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THE BRONZE OBJECT FROM
KABILA, WEST SABU LESSER
SUNDA ISLAND

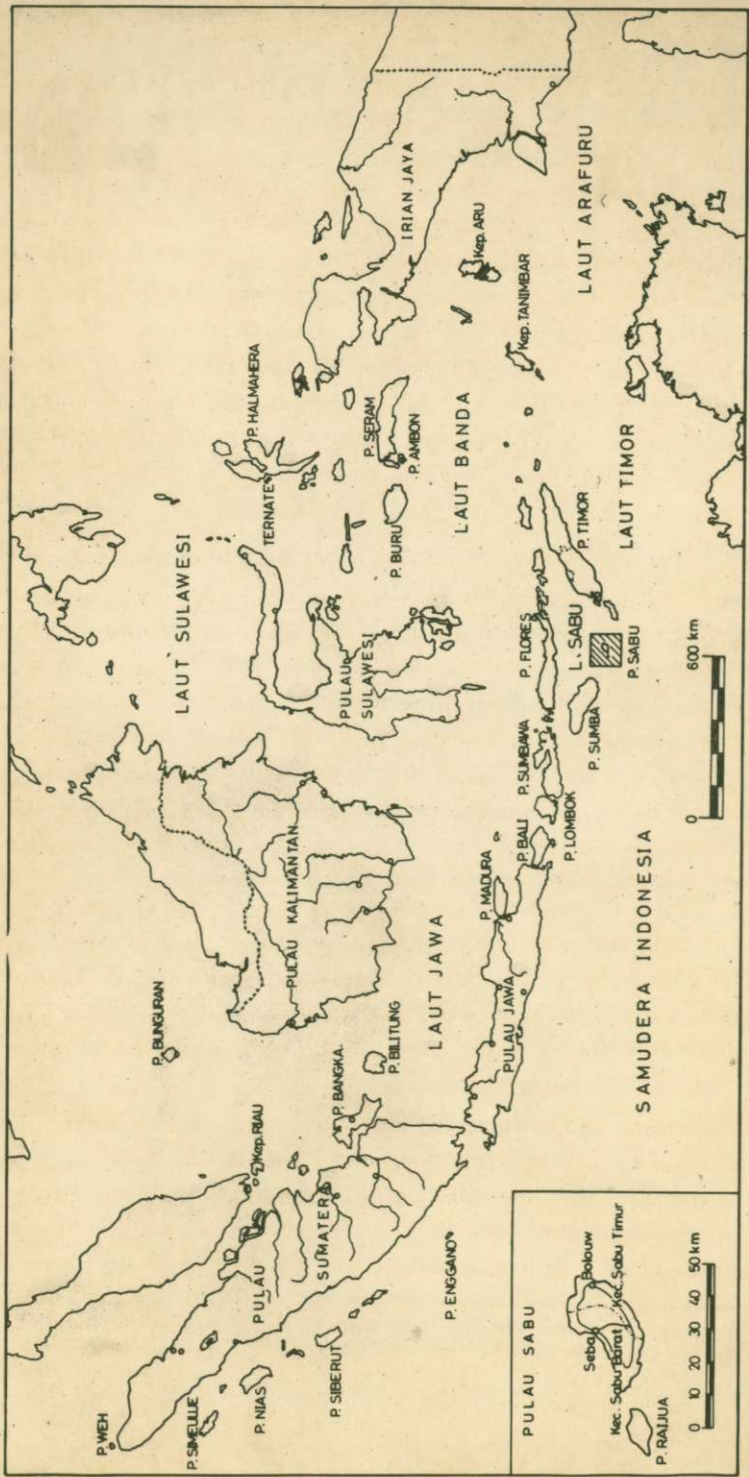
D.D. BINTARTI

Front Cover : *bronze axe from Kabila, Sabu Island,
lesser Sunda Islands.*

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D.D. BINTARTI

Proyek Penelitian Purbakala Jakarta
Departemen P & K



Map of Indonesia ; location of the island of Sabu, lesser Sunda islands.

THE BRONZE OBJECT FROM KABILA, WEST SABU Lesser Sunda Islands *

Actually I doubt whether the word "axe" could appropriately be applied to this kind of bronze object which was found at Kabila, considering the form which does not represent the general features that axes usually have in common. But this specific object which shows basic elements of an axe could be recognized as a type of "ceremonial axe". Bronze axes in Indonesia are classified by Soejono according to their types, and this particular type form from Kabila could be classified into this system as axe type VI. Such a type is mainly found in the eastern part of Indonesia, starting from Bali extending to the eastern part of the Lesser Sumba island and further to Irian Jaya.

The bronze object was found in 1971 by a local peasant named Ama Biddo Padji. He accidentally found this object in his garden which is situated at the bank of a small dry river, while he was planting sweet potatoes. It was dug beneath a coconut tree. Just like so many stories about archaeological findings done accidentally by local peasants Ama Biddo Padji's discovery started with a dream. Ama Biddo Padji lives at Kabila, hamlet of the village of Rai Dewa, which is located in the district of West Sabu. The night before he made his find, Ama Biddo Padji dreamt that an old man came up to him as if wanting to show him the place where to find the bronze axe. Then the next morning Ama Biddo went to the place and dug the site shown to him in his dream, and really he found the bronze object, but a very unusual one. This object became a family heirloom. Many people, above all foreign tourists wanted to buy the bronze object but Amo Biddo refused, for he feared that it might bring ill luck, or would affect one's life who wants to keep it as personal property.

This bronze axe is flattened long shaped with a flat heart shaped blade and has an average thickness of 0,5 cm. It can be divided into two parts namely : the long handle and the blade. The finder broke the handle in several pieces, some of which seem to be missing. The part of the handle which is still attached to the blade is ± 35 cm long. The

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widest section close to the blade measures 11,5 cm, while the average width of the handle is 6 cm. The handle has a plain surface without any decoration ; three pairs of protrusions are found on both lateral sides including protrusions of separated pieces of the handle. The space between the first pair of protrusions to the second pair is 5 cm, from the second pair to the third pair is 12 cm; and from the third to the blade is 11,5 cm. The blade has in the centre a circle with eight rays. The vertical ray or spoke down to the handle looks like a neck supporting the circle which is shaped like a human face (mask). This spoke is the widest in size. A spoke from the top of the mask towards the end of the blade runs in protrusions. This spoke has a broader base and is smaller to the top. It shows a pair of protrusions close to the base and a pair of side spokes connected with the lateral sides of the blade. Each of the side-spokes ends in a concentric circle. Three other pairs of spokes connect the mask shaped circle with the edge (or lateral sides) of the blade. The lowest pair at the level of the mouth of the mask has a side spoke, each running parallel with the neck of the head shaped circle, in the direction of the handle. Near the middle of the three pair of spokes is applied a small concentric circle. Actually the blade is a hollowed-out part which shows a circular centre with spokes (or rays) and side spokes as well as the lateral sides as the condensed component. The decorative pattern of the spokes consists generally of straight and circular lines, double diagonal (or cross) lines, double short lines and rows of single short lines. Both sides of this bronze axe which can be distinguished into an upperside (side A) and lowerside (side B), have an almost similar decorative pattern.

The big circle in the centre on side A, has a mask pattern. This pattern is rather different from side B. The pattern on side A is as follows: a mask pattern lies in the centre within two circles. The forehead is formed by two convex lines, three circles (forming a concentric circle) stand for the eye with its smallest as its focus, while two vertical lines which stand for the nose go upwards and so forming the long curved eyebrows. Double lines form the lips of a rather large mouth with the teeth exposed.

The pattern on side B : on the whole the pattern of this side is almost the same with that of side A; it differs only in some respect i.e.

the lines which form the forehead are wavy lines. Unlike the double lines of the nose on side A, we find only one single line which forms the nose on side B, and it goes upwards into two curves (semi-circular line) forming the eyebrows. The teeth seem to be more in number and are close to one another.

On the whole as one might observe, the decorative pattern on this bronze object, consists of geometric and mask design, and the symbol of the sun, which is most common in Indonesia. The geometric pattern as well as the pattern of the human face is widely spread and is used on objects of bronze, iron, stone, or clay in Indonesia.

This mask pattern as decoration can be found on objects such as :

1. A flask found in a burial jar. In the burial jar are placed skeletons of a secondary burial. Burial jars were found particularly at Melolo on the island of Sumba. There are two systems of burials, namely the primary and the secondary burial. Burials at Melolo are of the secondary type furnished with burial gifts like flasks (vessels) and shell ornaments. The mask pattern which is incised on the neck of vessels consists of two circles representing the eyes and two parallel slanting lines which stand for the cheek and two crosslines within a quadrangular stand for 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 is long, the shaft-end deeply concaved. This type is called Soejono type I C. The mask pattern is not clear because of the worn condition of the axe ; two circles here represent the eyes, and it further has a long nose (Van der Hoop, 1949 : 100).
3. A big bronze ceremonial axe (actually it is more appropriate to call this axe a vessel) found at Ujungpandang (South Sulawesi); its shaft is long and the edge is semi-circular. It measures 70,5 X 45 X 8,3 cm. This axe is decorated with geometric patterns, only on the shaft we find the mask pattern placed within two concentric circles. The face has oval eyes, a triangle stands for the nose as well as for the cheeks, only in reverse position, and the mouth is also oval shaped. Dots are found on the face (Van Heekeren, 1958 : 8)

4. Several bronze axes found at Bandung (West Java). The mask pattern is also found on the shaft, (usually stylized) combined with geometric motives. The eyes are oval and protruding. (Van Heekeren, 1958 : 9).
5. A "moko" found at Pejeng (Bali). This moko is well known since 1705 and described by Rumphius as a sacred idol of the local people. This object supposed to be the moon which had fallen down to earth is now placed in a temple called Pura Penataran Sasih or "Moon temple". To have a look at it or, above all, to photograph it, a special permit is needed or certain ceremonies must be held before. The mask pattern is applied in four pairs in the upperzone. The face is heart-shaped ; concentric circles with radii represent the eyes and in each centre again is a small circle, making thus the eyes look wide and staring. A sickle motif with curve on top stands for the eyebrows. Two long triangles are placed upside down for the nose. There are small rectangulars below the eyes, two arch-lines below the nose and just below these lines is the mouth. The ears are elongated and have coins as ear ornaments. There are in total four handles, each is 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 going downwards and splits into two short lines and circles at the top stands for the upper part of the nose (W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp, 1922 : 67 - 97).
7. A ceremonial bronze axe from Roti (East Nusa Tenggara). In general this pattern has also indistinct geometric lines. The forehead is rather too large in comparison with the nose, eyes, and mouth which are small (Van Heekeren, 1958 : 10).
8. Clay objects. A mask pattern on a potsherd was found at Kalumpang (Central Sulawesi). Two knobs stand for the eyes, a hillock stands for the nose, and a curved circular-shaped protrusion stands for the mouth (van der Hoop, 1949 : 100 - 101).
9. Stone burial coffins found on the island of Samosir (North Suma-

tra) which have also a mask pattern with large open eyes.

10. Kalambas (Stone jars) from Besoha (Central Sulawesi) which seems 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 which are also stone burials coffins in the shape of a rectangular box with the lid in the shape of a roof. One of the decorative patterns is that of the human face with large eyes (Hadimuljono 1976).
12. Sarcophagi found in Bali. On these sarcophagi are found knobs carved on the coffin and lid. Knobs are sometimes shaped as human heads or bear carved human faces (Soejono, 1977).

The pattern of human heads and human faces is very important. A great deal of human patterns are found on objects made of clay, stone, bronze, and iron during the early metal age in Indonesia. Objects on which human patterns are applied comprise bronze axes, mokos, and kettledrums, a few iron tools, and quite a number of pottery, particularly on those related to burials and also on objects of stone such as sarcophagi, warugas, kalambas, and stone cists.

Designs of human figures or parts of them prevail on archaeological objects because human beings are considered to have supernatural powers. The parts of the human body which are carved on objects are supposed to ward off evil spirits and are also representatives of their ancestors (Van Heekeren, 1958 : 47). The parts of the human body supposed to have great supernatural power are the face and eyes. The use of human faces has a certain purpose i.e. to ward off evil power, harm, disasters, as well as symbolizing the spirit of the dead or his ancestors or revered tribal chiefs (Soejono, 1977 : 137).

Considering the unusual shape, but still indicating the shape of a big axe, the mask pattern is the most dominant element of the whole object, and considering its appropriateness for practical usage, we may assume that the bronze object from Kabila is a ceremonial axe.

The age of the Kabila bronze is still a problem as no related finds have been reported during the discovery. The stylized form of the

object as well as the style of the mask motif and the use of simple geometric designs (especially concentric circles) point to a traditional pattern of the early metal age in Indonesia estimated between the last centuries before the Christian Era until the first centuries AD. This style could develop even during later centuries AD. So far the form of this object is unique.

Photographs

Plate 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10 from Pusat Penelitian Arkeologi Nasional. (National Research Centre of Archaeology).

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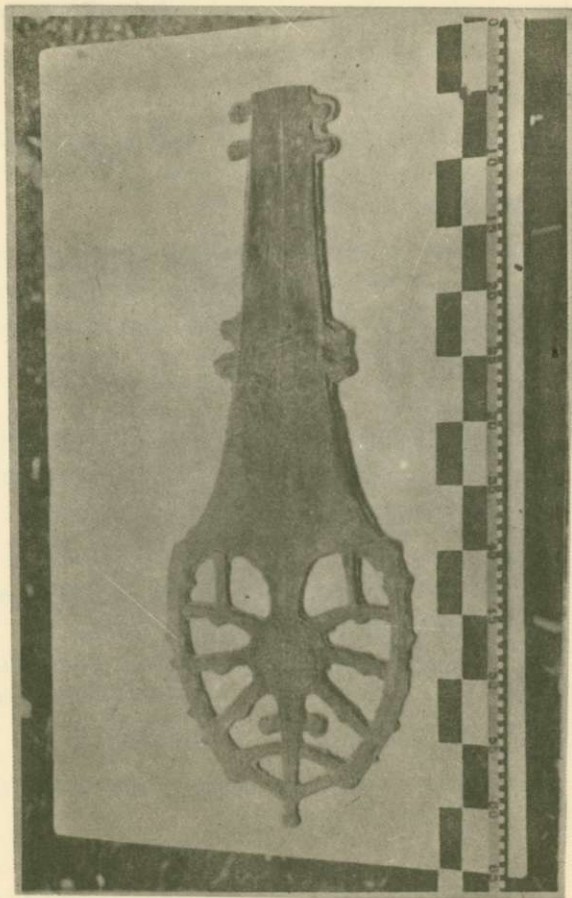


Plate 1 : A Bronze axe from Kabila, Sabu island, Nusa Tenggara Timur.

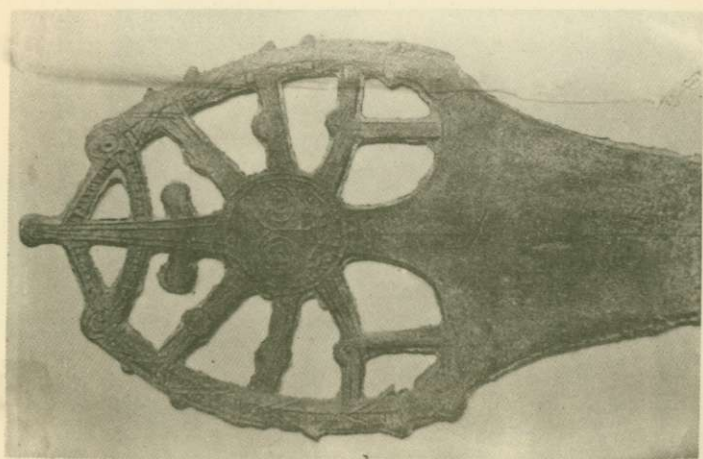


Plate 2 : A bronze axe's blade from Kabila.

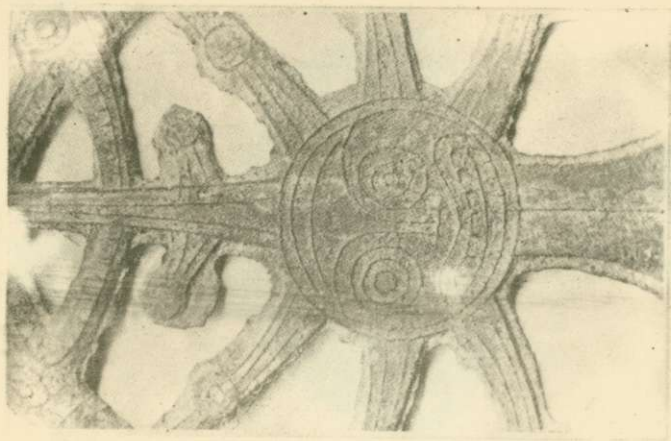


Plate 3 : Side A of the bronze axe from Kabila.

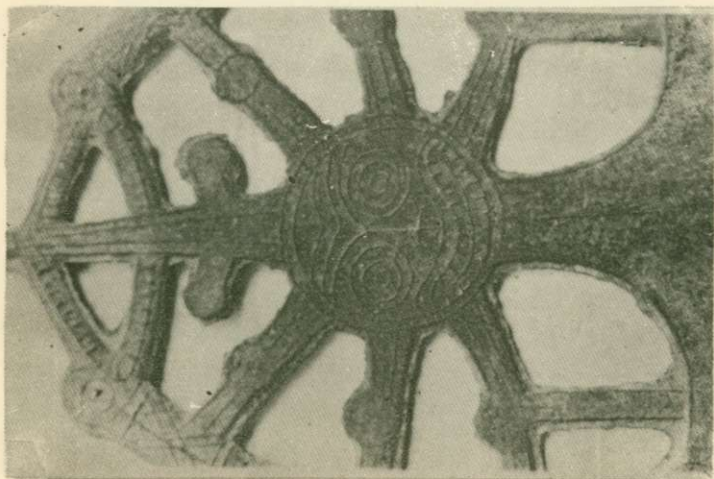


Plate 4 : Side B of the bronze axe
from Kabila.

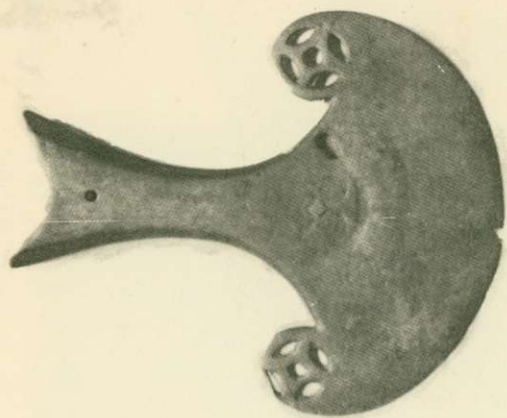


Plate 5 : A bronze axe found in Lake
Sentani (Irian Jaya), type
Soejono.I B



Plate 6 : A bronze axe from Ujung Pandang, type Soejono I A.



Plate 7 : A bronze axe found at Bandung, Socjono type II B.

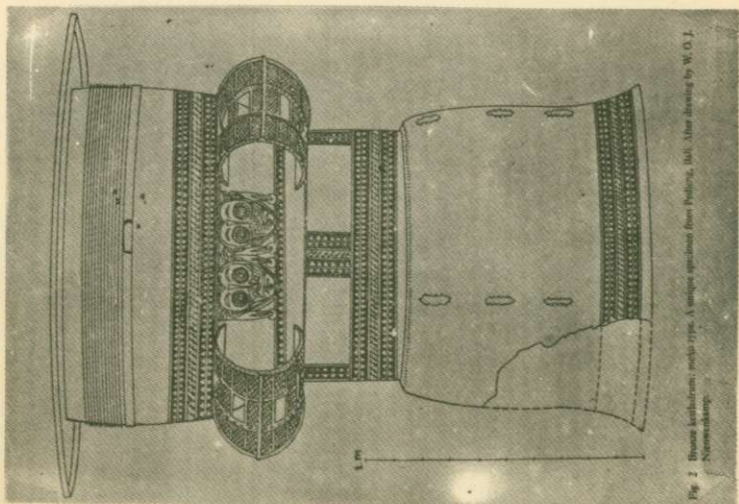


Plate 8 : A moko found at Pejeng (Bali)
(WOJ Nieuwenkamp, 1908)



Plate 9 : A moko from Alor (Nusa Tenggara Timur).

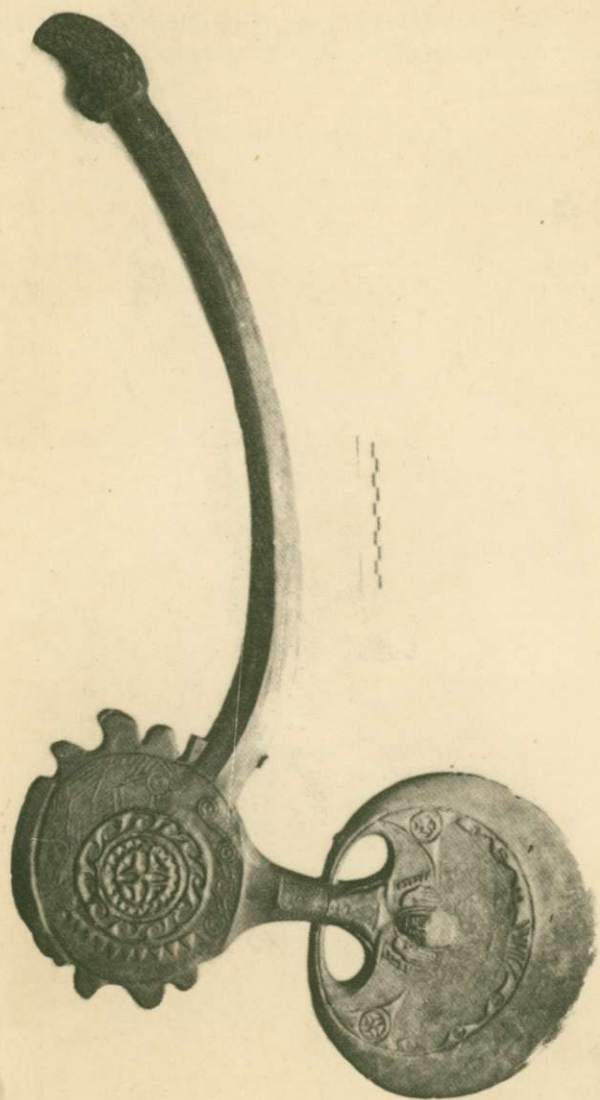


Plate 10: A bronze axe from Rote (Nusa Tenggara Timur).

DD Bintarti, finished her studies at the Faculty of Letters, University of Indonesia, Jakarta, as an archaeologist. She specializes in prehistory. She is a staff member of the Prehistory Department of the National Research Centre of Archaeology in Jakarta. She has participated in several researches and excavations in Jawa, Bali, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Flores, and Maluku.

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