PAINTING THE POLICE:
Aboriginal Visual Culture and Identity in Colonial Cape York Peninsula

Noelene Cole

Abstract
Aboriginal rock paintings of policemen near Laura and their ‘ethnographic interpretation’ were reported by Percy Trezise (1985:74, 1993) but are otherwise unstudied. This research integrates formal analysis of an assemblage of police and associated depictions with cultural, historical and archaeological evidence to shed light on Indigenous society and identity in the frontier period (c.1873-1890s). In drawing on Aboriginal testimony the study connects with local webs of meaning. Stylistic analysis reveals the police motif as an innovative, specialised category within Quinkan style. Signs of cognitive structure include visual, material and contextual attributes (e.g. shape, colour and form, paint recipes, graphic associations, positions and locations). Stylistic coherence suggests that radically new contexts of production (war, social and demographic transformations) did not disrupt the ancestral knowledge systems and unique worldviews which lie at the heart of visual culture at Laura. Unlike most colonial texts, the depictions record Indigenous identity in the contexts of local agency and colonialism.

Introduction
Aboriginal resistance to colonial invasion of the Cooktown Palmer region has been well-documented (Cole 2004; Hughes 1978; Kirkman 1978; Loos 1982) but colonial records have little to say about Indigenous identity or attitudes (Loos 1982:85; Reynolds 1972:34). How can archaeology, which has seldom been used to address Australia’s contested history (see Barker 2007; Lydon 2006), fill such gaps in historical records? While the remains of colonial settlements such as Native Mounted Police camps stand out in the landscape and can be studied archaeologically (Cole 2004), it is more difficult to identify Indigenous traces of the same era, mainly because many traditional ways of making artefacts persisted in the midst of contact (Byrne 2002; Harrison 2004). Although Aboriginal people of the area readily made use of exotic materials (Cole 2004), archaeologists have found limited traces of this practice in archaeological sites.

Perhaps the best-known Indigenous ‘contact’ artefacts around Laura are rock paintings of foreign animals, people and objects first reported by Trezise (1971). These include pigs and horses (see Flood 1997; Maynard 1979; Morwood 2002; Rosenfeld 1982), Europeans and Europeans with rifles (Flood 1997; Morwood 2002) and policemen or Native Police (Huchet 1993; Maynard 1979; Trezise 1985, 1993; Walsh 1988). Of these types only the animal depictions have been studied archaeologically (see Rosenfeld 1982).

Elsewhere, studies of visual culture have provided insights into Indigenous concepts and social transformations in the context of culture contact (Jolly 1998; Klassen 1998; Taçon et al. 2003).

For example Taçon et al. (2003) identified aspects of individual versus group identity by studying imagery on portable objects made by Aboriginal people in southeast Australia between 1850 and 1970. The field of contact archaeology is increasingly calling upon visual depictions to integrate with written histories and archaeological investigations of the past (e.g. Taçon et al. 2010).

This research calls upon visual depictions of policemen identified by knowledgeable Aboriginal people (see Huchet 1993; Trezise 1985) to expand an investigation of colonial conflict in the Laura-Cooktown area (Cole 2004). Although the latter study identified factors which contributed to the effectiveness of Aboriginal resistance, it shed little light on Indigenous society owing to the one-sided nature of the records used – archaeological remains of Boralga police camp and historical texts (see Galloway 2006 and Little 2007 regarding partiality in historical records). These shortcomings provide the rationale and main question for this new research: What, if anything, can depictions associated with policemen tell us about the identity and mindset of the Aboriginal people who actualised them? The analysis is not an archaeological end in itself but a way of integrating rare evidence from the ‘other’ side of the frontier to read between the lines of colonial history in Cape York Peninsula.

Research Issues and Methods
Andrée Rosenfeld (1982:199) analysed depictions of horses and pigs within a broader stylistic study, applying the premise that Laura rock art constitutes ‘the durable component of a past system of expressive symbolic behaviour’. Rosenfeld’s search for ‘types of structure, levels of complexity, modes of operation’ as indicators of ‘cognitive significance’ were novel in Australian archaeology, which was yet to take up the ‘contextual, structural

Figure 1 The study area with localities of police figures.
Aboriginal rock art (see Morwood 2002) that have emerged to challenge dominant accounts (Williamson 2004:183), are typical of the ‘hidden histories’ of Trezise’s three decades of work, which included establishing an archive at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to record rock art in the Laura region. These approaches are now standard in Australian archaeology, particularly in studies of the systemic roles and functions of Aboriginal rock art (see Morwood 2002).

The research presented in this paper follows the methodology of such studies: the integration of structural analysis of rock art with other archaeological data. However it takes a more holistic approach by drawing on cultural, historical and ethnohistorical data (Ross 2001; and see ‘informed methods’ of Taçon and Chippendale 1998:6). Some of the ethnohistorical data were provided to Percy Trezise in the 1960s by senior Aboriginal men who were born and raised in the Laura region in times when Aboriginal people were hunted by the Native Mounted Police and rock art was still a living tradition. More recently, relevant information was recorded from the next generation, including George Musgrave (c.1920-2006) and Tommy George. These Indigenous lives, which supply ‘local webs of meanings’ (Williamson 2004:183), are typical of the ‘hidden histories’ (Rose 1991) that have emerged to challenge dominant accounts of national identity and enrich archaeology (Clarke and Paterson 2003:49).

Ethnohistorical data were recorded during community archaeology projects (e.g. Cole et al. 2002) or retrieved from the publications of Percy Trezise (1969, 1971, 1985, 1993), who was engaged in the 1960s by the (then) Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to record rock art in the Laura region. Trezise’s three decades of work, which included establishing an archive at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Canberra, ‘provided the platform for all later researchers in the region’ (Morwood and Smith 1994:23; see Rosenfeld 1982). Much of the cultural, ethnohistorical and linguistic information he recorded has been confirmed and extended by Rigsby, Cole and others, and used in land claims and Native Title research over the past 20 years (B. Rigsby, pers. comm., 2010). I studied rock art and paint materials at Giant Horse, Lee Cheu, Mingaroo Hill and Red Bluff rockshelters and at other cultural sites in the course of fieldwork for regional projects (e.g. Cole 1998; Ward et al. 2001; Watchman et al. 1992). I recorded rock art at Emu rockshelter in 1984 as a participant in a research project directed by Trezise (1985). Comparative and contextual data were retrieved from a local study at Jowalbinna (Cole 1992) and a regional study (Cole 1998). I analysed Trezise’s records, including his unpublished records held at AIATSIS and James Cook University for Giant Horse, Crocodile, Pig, Emu and other cultural sites in the context of the regional study.

The Setting

The study area (Figure 1) lies in the Laura district within the greater Quinkan region, which is known for its spectacular sandstone topography and an Aboriginal rock art tradition that dates to the terminal Pleistocene and possibly earlier (Cole et al. 1995). People of the surviving Indigenous language groups (Guugu Yimithirr, Kuku Yalanji, Kuku Thaypan and Olkola) are descendants of the ‘classical’ land-owning clans, such as those around Laura which were collectively known by some older people as ‘Kuku Warra’ and ‘Kuku Mini’ (Rigsby 2003). The system of land/people relationships was based on ancestral law (Rigsby 1999). Clans owned their own languages, totems, songs, dances and designs which connect them with their lands and Stories (Rigsby 1997, 2002). An important understanding was (and is) that the Stories (the spirits of the ancestors or the ‘Old People’ who include the recently dead) live on the land in their own places. In this way rock paintings are part of the ancestral law – they are Stories and their sites retain the footprints of the Old People (G. Musgrave, pers. comm., 2000).

The local groups were comprised of several families of different clans who moved around and lived in the landscape together. Land-use was organised around (men’s) primary rights to use land and secondary rights from relationships such as marriage, a system which provided options of movement and access to seasonal resources (Rigsby 1980). During the wet season (November to April) Aboriginal people led a more sedentary life, camping in rockshelters or on sandy ridges. The dry season (May to October) was a time of mobility and ceremonial life (Sharp 1939) when groups gathered together around rivers, running creeks and waterholes.

From the onset of the Palmer River goldrush in 1873 a major source of cross-cultural conflict was the colonial occupation of waterways and river crossings for settlements and for transport routes such as the Hell’s Gate, Palmerville and Maytown tracks (Figure 1). To deal with Aboriginal resistance the Queensland government established Native Mounted Police camps staffed by armed European officers and Aboriginal troopers recruited from the south, their role being to kill Aboriginal people (Richards 2008). One of the earliest police camps was Boralga (Lower Laura) set-up in 1874 near a crossing of the Laura River on the Palmerville track.

After an initial period of fierce guerilla warfare Aboriginal people were forced to change age-old patterns of land-use (Cole 2004). Some groups moved more or less permanently to the remote, semi-arid uplands where essential water is available in springs and sandstone aquifers. The Laura Deighton plateau became ‘a great stronghold’ for Aboriginals (Pike 1998:83), particularly after the miners abandoned the Hell’s Gate track. Officially this area was patrolled by Boralga police, but in reality police movements were severely restricted by seasonal conditions.
In the 1880s, despite the decline of goldmining and ‘the high mortality of the blacks’ (Hughes 1978:103), the conflict continued. According to Tommy George and George Musgrave their Old People put down their spears in their father’s and grandfather’s time (c.1897, Rigsby 2002). However, free-ranging Aborigines continued to be pursued by police patrols which continued to operate into the twentieth century (Figure 2). The ancient tradition of making rock art is believed to have ceased around the 1920s (Trezise 1971).

Hidden Histories
The Aboriginal men who assisted Percy Trezise were born into the resilient clans and free-ranging local groups of the Quinkan region in the late nineteenth century. As such they were knowledgeable about traditional culture and well-acquainted with the methods of the Native Mounted Police. For example, Willy Long was an initiated Olkola man who lived free before eventually coming ‘inside’ to work on cattle stations (Trezise 1969:49). His parents escaped a massacre of the Olkola people by the Musgrave police (Trezise 1969:102). Caesar Lee Cheu was Koko Warra by tribal identity (Land Tribunal 1996:114; Trezise 1993:137), and spoke his father’s language, a Thaypanic language Ogo Ikarrangal (Rigsby 2003). His family was regularly pursued by the police before they ‘came in’ to work on cattle stations (Trezise 1993:153). Retired police tracker Harry Mole, who spoke a Thaypanic language from around Laura (Rigsby 2002), was captured by the police as a child during an attack on the Kuku Warra (Trezise 1993). He was recruited as a trooper at an early age, worked in the police force for some 40 years, and has been remembered as a ‘very strict’ policeman (L. George, pers. comm., 2000). Tommy George of the next generation is the last surviving, fluent Indigenous speaker of Agu Alaya (Taipan Snake language of the Thaypanic complex). Over three generations members of his family, including brothers Jerry Musgrave and George Musgrave, worked for the police force as Aboriginal trackers (note that the latter name eventually replaced the term ‘trooper’). Their father, George Wanaya, was forcibly ‘recruited’ into the Native Mounted Police (Cole et al. 2002).

Police Sites and Depictions
The analysis presented here focuses on an assemblage of figures that is distributed across seven rockshelters and three localities of the Laura district (Figure 1). The core assemblage of 19 human figures (Table 1) is deemed to be a sample as there are probably other unidentified or unlocated paintings associated with the police. Locality 1 lies on the plateau between the Laura and Deighton Rivers where Trezise (1971, 1985, 1993) reported police figures at Crocodile (C1-C4), Pig (P1-P7) and Emu (E1-E3) rockshelters. Locality 2 is around the middle reaches of the Laura River where Tommy George identified paintings at Giant Horse (GH1) shelters. To the southwest on a headwater of the Little Laura River is Locality 3 where the Lee Cheu (LC1) figures were located and described by Trezise (1993). Figures at Red Bluff (RB1) near the Little Laura and Mingaroo Hill (M1-M2) in the Laura River locality are included on the basis of their attributes.

Locality 1, Laura Deighton Plateau
The Laura Deighton plateau has a long history of Aboriginal occupation dating from c.14,000 BP (Rosenfeld et al. 1981). From 1873 the ‘rush’ track from Cooktown to the Palmer crossed the plateau down to the Laura River by way of Coomey Creek (Trezise 1973). The three sites in which police figures have

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motif</th>
<th>PT</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Horizontal</th>
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<th>Male</th>
<th>Eyes</th>
<th>Cap</th>
<th>Object/ Rifle</th>
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Table 1 Visual attributes of police figures (PT-code after Trezise 1971).
Figure 3 Crocodile 1, police paintings inner wall (Photograph: Noelene Cole).

Figure 4 Crocodile 1, police paintings outer wall (Photograph: Noelene Cole).

Figure 5 Police painting, Pig shelter (Photograph: Noelene Cole).

Figure 6 Police paintings, Emu shelter.
been identified occur within two separate clusters of rock art sites (the Crocodile and Pig groups respectively) of the rugged Coamey Creek catchment. The sites, Crocodile 1, Pig and Emu rockshelters, are situated on or near escarpments with views across the plateau to the Laura River. All are close to freshwater springs, have surface scatters of stone artefacts, charcoal and used ochres and relatively large assemblages of superimposed paintings. Evidence of recent occupation includes a wooden paintbrush handle found near an ochre stained grindstone at Emu shelter (P. Trezise, pers. comm., 1984).

In 1965 Trezise was accompanied to the area by Willy Long who described ‘large men painted in the top layer’ of Crocodile 1 rockshelter as ‘bullymen’, the Aboriginal English name for policemen (Trezise 1985:75). At the time Trezise knew nothing of the Native Mounted Police and assumed the figures to be European policemen. Later Caesar Lee Cheu identified the paintings as ‘black police’ (i.e. Native Mounted Police) (Trezise 1985, 1993). The figures have staring eyes, bare feet and an elongated shape under the left arm; each pair includes a man with a long neck and a regular infill of lines and another man with no neck, a mouth and an irregular infill (Figures 3-4). On the foreheads of the pair on the outer wall are red discs identified by Caesar Lee Cheu as police caps (Trezise 1985) (Figure 4). Lee Cheu described lines which project from the mouth of a repainted snake into the foot of one police figure as venom ‘to put the poison’ in him (Trezise 1993:51) (Figure 9b).

Several kilometres northeast across the plateau at Pig shelter, Caesar Lee Cheu identified four figures as police (Trezise 1993:52). One inverted figure (Table 1-P1; Figure 5) is infilled in red with intersecting white lines. Another (Table 1-P2) is a monochrome, horizontal male with an elongated shape alongside. Nearby are two small men described by Lee Cheu as possible representations of ‘white leaders of black police’ (Trezise 1993:52). Pecking into the armpits of two figures are birds said to ‘steal the bones of dead people from mortuary platforms’ (Trezise 1971:30) (Figure 9g); the bird is apparently the elusive black bittern (Ixobrychus flavicollis, Pizzey and Knight 1997:124). The site contains other male figures with rounded feet and juxtaposed objects (e.g. Trezise 1971:27, M26, J37).

Across the gully from Pig shelter is the Emu rockshelter where three finely painted, bichrome figures (Table 1-E1-3, Figure 6) were identified by Caesar Lee Cheu as police. Part of the curved figure (Figure 6a) is missing, apparently erased by the action of wallabies or feral pigs. The two horizontal figures have neatly rounded feet with white lines at the ankle. A leg bulge on one (Figure 6b) was identified by Caesar Lee Cheu as a revolver holster (Trezise 1993:51). This may be the sign of an officer as revolvers were issued only to white officers of the Native Police (J. Richards, pers. comm., 2008).

**Locality 2, Laura River**

The Giant Horse cluster of rockshelters lies at the head of a spring-fed gully on the Laura River escarpment south of Laura. Aboriginal occupation dates from c.4000 years ago with intensive artistic activity continuing into the contact period (Morwood 1995a:105). Andreé Rosenfeld’s surface collection (Queensland Museum S590, S591) which includes wooden artefacts, flaked bottle glass and mussel shell indicates the everyday activities which took place here in the recent past. In a prominent position on a west-facing wall of an overhang which adjoins the main shelter with the spectacular painting of the ‘Giant Horse’ is a group of figures which Tommy George (pers. comm., 2000) describes as ‘the dead tracker paintings’. Tommy George has little to say about the paintings other than that the tracker is ‘dead’, and that he knows the name of the artist, one of the Old People who fought the police. The tracker is prone, his hands clutching the reins of a horse (Figure 7). His rounded thighs suggest trousers and leggings. Trezise (1971:68) noted a similarity between this ‘thrown rider’ and a male figure in the top layer of paintings near the ‘Giant Horse’.

Several kilometres to the west is the Mingaroo Hill complex first recorded by Trezise in the 1960s. Mingaroo 1 has a wide overhang and views across the Laura valley. Cultural materials include a surface scatter of stone artefacts, utilised ochre and glass fragments. Pigment art on the rear wall includes two stencilled bones and a frieze of fresh-looking figures, two of which have attributes of the police (Table 1-M1, 1-M2, Figure 9c,h).

**Locality 3, Little Laura River**

After 1875 travellers to and from the Palmer goldfields had the use of an alternative coach route, Robinson’s track, the precursor of the Maytown track (Hay 1987). Overlooking the track, the Little Laura River and Shepherd Creek, is Red Bluff, a local landmark known by Aboriginal people as ‘Jowalbinna’ (Dingo...
The Police Motif

As indicated in Table 1, 16 of 19 of the motifs believed to be police have horizontal or inverted positions as opposed to the upright stance of the majority (c.90%) of human figures. The former positions are said to be associated with death (George et al. 1995:33; George Pegus cited by Trezise 1993:38). In some police figures (see Figures 6a, 9a,g) the line of the body is curved and in others there are signs of interaction (e.g. a fallen horseman, lines of venom striking a policeman). Such features are unusual in an art system which generally lacks signs of movement and interaction (Rosenfeld 1982).

Most police are depicted with a penis whereas only a minority (27%) of humans are depicted as explicitly male (Cole 1992). The staring eyes of most (14) police also give them special character as only c.6% of human figures have eyes. The latter group includes figures of special significance such as the Timara Quinkans (see George et al. 1995).

Rosenfeld (1982) compared relative elongation and compactness of animal shapes by calculating simple ratios of linear dimensions. A similar method was used here to compare ‘police’ shapes with two subsets of human figures – Quinkan spirit figures which have various supernatural features (George et al. 1995:24) and a group of human figures identified as explicitly male. A ratio was obtained by dividing width of each figure (maximum width of torso) by length (from top of head to base of feet). The groups of Quinkans and male human representations have a wide range of physiques which include elongated, stick-like bodies on the one hand and short, roundish bodies on the other. Such ‘extreme’ body shapes are responsible for the degrees of variation indicated for these two groups in Table 2. In comparison, police figures tend to be somewhat homogeneous in shape and size, resulting in a low degree of variation (Table 2). While human depictions in general tend to be less than 1m in height (Cole 1992), more than half of police figures are relatively tall (>1.5 m.). The comparisons suggest that in terms of body shape the police assemblage lies at the more naturalistic end of the spectrum of human representations in Laura rock art.

When visible, human feet in Laura art are depicted with various numbers of toes or toeless with rounded, sometimes indistinct ends. The range is apparent in various published records (Cole 1992:Figures 2-6; Huchet 1993:Figure 4; Trezise 1971). The police depictions tend to have clearly defined feet,

**Figure 9 Police motifs (not to scale).**
Table 2 Body ratio (width/height; SD=standard deviation).

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Quinkan Figures</th>
<th>Male Figures</th>
<th>Police Figures</th>
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<td>759</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>625</td>
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Table 3 Composition of white ‘contact’ paints, extract from Watchman *et al.* (1992); *Ward et al.* (2001) (note GH3 contaminated with underlying yellow paint).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Motif</th>
<th>Sample No.</th>
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<td>MR8</td>
<td>White 5Y8/1</td>
<td>K,Al, Si, Fe</td>
<td>muscovite</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lee Cheu</td>
<td>horse</td>
<td>LCS1</td>
<td>White 5Y8/1</td>
<td>Al, Si, K (Ti, Fe, Si)</td>
<td>quartz, kaolinite, illite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee Cheu</td>
<td>LC1 policeman (upper)</td>
<td>LCS2</td>
<td>White 5Y8/1</td>
<td>Si, Al, K (Fe, Ti, Si)</td>
<td>quartz, kaolinite, illite</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lee Cheu</td>
<td>man</td>
<td>LCS3</td>
<td>White 5Y8/1</td>
<td>Al, Si, K (Ti, Fe)</td>
<td>quartz, kaolinite, illite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Bluff</td>
<td>policeman (cap)</td>
<td>RB3</td>
<td>White 2.5Y8/2</td>
<td>Si, Al, (K, Ti, Fe)</td>
<td>kaolinite, quartz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Bluff</td>
<td>woomera stencil</td>
<td>RB4</td>
<td>White 5Y8/1</td>
<td>Si (Al, K, Ti, Fe)</td>
<td>kaolinite, quartz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giant Horse</td>
<td>Giant Horse (outline)</td>
<td>GH3</td>
<td>White 10R8/1</td>
<td>Fe, Si, K, Al</td>
<td>goethite, quartz, muscovite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Composition of red ‘contact’ paints (Note: LCS4 contaminated with underlying white paint).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Motif</th>
<th>Sample No.</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Minerals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red Bluff</td>
<td>policeman</td>
<td>RB2</td>
<td>Dusky red 10R3/4</td>
<td>Fe (Si)</td>
<td>Hematite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee Cheu</td>
<td>policeman (Red stripe)</td>
<td>LCS4</td>
<td>Dark red 7.5R3/4</td>
<td>Si, Al, Fe (K, Ti, P, Cu)</td>
<td>Quartz, kaolinite, illite, haematite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 Policemen and associated objects (‘rifles’) (W/R/W= white outline around red solid area with infill of white lines; Y=yellow; BY=brownish yellow; RY=reddish yellow; PT=code after Trezise 1971).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motif</th>
<th>PT</th>
<th>Object as Fraction of Policeman Height</th>
<th>Object Colours</th>
<th>Policeman Colours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>O23</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>P27</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>J52</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>Red outline</td>
<td>R/RY/R (and grey upper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
<td>G57</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>Red outline</td>
<td>R/RY/R (and grey upper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>E6</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>W/Y/W</td>
<td>W/Y/W (upper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>I12</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>BY</td>
<td>BY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>J7</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>W/Y/W</td>
<td>W/R/W (lower)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>E10</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>BY</td>
<td>R (upper); BY (lower)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>M26</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>BY</td>
<td>R (upper); BY (lower)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>J37</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>N47</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>K21</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>J25</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>L38</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GH 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH 1</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH 2</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LC1</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>R/W/R</td>
<td>R/W/R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB1</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td>W/R/W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and of these four have toes (Figure 9a,b). The trend suggests that clearly defined, rounded feet (interpreted by Trezise 1971 as boots) may be a sign of the police.

Some figures have variations in colour and/or form which may indicate clothing (e.g. Figures 8, 9b,c,d,e,h) or features which may represent a holster or leggings (Figures 6-7). Six of the figures (e.g. Figures 9b,c,d,e,h) have unique head forms, quite different from standard head shapes and headdresses at Laura including those of various spirit figures and 'culture heroes' (see Cole 1992; Figures 2-6; Huchet 1993:97, Figures 4-5). Caesar Lee Cheu stated that (at Crocodile 1) the 'red oval shapes on top of the heads of figures 205 and 214 represent the peaked caps of the mounted police' (Trezise 1985:75). The Aboriginal hand sign for 'bullyman' was an open hand across the forehead followed by a gesture which meant 'run away quickly' as demonstrated by Willy Long (Trezise 1985:75). As the troopers wore caps at all times to distinguish them from local Aborigines (Corfield 1923; see Figure 11) it is likely that the depiction of the cap symbolises this practice. The lines across the foreheads of some police are reminiscent of the hand sign.

Paint Colours and Materials

With the exception of grey, the colours of police paintings follow the usual colour spectrum of Laura art. The most frequent combination, white outlines around red solid areas with white infill, is characteristic of the recent style at Laura (Cole 1998). Overpainting, a practice which is commonplace here and may have some antiquity (Cole 1998; Watchman 1988) has transformed some monochrome police figures into bichromes or polychromes. However, the application of grey paint over light red infill in two police figures at Crocodile 1 is unique. Another unusual stylistic combination is the use of contrasting colours above and below the waist of the capped figure at Lee Cheu (Figure 8) and two figures at Pig shelter (Table 1-P3, 1-P5).

Earth pigments were obtained from local sources such as the ochre quarry near Emu shelter reported by Trezise (1971). Paint sampling projects (Ward et al. 2001; Watchman et al. 1992) included Giant Horse, Lee Cheu and Red Bluff shelters for the express purpose of including 'contact' paints in the analysis. White paints from a cap, horse and a policeman follow standard recipes with kaolinite as the main mineral (Table 3). However, in the field the Lee Cheu whites appeared to be very luminous and were difficult to match with Munsell colours. The identical compositions of these paints support field observations that the Lee Cheu 5 paintings are linked, as in a scene.

Although Laura red paints have similar gross mineralogies (haematite and quartz), a minority (5/30 samples, see Watchman et al. 1992; Table 3) contain a relatively pure haematite with a typical value of 10R3/4, dusky red. The red paint from the policeman at Red Bluff (Table 4) is in this group, suggesting the selection of a high grade pigment.

Yellow, reddish yellow and brownish yellow (Table 5) are typical of Laura paints which contain goethite (Watchman et al. 1992:Tables 4-5). However the grey paint used in two police figures at Crocodile 1 is rare and its source unknown. The only known paint of similar colour occurs at Blue Figures shelter, Deighton River, where a possibly unique bluish grey paint contains a manganese bearing mineral and perhaps organic ingredients (Cole and Watchman 1993). The grey paint at Crocodile 1 points to very dedicated efforts to obtain rare pigment to characterise the navy blue of the troopers’ shirts.

Lines

All but two police figures have infill in the form of a grid or a simpler pattern of intersecting lines and outlines (Table 5, Figure 9). Such arrangements are not unique to the police as Rosenfeld (1982:211) identified them on 49% of faunal depictions (see Huchet 1990; Walsh 1988:204). Rosenfeld concluded that the regular placement of lines is likely to have cognitive value. It follows that the regular lines which mark off or form axes along arms, wrists, necks and ankles, or intersect legs and bodies of police figures have cognitive value. In three figures there is a clear demarcation between the grid pattern of the lower body and the plain upper body creating the impression of shirts and trousers (Figure 9b,d). Another pattern is the correspondence between the colour, outlines, lines or infill of each policeman (particularly his feet) and the style of the juxtaposed object (Table 5, Figure 9).

Other Associations and Graphic Cues

Painters were selective with regard to the motifs they placed next to policemen. For example, horses (and horse tracks) are depicted rather than pigs. Association with white hand stencils is a standard pattern in Laura art, as are juxtapositions with apparent symbols of sorcery or violence (snake, catfish, bones, crocodile, see Trezise 1971). Lines of shallow, pounded marks such as those which run across police paintings at Mingaroo Hill are another common feature of Laura rockshelters (Cole 1998). According to George Musgrave (pers. comm., 2000) such marks were made by ‘flogging the rock with a stone while singing, clapping and using special words’, a ceremonial act to re-energise the paintings, similar to repainting.

Although there are one or two cases of speared human figures amongst the wider assemblage of human figures in Laura rock art there is no evidence of patterned associations between human figures and artefacts most commonly depicted in the art: axes, boomerangs, spearthrowers, dillybags and mortuary baskets. Therefore the placement of a stone axe with a policeman and the repeated juxtaposition of the police figures with the shapes which have been widely labelled as guns or rifles (Cole 1995; Flood 1997; Huchet 1993; Morwood 2002; Trezise 1971, 1985; Walsh 1988) is most unusual. As Trezise does not indicate the source of the term ‘rifles’ we cannot assume that it came from Aboriginal informants. Although the shapes are unlike realistic depictions of rifles in Arnhem Land art (see Brandl 1982; Chaloupka 1993) they are positioned under arms in realistic proportions to human height (Table 5). The objects with figures P6 and LC1 are outside of the usual range (Table 5, Figure 9d,f) but neither do they comply with standard artefact categories at Laura. If the vaguely drawn objects (Figures 4, 9b) depict rifles, they may represent the very uncertain perceptions of early, terrifying encounters with guns.

Locations

Selection of ‘police’ sites appears to have been culturally determined – all are established story places where successive paintings connect with ancestral law. Within these cultural constraints sites were chosen for strategic features: elevation, shelter, security, water supplies and views across settler tracks and...
river corridors. The figures are painted on walls, not ceilings, in prominent positions. Many appear to gaze across the landscape, placed for visual effect, to see and be seen.

With the exception of Lee Cheu 1, the police sites have good shelter, living space and substantial evidence of occupation and art. As shown in Table 6 they contain c.40–350 motifs, and as such are typical of Laura rockshelters with medium-to-large, generalised assemblages of art (Cole 1998). They do not resemble ‘specialised’ sites identified by Rosenfeld (1982:215) by a ‘restricted theme’ of ‘elaborate anthropomorphs’ (e.g. Timara Quinkans, see Ang-Gnarra Aboriginal Corporation 1996) and an absence of habitation debris.

**Temporal and Social Contexts**

Although clan populations were depleted, displaced and sometimes obliterated in the colonial period (e.g. Brady et al. 1980), the local groups continued, albeit with altered compositions. In the late nineteenth century such resilient groups were living on the Laura Deighton plateau, in the Palmer ranges, near the head of the Little Laura River and moving around the Laura, Deighton and Kennedy Rivers (Cole 2004; Trezise 1993).

The police sites are located in such areas, situated on top layers of the art sequence in sites which have evidence of both long-term and very recent Aboriginal occupation. According to George Musgrave and Tommy George such paintings are associated with rockshelter use by their Old People (who belonged to the local groups) in ‘The Wild Time’. Perhaps the genesis was at Crocodile 1 during guerilla warfare on the nearby Hell’s Gate track (see Cole 2004:174-175).

**Discussion**

The distribution and coherent style of the police assemblage across the catchments of the Laura and Little Laura Rivers confirms oral history and documentary evidence that Aboriginal groups continued to move around and interact in the post-contact period. Cultural features which allowed local groups to transform and survive included multilingualism, webs of kin relationships, flexible laws of inheritance, ancestral, inalienable connections to land and the capacity to live in wild and inaccessible ancestral country which was marginal to colonisation.

Sources of symbolic structure in the police paintings are visual, material and contextual (motifs, paints, design elements, graphic associations, positions and locations), following conventions of Laura art. However the police motif is distinguished from other anthropomorphs by a singular selection and combination of customary signs (masculinity, eyes, characteristic feet, traditional colours and paints, lines, positions, associations) and innovations (selection of rare paint, realistic features, juxtaposed objects, signs of action and interaction). Elaborate patterns, additions and renovations suggest that paintings were constructed ceremonially, painstakingly and periodically. Variation is within the usual range of Laura style (Cole 1992, 1998). Some is likely to be a result of ‘artistic freedom’ (see Biebuyck 1973:180 cited by Layton 1993:34; Morphy 1991; Rosenfeld 1982:217; Washburn 1983 for creative variation in corporate art systems). Smaller-scale police paintings may be connected to shorter stays at sites which lack water supplies or living space.

Why were signs of naturalism (in height, body shape and clothing) an attribute of the police? While representations of clothing may be merely an elaboration of the convention of adding headdresses, belts etc to denote special functions (see George et al. 1995), Rosenfeld (1982:213) concluded that the ‘higher level of explicit characterising information’ in depictions of pig and horse was intended to assist image recognition, except where such detail is already provided in ‘clearly characterised paintings of the same species’. This theory may explain the relative naturalism of most police figures and the absence of detail in figures which have nearby, explicit paintings of pigs, horses or policemen (Figures 9f,h,i). It may also shed light on the depiction of the ambiguous shape of the object or ‘rifle’. As there is a virtual absence in Laura art of the non-figurative (see Rosenfeld 1982), there must be a reason for this ambiguity. The spatial and stylistic connections between the objects and the juxtaposed policemen suggest that the figures are cognitively inseparable. Therefore the clue to identifying the object lies in the external information supplied by the juxtaposed policeman.

Official police photographs suggest that the trooper uniform of navy blue shirts with red facings, navy blue caps, trousers with a red stripe, boots and leggings (see Lamond 1949:32; Richards 2008:125) was a powerful symbol of police authority. Evidently the distinctive cap and the navy blue trousers with the red stripe continued to be worn by police trackers into the twentieth century (Laura George, pers. comm., 1999) (Figure 12). It is likely that the intrinsic, symbolic value of the uniform is a source of meaning in depictions of the police. If the rounded feet represent boots their use as graphic signs is also feasible given the significance of tracks in Aboriginal knowledge systems (Rosenfeld 1982; Trezise 1971) and reports of amazed reactions of Aboriginal people to seeing boots and boot tracks (Flood 1997:314; Reynolds 1982).

The depiction of the penis on apparently trousered figures may seem an illogical mix of realism and metaphor. However
a similar contradiction is evident in horse depictions in which Rosenfeld (1982:213) found ‘a non-standardized combination of new visual clues of shape and traits are incorporated to specify the identity of the animal painted’. In some depictions this appears as a blend of realistic shape and an unnatural, marsupial-like anal swelling. Rosenfeld (1982:217) concluded that such ‘zoologically contradictory information appears to have been acceptable’. Clearly the mindful selection of attributes by Aboriginal artists to create motifs (i.e. consistent categories) is not required to conform to non-Indigenous understandings and categories (see Ross 2001).

The police figures have alignments associated with death or juxtapositions with symbols of sorcery or violence. Trezise (1971) was informed of the use of image sorcery to kill an enemy. For example, a man could make and use a bark effigy of a crocodile to kill his enemies, or paint a picture of the victim attacked by snakes (Trezise 1971:30). A piece of apparel containing the victim’s sweat or hair was taken to a rockshelter ‘chanted over and buried in the floor, the appropriate figure painted on a rock wall or ceiling, while the sorcerer chanted the manner of death’ (Trezise 1971:9-10). Painting details such as clothing may have compensated for a lack of personal items of the police, although it is not known whether the sorcery was aimed at individuals or police in general. As the process required the victim’s knowledge, the staring eyes and prominent placement of police figures may represent efforts to connect visually with the victim.

Reynolds (1982:86-87) argued that sorcery was important to Aboriginal resistance and in the Aboriginal mind possibly ‘at least as significant as physical confrontation’. However the usually elaborate police paintings are not typical sorcery figures which, according to Trezise (1971:9), are ‘usually poorly executed in a plain solid colour and seldom have any decoration.’ Tommy George Musgrave and George Musgrave (George et al. 1995:33) explained that painting the invaders was not only ‘to kill them’ but ‘to get strong to fight them’. In other words, the police motif was as an expression of cultural identity, power and solidarity in fighting the police.

Conclusions
Richards (2008:5) concluded that the Queensland Native Police ‘were, for Aboriginal people, the symbol of invasion and dispossession throughout the second half of the nineteenth century’. Perhaps the paintings reflect this ideology. However, colonialism was not a simple, dualistic process involving two isolated, opposing entities (Stein 2005; Van Dommelan 2006). Native police detachments were plagued by internal conflict due to the coercion of Aborigines into their ranks (a policy of divide and rule, Richards 2008). Troopers often deserted or rebelled as in the uprising of six troopers at Upper Laura Barracks in 1880 in which three troopers were killed (see Richards 2009). The Native Mounted Police force, like colonialism itself (see Little 2007; Schreiber 2005) was not monolithic, and in Cape York Peninsula it struggled for years to defeat Aboriginal resistance (Cole 2004).

Evidence presented in this study suggests that visual culture, an ancient and enduring traditional knowledge system at Laura, remained at the heart of Aboriginal culture in the tumultuous colonial period. Symbolic structure indicates that the artists collectively conceived and contextualised cultural meaning in both traditional and innovative ways, through the painstaking selection and mindful combination of graphic elements, motifs, story sites, materials and associations. The paintings of police emerged as specialised, value-laden images in Quinkan style. Colonial politics and war generated drastic changes in Aboriginal society but did not destroy the unique worldviews and values which bound it together.

Symbolic structure therefore points to solidarity and confidence rather than cultural disintegration. However, the production of art in this dangerous environment also involved imagination and courage. Following other cross-cultural studies which have shown how material culture negotiated cultural identities (Harrison 2002; Stein 2005; Taçon et al. 2003; Thomas 2002) this research suggests that visual culture supported the
cultural resilience and strategic transformation of Quinkan society. Rock art has provided a rare glimpse of cultural identity in the context of local agency (see Rogers 2006) which, although a key component of colonialism (Hall and Silliman 2006; Stein 2005), is missing from colonial accounts.

Acknowledgments
I thank the George and Musgrave families of Laura, in particular Tommy George, and the late George Musgrave and Laura George for their support in this research. This paper was presented at WAC6, Dublin, in a session convened by Paul Taçon and colleagues (2008). For valuable comments I thank Bruce Rigby, Tommy George, Jonathan Richards, Alice Buhrich and the editors and referees. James Leech, Arthur Cole and MBE Toowong assisted with graphics. The paper draws on research assisted (variously) by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, James Cook University, Ang-Gnarra Aboriginal Corporation, Queensland Government Protection Agency (Community History Grants) and Earthwatch Institute.

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Australian Archaeology is indexed in the Arts and Humanities Citation Index of the ISI Web of Knowledge, SCOPUS, Australian Public Affairs Information Service (APAIS) and Anthropological Literature and Anthropological Index Online.

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Australian Archaeology is available through Informit and JSTOR.

Graphic Design: Lovehate Design
Printing: Screen Offset Printing
Cover: Painting of a European tall ship, most likely made in the 1700s (Photograph: Paul S.C. Taçon).

All correspondence and submissions should be addressed to:
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