

# Discovery of Late Prehistoric Burial Systems in Bali

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In July 1998, a team made up of members of the Bali Office of The National Research Centre of Archaeology (NRCA), Indonesia, excavated a late prehistoric burial site in a western mountain village in Kintamani. The village, named Manikliyu, lies within the regency of Bangli, a province of Bali.

This excavation was a follow-up of the first one that had been carried out a year before, and its archaeological result is very important for tracing back burial customs before the arrival of Hinduism and Buddhism, particularly among the megalithic people in Bali. The burial site found in the village of Manikliyu represents a unique burial system that had not been discovered in Indonesia before. This burial consisted of two large sarcophagi, and a bronze kettledrum, as container of the deceased.

The large sarcophagus measures 206 cm in length and 70 cm in breath; is well preserved, but not yet opened. The other one is smaller, 172 cm in length and 69 cm in breath, and although it has not been opened, some parts are broken. Amidst the sarcophagi is a bronze kettledrum - belonging to the Pejeng type but smaller in size (height 120 cm and diameter of the tympanon 77 cm) - which

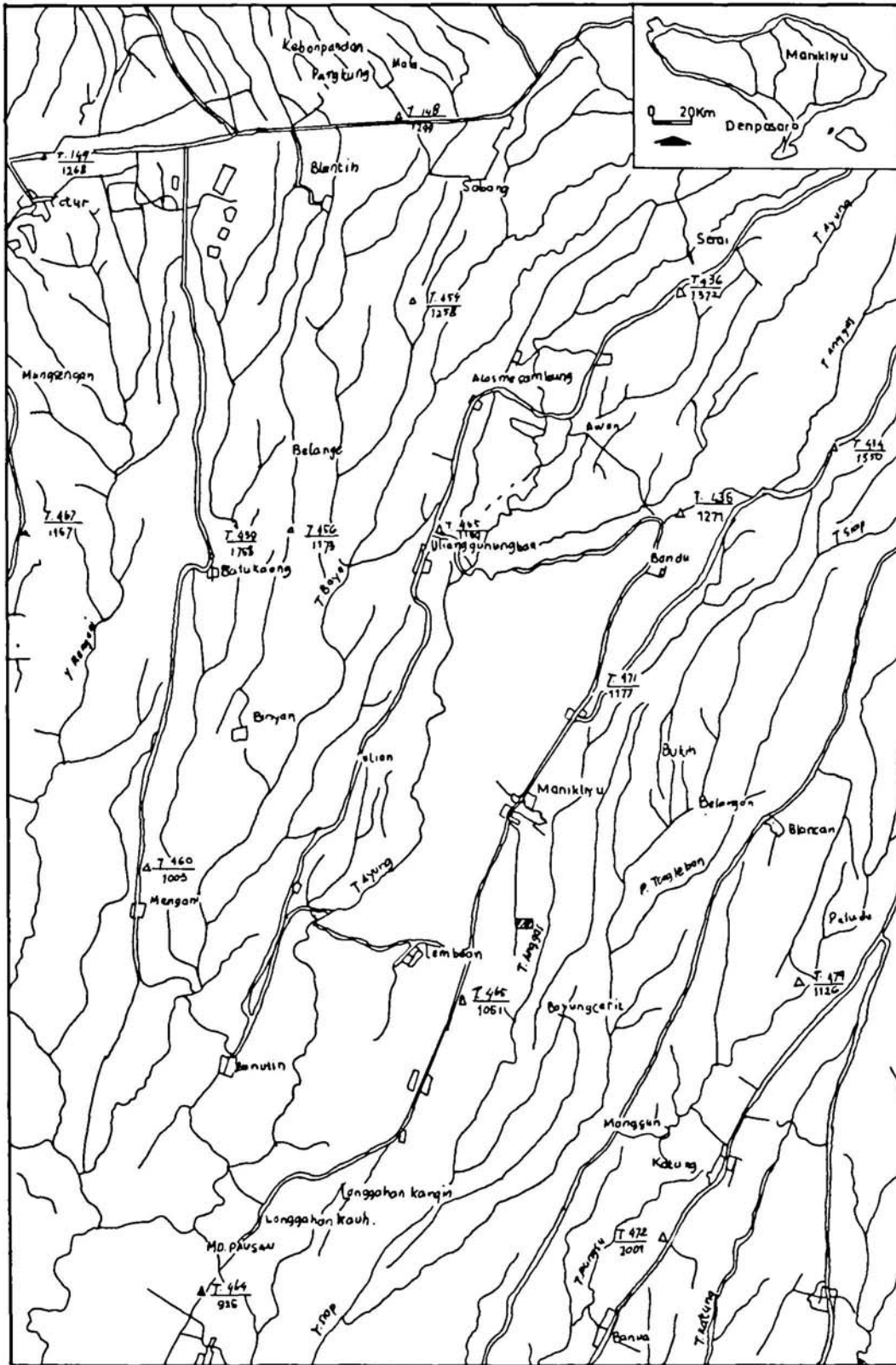
contains human bones in flexed position. Almost similar to the Pejeng type, this Manikliyu kettledrum is decorated with eight stars on the



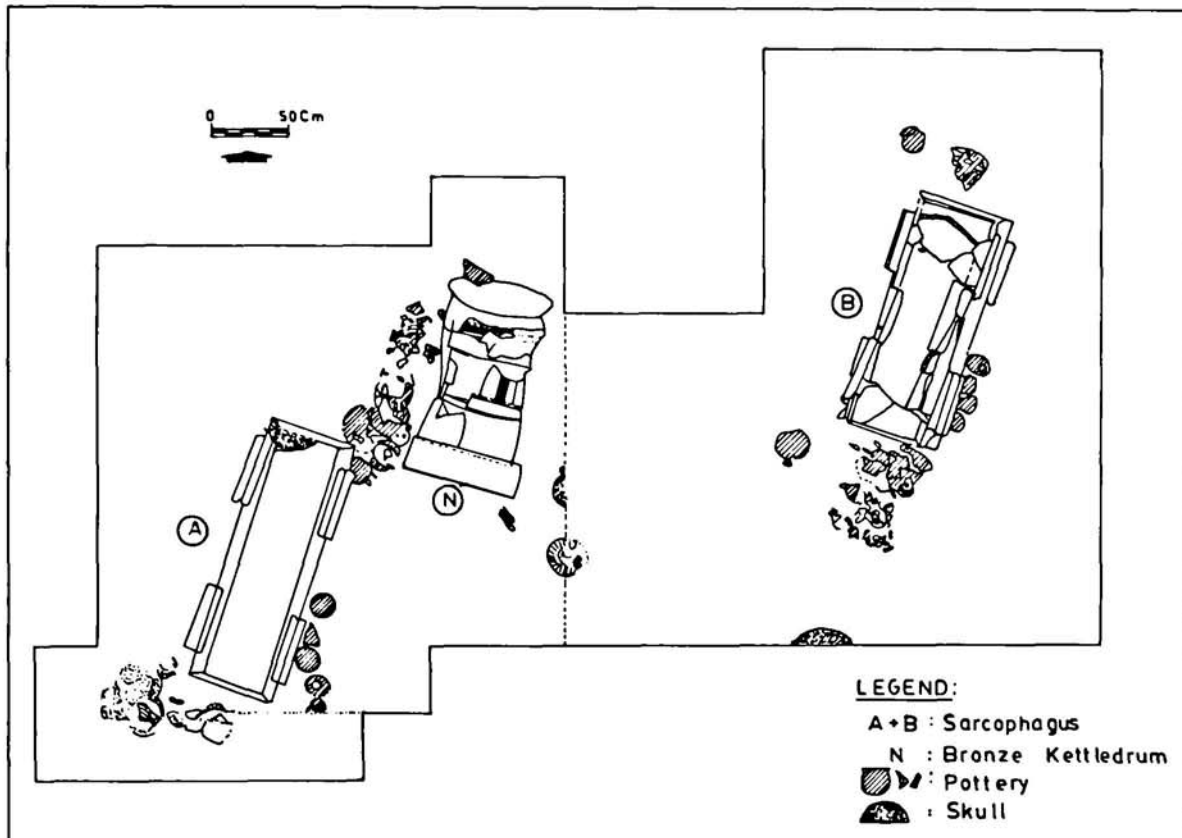
Combined burial systems: sarcophagus and bronze kettledrum excavated in Manikliyu, Bali (1997)



Bronze kettledrum contained human bones in flexed position (detailed), Manikliyu, Bali (1997)



Map of Manikliyu village, Kintamani, Bali



Combined burial system: two sarcophagi and bronze kettledrum found in Manikliy

tympaon, and human masks on the body. Several funeral gifts, such as carnelians, beads, bronze spirals and bronze fingers protector, are buried in the same area. Beside these gifts, a number of pottery (partly broken) were excavated outside the burial site, and near the containers, as customary. According to the team's palaeoanthropologist, the human bones are determined to be that of a young man between 20 and 35 years old. He was believed to have been killed by the impact of a sharp tool, as shown by the broken part of his upper face. Anatomically, these human remains are thought to be Mongoloid.

The sarcophagi, the kettledrum and the uncovered burial are lying parallel to the Northeast Southwest direction, clearly indicating that the dead were buried to the Mount Panulisan-Batur orientation, the sacred mountain of the

Balinese. This position is based on the universal religious concept of the megalithic people that the mountain is the abode of the leader's or the ancestor's spirit. These spirits have magic power for protecting families or the communities, and the offering of burial gifts were for the continuation of life in the spirit world.

The bones of the second human are buried uncovered south of the containers. They show the Mongoloid affinities as in the first one even though they are incomplete, probably due to the climatic conditions and other unknown reasons. This is a young female, between 20-25 years-old; the cause of her death could not be determined.

Funeral gifts, namely carnelians, bronze spirals crowned on the skull and bronze fingers protector,

were found. Here a couple of pottery lay, without any decoration, and appeared similar to the pottery from Gilimanuk, western part of Bali (Gilimanuk is an important necropolis site of the late prehistoric period, where more than a hundred human bones of Mongoloid character were preserved in this site). Also found were many pottery, bronze goods (axes, bracelets), glass bracelets and other funeral gifts.

By 1998, more than a hundred sarcophagi have been found in Bali. Some were broken, but several remain in good conditions. Although not as sophisticated as in Manikliyu, another combined burial system in a single site in Bali had also been discovered.

It contained double jars, sarcophagi, and uncovered burial (as in Gilimanuk), and sarcophagi combined with opened burial (as in the village of Keramas, Gianyar). A variety of funeral gifts such as bronze goods (rings, bracelets, spirals, axes and shovel) and carnelians were buried with this burial.



Combined burial system: sarcophagi and urn burial, Gilimanuk, West Bali (1994)

Combined burial systems are also found in other places, for example the uncovered burial in Plawangan (Central Jawa) with evidence of urn,

bronze kettledrum, and that of East Sumba (large urns with dolmen graves). Another burial system used stone cists in Pasemah (South Sumatra), pandhusa in Bondowoso (East Java), waruga in Minahasa (North Sulawesi) and Kalamba in central Sulawesi. Burial systems may vary over the large region of Indonesia, and are characterised by the differences in types, and decorations; but all of them are definitely founded on the same religious beliefs in ancestors' spirits.

The findings in Manikliyu, especially the bronze kettledrum and the Mongoloid character of the dead, lead to an assumption that a socio-

cultural relation between Bali with the people of Southeast Asia has been created through trading and other relations during the late prehistoric period. This must have been facilitated when the people achieved the highly metallic technology along with the development of the

megalithic tradition. Burial systems, whether using containers or not, and bearing different funeral gifts in quantities and qualities, are a symbol of the social status of the dead.