

## Rethinking Regional Analyses of Western Pacific Rock-art

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**ABSTRACT.** Jim Specht has played a central role in the identification of two discrete bodies of rock-art in the western Pacific region, referred to in this paper as the “Austronesian engraving style” (AES) and the “Austronesian painting tradition” (APT). The aim of this paper is to explore the merits of the AES and the APT as analytical entities by determining how they articulate with one another across the region. This is achieved by conducting statistical analyses of western Pacific rock-art motifs. The results of these analyses are then compared with models founded on consideration of non-motif variables by previous authors, including Jim Specht.

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Several efforts have been made to document Pacific rock-art but these studies have tended to be restricted in their geographical focus and thus in their ability to enhance our understanding of Pacific prehistory on a broad-scale. This can be attributed largely to the fact that Pacific rock-art studies remain in a “data procurement and reporting” stage. Inter-regional collaboration is in its infancy, with most researchers adopting rock-art recording methodologies appropriate to their own area of study. Examples of these local studies include Röder’s (1956, 1959) analysis of the rock-art of the MacCluer Gulf (West Papua), Roe’s (1992) study of the rock-art of Guadalcanal (Solomon Islands), Spriggs & Mumford’s (1992) overview of sites in Southern Vanuatu, Frimigacci & Monnin’s (1980) inventory of rock-art motifs for New Caledonia, Lee’s (1992) analysis of the rock-art of Easter Island, Millerstrom’s (1990, 2001) Masters and doctoral research on the rock-art of the Marquesas, Lee & Stasack’s (1999) recent synthesis of the rock-art of Hawaii, and Trotter & McCulloch’s (1971) summary of the rock-art of New Zealand.

Only a handful of attempts has been made to understand how the rock-art of each of these regions articulates with one another. Comparative analyses of *western* Pacific rock-art, for instance, have been seriously undertaken by only four researchers—Hugo (1974), Specht (1979), Rosenfeld (1988) and Ballard (1992). The task for each of these researchers, however, was invariably inhibited by a lack of comprehensively recorded and inter-regionally comparable data. As a result, none of the rock-art models constructed by these authors derive from a systematic comparison of regional *motifs*. David Hugo (1974) embarked on a brief analysis of motifs but employed a relatively limited data set (a total of 77 different motifs from PNG compared to over 600 from an area extending from PNG to Tonga used in this study). The two most comprehensive studies of western Pacific rock-art, by Specht (1979) and by Ballard (1992), relied almost exclusively on the analysis of *non-motif* data. These authors paid attention to the relative distributions of rock-art techniques, colouring agents, and the locational contexts in which rock-art sites were found.