



## RAR DEBATE

### The 'buffaroo': not necessarily a 'first sight' depiction

By DARRELL LEWIS

In their paper titled 'The buffaroo: a "first-sight" depiction of introduced buffalo in the rock art of western Arnhem Land, Australia' (May et al. 2020), the authors discuss the painting of a water buffalo (*L.*



Figure 1. Line drawing of a dingo painting with kangaroo body and leg proportions, painted by Spider Murululmi in 1968 (after Brandl 1973, Pl. 19, p. 129).



Figure 2. A donkey painting with kangaroo body and leg proportions, painted by Spider Murululmi in 1968 (Brandl 1973, Pl. 21, p. 131).

*Bubalus bubalis*), executed in red lines with white infill. Aboriginal traditional owners named the painting 'the buffaroo' because it appeared to combine elements of both buffalo and kangaroo. The authors 'contend that this painting embodies a period of experimentation for Aboriginal rock painters and provides insights into adaptations necessary to depict new animals being introduced in this region in the nineteenth century ...'. They add that 'In a wider context, this painting also hints at a process of buffalo being integrated into artistic and cultural systems in northern Australia'. The authors argue that the buffaroo represents a 'first-sight' painting — one that was probably produced in the period 1820 to 1850. The key points for making these assertions are:

First, the painting in question has the body shape of a kangaroo which the authors suggest indicates a lack of familiarity with the animal on the part of the artist. They believe that once Aboriginal artists became familiar with buffalo, they began painting them with a more realistic body shape.

Second, the authors note that the painting 'lacks key stylistic elements found in later depictions of buffalo', namely, the internal features and particularly the cross-hatching typical of x-ray paintings. They note that such infill decoration often relates to a particular clan affiliation and they suggest that the absence of these features may indicate that buffalo had not yet been integrated into the artistic and cultural system of the region. There are problems with both assertions — the authors have overlooked important evidence which considerably weakens their 'first sight' arguments.

On the issue of the kangaroo-like body and leg proportions indicating an unfamiliarity with the buffalo on the part of the artist, the authors do not refer to the work of Brandl (1973 and 1980) which is of direct relevance to their paper. In his 1973 publication, Brandl illustrates and discusses several animals in x-ray style, painted on the wall of the Superintendent's office at Bamyili Settlement (now Barunga community), south-west Arnhem Land, in 1968 (Brandl 1973: Fig. 17 and Pls 19, 20 and 21). The paintings were created by Aboriginal artist 'Spider' Ngabunun Murululmi, and among the animals he depicted was a 'native cat' (northern quoll), a dingo (Fig. 1) and a donkey (Fig. 2). There can be little doubt that Murululmi was completely familiar with all three animals and knew that they have bodies that in general shape resemble that of a dog, and have front and hind legs of equal size, yet



Figure 3. The tail of an x-ray fish overlying a kangaroo which has been painted in a very similar manner to the buffaroo, with no internal features other than 'joint' lines.

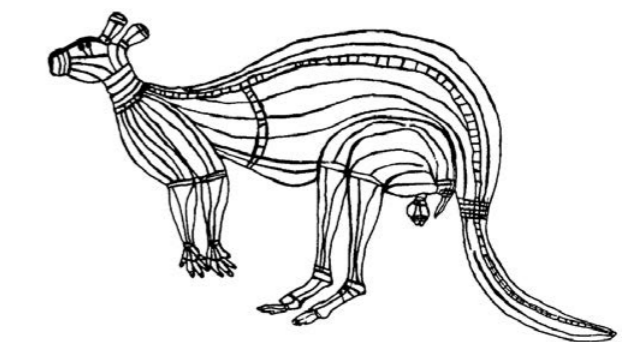


Figure 4. A recent style kangaroo with internal divisions and backbone, but no cross-hatched design elements.

he painted them with bodies and legs in the proportions of a kangaroo. In keeping with the appellation given to the buffalo painting, these paintings could be termed, respectively, a 'quollaroo', a 'dingaroo' and a 'donkaroo'.

The animals painted by Murululmi, who clearly was an accomplished artist, were not 'first-sight' or rarely seen animals, so why did he portray them with a kangaroo-like body and leg proportions? Brandl provides an explanation in his 1980 paper. There, he reports a conversation he had with Murululmi in which he told him that he thought the donkey he had painted looked like a kangaroo. Murululmi was very surprised and pointed to various features of the painting that, to him, clearly indicated it was a donkey — the tail, the hooves, the saddle (added at the suggestion of a white resident at Bamyili), and the front legs being parted because 'this is the way a donkey walks, he jumps like a horse'. When Brandl 'pointed to the somewhat slender forequarters, to the heavy rump and particularly to the exaggerated length of the hindlegs', Murululmi acknowledged that he might have been 'thinking of a kangaroo' when he made the painting. Brandl remarked that,

There is no doubt that the kangaroo means something very special to an Aboriginal. He has seen it, hunted it, cut it up, cooked and eaten it perhaps more often than any other native animal — quite apart from what the kangaroo signifies to him if one thinks of the Ubar (or Ngurlmag) ritual ...

Brandl concluded that 'Sometimes the characteristics of a frequently painted animal interfere with the artist's conception when he paints a rarely depicted motif'. The fact that this 'interference' was still occurring in 1968 demonstrates that a painting of a buffalo or any other introduced animal that has kangaroo-like body and legs proportions cannot be assumed to represent a 'first sight' of that animal.

The other key point in the argument of the authors is that the presence of x-ray features and particularly

cross-hatched design elements may signify the integration of the subject into the existing artistic and cultural system. They present evidence that at least in some parts of Arnhem Land, buffalo have been so integrated, and they argue that the absence of such features on the buffaroo suggests that it was painted before such integration took place. This may be so, but there are paintings of native animals in recent style where such features are minimal or absent. An example here is Figure 3, a kangaroo partly covered by the tail of an x-ray-style fish. The kangaroo has a very pale-red base silhouette, and a red outline and 'joint' lines, but no x-ray features or cross-hatching.

Similarly, Figure 4 is a well-preserved kangaroo in yellow with a red outline and internal divisions. It has a backbone, but no other x-ray features and no cross-hatching. There are also recent-style paintings of native animals where internal organs are depicted, but there is no cross-hatching (e.g. Fig. 5). Finally, Figure 6 is of a buffalo (or perhaps a goat) which combines the x-ray features and cross-hatched design elements which the authors suggest indicates a relatively recent painting, but which also has kangaroo body proportions.

It is possible, indeed likely, that when Aboriginal artists first encountered introduced animals, they found it difficult to portray them realistically and were unconsciously influenced by the frequently painted motif, the kangaroo. There can be little doubt that as they became more familiar with these animals, some artists could paint them more realistically. However, as the above examples make clear, the depiction of non-kangaroo species with kangaroo-like body and leg proportions was not dependent on lack of familiarity



Figure 5. A well-preserved kangaroo painting with x-ray features but no cross-hatched design elements.



Figure 7. A real 'buffaroo' at the Camooeal roadhouse, Queensland.



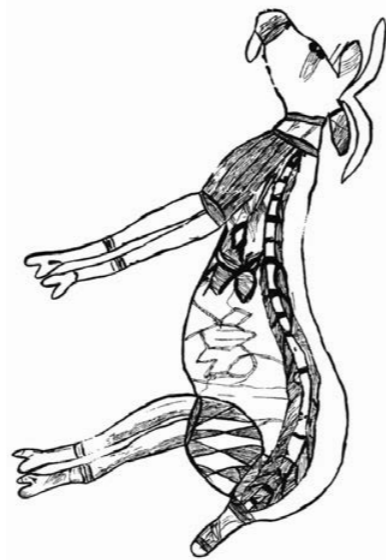
Figure 6. A fully developed x-ray painting of a buffalo or goat with a kangaroo-like body, and its monochrome recording.

with the subject. Such 'distortions' continued into relatively recent times and were not restricted to introduced animals. Likewise, paintings of introduced animals with kangaroo-like body proportions, and/or lacking internal features or cross-hatching design elements, cannot automatically be taken to be very early, 'first-sight' paintings of the animal portrayed.

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RAR 38-1363



## Another buffaroo

By OLGA GOSTIN

Upon receiving the November 2020 issue of *Rock Art Research* I was fascinated by the article on the buffaroo (RAR 37[2]: 204–216). I could not suppress my excitement as back in 1965, I had bought a strange bark painting in Alice Springs or Darwin, thinking it was my valedictory visit to the region before returning to South Africa after completing my PhD. Well, then I met Victor, who became my husband, and here I am with the same strange kangaroo whose physiological anomalies have always bewildered me (Fig. 1). I know nothing else about it, or its provenance. The only information I could secure after removing the bark painting from its mount were these inscriptions on the back: '2449/ONRI/1 \$46', written in black over a smudged white chalk inscription, '1387/OIII/1 \$40'.

I was very naive in those days, and tourist shops stocked stuff without due recognition of artists. The



Figure 1. Bark painting of buffaroo by an unknown artist, Alice Springs 1965.

bark painting appealed because it defied logic or conventional art forms. At the time, I was an Africanist completing my research on resettlement and cash-cropping in Papua, so had next to no awareness of proper protocols when purchasing art. I thank the authors of this paper for explaining the context of my bark painting.

Dr Olga Gostin

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## REPLY

### Broadening our understanding beyond the 'Buffaroo'

By SALLY K. MAY, INÉS DOMINGO SANZ, JOAKIM GOLDHAHN, DUNCAN WRIGHT AND GABRIEL MARALNGURRA

We thank Darrell Lewis for his insightful reflections on the 'Buffaroo' paper. In this paper, we explore the idea of Aboriginal artists experimenting with their depictions of newly introduced animals, such as buffalo. As Lewis highlights, we contend that this painting represents an ongoing period of experimentation and innovation. We also touch upon how new animals were (or were not) integrated into existing cultural and artistic systems. Lewis has two key concerns, so we will address these separately.

First, we comment on our neglect of Brandl's 1973 discussion of a series of paintings made on a building in Barunga (Bamyili) in 1968. Brandl's work has been a source of inspiration in our rock art research over the years, but in this case, we chose to focus on rock art and anthropological research undertaken in western Arnhem Land. There is no question Brandl's insights into the paintings by 'Spider' Ngabunun Murululmi add new challenges to our broader understanding of recent northern Australian rock art and opens up new

avenues of research, and we are grateful to Lewis for raising this case study.

Importantly, our suggestion that the Buffaroo may represent an early depiction of a buffalo is based on more than an archaeological analysis of the rock art. It was also inspired by anthropological research, our conversation with senior artists in the area, and a broader archaeological analysis of the overall site and artefacts. Nevertheless, the continuing depiction of buffalo and other introduced animals adopting a symbiotic body shape between kangaroos and introduced animals, as illustrated by the examples reported by Lewis, opens up very interesting research questions. These relate to the birth and perpetuation of the way of depicting introduced species, and whether this symbiosis or fusion between different local and introduced species arises from an initial difficulty in reproducing the proportions of the new species that later becomes a way of doing, or whether it is intentional and culturally significant from the beginning. It would also be interesting to explore whether Ngabunun Murululmi's own paintings were influenced by rock art. Did rock art influence and inspire his way of depicting certain introduced animals, or were different artists at different points in time (and in different contexts) depicting introduced species similarly by mixing the shape of the kangaroo with the distinctive features of the introduced species?

It is quite interesting to us that regardless of how this originated, it was perpetuated over time and across a relatively large territory.

Second, Lewis is doubtful that the presence of x-ray features and cross-hatched design elements may indicate integration of the subject into existing artistic and cultural systems. Our intention was not to suggest an evolutionary timeline in which all rock art moves from simple paintings to integrated, significant paintings. Decades of research have clearly shown that this is not the case. However, we do know that certain design elements have important links to ceremonial life, *djang* (Dreaming) sites, and more (e.g. May et al. 2020; Taylor 1996; Taçon 1989). We intended to highlight the lack of any evidence for this on the Buffaroo. Taken in context with our other findings, and more broadly in context with other introduced subject matter that does include these design elements, it may suggest that the artist was communicating less cultural knowledge with this painting than, for example, other recent paintings imbued with Maraiian or other design elements.

Upon finishing the Buffaroo paper, we too felt there was unfinished business and have continued to explore the depiction of buffalo in western Arnhem Land rock art. This is outlined in our forthcoming *Antiquity* article (May et al. in press): 'The re-emergence of *nganaparru* (water buffalo) into western Arnhem Land life, landscape and rock art'. Drawing heavily on anthropological research in western Arnhem Land, we explore in greater detail how animals such as buffalo were simply 're-emerging' into the world rather than appearing as a 'newly introduced animal'. Rock art had a role to play in this re-emergence. The timeframe in which these paintings are made is not of central concern — whether they are 'first sight' or are well known to the artists is secondary to how artists were (and still are) using rock art to navigate a rapidly changing world.

We thank Lewis for raising these issues and for his additional insights into recent Arnhem Land rock art. They further illustrate the extraordinary complexity of the western Arnhem Land artistic system, including

the often-overlooked recent rock art.

We also thank Olga Gostin for her interest in our paper and for sharing an image of her bark painting. It is always interesting to contemplate how art recorded on a rockshelter wall relates to contemporary portable art. We hope that the ideas outlined within our paper will add to your enjoyment of this painting.

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## BRIEF REPORTS

### *New petroglyph sites in Hawraman, Kurdistan Province of western Iran*

By AMIR SAED MUCHESHI and KEYVAN ROSTAMPOUR

The Kurdistan Province is located in western Iran, east of Iraq. Sanandaj is the centre of the province. The Zagros Mountains extend northwest-southeast through Kurdistan Province to southern Iran. Numerous intermountain plains and valleys can be seen in this mountain range. The southwest of Kurdistan province is a part of Hawraman, which in addition to geographical features, also has its cultural characteristics. Based on archaeological studies in Kurdistan Province, including the Hawraman region, sites of Palaeolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Historical periods have been identified (Swiney 1975; Biglari and Shidrang 2019).

Several studies have been conducted in the field of rock art in Kurdistan Province, based on which we see a variety of petroglyph designs, especially in the Hawraman region. Petroglyphs include geometric patterns, zoomorphs such as 'ibex', 'riders' and presumed

abstract motifs (Ghasimi 2007). Several sites of cupules and mortars have been reported (Lahafian 2010), but their association with settlement sites is unclear. Recent excavations at two archaeological sites known as Bardeh Mar and Sarcham have identified several cupules, mortars and a small number of petroglyphs. In addition, around the village of Bahramabad, many petroglyph motifs have been identified in a place called Sarbir, which will be discussed in this paper. All these new finds are in the Hawraman region, in the southwest of Kurdistan Province (Fig. 1) and these petroglyphs were all created on limestone.

#### The site of Bardeh Mar

The site of Bardeh Mar is located on the northern slope of Shaho Mountain, and during its excavation, traces of the middle (12th to 14th centuries CE) and late Islamic periods (18th to 19th centuries CE) were identified. In this excavation, stone architecture, pottery, animal bones and other cultural materials were obtained. On the surface of this site are several large natural stones that have been a good platform for creating cupules and mortars. In addition to cupules and mortars, two stylised zoomorphs were also pounded, severely eroded due to their exposure to rain and being located within the ancient village (Fig. 2). From zoo-archeological studies conducted at the Bardeh Mar site, a small number of wild goats (*Capra aegagrus*) and wild sheep (*Ovis orientalis*) bones were identified, which is a sign of their hunting in previous periods (Saed Mucheshi et al. 2017).



Figure 1. Location of Bardeh Mar, Sarcham and Sarbir in western Iran.



Figure 2. Cupules, mortars and petroglyphs of Bardeh Mar.



Figure 3. Cupules and mortars of Sarcham, scales 10 cm long.



Figure 4. Petroglyphs of Sarcham.

Rock No.	Diameter in cm	Depth in cm
1	8 & 9	2
2	17	9
3	88	14
4	26	14
5	21.7	74.5
6	18	53

Table 1. Bedrock mortars and cupules of Sarcham site.

#### The site of Sarcham

The site of Sarcham is located 6 km east of the Bardeh Mar site and 200 m north of Rowar village. Archaeological excavations at this site have uncovered cultural materials from the Chalcolithic, Bronze Age, Iron

Age and Historic periods. Architecture, pottery and animal bones are among the excavated remains. On the site's surface were boulders that, due to their large size, were recorded higher than the archaeological deposits (past occupational/settlement layers). Here, as in the Bardeh Mar site, a few mortars and cupules of various dimensions have been created on these large rocks (Table 1 and Fig. 3). In addition to these cupules and mortars, several stylised zoomorphs have been created (Fig. 4), similar to those at the site of Bardeh Mar. These motifs, located on the horizontal surface of the rock, have been exposed to various types of erosion. In both sites, the motifs are not well recognisable. It is most likely that the engraved designs belong to periods after the site was abandoned. Along with the rock motifs of Sarcham, many letters from the recent period have been written with memorabilia themes. These rock inscriptions include specific names, words that emphasise their memory, and engraved history. Therefore, at present, it is not possible to suggest a definite connection between the archaeological periods of these sites and the rock art motifs, but the mortars and cupules are related to the sites. In archaeological excavations of these two sites, several pestles were found. Archaeological excavations in the Chalcolithic remains of Sarcham site were limited to a corner of a trench, and no skeletal remains were obtained (Saed Mucheshi 2015). However, zooarchaeological studies of other periods indicate limited hunting of wild goats (*Ovis orientalis*).

#### Sarbir petroglyphs of Bahramabad village

The Sarbir petroglyphs are at the top of the Zarawa mountains west of Bahramabad village. The height of the rock art panel is 1.5 m, so it starts from a height of 2.5 m and continues to 4 m height. A crack divides the panel motifs into northern and southern groups, with five 'ibex' motifs at the bottom and the rest at the top. The texture of the limestone rock features karst phenomena, and its numerous erosion grooves have made it possible for humans to climb over them and create patterns on the panel.

The created petroglyphs include 'ibex', groups of dots, anthropomorphs, a few single dots and a 'snake', all drawn in a simple and schematic way (Fig. 5). An 'ibex' body is a straight horizontal line with four vertical lines attached below it, indicating their legs. A short line is drawn at the bottom of the legs at a 90° angle, perhaps indicating their 'hoofs'. The 'snout' and 'beard' are depicted as two simple lines perpendicular to each other, and the 'horns' are long and extended to the 'tail', with an arched curvature. There are small vertical lines on the 'horns' that probably indicate the horn ribbing.

The motifs that probably depict ibex are the most frequently engraved on this panel, but some motifs, including the highest at the bottom and the highest at the top section, are not very clear. Recent designs also resemble 'ibex' but are less distinct. These designs

may be incomplete or different motifs. In the lower parts of the upper section of the panel, the sketch of a 'snake' and the image of an abstract and simple anthropomorph can be seen, with a point between its legs, which may or may not emphasise this figure's sex. At the top of the upper panel is a large dot with two circular rows of small dots around it. Most of the motifs engraved here and all the motifs of the sites of the Bardeh Mar and Sarcham are of 'ibex'. High mountains, deep valleys, inaccessible cliffs and pastures are suitable habitats for ibex, which are still abundant in this area.

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RAR 39-1366



Figure 5. Petroglyphs of Bahramabad.

#### Lt George Grey's 'script': journal, plate and painting

By MICHAEL P. RAINSBURY

The published images from Lt (later Sir) George Grey's expedition to the Glenelg River of Western Australia in 1837–38 (1841) led to a torrent of speculation by scholars as to the origins of the figures depicted (Crawford 1968; Akerman 2016). The two caves discovered on 26th and 29th March 1838 contained paintings of anthropomorphs that almost ninety years later would be identified as Wandjinas, ancestral beings of the west Kimberley people (Elkin 1930).

The digitisation of Grey's collection of papers held by Auckland Libraries Heritage Collection allows access to his sketch of the anthropomorph from 29th March cave (Grey n.d.), and it is apparent there are differences between it and the published colour plate. Mike Donaldson's photographs (2013: 254–259) of Grey's two sites provide the most comprehensive coverage of the rock art in print, allowing direct comparison between paintings and recordings.

In brief, George Grey's expedition was one of discovery, landing at Hanover Bay in the west Kimberley and travelling in the Wet Season height in early 1838. He named the Glenelg River, but violent encounters with the Worora people, plus harsh terrain and climate, led him to abort the trip and return to the coast. He found two caves, or rockshelters, with rock art, the first on 26th March, the second on 29th March 1838. 26th March cave held the painting of an anthropomorph on the ceiling and an associated panel of four



**Figure 1.** Bandidjin / 29th March Cave. (a) From Grey's unpublished journal 1838 (courtesy of Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections GMS 136.3). (b) Grey's published colour plate in 1841. (c) Howard Coate's sketch (Elkin 1948). (d) Photograph of the figure in 2002 showing head detail (Donaldson 2013: 256).

busts (Donaldson 2013: 254–255) which Grey thought depicted a group of women. 29th March cave had a full-length figure on the ceiling over a naturally formed seat (Donaldson 2013: 257). The figure had apparent markings on its 'headdress'.

The speculation of Victorian scholars was based on the countenance of the figures, their grouping and position (for 26th March cave), and on the 'dress' and 'lettering' of the 29th March cave. Ian Crawford lists some of the fanciful theories ranging from Red Sea traders, Malays, eleventh century Moors or even sixty-two ship-wrecked Japanese sailors, the 'hopeless ones' (see below), all based on interpretations of the 1841 colour plates (1968: 66–67). At the time, no one considered whether the published works were accurate representations even though Grey's text described weathered art, not the pristine images of the book plates.

Frederick Brockman's 1901 survey of the Kimberley published photographs of other sites showing the rock art was not unique, and Elkin confirmed it was part of the rich belief system of the local people (Elkin 1930). The sites were rediscovered by Howard Coate in 1947 (Elkin 1948), confirming that Grey's sketches had a high degree of artistic licence. Coate's Aboriginal guides were able to offer mythology for the caves, so placing them firmly in the cultural landscape.

Grey's journal sketch allows for a comparison with his published colour plate and the actual panel as seen in Donaldson's photographs (2013: 256, 257) (Fig. 1). First, the figure in the journal sketch (Fig. 1a) is less elegant than the colour plate. Fingers are shown but

are less distinct than in the plate. Separate legs are hinted at under the gown. The feet are less dainty than the plate but depicted entirely incorrectly, as seen with Donaldson's full photograph; the usual depiction of feet is to rotate them ninety degrees, revealing the sole. A thicker 'chin' area is shown on the head, which matches the actual photograph and Coate's figure. As for the 'headdress' and alleged markings, differences are immediately apparent. The published plate (Fig. 1b) has the six-letter 'text' 'GITILF' (the F lacking the crossbar). From this and adjacent columns of circles, many of the wonderful interpretations were developed. The journal sketch offers five letters, 'GITII'. Neither matches with Coate's figure (Fig. 1c) nor Donaldson's photograph. Grey's journal sketch shows a slight protrusion from the 'headdress', something the colour plate does not, though Coate's sketch has this as feather ornamentation. Three columns of circles are shown adjacent to the figure's right arm, though Donaldson's photographs do not show them at all, and Elkin wrote that Coate found them too faint to photograph. His guides informed him they were yam seeds (1948: 14). One Victorian scholar thought they represented the number of ship-wrecked sailors. The published plate has columns of 21, 24 and 17 circles, totalling 62, the journal sketch 14, 21 and 10 circles, respectively, making 45, reducing the number of apparent 'castaways'.

The colour plate has two marks below the figure's left shoulder corresponding to the lower-case letters 'cd'. The marks disappear and reappear with reproductions of the plate in the literature over the years and are absent from the journal sketch. Favenc (1987: 314) regarded them as proving the European origin of the rock art and so making the figure a Christian religious painting. As for their presence, a working hypothesis is they are the plate lithographer's or artist's initials.

Returning to the 'head band' markings, Elkin pointed out that Grey, in his text, had said it was impossible to tell if they were written characters or ornamentation

are less distinct than in the plate. Separate legs are hinted at under the gown. The feet are less dainty than the plate but depicted entirely incorrectly, as seen with Donaldson's full photograph; the usual depiction of feet is to rotate them ninety degrees, revealing the sole. A thicker 'chin' area is shown on the head, which matches the actual photograph and Coate's figure.

As for the 'headdress' and alleged markings, differences are immediately apparent.

(1948: 13). Coate himself had difficulty making out the 'head band', what with insect nests to be removed, and the faded markings. Crawford, writing later and about a different shelter, states the markings result from differential weathering of the pigment revealing underlying layers (1968: 68). Coate's informant stated the markings are, in fact, lightning, something which ties in with the mythology of the rock art. Donaldson's photographs (2013: 256, 257) reveal the anthropomorph partially superimposes an underlying image showing through the pigment, this image resembling a tree or plant with leaves (Fig. 1d). For comparison, refer to Wanalirri site and the edible root of the native plum tree over Wodjin's shoulder (Crawford 1968: 41; Donaldson 2013: 448–449). If this underlying image is a tree, it parallels the mythology of the area whereby one Ancestral Being spiked his foot on a wattle stick and became known as Wattle-tree Man, Wargalimada (Elkin 1948: 9). This same mythology is known on the Calder River at Koralyi shelter, where the Ancestral Being is Yaoburra Kalingi Warkalemada (Fox 1939).

Grey reports the cave to have a naturally formed seat under the anthropomorph with paintings on rocks on either side, perhaps "some fabulous species of turtle" (Grey in Elkin 1948: 14). Coate's guide stated they were yams (ibid.: 14), and Donaldson's photographs confirm this, being perhaps Long Yams (2013: 258). This, too, ties in with the area's mythology whereby Wargalimada deposited yams he was carrying before lying down to become a painting (1948: 9, 14).

The mythology of the caves was known to Elkin (1948: 9, 10); 26th March cave is Don-don-dji, and the ceiling painting is the Wandjina Dalimen. The group of four busts are young female Wandjinas (one identified as a mother, Djilinja), lovers of Dalimen. Sam Woola-goodjah, Ian Crawford's informant fifteen years later, called the women the Mulu mulu (1968: 65). This cave and two others, along with a basaltic hill, are part of a mythological landscape connected with the sexual adventures of Dalimen and the women.

Grey's 29th March cave is Bandidjin. Although only 18 km or so S.E. of Don-don-dji (26th March cave), it sits in Ngarinyin country on the border with the Worora, and Elkin reports it as having a different mythological tradition (1948: 9, 10). The ceiling painting is thought to be Barambad ('bald-headed fellow'), the leader of the Bandidjin clan, which split away from the Calder River Galarungari clan (ibid.: 10). The Galarungari's totem is rain, Golingi, and Galaru is the Rainbow Serpent, the mythology of which spread into the area from the south and south-east Kimberley (ibid.: 10).

The Bandidjin figure differs from Wandjina paintings such as at Don-don-dji (26th March cave), and Elkin believes that the figure, lacking both nose and mouth, creates a 'frog-like' impression. If so, this ties in with Galarungari being rain country as one of their

Ancestral Beings is the frog, Ralamara (1948: 11). Coate visited a site to the north-east of Bandidjin where his guides stated, "no more Wandjina, him different kind" (Elkin 1948: 13).

Discrepancies between George Grey's journal sketch and published plate for Bandidjin (29th March cave) create irreconcilable differences for the 'deciphering' of the apparent script as attempted by Victorian scholars. This is compounded by inaccuracies between the sketch and rock art, as illustrated by Donaldson's photographs. Coate's 1947 rediscovery and Elkin's ethnography place the shelter and image firmly within the belief system of west Kimberley people. The 'writing' results from differential weathering showing an underlying tree motif. Its angled lines can be interpreted as either lightning (the opinion of one of Coate's guides) or a tree, so tying in with the local mythology of the Ancestral Wattle-tree Man, Wargalimada.

#### Acknowledgments

Thank you to Dr David Welch; Andrew Henry of Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections for permission to use Grey's journal sketch; and Dr Mike Donaldson for permission to use his photograph of Barambad.

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## RAR REVIEW

**Indigenous heritage and rock art: worldwide research in memory of Daniel Arsenault**, edited by CAROLE CHARETTE, ARON MAZEL and GEORGE NASH. 2021. Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, Oxford, 197 pages, 164 photographs, 43 line drawings. ISBN 978-1-78969-689-9, £38.00.

Ostensibly a memorial to the French-Canadian archaeologist and anthropologist Daniel Arsenault from Quebec, who died with his partner and a family member in a car accident in 2016, *Indigenous heritage and rock art* is actually something more than that. At first reading, it appears to be a very concise critique of the business of studying rock art or, more precisely, of trying to understand what can be represented by non-alphabetic visual communication systems that have survived as assemblages of marks painted onto or incised into rock supports. It seems to be asking the question about the dynamic of making marks on surfaces available to pre-literate communities and bedrock exposures in particular. Is the dynamic of the activity its function, or its purpose or the search for transcendental power? Then one notices on repeat reading that there is a dominant but more restrictive thought in the text that is to some extent consistent with the title of the book. It is preoccupied with a single problem. It concentrates on the difference and similarities between the words 'heritage' and 'sacred'.

As is common with publications of this nature today, the book contains fourteen articles by seventeen authors. It also contains a short and charming Preface in English and French by two surviving daughters of Daniel Arsenault, Sarah-Anne and Élisabeth. The fourteen articles divide into three groups. The first group comprises three articles by two of the three editors on sites with mark assemblages like those studied by Daniel Arsenault and two other articles by academic colleagues. Aron Mazel writes on the motivation for the transition from monochrome to polychrome paintings of eland and men by the San hunter-gatherers in the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg in south-eastern Africa and its association with the arrival of Basuto cattle herders. George Nash writes on cupules on twelve megaliths in west Wales and on the topology of glaciated surfaces used to map settlements in Valcamonica, north Italy. Oscar Mario Abadia and Bryn Tapper question the validity of western European methods of study of parietal mark assemblages of the Late Pleistocene and early Holocene for the study of mark assemblages of more recent date in lands colonised by Europeans. Sara Garcés, Hugo Gomes, Luiz Oosterbeek and Pierluigi Rosina attempt to make sense of the extensive records

made with moulds, photographs, maps and notes on the panels of mark assemblages in the Tagus valley in central Portugal before they were flooded for hydroelectric and water conservation purposes. All five contributions describe research programs that were begun long before the authors knew anything about Daniel Arsenault and, in some cases, completed but gained from his enthusiasm when contact was made.

Two articles recount ideas addressed by Daniel Arsenault himself and form the core of *Indigenous heritage and rock art*. It is perhaps a pity that Aron Mazel and George Nash needed to rewrite them from existing notes because they were incomplete when he died, but their rewrites are consistent with his other publications. The first is an exploration of the relationship between Algonquian oral traditions, the thought recounted by the context of a site and the graphic designs painted onto the rocks. The second was assembled from notes and a PowerPoint presentation on the nine stages of a 'chaîne opératoire' or 'flow chart' of creating a rock art site. It is an idea that Daniel Arsenault says he acquired from the work of the Breton French archaeologist and prehistorian André Leroi-Gourhan. It was a part of his statistical procedure for distinguishing the normal patterning in Late Pleistocene images and signs in Franco-Cantabrian caves.

In Daniel Arsenault's view, the *chaîne opératoire* for rock art in caves begins with the conceptualisation of the undertaking, choice of place follows, then preparation of materials the nature of the rock support, mark-making, viewing and eventual abandonment. It is a process that has to be read backwards by the viewer according to André Leroi-Gourhan in *Lascaux inconnu* (1979), but Daniel Arsenault argues that for the viewer, speculation as to the significance of the mark assemblages is prior and the other processes in the *chaîne* confirm or deny the speculation.

The other seven articles are all by authors or groups of authors who claim in an elaborate 'forethought' that Daniel Arsenault had some form of input in their work, and consequently, their contribution threw further light on his thought or vindicate his formulation of the *chaîne opératoire*. Perhaps the most revealing of these articles is also the hardest to read because it is written with a French-Canadian word structure and English words. It is by the third editor Carole Charette and is not actually about rock art. It describes the patterning applied to 104 coats and 75 other garments cut, sewn and painted from caribou hide to the measurements of individual caribou hunters living in the provinces of Québec and Labrador between about 1650 and 1950. They are all now preserved in ethnographic museum

collections in America and Europe. A new coat was made and painted with yellow and red ochres for each cold or warm season, and the tensions set up within different patterns were designed to promote the hunter's success for whom the hides were cut and sewn. There is a paragraph relating the designs on the garments to the designs on the rocks, but it is not very clear and is not backed up by any images, so although the implication is that there is a match, none is actually demonstrated.

*Indigenous heritage and rock art* is an interesting collection of articles on the concepts 'artefact' and 'art' as well as a discussion of the concepts 'heritage' and 'sacred'.

**Michael Eastham**  
RAR 39-1368

## RECENT ROCK ART JOURNALS

**International Newsletter of Rock Art.** Newsletter of the Association pour Rayonnement de l'Art Pariétal Européen (ARAPE). Edited by JEAN CLOTTES. Bilingual newsletter (French and English). Recent issues include these research articles:

Number 88 (2020):

DUBEY-PATHAK, M.: Women and mother representations in Indian rock art.

BEDNARIK, R. G.: U/Th analysis and rock art dating. BEDNARIK, R. G.: Reviewing Siega Verde, Spain.

HERMANN, L.: Note regarding the Arzanfoud (Arzanpoul) petroglyphs, Hamadan Province of western Iran.

VAN HOEK, M.: A case of diffusion or of parallel creativity?



## ORIENTATION

### **An obituary and memorial of the first Indigenous rock art researcher in Brazil: Prof. Poani Higino Tuyuka, killed by Covid-19 and by the Brazilian government**

By RAONI VALLE

Prof. Poani Higino Pimentel Tenório (24 March 1955 – 18 June 2020) was a brilliant Indigenous scholar and pedagogue. Sharing a deep *Utāpinoponā* ancestry, he was a son of the stone snake, also known as the Tuyuka people from the Tiquié River, an Upper Negro River tributary, Northwest Amazonia. Acknowledged as a *Baya* (a master of ceremonies) by some Tuyuka wise men, self-defined as a *Kihti Masigu* (historian), also recognised by some of his Indigenous students as a *Kumu* (philosopher-healer), he was a profoundly respected and internationally renowned Tuyuka ed-

ROMÁN RAMOS, I.: Petroglyphs, rock shelters and households in the archaeological site of Tehuacalco, Guerrero, Mexico.

Number 89 (2021):

GARATE, D., O RIVERO, I. INTXAURBE, S. SALAZAR, P. DESMONTS and J.-M. PÉTILLON: Remains of rock art in the classical cave of Saint-Michel (Arudy, Pyrénées-Atlantiques).

BRAVIN, A.: A new 'Tazina' site in the region of Tata, southern Morocco.

HERMANN, L., B. ZHELEZNYAKOV and M. ORYNTAEVITCH: The rock art of Shoshkali at Tamgaly (Almaty Oblast) in Kazakhstan.

DUBEY-PATHAK and J. CLOTTES: Turtles in central Indian rock art.

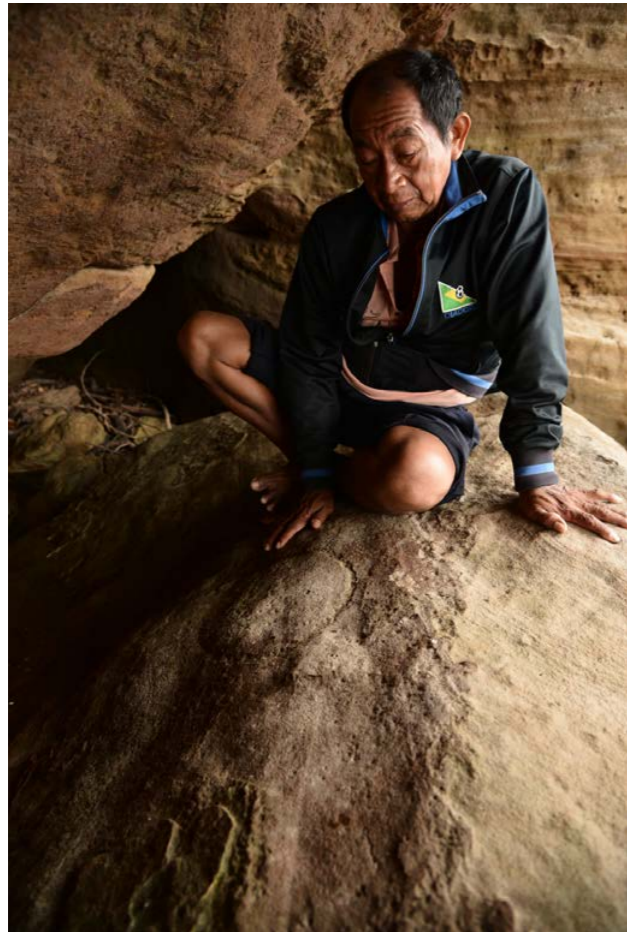
## RECENT BOOKS OF INTEREST

**Grotte de Cussac, -30 000**, edited by JACQUES JAUBERT, VALÉRIE FERUGLIO and NATHALIE FOURMENT. 2020. Éditions confluences, Bordeaux. Preface by Germinal Peiro; Foreword by Bany Barraud and Jean-Michel Geneste, 200 pages, 250 colour illustrations, 220×270 mm, hardcover, 32 €, ISBN 978-2-35527-257-8.

岩画科学—远古艺术的科学研究 (*Rock art science: the scientific study of palaeoart*, Chinese edn), by ROBERT G. BEDNARIK. 2020. Translated by JIN ANNI. Shaanxi People's Education Press (Shaanxi Xinhua Publishing & Media Group), Xi'an; 324 pages, colour and monochrome illustrations, softcover, ISBN 978-7-5450-7619-6.

ucator. In 2017 he was acknowledged in Cusco, Peru, during the Second International Conference of Rock Art and Ethnography, as a relevant Indigenous rock art scholar from the Amazon, delivering a final honour lecture. One year later, during the biannual meeting of the Brazilian Rock Art Association (ABAR), he was acclaimed as the first Indigenous rock art researcher in this country and invited to become an honorary member of that organisation.

He was born in the Upper Tiquié River, near the Colombian border, in the multiethnic village of São



Poani Higino at Ponta do Iaça rock art site, Lower Negro River, in 2016 (photograph by RV).

Pedro (*Mapoea*), living with Tukano, Makuna, Desano and other peoples, but mostly Tuyuka. These are ethnic groups of the Eastern Tukano linguistic family. Poani, his Tuyuka ritual name given by his ancestors, was raised inside this intercultural matrix during at least his first ten years of life. However, just like his father (Hernandes Tenório, a Tuyuka man who came from the headwaters of the Colombian Tiquié), Higino has experienced a traumatic ethnocidal education process in the boarding school of the Salesian missionaries between the ages of eleven and eighteen years (1965–1972). That caused a rupture in his traditional process of initiation, as a fully grown member of his society and as a ritual specialist, *Kumu*, just like his grandfather was, before the Salesian invasion. It imprinted long-lasting scars in his *Utāpinoponā* soul.

The Salesian nuns soon acknowledged Higino as a determined insubordinate *enfant terrible*. With an electric curiosity, while refusing to speak in any language other than his own, he was often punished with food deprivation and other physical and psychological violence. Daily forced hard labour, compulsory learning of Portuguese and Christian catechesis was his youth routine. Those boarding schools were somewhat like Nazi concentration camps, except for the macabre physical termination purpose of the latter, for the Sale-

sian priests and nuns were seeking the conversion of those young native souls, breaking their spirits without killing their bodies. Higino fiercely reacted back along all those years of deeply abusive experiences.

In consequence, he developed an acute critical sense of the historical, cultural and political expressions of colonialism. This experience raised his awareness regarding the general disruptive character of colonialism to a point when, after leaving the Salesian control, he decided to become a school teacher, ironically through the influence of the missionaries, among other causes. However, he saw in the Indigenous education a key and a pathway to emancipate himself and to decolonise those historically established relations of power. This was not immediately, for he took some time to earn a living in Colombia as a peasant in the Vaupés region amidst coca plantations, guerrillas, paramilitaries and brutal social injustices and oppressions. In effect, half of the entire Tuyuka population traditionally lives in the Colombian Amazon. He stayed there for five years, returning to Brazil by the late seventies and delving into the education pathway. This Colombian experience exerted quite an influence on his future choices and worldview.

Prof. Higino was searching for ways towards an anti-colonial system of Indigenous knowledge building and transmission, as opposed to what he lived under the Salesian control. Wisely, he understood that the only way to pursue this was through the ancient philosophy of life and mind practised and nurtured by the *Kumuā* (philosopher-healers and myth-poets), *Bayaroá* (singers/dancers/fluteplayers) and *Yaiwa* (shamans). These ritual specialists were becoming scarce as a result of the previous 60 years of intense external interventions and the disruption of the Tukanoan social world. Notwithstanding, a few of the old and powerful *Kumuā* and *Bayaroá* were still proactive by the late seventies of the last century, with whom Higino would re-establish an intense dialogue and engagement.

Higino's project for a Tuyuka school implied the rescue of memory and knowledge from the roots of the *Utāpinoponā* ancestry and the construction of a decolonial resistance pedagogy that stemmed from the *Kumuā* science. However, this could not be in isolation, for it was not feasible anymore to live apart from the white people since their increasing invasion from the late 17th century onward, amplified by the Salesians in the early 20th century. Therefore, Prof. Higino pursued a journey through *Kumuā* epistemology parallel to the dialogue with Western sciences nurtured in the search for reciprocity and symmetry, that is, a diplomatic alliance between these knowledge philosophies.

Noteworthy, during the Brazilian military dictatorship period (1964–1985), the militaries kept missionaries in charge of Indigenous education in the Upper Negro and its cultural integration into westernised Brazil, a role Salesians have played since 1915. However, in the mid-seventies, the military increased their presence in that region, escalating interethnic contact

and conflict. Higino saw in the heart of *Kumuā* epistemology the source for a pedagogy of Indigenous liberation and autonomy that could counteract the Salesian-military power structure. That was one of the initial strategic goals of Higino's project, elaborated more than 40 years ago.

In 1987, the foundation of the Federation of Indigenous Organisations of Negro River (FOIRN) constituted a critical step towards securing Indigenous rights in that region. An intrepid multiethnic group of young leaderships, Higino among them, supported by their wise elders and white anthropologists and activists, were slowly but steadily taking control of the situation, proactively negotiating with the military, mining industries, Salesians and the Federal Government the process of territorial demarcation of their Indigenous lands against extensive mining interests and national security martial doctrine. After a much-heated debate and following the atmosphere of the Indigenous rights movement in the Constitutional Assembly of 1988, and the general spirit of re-democratisation in Brazil, the Indigenous land of Upper Negro River was demarcated in the early nineties, encompassing 23 ethnic groups of 4 different linguistic families.

During the nineties, he met more anthropologists seeking to understand Tuyuka socio-environmental organisation, cosmology and other topics of anthropological interest. Some of these encounters resulted in fruitful partnerships, for Prof. Higino found supporters for his courageous enterprise concerning his political-pedagogic project to sustain a new Tuyuka Indigenous school. Initially oriented towards linguistic empowerment and revival of Tuyuka language (sub-alternated by Tukano and Portuguese/Spanish idioms, hegemonic in the Uaupés-Tiquié basin), later it became a broader innovative proposal in the context of what was beginning to be known as Differentiated Indigenous Education. Anthropologists from the Socioenvironmental Institute (ISA), a non-governmental organisation by then consolidating their work in the region, were relevant allies in that process. Together they helped developing Higino's project further, culminating in 1997–98 when, with the financial support of Norwegian cooperation, the *Utāpinoponā* Indigenous School Program of Tiquié River was released, and fully developed up to the years of 2009 to 2011, when it was supposed the Brazilian government would take over its funding. However, it did not happen as expected, causing the project to discontinue afterwards.

In 2007, we met each other by chance on the streets of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, the main town of the Upper Negro River area, on the Brazilian side. I was leaning against a wall in the street in front of the FOIRN's building, waiting for the time of a scheduled meeting with Baniwa leaderships (a Northern Arawakan people) concerning another ethnoarchaeological project in that area. Suddenly, from out of nowhere, this short, mid-aged man just appeared by my side, strangely asking:

"What are you? Anthropologist? Biologist?"

I took a few seconds to understand what was going on and replied:

"No, I am an archaeologist. It is a sort of anthropologist that studies dead people and old material stuff."

Then, he asked:

"What are you reading?"

I replied, possibly mentioning Koch-Grünberg, an early German ethnographer of Amazonian peoples. Then, he just grabbed a book from his pouch bag, exclaiming: "I'm reading this! Machiavelli's *The prince*!" Almost rubbing the book cover on my face, as he concluded: "I need to understand how the whites think, for I am an ethnographer of the whites!" From that surprising close encounter, a mutual curiosity began to move us together, thus flourishing into friendship and research partnership.

A few years later, he was co-advising Tukanoan students doing their master's degree in anthropology at the Federal University of Amazonas and other institutions. So, he was already an experienced Indigenous scholar with a dozen Indigenous students of anthropology, although not acknowledged by universities as a professor of anthropology, but as an Indigenous collaborator with recognised extensive knowledge in the field. If anthropology was a known terrain for him, though not institutionally acknowledged, archaeology was still a sort of novelty. However, regarding rock art, Prof. Higino had quite a profound knowledge stemming from his immersions into the *Kumuā* epistemology, which he mastered after many years of learning with those old skilled specialists in Brazil and Colombia. In effect, the creation of an Indigenous Research Institute in the Upper Negro River, or an Indigenous University, was an old dream and commitment: an institution where he and other Indigenous scholars would have received full institutional and academic acknowledgment and support to put forward their projects — although not attained up to the present.

In 2013 we shared a first intercultural fieldwork experience, together with ten *Kumuā* and *Bayaroá* from eight different ethnic groups of the Eastern Tukano linguistic family from Brazil and Colombia. That occurred thanks to ISA, who invited me to participate in one of their cultural mapping projects, surveying the sacred Indigenous landscapes along the Negro River basin. In that process, I had an extraordinary opportunity to take these Tukanoan philosopher-healers to the rock art sites I have surveyed and documented for my PhD dissertation, finished in 2012, learning directly from them, under Higino's supervision. After that experience, Prof. Higino and I decided to work together in an ambitious and intense campaign towards decolonising rock art studies in Brazil and South America.

He proposed to me an approach based on the concept of *Padeo Masirë* (culture of respect), a diplomatic alliance between different onto-epistemologies granted by a culture of reciprocal, respectful exchanges articulating human and non-human knowledge, places

and bodies. That stems from the way *Kumuã* acquire knowledge about the cosmos, socially learning from non-humans and ancestors. Eventually, I proposed the adoption of the term *inter-epistemic archaeology* in equivalence, for what he proposed, otherwise, *Kumuã archaeology* (i.e., ways of knowing the past-future through things, marks and places of memory and power, knowledge of which the *Kumu* receives from the ancestors *pamuri mahsã*, and non-human persons and spirits, such as *waimahsã*). From an initial focus on rock art interpretation, he patiently guided my attention to the ontology of living sentient places.

Despite rarely using the word ontology, Higino sometimes thought of rock art places as living bodies and their marks as organs, tissues or functional structures; or, in other contexts, as beings and objects of even greater importance, pointing out that the Western idea of symbols conveyed just a superficial understanding. He talked about the living essence of rock art places, as sentient places that consciously perceive humans and non-humans and communicate with them. For him, rock art was a matter of biogenesis, not anthropogenesis: what life systems might imply and how we should consider rock art as synaptically integrated within them. Months before his death, he was elaborating a theory regarding rock art *wametisé* (sacred places) as part of an extended neural network, connecting *Kumuã* minds with places, epochs (including the future), ancestors, and non-human consciousnesses all around.

Tukanoan peoples became known to rock art theory since the ethnographic work of Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff in the sixties and seventies, who did quite important ethnographic research on Tukanoan symbolism and cosmology, despite a controversial past in Nazi Germany. His ethnographic data supported a phosphenic and hallucinogenic theory for the origin of Indigenous imagery, informing Lewis-Williams and Dowson in their seminal and disputed neuropsychological model to interpret Upper Palaeolithic rock art, resuming the shamanic paradigm in the late eighties and early nineties, still somewhat influential nowadays. Thus, Tukanoan knowledge and cosmology became, to some extent, the ethnographic ground for the development of the neuropsychological theory of rock art. The perspective sustained by Prof. Poani Higino regarding rock art as an organic part of a living ecosystem shared by a plethora of sentient beings capable of Theory of Mind and complex intercommunication stems from the same onto-epistemological framework.

Higino died of Covid-19 in the Brazilian Amazonia, aged 65, yet at the beginning of a prolific career as an epistemologist of Indigenous Education and Native Amazonian rock art research. Tragically, he shared the fate of thousands of Indigenous men, women, children, old and new generations of several tribal groups and linguistic families. Those in Brazil, besides the Sars-cov-2 virus, fell victim to a genocidal and fascistically inclined government that openly indulges and promotes a downplaying, negationist,

and neglectful public health policy towards Covid-19 control, with devastating consequences, especially in Indigenous territories. The Brazilian government must be held accountable for that. Prof. Poani Higino left a wife (Mrs Amélia Barreto), sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters, and a legion of disciples and admirers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous in several fields of expertise, from different countries. In all those hearts, he planted decolonial seeds that are already germinating.

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PS: this text was the product of my memory retrieving pieces of information Prof. Poani Higino told me about his biography along those years of friendship we shared. However, the memorial text made by Dupo Justino Sarmento Tuyuka was an invaluable source (<https://www.socioambiental.org/sites/blog.socioambiental.org/files/blog/pdfs/entrevistacomhiginojustino2005.pdf>), helping to calibrate some of those memories. All possible inaccuracies and misinterpretations are my sole responsibility.

Santarém, Pará, July – December 2020.

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