



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



## Uncovering Ancient Mysteries: The Megalithic Cist-Burials of Enadimangalam

R Harinarayanan \*

*Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of History, University College, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India.*

World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 24(01), 565–570

Publication history: Received on 27 August 2024; revised on 04 October 2024; accepted on 06 October 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.24.1.3084>

### Abstract

Megalithism is the practice of huge stones associated with burial practices. An interdisciplinary approach is needed in collaboration with History and Archaeology to study Megaliths. This article is a brief report of the exploration conducted at Enadimangalam Grama Panchayath in Adoor Taluk, Pathanamthitta District, Kerala, during the field season 2018. The researcher's primary objective was to systematically explore the unreported megalithic sites in Enadimangalam and report them. The researcher discovered nine sites in the systematic ward-to-ward survey, and explorations carried out at Enadimangalam Grama Panchayath in 2018. These sites were reported to the authorities. This article elaborates on a detailed description of the reported sites. This study shows that the Enadimangalam area has a predominant Megalithic background and is assumed to be one of the largest sites so far discovered. It is observed that the area is very vast and bounded by hills and valleys that comprise more than a thousand acres of land. This indicates that the Megalithic monuments are widely distributed in this area and shows the enormity of the settlement.

**Keywords:** Megalithism; Exploration; Orthostats; Carbon dating; Burials; Monuments

### 1. Introduction

Megalithism is the practice of huge stones associated with burial practices. In collaboration with History and Archaeology, an interdisciplinary approach is needed to study Megaliths. In the past, Megaliths were known as rude or rough stone monuments. , Megaliths are large stones erected in memory of the dead ancestor. The practice of huge rocks associated with burials is generally considered Megalithism. In 1823, studies on Kerala Megaliths were started with the discovery of the first Megalithic monument in Bangla Vattapparambu, Kannur, by J. Babington. Megalithic research was not done systematically in the first half of the 19th Century. During that time, the explorations were mainly carried out by curious antiquarians, natives, witches and amateur treasure hunters. Subsequently, several British administrators and many others explored and excavated many megaliths, bringing their findings to the notice of people. However, they were mainly interested in the grave goods found in the megaliths, and some of them even related the monuments to local legends and folk tales. Later on, in 1887, scholars like William Logan carried the study of the megaliths further. The systematic investigations of the South Indian megaliths began only in the 1940s when scholars like Mortimer Wheeler, B.K. Thapar and V.D. Krishnaswami studied the megaliths at Brahmagiri (Karnataka), Porkalam (Kerala) and Cochin (Kerala) regions, respectively and enriched our knowledge about the megalithic phase.

In collaboration with History and Archaeology, an interdisciplinary approach is needed to study Megaliths. This article is a brief report of the exploration followed by an excavation conducted at Enadimangalam Grama Panchayath in Adoor Taluk, Pathanamthitta District, Kerala. To identify the Megalithic sites, a systematic ward-to-ward survey and exploration was carried out at Enadimangalam Grama Panchayath in 2018, which resulted in the discovery of Ten Megalithic sites. One of the Megalithic sites was excavated by the Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala, in 2019. It is clear that the Enadimangalam area has a predominant Megalithic background and is assumed to be one of the largest sites so far discovered. It is observed that the area is very vast and bounded by hills and valleys that comprise

\* Corresponding author: R Harinarayanan

more than a thousand acres of land. This indicates that the Megalithic monuments are widely distributed in this area and shows the enormity of the settlement.

The Megalithic monuments play a crucial role to reinterpret the history of Kerala. To make a clear picture regarding the Megalithic Culture, an interdisciplinary approach is needed in collaboration with History and Archaeology. The different typologies of Kerala Megaliths are Rock Cut Chambers, *Kudaikkal*, *Toppikkal*, Cists, Dolmens, Dolmenoid Cists, Urns and Sarcophagus, Hood Stones, Menhirs and Cairn Circles. Megalithic people might have practiced multiple burials to save the effort, material and time of the people. Megalithic people knew the art of stone working. The presence of rocks can be seen abundantly adjacent to the megalithic sites. They could detach considerable slabs for the orthostats, cutting them to the required shapes and sizes for the door slab, covering and lining the passages, and making round and semi-circular openings in the orthostats. People needed considerable knowledge of stone quarrying and working to do the above work. Cutting and carving the stones required quality iron tools and related techniques and technologies. The vast slabs and other massive stones were transported from their primary source to the sites, which may have been done using wooden rollers. In Kerala, Megalithic sites and monuments were destroyed massively for the sole purpose of a treasure hunt. This caused a massive loss for the academic community for their research interest in Megalithic Culture.

---

## 2. Archaeological Excavation in Enadimangalam

A Cist burial was excavated recently in 2019 by The Department of Archaeology, Kerala University, as a part of the Kerala Megalithic Gazetteer Project, under the guidance of Dr Abhayan GS and Dr Rajesh S.V, Associate Professors of the same department. This was a two-chambered Cist Burial with port holes. Typical megalithic pottery and a few iron objects were recovered from this cist, and the analysis of the grave goods is ongoing. Apart from other cist burials in Kerala, this multi-chambered cist contains a slab stone, which is unusual in other cist burials. The excavated burial was disturbed by some external activities, evidenced by the lack of availability of top-closing orthostats and the visible spreading of ceramic materials scattered outside the burial. The excavation revealed Megalithic Ceramics of different types, including ribs and libs, iron fragments and charcoal pieces. The Multi-Chambered burial contains port holes, which was common in most of the Cist Burials. The Port-Holes were covered; one with a circular stone and the other with a triangular one. Both the cover stones of Port-Holes were placed on an elevated platform. The trenches were about eight meters deep, and the burial chambers were 7x4 meters long (Approx.) Excavated remains were subjected to scientific analysis at the Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala. The excavation report is expected to be published shortly.

---

## 3. Megalithic remains and other artefacts from other Sites

The survey revealed Ten Megalithic monuments, mainly Cist-Burials from the Enadimangalam region. Typologically, the Megalithic relics discovered from the sites during exploration can be characterised as Cist-Burials. Most of the ceramics found from the site are cooking vessels with soot and smoke marks and table wares like bowls, dishes and basins. The ceramics include Red Ware, Black Ware and Grey Ware, and a significant share of the diagnosed sherds are pots, followed by dishes or basins and bowls.

### 3.1. Kodumon Plantation Poothamkara Division Locality-1

Kodumon Plantation Poothamkara Division Locality-1 (N09°09'06.96" E076°49'08.47") is in Enadimangalam Grama Panchayath of Adoor Taluk in Pathanamthitta District, Kerala. Brownish forest soil, reddish laterite soil, and massive granite formations are in that circular mounted area.

The site contains the most complex Megalithic burial monuments compared to the other sites in the surrounding area. From here, one cist burial complex with six chambers was identified during the exploration. The site is partially destroyed for rubber cultivation. Currently, 12 ft of the Eastern wall and 3.5 ft of the Southern wall are visible over the surface, the Northern fence was destroyed, and the Western wall of the complex is buried under the earth. The chambers are separated with orthostats; only three are visible over the surface. The chamber located on the southeastern corner is considered Chamber 1, which is attached to the Eastern wall of the complex and separated from Chamber 2 (to the West of Chamber 1) with an orthostat (measures 4.5 ft). Chamber 2 is between Chambers 1 and 3, containing two small orthostats inside. Chamber 3 is entirely covered by a capstone on the complex's southwestern corner. One orthostat is visible over the capstone of Chamber 3, possibly the capstone removed from Chamber 2. Chamber 4 is located on the complex's northeast corner, just below Chamber 1 and attached to the Eastern wall. On the right of Chamber 4, the Chamber 5 is located. The chamber is covered with a capstone that measures 6.5 ft in width and 8 ft in length. Chamber 6 is located on the northwestern corner of the complex, which is covered with a broken orthostat, and none of the chamber's walls were visible over the complex.

### **3.2. Kodumon Plantation-Poothamkara Division Locality-2**

Kodumon Plantation-Poothamkara Division Locality (N09°09'03.37" E076°49'27.88") is a Megalithic site located in Enadimangalam Grama Panchayath of Adoor Taluk in Pathanamthitta District, Kerala. This archaeological site is now part of the Kodumon Plantation Corporation, which is 3 km away from the Kayamkulam—Punalur road. It has brownish forest soil, reddish laterite, and granite formations.

The site contains a multi-chambered cist complex surrounded by Cairn Circle. A total of six orthostats of the cist complex and seven orthostats of the cairn circles are visible over the surface, and the remaining may be destroyed or buried under the surface. The complex is north-to-south oriented, and each chamber has a 5.5 ft length and a 3.5-meter width. The chambers are separated with granite orthostats measure 6 ft in length. The Eastern wall of the cists measures 6 ft, and the western wall measures 4 ft. The Western chamber is considered Chamber 1, which contains two visible orthostats; one measures four feet in height and the other 3 feet.

The orthostat which separates Chamber 1 and 2 was removed or destroyed. The middle chamber is considered Chamber 2, separated from Chamber 3, with an orthostat measuring 5.5 ft in length. 1.6 ft of the Northern wall of Chamber 2 is also visible. Chamber 3 is the Eastern one with three visible orthostats; one is the boundary between Chamber 2, the second is the Eastern wall of the complex, and the third is the Southern wall of the chamber, which measures 3.5 ft in length. The orthostats of the Cairn Circles are 7.5 ft. away from the Western wall, five ft. away from the Southern wall, 10 feet away from the Eastern wall and 8.5 ft. away from the Northern wall. Most of the Cairn Circles orthostats are roughly circular, and some have rectangular shapes. Near this site, on the Eastern side, some more orthostats are present, which might be a cist complex, Cairn Circles, or manufacturing waste of the cist burial. All the cist burials are on the top of the laterite mount.

### **3.3. Kodumon Plantation Poothamkara Division Locality-3**

Kodumon Plantation Poothamkara Division Locality-3 (N09°09'18.84" E076°49'14.86"). The site is atop a highly elevated circular laterite mount measuring approximately 1 x 1 km. The slope of the hill contains huge naturally developed caves in the granite formations ideal for prehistoric occupation. The wild fauna of the area includes leopards, elephants, Jackal, wild boars, monkeys, rabbits, Malabar giant squirrels, porcupines, palm civets, wild cats, peacocks, reptiles like monitor lizards, snakes, insects like wild bees, spiders, butterflies and mammals like bats. The flora includes trees and medicinal plants that grow in Western Ghats. The site is on forest land owned by Plantation Corporation, Government of Kerala. The site can be reached through Plantation Road, Poothamkara division. Geologically, the site contains the deposition of reddish, yellowish and brownish laterite soil and rocks. The site also includes the deposition of brownish forest soil and a heavy deposition of granite rocks. The cultural deposit at the site consists of Hood Stones and orthostats made of laterite rock. No ceramics were collected from the site. One circular Hood stone found from the site comprises seven lateritic orthostats. The site is now in a good state of preservation.

### **3.4. Poothamkara Parakkada Locality**

Poothamkara Parakkada Locality (N09°08'31.61" E 076°48'55.48") is an archaeological site that contains the cultural remains of the Megalithic and Late Medieval periods. The site is situated on the slope of a rough circular laterite mount. The nearest water source is a local stream flowing 300 meters nearby. The area's geological formations comprise forest soil and reddish, yellowish, and brownish laterite soil. Granite, gneissic, and laterite rocks are also visible.

The cultural remains of the site include one cist burial with two chambers and Megalithic as well as Medieval ceramics, i.e. Megalithic Red Wares, Black and Red Wares and one fragment of Medieval Red Ware. The cist has a South-to-north orientation, partially destroyed during the plantation activities; the remaining vestiges comprise a few orthostats. The Megalithic cist found from the site contains only one chamber with three visible orthostats. Four feet of the Eastern wall and two feet of the Western wall of the cist are visible over the surface, respectively; the Northern wall is completely buried under the earth, and the Southern wall is entirely exposed and measures 4.8 ft in length. All of the orthostats have approximately 20 cm thickness.

### **3.5. Chappalil Locality-1**

Chappalil Locality-1 (N09°08'47.28" E076°48'52.51") is located in Enadimangalam Grama Panchayath of Adoor Taluk in Pathanamthitta District, Kerala. The site is planted with rubber trees and is now owned by Sri. Radhakrishnan Nair. The cist burial complex in Chappalil Locality-1 contains two chambers with five visible orthostats over the surface. The North to South oriented burial complex comprises two chambers, i.e., the Eastern chamber (Chamber No. 1) and the Western Chamber (Chamber 2). The Northern wall of the cist measures eight ft. in length and 20 cm in thickness. Only six ft. of the Southern wall is visible over the surface, the Eastern wall measures four ft., and the Western wall is broken

into two pieces; one (measures three f.t.) is attached to the Northern wall, and the other (2.5 f.t.) is removed from the chamber and placed near to the western side of the cist. The chambers in the cist complex are not separated, or the separating orthostat may be removed during the later period. The internal length of the cist chambers is approximately 4.3 ft., and the internal width of the entire complex is 10 ft. in size.

### 3.6. Chappalil Locality-2

The site, Chappalil Locality-2 (N09°08'44.68" E076°48'44.25"). The circular mounted area is now with Rubber Plantation. Reddish laterite, pebbles, gravel with quartzite, granite rocks, and brownish forest soil surround this archaeological site. A local stream of nearly 600 meters is present there. The site contains Megalithic and Medieval archaeological remains. The Medieval remains from the site include ceramics, i.e. Red Ware and Grey Ware. The Megalithic monument of the site is characterised as a cist burial. One North-South-oriented cist complex with three burial coffins was found at the site. Four orthostats of the multi-chambered cist were visible over the surface. Seven f.t of the Northern wall, five f.t of the Southern wall, three f.t of the Western wall and five f.t. of the Eastern fence were visible over the surface. The internal width of the complex is 13 ft, and the separating orthostats of the coffins are not visible. Each of the burial chambers measures 8.3 ft in length.

### 3.7. Chappalil Locality-3

Chappalil Locality-3 (N09°09'52.32" E 076°48'49.28") is a worshipping centre on a circular mount near Chappalil Subrahmanya Swami Temple. The site is protected with walls on four sides. The site contains two single-chambered cist burials. Three orthostats of the cist burials are visible over the site's surface; two belong to Cist 1, and the other belongs to Cist 2. The Eastern wall of the Cist 1 measures 3.5 f.t. in length and 25 cm thickness, and the Southern wall measures three f.t. length and 20 cm thickness. Only one orthostat of the cist 2 is visible, which measures two f.t. length, 20 cm thickness and 30 cm is projected over the earth. The present-day temple is situated over Cist 2, located East of Cist 1.



Figure 1 Excavated Cist-Burial



Figure 2 Unexcavated Cist-Burials



**Figure 3** Ceramics from the Sites

#### 4. Conclusion

From the above findings, we can say that the Enadimangalam area has a predominant Megalithic background. Compared with other megalithic sites in Kerala, this is assumed to be one of the largest sites discovered. It is observed that the area is very vast and bounded by hills and valleys, which comprise more than 1000 acres of land. This indicates that the Megalithic monuments are widely distributed in this area and shows the enormity of the settlement. Megalithism was the earliest cultural sequence identified in the study area. The Megalithic peoples strongly believed in life after death and properly maintained burial customs. The Cist burials, Urn burials, Hood stones, Cairn Circle, Megalithic ceramics and antiquities clearly show the culture in the study area. The significant burial typology in the study area is Cist burials, and most of the Megalithic people of the substantial area used granite coffins in their burial practice. In Peninsular India, stone coffins for burial were introduced during the Neolithic periods, extending to the Megalithic periods and continuing in early historical, medieval, late medieval, and even modern times. The typological features, size of the granite orthostats and orientations, technology, the Black and Red Ware ceramics, iron objects and associated antiquities clearly show that the Cist burials from Enadimangalam Grama Panchayath belonged to the Megalithic period.

Megalithic people knew the art of stone working. The presence of rocks can be seen abundantly adjacent to the megalithic sites. They could detach considerable slabs for the orthostats, cutting them to the required shapes and sizes for the door slab, covering and lining the passages, and making round and semi-circular openings in the orthostats. It needed considerable knowledge of stone quarrying and working to do the above work. Cutting and carving the stones required quality iron tools and related techniques and technologies. The vast slabs and other massive rocks may have been transported from their primary source to the sites using wooden rollers. The Cist burials, Urn burials, Hood stones, Cairn Circle, Megalithic ceramics and antiquities clearly show that a Megalithic culture existed in the study area. The significant burial typology in the study area is Cist burials, and most Megalithic people used granite coffins for their burial practices. In Kerala, unfortunately, Megalithic sites and monuments were destroyed extensively by treasure hunters, incurring a massive loss for the academic community and their research interests in Megalithic Culture.

#### Compliance with ethical standards

##### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

## References

- [1] A Sundara, *The Early Chamber Tombs of South India*, University Publishers, Delhi, 1975
- [2] Ajith Kumar and Ambily C.S, "Megalithic remains excavated from a Cist burial at Niramakulam Pathanamthitta District, Kerala -The Megalithic Culture of South India", Indian Archaeological Society, Special Report No. 6, New Delhi, 2014
- [3] Ghosh, "Expeditions Outside India", Indian Archaeology 1961-62 - A Review, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1964
- [4] J. Mc Intosh, "Dating the South Indian Megaliths", *South Asian Archaeology* 1983, Naples: Institute Universitario Orientale, 1985
- [5] James Fergusson, *Rude Stone Monuments in all countries, their ages and uses*, John Murray Publishers, London, 1872
- [6] Jenee Peter, *Dimensions of Megalithic Culture of Kerala in relation to Peninsular India: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis), Department of Archaeology and Ancient History Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, 2002
- [7] John Ochanthuruth, "Pre-History of Kerala: Problems and Prospects", *Issues in Kerala Historiography*, International Centre for Kerala Studies, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 2003
- [8] Kumbhodaran S, *Megalithic Cultures of Thiruvananthapuram District with special reference to Nedumangadu, Kattakkada, Varkkala and Chirayinkezhu Talukas, Kerala* (Unpublished M.Phil Thesis Submitted to the Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala), 2016
- [9] R.E.M. Wheeler, "Brahmagiri and Chandravalli 1947: Megalithic and other Cultures in Mysore District", *Ancient India* 4, 1948
- [10] Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, *Cultural History of Kerala – Vol.1*, Department of Cultural Publications, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999
- [11] Rajesh K. P, *Archaeology Of Iron Age Burial Of North Malabar, Kerala, India: A Cognitive Analysis* (A Brief Summary of the UGC Minor Research Project, Unpublished)
- [12] T. K. Joseph, "A Buried temple, Some Stone Cists and Other Antiquities", *Kerala Society Papers*, Vol 1, Gazetteers Department, Govt. of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1997
- [13] V. Gordon Childe, "Megaliths", *Ancient India*, Vol No. 4, 1947