

MEGALITHS AND DOHANNIM (OR DOVORNNIM)-19

In 1580 when the Jesuit missionary Fr. Rudolf Acquaviva and his companions traveled overland from Surat to the Mughal Court at Fatehpur-Sikri near Agra, their road led through a broad and populated plain, covered with cacti, palms and banyan trees... At the roadside they noticed frequent wells, built by the charity of Banyans, and periodically, stone tables on which the passers-by might lay down their burdens for rest.ⁱ This may be the earliest travelogue by a foreign visitor that recorded the existence of stone tables in villages on the way from Western to Central India.



Fig. 1 A sketch of a dohannimⁱⁱ



Fig. 2 Dohannim (Photo:Newton Sequeira)ⁱⁱⁱ



Fig. 3 Dohannim in Camurlim



Fig. 4 Dohannim in Colvale



Fig.5 Dohannim converted to a shrine and plastered

The sketch in fig.1 and the photo in fig.2 depict dohannim (plural of dohannim) under trees. The description in Portuguese, under fig.1, translated - such resting stone tables were sited in select places and in the vicinity of bodies of water (likely ponds and wells) that served both humans and animals. This is consistent with the observation by Fr. Acquaviva.

Several such structures still exist in the province of Bardez. Many are in ruins. The dohannim/dohannim (fig. 3) seen in Camurlim, Bardez is in front of the shuttered Chapel of St. Francis Xavier located at 15° 37.82" N 73° 48 67"E. The table-shaped structure is built of regular masonry laterite stones, without mortar, to a height of an average adult. Nearby, at Colvale, is another (fig. 4) in ruins on a plateau off from the main road. There is banyan tree further back and beyond the tree a small covered cross. Located at N 15° 38.32" E 73° 50.60". Yet another, in the middle of the same village also has an attached stone bench and recently converted into a shrine and plastered, so as to protect the ancient heritage, is seen in fig.5. This was attested by a local resident.

In South Goa, stone structures built with much larger stones (megaliths) have been sighted in several provinces. Two are intact and others in various stages of ruins. These generally consist of three standing ones or supportive megaliths of various heights, and one placed horizontally capping the three. This fits the description of typical dolmens seen elsewhere from Ireland to Korea.^{iv} In Peninsular India thousands of dolmen-like structures of different architecture/configurations have also been documented. Several excavated sites revealed human remains and artefacts.

However, the megalithic structures in Goa are mistakenly perceived also as dohannim/dovornnim, since in earlier times, when conveniently located along the trails may have been used as resting platforms. A typical model, exhibited at a heritage museum as an example of how they might have been used, is depicted in fig. 6.

Following measurements of several recently researched dolmens and reported earlier^v, it became apparent that they were not uniform in heights and spacing between the vertical stones, whereas dohannim are standardized flat stone tables. Three examples of differently-sized megaliths (figs.7-9) are shown below to see the contrasting differences.



Fig.6 Megalith used as a model of Dohannem at a Heritage Museum^{vi}



Fig.7 Dolmen in ruins in Nagoa (Height 44-46"; gap between stones – 4-5")



Fig.8 Dolmen in Quepem with the topping fallen (Height 47-48"; gap between stones – 4.5")



Fig. 9 Intact dolmen in Cuelim (gaps between stones - 9-11")

References

ⁱ Goldie Francis, *The First Christian Mission to the Great Mogul...*, Dublin: M.H. Gill, 1897, pp.59-60.

ⁱⁱ D^oMiranda Carmo, *Os Transportes dos Goeses Dos Tempos Passados*, (Transport in Goa of the Past) Purabhilekh-Puratatva, vol.vii, No.2 1989, pp. 33-67

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/Goas-original-pitstops/articleshow/49121121.cms>

^{iv} <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/dolmen>

^v <https://goaprehistory.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/megaliths-dolmens-goal.pdf>

<https://goaprehistory.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/megaliths-around-source-river-sal.pdf>

<https://goaprehistory.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/dolmens-in-district-of-quepem.docx>

^{vi} Big Foot, Loutolim, Salcete, Goa