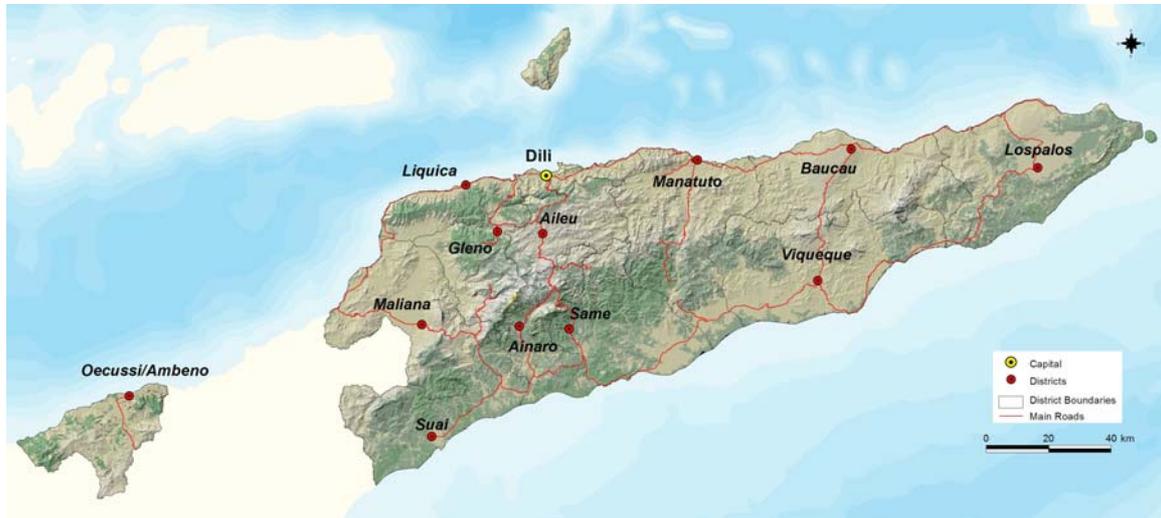


Excavations at Bui Ceri Uato Mane rock shelter, Baucau (East Timor) 2005 Fieldwork Report

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After last systematic work carried out by Ian Glover in the sixties (Glover 1986), the newborn nation of East Timor (Timor-Leste) has seen increasing archaeological activity since 2000, after a joint-team of ANU and James Cook University resumed fieldwork in the country. Since then, many new sites have been recorded, ranging from shell middens and rock shelters to rock art sites (O'Connor, Spriggs & Veth 2002; Spriggs & O'Connor 2003).

My own research in East Timor² has commenced last year, when a series of rock shelters were recorded and some test pitted. The main purpose of that first field season was to find new sites and assess the preservation of macro-charcoal remains in them, in order to document the early use of plants and the introduction of agriculture in East Timor.

After preliminary laboratorial analyses earlier this year, it was decided to conduct more extensive fieldwork at one of the sites initially surveyed. In June this year a 2 square meters test pit was thus initiated at Bui Ceri Uato Mane, a 30 m large by 6 m deep rock shelter in the Baucau region, located 187 meters above current sea level. The excavation, which reached a depth of around 2.5 meters, was done by 5 cm artificial spits and according to the natural stratigraphy.

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1. Map showing the location of BCUM



2. Main entrance to BCUM



3. Excavation detail



4. Excavation detail

All excavated sediment was transported to the nearby village of Osso Ua, where it was subject to a process of bucket floatation and sieved through fine chiffon cloth <0.25 mm (Fairbairn 2005). Charcoal and seeds thus recovered were dried on site and later sorted and bagged.

The sediment left was wet sieved with a 1-millimetre sieve and also dried and sorted on site, the materials being separately bagged.

Sediment samples from all spits were recovered in order to conduct targeted pollen and phytolith analyses.

Another two smaller test pits of one square meter each were dug close to the Northern entrance of the rock shelter. All sediment from these two test pits was dry sieved with a 1mm sieve and charcoal recovered for further analyses.



5. Flotation process



7. Wet sieving

6. Charcoal samples drying



8. Test pit at Northern entrance

A small reference collection of plant specimens and fruits was also collected from around the excavated site. This was done with technical advice from Dr. Lyn Craven, from CSIRO, and after careful storage the specimens were sent to that Institution.



9. Collecting plant specimens

Upon arrival of the archaeological materials at the ANU, analyses will be conducted, with special emphasis on microscopic and SEM analyses of macro-botanical remains. Together with targeted pollen and phytolith studies, and direct dating of charcoal from the excavated deposit (both by conventional and AMS dating methods), it is hoped to make a contribution to our understanding of the origins of agriculture in East Timor, as well as to what crops were imported or locally developed.

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