

Burial Traditions In Indonesia

by

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Funerary systems in prehistoric times practised the primary and secondary burials with or without the use of containers. They have been found all over Indonesia, on the coastal — as well as in the interior areas. The containers they used were very much varied in material, ranging from stone, like the stone cists, sarcophagi, kalamba's, cylindric graves, dolmens, waruga's, and stone chambers; earthenware like jars and urns, or metal like the kettledrums. Those without containers were mostly found on the coast like at Gilimanuk, Plawangan, Lewoleba, Anyer, etc. For Indonesia it has not been easy to determine a burial complex of one type of system, for instance Plawangan represents both types, those without containers and with containers; such as earthenware jars and a bronze kettledrum. Loweleba as an urn burial site also represents the type of burials without coffins/containers and those which use of dolmens. For burial sites were selected places located on the sea- and lake shore, river banks, hill slopes flat lands, caves or crevasses. The position in which they arranged the corpse varied: extended, flexed, crouched, squatted, with an orientation of West-East, Southwest-Northeast, or Northwest-South East (D.D. Bintarti 1991).

Since the neolithic stage, the prehistoric culture has progressed rapidly and man started to live not solely concentrating on surviving by producing food, they also showed interest in matters beyond life. Death was regarded as the final journey man has to undertake, therefore it was seen as an important event of separation of the dead from those left behind. It was for that reason rituals took place to honour the dead, with the hope for a smooth journey with no obstacles to the land of soul. The dead was also provided with burial goods consisting of objects very much prized in life. To honour the dead, monuments were then erected, which later developed into the complex of the megalithic culture. This culture reached its culmination during the metal age, continuing until the present,

though at some places undergoing changes (Teguh Asmar 1983: 836-840).

At present funerary systems with prehistoric characteristics are still practised in Indonesia: primary and secondary burials, with or without containers, and the combination of both. Observing the customs of burials with various rituals in several areas, the concept of life after death was obvious.

Primary burials in containers were found in Sumba, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku. The dead is wrapped in cloth or mats, or put in a wooden coffin/box, securely closed and placed in the main house like in Batak Karo, Nias, Kayan, Bolaang — Mongondow, Adonara, Lembata, East Kalimantan, Sumba.

Direct burial was done by placing and burying the dead in the squatted position like in Sawu, Ngada, South-West Timor, Aru, and Seram. The extended position were for those who met unnatural death, were killed, because of accidents, or suicide, such as was practised in Sabu, Flores, Sumba, and North Halmahera. This position with no regard as to the cause of death was found in Sula, and West Sumatra. On Buru island the dead was placed extended side long. Children were buried flexed in side long position (Leti, Kisar). Rituals were done before and during the interment as a parting feast, providing the dead with funeral goods (R.P. Soejono 1977).

Secondary funeral in dolmens in Sumba's, and in warungs still practised in Minahasa until recently, also using stone cists like in Toba. The placing of the dead in caves was found in Maluku, Irian Jaya, and South Sulawesi. The Dayak in Kalimantan used wooden coffins or earthenware jars. Open burial sites are found at Trunyan, Bali. The burial sites are on the hills, hill-slopes, flatlands, in caves or in niches, on poles or around the dwelling places house.

In Sawu, when a man died he will buried under the steps of the house facing the man's quarters; and women were buried under the steps at the back of the house leading to the women's quarters (Wetering 1926: 530). In Sikka (Flores) and Kisar (Maluku) children were buried under the parents' room (Riedel 1886: 421; Ardnt 1932: 126).

Several tribes in Nias put the bones of the primary burial in a stone - or wooden box and buried it in front of the house (Kruyt 1906: 332). On Bima burials were found among the dwelling places (Zollinger 1850: 160-161).

There are various ways to carry out the primary and secondary burials. First the corpse was buried or wrapped in clothes/mats and laid in the house in a wooden coffin or placed on a platform, tied in a tree, or cremated. The secondary burial took place after it decomposed, leaving only bones, which were collected, rewrapped with clothes. they may make use of containers, or put them on a felled tree, in caves/niches, in stone chambers or in cylindric graves. The primary burial not to be followed by the secondary stage, with or without containers like in the Limapuluh Koto Regency, was marked only by a tomb stone grave built of upright stones. On Sumba, in the event of death, the corpse was tied in flexed position than wrapped in the traditional cloth, regarded as to be of the highest cultural value, and put in a container made of bamboo. The dead was put in the *adat house*, guarded by his relatives, usually women. In the evening the *gong*

was played to accompany the chaunting of players for the dead's well being directing his way to *praimarapu*, the abode of the dead. Every body who regards himself as member of the same clan came and contributed a cloth, so that the dead was buried under a heap of cloths. After the right moment was decided upon, it was put into a wooden coffin and buried, or after it was wrapped with clothes, it was left as that, till the time for burial came. If a family dolmen was available, then with various rituals the dead was buried in it. Prior to the making of new dolmen, various rituals were carried out, including the selection of material, cutting, dragging to the place for the ceremony, carving and erecting the dolmen and finally the inhumation. Status or position of the deceased in the community was reflected on the dolmen by the size, decorative motifs, supporting poles, menhirs (*penji*), and funeral good (H. Sukender 1990-1991).

The Ngaju's in Central Kalimantan practised the primary and secondary burial. The first was done in three ways:

- the ordinary burial;
- putting the dead in a coffin than placed him on platform;
- cremating the corpse.

The ordinary burial was done by burying the dead, lying extended on the right side for men and on the left side for women. The funeral goods consist of daily tools (*mandau*/sword, spear, arrows, etc.), pottery (plate, bowl), money, and cloth. The grave was marked by a tomb stone. On the 4 corners, small poles were planted, on which were tied shreds of cloth, marking it as the first stage of burial.

The disposal by putting the dead in a coffin, then placing it on a wooden platform of 1-2 m high was the second. At the bottom of the coffin was a hole through which a bamboo pipe was put as a led out for the corpse's fluid.

The third way by cremation, only to enhance the decomposing process, so care was taken as not to burn it to ashes. When the bones were clean, they were collected, put in a jar, than placed in a small hut in the cemetery/funeral site. After this stage, then the relatives prepared the funeral ceremonies. By doing so, they were then released from the burden and duty, and for several years they made preparations for the second stage involving many rituals which costs a lot of money.

The secondary burial started by a ritual of digging up and collecting the bones, putting them in a container. There were two types of containers: *pambak/tambak* and *sandong*. A *tambak* is a space dug out an the earth measuring 2 X 2 X 2 m. The four sides were covered by ulin wood planks and a coverlid at the upper side. On this cover the roof was built. The bones were put in this dug-out space and returned. *Sandong* may present 3 types: *kariring*, *samburub* and *true sandong*. Unlike the *tambak* which was buried (under ground), the *sandong* is put on the surface, supported by poles. The *kariring* is supported by a pole of about 2 m high. On the pole was a miniature hut a resembling a boat, measuring 50 X 100 X 50 cm. The cover was made of layers of planks laid slanting on its length, with no nails. The decoration consist of spiral motif. The *samburub* was

supported by 2 poles of 1,5 - 2 m high, the roof top decorated with a statue of a bird, the *piak liau*. the pole was carved with human faces, triangle- and ladder-motifs. The *true sandong* (some times people called all funerary structures *sandong*) present those supported by 4 poles and single pole. They were richly decorated, mostly with geometric design (spiral, ladder, triangle, circle). These supporting poles are 3-6 m high (Kiwok D. Rampai 1983: 883-898).

In Maluku, particularly Southeast Maluku primary burials were done by putting the dead on a bamboo-platform. After it decomposed the bones were collected and buried on the beach. The site was then fenced by coral rocks forming a rectangle. They were mostly for a family or clan. Besides, they also put the dead in caves (which are also located on the beach), in wooden coffins with various funeral goods (D.D. Bintarti and Sudiono 1990).

Irian Jaya and South Sulawesi have similar customs like in Maluku, viz the cave burials. The funeral goods were mostly Chinese ceramics. Irian Jaya also yielded evidence which showed that the bones were disposed and was not followed by the second stage, like those in *Ayamuru*. After the bones were collected, they were distributed among the relatives to function as salismans, since they live nomadic, the bones go with them (D.D. Bintarti 1994).

In North Sulawesi, secondary burial was done by using the *waruga*, a trapezoid burial coffin. The *waruga* was carved with various motifs and some even depict the process of birth (Hadimulyono 1976).

In Sumatra, particularly Tapanuli of the Batak people, secondary burials used *sarcophagi* and on the cover part was carved a horse-head, and boat (H.T. Simanjuntak 1982-1983: 15-29). in West Sumatra no coffins were used, the dead were directly buried, the grave was marked by upright stones (*menhir*) with curving tops. For the present, according to the modern tradition, the dead were placed facing west (H. Sukender 1989).

Based on observations of modes of burials, Indonesia presents a variety of burial patterns, containers and funeral goods. What they have in common ways the concept and believe of life after death. Are the differences in the mode of burials indicating the differences of places of origin or time of arrival in the archipelago? These are interesting questions and open for further deliberations.

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