

## SAPUNDU: MORTUARY POST ON THE SERANAU AND CEMPAGA RIVER BASINS

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### Abstrak

*Sifat sosial manusia dalam lingkup kegiatan kematian secara umum adalah upaya mengingat orang yang meninggal. Salah satu cara adalah membuat tanda-tanda yang mencirikan atau mengingatkan 'yang masih hidup' akan si mati. Salah satu contoh nyata pembuatan tanda-tanda kematian dilakukan oleh masyarakat Ngaju di Kalimantan Tengah yang masih memiliki keyakinan Kaharingan yang kuat dengan upacara kematiannya, Tiwah. Pada masyarakat Ngaju di Daerah Aliran Sungai Seranau dan Cempaga, kegiatan kematian selalu diiringi dengan pendirian sapundu. Fungsi utama sapundu adalah tiang penambat binatang yang akan dikurbankan dalam Tiwah. Namun, ternyata sapundu memiliki makna sosial-religius yang lebih luas daripada fungsi teknisnya sebagai sekedar tiang tambat kurban. Terdapat beberapa jenis, fungsi dan makna sapundu yang dapat diidentifikasi berdasarkan sifat, orientasi dan lokasi penempatan sapundu. Tulisan ini akan membahas karakteristik sapundu pada Daerah Aliran Seranau dan Cempaga yang ditinjau dari aspek dimensi, pose, gender dan ornamen, serta orientasi.*

**Keywords:** mortuary, Ngaju, Kaharingan, kematian, tiwah, sapundu kurban, sapundu gapit, daerah aliran sungai

### A. Introduction

Mortuary behaviour of any given society depends on its social and cultural complexity. O'Shea (1984:4) quotes Binford (1971:225-231), and McHugh (1999:4) quotes Saxe (1970:75), to the effect that the more complex a society is, the more diverse will be the manifestation of its mortuary system. Nevertheless, as with many other aspects of culture, Mytum (2004:145; O'Shea 1984:30; Pearson 2003:28) suggests that mortuary

behaviour possesses a dynamic quality that tends to change, yet retain its potent attributes. These factors provide the foundation that supports the interpretation of various tangible mortuary manifestations within a society. O'Shea (1984:39-41) proposes six categories for analysing mortuary variation. Among his categories, the one relevant to the present study is the mortuary facility, which comprises the physical attributes of the mortuary repository including its paraphernalia.

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Mortuary repository on the Seranau and Cempaga River Basins (Figure 1) is established by the Ngaju, who persist on performing their mortuary practices until today with reference to their belief system, the *Kaharingan*, and concepts of the afterlife. The mortuary repository, the *sandong*<sup>1</sup>, is the most important element marking the climax of mortuary ritual of the Ngaju. However, its paraphernalia, which consist of *sanggaran*<sup>2</sup>, *pantar*<sup>3</sup> and *sapundu*<sup>4</sup>, are no less important than the repository itself. The Ngaju on the Cempaga River Basin usually erected *sanggaran* to signify the end of the use of *sandong*<sup>5</sup>. The *pantar* is not employed by the Seranau and Cempaga Ngaju. On the other hand, *sapundu* are always found in association with existing mortuary repository. My observation on their mortuary behavior indicate that *sapundu* is created simultaneously with and to complement the establishment of *sandong*. The Ngaju recognize two kinds of *sapundu* i.e. *sapundu gapit*<sup>1</sup> and *sapundu kurban*<sup>2</sup>. The forms of *sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban* are reasonably the same

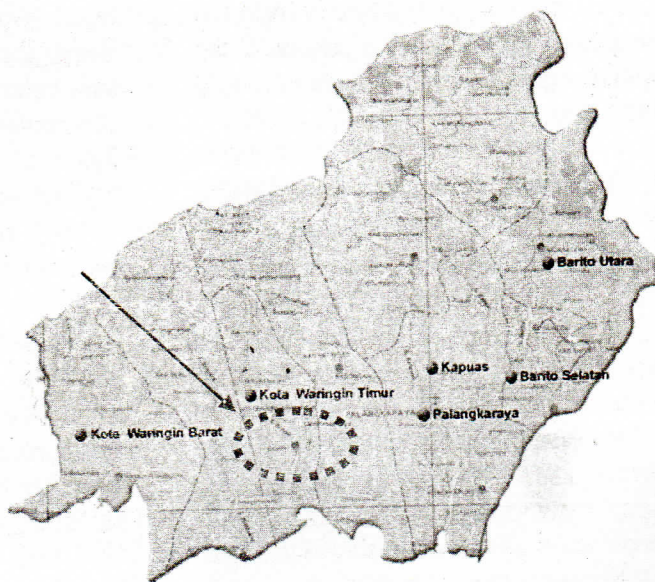


Figure 1. The Ngaju of the Seranau and Cempaga River Basins in Central Kalimantan (<http://www.menlh.go.id/usaha-kecil/prop/kalteng.htm>)

with human figures sculpted on top of posts; however, they differ in their spatial arrangements. The *sapundu gapit* are erected immediately next to the *sandong*, while the *sapundu kurban* is either left at its original place for *tiwah* or moved to the burial grounds relatively far from the *sandong*. By and large each type of *sapundu* has its own significance portraying the belief system and concept of the afterlife. This article discusses the characteristic of *sapundu* on the Seranau and Cempaga River Basins to understand the mortuary behavior of the

<sup>1</sup> There are two varieties: *sandong tulang* and *sandong raung*

<sup>2</sup> A tall decorated post symbolizing the Tree of Life

<sup>3</sup> A long undecorated post denoting a ladder to the Upperworld

<sup>4</sup> An anthropomorphic post

<sup>5</sup> Which has become full of bones, so that it is necessary to construct a new one to accommodate a recently deceased individual; 2003 pers.com with the Village Head of Bukit Batu, Ayetri Ucun bin Jaharnis, 51 years old



Seranau and Cempaga Ngaju in regard to dimension, poses and hand position of the figures, gender and decoration, and orientation.

### A. Seranau and Cempaga River Basins

The Seranau and Cempaga River Basins are tributaries of the Mentaya River that cuts through Kabupaten Kotawaringin Timur, flowing south to the Java Sea. Both river basins lie on a topographical setting of periodically wet lowland. The Seranau flows northeastward from the northwest, and the Cempaga southward from the north. During the monsoon season the Seranau River floods inland, while the Cempaga River does not. In the dry season, both rivers subside, exposing a broad expanse of dried-mud riverbank. On each river are located villages of the Ngaju: the Keleka<sup>3</sup> Natay Kunang and Tanah Putih<sup>4</sup> on the Seranau River Basin, and Keleka Nahan Biru and Bukit Batu<sup>5</sup> on the Cempaga River Basin.

The Kelaka Natay Kunang and Keleka Nahan Biru are abandoned settlements, which have been archaeologically investigated in 2004. The ethnohistory of both abandoned villages suggests that they belonged to the ancestors of the inhabitants of the new nearby villages, the Tanah Putih and Bukit Batu. Keleka

Natay Kunang and Keleka Nahan Biru were investigated due to their characteristic as have been unoccupied for 50 to 100 years. The contemporary Tanah Putih and Bukit Batu were selected because they contain both old —approximately between 1816 and 1948— and new mortuary facilities, particularly *sapundu*.

#### 1. *Sapundu* on the Seranau River Basin

The Keleka Natay Kunang *Sapundu* are found in an environment of cultivated rain-fed rice, tubers and timber species such bamboo, jack fruit, *ulin*<sup>1</sup> (Mackinnon 1997:130), rattan and rubber trees. Two clusters of *sapundu* were found 217 meter apart separated by a relatively small river, the Raku, which flows northeast and joins the Rinjau and eventually the Seranau River (Figure 2). Each cluster of *sapundu* is associated with a *sandong*. The first cluster is the paraphernalia of Sandong Marotan, which can be reached on foot from the Pangkalanbun-Sampit Highway north-westward for one and a half hour on foot. The second cluster belongs to Sandong Rami, which is reached another half hour from Sandong Marotan across the Raku River.

<sup>1</sup> Anthropomorphic post for casting away evil spirits

<sup>2</sup> Anthropomorphic post for tethering sacrificial animals

<sup>3</sup> Old abandoned village

<sup>4</sup> Tanah Putih is located approximately 7.5 kilometers northeast to Keleka Natay Kunang

<sup>5</sup> Bukit Batu is located approximately 2 kilometers north to Keleka Nahan Biru

<sup>6</sup> Ironwood *Eusideroxylon zwageri*

<sup>7</sup> *Rambutan* (*Nephelium*), coconut, *pinang* (areca nut), *rasau* (a pandanus-like plant that bears a breadfruit-like crop), rattan and *belangiran* (*Shorea belangeran*)

<sup>8</sup> Small sacrificial shrine

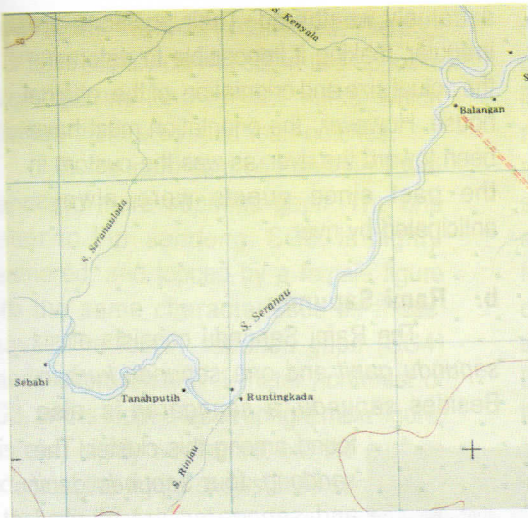


Figure 2. The study area on the Seranau River Basin

The Tanah Putih Sapundu are found in a contemporary village environment of vegetation of economic trees<sup>2</sup> and bordered by cultivation to the north and east. On the northeastern village periphery are found two groups of *tajahan*<sup>3</sup>. The first group, *Tajahan Antang*, is claimed by the villagers as the original village boundary marker established simultaneously with the village, while the second is new. There are five clusters of old *sapundu* in Tanah Putih, which belong to *sandong*: Julak Jawa, Sri Saong, Nyi Goebang, Tihin Bahen and Nawa Goebang.

#### a. Marotan Sapundu

The Marotan Sapundu consists of two varieties of *sapundu* i.e. *sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban*. There are three *sapundu gapit* (SG) that stands aligned with

the *sandong* facing northwest to the Raku River in a northeast to southwest line, in the following order: SG1, SG2 and SG3 (Plate 1). The Marotan *sapundu gapit* consists of two female statues and one male. SG1, located on the northeastern most line, is depicted as a bare-chested female standing upright with an exposed large belly, clad in a knee-length sarong, with arms hanging down each side of the body and both hands holding a small rectangular box below the belly. SG2,



Plate 1. A *sandong* is sandwiched between SG1 and SG2

located to the southwest of SG1, has the same characteristics as SG1, except for its rather crooked arms and flat belly. SG3,

<sup>1</sup> Horizontal notches

<sup>2</sup> Incised of "X"s



stands to the southwest of SG2, is carved as a human male in an upright position, apparently bare-chested, clad in a knee-length sarong with both hands holding a small rectangular box in front of its belly. About 100 cm southwest of SG3 is found a hole assumed to have supported another *sapundu*. All *sapundu gapit* are highly weathered, showing splits in the wood. The ornamentation found on the posts of SG2 and SG3 are notches of *tetat*<sup>1</sup> and *cacak burung*<sup>2</sup>.



Plate 2. Four *sapundu gapit* and Sandong Rami

The *sapundu kurban* is a post of 3.30 meters in height, of which the upper part has been sculpted as a human figure standing upright with bulging chest, yet without indications of female gender. It stands 6 meters northwest of SG1, extremely weathered and the head is badly fractured. Approximately 4-12 meters to the northeast and east of the cluster *sandong* and *sapundu* were found eight house posts, 125-160 cm high and

extremely weathered. Their positions are irregular, making it impossible to determine the actual size and orientation of the original house. However, the orientation must have been toward the river, as was the custom in the past since guests were always anticipated by river.

#### b. Rami Sapundu

The Rami Sapundu consists of six *sapundu gapit* and one *sapundu kurban*. Besides *sapundu*, a *sanggaran* is also

found among this cluster. The *sandong*, four *sapundu gapit* and *sanggaran* are aligned northeast to southwest, facing southeast to the Raku River. The two other *sapundu gapit* and the *sapundu kurban* are found in a row parallel to the four previous *sapundu gapit*, and 4.5 meters in front of them. All figures carved on the *sapundu gapit* are weathered.

To the southwest of Sandong Rami were found of two *sapundu gapit*, each crowned by a female figure (Plate 2). The one (SG1) farthest

to the *sandong* is depicted standing with its hair styled in a bun, upright torso, apparently bare-chested and clad in a *sarong*, with both hands on the chest, a rectangular box on the lower belly, and slightly bent legs. The other female *sapundu gapit* (SG2), closer to the *sandong*, is more weathered but similar to the first, except that the hands are placed on each side of the box and the

<sup>1</sup> Bun hairstyle



upper part of the head is damaged. The post of SG2 is slightly carved out in two opposite places leaving long vertical marks, which between them are found *tetat* notches.

To the northeast of Sandong Rami stand two more *sapundu gapit*. The one closer to the *sandong*, SG3, is highly weathered, and topped by a female figure with the same characteristics as those above. The fourth *sapundu gapit* (SG4) stands approximately 1 meter northeast of SG3, and is topped by an upright male figure. It is also highly weathered, but the surface texture of the figure shows lines suggestive of the edges of a shirt, trousers, and a cap. 4.5 meters to the east of Sandong Rami stands a 2.79 meters high *sapundu kurban* facing the Raku River -an upright male figure with a damaged face and rather bent arms dangling on each side of the body. It is depicted wearing a shirt, trousers and shoes; there are no other traces of ornamentation. 5.8 meters northeast of the *sapundu kurban* stands the fifth *sapundu gapit* (SG5), its wooden figure hacked by looters leaving only a 1.00 meter high undecorated post. 7 meters southwest of the *sapundu kurban* stands another hacked *sapundu gapit* (SG6).

3.2 m to the north of SG4 were found two house posts. About 4.5 m to the north of theses stand another four house posts of diverse heights. The first, closest to the SG4, is tall compared to the other five and has a rectangular perforation to take a horizontal beam to support a raised platform.

#### a. Julak Jawa Sapundu

The Julak Jawa Sapundu consists of two short *sapundu gapit*, erected in front

of the *sandong* and aligned with it, set 50 cm apart facing northeast to the Seranau River. The northwestern *sapundu gapit* is male and the southeastern is female. The male *sapundu gapit* is sculpted erect with straight face, upright torso, and slightly bent arms dangling on each side (Plate 3). The female *sapundu* shows the same general characteristics with additional protruding earlobes, exposed breasts and a large belly. Both statues are very weathered, especially their heads, and supposedly each is clad in a sarong. 50 cm southeast of the female *sapundu gapit* is a hole that might have supported another *sapundu*.

#### b. Sri Saong Sapundu

The Sri Saong Sapundu consists of two male *sapundu gapit* (SG1 and SG2) that stand on the northern side of Sandong Sri Saong, and two female *sapundu gapit* (SG3 and SG4) on the southern side. They are all facing northeast to the Seranau River, painted in white and yellow, and are in relatively good condition. However, unlike the Julak Jawa Sapundu, these *sapundu* are attired in clothing of recent style. The northernmost male *sapundu gapit* (SG1) is depicted wearing a long sleeved shirt, trousers, a pair of shoes, and holds a rectangular box in front of his stomach possibly a betel leaf container or a musical instrument. The second male (SG2) is similarly depicted, but wears shorts and a *kopiah* (an Indo-Malay cap).

The most northerly female *sapundu gapit* (SG3; Plate 4) wears a long sleeved blouse, an ankle-length *sarong*, and shoes. She holds a rectangular container in front of her stomach. The second female





Plate 3. Julak Jawa's male  
*sapundu gapit*



Plate 4. SG3, Sri Saong's female *sapundu*

*sapundu gapit* (SG4) wears a short-sleeved blouse, a knee-length skirt, and shoes. Her hands are by her sides. Both female *sapundu gapit* have their hair fashioned in a *gelung*<sup>1</sup>. The posts of all *sapundu gapit* are notched with *tetat*.



Plate 5. Nyi Goebang Sapundu Kurban

head is placed a *gong*. The heirs claimed the *gong* was played in the death ceremony for Nyi Goebang. The lower part shows a number of plain vertical grooves carved in slight relief.

#### d. Tihin Bahen Sapundu

The Tihin Bahen Sapundu are found erected on the north and south side of



the *sandong*. The human figure on the northern one (SG1) is in a sitting position and wears trousers, presumably a male, with its torso damaged. The southern one (SG2) is standing, clothed in a knee-length sarong, presumably female, also with a damaged torso. Both figures have their arms at their sides, and the hands are placed upon the abdomen. The lower parts of both *sapundu* posts show a row of *tetat* notches.

#### e. Nawa Goebang Sapundu

The *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Nawa Goebang are aligned north-south facing the Serana River: one male (SG1) on the northern side and three on the southern side of the *sandong*, comprising two female figures and one male. All *sapundu* are sculpted in an upright stationary position. SG1 is depicted as a fully attired male figure wearing a *kopiah* with hands dangling on each side of the body. On its post are found *tetat* notches. The most northerly *sapundu gapit* (SG2) on the southern side is depicted as a bare-chested female figure clad in a *sarong* and holding a rectangular container in front of her stomach. The next male figure (SG3) wears a *kopiah*, and possibly a long sleeved shirt and trousers (the carving is weathered). The most southerly female (SG4) is highly weathered, making it difficult to describe her attire. However, it is presumed to be identical to SG2.

#### 2. Sapundu on the Cempaga River Basin

The study area of Keleka Nahan Biru Sapundu is on top of a small hill covering a land of 3,500 square meters overgrown with

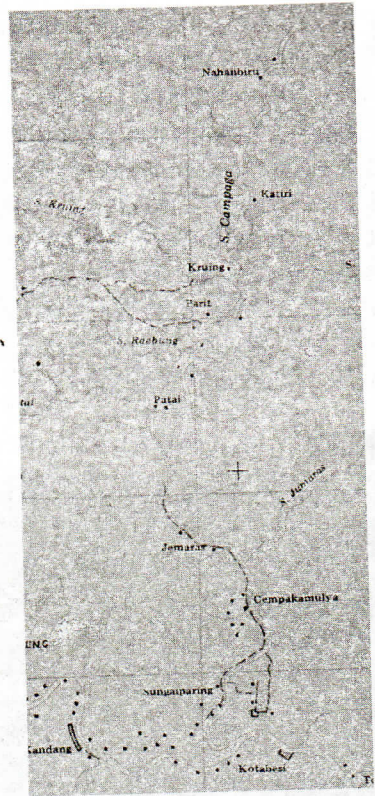


Figure 3. The study area on the Cempaga River Basin

thick immature prickly rattan. A lumberyard of a sawmill company borders Keleka Nahan Biru to the north and south, and there is a forest of *ulin*, rattan and rubber to the west. To the east lies the Cempaga River (Figure 3), while cultivations lie beyond the trees to the west. The locals inform a cluster of *hampatong*<sup>1</sup> was erected to mark the establishment of Keleka Nahan Biru and to mark the southern boundary of the village. Presently, this cluster of *hampatong* is nowhere to be found. A cluster of nineteen *sapundu gapit* and one hole, which might be a *sapundu* hole, were found in this site<sup>2</sup>, all facing east towards the Cempaga River;



these nineteen *sapundu gapit* are paraphernalia of Sandong Nahan Biru-1 (NB1) and Nahan Biru-2 (NB2).

The Bukit Batu Sapundu are found in a contemporary village on a small mound next to the present Christian cemetery located to the rear (west) of the village, which is presently across the Kasongan-Sampit Highway. The Bukit Batu Sapundu is a cluster of three *sapundu gapit* which to the old Sandong Sendung Timbang<sup>3</sup>.

#### a. Nahan Biru Sapundu



Plate 6. Nahan Biru's male *sapundu gapit* (SG17) holding a small wine jar

Plate 6. Nahan Biru's male *sapundu gapit* (SG17) holding a small wine

jar Among the nineteen Nahan Biru Sapundu, nine *sapundu gapit* are arranged in an uneven row to the north of NB1. Three others are standing unevenly in front of the first row to the northeast of NB1 and one in front of NB1.

Five others stand irregularly between NB1 and NB2, and one was found 11 meters southeast of NB2. Every *sapundu gapit* is highly weathered, and 8 could not be identified due to weathering or damage by looters. Among the 11 identifiable *sapundu gapit* there are 8 female and 3 male figures. The females are identified by their knee length sarong, and the males wear slacks. However, there is one male figure depicted fully attired and holding a supposedly small wine jar, SG17 (Plate 6).

Eight figures are identified as sculpted in upright positions: SG1, SG7, SG8, SG11, SG12, SG15, SG16 and SG17, and five figures identified in sitting position: SG2, SG4, SG5, SG6 and SG14. Four female figures each holds a rectangular box: SG2, SG5, SG14 and SG15, and one male figure (SG6) has its hands on each side of the body. Seven posts have been vertically carved out on their north and south sides (SG2, SG4, SG5, SG6, SG7, SG8 and SG16). *Tetat* notches are found on SG2 and SG3, while a row of *tetat* and *cacak burung* is found on SG6, SG7, SG8, SG9, SG12, and SG16.

There are three damaged *sapundu gapit*: SG10, to the north of NB1 engraved with a devilish face with a protruding tongue pointing to the north;

<sup>1</sup> Statues of ancestors

<sup>2</sup> Three collapsed *sanggaran* were found among the nineteen *sapundu gapit*

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the Sendung Timbang Sanggaran were found within the village settlement instead of close to the *sandong*



SG13, between NB1 and NB2 without any decoration; and SG19, to the far southeast of NB2 carved with symmetrical fern fronds and a geometrical pattern of repeated triangles, arches, punctures, and a number of ridges.

## b. Bukit Batu Sapundu



Plate 6. A male sapundu gapit carved holding a huge lizard

The Bukit Batu Sapundu consists of three sapundu gapit, standing in aline 4 meters, topped with standing human figures. The northeastern one is a female painted wearing a traditional blue blouse, a calf-length batik sarong with *parang* (S-scroll) patterns, and a pair of black shoes. Her arms hang beside her body and she holds a rectangular object. The middle figure is sculpted and painted similar to the first,

except for the black colour of the blouse and the hands positioned above the rectangular object, instead of holding it. The poles of both female figures are undecorated and painted blue. The third figure to the southwest is a male standing with legs slightly apart, painted attired in a long sleeved shirt, trousers, shoes and a cap. Interestingly, rather than the usual rectangular object, the man grasps a huge lizard carved vertically with its head pointing down (Plate 7). The supporting post of the male figure is carved as a pedestal decorated with repeated triangles, ridges and a repeated leaf pattern.

The clusters of sapundu in each site described above provide a preliminary understanding of mortuary practice performed by the Seranau and Cempaga Ngaju. Each *sapundu* shows distinct traits, yet they are based on one belief, *Kaharingan*, indicating varieties (and preferences) of mortuary behaviour occurred in the past.

## A. Distinct Characteristic

Each *sapundu* found in the abandoned villages of Keleka Natay Kunang and Keleka Nahan Biru and in the contemporary villages of Tanah Putih and Bukit Batu display interesting characteristic differences in regard to its dimension, poses and hand positions, gender and decoration, and orientation.

### 1. Dimension

The comparison of associated paraphernalia between the abandoned villages shows that the heights of most *sapundu gapit* in Keleka Nahan Biru (226-440 cm) are greater than those in Keleka



Natay Kunang (197-354 cm; Table 1). Interestingly, the figures sculpted on *sapundu gapit* in Keleka Natay Kunang take up an average 48% or more of the total height of the *sapundu gapit*, in comparison to those in Keleka Nahan Biru, which cover an average 18% of the total height (Figure

III-1). The Ngaju in each abandoned village designed their *sapundu gapit* differently, as well as their *sandong*. Nevertheless, the *sapundu gapit* in Keleka Natay Kunang have approximately the same height as their associated *sandong*, which also applies in Keleka Nahan Biru.

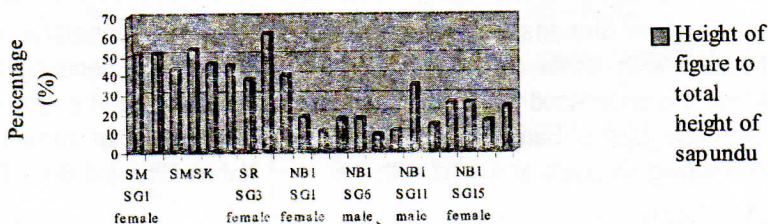
Table 1. Dimensional variation of the associated *sapundu* in the abandoned villages

			Dimensions and percentages		
			Height of statue	Height of post	Height percentage of statue to total height (%)
Sites in abandoned villages	Seranau River Basin	Keleka Natay Kunang	SG1-female	145	140
			SG2-female	119	116
			SG3-male	90	120
			<i>Sapundu kurban</i>	160	144
		Sandong Rami	SG1-female	119	142
			SG2-female	103	129
			SG3-female	76	125
	Cempaga River Basin	Keleka Nahan Biru-1	SG4-male	121	76
			<i>Sapundu kurban</i>	110	169
			SG1-female	55	246
			SG4	40	320
			SG5-female	70	335
			SG6-male	70	350
			SG8	35	385
			SG9	38	328
			SG11-male	79	147
			SG12-female	60	380
			SG14-female	70	212
			SG15-female	78	235
			SG16-female	70	362
			SG17-male	55	183
					23.11

For instance, the heights of the four *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Rami (SR) range between 197 and 261 cm, and the height of the *sandong* is 240 cm. The human figures sculpted on the upper shafts of the *sapundu gapit* are at approximately the same level above the ground as the vault floor of the *sandong*, both in Keleka Natay Kunang and Kelaka Nahan Biru. As the *sapundu gapit* is acknowledged by the Ngaju to represent the ancestors and erected as a means of casting away evil spirits, I assume that this is the motive for sculpting the human figures level with the vault floor of the *sandong*. Although the heights of two of the *sapundu kurban* in Keleka Natay Kunang are greater

than those of the *sapundu gapit*, the human figures are sculpted at the same height as the vault floor of the *sandong*. Based on this evidence, it is assumed that the societies of Keleka Natay Kunang and Keleka Nahan Biru utilised similar concepts in the design of their *sandong* and associated paraphernalia. The dimensions of the *sapundu gapit* in the abandoned villages and their living successors in the Seranau and Cempaga River Basins present both differences and similarities. The heights of the *sapundu gapit* in Keleka Natay Kunang and Tanah Putih correspond with the heights of their associated *sandong*. Where there are *sandong tulang* (Sandong

Figure III-1. Dimensional differences in the abandoned villages



*Sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban* in the study area

Marotan, Sandong Rami, Sandong Nyi Goebang and Sandong Tihin Bahen) which are raised above ground on support structures, the *sapundu gapit* are also raised on high posts (Table 2). In contrast, where there are *sandong raung* (Sandong Sri Saong and Sandong Nawa Goebang),

which are partly sunk into a rectangular pit supported on beams, the *sapundu gapit* are not as high, but are still raised above the ground, except for Sandong Julak Jawa where the *sapundu gapit* are more deeply buried (Table 2).

Table 2. Dimensional variation of the associated *sapundu* in the Seranaul River Basin

Table 2. Dimensional variation of the associated <i>sapundu</i> in the Seranau River Basin				Dimensions and percentages				
				Height of statue	Height of post	Height percentage of statue to total height (%)		
Sites in abandoned and contemporary villages	Seranau River Basin	Keleka Nalay Kunang	Sandong Marotan	SG1-female	145	140	50.87	
				SG2-female	119	116	50.64	
				SG3-male	90	120	42.86	
				<i>Sapundu kurban</i>	160	144	52.63	
			Sandong Rami	SG1-female	119	142	45.59	
				SG2-female	103	129	44.40	
				SG3-female	76	125	37.81	
				SG4-male	121	76	61.42	
			<i>Sapundu kurban</i>	110	169	39.43		
			Sandong Julak Jawa	SG1-male	101.3	-	-	
				SG2-female	72	-	-	
				Sandong Sri Saong	SG1-male	56	76	73.68
					SG2-male	51	71	71.83
				SG3-female	54.4	72.4	75.14	
				SG4-female	55	98	56.12	
		Tanah Putih	Sandong Nyi Goebang	<i>Sapundu kurban</i>	208	383	54.31	
			Sandong Tihin Bahen	SG1-male	-	255	-	
				SG2-female	-	223	-	
	Sandong Nawa Goebang		SG1-male	74	134	55.22		
			SG2-female	100	150	66.67		
			SG3-male	78	146	53.42		
		SG4-female	95	139	68.35			



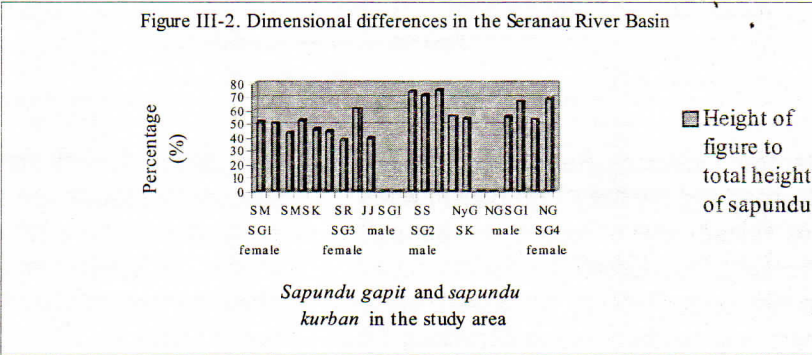
Since the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Julak Jawa and the figures of the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Tihin Bahen have perished, their dimensions cannot be compared with other *sapundu gapit*. However, it is understood that the figures of the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Julak Jawa were standing on posts at a level with the vault floor, which was supported on beams. On the other hand, based on the surviving post and remains of the figures of *sapundu gapit* of Sandong

Tihin Bahen, it appears that the human figures there were sculpted approximately 41-71 cm lower than the level of the vault, which is 271 cm high.

The *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Nawa Goebang (NG) and Sandong Sri Saong (SS) have approximately 61-69% of the upper shaft sculpted as human figures. This suggests that greater proportions of the *sapundu gapit* in Tanah Putih were sculpted as statues, leaving a lesser part unsculpted. Only 47-48% of the upper shafts of the *sapundu gapit* in Keleka Natay Kunang are carved into figures (Figure III-2).

The dimensions of the *sapundu gapit* in Keleka Nahan Biru and Bukit Batu in the Cempaga River Basin do not show great differences. The range of heights of *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Sendung Timbang (281-335 cm) is within the range of heights of Sandong Nahan Biru (226-440

cm; Table 3). Dissimilarities are revealed in terms of the percentage of the upper shaft carved into a human figure, and in the fact that the wooden statues of the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Sendung Timbang are raised high above the ground. Although the dimensions of *sapundu gapit* in Keleka Nahan Biru and Bukit Batu are similar, the



proportion of the sculpted part is greater in Bukit Batu (43%) than in Keleka Nahan Biru (18%; Figure III-3). The second difference is intriguing, since Sandong Sendung Timbang is a *sandong raung*, and so the sculpted human figures might be expected to at the same level as the vault floor. But they are not.

The differences in the dimensions of the *sapundu gapit* between the villages in both river basins are largely differences with respect to the relative heights of the human figures and the *sandong*. With *sandong tulang*, which are raised on high support structures, the associated *sapundu gapit* are as high as the *sandong*. With *sandong raung*, which are partly sunk in pits, the heights of their associated *sapundu gapit* vary considerably, being either at the same level as the vault, as in Sandong Julak Jawa (JJ) and Sandong Sendung Timbang (ST),

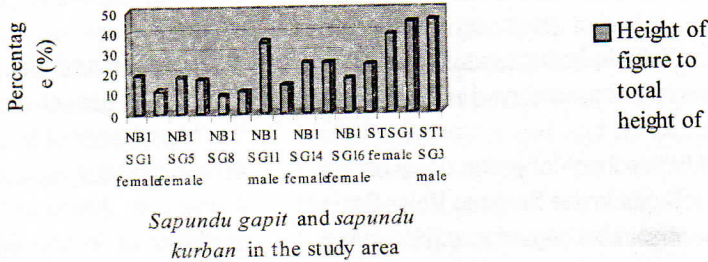


or on a higher level, as in Sandong Sri Saong (SS) and Sandong Nawa Goebang (NG).

Table 3. Dimensional variation of the associated *sapundu* in the Cempaga River Basin

Sites in abandoned and contemporary villages	Cempaga River Basin			Dimensions and percentages		
				Height of statue	Height of post	Height percentage of statue to total height (%)
	Keleka Nahan Biru	Sandong Nahan Biru	SG1-female	55	246	18.27
			SG4	40	320	11.11
			SG5-female	70	335	17.28
			SG6-male	70	350	16.67
			SG8	35	385	8.3
			SG9	38	328	10.38
			SG11-male	79	147	34.96
			SG12-female	60	380	13.64
			SG14-female	70	212	24.82
			SG15-female	78	235	24.92
			SG16-female	70	362	16.20
			SG17-male	55	183	23.11
	Bukit Batu	Sandong Sendung Timbang	SG1-female	109	172	38.79
			SG2-female	150	185	44.78
			SG3-male	151	181	45.48

Figure III-3. Dimensional differences in the Cempaga River Basin



Another dissimilarity is indicated by the greater proportional heights of the *sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban* being sculpted with human figures in the contemporary villages than in the abandoned ones, except for the *sapundu gapit* in Bukit Batu. Tables 1, 2 and 3 show that an average of 69% of the height of each *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Sri Saong (SS) is carved into a human figure. Comparative percentages are 54% for the *sapundu kurban* of Sandong Nyi Goebang (NyG), 61% for the *sapundu gapit* of

Sandong Nawa Goebang (NG) and 43% for the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Sendung Timbang. In the abandoned villages, the human figures occupy 48% of the total heights of the *sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban* of Sandong Marotan (SM), 47% in the case of Sandong Rami (SR), and only 18% for Sandong Nahan Biru-1 (NB1).

While most *sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban* in both river basins are level with the vaults of their associated *sandong*, the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Sendung Timbang present a different situation in that



the human figures are raised higher than those of the *sapundu gapit* of a *sandong raung*. In general, however, there is some degree of standardisation in the construction of these associated mortuary sculptures.

## **2. Poses and hand position**

The figures' pose and hand position suggest that changes have occurred over time in the mortuary depictions of the Ngaju. Notwithstanding the missing figures of SG1 and SG6 of Sandong Rami (SR), all of the surviving human figures are sculpted in an upright pose, whereas it varies in Keleka Nahan Biru. Based on the surviving human figures on the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Nahan Biru-1 (NB1), eight are sculpted in an upright pose (SG1, SG7, SG8, SG11, SG12, SG15, SG16 and SG17), while five are posed sitting or crouching (SG2, SG4, SG5 and SG6). In both abandoned villages, all standing figures are carved in a stationary manner.

A comparison of poses between the modern villages in the Seranau River Basin indicates that most *sapundu gapit* figures are also sculpted standing upright in a stationary manner. The figure of a *sapundu kurban* at Sandong Nyi Goebang is sculpted standing upright, but in a dynamic manner, while one of the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Tihin Bahen is sitting. In regard to the villages in the Cempaga River Basin, more varieties of pose are expressed in Keleka Nahan Biru than in Bukit Batu. As mentioned previously, there are figures on the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Nahan Biru-1 (NB1), which are sculpted in a stationary upright manner. However, there are also some sculpted in sitting positions, in contrast to those of Sandong Sendung Timbang (ST), which

are all sculpted standing in stationary stances.

Most of the human figures have their hands positioned holding a rectangular container, except for SG17 of Sandong Nahan Biru-1 (NB1), which is assumed to be holding a wine jar, and SG3 of Sandong Sendung Timbang (ST), which holds a lizard. There are also cases where a human figure has its hands on its chest or dangling on each side of the body (SG2 and *sapundu kurban* of Sandong Rami); dangling down the sides (SG1 and SG2 of Sandong Julak Jawa, *sapundu kurban* of Sandong Nyi Goebang and SG1 and SG3 of Sandong Nawa Goebang); over the abdomen without holding any object (SG1 of Sandong Tihin Bahen); and dangling on the sides (SG6 of Sandong Nahan Biru-1).

## **3. Gender and decoration**

The gender and decoration between the two abandoned villages indicates that 46% of the total *sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban* in Keleka Natay Kunang are sculpted as female figures, 27% as male and another 27% are unidentifiable. In Keleka Nahan Biru, 42% are female, 16% are male and 42% are unidentifiable. Other differences are indicated by the carved sides of the lower shafts of *sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban*, which are mostly found in Keleka Nahan Biru-1 (NB), but occur only on SG2 of Sandong Rami (SR). Other differences are: i) the devilish face that exists only on SG10 in Keleka Nahan Biru-1 (NB1); ii) *tetat* and *cacak burung*, which appear on 42% of *sapundu gapit* in Keleka Nahan Biru but only 27% in Keleka Natay Kunang; and iii) geometrical patterns of repeated triangles, arches, ridges, punctures and



symmetrical floral scrolls discovered only on the lower shaft of SG19 of Sandong Nahan Biru-1 (NB1).

Apart from the gender differences, decorations observed to be similar in both abandoned villages are the objects held by the figures and their attire. 53% of the figures in Keleka Nahan Biru are bare-chested and clad in a sarong for the females and in slacks for males. 5% of the latter are fully attired in shirt and slacks, and 42% are unidentifiable. In Keleka Natay Kunang, 56% are bare-chested and clad in either sarong or slacks, 18% are fully attired, and 26% are unidentifiable.

In Tanah Putih, 46% of the old *sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban* are sculpted as female and 54% as male, while in Keleka Natay Kunang, 46% are female and 27% are male. Dissimilarities are also shown by the differences in attire displayed by the figures. 55% of the human figures of the *sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban* in Keleka Natay Kunang are bare-chested and clad either in a sarong or slacks, 18% are fully attired and 27% are unidentified, while in Tanah Putih, 54% are fully attired and 46% are bare-chested and clad in a sarong or slacks.

Another variable is the presence or absence of *tetat* and *cacak burung* on the lower shafts of the *sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban*. In Keleka Natay Kunang, 27% of the total population of *sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban* are adorned in this way, while in Tanah Putih, 54% have *tetat*. Finally, the survival of the colours of yellow and white on the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Sri Saong is due to continuous maintenance by its inheritor. Similarities of decoration between both abandoned sites

include the slightly carved sides of the lower shaft of SG2 of Sandong Rami and of the *sapundu kurban* of Sandong Nyi Goebang.

In Keleka Nahan Biru and Bukit Batu, the percentage of sculpted female figures (42% in NB1 and 67% in ST) on either *sapundu gapit* or *sapundu kurban* is greater than that of male figures (16% in NB1 and 33% in ST). The differences of decoration observed are in the clothing; and in the decoration on the lower shafts of the posts. The characteristics of clothing between the two sites differ significantly. The figures in Keleka Nahan Biru are 53% bare-chested and clad in a sarong or slacks, while 100% of the figures in Bukit Batu are fully attired. The second dissimilarity is that 37% of the lower shafts of the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Nahan Biru-1 (NB1) have carved sides, 42% have *tetat* and *cacak burung*, 5% are decorated with a devilish faces and another 5% with a symmetrical floral scroll, repeated triangles, arches, ridges and punctures. On the other hand, 100% of the lower shafts of the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Sendung Timbang (ST) are painted in blue, white and black, but 33% also have the additional colour of green and are decorated with a geometrical pattern of repeated triangles, arches and ridges.

Although the female figures on the total number of *sapundu*, either *sapundu gapit* or *sapundu kurban*, in the study area outnumber the males, the male figures (20%) are more likely to be sculpted with a complete clothing of shirts and slacks than are the female figures (9%). The *sapundu gapit* and *sapundu kurban* in each site presents specific characteristic. I assume there are more female figures because they



are equated with death, but the male figures are there to add the balance of life.

#### 4. Orientation

The arrangement with respect to the orientation of the *sandong* indicates that the *sapundu gapit* in the abandoned villages in both river basins are arranged in a row aligned with their associated *sandong*, facing the river. However, in Sandong Rami (SR), two *sapundu gapit* are placed diagonally in front of the *sandong*; SG5 to the northeast and SG6 to the southeast, both destroyed leaving only 1 m high undecorated posts. In Keleka Nahan Biru there are 3 *sapundu gapit* standing unevenly north of the row of *sapundu gapit* aligned on Sandong Nahan Biru-1 (NB1), and another stands in front of the *sandong*.

The arrangements of *sapundu gapit* in each site vary. The *sapundu gapit* in the complex of Sandong Marotan are arranged in a line with the *sandong* facing the Raku River to their west, which flows to the northeast. The arrangement of the *sapundu gapit* from northeast to southwest is in the order of female, female and male. In the complex of Sandong Rami, where the *sandong* faces the Raku River to its east, two *sapundu gapit* southwest of the *sandong* are female, two to the northeast are female then male, while the other two erected diagonally in front of the *sandong* are male.

In Keleka Nahan Biru, Sandong Nahan Biru-1 (NB1) faces the Cempaga River to the east, which flows to the south. The arrangement of its 19 *sapundu gapit* is more complex than that in Keleka Natay Kunang. Based on the unweathered figures on the *sapundu gapit*, it appears that four *sapundu gapit* on the north row are female

and another four on the south row between NB1 and NB2 are also female, while two male figures are found within the north row and one among the south row. These facts suggest that, among the past societies of the Ngaju in both river basins, there was no specific manner of orienting the *sapundu gapit* with respect to their associated *sandong*.

The arrangement of *sapundu gapit* in Tanah Putih is more specific. The five *sandong* in Tanah Putih face the Seranau River to the east, which flows from northwest to east. The *sapundu gapit* of each associated *sandong* are erected in a line with the vault. The ones to the northwest are sculpted as males, and females to the southwest. There is an exception with Sandong Nyi Goebang and Sandong Nawa Goebang. The *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Nyi Goebang have not survived. The ones of Sandong Nawa Goebang are arranged as two groups of couples i.e. male and female to the northwest, and another male and female to the southwest. Nevertheless, the northwesterly *sapundu gapit* of each group are sculpted as males.

The arrangement of the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Sendung Timbang indicates a system different to that of Tanah Putih. Sandong Sendung Timbang faces the Cempaga River to its east, which flows southwards. The three *sapundu gapit* are arranged in a line 4 m in front of the *sandong*, facing the Cempaga River and in a northeast to southwest order of female, female and male.

The arrangement of *sapundu gapit* between the villages in the Seranau and Cempaga River Basins shows different ideas between the past and the present



society of the Ngaju. The irregular arrangements of *sapundu gapit* in the abandoned sites and the more orderly patterns in the contemporary villages demonstrate that there have been changing mortuary arrangements among the Ngaju. In regard to the female figures sculpted on particular *sapundu gapit* oriented downstream, representing the destination of the dead, I suspect the people who established Sandong Marotan had the same belief system as the people who established the old *sandong* in Tanah Putih.

Similar perceptions shared by the two societies include the emphasis on the double characteristics of death, represented by the downstream direction and the female gender, as evidenced by the *sapundu gapit* that face downstream and are sculpted with female figures. The three *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Marotan face the Raku River, that flows northeastward. Two female *sapundu gapit* are positioned alternately with the first *sandong tulang* (ST1) in the northeastern row. In Tanah Putih, the Seranau River flows southeast, bending eastward. The *sapundu gapit* southeast of the *sandong* are sculpted with female figures, except for the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Nawa Goebang, which are arranged alternately, male then female, either on the northwestern or the southeastern side.

In the case of Sandong Rami, although Kupun Idaa claims that the people who established the *sandong* come from the same lineage as those of Sandong Marotan, it appears that these two societies have a different method of manifesting their mortuary system. Most of the female figures on the *sapundu gapit* of Sandong Rami (SR)

are arranged on the southwestern side of the *sandong*, which points upstream.

#### D. Significance

Among the distinctiveness of each *sapundu* discussed above, the orientation aspect is the most significant variable which manifests the essence of mortuary behaviour of the Seranau and Cempaga Ngaju. The orientation of the cluster of *sapundu* in each site complies with the orientation of the related *sandong*. The clusters of *sapundu* in Keleka Natay Kunang faces a different direction i.e. northwest (Marotan Sapundu) and southeast (Rami Sapundu). All clusters of *sapundu* in Tanah Putih are oriented northeast, while Nahan Biru and Sendung Timbang *sapundu* are oriented southeast. The orientation northeast and southeast signifies that the cluster of *sapundu* are facing the direction of the sunrise, except for Marotan Sapundu that faces northwest, where the sun sets.

A common tradition shared by the Ngaju and the Maanyan (in the northeast Barito Basin) in constructing their dwellings is to orient them to the rising sun or *mate andrau welom* (Ngindra 1977/1978). Since the Ngaju perceive a link between the physical world and the afterworld, the orientation of their mortuary facility may mirror that of their dwellings. Nevertheless, the more significant aspect with respect to Ngaju eschatology is water, in this case the river, believed to be used in the journey of the dead to reach their destination. Every cluster of old *sapundu* (in respect with its associated *sandong*) in the study area either faces the Raku (the smallest tributary of the Seranau River), Seranau or Cempaga River. As well as mortuary orientation toward rivers,



a more significant direction in regard to the final destination of the journey of the dead is towards the sea. The physical relationship of the river with the sea is signified by the river course flowing downstream. There is a high correlation between the direction toward the sun, water and the high percentage of figures sculpted as female gender, which clearly connote death (Shärer 1963).

With respect to the relationship between death and river, and the female gender, the arrangement of human figures on both Rami and Sendung Timbang *sapundu* on the upperstream area suggest the people who established them had the similar concepts of death. The Raku River runs downstream northeastward and the human figure crowning the northeastern *sapundu gapit* is male. The Cempaga River flows southeastward and a male figure topped the southeastern *sapundu gapit*. Since the fundamental purpose of the Ngaju is to create balance in the world both in their present life and in the afterlife, they tend to portray the afterlife in reversed mode, as discussed above. I assume that is why the societies of Sandong Rami (SR) and Sandong Sendung Timbang (ST) positioned the male figures in accord with the river flow downstream and the female figures upstream, rather than the situation we would expect, given that female, death and the downstream direction are otherwise associated.

The varieties of *sapundu* reflect the varied mortuary behaviour of the Ngaju in both river basins in manifesting the ideal commemoration to the ancestors. It is assumed that the diverse sculpting styles of *sapundu* in the study area do not reflect

differentiation of social ranking or lineage. Each cluster of *sapundu* in each site has its own style, which assumed to be built dimensionally adjusted to its associated *sandong*. Nevertheless, the qualitative properties suggest a sharing of recent dynamics of cultural change. The constant change of culture can be influenced by internal or external agencies. Ngindra (*et.al* 1977/1978) indicates that the Ngaju have been continuously migrating from the highlands toward the coast to find new land to cultivate. In the case of the villages in the study area, claims of movement from the abandoned villages to the contemporary are persistently stated by the locals of the contemporary villages. Nevertheless, I assume external agency has played a significant role in cultural development in the Seranau and Cempaga River Basins.

Since the introduction of Hinduism by the Majapahit Empire in 1292-1478 (Schärer 196; Slametmulyana 1979), Islam by the Sultanate of Banjar in 1540 (Ngindra *et.al* 1977/1978; Kutojo 1979) Dutch occupation in 1635 (ANRI 1965) to Christianity in 1835 (Riwut 1993), the Ngaju have continuously affected by external influences. These influences have affected many and different aspects of the Ngaju culture. For instance, Hinduism has led to the borrowing of the terms *Mahatala* for *Tingang* and *Jata* for *Tambon*. Islam or Malayic culture has an effect on sculpture design, such as the use of the *kopiah* (Malay hat) and a combination of a long blouse and sarong or slacks. The influence of Dutch colonialism on the prohibition of headhunting and slavery caused the substitution of animal sacrifice for human sacrifice. Christianity significantly increased



the number of religious conversions among the Ngaju.

With respect to mortuary behaviour, I assume that the in the long run the influences of these external cultures have had an effect on how the Ngaju manifested their mortuary system. Tillotson (2005 pers.comm.) suggests the change or elimination of frightening attributes formerly found on mortuary facility and their associated paraphernalia, such as bulging-eyed monsters with giant lizards on their heads, suggests this may be part of a whole process, which seems to have occurred over time with Ngaju mortuary rituals, which is the steady softening up of the horrifying aspects, and at the end the manifestation becomes based on custom rather than real fear.

### **E. Conclusion**

The characteristic of *sapundu* of the Seranau and Cempaga Ngaju show distinctiveness in each site in regard to dimension, poses and hand position, gender and decoration and orientation. For instance, the percentage of height of figure to total height of *sapundu*, standing or sitting

pose of the figure, hand dangling to each side of body or holding an object over its belly, *tetat* or/and *cacak burung* notches, headdress and attires. However, there are potential attributes that retain to exist constantly in every sculpture i.e. the display of human figure crowning the *sapundu* post and a rectangular box held over the belly. The most interesting aspect is the choice of female gender for sculptures on the *sapundu gapit*. On the other hand, the *sapundu kurban* are crowned by male figures. In term of orientation, it can be suggested that the *sapundu* conforms to the Ngaju conception of the microcosm and death noted by the choice of direction generally toward the sun and the river flow downstream.

Conclusively, differences of characteristic in each site are assumed due to constant external and internal cultural transformation that had affected the mental template of the people either in the abandoned or contemporary villages in the same river basins, which are also separated in time. External influence is reflected by the qualitative appearance of *sapundu*, whereas internal changes reflect the natural dynamic of culture itself.

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