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#### *About the Institute*

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, a research division of Carnegie Mellon University, specializes in the history of botany and all aspects of plant science and serves the international scientific community through research and documentation. To this end, the Institute acquires and maintains authoritative collections of books, plant images, manuscripts, portraits and data files, and provides publications and other modes of information service. The Institute meets the reference needs of botanists, biologists, historians, conservationists, librarians, bibliographers and the public at large, especially those concerned with any aspect of the North American flora.

Hunt Institute was dedicated in 1961 as the Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt Botanical Library, an international center for bibliographical research and service in the interests of botany and horticulture, as well as a center for the study of all aspects of the history of the plant sciences. By 1971 the Library's activities had so diversified that the name was changed to Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Growth in collections and research projects led to the establishment of four programmatic departments: Archives, Art, Bibliography and the Library.

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Fungi study by  
LSU botanist  
turns to archeology

OFFICE OF MEDIA SERVICES  
THOMAS BOYD HALL • PHONE 388-4461  
October 8, 1970 jfj

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For release Sunday,  
Oct. 11 and thereafter.

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Dr. Bernard Lowy, who has received international recognition for his research on fungi, has taken an archeological detour to become the first mycologist to seriously study the enigmatic "mushroom stones" left in the wake of one of Latin America's most advanced pre-Columbian civilizations.

The mushroom stones, so-called because each one is topped with a sculptured mushroom cap, are carved from volcanic stone, stand about a foot high, and may bear the images of both human and animal forms, often in combination. Some of the stones date from as early as 1500 B.C.; others are as recent as 700-900 A.D.

Almost all of the some 100 mushroom stones now known to exist have been found in Guatemala, where most of the great ceremonial centers of the Mayan civilization were located. A limited number have turned up in the Mexican state of Chiapas, which borders on Guatemala, and a few have been found in El Salvador.

(more)

Mushrooms. . .2

The National Museum of Anthropology and History in Guatemala City has the largest single collection of the mushroom stones, although many are held by private collectors in Guatemala, whose leading families have an intense interest in their native land's wealth of archeological treasures.

Dr. Lowy said that archeologists and anthropologists who have studied the mushroom stones believe the small effigies had special significance in the religious life of the Mayas, probably as part of a mushroom cult similar to that which exists today in the Mexican state of Oaxaca.

The centuries-old mushroom cult in Mexico centers around the use of hallucinogenic mushroom eaten in a religious ritual to induce a trance-like state during which the participant has a mystic or religious experience.

Dr. Lowy's research on the mushroom stones is the result of a long standing interest in ethnomycology, a relatively new field of exploration which examines the role of fungi, particularly mushrooms, in the folk customs and religious practices of the races of man. Some of the same species of hallucinogenic mushrooms used by the Mexican cult today also grow in the central highlands and along part of the Pacific coastal plains of Guatemala. In this same area were located the sacred buildings and temples which formed the center of Mayan religious life.

This summer Dr. Lowy toured the northern and central parts of Guatemala and interviewed people extensively but found no traces, not even folklore, of a mushroom cult ever having existed in that area. However, he found that they have a considerable knowledge of edible and poisonous mushrooms and appropriate terms in their native languages to describe them.

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