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## Reconstructing the Quaternary landscape evolution and climate history of western Flores: an environmental and chronological context for an archaeological site

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**Reconstructing the Quaternary landscape evolution  
and climate history of western Flores: an  
environmental and chronological context for an  
archaeological site**

*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
award of the degree*

**Doctor of Philosophy**

from

**UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

by

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**2006**

## **CERTIFICATION**

I, Kira E. Westaway, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Kira E. Westaway

7<sup>th</sup> July 2006

## ***Abstract***

The recent discovery of a late-surviving new human species, *Homo floresiensis*, in western Flores has accentuated our lack of understanding of the history of the genus *Homo* in Asia and of the environmental challenges that may have influenced these hominins. Western Flores contains a wealth of archaeological and palaeoanthropological material with far-reaching implications for human evolution and for Indonesian, Australian and world archaeology. But the interpretation of this evidence has been hindered by a limited Quaternary context and age control for complex stratigraphies in a region of great geological instability and widespread environmental change.

Liang Bua in western Flores is a key site in the Indonesian archaeological record, providing evidence of cave occupation by *Homo floresiensis* and *Homo sapiens*, and human evolution and dispersal on the eastern side of Wallace's Line. In this study, archaeologically-relevant information has been gleaned from an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of this site, and has established the timing of key events, such as the first exposure of the cave and the nature of, and influences on, human occupation of the cave. This approach incorporated studies of landscape evolution, river terrace and cave development, sedimentology of cave sediments, palaeoclimate signals in speleothems, and a dating strategy utilising novel approaches to luminescence dating.

The research reported here provides a chronological and environmental backdrop to the human occupation of Liang Bua. A maximum age of cave occupation is shown to correspond to the time of cave exposure (~190 ka), which also represents a minimum age for the human habitation of the area. In addition, this study has established an age range for the occupation of the cave by *Homo floresiensis* (95–11 ka), the time of the most intensive phases of occupation (74–61 and 17–11 ka), the depositional age of the holotype skeleton (36–14 ka), and the age of the oldest human skeletal remains found on Flores (95–74 ka). Through the integration of techniques, a framework for terrace development and landscape evolution has been developed to establish the Quaternary

setting in which the cave was formed and evolved. These techniques have also defined a sequence of geomorphological and sedimentological changes in the cave, enabling the reconstruction of the occupational environment. At least two zones of occupation have been identified: a zone established ~74–61 ka, and a later zone established ~18 ka.

The environmental backdrop for the arrival and dispersal of humans throughout Indonesia has been established via a palaeoclimatic and palaeoenvironmental analysis of speleothem records. These records contain evidence of multiple wet phases (110–98, 82–65, 49–39 and 17–5 ka) and a flourishing fauna. The timing of these wet phases correlate with evidence for channel and flowstone formation, episodic erosion events, and the most intensive periods of occupation in the cave. There is also evidence for a prolonged period of reduced rainfall (36–17 ka) in an organic-poor environment, the timing of which correlates with evidence of reduced erosion, pooling and less intense occupation. These correlations suggest that the occupational success of *Homo floresiensis* in this area was related to the contemporaneous environmental conditions, which, combined with the evidence for at least two volcanic events (one of which may have forced human migration), establish a link between hominids and their environment.

The results of this research indicate the value of using an interdisciplinary approach to investigate and interpret archaeological sites in Southeast Asia. By providing an environmental and chronological context for important archaeological finds, we can develop a better understanding of the prehistory of *Homo* in Asia.

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## *Table of Contents*

Certification.....	<i>i</i>
Abstract.....	<i>iii</i>
Table of Contents.....	<i>v</i>
List of Figures.....	<i>xiii</i>
List of Tables.....	<i>xxi</i>
List of Abbreviations and Symbols.....	<i>xxv</i>
Acknowledgements.....	<i>xxvii</i>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: <i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 The origin and dispersal of the genus <i>Homo</i> .....	1
1.1.1 The Indonesian evidence	1
1.1.2 The Indonesian predicament	3
1.2 The selection of sites to address this problem	4
1.3 Aims and objectives	6
1.4 The originality of this study	6
1.5 Outline.....	7
<b>CHAPTER TWO: <i>The case for an interdisciplinary approach to the Indonesian archaeological record</i></b> .....	<b>9</b>
SECTION I: <i>The importance of the Indonesian Quaternary record</i> .....	9
2.1 Geological significance	10
2.2 Biogeographical significance	11
2.3 Climatic and environmental significance	13
2.4 Archaeological significance.....	18
2.4.1 Worldwide models of human dispersal	18
2.4.2 Human colonisation of Australia	19
2.4.3 Human evolution and dispersal across Indonesia.	20
2.4.4 Indonesian evidence	20

---

---

SECTION II: <i>Problems associated with the interpretation of the Indonesian record</i> .....	22
2.5 Establishing a chronological framework	23
2.6 Lack of Quaternary analysis	24
2.7 Lack of an interdisciplinary approach.....	26
2.7.1 West of Wallace's Line	
2.7.2 East of Wallace's Line	29
SECTION III: <i>Forging links between Quaternary analysis and Archaeology</i> .....	30
SECTION IV: <i>Assessment of potential Quaternary methodologies</i> .....	31
2.8 Landscape evolution.....	31
2.8.1 Tropical karst	32
2.8.2 River terraces	33
2.8.3 Caves and caves sediments	34
2.9 Palaeoclimate indicators in the tropics: speleothems.....	35
2.9.1 Dating of speleothems	36
2.9.2 Speleothems and tropical palaeoclimates	37
2.9.3 Speleothems and tropical bio-productivity	41
2.10 Luminescence dating of a 'volcanic' province.....	43
2.10.1 OSL and TL dating of quartz from a volcanic region	44
2.10.2 OSL and TL dating of feldspars from a volcanic region	45
2.10.3 Potential of red emissions from quartz	46
2.10.4 Applications of luminescence to sediments	48
2.10.4a Luminescence dating of river terraces	48
2.10.4b Luminescence dating of cave sediments in archaeological sites	49
2.10.4c Luminescence dating of archaeologically-relevant issues	50
2.11 SUMMARY	51
<b>CHAPTER THREE: <i>Methodology</i></b> .....	<b>53</b>
3.1 Karst development	53
3.2 Alluvial terraces	54
3.3 Cave morphology	55

---



---

3.4 Autogenic and allogenic cave sediments .....	57
3.4.1 Field analysis	57
3.4.2 Laboratory analysis	58
3.4.2.1 Particle size analysis	58
3.4.2.2 X-ray diffraction	59
3.5 Palaeoclimate analysis of speleothems.....	59
3.5.1 Field techniques	60
3.5.1.1 Selection of suitable caves	60
3.5.1.2 Selection of suitable speleothems	60
3.5.1.3 Sampling in the cave environment	61
3.5.1.4 Drilling equipment and techniques	62
3.5.1.5 Samples for isotopic tests	63
3.5.2 Laboratory techniques	65
3.5.2.1 Cutting the speleothem	65
3.5.2.2 Sampling the speleothems for TIMS U-series dating	66
3.5.2.3 Tests for isotopic equilibrium	66
3.5.2.4 Physical characteristics and growth rate	67
3.5.2.5 Macro-sampling techniques	68
3.5.2.6 Oxygen and carbon isotope techniques	69
3.5.2.7 Fluorescence spectrophotometry	70
3.5.2.8 Scanning of growth layers	71
3.6 TIMS U-series dating.....	72
3.7 Luminescence dating.....	72
3.7.1 Dose rate determination	73
3.7.1.1 Estimating field dose rates	73
3.7.1.2 Estimating field water content variability	74
3.7.1.3 Laboratory assessment of water content	75
3.7.1.4 Estimating the annual dose using high-resolution gamma-ray spectrometry	75
3.7.2 Palaeodose determination	76
3.7.2.1 Field techniques	76
3.7.2.1a Luminescence sampling of sedimentary sections	76
3.7.2.1b Luminescence sampling of concreted sections	77
3.7.2.2 Sample preparation in laboratory conditions	77
3.7.2.3 Chemical treatment	78
3.7.2.4 Sieving	78
3.7.2.5 Mineral separation	78
3.7.2.6 HF etching of quartz grains	79
3.7.2.7 Preparation of discs	79
3.7.2.8 Checks for quartz purity	80
3.7.2.9 Luminescence equipment	80
3.7.2.9a Single-grain OSL laser attachment	81
3.7.2.9b Red-sensitive photomultiplier tube	81
3.7.2.9c Radiation source	82
3.7.2.10 Filter arrangements: detection of UV, blue and red emissions	82

---

3.7.2.11 Stimulation of UV, blue and red emissions	82
3.7.2.11a Isothermal stimulation	83
3.7.2.12 The use of a preheat procedure	84
3.7.2.13 The use of a test dose to check for sensitivity change	84
3.7.2.14 Bleaching	85
3.7.2.15 Established OSL, IRSL and TL protocols	85
3.7.2.15a Single-aliquot and single-grain analysis: the SAR protocol	85
3.7.2.15b Linearly-modulated OSL (LM-OSL) and signal separation	86
3.7.2.15c Measuring the IRSL signal from K-feldspars using single-aliquots	87
3.7.2.15d Establishing the extent of anomalous fading in K-feldspars	87
3.7.2.16 Estimating the palaeodose using the bleachable red TL signal	88
3.7.2.16a The application of DAP to burnt stones	91
3.7.2.16b Extending DAP using a red-sensitive PMT	92
3.7.2.16c Additional validation test of DAP	92
3.7.2.17 Recovering a known dose	93
3.7.2.18 Estimating the palaeodose	93
3.7.2.19 Estimating error	94
3.7.2.20 Criteria for the acceptance of single-aliquots and single- grains	95

---

**CHAPTER FOUR: *The application of suitable methodologies to the Indonesian samples*** **97**

---

4.1 Red emissions from quartz.....	97
4.1.1 Characterising the red TL signals	99
4.1.2 Justification for DAP	102
4.1.2.1 The origin of the bleachable red TL signal	102
4.1.2.2 Selecting a suitable preheat	104
4.1.2.3 The use of isothermal measurements	106
4.1.2.4 The bleachable red TL signal	109
4.1.2.5 Thermal stability of the red TL signal	113
4.1.2.6 Determining the extent of sensitivity changes	115
4.1.2.7 Palaeodose determination using a dual-aliquot protocol (DAP)	119
4.1.3 Examples and validation of DAP data	120
4.1.3.1 Recycling ratios	123
4.1.3.2 Recovering a known dose	124
4.1.3.3 Comparison with other luminescence techniques: blue TL and OSL single-aliquot	127
4.1.4 Testing other methodological alternatives: a simple subtraction	128
4.1.5 Comparison with other red emissions	129
4.1.6 Further modifications/improvements to DAP	130

---

4.1.6.1	Single-aliquot analysis of the heat reset signal	130
4.1.6.2	Extending DAP using a red-sensitive PM tube	131
4.1.6.3	DAP applied to burnt stones	132
4.1.7	Summarising the potential of red emissions	132
4.2	UV emissions from quartz.....	133
4.2.1	OSL single-aliquot analysis of quartz	133
4.2.2	OSL single-grain analysis of quartz	136
4.2.3	LM-OSL single-grain: component analysis	138
4.3	Blue emissions from feldspars.....	140
4.3.1	IRSL single-aliquot for K-feldspars	140
4.3.2	Fading tests	142
4.4	Summary of red, UV and blue emissions: implications for the dating of the Indonesian samples.....	143
 <b>CHAPTER FIVE: <i>The first exposure of the cave</i></b> .....		<b>145</b>
5.1	The former extent and nature of the cave.....	147
5.1.1	Geological influences	147
5.1.2	Tectonic influences	149
5.1.3	Tropical karstification	151
5.1.4	Cave development	155
5.1.4.1	Present cave systems in the Manggarai karst	155
5.1.4.2	Liang Bua cave system	162
5.1.4.3	The structure of the former cave system	167
5.1.4.4	Establishing a chronology for cave development	167
5.2	Potential mechanisms of exposure.....	170
5.2.1	Alluvial processes	171
5.2.1.1	The terraces	171
5.2.1.2	Theories of terrace formation and river location	176
5.2.1.3	Establishing a chronology for the terraces	181
5.2.2	The potential for cave collapse	187
5.2.3	Cave collapse and river invasion	188
5.3	Evidence of exposure.....	188
5.3.1	River invasion	188
5.3.2	The conglomerate deposit	190
5.3.2.1	Establishing a chronology for exposure	191
5.3.2.2	Scenarios for deposition	195
5.3.3	Speleothem precipitation	197
5.4	SUMMARY.....	199

---

<b>CHAPTER SIX: <i>Human occupation of the cave: Part I – nature and timing</i></b>	<b>201</b>
6.1 The nature of the occupational environment.....	206
6.1.1 The structure of sedimentation	206
6.1.1.1 The conglomerate deposit	206
6.1.1.2 The basal cave sediments	208
6.1.1.3 The collapse material	210
6.1.1.4 The oldest intensive occupation level	211
6.1.1.5 The channel deposits by the east wall	212
6.1.1.6 The eroded and reworked conglomerate	212
6.1.1.7 The occupation level containing the skeleton	215
6.1.1.8 Volcanic sediments	215
6.1.1.9 The younger occupational levels and modern slopewash	216
6.1.2 The dominance of water action	217
6.1.2.1 Modifications by slopewash processes	217
6.1.2.2 Channel formation	218
6.1.2.3 Pooling of water	218
6.1.2.4 Flowstone precipitation	219
6.2 The timing of human occupation .....	220
6.2.1 Establishing a chronological framework for the cave deposits	220
6.2.2 Establishing the validity of the chronological framework	230
6.2.2.1 U-series dating of speleothems	230
6.2.2.2 Luminescence dating of sediments: red emissions	231
6.2.2.3 Luminescence dating of quartz: UV emissions	237
6.2.2.4 Luminescence dating of feldspars: blue emissions	238
6.2.3 Interpretation of the main sedimentary units at Liang Bua.....	238
6.2.3.1 The conglomerate	240
6.2.3.2 The basal cave sediments	243
6.2.3.3 The collapse material	245
6.2.3.4 The oldest intensive occupation level	245
6.2.3.5 The channel deposits by the east wall	249
6.2.3.6 The eroded and reworked conglomerate	249
6.2.3.7 The occupation level containing the skeleton	250
6.2.3.8 Volcanic sediments	252
6.2.3.9 The younger occupation layers and modern slopewash	254
6.3 SUMMARY.....	256
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: <i>Human occupation of the cave: Part II – volcanic and climatic influences</i></b>	<b>257</b>

---

SECTION I: <i>Volcanic influences</i> .....	257
7.1 Volcanic sedimentology in the cave	257
7.2 The timing of volcanic events	259
SECTION II: <i>Palaeoclimatic and palaeoenvironmental influences</i> .....	262
7.3 Establishing the isotopic influences in the Indonesian region.....	263
7.3.1 Present-day isotopic influences	263
7.3.2 Isotopic influences during the LGM	270
7.4 The caves and speleothems chosen for palaeoclimate analysis.....	270
7.4.1 Liang Padut, Flores	271
7.4.2 Liang Luar, Flores	274
7.4.3 Liang Neki, Flores	275
7.4.4 Gua Gebang, Java	276
7.4.5 Gua Dawung (remnant cave), Java	279
7.5 Multi-proxy records in speleothems from either side of Wallace's Line.....	281
7.5.1 Chronology	281
7.5.2 Growth rate	281
7.5.3 Physical characteristics	288
7.5.4 $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ record	288
7.5.5 $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ record	290
7.5.6 Fluorescence wavelength and intensity	290
7.5.7 Tonal intensity of the growth layers	293
7.6 Justification for the use of Indonesian speleothems.....	293
7.6.1 Hendy's test	293
7.6.2 Modern analogues	296
7.6.3 Contemporaneous speleothem records	297
7.6.4 Co-variance between $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$	298
7.6.5 Ratio between growth rate and isotopic values	301
7.7 Interpretation of multi-proxy evidence.....	303
7.7.1 Period 1: 50–39 ka	304
7.7.2 Period 2: 39–36 ka	310
7.7.3 Period 3: 36–17 ka	311
7.7.4 Period 4: 17–15 ka	315
7.7.5 Period 5: 15–11 ka	317
7.7.6 Period 6: 11–5 ka	318
7.8 Local, regional and global influences.....	319
7.8.1 Comparison with the sedimentological record from Liang Bua	319
7.8.2 Comparison with regional palaeoclimate records	321
7.8.3 Comparison with global palaeoclimate records	324
7.8.4 Comparison with the insolation record	326
7.9 SUMMARY.....	329

---

<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: <i>Implications for archaeological analysis and Interpretation</i></b>	<b>331</b>
8.1 Archaeologically-relevant information gained from this study.....	331
8.1.1 First exposure of the cave	331
8.1.2 Nature and timing of occupation	333
8.1.3 Volcanic and climatic influences	334
8.2 Intensity of human occupation.....	335
8.3 Implications for the archaeological record	340
8.3.1 Local implications	340
8.3.1.1 Significance of the site	340
8.3.1.2 Occupation of Liang Bua by <i>Homo floresiensis</i>	342
8.3.1.3 The survival of <i>Homo floresiensis</i>	343
8.3.1.4 The last <i>Stegodon</i> and <i>Homo floresiensis</i> remains: a local extinction event?	344
8.3.1.5 An overlap between <i>Homo floresiensis</i> and modern humans?	345
8.3.2 Implications for Indonesian archaeology	346
8.3.3 World wide implications: models of human dispersal	346
8.3.4 Prospects for future research	347
8.4 The case for an interdisciplinary approach.....	349
References	<b>351</b>
Appendices	<b>383</b>
Appendix I: Sedimentological charts used for field analysis.....	383
Appendix II: A worked example of DAP.....	389
Appendix III: Landsat images of Flores and Java.....	395
Appendix IV: Plates.....	397
Appendix V: Particle size percentages.....	405
Appendix VI: Website addresses.....	407
Appendix VII: Faunal list for Liang Bua.....	409
Appendix VIII: Peer-reviewed publications.....	411

---

## *List of Figures*

<b>Figure 1.1:</b> The Indonesian archipelago.	2
<b>Figure 2.1:</b> Orogeny in the Indonesian archipelago: the collision zone between the Indian and Eurasian plates and southern Banda Arcs and Australia.	11
<b>Figure 2.2:</b> The extent of continental shelf and ocean basin exposure within Indonesia during the LGM, when the sea levels were approximately 120 m lower than present day.	13
<b>Figure 2.3:</b> The location of the Indo Pacific warm pool (IPWP) and Western Pacific warm pool (WPWP) in Southeast Asia.	14
<b>Figure 2.4:</b> Schematic representations of the air masses controlling the weather in Asia and their distribution in Southeast Asia.	16
<b>Figure 2.5:</b> A schematic cross section of the main archaeological sites in the Soa Basin, Central Flores, showing the relative position, stratigraphy, finds and age of each site.	29
<b>Figure 2.6:</b> Limestone dissolution and speleothem development in a cave environment.	35
<b>Figure 2.7:</b> Contemporary climate data for Java and Flores, incorporating rainfall, temperature and $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ of rainwater.	38
<b>Figure 2.8:</b> Basic principles of optically stimulated luminescence dating.	44
<b>Figure 2.9:</b> Stratigraphy and age of the rock shelter at Nauwalabila, northern Australia.	49
<b>Figure 3.1:</b> Methods for mapping of the profile and plan of the caves in this study.	56
<b>Figure 3.2:</b> The palaeomagnetic drill adapted from a Stihl chainsaw	61
<b>Figure 3.3:</b> The techniques and equipment used for sampling the speleothems and drilling the cores using a specially designed drilling box	63
<b>Figure 3.4:</b> The strategy for collecting small calcite samples from one of the hemispherical cores, using a Gemmasta saw.	65
<b>Figure 3.5:</b> Procedures for sampling the calcite core for palaeoclimate analysis.	68
<b>Figure 3.6:</b> Procedural steps for using the dual-aliquot regenerative-dose protocol (DAP).	89

<b>Figure 3.7:</b> Schematic diagram of total and bleachable TL dose-responses curves for Aliquot B.	90
<b>Figure 3.8:</b> A schematic of growth curve construction and palaeodose determination	94
<b>Figure 4.1:</b> A comparison of the emissions generated by a single-aliquot of irradiated quartz.	98
<b>Figure 4.2:</b> A photograph of the luminescence emitted by quartz from Flores.	99
<b>Figure 4.3:</b> Red TL glow curves for naturally- and laboratory-irradiated aliquots of sample WR1, and laboratory-irradiated aliquots of sample LBS7-42.	100
<b>Figure 4.4:</b> Pulse-anneal curves for a laboratory-irradiated aliquot of sample WR1.	103
<b>Figure 4.5:</b> Red TL glow curves for naturally- and laboratory-irradiated aliquots of sample WR1.	105
<b>Figure 4.6:</b> Comparison of red TL glow curves and red TL isothermal decay curves for sample LBS7-40.	106
<b>Figure 4.7:</b> Results of bleaching experiments conducted on aliquots of sample LBS7-40.	111
<b>Figure 4.8:</b> Thermal stability data obtained from isothermal lifetime experiments using aliquots of sample WR1.	114
<b>Figure 4.9:</b> Investigations into the extent of sensitivity changes associated with the red TL signal, using fresh aliquots of sample WR1.	117
<b>Figure 4.10:</b> TL dose-response curves for aliquots of sample LBS4-32.	119
<b>Figure 4.11:</b> Examples of DAP data for samples LBS4-40 and LBS4-42.	121
<b>Figure 4.12:</b> A photograph of the luminescence emitted by quartz from Java	134
<b>Figure 4.13:</b> The OSL single-grain data for sample WR-14 from a river terrace close to Liang Bua.	137
<b>Figure 4.14:</b> Optically stimulated luminescence data for the Punung breccia sample (Pun-5).	139
<b>Figure 4.15:</b> Optical dating results using feldspars from Liang Bua.	141
<b>Figure 5.1:</b> A Landsat image of Western Flores showing the lowland topography and volcanic relief in the area around Ruteng.	146



---

<b>Figure 5.2:</b> The geological structure of western Flores, showing the main lithology.	147
<b>Figure 5.3:</b> The link between geology and landform in western Flores.	148
<b>Figure 5.4:</b> The rates of tectonic uplift on Sumba Island inferred from a series of raised coral-reef terraces in Cape Laundi, in the north of the island.	150
<b>Figure 5.5:</b> The density and morphology of karst features in a 1.5 km <sup>2</sup> area within the vicinity of Liang Bua.	152
<b>Figure 5.6:</b> A geomorphological map of the study area, emphasising the location, and distribution of the main caves.	155
<b>Figure 5.7:</b> The cave morphology of Liang Padut, showing the profile and plan of the chamber structure.	157
<b>Figure 5.8:</b> The morphology of Liang Luar, showing a profile and plan of the passage and chamber structure.	158
<b>Figure 5.9:</b> The morphology of Liang Neki, showing a profile and plan of the passage and chamber structure.	159
<b>Figure 5.10:</b> The differing effects of stress on a cave cross-section at certain depths within the karst topography.	160
<b>Figure 5.11:</b> A schematic representation of chamber size versus elevation for the caves within a 3 km radius of LiangBua.	161
<b>Figure 5.12:</b> The development of sink and source caves within the Manggarai karst region.	162
<b>Figure 5.13:</b> A profile through Liang Bua Mountain showing the stacked and interconnected nature of Liang Bua cave system.	163
<b>Figure 5.14:</b> A plan of Liang Bua.	164
<b>Figure 5.15:</b> Profile of Liang Bua.	165
<b>Figure 5.16:</b> A reconstruction of the extent of the former cave systems in the Liang Bua cave system based on the present morphology and sedimentology of the caves and remnant cave structures.	168
<b>Figure 5.17:</b> An estimated chronology for the stages of cave development in the Wae Racang valley.	170
<b>Figure 5.18:</b> The Wae Peci fluvial system from Ruteng to Reo.	171

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- Figure 5.19:** A geomorphological map of the topography within the vicinity of Liang Bua, concentrating on the location and extent of the strath and alluvial terraces. \_\_\_\_\_ 173
- Figure 5.20:** Profile of the Wae Racang valley from Golo Liang Bua to Golokoe village, showing the size and distribution of strath and alluvial terraces. \_\_\_\_\_ 174
- Figure 5.21:** A profile of the Wae Racang valley (facing down river) from Golo Tendarukeng to Golo Wari, showing the size and distribution of alluvial terraces. \_\_\_\_\_ 175
- Figure 5.22:** The estimated location of the Wae Racang during alluvial downcutting of the valley, based on the sedimentology and structure of the strath and alluvial terraces. \_\_\_\_\_ 177
- Figure 5.23:** Isothermal TL decay and dose-response curves for Aliquots A and B of terrace samples WR-1 and WR-13. \_\_\_\_\_ 180
- Figure 5.24:** Estimated downcutting rates for the Wae Racang valley, and the relative elevation of the river throughout its formation. \_\_\_\_\_ 185
- Figure 5.25:** The estimated elevation of the valley floor within the Wae Racang valley, the estimated chronology for the stages of cave development and the inferred rate of uplift from coral terraces on Sumba Island. \_\_\_\_\_ 186
- Figure 5.26:** Stratigraphy of the conglomerate cliff, showing the stratigraphic relations of the basal, middle and upper conglomerate layers to the flowstone capping. \_\_\_\_\_ 189
- Figure 5.27:** Isothermal TL decay and dose-response curves for Aliquots A and B of conglomerate sample LBC-36 and LBC-37. \_\_\_\_\_ 193
- Figure 5.28:** A schematic of the geomorphological events that occurred within the Wae Racang valley before and after the exposure of Liang Bua. \_\_\_\_\_ 198
- Figure 6.1:** Stratigraphic section and sedimentary log of the Sector I excavation at Liang Bua. \_\_\_\_\_ 202
- Figure 6.2:** Stratigraphic section and sedimentary log of the Sector III excavation at Liang Bua. \_\_\_\_\_ 203
- Figure 6.3:** Stratigraphic section and sedimentary log of the Sector IV excavation at Liang Bua. \_\_\_\_\_ 204
-

<b>Figure 6.4:</b> Stratigraphic section and sedimentary log of the combined Sector VII/XI excavations at Liang Bua.	205
<b>Figure 6.5:</b> The nine, main sedimentary units in Liang Bua cave based on the sedimentary characteristics of Sectors I, III, IV, and VII/XI.	207
<b>Figure 6.6:</b> Particle size analysis of the Liang Bua sediments showing examples of the coarser sediments and finer sediments.	209
<b>Figure 6.7:</b> The sedimentary structure of the remnant <i>in situ</i> conglomerate deposit, from the conglomerate cliff to the stalagmite mound.	214
<b>Figure 6.8:</b> The location of the samples collected for luminescence, U-series, C <sup>14</sup> and ESR/U-series combined dating techniques.	221
<b>Figure 6.9:</b> Isothermal TL decay and dose-response curves for Aliquots A and B of cave sediment samples LBS4-30 and LBS4-28.	229
<b>Figure 6.10:</b> A schematic of the composite stratigraphy in Liang Bua, showing the red TL ages obtained from the bleachable signal and the ages derived from alternative dating techniques.	232
<b>Figure 6.11:</b> Red TL dating results compared with the results of independent dating techniques.	233
<b>Figure 6.12:</b> A comparison of luminescence dating methods with independent dating techniques, in sites in the Southern Mountains of Java.	234
<b>Figure 6.13:</b> A comparison of the results produced by the two luminescence techniques	237
<b>Figure 6.14:</b> A schematic representation of the geomorphic evolution of Liang Bua at ~190 ka.	241
<b>Figure 6.15:</b> A schematic representation of the geomorphic evolution of Liang Bua at ~130 ka.	242
<b>Figure 6.16:</b> A schematic representation of the geomorphic evolution of Liang Bua at ~100 ka.	244
<b>Figure 6.17:</b> A schematic representation of the geomorphic evolution of Liang Bua at ~70 ka.	246
<b>Figure 6.18:</b> A schematic representation of the geomorphic evolution of Liang Bua at ~50 ka.	248
<b>Figure 6.19:</b> A schematic representation of the geomorphic evolution of Liang Bua at ~18 ka.	251

<b>Figure 6.20:</b> A schematic representation of the geomorphic evolution of Liang Bua at ~1-12 ka.	253
<b>Figure 6.21:</b> A schematic representation of the geomorphic evolution of Liang Bua at <11 ka.	255
<b>Figure 7.1:</b> Using the heat-reset red TL signal from the Indonesian samples to identify past heating episodes that may be related to volcanic eruptions.	260
<b>Figure 7.2:</b> The spatial distribution of rainfall within Indonesia.	264
<b>Figure 7.3:</b> The spatial variation in the stable-isotope composition of rainwater resulting from three main effects: latitude, temperature and amount of rainfall.	265
<b>Figure 7.4:</b> The relationship between the amount of rainfall, temperature and the $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ of rainwater for Jakarta and Jayapura stations.	266
<b>Figure 7.5:</b> An example of the temperature effect on the global distribution of $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ in modern rainwater.	267
<b>Figure 7.6:</b> The relationship between the amount of rainfall and the $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ of rainwater for the Jakarta station.	269
<b>Figure 7.7:</b> Details of the six speleothems chosen for palaeoclimate analysis from Flores and Java.	273
<b>Figure 7.8:</b> Profile and plan of Gua Gebang cave, in the Gunung Sewu province of eastern Java.	278
<b>Figure 7.9:</b> The location of Dawung remnant cave and the position and stratigraphic context of flowstone sample SPJ11.	280
<b>Figure 7.10:</b> The rate of calcite precipitation for the six speleothems analysed, according to the results of the U-series chronology.	285
<b>Figure 7.11:</b> Composite $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ record from 118 to 5 for the six speleothem records from Flores and Java.	289
<b>Figure 7.12:</b> Composite $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ record from 118 to 5 for the six speleothem records from Flores and Java.	291
<b>Figure 7.13:</b> Palaeoenvironmental analysis of sample SPJ3 using two different proxies.	292
<b>Figure 7.14:</b> Palaeoenvironmental analysis of sample SPJ3 using the tonal intensity of the growth layers.	294

<b>Figure 7.15:</b> The results of HENDY'S test for samples SPJ3 and SP27.	295
<b>Figure 7.16:</b> Contemporaneous records from Flores and Java.	298
<b>Figure 7.17:</b> Test for co-variance between the carbon and oxygen isotopes for the Indonesian samples.	299
<b>Figure 7.18:</b> Comparison of the relationship and strength of co-variance against $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ values for the speleothem samples.	300
<b>Figure 7.19:</b> Comparison of growth rates with the range of isotopic variation for all six speleothem samples analysed.	302
<b>Figure 7.20:</b> Correlating between the multi-proxy data for stalagmite SPJ3 (Java), from 47 to 5 ka.	305
<b>Figure 7.21:</b> Growth rates versus $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ values for samples SPJ3 and SP15.	306
<b>Figure 7.22:</b> The $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ record from SPJ3 compared with the estimated rainfall record for Java.	307
<b>Figure 7.23:</b> A schematic of the proposed expansion and contraction of the OMT and the shift in zone of convergence during a 47 ka period, as inferred from the $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ variability in the speleothem records.	314
<b>Figure 7.24:</b> The composite $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ record from 118 to 5 ka compared with the timing of geomorphological events in Liang Bua.	320
<b>Figure 7.25:</b> $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ isotope variations in speleothems from Java and Flores compared with palaeoclimate records from the region.	322
<b>Figure 7.26:</b> $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ isotope variations in speleothems from Java and Flores compared with global palaeoclimate records.	325
<b>Figure 7.27:</b> Composite $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ isotope variations in speleothems from Java and Flores compared with global insolation patterns.	327
<b>Figure 8.1:</b> Summary of the archaeologically-relevant information gained from using an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of Liang Bua evidence.	332
<b>Figure 8.2:</b> The intensity of occupation for the nine, main sedimentary units derived from the stone tool counts.	336
<b>Figure 8.3:</b> The intensity of occupation for the nine, main sedimentary units derived from the bone count.	337

**Figure 8.4:** The intensity of occupation for the nine, main sedimentary units compared with the events in the cave, the environment and climate outside the cave, and the timing of volcanic events. \_\_\_\_\_ 339

**Figure 8.5:** The location of karst areas for potential interdisciplinary research within Southeast Asia. \_\_\_\_\_ 348

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## *List of Tables*

<b>Table 2.1:</b> The extent of tropical cooling during the LGM according to different proxies for palaeotemperature change._____	17
<b>Table 2.2:</b> The theories behind the two most popular schools of thought regarding human dispersal._____	18
<b>Table 2.3:</b> Selected archaeological sites in Australia with occupation ages ranging from 60 to 40ka._____	19
<b>Table 2.4:</b> Selected examples of interdisciplinary approaches that have aided the archaeological interpretations of important sites worldwide and specifically in Southeast Asia._____	19
<b>Table 2.5:</b> Selected U-series dating applications of speleothem records._____	36
<b>Table 2.6:</b> Examples of speleothem records as proxies for palaeoclimate conditions._____	39
<b>Table 2.7:</b> The isotopic characteristics of modern rainwater in Flores and Java._____	40
<b>Table 2.8:</b> Strategies to avoid tropical speleothem records that have been affected by kinetic effects._____	41
<b>Table 2.9:</b> Some suggested solutions to deal with the problem of anomalous fading of blue emissions from feldspars_____	45
<b>Table 2.10:</b> Examples of investigations into the red TL properties of volcanic quartz._____	47
<b>Table 2.11:</b> Selected contributions of OSL dating to archaeologically-relevant issues._____	51
<b>Table 3.1:</b> Some characteristic landforms found in tropical karst regions._____	54
<b>Table 3.2:</b> Sedimentary evidence for channel or overbank deposits within terraces._____	55
<b>Table 3.3:</b> Speleogenetic and karst hydrological phases of cave development.____	57
<b>Table 3.4:</b> Characteristics of suitable and unsuitable caves for palaeoclimate analysis._____	60
<b>Table 3.5:</b> Characteristics of stalagmite deposits that indicate their suitability for palaeoclimate analysis._____	61

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<b>Table 3.6:</b> Isotopic tests applied to the speleothems sampled from the four cave locations in Flores and Java.	67
<b>Table 3.7:</b> The integration periods used for quartz and K-feldspars measured by IRSL, OSL and TL techniques.	94
<b>Table 4.1:</b> A summary of the dose recovery experiments implemented to identify suitable measurement conditions for DAP.	108
<b>Table 4.2:</b> Recycling ratios, thermal transfer percentages and $D_0$ values for the unbleachable and bleachable red TL signals from selected Indonesian samples.	123
<b>Table 4.3:</b> A summary of the dose recovery experiments using the red emissions from quartz as a means of justifying the procedures and measurements conditions used within DAP.	125
<b>Table 4.4:</b> Preliminary DAP results using the new red sensitive PM tube on samples with typically dim red emissions from Java.	131
<b>Table 4.5:</b> A summary of the results using DAP with the more sensitive red PM tube for a selection of Indonesian samples.	132
<b>Table 4.6:</b> A summary of the dose recovery experiments used to identify suitable measurement conditions for analysing the UV signal from single- aliquots of samples from Java.	135
<b>Table 4.7:</b> The results of the components analysis on natural LM-OSL signals from sample Pun-5.	140
<b>Table 4.8:</b> The results of published components analysis and their resulting photoionisation cross-sections.	140
<b>Table 4.9:</b> The results of the LM-OSL analysis of the Javanese samples.	140
<b>Table 5.1:</b> A comparison of the karst landforms found in two tropical karst areas in Flores and Java.	151
<b>Table 5.2:</b> A description of the caves, and the five main cave systems within the vicinity of Liang Bua.	154
<b>Table 5.3:</b> The features of the two predominant cave forms in the Manggarai karst region.	161

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<b>Table 5.4:</b> The five strath and alluvial terraces of the Wae Racang valley within the vicinity of Liang Bua.	172
<b>Table 5.5:</b> Red TL dating of sediments at Liang Bua, including dose rate data, equivalent doses, and optical ages.	178
<b>Table 5.6:</b> OSL single-grain results for a selection of the terrace samples from Liang Bua valley.	183
<b>Table 5.7:</b> The sedimentary characteristics of the three layers comprising the conglomerate deposit at the rear of Liang Bua.	190
<b>Table 5.8:</b> Uranium-series dating of flowstones in Liang Bua, including ages and supporting data.	192
<b>Table 5.9:</b> Two alternative scenarios for the geomorphological evolution and early archaeological record of Liang Bua.	196
<b>Table 6.1:</b> Particle size analysis of selected layers within the Liang Bua stratigraphy.	208
<b>Table 6.2:</b> X-Ray diffraction analysis of the composition of selected layers within the Liang Bua stratigraphy.	210
<b>Table 6.3:</b> Red TL dating of cave sediments at Liang Bua, including dose rate data, equivalent doses, and TL ages.	224
<b>Table 6.4:</b> Optical dating of sediments at Liang Bua, including dose rate data, equivalent doses, and optical ages.	226
<b>Table 6.5:</b> Uranium-series dating of flowstones from Liang Bua, including ages and supporting data.	227
<b>Table 6.6:</b> Independent dating techniques applied to charcoal and teeth from Liang Bua, including ages and supporting data.	228
<b>Table 6.7:</b> A chronology for the main sedimentary units in the cave.	239
<b>Table 6.8:</b> Average sedimentation rates for the sectors in Liang Bua using a combination of red TL dating, $^{14}\text{C}$ , U-series and ESR/U-series combined.	239
<b>Table 6.9:</b> The average sedimentation rates for each of the nine main sedimentary units.	239

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<b>Table 7.1:</b> X-Ray diffraction analysis of the volcanic layers that comprise the volcanic sedimentary units within the Liang Bua stratigraphy.	258
<b>Table 7.2:</b> Maximum log likelihoods for component populations.	261
<b>Table 7.3:</b> Temperature and humidity measurements for the caves utilised in the palaeoclimate analysis.	271
<b>Table 7.4:</b> U-series dating of speleothem from Flores and Java, including ages and supporting data.	282
<b>Table 7.5:</b> An assessment of the colour, porosity and transparency of each of the speleothem samples.	286
<b>Table 7.6:</b> An analysis of modern analogues of past isotope variability, using drip water and modern calcite sampled from Liang Padut and Gua Gebang.	297
<b>Table 7.7:</b> The results of the five tests for isotopic equilibrium for all the speleothem samples analysed.	303
<b>Table 7.8:</b> Trends in the proxy data sets for all of the speleothem records combined.	304
<b>Table 7.9:</b> Interpretation of multi-proxy evidence for sample SPJ3.	309
<b>Table 7.10:</b> Summary of the inferred climatic and environmental changes inferred from the palaeoclimate and palaeoenvironmental analysis of the speleothem samples.	329

## *List of Abbreviations and Symbols*

### *Luminescence*

TL	Thermoluminescence
OSL	Optically stimulated luminescence
PMT	Photomultiplier tube
SA	Single-aliquot
SAR	Single-aliquot regeneration
SARA	Single-aliquot regeneration and additive dose
DAP	Dual-aliquot protocol
SG	Single-grain
CW-OSL	Continuous-wave optically stimulated luminescence
LM-OSL	Linearly-modulated optically stimulated luminescence
UV	Ultra-violet (less than 380 nm wavelength)
IR	Infrared
IRSL	Infrared stimulated luminescence
Gy	Grays (unit of absorbed dose)
nm	Nanometers (unit of measurement for wavelengths of light)
eV	Electron-volt ( $1 \text{ eV} = 1.602 \times 10^{-19} \text{ J}$ )
mW	Milli-Watt (unit for measurement of power: $1000 \text{ mW} = 1 \text{ W} = 1 \text{ joule per second}$ )
exp	Exponential
$L_0$	Initial sensitivity corrected luminescence measurement
$L_n$	Sensitivity corrected luminescence values
$I_n$	A point where the initial sensitivity corrected luminescence divided by the subsequent measurements ( $L_n/L_0$ ) is equal to $-1$ .
$D_0$	A curve fitting parameter that describes the characteristic saturation dose ( $\frac{2}{3}$ saturation)
$I_{\max}$	The saturation TL intensity
$s$	Escape frequency factor
s	Seconds
kc	Thousand counts
kc/s	Thousand counts per second
$E$	Trap depth
K	Absolute temperature using the Kelvin scale
$k$	Boltzmann's constant ( $1.380658 \times 10^{-23} \text{ J/K}$ )
$\pm$	Plus and minus an error margin
$b$	Detrapping probability
$\sigma$	Photoionisation cross-section
$\infty$	Infinity (used when one side of the distribution cannot be statistically determined)
$\tau$	Lifetime of an electron in a trap
a.u.	Arbitrary units
$\sigma_{\text{OD}}$	Over-dispersion
$L$	Maximum log likelihood
BIC	Bayes Information Criterion

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**Quaternary**

ka	Thousand years (1 ka = 1000 years)
Ma	Million years (1 Ma = 1,000,000 years)
LGM	Last Glacial Maximum
MIS	Marine isotope stage
$\mu\text{m}$	Microns (unit of measurement for grain sizes)
$\phi$	Phi (unit of measurement for grain sizes)

**Palaeoclimate**

SST	Sea surface temperature
IPWP	Indo-Pacific warm pool
WPWP	Western-Pacific warm pool
ITCZ	Inter-tropical convergence zone
TWT	Trade wind trough
CMT	Continental monsoon trough
OMT	Ocean monsoon trough
ENSO	El-Ninó southern oscillation
CLIMAP	Climate long-range investigation, mappings, and prediction project
PAGES	Past global change
$\delta$	Delta – used to describe the ratio between stable isotopes e.g., $^{18}\text{O}/^{16}\text{O}$ and $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$
‰	Parts per thousand

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