

The Hunting and Gathering Stage in Eastern Indonesia

Eastern Indonesia is separated from the western part of the archipelago by what is termed the Wallace Line. Eastern Indonesia was never linked to the mainland of Asia even during the periods of lowest sea level during the Pleistocene era. Evolution, both natural and cultural, has followed a slightly different path from that which characterises western Indonesia.



as the bones. Their true age is not known. Other tools which may be very old have been found in Sumbawa and Flores but in these cases too no dates can yet be determined. Many Sulawesi sites lie in caves and rock shelters in limestone hills. The oldest absolute dates from eastern Indonesia come from sites in South Sulawesi.

These early dates were obtained from shells dated with the carbon 14 method. Shells can give misleading carbon 14 results as they absorb ancient carbon dissolved in water; however, the dates in this case (29,000 to 17,000 years ago) seem reliable. The site where they were found, Leang Burung (Bird Cave) 2, yielded shells of freshwater species, probably remains of human meals, and stone blades and flakes, some with a gloss on the sharp edges caused by the accumulation of silica. Such gloss is usually an indication that the tools were used to cut grass or bamboo, possibly for plaiting mats or baskets, or producing nets for hunting and fishing.

In Timor, a cave site, Uai Bobo 2, yielded a carbon 14 date of over 13,000 years for stone tools, mainly flakes. The inhabitants hunted local fauna including a now-extinct giant rat, and made use of a plant from the Areca family, probably the betel nut, more than 7,000 years ago. This is possibly the oldest evidence for the existence of betel chewing. A shell midden on the edge of Lake Tondano, north Sulawesi, contained remains dated to the time before the spread of the Austronesians, 8,500 years ago.

The best known prehistoric industry of eastern Indonesia is the Toalian, named after the ethnonym of the people who inhabited the areas of the cave sites where these artefacts were found in the early 20th century. The Toalian appears about 8,000 years ago. The main new tool forms typical of the Toalian are microliths in the form of flakes and blades with fine flaking along one edge which is thicker than the others; this is sometimes termed 'backing'. Sites such as Ulu Leang have yielded artefacts called Maros Points, resembling arrowheads of Amerindians but with serrated edges, probably used for hunting. Other typical artefacts include pointed bone tools.

Paintings appear on some cave walls containing Toalian artefacts. We are not sure of the precise age of the paintings, but they may be several thousand years old. They are executed with red haematite, samples of which are also found. Cave paintings are also found in other parts of eastern Indonesia though some probably date from more recent times. Subjects include hand stencils and wild boar.

Geography

The Wallace Line runs along the eastern edge of the Sunda Shelf, down the Makassar Strait between Borneo and Sulawesi. The territory east of this line, beginning with Sulawesi and Lombok and extending to Timor and Maluku, has been separated from all continental land masses for millions of years. Islands in this zone, termed Wallacea, exhibit plant and animal forms transitional between those of Asia and Australia. Large mammals never found their way across this zone until about 40,000 years ago, when the first humans landed in Australia. Culturally and biologically they were similar to the pre-Austronesian Upper Pleistocene inhabitants of Indonesia. The prehistoric populations of Wallacea were sparse, but their cultural development was not retarded by their isolation or relative lack of variation in resources. By late prehistoric times, several societies in this vast region of much water and little land had evolved distinctive customs and art styles, including sophisticated stone tools, colourful cave paintings, and highly decorative bronze artefacts.

Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene Sites

Stone tools found at Cabenge in South Sulawesi were once thought to be as old as the Middle Pleistocene era, and thus among the oldest artefacts in Indonesia, partly because very old animal fossil bones were found in the same area. It is now agreed that the tools, cores and thick flakes, are not as old



Maros points from the Toalian industry of South Sulawesi, from the site of Leang Burung 1 and dated to around 5,000–4,000 years ago.

Hand stencils of hand stencils, Leang Petta Kere, South Sulawesi. All these stencils are of left hands, and several of them have missing fingers, recalling the practice of finger amputation as a sign of mourning still carried out in New Guinea.

