



Australian Heritage Database

Places for Decision

Class : Indigenous

Identification

List:	National Heritage List
Name of Place:	Wurrwurrwuy
Other Names:	
Place ID:	106088
File No:	7/04/004/0008
Nomination Date:	28/01/2009
Principal Group:	Aboriginal Art Site

Status

Legal Status:	29/01/2009 - Nominated place
Admin Status:	15/03/2013 - Assessment by AHC completed

Assessment

Recommendation:	
Assessor's Comments:	
Other Assessments:	:

Location

Nearest Town:	Yirrkala
Distance from town (km):	10
Direction from town:	SE
Area (ha):	1.41
Address:	Yirrkala, NT, 0880
LGA:	Unincorporated NT NT

Location/Boundaries:

About 1.41ha, 10km south east of Yirrkala, being those parts of Northern Territory Portions 1044 and 1692 designated Northern Territory Portion 6647(A) and enclosed by a fence line located on a series of straight lines connecting in succession the Map Grid of Australia Zone 53 coordinates listed hereunder:

Easting (metres) Northing (metres)

1. 710097 8636036
2. 710131 8636024
3. 710181 8636007
4. 710223 8636049
5. 710262 8636086
6. 710226 8636124
7. 710186 8636159
8. 710145 8636123
9. 710105 8636083
10. 710102 8636042
- 1 710097 8636036

Assessor's Summary of Significance:

The stone pictures at Wurrwurrwuy might be nationally significant as a rare example of stones arranged to depict secular subjects rather than the arranged stones being associated with ceremony and the sacred. The stone pictures depict a range of subjects including Aboriginal camps, fish traps and images relating to the Macassan trepang industry including *praus*, canoes, the stone fireplaces where trepang were boiled and Macassan houses. The depictions of *praus* at Wurrwurrwuy show the internal arrangements of the vessels, which is rare in Aboriginal depictions of *praus* in any medium. The creators of the stone pictures would have acquired their knowledge of the internal arrangement of *praus* during visits to, or voyages on, such vessels.

Draft Values:

Criterion	Values	Rating
B Rarity	The stone pictures at Wurrwurrwuy might have outstanding heritage value to the nation as a rare example of stones arranged to depict utilitarian and secular objects rather than the arranged stones being associated with ceremony and the sacred. It is also a place with rare depictions of the internal arrangements in <i>praus</i> . This is knowledge that the creators would have acquired either during visits to or voyages on such vessels.	AT

Historic Themes:**Nominator's Summary of Significance:**

Beginning in the 1700s and ending in 1907, Macassans from the Celebes in Indonesia started coming to the shores of northern Australia. Each year they arrived at the beginning of the wet season between December and January to fish for and process trepang, leaving at the beginning of the dry season between April and June. The trepang was traded into China.

Macassan camps and trepang processing sites have been recorded along the coast from the Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory to the Kimberley in Western Australia. These places show that the Macassans came to Australia but provide no information about the relationship between the Macassans and Aboriginal people. We know that some Aboriginal people, and in particular the Yolngu of Arnhem Land, adopted some elements of Macassan material culture and incorporated other elements into their ceremonies. Examples of the former included the Yolngu lipalipa or dugout canoe which is based on small Macassan outrigger canoes, while examples of the latter include representations of Macassan anchors used in Yolngu ceremonial sand pictures.

At Wurrwurrwuy there are stone pictures of Macassan *praus*, canoes, houses, fireplaces where trepang were boiled, trepang drying houses, a house for storing wood and stones for sharpening iron knives. There are also pictures of an Aboriginal fish trap and Aboriginal dwellings. Two of the pictures of *praus* show details of the internal arrangement of these vessels.

When Macknight and Gray recorded the site in 1967 two Aboriginal informants, Munggurawuy and Mawalan, were able to explain how the divisions within the pictures of the *praus* represented different parts of the vessel: the crews quarters, the galley, the eating space, the store and the water tank. They also provided names for the different parts of *praus*, the rudder, bowsprit and the tripod mast with its sail and rigging. These pictures show that Yolngu visited trepang sites and spent enough time on *praus* to learn the various parts of the vessels and where the crew lived and ate. This is consistent with historical records showing that Aboriginal people travelled in *praus* to the Celebes and more distant ports like Singapore.

The stone pictures at Wurrwurrwuy are of outstanding heritage value because they tell the story of contact between Yolngu and Macassans in the 1700 and 1800s. There is a greater diversity of Macassan material culture recorded at Wurrwurrwuy than the Macassan material culture recorded in rock art. The site is also rare because there are detailed oral traditions about it, which include evidence that Yolngu adopted Macassan words for different parts of praus into their vocabulary. These stone arrangements are unusual because, unlike most Aboriginal stone arrangements, they are pictures of historical objects rather than symbols or sacred images.

Description:

The stone pictures at Wurrwurrwuy that depict aspects of the Macassan trepang industry lie on an open rocky shelf about ten kilometres south east of Yirrkala in Eastern Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. The area is bounded to the north by a small creek: on the west by a strip of dense coastal vine thicket and to the east and south by the sea. The vegetation on the shelf is low grass and stunted shrubs.

The stone pictures cover an area of about 80 metres by 70 metres. They are divided into three groups with a few outlying features. The group of pictures at the southern end of the site mainly depicts Macassan subjects in simple outlines. The northern group also depicts Macassan subjects, but the style is different, with stones of different sizes used to give weight to parts of the pictures. The western group comprises a mixture of Macassan and Aboriginal subjects.

Analysis:

Criterion (a): The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's cultural history;

Macassans began to visit the northern Australian coast before 1650 (Tacon et al. 2010). By 1750 they had established a trepang processing industry which supplied this delicacy to the Chinese market (Macknight 1972, 1976, 1986, 2011). The trepang industry is important in the course of Australia's cultural history as it is the first export industry to be established on the continent and for the first time draws Australia into a broader regional economy. The resultant interactions between Aboriginal people and Indonesians in Arnhem Land and on the adjacent islands led to changes in Aboriginal subsistence economies and exchange networks.

Evidence for this industry is provided by the distribution of trepang processing sites on the Kimberley (Crawford 1968, 2001; Morwood and Hobbs 1997), the Arnhem Land and Groote Eylandt (Macknight 1976: Ch 5) coasts. The pottery in these sites and the distribution of tamarind trees, an exotic species, provide evidence for the presence of Macassans on the north Australian coast.

Interactions between Macassans and Aboriginal people in the Kimberley appear to have been different to the interactions in Arnhem Land. Relationships in the Kimberley appear to have been hostile and there is little evidence that Aboriginal people were heavily engaged in the trepang industry (Australian Heritage Council 2010). Anthropologists have long recognised, however, that in Arnhem Land interactions with Macassans led to changes in Aboriginal material culture (Warner 1932), ceremonies and song cycles (Thompson 1949; Berndt and Berndt 1954; Russell 2004).

Recent research on the effect of Macassans on Aboriginal society in Arnhem Land and the adjacent coastal islands has focused on sites occupied by Aborigines in the past (Mitchell 1996, 2000; Clarke 2000a, 2000b; May et al. 2010) and Aboriginal rock art (Clarke and Frederick 2006; Tacon et al. 2010). Comparisons of the contents of middens on the Coburg peninsula showed that the Aboriginal economy changed with the Macassan trepang industry. Mitchell (1996) found that middens which accumulated after the arrival of Macassans contain a greater

number of dugong and turtle remains than earlier shell middens and relates this to the use of dugout canoes and steel heads on fishing spears. Dugout canoes were adopted from Macassans and replaced the earlier Aboriginal bark canoes, and steel and iron were important goods obtained from the Macassans. Mitchell also found an increased amount of exotic stone in middens that accumulated during Macassan times which suggests that trade between Aboriginal groups on the coast and the interior expanded at this time (Mitchell 2000). Research on Aboriginal sites on Groote Eylandt also suggests changes to Aboriginal economies and settlements after the start of the trepang industry (Clarke 2000a, 2000b). Once Macassans started to come to the island, Aboriginal people occupied new sites close to the sea. Their use of shellfish also changed with a greater reliance on mudflat species and an increased range of shellfish being taken. The Macassan period Aboriginal middens also contain a range of introduced material including glass and pottery.

Research on rock art in the Wellington Ranges in Arnhem Land has shown that Macassan praus were probably sailing off the northern Australian coast before 1650 which is much earlier than previously thought (Taçon et al. 2010). Clarke and Fredrick (2006) have looked at the interaction between Aboriginal people and Macassans on Groote Eylandt through the depictions of praus in the rock art. While Macassans were processing trepang on Groote Eylandt, the masts of the praus would have been lowered. They found that all but one of the paintings of praus on Groote Eylandt have raised masts and sails that are set. Many of the paintings also show human figures at the top of the mast. They relate this to the Macassan practice of having a prayer-man climb up the mast and chant when it is raised for a voyage. They suggest that the figures on top of the mast and the sails emphasise the social importance of the arrival and departure of Macassans.

Wurrwurrwuy lacks physical evidence from the processing of trepang and there are no middens at the place that show the way that Aboriginal people modified their economy to accommodate interactions with Macassans. Unlike depictions of praus in rock art, the stone pictures at Wurrwurrwuy show the division of space inside praus and this is evidence for Aboriginal knowledge of the way that praus were organised. The stone pictures at Wurrwurrwuy provide important information about the interactions between Aboriginal people and Macassans. However, Wurrwurrwuy does not meet the national heritage threshold under criterion (a) when compared with the Macassan trepang processing sites (Macknight 1976: 71-74), Aboriginal midden deposits (Clarke 2000a, 2000b) and rock art (Clarke and Fredrick 2006) on Groote Eylandt and similar sites on the Coburg Peninsula (Macknight 1976: 62-70; Mitchell 1976, 2000) although the place has state heritage value.

Wurrwurrwuy does not meet national heritage threshold under criterion (a).

Criterion (b): the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's cultural history;

The stone pictures at Wurrwurrwuy are a very rare example of stone arrangements used to depict utilitarian objects and secular places. The three depictions of Macassan praus, one highly schematic, are exceptionally rare images showing the internal arrangement of these vessels. These three depictions are an expression of the knowledge that Aboriginal people would have acquired either during visits to or voyages on praus.

Aboriginal stone arrangements occur everywhere in Australia (McCarthy 1940; Massola 1963; Campbell and Hossfeld 1966; Rowlands and Rowlands 1966, 1985; Stockton and Rogers 1979; MacIntyre-Tamwoy and Harrison 2004; Bowdler 2005; Ross 2011). They come in a variety of forms and may have a number of different purposes. There appear to be three simple forms of

stone arrangements: monoliths, heaps or cairns, and circles. At some places these simple forms are combined into more complex arrangements (McCarthy 1940; Rowlands and Rowlands 1966; Ross 2011). The purpose of Aboriginal stone arrangements is varied and includes their role as sacred sites associated with particular creation beings, as totemic sites associated with particular species and their use in a range of ceremonial activities including initiation, death and increase ceremonies (McCarthy 1940; Bowdler 2005). Aboriginal people may describe a particular stone arrangement as a particular animal species, but the form of the arrangement does not normally match the form of the species. For example, the Kantyu people in Cape York describe a line of elongate stones, up to three feet high, set on end along a ridge, as a file of ancestral kangaroos: buck, doe, and young (McCarthy 1940: 185). Examples of symbolic and totemic stone arrangements also occur in Arnhem Land and on the adjoining islands. For example, McCarthy (1953a, 1953b) describes stone arrangements on Groote Eylandt and the Ancestral Creation Beings that they symbolise. This includes parallel lines of stones that represent a pathway that an ancestral snake followed as well as arrangements that represent other totemic ancestors.

The only known sites with stones arranged as naturalistic or highly schematised depictions of non-sacred or secular subjects are Wurrwurrwuy and a site on Hardy Island (Macknight and Gray 1970). The images at Wurrwurrwuy depict Macassan praus, two types of Macassan canoes, houses with multiple rooms, fireplaces where trepang was boiled, trepang drying houses, a house for storing wood, and stones for sharpening iron knives. There are also pictures of an Aboriginal fish trap and Aboriginal dwellings. The site on Hardy Island has a less diverse range of images. Here the stone arrangements depict the lines of fireplaces used for boiling trepang. There are, also, some arrangements that can no longer be deciphered. This is a very restricted range of images when compared with those at Wurrwurrwuy.

While the stone pictures at Wurrwurrwuy are a rare example of stones being arranged to depict Macassan subjects, images of these subjects also occur in the rock art of Arnhem Land and in modern bark paintings. Macassan images are found in most parts of Arnhem Land and the adjoining islands, including the Wellington Ranges (Macknight 1976: plate 12; Taçon et al. 2010; May et al. 2010), Groote Eylandt (McCarthy 1960; Clarke and Fredrick 2006), Bickerton Island (Turner 1973) and Chasm Island (McCarthy 1960). The subject matter of this art is broad and includes praus, canoes, a possible smoke house and knives.

Praus are one of the more common items of Macassan material culture found in rock paintings. A detailed analysis of prau paintings on Groote Eylandt by Clarke and Frederick (2006) identified a consistent set of features in the images: rudders, decking masts, sails and rigging. They also found that all of these praus except one had their sails set, and that the images often include a human figure at the top of the mast. They point out that when the mast was raised a prayer-man would climb to the top and chant. They suggest that the figures on top of the mast and the sails emphasise the social importance of the arrival and departure of Macassans.

These images are very different from the three representations of the praus at Wurrwurrwuy. The most complex depictions shows a side view of a prau where a rudder can be seen but the mast and sails are not represented (Macknight and Gray 1970: 12). The remaining two depictions are very schematic with one having a roughly pyramidal form and the other a rectangular form. The prau shaped like a pyramid includes a mast and a line of stones that represents rigging attached to a sail (Macknight and Gray 1970: 16). The stone lines in all three representations divide the inside of the figure into compartments representing the crew's quarters, the galley, the food store, and where the water was stored. This form of representation maps the internal arrangements of the prau and demonstrates a familiarity with sleeping and eating arrangements on these vessels, which is a very different depiction to that found in the rock art.

The stone pictures at Wurrwurrwuy are of outstanding heritage value to the nation as a rare example of stones arranged to depict utilitarian and secular objects rather than being associated with ceremony and the sacred. It is also a place with rare depictions of praus showing the internal arrangement of these vessels. This is knowledge that the creators would have acquired either during visits to or voyages on such vessels.

Wurrwurrwuy may have outstanding heritage value to the nation for criterion (b).

Criterion (c): the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's cultural history;

Macknight and Gray (1970) worked with the Aboriginal custodians of the place, Munggurrawuy and Mawalan, when they recorded the place. The Aboriginal custodians provided comprehensive information about the history of the site and the meaning of each stone picture. It is unlikely that the place has the potential to yield more information that will contribute to an understanding of Aboriginal-Macassan interactions.

Wurrwurrwuy does not meet national heritage threshold under criterion (c).

Criterion (e): the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group;

The stone pictures at Wurrwurrwuy are actively promoted on the internet as a place tourists can visit to learn more about Aboriginal-Macassan interactions in the past (see for example http://en.travelnt.com/search/product-detail.aspx?product_id=9001646; <http://www.about-australia.com/attractions/wurrwurrwuy-garanhan-macassan-beach-interpretive-walk/>). While these sites refer to the history told by the pictures and the uniqueness of the stone arrangements, there is no mention of their beauty. Similarly, Yolngu talk about the pictures being made as part of history and do not refer to the beauty of the images (Wurrwurrwuy National Heritage nomination).

Wurrwurrwuy does not meet the national heritage threshold under criterion (e).

Criterion (i): the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance as part of Indigenous tradition;

The importance of the site is demonstrated by the photographs in Macknight and Gray (1970) which show that the custodians had kept the site clear of weeds, major growth, and obstruction. Yolngu custodians have not described any traditions, customs or beliefs associated with the site. Rather, Yolngu elders made the pictures to remind their people of the past Macassan presence (Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation 1999:24).

Wurrwurrwuy does not meet national heritage threshold under criterion (i).

History:

During his epic circumnavigation of Australia in 1802-1803 Matthew Flinders (1814: Chapters 7 and 8) found bamboo frameworks, lines of stone fireplaces, pieces of cloth and the stumps of

trees cut down with metal axes, at a number of places along the coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria. He interpreted this as evidence of Chinese visits to this part of Australia. On 16 February 1803, he met a fleet of Macassan praus anchored in the waters off the English Company Islands group. It was here that he learnt from Pobassoo, the captain of the fleet, that Macassan praus came to the coast of northern Australia every year on the north-west monsoon winds to collect and dry trepang or *bêche de mer* which they then sold to the Chinese (Flinders 1814: Chapter 9).

Interactions between Aboriginal people and Macassans

Flinders' encounter with Pobassoo is the first Australian record of the north Australian trepang industry. Macassans had probably started to visit the northern Australian coast before 1650 (Taçon et al. 2010) but Dutch East India Company documents suggest that the intensive catching and processing of trepang for the Chinese market probably began in about 1750 (Macknight 1986, 2011: 133-134). Macassan involvement in the industry ended in 1906 when the South Australian Government, which administered the Northern Territory at that time, restricted the issuing of licenses to locally owned vessels.

The distribution of tamarind trees (an exotic species), trepang processing sites and the depiction of Macassan praus and other items of Macassan material culture in rock art provide direct material evidence for the Macassan trepang industry. Trepang processing sites are found on the Kimberley coast (Crawford 1968, 2001; Morwood and Hobbs 1997) and on the the Arnhem Land and Groote Eylandt coasts (Macknight 1976: Chapter 5). While depictions of praus and items of Macassan material culture are not unusual in the rock art of Arnhem Land (Taçon et al. 2010; May et al. 2010) and offshore islands like Groote Eylandt (McCarthy 1960; Clarke and Frederick 2006), Chasm Island (McCarthy 1960) and Bickerton Island (Turner 1973), such images are rare in the Kimberley (O'Connor and Arrow 2008). These data and Aboriginal oral tradition suggest that the relationship between Macassans and Aborigines in the Kimberley was different to the relationship between Macassans and Yolngu with the former relationship characterised by hostility (Australian Heritage Council 2010).

Aboriginal people in Arnhem adopted a number of items of Macassan material culture (Warner 1932; Thompson 1949; Berndt and Berndt 1954; Russell 2004) including dugout canoes and iron. This transformed Aboriginal economies so they had an increased marine focus. This is shown by the large numbers of dugong and turtle bones in middens on the Coburg peninsula that date from the time of the Macassan trepang industry (Mitchell 1996) and an increased marine focus on Groote Eylandt (Clarke 2000a, 2000b). There is also evidence for changes in the way Aboriginal people used space and evidence for changes in their exchange networks (Mitchell 2000; Clarke 2000a, 2000b; May et al. 2010).

Aboriginal people living in Arnhem Land incorporated the memory of Macassans into their social and cultural life. For example, Macassans and their voyages are important in some ceremonies and song cycles where songs may reference Muslim prayers (Thompson 1949; Berndt and Berndt 1954; Russell 2004; Macknight 2011). Oral tradition also provides accounts of Aboriginal people working for Macassans on trepang sites and undertaking voyages on praus to the Celebes and further afield (Berndt and Berndt 1954:43, 51-53; Macknight and Gray 1970). The close relationship between Macassans and Aborigines is reflected in the large number of Macassan borrowed words found in Aboriginal languages in Arnhem Land and on Groote Eylandt which includes words for different parts of praus and the rigging on these vessels. Aboriginal people in these areas use the Macassan names for some parts of praus and their rigging that are depicted in rock art (Turner 1974: 54, 180-181).

The stone pictures at Wurrwurrwuy

The stone pictures at Wurrwurrwuy are part of the story of Macassan Aboriginal interactions in Arnhem Land. They lie within the territory of the Lamomirri clan but on the death of the last responsible Lamomirri man they were taken into the custody of the Gumatj clan. A father and son, Yumbul and Dhatalamirri, created the pictures, probably in the second half of the nineteenth century (Macknight and Gray: 1970). Oral histories recorded in 1967 indicate that Yumbul, possibly with the aid of some of his fellow clansmen, made the first pictures. The site was entrusted to his second son, Dhatalamirri, who added further pictures at a later date.

The stone pictures created by Yumbul and Dhatalamirri depict Macassan praus, canoes, houses with multiple rooms, fireplaces where trepang were boiled, trepang drying houses, a house for storing wood, and stones for sharpening iron knives. There are also pictures of an Aboriginal fish trap and Aboriginal dwellings that may not have been made by the father and son. When Macknight and Grey (1970: 5) recorded the site in 1967 two Aboriginal informants, Munggurawuy (a Gumatj custodian) and Mawalan (a relative of Yumbul and Dhatalamirri), were able to explain how the divisions within the pictures of the praus represented different parts of the vessel: the crews' quarters, the galley, the eating space, the store and the water tank. They also provided Macassan names for the different parts of praus, the rudder, bowsprit and the tripod mast with its sail and rigging. These pictures show that Yolngu visited trepang sites and spent enough time on praus to learn the various parts of the vessels and where the crew lived and ate. This is consistent with historical records showing that Aboriginal people travelled in praus to the Celebes (Berndt and Berndt 1954: 54-58; Macknight 1972: 286), a trip that was made by Munggurawuy's father (McKnight and Gray 1970: 6). The custodians told Macknight and Gray (1970: 37) that Wurrwurrwuy was a legacy from the past with no sacred associations. They felt that it was useful as it provided younger men with some idea of the way of life of Macassans who had come to the area to collect trepang. The pictures are a permanent reminder of Yolngu knowledge about this past.

Condition:

When first recorded in the 1960s there was some minor damage to the site from buffalo mainly at the southern end. There is no evidence for subsequent deterioration. The site has recently been fenced and paths and interpretive signs have been installed. The place is maintained by Dhimurru Corporation Aboriginal Rangers.

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