

## Archaeology Seminar Series 2021

# Pigs, popcorn, and the Pleistocene rock art of Sulawesi

Adam Brumm  
Griffith University



The limestone karsts of Maros-Pangkep in southwestern Sulawesi are host to a relatively rich body of prehistoric rock art that has been known to science since the 1950s, but has received little attention outside Indonesia until recently. Archaeologists had long assumed that this rock art is relatively 'young', most likely belonging to the Toalean foraging culture (~8,000–1,500 years ago). However, using Uranium-series dating of overlying calcite deposits ('cave popcorn') we have now shown that the art is considerably older than previously supposed. The earliest motif we have dated is a large figurative painting of the endemic Sulawesi warty pig (*Sus celebensis*). This pig representation is at least 45,500 years old. At another cave site we obtained a minimum age of at least 43,900 years for a

'scene' depicting warty pigs and dwarf bovids being hunted by what seem to be therianthropes (part-human, part-animal beings). As far as we are aware these are now the earliest known examples of figurative art in the world. Here, I will discuss the Late Pleistocene rock art of Maros-Pangkep, how we dated it, and what it can tell us about the cultural lifeways of the image-makers, including the nature of human-animal relations on the island. I will also consider the wider implications of these findings for our understanding of the emergence of figurative art. It has often been assumed that the first cave art traditions – the earliest 'true' art – arose in Europe around 40,000 years ago. So, what does it mean to find earlier evidence for humans creating rock art images of animals and supernatural beings on the other side of the 'ice age' world?

### SPEAKER BIO

Adam Brumm is a professor of archaeology at Griffith University in Queensland. He is a former Australian Research Council Future Fellow and is head of the Archaeology research theme in Griffith's Australian Research Centre for Human Evolution (ARCHE). Brumm was awarded his PhD in archaeology from The Australian National University in 2007 and has conducted extensive fieldwork in Indonesia (mostly in Sulawesi and Flores) since 2003. He has published widely on the early human story in Wallacea. Some of his team's recent findings appear in *Nature* and *Science Advances*, including the discovery of Late Pleistocene cave art in Sulawesi and early Middle Pleistocene hominin fossils in central Flores.

# MARCH

# 4

### TIME & DATE

Zoom Webinar, Thursday  
3:00 pm, Australian Eastern  
Daylight Time, Melbourne,  
Australia (Meeting  
registration in advance  
required).

### CONTACT NAME

Phillip Edwards  
[p.edwards@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:p.edwards@latrobe.edu.au)