Stones of power, Statuary and Megalithism in Nias

VIARO, Mario Alain, ZIEGLER, Arlette


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MESSAGES IN STONE
Statues and Sculptures from Tribal Indonesia in the Collections of the Barbier-Mueller Museum
Messages in Stone
Statues and Sculptures from Tribal Indonesia
in the Collections of the Barbier-Mueller Museum

Edited by
Jean Paul Barbier

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Pierre-Alain Ferrazzini

SKIRA
Cover:
Toba Batak ancestral stone couple statue. The man is shown riding, the woman seated by his side.
Seventeenth-eighteenth century. Village of Huta Sitonggi Tonggi, near Dolok Sanggul (see fig. 171).
Photo Jean Paul Barbier 1996.

Frontispiece:
Old warrior at Hili Anaetaniha, Nias.
Photo Jean-Louis Sosna 1990.

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Fig. 29. The villages on Nias are nestled atop or along a ridge of hills and can be spotted from a distance by the coconut trees surrounding them. The fields and paddies are located below, near the river (Orahili, South Nias). Photo Alain Viaro 1986.

From an Island on the Margins...

Nias is and always has been an island located on the very edges of the empires that have shaped the history of the Indonesian archipelago. In this vast ensemble of island societies, from the past to the present, Nias has never cut a particularly high cultural, political, or economic profile. In fact, the island has been largely absent from the archipelago's mainstream early history, as well as from that of the Indian Ocean. Similarly, in colonial times, Nias was never a major focus of Dutch interest, having no spices and being of little strategic importance. In consequence Nias was relatively ignored by outsiders until the beginning of this century, located as it was far from the main social currents and scholarly concerns.

For all practical purposes Nias played no part in the history of the great kingdoms that once ruled the archipelago. From the seventh to the eleventh century, the kingdom of Srivijaya spread from the south of Sumatra and present-day Malaysia to the west; passing through Java, it came to influence the Sunda Islands and the Moluccas to the east as well. From the thirteenth to the fourteenth century, the Majapahit empire controlled Java, Celebes (now called Sulawesi), and the south of Borneo (Kalimantan). However, in both cases, Nias lay beyond these empires' territories, and nothing suggests that it depended on them.

Nevertheless, the island did undoubtedly take some part in the exchange networks that came to dominate Southeast Asia in general between the eighth and the seventeenth centuries. Nias was known to Arab merchants by the ninth century, for instance. They were remarked on its wealth of coconut trees, as well as the inhabitants' aggressiveness, as well as the Niha tendency to exchange their fellow slaves for gold or copper. The island appears on Chinese maps by the twelfth century, and according to writers, it was also known to Indian merchants from Gujarat.

In contrast to this Nias did not start to appear on European maps of the Indian Ocean until the seventeenth century (fig. 31) and then only on a quite minor scale. There are many reasons for this. First of all, Nias was situated away from the major maritime routes be they the ones going along the coasts or the linking Sri Lanka and Aceh at the mouth of Malacca, used once navigators had discovered the reversing monsoons. Secondly, there were certain technical reasons for European cartography and commerce's relative lack of interest in Nias: currents and winds made it difficult to go near the island and safe shelter for ships was scarce. Finally and above all, the island had no natural wealth to lure merchants, neither gold nor spices, the most coveted goods between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Nothing was thought to justify the risk of dropping anchor at Nias except gaining slaves, which were the object of an important, intense trade, complete with its own social imagery: Nias women were considered the most beautiful in the archipelago, and the men, the most industrious. The Malays of the western coast...
Anthropomorphous statues of Nias (North and West)

A. Area of river Idanoy
1. Faighu
2. Bawodesolo
3. Ono Sitori
4. Onowaembo, Lalai Satua

B. Area of river Moro'o
5. Tuenberua
6. Lolozirugi
7. Lolo golui
8. Lolomoyo
9. Hiligohe
10. Iraonogambo

C. Area of river Lahomi
11. Onolimbu Lahomi
12. Onowaembo
13. Lasara

D. Area of Soliga
(rivers Moy, Idanom and Oyo)
14. Bitaha
15. Olayama
16. Sifaoasi
17. Tuenberua
18. Koidrafu
19. Togizita
20. Hilinaghe

Gunu Siroli (Helesalulu)
Hilina (Orhili)
Hilisimaennoi
Hilinawalo
Hilinawaio Marimo
Hilinaa's
Hili Ziono
Sumatra and even more so the Achehnese of northern Sumatra pursued this trade until the end of the nineteenth century.

Whereas the first trading posts in Indonesian islands rich in spices were founded as early as the sixteenth century, only in 1669 did the Dutch and their East India Company, the VOC, establish initial contacts with Nias. The agreement put into place with some of the local chiefs of South and Central Nias did not foresee any actual trading post but rather provided for an exclusivity of commerce for the VOC, in exchange for protection for the local aristocrats from slave raiders from Sumatra. Even more important, these Niha chiefs obtained Dutch protection against aggression from other local chiefs, who, they complained, often came headhunting and stealing slaves. This first document of agreement already implied in miniature the political stakes that went on to mark the island's entire history, pitting chief against chief in contests for status. As we shall see further on, this situation is indicated particularly in Nias's profuse production of stone statuary.

...To Colonization

The first relatively complete Western description of Nias, dated 1822, was made on the demand of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, founder of Singapore, who was at that time governor of Bengkulu in Sumatra. The Niha are presented as a gentle and pacific people, brought into slavery by their neighbors.

At the request of the Dutch authorities, the German Baron von Rosenberg organized the first exploratory mission in 1855. Only from then on do we get numerous direct reports from soldiers, missionaries, and Dutch officials, as well as published secondhand reports. Literature therefore becomes plentiful, but it is of varying quality. Among the numerous publications, E.E.W. Gs. Schröder's work on the culture of the island is still the most valuable today for its wealth of detailed information.

Parallel with the establishment of military and colonial control, the first mission was founded in 1865. The Christian faith spread rapidly over the whole island after 1911. Aiming to eradicate idolatry, the church in its zeal also unfortunately destroyed much of the island's artistic heritage. In spite of the Muslim environment of much of Indonesia as a whole, Nias is still mainly Christian today.

Only in this century has Nias truly been colonized in thoroughgoing ways: that is, coconut and rubber plantations have been developed, roads built, and maritime links established. The first tourists followed the scholars by the thirties. The Great Depression touched Nias because of its plantations; the Second World War arrived with the Japanese occupation of the Indies. Finally, in 1945, Nias was integrated into the new Indonesian state. The island was then more or less forgotten by outsiders for several decades, but in the seventies another wave of ethnologists and other researchers started to take an interest in the island's culture. Nevertheless, their specialized publications were largely known only to Indonesian scholar and to lovers of tribal art. A tourism trade of trekkers and surfers from Australia has also grown by word of mouth over the last twenty years, although Nias has only lately come to figure in travel catalogues as a tourist destination, and is still considered a very "adventurous" one.

Through the influences, economic preoccupations, and contributions of foreign religions and cultures, the traditional culture of Nias has of course weakened and changed. Christianity has been the most important cause of this transformation; another decisive factor has surely been the island's integration into the Indonesian state. This not only reinforced social changes started in the colonial period, but also introduced a new notion not to be neglected: Indonesian identity. This new idea superimposes itself on the local identities, Niha on the one hand, and clan affiliation on the other.

If we are relatively well documented in discussing the above elements, history from a local point of view is much more difficult to define, for several reasons. No research on prehistory has yet been undertaken on Nias, and there is thus no certitude as to the origin and time of the island's peopling. Also, we are dealing with a people of oral tradition, who...
have no other witnesses to their past than their still observable material culture and their still transmitted oral literature, along with observations remembered and transmitted in the recent past.

Outside observers often mentioned the island for its gold, which was present in abundance.13 Writers also described the savageness of Nias's cannibalism14 and headhunting inhabitants. Also noted was the size of the island's cities, and what is usually referred to as Nias's megalithism and more precisely, its impressive tall stone monuments, of several meters in height.

Despite all this, the island has never acquired the exotic status which would bring it wide recognition in the minds of the general public and make it figure among the highlights of our imaginary geography. Headhunters? The "wild Papuans" come to mind. Large stone statues? Do not think of them anywhere else than on Easter Island!

**An Island of Stones and Feasts**

The culture of Nias nevertheless makes visitors marvel. Its architecture, made of wood and leaves, is probably one of the most interesting in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, it has produced an incredible number of carved stones, among the most impressive ever known, and of particular interest to us here.

But before describing these sculptures and in order to understand their social role, we must explain the main aspects of Niha society and the competitive feast practices which produced them.

The island is usually divided into three cultural regions of unequal geographical importance: the North (6/9ths of the surface), the Center (2/9ths), and the South (1/9th) (fig. 31). They vary as to their political organization, architecture, the layout of villages, their rules for marriage alliance, the types of statues carved, and even the languages spoken. A precise delimitation of these three zones may be based on the construction typology of the houses. In the north they are oval (fig. 32), whereas in the south they are rectangular, semi-detached in rows, with small façades looking onto the street (fig. 34). In Central Nias they are also rectangular (fig. 33), but present a long side as a front façade; their structure is similar to the houses of the north.15 This division also concerns the other social and aesthetic factors mentioned, but it is obvious that despite variation they all have a common substratum and belong to the Austronesian sphere. When approaching this society, a first constant emerges: the Niha were warriors (fig. 35). Of course agricultural activities have always existed too, practiced either by free men or slaves, but in the traditional moral order warlike qualities were clearly pre...
Fig. 35. Impressive warriors from the south posing for the Dutch photographer Nieuwenhuis at the beginning of the century. The metal or crocodile skin waistcoat served as armor. In addition, warriors wore a metal "helmet" and a bark loincloth from which hung a sword adorned with pig's teeth and boasting a hilt shaped as a protective lassa head. Their arms included a spear and a shield whose shape varied according to the region. Archives Barbier-Mueller.

Fig. 36. A superb warrior poses in 1890 for the Italian entomologist Modigliani. Archives Barbier-Mueller.

Fig. 37. In 1974 the Niha kept their traditional swords, shields and kalabubu, and danced with them for tourist performances. Photo Jean Paul Barbier 1974.

Fig. 38. Once again in 1974 one could still find authentic iron helmets and armor mixed among commercial wooden carvings. By 1996 the old shields and swords had all been sold. Photo Jean Paul Barbier 1974.
dominant: war before tilling the soil; manufacturing arms (spears, swords, shields, armor) before manufacturing tools; defense systems before cultivation systems. Social and political structures, as well as the megalithism attached to them, should always be set into this bellicose context.

Throughout the whole island the clan (made), named according to its eponymous ancestor, is the largest reference unit. The most prestigious clans are those that claim to be direct descendants of the mythical original ancestors. The other clans are said to have issued from them by divisions and subdivisions, and their prestige is proportional to their historical depth. The importance of membership in a descent line is underlined by the fact that every Niha certainly knows to which clan he belongs and is quite aware of his personal genealogy in regard to this clan. Men always add the name of their clan to their own when they have contacts beyond the village. Clanship was also pertinent to territorial organization: in their origin time, each village descended from a single clan. Clan cohesion was thus expressed and reinforced by spatial cohesion. Nowadays most villages have representatives of several clans, although one typically has supremacy.

Below the level of clans comes the extended family (sagambat sebua) which joins a number of nuclear families (sagambato). Formerly the rule was for all the generations of an economic unit to live in the same house, under the authority of the senior father, whom everyone had to obey. Filiation is patrilineal and residence patrilocal, up to the present time.

Marriages are exogamous to the clan, although this is only a strict rule in North and Central Nias. In the south, the preference for a marriage between matrilateral cross-cousins (a man marrying the daughter of his mother's brother) is clearly attested, but is less frequent nowadays. This is so for two reasons: first, these weddings are forbidden by the Catholic church, and, second, arranged if not imposed marriages are no longer easily accepted by the young people. When a marriage is between members of two different social class categories, a hypergamic rule prevails: a "noble" man can marry a commoner woman, but the reverse is prohibited.

Clans and families are crosscut by categories of traditional social class, by identity as nobles (at least, they perceive themselves as having a superior rank), or as commoners (sato or ono mbanua, literally, the children of the village), or, up to this century, as slaves. These social categories are organized differently in the north, the center, and the south and are closely linked to the political structure and feast cycles that punctuate the life of every Niha. It is during such rituals that the stone
The villages are strongly structured by the prominent presence of an assembly square and a village meeting house, as well as by a chief's house, the omo sebua. These incredibly complex masterpieces of carpentry can reach up to twenty one meters at their rooftops, the height of a seven-story building (fig. 39)!

North and Central Nias have a different social and territorial organization, based on the clan as opposed to sharp social class distinctions as their main identity reference.

In the north, clan allegiance used to be marked in concordance to a physical and political territory, the ori. The ori, literally the circle (of villages), was formed of the villages belonging to a same clan. The ori was ruled by a tubenori, the elder of the clan, but each village had a chief governing alone, without any assembly. However, within the ori, these chiefs did not all have the same status. They were organized according to a hierarchy based on the age of their villages and the ranks obtained during feasts. Each of them therefore enjoyed the prerogatives of his status, although still subordinated to the ori. The latter was governed by the assembly of all the village chiefs concerned, under the tubenori.

The major characteristic of this system is that social mobility is closely linked to geographical mobility. If, in a village, a man wanted to accede to the highest levels, he could only do so by creating a new village of which he then became chief, the last step being to start a new ori and become the chief thereof. Beyond this system's social dynamic of constant village fission, it obviously encouraged the founding of new ori; it also fostered the formation of villages of a size compatible with good social cohesion. The creation of an ori could take either one or several generations, and the size of the territories involved fluctuated during the process. This also explains the relatively small number of stone monuments in the northern villages. There was no competition between "noblemen" inside the village, as gaining status very soon implied the need to found a new settlement, in which a stone was then erected to commemorate the importance of the new chief. The fluidity of the system did not encourage establishing what in the south expressed village identity and internal hierarchies. In the north there are no assembly squares, village meeting houses, or monumental groups of megaliths. However, there are giantic chiefs' houses with oval roofs, so ingeniously and strongly built that 150 men could dance in them without the slightest vibration occurring.

These villages present quite a different appearance from those in the south. Usually consisting of just a few rudimentary dwellings set around a chief's house, according to the earliest writers, even today their layout has little formal structure. Oval houses either follow each other along a path, or encircle an overgrown, only roughly defined open space. Most villages are recent, set out along the roads built by the Dutch. More often than not their borders are not marked.

After the thirties the ori no longer existed in their original form. The Dutch administration considered the ori a paradigm for the whole island, and therefore created some where there did not seem to be any beforehand—in the south and center—remodeling the existing settlements in the north by creating ori that no longer corresponded to the territorialization of a clan but rather to an administrative division of the land into districts. After independence, this type also disappeared, replaced by the division of Indonesian national territory into kecamatan, the equivalent of county districts.

Finally, Central Nias privileged a social and political organization based on clan and lineage logic. The process of political integration for villages seems to have varied according to the different micro-regions. In the Gomo area, the villages were independent from each other and small (mostly ten to twelve households); they were usually inhabited by the members of only one clan. The village was traditionally under the authority of a chief, who was either the founder of the village or his descendant. He had the title of balugu, which he obtained after having attained the highest level of prescribed feasts. In contrast to what we have seen in the south, there was no class of "noblemen" radically differentiated from the people. Anybody could reach the highest ranks, providing he was capable of doing so; in other words, providing he sponsored a sufficient number of feasts and therefore monuments. This probably explains the incredibly
profusion of carved stones in the villages of Central Nias.

As in the north, social mobility was linked to mobility in space: if one did not belong to the ruling lineage, it was essential to found a new village and thereby a new lineage to become village chief. Paradoxically the creation of this new community did not involve the maintenance of any particular ties with its village of origin. To the contrary, conflicts of interest among villages were so frequent that all of them lived in a permanent state of strife. Nowadays conflicts no longer take on the same violence, but strong tensions remain, as do most of the mechanisms legitimizing the authority of the village chiefs. There are still balugu in Central Nias, and when a young chief is appointed kepala desa (village head, in the Indonesian administration), he would have no legitimacy if he did not sponsor the feasts that his status demands, and possibly even erect the required stones.

It is rather difficult to establish the reasons leading to this specific type of social organization, combining as it does aspects of north and south and culminating in an original system. Topographical and environmental constraints should be taken into account first. In Central Nias, natural barriers are so numerous and so strong that they prevent the development of large villages, and even more so of ëri. At such a scale, only the authority of a lineage head can come into consideration. The size of the village itself—demographically speaking—does not enable competition between rival notables, as it does in the south.

Due to this isolation, each valley tends to become a cultural micro-zone, although the physical organization and layout of the villages have a certain similarity. The oldest settlements are built at the top of hills for obvious defensive reasons. Their access from the river confirms this concern: the “stairs” are made of such high stone blocks that they literally have to be climbed over; the entrance to the village itself is obstructed by similar blocks. The houses are built on stone terraces around a rectangular square. The chief’s house is on one of the short sides, the other sometimes being the ocoli, the terrace on which justice was rendered.

We must not forget that this is the area where headhunting and slave raids were most actively practiced, both through warlike expeditions from the south and in strife with the other villages of the central region. These not so distant times are still remembered today.24 Mistrust towards foreigners is more acute here than anywhere else on the island.

Headhunting is particularly well described
Feast Cycle Practices

As we have seen, competitive feasting is one of the main elements of Niha social dynamics and aesthetics. Feasts always impressed visitors at the beginning of the century, due to the mass slaughter of pigs. Today the history of Niha feasting still astounds outsiders, because of the megaliths produced.

Generally only one type of celebration is mentioned: the “feasts of merit.” Writers having classified in this category all rituals implying the erection of a megalith and (in their view) an ostentatious slaughter of pigs. But in Nias no type of festivity, ranging from honoring one guest to a gathering of hundreds of people, could take place without pigs. In other words, no pigs, no feasts!

In reality, however, the Niha have quite an elaborate system of feasts. These rituals’ main function is to reinforce cohesion and encourage social reproduction at different levels and by different means. There are two main levels of feasts.

The first consists of the classical ceremonies relating to an individual’s life cycle (birth, wedding, funeral), and those rituals intended to concretely express a man’s acquisition of the rank in the community he could or must occupy according to customary law. The highest stages of these feasts were also means of access to power. These ceremonies comply with the logic of giving and taking, an exchange process prevailing in Nias during an individual’s entire life and even beyond, with a son inheriting the exchange obligations of his father. In other words, everyone is socially compelled to give, and therefore to receive, and then to give back the equivalent of what he has received. The prestige of a man or a family is not measured by wealth accumulated, but by the capacity to produce it or have it produced for later redistribution, thereby ensuring the functioning and reproduction of the community through the exchange obligations forming its dynamic structure.

The second level of feasts refer to the clan; they are mainly the fondraksi (on the whole island) and, in the south, the bōr o n’adu. The first is very rare nowadays, and only seems to
During feasts, the shares of pork for the meal are carefully laid on banana leaves before being given to each guest. The choice of the piece and the quantity offered are scrupulously evaluated according to rank, marriage and family relationship, as well as the relationship established at previous pig feasts. A breach of these rules could cause a serious conflict.

Fig. 44. During feasts, the shares of pork for the meal are carefully laid on banana leaves before being given to each guest. The choice of the piece and the quantity offered are scrupulously evaluated according to rank, marriage and family relationship, as well as the relationship established at previous pig feasts. A breach of these rules could cause a serious conflict. Photo Alain Viamo 1982.

take place when an old site is reoccupied; as for the second it completely disappeared during the first quarter of this century.

The fondrako feast confirms or confirmed the foundation of a village or possibly of an iiri or clan. It could merge with the feast establishing a man as a new chief of a clan or a village. Stone sculptures seem seldom to have been made to celebrate a fondrako: the few monuments explicitly attached to such feasts are in the north, and are rough megaliths without interest from an artistic point of view.

In the south, the boro n’adu feast cyclically assembled descendants of a group of clans descending from the common ancestor Sadawa Molo. It can be considered a feast of the re-creation of the world. At this occasion, only wooden tiger effigies were made.

Among the feasts that concern the individual in his family and community, wedding celebrations are without doubt the most often mentioned. In Nias, as in many other cultures, the concept of the individual per se is not given separate high social value, and a man or woman only “make sense” through their descendants, once continuity with the ancestors has been ensured. Even today marriages still involve major ritual expenses and require high bridewealth payments. To use our Western terminology, the latter represent the maximum amount of economic effort the bride receiving group is prepared to concede to the wife-givers. Megaliths are never erected for a wedding.

But, it is not our intention to explain all the feasts in detail here. We shall only mention the main characteristics of those involving stone monuments erected for the acquisition of social rank, where one attains his “proper social station.” These are the “feasts of merit.

These feasts are always the occasion for presenting gifts of two kinds: cooked pig meat eaten during the feast, and urakha, the piece of raw pig each guest receives to take home. Urakha imperatively must be given back in raw form by an equivalent piece of pig, in the course of another feast as opposed to during some other gift exchange mechanism. The distribution of pig meat is the central act of the feast (fig. 44). One need only watch how carefully the livestock is evaluated, and see the smiles at the first bloodshed announcing the meal, to know that the main logic of these feasts is to participate in an exchange (even though it may extend over a long period of time). The more feasts an individual has sponsored, and the more numerous the guests, the more pieces of pig shall be returned. This is true that for a Niha it was until recently quite
inconceivable to kill a pig for personal use, without going on to give a pig feast.

The essential components of these feasts could be summed up in the following way: holding feasts allows a person to enter into one (or several) pig exchange circuits and establish or increase his social status, which also requires the manufacturing of gold ornaments, and in some cases participating in power struggles.

The customary law of each area, but also of each clan or village, defines the number and order of the feasts to be held. Numbers of pigs and stone monuments are defined by adat in the same way, but it would be wrong to say that such rules are truly constraining. According to all testimonies gathered, there has always been great latitude: in reality as many pigs are slaughtered as possible in regard to individual and family strategies, within the logic of exchange described earlier. This is also the case for the stones: the personal taste of the recipient and the talent of the carver can express themselves freely. In Central Nias, for instance, there is no prescription that an osa osa must be round or rectangular: it is just a question of choice and local custom.

South Nias’s cycle of feasts calls for up to eleven feasts for the si’ulu, although only the first ranks of such ceremonies are accessible to commoners. In the course of the first feast, a stone pillar (batu faulu or batu nitaru) is erected. A stone bench (daro daro) is built for the last feast, which for commoners merges with the funeral. For si’ulu, however, this bench is erected during the penultimate feast, as the last ritual—the funeral—does not require any stone. At all the celebrations, there is pig meat eaten and pig meat given, whereas only two of these rituals are commemorated by a megalith. Batu faulu are only sculpted for men, while daro daro benches are also carved for women. This being said, in southern villages, competition for power between the si’ulu seems to have favored a proliferation of the prescribed stones. The largest number of megaliths are in villages where there were several lineages of noblemen.

In the north festive cycles were directly related to the founding of an ori. They therefore disappeared with colonization and Christianization, implanted earlier and more deeply in this region than anywhere else on the island.

Pig feasts are often forgotten, and there no longer seem to be any in this part of the island. Feasts were attached to the notion of bosi, or rank. Each clan had a certain number of ranks (nine, ten, or twelve) determined at the time of its foundation, the upper ones corresponding to noblemen. However, there was a possibility of passing from one grade to
### Stones related to the village community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>Center</th>
<th>South</th>
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<tr>
<td>foundation stone</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>batu fondrakö</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>symbolic village center (navel)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>fusö newali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assembly terrace</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>gorahua newali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terrace for rendering justice</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>harefa or osali</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protective effigies (male and female)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>nio bawa lawöl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shield at village entrances</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>niorane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carved flagstone or stringer</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>various names</td>
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### Stones related to a person’s cycle of feasts

<table>
<thead>
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<th>North</th>
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<td>male rough raised stone</td>
<td>gowe</td>
<td>behu</td>
<td>batu nitaruo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male rough horizontal stone</td>
<td>daro daro</td>
<td>daro daro</td>
<td>daro daro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut/carved commemorative male pillar:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commoner</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>batu nitaruo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nobleman</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>behu</td>
<td>batu nitaruo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chief</td>
<td>gowe</td>
<td>behu</td>
<td>batu nitaruo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pillar replacing the chief</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>naha gama-ga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pillar with zoomorphic osa osa on top</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>behu</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male or female seat rectangular or round</td>
<td>daro daro</td>
<td>osa osa</td>
<td>daro daro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>round female table</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>niogaji</td>
<td>daro daro nich.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>throne</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>kursi batu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anthropomorphic chief’s figure</td>
<td>gowe</td>
<td>?*</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>figure with raised arms holding an osa osa</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>behu or lawölö börö</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anthropomorphic village protector</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>lawölö</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Funerary monuments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funerary monuments</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>Center</th>
<th>South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pyramidal tomb</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>tsiuho</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skull urn</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>tsiuho (?)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Anthropomorphic chief’s statues are not noted in the Center. However there is a doubt about them and we shall come back to it later.
another: a commoner, in fact, could accede to the highest level of power.

To maintain or increase his bōsī, every man had to give feasts. This implied the inevitable pigs both given and eaten, and some feasts also demanded the acquisition of gold jewelry. All of this gave honor to ancestors and allies. Apparently, for people who were only confirming an inferior grade, a few stones would suffice; these would be simple, uncarved megaliths. But, for whoever wished to accede to a higher rank or to ratify his standing in the latter, anthropomorphic figures, gowe, would be carved. These were among the most impressive sculptures of the island. They enabled their owner to carry the title of balugu.\(^{38}\)

The feasts that accompanied the accession to power took place at every stage of a village or an ōri foundation. Some of them seem to have possibly merged with the feasts given for attaining the title of balugu.\(^{39}\)

In Central Nias, the cycle could have up to ten feasts. All the men of the village could give not just one owasa: they could sponsor all the feasts required to reach the highest level. The first feast is usually given in a wife's honor, then in the husband's, then in honor of the couple and the husband's parents. Stones were and are still sometimes erected for each of these feasts. Formerly their number could be up to six for one feast. Of course pig meat is given and eaten. In the past, gold ornaments were also necessary, but in lesser quantity than in North or South Nias, as they did not include the beautiful headdresses which adorned chiefs of highest rank. Such a profusion of stones for feasts, and for so many people, is only the case in Central Nias.

As we have seen, these “feasts of merit” are closely linked to what is called the island’s megalithism. All stone monuments and statues are erected during feasts, but not all feasts necessarily produce megaliths. Although they are the most spectacular expression thereof, and the one remaining over the years, we must remember that if stones speak of feasts, they do not speak of all feasts. One could go on to say that the Niha’s identity, the individual’s insertion of himself into social and physical space in the village, and power relations within and among villages, all expressed themselves (and to some extent still do) through these works that were fashioned of stone and Niha talent.

**The Stone Monuments of Nias**

It would be well to indicate the various major types of stones found in Nias, albeit without trying to enumerate each and every name they have ever been given. Each stone, in fact, may have several names used according to context and to a logic of language frequently invoked on the island. A statue, for instance, may be called by the honorary name given to its owner when it was erected, by the title the latter received, by its material or location, by one of its formal characteristics (in terms of how it was carved with the knife), or in refer-
Fig. 50. Detail of a gowe at Bitaha (North Nias). Photo Jean-Louis Soina 1990.

Fig. 51. This statue, from the Barbier-Mueller collection, comes from the northwestern part of the island and represents a chief, gowe salawa. Inv. 3254. Height: 90 cm.

Fig. 52. The Bitaha group (North Nias) has about 20 monuments standing on the osalé, a terrace of large flat stones. The small monuments (fao gana’a) were erected during feasts to celebrate the manufacturing of gold ornaments. The statues, behu or sirao-gowasa, honored the glory of the clan’s chief. Photo Alain Viaro 1980.

Each object therefore has several categories of names, which of course hardly simplifies identification. Furthermore, local usage engenders variations in terminology. We shall therefore use the most general and frequently applied descriptive appellations.

A chart (fig. 47) should familiarize the reader with the different types of monuments as well as their usual names according to their location. For each region, only the stones attested to by early writers which we have seen ourselves are mentioned. At issue here are only monuments and representative carved elements, not any features of stone village architecture or equipment. In the villages of South Nias, for instance, in addition to sculpture one can also still observe jumping pyramids, which used to serve for the training of young warriors, and monumental staircases, along with baths built near the river. The fortified walls surrounding the villages have, however, completely disappeared.

Most monuments are just rough stone slabs, found throughout the whole island. There is, however, a large typological and formal variety of cut and/or carved stones which can be classified in three categories, more or less corresponding to the three main regions.

Only two types of stones are erected in the north: daro daro, simple, grossly cut benches without any aesthetic qualities, and gowe. If the latter are often just raised stone slabs, they may also be impressive anthropomorphic statues several meters high. Between these extremes, there is a vast array of different sculptures: stone shafts with vigorous male attributes and headhunters’ necklaces, pillars with barely perceptible low-relief faces, massive stelae ending with a human head adorned with all of a prestigious chief’s jewelry—his headdress, earring, and necklace—or noble-looking effigies squatting on their heels, holding the welcoming betel pot in their joined hands. The largest gowe can reach a height of 2.8 m, although most of them measure less than a meter.

Many villages have one or even two gowe. Even more impressive are the arrays of gowe standing on a mound on ancient sites of the Soliga area, now hidden in the forest (figs. 48 and 52). All these statues stem from the same clan and seem to have been carved by the same artist.

The Barbier-Mueller Museum has three stone sculptures from the north, two gowe...
Figs. 53 and 54. Impressive gowe (270 cm) of the Gulo clan in Mandrehe (Hiligoe, North Nias), photographed in 1914 and 1980. Photos Schroeder 1917, fig. 113, and Alain Viaro.

Fig. 55. Dating back four generations this gowe of the Gulo clan stands in Ironogambo (North Nias). Height: 220 cm. Photo Alain Viaro 1980.

Fig. 56. The large gowe (380 cm) of Mandrehe (North Nias), probably in 1887. Three wooden adu can be seen under the house. Photo Schnitzer 1939-1942, fig. 24.
Fig. 57. Gowe (260 cm) in Ko’indrafi, near Soliga (North). Photo Alain Viaro 1979.

Gowe salawa and one figure of a human head.

One of the gowe (fig. 51) has been assigned to the Gomo area, but the quality of the stone, the general outlines, and the detail of the headdress make it more likely to originate from the Idano1 Lahomi area. The figure is a gowe salawa (a stone erected in honor of a chief) typical of this area. It represents a squatting man, with arms on his chest, a frequent position in that part of the island. This attitude draws attention to the chest, and although the breasts are not visible this mode of representation means that the chief is “like a mother for his people,” a quality combined with the virility expressed by the penis. The gowe bears the regalia of a high ranking chief: gold necklace, an earring worn on the right ear as prescribed by tradition, shell bracelet and also headgear, showing that the ornaments and the different feasts required by his status have been acquired and organized.

Fig. 58. Gowe salawa from the Barbier-Mueller collection (fig. 61) photographed in situ (site unknown) around 1970. North Nias. Photo Catherine Becker 1978.

The other gowe salawa (fig. 62) is sitting, his phallus erected between his knees. His right arm is on his chest, whereas the left is on his stomach. The gowe salawa of course wears chief’s ornaments, but slightly different ones: the headdress is higher and encircled at its base by a headband with studs, the armlet is on the upper arm and the necklace represents a ring which in reality would be attached by a cord on the nape of the neck. Although the status is relatively old and weathered, this detail, carefully carved by the artist, can still be seen. Gowe salawa of a similar quality of sculpture and stone can still be found at Ambuga, southwest of Gunung Sitoli.

The head fragment (fig. 59) is more enigmatic. The face protrudes from a stone slab which may have been a very narrow statue. The kalabubu (headhunter’s necklace) under the straight chin shows that the sculpture is male. The finely carved mouth and the diamond-shaped eyes are frequently encountered in the north, but the angle of the eyes and the eyebrows forming a Y with the nose are more unusual. Unfortunately the top of the head is missing, depriving us of a precious source of identification. The type of stone, however (a very fine yellow sandstone only found in the area of the Moro’o and Lahomi valleys in the northwest part of the island) makes us think that it could come from that area. We have seen a statue of similar style and identical qualities of stone as this fragment at Onowaimbe Satau, on the Lahomi River (fig. 61). It carries a knife in a sheath on its chest, and has large almond-shaped eyes and eyebrows attached to the nose, which is unfortunately broken. But in spite of this, indications are insufficient to determine the precise origin of the piece, and it retains some of its mystery behind its closed eyes.

In Central Nias stone expressions are more varied. Besides the vertical or horizontal slabs previously mentioned, terraces of either dry or drafted stone can be seen. Now abandoned, they used to serve as places for rendering justice and as squares of honor and power. Their names vary according to valleys, bahu or osa, but their function seems identical in the whole of Central Nias.

Without a doubt the most striking element is the bahu, a vertical stone symbolizing the importance of a village founder or chief. The village of Lahusa Id. Tae is a perfect example of the imagination and artistic sensibility of the Central Nias. It has a bahu 2.8 m high, a rectangular pillar measuring about 60 cm on each side. The top supports an osa osa in the shape of a stag, as can be seen on an old photograph (fig. 63). Most bahu had such seats so that the recipient of the feast could sit on top and thereby symbolically reproduce the feat of the Niha pantheon mentioned previously. I seems that these osa osa were an intrinsic part of the bahu, and not added at later ceremonies. They were fixed by mortise-and-tenon joint or built in, so as to avoid toppling over. Some have kept their osa osa at their summits; these are always animal figures, usually stags or birds (figs. 63 to 65 and 69). In other cases the osa osa have been replaced (fig. 66).

Another impressive monolith (fig. 60) of equal size has steps hewn from the block on its sides, enabling the honored recipient to climb onto it and preside over the ceremonies marking his preeminence. This bahu has a ring probably for hanging gold ornaments on during feasts. Other bahu have large masculine features. It is impossible to describe them all as from the most modest to the most imposing there are still 44 bahu in Lahusa. This village is only one among others, all with exceptional sculptures. In Tetegewo, for instance, there is a splendid specimen. It has a hook on which to
Fig. 59. This fragment of a head from the Barbier-Mueller collection apparently comes from the Labó region. Stylistically, the Y-shaped eyebrows, the thin mouth and cut chin recall the traits of fig. 61. No Nias. Inv. 3256. Height: 29 cm.

Fig. 60. The great number, diversity and beauty of its stones rank Lahua Id. Tae (Central Nias) among the most important sites of Gomo culture. One of its bhuhu (height: 290 cm) is surmounted by a small osa with one head. Photo Alain Viaro 1979.

Fig. 61. At Lasara (North Nias), a statue 14 generations old from Durunaja, where the Lahom orhi was founded 25 generations ago after a treaty of alliance was drawn up between the Hia and Dael clans. This detail shows the fine curve of the eyebrows. Photo Alain Viaro 1981.

Fig. 62. Gowe salawa from the Lahomi area, from the Barbier-Mueller collection. The type of stone and style here suggest that it may possibly come from Lasara or Durunaja and could be attributed to the Dael clan, but neither its age nor history are known. No Nias. Inv. 3259. Height: 131 cm.
Fig. 63. The site of Lahwua Id. Tae (Central Nias) at the start of the twentieth century. Photo Vidoc.

Figs. 64, 65 and 66. Behu surmounted by zoomorphic osa osa in Orabili Gomo and Gui Gui Susuwa (Central Nias). Photo Alain Viare 1979 (figs. 64 and 65), and 1982.
exhibit the chief's regalia, clothes, and helmet, during ceremonies, while the side is adorned with a sword, further enhancing its prestige; steps and rosettes contribute to its splendor (fig. 69).

*Osasi* are impressive for their quality of stone carving. They are round or rectangular seats with either a central column or four feet, one or three heads in the front, and one or three tails at the back (figs. 67 and 68). All of them are erected both for men and women. Two features distinguish them from the *daro daro* found in the south and north. The first distinction is social: *osasi* may be carved for all the feasts of the cycle, whereas *daro daro* are reserved in the south to the last ritual (or the penultimate feast, for *síulu*). The second element of difference is formal: *daro daro* do not have the heads or tails that characterize *osasi*.

In our chart we have shown that *osasi* only exist in Central Nias, which is correct for stone monuments. It should, however, be added that North Nias has wooden *osasi* (fig. 71), used as palanquins to carry the highest of the hierarchy during feasts. Their shape reminds one of the stone *osasi* of Central Nias.

In neither Central nor South Nias did people use such wooden seats of honor. During the ceremonies involving a stone, the honored recipient climbed onto it and was carried (always by men from his village) nine times round the central square, before being set down with the stone in front of his or her house. All Niha say that this practice symbolizes the rebirth of a person in his village with a new status; it thereby adds a rites-of-passage dimension to "feasts of merit."

In Central Nias, the name most frequently used for *osasi* refers to their number of necks. The fact that the stone may be round or rectangular is not taken into account. One therefore speaks about an *osasi sisiara mbagi* or an *osasi sitolu mbagi*, meaning a seat with respectively one or three necks. The heads are unquestionably the predominant feature of these seats. They can represent hornbill birds, stags, or *lasara*. The latter are a recurrent theme on the whole island. *Lasara* effigies have a protective role and reinforce the assertion of power. Highly stylized, they adorn the frames of the openings of northern houses; in more realistic form they protrude from chiefs' house façades (fig. 70) or guard the entrance of southern villages. In Central Nias, however, they are only seen on stone sculptures. A *lasara* head has a strong open jaw with heavy lips, a hanging tongue, and boar or tiger fangs; its snout is surmounted by an excrescence similar to the one on a hornbill's beak. The eyes are well marked, often diamond-shaped, and the head has horns, probably stags' antlers, and sometimes ears with or
without earrings. The cheeks have pronounced planes, occasionally adorned by a carved rosette. The neck carries the warrior’s most typical symbol, the *kalabubu*.

The most beautiful sculptures are in a relatively small area of old villages above the Tae, Gomo, Susuwa, and Mbolo rivers. Outside this specific area, called the “Gomo” region, carved stones are rarer, but rough megaliths proportionally are more numerous, with their social and symbolic value being equivalent. Therefore it is in this Gomo area that the profusion and wealth of the stones will strike visitors most profoundly. These sculptures indicate that, contrary to the case in the rest of Central Nias, the Gomo area enjoyed a considerable surplus of goods, making it possible to achieve the numerous feasts required for the erection of stones, and for their carving and transport.

Analyzing this factor, it seems out of the question that such prosperity could have been due to agriculture, as suitable land for cultivation and the technical means for intensive farming were insufficient. Another source of wealth probably enabled this very localized development of the arts: the slave trade. This trade is attested to very early on the island, with slaves being taken and sold to Malay, Acehnese, and European dealers. One of the main boarding ports was Sumbawa at the mouth of the Susuwa River, only a few hours’ walk from Gomo. Through this traffic, the chiefs (and noblemen) obtained the gold essential to manufacture the ornaments which the feasts and their rank demanded, as well as most probably the metal tools necessary for the remarkable workmanship of their stones. Furthermore, one of the island’s only fine sandstone quarries was near the Susuwa River, so all the indispensable components for the emergence of this magnificent art were combined.

Seven *osa osa* of the Barbier-Mueller collection come from this area and form a very representative and possibly unique array of the different stylistic varieties of the category.

The *osa osa si sara mbagi* (fig. 73), round with a central foot, has a most beautiful *lasara* head with diamond-shaped eyes. Both the neck, adorned with the required *kalabubu*, and the tail have foliate motifs; the tail is also enhanced with a lizard on its top. Usually the lizard and the varan (the monitor lizard) symbolize wisdom. For the latter, the association is generated by its forked tongue enabling it to speak both to good and evil people, like a wise man. Comparable in quality to the previous one, the *osa osa si sara mbagi* (fig. 75) differs from it by having a phallus under the round seat (fig. 76), as well as other decorative motifs. These two *osa osa* presumably come
from the southern Gomo area, and in all likelihood from the old site of Tetegewo.

The *osa osa si sara mbagi* (fig. 72) is rectangular and has four feet. Purer in style than the former, it has no decoration except a *kalabubu* around the neck of the *lasara*, and carved circles divided in four on its cheeks. When used on house fronts, the latter motif usually refers to the moon.

The *osa osa si tiolu mbagi* (fig. 74) of the Barbier-Mueller collection are perfect examples of the large *osa osa* found at the confluence of the Tae, Gomo, and Susuwari rivers. Rectangular, they stand on four legs, one having square feet and the other slightly bent knees. Their three lyre-shaped tails and their heads evoking *lasara* are very typical of this area, which produced notably massive monuments. The ears are adorned with double-ridged crescents representing the gold ones worn for feasts. One of the *osa osa*, further, has combs on the backs of the heads. Associated with the ear ornaments right and left, these show that the stone was erected in honor of a woman.

Another typical sculpture of Central Nias, the *niogaji*, is a round table on a column-shaped central foot, in which women dance in the course of the feasts dedicated to them (fig. 77). The largest ones can reach a diameter of 2.4 m. Their top is seldom decorated, the only motif sometimes being a low-relief frieze on the side. The foot, however, can be fluted, wide on top, or even bulging in the middle. It can even end with a capital.

Although the descriptions of feasts we obtained in the field gave men the main roles as beneficiaries, the great number of *niogaji*, compared with other monuments, should be noted. In the village of Lahusa on the Tae River, for instance, there are fifty-six *niogaji* and only six *osa osa*. This amazing proportion indicates that, in spite of having strongly marked masculine values, Niha society does not consider the place of women insignificant.

Skull urns (fig. 80) are a great deal rarer and are far from being found in all villages. Usually they are simple stone caskets, sometimes adorned with rosettes or friezes. Some open on the side and have an animal motif on top. These urns were for the deceased’s skull only, the body never being buried in the village. Tradition required that the head be detached with a bamboo knife, as soon as the weather and predators had removed its flesh. The skull was then rubbed with oil, put onto a plate in the casket, and positioned in front of the deceased’s *behu*. The same implement was used to cut the umbilical cord of newborn babies, uniting birth and death via bam-
Fig. 78. Group of monuments at Labusa Id. Taé (Central Nias) in front of the chief’s house which was built in 1975. Photo Alain Viaro 1986.

Fig. 79. Tomb of the chief Sahonigeho near Bawomataluo (South Nias). Photo Alain Viaro 1979.

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A plant which is not without significance, as we shall see later. In the south funerary traditions are different: the corpse was laid into a wooden coffin adorned by a lasara head and placed under a shelter outside the village. This practice was only for important chiefs; the tomb of the brave chief Sahonigeho of Hilisimetano can still be admired today (fig. 79). Because they are associated with funerary sites, croton bushes were and still are planted. Although tradition never mentions “funerary” stones, Christianization has introduced them. Huge tombs are now to be seen, often in concrete, but always with a lasara head. As to traditions in the north, early sources relate that the deceased was buried under a small stone mound in front of his house. Up to a certain point, this tradition remains with the Christian tombs, which now have cement figures of the deceased. This practice seems to perpetuate a custom recorded on the west coast, which was to build a miniature house with an oval roof, into which bright painted wooden figures of the deceased were put. 53

But let us come back to Central Nias for the last type of stones to be mentioned: anthropomorphic figures. First it should be stated that this part of Nias, 54 and particularly the area south of Gomo and Taé, has been seldom visited and studied. In 1908 the missionary Fries went to the Susuwa area, but he does not say anything about statues and monuments. The same year, Schröder is the first to visit this region, but he only describes anthropomorphic statues very briefly. 55 In 193 Schnitger spends a short time there and gives us good descriptions. 56 Finally, in the eighties Hämmerle, as well as ourselves, pinpoint the locations of important monuments.

Information about the anthropomorphic figures is very scarce, be it from the above mentioned writers or from information collected in the field. Although Schröder attests to their existence, he calls them either behu ni niha (literally, human-shaped behu) which could lean against a behu, such as the one at Orahili Gomo (fig. 83), or behu latelawo (surmounted by a small osa osa and thereby evoking the mythic feat of Sirao’s son) which shows us at Hiliana’s Susuwa (fig. 84). Schnitger publishes a figure of this second type at Ichundrawalo, which we also note at Gui and Orahili Gomo.

Therefore Central Nias should only have two types of statues. The first consists of stones with raised arms holding a latelawo (fig 84 and 85). They are relatively small (about 1.2 m) and very few remain in situ. Their function is no longer remembered, and the do not appear in any of the festive cycles noted, nor are they described by past authors. They may be a variety of behu, but with an osa osa at their summits cut in the same block.
Fig. 80. Skull urn at Koidrafo (Cen. Photo Schröder 1917, fig. 214.

Fig. 81. "Forked poles" or wooden axis of the skull pyramids of Holi (Cen. Photo Schröder 1917, fig. 217.

Fig. 82. Skull pyramid of Holi (Cen. Photo Schröder 1917, fig. 216.)
The hermaphroditism of most of these pieces means nothing definite in a Western sense, for we have seen that the association “breast-penis” refers to a male chief’s qualities in Niha logic. Neither the faces nor the ornaments are of any help either in determining these pieces’ uses or identity, as in contrast to the case with the sculptures of the north, faces and jewelry are only slightly marked. In our present state of knowledge, it seems difficult to give them a precise place among the total range of monuments.

The second type concerns the behu nio niha illustrated by Schröder, of which we do not know of a single specimen still remaining in situ.\(^{57}\)

However, another type of anthropomorphic statue is definitely present: these are massive, with round heads deprived of headdresses, and have particularly ferocious expressions. In the Tropen Museum in Amsterdam a very dark picture\(^{58}\) shows a statue hidden in palm leaves, presumably outside a village, with a priest of the traditional religion sitting next to it. The caption of this document gives neither information about its function nor its precise provenance. The rarity of these statues and the lack of data concerning them arouse questions as to their role and the size of the area where they were erected. Nevertheless, in 1979 we were able to see a statue of this type (fig. 86) in the same region.\(^{59}\) As far as we know, it is the only one to remain on the island. It had been moved into a house, and its inhabitant: were very scared of it, even saying it had served for black magic in the past. Locally it was called “stone lawolô” and not behu. Indeed, it did not have the name of an ancestor, which behu do. Perhaps its appellation gives a clue for according to Rosenberg\(^{60}\) and other late writers\(^{61}\) lawolô are statues protecting the village, one male and one female, disposed near the village entrances to frighten approaching enemies. The root lawô implies “strength” and “protection,” according to Schröder. This meaning recurs in the south where in the village of Bawômatalu, for instance, a protective lasara head still to be seen on the remains of the village wall is called lawolô bawa goli (the protector of the entrance). Other traces of lawolô bawa goli, but in wood, can be observed at Onohondro, also in the south. An effigy of a statue called lawolô could well involve protection, and not mark the celebration of chief’s importance.

One statue from the Barbier-Mueller collection (fig. 87) presents all the features of such a sculpture, both in shape and name, as it is called lawolô.\(^{62}\) It could therefore be one of these rare protective effigies. Except for an ear ring on the right ear, it shows no ornaments whereas all the anthropomorphic statues erected in honor of individuals do. The round head with fixed bulging eyes is far more frightening than it is stately. Its plinth has a hole in the back which may have served to hold a banner or spear. The chest is engraved with a tex
dated 1908, which enables us to say that the figure is previous to this date. Such stones were frequently moved when a new village was founded, and the event was remembered by an added text on the stone. This seems to be the case here, as the text recalls the day the figure was dug up.

The stones from South Nias are very different formally from anything we have seen so far. Most monuments are of essentially two types: *batu fa’ulu* or *batu nitaruo*, vertical stones raised by and for men, and *darō darō*, horizontal stones erected for both men and their wives. The *darō darō nichōlō* were dedicated to the noblest of the latter. They are round stone tables, as are the *niogaji* specific to women in Central Nias. Here too there may well be an underlying reference to the egg.

But southern stone carving does not stop at just these two types of monuments. What totally differentiates the south from the rest of the island are the numerous constructions which could be classified as "village megalithism." It is only in the south that one sees paved streets, access stairs with carved stringers, guard posts with stone seats and shields, flagged terraces in front of the houses, jumping pyramids for training young warriors, baths outside the village, and ancient fortifications of carefully assembled stones. Further-
more it is in the south that assembly squares
were conceived, not only grouping together
the monuments of the ruling lineages, but also
including benches, and at the place of honor,
the chief's stone throne (fig. 92). This type of
layout can be observed on the Batu Islands as
well, which are said to have been colonized rela-
tively recently by southern clans. The Batu
Islands' most famous group of monuments,
now destroyed, was in front of the house of
the chief of Pulotello. It had a carved stele
and a chief's armchair.

There are three other differences between
the monuments of the south and those of the
island's other areas. First of all, South Nias has
no anthropomorphic stone statues. This
absence is most surprising, as no apparent rea-
son explains it. We must immediately rule out
the idea of any Muslim influence forbidding
figurative sculpture; the south, which was the
last region of Nias to be Christianized, kept up
most of its traditional religion until the first
quarter of this century. The necessary tech-
nical skills were obviously at hand too, for
southern stones are carved with a precision
and a care of detail not to be found elsewhere.
One might even say, and this brings us to the
second point, that outside contacts, particularly
with the Dutch, quite strongly influenced
southern carving. The previously mentioned
stone thrones reproduce the European style of
the end of the last century. Other monuments
show this influence too: only the villages
of South Nias have motifs representing tools,
daro daro in the shape of chests with locks, and
carved warriors with blunderbusses on monu-
ments, just to mention a few examples.
Arabesques, scrolls, or other affectations of
obvious European origin strangely contrast
with the much more archaic art of North and
Central Nias. It should be taken into account
that the villages most famous for their monu-
ments are relatively recent. Bawomataluo, for
instance, was built in 1865 on a virgin spot,
after the old Orahili, the sanctuary of the
southern Niha resistance against the Dutch,
was destroyed in 1860. The present-day
Orahili was rebuilt on the same site, but no
longer has the splendid chief's house which
was its pride. Hilsimetano, another large vil-
lage, was reconstructed at the end of the nine-
teenth century on the site of the village of
Fadoro. In short, the villages and monuments
in this region are practically always recent, and
this is another feature of southern stone art.
The oldest carvings date from the second half
of the nineteenth century and the first half of
the twentieth. The last specific trait of South
Nias is that nearly all the stone monuments
are in situ, whereas the wooden ancestor effig-
gies, adu, gold ornaments, decorated house
panels, weapons and other objects of material
culture have been moved to museums and pri-
ivate collections. One therefore might say
that the appearance of today's villages is pretty
similar to that found in the earliest testi-
monies, and to Modigliani's first pho-
tographs, taken around 1880. There has been
no appreciable evolution between the stones of
the end of last century and the ones erected in
our time.
The monuments of the south practically always figure in travel guides and tourist leaflets, with more or less judicious comments and interpretations. They also have been the subject of several more substantial publications.

The village of Bawömataluo is certainly the best known one in South Nias, and in fact of the whole island. It is true that its monuments, erected over three generations, are particularly impressive. The gorahua newali, the assembly square, has 65 stones of which 25 are in front of the chief's house. Among them are two large daro daro, called daro daro ni'o bagi gifa, raised respectively in honor of Laowo (in 1881) and Sahonigeho (in 1914). The first measures 4.1 m by 2.1 m, is 42 cm thick, and weighs about ten tons (fig. 93). It apparently required a sacrifice of a total of 1,500 pigs for the transport of the stone and the feast itself. This is quite plausible, as it is known to have been moved by 525 men, over a distance of three kilometers, 300 m up in level. These two stones are part of a group of monuments of different shapes, rectangular daro daro, daro daro nicholi, and approximately ten batu nitaruo, two of them 4.3 m high. The group also includes a naha gama gama, a pillar onto which the chief's regalia was hung in his absence, thereby becoming his substitute (figs. 93 and 100). About fifteen years ago another naha gama gama was moved to the access staircase of the village, near a panel welcoming visitors in English! In this way this pillar (no longer having any traditional function at its original location but becoming a “substitute of the substitute”) plays a part in the contemporary world attached to tourist activities, now an important source of income for the village. But it is also a manner of stating the ever-claimed preeminence of Bawömataluo over the whole southern region, and thereby the preeminence of its chief who had the stone moved and reinstalled.

Fig. 91. Stone substitute heads at Lahua Id. Tat (Central Nias). Photo Schnitger 1939, fig. 17.

A Megalithic Culture?

Nias has been presented as a megalithic culture, and even as one of the main centers of the Southeast Asian “megalithic complex.” Perhaps it is necessary to be more specific about megalithism. The expression appeared in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century and is exclusively used to refer to dolmens, menhirs, cromlech, and other raised stones, which up to that time had been called “Celtic.” In these early years of study, all assemblaged stone monuments were classified as megalithic and interpreted as prehistoric tombs. The two notions—funerary and prehistoric—remained in place when monuments of apparently similar types were later discovered in other parts of the world, especially in India, Island Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific.

Two schools of thought were prominent in the discussion of non-European megalithism: evolutionism, which attempted to find the equivalent of our prehistoric Western past in societies it considered “primitive,” and diffusionism, which aimed to demonstrate patterns of diffusion of cultural features mainly on the basis of formal similarities. Several authors who wrote about Nia stone followed this second line of thought, thereby enabling us to benefit from relatively precise descriptions of the monuments. However, their conclusions and interpretations are no longer acceptable nowadays. Perry shall only be mentioned briefly, his hyper-diffusionism and “solar” theory having become an object of curiosity today. However, another writer, Robert Heine-Geldern, extensively describes Nias in numerous articles and his contributions have generated abundant and lengthy discussions. As far as we know, he is the initiator of the notion of “megalithic culture,” in which Nia megalithism is associated with the cult of the dead. The stone monuments and statues of the island were presented as ancestor effigies, and portrayed as being worshiped as such.

Without entering into the details of a debate which has no place here, it nevertheless seems useful to recall and clarify certain points.

First of all in Nias monuments and statues were carved in stone, but also in wood. The simultaneous use of both materials for relatively similar creations has never prompted any questioning so far. However, an analysis of terminology, the contexts for erecting stones, their functions, as well as the respective locations of wooden and stone statues show that what was created in stone could not be in wood, and vice versa.
All wooden figures are called *adu*, which could be translated as “ancestor spirit,” and all *adu* are attached to the supernatural world of spirits, be they those of ancestors, gods, or diseases. Therefore *adu satua* (fig. 97), of which the Barbier-Mueller collection owns remarkable examples, are effigies of the deceased. They were only carved after death, specifically to serve as a seat for the deceased's soul. These *adu satua* were kept inside the houses, and the ancestor's blessing was called upon them. Offerings were set in front of them. Although the *adu satua* are better known, the effigies of mythical ancestors, *bôrò n'adu*, should not be forgotten. Up to the beginning of this century, these male and female wooden figures were regularly celebrated in South Nias during sumptuous feasts. In spite of this cult having officially disappeared, *bôrò n'adu* have still been established lately at Sifalago Boronadu, a village in Central Nias. This is the settlement that is said to have welcomed the Niha's founding ancestors when they descended from heaven to earth. The recent appearance of these wooden effigies, with no particular aesthetic qualities, are part of the social process of asserting Niha identity within contemporary Indonesia.

Another type of *adu, adu siraha goali*, or statues of founding ancestors and clan protectors (according to Modigliani who observed them in the south) was kept with great care in the assembly house and supported the decisions of the chief and the elders. Modigliani also mentions *adu bôrò* (fig. 99), figures to
which offerings were made when blood had been shed, to keep away victims' spirits' curses from bringing diseases to the village. The chief also addressed himself to the *adu bōrō* when he feared the consequences of a wrong judgment that led to death. In that sense, the *adu bōrō* embodied the power to act on the spirit of victims who might do harm.

The innumerable *adu* representing spirits of diseases should also be noted. They helped the priest of the traditional religion find the origin of an illness and drive it away by calling on the responsible spirit. Numerous *adu* ensured the fertility and health of women, and kept enemies and ailments at a distance; in short, their task was to protect the *niha* against the adversities of the world.

The word *adu* is used exclusively for wooden figures, which all mediate communication with the spirits, among them the spirits of the deceased.

Stone statues and monuments, by contrast, are never called *adu*: they belong to a totally different terminology, as we have seen.

They are erected for and by the living, and are always placed in a public space of the village, during great feasts asserting an individual's successful social incorporation into his community at an important social rank. One could therefore say that the stones linked together the members of a community, in the way that the *adu* linked these same members to their ancestors and to the spirits.

In theory, these two axes of relationship can be expressed in a diagram:

```
upperworld-gods-ancestors
w
o
d
clans, villages, humans
<->
stone
humans, villages, clans
```

Empirically observed, this relationship model can be found in the Niha myths of origin as well. The "Song of the Hia Clan's Father," noted by Thomsen in Central Nias,
and more precisely at Sifalago Boronadu in 1935, shows how the main categories of natural forces, plants, animals, and men are organized and linked in the conception of the Niha's world. We cannot go into details of these eleven chants, amounting to a total of about 2,000 double verses. The first chant, however, is dedicated to the birth of men on earth, the second to the origin of the earth, the third to the birth of the ancestor Hia, the fourth to his descent on earth, the fifth to the birth of the nine names—in fact, the nine goods and possessions that organize social life—and the sixth to the use of the following goods: gold, pigs, rice, tubers, areca nuts, betel leaves, tobacco, coconuts, and chickens. Only in the seventh chant, celebrating the wisdom of Hia, do the stones appear. In this song Hia is adult, a father, wise and respected. He builds a house according to adat rules and erects a male behu in front of the roof of his house, in the middle of the village square. He builds a barefa gowasa terrace, he carves stone chickens, he has stones found and cut. Finally, at the height of his wisdom, when the village conforms to customary law, he carves a wooden effigy of his deceased father, in the shape of a human being. He puts it in his house and presents it with offerings. The head of this adu satua carries an ornament made of fosii wood, the original tree planted by Hia, from which stem all the goods listed above. The chant further says that this fosii tree descends from the primordial tree in the original village of heaven, Teteholi Ana’a. Therefore if wood is said to have a divine origin, and to be the means of relation between men and spirits, this is absolutely not the case for stone, which in the myths has never come down from heaven with the ancestors, but is always obtained and erected by and for men, on earth.

The eighth chant, the longest, relates what happened after Hia’s death. One is told that one of his daughters-in-law, who never took care of the Hia’s soul, was stabbed to death by her husband who, to punish her, did not carve a wooden figure for her but simply threw her corpse away without any ceremony. So without an effigy, her spirit could not get the usual offerings and be honored as an ancestor. The ninth chant relates the origin of ancestor figures; it concerns the obligations to carve wooden effigies and place them in the house, decorate them with palm leaves, and give them offerings to invite the soul to come to the figure. The tenth chant describes Hia’s stay in the heavenly village of Teteholi Ana’a. Finally, the last chant promises that if his sons behave according to the rules prescribed by the ancestors, the latter—in this case Hia—will take good care of them and they will be able to enlarge their villages and hold splendid feasts.

The rapid summary of this myth already shows us the symbolic categories involved, but some points remain to be clarified.

It has been asserted that the monuments and statues of Central Nias were for the dead, and thus contained the skulls of the deceased. Furthermore, it has often been said that the southern daro daro are funerary monuments, as they are erected after death, to commemorate the deceased. Also, in some parts of Central Nias, urns were carved for the deceased’s skulls, and stone pyramids, sometimes containing skulls, were built. Do these facts, however, contradict what we have just stated: that stone is a means of relations between the living, with wood and more generally plants serving as the link between the living and the dead?

Certainly not, if we consider all social practices altogether, and even less so if we place them within a relevant time scheme.

In fact, these stones were all erected by and for the living, even if later they were to receive bones, which is only seldom the case. What shows they are not ancestor effigies to be worshipped is that all prayers are not addressed to the stone monument, but to the adu satua inside the house. The latter contains the ancestor’s soul. Hämmerle is quite clear about this: “Behu are not worshipped like adu, they receive no offerings. When the blessing of an adu is beseeched, it is not in front of the behu but in front of the adu, in front of the house. Only the adu receives offerings, because the adu is where the deceased’s spirit resides.”

Certain behu, although not very many, have a hole at their summit, or an osa osa with a body in the shape of a hollow box for keeping a skull. This can be explained by the logic of protection ensured through skulls, as seen before.

The daro daro of South Nias, sometimes
interpreted as stones for the deceased, are probably related to the same logic. Just as a *batu nitaru* can be raised for one's son, so can a *daro daro* be for one's father. This process is certainly part of the logic of lineage, requiring that a son take over the commitments of his father, for in the southern part of the island as elsewhere the *adu* are the ones to receive the spirit of the dead.

The only exceptions to this division between what concerns spirits and what concerns living beings are the stone skull urns and the piled up stone pyramids (fig. 82) for important deceased persons' skulls, built for the *owusa* (and hence for the living). These caskets are only found in a small area around the upper Susuwa basin, where the Layia, Hulu, and Ndruru clans live. The mounds are even rarer, existing just in four or five villages of the Zai clan on the upper Gawa. Schmitterg says that these mounds always had forked wooden poles on them, representing the strength of the ancestor (fig. 81).

The second point derives from our numerous visits to Nias. These studies have convinced us that Niha stone monuments are not archeological but historical, and sometimes even part of recent history.

We have several arguments to sustain this. First of all, practical reasons: eighteen years have elapsed since our first fieldwork in Nias, and during that time, we have been astonished by the fast degradation of the stones. The tropical climate is the essential cause of this change, but lack of protection and upkeep should also be taken into account. Pieces which look very old are not always so. Considering the rate of erosion, we reckon that most of the stones date back to the nineteenth century, with some perhaps being older. Furthermore, no Neolithic tools are known. If there were any, farmers would have found specimens, and we would know it. Forget the idea of disinterest for this type of object: how often did we travel long, exhausting kilometers to finally discover that the piece we had heard so much about just turned out to be a stalagmite, a stalactite, or some other oddity of nature?

Another argument is the way of dating monuments by generation in Nias. For some of them the information seems in accord with genealogies and historical landmarks, and these stones are at the most 150 years old. For others their given age seems totally fanciful, but it is only metaphorical. If a Niha says this house or that object is forty, a hundred, or a thousand generations old, it just means that it is old. The social necessities of speech should not be forgotten. By conferring a great age to his family and his village's monuments, the Niha reinforces his nobility and respectability towards a foreigner, but even more so towards his kinfolk, as in this way he belongs to one of the oldest clans of the island. In other words, speaking of statues means speaking of politics, as these statues were erected as symbols of power, this power of course reflecting on the descendants of their recipients.

The last point to be remembered is that stones are still carved and erected during feasts in the villages. They are therefore not beautiful remains of a bygone art but witnesses of a practice still quite alive, contrary to what has been asserted by others.

To get back to our starting point, can one speak of a "megalithic culture" in Nias? Yes and no, according to what is meant by this expression. If it means a culture dating back to the Neolithic period, nothing allows us to say so at the present stage of research. If it means a culture of people who are still at the Neolithic stage, long arguments are unnecessary to see the ideological implications and untenability of such a thought for, whatever the criteria, it is evident that this people is our contemporary, and that this society has mastered stone carving as skillfully as it has wood carving. If, however, this terminology is applied to any society erecting stone monuments, be they symbols of power, memorial or funerary, then very few societies are not megalithic!

In reality Nias's megalithism has little to do with a death cult but is closely related to politics as a symbol of power for the chiefs, and an expression of belonging to the village community for the people. It is through stones that the Niha assert themselves as such, and assert their pride in their village and their lineage. In this equatorial island where rain and plant life prevail, it is through these remarkable stone testimonies that men express themselves, in mineral form, evoking combat.
The first mention of Nias is by Suleyman in 851 (Reinard 1845, pp. 6, 7), then in the Adab manuscript dated between 900-950 (van der Lirth 1883-1886, p. 126) and finally in the world description of El Edrisi in 1154 (Jaubert 1836, pp. 76, 77). Nias was also known to the Chinese and Indian merchants from Gujarat: manuscript of Rasid Ad-Din 1310 (Ferrand 1913-1914, p. 361), manuscript of Ibn Al-Wardi 1340 (Ferrand 1913-1914, p. 414), descriptions of Ma Huan 1433 (J.V.G. Mills 1970, pp. 203, 282). For the Malay world, the first mention is in Bustan el Saladin (Lombard 1967, pp. 94, 197).

The Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, the United East India Company, was created in 1602 by a consortium of Dutch merchant cities, in order to ensure the commercial control of that area.

The agreement of 1669 concerns the northeastern coast, whereas the one of 1693 concerns Teluk Dalam, Gunung Simoli and the Nakko islands. As can be seen, by and by the contacted territories spread.

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5 The word nihâ, as in many societies, means “human being.” It is used by the people of Nias to refer to themselves. We shall use it in the same sense.


It was published in several languages, without any mention of author, and is part of Raffles’ argumentation in favor of the abolition of slavery.

7 The year of the Niha’s massive conversion. See Kayser 1976.

8 It should be remembered that Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world.

9 W. Marschall, J. Feldman, then P. Scarduelli, and finally A. Beatty.

10 Since the middle of the eighties the Indonesian government and foreign investors have been planning a larger scale development. The aim is to make a second Bali out of the island.

11 One wonders why a society, in contact for nearly a thousand years with other peoples familiar with writing, did not adopt it, although it was receptive to other novelties such as working iron or gold. The first transcriptions of the vernacular language date from the early German missionary ministers of the Rheinische Mission, this accounting for the German umlaut in the present writing.

12 There are no gold mines in Nias. Gold and all other metals were provided by exchange with Sumatra, as noted (see n. 1).

13 This is pure invention, as in contrast to the Batak of Sumatra the Niha had no anthropophagic traditions.

14 For a description of building typologies, see Vian 1990 and 1992.

15 Traditional structure attached little importance to nuclear families, but in present-day Indonesia they have more and more significance, a factor reinforced by the national legislation supporting the individual to the detriment of customary laws, which favored the clan and extended family.

16 Today nearly a quarter of the population is Catholic, the majority being Protestant; the latter religion accepts this type of marriage. As in Indonesian legislation a religious wedding is compulsory, it is out of question not to comply with canon laws.

17 Numerous examples show that chiefs used every opportunity to accumulate goods attached to the rank so as to give more prescribed feasts in the name of their son.

18 Often of course, traditional chiefs cumulate the traditional function with that of mayor in the Indonesian political system.

19 They disappeared, several decades ago, because this region Christianization and colonization started earlier and were more powerful than anywhere else on the island. The last chief’s house at Onlimbuh Lamhômi near the west coast fell down in 1984.

20 Anonymous, 1880, p. 749.

21 Beaty (1992, pp. 266 and following), who worked in the Susuwâ area, relates that: “leadership of the village is informal and unstable, as the prominent men of each lineage vied for supremacy. In one village, there might be three or four rivals ruling in concert; in another a first among equals; a third, domination by an outstanding individual.”

22 This situation corresponds with our own analyses of Hammer’s observations (1983). Beaty (1992, p. 266) suggests that “independent villages might consist of a single descent group or a loose association of lineages belonging to different clans occupying the same or adjacent hamlets.”

23 In 1979 during our first visit to Central Nias, according to rumor, the last headhunter had kept up this tradition up to his death at Foidrako in 1979.

24 “The house of strange aspect, although built of piles, was lower than the others, square with a low slanted roof. Contrary to the other houses there was no interior division, nobody was in the building; there was no furniture except for a large idol at several smaller ones attached to a central pillar at the angles. Outside the roof was adorned with numerous human skulls, twenty-one in total, which nine hanging from the road façade, the others hanging from the side walls. It is the Osâle, the assembly hall with the chiefs meet with the old warriors to discuss questions interesting the whole village, such as declaring war, establishing peace and rendering justice. It is there that the body of the deceased chief is put until his heir has gathered the amount of pigs necessary for the funeral, and finally it is there that as a gesture of honor the skulls of the enemies killed at war are hung, as well as the first young warrior has cut, even in peace time.”
show his courage.” (Modigliani 1890, pp. 209–211 and fig. 9).

26 For instance Lahusa Id. Tae. After having been an important village, as can be seen from the megaliths we counted in 1979, it was abandoned, and then reoccupied by a few families after 1970.

27 Schnitger (1939), Führer-Haimendorf (1939), Suzuki (1959), Birker-Smith (1967), Beatty (1992), use this term, whereas Modigliani (1890) prefers “feasts of honor” and Schröder (1917) speaks of “feasts of rank” or “feasts of citizenship.”

28 Sunderman (1905) tells us that “the chief then gives a big feast called owusa during which up to three hundred pigs may be killed... In the best of cases all the meat cannot be eaten... so the children then throw it onto the ground, and the soil is all slippery with pork meat.” No doubt this apparent waste shocked the writer, who by the way seems to ignore the practice of carving the pigs on the ground.

29 In contrast to the rest of the archipelago, Nias has no buffalo.

30 One might like to say “had” although there are still enough celebrations, particularly feasts attached to the individual, to use the present tense.


32 According to their myths of creation, all Niha descend from ancestors who came down from the Upperworld to a spot at the center of the island, Sifalago Gomo Bōtō n’adu, which still nowadays they all consider to be their place of origin. Sadawa Mōlō is a son of the patriarch Hia.

33 These feasts have been described elsewhere and we shall not come back to them in detail here. For the feasts of the South, see Ziegler 1990, for the feasts of the Center, Ziegler 1986. For a recollection of all the feasts, the architecture and the territorial organization, see Viaro and Ziegler, Architecture de l’île de Nias, Ed. Parenthèse, to be published.

34 For details about urakha, see Ziegler 1986, Beatty 1992.

35 Christianity somewhat changed these rules. Now intricately carved cement tombs are built, which in some instances may be integrated in the traditional cycle of monuments. We shall not discuss this type of monuments here. They can be observed all over the island.

36 If a woman died childless, custom required that feet be carved on the doro doro to mark her passage on earth, as no descendants can testify thereof.

37 Paradoxically, the feasts best documented are the ones punctuating the foundation of the ori, as they were related by the Dutch civil servants at the time of the change from clan-based to “administrative” ori.

38 The title balugu is honorary and refers to a person’s status. In theory it is not linked to power and several balugu can be found in the same village. Nevertheless, if all village chiefs are not balugu, most of them are. The term is still in use and often an equivalent for ialawa, village chief.

39 Term referring to a man’s integration in his community. Only noted in the language of Central Nias, it has nevertheless been used by writers (among them Suzuki) for “feasts of merit” in the whole island.

40 This myth is quoted by many writers. There is a summary of several versions of the foundation myths in W. Stöhr, Les religions d’Indonésie, Paris, Payot, 1968.

41 Idano means water in general, and in particular river; it is shortened Id. for toponomy.

42 An only earring on the right ear indicates that the recipient is a man, whereas earrings on both ears would mean the recipient is a woman.

43 This does not mean that feasts are just rites of passage. Van Gennep (1909) described their ternary structure as associating a phase of separation, a phase of exclusion, and finally a phase of reintegration into the community with a new status. In our case, separation is not very marked, whereas exclu-
As the hornbill is beautiful, builds nests at the top of the trees near the sky, and has a powerful song, it symbolizes the most commendable virtues.

The stag is said to be a proud and brave animal, as a person deserving admiration should be.

Although nothing can be asserted concerning the origin of the lasara, the formal resemblance to the dragon figures known in China and elsewhere in Indonesia, for instance in Bali, are striking.

Everywhere on the island, be it for humans, monuments, or statues, a single pendant on the right ear indicates that the person is male, whereas pendants on both ears indicate she is female.

In these villages live the Telambanua clan (Orahili Gomo, Tuhegewo Id. Mbolo, Tegetewe Id. Mbolo, Tjudrubah Id. Tae villages), the Ndruru clan (Lahuza Id. Tae village) and the Hulu clan (Hillina’s and Gui Gui Id. Susuwa villages).

Raffles 1822.

This osa osa disproves the theories of the beginning of the century, asserting that round seats were for women and rectangular ones for men.

One could of course link this phenomenon to the asymmetry between wife-taking and wife-giving groups, and say that in this way the benefits due to brideweal are perpetuated through the ceremonial exchanges attached to them. Probably, but does it change reality? Must an exclusively functional interpretation be absolutely privileged, and should women be deprived of their place, even if this place is not dominant in male speech, or should the Niha be denied the artistic taste they proved so fully?

Ziegler 1986, p. 68.

Schroeder 1917: figs. 140, 213, 215; this construction was called simaloa.

It may be useful to be reminded that the definition of North, Center and South we made (see map at the beginning) does not necessarily correspond to the ones adopted in the course of different periods. They vary according to administrative demarcations, or even with the choice of the writer.

He only devotes them a few lines in paragraph 307.

Schnitger 1939. We should also note the presence at about the same period of Dr. Thomsen, a physician who worked in Central Nias for many years, both before and after Independence. In 1976 he published a brochure without illustrations on megalithism, written in Niha.

This claim opens several hypotheses. The statues may have been very rare and disappeared; they may have been destroyed following Christianization, and may now be in collections; or they may have been buried so as not to be seen according to a rumor we heard during some of our visits.


In the village of Ewo on the Naaij River, tributary of the Susuwa.

Barbier 1984, p. 32.

The last boronu n’ada is said to have been held in 1912, according to Borutta (Rynjhe Zending 1912, pp. 188–189). Our informants told us that some villages, and in particular Hiliamaetanaha, were still very close to their traditional religion at the beginning of the fifties.

For example the Copenhagen Museum owns the house of the chief of Hilimondregarya.

Raffles 1822; von Rosenberg 1855.

We have for instance read in a tourist guide that the stones served as altars for sacrifices, the blood-colored stones supposedly proving it. Anyone familiar with Asia will have understood that these stones were caused by the spurn of betel chewers. Nevertheless these monuments, together with the splendid houses of the southern chiefs, are in fact the emblem of Nias in Indonesia and worldwide.


According to Mohen 1989 in Le monde des megalithes, the expression is used for the first time in 1849 by Algrenon Herbert, in Cyclos Christianus, Oxford University. According to Reinach 1913 in Cultes, mythes et religions, it was adopted during the International congress of anthropology and archeology of Paris in 1867.

The concept "megalithic people and/or culture" is not usual in Dutch research at the time Schroeder publishes his work as he only writes about "steen" (stones) and when he mentions the idea of megalithism, he uses the phrase "megalithische volkeren" (p. 84). The stone monuments he describes most remarkably are compared to the prehistoric monuments known at the time. For instance, of the long stone lying near the baie of Bawomataluo he says that it has "the shape of a boat... [we know that] the typical design of a Irish dolmen was supposed to represent a ship... In Minorca similar shapes are called nenetus (boat)" (par. 269). However he is clearly in favor of the diffusionists theories as he writes, "From what can be seen here (at least as tombs) one may speak of 'megalithic peoples', who coming from Scandinavia, along western Europe to North Africa, Greece, Arabia, India and Japan, built such monuments. Fig. 77 shows a dolmen type monument. The dara-dara as a skull tomb expresses the dolmen as house of the dead" (p. 84). This is one example among many others.

Perry 1918, The Megalithic Culture of Indonesia.

In particular in Early South-East Asia, 1979, where the problem of megalithism is discussed. "In short we can say that the expression megalithic culture cannot reasonably be applied to any phase or social integration level observed in the recent or prehistoric past of Island Southeast Asia. Considering the very large distribution in space and time, and the morphological and functional diversity of large stone structures in that region, this expression does not make sense, even within the restricted meaning archaeologists give the concept 'culture'. Therefore, although there are numerous megaliths