

Megalithic Traditions in Sembiran

by I Made Sutaba

Through its numerous temples and its general layout, a Bali Aga village retains its megalithic culture.

Sembiran is a small mountain village situated nearly 30 kilometers to the east of Singaraja, North Bali and about 332 metres above sea level. The village is well-known as one of the so-called Bali Aga villages in which Hinduistic elements are not dominant. Until recently, it was an isolated village which could be reached only by walking through the rice fields. At present, a newly built road connects Sembiran with the outer world. As a result, it is now open to all kinds of contacts from the outside which naturally, affect the life of its people.

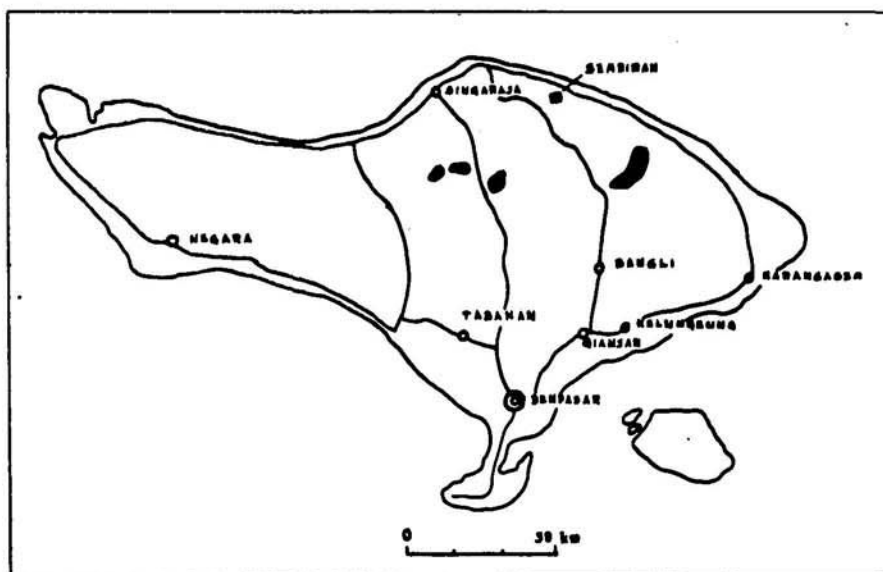
An old village, Sembiran has attracted the attention of scholars since the nineteenth century. J.L. Brandes, among others, studied the inscriptions found in the area¹ (Brandes, 1889:16). These inscriptions revealed that, probably as early as the 10th century, Sembiran formed part of the ancient history of Bali. F.A. Liefbrink in his desa monograph of North Bali also wrote an account of the village (Liefbrink, 1934:1-345). In the field of linguistics, H.N. van der Tuuk was the first to point out that Sembiran had its own dialect quite different from those spoken

in other parts of Bali² (van der Tuuk, 1897-1912: 355). This dialect was also discussed by Miguel Covarrubias and mentioned by Ngurah Bagus (Covarrubias, 1972: 25 and Ngurah Bagus, 1968 : 2). Bagus also made a short survey of clans and their settlement patterns (Bagus, 1968: 1-8).

A prehistoric research in Sembiran was carried out by R.P. Soejono in 1961. He found a number of paleolithic implements that showed a remarkable similarity and were contemporary with those found in

Pacitan (Soejono, 1961 : 217-232). Unfortunately, he found no human skeleton; hence no description of the makers of these implements could be made available. Soejono was also the first to report the existence of living megalithic traditions in Sembiran (Soejono, 1961:38). His findings revealed that Sembiran had been inhabited by ancient Indonesian people since the beginning of the prehistoric periods. They explained why the village became an important source of data on the ancient history of Bali.

Map of Bali



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These notes on megalithic traditions in Sembiran must be regarded as a very preliminary report. They were based on a research conducted in 1971 and 1972 as a follow-up to that of Soejono. The research was carried out by the members of the National Archaeological Institute in Bali.

The Village Temples

The megalithic tradition in Sembiran is seen not only in the temples but also in the general layout of the village. It is terraced and the roads are covered with river stones and stone slabs. The same features are observed in another Bali Aga village in Karangasem called Tenganan Pegeringsingan³ (Seojono, 1961:31).

The research covered all the village temples in Sembiran. Of the 20 existing in the village, three namely Pura Bale Agung, Pura Sanghyang Marek and Pura Jugan do not have megalithic features. For this reason, these three temples are not discussed further in this report. Neither are the family shrines — each family in Sembiran owns one — described.

The village temples described are as follows: Pura Sanghyang Kedulu, Pura Dalem, Pura Ngudu, Pura Suksuk, Pura Pelisan, Pura Sanghyang Sakti, Pura Janggotan, Pura Ratu Ngurah Dijaba, Pura Kajehan Kangin, Pura Tegalangin, Pura Dukuh, Pura Melaka, Pura Jampurana, Pura Pendem, Pura Pintu, Pura Sanghyang Tegeh and Pura Empu.

In Bali, most temples or *pura* have religious buildings called *pelinggih* or *gedong* which have their own function (Goris, 1960:103-111). In Sembiran however, the temples, being megalithic shrines or megalithic sanctuaries, frequently have no buildings. These sanctuaries are often crude monuments built of large uncut stones arranged in an open space. Yet, they are also called *pura*.

The description of each temple follows.

Pura Sanghyang Kedulu

In 1961, this temple was very simple and contained scarcely any religious building. Three stones

measuring 1.05, 0.65 and 0.45 metres high, respectively, stand upright on the ground. The local people regarded them as holy relics and worshipped them on occasion.

From 1965 to 1972, the temple was restored and a number of new buildings and a surrounding wall were constructed. The two upright stones were moved into an open building at the centre of the temple. They were named after the local deity Pelinggih Ratu Gde Penataran for the local people believe that they symbolise that deity. The third upright stone, smaller in size, was also moved but to a small open building named *taksu*.

Pura Dalem

This temple has no surrounding wall. In front, an arrangement or construction of stone slabs has been laid as long as 18.40 metres. It probably indicates the entrance of the temple. Its three *pelinggih*s have megalithic forms. The Pelinggih Ratu Dasar, a big uncut river stone measuring 0.70 meters high, stands surrounded by a number of smaller stones. The second Pelinggih, the Ratu Ayu Mas, is also a big upright stone, 0.25 metres high. It is completely unworked and also surrounded by a number of small stones. Pelinggih Ratu Penyarikan, the third one, is composed of three

standing stones, each 0.20 metres high.

Pura Ngudu

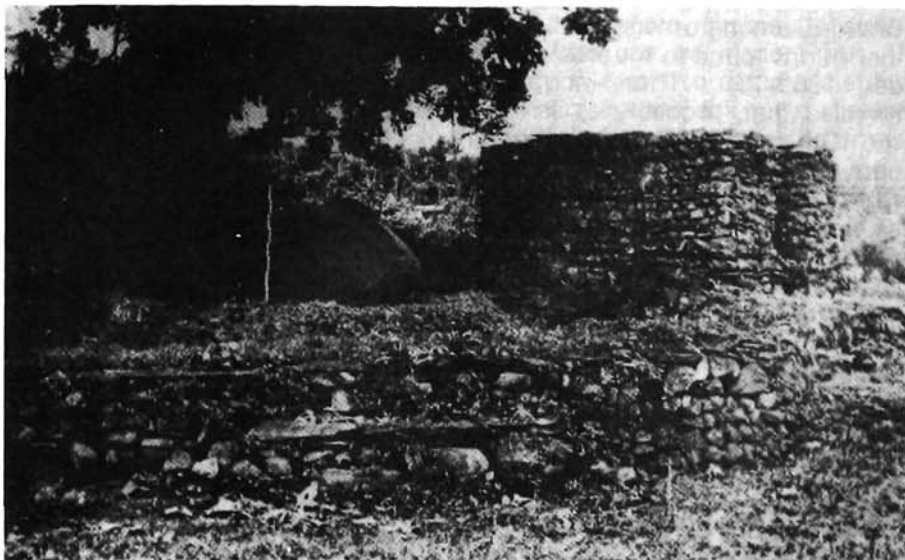
The surrounding wall of this temple built of stone slabs is only 0.60 metres high. It has three yards, like most of the Bali temples: a *feroan* (inner court), a *jaba tengah* (central court) and a *jabaan* (outer court). No building was found in the inner court; but some had been built in the central and outer courts.

In the central court stands the Pelinggih Ratu Ngudu, a stepped terrace consisting of two platforms made of stone slabs. The lower terrace has an area of 2.40 x 1.85 metres, is 0.70 metres high and crowned by an upright stone 0.25 metres high. Another building in this court is Piyasa, built of stone slabs also. In the outer court is a building named *taksu* with an upright stone of 0.20 metres high.

Pura Suksuk

This temple has a surrounding wall constructed of river stones. It has four buildings, all rectangular in form but with an additional platform in front, and built of river stones. They are all named Pelinggih Ratu Gde Suksuk. One of the buildings, which has a simple terraced form, has two erect stones, both 0.40 metres high. The second build-

An arrangement of stone slabs found in Pura Dalem



ing, a taksu, is crowned by an upright stone, 0.17 metres high. The third is a *pesamuan* and the last a *pecaruan*.

Pura Pelisan

The surrounding wall of this temple is made of river stones. Unfortunately, it is not well tended hence parts of the wall have disappeared. The temple is located near the shore of the Bali Sea. The inner and central courts are bordered by an incomplete low wall of river stones.

All the four pelinggih are constructed of river stones. The biggest, the Pelinggih Ratu Gde Sakti, is a terraced structure of which the lower terrace is 0.10 metres high and has an area of 3.20 x 2.00 metres. The second terrace is 0.15 metres high with an area of 2.70 x 1.50 metres. On the upper terrace,

an uncut river stone is placed.

The second pelinggih, called taksu, is square and made of river stones. The third, *pesamuan*, is also built of river stones, but only partly visible now. Bale Gong, the last, has a rectangular shape of which only a small part can still be seen. It is also made of river stones.

Pura Sanghyang Sakti

This temple is located only a few metres to the north of the Pura Pelisan. It is surrounded by a wall of river stones which is not well preserved. It has only one pelinggih, the Ratu Bagus Agung, which is square in form and made of river stones.

Pura Janggotan

This temple is made of stone slabs and seems to have been

neglected. Careful investigations revealed that, most probably, it had a small terraced structure with an erect stone at the top. Unfortunately the terraced form has broken down. The pelinggih is named Ratu Gde Janggotan.

Pura Ratu Ngurah Dijaba

An informant mentioned that the temple had been a clan temple before. It later became a village temple but no satisfactory explanation was given why. The temple had been called Pura Kaki Kapu.

The temple is built, using river stones and stone slabs, in the form of terraced structures. There are four terraces, on the very top of which are some buildings built recently. The form of the temple is reminiscent of Candi Sukuh and Pura Besakih in Bali.

Pura Kajehan Kangin

This temple was built of stone slabs on the steep bank of a dried river. It has not been well looked after, hence the original structure is indistinguishable. Probably it had a terraced structure. Its pelinggih, Ratu Ayu Taman, is square in form and made of stone slabs. Another pelinggih is noted but it seems to be new.

Pura Tegalangin

A wall of stone slabs, part of which have fallen into decay, surrounds this temple. Its four pelinggih are all made of stone slabs. Three of which are in a rectangular platform, each one occupying a small square platform. The pelinggih are named Ratu Ngurah Tegalangin, *Pesamuan*, Taksu and Ki Kelaban Apit.

Pura Janggotan is also built of stone slabs.

A terraced structure forms the Pura Ratu Ngurah Dijaba.



Pura Dukuh

The temple is located in the middle of a garden and has a surrounding wall of stone slabs. It is divided into two courts only, an inner and a central courts. The two pelinggih are found in the inner court which is also surrounded by stone slabs. They are made of stone slabs and are built in a square platform. The first pelinggih, Ratu Gde Didukuh, an upright river stone measuring 0.15 metres high, is situated on top of the platform. Pesamuan, the other pelinggih, is also made of stone slabs.

Pura Melaka

A temple with no surrounding wall, it has four pelinggih. The biggest is Pelinggih Ratu Ngurah Kamasan which is made of stone slabs. It appears to be resting on a terraced structure that is not well-kept. An upright stone measuring 0.37 metres high stands in front. Another one measuring 0.35 metres high is found in the upper part.

Taksu, the second pelinggih, is also made of stone slabs and rests on a square platform. Like the first pelinggih, it is also neglected. Pecaruan, the third, is formed by river stones only.

Pura Jampurana

Originally on a steep bank, the temple consists only of a very huge coral stone which is still hidden in the middle of a garden. The stone has a small hole. According to an informant, incipations belonging to the people of Sembiran are preserved in this temple.

Pura Pendem

The temple is entirely hidden under big trees in an isolated small forest. It is reduced to ruin, so the original form is not easily noticeable. It was probably built in the form of a pile of river stones very irregularly arranged.

Pura Pintu

Located a few metres to the north of Pura Sanghyang Tegeh, the temple is made of a few stone slabs

formed into a simple square. A standing stone slab measures 0.35 metres high.

Pura Sanghyang Tegeh

This temple in the form of a terraced structure is made of stone slabs. Like the others, it is not well preserved thus is now wellcovered with grass. On the lower terrace are three buildings recently constructed. The upper one has two standing stone slabs 0.90 metres high. According to the local people, this upper terrace is a temporary seat of the God of Pura Pintu.

Pura Empu

A terraced structure made of stone slabs and river stones, the temple has five pelinggih (Soejono, 1961:39). Two pelinggih are named Ratu Empu: one is a big river

1. A platform with an upright stone is shown in Pura Melaka.

2. A simple arrangement of stone slabs characterizes Pura Pintu.

3. Another terraced structure of stone slabs is apparent in Pura Sanghyang Tegeh.



stone 0.25 metres high; the other has a square form. Pesemuan, the third pelinggih, is made of stone slabs and shaped like a square platform. The last peringgih is Sumur. The temple is located on a steep bank of a dried river.

Concluding Notes

Based on the above findings, it can be deduced that most of the village temples bear remarkable megalithic features. Their shrines and sanctuaries are living examples of prehistoric megalithic traditions. All the temples are still in use, worshipped by the local people during the temple festival. This shows that the Sembiran megalithic traditions still play an important role in the religious life of the people.

Van der Hoop stated that megalithic traditions were very important in Bali. He explained that the so-called Hindu temple in Bali could be traced back not to the temples of India but to the prehistoric megalithic sanctuaries. He also noted that in some temples in Bali, simple megaliths are preserved still (Goris and Dronkers, 1954: 28)⁴.

Classification of the Temples

Based on the kinds of megalithic shrines in Sembiran, one can tentatively classify the village temples into four groups, namely:

1. shrines bearing a single or more erect stones such as the Pura Sanghyang Kedulu;
2. shrines bearing big and small stones, such as Pura Dalem and Pura Jampurana;
3. shrines built in the shape of terraced structures, such as Pura Pelisan and Pura Janggotan. A variation of this form is a) the terraced structures crowned by an upright stone, such as Pura Ngudu, Pura Suksu, Pura Sanghyang Tegeh; and b) the terraced structures with big and upright stones, such as Pura Empu (Soejono, 1961:39).
4. shrines in forms other than mentioned above, such as a pile of river stones; a platform

made of irregularly shaped stone slabs for example Pura Tegalangin, Pura Sanghyang Sakit; and a stone platform or a stone altar with a standing stone slab, such as Pura Pintu (Sutaba, 1972).

Research on megalithic traditions in Sembiran is not complete yet. Further studies concentrating in the mountain areas, as Soejono recommended, should be conducted. Yet attention should also be given to the other parts of Bali.

It is necessary to carry out these studies not only to enlarge present knowledge but, more important, to record old traditions before the local people lose them forever. Modernization and its influence, for instance tourism which is fast developing in Bali, are bound to affect the life of the local people. It has to be written about before it is too late.

Footnotes

¹ See also Goris, **PB. I**, 1954, pp. 9,65-67,11, 72-73, 13, 77-79; 15, 95-96, 20,33; **PB. II**, 1954, pp. 131-134; 195-196; 140; 197; 144-146 198, 199 and 200.

² In 1928 a palmleaf manuscripts library was founded and named Kirtya Lieftrinck-Van der Tuuk.

³ In Tenganan Pegeringsingan, a number of village temples are found, along with living prehistoric megalithic traditions. All of them are regarded as holy relics, still in use and worshipped by the local people. For more information on this matter, see: Darsana, *Pandangan Tentang Pura dan Segi-segi Megalithiknya*, 1968.

⁴ See also, **Museum Für Völkerkunde**, Bali, Basel/Sonderaustellung 1 October 1955 bis 30 April 1956, pp. 1-13, especially p. 6.

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