



Megaliths of Assam

Why in News?

Recently, Archaeologists have identified **65 large sandstone jars** ([Megaliths](#)) believed to be used for ritual burials across four sites in Hasao district, Assam.

- Earlier in 2020, the State Department of Archaeology, Chennai had identified 250 cairn-circles (Megalithic Structures) from the [Kodumanal excavation site in Erode district of Tamilnadu](#).

What are the Assam Megaliths? //



- Some jars are **tall and cylindrical**, while others are **partly or fully buried in the ground**.
- Some of them spanned up to **three metres high and two metres wide**. Some of the jars **feature decorative carvings**, while others are plain.

What is the History of Megaliths in Assam?

- The jars of Assam were **first sighted in 1929** by British civil servants **James Philip Mills and John Henry Hutton**, who recorded their presence in **six sites in Dima Hasao: Derebore** (now Hojai Dobongling), **Kobak, Kartong, Molongpa** (now Melange Puram), **Ndunglo and Bolasan** (now Nuchubunglo).
- **Two sites were discovered in 2016**. In 2020, four more sites were discovered by the **History and Archaeology Department at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya**.
 - At one site, **Nuchubunglo**, as many as 546 jars were found which was the largest such site in the world.

What is the significance of the Findings?

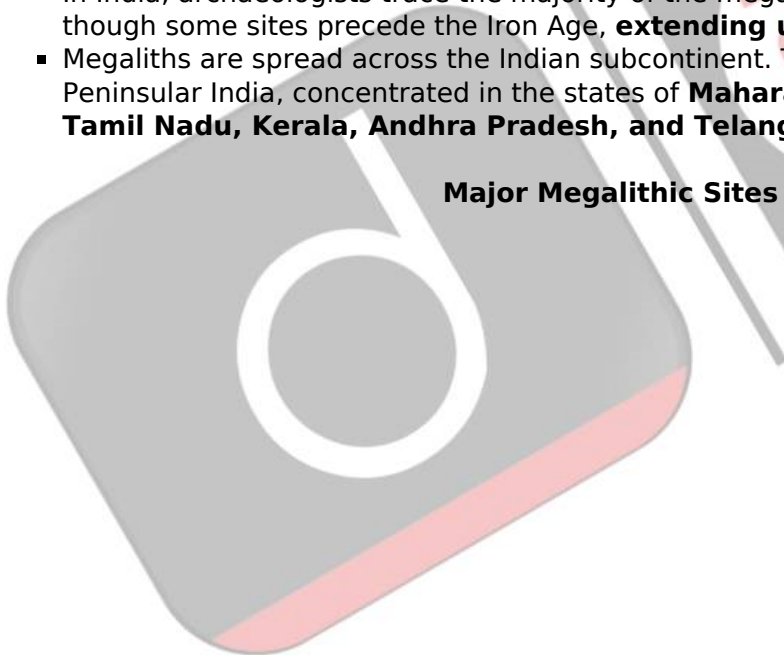
- While the jars are yet to be scientifically dated, the researchers said **links could be drawn with the stone jars found in Laos and Indonesia**.

- There are **typological and morphological similarities** between the jars found at all three sites.
- There is **no reported parallel anywhere else in India**, apart from the northeast – this points to the fact that once upon a time a group of people having similar kind of **cultural practice occupied the same geography between Laos and Northeast India**.
 - Dating done at the **Laos** site suggests that jars were positioned at the sites as early as the late **second millennium BC**.
 - In Laos, researchers had said there was a **“strong association” between the stone jars and mortuary practices, with human skeletal remains found inside and buried around the jars**.
 - In Indonesia, the **function of the jars remains unconfirmed**, although some scholars suggest a similar mortuary role.
- It calls for more research to understand the “likely cultural relationship” between Assam and Laos and Indonesia.

What are Megaliths?

- A megalith is a large stone that has been used to construct a **prehistoric structure or monument, either alone or together with other stones**.
- Megaliths were constructed either as **burial sites or commemorative (non-sepulchral) memorials**.
- The former are sites with actual burial remains, such as **dolmenoid cists** (box-shaped stone burial chambers), **cairn circles** (stone circles with defined peripheries) and **capstones** (distinctive mushroom-shaped burial chambers found mainly in Kerala).
- The urn or the sarcophagus containing the mortal remains was usually made of terracotta. Non-sepulchral megaliths include **memorial sites such as menhirs**.
- In India, archaeologists trace the majority of the megaliths to the **Iron Age (1500 BC to 500 BC)**, though some sites precede the Iron Age, **extending up to 2000 BC**.
- Megaliths are spread across the Indian subcontinent. The majority of megalithic sites are found in Peninsular India, concentrated in the states of **Maharashtra** (mainly in Vidarbha), **Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana**.

Major Megalithic Sites in India





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