The hefty price tag reflects the size of the volume, which, while not a cover-to-cover read for the interested non-specialist, is a very useful point of reference, with many chapters providing a good entry point into their subject matter. It will certainly be a valuable resource for archaeologists seeking to apply best practice when working with mummified remains, and a go-to book for students looking for a reference point for particular types of mummies or techniques.

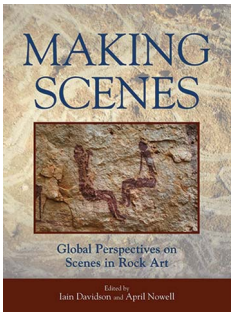
Reference

Aufderheide, A.C. 2003. *The scientific study of mummies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Amandine Flammang
Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium
✉ amandine.flammang@ulb.be

Antiquity 2022 Vol. 96 (388): 1045–1047
https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2022.68

Iain Davidson & April Nowell (ed.). 2021. *Making scenes: global perspectives on scenes in rock art*. New York: Berghahn; 978-1-78920-920-4 hardback £148.



Rock art has always been a difficult archaeological subject: hard to date and often challenging to interpret and understand. One early approach was to define descriptive 'scenes': intentional groupings of motifs thought to illustrate an event of some kind. This typically led to the identification of putative quotidian vignettes. But these reflected more about the primitivist biases of the archaeologist than about the art, in the process stripping Indigenous peoples of potential complex symbolism and metaphysical or religious concerns. Despite these initial dead-ends, great headway has been made recently in defining and interpreting complex scenic imagery. Particularly notable are Lewis-Williams's (2002) explication of the Salon of the Bulls and the Axial Gallery at Lascaux (including a ledge serving as a ground-line) as a type of cosmogram; Keyser's (e.g. 2004) long-term study of the Great Plains 'biographical style' panels and the war events and honours they portray; and Boyd's (2016) detailed micro-superimpositional analysis of a complex Pecos River panel, demonstrating that it is a single composition encoding a widespread aetiological myth. Rock art research clearly has much to gain from identifying, and plausibly interpreting, scenes among the myriad individual motifs that are present at many sites.

Making scenes: global perspectives on scenes in rock art is thus a timely contribution addressing a key analytical concern. With an introduction, epilogue and 20 chapters, the volume provides good

international coverage, including six substantive analyses from Western Europe (Villaverde; Culley; Van Gelder & Nowell; Utilla *et al.*; Domingo Sanz; Alexander *et al.*), two from the Middle East (Karimi; Brusgaard & Akkermans), one from southern Asia (Dubey-Pathak & Clottes), three from Australia (P. Dobrez; Ross; Kelly *et al.*), two from southern Africa (Lenssen-Erz; McCall *et al.*), two from North America (Spangler & Davidson; Tapper & Moro Abadia) and one from South America (Aschero & Schneir). Three of the chapters (Davidson; L. Dobrez; Kelly & David) are theoretical contributions addressing the analytical issue of defining scenes in general terms.

Many of the substantive chapters also address the analytical problem, but their approaches vary, from direct applications of Davidson's theoretical argument to formal statistical analyses, to the use of ethnographic sources to understand the ontological and epistemological issues of defining scenes in non-Western cultural contexts, to the chronological implications of previously identified types of scenes. The two chapters that deploy ethnographic data (Kelly & David in Australia, and Tapper & Moro Abadia in North America) are the most successful and convincing analyses. Of course, many rock art corpora do not have the luxury of direct ethnography, and Brusgaard and Akkerman usefully demonstrate how other kinds of information (textual in their case) sometimes can be used to inform interpretations. There is, however, fundamental confusion on the part of some authors about the nature of symbolism and thus the limits of interpretation. Because some symbols have multiple meanings, they allege, we can never know the meaning of rock art without information from its creator. In fact, all symbols, always, have multiple meanings. Specific meanings are defined by context and associations, but even these can vary between different people. This is why many interpretations of ethnographic rock art have emphasised the origin of the art—its primary meaning to the artist, rather than its many secondary meanings and the subsequent ritual uses of the sites.

There are some other disquieting aspects of this volume. These start with the editors' acknowledgement of their contemporary Western biases in interpreting non-Western Indigenous art, but they then do nothing about these biases, as if the open admission somehow absolves a researcher and resolves the problems. It does neither. It instead outlines why their interpretations should be rejected. This problem, in part, likely results from the editors' confusion over the method and purpose of ethnographic analysis and interpretation, one goal of which is to develop models providing a range of variation for rock art practices and beliefs (e.g. among forager societies) that can be used to evaluate prehistoric cases and can assist in moving beyond Western interpretive biases. Two of the theoretical chapters intended to better define scenes for analytical purposes, furthermore, fail on first principles. The first, by Davidson, has the highly problematic conclusion that "The emergence of art with agency heralded a different social context for the art, making it secular and available for unrestricted view" (p. 28). The second, by L. Dobres, insists that scenes depict 'real' events; despite the author's claim to attention to philosophical matters, 'real' is undefined, as if unproblematic ontologically or epistemologically. Both definitions fail the Sistine Chapel test in that neither can accommodate the interpretation of Michelangelo's mural as a religious scene, despite the agency, action and narrative so obviously expressed by this masterwork. Both definitions, in other words, lead back to scenes as putative depictions of quotidian life—exactly where rock art research was mid-last century and not where it should be today.

https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2022.68 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Despite these issues, the volume's strength is in the breadth and diversity of the contributions that illustrate the numerous approaches being taken to this analytical and interpretive problem. It will be useful for all rock art researchers concerned with interpretation, but also with documentation. Without some understanding of the potential existence of scenes, even the question of tabulating motifs becomes problematic: are the various motifs on a panel individual symbols or are they some combination of a single, symbolic representation? The answer will almost certainly vary from case to case but the many studies in this monograph can provide ideas for how best to resolve this problem.

References

Boyd, C.E. 2016. *The white shaman mural: an enduring creation narrative in the rock art of the Lower Pecos*. Austin: University of Texas Press. https://doi.org/10.7560/310304

Keyser, J.D. 2004. *The art of the warrior: rock art of the American Plains*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

Lewis-Williams, J.D. 2002. *The mind in the cave: consciousness and the origins of art*. London: Thames & Hudson.

David S. Whitley
ASM Affiliates, Carlsbad, USA
✉ huitli53@gmail.com

https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2022.68 Published online by Cambridge University Press