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Reporting Summary

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Statistics

For all statistical analyses, confirm that the following items are present in the figure legend, table legend, main text, or Methods section.

n/a	Confirmed
☒	☐ The exact sample size (*n*) for each experimental group/condition, given as a discrete number and unit of measurement
☒	☐ A statement on whether measurements were taken from distinct samples or whether the same sample was measured repeatedly
☒	☐ The statistical test(s) used AND whether they are one- or two-sided *Only common tests should be described solely by name; describe more complex techniques in the Methods section.*
☒	☐ A description of all covariates tested
☒	☐ A description of any assumptions or corrections, such as tests of normality and adjustment for multiple comparisons
☒	☐ A full description of the statistical parameters including central tendency (e.g. means) or other basic estimates (e.g. regression coefficient) AND variation (e.g. standard deviation) or associated estimates of uncertainty (e.g. confidence intervals)
☒	☐ For null hypothesis testing, the test statistic (e.g. *F*, *t*, *r*) with confidence intervals, effect sizes, degrees of freedom and *P* value noted *Give P values as exact values whenever suitable.*
☒	☐ For Bayesian analysis, information on the choice of priors and Markov chain Monte Carlo settings
☒	☐ For hierarchical and complex designs, identification of the appropriate level for tests and full reporting of outcomes
☒	☐ Estimates of effect sizes (e.g. Cohen's *d*, Pearson's *r*), indicating how they were calculated

Our web collection on statistics for biologists contains articles on many of the points above.

Software and code

Policy information about availability of computer code

Data collection	Zeiss Stemi 508 stereomicroscope fitted with an Axiom 105 camera using the Zeiss "Zen (Blue Edition)" was utilised to examine and measure features of interest on both artefacts.
Data analysis	No software was used.

For manuscripts utilizing custom algorithms or software that are central to the research but not yet described in published literature, software must be made available to editors/reviewers. We strongly encourage code deposition in a community repository (e.g. GitHub). See the Nature Research guidelines for submitting code & software for further information.

Data

Policy information about availability of data

All manuscripts must include a data availability statement. This statement should provide the following information, where applicable:

- Accession codes, unique identifiers, or web links for publicly available datasets
- A list of figures that have associated raw data
- A description of any restrictions on data availability

The artefacts reported herein are currently curated at the Australia Research Centre for Human Evolution, Griffith University, Nathan, Australia. They will return to Indonesia at the conclusion of the project where they will be given accession numbers and be curated by in Makassar by Balai Arkeologi Sulawesi Selatan.

Field-specific reporting

Please select the one below that is the best fit for your research. If you are not sure, read the appropriate sections before making your selection.

☐ Life sciences ☒ Behavioural & social sciences ☐ Ecological, evolutionary & environmental sciences

For a reference copy of the document with all sections, see nature.com/documents/nr-reporting-summary-flat.pdf

Behavioural & social sciences study design

All studies must disclose on these points even when the disclosure is negative.

Study description	Examination and analysis of archaeological samples -- stone artefacts -- using a qualitative analysis of anthropogenic features.
Research sample	High-resolution study of two artefacts -- only examples bearing figurative engravings thus far recovered from excavations in Sulawesi by Adam Brumm.
Sampling strategy	These two artefacts are currently the only examples bearing figurative engravings thus far recovered from excavations in Sulawesi by Adam Brumm -- therefore both were extensively examined.
Data collection	These artefacts were recovered during the 2018 field season at Leang Bulu Bettue (Sulawesi), and were taken to Griffith University (Nathan campus) for analysis. There, macrophotography of each artefact was undertaken using a Canon digital SLR camera, with these photographs serving as the basis for tracings and illustrations. A Zeiss Stemi 508 stereomicroscope fitted with a Axiom 105 camera was used to examine all surfaces of the artefacts. Measurements and photography utilised the Zeiss "Zen" (Blue Edition) software. Photographs taken on the Zeiss were stitched together using the Canvas XII illustrating software. MicroCT images were created X-ray Computer Tomography laboratory, operated by the Department of Applied Maths at the Australian National University (Canberra). The X-ray detector is a 16-bit, scintillator-coupled 3040x3040 pixel CCD camera mounted on a linear rail. The radiographic data were translated with the ANU Supercomputer facility, and rendered with Drishti software. Gross artefact metrics were obtained using Mitutoyo CD-6" CX digital calipers, their metal arms coated with a thin plastic layer to protect the artefacts from scratches.
Timing	The 2018 Sulawesi excavation began on the 9th July 2018, with the in laboratory analysis completed in early June 2019.
Data exclusions	No data was excluded from this analysis.
Non-participation	NA
Randomization	NA

Reporting for specific materials, systems and methods

We require information from authors about some types of materials, experimental systems and methods used in many studies. Here, indicate whether each material, system or method listed is relevant to your study. If you are not sure if a list item applies to your research, read the appropriate section before selecting a response.

Materials & experimental systems

n/a	Involved in the study
☒	☐ Antibodies
☒	☐ Eukaryotic cell lines
☒	☐ Palaeontology
☒	☐ Animals and other organisms
☒	☐ Human research participants
☒	☐ Clinical data

Methods

n/a	Involved in the study
☒	☐ ChIP-seq
☒	☐ Flow cytometry
☒	☐ MRI-based neuroimaging