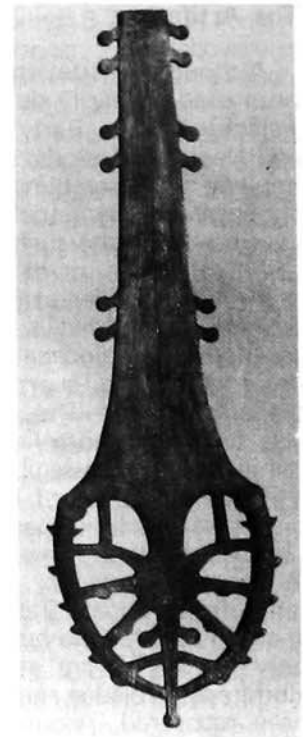


Bronze Objects from Kabila, West Sabu

by D.D. Bintarti



The bronze axe

In 1971, a bronze object was found by a local peasant named Ama Biddo Padji in Kabila, a hamlet of the village of Rai Dewa in the district of West Sabu. He found this object while he was planting sweet potatoes in his garden situated at the bank of a small dry river. It was dug beneath a coconut tree.

Like many stories about accidental findings of archaeological artifact, Ama Biddo's discovery started with a dream. The night before he uncovered his find, he had dreamt of an old man who indicated to him the location of an object. The next morning, he dug the site shown in his dream and, true enough, he found a bronze object. A very unusual artifact, it became a family heirloom. Many people, foreign tourists specially, wanted to buy it but Ama Biddo refused. He feared that it might bring ill luck or affect the life of whoever would keep it as a personal property.

Although the bronze object does not have the general features usually associated with an axe, it has been labeled as a type of "ceremonial axe". Based on Soejono's classification of bronze axes, the author catalogued this object as axe Type VI. Such a type is mainly found in the eastern part of Indonesia, from Bali to the eastern part of the Lesser Sunda Island and further to Irian Jaya.

Description of the Axe

The bronze axe is flat, long and has a heart-shaped blade. It has an average thickness of 0.5 cm. and two parts namely: the long handle and the blade. Unfortunately, the handle has been broken into several pieces, some of which seem to be missing. The part which is still attached to the blade measures \pm 35 cm. long. Its average width is 6 cm. but the widest section close to the blade measures 11.5 cm.. The surface of the handle is plain and has no decoration at all. On both lateral sides are three pairs of protrusions (this includes the pair on the separated piece). The space

between the first and second pairs is 5 cm.; the second and third, 12 cm.; and the third pair and the blade, 11.5 cm.

In the centre of the blade is a circle with eight rays. The vertical ray or the spoke going down the handle looks like a neck supporting the circle which is shaped like a human face or a mask. This spoke is the widest among the rays. The ray from the top of the mask towards the end of the blade juts out. Its base is broader than its top. Close to the base is a pair of protrusions and further up, a pair of side spokes connected to the lateral sides of the blade and ending in a concentric circle. Three other pairs of spokes connect the mask-shaped circle with the edge of the blade. The lowest pair, at the level of the mouth, has two side spokes each running parallel to the neck. Near the middle of the three pairs of spokes, a small concentric circle is also found. In short, the blade is a hollowed-out part which shows a circular center with spokes or rays.

The decorative pattern of the spokes consists generally of straight and circular lines, double diagonal or

A reprint of Monograph No. 8, 1981 published as part of the Aspects of Indonesia Archaeology Series.

cross lines, double short lines and rows of single short lines. Both sides of the bronze axe, the obverse or side A and the reverse or side B, have an almost similar decorative pattern.

The Mask Design

A mask pattern dominates both sides of the big circle in the center. Two circular lines border the drawn-up face. In side A, the forehead is formed by two convex lines; three circles forming a concentric circle stand for the eye; and two vertical lines which shape the nose go upward to become the long curved eyebrows. Double lines delineate the lips of a rather large open mouth that exposes the teeth.

The pattern of side B is almost identical with that of side A. It differs only in some details: the lines which form the forehead are wavy; only a single line fashions the nose and this divides into two curves to show the eyebrows; and more teeth drawn close to one another are revealed.

On the whole, the decorative pattern of this bronze object consists of geometric and mask designs which symbolize the sun. Common-

ly used in Indonesia, the design is employed in various objects be they bronze, iron, stone or clay.

Some of the artifacts utilizing this decorative pattern are as follows:

1. A flask found in a burial jar at Melolo in Sumba Island. Burials at Melolo are of the secondary type: skeletons are placed in burial jars which are interred along with gifts like flasks and shell ornaments. This particular flask has a mask pattern incised on its neck. Two circles represent the eyes, two parallel slanting lines stand for the cheeks and two cross lines within a quadrangular shape the mouth (H.R. van Heekeren, 1956: 85-89).
2. A bronze axe found in the area of Lake Sentani, Irian Jaya. This axe has a semi-circular blade. The shaft ending in a deep concave is long. It is classified as Soejono type 1C. The mask pattern is not clear but the eyes represented by two circles and the long nose are apparent (Van der Hoop, 1949:100).
3. A big bronze ceremonial axe (more appropriately a vessel) found at Ujung Pandang, South Sulawesi. Its shaft is long and the edge is semi-circular. It measures 70.5 x 45 x 8.3 cms. It is decorated with geometric patterns. Its mask design placed within two concentric circles is found only in the shaft. The face has oval eyes. A triangle depicts the nose; two triangles placed upside down represent the cheeks. The mouth is also oval in shape. Dots are found all over the face (van Heekeren, 1958:8)
4. Several bronze axes found at Bandung, West Java. The mask pattern is also found in the shaft. It is usually stylized and combined with geometric motifs. The eyes are oval and protruding (van Heekeren, 1958:9).
5. A *moko* found at Pejeng, Bali. This moko has been well known since 1970 and is described by Rumphius as a sacred idol of the local people. Supposedly a moon fallen down the earth, it is now in Pura Penataran Sasih or Moon Temple. To have a look at it or, above all, to take its photo, one has to have a special

Bronze axes from...

...Lake Sentani, Irian Jaya, Soejono Type 1B

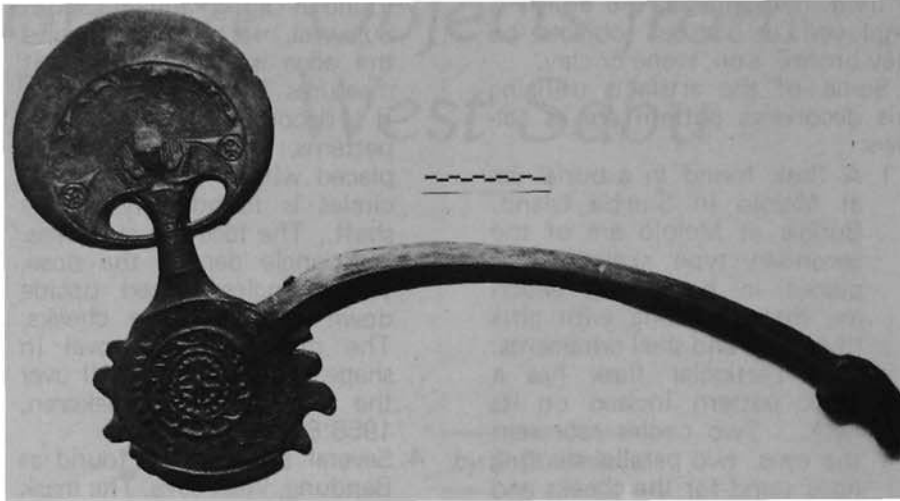


...Bandung, Soejono Type IIB



...Ujung Pandang, Soejono Type 1A





A bronze axe from Rote, Nusa Tenggara, Timur

permit or to perform certain rites.

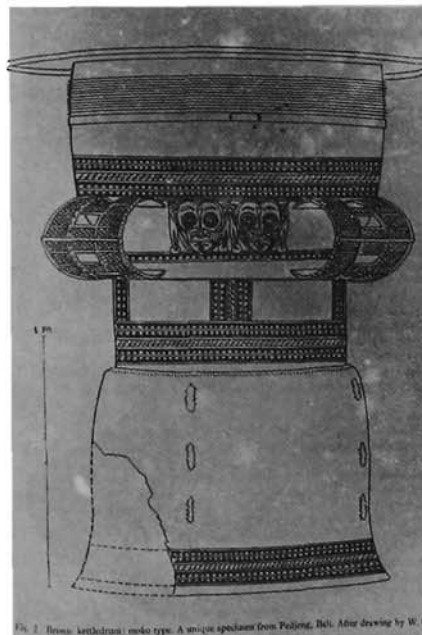
Four pairs of the masks are found in its upper zone. The face is heart-shaped. Concentric circles with radii represent the eyes. At the centre of each is a small circle that makes the eye look wide and staring. A sickle motif with a curve on top stands for the eyebrows. Two long triangles placed upside down form the nose. Small rectangles are placed below the eyes; two arch-lines below the nose and under these lines form the mouth. The ears are elongated and have coins as ear ornaments. The moko has four handles, each decorated with crossed lines design (W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp, 1908:319-338).

6. A moko from Alor, East Nusa Tenggara. The mask pattern on this moko is rather indistinct as it lies between motifs of houses. Circles represent the wide eyes. One line stands for the ridge of the nose. This goes downwards, splits into two short lines and circles at the bottom to form the lower part of the nose (W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp, 1922:67 – 97).
7. A ceremonial bronze axe from Rote, East Nusa Tenggara. In general, it also has indistinct geometric lines. The fore-

head is rather too large in comparison with the small nose, eyes and mouth (van Heekeren, 1958:10).

8. A mask pattern on a potsherd found at Kalumpang, Central Sulawesi. Two knobs stand for the eyes, a hillock for the nose and a curved circular-shaped protrusion for the mouth (van der Hoop, 1949:100 – 101).
9. Stone burial coffins found on

Mokos from... ... Pejeng Bali



the island of Samosir, North Sumatra. It also has a mask pattern with large open eyes.

10. *Kalambas* (stone jars) from Besohas, Central Sulawesi. They seem to be burial coffins of circular shape. On the surface of several kalambas is carved a human face with large eyes, large nose and large eyebrows (R.P. Soejono, 1977).
11. *Warugas*. These are also stone burial coffins but rectangular in shape. Its lid is shaped like a roof. A human face with large eyes forms part of the decorative patterns. (Hadimuljono, 1976).
12. Sarcophagi found in Bali. Knobs are carved on the coffin and lid. They are sometimes shaped as human heads or bear carved human faces (Soejono, 1977).

These examples show that human patterns are used on a number of objects made of clay, stone, bronze and iron during the early metal age in Indonesia. They are typically associated with bronze axes, mokos, kettledrums, a few iron tools, a number of pottery

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...Alor, Nusa Tenggara, Timur

