Proceedings of the Kimberley Society Rock Art Seminar
Edited by Mike Donaldson and Kevin Kenneally
Rock Art

OF THE KIMBERLEY

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edited by
Mike Donaldson
and
Kevin Kenneally AM
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INTRODUCTION

The first thing, I guess, is just to discuss what is so-called 'Bradshaw art'. In a way, Kimberley rock art is broken down into two phases: the art of the Wandjina Period, and the art before that. The word 'Bradshaw' has different meanings to different people and I try to avoid using that term in my own writing, but it always gets put in there because people want to hear that word. To me, when I first visited the art, there were so many styles apparent that my understanding of 'Bradshaw' art was that it just meant early Kimberley rock art, so I think of Bradshaw art as synonymous with early art. However, to a lot of people it means the very elegant, decorated human figures, and for them that is the Bradshaw art.

EARLY KIMBERLEY ART

There are many phases of paintings as we know, and you see many different motifs and styles. The figures shown in Figure 5.1 are not what some people might think of as Bradshaw art, but it is early art, and in this case a long thin figure, presumed to be a male with a circular headress, and a female breast-feeding and with a bulge, probably indicating pregnancy. In Figure 5.2 there is another pregnant female with a swelling and feeding an infant, and in an ancient-looking mulberry pigment. It may well be contemporaneous with the earliest human figures — it is almost certainly one of the early human figures.

Above right: Fig 5.1 Early Kimberley figures: tall male with circular head-dress and breast-feeding, pregnant female
Right: Fig 5.2 Pregnant female breast-feeding an infant
David Welch: David is a rock art researcher who has spent many years studying the early art of the Kimberley and Arnhem Land. He has published widely on this subject. David is a medical practitioner in Darwin.

Chairman: Our first speaker in this session is David Welch who is a rock art researcher from Darwin. He has spoken to the Kimberley Society recently on other aspects of Bradshaw art in the Kimberley, and today he is talking to us more about the Bradshaw or Gwion Gwion art of the Kimberley.

Below: Men wearing ngadari head-dress, carrying spearthrowers and feather bunches. Kimberley, 1938