

PRELIMINARY NOTES ON ANCESTOR STATUES IN BALI

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a number of stone statues kept in Balinese temples which are believed to be associated with pre-Hindu-Buddhist customs of ancestor veneration.

The megalithic tradition in Indonesia was associated with the worship of important ancestors, who were believed to have the power to influence the well-being of the society. Prehistoric examples of this megalithic tradition are found in Pasemah, South Sumatra, in Java, in Sulawesi, in Bali and in Nusa Tenggara (Heekeren 1958: 44-79; Soejono 1984: 205-38). Living examples still exist in Nias, Toraja (Sulawesi), Bali and Nusa Tenggara. In these regions, people still build monuments to worship the souls of their ancestors and local deities (Soejono 1963: 34-43).

Research on the megalithic tradition in Bali has been carried out by Soejono, who has studied more than one hundred stone sarcophagi and classified them into three types (large, medium and small) based on size. Soejono believes that the burial system was based on a belief that ancestors continued to maintain spiritual powers after death. Sarcophagi have been found all over Bali, but most have been found concentrated in Central Bali (Soejono 1977: 246-270).

Other megalithic objects found in Bali include standing stones, upright settings with capstones ("dolmens"), pit-marked stones and stone heaps. Terraced platforms exist in the villages of Selulung, Pengajaran and Batu-kaang, and in villages in the western part of Kintamani. It is very important to note that all such sites are still used today as holy media for worshipping the souls of the ancestors and the local deities who protect human life (Hadimuljono 1969). Buffalo horn motifs bearing human masks have been carved on the pillars of the Bale Agung

(assembly hall) in the village of Manikliyu, and in villages in the western part of Kintamani. Such motifs are found also as symbols of ancestors in Minangkabau (Sumatra), Toraja (Sulawesi) and in the eastern part of Indonesia, (Sutaba 1969, 1970).

A number of stone seats exist in the villages of Gelgel, Tojan, Kamasan and Sampalan (Klungkung), but nowadays they have lost any former sacred function they may once have had. Other stone seats occur in temples in the villages of Kalembang, Bengkel Anyar (Tabanan) and Basangalas (Karangasem), here still with sacred connotations (Sutaba 1990; 1992: 1-16). Such stone seats are concentrated in central Bali, especially in Klungkung and Tabanan regencies, and also occur in Nias, Lampung and Terjan (Rumbi Mulia 1981).

It is clear that there are three important megalithic elements in Bali, namely sarcophagi, stone seats and ancestor statues (Soejono 1977; Sutaba 1980; 1992: 1-16). Research in Bali has also located more than one hundred ancestor statues. These are mostly kept in temples, especially in central Bali, because the local people regard them as having a holy character (Sutaba 1989: 89-15). Such statues, also known in some of the Indonesian literature as "primitive statues" or "Polynesian statues", are the subject of this short paper.

ANCESTOR STATUES IN BALINESE SOCIETY

The first ancestor statue to be reported by an archaeologist was found in the village of Poh Asem near a sarcophagus. Soejono (1977: 45, plates 133,134) believed that the statue was of the ancestor buried in the sarcophagus. This statue is very simple (Figure 1), having long ears and rounded eyes.

Another statue discovered in the village temple at Gelgel, Klungkung, is regarded as a sacred relic by the inhabitants. This statue has rounded eyes, bears a vagina on its chest and has no legs (Figure 2). The local people

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believe this statue can help childless couples to conceive (Oka 1977). Also in Gelgel and neighbouring villages, namely Tojan, Kamasan and Sampalan, there are a number of stone seats, upright stones, stone heaps, pit-marked stones and stone mortars (Oka 1977).

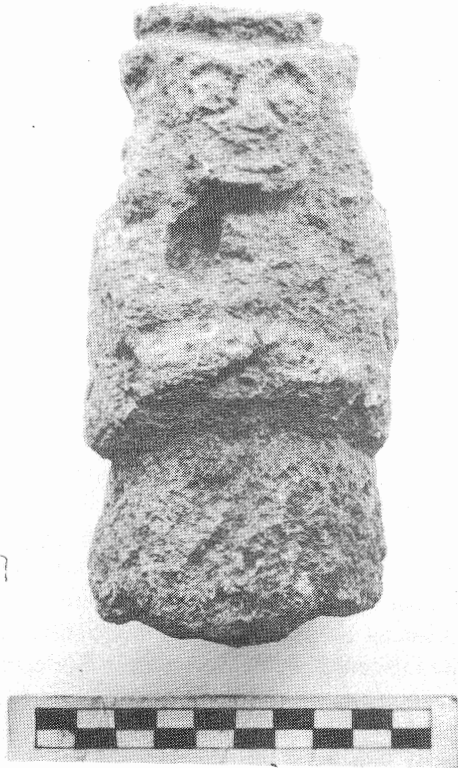


Figure 1: Ancestor statue from Poh Asem

The present writer has reported two ancestor statues found at Depaa, in the eastern part of North Bali, located not so far from the "living megalithic" village of Sembiran (Sutaba 1982: 103-18; 1985). Anatomically, these statues are very simple and have long ears.

In a temple in the village of Keramas, Gianyar regency, Purusa discovered 32 statues near a number of stored sarcophagi (Purusa 1982: 19-27). The most important of these have simple forms with genitals (male and female) symbolising their magical powers. These statues belong to the clan temple and are still worshipped in connection with cremation ceremonies. A further five ancestor statues exist in other village temples as sacred relics. As with the above, their main features are carved in a very simple way, with genitals (both male and female) and rounded eyes (Taro 1983).

Other reported ancestor statues are kept in the Pura Dalem in the village of Celuk, Gianyar (Agung 1984). The Pura Dalem is related to ancestor worship and is a

very suitable place to keep ancestor statues. These Celuk statues also have very simple forms with genitals (Figure 3) and local people still worship them. A number of sarcophagi have also been found in Celuk.

In Selulung, a mountain village in the western part of Kintamani, there are also a number of ancestor statues together with other megalithic objects such as upright stones and terraced platforms (Sita Laksmi 1985).



Figure 2: Ancestor statue in Pura Penataran Jero Agung, Gelgel, Klungkung

Recently, the present writer has found five ancestor statues in Pura Penataran Keramas, a clan temple located at Banjar Kawan, Bangli (Sutaba 1989: 89-115). As the temple is used for worshipping the souls of local ancestors it is easy to accept that the statues are the symbols of ancestors. These statues (Figure 4) have interesting characters such as bulging eyes, big noses, open mouths with prominent teeth and breasts. They are legless. The local people worship these statues, especially in relation to cremation ceremonies.

Research on ancestor statues in Bali is continuing. By 1992, a total of 134 such statues had been recorded, mainly in a belt from north to south through the centre of

the island (Table 1). All such statues are preserved in temples, except for those from Buleleng. Tentatively, I suggest that the functions of the statues are connected with the following activities:



Figure 3: Ancestor statue in Pura Dalem, Celuk, Gianyar



Figure 4: Ancestor statue in Pura Penataran Keramas, Banjar Kawan, Bangli

- 1 Ensuring the success of agriculture and the fertility of the land.
- 2 Ensuring the well-being of domestic animals.
- 3 Increasing the prospects of childbearing for childless couples.
- 4 For celebrating important rites of passage.

It should be remembered that research on ancestor statues, as well as research on the megalithic tradition in Bali, shows that the megalithic tradition was an important element of Balinese culture before the coming of Hindu-Buddhist influences. It is clear also that Balinese culture has successfully been able to absorb and modify foreign elements. The study of ancestor statues in Bali is very important in terms of tracing back the art of carving in megalithic style, which forms such a basic foundation of Balinese art today.

Table 1: Corpus of ancestor statues found in Bali up to 1992

No.	Location (regency)	Total Finds and Function	
		Sacred	Profane
1.	Gianyar	72	-
2.	Bangli	25	-
3.	Badung	18	-
4.	Tabanan	6	-
5.	Klungkung	5	-
6.	Buleleng	-	3
7.	Karangasem	2	-
8.	Jembrana	-	-
		131	3
	Total	97.6%	2.4%

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