

## MORE ON URN BURIALS IN INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Urn burials have been found from the west to the east of Indonesia, in the provinces of Jambi, West Sumatra (Lesungbatu), Bengkulu, Lampung (Pugungtampak), South Sumatra (Lahat), West Java (Anyar and Buni), Central Java (Plawangan and Bonang), Bali (Gilimanuk and Bondalem), South Sulawesi (Tile-tile), Central Sulawesi, North Sulawesi, Sumba (Melolo and Lambanapu), Flores (Warloka and Lewoleba), and still other places. This article discusses some aspects of jar burial research.*

### INTRODUCTION

Research on Indonesian urn burials was started in 1908 at Melolo, East Sumba, by A.C. Kruyt. In 1912 E.E.W.G. Schroeder found the urn burials at Tile-Tile in South Sulawesi. In the same year L. Van Vuuren reported the discovery of urns holding the cremated remains of a fifteenth century Bugis ruler at Bukaka, South Sulawesi. In 1938 reports came on urn burials at Lesungbatu in West Sumatra and Bada in Central Sulawesi (van Heekeren 1958:80-89).

After Indonesian independence, studies on urn burials commenced in Java and Bali. In 1954 van Heekeren (1958) excavated at Anyar in West Java, and this excavation was continued by H. Sukendar in 1979 (Sukendar *et al.* 1982) and 1988. Buni in West Java also yielded urn burials but the illicit diggers had destroyed the site. When R.P. Soejono excavated there in 1961 the results were nil. Gilimanuk in Bali was discovered by Soejono in 1962, and thereafter excavations were conducted in 1963-1964, 1973, 1979 (Soejono 1977, 1984), 1985-1986, and 1990-1997. In 1977 Plawangan in Central Java was discovered by H. Sukendar, and it yielded urn burials.

This site was then continuously excavated up to 1992 (Sukendar 1981; Prasetyo 1994-5).

The excavation of Lewoleba, Lembata Island, Flores, was first undertaken by Verhoeven in 1964-1965, and continued in 1984 and 1985 by the author who did not however recover any more urns (Lie Goan Liong 1964, 1965; Bintarti 1986). After finds of urns were reported from Pugungtampak, Lampung, South Sumatra, the author carried out research there but no finds occurred of whole specimens. Kolana was discovered in 1987 by the author while studying the Pejeng-style drums on Alor, but no further studies have been made there to date.

In 1993 the Yogyakarta branch office of the National Research Centre of Archaeology found fragments of urns along with animal bones, teeth, iron artefacts and pebbles in Bonang, Central Java. Fragmentary burial jars were also discovered at Uattamdi, North Maluku (Bellwood *et al.* 1992). A team made up of Citha Yuliati and Made Suastika found a site with urn burials on the south coast of East Flores in 1996, but excavation has not been performed yet owing to difficulties of access.

In 1996 Sueroso excavated urn burials in the sites of Muara Betung and Kunduran (Ulu Musi, Lahat, South Sumatra). The excavation was stimulated by illicit diggings, earlier in the year, which had yielded a number of artefacts. These sites also presented a dolmen positioned as though surrounded by jar burials (Sueroso 1996). In the same year the Jambi branch office of the Directorate of History and Archaeology excavated an urn burial site in the city of Jambi which yielded three urns. These include a pair of jars used as container and cover. The container measures 30.5 cm high, and the diameter of the mouth is 24.5 cm. Among other finds there are 85 beads including eight of the *mutisalah* type (Sunanto 1997).

The urn as a vessel form is described by Santoso Soegondho (1995:4) as follows:

age life expectancy of 33-34 years (Aziz 1993-4), and familiarity with tooth evulsion (Agus Supriyo 1983). Carbon 14 dating gives median dates between AD 150 and AD 350 (Santoso Soegondho 1995).

Plawangan is also a very interesting site with various forms of burial. They include primary and secondary burials which employed jars as containers or, in the case of one primary burial, a Dong Son bronze kettledrum as a container (Bintarti 1989). Most primary and secondary burials however lacked containers. The variety of associated finds includes earthenware sherdage, metal, stone artefacts, molluscan shell, faunal bone and glass beads (Prasetyo 1994-5). The Carbon 14 dating undertaken by BATAN gives a date between 1500 BC and AD 400 (Santoso 1995:27).

Lewoleba, in Flores, yielded urn burials when excavated by Verhoeven and Lie Goan Liong in 1964-1965 (Lie Goan Liong 1965). The burials consist of those in jars and outside the jars as well. Other finds include dog and pig bones, molluscs from diverse families, artefacts of shell, and plain and decorated sherds of 0.2-1.5 cm thickness. Impressed scallops and incised motifs occurred on the decorated pottery (Bintarti 1986). Later, a fragment of a jar was discovered by the local people in East Flores. Survey by the Bali branch office of the National Research Centre of Archaeology resulted in the recovery of an urn burial site in the village of Waibau, Larantuka district. On the seashore of this village a fragment of a decorated jar was found, along with fragments of human bones and teeth (Yuliati 1998).

## COMPARISONS

Urn burials found in Indonesia are usually located close to water, whether it be the sea, a lake or a river. In Lewoleba, Plawangan, Gilimanuk, Melolo, Anyar, Tile-tile, Kolana and East Flores, the locations are not far from the sea, even if the present coastline may have changed from that which formerly prevailed. On the other hand, Lamabanapu and Kunduran are located near rivers.

The burials in urn burial sites are not necessarily homogeneous. Even Melolo, Lamabanapu and Anyar present burials without containers as well as jar burials. In Plawangan there was a mixture of burials in urns, a burial in a kettledrum, and burials without containers. Gilimanuk shows a prevalence of burials without containers, plus burials in a sarcophagus and in urns. At Kunduran and Lamabanapu, urn burials were found in the same site as were dolmens. Melolo and Lamabanapu have the densest concentrations of jars, placed in rows close together, and also stacked on top of each other.

The finds associated with the jars are highly varied, particularly at Plawangan and Gilimanuk. These sites are very rich in metal artefacts, miscellaneous earthenwares, stone artefacts, shell artefacts and animal bones. The jars used also show a variety, since they were not always globular in shape with a narrow mouth, but may also be of rectangular shape with a flat base. Others are round bodied with straight rims, carinated at the shoulder, or straight-bodied with a straight rim and carination. Further, the burial jars are generally plain with a height of 30 to 80 cm, a diameter at the mouth of 20 to 50 cm, and a wall thickness of 0.5 to 1.5 cm (Soejono 1977; Sukendar *et al.* 1982; Bintarti 1989; Santoso Soegondho 1995).

Primary burials are found mainly in large jars, though these may also contain secondary burials. The corpse would have been placed in a squatting position in the case of primary burials, but in the case of secondary burials, the jar contains only various postcranial bones or the skull, sometimes from more than one individual. Dental and osteological features of the people who practised urn burials include those typically ascribed to both the "Australomelanesian" and "Mongoloid" population complexes. Indonesian physical anthropologists usually assign the skeletons at any site to both complexes, but not always in an even ratio (Agus Supriyo 1983, 1990; Boedhisampurno 1985; Soejono 1977).

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