

**Gli Allucinogeni nel Mito: Racconti sull'Origine delle Piante Psicoattive [Hallucinogens in Myth: Origin Stories of Psychoactive Plants].** Giorgio Samorini. Torino, Italia: Nautilus, 1995. Pp. 172. Lire 20,000 (sew-and-glue paperbound); 25 B/W illustrations; 13 pp. notes; 12 pp. bibliography of 201 sources; no index). Not copyrighted; no ISBN.

Italian ethnopharmacognosist and psychotropic plant specialist Giorgio Samorini has compiled a fascinating and useful volume of origin myths of 19 psychoactive plants or plant categories. Following a brief introduction describing the historical and geographic scope and cultural importance of this often-overlooked aspect of ethnomedicine, Samorini proceeds to detail a half-dozen Amazonian myths relating to the origin of *yajé* or *ayahuasca*, famed complex of pan-Amazonian visionary potions based on aqueous infusions of stems of the malpighiaceae liana *Banisteriopsis caapi* (Spruce ex Grisebach) Morton and numerous psychotropic and other medicinal plant "admixtures" (Ott 1994). Background information reviewing the history, ecology, and entheobotany of the source plant precedes the elaboration of the relevant myths, themselves set off neatly in italic type from the author's erudite intercalated commentary. *Peyotl* (the mescaline-rich Mexican cactus *Lophophora williamsii* (Lem.) Coulter) is also examined in similar detail under the same format (Anderson 1980); followed by *Cannabis* spp. or marijuana/hashish (Mechoulam 1973); a chapter on Solanaceae, subdivided into *Datura* spp., mandrake or *Mandragora* spp. and tobacco or *Nicotiana* spp., the prototypical and most important New World shamanic inebriant (Ott 1993). A brief chapter outlines major groups of inebriating South American snuffs and gives a Desana myth of the origin of *vihó* snuff (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975), based on myristicaceous *Virola* spp.; plus Barasana and Yanoamá variants. There is a detailed chapter of myths relating to *iboga* (powdered root of the apocynaceous *Tabernanthe iboga* Baillon), the Pygmy entheogen which has become the focus of the syncretic Bwiti religion in Equatorial West Africa, on which Samorini has conducted field research, including surviving the full initiation, a sort of near-death experience provoked by sub-lethal doses of *iboga* (Samorini 1993). There follow brief chapters on mythology associated with the pan-Andean *San Pedro* cult (aqueous potions containing the mescalinic cactus *Trichocereus pachanoi* Britton et Rose) (Joralemon and Sharon

1993) and *vinho da jurema* (aqueous infusions of roots of *Mimosa tenuiflora* (Willdenow) Poiret and other Leguminosae) of Atlantic coastal Brazil (Ott 1993). Samorini then treats in more detail the Polynesian potion *kava* (aqueous suspensions of rhizomes of the piperaceous *Piper methysticum* Forster fil.) (Lebot *et al.* 1992) and psychoactive fungi, the latter divided into two subgroups: *Amanita muscaria* (L. ex Fr.) Persoon ex Gray (Wasson 1968) and "other" (i.e., psilocybine-containing) mushrooms (Ott and Bigwood 1978). The book's focus then shifts from visionary plants to primarily ludible inebriants. There is a chapter on "Stimulant Plants," subdivided into four sections: 1) *coca* (cocaine-rich leaves of *Erythroxylum* spp.); 2) coffee (caffeinated, roasted seeds of *Coffea arabica* L.); 3) tea (caffeine-containing leaves of *Camellia sinensis* (L.) Kuntze) and 4) cola (African nuts of *Cola* spp., also rich in caffeine). The book concludes with a chapter on "Alcoholic Plants and Beverages," having two short subsections, "The Vine and Wine" (our familiar *Vitis vinifera* L.) and "Maguey and Pulque" (*pulque*, wine made from juice of *maguey*, *Agave* spp. in Mexico, from which *mezcal*, including *tequila*, is now distilled). Samorini gives little space to this aspect, but notes correctly that ancient wines were a sort of "mother liquor" for maceration of "leaves, roots or seeds of hallucinogenic (and other psychoactive) plants," citing the famous Homeric soporific and grief-assuaging *nepenthes*, Helen's opiated wine of the *Odyssey*. Although the beer portion of this equation was recently ably addressed by Christian Rätsch (*vide* review of *Urbock*, this issue), a study of psychotropic wine additives remains a *desideratum* of visionary ethnopharmacognosy. Samorini's book includes 13 pages of end-notes to an eclectic 12 page bibliography of 201 sources. There is a signature insert with 25 pages of black-and-white illustrations of plants, their preparation, use, and artistic representation. Unfortunately, while interesting, these reproductions are of poor quality, not at all in keeping with the overall high quality of typography, graphic design, binding, and paper. The publisher would have done better to eliminate half or all of these pages of illustrations, failing rendering them in a style commensurate with the rest of the book. Better still, these might have been substituted with a much-needed index. It is unconscionable that a high-quality, scholarly book containing so much valuable and interesting information from so many recondite sources — meticulously referenced and documented by the author, one of the world's leading experts on entheobotany — lacks even a rudimentary subject index, and this oversight vitiates the value of the book as a reference for specialists and laypersons. I earnestly hope that in a subsequent edition this grave deficiency will be remedied.

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