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## UNUSUAL PAINTED ANTHROPOMORPH IN LEMBATA ISLAND EXTENDS OUR UNDERSTANDING OF ROCK ART DIVERSITY IN INDONESIA

Sue O'Connor, Mahirta, Shimona Kealy, Julien Louys, Hendri A. F. Kaharudin, Antony Lebuan and Stuart Hawkins

**Abstract.** We report new finds of two painted rock art sites in Lembata Island in Indonesia, one depicting a 'boat', the other an anthropomorph. The style of the anthropomorph is quite distinct from the small dynamic painted anthropomorphs common elsewhere in eastern Indonesia. Based on similarities with figures on Moko drums we hypothesise that this painting dates to the last millennium CE. This find extends our knowledge of the diversity of anthropomorph figures in Indonesian rock art, and indicates continuity in the expression of relationships and obligations to the ancestors through different mediums in the Sunda Islands.

### Introduction

Island Southeast Asia (ISEA) has recently been suggested to have some of the world's oldest painted rock art. Hand stencils and large animal motifs in Sulawesi dated by uranium-thorium have produced minimum ages of 40 700 and 36 900 cal BP, respectively (Aubert et al. 2014). The distribution of known Pleistocene art in ISEA is currently confined to Sulawesi

and Borneo; however, there is a widespread body of painted art with quite different stylistic conventions found throughout eastern Indonesia and the Pacific, which is thought to have been introduced by incoming Austronesian-speaking settlers after c. 3500 cal. BP, known as the Austronesian Painting Tradition (Ballard 1992). Here we describe two painted rock art sites from the island of Lembata, Indonesia (Fig. 1), an island

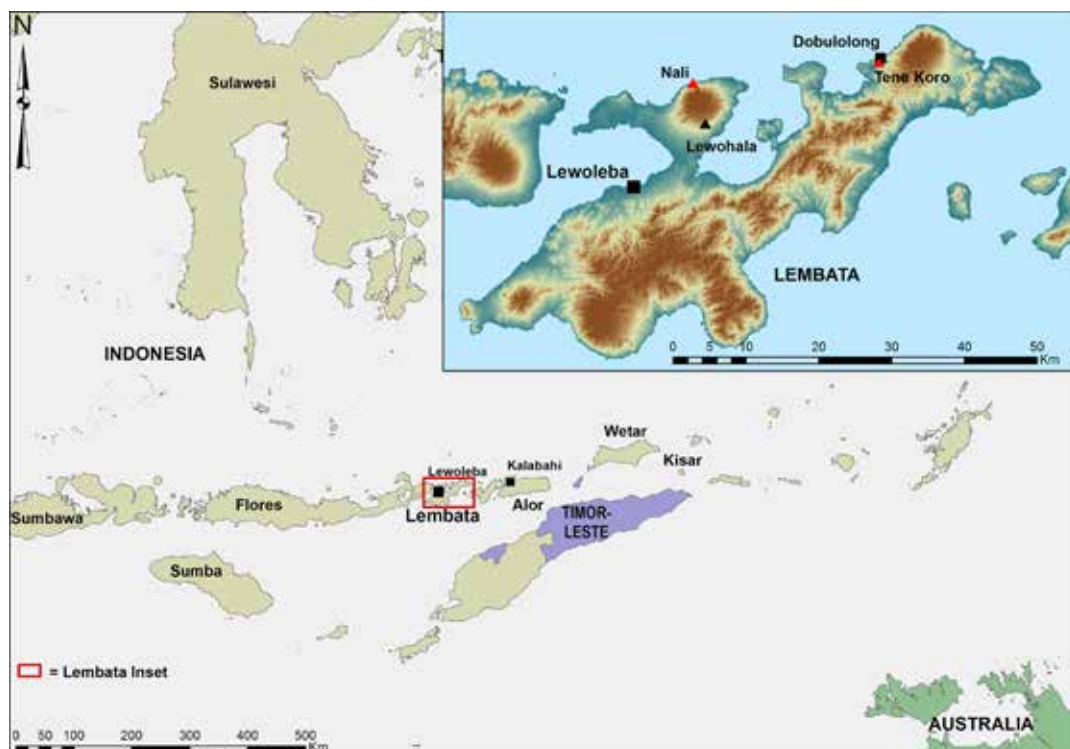


Figure 1. Map of Nusa Tenggara with inset of Lembata Island showing location of sites (red triangles) and villages (black squares).



Figure 2. Overview of the Nali rock art site.



Figure 3. Nali anthropomorph.

from which no painted rock art has been reported previously. The painting in one of the sites is quite distinct, in terms of scale and subject, from the art corpus of the Austronesian Painting Tradition. This raises the possibility that there may be distinct painting traditions in the islands to the west of Timor.

#### Location of painting sites

Lembata Island (formerly known as Lomblen Island) is located to the west of Alor in the Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (Fig. 1). Lembata is a volcanic island formed mostly of a mix of old (Miocene) and young (Plio-Pleistocene) volcanics (Koesoemadinata and Noya 1989) with the majority of the caves and shelters formed of andesitic breccias, agglomerates and tuffaceous breccias belonging to the Miocene Kiro and Nagapanda Formations (Koesoemadinata and Noya 1989), so surfaces suitable for painting were unanticipated during our survey of the island.

#### Nali rock art site

The rock art site Nali consists of an isolated human figure painted in solid infill white/cream pigment. It is located on a large boulder in an outcrop in the village of Atawtung-Lamagute on the northern slopes of the Ilelewotolok volcano (Figs 1 and 2). The boulder belongs to the young volcanic formation of the (still active) Ilelewotolok volcano which is Holocene in age (Koesoemadinata and Noya 1989). The boulder is located at the back of the village where the slope of the hillside increases significantly and large boulders have accumulated at the base of the hill over time. According to reports from both local villagers and the island's cultural heritage officers, there was also a boat motif painted in a similar pigment colour on a boulder outcrop not far above the human figure. Unfortunately, recent road improvements have resulted in this image being destroyed.

The Nali figure is shown in full frontal stance with prominent male genitalia, hands and feet, including fingers and toes (Fig. 3). There are protrusions (ears?) at the sides of the head and there is a head 'adornment' rising centrally from the top of the head. No internal body features or decorations are shown. The figure is relatively large, measuring about 60 cm in maximum length from top of 'headdress' to bottom of heel and about 42 cm in maximum width from fingertip to fingertip.

The mineralogical composition of the white/cream pigment used at Nali is unknown and white/cream pigments can be composed of several different minerals, more than one of which may be represented at the same site, or even in different layers of the same motif (Ford et al. 1994). Although the composition of the pigment is unknown, generally white/cream pigments do not have the bonding qualities or lifespan of haematite-based pigments, so the image is not likely to be of great antiquity.

### Tene Koro rock art site

The Tene Koro rock art is located in the Uaq Loroq area (meaning 'cave by the Kapok tree' in the local language), near the village of Dolulolong on the northern coast of the island (Fig. 1). The large boulder outcrop (Uaq Loroq) on which the Tene Koro rock art is painted, belongs to the Upper Miocene Waihekang Formation (Koesoemadinata and Noya 1989) and is composed of tuffaceous sandstone with poorly sorted, irregular clasts (Fig. 4).

The 'boat' at Tene Koro is painted in white on what appears to have been a solid red pigment background (Fig. 5). The features of the 'boat' are difficult to distinguish as the white pigment is flaking in places. In order to better discern the features we have isolated the white pigment from its background with Adobe Photoshop, using colour information only, producing a selectable shape. The selectable shape was then inverted to black from its original tones to achieve clarity against a white background. The resulting image shows that the 'boat' has a steeply up-raked prow and stern, a single mast comprised of two uprights and a steering oar. The up-raked stern is still clear but the prow has mostly flaked away and is less distinct. Red pigment has also been used to accentuate natural holes in the rock, as seen in the holes in the bottom left of the panel. Painting to accentuate natural features in the rock surface has also been noted as a feature of the rock art of Timor Leste and Kisar Islands (Galipaud et al. 2016; O'Connor et al. in press).

### Discussion

The Nali anthropomorph is large, visually striking and static in pose, contrasting sharply with the diminutive anthropomorphs often shown in active poses which are common in the painted rock art repertoire of eastern Indonesia and Timor Leste, and usually associated with the Austronesian Painting Tradition (Ballard 1988, 1992; O'Connor 2003). It is similar in size to the anthropomorph (also painted in frontal stance) in the Verulu shelter in Timor Leste; however, the Verulu



Figure 4. Tene Koro site overview showing location of 'boat' image.

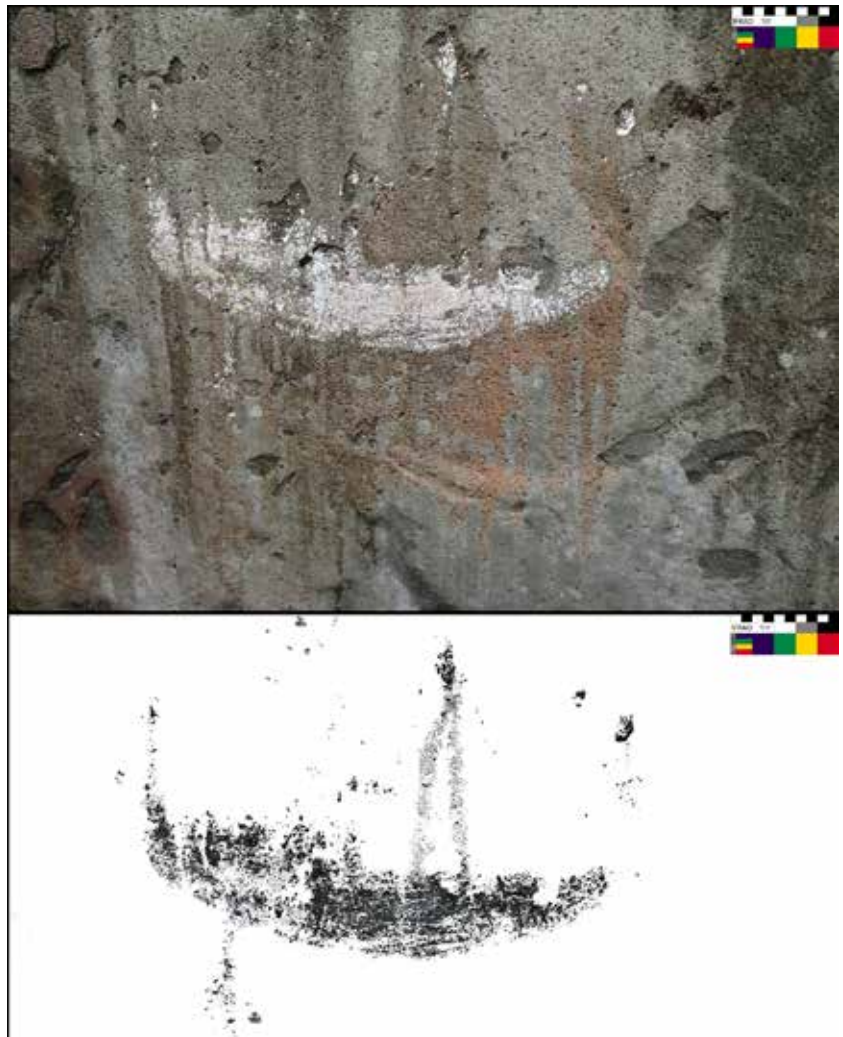


Figure 5. Tene Koro 'boat' with red pigment background and enhancement showing mast and steering oar in white pigment.

figure is executed in red pigment and is stylistically distinct with exaggerated leg muscles and elaborate 'headdress' executed as an infill



Figure 6. Lewohala Moko drum showing anthropomorph with central protrusion from head.



Figure 7. Lewohala ancestral village with Ilelewotolok volcano in background.

design (O'Connor 2003).

While no precedents are known in the painted rock art corpus of the region for large anthropomorphs like the Nali image, it is strikingly similar to a motif observed on a Moko drum in the ancestral village of Lewohala (Figs 6 and 7), approximately 6 km south of Nali (as the crow flies), on the southern slopes of the Ilelewotolok volcano. The anthropomorph on the

drum has arms and legs in similar stance to the Nali figure, although fingers and toes are not indicated. The head also has a central and two side protuberances like the Nali anthropomorph. The impression of male genitalia is created between the relief casting of the upper legs, although whether or not this was intentional is unknown.

The Lewohala Moko drum is stored in a sacred house along with pottery, baskets, Chinese trade-ware, food offerings and a number of elephant tusks said to have been brought from India (Fig. 8). The tusks, like the Moko drums used in neighbouring Pantar and Alor Islands, are traditionally of great significance in marriage negotiations as the payment of bridewealth (Andaya 2016), while the sacred house and the ancestral village as a whole are used during important rites of passage by the head of the household, and during larger village ceremonies and festivals (e.g. the annual nut harvest festival) (Lebuan pers. comm.).

Like the better known and larger Dong Son drums, the small hourglass-shaped Moko drums are cast of bronze. They are found throughout the Nusa Tenggara islands from Flores to Alor but are most common in Alor. While Moko drums were used in Nusa Tenggara they were produced in workshops in east Java for export to the east (Calo 2014: 151). They are more recent than the larger Dong Son and are thought to have been produced from the late first millennium CE with production continuing into the twentieth century.

Demand for eastern Indonesian products in the broader world trading system was probably a contributing factor for the continuing casting of Moko drums to trade for such commodities (Calo 2014; Du Bois 1944). We thus suggest that the production period for Moko drums provides a *terminus post quem* for the execution of the anthropomorph at Nali.

Today many of the Moko drums are still in use in villages, where they are revered as sacred and fundamental to ritual performance, and are played during ceremonies marking transitions in life such as marriage and death (Calo 2014: 120–125). They are also regarded as culturally significant heritage objects in contemporary Alor and the capital of Alor, Kalabahi, has a Moko Museum said to contain 1000 drums. The motifs on Moko drums are highly variable and some have minimal decoration. Stylised human figures are popular motifs for Mokos with paired near-identical figures cast on either side of the drum.

Ballard and colleagues (2004) have discussed the

ways in which motifs cross media in eastern Indonesia, with boats and tree of life motifs occurring in the painted rock art as well as on woven fabrics, and boat motifs similar to those on Dong Son drums occurring in the rock art (see also Ballard 1992 and Lape et al. 2007). It seems likely that the emblems on Moko drums, which are so central to ritual and performance of rites of passage, were also reproduced in different media. The painting of the anthropomorph at Nali may have been executed by villagers in the modern village of Atawtung-Lamagute to manifest the power of the Moko that was stored in the sacred house in the ancestral village. Likewise boats, which are emblematic motifs in the Austronesian Painting Tradition, are reproduced in a variety of other media (Ballard et al. 2004). The 'boat' image at Tene Koro would fit within the corpus of boats that have been thus described, with the exception of the use of white pigment for its execution. However, the fact that the white pigment boat is still largely preserved suggests that this image does not have great antiquity.

In Timor Leste 'boats' in the rock art are said to represent the actual boats of migrant groups who came from other islands, and who settled and were given land by the autochthonous groups already resident (Pannell and O'Connor 2012). The landing places of these migrants are often marked by 'stone boats', said by the descendants of these groups to be the boats of the ancestors which then turned to stone (Pannell 2006: 206; Lape et al. 2007: 5). While in some cases the stone boats are built stone arrangements, more often they are natural stone outcrops. These original landing places and the stone boats are also marked by ancestral 'first footprint' sites, where the footprints of arriving ancestors were left in the stone. Interestingly, in the oral history of the Lembata village of Dolulolong, the local people recount how their village was named by a founding ancestor from nearby Alor Island who was born in the Alor village of the same name. Perhaps the Tene Koro 'boat' can be viewed as a late expression of the Austronesian Painting Tradition, and like the stone boats of Timor Leste, a metaphor for the passage of their ancestors from Alor and their arrival and settlement in Lembata.

### Conclusion

The rock art sites reported here extend the known distribution of painted rock art in eastern Indonesia to include Lembata Island. The Nali anthropomorph is quite different from painted anthropomorphs recorded in other parts of eastern Indonesia in its static, bold frontal stance, size and colour. The striking similarity of this figure to those on a Moko drum in an ancestral house nearby strongly suggests that it was painted in the last millennium. This would seem to be supported by the fact that the image is painted in white/cream



Figure 8. Moko drum and other objects in Lewohala sacred house.

pigment, which has limited longevity. The white painting of the boat at Tene Koro is undated but may document the arrival of the ancestral population from Alor as recounted in oral tradition. Both paintings signal the ongoing relationships and obligations connecting the populations in the present day villages of Lembata with the ancestral realm.

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Professor Sue O'Connor  
Department of Archaeology and Natural History  
School of Culture, History and Language  
College of Asia and the Pacific  
The Australian National University  
Acton, ACT 0200  
Australia  
[sue.oconnor@anu.edu.au](mailto:sue.oconnor@anu.edu.au)

Dr Mahirta  
Jurusan Arkeologi, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya  
Universitas Gadjah Mada  
Yogyakarta  
Indonesia

Shimona Kealy  
Department of Archaeology and Natural History  
School of Culture, History and Language  
College of Asia and the Pacific  
The Australian National University  
Acton, ACT 0200  
Australia

Dr Julien Louys  
Department of Archaeology and Natural History

School of Culture, History and Language  
College of Asia and the Pacific  
The Australian National University  
Acton, ACT 0200  
Australia

Hendri A. F. Kaharudin  
Jurusan Arkeologi, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya  
Universitas Gadjah Mada  
Yogyakarta  
Indonesia

Antony Lebuan  
DINAS Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Lembata Regency  
Jln. Polres Lewoleba  
Lembata  
Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur  
Indonesia

Dr Stuart Hawkins  
Department of Archaeology and Natural History  
School of Culture, History and Language  
College of Asia and the Pacific  
The Australian National University  
Acton, ACT 0200  
Australia

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