The *mandu* coffin:

a boat symbol of ancestral spirits among the Enrekang people of South Sulawesi

Akin Duli

Keywords: Sulawesi, Enrekang, boat-shaped coffins, ancestor worship

Abstract: Comparative study of Indo-Malaysian societies has pointed to watercraft as an important symbol for social organisation. Many Indo-Malaysian communities live on coasts or small islands, where watercraft are a visible feature of daily life. When communities are located inland and lack specialist watercraft, yet boat symbolism plays an important role in their lore and mortuary practices, this leads to the supposition that the watercraft symbolism reflects inherited ancestral beliefs. This contribution documents an example of this kind from Enrekang in the rugged hinterland of South Sulawesi. During a survey of boat-shaped coffins in disused cemeteries in caves and cliff niches, reports were collected on the traditional role of these coffins in transporting the deceased to the spirit world. Radiocarbon dates from the coffins (after calibration) predominantly date to between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries AD, although the antiquity of the coffins themselves may be focused on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, after allowing for the ‘inbuilt age’ in timber from long-lived trees. The use of these coffins ceased with the conversion of the populace to Islam, but the boat remains as an important metaphor for the expression of social relations in Enrekang.

Indo-Malaysia is a geographical term for the tropical realm that includes the Malay Peninsula and the triangle of islands from Sumatra in the west, to the Philippines in the northeast, and Timor and Aru in the southeast. The great majority of the inhabitants speak languages belonging to the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family. On a wider scale, Malayo-Polynesian languages are distributed from Madagascar in the Indian Ocean to Easter Island in

the Pacific Ocean, implying an advanced maritime capacity for the seaborne dispersal of these languages. Sulawesi, which lies near the centre of Indo-Malaysia, is suitably emblematic of this maritime capacity. It is a large, spindly island with a very long coastline and, especially in recent centuries, its two most numerous ethnic groups, the Bugis and Makasars, have earned a reputation for long-distance seafaring and the establishment of trading, fishing and farming colonies across Indo-Malaysia.

Both the Bugis and the Makasars, as well as inland ‘Toraja’ groups of central Sulawesi, are included amongst Manguin’s (1986) examples of the role of boat symbolism as a central metaphor in the organisation of Indo-Malaysian societies. Manguin observes that many of these societies describe their social units, from the household to the village and the overarching political unit, as a boat, either explicitly or through the use of terms that are cognates of ‘boat’. He further notes that a strong sense of social hierarchy pervades Malayo-Polynesian societies, which is explicable in the context of the clear chain of command required for the survival of captain and crew at sea. While observing that the Malayo-Polynesians’ colonisation of their island world have required overseas migrations, and that the household is the boat for specialist maritime groups such as the Bajau, Manguin emphasises the need for further research into the antiquity and development of boat symbolism in Indo-Malaysia.

Sixteenth-century and later sources, confirmed by archaeological examples, document the production of boat-shaped coffins across Indo-Malaysia from Riau to the Philippines and the Kei and Aru islands (Manguin 1986; Szabó and others 2008). An early example from Peninsular Malaysia is the canoe-shaped coffin from Kuala Selinsing (table 1), a site with habitation and mortuary remains dated to the first millennium AD (Hassan 1991; Ramli and Hassan 2009). Directly dated examples are known from the Niah complex in Sarawak, including a buried Neolithic log coffin, and Early Metal Phase canoes placed amongst human remains distributed on the cave surface (table 1). The radiocarbon dates from these mortuary materials range between circa 900 BC and AD 1000, although a radiocarbon date obtained from a modern replica commissioned by Tom Harrisson
## Table 1. Radiocarbon dates and 95 per cent calibrated confidence intervals on wood from log coffins and mortuary canoes in Indo-Malaysia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Laboratory code</th>
<th>Determination</th>
<th>Calibrated date (a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Niah West Mouth coffin</td>
<td>GrN-1907</td>
<td>2695±65 BP</td>
<td>780–1003 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarawak, Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Harrisson 1958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niah Painted Cave canoe</td>
<td>GX0307</td>
<td>2330±80 BP</td>
<td>166–750 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarawak, Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Szabó and others 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niah Gua Samti canoe</td>
<td>GX0213</td>
<td>2115±125 BP</td>
<td>411 BC–AD 207</td>
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<td>Sarawak, Malaysia</td>
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<td>Szabó and others 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>Niah Painted Cave canoe</td>
<td>GX0212</td>
<td>1780±150 BP</td>
<td>101 BC–AD 584</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarawak, Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Szabó and others 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Selinsing</td>
<td>BM-959</td>
<td>1767±50 BP</td>
<td>AD 130–400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peninsular Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Burleigh and others 1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niah Painted Cave canoe</td>
<td>GX0214</td>
<td>1450±125 BP</td>
<td>AD 266–870</td>
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<td>Sarawak, Malaysia</td>
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<td>Szabó and others 2008</td>
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<td>Niah Painted Cave canoe</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1180±70 BP</td>
<td>AD 685–987</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarawak, Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Harrisson 1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niah Painted Cave canoe</td>
<td>GX0309</td>
<td>1045±80 BP</td>
<td>AD 779–1163</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarawak, Malaysia</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Szabó and others 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agop Atas coffin</td>
<td>ANU-2944</td>
<td>960±70 BP</td>
<td>AD 899–1221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabah, Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bellwood 1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanta Tutup coffin</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td></td>
<td>AD 880–1110(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabah, Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chia 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanrabone, Bayoa coffin</td>
<td>ANU-5564</td>
<td>780±80 BP</td>
<td>AD 1040–1388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sulawesi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bulbeck 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arateng 1 coffin</td>
<td>ANU-11109</td>
<td>450±60 BP</td>
<td>AD 1324–1634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sulawesi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bulbeck and Caldwell 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamuru coffin</td>
<td>ANU-5922</td>
<td>340±70 BP</td>
<td>AD 1437–1794</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Sulawesi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bulbeck 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayoa 1 coffin</td>
<td>ANU-5927</td>
<td>270±120 BP</td>
<td>AD 1442–1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sulawesi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bulbeck 1992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Calibrated using Intcal09 with the OxCal 4.2 program, Bronk Ramsey (2013)
(b) Calibration program not stated but probably Intcal04
suggests that the coffins may have an ‘inbuilt age’ of around 300 years (Szabó and others 2008). A similar correction may apply to the two log coffins excavated from caves in Sabah and radiocarbon dated to around AD 1000 (table 1). Numerous log coffins have been recorded from open-air cemeteries on the South Sulawesi coastal plain. As for the four directly dated examples, the date from the coffin at Bayoa (the Makasar term for Bajau), Sanrabone, would be at least 80 years too old based on the log’s tree-ring count (Bulbeck 1992). The initiation date for this group of coffins would be the fourteenth century AD and the latest date the seventeenth century, at which time there was widespread conversion to Islam across the South Sulawesi lowlands.

The late dating of the South Sulawesi log coffins compared to their Sabah counterparts raises the possibility that they reflect cultural influence on South Sulawesi from northern Borneo or the southern Philippines, mediated through the Bajau or another maritime people (Bulbeck 1996–7; Bougas 2007). An alternative perspective on this possibility is presented by the boat-shaped coffins or mandu located in the Enrekang district (kabupaten) of South Sulawesi (map 1). Enrekang is a mountainous, hinterland region with limestone karsts that contain numerous caves and rock niches. The indigenous Masenrem pulu languages of the region, Enrekang-Pattinjo, Maiwa, Duri and, probably, Malimpung, are related to the ‘Toraja’ languages of the highlands north of Enrekang (Friberg and Laskowske 1989). During late pre-Islamic times there was considerable Masenrempu cultural influence on the Bugis communities directly south of Enrekang (Druce 2009) although in later times Bugis influence on Enrekang has been intensive. Archaeological survey and excavations in Enrekang have revealed the widespread distribution of the mandu coffins and recovered flaked stone tools, polished stone tools such as grinding stones and a bark cloth beater, earthenware pottery and bronze fragments (Mahmud 2008; Somba 2010). The Enrekang boat-shaped coffins can therefore be understood in the context of long-term occupation by a Malayo-Polynesian group with its own distinctive culture.

In February 2010 a survey was undertaken of Enrekang district with a focus on its mandu coffins. The Puang Leoran, Tontonan (Makkulasse 1986) and Marengo’ Papaling sites (Somba 2010) were
revisited and six additional sites with *mandu* coffins were located. The shape, size and condition of the coffins were recorded, and samples of
wood collected for radiocarbon dating. Local information relevant to the coffins was obtained including origin stories and the villagers’ attitudes to the coffin sites.

**Description of mandu coffin sites in Enrekang district**

Generally speaking, the surveyed sites are located east of the Sa’dang River, which is the main river draining the Toraja highlands to their south (map 1). As described below, most of the sites are in remote locations that are difficult to reach. Many of the coffins have deteriorated due to neglect by the local communities, which have all embraced Islam, and some coffins have been directly damaged through accidental burning or through being pilfered for firewood and building materials. Only a minority of the sites have been actively maintained for their recognised heritage value. The results of the six available radiocarbon dates on wood from the Enrekang coffins are presented in table 2.

**Marengo’ Papaling**

The site of Marengo’ Papaling is located two kilometres west of the Marengo’ hamlet at an altitude of 907 metres asl (above sea level), with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Sample code</th>
<th>Laboratory Code</th>
<th>Type of wood</th>
<th>Determination</th>
<th>Calibrated date (a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marengo’ Papaling</td>
<td>7/E1/10, ENR 01</td>
<td>Beta-274729</td>
<td><em>Elmerillia celebica</em></td>
<td>700±40 BP</td>
<td>AD 1241–1390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puang Leoran</td>
<td>8/E2/10, ENR 03</td>
<td>Beta-274730</td>
<td><em>Elmerillia celebica</em></td>
<td>700±40 BP</td>
<td>AD 1241–1390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To’ Cempa</td>
<td>9/E3/10, ENR 06</td>
<td>Beta-274731</td>
<td><em>Elmerillia celebica</em></td>
<td>790±50 BP</td>
<td>AD 1057–1291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaluppini</td>
<td>10/E4/10, ENR 07</td>
<td>Beta-274732</td>
<td><em>Elmerillia celebica</em></td>
<td>790±50 BP</td>
<td>AD 1057–1291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttu Mila</td>
<td>11/E5/10, ENR 09</td>
<td>Beta-274733</td>
<td><em>Vitex cofassus</em></td>
<td>570±40 BP</td>
<td>AD 1297–1438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liang Datu</td>
<td>12/E6/10, ENR 12</td>
<td>Beta-274734</td>
<td><em>Vitex cofassus</em></td>
<td>470±40 BP</td>
<td>AD 1328–1607</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Calibrated using Intcal09 with the OxCal 4.2 program, Bronk Ramsey (2013)

*Table 2. Radiocarbon dates and 95 per cent calibrated confidence intervals on wood from Enrekang boat-shaped coffins*
coordinates S 03° 28’ 39.7” E 119° 47’ 12.1”. The local economy is based on shifting cultivation with garden plots left to regenerate for three or four years after their productivity noticeably declines. The principal crops include barley, mountain taro, wet taro, sweet corn, sweet potatoes, cassava, dry-land rice, breadfruit, bananas and sundry vegetables. The inhabitants also raise dogs and make palm sugar and palm wine from palm-tree sap. Local conversion to Islam is reportedly dated to the 1700s, but remnants of pre-Islamic beliefs persist, such as worship of the ancestors’ spirits.

Marengo’ Papaling sits at the foot of Mount Bambapuáng, which is revered by the inhabitants of Tana Toraja as well as Enrekang (Mahmud 2008). According to local stories (Ambe’ Tajju, personal communication, 4 February 2010), the foot of Mount Bambapuáng was settled by the ancestors after they sailed northwards up the Sa’dang River until their boat ran aground where the river became shallow and rocky. The summit of Mount Bambapuáng also has major significance in local traditional beliefs. This is the place where the first leader, the ancestor of all subsequent leaders, appeared after descending from the sky (to manurung), and the place where the deceased return to dwell with the ancestors and the puya (nature spirits).
Marengo’ Papaling site is an eastward-facing cave with two chambers (figure 1). The first chamber is four metres wide, six metres deep and two metres high, and the second chamber is three metres wide, four metres deep and two metres high. According to Ambe’ Tajju (personal communication, 4 February 2010), during the 1970s the site contained about twenty large, undecorated boat-shaped coffins, but since then many have decayed, burned up or been pilfered for household purposes. As late as 2008, a complete coffin could still be seen at the site (Somba 2010), but by 2010 only coffin covers remained. Eight complete and fragmentary examples were observed in the first chamber, the largest 167cm long, 50cm wide and 5cm thick, and an even larger example (183cm, 61cm wide and 6cm thick) was recorded in the second chamber. All of the coffin covers were made from cempaka or uru wood (Elmerillia celebica Dandy). As noted by Somba (2010), other surface finds from the site include plain and decorated earthenware pottery, a broken bronze bracelet, and fragments of burnt bone.

Two samples of wood were taken from the large coffin cover in the first chamber for prospective radiocarbon dating. The submitted sample (ENR 01) returned a date between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, after calibration (table 2).

Puang Leoran

The site of Puang Leoran is located in the vicinity of Galonta’ village at an altitude of 421 metres asl, with coordinates S 03° 36’ 02.8” E 119° 48’ 05.8”. According to the local community (Ibrahim, personal communication, 6 February 2010), puang is the title for the leader who dispenses customary law in a village, while leoran means goodness. Puang Leoran is remembered as a leader who was honest, wise, peace-loving, and full of understanding and compassion. The site is named after him as it was the final resting place for him, his wife named Palullung, and his family. He was a descendant of the tomellao rilangi (the one who descended from the sky) at Kaluppini, named Tomanurung Palipada Embong Bulan Posik Tana. Makkulasse (1986) recorded a similar tradition, including an account that Puang Leoran was the great grandfather of the first arung (lord) of Enrekang. I was also told that
The Puang Leoran entered into a treaty of friendship with the Puang Makale (Tana Toraja leader), the Puang Baroko (leader of Tana Duri, which lies inside Enrekang) and the Arung Belawa (leader of the Wajo’ Bugis). The treaty is marked by an upright stone or menhir erected about one kilometre to the north of the Puang Leoran site.

The site can be reached by walking one kilometre from the closest point of vehicle access. It faces west from the foot of a karst. The form of the site is a niche eight metres long, six metres deep and nine metres high. The niche includes seven terraces where boat-shaped coffins have been placed. The coffins have experienced some deterioration from exposure to the rain and sunlight, but not from human intervention, as the site has a protective fence erected by the local government and is guarded by the community.

Makkulasse (1986) recorded the presence of five coffins, two large and three small (figure 2). My survey team observed nine boat-shaped coffins, four still intact and five broken. Six of the coffins are large, and these are made of *cempaka* wood (*Elmerillia celebica* Dandy) and *gofasa* or *bitti* wood (*Vitex cofassus* Reinwald). The other three coffins, which are small, are made of sandalwood (*Santalum album* Linnaeus). Three of the coffins have *pa’sussuk* decorations (vertical

![Figure 2. Boat-shaped coffin at the Puang Leoran site](image)
lines). Inside the coffins there are skulls and other human bones piled together. Samples for dating were taken from three of the coffins that had rotted, located at the rear of the site. Of these, the ENR 03 sample (cem paka wood) was dated, returning a date between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries after calibration (table 2).

During the survey the team recorded metal goods and imported ceramics at the site. These artefacts include bronze, machetes and spears of iron, and Ming and Qing Chinese ceramics.

**To’ Cempa**

The cave of To’ Cempa is located one kilometre from the hamlet of the same name and three kilometres from the closest vehicular access. Its coordinates are S 03° 20’ 46.2” E 119° 47’ 47.2” and its altitude is 927 metres above sea level. The cave mouth is an eastward-facing opening seven metres wide and ten metres high, and the cave’s depth is ten metres. The site is flanked by limestone mountains to the west and by gardens and an Islamic graveyard to the east.

Inside the cave are two boat-shaped coffins of similar size (figure 3). The coffin chests are rectangular in shape and the covers, both lying beside the chest, are canoe shaped. The chests are sculpted, including pa’sussuk vertical lines, and contain skulls and other bones.

![Figure 3. Boat-shaped coffins at To’ Cempa cave](image)
The mandu coffin

The material used to make the coffins is cempaka wood (*Elmerillia celebica* Dandy). A sample taken for dating (ENR 06) returned a calibrated age between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries (table 2).

Kaluppini

The Kaluppini site is located three kilometres west of Kaluppini village, which can be reached by car. The site is a westward-facing niche at the foot of the limestone mountains of the Kaluppini range, located at S 03° 14’ 47.0” E 119° 49’ 59.8”, altitude 370 metres asl. The niche is 12 metres deep, five metres wide and seven metres high, with a flat floor and a stone fence across the mouth.

The site has five wooden coffins, one still intact and the other four represented by the incomplete remnants of their chest and cover. The complete coffin, which contains just one skull, reportedly houses the remains of the customary law leader known as To Palipada. The chest has four legs set on a platform of assembled stones, while the boat-shaped cover has a carved snake’s head added to its tip, making the cover 350 cm long (figure 4). The coffin’s height is 113 cm, the chest is 203 cm long and 60 cm wide, and the dimensions of the cavity are 172 cm long, 56 cm wide and 81 cm deep. The chest and cover are decorated in seven panels, with motifs that include rectangular

![Figure 4. Boat-shaped coffin at the Kaluppini site](image-url)
meanders, circular meanders, circles, swastikas, lozenges, gyres and double gyres.

All of the coffins are orientated north-south, and have been chiselled from cempaka wood (*Elmerillia celebica* Dandy) and gofasa wood (*Vitex cofassus* Reinwald). Other finds at the site include fragments of skulls and other bones, either inside the coffins or scattered around them, as well as additional coffin fragments and pottery. The pottery included Ming and Qing ceramics. Two wood sample were collected from the incomplete coffins for dating analysis. The dated specimen (ENR 07, cempaka wood) returned a calibrated age between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries (table 2).

**Buttu Mila**

Buttu Mila site lies about three kilometres southwest of the Bakka’ hamlet and two kilometres southeast of the Puang Leoran site, from where Buttu Mila can be reached via an undulating trail through the woods. Its coordinates are S 03° 36’ 03.6” E 119° 48’ 05.5” and its altitude is 492 metres asl. The site is a niche facing southwest from the foot of the karst.

There are seven boat-shaped coffins at the site, six of them intact and one incomplete (figure 5). The site also has a pile of skulls and

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Figure 5. Boat-shaped coffin at Buttu Mila
other human bones as well as fragmented pottery. Five of the coffins are large and two are small, and all are oriented north-south. One coffin has chisel marks, and the chests are decorated with *pa’sussuk* vertical lines. The coffins are made of the same three types of wood as recorded at Puang Leoran. Two wood samples were collected from the weathered coffins. Of these, ENR 09, consisting of *gofasa* wood, was dated to the fourteenth or early fifteenth century, after calibration (table 2).

**Tontonan 1 and 2**

The Tontonan 1 and 2 sites are located in the Buntu Batu Tontonan limestone monadnock that rises 200 metres high. The Mata Allo River flows past the northeast face, which is a perpendicular cliff. Across the river lies the Tontonan hamlet, which can be reached by car. Tontonan 1 is located in the cliff face 150 metres from the hamlet, with coordinates S 03° 25’ 20.5” E 119° 48’ 21.8” and an altitude of 518 metres asl. Tontonan 2 is a cave 86 metres above the base of a steep cliff (70 degree slope) at the southwest face of the limestone monadnock. Its coordinates are S 03° 25’ 20.3” E 119° 48’ 21.7” and its altitude is 617 metres asl.

Tontonan 1 is a niche two metres high and 130 metres long, 13 metres above the base of the cliff, created by river-flow erosion.
Twelve coffins were counted at the site, ten intact and two broken. Surface finds include pottery, bone and metal fragments (figure 6). The attention of the surveying team focused on two coffins, at the front of the niche, oriented northeast to southwest and placed on platforms made from small stones. The coffins, chiselled from *tempaka* wood, have rectangular chests made from planks, capped by boat-shaped covers. One coffin has jagged and serpentine motifs on the cover and the other has network and *pa’sussuk* motifs on the chest. Skulls and other bones lie piled inside the coffins. Radiocarbon dating of the coffins is not possible because the local residents did not allow any samples to be collected from the site.

The mouth of the Tontonan 2 cave is three metres wide and two metres high. The coffins originally placed in the cave have all rotted and burnt. The fire that guttered the coffins lasted for eight days, according to Makkulasse (1986). Currently the cave floor is strewn with charcoal, fragments of wooden coffins, bones and pottery. A wood sample was collected but not submitted for dating because it was suspected to have come from several coffins.

Stories recorded by Makkulasse (1986) associated both sites with former aristocrats. The remains stored at Tontonan 1 include Duri rulers from the time when they took the title *Pake*, notably Tarru’ and his wife Sairina. Tontonan 2, for its part, had contained the coffins of the aristocrats named Gunto Barani and Puang Pasaran.

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*Figure 7. Mandu coffin at Lo’ko’ Liang  Figure 8. Human skull at Lo’ko’ Liang*
Lo'ko' Liang

The cave site of Lo’ko’ Liang is located near Lembang village at S 03° 33’ 55.5” E 119° 51’ 02.1’’, at 471 metres asl. It is 17 metres deep, 13 metres wide and two metres high, and the mouth faces south. Three coffins with boat-shaped covers were found, placed in rock crevices at a north-south orientation, and all heavily damaged (figure 7). They are of a similar size, with the cover around 260 cm long, and the chest 200 cm long, 40 cm wide and 47 cm high. They are made from *empaka* and *gofasa* wood. The residents forbade collection of coffin samples because they believed that tampering with the coffins would be disastrous for them. Other items observed at the site comprise fragments of pottery and human bone, including skull (figure 8).

Lo’ko’ Mandu

Lo’ko’ Mandu is a cave located near Lembang village at S 03° 33’ 41.8” E 119° 51’ 55.8’’, altitude 334 metres asl. The cave is 14 metres deep, 11 metres wide and three metres high, and the entrance faces south. Two coffins lacking their cover lie on the cave floor. Both coffins are around 183cm long, 30cm wide and 30cm high, made of *gofasa* wood. Other surface remains include fragments of human bone, chicken bones, freshwater shellfish and pottery. The local residents still believe that the coffins house ancestral spirits and so neither the coffins, nor the human remains at the site, should be disturbed or destroyed. They feared that calamity would befall them if they allowed the archaeological team to collect any coffin samples.

Liang Datu

The Liang Datu cave is located near Palakka village at S 03° 338’ 04.6” E 119° 49’ 24.6’’, altitude 442 meters asl. The cave is 13 metres deep, six metres deep and four metres high, and its mouth faces southeast with a 130° orientation. Although 27 boat-shaped coffins could be counted (figure 9), most are severely weathered. The average length of the covers approximates 258cm, while the chests are around 200cm long, 42cm wide and 48cm high. The coffins contain skulls and other human bones. They were made of *gofasa* wood and sandalwood (*Santalum album* Linnaeus). A sample of *gofasa* wood (ENR 12) taken
Table 3. Contrasts between Enrekang mandu and lowland log coffins

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Enrekang mandu</th>
<th>Lowland log coffins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shape</td>
<td>Deep rectangular chests</td>
<td>Shallow canoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat effects</td>
<td>Ornamentation enhanced at or restricted to cover</td>
<td>Coffins are canoes (uncovered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of cemetery</td>
<td>Collective, above-surface, secondary disposals</td>
<td>Primary extended burials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bulbeck 1992; Bulbeck &amp; Caldwell 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffins’ place in cemetery</td>
<td>Central/exclusive</td>
<td>Accessory (most burials not in coffins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bulbeck 1992; Bulbeck &amp; Caldwell 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortuary goods</td>
<td>Absent to minor; collective</td>
<td>Modest to lavish, depending on deceased’s status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Bougas 2007</td>
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Figure 9. Boat-shaped coffin at Liang Datu
from the most weathered coffin, which may be the oldest, returned a date between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries after calibration (table 2).

**Summary**

The Enrekang coffin sites are variable in most respects. The number of individual coffins varies between two and 27. Some sites have large coffins only, while others have both small and large coffins. The coffins may or may not be decorated, apart from sharing the feature of a boat shape. This boat shape is observable on the chest at some sites and just on the cover at other sites. Where the coffins’ orientation was recorded, it was north-south or northeast-southwest. The caves and niches that contain the coffins, however, face east, west, south or orientations in between. They may be located at the base of a cliff or high on the slopes, at an altitude between 340 and 927 metres above sea level. Some but not all of the coffin sites are thought of as the resting place of bygone aristocrats. Artefacts that may be funerary offerings have been recorded at just three sites, and may vary between these three sites (bronzes at two sites, local pottery at two sites, Ming and Qing ceramics at two sites, and ironware at one site).

One consistent feature of these sites is the use of most or all of the coffins for collective disposals. The only recorded instance of a coffin reportedly reserved for a single individual is To Palipada’s coffin at Kaluppini. From the available information, it is not possible to discern whether the collective disposals in a single coffin might related to social groupings, such as extended families or residents of the same hamlet, or whether the remains of the deceased were consigned to the same coffin without regard to the fine details of social relationships. In either case, the disposals would have been secondary; that is, the deceased were treated to one or more mortuary practices prior to their disposal in a collective manner.

The radiometric dates from the coffin wood span three to four centuries, from around the eleventh/twelfth to the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries, after calibration (table 2). The actual age of the coffins is likely to be later in time, in view of the inbuilt age inherent in timber from long-lived trees. In that context, it is worth noting that the two dated samples of *cempaka* wood (ENR 01 to ENR 07) are dated to
between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, while the two samples of *gofasa* wood (ENR 09 and ENR 12) date to the between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is therefore likely that some of the apparent chronometric difference between the dated samples reflects a typically larger inbuilt age in *empaka* wood compared with *gofasa* wood. Accordingly, based on a cautious interpretation of the available radiocarbon dates, the fourteenth century is the earliest onset date that can be reasonably proposed for the production of the Enrekang coffins. The period when they were made may be restricted to a few centuries, starting not much earlier than 1400 and finishing by 1600 or slightly later, consistent with the observation of Ming ceramics at two of the sites.

Of relevance to the chronology of the Enrekang boat-shaped coffins is the timing of the transition to Islamic burial rites. Makkulasse (1986) describes four Islamic cemeteries which feature the graves of former aristocrats, with historical associations that reach back to the nineteenth century but not necessarily any earlier. The transition to Islamic burial practices is perhaps captured at Buntu Kotu, a fortified hilltop settlement with abundant surface remains from past habitation (Somba 2009). According to local information, previous visitors to the site encountered wooden coffins with an east-west orientation, the skeleton extended with the skull to the east. This direction departs from the north-south orientation of most of the cave coffins, as well as the north-south orientation of Islamic burials in Indonesia. The site also has a gravestone, reportedly the burial place of the former village head. The gravestone is not specified as Islamic but it is similar in appearance to many of the Islamic gravestones in the South Sulawesi lowlands. While Somba (2009) does not estimate the period of occupancy at Buntu Kotu, there is no evidence that it continued as late as the nineteenth century, given the absence of an Islamic cemetery at the site and the lack of evidence that Buntu Kotu played any role in the early twentieth century pacification of Enrekang by the Dutch colonial administration (Makkulasse 1986; Bigalke 2005). Thus, Buntu Kotu may track a transition from collective to individual treatment of the deceased, dating perhaps to the seventeenth century, and the adoption of Islamic iconography by the eighteenth century.
Mandu coffins as a boat symbol of ancestral spirits

Magetsari (1983) outlines a general perspective for archaeologists interested in researching the religious beliefs of times gone by, as in the present study on Enrekang coffins. According to this perspective, religious beliefs affect the three levels of a society’s culture, namely the system of ideas, the social system and the system of physical culture. Ancient human ideas cannot be observed directly, but they govern human behaviour, including the expression of religious beliefs at ceremonies and rites. When the expression of religious beliefs results in durable objects with overt symbolic associations, these objects serve as a reminder to people in the society of their former beliefs, and also allow a productive comparison between societies that have produced objects with similar symbolic inspiration.

Muttalib (1978) may be the first published source that recorded traditional beliefs in Enrekang on the symbolism of the boat-shaped coffins. As he stated, the boat shape reflects the pre-Islamic belief that the spirits of the deceased should sail to the other world, the world of the dead, and should not return to this world. According to my information on the traditional beliefs of the Enrekang people, the boat-shaped coffin was the vehicle that brought their ancestors to Enrekang in days of yore, and when they die it is the vehicle to transport their spirits to dwell with the spirits of the ancestors, in nature. In this traditional belief system, called aluk tojolo, the safe homeward journey was particularly important for people of high social status. The Tana Toraja people, who inhabit the highlands adjacent to Enrekang, continue to make coffins to ensure the return of the deceased to the realm of the ancestors (Duli 1999; Duli and Hasanuddin 2003:133–5).

Boat symbolism informs the ideology of social organisation in Enrekang as well as traditional beliefs on the afterlife. Traditional social units are likened to passengers on a boat (lembang). A tract of country is prefixed Lembang and a partnership founded on social custom is called Tallu Lembang. Enrekang folk literature, for instance proverbs, poems and songs, frequently use the word lembang as a symbol of an ideal, perfect cosmos, both in the here and now and the hereafter. As noted above, origin stories associated with the sacred mountain of
Bambapuang state that the ancestors arrived in Enrekang after sailing up the Sa’dang River. These stories would appear to reflect an ancient, ingrained reference to the boat as a symbol of society, and certainly could not be ascribed to Bugis influence. (In contrast, the stories of a heavenly being who descended from the sky to establish Enrekang’s ruling dynasty, which could conceivably reflect Bugis influence, as it recalls the tomanurung royal founding mythologies associated with all of the major Bugis kingdoms.)

The available radiometric dates for the Enrekang coffins indicate that their construction was a late pre-Islamic tradition, more or less contemporary with the log coffins recorded from late pre-Islamic cemeteries in the South Sulawesi lowlands. Despite the contemporaneity, the Enrekang coffins and lowland log coffins reflect distinct traditions. They differ sharply in their form, their role in the cemetery and in terms of the cemeteries themselves (table 3). As demonstrated for the Makasar cemeteries, the lowland log coffins appear to have been an accessory component of a broader change in burial practices that emphasised preparation of the deceased, according to their wealth within a hierarchical society, for their journey as individuals to the afterlife (Bougas 2007). In contrast, the Enrekang boat-shaped coffins were the centrepiece for the transport of the souls of the deceased, and they emphasised social collectivity.

There is additional evidence to indicate that the Enrekang coffins should be viewed as an essentially independent development of the widespread Malayo-Polynesian perception of the boat as a symbol for society, both in life and death. As noted above, Enrekang terminology and the origin stories associated with Mount Bambapuang both reflect the central role of the boat as a metaphor for social organisation. Further, the symbolic importance of the boat in South Sulawesi’s prehistory is evident from its depiction in rock art in Pangkajene, some 100km to the south of Enrekang (Bulbeck 2004:151 and references there). The depictions include a red painted canoe at the Sumpang Bita gallery, and sketches in charcoal or haematite at six other sites of boats (some with passengers) in the ‘Austronesian painting tradition’ (see Ballard and others 2003). These depictions may reflect the ‘ship of the dead’ motif widespread in Indo-Malaysian prehistory.
(Ballard and others 2003; Szabó and others 2008), or refer to boats as social units, or (in some cases) emphasise a scene from daily life. Whatever their interpretation, they point to a deeply rooted tradition of boat symbolism in South Sulawesi.

While it is possible that some external influence may have helped to stimulate the production of the Enrekang *mandu*, interpreting them as an essentially independent development is indicated by their archaeological distinctiveness and the general importance of boat symbolism in Enrekang. The collective nature of the disposals in most of the coffins suggests that their purpose was to create a sense of social cohesion. In the rugged environment of Enrekang, subsistence would have been based on shifting cultivation, with the garden plots accessed from dispersed households and/or centrally located hamlets. A ‘social contract’ binding small residential units together would have been essential for security and social coordination. The role of the coffin sites in affirming a sense of society is indicated by their association in several cases with remembered ancestors who brought social harmony and order to Enrekang. Accordingly, the social transformation in Enrekang involving the establishment of larger social units may have been the inspiration for Enrekang’s boat-shaped coffins and their purported role in transporting the spirits of the deceased to where they could reunite with the ancestors.

**Conclusion**

Archaeological evidence for ‘ship of the dead’ symbolism in Indo-Malaysia extends back to the Neolithic, with increasing signs of its expression during the last 2000 years. The Enrekang boat-shaped coffins serve as an example dated archaeologically to the middle second millennium AD. The use of the coffins has ceased with the conversion of the Enrekang populace to Islam, but several of the sites are still held in awe, and the coffins’ traditional role in reuniting the deceased with the ancestors is still remembered. The boat’s role in maintaining the cohesiveness of the deceased resonates with the use of the same term to refer to social units amongst the living, and the origin story in which the founding ancestors arrived at the sacred mountain of Bambapuанг by ship. The function of the particular expression of ship-shape social
symbolism represented by the *mandu* may have been to strengthen the development of larger, more inclusive social units in Enrekang at the time. However, the widespread adoption of this religious iconography across Enrekang was probably predicated on an older concept, perhaps of Neolithic antiquity, that adopted collective life in watercraft as a model for social organisation.

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