

## Unit 14: Kosrae: Lelu Stone Ruin

*Tadasy Charlie*

### Facts

Government:	Independent (State of the Federated States of Micronesia-FSM)
Urban areas:	Lelu and Tofol
Biggest Island:	Kosrae
Highest Point::	Mount Finkol (634 m)
Population	7700 (estimated 2010)
Size	11km x 10km

### Glossary

<b><i>Insura</i></b>	The name of the historic site of the Lelu Ruins
<b><i>Tokosra/ Togusra</i></b>	Meaning King
<b><i>Inutnut</i></b>	Meaning spiritual magic
<b><i>Luo</i></b>	**** <i>need meaning</i>
<b><i>Fafa</i></b>	**** <i>need meaning</i>

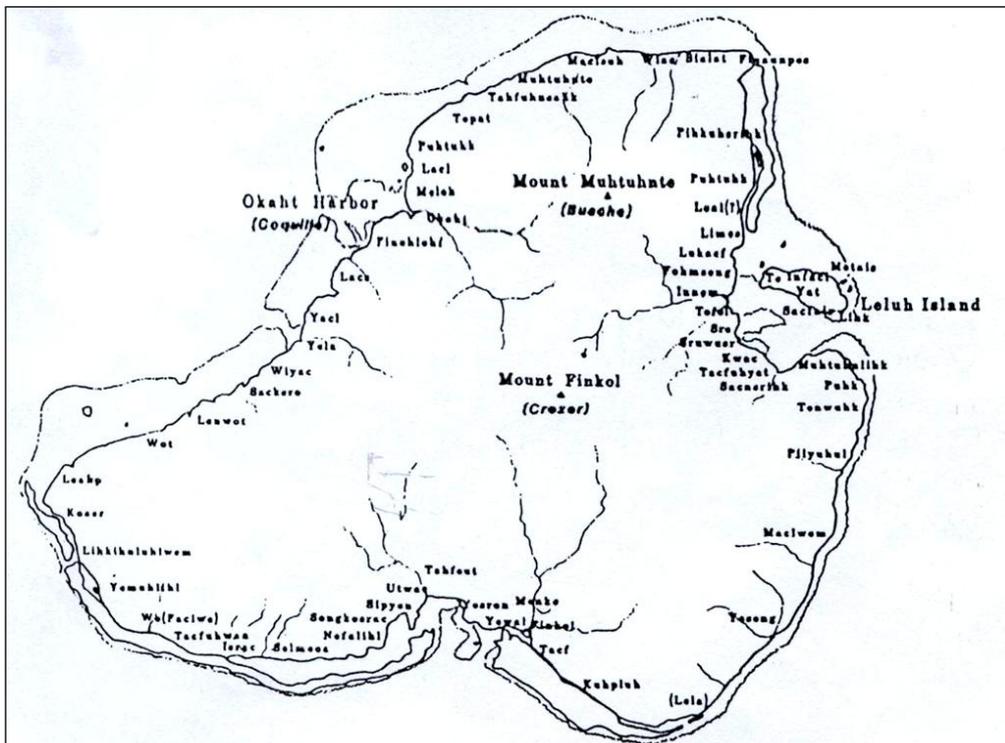


Figure 14.1. Map of Kosrae

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- appreciate the role of ruins in today's culture
- describe the importance of the "Lelu Ruin" in ancient times
- understand the history of the coronation of the Kosraean King

This chapter is about the stone walled ruins on Kosrae known as “Lelu”.

The Lelu Ruins or *Insura* is a historic site of great importance on the island of Kosrae. The city of Lelu once covered the entire flat portion of Lelu Island, and included 100 large rock wall compounds. Historically, it was the ruling centre and the capital of Kosrae. The time period 820-860 seems to mark the peak of the city. It was then a dwelling for nobles, including the *Tokosra*. It was the ceremonial centre of the society.

Only legends and archaeology can tell us what actually happened, as there was no written language until missionaries came to Kosrae in 1851.

### **The ruins in today’s culture**

Before 1979, the Lelu stone ruins were heavily overgrown. Only the landowners entered the area to make copra, collect wood, harvest a few crops, or take care of pigs placed in the stone walled compounds. The school children of Lelu also passed through the ruins, taking a shortcut to school. The ruins were not appreciated as an impressive historic site.

A kind of awe and fear of the ruins had grown up over the years, but the people of Lelu Island, as a whole, were not afraid of the ruins. Stories of ghosts of old residents are common yet Lelu people, with little fear, have removed stone from walls to build new house foundations and wharves.

Many people from outside Lelu, however, do fear the ruins. One rather famous ghost (an old woman) is frequently sighted, and workers are sometimes reluctant to go into the ruins.

The site was the capital of the former king and feudal lords of Kosrae. Some Kosraeans were aware of the history of the site and its features, but very few had visited the remains or believed they were a symbol of their past. The landowners of the site were willing to allow access to Kosraean and non-Kosraean visitors to the ruins.

The concept of a historical park is now forming, and it is hoped that the ruins will soon become a protected symbol of Kosrae's past - a place that schoolchildren and outsiders can visit to help them understand life in early Kosrae.

### **When the site was built**

A huge tree - probably a banyan - destroyed part of a stone wall many years ago. Because it is possible to calculate the age of a tree it is also possible to guess the age of the rock wall. It was

suggested that the tree was 500 years old. It was then estimated that the walls were 1,000 years old - from around 850 A.D.

### **The action of wind and waves**

Geographers tell us that the flat land on the west side of Lelu Island was created when a hurricane threw sand up on the reef behind a huge basalt rock. To protect this land and make it stable, Kosraeans built sea walls and levelled the earth to make the flat land on which the city was built. So what was originally under water (on shallow reef) was built up artificially to become a part of Lelu Island. It was protected from further storms by the huge basalt rock on the seaward side.

#### **Questions and Activities**

1. How was the site being used before 1979?
2. Why are people afraid of the ruins?
3. Who originally lived in the stone walled city of Lelu?
4. How was the age of the ruins discovered?
5. When was the most powerful period in the history of the city?

### **The legend: the story of Sataf**

A popular legend describes two magicians, by the name of Sataf and Lupankosrayawai, who led the project and competed the building of this gigantic city. These two men possessed the greatest power of magic on the island of Kosrae.

A king summoned all the people of Kosrae, forcing them to build the walls in Lelu. He ordered Sataf to take part in the building of the walls, and also Lopankosa from Yewal. When all the people of Kosrae were finished with the preparations, they came together to Lelu, in order to build the walls. Sataf alone stayed away. The king said he should come as the walls would be built on the next day. Sataf answered that he would come later, because he was waiting for the return of his two sons. When he did not come on the following day, people began to build the walls.

When Sataf heard of this, he quickly built himself a small wall. He wanted to use magic to destroy the walls of Lelu. As soon as he pulled out just one stone from his wall, the walls of Lelu collapsed. The

people at Lelu rebuilt them. When they were perfect again, Sataf again pulled a stone from his wall. The walls of Lelu again fell down.

The king sent Sataf a message that he should come as soon as possible. Sataf consulted with Lopankosa from Yewal about the trip. When Sataf had his raft ready, he commanded the stones to hurry on to it. When the raft was loaded, he walked on the shore and said the following:

*Outside of Tauesomo,  
of Tauesmo, of Tauesmo,  
Outside of Tauesmo  
Stands alone a coconut tree,  
Slanting stands the trunk,  
Held from a staff,  
It bends near,  
And turns again high.  
Spirit Soap! Soap!  
Leave the small waves,  
Send me great waves!  
Take for it this **luo!**  
Take this face!  
Spirit Soap, Soap!*

Then a high tide came. With the ocean storm and the waves, the raft rose high and was taken out to sea. Sataf guided it through the ocean storm. On the raft he made an earth oven, prepared **fafa** and caught fish. When Sataf came to Lelu, he landed in Yat and made an appointment with the king. The king told him that each time the work was complete, the walls collapsed again completely.

After the welcoming festivities, Sataf began his work. He spoke and the stones quickly piled themselves on top of each other, until the walls of Lelu were finished.

Since his two sons still had not returned when Sataf departed, he had left two stones out for them to bring to Lelu. On their return, the sons carried the stones high using a walking stick, but it was very difficult. When their mother laughed at them they put the stick away. They made baskets out of wild cane leaves to carry the stones. However, the stones slid out of the baskets. Now the woman told her sons to go ahead and the stones ran after them.

When the two sons came to Lelu, Sataf asked them why they had come so late. When the sons told Sataf, he told his sons to lay down the two stones they brought for the people.

After completing the walls of the city, Sataf headed home with his two sons.

**Where were the stones from and how were they transported?**

Flat and round coral stones are located all along the edge of the reef around Lelu Bay today. These stones were easily available for building. The hill of Lelu is basalt and could have been the source for some basalt stones, but it could not have been the only source. Most of the stones had to come from the main island. The story of Sataf suggests that these large stones came from the main island.

But from where on the main island did the stones come? It is said in traditions that some came from Utwe. A large stack of basalt off Taf (near modern Utwe Village) on the shallow reef is said to be a stockpile for Lelu. The story of Sataf also suggests that the stones came from Taf. But the story of Sataf also states that Lopankosa brought stones from Yewal in Utwe. The different stones in the ruins suggest several sources (the stones are round, block or prismatic basalt).

The legends about Lelu solve one question that often arises, "How were the big basalt stones brought to Lelu?" These stones were too heavy to carry or drag across the reef, and if put in a canoe, the canoe would soon be on the bottom of the sea. The Sataf story says stones were floated to Lelu by raft.

### **Architectural styles**

The Germans who visited Kosrae in the 19th century were impressed by the huge walls of Lelu. The scientist Paul Hambruch stated that three types of basalt stone were used:

- (a) roundish blocks (*eot mwen tukunkun*)
- (b) "mighty" irregular squares (*eot srolep*)
- (c) four and six sided prismatic blocks of basalt

Some of these blocks are 2.5m long. Some prismatic basalt was stacked in a log-cabin fashion.



### Questions and Activities

6. When was the ruin built?
7. Who lived at Lelu?
8. Where did the basalt rocks come from?
9. List the three types of stones on the ruins?
10. Describe a core-filled wall (in 50 words) and include a drawing of the process

### The selection of a King (*Togusra*)

The Kings of Kosrae were selected by heredity through the mother's descent. If there was no descendant in the *Togusra's* family, an alternative descendant would be chosen King. The High Chiefs would decide. The *Togusra* was regarded as part spirit because his power was so great. When a commoner was in the presence of a chief, or a chief in the presence of the *Togusra*, they would crouch down low. They would not speak unless asked. This demonstrated obedience and homage.

### The coronation of a king

The coronation of a king at Lelu was an island-wide event. A month long celebration was planned. Food was transported to Lelu in canoes from the villages. Every day was organised and everybody came to the king's palace at Lelu. The new king moved to Posal, the ancient royal homestead where the two high priests or magicians, Salem and Nisapon, conducted the ceremony. During the ceremony, a folded banana leaf was opened and young orange leaves and flowers were taken out and the priests made *inutnut*, mumbling secret and mysterious words. The priests then put the leaves in the king's ear lobe and some on his head, calling out in loud voices, "*Togusra*" and "*Kasaa*".

The celebration began with a distribution of food which the local chiefs from Oualun, on the main island, gave to the people.

## The burial of a king

The death of a *Togusra* was marked by burial in a royal tomb. This great ceremony took place in a special compound in Lelu. The body was hung on a rafter in the tomb and not removed until all the flesh had rotted away. Then the bones were gathered and washed in another ceremony and dropped in a hole on the ocean floor, on the reef close to the Lelu compound.

## A Pacific Heritage Site

The Lelu stone walled city is considered to be one of the most impressive historic sites in the entire Pacific. Lelu has large walls, canals, streets and a King's tomb. This site is extremely important archaeologically in the Pacific region. It represents the highest point of development in old Kosrae. It was the capital of the island, and the ruling city where the Kings and High Chiefs lived. Although now a ruin, with broken walls and the water canals filled with earth, it allows Kosraeans to glance at and remember their own past.

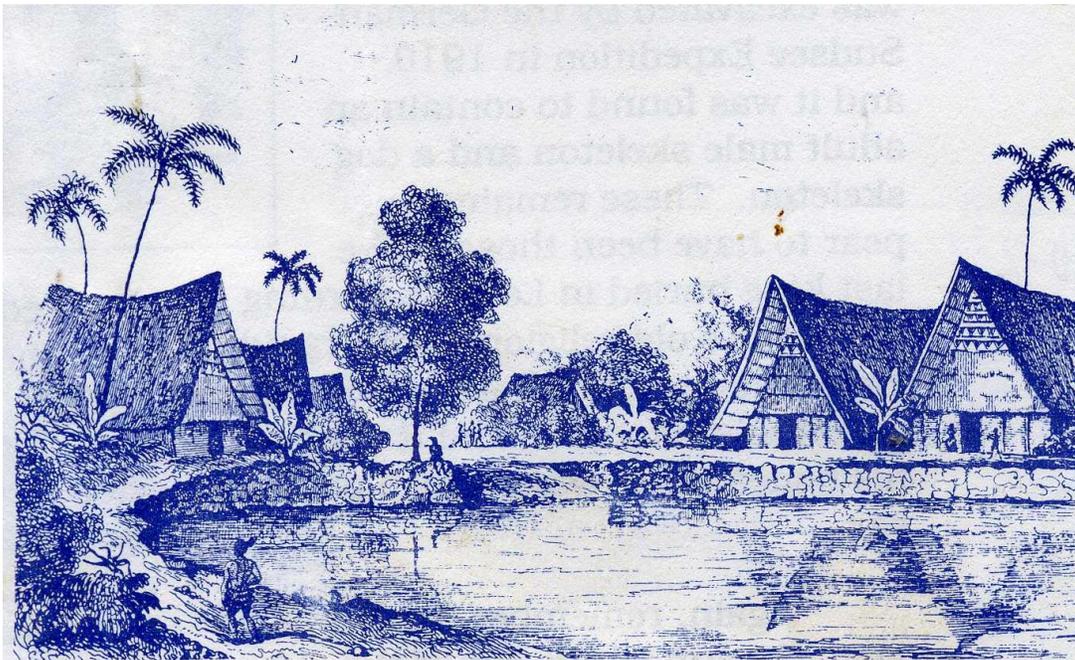


Figure 14.1. Lelu village, a painting by the artists on the voyage *Senyavin*, captained by the the Russian, Lutke in 1827-28

### Questions and Activities

#### *Fill the Blanks*

Write the missing words from the list below in the appropriate blank spaces to complete the sentence.

*Salem, high chiefs, tomb, remember, streets, chief, Nisapon, Togusra, Oualun, observe, canals*

11. The \_\_\_\_\_ chose the King if there was no descendant in the Togusra's family.
12. When a \_\_\_\_\_ was in the presence of the \_\_\_\_\_ he would crouch down.
13. The King was crowned by the two high priests, called \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
14. The local chiefs from \_\_\_\_\_ distributed food to the people as part of the coronation celebrations.
15. The Lelu stone ruins have these features: large stone walls, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and a king's \_\_\_\_\_.