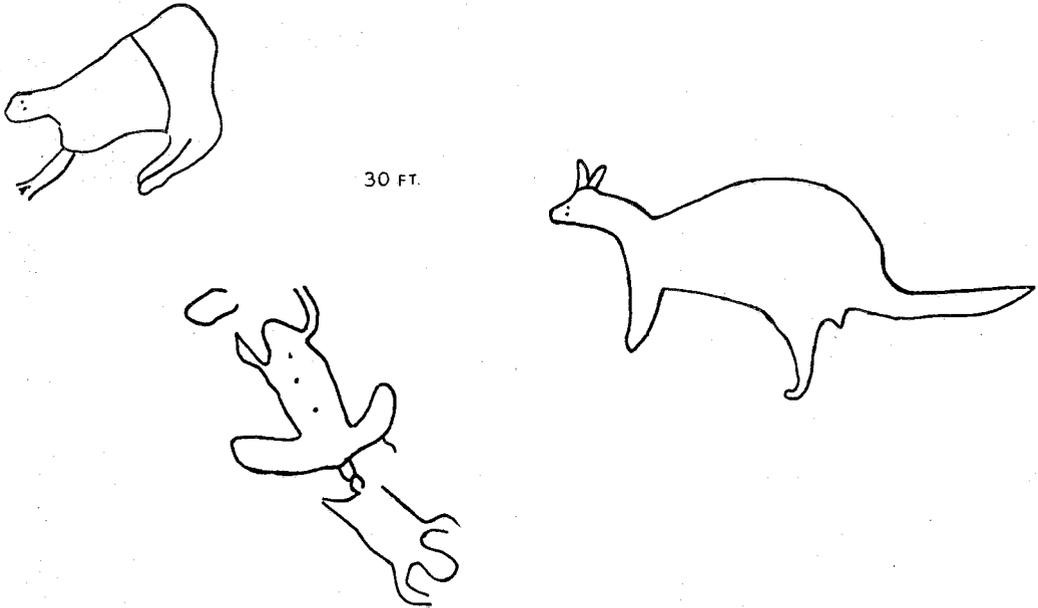


Fig. 71.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

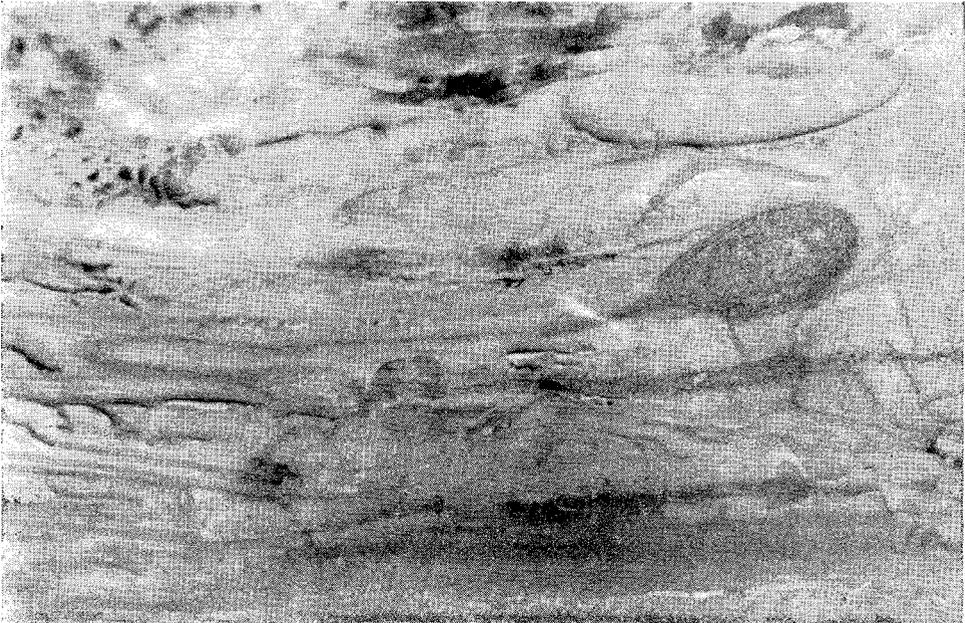
This site was first reported to the Museum in 1957 by the owner of the property beside whose boundary it is situated. A scale plan was made of the gallery by John Beeman, Australian Museum artist, and the author, and then Mr. Justice F. G. Myers made a set of colour negatives of the paintings which he presented to the Museum. The scale plan was compared with these negatives, with a set of enlarged black and white photographs taken by H. Hughes, Australian Museum, and with the paintings in the shelter. A final scale plan was then made by Miss Jannelle Bailey, technical assistant, Australian Museum. I have pleasure in thanking all of the above-mentioned for their assistance in building up the final recording, rendered as accurate as possible, of this very interesting and important Aboriginal art gallery, the Cumberland County Council for its constructive action to protect the site from vandals, and the owner of the adjoining farm for permitting access through his property to the site.

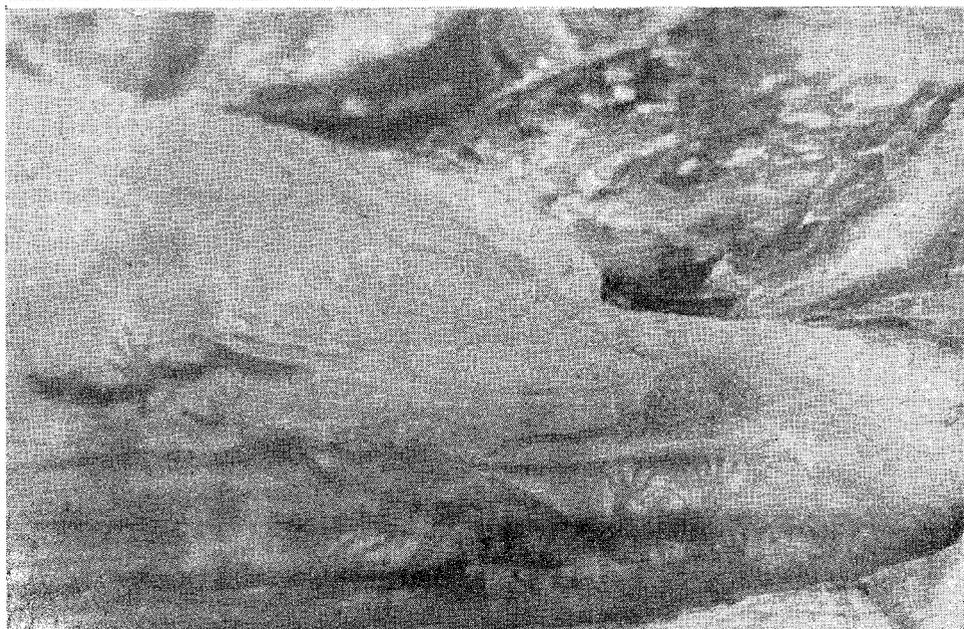
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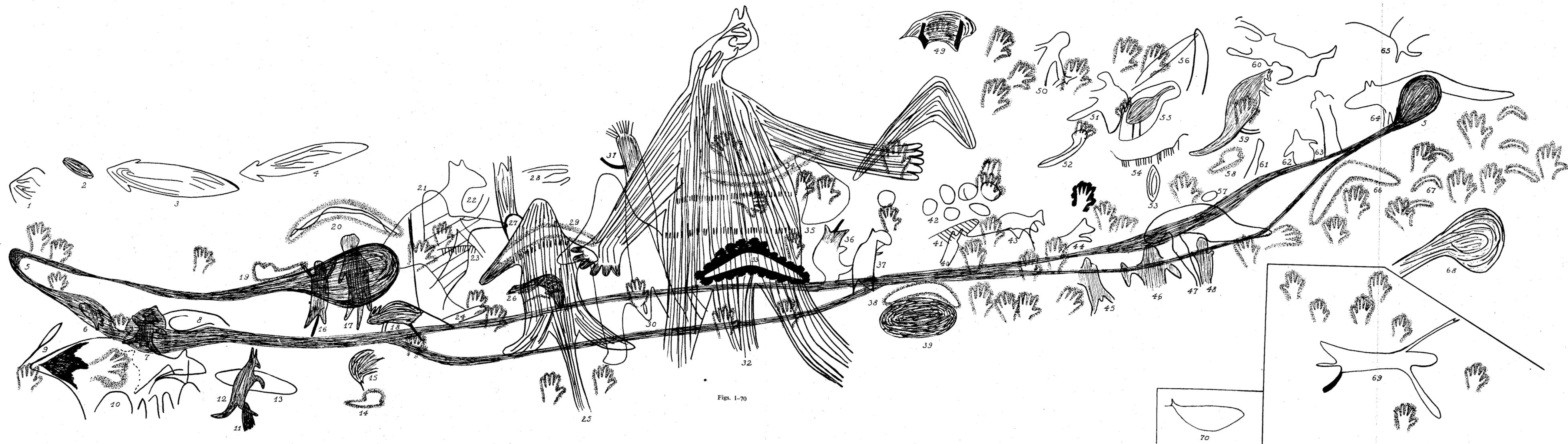
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EXPLANATION OF PLATES

- Plate I.—Top: General view of site, with pools in foreground, area of rock in which engravings are made, and the rock shelter at the far end of the ledge. Bottom: Eastern end of the painted frieze.
- Plate II.—Top: Middle of the painted frieze, showing the polychrome culture hero. Bottom: Western end of the frieze.







Figs. 1-70