

## BOOK REVIEW

**Altrove 1: Società Italiana per lo Studio degli Stati de Coscienza.** Claudio Barberi, Antonio Bianchi, Gilberto Camilla, Francesco Festi, Marco Margnelli, Bruno Pochettino, Giorgio Samorini, Eds. Nautilus, Casella Postale 1311, 10100 Torino, Italy, 1993. Pp. 152. Lire 15,000 (paperback). No ISBN or copyright. [Note: Address of SISSC: c/o Museo Civico di Rovereto, Via Calcinari 18, 38068 Rovereto, Italy (Lire 40,000 to receive only the newsletter and "other informative material," Lire 50,000 for individual membership; Lire 100,000 for group membership).]

This first yearbook of the Italian Society for the Study of the States of Consciousness, which also publishes a 16–20 page tri-annual periodical newsletter entitled *Bolletino D'Informazione*, marks a considerable advance both quantitative and qualitative for the two-year-old group. Instead of a garden-variety newsletter, we have here a nicely-printed, well-illustrated paperback book with a sewn binding. Each article is graced by a different Huichol face-paint design in the margin, and abstracts, notes and bibliographic citations likewise appear as marginalia. There are also numerous black-and-white illustrations, some of them full-page, and in general the design and production is clean and professional.

There are 13 articles by different authors, preceded by introductory descriptions of the publishing company Nautilus, and the Society, responsible for production and content of the yearbook respectively. Four of the authors are members of the scientific and editorial committee behind the publication—G. Camilla, F. Festi, M. Margnelli and G. Samorini—the remainder are members of the Society. Camilla leads off with an introductory essay entitled "For a Science of States of Consciousness," followed by Samorini's paper on the "Utilization of Hallucinogens for Religious Purposes," using the African Bwiti cult, based on sacramental ingestion of the roots of *Tabernanthe iboga* Baillon as an example (Samorini 1993). A brief note on the Tassili frescoes of Africa (Samorini 1992) is followed by Camilla's article on the "Universality of Psychedelic Experience." Pierangelo Garzia then presents a short interview with Albert Hofmann "The LSD Man," after which Peter Gorman discusses "Shamanism among the Matses." This interesting article describes the preparation of entheogenic *nu-nu* snuff from tobacco leaves and ashes of inner bark of *macambo*, a species of *Theobroma*. Gorman describes the effects and use of the snuff to provoke visions of game animals as an aid to hunting. He also describes preparation and effects of another visionary drug used as an aid in hunting, and called simply *sapo*—here not identified, but known to be the venom of the frog *Phyllomedusa bicolor*, which is mixed with salvia and rubbed into a small burn on the arm (Amato 1992). Giorgio Spertini then presents a study comparing "Anorexia and Mysticism," followed by Mario Polia's detailed article on "Use of the Mescalinic Cactus *Trichocereus Pachanoi* in Traditional Andean Medicine" (Polia and Bianchi 1991). Margnelli's piece on "Virtual Reality and Self-Consciousness" is followed by Luis Eduardo Luna's article on use of *ayahuasca* to aid "Therapeutic Imagination in Amazonian Shamanism" (Luna and Amaringo 1991). There is a brief unsigned piece on the biochemistry of *ayahuasca* (Ott 1994), which unfortunately perpetuates the persistent error that harmaline is the major alkaloid of the source plant *Banisteriopsis caapi* (Spr. ex Griseb.) Morton and of the potions themselves. In reality, harmaline is a secondary alkaloid of *Banisteriopsis* species, present only in trace quantities in *ayahuasca* potions, while harmine is the most important active principle (Ott 1993, 1994). There follows Festi's concluding article on "A Panorama of Hallucinogenic Fungi," ending with an "Essential Bibliography" to the subject, as well as an Italian bibliography (Festi 1985). Inexplicably, this volume concludes with two separate tables of Italian "psychotropic" and "hallucinogenic" fungi (which, unfortunately, do not quite agree), together with a table of the "Chemical Pharmacology of Adventitious or Cultivated Italian Plants."

An unfortunate error in this volume is the presentation by Camilla of a photograph of the 13th century French Plaincourault fresco, said in the caption to represent "clearly identifiable" *Amanita muscaria* (L. ex Fr.) Persoon ex Gray as the Tree of Knowledge of *Genesis*. In reality, this conventional representation from Romanesque and early Gothic art, of which there are hundreds of examples, shows a stylized Italian pine tree, distorted by repeated copying from classical prototypes into a shape somewhat suggestive of a mushroom. Indeed, art historians call this sort of representation a *Pilzbaum* or "mushroom tree," but its resemblance to a mushroom is fortuitous (Wasson 1968). The presence of branches, the coloration, and the clump-like growth indicate to anyone with first-hand experi-

ence with *A. muscaria* in the field, that this is *not* an *Amanita* motif. The popular book *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (Allegro 1970), a fanciful linguistic speculation inspired by R. Gordon Wasson's pioneering book *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (Wasson 1968), is the modern source of this gross misinterpretation of a well-known medieval art motif. Equally dubious is Camilla's identification of *A. muscaria* in bunches of grapes being presented to Persephone by Dionysos in a fourth century B.C. terra cotta tablet—unless in Italy this mushroom grows on grapevines, replete with naturally-rendered grape leaves!

While the great bulk of the material in *Altrove 1* deals with psychotropic plants, three articles treat general themes about consciousness, as befits a publication by a society for the study of "States of Consciousness." The articles are of an introductory nature, clearly written for the layperson, and consequently feature less detail and fewer bibliographic citations than would be expected in a journal for a professional society. On the other hand, the authors are well-known experts in their particular fields, and there are here some tidbits of new information of interest to the specialist, too. All in all, this is a solid publication by the Italian group, setting a good example for the rest of the world to follow, of the conception and presentation of wide-ranging information on altered states of consciousness, of interest to the layperson and specialist alike. While the United States has traditionally been, and remains, a hotbed of research in these subjects, we have no equivalent publication of the quality and scope of *Altrove*, which might hopefully serve as a model and stimulus on this side of the Atlantic!

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Jonathan Ott  
Natural Products Co.  
Apartado Postal 274  
Xalapa, Veracruz, México