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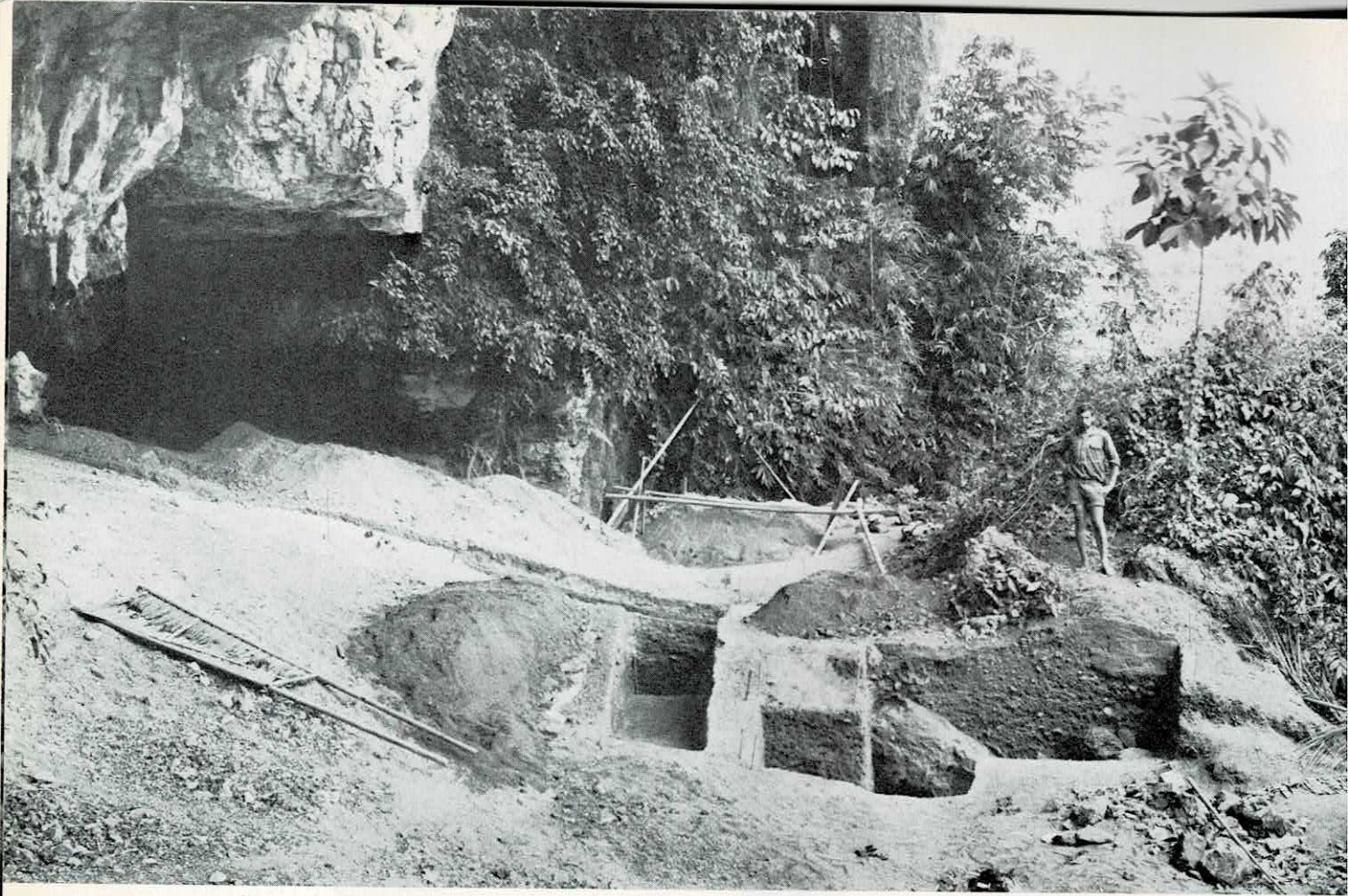
Hemisphere



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Excavations made by the Indonesian-Australian archaeologists outside Leang Burung cave, Sulawesi.

INDONESIAN PREHISTORY AS SEEN FROM



REVIEWING John Mulvaney's *The Prehistory of Australia* (Thames and Hudson, \$45.95), Aldo Massola in the *Melbourne Age* described him as the man of the moment: 'A professional historian who became a professional prehistorian and with a background of study and scientific training and a record of archaeological excavations in several parts of the world, he was, in the early 1950s, among the first to bring to Australia the new concepts and techniques of excavations and to develop a new approach to the discoveries made by an older generation of prehistorians . . .

'Mulvaney struck out on his own and his new methods from the beginning brought out such definite results that he soon became a leader in the field. Meanwhile, his published works made his name and his opinions respected by all the contending parties . . .'

Massola calls Mulvaney's book 'a milestone in Australian prehistory', and adds that 'even the arrangement of the chapters points to an excavator'. Instead of beginning from the beginning, as most other scientists would do, Mulvaney begins at the end—that is, at the surface—and digs his way down to the beginning, from protohistory through landscapes and peoples, ethnohistory, prehistory and Aboriginal origins to field archaeology—observing, annotating and explaining as he goes along.—The Editor.

John Mulvaney

AN attractive feature of the study of prehistory which makes it a stimulating educational theme is that prehistoric societies flourished before the era of national states. The reconstruction of the way of life of people who practised comparable subsistence and technological patterns and who knew neither frontiers nor passports offers full scope for international co-operation.

Indonesian and Australian archaeologists have just completed the first stage of such a joint project, concerning the interaction between the prehistoric inhabitants of their region.

When Australian prehistorians speculate about Aboriginal origins, antiquity and migration routes, Indonesia is the crucial zone for any hypothesis. Back in Pleistocene (ice age) times, when the sea level was considerably lower, the Australian continent stretched closer to Asia, while Indonesian islands were either linked or separated by narrower straits than today. Therefore, the region offered opportunities for migration to anyone possessing even rudimentary watercraft.

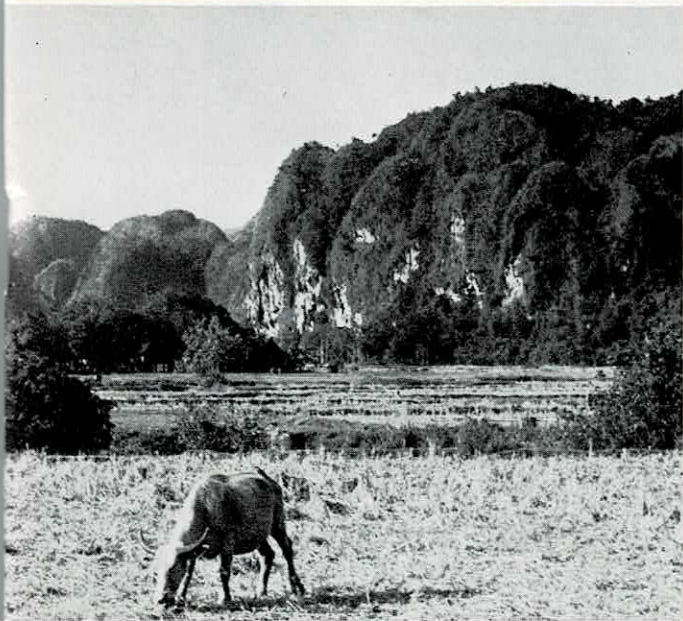
As toolmakers have inhabited Java for hundreds of thousands of years, the possibility is high that the earliest Australians were of the same stock and that their initial material culture was comparable. Recent research within Australia by archaeologists and other specialists has recovered intriguing clues on possible Pleistocene connections, but their finds are still under analysis, and extremely early dates are unlikely.

Around ten thousand years ago, when oceans rose again after the ice sheets melted, the meteorological conditions of island South-East Asia probably assisted people to cross the wider seas, because of the constancy of monsoonal and trade winds. Post-glacial migrations may have been stimulated by the shrinking land areas available to exploitation, and by the movement into the region of new racial elements from Asia.

Any consequential contacts with Australia may have been journeys of no return. Two-way traffic can be demonstrated only during the last few centuries, when Makassarese and Buginese praus fished in Australian waters for trepang, and Aborigines

FAR LEFT: The Australians in the team present an Aboriginal bark painting to the Director-General of Culture in Djakarta, Professor Mantra. The Australians are (from left) the author, Campbell Macknight and Ian Glover. LEFT: The valley in limestone mountains east of Maros where the team excavated profitably.

AUSTRALIA



accompanied them as crewmen to Makassar.

The likelihood of prehistoric Indonesian-Australian links was first raised in a systematic manner by Frederick D. McCarthy, who is the present Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. In Singapore in 1938, addressing a congress of prehistorians, he emphasised the apparent similarities between many types of South-East Asian and Australian stone and bone implements. McCarthy had come directly from visiting Dutch excavations in South Celebes (Sulawesi Selatan) of sites attributed to the Toalean culture, named after the Toala, a supposedly non-agricultural people of that area. He stressed the relevance of the excavated finds to Australian research, but at that time there was no means of dating these prehistoric artefacts either in Australia or Indonesia.

Among the possible parallels were Toalean small blades with distinctive backing or blunting along one edge. Some specimens were shaped like small knife blades, which resembled the Australian Bondi-point, named after the Sydney beach resort where this type was first recognised. Other tiny examples were trimmed into shapes such as crescents and triangles. The term used to describe them—geometric microlith—is applied generally in Europe, Africa and western Asia, including India and Ceylon. Their only known occurrence further east is in Australia and Indonesia.

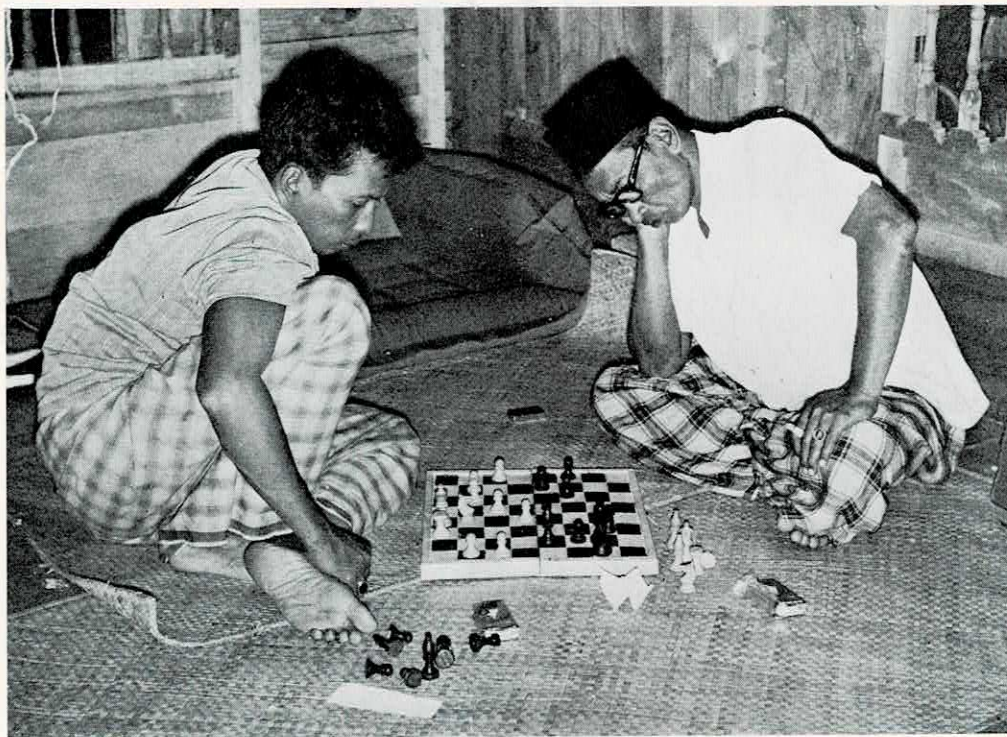
McCarthy also drew attention to the presence of

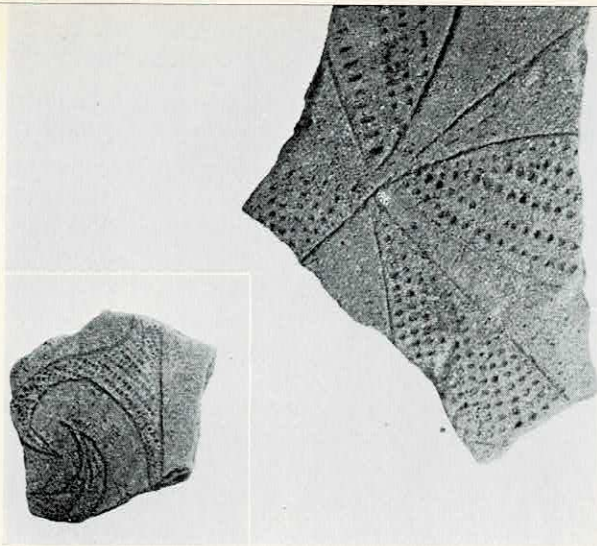
deeply serrated edges both on Kimberley region spearheads in Australia and on small stone points in Sulawesi. In other parts of Australia, stone points were symmetrically trimmed on one side only, and these *pirri* points, as they were termed, also had possible Indonesian parallels. In southern Australia, small bones ground to pointed tips at both ends were termed *muduk*, and similar bi-pointed bones occurred in Sulawesi.

My own interest in Indonesian prehistory dates from the middle 1950s, when radiocarbon 14 dating offered a means of estimating the age of excavated finds. I excavated a shelter in the limestone cliffs on the Murray River at Fromm's Landing, South Australia, almost five thousand kilometres from Sulawesi. About five metres of deposit had accumulated since Aborigines first camped there, and carbon 14 dates proved that it had been inhabited for the past five thousand years. The lower layers contained geometric microliths, other types of backed blade, *pirri* points and bone *muduks*.

Writing of my finds in 1960, I compared them with other Australian implement collections and commented that 'future fieldwork must probe this possible connection between Indonesia and Australia'. Relationships in archaeology are easier to assert, however, than to substantiate. Archaeological literature abounds with superficial and misleading examples of the spread of cultural items or ideas, testimony to the rashness of attempting long distance

Teguh Asmar and Basuki, two of the three Indonesian archaeologists, enjoy a quiet game of chess.





Pottery decorated in a style linking Batu Edjaya with other parts of Sulawesi.



A broken pot, rather like a large, undecorated basin, which was excavated at Batu Edjaya.

correlations which emphasise similarities and ignore major discrepancies. For this reason, I criticised Dutch workers who prematurely adopted Australian terminology, which even within Australia was not always clearly defined or universally valid. Thus, Sulawesi had 'Bondi-points', 'pirris' and 'muduks', terms which assumed an identity before it was demonstrated.

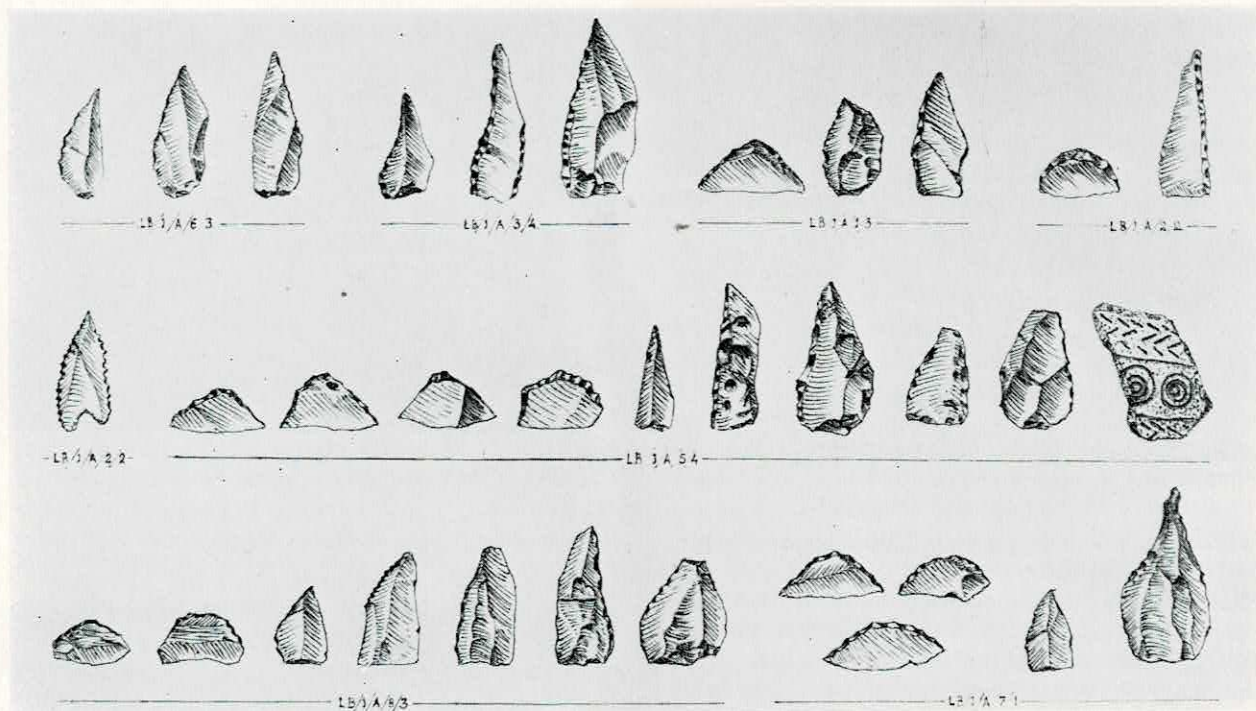
At that time, most of Australia was archaeologically unexplored, so that cultural associations and distribution patterns of significant traits were unmapped. Indonesian evidence, therefore, was tantalising but obscure. By 1968, however, it had become increasingly relevant to Australian prehistorians. Over the intervening years, systematic fieldwork in parts of Australia, co-ordinated with many carbon 14 age determinations, highlighted problems and introduced some pattern and purpose into prehistoric evidence.

It is known that Australia was colonised at least thirty thousand years ago, and that implement-making fashions changed both with time and area, although some types retained a distinctive uniformity over much of the vast continent. Carbon dates indicate that many of those tools with parallels overseas, including all varieties of backed blades and points, first appeared some six or seven thousand years ago, with their climax from perhaps 2500 B.C. to 1000 A.D. Their distribution patterns vary (backed blades are rare in tropical latitudes, and points are concentrated in a central band stretching from Arnhem Land to the Southern Ocean). This suggests the possibility of diffusion from different initial points of arrival. Conversely, some implements may have been invented within Australia and their use diffused northward.

Dated implement assemblages in Indonesia could contribute useful data on this question of local invention or external origin; but it is necessary first

With a bridal couple at Maros, Bupati Hadji Mohammed Kasjim (right) smiles for the camera. He farewelled the archaeologists with 'My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean'.





Implements excavated in Sulawesi during 1969 and drawn by Basuki.

to study Indonesian specimens in detail in order to determine whether the technology which produced them is similar to Australian techniques, or whether resemblances are more apparent than real.

Recent research has raised other problems which also make Indonesia a crucial area in any discussion of Pacific prehistory. Fieldwork in Australian New Guinea and in Portuguese Timor has failed so far to establish close cultural connections between those areas and prehistoric Australia; in the light of this negative evidence, the riches of Sulawesi appear even more intriguing.

Further, the last decade has seen an expansion of archaeology in Melanesia. Pottery has been excavated in island areas such as Fiji, Tonga, New Caledonia and New Britain, dating from the first millennium B.C.-A.D. Some prehistorians believe that this so-called Lapita style of pottery has stylistic affiliations with decorative devices on South-East Asian ceramics. In this context, collections made by Dutch archaeologists in the Kalumpang region of Central Sulawesi have aroused interested comment because many of their motifs are similar. The age of this pottery is unknown, and it is important to date it in relation to Melanesian discoveries.

In Melanesia also, archaeologists have recovered evidence for the spread of domesticated animal species. Limestone caves in the Highlands of New Guinea and in Portuguese Timor have preserved the bones of food animals cast aside as refuse by human

occupants. The identified remains include both native game animals and introduced domesticated species. It is anticipated that the limestone caves of Sulawesi will contain comparable evidence.

The Sulawesi expedition was planned in 1968, when R. P. Soejono, of the National Archaeological Institute of Indonesia, was a Visiting Fellow at the Australian National University.* Its success depended upon his active participation, the great assistance provided by his colleagues in the Institute, and the interest shown in the project by Indonesian officials in Sulawesi.

'The Team Joint Research' as we became known in Makassar consisted of three Indonesian archaeologists, Soejono, Basuki and Teguh Asmar, and three members of the Department of Prehistory at the Australian National University—myself, Campbell Macknight and Ian Glover, whose wife Emily, also an archaeologist, accompanied us. Glover has excavated in Timor, while Macknight wrote on the Makassar trepang industry in *HEMISPHERE* (April 1969). We also had the assistance of staff and student members of Makassar's Hasanuddin University, and all the facilities offered by Andi Abubakar Punagi and his cultural office in Makassar. I am indebted to Teguh Asmar, Ian Glover and Campbell Macknight for some of the photographs.

* R. P. Soejono wrote on Indonesia Before Written History for the September 1969 issue of *HEMISPHERE*.

Our first destination was Panganreang Tudea shelter, near BantaEng, south-east of Makassar. It had been dug in 1937 by Van Stein Callenfels, a legendary figure remembered by villagers for his vast bulk, his beard and his thirst. We came here first because, to judge from the brief published notes and illustrations, his excavation recovered all those implement types suggestive of Australian tools. We hoped to excavate more specimens in stratigraphic sequence, and to collect charcoal for carbon 14 dating. We reckoned without the persistent Callenfels, who lived here for two months and employed labourers to remove the entire deposit.

Fortunately, Batu Edjaya Cave was nearby, in a volcanic mass the crags of which house numerous baboons. Callenfels had dug here too, but he overlooked some of the deposit. In our trenches we recovered some of the stone tools for which we had come and also a quantity of potsherds. The decoration on these heavy fragments had close stylistic affinities with the Kalumpang ware, and the radiocarbon 14 dates will be of interest.

Thanks to the assistance of Solthan, the *Bupati* or senior official of the administrative district of BantaEng, our party lived in two houses in the village of TjampagaloE. Apparently we were the first Europeans in this area for many years, and we were the centre of attraction both at work and in leisure. In order to dig in comfort and in daylight, we had to rope off the working area. Once, I counted over ninety people standing on one side of the trench watching us work. On our last evening, almost five hundred attended a farewell outside our house. They entertained us with music and dancing, but the Australians reciprocated only with a discordant version of 'Waltzing Matilda'.

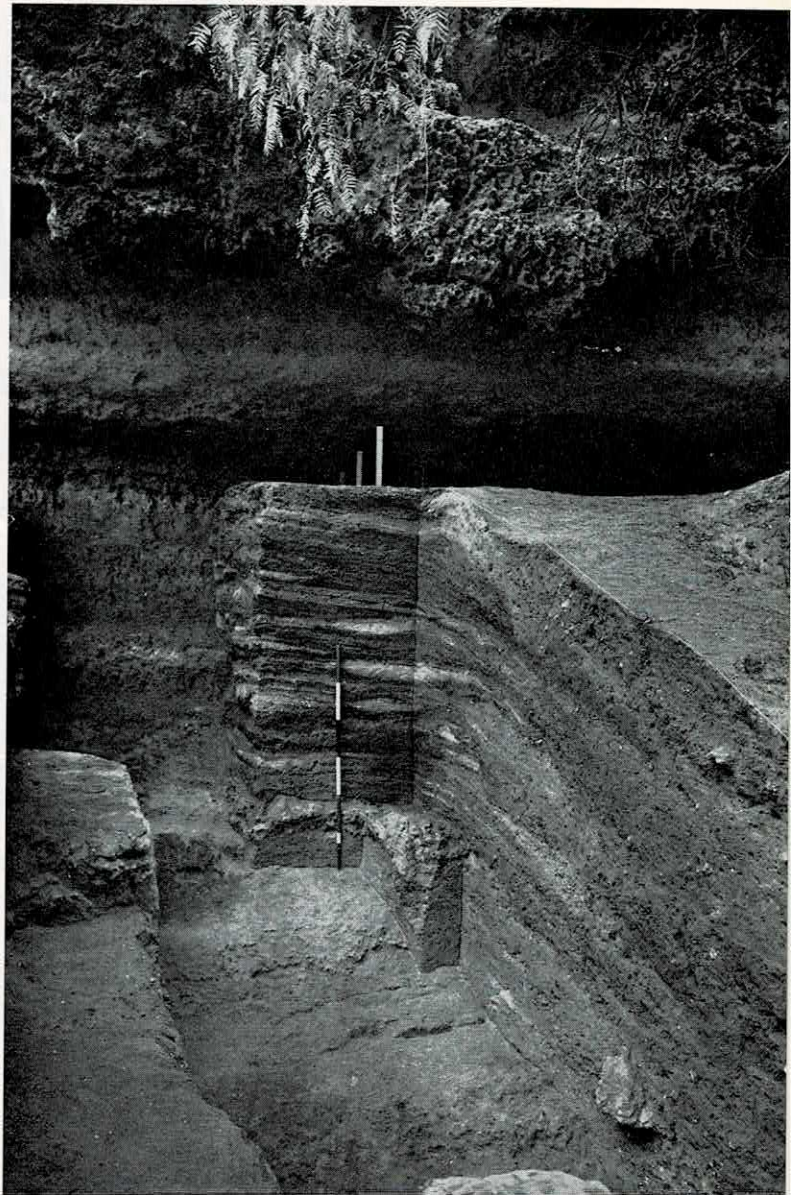
Our main research was done in the cave-studded limestone mountains behind Maros. Many caves are decorated with indistinct and ancient paintings, particularly hand stencils in red ochre. As the cliffs rise sheer for hundreds of feet and are thickly vegetated, the scenery is impressive. At night our valley echoed to the rhythmical thunder of communal rice pounding, in preparation for a wedding ceremony. Not far distant is the waterfall at Bantimurung, where over a century ago the British naturalist, Alfred Russel Wallace, collected the colourful large butterflies which still add beauty and fascination to this area. A link with Australia is provided by the marsupial cuscuses (Phalangiers), or large possums, which live here.

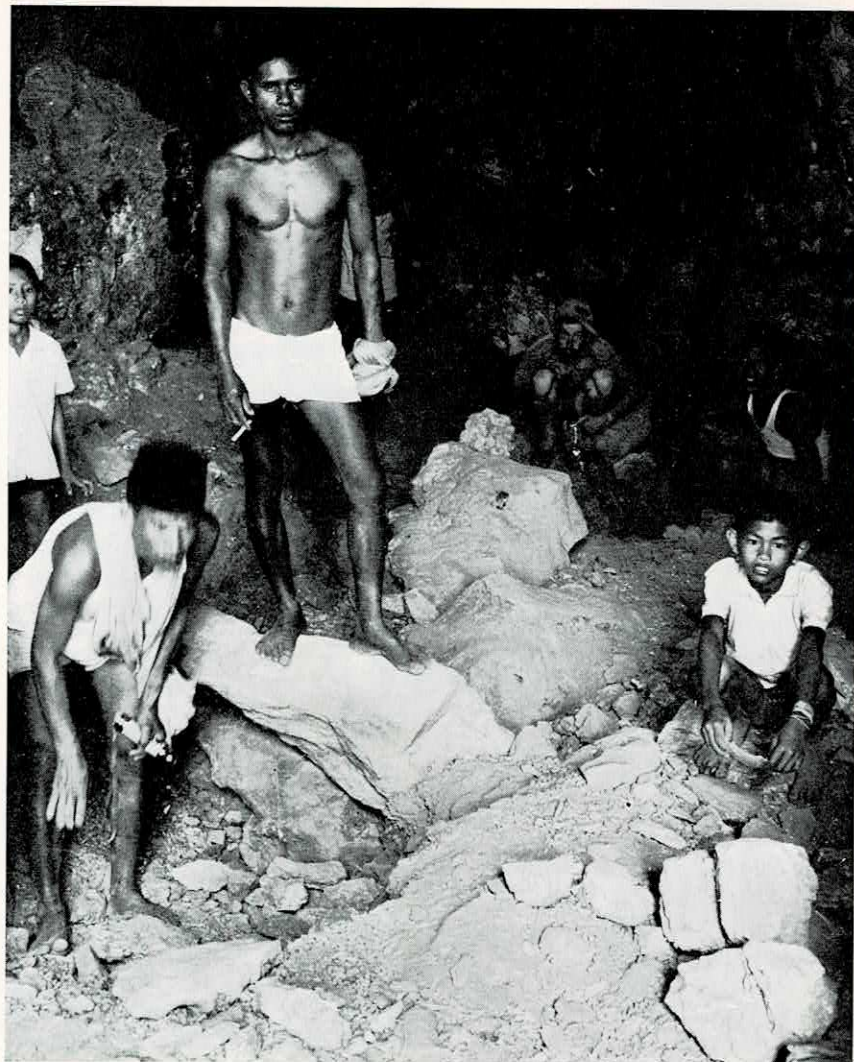
Our patron at Maros was *Bupati* Hadji Mohammed Kasjim, who found us an ideal house opposite the huge Leang Burung cave and who supplied us with coconuts, bananas and sticky rice sweetmeats. Our farewell was memorable, as the *Bupati's* programme included a variety of local entertainments



A marsupial cuscus in a valley near Leang Burung.

The layers in this trench at Fromm's Landing, South Australia, throw light on human occupation during the past five thousand years.





Fossickers for Chinese porcelain have disturbed archaeologically valuable material in this small burial cave; human bones and potsherds litter the floor.

and his own rendition of 'My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean'. We sang the inevitable 'Waltzing Matilda'.

In the Maros area, we had to contend with more than the degradations of earlier archaeologists. The fertile deposits in the caves have been dug into and carried away to enrich the paddy fields. The white limestone is itself quarried and pounded by women into a fine flour for plaster and other economic uses. In pre-Islamic times the dead were buried in the caves with rich grave goods, including Chinese porcelain. Few caves exist today which have escaped the antique dealer's drastic probing for Ming vases; the floors are littered with a compound of human bone and pottery fragments.

Our deepest trench, at Leang Burung, reached four metres below the cave floor, but unfortunately, the non-archaeological activities referred to above resulted in much disturbance of the top two metres. It is too early to describe the results. The implements require close examination and measurement, while the bones and other surviving food remains must be identified.

We examined many sites on this expedition and excavated large trenches in four of them. We recovered several hundred stone tools and some bone points, many of which resemble Australian types. These appear to include geometric microliths and other forms of backed blade. However, each cave produced somewhat different finds and sequences, and comment must await the detailed study.

Of particular interest is the fact that pottery was excavated in association with many of these tools, and the age estimations for the charcoal samples which were collected will be significant additions to our knowledge.

Our expedition demonstrated that Sulawesi is rich in archaeological potential and our radiocarbon samples should add appreciably to our knowledge of South-East Asian and Australian prehistory. It is hoped that this preliminary co-operative venture will initiate a continuing project of investigation.

THE AUTHOR: *D. J. Mulvaney* is a Senior Fellow in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology in the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University.