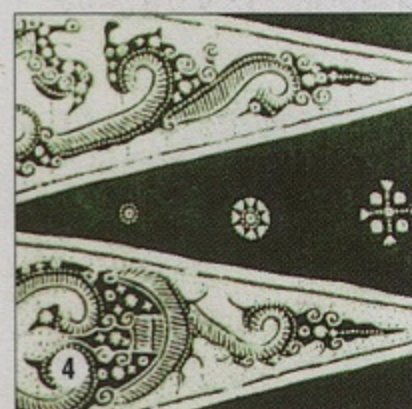
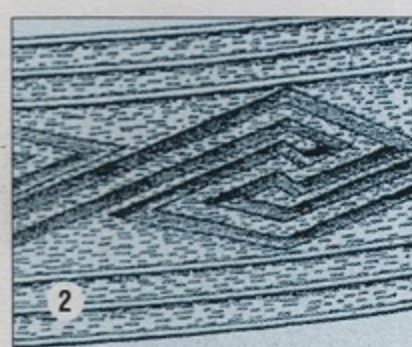
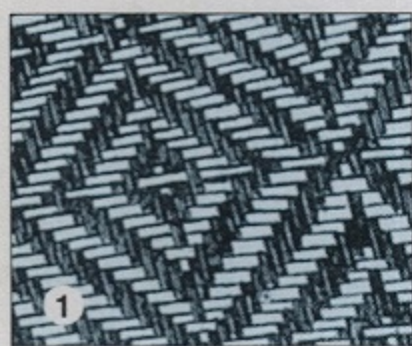


The Early Roots of Indonesian Art

Many archetypes of prehistoric Indonesian art may date back to a time before the arrival of the Austronesians some 5,000 years ago. However, given the continuity of style and form that have existed up to the present day, it is believed that some of these individual pieces may, in fact, have been executed more recently.



Bronze artefacts, believed to have been used in rituals, were engraved with geometric symbols and motifs. These shapes, which appeared in prehistoric art, have been reappearing in contemporary Indonesian art.

1 Square (belah ketupat), 2 meander (liku-liku), 3 spiral (ulir), and 4 triangle (tumpal). Other motifs that are commonly found are the hook (banji) and curves (lung).

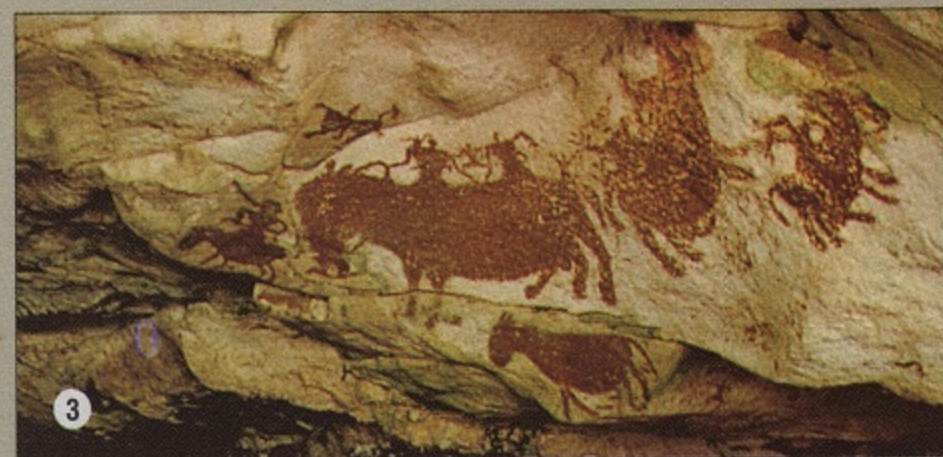
Rock Paintings

Rock paintings have been found at several sites in Irian Jaya, including around Lake Sentani, in the northwest; in South Sulawesi; and in Maluku. They have also been found on the islands of Kai, Tanimbar, Babar, Leti and Seram.

Hand- and footprints appear on the walls of caves on Muna island in South Sulawesi, in Irian Jaya, and in Kai as well as Seram. In Sulawesi, these paintings are associated with the Toalian culture of 8,000 years ago, though we cannot be sure they were painted by the Toalian people. In South Sumatra, in the slab-built subterranean chambers of the Pasemah Plateau, paintings of zoomorphic figures are still visible, using yellow and red clay, charcoal and haematite. These are dated approximately to 2,000 years ago.

Possible Interpretations

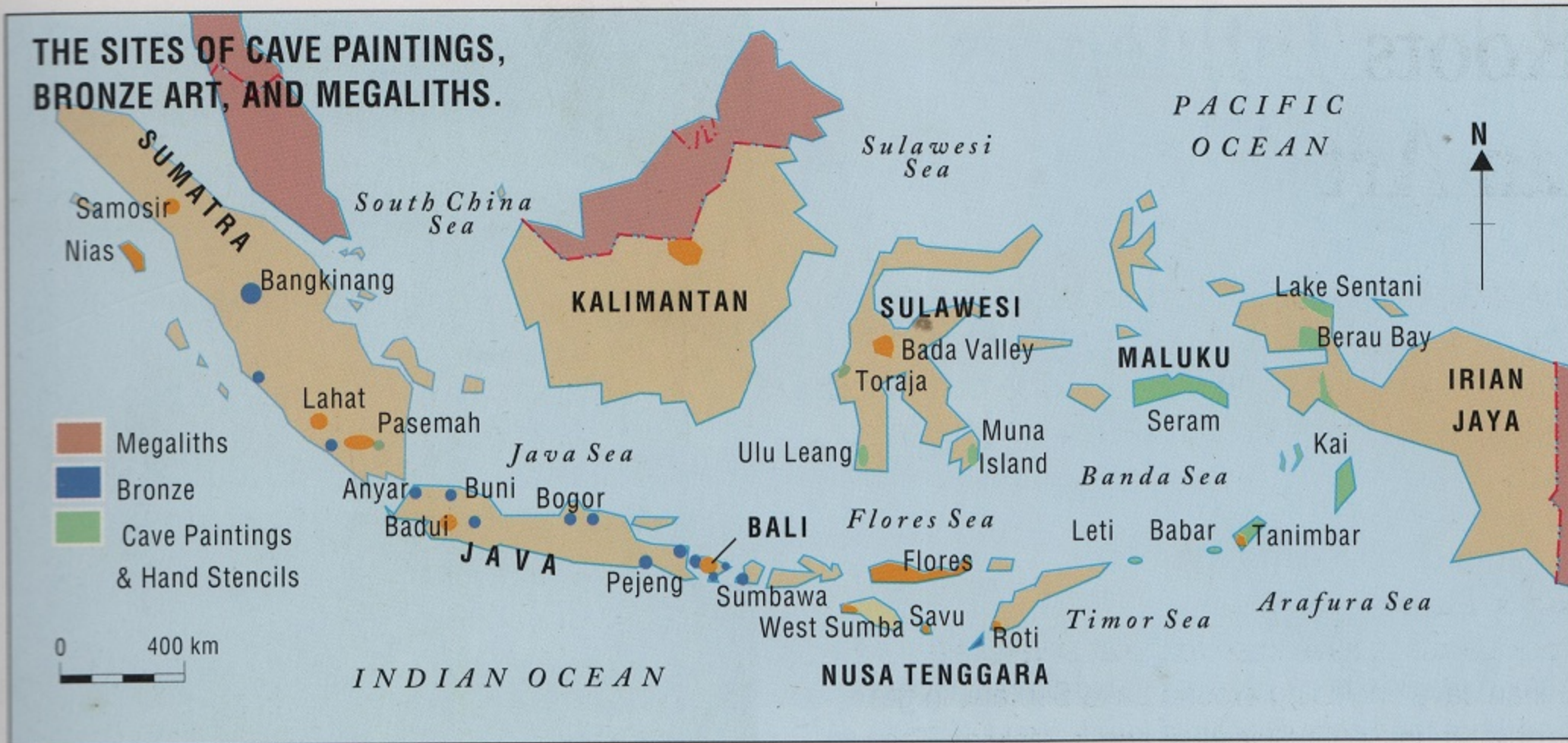
We cannot be sure why many of these paintings were created, or what the significance of the images is. However, based on current practices the hand stencils from South Sulawesi, with fingers missing, may be linked to mourning practices and to ancestral spirits. In parts of highland Irian Jaya, even today, women will cut off a finger as a sign of mourning. According to traditional belief, the hand prints are of supernatural beings who inhabited the area before the arrival of human beings.



CAVE PAINTINGS

- 1 Negative hand stencils on cave walls may have been produced by pressing the hand against the wall with red, black or white pigment before spraying colour over them.
- 2 Cave paintings from Irian Jaya depict figures of men, marine life, reptiles and boats. Many are composite beings such as bird-men and lizard-men. Executed in bold strokes, they show 'X-ray' like images with exaggerated genitals.
- 3 A horse mounted by two stick-figure riders, drawn in a naturalistic style, found in the Raha cave on Muna island in Southeast Sulawesi.

Some of the human figures depicted in these cave paintings may, in turn, represent supernatural beings, or refer to specific scenes from a mythology now forgotten. Among some present-day Dayak and eastern Indonesians, the depiction of genitalia in art denotes the ancestors' fertility and the continuity of the lineage, and this may have been the case in earlier times as well. Furthermore, many of the zoomorphic figures may, likewise, represent mythical ancestors and form a link with the supernatural world. Among the Dayak of Kalimantan and the Toba Batak of North Sumatra, lizards and crocodiles are still respected as ancestral and mythical forebears and as protective creatures.



Paintings of hunting scenes probably played a role in the practice of sympathetic magic. The hunters, by painting a kill, hoped to control the game by supernatural means and ensure success.

Statuary

Many examples of stone figures throughout Indonesia have been ascribed to a Megalithic period, although it would be more accurate to talk of a Megalithic tradition, one that persists in several contemporary Indonesian cultures. Many of these figures are now thought to be more recent, and so it is reasonable to assume that certain artistic forms and styles are legacies of far older practices.

Figures from the Bada Valley in Central Sulawesi are presented in low relief, the arms curving towards the abdomen as if to encircle the prominent genitalia. The faces consist only of the nose and eyes, the mouth being omitted. These may have been carved as late as the 14th century. Nothing is known of their original purpose, but similar forms, carved in wood, may be found in Kalimantan and Nias.

Similarly, figures from the Pasemah Plateau in South Sumatra, which has a concentration of prehistoric stone monuments, are also difficult to date accurately, as they differ quite radically in style from the more monumental shapes found in the Bada

Valley. Other megalithic sites are scattered in the eastern islands of Sumba and Flores, in Central Kalimantan to the south of the Malaysian border, and on the island of Nias.

Bronze Sculpture

Bronze-casting, using the *cire perdu* (lost wax) technique, was probably introduced into Indonesia around 500 BC. Early bronze artefacts and their stone moulds have been found scattered throughout the Archipelago, many decorated with human, animal and bird friezes and geometric forms. Some appear to be influenced by Dongson styles and motifs, showing details of animals and human figures.

Motifs and Symbols

Bronze artefacts, such as drums, bowls and axes, decorated with stylised birds, the tree of life, or ship motifs, are believed to have been used in rituals. These symbols can still be found on woven textiles throughout the region.

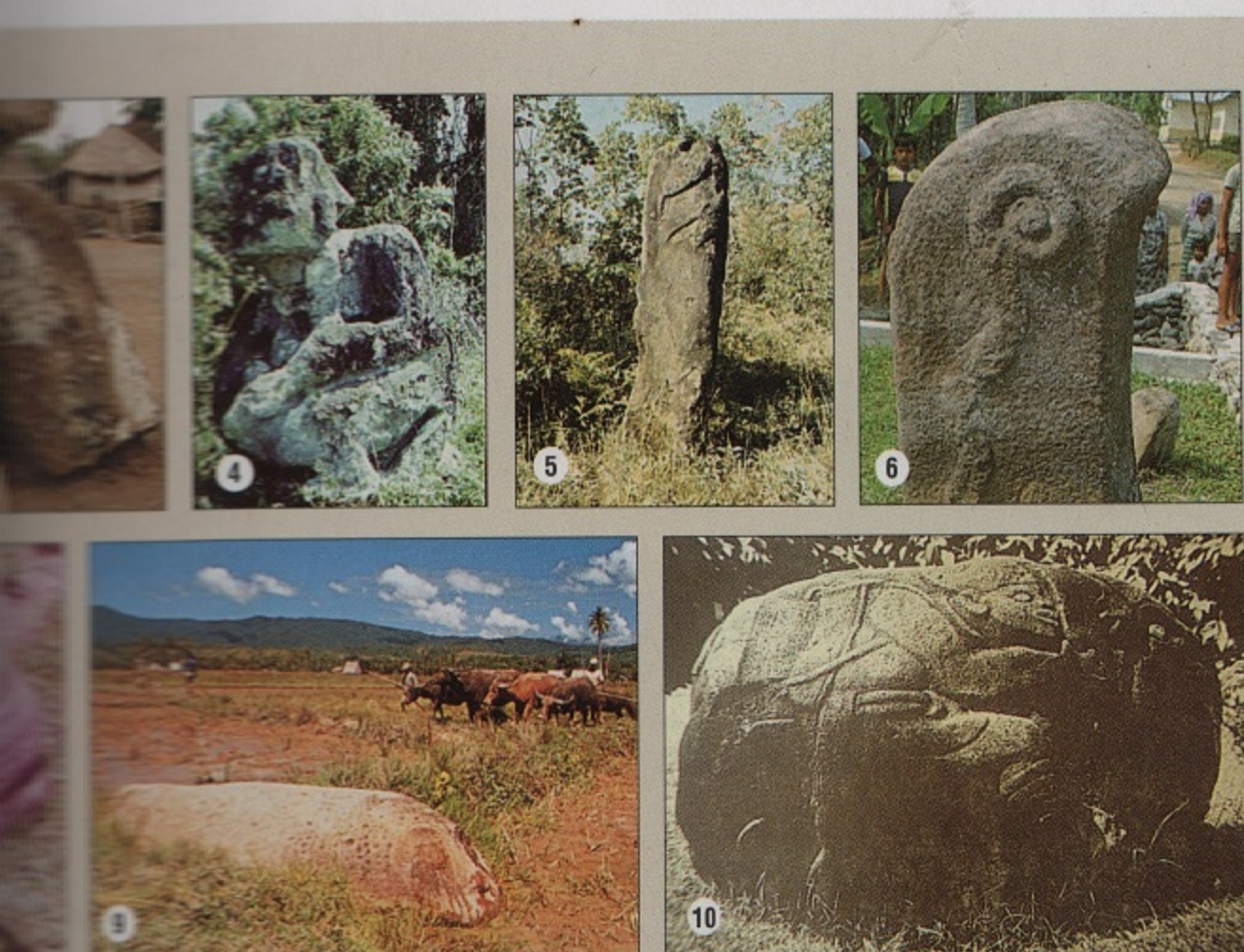
Many of these shapes may be seen as part of symmetrical arrangements in the woodcarvings on Toraja houses in Sulawesi. The simplified human and animal forms found as decorative elements on woven textiles from Krui, in Bengkulu, and Lampung in Sumatra are derived from the early bronze artefacts.



A bronze, male statuette found near Bogor in West Java portrays an early inhabitant of the first millennium. The stance is similar to that of the figures found on bronze daggers in Dongson (Vietnam) and in tombs in the Hunan province of China.



Detail of the bronze drum, Makalamau, found in Sangeang, an island near Sumbawa. Decorative geometric motifs like the meander, hook and circle adorn concentric lines. The human and animal forms depict a hunting scene.

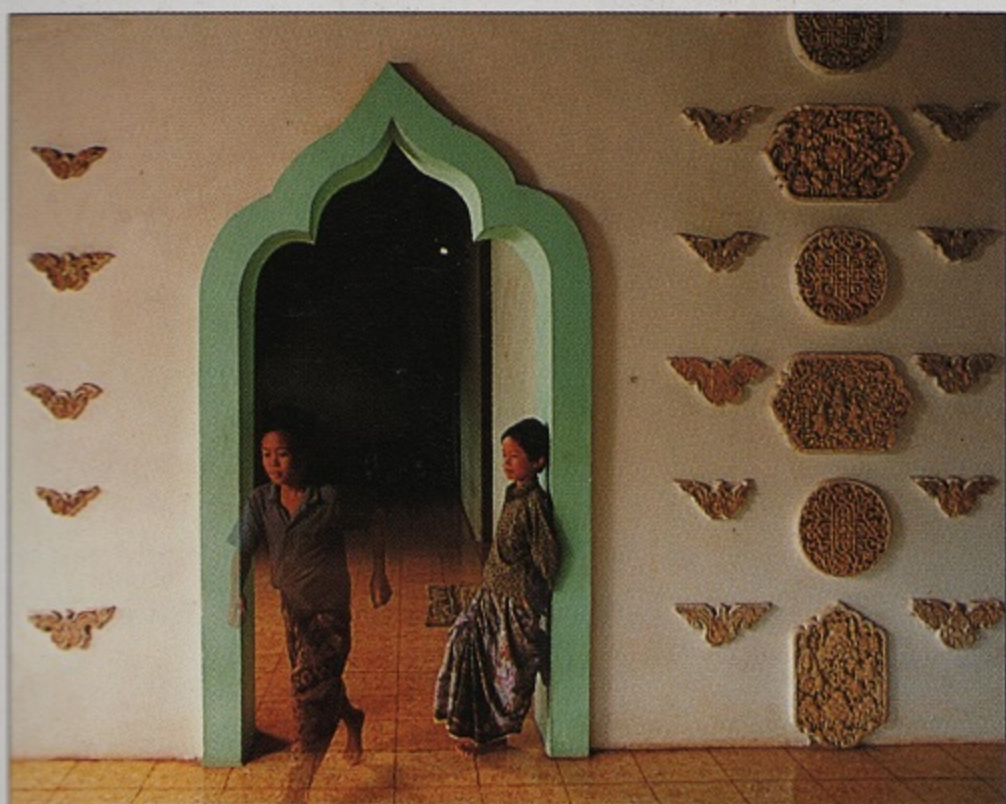


MEGALITHS IN INDONESIA

- 1 Male and female figures found in Bada Valley, central Sulawesi.
- 2 Menhirs in Ngada, Flores.
- 3 A village grows around the central menhirs in Ngada, Flores.
- 4 A humanoid form in Batu Lebar, Lahat in South Sumatra.
- 5 A megalith with carvings found in Tinggi Hari, Lahat in South Sumatra.
- 6 Kubu Rajo, Tanah Datar in West Sumatra.
- 7 Sungai Talang Koto in West Sumatra.
- 8 A *lesung batu* in West Sumatra.
- 9 A horizontal megalith in a rice field in the Bada Valley could have represented a buffalo.
- 10 The forms found on the Pasemah Plateau in South Sumatra are more fluid. This one depicts a man astride a buffalo.



(From extreme left) A stylised depiction of Mecca on a glass painting; an embroidered textile showing the winged Bouraq who is believed to have carried Prophet Muhammad to heaven; Petruk, a character in the wayang, is depicted in Arabic calligraphy.



Indonesia. Ceremonial objects in the old palaces, such as daggers, spears, swords and banners, are often decorated with calligraphy. Calligraphy appears often in glass paintings and woodcarvings forming some of the decorative elements of the palaces. Wayang characters or saints are rendered in calligraphy to disguise their human forms. In modern Indonesian art, calligraphic letters express a definite theme in Islamic paintings.

(Below) grave stones:

- 1 Megalith-shaped tombstone in Gudam, West Sumatra, beside an illustration (A) of one from Minangkabau kingdom;
- 2 The grave of Malik al-Saleh, Aceh;
- 3 Marble grave of Queen Nahrasiyah of Samudra Pase, Aceh;
- 4 Cirebon, Java;
- 5 Gresik, East Java;
- 6 Lamuri, Bone, South Sulawesi;
- 7 The royal graves of the Binamu dynasty in Bontoramba, South Sulawesi show non-Islamic influences like humans and animals.

Calligraphy abounded in Aceh, where one of Indonesia's most powerful Islamic kingdoms flourished between the 16th and 19th centuries. The Arabic script was used for formal letters as in the letter written by the Sultan of Aceh, Iskandar Muda (1607-1636) to King James I of England. It is also here, in Kuta Katang in Samudra (Aceh), that we find Arabic calligraphy on the oldest tombstone depicting Gujarati influences, that of Queen Nahrasiyah (1400-1427). Several other tombstones are embellished with calligraphic script in a blend of the Nashki and Kufi styles. Arabic calligraphy is also seen on ceremonial objects such as the double-bladed dagger, the kris and spears from Sumatra, Java, Madura and Lombok; and on various cloths such as batik, traditional ceremonial cloths like the head-cloth, palace banners, calendars. It is also woven in gold thread on the songket.

mosques can be seen in Cirebon, Banten, Demak and Kudus. Their interiors are decorated with floral, animal and geometric patterns. A practice adopted to emulate the colourful tiling found in mosques in the Middle East and in Moghul India was the setting of Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai plates into walls.

Calligraphy

Islamic calligraphy, more specifically Arabic calligraphy, has become an important element in Islamic decorative art. This is equally true for

