

**Urbock—Bier jenseits von Hopfen und Malz: Von den Zaubertränken der Götter zu den psychedelischen Bieren der Zukunft [Urbock—Beer Beyond Hops and Malt: From the Magic Potions of the Gods to the Psychedelic Beers of the Future].** Christian Rättsch. Aarau, Switzerland: AT Verlag, Bahnhofstrasse 39-43, CH-5001, 1996. Pp. 223. SF48.00/DM48.00/ÖS355.00 (clothbound with D/J); numerous color and B/W illustrations; glossary; two tables; three recipes; chronology; six pp. bibliography of 321 sources; three pp. index). ISBN 3-85502-553-3.

In my 1993 *Pharmacotheon* (Ott 1993:157), I remarked that, "An in-depth study of psychotropic additives to alcoholic beverages remains a *desideratum* of psychopharmacognosy," and now German anthropologist, well-known writer, and medicinal plant specialist Christian Rättsch has admirably addressed one major part of the task, publishing a detailed study of psychotropic additives to beers. His aptly-titled *Urbock—Beer Beyond Hops and Malt* is a beautifully-produced and lavishly-illustrated look at the history and botanical origins of beers, which almost immediately goes to the heart of the matter: "The Secret: The Additives," presenting a table listing 159 plant, five mineral, and nine animal additives, mostly psychoactive, to historical and actual beers of the world; including notations as to possible psychoactive principles, nature of presumed effects, and provenience. The bulk of the book consists of a 137-page section, "The Potions of the Gods," subdivided into 23 short chapters, commencing with specific examples of psychotropic-plant-enriched beers of antiquity, notably mandrake (*Mandragora* spp.) beer of the ancient Egyptians, and the *kykeon* of the archaic Greek Eleusinian Mysteries, thought to have been an aqueous infusion of ergot-infested (*Claviceps* spp.) barley containing psychotropic simple amides of lysergic acid; with speculations on the identity of the Aryan entheogen *soma*, a plant infusion extolled in the ancient *RgVeda* (Wasson 1968). I would say the *kykeon* and *soma* are here rather loosely classified as beers, as the latter did not even involve any grain substrate, and both were clearly prepared immediately prior to ceremonial ingestion, there being no time for fermentation or 'brewing', a hallmark of beers. There follows a fascinating survey of diverse beers or *chichas* of the world, with information on their preparation, source-grains and known or presumed additives. In every case, there are detailed examinations of all psychotropic plants involved, with superb illustrations, including color photographs and antique botanical illustrations, supporting summaries of our pertinent ecological, botanical, chemical, and ethnomedicinal knowledge. In the chapter, "The True 'Pilsener'," Rättsch shows convincingly that originally Pilsener beer was that brewed with *Bilsenkraut* or henbane, *Hyoscyamus niger* L. [still called *Pilsenkraut* in Switzerland], noting the specious nature of the common explanation of the name, alleging such beer came first from Slovakian Plzen [*Pilsen* in German]. Rättsch also makes a solid case for the identity of the notorious inebriant of the infamous Berserker warriors, as a beer infused with the ericaceous *Ledum palustre* L., still used as a shamanic inebriant in Siberia (Brekhman and Sam 1967). He summarizes the argument against the fanciful assumption that this drug was the more famous Siberian shamanic inebriant *Amanita muscaria* (L. ex Fr.) Persoon ex Gray, which ought to have been laid to rest 28 years ago by R. Gordon Wasson's pioneering study of this fabled mushroom (Wasson 1968). In

support of his theory that the Berserkers used *Ledum palustre* [German: *Sumpfpfurst*] beer, Rättsch proffers details of his psychonautic bioassay of garden-variety beer fortified with 20 drops of a homeopathic Ur-tincture of *L. palustre* — although he did not describe any wild Valkyrian riot and rapine, it is noteworthy that he “rapidly drained” a second glass! One cannot but admire such devotion to the demands of science! *Urbock* then proceeds to a review of the various contemporary beer festivals, showing their pagan, not Christian roots, and provides revealing details on the beer-brewing (and swilling) monks of the Middle Ages, concluding with reflections on the contemporary revival of hemp-beer (infused with *Cannabis* extracts) and suggestions for “Psychedelic Beers of the Future,” with actual recipes for mandrake, henbane, and hemp beers. Along the route of this cervisial ride of the Valkyries, Rättsch makes the perspicacious observation that the famous *Bayerisches Reinheitsgebot* (later *Deutsches Reinheitsgebot* — ‘German Purity Law’) of 1516, which limited ingredients of beers to water, hops (*Humulus lupulus* L.), and barley-malt — frequently hailed as an enlightened consumer-protection law, ahead of its time — was in reality a prototypical drug-prohibition statute, as it effectively proscribed the use of innumerable traditional visionary, stimulating, and aphrodisiacal beer additives in favor of the soporific hops, thus converting beers into the rather stupefying libations we all know, combining alcohol with hops’ 2-methyl-3-butene-2-ol. This Christian, anti-pagan law thus fits squarely into the millennial Pharmacratic Inquisition against shamanic inebriants (Ott 1995). The back-matter of *Urbock* consists of ten pages of footnotes to a bibliography of sources, followed by a sketchy, 2+ page index — given the wealth of recondite and interesting information the book contains, the reader deserves at least 11 pages of index, rather than merely 2 (5% of the text pages as index is a good rule-of-thumb for scientific books); at least there ought to have been a botanical-name index. This oversight may be due to the fact that the publisher intended the book more as a visual delight than a scholarly tome, although clearly the author, at pains to make text citations to a comprehensive bibliography, had a different conception. Not to split hairs, I must emphasize that as a visual feast, or illustrative “beer blast,” *Urbock* succeeds on all counts and leaves no stone unturned. The author and publisher are to be commended for their diligence in assembling such a beautiful and comprehensive amalgam of artworks: innumerable beer labels; exquisite botanical woodcuts, drawings and paintings; color photographs of the source grains and additive plants; color photographs of the preparation (and enjoyment!) of traditional beers of many lands... even of a delightfully-ruddy, home-brewed *genuine* Pilsener [henbane] beer! The only thing wanting is a companion volume on psychotropic additives to wines, and of course some taste-test samples to accompany review copies of the book!

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