

Graphic Image Restoration of Prehistoric Cave Painting in Painted Cave, Niah, Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

This article will discuss research on images on the cave walls of Painted Cave, Niah, Sarawak. The scope of this research focuses on the aspect of preserving the image as a heritage that needs to be protected in the initial effort to conserve the image. Reference sources and previous records are also used in identifying previously documented images. Photographic and sketch methods are the initiative of researchers in recording images that are still present on cave walls. Some iconic images are selected and discussed in this paper. The aspects discussed are iconic aspects and image sketches in detail. The characteristic features in the image need to be identified so that sketches can be implemented digitally and effectively. As a result of the sketch, a clearer image can be generated and subsequently a new record in the collection of existing images. Hence, the concept of digital image sketching is important in preserving the image. It is aimed to add more resources and become a reference in the future.

Keywords: *Painted Cave, prehistoric caves painting, 'death ship' images, and digital sketches.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Painted Cave is located separately in the formation of a small limestone from the Niah Great Cave Complex. Barbara Harrison is deeply touched by its peaceful, ancient paintings on cave walls and boat-shaped coffins on the cave floor, when the cave was discovered by her in 1958. About 100 small red-sized paintings up to one meter are available on cave walls throughout 50 meters. It is painted using hematite and dye material from plants.

Some possibilities should be taken into account in particular the factors affecting the cave painting. Due to the modernization and the longer periods of time, the cave paintings disappeared from the surface of the cave wall. This is particularly troubling to some parties, especially the Sarawak Museum itself. On the initiative to protect the cave painting, the Sarawak Museum has secured the cave painting area in the Painted Cave from public viewing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEWS

Cave art has indeed a relationship with the community and usually it has a specific purpose. The form and the contents will describe the work produced. To understanding the art, we need to understand artistic position in society as well as the development of society itself. The external and internal features of art are interconnected and are equally important in highlighting these things. Thus, art and society are very difficult to separate.

Cave painting found on the walls and ceilings of the caves are often subjected to large game animals such as bison, mammoth, goat and horse. In addition, small animals such as birds, fish and so

on are also subject to their paintings. An interesting thing in cave painting is there's always a male figure in cave painting. This male figure, according to some earlier researches, refers to the shaman of one group. A painting on the cave wall was found in France and Northern Spain about 120 years ago. The discovery proved that the community as early as 35 000 years Before AD had used paintings, images, and symbols. There are four places in Asia and Africa that have been discovered by many historical artifacts that prove that the art was born in prehistoric times (Tansey and Kleiner, 1996).

Siti Ermi Syahira Abdul Jamil (2012: 10) explains that prehistoric paintings are also known as wall paintings or cave paintings. The existence of prehistoric paintings can be traced through the visual sketches created on the tomb surface and limestone cave walls. It is believed that the paintings were produced by the people of ancient times who had stopped or settled in the vicinity of the limestone caves.

The Painted Cave in Sarawak's Heritage also reveals the unique nature of this legacy. In a separate cave, the Painted Cave has an attractive cave painting that is 32 meters long. Each image in this cave painting is sized from a few centimeters to one meter and is painted with thick strokes using red haematite. The resulting image clearly shows the arrangement of ships and human figures dancing with open arms like the shape of the eagle wing. It is believed to be related to the practices and beliefs of the deaths of the ancient people at that time.

In East Malaysia, the Niah Caves complex of Sarawak is one of the best-known archaeological cave and rock art sites in Southeast Asia. Situated on the northern side of Borneo, the cave was discovered and worked on by Tom and Barbara Harrison from 1954–1962, and was also recently investigated by another team of archaeologists from the University of Cambridge to confirm Harrison's earlier findings. Red paintings, described as haematite, were discovered in 1958, with some positioned up to 15 feet above the cave floor and extending over an area 200 feet wide. The paintings depict anthropomorphs standing on what appear to be boats or ships. The pictogram chamber, Gua Kain Hitam, is associated with funerary burials in boat-like coffins. Harrison associates the rock art with the "ship of the dead" motif and points out stylistic.

The Chauvet Cave is a cave that is very different from other caves ever inhabited by some 30,000 years ago. It is filled with unique paintings, engraving and ancient sketches unlike other caves. A lot of things are stored here besides the painting itself. There are still many questions that have not been answered about this unique cave. Therefore why it needs to be preserved from visitors is desirable. In the event of damage to the remains in the cave it is unlikely to be reclaimed to its origin (Jean Clottes, 2008).

He added that with the advancement of technology and the expertise of all involved in the Pont-d'Arc Cave project it is finally open to the public. While many expect to be able to visit the actual location but we need to be aware, the damage that can be caused from public tour activities may have a worse impact on the location. Therefore we must be careful when making a visit to other locations as well.

III. METHODOLOGY

In the initial process of conservation procedures, recording data is important and it is a procedure that needs to be done carefully and neatly. This research begins with making preliminary surveys in the cave. Preliminary data found that the cave painting was unclear and it was difficult to identify the image found on the cave wall. Hence, the records of early excavation writing on the cave are very important and valuable. From previous writing records, research on images is performed. Each image is taken are labeled and classified. Next is to make a selection of images that can be highlighted as the iconic subject of the whole image. The methods of sketching and photography also play a role in obtaining this very unique image.

Priorities in identifying artistic features in cave paintings are through the aspect of icons and also the forms highlighted by the ancient people. Hence, flat-drawn paintings are difficult to identify for layout elements and their perspective corners. The first step that can be taken is to look at artifacts such as the boat shape coffin. Due to the painting of the cave, the ship image has a link with the boat shape coffin, this image can be transformed into a visual artwork.

By using some of the methods as stated, efforts to produce image replication are achieved with the method propose. This effort is important in protecting the nation's heritage and can be enjoyed by diverse communities. The approach to fine arts in the initiative to conservation is thought to be very appropriate in the context of recreating the image in the form of visual artwork.

IV. PAINTED CAVE OF NIAH, SARAWAK

An initial survey of these prehistoric cave paintings suggests that significant erosion effects have led to fade and unclear effects. Some early records indicate more clearly used evidence in identifying the image. Among them is the excavation record by Barbara Harrison (1964: 192-194) showing clear evidence of the placement of ancient communities through the discovery of several boat-shaped coffins as well as precious artifacts on the cave floor in the Painted Cave alongside clear cave paintings on the white cave walls with an image of red haematite. The cave was founded in 1958 and the excavation process began around 1959 and extended to a larger scale in 1961.

Szabó, Piper & Barker (2008: 158) states that 'rock art' was photographed systematically and painted by local artist Paul Kerek, during the excavation process. The paintings of the prehistoric cave paintings are very broad, and photography is very fragmented, so they do not attempt to reproduce the panel as a whole, and do not systematically analyze the image's motives. Instead, we discuss the iconic motifs and main themes in this entire prehistoric cave painting. Although the site has been visited several times by researchers, observations are currently not available to supplement Harrison's research archives, since since 2006, most cave paintings have been overgrown with green moss micro growth over the surface of the cave walls.



Photo 1: Part of the image from the cave paintings panel of the Painted Cave, including 'dead ships', anthropomorphs and animals image.

Source: Taken from a color image taken in 2005 by Szabo and Piper).

Although the symbolism of the 'ship of death' in the Painted Cave is compared to those of Timor (Glover 1972: 42; Lape et al 2007: 4), it is unclear whether the two are related. While it is said that the Timor boat contained a visual trail showing the past maritime technology, the illustration of the death ship image in the Painted Cave was considered to be insufficient to contain information, but only a

symbolic representation. At least eight images of the death ship image have the 'living trees' growing from the deck and two recessive crescent motifs associated with the bow (Adams 1977: 97).

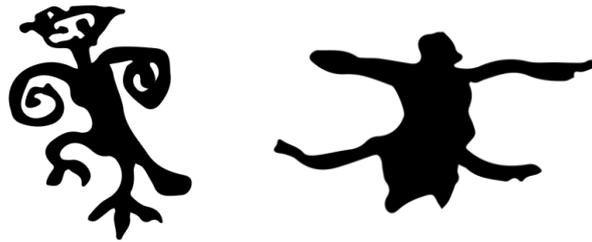


Photo 2: Zoomorphic images of birds and freshwater turtle.
Source: Modified from the panel of cave painting of the Painted Cave. (taken from color images taken in 2005 by Szabo and Piper).

Most death ship image contains a series of very fashionable figures, some with extra stylish *anthropomorphs* with open arms positions. Individual *antropomorphs* outside the image of a death ship are usually in an active state, although we hesitate to consider such a posture to dance (Harrison 1958: 202). Familiar animals include crocodiles, snails, turtles, four-legged mammals, and figures with birds and human characteristics. Some image even shows some figure wearing headwear or clothing.

V. PREHISTORIC IMAGE IN GRAPHIC IMAGE

Before producing a work, a painter needed inspiration to be the essence of their work. Likewise with the ancient people who see their surroundings and take these ideas and apply them in their paintings. However, there are significant differences when compared to cave paintings from the European and African regions. Cave paintings in the region show more images of animals, human figures and abstracts image (Jean Clottes, 2008). Meanwhile, the cave paintings produced in the Painted Cave is more than a narrative image that has a story or ritual ceremony that the ancient people tried to make.

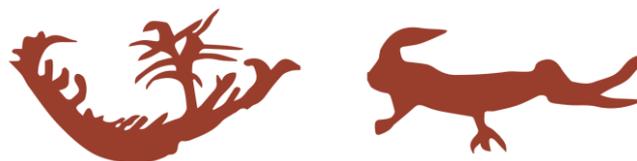


Photo 3: Two images from the Painted Cave panel, showing 'dead ship' with 'tree of life' that arose from the boat, and the crocodile image.
Source: Retrieved and modified from black and white images from the Harrison archive.

The above image shows the preliminary effort by previous researchers in identifying the appearance of the resulting image based on the preliminary record by Tom Harrison and Barbara Harrison. This effort obviously assists in future research and has given a slightly clearer picture of the image. The image should be recorded and re-painted using digital software. Thus, the reproduced image is more solid and also clear.



Photo 4: Thick line is clearly applied to form the shape of the boat in the image.

Source: Harrison Archives, Sarawak Museum.

The image above shows a boat that is shown with a figure that appears to be rowing. This iconic image was produced using thick line technique in order to display the picture of the boat and the shape of the figure. If examined, the appearance of the figure appears to be rowing forward.

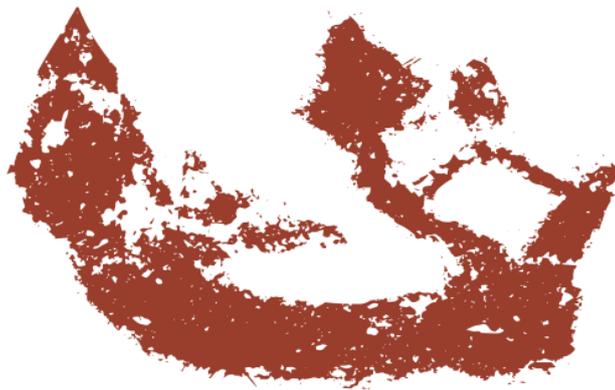


Photo 5: Line element app the thickness is clearly visible in the form of boats and figures on the image.

In the early stages of the research on the Painted Cave, images on the cave walls were only decorative and only a few records were found in related to the cave paintings. In fact, the early track record by Paul Kerek in the writing of Szabo, Piper and Barker also can not be identified. The record is particularly valuable because the image is still clear at the moment and the sketch is the most important source in the documentation of national heritage treasury efforts.

Sources from Archives and Department of Museums as well as materials from the Sarawak Museum and Niah Archaeological Museum used to rediscover the 'hidden image'. Based on these sources, research on images can be done. Although the resources are minimal, but because of the sophistication of today's technology, various digital software can be use in this research based on the visual arts aspect, especially in identifying the faded image in the cave paintings.

In the context of the cave painting on the Painted Cave wall, space and image unity make it clear that there is a meaning to be highlighted other than the death ceremony. As suggested by Ballard et al. (2004: 398), in the Painted Cave, every pattern clearly revolves around the death ship, and the movement of people and abstract-featured image.

According to Muliyadi Mahamood (1995: 47) nature has become the source of the idea and inspiration of the artist for ages. The perfection of the creation is inspired and presented through various perceptions and approaches that vary according to religion, age, race, culture and belief. The task of the artist is to appreciate and analyze something like nature and then translate it according to the needs, expertise and each artist approaches. The two main approaches to which they are practiced; Firstly, the painter portrays the beauty of nature through a natural and panoramic landscape. Secondly, the painter captures the relationship of nature's heritage with positive and negative attitudes, traits and actions. Hence, the pros and cons of human beings will influence the condition of this natural heritage. Current cave paintings have survived many threats, but the deterioration of the paintings has been identified and caused by increased light, humidity change, temperature rise and carbon dioxide exposure especially on sites where tourists visit. In addition, other factors of nature also add to the deterioration of the painting. Outdoor organisms come to the site through visitors who visit and leave biodegradable debris on the site, which will create a fungus for reproduction, bacteria and other micro-organisms and these small particles can grow on the paint itself.

Several cave paintings have been photographed throughout modern history. An effort must be made to find previous pictures for learning activities. This effort is to identify changes to the cave painting image. Photography techniques are important to see the changes that occur to the cave paintings. The photographs should be recorded and compared with the previous to identify if there was a change in the cave painting.

VI. CONCLUSION

Culture is often discussed in terms of its features without referring to the understanding of the system. It is assumed that the system association exists in this culture and attributes of relevance has been found in certain situations and has been described in the form of general goals for survival and for satisfaction. This is followed by a cultural description in terms of an important tendency, the norm or pattern that is considered ideal about how something should be done. The assumption is that most people have the behavior they are supposed to have. Otherwise, the culture studied will be short of affinity and in the long run the culture will be lacking in persistence to survive. The discovery of this cave painting along with a variety of ancient jewelry from snails, beads, ceramics and boats artefact believed to be the coffin that was meant for supplies to the deceased, proved to be regarded as a ritual medium for survivors in relation to the deceased. This shows how important the role of cave painting in the socio-cultural life of the past (Achmad Sopandi, 2003: 26).

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