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Megaliths of the World

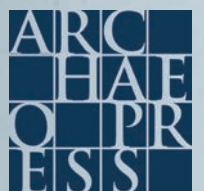
Volume I



edited by

Luc LAPORTE, Jean-Marc LARGE

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Megaliths of the World

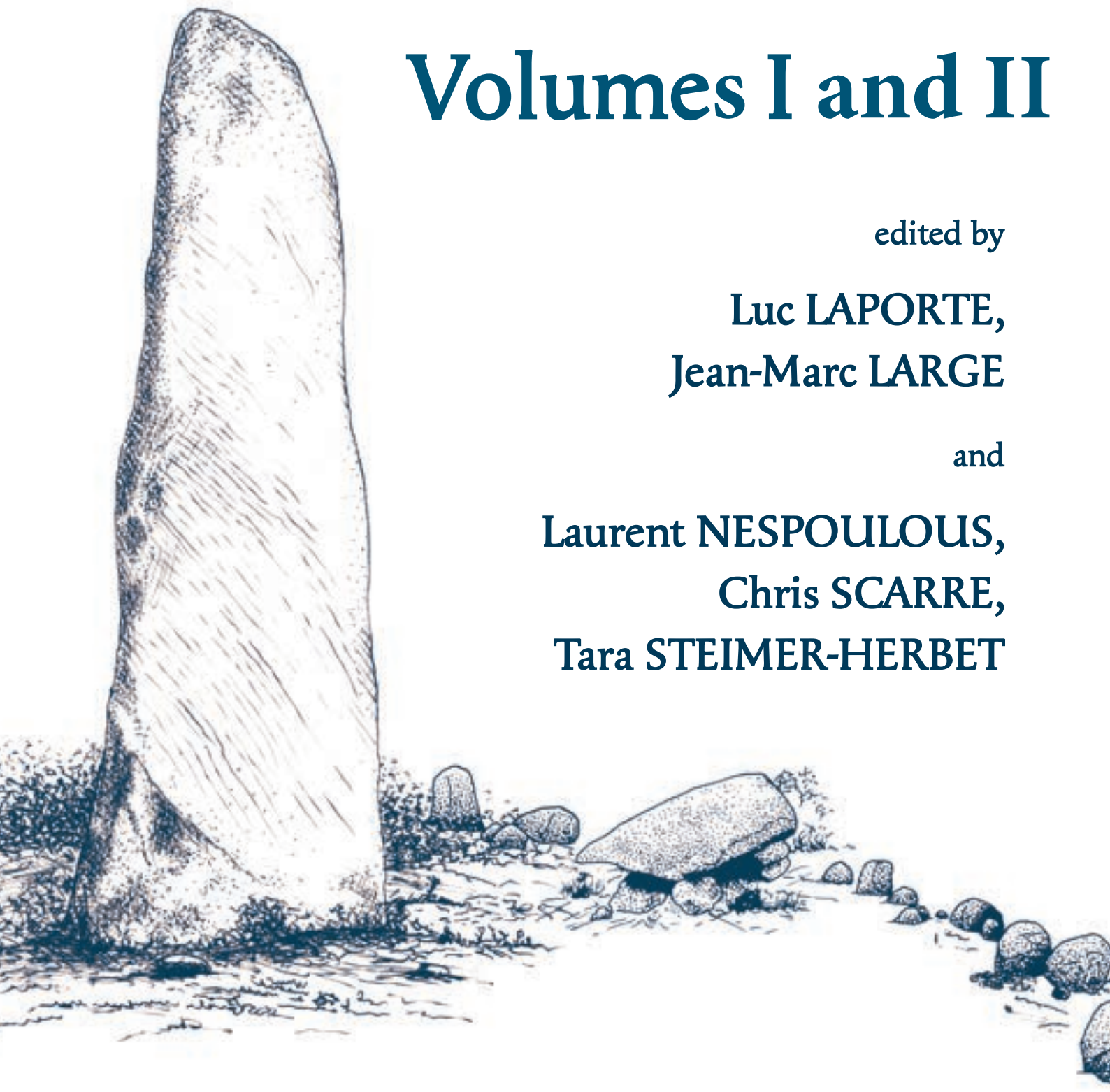
Volumes I and II

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and

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During the preparation of this publication we learned of the death of Alain Gallay, Emeritus Professor at the University of Geneva, who has made such a major contribution to the discipline. His participation in the international conference on The Megaliths of the World, and his membership of the Steering Committee, was a great honour for us. The whole of the editorial team pay tribute to him.

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Menhirs of Tana Toraja (Indonesia): a preliminary ethnoarchaeological assessment

Abstract: Stone remains a prominent feature of the natural and cultural landscape of Tana Toraja, Indonesia, where outcropping basalt and limestone karst formations create a dramatic backdrop. In this context, the manipulation of stone is a significant aspect of ancient cultural traditions that persist to the present day. The quarrying and erection of large menhirs are part of this stoneworking tradition that also includes the construction of rock-cut tombs and placement of smaller freestanding stone monuments. Menhirs are quarried, transported, and erected on the occasion of the largest type of funeral feast held in Tana Toraja, which can entail complex ritual practices, up to over a thousand guests, and the slaughter of what can be a staggering number of water buffaloes and pigs over a period lasting several days. In this paper, we provide an overview of the practice of erecting stone menhirs in Tana Toraja and its social significance. Preliminary ethnoarchaeological documentation of Torajan menhirs provides insights into the methods, logistics, and social dynamics associated with this megalithic tradition. The quarrying and shaping of menhirs is done by specialized stoneworkers, while the transport and erection of the menhirs involves a larger labour force. The monumental plazas in which the menhirs are placed serve to commemorate the deceased ancestors and mark the prominence and wealth of the family groups with which they are associated. These spaces, enshrined with megaliths, also become venues for important components of ritual feasts. From a broader perspective, the enduring significance of these monuments is inseparable from the elaborate feasts in which they are embedded and for which they become an everlasting symbol. The link between the menhirs and the social entanglements of large feasts is consistent with megalithic practices observed elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago, where monumental construction is often tied to elaborate ritual undertakings.

Keywords: *menhirs, ethnoarchaeology, feasting, Indonesia*

Menhir building in Tana Toraja is one of many megalithic traditions found throughout the Indonesian archipelago (Fig. 1). The megalithic phenomenon in the region being recent (a few centuries old) and in many cases still living (as opposed to prehistoric, as in Europe), this tradition in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia spans various types of societies (from kingdoms to small scale non-state societies) and has various forms (menhirs, chambered tombs, statues, etc.) (Gallay 2006; Steimer-Herbet 2018). In Tana Toraja, the practice of erecting menhirs is part of a stone-working phenomenon that also includes smaller, free-standing stones and rock-cut tombs. These practices are embedded in traditional ritual feasts and are key to understanding Torajan cosmological concepts, kinship, and social order. In this paper, we present an exploratory overview of the Torajan menhir tradition and examine links between menhirs and feasting, in the context of the complex and traditional sociopolitical dynamics of the area.

Menhirs and other stone constructions comprise an anthropogenic lithic landscape within a natural setting where stone figures prominently. The highlands of Tana Toraja contain mountain ranges that took shape during ancient volcanic activity that occurred between 150 and 15 million years ago. The resulting creation of magmatic rocks (basalt, ryolites, and gabbros) forms the Lamasi geological complex which covers Tana Toraja and other areas of south and central Sulawesi (Polvé *et al.* 1997: 83; White *et al.* 2017: 75). Overlying this complex of igneous rock in many parts of Tana Toraja are the Makale Formation Reef Limestones, attributed to the Lower to Middle Miocene geological epochs (White *et al.* 2017: 75). The resulting geographic setting is marked by outcropping basalts and other rocks of magmatic origin and a dramatic karst topography marked by steep cliffs that typifies the landscape of the upland areas of the southern and central parts of Sulawesi (Fig. 2) (White *et al.* 2017: 75).

In areas of Tana Toraja where outcrops and cliff faces of suitable stone (typically basalt or similar types of igneous rock) are present, there are active traditional stoneworking practices of constructing rock-cut tombs and carving large menhir stones. Rock-

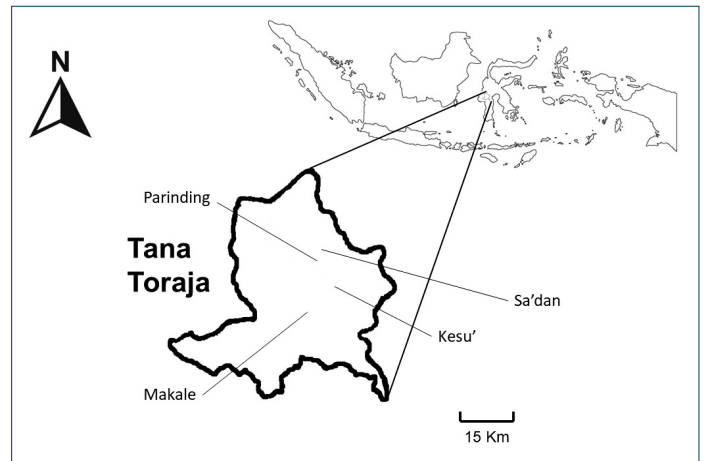


Fig. 1 – Map showing Tana Toraja and locations mentioned in the text.

cut tombs (*liang pa'*) are cut into outcrops by specialized stone workers and are part of elaborate death traditions which also include conspicuous funeral feasts (Fig. 3). Stone menhirs (*simbuang batu*) also correspond to Torajan funerary practices. *Simbuang batu* are erected in special ritual spaces known as *rante'* on the occasion of the largest funeral feasts held in Tana Toraja.

These funerary practices are part of a ritual tradition in Tana Toraja that includes numerous traditional feasts where socio-economic and political power is negotiated, and important relationships are established and maintained. Monuments constructed from stone are the enduring markers of these events. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the traditional process and methods of constructing menhirs in Tana Toraja and present observations on how these monuments are situated with the broader context of traditional ritual practices and their associated sociopolitical entanglements.

1. Previous anthropological and archaeological research in Tana Toraja

There have been myriad anthropological studies conducted in Tana Toraja over many decades (e.g., Adams 2006; Bigalke 1981, 2005; Crystal 1971, 1974a-b; de Jong 2013; Kennedy 1953; Koubi 1982,



Fig. 2 – View of landscape in Tallunglipu (northern Tana Toraja) (Photo: G. Robin).



Fig. 3 – Lokomata *liang pa'* rock-cut tomb complex (northwestern Tana Toraja) (Photo: G. Robin).

2008; Nooy-Palm 1979, 1986; Sandarupa 1997, 2016; Tsintjilonis 2000, 2007; Volkman 1985; Waterson 1986, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2009). The social and symbolic aspects of elaborate ritual practices and iconic traditional *tongkonan* kindred group houses of Tana Toraja have been a focus of many of these works, as has the impact of historical entanglements and the rise of modern tourism. The many years of social anthropological work conducted in Tana Toraja has provided rich descriptive accounts of the traditional culture and, given this long span of research, has enabled the use of a diachronic perspective when reviewing Torajan cultural traditions. In general, however, *simbuang batu* have received very limited attention in previous social anthropological research with a few exceptions (see below).

Archaeological investigations conducted within Tana Toraja have primarily consisted of ethnoarchaeological studies. Similar to the social anthropological work in the region, living ritual feasting practices and the potential insights they can provide for feasting in antiquity have been a focus of some of these investigations (see Adams 2004; Jeunesse & Denaire 2018). Ethnoarchaeological overviews of Torajan megaliths have also been conducted by Indonesian archaeologists. Akin Duli (Hasanuddin University) in particular, has provided valuable descriptive accounts of menhirs and examinations of their social and symbolic significance, as well as ethnoarchaeological studies of rock-cut tombs and older coffin burials in Tana Toraja (Duli 2015, 2018).

There have been very few well-documented ethnographic accounts of the specific elements of the process of erecting menhirs in Tana Toraja. In her extensive ethnographic study of Torajan social and religious practices Nooy-Palm (1986: 242-245) included an account of the erection of a menhir in a detailed description of the rites involved with the funeral for a prominent noble. Similarly, Crystal (1974a) devoted an entire article to the subject of Torajan menhirs in which he offered detailed descriptive accounts of the different phases associated with the practice. Importantly, these essentially historical accounts offer rare insights into megalithic practices that appear to have been altered over the course of several decades.

2. Stone monuments and living groups

As monumental constructions related to the deceased, *simbuang batu* and *liang pa'* are both linked to *tongkonan* kindred group houses. *Simbuang batu* are erected at feasting plazas known as *rante'* throughout much of Tana Toraja, and *pantunnuan* in the Makale' district of southern Tana Toraja and possibly also other areas (Crystal 1974a). The *rante'* are associated with villages of one or more related *tongkonan* houses and are the traditional location for the slaughter of water buffaloes during large funeral feasts hosted by members of the corresponding *tongkonan*. Similarly, *liang pa'* are linked to specific *tongkonan* groups and are reserved as the interment place for the deceased members of the *tongkonan*. The presence of proper *liang pa'* tombs is so important that *Tongkonan* are considered incomplete without a corresponding *liang pa'*, which have been referred to as '...the *tongkonan* of the ancestors' (Waterson 1986: 97). The *tongkonan*, *liang pa'*, *simbuang batu*, wet-rice paddy fields, and garden plots constitute a Torajan cultural landscape in which the dead are ever-present in the world of the living.

As the built representations of the kindred groups forming the basis of Torajan society, the *tongkonan* houses form the nucleus of this cultural landscape (Fig. 4). Groups of related *tongkonan* are tied to a founding *tongkonan* and form household clusters (*tondok*) that are scattered throughout the countryside in Tana Toraja. *Tongkonan* can have associated genealogies that go back 20-30 generations, and they therefore provide a means through which individuals trace their decent, as membership in the kindred group and associated house is inherited (Waterson 1995: 196, 197; Waterson 1997: 65). Due to bilateral kinship reckoning, individuals can claim membership to many different *tongkonan*. This membership is ultimately defined and expressed by participating in *tongkonan* rituals entailing contributions of livestock to *tongkonan* feasts and assisting with the maintenance of the kindred group house and its associated rice granaries. Some wealthy members of traditional noble classes in Tana Toraja can be members of more than ten *tongkonan*, although people are generally only able to maintain an active membership in several *tongkonan* to which they have inherited membership (Adams 2001: 28).



Fig. 4 – *Tongkonan* Karuaya (central Tana Toraja) (Photo: G. Robin).





Fig. 7 – *Tadoran* stones at Sa'dan Matallo (northeastern Tana Toraja) (Photo: R. Adams).

Ritual practices related to rice fertility can also be accompanied by the placement of stones. The *mabua pare* is a village-wide ritual that is rarely held and traditionally occurs as the final stage of a sequence of rites that take place over a period of many years. It has been documented by ethnologists in the past, although it is not clear if it is currently held anywhere in Tana Toraja. The ritual was performed at night and involved the placement of a small stone within the village and a second stone at the rice field of the leader of the village. Unlike the *simbuang batu* stones, which have an obvious connection with death, the stones emplaced for the *mabua pare* are related to fertility, with the stone in the village having a male symbolic association and the stone at the rice field having a female association (Crystal 1974a: 121, 122; Kruyt 1923-1924: 335, 339).

4. Menhirs of Tana Toraja: from quarry to erection

The authors collected preliminary ethnoarchaeological data on the process of quarrying and erecting *simbuang batu* in Tana Toraja in 2017, during fieldwork that was primarily focused on the tradition of *liang pa'* rock-cut tombs. The data presented below is also derived from ethnoarchaeological fieldwork conducted by Adams in 2000 and 2001. The insights gained from this

primary ethnographic data are augmented by previous documentation of menhir building by anthropologists Hetty Nooy-Palm and Eric Crystal.

The erection of a *simbuang batu* at a *rante'* occurs during the latter part of the sequence of rituals comprising a Torajan funeral feast (Nooy-Palm 1986: 244, 245). This ritual event, known in the Sa'dan area of northern Tana Toraja as *Mangriu' Batu* (pulling the stone) is the final stage of a process that can span weeks from the time the stone is quarried or retrieved whole to the time it is transported to the *rante'*.

The preparations for erecting a *simbuang batu* are part of the overall planning for a particularly important (expensive) funeral. These high-level funerals involve a lot of material preparation (gathering and building bamboo structures for the feasts, accumulating necessary livestock and other food stuffs, etc.) and are therefore planned months or years in advance. As part of the planning, a work crew is contracted to retrieve or quarry the stone. According to informant testimony in 2001 in interviews conducted by Adams, these stoneworking crews were traditionally not necessarily paid, but instead were provided with meals for each day employed cutting the stone with iron picks and hammers – if the stone was quarried (as opposed to simply retrieved as an erratic). According to current practice (2017), however, stone quarriers are paid

in cash to quarry *simbuang batu* and transport them to the *rante'*. Within the context of the overall planning, the quarry crew can be contracted from several weeks to several months prior to the funeral or perhaps longer. For example, we observed many menhirs that had been quarried, but not yet transported to the *rante'*, including one menhir that had been quarried for a funeral that had not yet been scheduled. In traditional practice throughout Tana Toraja, the deceased person's living siblings and children organize the scheduling and contracting of the menhir quarrying and other aspects of a funeral, as well as sponsoring the overall costs (Adams 2001: 181).

The cost to contract a crew of stoneworkers to quarry a large *simbuang batu* for a *rante'* in the Parinding area in north-central Tana Toraja in 2017 was 20,000,000 Rupiah (approximately €1,250). This crew comprised three individuals, which is common for stoneworking crews. It is also common (more common, in fact) for these specialized stoneworkers to also be contracted to cut *liang pa'* tombs in rock

faces and outcrops, which the authors observed on multiple occasions. In the case of quarrying *simbuang batu*, the process of quarrying the stones and transporting them to the *rante'* can take up to a month or longer.

On our 2017 survey of traditional stoneworking practices, we identified several *simbuang batu* quarries at small basalt outcrops in the uplands of the northwestern part of Tana Toraja. In many cases, *simbuang batu* had either been completely cut out from the quarries and were awaiting transport or had already been moved to the *rante'*, as could be deciphered by the concave shape in the basalt outcrop (Fig. 8). The quarry locales we observed were all situated adjacent to roads, which is probably no coincidence given the current practice of transporting these stones by truck.

Although quarrying appears to be the most common method used to obtain a *simbuang batu*, there are many accounts of stones being retrieved whole for this purpose. In these cases, according to informant testimony, stones are taken from stream locations or



Fig. 8 – Menhir quarry in Deri (northwestern Tana Toraja) (Photo: G. Robin).

fields without being quarried from outcrops. Some of the large boulders at *rante'* that have a relatively smooth, waterworn appearance are likely to be examples of this type of activity. For a funeral feast in the southern part of Tana Toraja in 1968, Eric Crystal (1974a) observed the placement of *simbuang batu* at a *rante'* (in this case referred to as a *pantunnuan*) that were apparently retrieved from the landscape in this manner. None of the five stones erected for this feast measured more than 1.2 m (4 ft) long according to Crystal (1974a: 120).

There also appear to be different criteria used to determine the suitability of a stone for use as a *simbuang batu*. Crystal (1974a: 120) noted that there were two main requirements for *simbuang batu* stones in the area of the Makale' district in southern Tana Toraja: the stones should not be too flat in shape and they should 'ring true' when struck with a blade, signifying that they were living rocks (Crystal 1974a: 120). Informant testimony in our 2017 survey indicated that the shape of the stone was not of particular importance, and this seems confirmed by the presence of *simbuang batu* with a variety of shapes at *rante'* throughout Tana Toraja. Similarly, Nooy-Palm (1986: 267) observed that in the Sangalla area of southern Tana Toraja, stones with exceptionally irregular/unusual shapes were chosen as *simbuang batu*. In the 2017 context, we observed menhirs of various shapes and sizes, including menhirs that had been fashioned from cement and decorated with stone chips derived from the quarrying of solid stone menhirs or rock-cut tombs. However, informant testimony indicates that these menhirs are considered less prestigious than those made from solid stone.

According to informant testimony in the northern part of Tana Toraja in 2001, the specific shape of the stone is considered to be the most important characteristic of a *simbuang batu*: it should be wider at the base and taper towards the top. Hired stoneworkers cut the stones to create these characteristics, and the most refined examples of this practice attain a prismatic shape.

There are multiple traditional methods used to transport stones. For large *simbuang batu*, stone hauliers use vines or rope to pull the stone, while others trail behind to push it. To facilitate forward progress, palm fronds can be placed parallel to the

long axis of the stone as it is pulled. This method contrasts with what has been documented in West Sumba, Indonesia, where timber segments are placed over the ground to provide a track on which large tomb capstones and wall stones are pulled (Adams 2007).

During fieldwork in 2017, we observed a stone being prepared for manual transport by a crew of hauliers pulling with vines in the Parinding area of northwestern Tana Toraja. The menhir had been placed along the roadside after being transported to the location by truck from a quarry located approximately 10 km to the north in the Buntu Lobo area. Coiled strips of bamboo were wrapped around the stone at intervals where vines would later be attached. The coiled strips of bamboo also secured segments of wood that extended the length of the long axis of the stone. Strips of bamboo were also being prepared and placed underneath the *simbuang batu* to facilitate its movement over grass while it was pulled from its position on the roadside to a *rante'* located approximately 20 m downslope and to the west of the road (Fig. 9).

In the past, *simbuang batu* were pulled by men to the *rante'* for up to several kilometres from the quarry or other locations from which the stones were procured. When stones were hauled a long distance, one water buffalo would typically be slaughtered to feed those pulling the stone (Crystal 1974a: 120). For a funeral held in 1968 in the Makale' district of southern Tana Toraja, Crystal noted that five modestly-sized stones measuring about 1 m in length were carried a distance of approximately 200 m. The stones were secured in bamboo slings wrapped around poles, and each stone was carried by 30 men holding the poles. In this case, a feast involving the slaughter of several pigs was held for the hauliers when the stones arrived at the *pantunnuan* (*rante'*) (Crystal 1974a: 120, 121).

Nooy-Palm (1986: 244, 245) documented the transport of a *simbuang batu* to a *rante'* in the Kesu' area of the central part of Tana Toraja in 1969. This *simbuang batu* stone was bound with bamboo and was pulled by men grasping bamboo 'handles'. It required 'tens of days' to move the stone to the *rante'*, during which time the men performed songs intended to make the stone lighter. The hauliers



Fig. 9 – Preparing *simbuang batu* for dragging to Rante' Sirrin (northwestern Tana Toraja) (Photo: G. Robin).



Fig. 10 – Erecting *simbuang batu* at Rante' Sirrin (northwestern Tana Toraja) (Photo: G. Robin).

were reportedly given rice, buffalo, pig meat, and palm wine for their labour.

When a *simbuang batu* reaches the *rante'*, there are specific steps taken to raise it upright. In the Kesu' area, this process involves a small ritual held to solicit permission from the 'spirits of the earth' (*ampu padang*) known as the *ma'tambuli padang*, for which a *to minaa* (practitioner of the traditional *aluk to dolo* religion) addresses the *ampu padang* (Nooy-Palm 1986: 244, 245). Following this rite, a hole is dug into which the stone base is inserted. The depth of the hole can vary depending upon the size of the stone. Nooy-Palm (1986: 244) noted that the hole for a *simbuang batu* placed at a *rante'* in the Kesu' area was 2 m deep. The erection of a *simbuang batu* we observed in 2017 in the Parinding area of northwestern Tana Toraja required a hole dug to a depth of approximately 1 m for a stone measuring approximately 4 m long.

According to informant testimony, certain items must be placed in the hole prior to inserting the *simbuang batu*, although there are differing accounts, most likely based on local traditions concerning what these items should be. According to informant testimony in the Sa'dan area of northern Tana Toraja in 2001, a fragment of a cooking wok, beads, and a beaded ornament should be placed in the hole. According to informant testimony gathered in 2017 referring to Torajan traditional practice more generally, chicken blood and a piece of copper were placed in the hole prior to the placement of the *simbuang batu*.

We observed the placement of a *simbuang batu* in 2017 in the Parinding area of northern Tana Toraja several days after the stone was transported to the *rante'* by truck (see above). Approximately 125 people were present to place the stone upright; it measured approximately 4 m long and 0.75 m in diameter. Due to the size of the stone, a temporary bamboo structure was built around the *simbuang batu*. Rope, chains, and sheaves were also used to lift the stone into place (Fig. 10). Those participating in this activity were members of the deceased person's family, as well as friends and others in the local community. Contrary to the traditional practice noted above, no items were placed in the hole prior to implanting the stone into the ground. Also, unlike traditional practice, concrete was poured around

the *simbuang batu* to stabilize its base. This extra measure is probably attributable to the relatively shallow depth of the hole (1 m) in relation to the length of the stone (4 m). Before the use of concrete became a normal part of erecting *simbuang batu*, it is likely that deeper holes were necessary for stabilizing the stones, more in line with the 2 m deep holes that Nooy-Palm (1986: 244) noted for *simbuang batu* erected in the Kesu' area. Similarly, the use of sheaves or pulleys appears to be a more recent practice as their use was not documented in accounts of menhir erection described by Nooy-Palm or Crystal.

Prior to the erection of the *simbuang batu* in Parinding in 2017, two water buffaloes and one pig were slaughtered. A *ma' bado* ceremony was also performed by a group of approximately 20 men (family members and friends of the deceased) who were standing in a circle while singing and chanting in honour of the deceased. After the *simbuang batu* was erected, meat from the water buffaloes and pigs slaughtered earlier in the day were served at a feast held at the village of the deceased's family.

According to Crystal (1974a: 121), in the southern part of Tana Toraja, once a *simbuang batu* has been placed, areca palms are traditionally planted adjacent to the stones. Nooy-Palm (1986: 266) noted that in the Kesu' area, a tree trunk was placed next to each newly erected *simbuang batu*. A tree was not planted adjacent to the *simbuang batu* that we observed being placed in 2017, although we observed that both areca palms and stouter arenga palms were occasionally present adjacent to *simbuang batu* stones throughout Tana Toraja.

The newly placed *simbuang batu* is typically one of many *simbuang batu* standing at a *rante'* that have been placed for various funerals in the past. In traditional practice, one *simbuang batu* is typically erected for each funeral feast. However, if there are no *simbuang batu* at the *rante'*, then five should be placed at a single event in order to complete the requirements for the highest level of funeral (Crystal 1974a: 120).

Later in the sequence of traditional funeral rituals, the deceased person's body is transported from their village to the *rante'* and placed on a *lakkian* wooden structure. Up to several days after the body is moved to the *rante'*, numerous water buffaloes are

slaughtered there. Many of these water buffaloes are tethered to *simbuang batu*. If there are more water buffaloes present than menhirs, some would have traditionally been tethered to bamboo stakes (Crystal 1974a: 121). In many cases, livestock is slaughtered in villages instead of the *rante'* (e.g., if the village is a long distance from its affiliated *rante'*). In the southern part of Tana Toraja, Crystal (1974a: 120) observed the slaughter of five different types of water buffaloes that were each tethered to the five *simbuang batu* erected for the funeral.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Torajan menhirs are constructed as impressive monuments to commemorate the deceased, although their function as memorials is only one aspect of their significance. As prestigious items tied to a specific class of large feasts, these monuments signify the success of the family and their ability to assemble the resources for such a large event. As Crystal (1974a: 120) noted:

'The simbuang batu are believed to harbor neither the soul of the deceased nor the spark of life eternal. These megaliths are representative, however, of wealth (as expressed in domesticates killed) and status (tied to the length and munificence of the ceremony).'

Unsurprisingly, the largest *simbuang batu* are considered to have the greatest amount of prestige attached (Crystal 1974a: 122; Nooy-Palm 1986: 265). However, *simbuang batu* are just one of several different material fixtures associated with funerals that signify large labour inputs and overall lavishness. Among other essential aspects of large funerals are temporary bamboo structures built for guests. These structures are built around the perimeter of *tondok* villages and serve as the areas where different groups of guests are seated and served food and coffee or tea. Elaborately carved wooden *saringan* litters are also crafted and used to carry the deceased during specific phases of a funeral. The *saringan* are built to resemble *tongkonan* houses in miniature and are only used for a single funeral before being discarded. They can only be built for a funeral at which at least ten water buffaloes are slaughtered.

In addition, wooden *tau-tau* effigy statues are carved and placed in front of *liang pa'* rock-cut tombs as

part of the final stage of the funeral (Nooy-Palm 1979b: 224-251). These effigy statues are the nearest equivalent to *simbuang batu* as prestige objects and signifiers of funerals for high-status individuals. *Tau-tau* are reserved for the highest-ranking nobles and are made from jackfruit wood, an extremely durable hardwood that is considered able to communicate verbally with humans (Fig. 11). They are only carved for funerals involving the slaughter of at least 24 water buffaloes in most areas, although in Malimbong in northern Tana Toraja, they can only be carved for a funeral at which at least 36 water buffaloes are slaughtered (Waterson 1993: 79). In modern times, due to theft, *tau-tau* have become less commonly placed in open positions in front of tombs and are instead kept within houses, tombs, or in galleries protected by locked metal fencing in front of groups of *liang pa'* rock-cut tombs.

Within the village, the most obvious testimonials to large funerals are the horns of water buffaloes slaughtered at funerals and displayed on the exterior of the *tongkonan*. *Tongkonan* can be adorned with dozens of sets of water buffalo horns which can be an indicator of the wealth and renown of *tongkonan* members who are able to amass the resources and support for these events. The water buffalo horns on the front of a *tongkonan* structure are also believed to ward off evil influences (Nooy-Palm 1986: 193).

Simbuang batu differ from these other markers of funerals in their permanence. Like the stone markers erected for other types of Torajan rituals, the permanence of *simbuang batu* is typically the most enduring vestige of these traditions. Indeed, this connection between stone monuments and ostentatious ritual practice is common among megalith-building societies in Indonesia. At the western end of the archipelago, ethnographically documented monumentality traditions among the Batak of northern Sumatra and on the island of Nias off the western coast of Sumatra are linked to feasts of merit (Barbier 1988; Beatty 1992; Feldman 1988; Sherman 1990). To the east, large stone tombs on the islands of Sumba and Flores are associated with elaborate funerary traditions (Adams 2019; Forth 2001; Hoskins 1984; Jeunesse & Denaire 2017; Schröter 1998). These monuments also attain a long-term link to feasting, as they are constructed at feasting plazas similar to the *rante'* in Tana Toraja



Fig. 11 – *Tau-tau* in Tampang Allo (southeastern Tana Toraja) (Photo: G. Robin).

(Adams & Kusumawati 2011). Archaeological data and ethnohistorical accounts indicate that these traditions most likely began during the second millennium AD (Bontatz *et al.* 2006; Steimer-Herbet 2018). The still extant megalithic traditions in West Sumba are associated with feasting locales representing centuries of tomb building (Adams 2007). Similar long-term histories probably apply to *rante'* in Tana Toraja. In this sense, *rante'* are good indicators of the prestige biographies of entire communities across Tana Toraja. Some famous *rante'* sites (e.g., Bori Kalimbuang) display dozens of very large menhirs representing generations of funerary practices and are the focus of particular renown, as well as tourist places.

Given their large size and very public orientation in the *rante'*, *simbuang batu* are the most outstanding of the Torajan stone monuments and suitably so, given that funerals are the most extravagant of the Torajan feasting events. The funerals and other periodic ritual occasions bind individuals to the larger kindred groups with which they claim membership and enhance the prestige of these groups and the respective member households. Long after the perishable house structures and rice barns have deteriorated, only the stone monuments commemorating large feasts and the rock-cut tombs will remain as visual reminders of this social order.

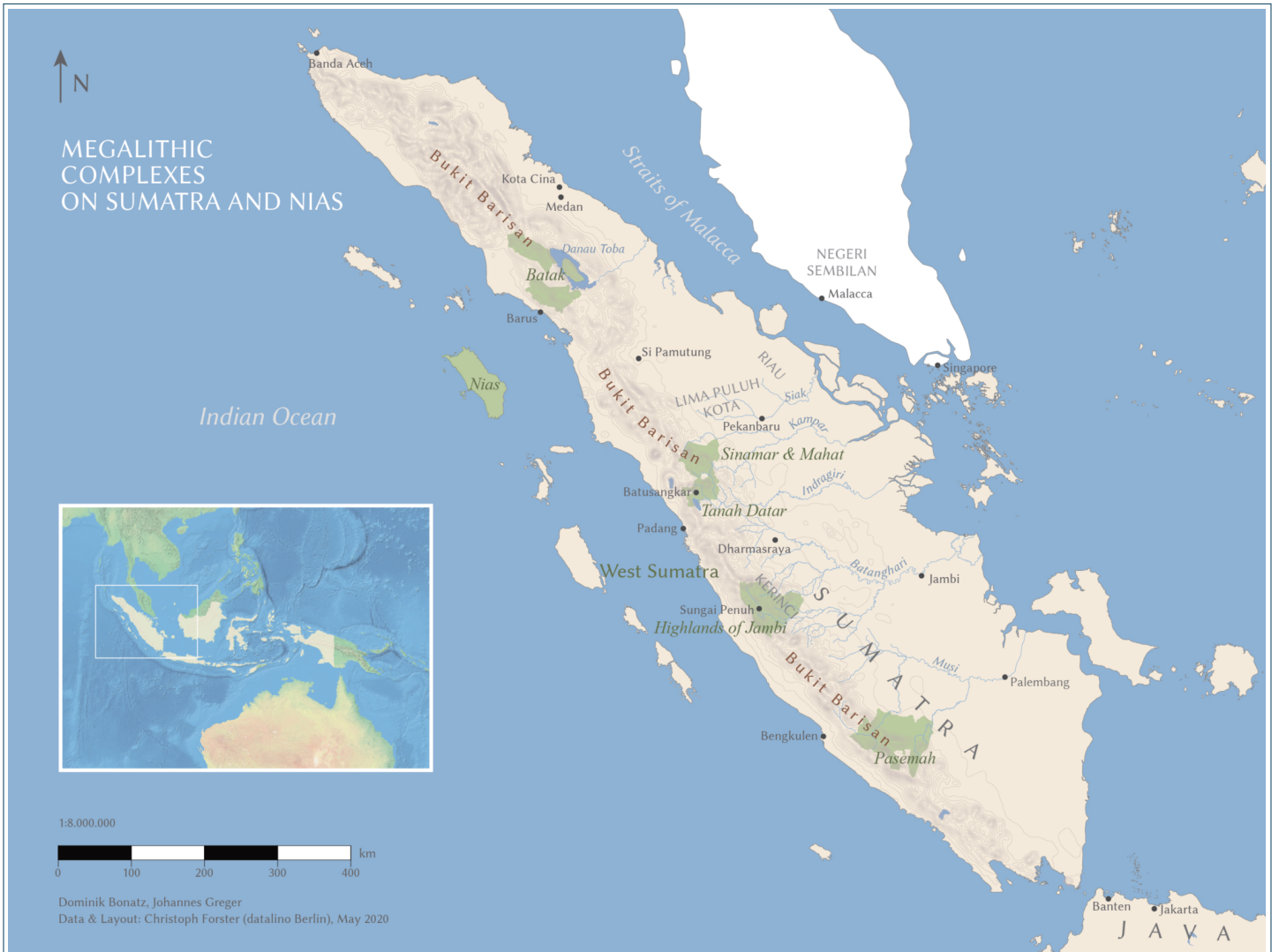


Fig. 1 – Map showing the location of megalithic complexes on Sumatra and Nias.