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# AESTHETICS AND FUNCTION: A COMPOSITE ROLE IN BORNEO ROCK ART?

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**Abstract:** *The recent discovery of decorated caves with unexpected rock art in the Indonesian part of Borneo has propelled forward a new field of research. With more than 1.500 negative handprints, Borneo rock art from the end of the Pleistocene provides clues for an interpretation that connects aesthetics and function. The manner in which the hand stencils are displayed on the panels, in arrangements that make up simple figures, such as friezes, fans, circles and hands in opposition to each other, ostensibly point toward elementary aesthetic concerns. Some caves, which only contain negative hand stencils, do not only provide evidence for their global, autonomous and intrinsic function but also for underlying aesthetic preoccupations. These emotionally expressive configurations show intentional organization and correspond to a “limiting case,” pointing toward clear similarities to therapeutical practices.*

**Key words:** *Rock art, Borneo, aesthetics, hands stencils, sexual dimorphism*

**Résumé:** *La découverte récente de grottes ornées dans la partie indonésienne de Bornéo contenant un art rupestre inédit a impulsé un nouveau champ de recherches. Avec plus de 1.500 mains négatives, l'art rupestre de Bornéo daté du Pléistocène, fournit des indices d'interprétation liant esthétique et fonction. La façon dont les mains négatives sont disposées sur les panneaux sous forme de figures simples telles que frises, éventails, cercles et mains opposées montrent ostensiblement des préoccupations esthétiques élémentaires. Quelques grottes ne contenant que des mains négatives démontrent, non seulement leur fonction globale, autonome et intrinsèque mais aussi en arrière plan, des préoccupations esthétique. Ces figurations exprimant des sensations sont néanmoins intentionnellement organisées et correspondent à un “cas limite” tout en présentant de fortes analogies avec des pratiques thérapeutiques.*

**Mots clés:** *Art rupestre, Bornéo, esthétique, mains négatives, dimorphisme sexuel*

The unexpected discovery during a speleo-archaeological survey in 1994, in the easternmost part of Borneo, of caves containing paintings<sup>1</sup> was a big surprise since all documentation contained in the literature asserted that there is no ancient rock art West of the Makassar Straits (see map 1). Thus that discovery was apparently in contradiction with the common description of rock art displays in that area, on the one hand, and showed that rock art dispersion had not been as regular and limited as thought before, on the other. Not only archaeological clues had to be re-organised to fit with that new find, but the content of that rock art itself presented major differences with the few examples which had already been observed in that large area.

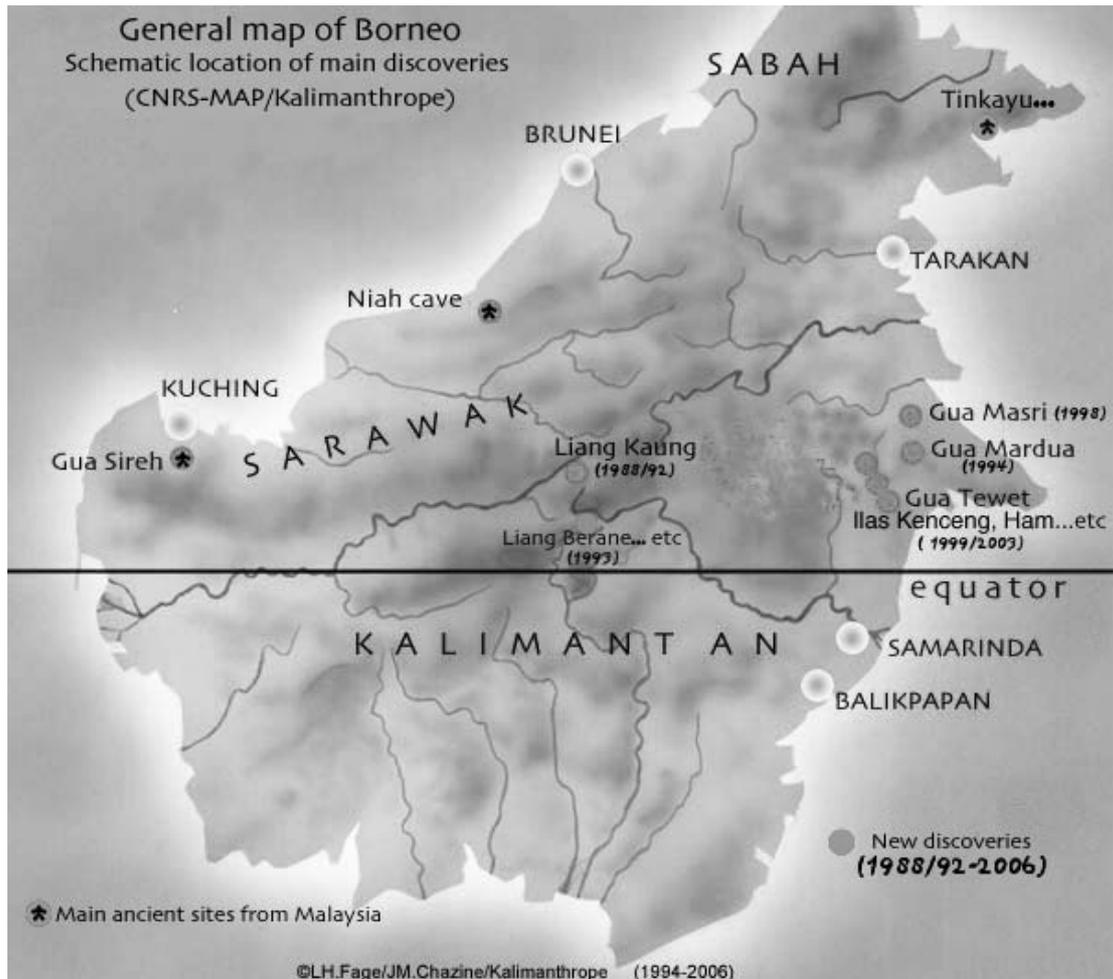
By chance, and as a strange sign anticipating the subsequent findings, the first cave where paintings were

discovered, contained almost all the subject types which were going to be found later in the following 30 or so decorated caves located in that eastern part of Borneo Island (Chazine 2004). In the cave where these discoveries were made, named Gua (cave) Mardua, all the paintings are located inside the entrance porch of the cavity, but out of the darkness. The majority are of hand stencils, at least 45 altogether, more or less juxtaposed or combined with some quite thin circular and zoomorphic figures (see fig. 8.1). Some of the hand stencils are organised into a linear frieze, following a natural narrow step, 4,5m high off the ground and originally seven meters long. Subsisting traces permit the supposition that all the hands contain the same inner sign, which has been added inside the blank part of the hand (see fig. 8.2). That totally unexpected discovery required thus a more precise survey of the adjacent area to try to decipher, at one level, that geographic and cultural anomaly and, on another, to better understand the different figures and the associated style which appeared in that remote area.

Preliminary colours samplings, analysed in France, did not find any organic matter that would permit dating. Therefore, considering the absence of any direct chronological clue permitting the dating of the period to which that rock art expression belonged to, comparative investigations had to be oriented towards neighbouring cases, although they had not yet been much more studied. In fact, before that unexpected discovery, rock art had been observed only in the Eastern archipelago of Insulinde, i.e. Sulawesi, Moluccas, Timor, West as well as

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Luc-Henri Fage, explorer, caver, photographer and documentarist for his invitation to the first expedition he organised in central Borneo in 1992, following the crossing of Borneo in 1988, organised by his caver colleague Georges Robert. The discovery of a rock shelter with charcoal drawings was the very beginning of the numerous survey expeditions which we have later conducted in a common agreement (see <http://www.kalimanthrope.com> and <http://www.pacific-credo.net> for complementary visual and bibliographic data).

My acknowledgment goes towards the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Commission des Fouilles in Paris, as much as the French Embassy in Jakarta for their financial support. Associated Rolex Award for Enterprise, SPB and National Geographic Society have been a determining financial support for 2001 to 2003 expeditions. Locally, Total Indonesia then the Puslit Arkenas and our colleagues have provided all the logistic and friendly help and contribution necessary to succeed in our scientific and sometimes adventurous expeditions.



Map 8.1. BNO: Map of Borneo showing the main locations of decorated caves and rock shelters studied

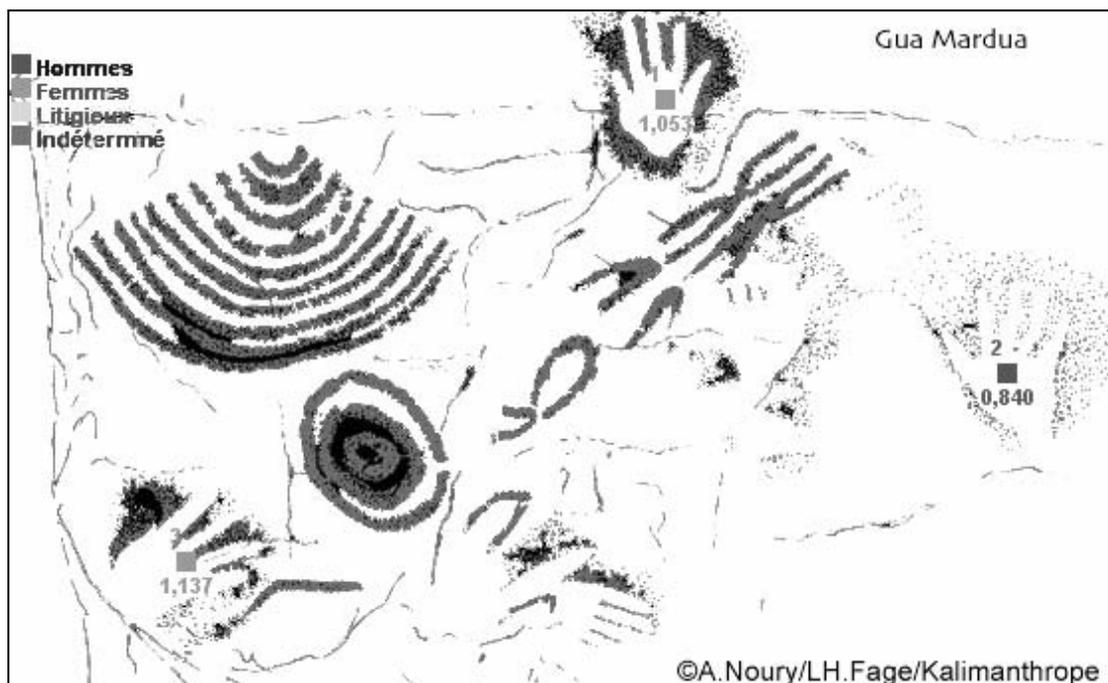


Figure 8.1. Gua Mardua, the first decorated cave discovered in East Kalimantan with circular allegoric figures and hand stencils of men and women, deciphered with ©kalimain

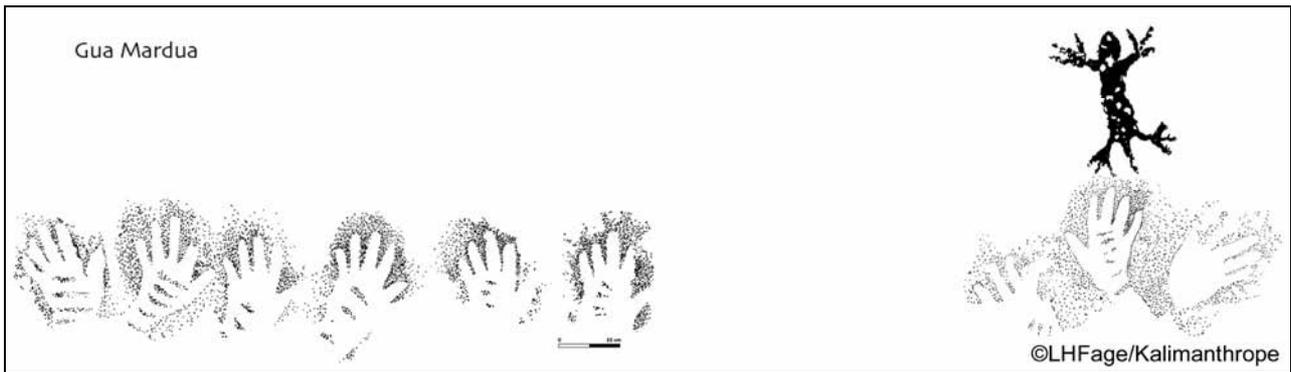
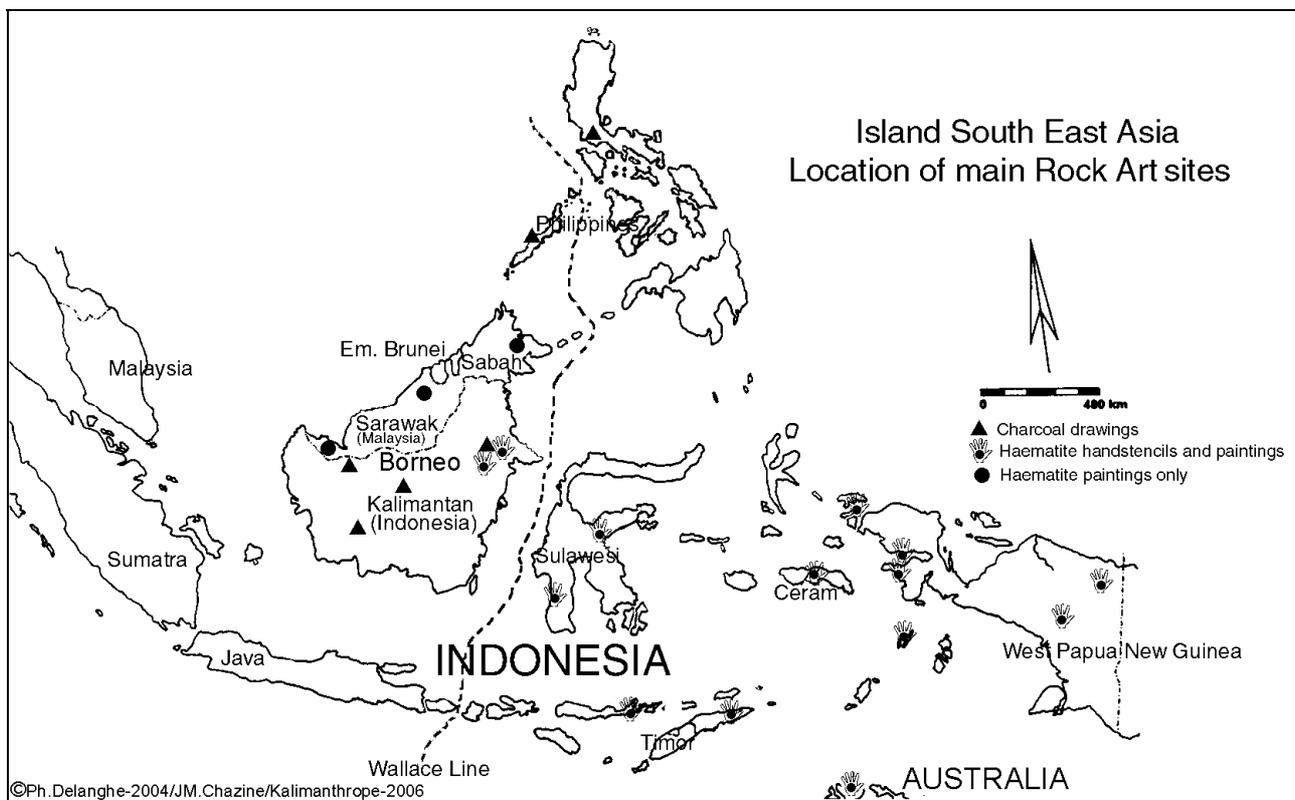


Figure 8.2. Gua Mardua, the overimpressed hands stencilled frieze, with a symbolic (spirit of ancestors?) lizard



Map 8.2. RA-SEA: Map of Island South East Asia showing the locations of the main rock art sites

East New-Guinea, and Australia (see map 2). A few places of that rock art from West Papua had already been very well surveyed before the WW II and especially described by Röder during the Frobenius Expedition, in the late thirties, but had remained almost undiscovered since that period (Röder 1959). The other new discovery which happened during and after WW II was made by Harrison, who came originally as an ornithologist with the Oxford Expedition in the end of the twenties and was sent back to the Malaysian jungle as a Special Forces operating agent. There, in the North-western part of Borneo, he discovered the huge Niah cave and some red paintings which he attributed to more or less recent Dayak cultures. Together with some other ornate caves, they were then studied less intensively by Solheim II and others, in the sixties, but

remained nevertheless estimated to be between 200 and a maximum of 2.000 years old. The fact that they present realistic, figurative and mostly anthropomorphic expressions (even including guns and foreign vessels) would clearly confirm that attribution. Although using red to brown haematite colours, they contain absolutely no negative handprints. Some boat representations like canoes adorned with peculiar items, led to the attribution of these paintings to the classical Austronesian representations of “Ship of the dead”, linked to their funerary practices.

Therefore, we have considered our unexpected new discovery presenting the association of figurations of schematic anthropomorphs, and to a lesser proportion, of animals sometimes linked to the presence of hand

stencils, as a clue of relative archaism, or at least related to other and different cultural practices. Furthermore that distribution of a rather high number of negative hand prints (from 45 in the first discovered cave, it has even reached 350 or so, in our subsequent surveys), has no comparative or similar example in the neighbourhood (see map 2). That relatively high number of negative hands prints would have at least corresponded to a cultural period preceding the arrival – and dispersal – of the Austronesian presence or influence. Based upon the observation that negative stencils are already present in the oldest rock art sites of the world – although that use may have also lasted until present times in some places – the hypothesis allocating a great age to that particular figure has been selected. The clues invoked to attribute a great age to hand stencilling will be developed later in this paper.

As until now no direct datings have yet been possible for the paintings (neither for hands stencils nor for expressive figures), which would allow to precise identification of the exact cultural influence behind its persistence, we have used indirect clues to fill that gap.

One of these clues includes the fact that rock art sites located on the Eastern shore of the Makassar Straits (corresponding practically there to the Wallace Line) contain also some negative hand prints. They are associated with some figures, themselves more similar to those recently found by our team, than those from Northern Borneo' Malaysian provinces (like Niah's or Gua Sireh's).

From a geo-chronological point of view, these few sites from South Sulawesi containing hands stencils were thought to be the most Eastern which were to be found in that part of the Oceanic world. Therefore, the Wallace Line had been considered as a practical limit to the expansion of that peculiar "rock art". The logical deduction was then to allocate it to a "retroverse" influence which could only be issued from late Australian Aboriginal origin. A first little "revolution", expressed in the 80's, from observations and analyses mostly conducted in the Moluccas, had been to attribute that rock art to native cultures (Ballard 1992), i.e. Austronesian settlements which have spread all over the Northwestern Pacific. The presence of new sites also containing some rock art, could thus also be attributed to Austronesian influence, based upon the fact that all languages in that area are now considered as Austronesian (Tryon *et al.* 1995).

The first determinations resulting from experiments upon some colour samples, have shown that only different red haematites had been used. No organic material could be detected until now, excluding automatically any direct <sup>14</sup>C datings that would date directly these paintings. By chance, figurations of vanished species like ox or tapir at the end of the Pleistocene period would allocate more than 10.000 years to the oldest paintings. These clues

have been confirmed by datings of a calcite veil covering a hands panel in Gua Ilas Kenceng, dated between 9.400 and more than 10.400 y. B.P. (Causses *et al.* 2002). Attributing a Pleistocene antiquity to East Borneo's oldest paintings may thus be asserted with certainty.

But, the successive discoveries of 1500 or so negative hand prints within 30 ornate caves, point out the relative importance of hand stencilling, if compared with the number of realistic or even symbolic or simple geometric features. Considering also that more than almost two thirds of that number (approx. 900) are concentrated within 2 twin caves (G. Masri 1 & 2), and 3 isolated (Ilas Kenceng, Tewet and Ham)<sup>2</sup>, their importance is clearly apparent.

As originally expressed in the descriptive terms related to paintings found in the caves, the word and idea of "Art" applied upon rock, has been automatically associated with these traces from the past. Therefore they have consisted from the very beginning of discoveries and observations, of interpretations which had not to be automatically linked to, or associated with archaeological material remains. Searchers were interested in general archaeological contexts, but did not really think that they were an intrinsic part of the remains left by prehistoric communities. These remains which were indicators of different activities, conceptions and intentions, could thus be placed beyond interpretations including abstract notions like "art", "magic" or simply "primitive" beliefs. The numerous presences of animal figurations, found not only inside the Franco-Cantabrian caves, but very soon thereafter, in numerous places of the world, have originally enhanced the importance of fauna figurations in the caves. As a consequence, that subject should have been a central point of interest, hunting practices and whatever would be linked to that aspect of food access, as much as every ceremony related to, became thus determinant. It is true that they are the most numerous and frequent elements which must not be underestimated, considering that the animal world encircling that of humans, has generally no precise limits, especially within animist communities.

Furthermore, the impression provided by these representations, could not be separated from artistic feelings, at least by contemporary, i.e. modern viewers. It presents such an inexplicable gap between the skill exposed on the walls of caves and the poor surrounding technology, that another logical explanation has to be found and reference to an external rationality has to be used. The major importance of aesthetics which has been focused that time, cannot be separated in fact from the ideology or the practical strategy which had to be developed at the same time, concerning prehistoric cultures. The discovery of the great ancestry of mankind involving automatically its different avatars including developed feelings as well as

<sup>2</sup> A new group of ornate caves located 50km in the North West of Marang, one of them containing at least 150 hands stencils, has just been surveyed by two independent groups of cavers and will be studied during future archaeological expeditions.

larger abstraction capacity, in opposition against a still very low level of technology, led to two kinds of observations. One oriented towards reducing the effective intelligence of prehistoric man to separate these two paradoxical aspects of his reality, the second to simply attribute paintings or any glyph to magic practices, mostly intended to achieve success in hunting. The more realistic the realisation of animal figures, the most efficient would be attributed to the mediation of that practice. Breuil, in France has been himself one of the most efficient supporters of that theory. Later, it has been supposed that the cave has to be considered as a whole, which would have had its own internal logic of repartition of figures. Some panels being structured through repetitive oppositions were understood as presenting and even making explicit an intrinsic rationality, while others would have been exclusively devoted to “artistic” expression. This late showing that its different stages had evolved from one basic phase to another better evolved, expressing thus a “natural” continuous progress (Leroi-Gourhan 1992). More recent discoveries have shown that such a linear interpretation was far from including most of the data collected, not only in Southern Europe, but even throughout the world.

In many cases, the presence of negative hand prints on the same panel or individually scattered along different rooms has well been noted but not really included in the analysis, whenever it happened, nor in the interpretative description of the scene. Sorting tables of figures more or less represented in caves would list negative hand prints, but they mostly include them as “representation of human body parts”, at the same level of implicit analysis as positive hands, heads, legs, arms, penis or vulva (ibid Leroi-Gourhan 1992; Lewis-Williams 2002; Vialou 1986). It is just one of the various converging appreciations of the role of paintings or signs found in the caves: the main central or basic function of ornate caves was considered as linked to ritual functions or directly expressing artistic feelings. But the continuity between these two aspects of one single cultural expression has frequently been underestimated. It is true that analysis and description of visual artefacts, although they belong to some of the oldest explicit witnesses from the past, are easier to state than the strict archaeological process, which consists of reconstructing past activities. Paintings are evident, or at least seem evident, even though deciphering cultural intentions or purposes which were underlining these same objects, requires a larger set of hypotheses, clues and facts.

Therefore, appreciating the reality – or the feeling – of art, or at least aesthetics by itself, is much more subject to ethno-centric structuring. Although contemporaneous, many observations or studies conducted within aboriginal communities from Papua New Guinea or Melanesia, for instance, have shown that aesthetics did not exist by itself. It cannot be estimated and appreciated by itself, apart from the “story” (or more often, the “myth”) which envelops it or is tied beyond (Lupu 1973; Jeudy-Ballini

2005). It does not mean that there is no “art” in any sense, but that notion or perception cannot be isolated from its context, be it a domestic tool, a shield, a ceremonial mask or some Men’s house panels. What is to be seen – and very intensively judged and appreciated by the community, for restricted or open view artefacts – is the whole: the author and the global rights he is allowed to externalise, the way he has done it, and the meaning which may be allocated by viewers.

That kind of ethnographical transposition has of course to be very carefully applied, not only in the synchrony itself, but backwards into the past. Nevertheless, the concept embracing more items than the only final design, drawing or simple glyph, has deep roots in prehistoric cultures and their seemingly contemporaneous avatars, still visible in some traditional cultures. If invention or creation is totally possible by any community, whenever it responds actually to their present needs, the probability of representations in previous, ancestral, periods, is difficult to elude. Similarities of hidden, if not buried, beliefs in a cosmology including all kinds of spirits, ancestors and the like, are so numerous even in present modern societies, that they may be considered as traces of deep and early mental constructions. Surviving “sorcery” and healing practices all over the contemporary or modern world, would easily bear witness to the reality of virtual global prehistoric cosmogonies (Camus, 1997/99).

There are very few, if any, single facts which are realised without any social or at least cosmologic background. Every bit of operating chain, at least within South East Asia and Borneo cultures, is linked with and dependent on the conceptualisation of the society. In their material cultures (and probably in most of the others), there are no segment responding to elementary or functional needs only. Then, the probability that paintings in caves and rock shelters, would mostly be a simple aesthetic or casual expression becomes void or highly unlikely. At least in Borneo’s rock expression, which is until now not represented by only realistic drawings, we are obliged to suppose that each glyph, would it be related (or linked, as in fig. 8.4) or not, to its neighbours, bears a part of meaning and thus of intention. The way itself, in which it has been expressed, is an indicator of some intention possibly combined or intimately tied with aesthetical parameters.

The wide importance of negative hand prints in the Borneo’s paintings stock, compared with other realistic figurations, shows a real differentiation in the choice by itself and thus, points out another probable set of concerns. Whether these concerns are totally or partially different from others in the world, is still inaccessible, but the synchronic presence of by side preoccupations remains apparent. The practical choice of locations, the manner the prints have been displayed (even in incorporating different and until now, undeciphered time lapses), does reveal an order which is not due to random actions. Although the methodical sorting of locations in



Figure 8.3. Ilas Kenceng and its “Bouquet of (male) hands” (blown on the ceiling, 8m high)



Figure 8.4. Gua Tewet with its “Tree of life,” displaying hand stencils of men and women

the caves like their altitude on vertical panels, their locations upon more or less high ceilings (up to 14 m for the highest yet checked), or the non-use of directly human-sized accessible places... etc, does not provide any apparent logical organisation by itself. Each group of stencils shows an organisation including what may be interpreted as to aesthetics. Series of prints like friezes, as in Gua Mardua (see fig. 8.2) or in Gua Ham (fig. 8.5), fans or triads like in Gua Masri II (see fig. 8.6) or opposite hands, as in Ilas Kenceng, Gua Tewet or Gua Thamrin (see fig. 8.7), are clear indicators that aesthetical concerns – and/or possibly symbolic structuring – are also expressed there.

As said before, the relatively high number of hand stencils, and thus their probable importance in the

paintings series, implies a different analytic approach than from figurative or geometric figures. For many authors (Anati 2002; Bednarik 1994; Flood 1997; Groenen 97; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1982; Lewis-Williams 2002; Lorblanchet 1999; Morwood 2002; Vialou 1986 and many others) most of signs, designs and figures may be partly included in psychograms, mythograms or phosphenes, as much as structural and/or spontaneous features. But negative handprints, and the stencilling technical principle itself, cannot be included in that same group. If the first correspond to early man's natural, if not biological, capacities, then hand stencilling whose mechanical process corresponds to a totally different set of actions, would correspond to different preoccupations. The fact is that besides the initial inversion of representation, implying another psychological – and probably cultural – route, the technical process which has been conceived, is quite different.

The specificity of hand stencilling, has been evidenced especially in Gua Masri twin caves. These two superposed caves have the particularity of containing only hands prints; 140 or so in each, and no other drawing or even slightest sign. That discovery may be considered as our “Rosetta stone”, demonstrating, if necessary, that negative hands prints may – in some cases – be self-sufficient and respond to a specific and autonomous function, which does not need any complementary pictorial element.

That function is probably multiple, but a simple interpretation based upon the technical process itself is clearly possible.

If similarities of operating chains may reveal similarities of ideas – and possibly of intentions – then hand stencilling implies in fact, all of the universally successive stages of laying on of hands, used at least for therapeutic actions. Is it necessary to remember that the need for care, is at least as old and even primitive in human cultures, as all other resources acquisition or production and as technical inventions. Associated with the breathing and the spitting of charged substances intended to (re)-animate or regenerate sick individuals or symbolic representations, these kinds of healing route contain all the same segments as would fit with negative hands paintings. The superposition of elementary actions is the same. And the general use for the paintings of more or less red ochre, which is a material far from being neutral, is an important clue. The continuous use of ochre (archaeological findings have proved it) would it be for body paintings, funerary, warfare or social rituals, shows that its use is deeply tied to early human practices. The ochre by itself is a very peculiar material bearing specific properties including the analogy with the colour of blood and its almost everlasting property of being totally oxidised.

For many cultures, the global power which is concentrated within that natural coloured core, would be perpetuated

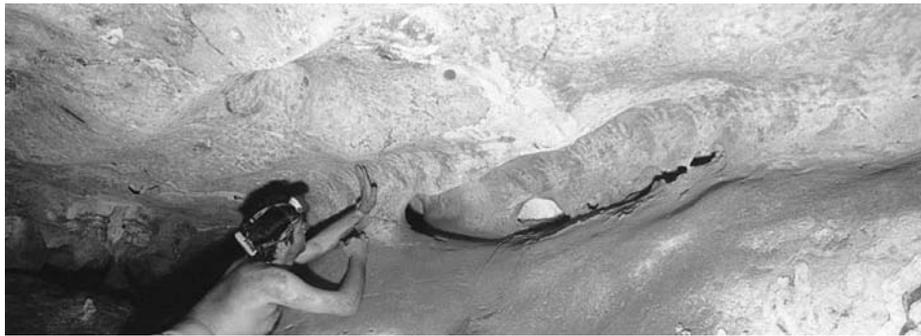


Figure 8.5. Gua Ham, when first discovered and studied (© LH. Fage/Kalimanthrope)

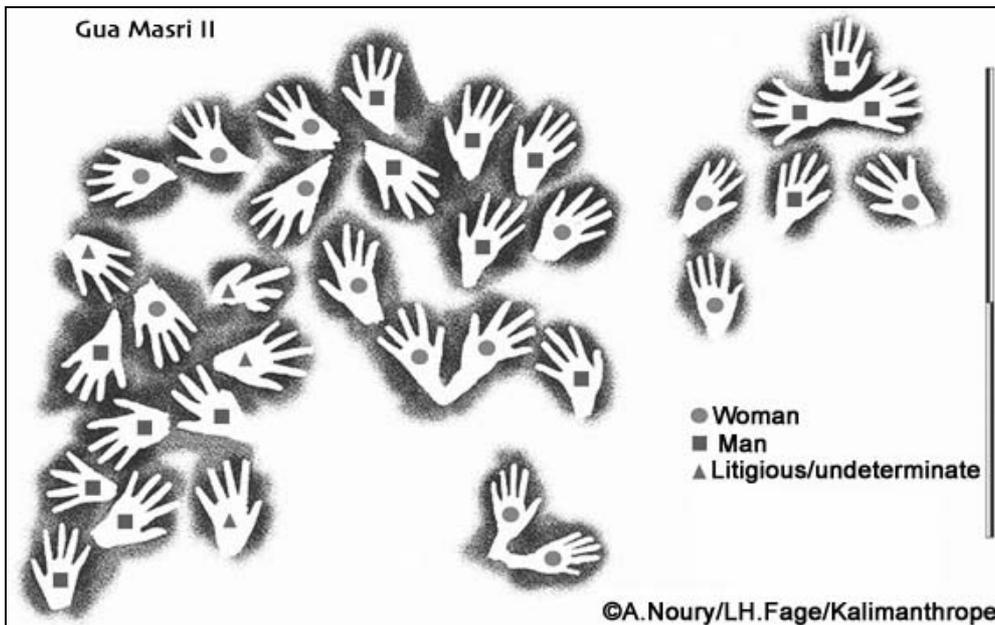


Figure 8.6. Gua Masri 2, one of the twin caves containing only hands stencils, showing aesthetic arrangements (according to LH. Fage's computer reconstruction)

and amplified by gestural moves, through the pestles, anvils and containers necessary for its uses. Preparation of ochre is included in the ritual process and the complete action itself responds to a global attitude towards external forces. Although hands stencils are said to be universal, in fact it is the need for the recourse to which is really universal, and thus, so are the practical and technical answers. But the process of perpetuation by itself is not universal. Examples of differentiated practices by communities who do not possess any cave or cavity, but where archaic societies have settled since long time, have been observed. For instance, some remote contemporary groups from Palawan Island, Philippines, still have troglodytic way of life and ritual practices, including access and settlement into caves or cavities. Their culturally identical kin neighbouring communities, who have no caves or rock shelters, have elaborated peculiar wooden buildings, which symbolically answer to the same needs (Macdonald & Chazine, 1997). Therefore, it may be thought that irregular distribution of presence/absence of "rock art", all over the world, which does not corres-

pond to the archaeological distribution of occupation remains, may correspond nevertheless to the different substitutes invented everywhere where nature and environment were deficient.

The fact is that although using various designations illustrating cultural variations, the need for therapies, be they individual or collective, is common to all of human-kind, and everywhere communities have been obliged to select peculiar practices and ceremonies intended to answer to that need. Be they called healers, sorcerers, shamans, soothsayers, witches or else, they are inevitable mediators, who thanks to their attested or supposed knowledge, the confidence granted to them, the influence or care they provide, the control they may exert upon natural or supernatural events, express it actually through attitudes or specific gestures. In most of these gestures, whatever would be the concerned application points or places, aesthetics, i.e. pleasure of feeling or emotion, is contributing and has even its role to play.

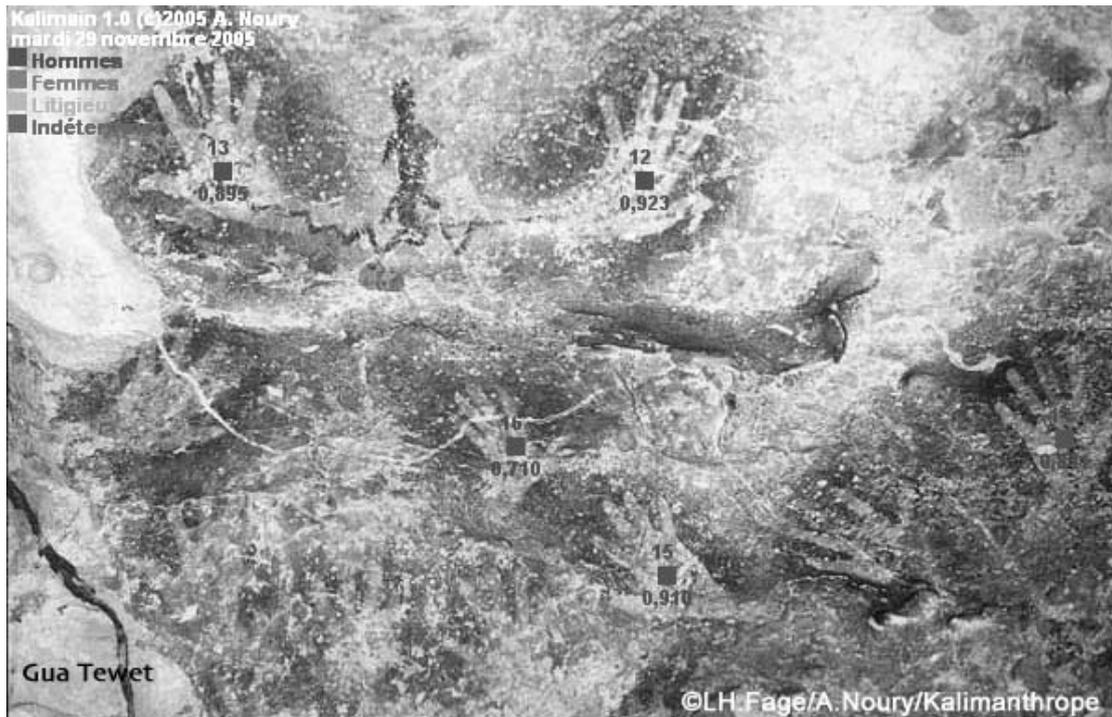


Figure 8.7. Gua Tewet, two differently overpainted hand stencils in opposition but linked by a symbolic mediator lizard

As all rituals which imply some bodily moves, imply also a scenography of the action, the desire of materialisation of that action, its printing or editing for longer lasting periods would include also all the same structures. Like all moves which are organised they are submitted to emotion and every factor which generates it: the body or any of its parts, arms and hands are not randomly waved. They have to provide also beyond its intrinsic sense, a feeling of pleasure. Therefore the importance of dancing, chanting or reciting in organised ritualised ceremonies may be found also expressed, although differently on panels with hand prints.

Hand moves of the healer, during a ceremony or even a casual session, are not left to any complete hazard, nor systematically frozen by an immutable coding. The whole corresponds to a thread of Ariadne which itself contains its part of immanence upon which is grafted the punctual or spontaneous inspiration of the practiser. Dances, moves and encoded gestures, chants, talks, applications of body paintings or ornamentation, while submitted to strict repetitive ritual rules, include a part of free interpretation. It leaves open some individual flexibility, which corresponds to the part filled by the pleasure to be, to act or sometimes to “be acted”.

Is it universally felt that when a total and full action is perfectly performed, expressing also a complete feeling of fulfilment, it provides at the same time an aesthetic satisfaction. Thinking that hand stencils are above all, the only prehistoric figures which correspond exactly to a real human being, who has applied his own hand on the rock,

it becomes more evident that this action implying the body and its spirit, being charged with symbols is a perfect one. As for any move that is successful, it is aesthetically plain, at least for the performer, in its own culture.

Therefore, the simple repetitive or different succession of waves, does express also concerns where aesthetics is present. But it is not at all times realised in a visible way for us, western viewers. It is not that much in the final result, which contains the part of aesthetic or even purely artistic materialisation, may be isolated and perceived, but in the whole process which has been set in motion and carried out. And there, archaeological gaps may be compensated by some ethnographic comparisons or analogical data. They tend to confirm that for all ritual actions, it is the complete process which has the complete value, not only the result obtained (Camus 1997/1999; Lemonnier 2006).

The specificity of the twin Masri Caves is thus fundamental, because they concentrate within a single expressive motif (hand stencils), a complete operating chain – and therefore its final efficiency – as much as an autonomous aesthetic expression. This latter does not need any complementary figurative support or graphic addition, be it symbolic or not. That extreme reduction, something like the “zero degree”, or basic unit of human expression, is sufficiently exceptional and moreover representative to become a reference. Results of the deductions drawn from that borderline case may logically be applied to other samples.

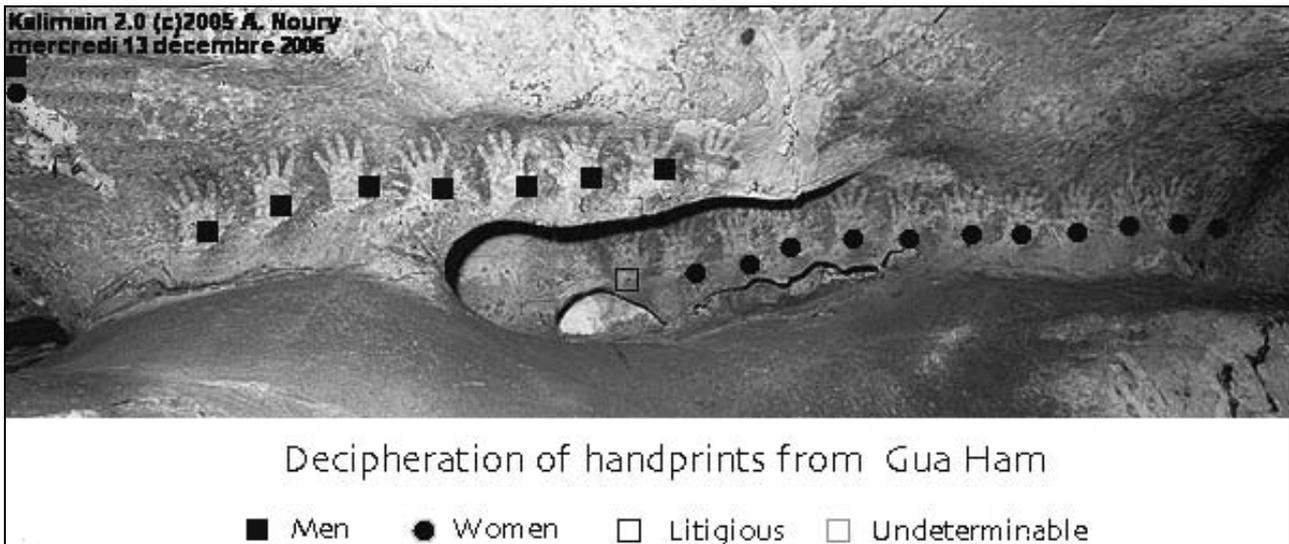


Figure 8.8. Gua Ham, with perfectly regular hand stencils of men and women (© A. Noury/LH. Fage/Kalimanthrope)

Thus, more than 80 kms south, along a gigantic conic karst, Gua Tewet shows a larger use and much more complex display of hand stencilling (see fig. 8.4). They are individualised by motives which not only differentiate them from each other, but moreover tie them like a network evoking a set of social relations within a community. There too, like in Ilas Kenceng (see fig. 8.3), the display of these negative hands prints put together like a dance, expresses undeniable aesthetic concerns.

Aesthetic intention is also present in the Gua Ham frieze, with its 21 hand prints painted side by side to produce a continuous panoramic effect in spite of the original irregularity of the panel. It was naturally apparent at the moment of discovery in 2002 and has been remarkably enhanced by the gender deciphering which has been recently<sup>3</sup> applied to them (see fig. 8.8). The regularity of distribution between men and women shows that – while we have yet no distinctive chronological clues – everybody and even each gender group has respected the main display and added its own print within the same sense. There also is no other complementary design or glyph to complete – should we say actually compete with? – that simple basic frieze. The succession of hand prints, whether they have been produced in one sequence or staggered over time, shows that the final visual result has been present – and acting – all along the process.

Thus, it would confirm the specificity of these East Borneo's caves. Their negative prints, besides likely having a therapeutic purpose and invoking some individual or collective goal have also expressed aesthetic concerns.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to my colleagues Sharpe & Van Guelder, followed by Snow, I was able to ask Arnaud Noury, an archaeologist-computer expert, to conceive a program applying "Manning's ratio" which is able to directly decipher hands prints. This led to ©kalimain program, which has begun to explicit the different roles and actions of male/female hand prints in the ornate caves (Chazine & Noury, 2006a).

Although it was not the main purpose of the authors, the aesthetic angle perspective constitutes an underlying focus. The global contents of these caves, aside from showing almost all of the classical expressions found worldwide (local bestiary, signs and anthropomorphs), also confirm the presence of a complete rock "art", even if of an elementary sort. So, even being reduced in some cases to the very basic fundamental structure of rock art, these manifestations should therefore be useful, as a modelling sample, for future more wide-ranging interpretations.

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