

ROCK ART IN WESTERN OCEANIA¹

*Andrée Rosenfeld
Australian National
University*

In a recent review of the rock art of the western Pacific, Specht (1979) emphasised the paucity of reliable records of rock art for that area. The subject was then, and still is now, a much neglected aspect of the archaeology of the whole Pacific region. The available information on rock art consists of a dispersed and disparate literature supplemented by a body of material in archives and in private field records which remain unpublished. What is available has, for the most part, been collected somewhat peripherally in the context of broader archaeological, ethnographic or speleological exploration, or as incidental observations by colonial administrators and other travellers. Specialised studies, in which rock art is the author's main focus, are few. Since 1979, the major analytical studies listed by Specht have been augmented only by Frimigacci and Monnon's (1980) comprehensive analysis of the engravings of New Caledonia. This now largely replaces Luquet's (1926) somewhat inaccurate corpus. Specht's article remains the only attempt to synthesize the available material for the whole western Pacific region. He chose to concentrate on contextual and technical aspects of the rock art, and he does not discuss the range and distribution of motifs throughout the region.

NEW GUINEA AND ISLAND MELANESIA

Both rock painting and rock engraving are known in New Guinea and island Melanesia. The generally wide distribution of sites dotted throughout the region suggests that further exploration is likely to reveal significantly more sites. From the information available, some distinct concentrations appear to exist, but these might reflect the uneven nature of observations as much as real distributional data. The MacCluer Gulf area contains a fairly coherent body of painted sites and further similar concentrations have been reported (Solheim, Australian Rock Art Association conference, Darwin 1988). Painted rock shelters with very few engravings are reported irregularly throughout much of the New Guinea Highlands, mainly in those areas where archaeological survey or speleological exploration has taken place. The known distribution along the northern lowland and coastal areas of the New Guinea

¹ This paper was one of the regional surveys commissioned for the First World Congress of Rock Art held in Havana, Cuba, in January 1986. A Spanish translation of the paper is to appear in the proceedings of that conference. The English text is reproduced here, in a journal with a regional focus, in the hope that it may stimulate research in this clearly neglected area of the archaeology of the region.

mainland is irregular and sporadic.² In Papua, concentrations of sites with engravings and paintings have been recorded from Sogeri and adjacent areas, in the hinterland of Port Moresby, and engravings but very few paintings are known from the easternmost area of Papua, particularly in the Goodenough Bay area. Among the island archipelagoes, New Caledonia contains a particularly rich and well documented rock engraving tradition, but irregular distributions of sites, mainly engravings, in the intervening island groups of Vanuatu, the Solomons and the Bismarck archipelago indicate that more rock art is likely to occur there also. The easternmost Melanesian island group of Fiji also contains rock paintings and engravings.

Engravings occur in rock shelters, on natural rock exposures and on boulders or dressed stones erected in stone arrangements. The latter are usually in or near villages or in abandoned village sites. Paintings are only known from rock shelters and sheltered cliff faces. Painted rock shelters are not associated with recent habitation debris, though in many instances they are now used for temporary shelter near gardens or on hunting trips. Some painted shelters contain burials. The association between paintings and other shelter use is difficult to evaluate. Many authors claim that local inhabitants were generally disinterested in the art. The colonial date of many of the reports, and the incidental nature of their collection makes the earlier literature difficult to evaluate in terms of the real recent significance of the rock art. For instance, Williams (1931) who made a very objective record of the art, was at pains to emphasise the lack of knowledge or interest shown by local inhabitants. Whereas Egloff (1970-71) who worked in the same villages some forty years later, and took pains to obtain the inhabitants' permission before recording sites, observes their deep concern with the same engravings. Indeed, he was not permitted to record the entire range of sites known to him. Williams' interference with the sites some forty years earlier was still remembered and deplored.

Whatever the current attitudes to rock art sites may be, it seems reasonably certain that rock engraving is no longer practiced, and rock painting very rarely. A chronology for the rock art of this region cannot, however, be offered at this stage. The intensive weathering of a humid tropical environment suggests that it is unlikely to have very great antiquity. Gorecki and Dallas (1985) refer to the damaging effects of extensive algal and/or lichen cover on many of the sites they investigated in the Jimi Valley. Williams (1931) discussed the different degrees of patina on engravings in the Sogeri district to suggest that they span some period of time right up to the recent past. Similarly, the occurrence of engravings in the Melanesian islands on exposed limestone and other rock surfaces suggests that we may not be dealing with very high antiquities.

² In a recent survey Ballard has found several concentrations of rock art situated in coastal rock shelters in enclaves inhabited by Austronesian speakers (Ballard pers.comm.).

However, on the mainland of New Guinea, and in New Ireland, human occupation dates back to the upper Pleistocene. For the remainder of island Melanesia Pleistocene occupation has not, as yet, been confirmed, but the existence of established populations prior to the spread of the Lapita traders some 3,500 BP is now documented as far south as the Solomon Islands.

THE MACCLUER GULF

The paintings of the MacCluer Gulf in western New Guinea are probably the only rock art from Papua and Melanesia to have been considered in the more general literature on rock art (e.g. Berger-Kichner 1970). They have been analysed by Röder (1959) who, with his field artist Hahn, worked in the region in the context of the Frobenius Institute expedition of 1937-38.

The paintings occur in shelters, or on the cliffs directly overlooking the sea, along a 30km stretch of the southern coast of the MacCluer Gulf, and on two small off-shore islands. This location and the importance of fish and of ship motifs unarguably links the art to a marine oriented population. Many of the shelters also contain platform burials, but Röder argues against a connection between art and burial on the grounds that the paintings are often on panels away from the burials, and many burial shelters do not have paintings. Their temporal relationships also remain unclear. Already in the late 1930s when Röder was in the area Islamic Indonesian influence appears to have been so strong that neither the art nor the burials were considered recent by the local people. Some of the localities were, however, viewed with awe, and had mythological associations.

Röder identified a number of styles to which he gave a chronological significance on the basis of superposition. He identified four styles of red paintings, followed by a phase of black painting. A few 'crude' white paintings are considered recent and are not discussed.

The earliest, Tabulinetin style paintings are characterised by large numbers of stencils as well as plain infilled silhouettes. The stencils are primarily of hands in large numbers, and also of feet, a range of artefacts and even large fish. They tend to be densely packed on the rock face, creating broad pigmented areas among which the figures, both stencilled and painted, stand out in varying degrees of clarity. The dominant freehand motif is of fish. These are drawn with a high level of visual realism, so that local people were able to identify the species. A fluidity of line frequently suggests fish in motion. Some anthropomorphic forms are assigned to this phase by Röder, although they are more characteristic of the later phases. Many show bent legs and raised arms, and some have a tall conical headdress. Lizard or crocodile figures also occur and there are intermediate lizard-human forms. Some of these have a human face and conical hat while figures with more human head and

body configurations may have a long sinuous or spiral 'tail'. These intermediate figures between human and lizard were said to represent the Matutuo spirits associated with fishing, although present day sculptures of Matutuo spirits illustrated by Röder do not have these ambivalent animal traits. Röder's informants appear to have had no difficulty in identifying the rock pictures according to their current concepts relating to these Matutuo spirits. Variants of the ambiguous human-lizard shaped figures are, in fact, very widespread in paintings of the New Guinea mainland.

The contrast between the Tabulinetin style and the next Manga style is stark. Here, red outline figures are drawn in strong controlled lines, and fish and anthropomorphs are more rigid than in the preceding style. The human-lizard forms in particular show great diversity, and fish are no longer the dominant motif. Several outline silhouettes of fish, anthropomorphs and others have an internal design of a median line, or median line and chevron pattern, which in fish resemble an X-ray depiction of the skeleton.

The most elaborated motifs of the Manga style, however, are non-figurative designs. They occur in a wide range of forms and many are based on circles. Simple circles, concentric circles, with rays or spokes or other elaboration form complex symmetrical designs. Highly decorative and symmetrical designs are also structured from mazes of interlocking spirals and scrolls. Röder compares some of these with the decorative motifs from the later bronze age in Indonesia. He also discusses the chronological significance of some stencils which resemble Dong Son bronze axes. He argues that since locally such axes have been venerated and curated up to the present (i.e. the 1930s), their presence in the art can only indicate a date 'post quem'. The adoption of decorative designs from bronze objects and their reproduction in paint is a more secure chronological link to the late bronze age, and would indicate an order of magnitude for the age of some of the paintings of c.1000 years (Röder 1959:71).

The two other styles of red paintings identified by Röder are more restricted in their occurrence, and are essentially variants of the Manga style. They are said to be less controlled, less elaborated and less decorative. Röder argues that they may be very localised expressions of the Manga style, but he suggests that they are late within this period because of the appearance of a few ship designs. Ships are characteristic of the next, black painting phase.

The black paintings are much less abundant. They are linear designs, sometimes in thin sketchy lines, others in broad strokes. Röder attempts to identify substyles on this basis, but the range of motifs is shared. The black paintings contrast with the Manga style not only in colour, but also in a freer less standardised approach to form. Human-lizard forms and some of the non-figurative designs continue in use, but they are more sketchy. Simple ship motifs are common and these are a new introduction. They are often no more than a long curved line, rising to a hook at one or both ends, suggestive

of a decorated stern or prow, and with unidentifiable linear items along the length of the boat. Röder argues for a continuation of tradition between the red and black phases on the basis of shared elements, but he identifies increased contact with seafaring peoples to the west or even immigration in the introduction of ship motifs.

The sketchy nature of the ship designs precludes any secure formal analogy either with known ship constructions, or with ship motifs in other art styles. The generalised trait of a high curving prow or stern and a row of 'standing' elements, however, are traits found on the varyingly represented 'ship of the dead' motif so prevalent in Indonesian arts and generally accepted as of Dong Son origin. The occurrence of a tree-like motif on one of the black MacCluer Gulf ship paintings tends to heighten the formal analogy with a Dong Son 'ship of the dead' motif (Figure 1). Röder considers that the platforms in the burial caves along this coast represent ships for the spirits of the dead. This practice, together with other evidence for late bronze age influence in the paintings would tend to support the hypothesis that the motif can be interpreted as a funerary ship rather than as evidence for increased seafaring.

Röder's analytical framework in which he equated 'naturalism' in art with hunter-gathering subsistence, and increasing stylisation with food production can no longer be accepted. Thus his suggestion for a very early, pre-agricultural date for the earlier phase cannot be upheld. However, three distinct stylistic developments seem clearly established, and these correspond to significant shifts of emphasis in the subject matter depicted. Contacts with people to the north and west, in the Philippines or the Indonesian islands is indicated by the decorative motifs, the likely Dong Son bronze axes, and possibly the introduction of the 'ship of the dead' motif. If, as Röder suggests stencilling is exclusively an early, Tabulinetin technique, then the axe stencils would imply a date no earlier than the latter half of the third millenium BP for the whole of this art.

THE NEW GUINEA HIGHLANDS

All known rock art sites of the Highland zones of New Guinea are in rock shelters. They are mostly either red or black, and sometimes two or more colours are combined. In several instances authors report that local people were either unaware of the art or at least unconcerned. However, Wilde (1975) noted that some paintings in Chimbu district had recently been retouched. He also obtained apparently unambivalent identifications for some of the spirit figures, but not for all motifs. Gorecki and Dallas (1985) on the other hand note how informants' interpretations in the Jimi river valley were sometimes modified as designs became clearer during the recording process. Such interpretations were clearly analyses formulated within the framework of current Highland cultural perceptions rather than the recognition of familiar designs.

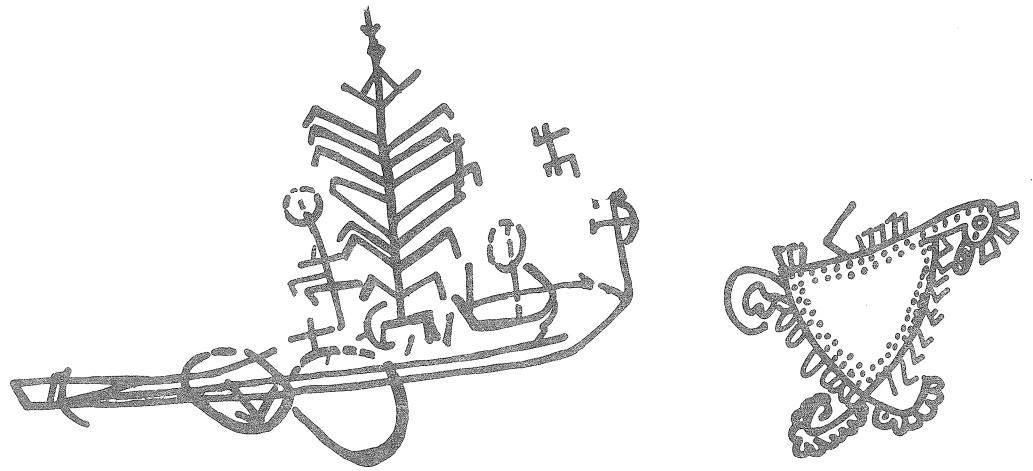


Figure 1. (Left). McCluer Gulf. Black painting of a ship motif, after Roder 1959.

Figure 2. (Right). Aibura Cave, Eastern Highlands. Black painting of a complex shield-shaped design, after Wilde 1978.

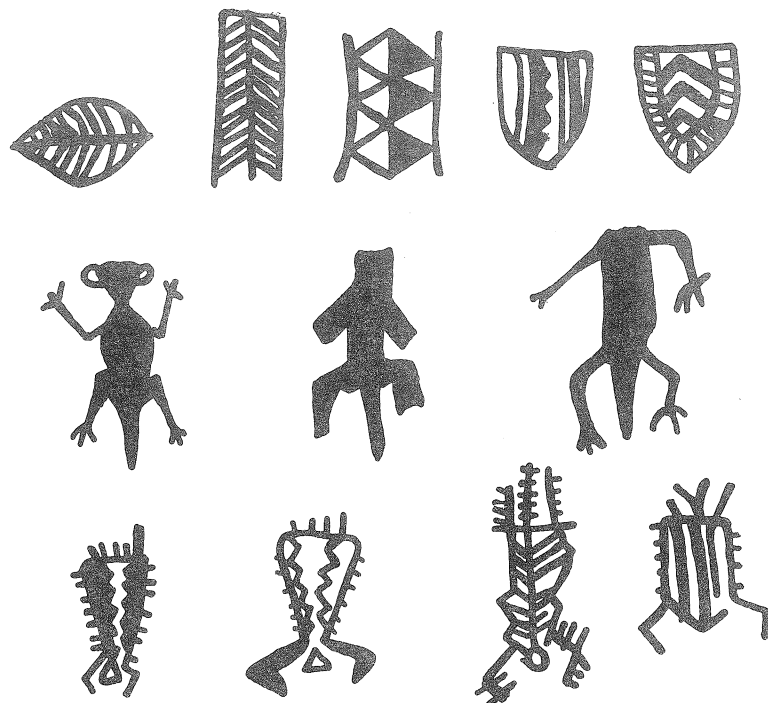


Figure 3. Chimbu District. Top: black painting of geometric motifs. Middle: black painting of human-lizard motifs (the left-hand figure identified as a yogondo spirit). Bottom: black paintings of malevolent gawage ambu spirits. All after Wilde 1975.

Wilde (1975a, 1975b, 1978) has described rock art from a number of sites in the Chimbu and Eastern Highland Districts, which, though they show regional variation, appear to form a broad stylistic unit. The majority of designs are geometric. They are charcoal drawings, mainly in line work, but highlighted with some patterns of contrasting black infill and uncoloured areas.

The geometric motifs include circular designs which may be simple circles, concentric circles, with a dividing line or spokes or rays, or with dotted outline or infill. Another category of geometric designs are based on the use of triangles, lozenges and chevron patterns, sometimes to form long decorative bands of repeated design. Chevrons enclosed in a rectangular or leaf-shaped outline are a characteristic motif (Figure 3, top row). Finally, a smaller number of other non-figurative designs appear to be more localised. Shield-shaped motifs with infills of triangle, chevron or other linear patterns are described for the Chimbu sites. Elaborate shield-shaped motifs from Aibura in Eastern Highland Province can be surrounded by hooks or rectangular projections and adorned with scrolls from each corner (Figure 2). At Ofafunga cave, in Eastern Highland Province Wilde identified the 'croix à enveloppe' motif, including one with multiple envelope.

It is in the anthropomorphic designs that regional variation and even site individuality seem to be most marked. For the Chimbu area Wilde (1975a) has identified two sets of anthropomorphic figures. One set consists of broad silhouettes with a square or triangular head with its apex at the neck. The legs are bent, and the arms may be raised or down. Many have what appear to be either a long penis or tail between the legs. One type of these with two rings at each corner of its triangular head was recognised as a yogondo, a mildly malevolent spirit, by Wilde's informants (Figure 3, middle row). This type is also known from Aibura cave, but a name was not recorded for it in that area. Variants of the anthropomorph with tail from the Eastern Highlands are more clearly of the intermediate human-lizard form. They frequently have a spindle-shaped body and long pointed tail, but with a square or broad triangular head.

The other set of anthropomorphic forms from Chimbu is much more elaborate in design and varied in detail. It consists of figures with a more or less triangular body form and short upraised arms. A small round or triangular head is usually drawn, and many have from three to five thin lines for the legs (?). Elaborate infill of chevrons, triangles or other geometric patterns are very varied, and several of these figures are also surrounded by short rays around the body outline and across the limbs, which gives them a very spiky appearance. They are all drawn upside down (Figure 3, bottom row). Wilde's informants recognised these as gawage ambu, a malevolent spirit which brings disease or even death, and he records that people showed some reluctance in talking about them. Gawage ambu figures occur in only three of the eight sites investigated by Wilde in

Chimbu, and are common only at Dengong cave (Ak Kagamugl). This also has the largest concentration of drawings, and is an important burial site. It is said to be used by several local clans mainly for men who have died in combat (Wilde 1975a:16). Other burial shelters in the area have no gawage ambu figures, or even no rock art at all, and the apparent association of these motifs with an important burial place may be fortuitous. Several of the anthropomorphic figures of Ofafunga in Eastern Highland District are adorned with spikes along part of the body, and one broad squat figure is shown 'upside down', but they do not resemble the gawage ambu figures in any other respect. Aibura cave has one exceptional anthropomorphic figure which is fairly large, c.70cm. It is a standing female figure with the breasts under the arms, round knobs at the elbows and the head is triangular with small oval projections resembling animal ears.

Wilde (1978) also mentions rock paintings of different style, including a bichrome anthropomorph, in one of the Eastern Highland Province shelters, but these have not been described. Mountain (pers.comm.) has recorded polychrome geometric paintings from Umbeka rock shelter on the southern margins of Mt Elimbari, in eastern Chimbu District. The designs include sinuous bands of parallel lines in contrasting colour, and rectangular motifs divided into differently coloured areas, outlined in white or black. Because these paintings are on a very exposed rock face Mountain considers that they are likely to be very recent. Clearly, although the black charcoal linear style appears to be the most common throughout these regions, there are also other rock painting styles, but the relationship between these cannot yet be evaluated.

To the northwest of Chimbu in the upper Jimi and Wahgi river valleys very different types of rock art sites have been recorded (Gorecki and Dallas 1985). About a dozen sites are known from this area. They contain red ochre paintings, and two shelters also contain engravings of a pointed oval with a central groove. Some of these show traces of red ochre in the engraved line. They were locally interpreted as vulva motifs (Gorecki and Dallas 1985). The painted motifs are fairly diverse and many are so poorly preserved that secure motif analyses are difficult.

The recordings of Gorecki and Dallas show three motif types which recur with minor variations. An apparently common range are the lizard and ambiguous human-lizard forms. Two adjacent short spirals are used to construct heart shaped motifs, when curving inwards, or a scissor-shaped design when curving outwards. A pointed oval surrounded by rays was identified by local people as the ceremonial kina shell board which is displayed at certain ceremonies, and some more elaborated curvilinear designs are also represented. The design elements as well as colour and technique are all quite distinct from the Chimbu and Eastern Highland Province art. Interestingly, one rock shelter just outside the Melpa speaking region of the area surveyed by Gorecki and Dallas, in Pinai country, also displayed quite different rock art. These were charcoal

drawings of netlike motifs. As yet, only one site is known in this Pinai speaking area.

MOROBE DISTRICT

A small, but rather striking assemblage of painted sites has been documented in a tributary gorge of the Snake River which flows into the Huon Gulf (Girard 1957). The painting sites are cliff faces, barely protected from the elements, and they overlook the ossuaries of traditional burial grounds of the Buang people. Although many villages of the Snake river have their ossuaries, Girard states that associated paintings occur only at four localities in the narrow gorge of the Ranguai tributary. Traditional burial practices were abandoned under Australian colonial administration, but for one of the sites, Girard was able to record genealogies of the ancestors who were deposited in the ossuary and depicted on the rock face. Her informants offered identifications for the individual painted figures. At the other sites she obtained more generalised information about the deceased, including the lineage ancestors who are said to have created the paintings.

The motifs are almost exclusively of human figures. The body is spindle shaped, linear legs are bent and the arms raised. The head is a large arc with rays said to represent the hair, and some have rake-shaped projections identified as the tall feather headdresses worn only by Buang people in that region. Facial features are generally reduced to a double arc representing the heavily painted eyebrows of dancers. On some figures there is a central round feature, on others the arcs join into a line suggestive of the nose, and other elaborations occur. A long narrow projection between the legs was identified as the bark tassels worn from the waist belt for dancing. Formally, these figures would be classified as rather elaborate variants of the human-lizard form which is so widespread in New Guinea rock art, but Girard discovered no lizard or other animal association for the figures. Most of the figures were identified as male ancestors, but some were named female ancestors, although no sexual differentiation is evident in the paintings. Girard's informants did not claim to have made the paintings, nor to know of such figures being painted within living memory.

Williams (1941:69) reports simple red linear paintings of barred ovals, barbed lines and similar motifs associated with ossuaries among the cliffs in the area around Lake Kutubu. He did not obtain any information as to how, or whether the paintings relate to the deceased.

SOUTHERN PAPUA

Rock paintings and engravings have been described from the Sogeri district (Williams 1931, Leask 1943) and from the hilly hinterland of Port Moresby (Strong 1924, Mountain pers.comm.). They are all in rock shelters, now only used as shelters while gardening.

The engravings are reported from five of the Sogeri shelters, and consist primarily of deeply incised ovals with a central dividing line. Several are said to have red pigment in the engraved line. They appear to be identical to the engravings reported from the Jimi river by Gorecki and Dallas (1985). Other engraved motifs are less common, and include pits, rayed star, concentric arcs, a human figure, and a design described by Williams as a 'closed M' (i.e. with its base closed in). Williams also illustrates one motif which might be described as an open ended 'croix à enveloppe'. White (1969) reports 'croix à enveloppe' motifs among the paintings of the upper Strickland River.

Paintings are far more numerous and vary to some extent from site to site. Most are monochrome, mainly red or white, but at Wagava and Serinumu rock shelters red and white are combined into non-figurative designs of concentric arcs, sinuous lines, chevron patterns enclosed in a leaf-shaped or rectangular outline and rayed circles. This motif range shows close similarities with the motifs in a different style from the Chimbu District. Similar non-figurative motifs occur in monochrome at the other sites, as well as lizard and human-lizard motifs. One red painting at Wakuai Wai resembles a ship with a row of standing figures.

In the east of Papua, in the Goodenough Bay area, engravings are found on standing stones in Boianai, Wedau and other villages and on stones and natural rock surfaces on Normanby Island in the d'Entrecasteaux group. Williams (1931) reproduces photographs and drawings and discusses the possible affinities of the motifs with present day facial tattoo and other art. More recently, Egloff (1970-71) has re-examined the sites, and he discusses their analogies with the rock art of island Melanesia.

The engraved stones are part of circular stone arrangements with paved areas, and usually with a stone or ceramic bowl. Such stone arrangements are known from many villages or abandoned village sites of the Massim on the mainland and also throughout the Massim islands. Some contain burials of real or mythical individuals, and they have differing mythological associations. Egloff reports that the contemporary significance attached to these sites is variable. Stone arrangements of a broadly similar type are widely dispersed throughout island Melanesia, but on the mainland they are restricted to the Massim area (see Riesenfeld 1950). Other stone arrangements are also reported from the Waghi and Jimi rivers (Gorecki, pers. comm.). The great majority of these stone arrangements do not have engravings.

The engraved designs are curvilinear patterns which may cover extensive areas of the standing stones. They comprise motifs based on circles, elaborated with concentric circles, rays, spokes and rosette like designs. Broad bands of concentric arcs, spirals, linked spirals and S-curved double spirals interlock. Egloff also records one 'croix à enveloppe' motif and what he identifies as a 'stylised

face' (Egloff 1970-71:150). One stone from Wedau village has motifs of a 'line curving up at each end'. This is a very widespread design element in the contemporary arts along the north coast of New Guinea, in the Admiralties, the Massim and down to the Solomons. Badner (1972) has argued for the derivation of this design element from the Dong Son 'ship of the dead' motif on the basis of its iconic associations.

A carved stone from the village of Boianai in the collection of the Museum of Australia (AF2-119) also contains this design element. It is carved on both faces, and the designs were probably continuous across the narrower sides, but the stone is very worn, and the designs can only be partly deciphered. One face has a pattern which is symmetrical along its long axis consisting of the motif of the 'line curved up at each end', set back to back and enveloped in a scalloped outline. This is, in part, surrounded by a network of lozenge patterns which continue over the narrower sides of the boulder (Figure 4). At one end of the stone (its base?) notches have been cut on each face, as if to aid in clamping the stone into an upright position.

The date of the Goodenough Bay engravings is not known. Surface finds from the disturbed prehistoric mounds at Wanigela, in Collingwood Bay, just north of Goodenough Bay include fragments of shell engraved with the S-curved double spiral and one shell fragment is engraved with parallel zigzag lines around a motif which resembles some of the elements on the Wedau and Boianai stones. Subsequent excavations by Egloff (1979) yielded no further engraved shell, but a time scale for the prehistoric mounds of between 1000 and 500 BP has been established.

On the basis of their location, the time scale and the pottery styles it is reasonable to consider the prehistoric mounds of Wanigela as ancestral to the present Massim population of the area. The patterns on the engraved standing stones and their location in present day Massim village sites suggests that they also belong to this same long-lived tradition. On purely formal grounds, Heine-Geldern (1937) had suggested bronze age Dong Son antecedents for the development of some contemporary Massim art motifs. The occurrence of these same design elements, viz. linked spirals, S-curved double spirals and the 'line with curving ends' in the prehistoric art of the region tends to strengthen this possibility (and see also Golson 1972:581ff).

Similar circular designs are found among the rock engravings of Normanby Island (Williams 1954). At one of these sites, there are in addition, human motifs with linear body and limbs and round heads, surrounded by rayed or dotted 'hair' or 'headdress'. These are different from any designs associated with the stone arrangements, and find no parallels in the region.

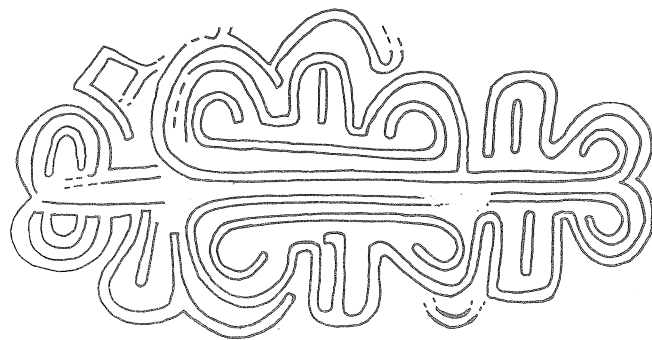
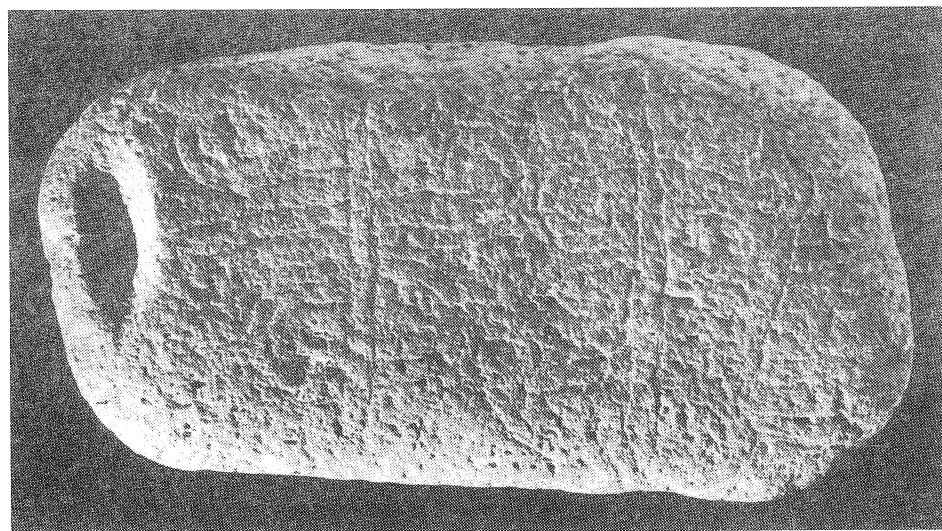


Figure 4. Carved stone from Boianai village, Goodenough Bay, now in the Museum of Australia. The stone is a boulder of a coarse-grained igneous rock, 33 cm long, average width 16 cm, thickness 7.5 cm. The central design on one side is drawn at right. Photographs by W. Hudson, ANU.

ISLAND MELANESIA

Reports of rock paintings in island Melanesia are very disparate (see Specht's 1979 site inventory). A number of isolated occurrences have been recorded, but no overall pattern emerges. They are for the most part relatively small scale and simple red paintings or charcoal drawings. However, Ballard's recent discovery of painted sites in coastal shelters of Manus island (this issue) serve to remind us of the inadequacy of existing reports on the rock art of these regions.

Engravings are more abundant and have received more attention in the literature. Several authors have pointed to an overall similarity in the range of motifs used from southern Papua to New Caledonia.

Specht (pers.comm.) has recorded an important rock engraving site on the south coast of west New Britain. It consists of four localised concentrations of boulders on a hillock, near Silimati village in Kilenge. Some of these boulders have clearly been aligned into a closely packed row. A comprehensive analysis of the site and its engravings is in preparation (Specht in prep.) and only a general descriptive account can be made. Circular and spiral motifs are the most conspicuous (Figure 5). The spiral designs include lines with spiral ends and also motifs of two opposed spirals with a downward projection resembling a scissor pattern (Figure 6). Shield-shaped motifs with miscellaneous infill, triangles, zigzags and wavy lines are among the more common elements. One stone has two silhouette birds back to back. These seem to be the only explicitly figurative motifs.

Further east Kamminga has recorded engravings on natural rock surfaces which consist principally of circles, many of which enclose one, two or three pits. Wavy lines, pits and a barred ovoid shape appear to complete the motif inventory (Kamminga 1972).

At the eastern end of New Britain, on Watom Island, are engraved stones with circular and spiral motifs, only one of these has been published (see Riesenfeld 1950, Figure 18). Engravings on natural rock surfaces have been reported from two localities on New Hannover. These comprise circular and spiral motifs and also the 'croix à enveloppe' motif as well as human footprints and possibly a human figure (Lampert 1967).

Gunn (1986) has published a survey of rock engravings on the Tabar islands, New Ireland. These include some circular and spiral motifs, but for the most part consist of a range of figurative elements, mainly fish and human-like faces. The engravings are on boulders in the middle reaches of streams which radiate out from the central mountainous core of the island. Local people know of the engravings, and many are considered masalai places (i.e. the locale of clan ancestral spirits). Some of the images are interpreted in



Figure 5. West New Britain. Engravings on a boulder in a stone arrangement near Silimati village. Photograph by Jim Specht.



Figure 6. West New Britain. 'Scissor' shaped motif engraved on a boulder of the Silimati stone arrangement. Photograph by Jim Specht.

terms of masalai myths. As Gunn points out, however, the rock art of Tabar is too heterogeneous to be considered an artistic tradition, rather it seems to contain elements of other traditions, expressed more commonly in other materials, notably the malagan carvings and masks. The spiral and circular elements, which are not a feature of malagan art, may well represent evidence for an earlier artistic tradition on the island which links it with similar types of engravings on other parts of island Melanesia.

The engravings of New Caledonia occur on natural rock surfaces throughout most of the island and some of its small off-shore islands. These engravings have been very fully documented and an analysis was published by Luquet in 1926. They have been re-evaluated recently by Frimigacci and Monnin (1980) who point to some serious discrepancies between Luquet's interpretations and the original field documents in the Musée de l'Homme from which he worked.

A new design typology is offered by Frimigacci and Monnin and this reveals a great diversity of motifs, among which designs based on circles, spirals and the 'croix à enveloppe' predominate. Many variants and elaborations of these basic elements are found, including several which are structurally identical to those on the several engraving sites farther north. Zigzags, sinuous lines, bands of concentric arcs, circles or concentric circles enclosing two or three small pits, as well as some rectilinear and rectangular motifs complement the most frequent design range. In addition, Frimigacci and Monnin have isolated human figures. Some are simple linear stick figures with small round head, others which are made up of parallel bands of lines appear broader and have circular heads with facial features suggested by pits. A few human footprints and lizard, fish and turtle motifs occur. Explicitly figurative designs are however infrequent and there seem to be no birds.

Frimigacci and Monnin discuss the elaborate 'frontal' face design identified by Luquet as one of the most characteristic motifs of this art style. They were unable to rediscover this motif, and discard it from their analysis. One of the main results of Frimigacci and Monnin's work is an exhaustive distributional analysis of motif types across the numerous sites of the island. This shows clearly that certain motifs have quite restricted distribution, and that overall the site assemblages show regional trends. The rock engravings of New Caledonia, though clearly all within the same artistic tradition are not uniform, and local or regional expressions have varied. In some districts the most common motifs were said to belong to the local land owning clan, and Frimigacci and Monnin refer to a few instances in which the engravings or engraved stones are given meaning in the context of contemporary myths. Elsewhere the local inhabitants appear to have been unaware of the existence of the engravings. Although they cite one informant who claims to have made, or witnessed the making of engravings with his grandfather, it

seems that by and large the engravings are prehistoric and are only incidentally incorporated into current traditional concepts.

CONCLUSIONS

The information available for the rock art of New Guinea and Island Melanesia is still clearly insufficient to attempt developmental syntheses. The almost complete absence of chronological information is a major problem in attempts to discuss development. A great diversity of localised artistic expression is evident. However, the existence of certain recurring motifs throughout the area suggests that developments have occurred through differential adoption and adaptation from shared origins.

In contrast to most other figurative rock art traditions, animal motifs are rare in New Guinea and Island Melanesia. The principal motif bases are variants of a range of non-figurative forms and variants upon the human form. Where animals are depicted they seem to be mainly fish, as in the earlier phase of the MacCluer Gulf paintings or among the few and localised painting sites on some of the islands, and possibly a lizard or crocodile.

There seems to be surprisingly little overlap between the motif range of paintings, which are primarily a mainland trait, and of engravings which are predominantly a trait of island Melanesia³. On present published evidence it seems valid to examine the art of the region within the framework of two major artistic traditions. The existence of a few shared motifs of some complexity, however, serves as a warning that such a twofold schema is undoubtedly an oversimplification. The 'croix à enveloppe' motif which is most abundant and most elaborated among New Caledonian engravings occurs sporadically among both engravings and paintings elsewhere. Some design elements of possible Dong Son origin may also cross this hypothetical twofold division.

The engraved tradition is most abundant in New Caledonia. If, as is generally assumed, the original transmission of ideas and skills was from west to east, then the fullest known development of this artistic tradition occurs at its point of farthest remove from its putative origins. This could imply that our best data for this tradition are also the most divergent from the original sources of inspiration.

The range of designs in New Caledonia is both greater and more elaborated than those recorded farther to the north. However, it is unarguable that there is a shared basic vocabulary of design elements. This presumably represents the spread in prehistoric times of an artistic tradition with some of its associated symbolism across

³ Bellard (pers.comm.) has since discovered more painting sites in coastal locations on the islands as well as on mainland New Guinea.

island Melanesia, and touching on what is now part of the Massim area. If the derivation of formal motifs from a Dong Son inventory is accepted, the origins for this tradition can be traced back even farther west. In the absence of intervening archaeological data such an hypothesis remains highly speculative. The occurrence of stencils of Dong Son axes and probable bronze age design elements in the MacCluer Gulf paintings is, at present, the only tenuous line.

The extensive use of related design elements in contemporary products of wood, barkcloth and to a lesser extent tattoo and other perishable materials should caution against the assumption that it was the tradition of rock carving that was primarily transmitted. The rather different contexts in which engravings are found: on natural exposures in New Caledonia, and on erected stones in Massim villages, for instance, suggests that we may be faced with an artistic assemblage of motifs which found meaningful expression in different social contexts.

Other decorated archaeological material known for the region is almost exclusively pottery, with a few examples of incised shell. Except for the Wanigela mounds, none of these show immediate analogies with the rock engraving designs. The paddle impressed wares and the incised and appliqué wares of island Melanesia are thoroughly different. Decorations on Lapita wares is quite complex. It includes bands of rather angular linked spiral designs, impressed circles and elaborate circular motifs. In the absence of a more probing analysis, analogies between Lapita style decoration and rock art inventories are not obvious. The spatial distribution of Lapita sites and of rock art sites throughout the region is also rather different. It is clearly premature to speculate on the date or the mechanism for the spread of this artistic system across island Melanesia.

The body of rock paintings appear more diverse than the engravings. However, certain shared traits among the paintings can also be isolated. The relative scarcity of clear animal symbolism among its figurative motifs is a distinctive trait. The human form is the most common basis from which its recognisable figurative symbols are structured. The conventional schema for the human form is also remarkably stable. A frontal view with bent legs and arms, frequently with the addition of an appendage between the legs, finds a variety of stylistic expressions, but its essential structure is widespread. Apparently formal gradation between these anthropomorphic figures and occasional figures which resemble lizards or crocodiles have lead to the use of the formal term 'human-lizard' figure. The identifications obtained by Girard for the long appendage among the Buang should caution against a literal interpretation of this faunal resemblance. The Yogondo identification obtained by Wilde for one class of such figures again has no explicit reptilian connotations.

Röder's informants recognised this tailed anthropomorph as the Matutuo spirit, concerned with fish and fishing, and to whom offerings of fish, shellfish etc., are appropriate. The fishbone like chevron pattern on some of these figures may be seen as a significant symbolic expression of this association. No symbolic explanation was offered for the tail, and nowhere in Röder's account is any reptilian association demonstrated, though he discusses it on formal grounds. It is clear however, that any prima facie assumptions about reptilian characteristics deduced from formal similarities are suspect. The term 'human-lizard' figure is a useful descriptive term provided it is seen as devoid of any symbolic implications.

Among the non-figurative painted motifs there is less stability. Some of the designs expressed in black line work in the chimbu sites find remarkably close analogues in a more painterly bichrome style in the Sogeri district. The formal characteristics of zigzags, wavy lines and chevrons outlined in a rectangular or leaf-shaped frame are strikingly similar in both regions. The Chimbu art, is, however, considerably more varied in its design range. The designs found in the Wahgi-upper Jimi river, on the other hand, seem to belong to a different assemblage. Circles, spirals, and especially the use of spirals to construct the scissor-shaped motifs are more characteristic of the engraving tradition. These, as well as the rare 'croix à enveloppe' motifs reported from some inland painted signs hint at the existence of a more complex relationship between the essentially coastal and eastern engraved tradition, and the primarily inland painted rock art than can presently be assessed.

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