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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.

Department of Botany
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL COLLEGE
BATON ROUGE · LOUISIANA · 70803-1705

504/388-8485

March 19, 1986

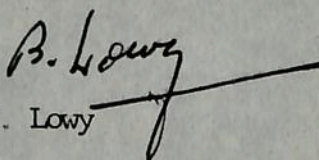
Dr. Ray Boehne
Box 16992
Portland, Oregon 97233

Dear Dr. Boehne:

I want to thank you for your kindness in sending me a typed copy of K.S. Manilal's paper on mushrooms and dolmens. Since it was published several years ago and not sent to me by the author, he may not appreciate anything I may have to say about it, but I have written to Dr. Abraham as a matter of courtesy because he wanted to bring it to my attention. Without going into details and only for your information, I find Manilal's far reaching conclusions to be based largely on what appears to be inadequate evidence. He may be right, but a more rigorous approach is needed to document his observations.

I hope that your work is progressing satisfactorily, and that you may soon be able to report your findings from Oaxaca.

With best wishes,


B. Lowy

Department of Botany
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL COLLEGE
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18-III-1986

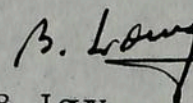
Dr. S. P. Abraham
RRL, Srinagar
Kashmir, India 190005

Dear Dr. Abraham:

I have just received a copy of your paper from Dr. Ray Boehne which clarifies the questions I had when I wrote to you in response to your Jan. 15th letter.

K. S. Manilal makes some provocative points concerning the mushroom-shaped dolmens in Kerala, but as he implies, apart from the shape of the dolmens themselves, it is still far from conclusive that they were associated with a cult based on "respect and fear towards these types of mushrooms". He refers to Psilocybe and Amanita, "several species of which contain hallucinogenic compounds". This far-reaching conclusion requires strict documentation. There are scores of mushroom genera with shapes similar to Psilocybe and Amanita. What is needed, I believe, is credible evidence indicating that the mushroom-shaped dolmens and actual mushrooms were not merely fortuitously associated. Regarding the Maya mushroom stones, there is such evidence, both from the past (pre-Columbian) and present, but I am unaware of similar evidence from India specifically referring to the dolmens in question. There is, of course, the well known interpretation by R. G. Wasson of passages from the Rig Veda which indicates that Soma was probably Amanita muscaria, but this is unconnected with dolmens in any way. Perhaps, when you are in Kerala, you could try to verify whether or not "the tribals...eat the hallucinogenic mushrooms". If this is true, the mushrooms used would have to be collected and identified, and if used ritually, such a ceremony should be witnessed, and if possible, photographed, and any spoken narrative, chants or accompanying songs recorded.

With kindest regards,



B. Lowy
Prof. Emeritus

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Phone call from Dr. B. — (wash.)

- 1) He has A. muscorum from Kashmir in mycorrhizal form and wants to culture it. It was on Betula utilis (POA)
- 2) He also found a new Dorussia sp. in Dorosa (1985), identified by Schultze.
- 3) Dr. S. P. Abraham (Kashmir) is working with him. Also Dr. Watling (Eng.)
- 4) Dave Trenkner (Alabama) may do culture work.
- 5) I sent P. cubense to him, years ago.

27-II-86

± 1 PM

March 5, 1986

Dear Dr. Lowy,

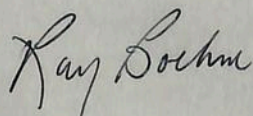
I'm glad to hear of your South American project and am impressed by the scope of it.

Please forgive me for any confusion caused by my delay in getting the enclosed paper down to you. As you now, it was handed to me in Kashmir by Dr. Sales Abraham of the Regional Research Laboratory in Srinagar. I told him that it would be of interest to you, and that I would forward a copy to you on my return to the U.S. I delayed doing so because I wanted to type it for you, and I simply have not taken the time to do so until the present.

As you know from our telephone conversation, I took cuttings and seed of a new, or at least relatively unknown, hallucinogenic morning glory from Oaxaca over to Dr. Schultes last week. He had not seen it, and is doing a review of the Monograph of the Convolvulaceae of Mexico to be sure it has not been noted before. Its flower is white and lacy, and at first glance resembles a carnation. I'll send pictures in my next letter. The seeds were given to me by a man who had the plant in cultivation on the side of Monte Alban.

I'll send a follow-up to this letter to bring you up to date on the work we're doing with Amanita muscaria of Kashmir.

Best regards,



Ray Boehne

Box 16992
Portland, Oregon 97233
(503) 761-7720

18-III-1986

Dear Dr. Abraham:

I have just received a copy of your paper from Dr. Ray Boehne which clarifies the questions I had when I wrote to you in response to your Jan. 15th letter.

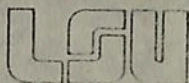
K.S. Manilal

You makes some provocative points concerning the mushroom-shaped dolmens in Kerala, but as ^{he} ~~you~~ implies apart from the shape of the dolmens themselves, it is still far from conclusive that they were associated with a cult based on "respect and fear towards these types of mushrooms." ^{He} ~~you~~ refers to Psilocybe and Amanita, "several species of which contain hallucinogenic compounds." ^{This} ~~your~~ far-reaching conclusion requires strict documentation. There are scores of mushroom genera with shapes similar to Psilocybe and Amanita. What is needed, I believe is credible evidence indicating that the mushroom-shaped dolmens and actual mushrooms were not merely fortuitously associated. ~~At the~~ Regarding the Maya mushroom stones, there is such evidence, both from the past (pre-Columbian) and present, but I am unaware of ~~any~~ similar evidence from India specifically referring to the dolmens in question. There is, of course, the well known interpretation by R. E. Heason of passages from the Rig Veda which indicates that Soma was probably Amanita muscaria, but this is unconnected with dolmens in any way. Perhaps, when you are in Kerala you could try to verify whether or not "The tribes ... eat the hallucinogenic mushrooms." If this is true, ~~specimens~~ the mushrooms used would have to be collected and identified, and if used ritually, such a ceremony ~~would have to be witnessed, and if possible,~~ should be

photographed, and any spoken narrative, ~~the~~
chants or ^{accompanying} songs recorded.

With kindest regards,

M



3-II-1986

Dr. S. P. Abraham
RRL, Srinagar
Kashmir, India 190005

Dear Dr. Abraham:

Thank you for your kind greetings and good wishes, which I reciprocate. I must confess to some embarrassment in being unfamiliar with Mr. Ray Bohone whom you refer to in your letter. Consequently, I am unaware of your work on Kerale dolmens or any attempt to link such "findings with the Mexican mushroom stones." Perhaps you would be good enough to further explain what you mean by this.

Concerning your interest in post-doctoral work here at the university, I would suggest that you submit all pertinent data to: Dr. Thomas F. Moore, Chairman of the Botany Department, together with a statement indicating in which area you plan to work, and the problems you wish to pursue. I am sure that your inquiry will receive prompt and courteous attention.

I wish it were possible to visit India some day, but my present plans do not permit this. During the last week of April I shall be on my way to the Brazilian Amazon to participate in a mycological project for about 3 months.

With best wishes,

B. Lowy
Prof. Emeritus

Dr. S. P. Abraham

Trinagar 15th January 1986

Dear Prof. Lowy,

I take this opportunity to greet and wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year. May this season of hope brings you joy, happiness and good health in abundance throughout 1986.

This has reference to Mr. Ray Bohone's introduction I suppose the article on dolmens in Kerala (South India) has some significance and perhaps of some use. There are no other similar reference on dolmens elsewhere in India, although the possibility can not be ignored as not much work in this line has been done in this part. I shall be looking into this more seriously, especially when I go to Kerala next time; incidently Kerala is my home state. I am sure lot more first hand informations can be gathered than on dolmens found there in Kerala. It would be really worth attempting to link this findings with the Mexican mushroom stones. The people referred in the article are the true inhabitants of Kerala, the 'dravidians' the sons of the soil, now being pushed back to remote hilly tracks. It would have been much interesting and useful if you would visit India this year sometime. In such case we could share the mycological pleasure of collecting agarics in Kashmir; and gathering informations on dolmens in Kerala etc. The best time to visit Kashmir would be August-September to October; and for Kerala being in the tropics would be any time except the monsoon season i.e. May-June. Let me know your views on this.

Perhaps Ray must have mentioned to you my interest in working in United States for sometime. I am really looking forward to such an opportunity or it possible for you to offer me a scholarship under any suitable scheme, preferably a post-doctorate fellowship. Certainly I shall be much benefited by this and kindly consider all possibilities of such an offer. It is very important for me now.

I shall submit my biobata, educational background,
experience etc. etc on hearing from you.

Looking forward to hear from you soon.

With profound regards

Yours sincerely,

As to _____

(S. B. Abraham)
Regional Research Laboratory
Sanat Nagar
Srinagar - 190005
KASHMIR, India

P.S

On collecting more accurate informations on dolmens
found in Kerala, we can publish the date
jointly. We shall discuss this later

Q

(SALES)

Glimpses of Indian Ethnobotany

Ed. S.K. Jain, Oxford IBH Pbl. Co., New Delhi, Bombay, and
Calcutta.

Page 321-325

An Ethnobotanic Connection Between Mushrooms and Dolmens

K.S. Manilal (1981)

Dept. of Botany

Calicut University

Kerala

A unique type of dolmens in the shape of mushrooms are found in several localities in Kerala. These structures, called umbrella-stones, are megalithic burial monuments made out of hard lateritic stone by the acient people in 1000-500 B.C. The main feature of interest about these dolmens is considered here as their characteristic shape itself, which closely resembles that of some mushrooms like Psilocybe, Amanita, etc., several species of which contain hallucinogenic chemical compounds. Some of the tribals who eat such mushrooms are found to worship them, hold them as possessing mysterious powers and properties and consider them as a means to communicate with their Deity and with the spirits of the dead. It is suggested that it is their respect and fear towards these types of mushrooms which prompted the acient people to construct the stone monuments in a similiar shape for their departed leaders so that the tribes may expect to continue to receive their able leadership and guidance from beyond.

Some characteristic megalithic lateritic monuments in the form of large mushrooms are found in several localities in Kerala, such as Porculam, Kunnankulam, Eyyal, Morayoor, Devikulam, Mayarad, Tirur, etc. These structures are known as Kudahkallu or umbrella stones (Krishnaswami, 1969; Rao, 1972). These are the burial structures constructed by ancient men in 1000-500 B.C. and being to the type called dolmens. The dolmens in general, are found along a long belt on earth, including such regions as southern and western Europe, northern Africa, central Asia, and extending up to Malaysia. In India, dolmens are found mainly in Kerala. No conclusive evidence has yet been found to prove why the ancient people of such diverse cultures and far-apart regions of the earth were constructing identical types of monuments to bury their dead.

There are mainly three types of dolmens: (1) with a square chamber, covered on all four sides with flat stone pieces and with another flat stone piece for a roof; (2) with a square chamber as in the first type but with one side open, and (3) with a tapering conical pillar-like structure made of four stone pieces so as to make a circular outer side, and another circular stone with a flat bottom and a convex upper side as a roof piece. In the central chamber inside the dolmens, the ashes, bones, and other mortal remains of the person are buried. Some of his belongings may also be kept. The last type of dolmen which looks exactly like a giant mushroom or an umbrella and is called umbrella stone, is found in Kerala alone.

✓

③

The shape of the umbrella stone megalithic is of particular interest. It is well known why this shape was preferred for the monuments, when countless numbers of designs for such a construction could be imagined. It could of course, be said that the geology of the region had a part to play in this, as it is sometimes found easier to cut circular pieces, rather than flat slabs, from laterite formations. In Kerala, which may geologically be divided into three main regions, viz, the coastal sandy region, the midland lateritic region and the highland granite region. The umbrella-stones are mainly found in the middlelands. However, many of them are found to be located in the coastal regions as well as in the highlands. Similarly, it is also evident that protecting the ashes and other remains of the dead from the vagaries of the climate has not been the primary concern of their builders, because evidently the roof piece in the umbrella-stone, placed at the pointed tip of the four-stone basal structure, is not planned for its stability. Therefore, it maybe concluded that the most important feature in this type of dolmens has been the shape itself. This leads one to wonder whether there was any significance or speciality for this particular shape to capture the imagination of the ancient men.

The only common things in nature with a similar shape are the mushrooms. Although there are many types of mushrooms, from the striking similarity in their external appearance it may be seen that the toadstools belonging to the genera such as Psilocybe, Amanita, etc, were the ones which were taken as the models of these dolmens. If this is so, these mushrooms would

have some special relations with those people who constructed the monuments. We have, at present, very limited knowledge about the philosophies on which the acient men based their burial customs but, some strange beliefs and customs, which are still existing among some tribals of Kerala (and surprisingly among some natives of Southern Mexico) throw some light in this direction.

Modern chemistry has identified many chemical substances, which consumed, are fatal to humans or affect the nervous system of men creating hallucination, unreasonable sense of happiness, etc. Most of the latter types of chemical compound contain indole or closely related compounds. Important among such chemicals are Psilocybin found to be present in Psilocybe and L.S.D. (lysergic acid diethylamide) which is contained in another fungus called Claviceps. Several tribals in Kerala like Malaparidaram, Paniyas, Kanikkars, etc. who eat such types of mushrooms are found to have a reverance towards them and reluctance to talk about them. ~~Malapars are known to make~~ Malapardarams are known to make dolmen-like structures for their worship on certain occasions. It has been recorded that the species of Psilocybe have for thousands of years been eaten by the native tribes of south Mexico also as a community ritual and their method of communication with the diety (Christionsen 1966). The tribals who eat these mushrooms fear and adore the mushrooms, and regard them as the key to being in touch with infinity. Intake of these mushrooms in the ritualistic manner is believed to enable them to predict the future and to communicate with their dead leaders as well as relatives. Handling these mushrooms is considered a sacred matter and they can be talked of only in whispers among

trusted friends and in the dead of the night. It is also believed that the eaters of these mushrooms attain super-human strength and an eternal life. Closer investigations about the role of these mushrooms in the rituals of the Kerala tribes may yield more interesting information.

Mushroom flora of Kerala, especially the species containing poisonous and hallucinogenic compounds, have not been subjected to any detailed study so far.

Psilocybe and Amanita species are reported from many locations in India. Tribals in Kerala who eat the hallucinogenic mushrooms have a worshipful attitude toward them and hesitate to talk about the mushrooms. It is strongly suspected that they have a superstitious reluctance to talk about the object of their worship, which is similar to the beliefs of the S. Mexican tribals.

It may therefore be stated that it was the respect and fear toward these types of mushrooms as a means for establishing a communion with their diety, and for attaining an eternal life, which prompted the ancient people to construct the stone monuments for their heroic chieftains and rulers in this particular architectural design. By keeping the mortal remains of their brave leaders and warriors inside these mushroom shaped monuments, the ancient people might have expected to continue to recieve the leadership and guidance from their powerful ancestral spirits to win their own battles and solve their earthly problems.

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Symposia of Indian Ethnobotany
Ed. S. K. Jain. OXFORD & IAH Pbl. Co. N. D. C.
P. 321-325. Botany

K.S. Manilal (1981)

Dept. of Botany
Calicut Univ.
Kerala

An Ethnobotanic connection
between Mushrooms and
Dolmens

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ancient men in 1000-500 BC and being to the type called dolmens. The dolmens in general, are found along a long belt on earth, including such regions as southern and western Europe, northern Africa, Central Asia and extending up to Malaysia. In India, dolmens are found mainly in Kerala. No conclusive evidence has yet been found to prove why the ancient people of such diverse cultures and far-apart regions of the earth were constructing identical types of monuments to bury their dead.

There are mainly three types of dolmens: (1) with a square chamber, covered on all four sides with flat stone pieces and with another flat stone piece for a roof; (2) with a square chamber as in the first type but with one side open, and (3) with a tapering conical pillar-like structure made of four stone pieces so as to make a circular outer side and a flat, circular stone with a flat bottom and a convex upper side as a roof piece. In the latter chamber inside the dolmens, the ashes, bones and other material remains of the poor are buried. Some of his belongings may also be kept. One last type of dolmen which looks exactly like a giant mushroom or an umbrella and is called the umbrella stone is found in Kerala alone.

The shape of the umbrella stone megaliths is of particular interest. It is well known why this shape was preferred for the monuments, when counters numbers of designs for such a construction could be imagined. It could of course be said that the geometry of the region had

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The only common things in nature with similar shape are the mushrooms. Although there are many types of mushrooms, from the striking similarity in their external appearance ~~it may be seen~~ that the toadstools belonging to the genera Psilocybe, Amanita, etc., were the ones which were taken as the models of these domes. ~~It may be~~ true is so, then mushrooms would have some special relations with those people who constructed the monuments. We have, at present, very limited knowledge about the philosophies on which the ancient men based their burial customs but, some strong beliefs and customs, which are still existing among some tribes of Kerala (and surprisingly among some natives of Solomon Many) throw some light in this direction.

Natural chemistry has identified many chemical substances, which comprised, are related to humans affect the nervous system of man creating hallucinations

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who eat such types of mushrooms are found to
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investigations about the role of these
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Mushroom flora of Kerala, especially the species containing poisons and hallucinogenic compounds, has not been subjected to any detailed study so far. (eg. Gurkayatho and Chandra, 1976). Psilocybe tristis, P. caespitica, Amanita caesarea, A. vagenata, etc. are already reported from other regions of India, as the edible forms. Evidently, some poisonous species of Amanita and Psilocybe are present in this region. Although the tribals who eat such mushrooms have a worshippful attitude towards them which are considered by these tribals could be obtained. However, it is strongly suspected that they have a superstitious reluctance to talk about this subject, which is similar with the beliefs of the S. Mexican tribals.

It may be, therefore, be stated that it was the respect & fear towards these types of mushrooms as a means for establishing a communion with their deity and for attaining an eternal life, which prompted the ancient people to construct the stone monuments for their heroic chieftains and rulers in this particular architectural design. By keeping the mortal remains of their brave leaders & warriors inside these mushroom shaped monuments, the ancient people might have expected its continuous to receive the leadership and guidance from their powerful ancestral spirits to win their own battles & solve their earthly problems.

References

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