

**Pharmacotheon. Entheogenic Drugs, their Plant Sources, and History.** Jonathan Ott. Kennewick, Washington: Natural Products Co., 1993. Pp. 639. \$70.00 (hardcover), \$40.00 (softcover) plus \$4.00 shipping and handling. ISBN 0-9614234-2-0 (hardcover), 0-9614234-3-9 (softcover) (Distributed by agAccess, 603 Fourth Street, Davis, California 95616).

*Pharmacotheon* is actually at least two books that have been rather puzzlingly bound into one—an ultimately quite useful guide to both plant and fungal sources of a number of important “entheogenic” (psychoactive) drugs, and a popularist treatment of North American drug culture. It begins with a note that defines the author’s own neologisms (including *entheogenic*) and explains his justification for his use of terms such as *psychonaut* and even his spelling of *Gaia*. This is followed by the 85-page Proemium in which the author argues the case for the legalization of entheogens, on scientific, ecological, medical, economic, and practical grounds. However, this reveals little if anything about the nature of entheogenic drugs, their plant sources, or their history.

The greater part of the book is subsequently organized into three parts each of which discusses the history and modern usage of one group of psychoactive natural chemicals. Part 1: Beta-phenethylamines, concentrates primarily on plant sources of mescaline, while Part 2: Indole derivatives, discusses sources of LSD and DMT, the alkaloids of the Amazonian shamans’ *ayahuasca*, and fungal metabolites of religious importance in Mesoamerica. Part 3: Isoxazole derivatives, finally considers the active chemicals of the fungus *Amanita muscaria* and related species. Each chapter begins with an account of the psychoactive effects of the plants as described by westerners such as Albert Hoffman and Aldous Huxley.

This is followed by some comments on the chemistry and natural history of the organisms concerned, and finally a discussion of the past and present use of the plants, though much of this concerns their role in nonindigenous cultures.

Further important drug types are discussed in Appendix A of Part 4: Appendices, Bibliography, Index, Acknowledgements. Appendix A: "Sundry" visionary compounds, includes sections on the tropane alkaloids, nicotine and tetrahydrocannabinols, while Appendix B: Putative entheogenic species, consists of three annotated lists of "probable," "possible," and "doubtful" plant (and some animal) sources. Appendix C: Index of entheogen chemistry and pharmacology, presents chemical information on 50 psychoactive compounds, and is followed by indices and bibliographic details.

While there is undoubtedly a great deal of useful information within this text, the structure of the book often makes it rather difficult to find—not least since the botanical and subject indices are separated by 124 pages of bibliographic detail. Also, much of the book is rather difficult to read, which is due partly to the large number of references cited, but also to the author's style, and his organization of the material—subheadings within the text are not always helpful, while chapters lack any general introduction to their content or aims. Perhaps more importantly, neither the botanical, nor the subject index (44 pages in total) employ any method of subcategorization or cross-referencing—a significant feature when trying to navigate through a text of this size.

Without doubt, one of the most useful features of the book is its bibliography, which is both extensive and up-to-date, and with over 2,440 sources cited, can direct the patient reader to a vast wealth of primary information on the botany, chemistry, pharmacology, and ethnology of many biologically active plant chemicals.

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