

## THE LIVING MEGALITHIC TRADITION IN EASTERN INDONESIA

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This paper is a brief report on research recently carried out by our Research Centre in eastern Indonesia. Not many experts, either Indonesian or foreign, have studied megalithic sites in this region, but some data on the megalithic tradition there can be obtained from the many publications of van der Hoop, Heine Geldern and van Heekeren. These authors mention the existence of still-living traditions among the Bataks of North Sumatra, in Nias, in Toraja-land (South Sulawesi), as well as in Flores and some other parts of eastern Indonesia.

This paper does not give a detailed account of prehistoric megaliths, and focuses on the living megalithic tradition and the functions of the monuments. By studying living megalithic traditions we may better understand the megalithic traditions of the past. In this paper the islands of Sumba, Flores and Timor have been selected for study, as the populations still build megaliths and hold ceremonies around them (Kapita 1976). This paper therefore represents an excursion into ethnoarchaeology.

There is evidently a relationship between the megalithic tradition and ancestor worship, in particular where menhir statues are said to represent ancestors. There are two kinds of megaliths - those for ceremonial use and those for burials. Ceremonial megaliths include stone enclosures, menhir statues and stepped terraces. The megaliths used for burials include dolmens, stone-lined graves and stone enclosures.

In eastern Indonesia, dolmens occur on Sumba, while stone enclosures and menhir statues are found in western Timor and on the island of Flores. This paper discusses certain matters connected with the building of such megaliths, including the acquisition of raw materials, the ceremonies held, and the transport of the stone. In Flores and Sumba the megaliths are usually located in settlements, perhaps for convenience so that the villagers do not have to travel far for ceremonies. Such ceremonial places are often found in front of the "adat house" (traditional house), or in front of the tribal chief's house.

### FUNERARY MEGALITHS

Many dolmens and stone graves are found on Sumba island, where they are called reti. There are many variations in heights and numbers of the supporting legs; heights range from 10 to 175 cm, and variants with four, six and multiple legs occur (Plates 1,2,3). The

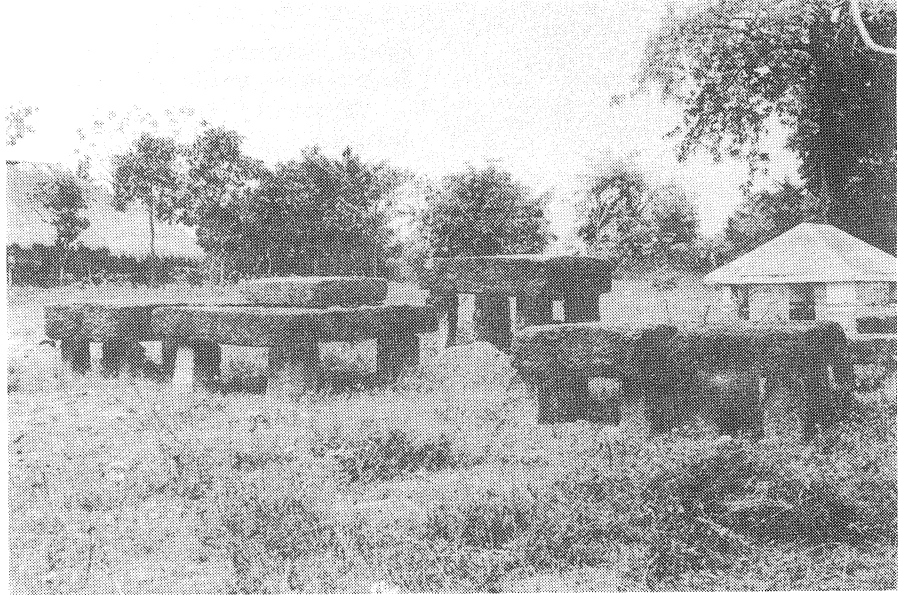


Plate 1. Dolmens in eastern Sumba, each supported by four legs. Dolmens of this type are used for the burial of rulers and their families.

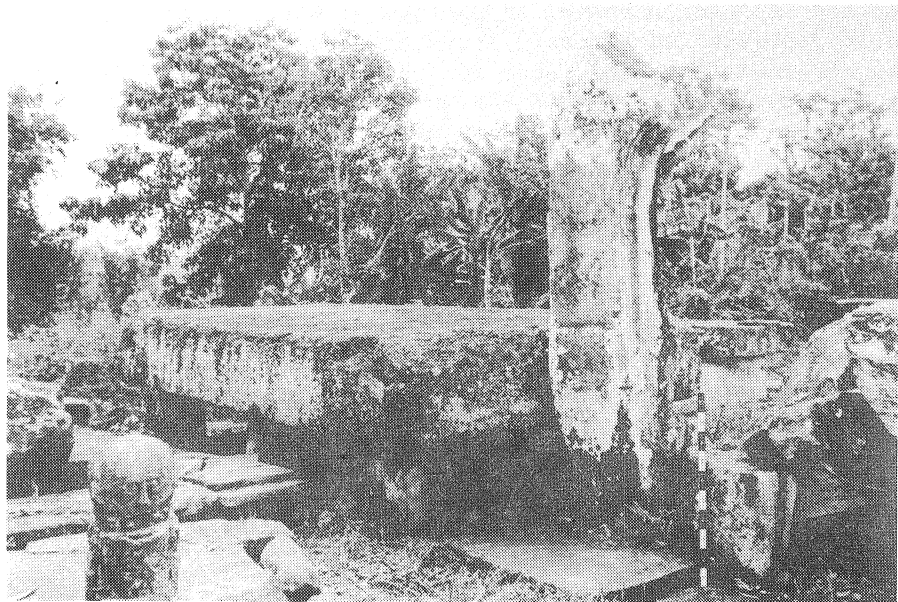


Plate 2. A dolmen supported on six legs in western Sumba. According to local tradition this monument served a ceremonial rather than a burial function.

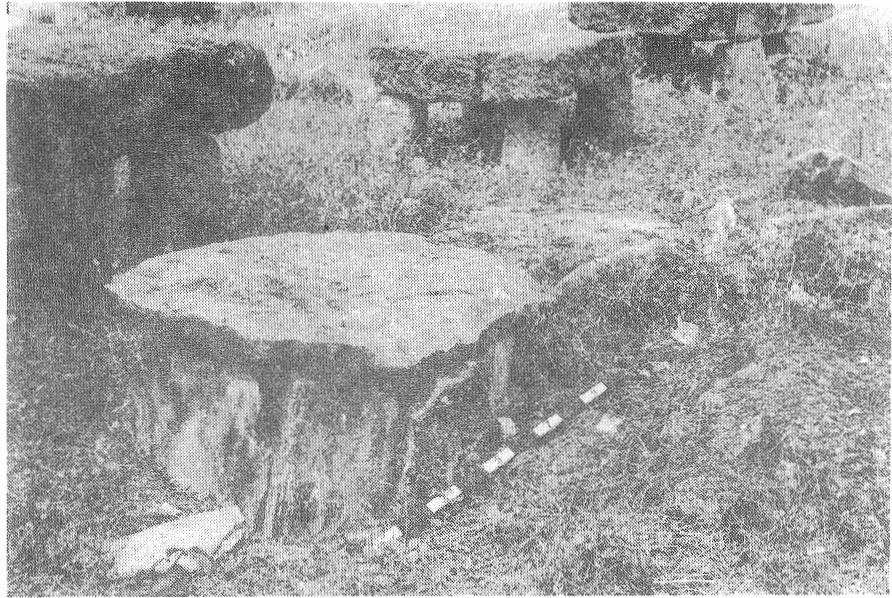


Plate 3. Dolmen of undressed stone with several supports. Sumba.



Plate 4. Terraced grave of stone slabs, Kewar, western Sumba.

tabular horizontal slabs can also be finely carved and rectangular, or roughly hewn and irregular in shape (Plate 3).

Traditions about the dolmens in the Pau, Kaliuda, Okavatu, Lewapaku, Widiwai and Kawangu districts of eastern Sumba indicate that those with high legs (75-175 cm high) in general cover the graves of ruling chiefs, while those with medium legs (50-70 cm high) cover the graves of the chief's family or his close relatives. Dolmens with short legs (10-50 cm high) belonged to retainers or other inhabitants of the ruler's establishment. There are no special marks to distinguish dolmens for males or females. Dolmens with multiple legs are rare, and only occur in Lewapaku and Kawangu. According to informants these dolmens were not intended for burials of rulers, but only for their relatives or attendants.

The dolmens built over royal graves are usually large and have a fine appearance. At the end of a royal dolmen there is an upstanding stone, sometimes a statue, representing a deceased ruler or a royal guard.

#### THE CONSTRUCTION OF A DOLMEN

I had the opportunity of watching the building of a dolmen for the ruler of Pau. The stone table was taken from an old grave, approximately 3 km from the place where the new dolmen was to be erected. Before the stone was removed, it was first decorated in accordance with the deceased ruler's wish, after the people had prayed that the spirit in the stone would not be angry and disturb their work. After the carving was finished there was a small ceremony when bulls and cocks were slaughtered, and the workers slaughtered buffaloes and pigs, which they ate. The stone was then pulled by approximately 1000 praying and singing people. Whenever the pulling stopped, owing to obstructions, the accompanying priest beat a gong.

The menhir (penji) and the statue to be placed at the end of the new dolmen were carved at the place where the dolmen was eventually to be erected. Large wooden blocks were used to support the table stone, which weighed several tons, as it was levered upwards to rest on its legs. The burial took place a few days after the dolmen had been erected. A grave was at first dug under the stone table, and then the corpse was buried following a ceremony accompanied by the slaughter of buffaloes, pigs and cocks.

#### TERRACED AND ENCLOSED GRAVES

Stepped terrace graves occur in eastern Nusa Tenggara at Kewar and Lewalutas in western Timor. At Kewar the grave is that of a ruler, whereas at Lewalutas it is the grave of a tribal chief of Jailolo. The stepped terrace grave at Kewar was found at the entrance to a megalithic compound (Plate 4).

A stone enclosure which served as a grave yard also occurs at

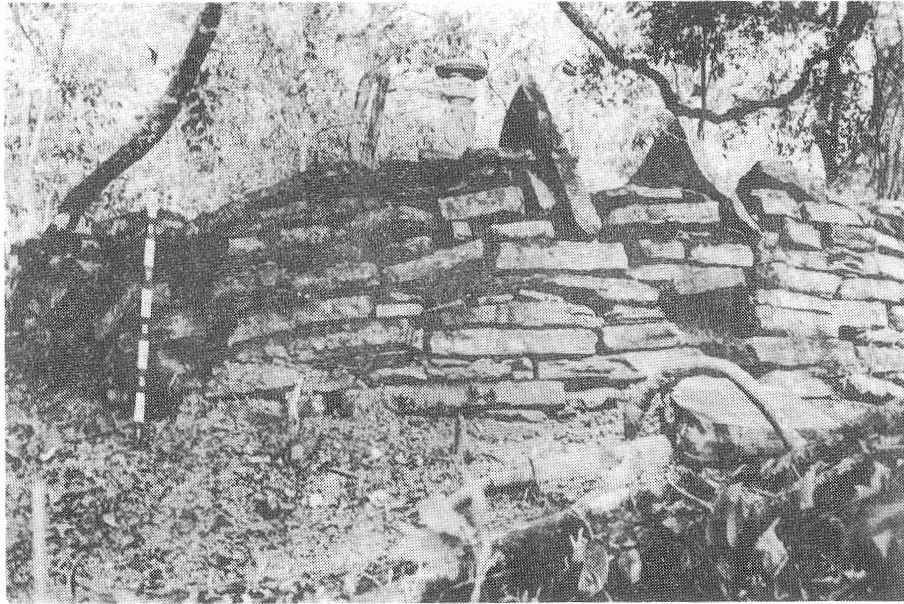


Plate 5. Bosok constructed of stone slabs, supporting a wooden statue. Timor.



Plate 6. Ruins of a ksadan stone enclosure, Timor.

Lewalu in the district of Lewalutas, western Timor. This enclosure lies to the south of Lewalu in an isolated place outside the village. There are two graves inside the enclosure, which is made of flat stones constructed into a circular wall, 65 cm high and 375 cm in diameter (Figure 1). Not far from this grave stands an oval-shaped monolith with a human face carved on top.

#### CEREMONIAL STRUCTURES

Ceremonial structures include stone enclosures (ksadan) and stone structures with menhir statues (bosok) (Plate 5). Ksadan (Plates 6, 7) are common in western Timor, and comprise a circular wall made of flat stones. There is only one entrance to a ksadan. In the centre of the enclosure is a small menhir, usually called latabokan. There are several sizes of ksadan, and diameters generally range between 7 and 14 metres. On top of the ksadan wall there is sometimes an aitos (ceremonial pillar), which is a decorated monolith with a carved human face. The aitos is an object of worship and is considered as a symbol that keeps the four tribes of the region united, and also as a symbol of fertility which is worshipped during the harvest ceremony.

Menhir statues also occur at Kewar and Lewalutas in western Timor. They are very simple, and have a head and straight down-hanging arms.

The bosok is usually a structure of flat stones in the form of a stepped terrace with a menhir or a round flat stone surrounded by other stones on top. This bosok is used for ceremonies for house building, harvest, or as a meeting place where members of the community pray for recovery from illnesses, or for blessings and safe travelling.

#### DISCUSSION

Dolmens in eastern Indonesia generally served as burial places, in contrast with dolmens in other parts of Indonesia, such as Nias, South Sumatra (Hoop 1932), Lampung (Sukendar 1979), West Java (Sukendar 1979) and Besuki in East Java (Willems 1938), which appear to have served purely ceremonial functions. According to van der Hoop (1932), most of the dolmens in Sumatra were only used as places of worship. I agree with this theory, since an excavation of a dolmen carried out by our team in Sumberjaya (Lampung) produced no human remains, but only some pottery and ceramic sherds, as well as beads and glass fragments.

Dolmens used as burial places are found in East Java, and the graves contain funerary gifts such as beads, metal tools and pottery (van Heekeren 1958). Van Heekeren also suggested that these dolmens date to the "Older Megalithic" period and were used as "sacrificial altars or as memorials."

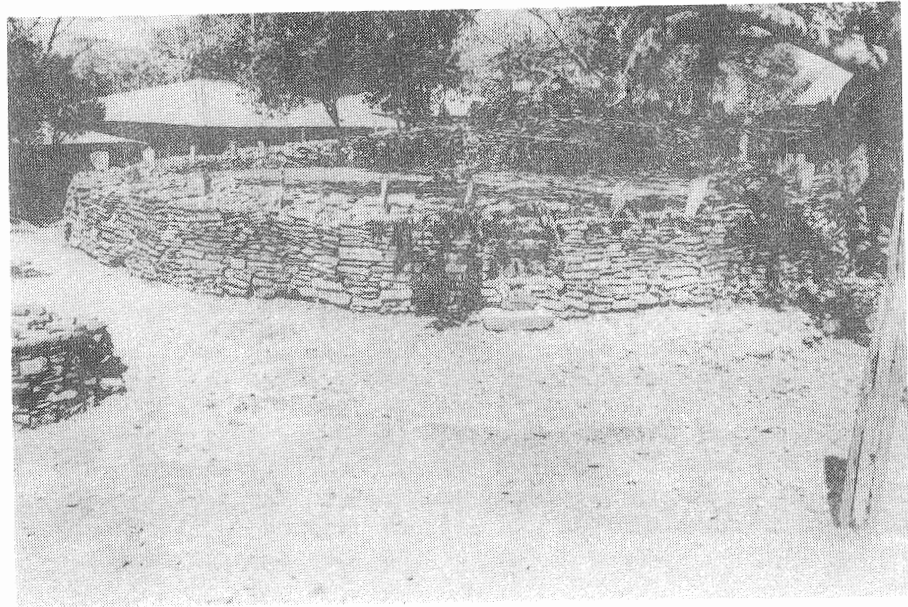


Plate 7. A modern Ksadan at Desa Kewar, West Timor.

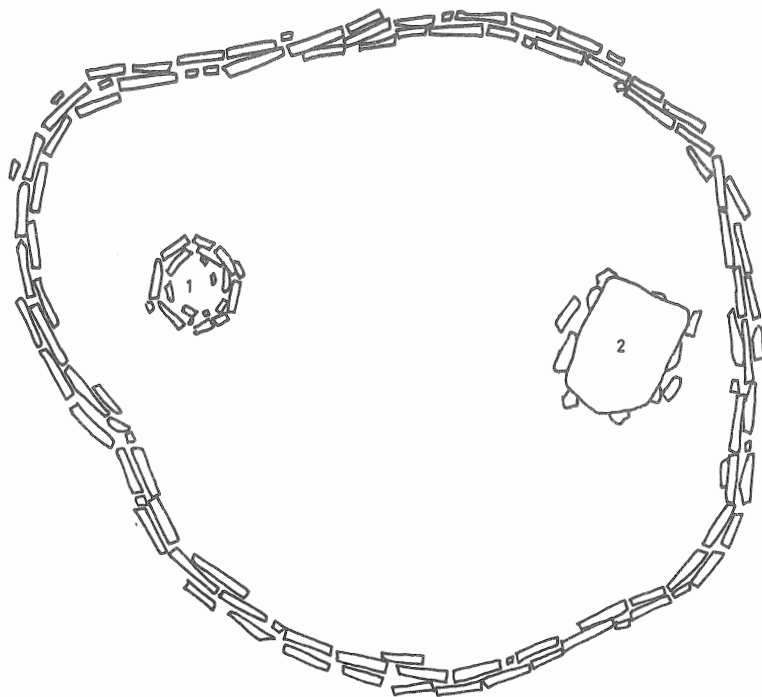


Figure 1. Stone enclosure with two graves inside, Lewalu, western Timor.

Stepped terraces like those found in eastern Indonesia are also found in Nias, Lampung and West Java. Their functions vary from place to place; in eastern Indonesia some are used as ceremonial places, others for burials. On Nias stepped terraces called aerosali serve as meeting places for adat chiefs. During surveys in West Java, many stepped terraces have been located at Ciranjang, Lembah, Duhur, Gunung Padang (Bintarti 1981), in Sukabumi and in southern Banten. These are not graves, but ceremonial places. Van Tricht (1929) mentioned in particular these Javanese sites, and van der Hoop (1932) mentioned stepped terraces as burial places in the village of Mingkik in South Sumatra. Similar terrace graves also occur in Bogor and in West Sumatra Province, the latter found during a survey by a team from our Research Centre in 1984.

The stone enclosures of eastern Indonesia have never been included in the classifications of megaliths by Heine Geldern (1945) or other scholars. Stone enclosures are also found in Nias, West Sumatra, Lampung, West Java, Central Java (Sukendar 1981; Soejono 1982) and Central Sulawesi (Sukendar 1980). The difference between stone enclosures in eastern Indonesia and western Indonesia is evident from their construction. In eastern Indonesia, flat stones were usually employed, whereas in western Indonesia large monoliths were used.

In eastern Indonesia the menhir statues are apparently not connected with burials but only with ceremonies, except for the menhir statues found with dolmens in the Sumba region. In western Indonesia many menhir statues occur in Sumatra, Java, Bali and Central Sulawesi. Examples include the menhir statues found in Liwa in northern Lampung, in Gunung Kidul (Sumiyati 1980), in Bondowoso, and in Central Sulawesi (Kaudern 1938; Sukendar 1980). In Liwa, a menhir statue was found facing a grave made of boulders. In Gunung Kidul in Java the menhir statues look very crude and stand beside a stone cist grave. The menhir statues in Central Sulawesi are very large, some of them even 5 metres high. These statues are found together with stone vats (kalamba).

The megalithic tradition of eastern Indonesia is thus similar to that of other regions of Indonesia. A structure which has no parallel, however, and is very rare is the ksadan (stone enclosure).

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