

Discovery of a Stone Circle (Cairn Circle) at Sree Krishna College Guruvayur: A Link to South India's Stone Age Heritage

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Abstract:- Megalithic monuments are found extensively across Kerala, offering significant insights into the ancient societies that once thrived in the region. These structures—comprising umbrella stones, rock-cut caves, menhirs, dolmens, port-holed cists, and stone circles—represent a sophisticated ritual landscape spanning various districts. The Thrissur district, particularly near Kunnankulam and Kandanassery, hosts several important prehistoric sites within a 15-kilometer radius, such as burial caves in Kattakambal, Kandanassery, and Kakkad, as well as the Kudakkallu Parambu at Cheramanangad and the Ariyannur Umbrellas. This paper introduces a newly discovered megalithic site at Sree Krishna College, Guruvayur, featuring a stone circle or cairn circle—the first of its kind documented at this location. The study explores the site's geographical setting, structural characteristics, and cultural significance, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Kerala's megalithic heritage.

Keywords:- *Megalithic Monuments, Archaeological Heritage, Stone Circle, Cairn Circle, Umbrella Stone, Burial Practices.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Thrissur district in Kerala is notable for its significant collection of megalithic monuments, which offer a glimpse into the region's prehistoric Iron Age. These structures, typically made from large granite stones, serve as cultural and historical markers that reflect ancient burial practices, social customs, and architectural skills. Thrissur's landscape includes dolmens, menhirs, rock-cut caves, umbrella stones (Kudakkallu), and hat stones (Toppikkallu), each with distinct burial forms and symbolic meanings (Valsa 61-64). According to Valsa M.A., Thrissur's megalithic sites reveal Kerala's connections to broader South Indian, West Asian, and Mediterranean megalithic traditions, suggesting a continuity of cultural practices influenced by migration and trade networks (61). Noteworthy sites such as Ramavarmapuram, Ariyannur, and Cheramanangad exhibit variations in construction techniques and grave goods, indicative of differing social structures, religious beliefs, and possibly ethnic groups among these early communities.

The recent discovery of a megalithic stone circle on the campus of Sree Krishna College, Guruvayur, expands Thrissur's inventory of prehistoric monuments, underscoring the district's archaeological potential. This discovery not only enriches the understanding of Thrissur's role in the megalithic landscape of South India but also emphasizes the region's ongoing importance for archaeological inquiry.

➤ *Thrissur's Megalithic Heritage*

Thrissur is renowned for its dense assemblage of megalithic sites, with prominent examples including Cheramanangad, Porkkulam, Kakkad, Eyyal, Kattakambal, Chowannur, and Ramavarmapuram. These sites reflect diverse burial practices and high craftsmanship, particularly evident in the umbrella stones and menhirs at places like Eyyal and Ramavarmapuram, which serve as markers of social memory and ritual practice. Together, these structures convey the ritual, religious, and social dimensions of early societies in the region, situating Thrissur within the broader context of South Indian megalithic culture.

The newly discovered stone circle at Sree Krishna College, Guruvayur, adds an important element to this collection. Stone circles are relatively rare in this region and are often associated with communal burial customs, suggesting a possible social hierarchy or collective ritual practice. This site not only broadens the catalogue of Thrissur's megalithic monuments but also raises questions about the symbolic and social functions of stone circles in Kerala's prehistoric landscape.

II. DATA METHODOLOGY

In this preliminary study of the newly discovered stone circle, our methodology was limited to non-invasive observational techniques and measurements, as excavation is restricted to the Archaeology Department. We began by identifying the structure as a stone circle based on guidelines from archaeological textbooks, focusing on specific features such as the diameter, layering gaps, and the shape of the stones. Using these criteria, we verified the structure's classification through comparisons with documented stone circle images. Subsequently, we took detailed measurements and photographs of the site, which allowed us to create maps and schematic representations of the stone circle's layout. These schematic diagrams, which capture the overall shape and configuration of the stones, were generated using Python

Software for accurate spatial mapping. Additionally, we calculated distances between this site and other nearby megalithic sites to contextualize it within the regional archaeological landscape.

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

The stone circle was discovered near Sree Krishna College in a secluded, shrub-covered area on the laterite-rich hills by the college men’s hostel (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). The site was found during a National Service Scheme’s (NSS) palmyra-planting initiative (2022-2023) when the author recognized the unique circular stone formation, identifying it as a megalithic monument due to its resemblance to nearby umbrella stones and rock caves.

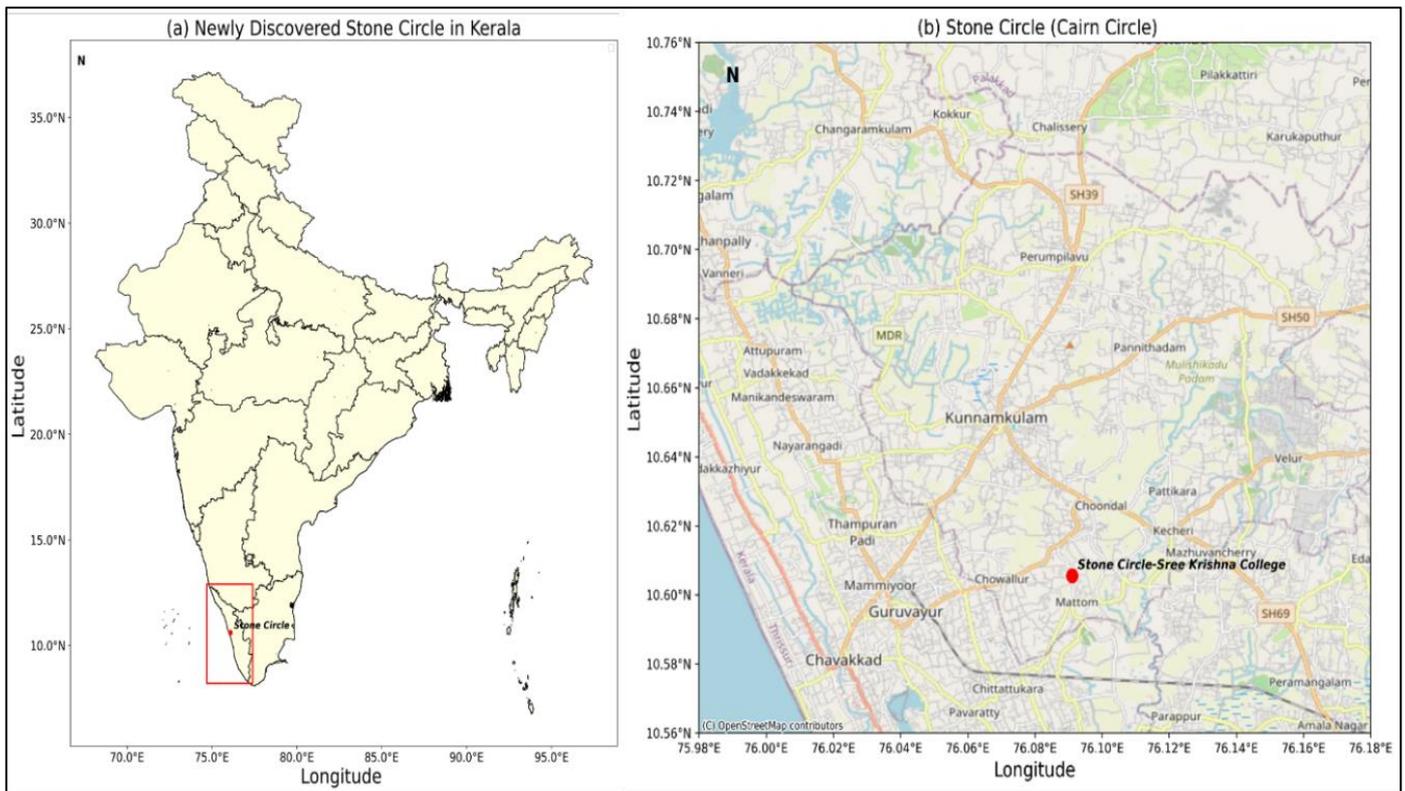


Fig 1: Location of the Newly Discovered Stone Circle



Fig 2: Newly Discovered Stone Circle at Sree Krishna College Campus, Guruvayur

The structure comprises two main concentric stone layers, with evidence of a potential third, fragmented outer layer. The innermost circle, approximately 6.65 meters in diameter, contains about 24 stones of varying sizes, each standing 0.08–0.12 meters above ground level (Fig. 3). The second circle, separated by a gap of approximately 0.5 meters from the first, consists of around 12 stones. The outermost layer, although incomplete, suggests a tiered design that may have served a ceremonial purpose. Further examination and excavation are necessary to confirm the complete layout and function of the structure.

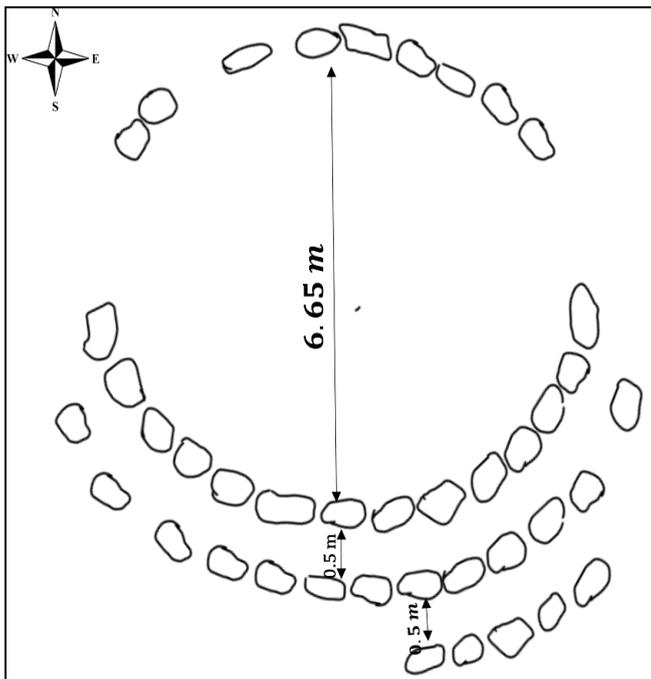


Fig 3: Schematic Representation of Newly Discovered Stone Circle in Thrissur District

IV. CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Stone circles, or cairn circles, are distinctive megalithic structures with considerable cultural and historical importance in Southern India. In Kerala, these formations vary significantly in size and complexity, with some featuring multiple layers or central mounds. Typically found alongside other megalithic monuments like dolmens and umbrella stones, they highlight the spiritual and communal values of early societies. Stone circles may have been used for ancestral worship or as memorial sites, reflecting the reverence for natural landscapes and local stones, which may have been selected for their symbolic and practical value. This discovery, therefore, adds to our understanding of Kerala's megalithic traditions, revealing insights into the social structures, belief systems, and ritual practices of ancient communities.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The site under investigation is notably absent from official records, particularly from the *Inventory of Monuments and Sites of National Importance (Vol VII, Part 3) Thrissur Circle*, which catalogues all known archaeological sites within the region. This omission is significant given the site's archaeological potential and its location within a college campus—an area not readily accessible for public exploration. The restricted access may have contributed to the site's prior unrecognition. Sri Rajan V., a college staff member and alumnus, has provided valuable insights into the site's historical significance, recalling a large pit in the area during his childhood that would fill with water during the monsoon season and was locally known as an “elephant bathing pit.” This anecdote reflects limited community awareness, as even the existence of the stone circle was largely unknown until recently.

Positioned near several significant archaeological sites, the stone circle occupies a strategic location within the regional archaeological landscape. Nearby sites include Ariyannur Umbrella Stones (0.78 km), Kandanassery Burial Cave (1.03 km), Kattakambal Burial Cave (10.03 km), Eyyal Burial Cave (6.56 km), Kunnamkulam Burial Cave (6.72 km), Cheramanangad Kudakkallu Parambu (9.46 km), and Chowannaur Burial Cave (5.67 km) (Fig. 4). These proximities underscore the importance of the stone circle, particularly within Cheramanangad, an area dense with archaeological monuments. Rachel A. Varghese describes the Cheramanangad Stone Circle: “The stone circle was made of laterite stones and had a diameter of 4.5 m; there were three pit burials within it, each containing an urn. One urn was bigger than the other two. All three urns were covered with Thopikkals. They contained ceramic vessels and iron implements. The iron implements included lamps with hooks, rods, ring stands, arrowheads, sickles, knives, and tripod stands. One urn had a copper bowl in it. Copper is not as common as iron in the region. The excavations showed that the monuments differed not just in over-ground features but also in subterranean ones. These features can occur in different combinations, indicating that burial assemblages vary among monuments.” (*Megalithic Sites of Thrissur, Kerala: Appreciation through Site Visit*)

Unlike other stone circles, such as the one documented by Rachel A. Varghese in Cheramanangad, this stone circle remains in good condition, shielded within the college grounds from public disturbance. However, according to Rajan V., the inner circle pit would fill with water during the monsoon, which may have led to damage of the urns and other artifacts. This preservation, while fortuitous, highlights the local community's limited awareness of the site's significance, as they could not recognize it as a stone circle. The site offers invaluable insights into Kerala's rich megalithic heritage and underscores the need for further scholarly exploration.

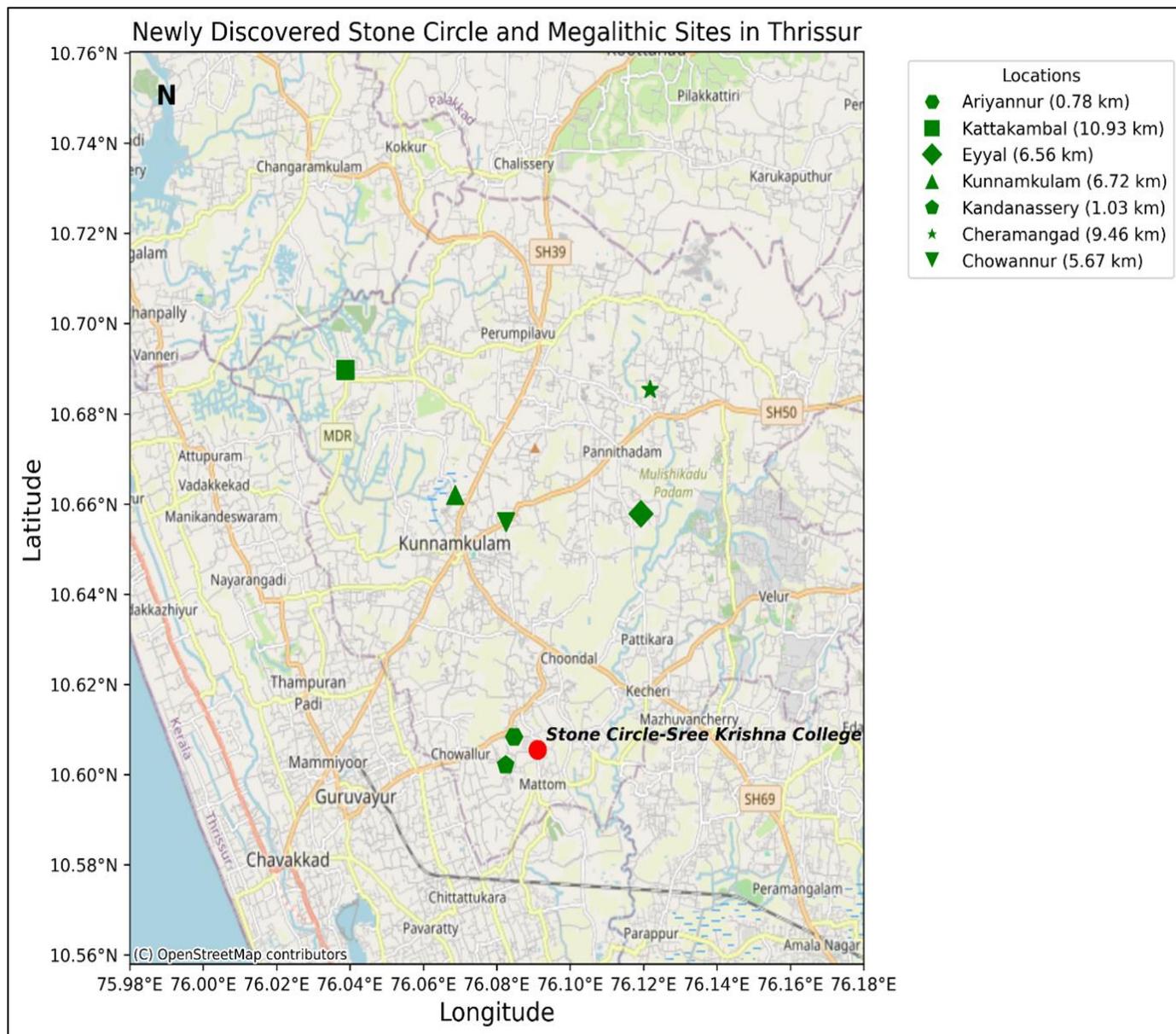


Fig 4: Distances from Newly Discovered Stone Circle at Sree Krishna College to other Megalithic Sites in Thrissur District

VI. CONCLUSION

The discovery of the stone circle within the college grounds enriches our understanding of Kerala’s prehistoric and megalithic heritage. Its exclusion from official records highlights the need for thorough surveys of lesser-known sites, especially those situated in accessible areas like educational institutions. Local oral traditions provide some historical context but also reveal a knowledge gap regarding the stone circle’s significance, underscoring the need for community engagement and further research.

The stone circle's proximity to other megalithic sites indicates a cohesive network of prehistoric activity in Cheramanangad. This interconnectedness reinforces the district’s historical importance and suggests ample scope for further archaeological investigation. By documenting and preserving this site, we enhance our understanding of

prehistoric Kerala and contribute to the safeguarding of the region’s cultural legacy.

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