



Figure

Not on display

Title/Description: Figure

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Limestone

Measurements: h. 580 mm

Accession Number: 1095

Production Place: Celebes, Pacific, South Sulawesi

Cultural Group: Matana

This highly schematic figure terminates below the hips in a rectangular-section tenon for fixing into a support of some kind. The flat oval head has circular eyes, prominent asymmetrical ears and a rectangular mouth. The figure was reported by the vendor to have come from near Lake Matana in Sulawesi in 1991, where it was found buried in the ground and encrusted with laterite, together with seven other similar figures.

Although nothing is known for certain about the age and function of these pieces, there are parallels in Sulawesi for such images in stone (Kruyt, 1938: pls. 111-13), terracotta and wood. The well-known large megalithic statues of Lake Posso, Napu and the Bada Valley in Central Sulawesi are most probably funerary monuments. The *tau tail* of the Toraja, funerary figurines of high-ranking dead persons who watch over the rice fields of their descendants from the balconies in front of their rock-cut tombs (Nooy-Palm, 1988), also belong to the same general category. All these are almost certainly representations of ancestors or ancestral spirit figures, and comparable types of image are found not only in Sulawesi but in many other islands in central Indonesia and the Philippines and even among the Austronesian-speaking Jarai 'montagnard' people of the central Vietnamese Highlands (Doumes, 1988: fig. 22).

In Sumba there are occasional carved stone ancestral figures among the more common penji or stone banners, which have a similar base plug for mounting on the massive stone tombs (Hoskins, 1988: fig. 144). Other examples of stone figures come from Flores, Sumatra, Nias and elsewhere (Barbier and Newton, 1988: *passim*), although all of these differ from those found in Sulawesi in many details of style.

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).
