

Introduction

Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin and I Wayan Ardika

This book is the outcome of the cooperation between Fakultas Sastra Universitas Udayana Denpasar (Bali), Indonesia, and the Institute of Cultural and Social Anthropology, University of Göttingen, Germany. Based on the results of the long-standing research in North Bali of the archaeologist I Wayan Ardika, Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Udayana and of the Balai Arkeologi Denpasar, the Pusat Arkeologi Nasional in Jakarta, the anthropologist Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, Göttingen University, suggested an ethnoarchaeological project (under the auspices of Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan, Jakarta) in which Ardika acted as the academic counterpart.

The ethnoarchaeological project can be seen as an attempt to bring together various pieces of cultural evidence: among these are the findings produced by the archaeological excavations documenting a time as far back as the first century BC. Further evidence consists of the royal edicts, the so-called Sembiran Inscriptions (Goris 1954), written on copperplates; they were issued by kings between the 10th and 12th century. These inscriptions are testimonies of one of the earliest known kingdoms in Bali; they display significant Indian influence (see Appendix).

The preconditions for ethnohistorical research therefore seemed favourable since all these data originated from the same area in North Bali, namely the area of the villages of Julah, Pacung and Sembiran (Kecamatan Tejakula, Kabupaten Buleleng). Moreover, the village name of Julah appeared already in the copperplate inscriptions; it was to this village and their inhabitants that these royal edicts were

addressed. And it is in today’s Julah – as well as in Julah’s sibling village of Sembiran – that these royal edicts are still kept and venerated as sacred heirlooms. Nevertheless, it needs to be pointed out that the continuity in name does not preclude continuity in population or culture, as will become clear in some of the contributions to this book.

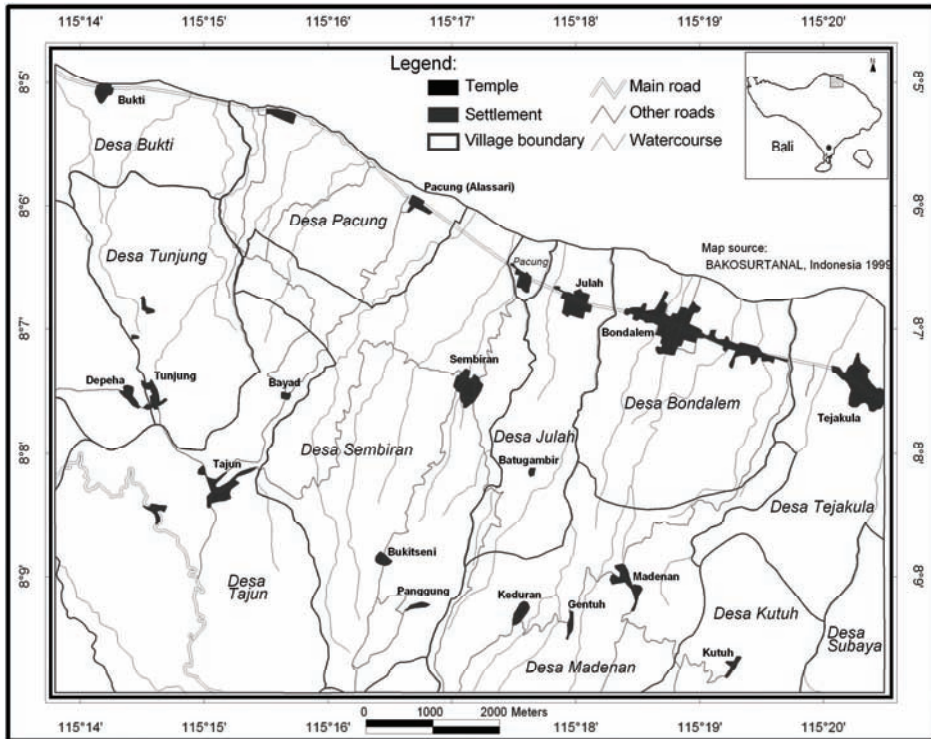


Figure 1: The research area on Bali’s north coast, Kecamatan Tejakula, Kabupaten Buleleng.

In popular as well as academic writing since the 19th century, these villages have been described as a survival of an ancient, somewhat mysterious culture, allegedly originating in a pre-Hindu era and still displaying “animistic” features. They were labelled (together with a couple of other mountain villages) as Bali Aga, Old-Balinese. They were assumed to have remained untouched by the culture of those immigrants in the 16th century from East Java who fled to Bali after the mighty Hinduized kingdom of Majapahit collapsed due to the advent of Islam. The aura of an aboriginal culture is expressed also in today’s international art market where all kinds of textiles allegedly of true Sembiran origin fetch exorbitant prices (see Nabholz-Kartaschoff this volume).

It therefore seemed tempting to investigate these villages on the North Coast, with their social and religious life, from an ethnohistoric perspective: are there any traces that relate to any of the earlier periods documented by archaeological artefacts or the copperplate inscriptions? How far can we assume continuity, and to what extent do we have to consider change? Conversely, can the study of today's culture contribute to the understanding of earlier practices mentioned in the inscriptions, such as the obligations of the villages to deliver offerings and goods at set dates at temples and other institutions (see Hauser-Schäublin this volume), or the veneration of ancestors (see Patera this volume) or burial practices (see Dra-watik this volume)?

There is no simple answer to the questions of continuity and change. Neither one excludes the other. Rather, as this book will show, both are intertwined in complex processes through time.

The academic concept of history as used in this book is based on the notion of continuous processes that take place between actors themselves as well as between actors and their environment, thereby continuously producing modifications of existing practices and beliefs, though to differing extents and at different tempos. Some practices and beliefs may change faster than others, some may come to an end, others are newly created or introduced or adapted from the outside and meanings may gradually or abruptly shift.

Nevertheless, there are material artefacts that were once created and may persist unaltered for centuries depending whether or not they were exposed to factors of natural decay and/or human use. One category of the most exciting objects that have inspired the imagination of many scholars are those called “megalithic”, menhirs, step pyramids and the like, of which many existed in Sembiran until recently. However, these megalithic monuments, often taken as proof of Neolithic culture, are difficult to interpret in terms of date of origin, their actual age and the question of continuity.

Though many factors that have to be considered when discussing cultural issues through time may be roughly determined, many unknown factors related to social interactions have to be taken into account as well. However, the type of factors, the way some became more influential than others, and the extent to which they caused change or not are impossible to estimate. The most evident factors of change are those related to the environment and ecology. Over the past one thousand years the environment has dramatically changed – and with it of course the modes of subsistence (see Kalb this volume) with noticeable consequences for social organization.

Other factors – to start with, epidemics that several times must have devastated and emptied whole strips of land – human agency and social interactions of various kinds are almost impossible to ascertain. The geographic location of these villages as such, more or less right on the border of the sea, suggests vivid interac-

tions of all kind, attacks, fights and perhaps even wars, trading activities, the advent of men of knowledge, missionaries, immigrants, refugees and many others. We have evidence of a number of factors at certain times over the past 2.000 years, but these allow us just a glimpse into dynamics that must have been, to various degree, continuously at work. Thus, the inscriptions, for example, give evidence of almost regular plundering of the villages and the villagers fleeing to settlements up in the mountains, such as Upit (see Setiawan and Rochtri this volume). Oral histories and ritual practices testify to intense interaction with by-passers and immigrants. There are strong indications that the villages on the North Coast were rarely culturally homogenous settlements even in the most ancient times. Among these indications are the apparently different burial practices that Ardika and his team discovered already for a time 2.000 years BP (see contributions by Ardika, Suastika and Drawatik).

Of course the location of these villages in the context of social networks, too, explains why the internal as well the external dynamics to which Julah, Sembiran and Pacung were exposed and to which they themselves actively contributed for a long time, were so vigorous: They were situated on one of the major trade routes from China, India and beyond to the Spice Islands (spices from the Molukku were highly valued already among the Romans) that apparently goes back to the first millennium B.C. (see Ardika and Suastika this volume) with foreign traders from India already reaching this tiny spot in Bali (see Ardika this volume). Thus, far from being isolated, closed communities, these villages and their past seem to be a patchwork rather than a 2.000 years old undisturbed autochthonous culture.

This book sums up the different kinds of research that have been carried out so far in the villages of Sembiran, Julah and Pacung. They all give evidence of the rich cultural life in these villages, which during certain periods could even be described as cosmopolitan. Among the archaeological evidence were also bronze objects such as a kettledrum (*nekara*) related to the so-called Dong-Son bronze work with its characteristically shaped artefacts that originated in today's northern Vietnam in the second millennium BC (Bellwood 1985:272). Many other artefacts testify to direct contact with India and China; foreign trading communities located nearby are mentioned in the copperplate inscriptions (see Setiawan this volume). Oral histories also tell of wars in which the villagers had to participate such as the war the famous king of Buleleng, Panji Sakti, led in Blambangan, East Java. Others tell of early contact and dealing with Islamic immigrants in the 17th century which substantially changed the religious and social organization of the villages.

When the first Dutch visited Julah and Sembiran they knew nothing of the rich past of these villages. They had to rely on what they saw and what they were told. These villages were labelled "Bali Aga", aboriginal Balinese, by those Balinese who thought of themselves to be descendants of the highly praised kingdom of Majapahit. The myth of the "aboriginal Balinese" has persisted ever since; this book, however, offers a new perspective based on a broad range of archaeological

and historical evidence that proves a past very different from the popular assumptions of “Bali Aga”.

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