

Living Megalithic Tradition in Bali*

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Prehistoric study in Indonesia has found evidence that megalithic tradition was once widely spread in Indonesian archipelago, namely in Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi, Bali, Sumba, Sumbawa, Flores and East Timor (Hoop, 1932; Heekeren, 1958: 44-79; Soejono *et al.*, 1984: 203-238; Sutaba, 1995). It is believed that the tradition, developed approximately before or after the Christian era, produced menhirs, dolmens, sarcophagi, stepped pyramids, stone seats, ancestor statues and others. Generally, most of them are dedicated to the worship of spirit of the ancestors and the supernatural powers. This religious system is a universal feature of the megalithic society which had a very strong influence on the life of the people in Indonesia.

Although the megalithic tradition has seen changes, but the tradition is still alive in Nias, Toraja, Bali and in the eastern part of Indonesia (Mulia, 1981; Sutaba, 1996b). It should be noted here that the megalithic tradition in Indonesia has been diffused into the traditional local culture and also into Hinduism in Bali and Christian in eastern part of Indonesia. This important fact should be regarded as the dynamic character and selective capacity of the Indonesian people, who have successfully kept the tradition alive until to-day. It is proved also that the megalithic tradition had established a strong social and cultural foundation for the nation (Sutaba, 1996a, 1996b).

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In Bali (fig 1) there are several megalithic monuments, namely menhirs, sarcophagi, terraced pyramids, stone seats, ancestor statues, pitmarked stones etc. Among them there are living megalithic tradition, which is still maintained by the people for the welfare of the society (Sutaba, 1996b). Based on our researches, we have classified the megalithic monuments in Bali into four main groups (Table 1), namely:

- 1) menhirs
- 2) sarcophagi
- 3) ancestor statues, and
- 4) stone seats.

Megalithic tradition in Bali is very remarkable in the sense that it developed its local character which could be seen in its type characteristic and local names. These features have been found in other megalithic sites in Indonesia, although the development of the megalithic tradition in Bali could not be separated from the development in other parts of Indonesia.

Megalithic culture in Bali belonged to the old megalithic tradition. However this tradition had undergone several changes and some of them have lost their religious function to-day. Fortunately most of them are still maintained as sacred monuments, such as the menhirs and a number of ancestor statues and stone seats. The last group, the stone seats, are being built in village temples, clan temples and in special places such as in the ricefield. Generally these monuments are not found alone, but together with other megalithic monuments,

Table 1.

THE MAIN MEGALITHIC BLEMENTS IN BALI AND ITS FUNCTION TODAY

No.	Megalithic Elements	Total and Function		Total
		Sacred	Profane	
1.	Menhirs	229	—	229
2.	Sarcophagi	—	174	174
3.	Ancestor Statues	135	3	138
4.	Stone Seats	99	27	126
TOTAL		463 (69,42%)	204 (30,58%)	667 (100%)

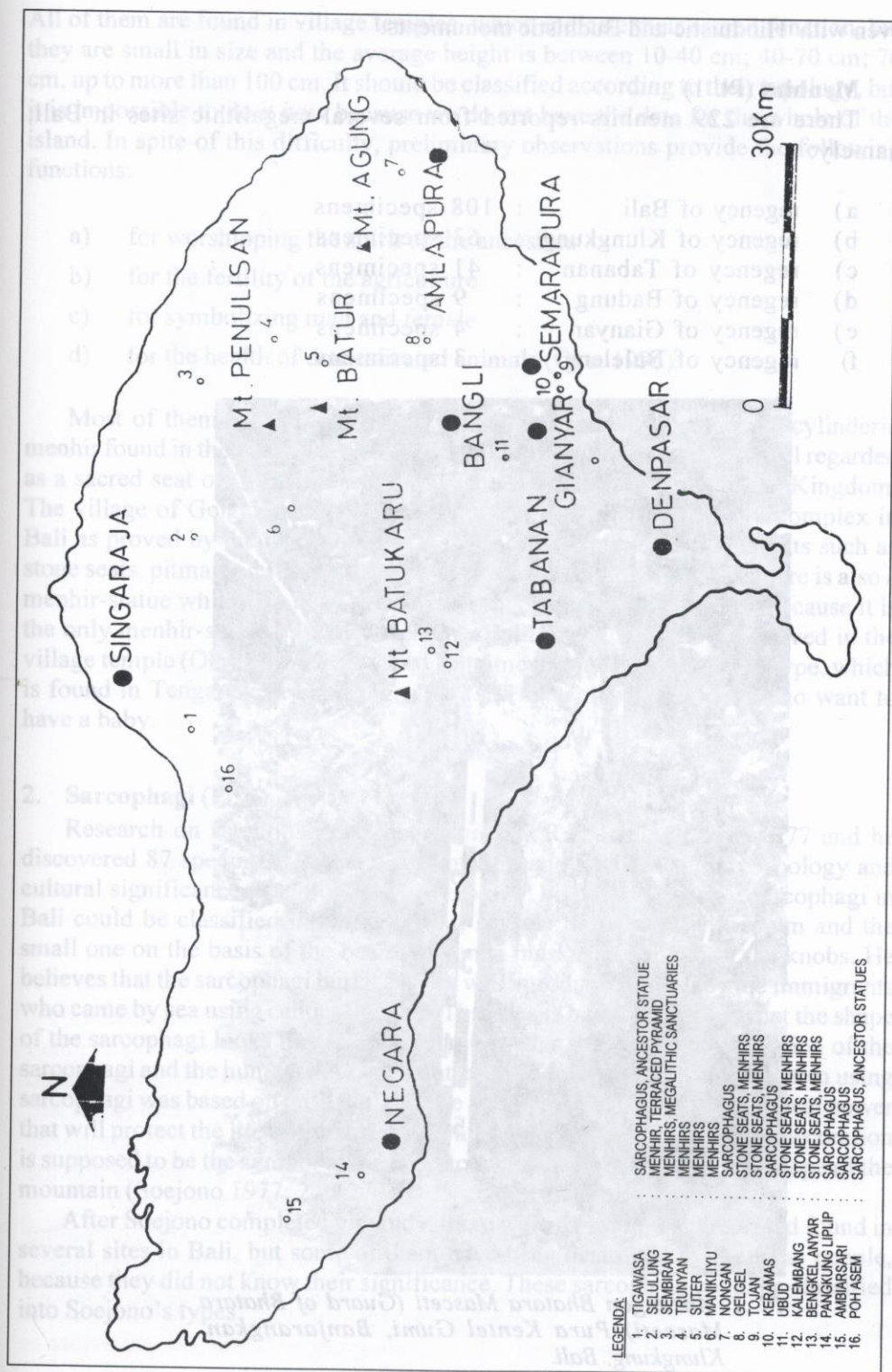


Figure 1. Distribution of megalithic in Bali.

even with Hinduistic and Budhistic monuments.

1. Menhirs (Pl. 1)

There are 229 menhirs reported from several megalithic sites in Bali, namely:

- a) regency of Bali : 108 specimens
- b) regency of Klungkung : 63 specimens
- c) regency of Tabanan : 41 specimens
- d) regency of Badung : 9 specimens
- e) regency of Gianyar : 4 specimens
- f) regency of Buleleng : 3 specimens



Pl. 1. Ancangan Bhatar Masceti (Guard of Bhatar Masceti) Pura Kentel Gumi, Banjarangkan, Klungkung, Bali.

All of them are found in village temples, which indicate their sacred function, but they are small in size and the average height is between 10-40 cm; 40-70 cm; 70 cm. up to more than 100 cm. It should be classified according to their typology, but it is impossible to do it now because we do not have the data for the whole of the island. In spite of this difficulty, preliminary observations provide the following functions:

- a) for worshipping the spirit of the ancestors
- b) for the fertility of the agriculture
- c) for symbolizing man and female
- d) for the health of domesticated animals (Oka, 1996).

Most of them are made from unworked river stone, except for a cylindric menhir found in the village of Gelgel, Klungkung (height 58 cm.), and still regarded as a sacred seat of Gusti Agung Maruti, the Prime Minister of Gelgel Kingdom. The village of Gelgel can be considered as an important megalithic complex in Bali as proved by the discoveries of a number of megalithic monuments such as stone seats, pitmarked stone and menhirs. Apart from these findings, there is also a menhir-statue which has been regarded as very important monument because it is the only menhir-statue ever discovered in Bali. The find is now preserved in the village temple (Oka, 1977). Another type of menhir in Bali is a phallic type, which is found in Tenganan Pegringsingan and still worshiped by couple who want to have a baby.

2. Sarcophagi (Pl. 2)

Research on sarcophagi has been done by R.P. Soejono until 1977 and he discovered 87 specimens in the whole of Bali and he studied their typology and cultural significance. Regarding their typology, he pointed out that sarcophagi in Bali could be classified into three types, namely the large, the medium and the small one on the basis of the bearded human masks decoration on the knobs. He believes that the sarcophagi burial system was introduced to Bali by the immigrants who came by sea using canoes or ships. This idea is based on the fact that the shape of the sarcophagi looks like a canoe or ship. After studying the orientation of the sarcophagi and the human masks decoration, he concludes that burial system using sarcophagi was based on the belief that the ancestor's spirit provides magical power that will protect the life of the society from bad spirit. The human masks decoration is supposed to be the symbol of the ancestors who lived on top or on the slope of the mountain (Soejono 1977: 246-270).

After Soejono completed his study, there were 87 sarcophagi reported found in several sites in Bali, but some of them have been destroyed by the local people, because they did not know their significance. These sarcophagi could be classified into Soejono's types.



Pl. 2. Sarcophagus found in Bona, Gianyar, Bali.

3. Ancestor Statues (Pl. 3)

We have investigated 138 ancestor statues originated from several sites in Bali, but not from the west part of the island, although in this part a number of sarcophagi and urn burials have been discovered. Most of the statues are very simple, rounded eyes, open mouth with outstanding teeth and some of them have genital (male and female), but not in proportionate way (Sutaba, 1996b). Among them, 135 specimens (97,83%) are functioning as sacred medium for the welfare of the society and the rest, three of them (2,17%) have turned out to be profane objects.

Until now, research on these findings have not yet finished and still continuing in order to complete compiling data in solving various problems, such as typology, diffusion, role and background. On the basis of our present knowledge we proposed a very tentative classification based on their function:



Pl. 3. Ancestor Statue, Pura Dalem, Celuk, Buruan, Blahbatuh Gianyar, Bali.

1. for worshipping the spirit of prominent leaders or ancestors.
2. for the success of agriculture or the fertility of the land.
3. for the health of the domesticated animals, e.g. buffalo and cow.
4. for the couple who want to have baby.
5. for celebrating the success of the people's prayers (Sutaba, 1996b).

4. Stone Seats (Pl. 4, 5)

Among other megalithic types are the stone seats. Research on these stone seats has been done by I Made Sutaba (1995) in the regency of Karangasem, Klungkung, Gianyar, Badung and Tabanan and he found 126 stone seats which have not been studied yet in terms of typology and functions. On the basis of their function, he has differentiated them into two groups, namely 99 specimens (78,57%) as sacred objects, and 27 specimens (21,43%) have lost their sacred function.



Pl. 4. Stone seat, subtype TB1 Gelgel, Klungkung, Bali.



*Pl. 5.
Stone seat, subtype
TBS2StR3, in the
family shrine,
Kalembang Kaja,
Penebel, Tabanan,
Bali.*

Based on their typology, he classified them into four main types, namely (1) type TB¹ is the simple one, consisting of one or more horizontally placed flat stone with a vertically placed flat stone as back support. This type is also called sampalan type, because it is found in the village of Sampalan and its surrounding (Klungkung). Type TB¹ is a horizontally long stretched subtype, and also without arms support; (2) type TBSt is the type with arms support (for the right and the left arm) with one or more spaces between the utmost right and the utmost left arm support, which is found in the village of Bengkel Anyar. There are five subtypes, namely TBStR1, TBStR2, TBStR3, TBStR5 and TBStR8; (3) type TBSSt is the stepped type of stone seats with arm supports and one or more spaces between the utmost right and the utmost left support. This type is also named as Kalembang type, because it is found in the village of Kalembang and Pegubugan (Tabanan) and there are three subtypes, namely TBS2StR1, TBS2StR2 and TBS2StR3; (4) type TBM is made of one block of monolith demonstrating the horizontal seat and vertically carved back support. This Ubud type (Gianyar) is found in the village of Ubud and in Kamasan (Klungkung). It is proved now that such type does not give us its function (Sutaba, 1995).

Based on their function the sacred stone seats could be divided into four groups, namely (1) for worshipping the spirit of the ancestors (37 stone seats or 40.66%); (2) for supernatural power (17 specimens or 18.68%); (3) dedicated to the spirit of fertility and wealth (34 specimens or 37.36%), and (4) the one with the multiple functions dedicated to the ancestors as well as the supernatural power (three specimens or 3.30%). The believe that the soul of the ancestors who had their homes on top or on the slope of the mountainous area have the power of fertility which can be distributed through the water from the mountain to the ricefields. Being sacred, the stone seats are generally built on sacred and important places in the village such as in the temple compounds, in the family shrine compounds and in the ricefields. It is obvious that the stone seats are built on sacred areas in the village and this belief is based on dualism concept which the Balinese social-religious system is based. This belief system distinguished opposing directions such as *kaja* (north) and *kangin* (east); and *kaja kangin* (north-east) and profane *kelod* (south); and *kauh* (south-west) (Sutaba, 1995).

It should be noted here that sarcophagi is no more in use by people to-day, menhirs are still regarded as sacred monuments for the welfare of the society. The remaining groups, the ancestor statues are still regarded as sacred monuments and are maintained in the temples by the local people and only a small number of them have lost their sacred function. The last one is the stone seats which are still used for worshipping the ancestor's spirit and the supernatural power as well. Most of them are still regarded as sacred medium and only a few of them have lost their

1 TB = tahta batu (stone seat)

St = sandaran tangan (arm support)

S = susun (stepped)

R = ruang (space)

For further information see Sutaba, 1995.

holy function (Sutaba, 1995; 1996b). In discussing the sacred function of the above mentioned megalithic groups in Bali, it is very remarkable that most of them, menhirs, ancestor statues and stone seats have retained the same functions until today. In everyday life of Balinese people today, living megalithic tradition still plays important role especially in the religious life, although Hinduism has influenced the people.

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