

Christmas Customs May Trace Back to Ancient Amanita Mushroom Rituals

Donald Pfister, Professor of Systematic Botany and Curator of the Farlow Library and Herbarium at Harvard University, has suggested that some of our most cherished Christmas customs — from hanging stockings and placing gifts beneath the tree to Santa's red-and-white attire — may trace back to ancient rituals centered on the *Amanita muscaria*, a striking red-and-white psychoactive mushroom.

Historically, shamans in Arctic regions gathered and dried these mushrooms, then shared them with families during winter solstice celebrations. Because heavy snowfall often blocked entrances, the mushrooms were sometimes delivered through roof openings or chimneys. The shamans' ceremonial clothing echoed the mushroom's colors, and the classic Christmas palette of red, white, and green closely resembles *Amanita muscaria* growing at the base of evergreen trees.

Researchers have also pointed out that in parts of Siberia, both shamans and reindeer consumed these mushrooms, leading to vivid visions. Pfister jokingly reflects on this, wondering whether tales of flying reindeer might be the result of altered perception rather than literal flight.

Whether or not *Amanita muscaria* played a role in shaping Christmas imagery, the similarities are undeniably intriguing.