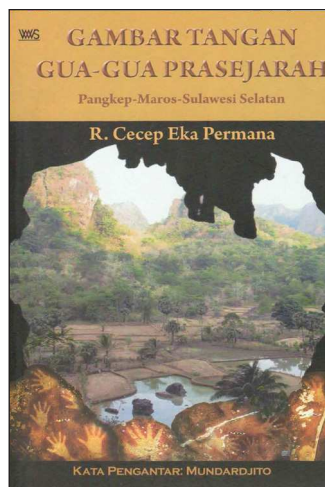


R. Cecep Eka Permana, *Gambar tangan gua-gua prasejarah; Pangkep-Maros-Sulawesi Selatan*. Jakarta: Wedatama Widya Sastra, 2014, xvii + 318 pp. ISBN 978-602-273-003-3. Price: IDR 55,250 (paperback).



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The Maros-Pangkep karst region in South Sulawesi always attracts national and international attention due to its distinctive archaeological remains which include stone flakes, bone tools and rock arts. Large numbers of artworks, especially human hand stencil, have been found together with naturalistic local fauna and geometric images in 93 caves in the Maros-Pangkep region. The hand stencils, in red or brown colour, are also known as negative paintings

because the pigment is sprayed around and over the hands; thus the left hand pattern is surrounded by patchy colour. This motif is more universal compared to the animal depictions or geometric designs. A small number of black drawn figurative and geometric designs have also been found, but only in Pangkep region.

The richness of artworks in the Maros-Pangkep karsts had motivated Cecep Eka Permana to carry out a PhD research in this region. He focused solely on hand stencils which are distributed in 54 caves and rock shelters in this region. The figures, more than 500 in total, consisted of three types: mere hands, hands with arm wrists, and hands through the arms. All hand stencils which were still in good condition from 12 caves in Pangkep and 24 caves in Maros, were examined in detail based on variations of the directions of the hands, their sizes, colours, and positions in the caves or rock shelters, with the aim of finding out the patterns.

In his book, *Gambar tangan gua-gua prasejarah; Pangkep-Maros-Sulawesi Selatan*, Permana mentions that the hand stencils are scattered on the walls of rock shelters, on both sides of the walls near the entrances, on the ceilings or inner walls of the caves. The figures are arranged as single images or sometimes in clusters; they are mostly brown in colour, although many of them are red. The numbers of the fingers are varied—five, four, or three—but most of them are complete.

Many researchers believe that rock arts were produced intentionally, and Permana seems to be one of them. The research he carried out revealed some interesting patterns among the artworks from the Maros-Pangkep region. In the book, he suggests that there are correlations between the small number of certain types of hands (for instance, hands through arms or hand through

arm wrists), the difficulty in drawing, and the location or elevation of the caves. Hands with four or three fingers are also found on the inner walls of the deep caves (p. 249).

According to Permana, hand stencils from Maros and Pangkep karsts, which are only 10 km apart from one another, show different patterns that indicate the possibility of a sub-culture (p. 286). He finds that most of the hand stencils in Pangkep are drawn on the ceilings and inner walls of the caves, but in Maros most of them are located on the walls close to the cave entrances. In addition, the author suggests that the hands have never been found in pairs. This indicates that the artists might have drawn their own hands.

In 2014, when Permana's book was launched, M. Aubert and his team also published the results of a new research on the chronology of 12 red hand stencils and two animal figures from seven caves in the Maros karsts (Aubert et al. 2014). The team, using uranium-series dating of coralloid speleothems directly associated with the figures, suggest that the rock arts in Sulawesi were produced about 40,000 years ago (Late Pleistocene Period), meaning that they are as old as the earliest European arts. The dates obviously show the importance of the art works in Sulawesi. Therefore, the dates for the Sulawesi arts mentioned by Permana in his book need to be updated.

Permana states that most of the figures in the caves of the Maros-Pangkep region are brown in colour, many are red and a small number are black. He indicates that those that are brown in colour were originally red but underwent deterioration and changed colour. However, there is no further discussion of the black drawings. There have been some debates about who the artists were and whether the different colours of figures were produced by different communities. Taçon et al. (2014) argue that the colour of the drawings is related to the Austronesian Painting Tradition (APT) and pre-APT; the pre-APT figures are in red, while "the black drawn figurative and geometric motifs fit well into the stylistic criteria of the APT". The APT was developed about 4000 years ago according to Taçon et al. (2014).

Needless to say, Permana's book offers the reader a complex analysis of the art works. Based on his dissertation, the book seems to be designed with its specific targeted readers in mind, such as scholars and university students. It also provides important information, however, for the general reader who have no background knowledge in archaeology or ancient rock arts.

## REFERENCES

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