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Petroglyph hints at ancient link

Isle image traced far afield

By Jan TenBruggencate
Advertiser Kauai Bureau

A rare Hawaiian petroglyph design showing a side-view of a crouching human figure may have links to New Guinea, where a recent archaeological dig has turned up Polynesian artifacts, according to an expert in Hawaiian rock art.

The design, which also is found in Southeast Asia and other parts of Polynesia, suggests an artistic link among the peoples of these regions, Ed Stasack said. It suggests Hawaiians inherited an enduring cultural image, which they recorded on local stones wherever their voyaging canoes went, Stasack said.

Petroglyphs are images carved onto rock. In Hawaii they can take the form of human stick figures, canoes, animals or simple dots, circles and other geometric designs.

The crouching figure is extremely rare. Only six are known: four from the Big Island and one each on Oahu and Kauai. Stasack said the figure's meaning is unclear, but guesses it may be associated with a goddess, La'ila'i, who is referred to in Martha Beckwith's translation of the Hawaiian creation chant "The Kumulipo" as "the woman who sat sideways." La'ila'i was known as the mother of both gods and humans.

Archaeologists in Hawaii find the issue intriguing, but hardly a certain link.

"I think it's a stretch. It's just looking at one trait in isolation," said Paul Cleghorn of the archaeology firm Pacific Legacy.

The New Guinea work is being performed by John Edward Terrell, an archeologist

with the Field Museum in Chicago. He surprised the anthropology world last year when he announced having found pieces of Lapita pottery — normally associated with early Polynesian societies — at Aitape on the Sepik coast of New Guinea.

Lapita-style pottery has been found in several areas of the southeast Pacific centered around New Caledonia, and at ancient sites in Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. Small pieces have been found in the Marquesas, but none in Hawaii.

Terrell said the coastal people of northern New Guinea have some genetic links to Polynesians, along with language similarities.

"This does not mean, however, that Polynesians came from northern New Guinea," Terrell said, "but only that the people who left Melanesia to settle Polynesia (about 3,000 or so years ago came from what Geoff Irwin at the University of Auckland has called 'the voyaging corridor' of islands linking Indonesia with Melanesia as far out as the Solomons."

Stasack, retired chairman of the University of Hawaii Art Department and co-author of the authoritative "Hawaiian Petroglyphs," said he had already noted the similarity in appearance between the Hawaiian crouching images and wooden bas-relief images found among the Asmat people of southwestern New Guinea.

The crouching figures may be the rarest of Hawaiian petroglyphs, Stasack said. The most recent one, found

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New Guinea and Hawaiian petroglyphs

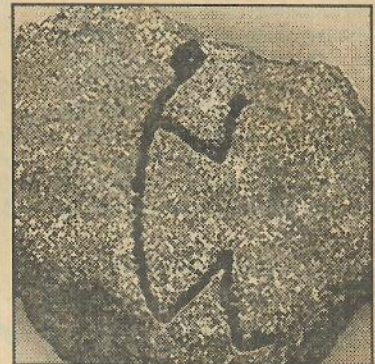
The recurrent images of crouching human figures in petroglyphs in Hawaii and bas-relief carved images from the Asmat people of New Guinea raise questions about cultural connections between the two areas. Similar images are also found in Polynesian islands throughout the Pacific.

NEW GUINEA



Asmat, New Guinea

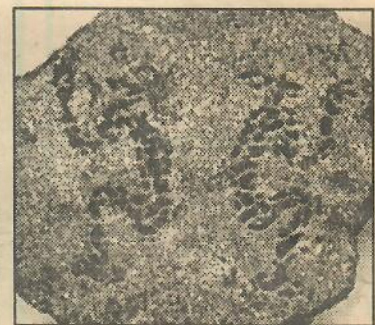
HAWAII



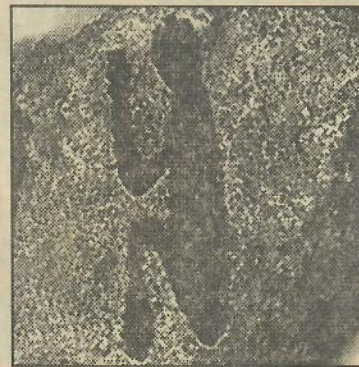
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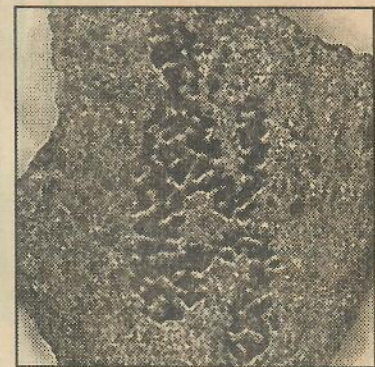
Asmat, New Guinea



Moanalua, Oahu



Asmat, New Guinea



Wailua, Kauai

Photo illustration by Greg Taylor/Honolulu Advertiser

Petroglyph: Hawaii design seen in New Guinea

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in a cave at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, was next to an archaeological site dated at 100 to 300 A.D., one of the oldest radiocarbon-dated sites in Hawaii.

"The implication is that it may have been made by early settlers, while the image was still fresh in the mind of the petroglyph maker," Stasack said.

The Kauai and Oahu figures are bas-relief, meaning the image itself is raised above the surrounding rock. Instead of

scratching the image into the rock, which is more common, the makers of these images pecked out the background.

The Oahu crouching figure is on display in the courtyard of Bishop Museum. The Kauai figure has disappeared, Stasack said, and may be in someone's secret collection.

Cleghorn, of Pacific Legacy, said none of the crouching figure petroglyphs has been adequately dated. Bishop Museum anthropologist Toni Han said it is even possible they were made by Hawaiians who trav-

eled and saw the images in other areas after European contact.

Han, cultural resource specialist at Bishop Museum, said she also is wary of inferring too much from the appearance of similar images in areas with cultures so different and settled so far apart in time.

"There's quite a bit of distance between New Guinea and Hawaii, and there's probably 3,000 years," Han said. "Most anthropologists reason that the Polynesians came out of that part of the world, but I don't know. It's possible (that there is

a link), but there is a big temporal gap."

Stasack said he isn't looking for a direct connection between New Guinea and Hawaii. He reasons that the single design reappears in island group after island group — many of which had Polynesian connections — representing a Polynesian link to New Guinea.

"I think it's interesting that we continue to follow this shape throughout the Pacific. It follows the hop, skip and jump (of the Polynesian voyagers) across the ocean," he said.