

Some Megalithic Finds in West Timor, Indonesia

by Haris Sukendar Djojowasito

The megalithic sites in West Timor, particularly in the Regency of Belu, are situated nearly 65 kilometers to the northeast of Atambua. They are about 900 metres above sea level. Among other sites are those at Kewar, Watuloto and Duarato, which can be reached by car. In Lewalutas and Kiragawalariki Kobakoliarisasi, the sites are so isolated they can only be reached by foot.

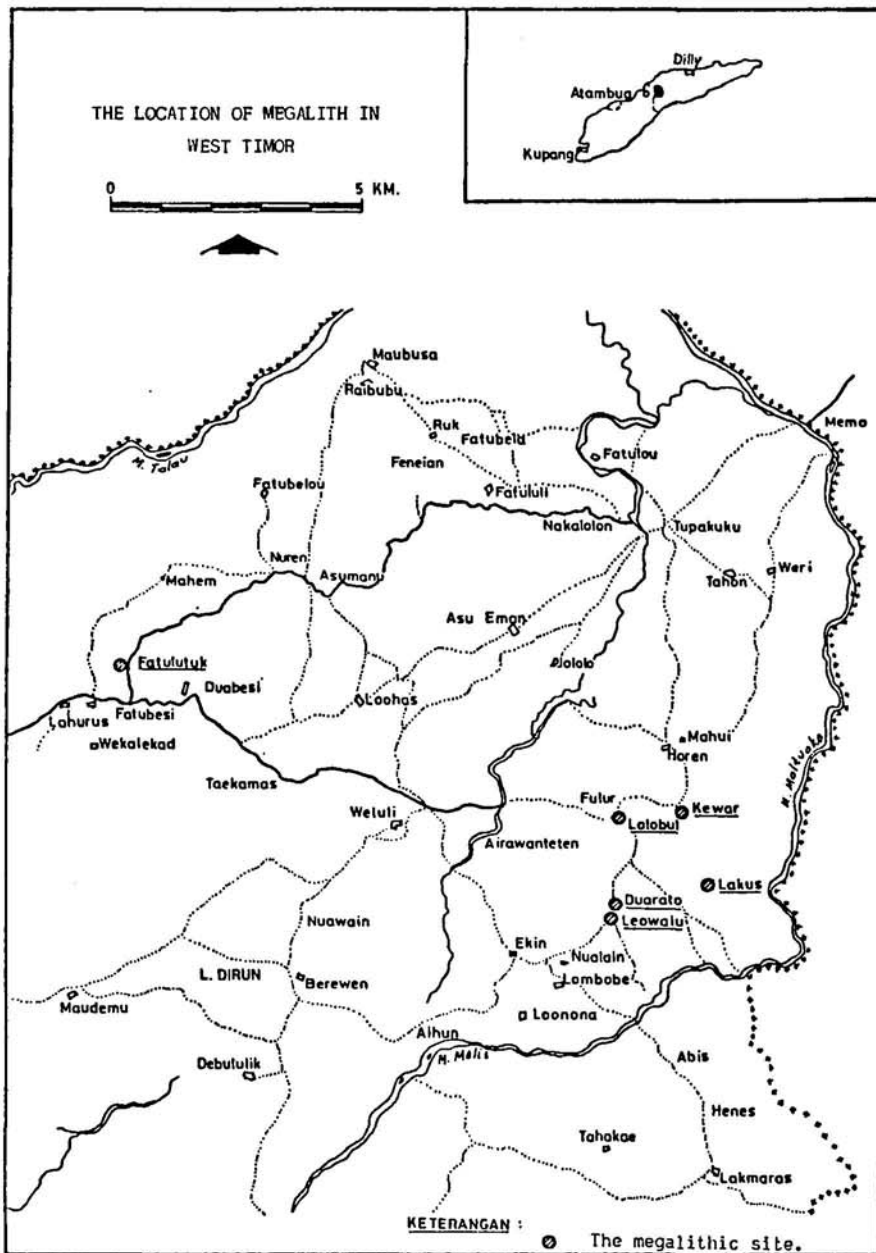
Megalithic finds in West Timor are usually round or oval stone structures. Square platforms, made of stone slabs or corals, can also be seen. They are generally classified as: stone enclosures, stone altars, stone terraces, menhir statues, upright-stones, pillars with the human face decorations, and others.

Dead as well as living monuments and sites, which have retained "the living megalithic tradition", were encountered in West Timor. Some dead monuments exist in

The author is an archaeologist specializing in the megalithic tradition. He is presently connected with the National Research Centre of Archaeology, Indonesia.



A menhir statue from Kewar, West Timor.



Kiragawalariki Kobakoliairasi, Lewalutas District, and they are usually located atop high hills which are difficult to climb. On the other hand, living monuments and sites, where the communities have moderately developed, can be found both in Kewar and Lewalutas.

KEWAR

Kewar is a small village located at the border of West and East Timor. The site complex is separated from the village by a small road, consisting of paved stone slabs. The road is directed to offering places located in the eastern part of the site complex.

This complex pattern is similar to that of the Nias and the Sumba islands, where many megalithic complexes are separated by a small road directed to offering places. The local people build their houses on both sides of the small road. These offering places are usually located at the end or at the centre of the complex. They are either square, round, or oval yards.

The megalithic site at Kewar is 900 meters above sea level. It is usually covered by clouds in the mornings when it is very cold. On both sides of the terrace stairway are houses facing various directions. Some face the offering place, known as **Ksadan**, while others face elsewhere. Recent investigations have revealed a continuous line of occupancy in the site.

In front of the Kewar complex, in the centre of a wide yard, is a round platform made of stone slabs. Still in good condition, this platform contains primitive stone statues facing the northeast.

Menhir Statues

A **menhir** statue consists of a head and a body without legs. Its arms are carved straight down in low relief. The **menhir's** eyes are almost circular and short. It has a broad nose, a narrow mouth and wears a square hat. Little knobs at the side of the head indicate the ears while carved little nipples below the short neck represent the breasts. Standing 82 cm high, this statue has no genital organ. It is a cylindrical block in which a face was carved.

One stone and two wooden **menhir** statues were found at the Kewar complex. The stone statue stands on the stone altar in the front

yard of the complex. It faces the northeast but the natives do not know which direction the statue originally faced.

Atop another stone altar, located 125 meters south of the complex, is a wooden *menhir* statue with a stone hat. Its eyes are indicated by two little holes while its mouth is a simple incised line.

Stone Altars

A variety of stone altars in the Kewar complex are still venerated by the natives. They are made of slab stones in many different forms and sizes; sometimes round, oval or square. A big black round or oval stone is usually found on top of the altars.

A *bosok* is a big stone altar used for worshipping and praying for recovery from illness and the safety of the community in general. Usually holding a *menhir* stone or stone pillars with various decorations, it is also used for worship after harvesting and after succeeding to build a house.

The form and size of a family's *bosok* indicates status. The better the status of the family, the bigger the *bosok*. Sacrifices, made for worshipping, include saffrons and rice. Sometimes a buffalo head and a young coconut leaf is used especially after a traditional house is built.

In the Lewalutas village, where a living megalithic tradition was found, each family has a *bosok* standing beside the biggest one. The biggest *bosok* is used for communal worship; it also holds the ceremonial objects of the commune.

Stone Enclosures

There are two stone enclosures,

made of circular slab stones, at the Kewar complex. The diameter of one enclosure is nine meters and its wall has a fluctuating height, varying from 45-125 cm. The other enclosure has a diameter of 14 cm, also with an irregular wall height, varying from 75-126 cm. These enclosures lie on the east end of the complex.

The natives call these enclosures *ksadan*, literally offering places. The small one is classified as a male *ksadan* while the big one is a female *ksadan*.

At the centre of the female *ksadan* is a little *menhir* stone statue, called *latabokan* by the locals. It is a sacrifice object which is 35 cm high, 17 cm wide and 12 cm thick. An

ancient local war leader, according to the local inhabitants, was buried under this stone.

During important ceremonial occasions local people usually slaughter a pig. Inside this *ksadan*, a group of girls, garbed in traditional clothings, dance accompanied by the sound of the gongs. During the ceremony people assemble and eat together under a big tree.

In contrast, there is no *latabokan* in the male *ksadan*. But it is surrounded by a variety of other *menhirs*, the biggest of which is 125 cm high and the smallest is 35 cm high.

Each *ksadan* has one door entrance with two *menhir* statues



Left: A stone altar used as an offering place. Found in Kewar.



Below: A stone enclosure known locally as Ksadan. Also found in Kewar.



Left: A stone terrace, found in Kewar, with both male and female stones.

Beside the eastern wall of the female *ksadan* is what could have been a ceremonial place: another stone terrace. Two big round stones, with a diameter of 70 cm, were seen at each end of this terrace. The first stone, which is plain, is called a “male stone” while the second, which has a 28 cm wide hole (18 cm deep), is called a “female stone”. Local inhabitants claim that the female stone has magical powers. Water held by the hole of the female stone is said to cure illnesses.



Close-up view of a female stone, found on top of a stone terrace at a *ksadan* in Kewar.

standing on both sides. It is used as an offering place especially after harvest or after renovating a traditional house. It is also used as a council meeting place where the leader makes judicial decisions. In the Nias Island, an offering place, usually in the form of a square yard, is located in the middle of a village or settlement.

Stone Terraces

Stone terraces from old megalithic traditions were used for ceremonial worship. But younger



A stone enclosure with a wooden menhir statue.

megalithic terraces were used as graves. These terrace graves, made of square or oval shaped stone slabs, measure about 410 cm in length and 230 cm in width. Facing the southeast and the northwest, they are no longer used for worship.

A stone terrace found in the Kewar complex, according to the natives, is the grave of King Dasiroloka, founder of the village. Paved with a flat stone, now partly disappearing, it is located in front of the complex under a banyan tree (*ficus banyamina*).

LEWALUTAS

Nearly five kilometers southeast of Kewar, on the slope of a high hill in the district of Lewalutas, is a living megalithic village. This village, consisting of about 25 families, has been occupied since 1935.

Menhir Statues

Among the various ceremonial objects, a stone *menhir* statue, with a round stone hat, was discovered in the southeastern part of the village. It was found standing on a stone structure used as a ceremonial place. The villagers call it *aitos*, meaning statue. Looking very primitive, this statue has a mouth represented by a line, round eyes, but no ears. Wooden *menhir* statues, similar to those found in Kewar but wearing round stone hats, were also found at isolated places in the western part of the village.

Stone Terraces

About 10 meters west of this

menhir statue is a stone platform made of river stones and slabstones similar to those in the Kewar complex. It is said to be the grave of the chief of the Kaisahe and Joil tribes.

Stone Altars

Stone altars or what they also call **bosok** are built by villagers from slab stones or pebbles. Similar to the Kewar complex, a large stone is often placed on top of a **bosok**. And since they are still used for ceremonies, a **bosok** is usually constructed beside a house or under a big tree such as a banyan tree.

As previously mentioned, there are two types of **bosok** in Lewlutas: the large type, used for communal ceremonies, and the small type, for family use. The family type **bosok** measures approximately 125 cm in length, 100 cm in width and 65 cm in height.

Stone Pillars

In the northeastern part of the village, not far from the aforementioned **menhir** statue, is a stone pillar. This pillar is 105 cm high with a diameter of 45 cm. Double spiral carvings in geometric design make up the body of the pole which has four sculptured human head decorations, facing the four different compass directions. Villagers say the human heads represent the four tribes living in the village.

This pillar is usually used for ceremonies relating to harvest or after the construction of a house. Similar pillars were also found in other parts of West Timor, i.e., Kiragawa Lariki and Watuloto.

CONCLUSION

There are various interpretations on the use of the **menhir** statues

but the most popular is the interpretation that they represent the deceased custom chiefs and other high-ranking people. The primitive looking **menhirs** are regarded as having magical powers. Basically **menhir** statues are used for ceremonial purposes. They usually face the same direction as the stone structures.

All of the megalithic finds in West Timor are ceremonial objects. They have been used during the ceremonies for funerals, harvest, and after a traditional house is rebuilt. Most of the megaliths in West Timor are found in isolated places, such as on high hills. The living megalithic sites are usually occupied by 20-40 families led by a custom chief. Stone structures found in West Timor are very similar to those found in the Oceania Islands.



The stone terrace used as the burial for King Dasisiroloka, the founder of Kewar.