

Pre-Islamic Burial Practices of South Sulawesi: Insights from Archaeological Studies

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Abstract: This study explores the diverse pre-Islamic burial practices of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, with a focus on the Toraja and other ethnic groups whose mortuary traditions reflect complex spiritual beliefs and social structures. Drawing on archaeological evidence, ethnographic records, and historical accounts, the research documents a wide range of burial methods, including primary (direct) and secondary (reburial) interments, both with and without containers such as earthenware jars (*tempayan*) and wooden coffins (*erong*, *duni*, *allung*). The study highlights distinctive Toraja forms such as *Liang* cave burials, *Tangdan* or *Patane* house-shaped tombs, tree burials (*Passilliran*) for infants, and *Lamunan* ground interments, each historically linked to social stratification (*tanak*) and spiritual symbolism. The findings reveal that grave orientation (east–west or toward mountains) and the inclusion of grave goods—locally made ceramics, imported Chinese and Annamese wares, metals, and personal belongings—underscore beliefs in an afterlife requiring provisions for the soul’s journey. Rituals before and after burial served not only to safeguard the spirit but also to reinforce kinship bonds and communal cooperation. By tracing the evolution of these practices from the Mesolithic through the early Islamic period and noting the influence of later Christian and Islamic traditions, this study illuminates how mortuary customs functioned as both spiritual rites and social events. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of Sulawesi’s cultural history, showing how burial traditions encode cosmological views, social hierarchy, and the enduring relationship between the living and their ancestors.

Keywords: South Sulawesi, pre-Islamic burial, Toraja mortuary practices, secondary burial, ancestral rituals.

I. INTRODUCTION

The mortuary practices of pre-Islamic South Sulawesi remain a relatively underexplored subject within Indonesian archaeology and cultural history. Existing archaeological studies indicate that long before the arrival of Islamic and European cultural influences, diverse ethnic groups in the region had already developed distinctive burial systems. These practices reveal a complex interplay of spiritual beliefs, social structures, and environmental adaptation that shaped local traditions of honoring the dead. The variations in burial sites, ranging from cave interments to megalithic structures, reflect the social hierarchy and cosmological understanding of the communities. Moreover, these mortuary traditions offer valuable insights into the continuity and transformation of indigenous belief systems that persisted even after the spread of Islam in the region.

Remarkably, elements of these ancient customs continue to endure in certain indigenous communities. Groups such as the Kajang, the Tolotang-Towani, and the Toraja maintain burial traditions that still reflect prehistoric patterns, offering valuable insights into the persistence of pre-Islamic cultural heritage (Bulbeck & Caldwell, 2000). The survival of these customs highlights the resilience of indigenous belief systems and provides a living link to practices that predate the spread of world religions in the archipelago (Nooy-Palm, 1979; Rahman, 2019; Sahib et al., 2019).

South Sulawesi itself is a culturally rich and geographically diverse region, comprising coastal areas, highland valleys, and mountainous terrains. This diversity has influenced burial practices across different ethnic groups, leading to variations in funerary architecture, ritual performance, and the use of megalithic monuments (Pelras, 1996). Megalithic burial sites, cave interments, and tree burials represent only a few of the forms found throughout the region. Each method reflects a

distinctive worldview about death, the afterlife, and the relationship between humans and nature.

The spread of Islam from the 16th century onward introduced significant religious and cultural changes to South Sulawesi. Islamic teachings on burial, emphasizing simplicity and uniformity, gradually reshaped funerary customs among many local communities. Nevertheless, certain groups retained pre-Islamic practices either wholly or partially, resulting in a layered cultural landscape where ancient and newer traditions coexist (Duli, 2011; Waterson, 2009). Understanding these continuities and transformations offers valuable insights into the processes of religious and cultural negotiation that have characterized the region's history.

Despite the importance of these traditions, scholarly attention to pre-Islamic burial systems in South Sulawesi remains limited. Much of the available literature focuses on broader themes of Indonesian archaeology or on the Toraja's well-known funeral ceremonies, leaving other communities and less-visible burial forms underrepresented. There is a pressing need for systematic documentation and interpretation of these practices to prevent the loss of valuable cultural knowledge as modernization and religious homogenization advance.

This study seeks to address that gap by providing a detailed overview of burial forms across South Sulawesi, with particular emphasis on pre-Islamic practices and those still observed in communities that remain outside the influence of Islamic culture. Drawing on fieldwork, site visits, and analysis of both prehistoric and ethnographic evidence, this research illuminates the cultural continuity and diversity of mortuary systems in the region. By doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of Indonesia's cultural heritage and underscores the significance of preserving these unique traditions for future generations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on mortuary practices in Indonesia has highlighted the archipelago's diverse and dynamic cultural landscapes, yet studies focusing specifically on pre-Islamic burial systems in South Sulawesi remain limited. Early archaeological investigations in Sulawesi primarily concentrated on prehistoric cave art and stone tools (Bulbeck & Caldwell, 2000), with mortuary traditions often treated as secondary topics. However, recent studies emphasize that burial systems are crucial for understanding the spiritual beliefs, social hierarchies, and ecological adaptations of ancient communities (Spriggs, 2015). These perspectives underscore the need for more region-specific studies to capture the complexity of local traditions.

Several ethnographic and archaeological works shed light on the enduring influence of pre-Islamic practices in South Sulawesi. Nooy-Palm (1986) provides a detailed account of Toraja funeral rites, illustrating how elaborate ceremonies and megalithic tombs reflect a cosmology centered on the relationship between the living and the ancestral spirits. Although Toraja traditions are relatively well documented, similar practices among other groups—such as the Kajang and the Tolotang-Towani—remain less thoroughly explored. Acciaioli (2009) notes that these communities preserve aspects of prehistoric belief systems, maintaining rituals that emphasize the interconnectedness of nature, ancestors, and community identity.

The spread of Islam to South Sulawesi during the 16th century introduced new religious and cultural norms that reshaped local burial customs. Pelras (1996) explains that the Bugis and Makassar peoples gradually incorporated Islamic funeral rites, favoring simplicity and uniformity in burial. Nevertheless, as Henley (2005) observes, syncretism frequently occurred, with communities blending Islamic principles with older animistic practices. This layered religious landscape created a spectrum of burial forms, ranging from strictly Islamic interments to hybrid or fully indigenous systems, which continue to coexist today.

Megalithic traditions in Indonesia have also been examined as a lens for understanding prehistoric social organization. Bellwood (2007) and Hasanuddin (2012) highlight that the construction of stone monuments and collective tombs indicates complex communal rituals and

technological skills. In South Sulawesi, megalithic burial sites—such as those in Enrekang and Soppeng—demonstrate continuity with wider Austronesian cultural patterns. These findings support the argument that mortuary practices are not only spiritual expressions but also evidence of sociopolitical networks and regional interaction.

Despite these contributions, there remains a gap in scholarship addressing the full range of pre-Islamic mortuary systems across South Sulawesi. Most available studies focus on either prehistoric artifacts or well-known ethnographic groups, leaving less-documented communities and active burial traditions underrepresented. This study aims to build on existing archaeological and ethnographic literature by integrating field observations, site visits, and historical records to provide a more comprehensive understanding of pre-Islamic burial practices in the region. Through this synthesis, it contributes to the broader discourse on cultural resilience, religious transformation, and the preservation of intangible heritage in Indonesia.

III. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach combining archaeological analysis and ethnographic inquiry to document and interpret pre-Islamic burial systems in South Sulawesi. The research design emphasized an in-depth exploration of material culture, living traditions, and historical records to provide a holistic understanding of mortuary practices across different ethnic communities.

1. Research Sites and Selection Criteria

Fieldwork was conducted at selected locations across South Sulawesi known for their pre-Islamic or non-Islamic burial practices. Key sites included megalithic burial grounds in Enrekang and Soppeng, ancestral caves in Bulukumba, and active ritual areas within the Kajang, Tolotang-Towani, and Toraja communities. Sites were chosen based on three criteria: (a) evidence of pre-Islamic burial features (stone chambers, urn burials, or cave interments), (b) continued or recently documented traditional burial rituals, and (c) accessibility for systematic observation and community engagement.

2. Data Collection Techniques

Archaeological Survey and Documentation: Surface mapping, photographic recording, and dimensional measurements of burial structures were carried out to capture details of megalithic formations, cave tombs, and other physical remains. **Ethnographic Observation:** Participation in or observation of ongoing funerary rituals within Kajang, Tolotang-Towani, and Toraja communities allowed for direct recording of practices, symbols, and ceremonial sequences. **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with local elders, cultural custodians, and community leaders to gather oral histories, mythologies, and explanations of ritual meanings.

Archival Research: Historical manuscripts, colonial records, and previous archaeological reports from the National Archives of Indonesia and local cultural offices were reviewed to provide context and verify continuity of traditions.

3. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed thematically using an interpretive framework. Archaeological data were compared with ethnographic observations to identify patterns of continuity and change. Iconographic and spatial analyses of burial sites helped classify structural types and ritual functions. Interview transcripts and archival records were coded to trace narratives of cultural resilience and religious syncretism.

4. Validity and Reliability

Triangulation of methods—archaeological, ethnographic, and archival—ensured the credibility of findings. Member checking was employed by sharing preliminary interpretations with local informants and cultural leaders for feedback and validation.

5. Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical standards for fieldwork with indigenous communities. Permissions were obtained from local authorities and traditional councils prior to site visits and interviews. Sensitive cultural knowledge and sacred locations were documented only with explicit consent, and community anonymity was preserved when requested. Through this mixed qualitative methodology, the study provides a robust, contextually grounded account of pre-Islamic burial systems in South Sulawesi, capturing both tangible archaeological evidence and the living intangible heritage that continues to shape these practices today.

IV. RESULTS

A. Findings

1. The Late Pre-Islamic Burial Systems in the Indonesian Archipelago

The earliest evidence of burial activity dates back roughly 500,000 years, based on excavated fossil data of *Homo Neanderthal* in Europe (Koentjaraningrat, 1977, p. 227). These findings reveal early burial methods and grave goods. In Indonesia, the Gua Lawa (Sampung) site represents the oldest record of burial activity. The data include human skeletal remains interred in a flexed position, with hands placed under the chin or covering the eyes—a typical Mesolithic burial practice (Heekeren, 1972, p. 94).

Several excavations of Indonesian burial sites—such as Gilimanuk, Gunung Piring, Plawangan, and Anyar—provide detailed insights into burial methods. Excavations at Gilimanuk revealed four distinct burial patterns. The first pattern, primary burial, involved one or two bodies and exhibited diverse features. The second, secondary burial, included varied skeletal arrangements while preserving the original bone positioning. The third pattern combined primary and secondary methods, while the fourth used large ceramic jars as burial containers. Jar burials were rare at Gilimanuk, where sarcophagus-style containers dominated the first three patterns (Soejono, 1977, p. 186–192).

Findings at the Gunung Piring site (South Lombok), excavated in 1976, indicate pre-Islamic burial practices. The skeletal remains show primary burial without a container and with the body laid supine (Nitihaminoto, 1978, p. 14). Excavations at Terjan and Plawangan in 1977–1978 offer further evidence of burial forms. At Terjan, remains were oriented northwest–southeast, with the head toward the northwest, suggesting a megalithic context. Plawangan revealed both primary burials—placing the body directly in the ground or in jars—and secondary burials using jars (Sukender & Rokhus Due Awe, 1981, p. 24–25). At Anyar, West Java, research in 1979 showed two burial types: primary jar burials with lids, and flexed-position jar burials (Sukender, 1982, p. 26).

Ethnographic studies show that traditional burial systems persist in various Indonesian communities. For example, the Sumba people follow a three-stage process: pre-burial, burial, and post-burial (Soelarto, 1980, p. 33–34). The pre-burial stage involves washing the body, anointing it with coconut water or oil, and positioning it squatting with broken knees and bent elbows supporting the cheeks. Parts of the body—knees, heels, abdomen, chest, and arms—are wrapped in cloth or sarongs, especially for female corpses. The head and forehead are bound with a headband and decorated with jewelry. The body is then laid out at home for several days, during which daily animal sacrifices are performed. The deceased is treated as though still alive, with meals and drinks offered at regular times.

During burial, both primary and secondary methods are practiced. In primary burial, the spirit of the deceased is believed to remain near the living and must be cared for (Koentjaraningrat, 1958, p. 191). This stage may last from a few weeks to ten years, awaiting the decomposition of all but the bones. The corpse is placed in a coffin with grave goods, sealed, and stored in a designated primary burial area. For the secondary burial, bones are exhumed, cleansed, and honored with offerings and animal sacrifices before final interment. Post-burial rituals include a soul-raising ceremony on the

third day after secondary burial, symbolizing the spirit's return to its origin, accompanied by offerings of betel nut and sacrificial animals such as dogs for protection.

Technological aspects of death practices can be observed in the treatment of corpses, which typically follow four main patterns: burial, exposure, cremation, and preservation. These practices serve three main purposes: placing the body in a culturally appropriate location, facilitating the soul's journey to the spirit realm, and restoring the social balance disrupted by death (Koentjaraningrat, 1958, p. 193). Burials may be performed with or without containers such as jars or wooden coffins. Koentjaraningrat (1958, p. 193) also notes the widespread use of ritual artifacts—particularly statues symbolizing deities or ancestral spirits and ceremonial masks representing gods and ancestors. These masks are essential in sacred dances or ritual dramas, believed to channel spiritual power and guide communities through times of crisis (Kirby, 1983, p. 196).

Death practices in the Indonesian Archipelago are deeply embedded in the conceptual systems of its diverse societies. The region's cultural variety reflects a broad spectrum of social behaviors and material culture linked to mortuary traditions. Ethnographic studies consistently indicate a shared belief that death represents a transition from one stage of life to another—a view still evident among indigenous cultures across the archipelago. This aligns with the widespread understanding of *jiwa* (the earthly soul) and *roh* (the spirit in the afterlife), as observed among the Batak Toba, Nias, Mentawai, Javanese, Toraja, Dayak Ngaju, Dayak Malok, Yamdena, Buru, and some Papuan communities (Dyson & Asharini, 1981, p. 38–41; Kana, 1983; King, 1985; Koentjaraningrat, 1977, p. 235–236; Nooy-Palm, 1979, p. 128–129).

Underlying these beliefs is a psychological perception of a close relationship between humans and ancestral spirits, often stronger than their connection to a supreme power, which is typically known only through myth. Nooy-Palm (1979, p. 121) summarizes this phenomenon in the context of the Toraja people, illustrating how mortuary practices express a worldview in which death is merely a passage within the continuum of existence.

Data 1

“.... Para dewa itu berkuasa dan penting, tetapi mereka jauh dan tak terjangkau. Yang lebih dekat dan akrab adalah arwah dari orang-orang yang (baru-baru ini) meninggal, para leluhur dari Barat (to matua) dan dari Timur (deata), serta roh-roh yang berhubungan dengan lokasi tertentu.”

“.... The gods are powerful and important but they are far off. Closer by and more familiar are the souls of the (more recently) dead, the ancestors of the West (to matua) and of the East (deata), and the spirits associated with specific location”.

The relationship between humans in the earthly realm and ancestral spirits in the spirit world exists for the benefit of the living. Across many cultures of the Indonesian archipelago, this relationship is expressed through offerings and prayers (Nooy-Palm, 1979, p. 125; Kana, 1983, p. 41; King, 1985, p. 186–198; Koentjaraningrat, 1977, p. 251–253). Indigenous traditions throughout the archipelago believe in a distinct dwelling place for spirits, both as a location and a community. Generally, these spirit realms are thought to reside atop mountains. Land-oriented communities hold that the spirits dwell on mountain peaks (Dyson & Asharini, 1981, p. 211; Nooy-Palm, 1979, p. 126). Others believe the spirit world lies deep within the earth or beneath the sea, and that spirits must pass through a long, vertical tunnel to reach it (Koentjaraningrat, 1977, p. 253). For sea-oriented societies, the spirit world is often envisioned as another island where souls ultimately reside (Kana, 1983, p. 60). In these cultures, the boat is considered the spirit's vehicle to the ancestral realm (Kana, 1983, p. 73). Interestingly, some land-oriented groups also regard boats as the vehicle to the spirit world, connected to myths that their ancestors originally arrived by boat, such as the Toraja origin myth (Duli, 1999).

Among communities that practice a two-stage funeral ritual, it is believed that the spirit of the deceased lingers near the living during the period between the first and second ceremonies. There is also a belief that these lingering spirits can be malevolent, and that the spirits of those who died unnatural deaths may fail to reach the afterlife (Dyson & Asharini, 1981, p. 30; Ellen, 1978, p. 39; Kana, 1983, p. 63; King, 1985, p. 198; Koentjaraningrat, 1977, p. 237–238; Nooy-Palm, 1979, p. 122). Therefore, rituals and careful funerary treatment are considered essential to guide the soul's journey to the eternal world. The process of corpse care, reflecting the idea of a transition from one stage of life to another, is commonly divided into three phases: first, separating the individual from their former community; second, preparing the person for their new status; and third, finally integrating the individual into that new spiritual status (Koentjaraningrat, 1958, p. 191).

The first phase is manifested through activities and rituals that emphasize the difference in status between the deceased and the living. In several pre-Islamic death practices in Bali, the body was left to decompose in or near the dwelling, placed on a raised platform, in a death house, or on the forest floor (Soejono, 1977, p. 197). Similar practices were observed among some communities in Papua (Koentjaraningrat & Harsja, 1963, p. 295–334). In other areas, burial was preferred, such as among the Dayak Ngaju of Kalimantan (Dyson & Asharini, 1981, p. 40) and certain Papuan groups (Koentjaraningrat & Harsja, 1963, p. 129–130). Other communities practiced cremation and mummification (Koentjaraningrat & Harsja, 1963, p. 229, 246). Fundamentally, these treatments were temporary, intended mainly to preserve the bones of the deceased. Similar customs are observed among the Toraja, particularly among the noble class (Sandarupa, 2010, p. 2).

The second phase involved various activities intended to prepare the individual for the journey to the spirit world. During this stage, the dead were provided with supplies such as food (Dyson & Asharini, 1981, p. 41) and a drink known as “traveling oil” (Kana, 1983, p. 58–59, 65). The principle was to carefully prepare and adorn the corpse so it would be accepted by the ancestors, traveling by boat to the unseen world (Kana, 1983, p. 60). The third phase consisted of a final ceremony releasing the spirit to its ultimate resting place in the ancestral realm. At this stage, the remains—sometimes only the skull—might be kept in the family home, placed in a cave (Soejono, 1977, p. 197), or cremated (Dyson & Asharini, 1981, p. 40). Cremation practices were common in Kalimantan and Papua, with various local names such as *ijambe* (Dayak Ma'anyan) and *tiwah* (Dayak Ngaju).

In death practices, social and kinship elements are closely interwoven with ritual and religion, often overlapping in complex ways. Reflecting the belief in a spirit world and the duty of the living to ensure a smooth passage for the deceased, it is customary to provide the dead with offerings and personal belongings to accompany them. These typically include everyday items that belonged to the deceased (Kana, 1983, p. 58–60; Koentjaraningrat & Harsja, 1963, p. 229, 263). Animal companions, such as buffalo (Nooy-Palm, 1979, p. 196), were also sometimes sacrificed. In some traditions, even human companions were included, giving rise to the practice of headhunting, which Dyson and Asharini (1981, p. 35–36) describe as a ritual tied to these beliefs.

Data 2

“.... Adat mengayau ini sebenarnya berhubungan dengan pelaksanaan upacara-upacara kematian pada orang-orang Dayak, seperti upacara Tiwah misalnya. Untuk melaksanakan upacara ini diperlukan kepala manusia, maka mereka mencari korbannya ke wilayah kelompok lain. Adat mengayau ini adalah sebahagian dari sistem kepercayaan mereka yang berkaitan dengan pandangan mereka tentang dunia akhirat, yaitu bahwa orang yang meninggal itu perlu ditemani sepanjang jalan menuju dunia arwah”.

“...The headhunting custom is actually related to the performance of death rituals among the Dayak people, such as the Tiwah ceremony. To carry out this ritual, a human head is required, prompting them to seek victims from other groups. This headhunting tradition is part of their belief system

connected to their view of the afterlife—that the deceased must be accompanied along the journey to the spirit world.”

The same practice was also carried out by the Toraja people in the past (Kruyt, 1923–24:272; Nooy-Palm, 1980:172; Buijs, 2009:223). For the well-being and safety of the soul and to strengthen the bond with the living, people place offerings on graves when visiting them (Kana, 1983:58). Burial practices and the treatment of graves that have existed since the pre-Islamic period through the ethnographic era, as described earlier, are still maintained by certain groups, especially within traditional communities.

2. Forms of Pre-Islamic Burials in South Sulawesi

The oldest evidence of burial in South Sulawesi was discovered by Fritz and Paul Sarasin at the Leang Cakondo and Leang Uleleba sites (Maros), estimated to date between 10,000–5,000 BCE during the Mesolithic period. In the Neolithic period, burial evidence shows the use of various containers such as pottery and stone. With the advancement of technology, particularly after the introduction of metal, burial systems also developed, both technologically and typologically.

The Portuguese writer Tome Pires, who visited Indonesia in 1512, mentioned that South Sulawesi consisted of about 50 kingdoms whose people still practiced animist worship. This indicates that several Sulawesi kingdoms at that time were not influenced by Hinduism but maintained strong ancestral customs and unique burial traditions. Among the Bugis-Makassar people, pre-Islamic burial practices included laying the body east–west and placing grave goods such as bowls, jars, large storage vessels, imported Chinese wares, and oyster shells in the tomb. There was also a tradition of placing a gold or silver eye-covering (mask) on the deceased if they were nobles or prominent figures (Tjandrasarmita, 1972:208–210; Pelras, 1972:208–210).

Macknight (1993:38) notes that archaeological research and Portuguese records report that the Bugis-Makassar people practiced secondary burials in the pre-Islamic era, a tradition still maintained by the Toraja people into the early 20th century, using caves as burial sites.



Figure 1. Stone coffin burial at the Gojeng-Sinjai Megalithic site

Evidence of pre-Islamic burials in South Sulawesi shows that the dead were interred using both direct (primary) and indirect (secondary) burial methods, with some utilizing containers and others not. Burials without containers involved placing the body directly in the ground, stone chambers, caves, or inside trees without any vessel, merely wrapped in cloth or a mat. Burials with containers used various receptacles such as pottery jars (tempayan) and wooden coffins like the *erong* (Toraja), *duni* (Bugis), and *allung* (Makassar).

Burials without containers were generally primary burials, whereas those with containers were usually secondary burials. The orientation of the graves was typically north–south or east–west, with a variety of forms: in-ground graves topped with mounds or stacks of earth or stones shaped like hills,

rectangles, or terraced structures, as found at the Pambokboran site (Majene), as well as in Toraja and Enrekang. There were also stone arrangements forming circular, oval, or rectangular rings, such as those at Tinco (Soppeng), Manipi (Sinjai), and Gattarang Keke (Bantaeng). Other types included carved stone coffins, like those at the Batu Pake' Bojeng site (Sinjai) and Liangpa' (Toraja).

In addition, some burials used wooden coffins. These coffins were sometimes buried in the ground, as seen with the *allung* coffin excavated at the Tallo site (Makassar), dated to 1113 ± 80 BP (around 880 CE) (Maria, 1993:40), as well as at the Sanrobone site (Takalar) and the Sigeri site (Pangkep). Others were placed in natural caves, such as those found at Batu Baba (Selayar), Gua Passea-Ara (Bulukumba), Lanja-Patampanua (Polman), Lebani-Kartaun (Kalumpang), and several sites in the Enrekang, Mamasa, and Tana Toraja regions (Somba, 1999; Bernadeta, 2007).

Research on wooden coffins conducted by Akin Duli in 2010 across Tana Toraja, Enrekang, and Mamasa recorded around 50 sites containing hundreds of wooden coffins. The *erong* coffins in Tana Toraja date to around 780 CE, the *duni* coffins in Enrekang to about 1200 CE, and the *tedong-tedong*, *bangka-bangka*, *talukun*, and *batutu* coffins in Mamasa to approximately 1300 CE (Duli, 2010, 2011). In the Luwu area, a *duni* coffin was found dating to about 450 ± 60 BP (Bulbeck & Caldwell, 2000:134).



Figure 2. Pre-Islamic graves at the Pambokboran site and Mara'dia burial site (Majene)

Among the Bugis-Makassar people, up until the 17th century CE there was still a tradition of erecting menhir stones (*ilamung mpatue*) as markers of agreements or as grave markers. Beneath these menhirs, the ashes or human bones of prominent individuals were sometimes found (Pelras, 2006:30).



Figure 3. Jar used as a burial container at the Datu Mario site (Soppeng)

3. Types of Burials among the Toraja People

The form and layout of graves within a burial complex for the Toraja people in the past were determined by their social stratification (*tanak*). Today, however, this is no longer the case, as burial arrangements are based on each family's economic capacity. The types of Toraja burials can be described as follows:

a. Liang

This refers to burials located in caves or rock niches, either naturally formed or intentionally carved into stone walls. *Liang* includes several types:

- 1) **Liang Alam:** Natural cave burials in which the corpse is placed inside a natural cave (*lo'kok*), such as those found at the base of hills or rocky mountains, and then covered with small stones. These burials do not use *erong* coffins, and infants who die before teething are typically placed in earthenware containers. This form of burial was designated for people from the *tanak kua-kua* and *tanak karurung* classes.
- 2) **Liang Erong:** Burials where the corpse is placed in a cave or niche using an *erong* wooden coffin. These coffins are arranged to reflect social stratification, with higher-status individuals placed at higher levels, and their status also indicated by the shape of the *erong*. This burial type is also known as *Liang Tokek* ("hanging burial") because the *erong* is hung from the cave ceiling or wall.
- 3) **Liangpa':** A burial carved into a rock wall, forming a large inner cavity sized according to the family's wishes and means. The entrance, about 1 m × 1 m, is covered with wood. The body, wrapped in cloth, is no longer placed in an *erong*, but in a modern coffin, either rectangular or rounded. Formerly reserved for the high nobility, *Liangpa'* burials are now open to anyone who can afford them. *Liang* burials are typically clustered together as family or community burial grounds, so their arrangement and grave forms often reflect the social hierarchy much like the layout of a village during the deceased's lifetime.

b. Tangdan

This type of burial resembles a traditional Toraja house (*Tongkonan*) and is usually built on a hilltop or an elevated site; in Mamasa it is called *Batutu*. Constructed entirely of wood like a customary house, it contains a single enclosed room. The deceased, placed either in an *erong* coffin or simply wrapped in cloth, is laid inside. Formerly reserved for nobility, this burial form has evolved into what is now called *Patane*, which anyone can use depending on their financial capacity. Examples of *Tangdan* or *Batutu* burials can be seen at the Paladan site (Saluputti) and in the Mamasa area.

c. Patane

Patane is a development of the *Tangdan* house-shaped burial. The differences are:

- 1) *Patane* uses both wood and cement as building materials.
- 2) *Tangdan* is typically located on a hilltop, whereas *Patane* can be built anywhere according to the family's or the deceased's wishes.
- 3) *Tangdan* serves as the actual burial site, while *Patane* functions as a protective structure (similar to a mausoleum built over a carved rock tomb or an underground grave).
- 4) *Tangdan* was reserved for nobility, while *Patane* may be used by anyone who can afford it.
- 5) Historically, *Tangdan* developed earlier and is now rarely used except in the Mamasa region.

Both *Tangdan* and *Patane* are typically found in areas lacking large boulders, hills, or rocky mountains, though modern *Patane* structures can now be found throughout Tana Toraja.



Figure 4. Erong Coffin and Passilliran in Tana Toraja

d. Passilliran Pia

This is a type of tree burial specifically for children who died before their teeth had grown. The trees used are typically *sipate*, *tarrak*, or *kau-kau*. The child's body is placed among the roots or inside a hollowed section of the trunk, then covered with palm-fiber material (*ijuk*). In the past, this burial type was reserved for members of the *tanak kua-kua* class. Formerly, those buried in rock crevices or caves sealed with stones without using an *erong* coffin—or placed among tree roots—especially those from the *tanak kua-kua* or *tanak karurung* classes, were also known as *disillik* or *Passilliran* graves. Today, however, *Passilliran* refers only to infant tree burials.

e. Lamunan

This is a burial in which the deceased is placed directly into the ground. Traditionally, *Lamunan* was reserved for infants who died in the womb or were miscarried: the body was placed in an earthenware jar and buried in the soil southwest of the house. In the past, some adults were also buried in the ground—either with a wooden coffin or without one—in other Toraja areas such as Mamasa, Enrekang, and Rongkong, especially where there were no rocky mountains. Today, ground burial has become more common among the Toraja, particularly with the arrival of Christian and Islamic influences.

V. CONCLUSION

Pre-Islamic burial practices in South Sulawesi were generally based on ancestral traditions, with graves oriented east–west or toward the mountains and furnished with grave goods such as bowls, *cepuk* containers, locally made jars, imported Chinese and Annamese items, metal objects, and more. Bodies were interred either by primary burial (direct burial) or secondary burial, with or without containers. Burials without containers involved placing the body in soil, rock, caves, trees, or even water, wrapped only in cloth or matting. Container burials used earthenware jars (*tempayan*) or wooden coffins such as *erong* (Toraja), *duni* (Bugis), or *allung* (Makassar, Mandar). Generally, container less burials were primary, while those with containers were secondary.

Grave forms varied: simple earth graves covered with soil or stones forming mounds, squares, or tiered terraces; ring formations (circular, oval, or square); stone coffins carved from rock; or *Liangpa'* cave burials (Toraja). It was also common to erect menhirs (*ilamung mpatue*) as grave markers, sometimes with ashes or human bones of prominent individuals beneath them. Collective burials were also practiced, such as the use of *erong* coffins and Liang caves in Tana Toraja to house multiple skeletons. These were placed in natural caves, niches, rock cliffs, or special structures, and the coffins were made of *uru*, *bitti*, or sandalwood. Before and after burial, a series of rituals was performed to ensure the welfare of the ancestral spirit and the well-being of those left behind. Funeral

ceremonies were key social events that strengthened kinship ties, encouraged communal cooperation, and fostered mutual sharing.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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