

**The Schism: Wasson vs. Allegro**  
**Were Psychoactive Drugs Involved in the Foundation of Christianity?**  
**A Critical Analysis**

By J. R. Irvin – November, 2007

**[6 page excerpt only – this article is not yet released]**

Beginning in the 1950's a serious theoretical disagreement regarding art interpretations emerged within the fields of theology and entheobotany. Entheobotany is the study of how certain cultures use plants and fungi for religious purposes. The centrally important question that underlines this disagreement concerns the study of the origins of religion, and more specifically Judeo-Christianity. Gaining insight into the core issues of this disagreement is of utmost importance to anyone with an interest in understanding the origins of religion.

The question: Were psychoactive drugs involved in the foundation of Christianity?

This question has caused a schism within theological studies, and especially within the field of entheobotany itself.

One side argues that the use of psychoactive substances can be traced only up until, and their impact is limited to, the earliest writings of Genesis, about 1000 B.C.E. – which excludes Christianity.

The other side argues that the use of psychoactive substances was more widespread and their use is a core part of the foundation of nearly all religion, including Christianity, traces of which can be found into more modern times.

It is important for biblical theologians and entheobotany scholars alike to understand the cause and effect of this schism if open dialogue is to continue. Until this issue is resolved and faced head on, scholarship, in regards to Judeo-Christianity, is at a standstill.

### **Introduction**

In 1952 leading art historian, Dr. Erwin Panofsky, wrote to famed amateur mycologist, R. Gordon Wasson, that the Plaincourault mushroom tree that depicts a mushroom with Adam and Eve was not a mushroom, but a stylized Italian pine tree. Wasson uncritically accepted Panofsky's interpretation and thenceforth began a practice of enforcing the Panofsky interpretation on other scholars. Uncritical acceptance of the Wasson-Panofsky interpretation lasted unchecked for nearly fifty years. Their interpretation of the Plaincourault mushroom has unnecessarily caused a major schism

in biblical theology and entheobotany. In 2006 Michael Hoffman and I reevaluated the critical points of the 'Plaincourault as Pine' argument (Hoffman & Irvin, 2006), and found them baseless. Other scholars, including Giorgio Samorini, have also recently attacked the Wasson-Panofsky interpretation (Eleusis ns 1, 1998, pg. 87-108).

The purpose of the following article is to show the source of the schism between two primary juxtaposed theories within the field of entheobotany, as well as these theories' lasting effects on biblical scholarship. These theories are:

- 1) Psychoactive substances, and especially mushrooms, were used only at the earliest stages of the formation of Judeo-Christianity. With regards to Judeo-Christianity, their usage is limited to, and does not go beyond, circa 1000 B.C.E. These substances were possibly used with the writing of The Book of Genesis and the story of Adam and Eve. Their usage may extend into other minor heretical Christian sects. There is no evidence to support that psychoactive substances were used in the foundation or body of Christianity itself. Depictions of these substances in art work, such as the Plaincourault, are purely fortuitous misinterpretations.

This theory was first proposed by R. Gordon Wasson, the famous amateur mycologist who in *Soma, Divine Mushroom of Immortality*, 1968, first proposed that the Rig Vedic Soma was the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom – a theory widely accepted today.

- 2) Psychoactive substances, and especially mushrooms, were not only part of the earliest stages of the formation of Judeo-Christianity, but are actually a core part of Christianity's foundations. Their usage may be seen all the way into more modern times. This fact is evidenced by, but not limited to, artwork such as the Plaincourault.

This theory was first proposed by John M. Allegro, the famous Dead Sea Scrolls scholar and Manchester philologist, who first proposed in *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross (SMC)*, 1970, that Christianity is based on a fertility drug cult. This proposal destroyed his career.

Those in support of either of these theories have briefly and haltingly argued their points of view in various entheogen books and letters to editors, etc, for nearly four decades – and more often than not, rather uncritically.

The effects of these theories are not limited to the field of entheobotany, but have had strong and lasting implications on theology as a whole, especially with regard to biblical scholarship and the study of the origins of Judeo-Christianity.

Scholars who've been swept up by this schism include, but are not limited to: Dr. John Pilch and Dr. Dan Merkur who have clearly stated their positions against Allegro; D.M. Murdock (Acharya S.), who supports some of Allegro's ideas (Acharya S., 1999); and Dr. Robert Price, who was at one point sided with Wasson, but has since accepted some of Allegro's ideas. In Price's original review of Acharya's book *The Christ Conspiracy*, he wrote:

Having mentioned the Dionysian associations of the hallucinogenic mushroom, it behooves me to mention [Acharya's] rehash of John Allegro's claim (in *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*) that an ancient Christian catacomb fresco depicts Adam and Eve flanking, not a tree, but a red-capped *Amanita muscaria* mushroom, implying perhaps that the early Christians cherished the forbidden knowledge of the mushroom, as the ancient Soma priests of India did. [Acharya] likes this, as a bit of New Age pot-smoking apologetics. But, unfortunately for this theory, art historian Erwin Panofsky declares that [Price here quotes the Panofsky excerpt from *Soma*]. - Price, review of *Christ Conspiracy*

Price has since removed his entire review of Acharya's book from his website and replaced it with a promise for a revision.

([http://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com/rev\\_murdock.htm](http://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com/rev_murdock.htm))

The reason understanding this schism is important is because each time the topic of psychoactive substances (entheogens) in Christianity is discussed, Allegro's name is brought up in opposing arguments as if he is some sort of joke, a show-stopper, the end all to a logical discussion. As Pilch wrote me personally:

[W]e discussed Allegro when I was in graduate school in the late 1960's. His scholarship is not respected and his conclusions are fanciful. He should really write science fiction.

~ Dr. John Pilch, biblical scholar, Georgetown University

Wasson is perceived as credible as compared to Allegro. But Wasson doesn't cover entheogens in Christianity. Allegro does. Thus this anti Allegro, and pro Wasson impression gives the appearance that entheogens in Christianity is baseless.

To the extent that Wasson covers Amanita in Judeo-Christianity – he affirms Amanita in Genesis, but rejects it in Ezekiel, Revelation and later Christian practice. But Allegro finds entheogens in the entire Bible era, and to some extent, after, such as in the Plaincourault.

To overly credit Wasson, and under credit Allegro is to underestimate the extent of entheogen use throughout the Bible era and later. It's giving all credit to Wasson in an undiscerning way.

Wasson's theory is preventing the integration of Allegro's paradigm changing research while also keeping the field of Christian origins from the value of Allegro's research – thus preventing its evolution and causing its stagnation.

Not recognizing Wasson's flaws is preventing Allegro's voice from being heard and his valid contributions from being recognized and integrated into these fields. As long as Wasson is seen as a saint he is preventing scholars from recognizing the value of Allegro's insights.

When it comes to many of the arguments against Allegro, misconstruing evidence and making it up where often none exists seems to be standard protocol. Allegro's ideas, and the ideas of those that have continued this area of research, are often unjustifiably swept aside. They are too often dismissed and ignored in an uncritical and largely unfounded diatribe which refuses to review the specific points of the arguments:

- Does the Plaincourault really represent mushrooms?
- Is Jesus really a mythological character?
- Were Christian origins based in fertility cults and drugs use?
- Did the use of entheogens take place in Christianity, even to modern times?

This article is a follow-up to *Wasson and Allegro on the Tree of Knowledge as Amanita* co-authored by Michael Hoffman and me from May 2006 in the *Journal of Higher Criticism*, in press in November 2007. It is recommended that the reader read both articles in order to gain understanding of the importance of the following information as it pertains to the history of Judeo-Christian religions and their origins. *Wasson and Allegro on the Tree of Knowledge as Amanita* may be found online in full at:

<http://www.egodeath.com/WassonEdenTree.htm>

This article helps to further bring an end to erroneous claims such as:

- The Plaincourault does not represent a mushroom. Art historians have studied the matter.
- Entheogen use is limited to pre-Christian times and fringe heretical sects.
- Allegro was on the lunatic fringe, a crazy man, out for scholarly revenge. His research is utterly unfounded.

- Allegro based most of his ideas from Wasson.
- Wasson later changed his position to being in support of Allegro's work and the idea of mushrooms in Judeo-Christianity.

Included herein is a complete list and breakdown of Allegro's entheobotanical citations used in *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (SMC). These citations are intentionally kept limited to those with specific regard to his entheogenic scholarship. The breakdown includes important textual references which highlight many of the erroneous arguments used by Wasson and those in support of his theory, as well as academia at large, against Allegro's scholarship.

These references also reveal errors Allegro copied from other scholars, as well as several of his own errors. All of these errors are extremely important to the discussion herein. When reviewing the citations in a structured format, it is beyond reasonable doubt that Allegro took the blame for many errors that were not his own, but those he simply copied from other scholars. This happens especially with regard to the chemical constituents, taste and effects of the *Amanita muscaria*. The original errors, and the scholars who made them, were largely, if not completely, ignored.

In order to give the reader the best possible understanding of this schism, both the personal letters and the letters published in *The Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) betwixt Wasson and Allegro are included in full. Also included is an important letter from Wasson to the editor of TLS, Arthur Crook, which is used for important additional analysis. These letters are provided in full because they form the foundation of this study and reveal the origins of the schism between Wasson and Allegro. In doing so, they also reveal the beginnings of the schism in the field of entheobotany, and beyond into Judeo-Christian theology, that has continued to the present day.

Critical analysis of the words exchanged between Wasson and Allegro suggests a deeper, almost hidden, argument between the two men. I suggest it is this argument that has caused serious shockwaves that have had strong, long lasting repercussions on theological research, especially with regard to Judeo-Christian origins, long after both their deaths.

Allegro caught Wasson in contradiction of himself in a private letter to Dr. John Ramsbottom, dated December 21, 1953. Wasson thus appears angry toward Allegro, lashing out at him in the press, personal letters, and interviews. And to the undiscerning public eye, Wasson's antipathy appears justified. Allegro's point ends up being almost completely overlooked, and from there he remains unresponsive, which appears to only further escalate Wasson's antipathy, who continues his attacks almost until his death, 16 years later.

Commentary is provided throughout this article to serve as analysis of the critical points.

## **The Wasson & Allegro missives**

### **1) Wasson to TLS, pub. 21 August 1970**

Sir, I have just read John M. Allegro's *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (reviewed in the TLS on May 28). I will refrain from passing on his philological evidence, which others have already treated thoroughly. But I will call your readers' attention to a question of art history, that I have not seen mentioned in the various reviews that have come to my attention.

Facing page 74 of his book Mr Allegro exhibits a photograph of what he calls "a Christian fresco showing the *Amanita muscaria* as the tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden". His publishers have reproduced a mirror-image of this on each of the end-papers of the book and also on the jacket.

This fresco, an expression of French provincial Romanesque art, was first called to the attention of the learned world in the Bulletin of the *Société Mycologique de France* in 1911 (vol. xxvii, p. 31). It has been picked up frequently in mycological publications, especially in England. Mycologists speak only to each other and never to art historians. Had they done so, the story would have been different.

I drew attention to this error in our *Mushrooms, Russia & History* (1957) and at greater length in my *SOMA Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (1969). In this last book I quoted from a letter that Erwin Panofsky had written me in 1952:

The plant in this fresco has nothing whatever to do with mushrooms...and the similarity with *Amanita muscaria* is purely fortuitous. The Plaincourault fresco is only one example – and since the style is provincial, a particularly deceptive one – of a conventionalized tree type, prevalent in Romanesque and early Gothic art, which art historians actually refer to as a "mushroom tree", or in German, Pilzbaum. It comes about by the gradual schematization of the impressionistically rendered Italian pine tree in Roman and early Christian painting, and there are hundreds of instances exemplifying this development – unknown of course to mycologists. ... What the mycologists have overlooked is that the medieval artists hardly ever worked from nature but from classical

prototypes which in the course of repeated copying became quite unrecognizable.

I checked with other art historians including Meyer Schapiro, and found that they were in agreement. I was struck by the celerity with which they all recognized the art motif.

One could expect mycologists, in their isolation, to make this blunder. Mr Allegro is not a mycologist but, if anything, a cultural historian. On page 229 of his book, in his notes, he shows himself familiar with my writings. Presumably he had read the footnote in which I dismissed the fresco on page 87 of *Mushrooms, Russia & History* and, more especially, Panofsky's letter reproduced on page 179 of *SOMA*. He chooses to ignore the interpretation put on this fresco by the most eminent art historians.

R. GORDON WASSON

### **Commentary**

Unsolicited, Wasson fires his first attack against Allegro.

He states: "I drew attention to this error [Plaincourault as mushroom] in our *Mushrooms, Russia & History* (1957) and at greater length in my *SOMA Divine Mushroom of Immortality*(1969)." But Wasson avoids the fact that his own position in *Soma* (pg. 221) is that the Plaincourault does, nonetheless *indirectly*, represent the mushroom:

[...] the mycologists were right also, in a transcendental sense of which neither they nor the artist had an inkling, when they saw a serpent offering a mushroom to Eve in the Fresco of Plaincourault. ~ Gordon Wasson

The Plaincourault was already discussed in great detail in my previous article (Hoffman & Irvin, 2006) that art historians typically don't read mycology books either. In that article we revealed the Wasson-Panofsky argument as insupportable.

Here in the last paragraph, Wasson makes an unnecessary jab at Allegro. Wasson states: "Mr Allegro is not a mycologist but, if anything, a cultural historian." Wasson doesn't just say Allegro is not a mycologist, the likes of which he's just put down, but includes the caveat "if anything," purely as an insult to Allegro. He then ends with "a cultural historian," as if that's bad! Contrary to the image that Wasson wants to portray of Allegro, Wasson is himself a banker and not a mycologist or art historian! Allegro, in his own right, was an eminent cultural historian, theologian, and

philologist. But here it doesn't matter that Allegro isn't a mycologist because Wasson has just attacked the mycologists for not studying art.



The Plaincourault fresco



# Wasson and Allegro on the Tree of Knowledge as *Amanita*

by Michael Hoffman and Jan Irvin

Written 2006

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Thank you to Judith Brown and the Allegro Estate for the letters.

In reading the old accounts one finds a strange mixture of fact and fantasy. Some are so fantastic that if they had not been accepted by other authors they would not find a place in even a most detailed historical summary. Then there comes an observation of such merit that all seems set for real progress. But these facts, even when accepted, are often misinterpreted, almost as if in a superfluity of naughtiness, and again there is confusion. – John Ramsbottom, *Mushrooms & Toadstools*, 1953, p. 17

## Introduction

This article summarizes the theory that visionary plants play an instrumental role within Christian origins and the Bible, and helps straighten out the citations, issues, and relationships among John Ramsbottom, Erwin Panofsky, R. Gordon Wasson, and John Allegro, to clear up many of the inaccurate assessments and characterizations regarding their views on these hypotheses. More precision has been needed about exactly which arguments or issues were mentioned by whom, and what the reasoning and argumentation was, specifically. The treatment of the views of Wasson and Allegro has been too undifferentiated and careless.

Scholars of Christian history have too readily utilized the mycologist Wasson to dismiss Allegro's theory that there was no Jesus, that the first Christians used entheogens, and that the first Christians considered Jesus to be none other than visionary plants. Wasson's dismissal of Allegro together with mushroom trees has thus proven to be important for the study of Christian origins, the ahistoricity of Jesus, and historical Judeo-Christian use of visionary plants.

This detailed treatment shows examples of pseudo-arguments in disputes about religious history, and demonstrates point-by-point critical reading of a set of arguments. Even if the reader considers the interpretation of Christian 'mushroom trees' in art to be trivially obvious and to need no intensive point-by-point argumentation, or is uninterested in the subject of mushrooms in religious history, there are nevertheless interesting patterns of argumentation exposed and explained here. Recognition of these argumentation patterns is useful in other potential disputes as well, including the historicity of Jesus and the authenticity of all the Pauline epistles.

Wasson's positions are clarified on the emphatically distinct topics of whether there are psychoactive mushrooms in the Bible; whether the authors of the Genesis story of Eden meant the two trees as *Amanita* mushrooms and their host trees; whether the Christian artists who painted 'mushroom

trees' meant them as mushrooms; and whether the painter of the tree in the Plaincourault fresco in particular meant it as *Amanita* mushrooms and their host tree.

These findings help set the record straight and critically integrate Allegro's work into the corpus so research can move forward past the question of the tree of knowledge. This research brings together the study of visionary plants in religious history and research in the ahistoricity of Jesus – fields that support one another. This article advances the research by showing the following:

- The Panofsky/Wasson argument for reading Christian mushroom trees as representing Italian Pine trees but not mushrooms fails on all points, when critically examined. The Ramsbottom/Allegro interpretation is justified and has not been effectively challenged or put into doubt.
- Wasson considered psychoactives in Christianity and the Bible very little and narrowly. He was surprisingly un-curious and averse to opening the question of visionary plant use in Christianity.
- Wasson asserted that the two trees in the story of Eden in Genesis deliberately meant *Amanita* and its host tree, but that the painter of the Eden tree in the Plaincourault fresco was unaware of that meaning (even though the Plaincourault tree looks like *Amanita* mushrooms).
- Wasson neglects to address the relevant question of whether the tree of life at the end of the Bible meant *Amanita* mushrooms. He asserts that the tree of life in Genesis meant *Amanita*, while implying that the tree of life in Revelation did not mean *Amanita* – an unlikely combination of ideas, which he fails to address and justify.
- It's an illusion that the passage in *Persephone's Quest* about the Garden of Eden story was written 18 years after *Soma* and reverses Wasson's denial of later Jewish and Christian entheogen use such as at Plaincourault. This illusion is propped up by the failure of Wasson's readers to differentiate between his positions regarding the Eden text in Genesis versus the Plaincourault fresco, and by the essential incoherence of his views, which is misread as a change of views on the fresco.
- Wasson takes for granted the assumption that no one after pre-history understood *Amanita*, and dogmatically asserts this assumption as a given, without attempting to substantiate this assertion.
- Allegro assumes that the use of visionary plants was rare, distinctive, and a deviant practice in Hellenistic/Roman culture. He posits secret encryption to hide mushroom use from the Romans.
- Allegro was the first to attempt to *combine* the ahistoricity of Jesus and the apostles; early Christian use of visionary plants including *Amanita* mushrooms; and searching Christian writings for entheogen allusions.
- Wasson and Allegro share the unexamined assumption that entheogen use was rare in Christian history; neither of them inquires into the extent of entheogen use throughout Christian history and in the surrounding cultural context.

There have been significant, great, and long-lasting confusions about the positions and arguments of Wasson and Allegro on various questions related to the Plaincourault fresco. This article slows down to read the related materials closely, with critical commentary and analysis at each step, to settle and disperse these confusions. The issue becomes intriguing upon sustaining a consistently detailed and

critical reading, refraining from falling into the usual entrenched assumptions and misreadings that have obscured the dispute.

## The Entheogen Theory of Christianity and the Bible

The entheogen theory of religion asserts that the main source of religion by far is visionary plants, including Psilocybin mushrooms, Peyote, Ayahuasca combinations, Cannabis, Opium, Henbane, Datura, Mandrake, Belladonna, ergot, *Amanita* mushrooms, and combinations of these. Religious myths are, above all, metaphorical descriptions of the cognitive phenomenology accessed with a high degree of efficacy through these plants.

Religious myths are descriptions of visionary plants and the experiences they produce. Visionary plants are incomparably more efficacious and ergonomic than meditation; they are historically the source and model for meditation, and meditation was developed as an activity to do in the midst of an entheogen-induced mystic cognitive state. There is abundant and plentiful evidence, in various forms, for the entheogen theory of each of the major religions, including Jewish religion and Christianity.

The entheogen theory of religion finds visionary plants in the Bible and related writings such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, Nag Hammadi library, and Gnostic writings, together with metaphorical descriptions of the experiences and insights induced by the plants. The fruit of the trees of knowledge and life in Eden meant *Amanita muscaria* and its host trees such as birch and pine. Ezekiel's visions were induced by ingesting entheogens. John's visions in Revelation were induced by ingesting entheogens. 'Strong wine' in the Old Testament means wine with visionary plants such as henbane.

'Drunk' means inebriated with visionary plants, not merely alcohol, throughout the Bible. 'Mixed wine' means visionary plants, including its use in the Last Supper and Eucharistic meals, banquets, and feasts. In one metaphor, for example, the king drinks wine and sees the foreboding writing on the wall which indicates he will lose his kingdom. This is a metaphor for the initiate's visionary-plant inebriation and its revealing of the illusory aspect of the personal autonomous power of control.

The 'Holy Spirit' means the dissociative cognitive state, including the experience of divine wrath and then divine compassion toward the initiate as pseudo-autonomous agent. Anywhere any form of ingesting plants is found in the Bible – anointing, eating, drinking, or incense – likely indicates visionary plants.

There are common, shallow misunderstandings and misreadings to avoid. The effects of visionary plants are very unlike that of alcohol, except that alcoholic inebriation is a common metaphor representing visionary plant inebriation. Ironic reverse metaphors are common such as, visionary plant inebriation makes you sober, no longer drunken.

The moderate entheogen theory of religion holds that entheogens have occasionally been used in religion, to simulate the traditional methods of accessing mystic states. The maximal entheogen theory of religion holds that entheogen use is the primary traditional method of accessing the mystic altered state, and that pre-modern cultures differ from modern cultures precisely in that they are altered-state-based cultures; the modern era is deviant in its lack of integrating the mystic altered state into its cultural foundation.

### Avoidance of Scholarly Response to Christian Entheogens and Jesus' Ahistoricity

Several entheogen scholars including John Allegro, James Arthur, myself, Jan Irvin & Andrew Rutajit, and Jack Herer have maintained the definite ahistoricity of Jesus together with entheogens in Christian origins, and Clark Heinrich has openly considered it. Conversely, scholars asserting the

ahistoricity of Jesus have been interested in considering the explanatory power of the entheogen theory of Christian origins.

A personal conversation revealed that some prominent authors on the topic of Jesus' ahistoricity suggested that Christians used visionary plants, but their editors omitted coverage of that subject to avoid the kind of controversy associated with Allegro. Most publishers have avoided covering the entheogen theory at the same time as covering Jesus' ahistoricity, to stay above a certain threshold of perceived credibility, although the result may be the least consistent position of all.

However, there are indications we're finally moving past the automatic moratorium against taking Allegro seriously. Merely making the raw assertion that Allegro was worthless – as though mere ridicule and dismissal is a convincing presentation – has become less compelling; there are demands for justifying the rejection of the central idea in Allegro's theory, that for early Christians, Jesus was none other than the *Amanita* mushroom.

In 1902, William James wrote his often cited passage, albeit cited in a censored form, about how Nitrous Oxide forced upon his mind the realization that our normal waking state of consciousness is surrounded by other forms of consciousness which are separated from it as if by as filmiest of screens. At a touch, the other forms of consciousness are there in all their completeness. He concluded that these other forms of consciousness must be considered, to provide an adequately complete account of the world, reconciliation into unity consciousness.

Aldous Huxley enthused about mescaline in 1954, in *The Doors of Perception*. The Catholic scholar R.C. Zaehner wrote *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* in 1957, putting forth debatable arguments that mescaline-induced mystic experiencing was an imitation of authentic, traditional Christian mysticism, and an innately significantly inferior substitute only capable of immanent, not transcendent mysticism. Many other books about religious experiencing induced by visionary plants and psychoactive chemicals were published by 1968. 1968 was a tense, charged year, regarding cannabis and LSD.

In the midst of this tension in the late 1960s, Wasson published *Soma*, which mostly covered other religion, but has a few pages that proposed that the trees of knowledge and life in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden meant *Amanita* host trees and that the fruit of these trees meant *Amanita*, to the author or redactor of Genesis at the very beginning of the Jewish religion. Wasson also asserted that the tree in the Plaincourault fresco, which looks like *Amanita muscaria* mushrooms, wasn't intended to represent or allude to mushrooms in any way, but was intended as a stylized Italian pine tree (Umbrella Pine, Stone Pine, *Pinus pinea*).

In 1970, Allegro's book asserted that Jesus was none other than the anthropomorphization of the *Amanita* mushroom, and that the Plaincourault fresco intended to depict *Amanita*. That book is often misunderstood as asserting that Jesus was the head of a mushroom cult; as one example, Heinrich p. 24. Allegro is often mentioned by scholars of Christianity to this day, to bring up and then brush aside the entheogen theory of Christian origins or the ahistoricity of Jesus.

The recent books that cover entheogens in Christianity and the Bible often mention Allegro, but usually in a contorted way in a footnote or aside, misrepresenting his view or vaguely disparaging "Allegro's theory". One book by entheogen scholars attempts to justify omitting Allegro from the References section at the same time as calling for other scholars to address some aspects of his theory. The entire situation has become farcical; this awkward situation needs to be properly resolved instead of treating all aspects of his theory as taboo and off-limits.

Allegro held that Christianity began with an already long-established tradition of using *Amanita* and visionary plants, and that Jesus was not historical; Jesus and the apostles were none other than anthropomorphized figurations representing attributes of the *Amanita*. Allegro's explanatory framework heavily relies on linguistics as a foundation, together with positing as a motive that the

Christians had to resort to secret encoding of their practices because these practices would be suppressed if the ruling powers discovered them.

The aversion to treating Allegro in the normal scholarly straightforward and direct way is similar to the way the theory of Jesus' ahistoricity is brushed aside and ridiculed in mainstream scholarship, sidelined into the Preface or buried in the endnotes, without giving the theory the compliment of a direct, straightforward, component-by-component scholarly treatment in the body of the text.

## Books Covering the Entheogen Theory of Christianity and the Bible

A handful of researchers in the late 20th Century have been developing the entheogen theory of religion, including a paradigmatic research framework to help flesh-out the theory that visionary plants play an instrumental role within Christian history and the Bible. The following works and authors are the most prominent. These books are listed in order of publication year. The general position of each work regarding entheogens in Christian history is indicated.

The trees in Eden in Genesis meant *Amanita* and Birch host. (R. Gordon Wasson, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*, 1968.)

The trees in Eden in Genesis meant *Amanita* and Pine host. (R. Gordon Wasson, *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion*, passage written around 1969, published 1986)

Jesus was none other than the *Amanita* mushroom. (John M. Allegro. *The Sacred Mushroom & the Cross*, 1970.)

Early Jewish religion, early Christianity, and the Gnostics used *Amanita* and other visionary plants. (Clark Heinrich, *Strange Fruit: Alchemy and Religion: The Hidden Truth; Alchemy, Religion and Magical Foods: A Speculative History*, 1994.)

Early Jewish religion used ergot. (Dan Merkur, *The Mystery of Manna: The Psychedelic Sacrament of the Bible*, 2000.)

The early Jewish religion, early Christians, Gnostics, and later Christians used visionary plants, such as *Amanita*. (Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Staples, Clark Heinrich, & Mark Hoffman (for chapter 5), *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist*, 2000.)

Various key Jewish and Christian mystics used visionary plants, such as ergot. (Dan Merkur, *The Psychedelic Sacrament: Manna, Meditation, and Mystical Experience*, 2001.)

Use of visionary plants such as cannabis, mandrake, and henbane is evident throughout the Bible. (Chris Bennett. *Sex, Drugs, Violence and the Bible*, 2001.)

*Amanita* is found throughout Christian history. (Mark Hoffman (editor), *Entheos: The Journal of Psychedelic Spirituality*, 2001-2.)

*Amanita* is found in Christmas and in early Christianity. (James Arthur. *Mushrooms and Mankind: The Impact of Mushrooms on Human Consciousness and Religion*, 2003.)

Visionary plants are found at the heart of all Hellenistic-era religions, including Jewish and Christian, as well as in all 'mixed wine', and are phenomenologically described in the Bible and related writings and art; the Jesus figure was formed from many sources, including visionary plants and Roman imperial ruler cult. (Michael Hoffman, "The Entheogen Theory of Religion and Ego Death", in *Salvia Divinorum* magazine, 2006.)

Jesus was none other than visionary plants such as *Amanita*, integrated with astrotheology. (Jan Irvin, Andrew Rutajit, *Astrotheology and Shamanism: Unveiling the Law of Duality in Christianity and Other Religions*, 2006.)

There are numerous other books, chapters, and articles about entheogens and religion, including forthcoming works, supporting these works and elaborating on the general entheogen theory of religion; follow the Bibliography entries.

## Gallery: Christian Mushroom Trees

An online gallery of artwork and matching photographs is available at [Egodeath.com/christianmushroomtrees.htm](http://Egodeath.com/christianmushroomtrees.htm), showing the Plaincourault fresco, the Montecassino illustration, other Christian mushroom trees, and photographs of mushrooms matching the art.

The most basic step in presenting the question of identification is to place several reproductions of the Plaincourault tree, Italian Umbrella pine trees, *Amanita* mushrooms side-by-side, to demonstrate how much the Plaincourault tree looks like *Amanita* or Italian Pine.

What's the size of the database for Wasson and the art historians when they mentally compared Christian mushroom trees and mushrooms to assess whether the one was modeled after the other? How many Christian mushroom trees had Wasson seen, and how many mushrooms had the art historians of 1952 seen? An adequate database of evidence to compare is required, to determine how much of an overlap there is between Christian mushroom trees and photographs of mushrooms.

Christian mushroom trees and actual mushrooms occur in a range of variations of shape, with significant overlap. A well-stocked database of art and photographs enables each person to form their own informed opinion, without being completely dependent on a consensus among art historians who "of course" hadn't read any mycology books as of 1952, according to Wasson. Is there a strong overlap indicating that Christian mushroom trees, as a genre, intentionally refer to psychoactive mushrooms, beyond a reasonable doubt? It is becoming easy for the reader to inform their own opinion about artistic representation, beginning with *Entheos* Issue 1 and the images in the gallery for this article.

The Plaincourault picture is shown differently in each reproduction, as though people can't even agree on what the picture, as an exhibit, consists of physically. Most reproductions of the Plaincourault fresco have poor quality: they are gritty and spotty, black and white, overly cropped, or faded so half the areas are white.

In the reproduction in *Soma*, the woman's face is shown as a blank area colored light pink, and only half the white dots are visible on the tree. *Soma* shows a visibly different work than the *Entheos* and *Plants of the Gods* – apparently a painting that's an imperfect reproduction of the original fresco. Wasson's caption reads:

(Copied April 2, 1959, by Mme Michaëlle Bory, staff member of the Laboratoire de Cryptogamie, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris) – Wasson, *Soma*, plate XXI, p. 180b

The reproductions in *Entheos* and *Plants of the Gods* show Eve's face as having clearly visible details and an expression, as does Ramsbottom's *Mushrooms & Toadstools*, photo of the fresco, 1953, p. 34 facing, the same picture as in *Plants of the Gods*.

There might still exist as evidence a black-and-white photograph presented in 1910:

At the session of the Société Mycologique de France held on October 6, 1910, there was presented to the attendance a photograph of a ... fresco ... It was later the subject of a note ... on pp. 31-33, Vol.

XXVII, of the Bulletin of the Société. The fresco, crude and faded, ... – Wasson, *Soma*, 1968, pp. 178-179.

Rolfe (1925) writes that a reproduction of the fresco is shown in the Bulletin Société Mycologique de France, xxvii, 1911, p. 31. Ramsbottom's un-credited reproduction might be of the 1910 photograph. It would be helpful to check the 1910 photograph for details such as the woman's expression of "modesty traditional for the occasion" – or of an upset stomach.

## Various Authors on the Plaincourault Tree

### Rolfe, 1925

Wasson names Rolfe along with Ramsbottom and Brightman, on page 179 of *Soma*, to reject their reading of the Plaincourault tree. Rolfe's preface states:

... the toadstools and their allies ... fungi ... is a human subject. It starts with Adam and Eve, and it will continue after the ultimate man has looked his last on a dying world. It embraces not only our first ancestors, but such diverse characters as Judas Iscariot and the Devil, Pliny and Erasmus Darwin, the fairies and the witches, and Baron Munchausen and Sir John Mandeville. – Rolfe, *Romance of the Fungus World*, 1925, pp. iv-v

The next-to-last chapter of the book concludes with our topic:

**A Curious Myth.** We may close this chapter with a fitting historical reference to the fungi, relating to a curious myth, connecting them with our reputed ancestors, Adam and Eve. This is seen in a fresco in a ruined chapel at Plaincourault, in France, dating back to 1291, and purporting to depict the fall of man. A reproduction of this is shown,<sup>1</sup> and the Tree of Life is represented as a branching *Amanita muscaria*, with the Serpent twining himself in its "branches," while Eve, having eaten of the forbidden fruit, appears from her attitude to be in some doubt as to its after effects, which it is gratifying to know caused her no serious harm. It is impossible to say whether this picture is merely a quaint conception on the part of the artist, or whether it has any better traditional foundation. – Rolfe, *Romance of the Fungus World*, 1925, p. 291, chapter "Some Historical Aspects of Fungi"

1. (1911) *Bull. Soc. Mycologique de France*, xxvii., p. 31.

The tree would actually be the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, not the tree of life. The final sentence seems to be asserting that it is unknown whether this portrayal of the *Amanita* mushrooms in a chapel indicates that *Amanita* mushrooms were used by those Christians, and that it is unknown whether there is a tradition of portraying *Amanita* in Christian art.

Ramsbottom wrote the foreword of Rolfe's book in December 1924 and was the main reviewer of the drafts (*Romance*, pp. vii-viii). This 1925 book of historical mushroom lore, combined with the fact that Ramsbottom wrote his own book of historical mushroom lore, *Mushrooms & Toadstools*, in 1953, makes Ramsbottom a contender as the father of ethnomycology, competing with Wasson, though Ramsbottom's 1953 book has only a weak awareness of entheogenic use of mushrooms, compared to Huxley on Mescaline in 1954, or Wasson's coverage of *Psilocybe* mushroom use and the resulting phenomena in the 1957 *Life* article.

Ramsbottom was the most prominent mycologist, which is why Wasson put forth the effort to contact him, in particular, and correct him – or feed him the party line – on the topic of the interpretation of the Plaincourault tree.

## Panofsky, 1952

Erwin Panofsky wrote to Wasson in 1952:

... the plant in this fresco has nothing whatever to do with mushrooms ... and the similarity with *Amanita muscaria* is purely fortuitous. The Plaincourault fresco is only one example - and, since the style is provincial, a particularly deceptive one - of a conventionalized tree type, prevalent in Romanesque and early Gothic art, which art historians actually refer to as a 'mushroom tree' or in German, *Pilzbaum*. It comes about by the gradual schematization of the impressionistically rendered Italian pine tree in Roman and early Christian painting, and there are hundreds of instances exemplifying this development – unknown of course to mycologists. ... What the mycologists have overlooked is that the medieval artists hardly ever worked from nature but from classical prototypes which in the course of repeated copying became quite unrecognizable. – Erwin Panofsky in a 1952 letter to Wasson excerpted in *Soma*, pp. 179-180

Meyer Schapiro, another art historian, asserted the same argument in communications with Wasson.

## Ramsbottom, 1953

Ramsbottom's book *Mushrooms & Toadstools* shows the Plaincourault fresco on the page facing page 34, captioned:

Fresco from disused church at Plaincourault (Indre, France) dating from 1291, showing *Amanita muscaria* as the tree of good and evil.

Ramsbottom covers the Plaincourault tree as follows:

The Fly-Agaric is one of the easiest fungi to recognise and to describe. Consequently its poisonous properties were early known ... In a fresco in a ruined chapel at Plaincourault (Indre, France), dating from 1291, a branched specimen is painted to represent the tree of good and evil (Pl. 1b, pg. 34). Presumably it was the artist's conception of the essence of evil made more terrible by enlargement and proliferation. The serpent is shown winding round the stem, offering the traditional apple to Eve, who, apparently having eaten of the "tree," is shown in an attitude which suggests that she is "suffering from colic rather than from shame." – Ramsbottom, *Mushrooms & Toadstools*, 1953, p. 46

'Colic' here would mean a pain in the abdomen from ingesting *Amanita muscaria*.

## Wasson, 1953

Ramsbottom's book was originally printed in 1953 and lacks the following. The 2nd printing was 1954. Unbeknownst to Wasson until 1970, a printing after the original run contains the following passage which Allegro quoted from. Ramsbottom's introductory note reads:

*Addendum.* Mr. R. Gordon Wasson, of New York, an authority on the folk-lore of fungi, writes to me as follows (cf. p. 46):

Ramsbottom immediately continues the paragraph by quoting Wasson's private letter:

Rightly or wrongly, we are going to reject the Plaincourault fresco as representing a mushroom. This fresco gives us a stylized motif in Byzantine and Romanesque art of which hundreds of examples are well known to art historians, and on which the German art historians bestow, for convenience in discussion, the name *Pilzbaum*. It is an iconograph representing the Palestinian tree that was supposed to bear the fruit that tempted Eve, whose hands are held in the posture of modesty traditional for the occasion. For almost a half century mycologists have been under a



misapprehension on this matter. We studied the fresco *in situ* in 1952. – Wasson, private letter of December 21, 1953, quoted in Ramsbottom, *Mushrooms & Toadstools*, post-1953 printing, p. 48

Wasson is proposing that the placement of Eve's hands demonstrate that she's being modest, rather than exhibiting the Agaric intoxication symptoms described on page 46-47 of Ramsbottom, including by Jochelsen on the Koryak tribal practice. He argues that the picture portrayed the tree of knowledge and therefore did not portray *Amanita* mushrooms.

Ramsbottom does not comment on the merit of Wasson's argument or on Wasson's combining of uncertainty and conclusiveness. Ramsbottom does not express agreement or disagreement, and he does not revise his own statements on the subject on the previous page or in the caption of the plate.

## Wasson, 1957

Wasson's book *Mushrooms, Russia & History* (1957), p. 87 has a footnote that presents the Panofsky argument more briefly than in *Soma*. Wasson printed a restricted run of 512 copies.

The Plaincourault fresco does not represent a mushroom and has no place in a discussion of ethno-mycology. It is a typical stylized Palestinian tree, of the type familiar to students of Byzantine and Romanesque art. – Wasson, *Russia*, 1957, p. 87, quoted in Samorini, "Mushroom-Trees", 1998, p. 88

## Wasson, 1968

Wasson asserts that it's an incorrect interpretation of the mycologists in thinking that the Plaincourault fresco artist deliberately intended to allude to mushrooms: he endorses Panofsky's assertion that

... the plant in this fresco has nothing whatever to do with mushrooms ... and the similarity with *Amanita muscaria* is purely fortuitous. – Erwin Panofsky in a 1952 letter to Wasson excerpted in *Soma*, p. 179

Wasson doesn't provide any citations of published scholarly studies of 'mushroom trees' or 'Pilzbaum', where we can weigh the merit of the art historians' confident consensus and see how or whether they've addressed the most-persuasive objections to their consensus view.

He asserts, in passing, that it's a misinterpretation to read the *Amanita*-like tree in the Plaincourault fresco as intending a mushroom, but his wording is oddly indirect, regarding "events" long ago; he's not explicit about exactly what events he has in mind:

The misinterpretation ... of the Plaincourault fresco [as a deliberate reference to *Amanita* mushrooms] ... must be traced to the recent dissemination in Europe of reports of the Siberian use of the fly-agaric. ... the commentators have made an error in timing: the span of the past is longer ... and the events that they seek to confirm took place before recorded history began. – *Soma*, 1968, p. 180

Wasson there seems to be asserting that the comprehension of the Eden trees in the text of Genesis as *Amanita*, and deliberate use of the Eden trees to indicate *Amanita* mushrooms, only and exclusively occurred in pre-history – after recorded history began, people no longer recognized, understood, or utilized the Eden trees to deliberately evoke *Amanita* mushrooms. He puts forth no evidence, no basis, for his fundamental, unquestioned assumption that no one recognized the Eden trees as *Amanita* except himself and the ancients of pre-history.

Wasson fully retains this assumption in the later part of *Soma*, in the "no inkling" passage, and he did not retract this view in Persephone's Quest. In the later "no inkling" passage, Wasson asserts that

the Plaincourault fresco *does* slightly connect with mushrooms, albeit unconsciously by portraying the serpent, which in forgotten prehistory long before, used to be the caretaker of the mushroom.

In the quote of Wasson in Ramsbottom's book, Wasson asserts that "for almost a half-century mycologists have been under a misapprehension on this matter" of reading the tree in the Plaincourault fresco as deliberately intending *Amanita* (in the 2nd edition of Ramsbottom, *Mushrooms & Toadstools*, 1953, p. 48).

In *Soma*, Wasson asserts that the painter of the tree in the Plaincourault fresco didn't intend to depict mushrooms, but accidentally did so in the figure of the serpent itself – not the mushroom-shaped tree. Wasson affirms the Panofsky view, in *Soma* pp. 178-180, that the particular tree in the Plaincourault fresco has nothing to do with mushrooms, and that altogether, Jewish-Christian mushroom trees in art don't represent mushrooms. He doesn't retract or discuss these particular views in *Persephone's Quest* pp. 74-77.

Wasson in *Persephone's Quest* doesn't state whether he abandoned the position that mushroom trees don't indicate psychoactive mushrooms, or that only the serpent in the Plaincourault fresco had a connection to mushrooms, and that connection was long forgotten. Did mushrooms only appear in the Eden Tree story in the Bible? Was the Eucharist visionary plants? He doesn't state his view on these obvious major questions, in these book sections about the Plaincourault Eden tree and the Eden trees in the text of Genesis. He gives the subject of 'mushrooms in the Bible' surprisingly brief and narrow coverage, leaving Heinrich's chapters on the Bible with plenty to cover.

## Allegro, 1970

The argument that Christian mushroom trees were a developed schematization and "therefore" didn't intend mushrooms, was not seen as compelling by Allegro, who cites Wasson's view, in an endnote, in order to dismiss it. Allegro apparently didn't consider the Panofsky/Wasson argument or view worthy enough to warrant an analysis and rebuttal. Allegro mentions and rejects the Panofsky/Wasson reading of the Plaincourault tree in a cryptically brief and complicated endnote that points to an addendum in another book. Wasson wrote "I had found your note IX 20 incomprehensible."

The prime example of the relation between the serpent and the mushroom is, of course, in the Garden of Eden story of the Old Testament. The cunning reptile prevails upon Eve and her husband to eat of the tree, whose fruit "made them as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4). The whole Eden story is mushroom-based mythology, not least in the identity of the "tree" as the sacred fungus, as we shall see. Even as late as the thirteenth-century some recollection of the old tradition was known among Christians, to judge from a fresco painted on the wall of a ruined church in Plaincourault in France (pl. 2). There the *Amanita muscaria* is gloriously portrayed, entwined with a serpent, whilst Eve stands by holding her belly. (20) – Allegro, *Sacred Mushroom*, 1970, p. 80

Plate 2 is placed on facing page 74 in some printings, as well as on the back cover.

Endnote 20, on page 253, comments tersely:

Despite rejection of identity of the subject ("rightly or wrongly") as being a mushroom by R. G. Wasson: "for almost a half-century mycologists have been under a misapprehension on this matter" (qu. Ramsbottom op. cit. pg. 48) – Allegro, *Sacred Mushroom*, endnote 20, p. 253.

The Ramsbottom book cited is *Mushrooms & Toadstools*. Allegro and the battle of dubious footnotes go hand in hand: even Wasson was puzzled by to whom Allegro attributed the words "rightly or wrongly" and "for almost a half-century mycologists have been under a misapprehension on this matter". Wasson eventually determined that he himself originally wrote those words in a private letter to Ramsbottom on December 21, 1953.

In *Sacred Mushroom*, Allegro acknowledges Wasson's dismissal of reading the Plaincourault tree as intending a mushroom, yet holds steadfastly to his judgment that the tree was intended to look like *Amanita* mushrooms.

"Conjuring Eden" states that the fresco was inserted without identification in Allegro's book:

Two years later the fresco would appear, inserted – bizarrely – without comment or identification, in John Allegro's controversial book ... doing much to popularize both the fresco and Allegro's theory that early Christians knew and used the psychoactive mushroom as a sacrament. – Hoffman, Ruck, & Staples, "Conjuring Eden", 2001, pp. 20-21

Allegro does identify the fresco in the body of his book, 6 pages after the fresco, but remarkably briefly; he doesn't mention that this fresco raises many questions, including calling some of his own historical reconstruction into question. His note 20 mentions "the subject" and "on this matter". A 1971 printing shows the fresco on the back with a caption:

A Christian fresco showing the *Amanita muscaria* as the tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden.

The *Sunday Mirror* version reads slightly different:

Even as late as the 13th century some recollection of the old tradition was known among Christians, to judge from a fresco painted on the wall of a ruined church in Plaincourault in France. There the *Amanita muscaria* is gloriously portrayed entwined with a serpent, while Eve stands by, her hands on her belly. – Allegro, *Sunday Mirror*, 1970

## Wasson, 1970

Wasson wrote two public letters to the Times and one private letter to Allegro, all denying that the Plaincourault tree may be read as *Amanita*, and disparaging those who do so interpret it, as isolated, blundering, and naive.

One could expect mycologists, in their isolation, to make this blunder. Mr. Allegro ... chooses to ignore the interpretation put on this fresco by the most eminent art historians. – Wasson, "The Sacred Mushroom", letter to the editor in *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 21, 1970

... he has stuck to a naive misinterpretation made by a band of eager mycologists, and only because he thinks this would serve his thesis. Some would have preferred the judgment of specialists in Romanesque art. ... When he touches on subjects with which I am familiar, as the Plaincourault fresco ... he is ... unimpressive. – Wasson, "The Sacred Mushroom", letter to the editor in *The Times Literary Supplement*, September 25, 1970

I wrote a letter to Dr. Ramsbottom pointing out the misinterpretation of the Plaincourault fresco in his book ... I now gather that he was properly impressed and added a footnote ... What we wished to say we said in *Mushrooms, Russia & History ...* and ... *SOMA*.

## Schultes & Hofmann, 1979

Schultes & Hofmann appear to stand well back from the controversy, not taking sides. But they don't mention any alternative to the *Amanita* interpretation, leaving the new reader with little real choice; they silently omit the Panofsky/Wasson interpretation:

A faded Romanesque fresco in the late thirteenth-century Plaincourault Chapel depicts the Biblical temptation scene in the Garden of Eden. The Tree of Knowledge, entwined by a serpent, bears an uncanny resemblance to the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom. There has been considerable

controversy concerning this fresco. Some feel that the figure represents the Fly Agaric. – Schultes & Hofmann, *Plants of the Gods*, 1979, p. 83

Some; but we must go elsewhere to hear from the others (Wasson and his art historians) that this figure and *all* of the various hundreds of Christian mushroom trees are merely impressionistically stylized Italian pine trees. This exclusive interpretation-commitment would hold even when the impressionistic figure happens to end up bearing “an uncanny resemblance to” *Amanita*, *Psilocybe*, or *Psilocybe* paired with Mandrake.

## Hoffman, Ruck, & Staples, 2001

*Entheos* Issue 1 presents a substantial page of coverage of the Plaincourault tree, informed by Samorini’s articles dedicated to Christian mushroom trees in general and the Plaincourault tree in particular.

Wasson and his wife dropped their inquiry because of the opinion of art historians ... that it was simply another example of the stylized Italian “Umbrella pine” (*Pinus pinea*); this unreflective dismissal misses the point, namely that the depiction of trees as mushrooms is a common theme in medieval art. ... Samorini has revived the identification by gathering other representations of mushroom trees, none of which resemble, with their semispherical umbrella-shaped foliage, the uplifted branching of the pine.<sup>75</sup> The mushroom-tree ... [has] two more caps ... apparently growing at the base, where the actual “apples” would be found. – Hoffman, Ruck, & Staples, “Conjuring Eden”, 2001, pp. 21-22

Giorgio Samorini, “The ‘Mushroom-Trees’ in Christian Art”, *Eleusis: Journal of Psychoactive Plants and Compounds*, n. 1, 1998, p. 87-108.

The authors hint that the round “fig leaves” are *Amanita* caps, perhaps showing the underside.

## Wasson’s View on Mushrooms in the Genesis Text: The Eden Trees Meant *Amanita*

In both *Soma* (p. 221) and *Persephone’s Quest* (p. 74-77), R. Gordon Wasson asserts that the author of the Eden Tree story in Genesis intended to allude to the *Amanita* mushroom. *Soma* pp. 220-222 and *Persephone’s Quest* pp. 74-77 similarly assert that there were intentionally mushrooms in the Bible – the Eden tree.

I once said that there was no mushroom in the Bible. I was wrong. It plays a ... role ... a major one, in ... the Garden of Eden story ... – Wasson, *Persephone’s Quest*, p. 74

When Wasson says “I was wrong” in *Persephone’s Quest*, p.74, he’s not referring to his claim in *Soma* that the Plaincourault tree had nothing to do with mushrooms; nor to his Genesis treatment in *Soma*, which is mostly positive and is not contradicted by *Persephone*; rather, he’s merely referring to a statement he made in a presentation or some publication prior to *Soma* (1968), that there are no mushrooms in the Bible. When he writes “I was wrong”, for one thing, he’s apparently writing around 1969, not 1986, and for another, he merely and only follows with repeating the same assertion as in *Soma*, that the tree in the text of Genesis was intended by the Genesis author to mean *Amanita*. “I was wrong” is loudly silent regarding the Plaincourault tree.

Wasson says in both books that the Eden tree in Genesis was intentionally *Amanita* – he assumes that that Genesis text in itself has nothing to do with the specific image of a mushroom-shaped tree. It’s a dogmatic assumption in *Soma* that only the original Genesis author – not the later Jews and Christians – was aware of the *Amanita* meaning of the two trees in Eden.

Between *Soma* and *Persephone's Quest* he changed (without mentioning it) from saying that the *Amanita* host tree was sacred because it provided firestarting punk and *Amanita* (in *Soma*) to saying that the host tree was sacred "precisely because" (*Persephone's Quest*, p. 76) and "only because" (*Persephone's Quest*, p. 77) it provided *Amanita*. In his indirect, roundabout manner here, he doesn't say "I was wrong about Birch, and I overemphasized the importance of punk" – he leaves us unsure of his updated position on those points. He changed from identifying the Eden Tree as Birch to "a conifer".

He also switched from reading the Genesis authors as having mostly positive, yet in some cases virulent attitudes about *Amanita*, to being initiates favorable toward *Amanita* – without justifying and explaining how the analysis could switch from somewhat mixed to a simply positive reading of the redactors' attitudes. The result of this quick, unexplained switch is puzzlement as much as clarification.

Heinrich claims that Wasson in *Soma* held that the early Jews didn't use mushrooms.

Wasson thought that the devilish knowledge-giving fruit eaten by Eve and Adam was this same mushroom, though at the time *Soma* was written he thought the Garden of Eden story was a retelling of an older northern myth and didn't represent mushroom use by ancient Jews. In his last book, *Persephone's Quest*, Wasson rethought the matter and says the story does represent ancient Jewish mushroom use ... – Clark Heinrich, *Strange Fruit*, p. 10.

In *Soma*, Wasson presents about 4 indications that the early Jews did favor and use entheogens, although he ends on a negative-sounding note. His indirect wording keeps everyone guessing and debating. The single word 'virulence' makes this passage lean toward portraying the Genesis authors as anti-entheogen:

It is clear that among community leaders the hallucinogens were already arousing passionate feelings: when the story was composed the authentic fly-agaric (or an alternative hallucinogen) must have been present, for the fable would not possess the sharp edge, the virulence, that it does if surrogates and placebos were already come into general use. – Wasson, *Soma*, p. 221

*Soma* portrays "the redactors of Genesis", taken to be "community leaders", as having "passionate feelings" about some visionary plant that was "present", and they had attitudes of "sharp edge" and "virulence" regarding "the hallucinogens". Reading the above passage, would you agree with Heinrich that "at the time *Soma* was written [Wasson] thought the Garden of Eden story ... didn't represent mushroom use by ancient Jews" – even though Wasson states that "the hallucinogens ... must have been present"?

His word "present" is vague and ambiguous; he leaves us to guess what usage scenario he has in mind: he could equally well mean that the hallucinogens were present in the mouths of some faction of the orthodox proto-Jewish leaders, some of the heretical proto-Jews, or some nearby outsiders.

But the longer passage leading into the above is overall positive. Against Heinrich's reading, *Soma* asserts a mostly positive presence of *Amanita* use by Jews in Genesis' Eden story:

Of arresting interest is the attitude of the redactors of Genesis toward the Fruit of the Tree. Yahweh deliberately leads Adam and Eve into temptation by placing in front of them, in the very middle of the Garden, the Tree with its Fruit. But Yahweh was not satisfied: he takes special pains to explain to his creatures that theirs will be the gift of knowledge if, against his express wishes, they eat of it. The penalty for eating it (and for thereby commanding wisdom or education) is surely death. He knew the beings he had created, with their questing intelligence. There could be no doubt about the issue. Yahweh must have been secretly proud of his children for having the courage to choose the path of high tragedy for themselves and their seed, rather than serve out their lifetimes as docile dunces. This is evidenced by his prompt remission of the death penalty. – Wasson, *Soma*, p. 221

That long passage with an overall positive attitude toward *Amanita* of the Genesis authors, together with “the hallucinogens ... must have been present”, is counterbalanced only by Wasson’s mealy-mouthed and waffling, short passage “arousing passionate feelings ... sharp edge, virulence”.

Wasson portrays the Genesis authors as pro-entheogen in both *Soma* and “Persephone’s Quest”, on the whole. Wasson only slightly adjusts his view between the two books, introducing the ‘secret meaning for initiates’ concept. On the whole, he does not change his view in any major way regarding the Genesis Eden tree, between *Soma* and “Persephone’s Quest”. Therefore his sentence “I once said that there was no mushroom in the Bible” cannot coherently apply to the book *Soma*.

In *Persephone*, Wasson portrays the redactors as having a positive attitude toward *Amanita*:

He who composed the tale ... in Genesis ... refrained from identifying the ‘fruit’: he was writing for the initiates ... Strangers and the unworthy would remain in the dark. ... the ‘fruit’ ... the initiates call by ... euphemisms ... – Wasson, *Persephone’s Quest*, p. 76

Heinrich in *Strange Fruit* provides more straightforward and comprehensive presentation of the tree of knowledge and the tree of life as *Amanita* mushrooms in Genesis and Revelation than Wasson and Allegro, combined with a poetic mastery of expression that preserves and enhances clarity.

## The Shallow Wasson/Allegro Discussion of the Plaincourault *Amanita* Question

On August 21, 1970, Wasson wrote a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* focusing on the Plaincourault tree. Wasson there continues to limit his argument to a rank argument from authority; he tells us the reasoning art historians use to justify their implausible reading of the Plaincourault tree as an Italian pine tree but not as *Amanita* mushrooms, and it is the same, brief reasoning Wasson presented in *Soma*. The argument in *Soma* is spelled out in full; there simply isn’t any more to the argument, from the art historians around 1952, than that 1 1/2-page treatment. Wasson considers this astonishingly brief argument to be conclusive, obviously compelling, comprehensive, and final – he can hardly grasp that Allegro doesn’t.

But Allegro neglects to actually address the reasoning in the Panofsky/Wasson argument, point-by-point; he simply dismisses the Panofsky/Wasson argument with a single word, “Despite”. The present article presents, 36 years after Allegro, the point-by-point rebuttal which Allegro ought to have provided in place of the lone word “Despite” buried in fine print in his endnote number 20.

No additional argumentation ever seems forthcoming from the art historians through Wasson’s writings. He treats his *Soma* passage about the interpretation of the Plaincourault tree as complete, a treatment “at greater length”, indicating that there is no more to the argument of the art historians than the Panofsky argument, which boils down to the raw assertion that Christian mushroom trees mean the Italian pine and therefore do not and cannot mean mushrooms.

We could consult the art historians for details of how they observe the Italian pine being increasingly schematized until it coincidentally and unintentionally came to look identical to *Amanita* mushrooms (or *Psilocybe* and Mandrake in the case of Montecassino), but this will add nothing substantial to the argument that could have the power to compel a change of position.

To resolve this question of interpretation, we must bring in additional evidence and argumentation and the interpretive framework from the recent research on the maximal entheogen theory of religion, which easily concludes with high confidence that the Plaincourault tree represents *Amanita* mushrooms, as Allegro maintained and as Ramsbottom and the other mycologists rightly assumed, except for Wasson. This remains just as confident a conclusion even if the tree might *also* represent the Italian pine, which, as a pine, is a host tree for the *Amanita* mushroom anyway.

Wasson wrote in a public letter, about whether the Plaincourault tree was *Amanita*:

Sir, I have just read John M. Allegro's *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (reviewed in the TLS on May 28 [1970]). I will refrain from passing on his philological evidence, which others have already treated thoroughly. But I will call your readers' attention to a question of art history, that I have not seen mentioned in the various reviews that have come to my attention.

Facing page 74 of his book Mr. Allegro exhibits a photograph of what he calls "a Christian fresco showing the *Amanita muscaria* as the tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden". His publishers have reproduced a mirror-image of this on each of the end-papers of the book and also on the jacket.

This fresco, an expression of French provincial Romanesque art, was first called to the attention of the learned world in the Bulletin of the Société Mycologique de France in 1911 (vol. xxvii, p. 31). It has been picked up frequently in mycological publications, especially in England. Mycologists speak only to each other and never to art historians. Had they done so, the story would have been different.

I drew attention to this error in our *Mushrooms, Russia & History* (1957) and at greater length in my *SOMA: Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (1969). In this last book I quoted from a letter that Erwin Panofsky had written me in 1952: [Wasson presents again here the entire Panofsky excerpt shown in *Soma*]. I checked with other art historians including Meyer Schapiro, and found that they were in agreement. I was struck by the celerity with which they all recognized the art motif.

One could expect mycologists, in their isolation, to make this blunder. Mr. Allegro is not a mycologist but, if anything, a cultural historian. On page 229 of his book, in his notes, he shows himself familiar with my writings. Presumably he had read the footnote in which I dismissed the fresco on page 87 of *Mushrooms, Russia & History* and, more especially, Panofsky's letter reproduced on page 179 of *SOMA*. He chooses to ignore the interpretation put on this fresco by the most eminent art historians. – Wasson, "The Sacred Mushroom", letter to the editor in *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 21, 1970

Allegro's page 229 cites several of Wasson's works, including *Russia* and *Soma*, along with works by Heim, Hofmann, and Schultes.

The dysfunctional habit of demoting the discussion of the Plaincourault question to footnotes began in Wasson's footnote in which he dismissed the fresco on page 87 of *Mushrooms, Russia & History*. The battle of abused footnoting has begun: Allegro escalated it in *Sacred Mushroom* by responding with a cryptically terse endnote containing a series of two separate quotes followed by the names of two scholars, with ambiguous attribution, as return fire to Wasson's footnote that "dismissed the fresco".

Ramsbottom is innocent of misusing footnotes: he included Wasson's private letter excerpt, presented as an "addendum", within the body of his text, presented with full clarity and attribution.

The fact that Wasson again here presents the Panofsky excerpt shows the extent to which Wasson considers Panofsky's argumentation to be final, definitive, and compelling to anyone who hears it. Wasson expresses frustration that Allegro has read the Panofsky argument and yet Allegro persists (as though obstinately ignoring unimpeachable, compelling evidence) in reading the fresco as mushrooms. Wasson isn't expecting a refutation of the argument from Allegro; he expects Allegro to immediately concede to the fully overwhelming power of the Panofsky argument. But Allegro neither refutes nor concedes to the Panofsky argument; instead, he tersely dismisses it, pointing out Wasson's own private expression of uncertainty.

Is it true that Allegro "chooses to ignore the interpretation put on this fresco by the most eminent art historians"? In one sense, it's true; in another, not. Allegro didn't completely ignore the interpretation

– he mentions the interpretation, but only waves it aside dismissively in *Sacred Mushroom*, endnote 20, p. 253.

Allegro responded in a public letter, criticizing Wasson for not having read the book, and pointing out that Wasson must have overlooked Allegro's reference to the Panofsky/Wasson position:

Mr. Gordon Wasson's (August 21) objections to the mycologists' identification of the Plaincourault fresco's tree of good and evil as the *Amanita muscaria* are quoted verbatim in n. 20 to chapter IX. – Allegro, "The Sacred Mushroom", letter to the editor in *The Times Literary Supplement*, September 11, 1970 issue (written August 31, 1970)

By "Wasson's (August 21) objections", Allegro means the arguments or kinds of arguments as stated in Wasson's *Times* letter. What does Allegro mean by "Wasson's ... objections ... are quoted verbatim in note 20"? Allegro errs in being cryptically brief here, just as he was in note 20. Note 20 doesn't contain a verbatim passage from Wasson's *Times* letter, which came out after the book. Nor does Note 20 point specifically to Wasson's presentation of the Panofsky argument on page 179-180 of *Soma*. Rather, it turns out that the endnote contains a short quote from Wasson's private letter to Ramsbottom.

Wasson found Allegro's ill-constructed endnote baffling and incomprehensible, and couldn't tell whether Allegro had read the Panofsky/Wasson argument even if Wasson had read Allegro's book in full. A kind of footnote abuse had started swirling around the Plaincourault issue. It seems that the issue of mushroom trees made these scholars go mad in a kind of footnote vertigo or citation psychosis.

It's evident here that in Allegro's mind, writing "Despite ..." (in note 20) followed by a mention of the private letter excerpt from Wasson to Ramsbottom is essentially the same thing as citing and refuting Wasson's passage on Plaincourault and the Panofsky argument – either in *Soma* or in Wasson's *Times* letter.

Never does Allegro present a true analysis of and rebuttal to the Panofsky/Wasson argument, so Allegro isn't in a great position to complain how his own arguments have been brushed aside without being addressed. Allegro complains that Wasson needs to read the whole book, as though note 20 contains a rebuttal to the Panofsky/Wasson argument. But note 20 is in fact nothing but a brush-off of that argument, amounting to the raw declaration that Wasson is wrong in rejecting the *Amanita* mushroom interpretation of the Plaincourault tree.

Allegro continues:

... "others" have not, in fact, "treated thoroughly" my philological evidence for the identification of the mushroom cult and mythology in the ancient Near East. Adequately to assess the results of this major advance in language relationships, now presented for the first time in published form, will require much longer unemotional study by competent philologists ... Until this has been done, laymen would be well advised to ignore the kind of emotive criticism of my work so far expressed by clerical and other reviewers and read the whole book for themselves. – Allegro, "The Sacred Mushroom", letter to the editor in *The Times Literary Supplement*, September 11, 1970 issue (written August 31, 1970)

Wasson responded in a public letter:

... Mr. Allegro (September 11) ... chooses to avoid the point of my letter: the Plaincourault fresco does *not* picture the fly-agaric. ... for guidance on a question of medieval iconography he has stuck to a naive misinterpretation made by a band of eager mycologists, and only because he thinks this would serve his thesis. Some would have preferred the judgment of specialists in Romanesque art.



... I know no Sumerian, but I remark that in an area of pioneering scholarship he tosses around Sumerian roots with an agility and a self-assurance not customary among philologists. When he touches on subjects with which I am familiar, as the Plaincourault fresco ... he is ... unimpressive.

The above argument about Sumerian puts Wasson in a weak spot; it is liable to backfire against him. He implies the following argument: Allegro wrote certainly off-base and ignorant things about the Plaincourault tree, and therefore, we can equally suspect that Allegro's linguistic decryption is as off-base and ignorant. However, against Wasson, if we disagree that Allegro was off-base or ignorant regarding the Plaincourault tree, Wasson's implied argument suggests we should give more credence to Allegro's reading of the Bible as allusions to *Amanita* (whether or not we buy Allegro's "secret encryption" hypothesis regarding the Christians' motivations and cultural conditions driving such wordplay). Wasson continues:

The peoples of the Near and Middle East about whom Mr. Allegro is writing were ... most gifted and sophisticated ... That they should have centered their religious life on a drug with the horrifying properties he describes on pages 163-16[?] of his book is unthinkable. ... it would be a reflection on our own intelligence were we to get off on the wrong foot. Mr. Allegro in this passage exhibits the complete syndrome of the ... mycophobe. – Wasson, "The Sacred Mushroom", letter to the editor in *The Times Literary Supplement*, September 25, 1970 (likely written September 14, 1970)

Wasson's "mycophobe" accusation is a stretch: the "horrifying properties" Allegro surmises for *Amanita* around page 163 are justifiable, being similar to Jochelsen's report of the Koryak tribal usage of *Amanita*, page 45-47 of Ramsbottom's *Mushrooms & Toadstools*.

Wasson's letter of September 25th categorizes Allegro of being a mycophobe due to Allegro's sensationally harsh portrayal of physical effects of the *Amanita* mushroom. But Wasson, for his part, "exhibits the complete syndrome of" the myco-*Christianiphobe*, having a phobia about psychoactive mushrooms entering into the subject of Christianity. If Wasson is such a mycophile, then why does he strenuously avoid an energetic engagement with the natural looming question of whether the Christians commonly used visionary plants? Why does Wasson refrain from putting forth considerations on the general question of Christian entheogen use, when the placement of the tree of life at both ends of the Bible, as a kind of "alpha and omega", would seem to make this question a top priority?

Wasson's letter of September 11th criticizes Allegro for avoiding the central point of Wasson's previous letter about the Plaincourault tree. But Wasson avoids ever entering into the central point of Allegro's book, about Christian use of *Amanita*.

Wasson below points out that there were two printings of Ramsbottom's 1953 book *Mushrooms & Toadstools*, the later one adding a "footnote" (actually an Addendum, not seen by Wasson) that quotes Wasson on the Panofsky/Wasson position about the fresco.

Wasson sent a private letter to Allegro around the same time as the above public letter:

At last I understand. From your letter in the TLS 11.9.70 [September 11, 1970] I surmise what had baffled me. I had found your note IX 20 [endnote 20 for Chapter IX] incomprehensible. In nothing that I had published had I used the words apparently attributed to me, and it wasn't 100% clear whether you were attributing them to me or to Ramsbottom. I looked up 'Ramsbottom op. cit. p. 48' and I found nothing there.

That is, in 1970, when Wasson was reading Allegro's endnote, Wasson looked in his October 26, 1953 first-printing and first-day-available copy of Ramsbottom's book *Mushrooms & Toadstools*, but found the bottom third of page 48 blank. Wasson continues the paragraph by recounting how he obtained his copy in 1953 and wrote to the author:

In the fall of 1953 as I passed through London I saw an ad of Collins announcing a new book on mushrooms by Ramsbottom. (The date was the day it was put on sale, October 26.) I bought it and hurried home. On December 21 I wrote a letter to Dr. Ramsbottom pointing out the misinterpretation of the Plaincourault fresco in his book on page 34. I now gather that he was properly impressed and added a footnote, not to be found in the original edition, on p. 48. He never replied to my letter (which is not unusual with him), and he neither sought nor had my permission to reproduce what was a private letter. The letter was not drafted for publication. I had forgotten its text, which I have now looked up for the first time since it was written, and find the words you quote in it. What we wished to say we said in *Mushrooms, Russia & History* (1957) and I added Panofsky's letter in my *SOMA*. Does your copy of *Mushrooms & Toadstools* carry '1953' on its title page? If so, it is misleading, because it was either a fresh print or a new edition published at the earliest in 1954.

Actually, Ramsbottom didn't add the quote of Wasson as a footnote, but as an *Addendum* within the body of the text. At the time Wasson wrote privately to Allegro, Wasson evidently hadn't actually seen the Addendum Ramsbottom added to a subsequent printing. Apparently Wasson in 1970 hadn't determined how much of his private 1953 letter had been published in Ramsbottom's book this whole time. Wasson's word "Footnote" should instead read "Addendum", but he might not have known that, because he doesn't say that he ever saw the page 48 Addendum; he only surmises: "I now gather that he ... added a footnote ...". He continues:

Though we are utterly opposed to each other on the role played by the fly-agaric, we agree that it was important. I think we can correspond with each other on friendly terms, like opposing counsel after hammering each other all day in court who meet for a drink together in a bar before going home. I wish you would tell me one thing: when did the idea of the fly-agaric first come to you and from where? – Wasson, private letter to Allegro, September 14, 1970

Wasson seems to be asking whether Allegro the scroll scholar found out about the religious use of *Amanita* from Ramsbottom's 1953 book, Wasson's 1957 book, or Wasson's 1968 book.

## Role of *Amanita* in Christianity *Not* Tested in Debate Between Wasson and Allegro

Wasson wrote to Allegro privately that after such intensive debating about the role played by *Amanita* in religious history, they should continue to correspond:

Though we are utterly opposed to each other on the role played by the fly-agaric, we agree that it was important. I think we can correspond with each other on friendly terms, *like opposing counsel after hammering each other all day in court* who meet for a drink together in a bar before going home. – Wasson, private letter to Allegro, September 14, 1970 (emphasis added)

Wasson at long last seems to almost come to grips with (or admit) the reality that it is possible to read the Panofsky argument and yet remain opposed to it and not concede to its awesome force, instead continuing to posit the early Christian use of *Amanita*. Wasson characterizes this dispute over the Plaincourault interpretation and Christian use of *Amanita* as "like opposing counsel after hammering each other all day in court". However, here is another apologetics bluff – the sheer *claim* of having conducted a debate on the disputed matters.

Wasson portrays the Panofsky argument as remaining standing after having been tested in a long day of point-by-point, hammering, critical debate in court. But no such debate and critical examination of the merits of the Panofsky argument or the role of *Amanita* in Christian history had in fact ever occurred, certainly not between Wasson and Allegro. Wasson made strong public assertions, privately expressed the possibility of being wrong, and Allegro merely curtly dismissed the assertions – the opposite of "opposing counsel ... hammering each other all day in court".

## Summary of the Scholars' Exchange about the Panofsky Argument

Wasson and Allegro corresponded on the Plaincourault *Amanita* question August-September 1970. Examination of the available Wasson-Allegro correspondence leads to the remarkable finding that they nowhere there enter into an actual discussion of the topic at all, and Allegro nowhere writes any sort of critique of the Panofsky argument. Once all the academic bluster is cleared away – mechanics that confused even Wasson – the substance of this correspondence amounts to merely the following, paraphrased:

“The Plaincourault tree represents *Amanita* mushrooms.” – 1910 mycology bulletin, and Rolfe’s 1925 book with Ramsbottom’s guidance

“No, Plaincourault is an Italian pine tree, as art experts know.” – Panofsky’s 1952 letter to Wasson, and Schapiro’s communication with Wasson

“The Plaincourault tree represents *Amanita* mushrooms.” – Ramsbottom’s October 1953 book, 1st printing

“Plaincourault is an Italian pine tree, as art experts know.” – Wasson’s December 1953 private letter to Ramsbottom; *Russia* (1957); and *Soma* (1968)

“The Plaincourault tree represents *Amanita* mushrooms. Wasson says it’s an Italian pine tree per art historians.” – Ramsbottom’s book, beginning with one of the printings after October 1953

“The Plaincourault tree represents *Amanita* mushrooms, despite Wasson’s uncertain claim that it’s an Italian pine tree per art historians.” – Allegro’s 1970 endnote

“Didn’t you read where I pointed out it’s an Italian pine tree? If mycologists had seen this finding, they wouldn’t have misinterpreted it as *Amanita* mushrooms; you choose to ignore this interpretation of the eminent art historians.” – Wasson’s 1970 public letter

“Of course I know what the art experts say; you should’ve read my entire book – your objections to the mycologists’ *Amanita* identification are quoted verbatim in my endnote, along with your uncertainty on the matter.” – Allegro’s 1970 public letter

“You’ve avoided the point of my letter, that the eminent, competent specialists of art history have unanimously shown that Plaincourault is Italian pine, not *Amanita* per the mycologists’ naive misinterpretation.” – Wasson’s next 1970 public letter, written almost simultaneously with the following

“I was baffled by your incomprehensible endnote; now I’ve deduced that you got your quote of my words from my private letter to Ramsbottom, which I didn’t want to be published. Despite having conducted this exhaustively in-depth critical debate, let’s talk even further: where and when did you first read about the use of *Amanita* in religious history?” – Wasson’s 1970 private letter to Allegro

The discussion boils down finally to: “The Plaincourault tree is *Amanita*.” “No, it’s an Italian pine.” “No, it’s *Amanita*.” “It’s an Italian pine.” That’s the entire extent of the exchange (an abortive non-discussion) about the merit of the Panofsky argument versus the mycologists’ interpretation of whether the Plaincourault tree was intended to represent Italian pine or *Amanita* mushrooms, between the art historian camp as represented by Wasson and the mycologists as represented by Allegro.

## Early Dating for Wasson's Article "Persephone's Quest" as 1969

Wasson lived September 22, 1898 – December 23, 1986. The Eden section of Wasson's chapter "Persephone's Quest" in *Persephone's Quest* appears to have been written not in 1986, but rather, several months after finishing *Soma*, thus 1969, or perhaps as late as his 1970 Times letters rejecting Plaincourault as *Amanita*.

Some months ago I read the Garden of Eden tale once more, after not having thought of it since childhood. – Wasson, *Persephone's Quest*, published 1986, p. 76

Wasson had certainly thought of "the Garden of Eden tale" in significant depth in 1968, at age 70:

In the opening chapters of Genesis we are faced with ... the fable of the Garden of Eden. The Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil are both planted in the center of Paradise. ... The Fruit of the Tree is the fly-agaric harboured by the birch. – Wasson, *Soma*, 1968, pp. 220-221

The dating of the "Persephone's Quest" around 1969 is logically implied by "some months ago" combined with the fact that he did think about the subject in 1968. The conventional assumption of a 1986 dating would have Wasson write in detail about Genesis' Garden of Eden tale in 1968 in his famous book *Soma*, and then have him falsely write in 1986, "I haven't thought of the Garden of Eden tale in the Genesis text since I was a child."

The assumption that the "Persephone's Quest" passage about the Eden tale was written in 1986 inadvertently results in accusing Wasson of lying or being amazingly wrong regarding the date when he last considered the Garden of Eden tale – you'd be implicitly logically claiming that in 1986, *he forgot* that 18 years ago, in *Soma*, he had written a detailed passage about the meaning of Genesis' Garden of Eden tale.

## Wasson's Claim to Be the First to Cover Visionary Plants in Western Religion

Wasson may be the first to focus on the history of visionary plants specifically in religion. Wasson often writes ambiguously, causing confusion and dispute about what he claimed. It's unclear what Wasson is uniquely claiming when he states:

Valentina Pavlovna and I were the first to become familiar with the entheogens and their historical role in our society. – Wasson, *Persephone*, p. 77

The key words in his claim are 'entheogens', 'historical', and 'our society'. 'Entheogens' denotes the specifically religious use of visionary plants. 'Historical' denotes a span of coverage across time, potentially pre-history through today. 'Our society' is the most ambiguous term; presumably meaning centered around Europe. His usage of the word 'and' introduces ambiguity about the scope of his claim: is he claiming to be the first to become familiar with the entheogens, and the first to become familiar with their historical role? The first part of such a claim is disproved, and the second part of such a claim is vague in scope.

He may have been the first to commit all of his attention to the history of entheogens, but he was neither the first modern scholar to write about the role of entheogens in Western religion, nor did he cover them in the central, Christian aspect of the history of Western society. Manly Hall in 1928 quotes Eusebe Salverte, a French author, from 1846:

The aspirants to initiation, and those who came to request prophetic dreams of the Gods, were prepared by a fast ... after which they partook of meals expressly prepared; and also of mysterious drinks, such as ... the Ciceion in the mysteries of the Eleusinia. Different drugs were easily mixed up with ... the drinks, according to the state of mind ... into which it was necessary to throw the recipient,

and the nature of the visions he was desirous of procuring. – Salverte, *Occult Sciences*, 1846, quoted in Hall, *Secret Teachings*, 1928, pp. 353-354.

Hall has generally sound though brief coverage of the tree of knowledge, Soma, mystery religions, strong drink, and herbs in Western religion and Western esotericism, pp. 296-301, 352-354; for example, he quotes Helena Blavatsky from 1877:

Plants also have like mystical properties in a most wonderful degree, and the secret of the herbs of dreams and enchantments are only lost to European science, and useless to say, too, are unknown to it, except in a few marked instances, such as opium and hashish. Yet, the psychical effects of even these few upon the human system are regarded as evidences of a temporary mental disorder. The women of Thessaly and Epirus, the female hierophants of the rites of Sabazius, did not carry their secrets away with the downfall of their sanctuaries. They are still preserved, and those who are aware of the nature of Soma know the properties of other plants as well. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, 1877, quoted in Hall, *Secret Teachings*, 1928, p. 353

Blavatsky was from the Ukraine in Russia. She was raised by her maternal grandparents, including Princess Helene Dolgoruki, who was a serious amateur botanist, and she was cared for by servants versed in the folk traditions of Old Russia. The history of visionary plants was also covered in Baron Ernst von Bibra, *Plant Intoxicants*, 1855; Mordecai Cooke, *The Seven Sisters of Sleep*, 1860; and Louis Lewin, *Phantastica*, 1924. These include the use of visionary plants in religion, but do not make that the consistent main focus.

Wasson's near-total lack of coverage of Christian use of visionary plants renders problematic his claim to be the first to cover the historical role of visionary plants used in religion "in our society". He refrains from stating what he means by "in our society", so it's ambiguous and untestable whether Wasson meets the second part of his claim.

Gordon Wasson's father, Edmund A. Wasson, was an Episcopal minister, per Forte, *Entheogens*, 2000. Wasson Sr. had a Ph.D. from Columbia, and made wine, brewed beer, and distilled strong drink in his cellar during Prohibition. He wrote *Religion and Drink* in 1914, covering biblical references to drinking wine, defending as Christian the use of alcohol.

The maximal entheogen theory of religion holds that 'wine' in religion always ultimately refers to visionary plants, not fermented grape juice; doubly so for 'strong drink' in the Bible. Per the maximal theory, Wasson Senior's 1914 defense of use of *fermented beverages* as Christian is a misinterpretation and misapprehension; his Biblical findings are actually applicable foremost to visionary plants, not modern wine – a naive blunder made in his isolation from the experts of his day regarding psychoactive plants in religious history.

Gordon Wasson covers an unpredictable assortment of religions, not across-the-board as per the maximal entheogen theory of religion. He refrains from making any effort to discuss the question of the role of entheogens in Christian history, except a few pages rejecting the Plaincourault tree of knowledge as *Amanita* and rejecting all 'mushroom trees' in Christian art as meaning mushrooms; five pages explaining the tree of knowledge in Genesis as *Amanita* (assuming we count Genesis as a Christian text); and half a page describing Revelation as having a flow that's like the mushroom state of consciousness but without using mushrooms.

He also writes "I once said that there was no mushroom in the Bible." But he doesn't state where or when he "said" that – it would've been someplace prior to *Soma*.

Wasson provides only spotty coverage of the historical role of entheogens "in our society"; he doesn't justify his lack of investigation of entheogens within and throughout the history of Christianity, so we could reject not only his claim of being *the first* to cover the historical role of entheogens in our

society, but also reject his claim of having covered the historical role of entheogens in our society at all, except peripherally. Wasson seems to mean “in the pre-history of our society” when he writes “historical ... in our society”.

So who is actually the first to cover at length the role of visionary plants in religion throughout Western history? Clark Heinrich is a strong candidate, having written a book organized by era, *Strange Fruit*, 1994, not squeamish about dealing head-on with the question of entheogens within Christianity. Allegro's book has less-even coverage of the various eras.

## Wasson Claims Credit for Discovering What Plaincourault Plainly Shows

Wasson also claims to have discovered that the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden was *Amanita* and its host – but again, if we want to keep him from misstating his contributions, we have to add restrictive qualifiers. He claims:

To propose a novel reading of this celebrated story is a daring thing: it is exhilarating and intimidating. I am confident, ready for the storm. – Wasson, *Persephone's Quest*, p. 74

Some months ago I read the Garden of Eden tale once more, after not having thought about it since childhood. I read it as one who now knew the entheogens. Right away it came over me that the Tree of Knowledge was ... revered ... precisely because there grows under it the mushroom ... that supplies the entheogenic food ... – Wasson, *Persephone*, p. 76

Valentina Pavlovna and I were the first to become familiar with the entheogens and their historical role in our society. My discovery of the meaning of the Adam and Eve story came as a stunning surprise. The meaning was obvious. ... The tree is revered but only because it harbors the entheogen that grows at its base ... When my wife and I discovered the magnitude of what was revealed to us, what were we to do? ... Valentina Pavlovna and I resolved to do what we could to treat our subject worthily, devoting our lives to studying it and reporting on it. – Wasson, *Persephone*, p. 77

That Wasson describes the *Amanita* reading of Genesis' tree of knowledge in 1986, or even 1969, as a “surprise discovery” merely “some months ago” is baffling, given that he'd prominently written about the Garden of Eden tale as an adult, and had written many times about the Eden tree painting in relation to *Amanita*, and his private writings show he'd been considering the reading for decades:

Could the fruit offered in Eden by the serpent have been our hallucinogenic mushroom? – Wasson, letters, 1956

Was it in fact 'novel' for him to provide a reading of Genesis' tree of knowledge as *Amanita*? Rolfe and Ramsbottom must not have thought so. The idea is implicit back in 1910, at the session of the Société Mycologique de France held on October 6. What would they say were they told that a man would go around calling their interpretation "isolated, blundering, and naive" in books, private letters, and public letters for at least 17 years, and then turn around and publish these words 76 years after their conference, without retracting the words he breathed against them all those years; without giving them due credit?

How could it possibly have been a stunning surprise? Why not credit the old familiar fresco for the clue? The Plaincourault fresco and the mycologists' description of it as *Amanita* drew the connection for Wasson, informing him that he should consider that the Garden of Eden tree in Genesis is *Amanita* and its host, as depicted in the fresco. Did not Rolfe in 1925, Panofsky in 1952, and certainly Ramsbottom in 1953, all cause Wasson not only to think about the Garden of Eden tale but to *write* about it, specifically about a depiction of the Garden of Eden tree of knowledge in connection with *Amanita* mushrooms, in at least 1952, 1953, 1957, and 1968?

If Wasson wrote the *Persephone's Quest* passage in 1969, he had been thinking and writing about the tree of knowledge (with Adam, Eve, and serpent) in connection with *Amanita* for at least 17 years (since 1952); if written 1986, at least 34 years. In 1952 (age 54), Wasson is in touch with art historians Schapiro and Panofsky, and the mycologist Ramsbottom, discussing the Garden of Eden tree of knowledge in the fresco and whether or not it is *Amanita* – making assertions about the relation of this Garden of Eden tree of knowledge, with regard to *Amanita*.

For someone who hasn't *thought* about the Garden of Eden tale since childhood, Wasson sure did a lot of *writing* and *debating* about this instance of the tree (without thought, we may concede) in relation to *Amanita* throughout the 20th Century as an adult. Then in *Persephone's Quest*, he appears to take credit for what Plaincourault and the naive, blundering mycologists in their ignorance and isolation had been pointing out since 1910: the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden was *Amanita*. The fresco shows *Amanitas* growing at the base of the main tree.

How could Wasson's mental categories be so rigidly separated that he considers Plaincourault and Genesis to be two entirely unrelated subjects? What to make of Wasson's contradiction, his claim for discovering what Plaincourault plainly depicts, even while denying the connection of the Garden of Eden's tree of knowledge with *Amanita* in the fresco? Was Wasson lying? senile? caught in a web of his own unwieldy confusion, finally reached the point of a general collapse of logic and coherence? Was he pulling our leg, or having to pretend there are no mushrooms within Christian history?

Wasson might mean "I haven't thought about all aspects of the Genesis text of the tree of knowledge since a child, although I considered and wrote about the Plaincourault picture of the tree, in isolation from the Genesis text, quite often throughout the 20th Century." If so, he should say "I essentially knew this 'sudden discovery' all along, thanks to the Plaincourault fresco and the mycologists who have been pointing out since 1910 that it equated the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden with *Amanita* mushrooms and the host tree." But he only cited Rolfe and Ramsbottom to reject their interpretation while calling them isolated, blundering, and naive – never to grant them the credit that seems to be due for helping him recognize the meaning of the Genesis text.

## Ambiguity Conceals and Enables Misleading Half-Truths

Much of the scholarly trainwreck centering around Wasson, Allegro, and the tree of knowledge involves ambiguous statements. Restoring order requires resolving the various ambiguities through additional detective work.

[Wasson] could not bear sloppiness, especially in writing, and showed no patience with mediocrity. I have never known a man more meticulous in his bearing, his speech, his writing and his thinking. – Schultes, *Sacred Mushroom Seeker*, 1990, p. 17; *Future of Religion*, 1997, p. 66

Wasson has his own brand of unclarity and euphemistic evasiveness, resulting in reader confusion about his stated position on various distinct points. Wasson seems unable to bring himself to write an up-front, straightforward sentence on this point in *Soma*, along the lines of "The authors of the version of the tree of knowledge story that appears in Genesis used *Amanita* or other visionary plants, but some of their leaders disliked this, and the authors understood the tree of knowledge as *Amanita* mushrooms together with a host tree."

Wasson avoids such blunt, bare directness; he belonged to a culture far from both the sensationalism of *Sacred Mushroom* and the no-nonsense, businesslike directness of today's post-Allegro entheogen scholarship. We are fast reaching an era where no one needs to waste time and ink writing apologies such as:

I suppose that few at first, or perhaps none, will agree with me. To propose a novel reading of this celebrated story is a daring thing: it is exhilarating and intimidating. I am confident, ready for the storm. – Wasson, *Persephone's Quest*, p. 74

After the genteel restraint of Wasson and the tabloid-ready sensationalism of Allegro, the most recent entheogen research has become more efficient: matter-of-fact, direct, and to-the-point, neither restrained nor sensationalist.

## The Illusion that Wasson Admitted He Was Wrong on Plaincourault

It might appear that Wasson changed his stated position on later Judeo-Christian use of entheogens, through a quick reading. In *Persephone's Quest*, in 1986, Wasson published words including "I once said that there was no mushroom ... I was wrong ... the tree of ... Knowledge ... was ... *Amanita muscaria*", thus we may extrapolate that he was expressing through silence that he now considers the *Amanita* reading of the Plaincourault fresco an open possibility. But that would be a baseless assumption, a hope that is unsubstantiated in his published works.

First of all, it's a mistake to assume that the "Persephone's Quest" chapter was written near the end of Wasson's life and thus can be used as implicit evidence for his purported implicit renunciation of his "Plaincourault isn't *Amanita*" view.

Secondly, as Samorini points out in his Plaincourault article, we must differentiate between the Genesis text story of the Eden tree versus the Plaincourault tree, as Wasson does to the extreme every time he discusses both. Suppose Wasson's private writings state "when writing *Persephone's Quest*, I deliberately left open the *Amanita* reading of Plaincourault this time, unlike in *Soma*." This would do nothing to change the fact that *Persephone's Quest* contains no words retracting or asserting any position regarding Plaincourault or later Christian entheogen use, or mushroom trees in general.

It would be arbitrary and baseless to read silence on a subject as a retraction of formerly stated views. That method of reading would lack all controls, and is particularly unreliable when the author has often put out contradictory sets of position statements. Such a way of hinting to the reader would be as worthless in practice as no hint at all. If Wasson did mean to hint a retraction by his silence, and we find that confirmed in his private writings, it was a wholly useless manner of hinting; only an actual statement on the matter would suffice, given his past counterintuitive combination of stated positions.

Wasson has at least twice affirmed in print that the Genesis text means *Amanita*: in the main text of *Soma* and in the "Persephone's Quest" passage. He slightly changed his view about the attitude of the Genesis redactors toward *Amanita*: in *Soma* he thinks they were in favor of, yet somewhat against *Amanita*, and in "Persephone's Quest" he simply thinks they were initiates clearly in favor of *Amanita*; but in either case, he consistently holds that they meant the tree of knowledge as *Amanita*.

Wasson writes: "I once said that there was no mushroom in the Bible. I was wrong." And he made his view about the attitude of the Genesis redactors more consistently positive. But neither of these changes enable us to assume that he changed any of his views on other aspects, even if we believe that coherent thinking would automatically cause such a domino-chain shift.

If we eagerly rush to the assumption that Wasson's affirmation of mushrooms in Genesis necessarily must have led to a change of his other views, let us go all the way and also leap to the assumptions that he adopted the extreme maximal entheogen theory.

We might suppose that Wasson's clearer affirmations of *Amanita* in Genesis, combined with silence about related topics where he had once denied later Judeo-Christian entheogen use, must have been a hint to us that he had come to realize St. John of Patmos was given *Amanita* scrolls by the angel, the tree of life in Revelation was long understood as *Amanita*, the Plaincourault artist and chapel group meant *Amanita*, all Christian 'mushroom trees' mean psychoactive mushrooms, there is



no difference after all between our own Holy Agape and the Mexican religious use of mushrooms as the flesh of God, and everyone up to 1700 understood the tree of life as *Amanita*.

But we have not the slightest evidence for any of those suppositions about Wasson's final views, those mere possibilities, and Wasson has been shown to be no slave to consistency and coherence on these matters. Regarding the Plaincourault tree as *Amanita*, Wasson has denied it 5 times: in a would-be private letter to Ramsbottom in 1953; in a footnote in *Russia* in 1957; in the epilogue of *Soma* in 1968; and in two letters to *The Times* in 1970. He passes-by the opportunity to recant regarding that tree in the "Persephone's Quest" section.

Such an interpretation of Wasson's writings would violate his own previously demonstrated way of combining opposing positions on related topics: he never writes about "the" tree of knowledge in the Jewish or Christian context; he always writes specifically about the tree of knowledge or tree of life in the Genesis text, or, as if an entirely different subject, the tree of knowledge in the Plaincourault fresco.

The notion that Wasson waffled, or changed his view between 1970 and 1986, would have to rely on doing what Wasson's 2 books and 3 letters about Plaincourault distinctly and remarkably prevent us from doing: assuming that the tree in Genesis and in the fresco are the same topic of discussion so that his shift of thinking (or stated position) on the one can be extrapolated to the other.

Such a misreading would rely on going against Wasson's consistent extreme compartmentalization of these two trees, in conjunction with assuming such a late dating of the *Persephone* passage that Wasson is made to deny having previously written the Genesis tree section in *Soma*. It seems like it would be reasonable to assume that Wasson's position on the Genesis tree can be extrapolated to his position on Plaincourault, so that to affirm one is tantamount to affirming the other. That assumption would be incorrect in the case of Wasson.

## The Weakness and Impotence of the Panofsky/Wasson Argument

People have brushed aside Allegro's theory that Jesus was none other than the mushroom, or that Christianity is based on mushroom use, by matter-of-factly stating that Panofsky disproved Allegro in the excerpt from the letter to Wasson. But such a claim merely repeats and propagates Wasson's overconfidence in the authority of the art historians, and sustains the avoidance of actual critique of the art historians' argument. Such commentators brandish the Panofsky argument with the same undue and unearned finality as Wasson pushes for, without actually reading and paying careful attention to the distinct issues involved, the caliber of reasoning about the single issue addressed in Wasson's excerpt, and Wasson's exact views on the various distinct issues.

Even if all the art historians "recognized" the hundreds of Christian mushroom trees as "Italian pine", this says and implies nothing about whether such trees likely *also* meant the *Amanita* mushroom or other visionary plants. As presented by Wasson, that consensus is nearly irrelevant to the mushroom question and possibility. From what little actual argumentation Wasson presents, which Wasson portrays as sealing the case, we have to conclude that there simply is no discussion among the art historians and no argument from them beyond the feeble Panofsky argument, an argument which by no means settles the case or has any power to convince someone not already convinced of the Panofsky interpretation.

## Revelation: The Tree of Life Brackets the Entire Bible

What does Wasson have to say about the tree of life versus the tree of knowledge, in Genesis *and in Revelation*? It is odd and remarkable that Wasson refrains from mentioning the tree of life in Revelation, or its importance per its placement and role there. Was he unaware of it, and if so, why – does he avoid looking too much at the question of *Amanita* awareness in the later, Christian

scriptures, out of some inchoate fear of where that would take his writings? Was he deliberately keeping silent about it, and if so, why – to avoid stirring up the kind of trouble and defamation that Allegro's boldness provoked?

Near the start of the visionary journey in Revelation, John eats the little scrolls with writing on them (dried *Amanita* caps, per Heinrich), given by the angel. Per Wasson, was the tree of life in Revelation intended by the author as an allusion to the use of *Amanita*, or not? The Book of Revelation presents a problem for Wasson's implied assertion that only the very earliest Jews – when the Eden story was written – used and knew about entheogens, because Revelation is considered to be largely late in canon history and it includes an Eden tree: the tree of life, which those who overcome have the right to eat, and which bears its fruit every month.

The trees of life and of moral knowledge appear on page 2 of most bibles:

And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:9). And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” (2:16-17). When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (3:6).

And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” (3:22). After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. (3:24)

God's permission “to eat from any tree in the garden; but ... not ... from the tree of *knowledge*” logically implies that eating the fruit from the tree of *life* was permitted (per Heinrich, *Strange Fruit*, p. 64), until driving “the man” out from the garden and erecting a barrier or gate formed by a flaming sword. Were the man to get past the flaming sword, he would eat the fruit of the tree of life – originally permitted – and “live forever”. Living forever, or non-dying, is a promise or reward put forth in the New Testament; in Revelation, that reward implicitly occurs in conjunction with eating the fruit from the tree of life.

Wasson obscures the literary distinction between the two trees, so that he can then leave behind the Genesis/Revelation structure and talk generally of “the Tree” and “the Fruit of the Tree”:

The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil ... figure as two trees but they stem back to the same archetype.” – Wasson, *Soma*, p. 220.

There were two trees in the Bible story, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, whose fruit Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat, and the Tree of Life. ... they were expelled from the Garden to prevent them from eating of the Tree of Life, which would have conferred immortality on them. Now please read the following text ... I give only the passages that are pertinent for our purpose. – Wasson, *Persephone's Quest*, p. 75

In practice, Wasson's collapsing of the two trees together in his literary analysis amounts to the elimination of the tree of life in its role in Revelation, where it appears as the end-bracket of the Bible – once at the start of Revelation (2:7) and three spots at the end of Revelation, including the very end of Revelation (22:2-19). This mis-treatment of the tree of life amounts to a way of safely limiting the discussion of “the tree”, cordoning it off within the containing boundary of Genesis.

... [the] mushroom plays a hidden role ... and a major one, in ... the best known episode in the Old Testament, the Garden of Eden story and what happened to Adam and Eve. ... I read the Garden of

Eden story once more ... the Tree of Knowledge ... has been revered by ... Early Man in Eurasia precisely because there grows under it the mushroom ... He who composed the tale ... in Genesis was clearly steeped in the lore of this entheogen – Wasson, *Persephone's Quest*, p. 76

But Wasson is silent on what happens to Man through the Second Adam (Jesus Christ) in Revelation: he overcomes sin, is permitted to eat from the fruit of the tree of life, and lives forever. Wasson either discusses 'the Tree' or singles out 'the Tree of Knowledge', but he refrains from tracing the motif of the 'Tree of Life' to its ultimate destination. Are we to take Revelation's tree of life as not meaning *Amanita*, while we take the tree of life in Genesis as meaning *Amanita*, so that we can stay on-message with Wasson's implausible claim that only the very earliest authors of Bible passages comprehended that the trees of knowledge and life are the *Amanita* mushroom?

The misinterpretation ... of the Plaincourault fresco [as a deliberate and conscious reference to *Amanita* mushrooms] ... the commentators have made an error in timing: the span of the past is longer ... and the events that they seek to confirm took place before recorded history began. – *Soma*, p. 180

By 'the events', Wasson must mean comprehension that the tree of knowledge (and the tree of life) were the *Amanita* mushroom by the scripture author. Wasson's particular argument against Plaincourault as *Amanita* forces him to place the tree of life in Revelation into the same bucket: Wasson's argument and reasoning necessarily leads us to the unlikely conclusion that the author of Revelation cannot have understood the tree of life in Revelation as *Amanita*, because that comprehension was only present in prehistory.

Wasson ignores John's eating of the stomach-embittering scrolls from the angel, with writing on them, and assumes that John was in a mushroom state of consciousness without ingesting any mushrooms, as below.

Anna Partington and John Allegro were associates and friends who were both graduates of the Honours School of Oriental Studies at the University of Manchester England, though of different generations. Partington wrote, in personal correspondence March 13, 2006:

I thought Wasson made his position with regard to Christianity clear in 1961: when he carefully stated the difference as then understood by him between: a) Christian transubstantiation and chemically induced religious experience; and b) chemically induced visions in Mediterranean and Meso-American cultures and those achieved by Christians through "mortifications". Thus:

She quotes Wasson's oft-anthologized passage:

I could talk to you a long time about the words used to designate these sacred mushrooms in the languages of the various people who know them. The Aztecs before the Spaniards arrived called them *teo-nanacátl*, God's flesh. And I need hardly remind you of the disquieting parallel, the designation of the elements in our Eucharist: "Take, eat, this is My body ..." and again, "Grant us therefore Gracious lord, so to eat the flesh of Thy dear Son ...". But there is one difference. The orthodox Christian must accept by faith the miracle of the conversion of the bread into God's flesh: that is what is meant by the doctrine of transubstantiation. By contrast, the mushroom of the Aztecs carries its own conviction; every communicant will testify to the miracle that he has experienced.

I would not be understood as contending that only these substances [indole family] (wherever found in nature) bring about visions and ecstasies. Clearly some poets and prophets and many mystics and ascetics seem to have enjoyed ecstatic visions that answer the requirements of the ancient mysteries and that duplicate the mushroom *agapé* of Mexico. I do not suggest that St. John of Patmos ate the mushrooms in order to write the Book of the Revelations. Yet the succession of images in his vision, so clearly seen and yet such a phantasmagoria, means for me that he was in

the same state as one bemushroomed. Nor do I suggest for a moment that William Blake knew the mushroom when he wrote his telling account of the clarity of “vision”.

The advantage of the mushroom is that it puts many (if not everyone) within reach of this state without having to suffer the mortifications of Blake and St John. – Wasson, “Lecture to the Mycological Society of America”, 1961; near-identical passages in Wasson, “Divine Mushroom of Immortality” in Furst, 1972, pp. 185-200; Furst, *Hallucinogens and Culture*, 1976, pp. 85-6

Wasson apparently takes it for granted that poets and “orthodox Christian” mystics didn’t use visionary plants. As is his style, Wasson provides no direct declaration such as “Christian mystics didn’t use visionary plants”, so we’re left to deduce and extract his position to that effect, from the definite statement “there is one difference”. His claim of a difference is unsubstantiated and overly general, delimited only by the vague and problematic qualifier ‘orthodox’.

Wasson slips-in the hypothesis, without admitting it’s just a hypothesis subject to critique and can’t be simply taken for granted as fact, that St. John and William Blake did not use visionary plants, but instead, did use “mortifications”, a proposed technique or condition which Wasson keeps vague and unspecified. We are to complacently nod our heads to this hazy and rushed arm-waving, conceding to Wasson’s authority on all things mushroid. Partington continues by commenting:

It is not unusual for intellectuals to hive off their own culture from those they are investigating. This can be the consequence of the structure of an individual’s mind. Even if this is not a constraint a necessary degree of social and financial independence may be absent.

It is striking that Wasson felt the subject of entheogens and Christianity to be awkward and “disquieting”, rather than alluring. The matching language of the Eucharist and the Aztec expression “God’s flesh” should raise unanswered questions (not *a priori* assumptions taken as certain and given) prompting historical investigation into all the variants of the Christian movement across the world, over the entire period of Christian history.

Ott points out that the 20th-Century rediscovery of religious *Psilocybe* mushroom use as the ‘flesh of God’ in Mexico raises major, interesting problems about the Eucharist:

Latter-day “evangelists” of Protestant faiths have taken up where the Catholic Church left off, continuing to wage a vigorous holy war on the entheogenic mushrooms (Hoogshagen 1959; Pike 1960; Pike & Cowan 1959). As one missionary put it succinctly: “the partaking of the divine mushroom poses potential problems in relation to the Christian concept of the Lord’s Supper” (Pike & Cowan 1959). Indeed it does... – Ott, *Pharmactheon*, 1993, p. 278

Pike & Cowan’s article is titled as a dichotomy, “Mushroom Ritual versus Christianity”, which few modern scholars have stopped to question as to whether it is historically a *false* dichotomy.

Wasson’s position that Eden Trees were recognized as *Amanita* mushrooms only at the very beginning of writing the Bible is rendered problematic by “the Book of the Revelations”, because that late Christian book includes an Eden tree: the tree of life. Wasson has nothing to say about whether the tree of life in Revelation was intended by the author as an allusion to the use of *Amanita*. He doesn’t mention John eating the little scrolls from the angel with writing on them. Opening up that discussion would have blown Wasson’s story that only the very earliest Jews – when the Garden of Eden story was written – used and knew about entheogens.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. (Revelation 2:7). ... down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (22:2). Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of

life and may go through the gates into the city. (22:14). And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (22:19).

Wasson essentially asserts that only the Bible's opening is informed by understanding the Eden trees as *Amanita*. But the Bible is bracketed on both ends by these trees, virtually the extreme ends of the Bible, making it plausible that Jews and Christians commonly understood the tree of life to mean *Amanita* mushrooms throughout the entire era during which the Bible was written. The tree of life is first mentioned in Genesis 2:9, on page 2 of most Bibles, and is last mentioned in Revelation 22:19, only 4 sentences away from the end of the Bible.

Wasson's assumptions ask us to believe that the author and editor of the 'tree of life' passages in Revelation didn't understand that the fruit of the tree of knowledge meant the *Amanita* mushroom, but that they chose to end the Bible with the emphasis on the tree of life out of sheer superficial literary mirroring.

## How Eve's Stance is Represented

Ramsbottom writes:

Eve ... is shown in an attitude which suggests that she is 'suffering from colic rather than from shame.'

Wasson replies by writing:

... Eve, whose hands are held in the posture of modesty traditional for the occasion.

In *Sacred Mushroom*, Allegro writes:

... Eve stands by holding her belly.

In the *Sunday Mirror* version, Allegro writes:

... Eve stands by, her hands on her belly.

Eve's legs are wrapped and pressed together as though she is working on recycling the *Amanita*. Ramsbottom seems to focus more on Eve's entire posture, while Wasson focuses only on her hands, and his argument about her hands is quite weak: can we agree that her hands are in fact placed in a posture of modesty? The artist leaves a gap between her hands; they are too high and too far apart to cover her shame, so Wasson's bringing of our attention specifically to her hands works against his position.

Wasson, representing the expert art historians, doesn't recognize the difference between Eve's hands holding the sides of her stomach versus covering her genitals. With his every move of argumentation, Wasson helps strengthen the case against his own position, and then is baffled when no one is instantly converted by his clearly winning argument.

Compare these visionary passages which Heinrich explains as ingesting *Amanita* caps to enter a prophetic state, after an upset stomach and lament. From Ezekiel:

Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. He

then said to me: "Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them. – Ezekiel 2:9-3:4

From Revelation:

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel ..." ... he said to me, "Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth." So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. Then they said to me, "You must prophecy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings." – Revelation 10:8-11

Heinrich associates a feeling of physical discomfort and sickness with Ezekiel ingesting *Amanita*:

The voice then told [Ezekiel] ... four times to eat the proffered scroll, and the author mentions the eating of the scroll two additional times. Perhaps we are supposed to come away with the impression that something is actually being eaten here. ... lamentations, wailings, moanings ... all ... can apply to fly agaric sickness; this is how Ezekiel felt after he ate the scroll. Dried caps can be rolled and unrolled like a scroll, and sometimes appear to have writing on them. ... He experienced some of the physical discomfort for which the fly agaric is infamous; his description makes it sound like motion sickness. ... though unpleasant it was none the less profound. – Clark Heinrich, *Strange Fruit*, 1994, p. 100

Heinrich points out the cross-testament typology of Revelation and Ezekiel:

This 'scroll-eating' [in Revelation] is the same as in Ezekiel, a metaphor for the dried cap of a fly agaric mushroom. Dried caps are as pliable as leather and have a sweet, honey-like smell, unlike the fresh mushroom, yet eating them often causes an upset stomach ... The veil remnants on the cap often look like obscure writing of some kind, while the cap itself contains, and can reveal, the 'word of God', a word that can be seen as well as heard through the secret door of the mind. ... after eating the scroll John was able to prophesy again. – Clark Heinrich, *Strange Fruit*, p. 129

### The Pine Alternative Supports, Not Replaces, the *Amanita* Reading

If the artist had a species of Pine, specifically, in mind, that would point right back again to an *Amanita* host tree, which supports the plausibility of reading the Plaincourault tree and all mushroom trees as intending the *Amanita*. Thus the argument that the painter intended a Pine tree, not at all the *Amanita*, inherently backfires against Panofsky and Wasson (as Irvin pointed out in personal correspondence). Wasson probably overlooked this backfiring of Panofsky's alternative explanation in *Soma* because in that book, he overemphasized the Birch to the near-exclusion of considering the Pine as a major host tree for *Amanita*.

In *Persephone's Quest*, Wasson switches to asserting that the trees in Genesis are "probably a conifer" and silently refrains from mentioning the clearly self-contradictory Panofsky argument that the Plaincourault tree could not have meant *Amanita* because mushroom trees instead intend the Italian Pine:

... the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil ... was *Amanita muscaria* ... The Tree was probably a conifer, in Mesopotamia. – Wasson, *Persephone's Quest*, p. 75

The wording at a French website is a clear example of the usual poor argument, which only appears to hold up, until the implicit assumptions are brought out from hiding:

The temptation of Adam and Eve: at the centre, the Tree of Knowledge and the serpent. Some have seen in this tree of knowledge the representation of hallucinogenic agarics. In fact, this stylized representation of the tree of knowledge is relatively common in Romanesque wall paintings.

This Panofsky-like statement, especially the logical connector “in fact”, implies the poor argument that stylized portrayals of the tree of knowledge were common, therefore this instance cannot have meant mushrooms because mushroom depictions were not common in Christian art. This single tree is rightly considered important because if it falls into the category of an *Amanita* representation, the entire forest of Christian mushroom trees falls into the recognition and admission that they represent what they look like: mushrooms.

Wasson inadvertently highlights the evidence against his own position, while mistaking it as proving his position.

### There’s Not Just One Instance of an Eden Tree That Looks Like Visionary Plants

Wasson in *Soma* apparently thinks there’s only a single, deviant instance of a mushroom-shaped tree set in Eden:

The gentlemen who presented the fresco to the Société Mycologique made the sensational statement that, instead of the customary Tree, the artist had given us the fly-agaric. A serpent was entwined around a gigantic fly-agaric ... – *Soma*, p. 179.

Against that assumption of this being such a deviant portrayal, connecting the Eden tree to a mushroom-shaped portrayal of a tree, see the mushroom-shaped Eden tree showing Adam and Eve with a serpent-entwined *Psilocybe* mushroom, in Italy at the Abbey of Montecassino, around 1072.

Regarding this illustration of an Eden tree, Hoffman, Ruck, and Staples misidentify the Mandrake-shaped tree (which contains scopolamine, like *Datura* and *Belladonna*) as a Palm tree, and create an unconvincing explanation to account for the pairing of the non-psychoactive Palm with the *Psilocybe* mushroom:

The shape of the Tree of Knowledge is obviously distinctive, totally unlike the more ordinary, and perhaps intentionally different, palm tree on the right. Beneath the two trees there are two “extraneous” bushes, shaped like bunches of grapes, for the grape cluster has a long Graeco-Roman tradition as a stylized mushroom ... – Mark Hoffman, Carl Ruck, & Blaise Staples, “Conjuring Eden: Art and the Entheogenic Vision of Paradise”, in *Entheos*, Issue 1 (2001), pp. 21-22

I’ve identified the tree on the right as a Mandrake represented in the form of a tree. The Mandrake identification enables a stronger and more consistent explanation, and supports the general, multi-plant entheogen theory of Christianity due to the presence of a mushroom tree in combination with a Mandrake tree.

Similarly in *Entheos* Issue 3, the authors read the tauroctony as indirectly symbolizing *Amanita* due to general color scheme of white-spotted red above a single white leg, but overlook the *Psilocybe* mushroom explicitly formed by a thin blue stem line (with some 7 gradation lines) running up the middle of Mithras’ leg and the cap formed by the fold of his hem. That mushroom cap formed by a hem is more certain upon seeing the 3 mushrooms formed by the hem and 1 formed by the cape, in the middle of the “Dionysus’ Triumphal Procession” mosaic.

This tauroctony is shown in Manfred Clauss, *The Roman Cult of Mithras: The God and His Mysteries*, ISBN: [0415929784](#), 2001, cover, reversed; Manfred Clauss, *Mithras: Kult und Mysterien*, ISBN: [3406343252](#), 1990, non-reversed; *Entheos* [Issue 3](#), 2002, cover, reversed.

Thus additional visionary plants are identifiable in the very art that Hoffman and Ruck have gone over looking for other plant species. Both of the above identifications connect with the topic of the *Amanita* identification of the Eden trees. A common error made in the entheogen theory of religion is a tendency to overemphasize a single drug plant, instead of the pharmacopoeia of all the visionary plants. Entheogen scholarship books often tend toward the single-plant fallacy, resulting in an inadequate ability to recognize representation of other psychoactive plants. Hunting for *Amanita* in Christian art can result in overlooking other visionary plants, such as Mandrake, in the same illustrations.

It's important to take full advantage of the potential abundant clear evidence we have, instead of falling back on the excuse that we have too little evidence, in reconstructing Christian origins and history. We do not have too little evidence for alternative histories; rather, we have too little skill at modes of reading. We must consciously be in control of selecting the assumption-sets we apply while reading, and avoid the strong tendency toward carelessness and unawareness about what our background assumptions are.

### Art Historians' Term 'Mushroom Trees' Belies the Apologetics of "Unrecognizable"

Panofsky and Wasson correctly and uncontroversially report that art historians have found hundreds of what they call 'mushroom trees':

This fresco gives us a stylized motif in Byzantine and Romanesque art of which hundreds of examples are well known to art historians, and on which the German art historians bestow, for convenience in discussion, the name *Pilzbaum*. – Wasson, private letter of December 21, 1953, quoted in Ramsbottom, *Mushrooms & Toadstools*, post-1953 printing, p. 48

Art historians' choice to use the term 'mushroom trees' instead of 'Umbrella pines', 'Italian pines', or 'Stone pines' belies the apologetics behind the denial of the inclining toward mushroom-like shapes, denial that the template is none other than the shape of mushrooms.

... a conventionalized tree type ... a 'mushroom tree' ... comes about by the gradual schematization of the impressionistically rendered Italian pine tree ... the medieval artists ... worked ... from classical prototypes which in the course of repeated copying became quite unrecognizable. – Erwin Panofsky in a 1952 letter to Wasson excerpted in *Soma*, pp. 179-180

What are these models, these prototypes, which are so "unrecognizable"? The prototypes are recognizably the shape of mushrooms. The mushroom shape is the prototype; the prototype is the mushroom shape. Thus the term *Pilzbaum* does indeed provide "convenience in discussion", since the "impressionistically rendered ... prototypes" which Panofsky calls "unrecognizable" are at the same time admitted by Panofsky and the other art historians of 1952 to be quite recognizable, as looking like mushrooms.

As Hoffman, Ruck, & Staples point out in "Conjuring Eden", the fact to be explained, which the art historians don't explain except as an accidental product of errors in repeated copying, is that the Christian artists have chosen to present a spectrum of images ranging from those that look like trees but not mushrooms, to a striking number that look like mushrooms but not trees.

The real question is whether the artists intended the mushroom shape or whether this was arbitrary and accidental. The art historians don't even attempt to make the case for why we should hold that the use of the mushroom shape was accidental and unintended, rather than intentional; they simply *declare* it to be unintended, point to their framed diplomas as the evidence in the case, and then write like they have produced knowledge, won the debate, and settled the matter.



*Pilz* means 'mushroom'; *baum* means 'tree'. The trees altogether clearly look like mushrooms (though a Mandrake tree of life is paired with a mushroom tree of knowledge in the Abbey of Montecassino). Art historians continue to characterize them as 'mushroom trees', because that – not only the Italian Pine – is plainly the prototype which these trees are *recognizably* modeled on.

## Single- or Double-Layer Representation of the Tree

By reading the *Toadstools* page 48 exchange closely, we can see the essential difference between the Ramsbottom/Allegro interpretation and the Panofsky/Wasson interpretation. For Ramsbottom, mushroom trees simultaneously represent mushrooms *and* trees; for Wasson, mushroom trees represent *only* trees, not *also* mushrooms.

Ramsbottom writes that in a fresco there is represented (“painted”) an *Amanita*, which is painted so as to represent something else: the Eden tree:

In a fresco ... a branched [Fly-Agaric] *specimen is painted to represent* the tree of good and evil ... (emphasis added)

Wasson replies by writing as though Ramsbottom had only written the first part, that in the fresco there is shown an *Amanita*; Wasson’s wording ignores Ramsbottom’s phrase “to represent the tree of good and evil” and asserts the same thing as the second part of Ramsbottom: that the fresco presents a specialized representation of the tree of good and evil:

... we ... reject the Plaincourault fresco *as representing* a mushroom. This fresco *gives us a stylized* motif in Byzantine and Romanesque art of which hundreds of examples are well known ... It is *an iconograph representing* the Palestinian tree that was supposed to bear the fruit that tempted Eve ... (emphasis added)

It would’ve been clearer for Wasson to write that he agrees with Ramsbottom’s second part, “fresco ... painted to represent the tree of good and evil”, but disagrees with the first part: “In a fresco ... a branched [Fly-Agaric] specimen is painted”. Wasson should have acknowledged that Ramsbottom agrees that the fresco shows a stylized iconographic representation of the Eden tree. But to Wasson, ‘stylized iconographic’ in this context means something like abstract shapes, templates, or randomly developed schematized prototypes with no particular meaning in themselves, whereas to Ramsbottom, ‘stylized iconographic’ means shapes and colors that are deliberately chosen specifically because they are mushroom-like.

## Pretending There Is a Shared Assumption that the Painting Is Mutually Exclusive

Ramsbottom says that the painting is a stylized mushroom and also a stylized tree of knowledge. Wasson’s pseudo-refutation argues that Ramsbottom’s position that the painting is simply a mushroom is wrong because instead of a mushroom, the painting is a stylized tree. Wasson misreads Ramsbottom’s position and then misfires against it, so that no real head-to-head debate takes place.

Wasson frames the debate as a mutually exclusive single meaning of the painting, as though Ramsbottom shares that premise and could lose the argument the moment the tree is shown to represent something other than *Amanita*. Wasson acts as though he’s won the debate and corrected Ramsbottom simply by virtue of revealing, as though it’s a new point Ramsbottom hasn’t already affirmed, that the painting shows a stylized tree of knowledge. Wasson takes a stance of winning by saying simply that the painting shows something other than an *Amanita*. But that stance is based on Wasson’s pretense that Ramsbottom shares Wasson’s unjustified assumption that there is mutually exclusive dichotomy such that the painting can only represent a mushroom or a tree, but not both.

Wasson's argument here is impotent and irrelevant. He writes as though he's discovered something that Ramsbottom didn't already posit and affirm (that the picture is a stylized tree), a discovery that somehow automatically makes Ramsbottom's interpretation impossible. Wasson frames his supposed refutation of Ramsbottom as: You say that the Fresco shows *Amanita* – but it doesn't, because it can be demonstrated that it shows something else: a stylized tree – therefore your proposal that it is *Amanita* is immediately and necessarily proven wrong.

That setup of the argument's premises is out of touch with what Ramsbottom's position is, resulting in a *pseudo*-refutation of Ramsbottom's position. Wasson falsely attributes a position to Ramsbottom that Ramsbottom does not hold, in the first place. Wasson frames the debate as though either it's a mushroom, in which case Ramsbottom is right, *or*, it's a tree stylization, in which case Wasson is immediately right – as though Ramsbottom agrees that the truth on this point must be mutually exclusive, a premise which of course Ramsbottom does not share.

Ramsbottom's implied premise is that the picture can represent two things at once; Wasson's incompatible implied premise is that the picture can only represent one thing or the other. Wasson plows ahead pretending that Ramsbottom shares this premise and is subject to lose the argument by this game-rule.

What Wasson would need to do to refute Ramsbottom's actual stated position is to first acknowledge accurately what Ramsbottom's position is: that the painting shows both a stylized mushroom and a stylized tree. Then, Wasson would need to make the case that the painting is *only* a stylized tree and not *also* a stylized mushroom. The Panofsky/Wasson argument does not do these two steps, so in no way does the confident assertion that the painting is a stylized tree refute Ramsbottom's actual position, which is that the painting shows a stylized tree *and* also shows a stylized mushroom.

If anything, the Panofsky/Wasson argument affirms the "tree of knowledge" portion of Ramsbottom's argument and is *silent* regarding the plausibility of the painting *also* representing a mushroom. The Panofsky/Wasson argument fails to "connect" with the Ramsbottom interpretation, and thus couldn't possibly refute it.

## Panofsky Conflates Artistic Development with the Intent Driving the Development

Panofsky's argument is completely weak: he reasons that the art historians hold that these mushroom trees were developed by increasingly schematized copying and *therefore* the mushroom trees didn't intend, could not have intended, mushrooms. But that particular jump, as it appears in the passage Wasson quotes from Panofsky's letter, is useless and baseless; it has no compelling force whatsoever. There is no contradiction between the gradual development of a mushroom tree schematization, and the intention to portray mushrooms.

The hundreds of mushroom trees of course involved some type of gradual schematization, but that fact says nothing about the intention of the artists. It is completely likely, in fact highly likely and plausible, that the gradual schematization occurred *because* the artists *did* intend to portray mushrooms. So Panofsky's argument that mushroom trees developed schematically and "therefore" didn't intend mushrooms, is worthless, and tells us nothing one way or another about the intention of mushroom tree artists in general, nor the Plaincourault Eden mushroom tree in particular.

## The Bluff of Posing Quantity of Trees as a Disproof of the *Amanita* Interpretation

Another bluff and false move the Panofsky/Wasson argument makes is to focus on quantity – a superficial way of appearing to refute Ramsbottom. But several hundred instances supporting an irrelevant argument still amounts to irrelevance. The sheer quantity and familiarity to historians of *Pilzbaums* (Christian 'mushroom trees' in art) in no way constitutes an argument against the mushroom trees meaning mushrooms.

The popularity of an incorrect assumption does not somehow justify the assumption. Multiplying the instances only multiplies the same question; the sheer quantity of and familiarity with Christian mushroom trees does not somehow amount to an argument against their meaning mushrooms.

Wasson and Panofsky imply that there exists much evidence to substantiate Panofsky's conclusion about interpretation, including an arrangement of instances showing development, and a set of prototypes, and most of all, some compelling reason to not read those mushroom-like prototypes as alluding to mushroom use in addition to trees. But from what little information Panofsky and Wasson provide, it appears that the purported large quantity of evidence for their *interpretation* amounts merely to a large number of *instances* of the item to be interpreted.

## Mycologists Didn't Perceive Mushrooms out of Ignorance of Mushroom Trees in Art

In several writings, Wasson asserts that if mycologists had merely been aware of the many 'mushroom trees' in art, they would have read the Plaincourault tree as intending to represent an Italian pine and as not intending to represent mushrooms:

Mycologists speak only to each other and never to art historians. Had they done so, the story would have been different. ...

One could expect mycologists, in their isolation, to make this blunder. Mr. Allegro is not a mycologist but, if anything, a cultural historian. ... he shows himself familiar with my writings. Presumably he had read the footnote in which I dismissed the fresco ... and ... Panofsky's letter ... He chooses to ignore the interpretation put on this fresco by the most eminent art historians. – Wasson, "The Sacred Mushroom", letter to the editor in *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 21, 1970

The above claim that "the story would have been different" has been proven false by subsequent events in this field of scholarly research and theory-development. The Plaincourault tree is now commonly utilized as clear evidence to strengthen the case that the many mushroom trees in art were intended as psychoactive mushrooms (for example, Hoffman, Ruck, & Staples, "Conjuring Eden", 2001).

Now, in 2006, entheogen scholars and mycologists do "speak to art historians"; that is, they're aware of the Panofsky/Wasson argument, which Wasson considers he's fully and convincingly presented. Yet, the Plaincourault interpretation maintained by today's entheogen-aware mycologists is *not* different than that of mycologists from 1910 through 1953. Wasson affirms Panofsky's below argument, portraying and posing the existence of hundreds of mushroom trees as a slam-dunk win, an instantly compelling argument:

... the impressionistically rendered Italian pine tree ... there are hundreds of instances exemplifying this development – unknown of course to mycologists. ... What the mycologists have overlooked is that the medieval artists hardly ever worked from nature ... – Erwin Panofsky in a 1952 letter to Wasson excerpted in *Soma*, pp. 179-180

Can we agree with Panofsky's assertion that the "hundreds of instances" of mushroom trees in art were "unknown of course to mycologists" of around 1952? That is hard to determine, but it's certainly no longer true in 2006. Now, most mycologists and entheogen scholars continue to interpret not only the Plaincourault tree as mushrooms, but additionally interpret the hundreds of mushroom trees (which the art historians helpfully pointed out to them) as mushrooms, thus proving that the early 20th Century reading of the Plaincourault tree as mushrooms was not – as Panofsky and Wasson would have it – a result of simple ignorance about the frequent occurrences of mushroom trees in art.

Wasson claims that mycologists interpreted Plaincourault as mushrooms only because they were naively ignorant of the many mushroom trees known to art historians:

... Mr. Allegro ... chooses to avoid the point of my letter: the Plaincourault fresco does *not* picture the fly-agaric. ... for guidance on a question of medieval iconography he has stuck to a naive misinterpretation made by a band of eager mycologists ... Some would have preferred the judgment of specialists in Romanesque art. – Wasson, “The Sacred Mushroom”, letter to the editor in *The Times Literary Supplement*, September 25, 1970

Entheogen scholars now *are* aware of the so-called “development” of the hundreds of mushroom trees in art, and yet, against Panofsky and Wasson, the mycologists’ and entheogenists’ story is not different, but has instead become even more solidified and developed. After Wasson succeeded in enlightening the naive, ignorant mycologists that there are hundreds of mushroom trees in Christian art, the interpretation has not automatically swung in Wasson’s favor, but instead has turned into a situation described by Hofmann & Schultes in 1979 as “considerable controversy” rather than being immediately, unproblematically resolved in favor of the Panofsky/Wasson position, as Wasson expected.

The Panofsky/Wasson strategy was to drag out the hundreds of mushroom trees so that their quantity and the familiarity of the non-mushroom interpretation would prove to the merely ignorant mycologists that Plaincourault is not mushrooms. Yet what happened since then, as a point of historical fact, is that Wasson’s move backfired, because now the entheogen scholars take all the mushroom trees as substantiation for the case that the “classical prototype” for mushroom trees is identifiably literally mushrooms, and that mushroom trees do intend mushrooms.

To *portray* an argument as a compelling win – to declare that one’s opponents are merely ignorant and would have believed one’s view had only they known the argument, does not make it so, and is definitively disproved by today’s situation. This aspect of Wasson’s argumentation on Plaincourault, a move he repeats in several writings, amounts to a bluff (and a disproved one) rather than a substantial point that has the power to compel careful, critical readers.

## Panofsky Argument is Anti-Entheogen Apologetics, Lacking Compellingness

The Panofsky excerpt is often treated as though it were forcefully compelling, but it actually amounts to unconvincing apologetics for the anti-mushroom reading, apologetics that have no power to reassure anyone except those who are already *a priori* committed to rejecting the mushroom reading of mushroom trees. The Panofsky argument is anti-entheogen apologetics, or entheogen-diminishing apologetics.

The Panofsky argument is an apologetic, in that it *appears* persuasive, but only to those who already desire to reject any significant entheogen theory of Christianity or religion; it might have some power to persuade, compel, or cajole some of the less-critical readers who don’t pay close attention to the argumentation, but it has no power to persuade opponents to change their opinions, if they pay close attention to the argumentation and recognize that the argument is an assorted collection of superficial bluffs.

Panofsky’s argument is not compelling; its apparent force is parasitical and completely dependent on the reader being uncritical and ready to accept any apparent winning argument delivered by an authority, or a reader who is already committed to the anti-entheogen or minimal entheogen theory of religion. Panofsky’s argument is *a priori* apologetics; it’s not really what it poses as: an argument neutrally reasoned-out so as to lead the critical uncommitted person inevitably, through force of steps of reasoning, to a conclusion they didn’t hold before.

Wasson doesn't show us any citations of published scholarly studies of 'mushroom trees' or 'Pilzbaum': the result is 1-sided apologetics; within this presentation, we are only permitted to hear the opening assertions and position statement of one party in the debate, not to see how that position responds to the other side's objections.

Given that Wasson bandied-about this Panofsky excerpt for at least 17 years (1953-1970), and criticized Allegro for not accepting it, it's remarkable that in *Soma*, the letters to the *Times*, or the letter to Allegro, Wasson didn't go to the trouble of providing citations of the eminent art historians' published studies on *Pilzbaum*. These would need to be studies that convincingly show why the mushroom-and-tree interpretation is surely wrong – studies that would need to convince those who are not already convinced or too-easily convinced. If no such compelling studies exist, Wasson is wrong to insist and assert as fact and as sound scholarly conclusion, as he does, year after year, that the mycologists' view is a "misapprehension", "error", "blunder", and "a naive misinterpretation".

With no citations given of published, thorough studies, the result is an argument from authority. Wasson's unscholarly attitude and method here, toward his readers, is striking. We're not even supposed to wonder how exactly the art historians reached their conclusions on this highly relevant and interesting matter; we're to mentally picture hazy, idealized, intensive scholarly research, producing unimpeachable, compelling results, and imagine the conclusions as having been tested in the fire of robust critical examination. Either this, or we're supposed to be impressed and compelled solely by the arguments contained in Panofsky's letter, as though it were impossible to think of any objections to his sparse argumentation.

Samorini concludes that the state of the scholarship does not permit a definite rejection of the mushroom interpretation, but rather, shows we need to begin a comprehensive investigation:

... the problem of the interpretation of these documents consists in determining the intentionality or lack of it on the part of the artists to represent a symbolic mushroom as an esoteric message in their works. The only conclusions which it is possible to reach at the moment are the ascertaining of a typological differentiation of the "tree-fungus" discerned from the differentiation of the types of existing psychoactive mushrooms in nature (*Amanita muscaria* and *Psilocybe* mushrooms) and the fact that a great deal of evidence has by now emerged from the analysis of documents, sufficient to justify and promote a serious ethnomycological survey, and prevents making pre-judgments about ancient Christian culture. – Samorini (my translation), summary of "The 'Mushroom-Trees' in Christian Art", *Eleusis: Journal of Psychoactive Plants and Compounds*, n. 1, 1998

A hallmark of apologetics exemplified by the Panofsky passage and the brandishing of this passage by entheogen diminishers is the failure to state what the best opposing objections of the maximal entheogen theorists would be, and address those. An apologetic argument is one that *appears* that it *would be* convincing and compelling were it put to those who don't already believe the position. But such argument only *appears* to stand up, until it is field-tested, whereupon it wilts in the heat of actual critical consideration.

If Wasson and Panofsky were not doing apologetics here, but were uncommitted critical thinkers genuinely following reason where it leads through grappling with the best opposing arguments, they would have stated the obvious likely objections to this argument, and would have refuted those objections. But instead, Wasson and those who apply the Panofsky argument treat this passage as though it were simply final, unassailable, and beyond all possibility of objections – a telling sign that what we have here is 1-sided apologetics, not the outcome of a back-and-forth reasoned argument of most-persuasive rebuttal against most-persuasive rebuttal.

## Wasson's "No Inkling" Passage

In Wasson's "no inkling" passage, Wasson asserts that the tree itself in the Plaincourault fresco doesn't represent *Amanita* because as art historians know, mushroom trees represent the Italian pine (not psychoactive mushrooms), and that the serpent isn't offering a mushroom to Eve, but that rather the serpent itself, unbeknownst to the artist and mycologists, represents the psychoactive mushroom. Wasson selects this subject to end the main part of his ethnomycology book; the final paragraph of the epilogue contains the assertion:

"If these perceptions are right, then the mycologists were right also, in a transcendental sense of which neither they nor the artist had an inkling, when they saw a serpent offering a mushroom to Eve in the Fresco of Plaincourault." *Soma*, p. 221

In *Soma*, he strongly implies that only the original Genesis author and the contemporary initiates in pre-history comprehended that the Eden Tree meant *Amanita*, and that all later Jewish people and Christians forgot that. He explicitly puts forward the assertion that the Plaincourault fresco artist didn't intend to allude to mushrooms: the artist was blindly following an accidental convention of coincidentally mushroom-shaped trees, but accidentally alluded to mushrooms in that the serpent itself represented, in long-forgotten antiquity, the mushroom.

### Wasson's Strangely Contorted "Coincidence without an Inkling" View

It's unbelievable, the contorted view Wasson has constructed for our critique. Bunk assumption-sets (systems) produce bizarre, contorted, unwieldy results, and Wasson here poses as though he thinks this manifestly unwieldy result is so convincing, it needs no discussion of the specific means by which the art historians have convinced each other that their 'mushroom trees' have nothing to do with mushrooms.

Wasson was crazily coherent and brittle in his "no inkling" passage, relentlessly persistent in his assumption that the middle ages must have been ignorant of entheogen metaphor – no matter what the cost, no matter how implausible, cumbersome, and roundabout of an interpretation thereby results. It's as though he finds a medieval painting of people taking mushrooms and declares that they had no idea what they were doing but instead they thought they were eating tomatoes, because we all know that medievals are ignorant, unlike us moderns and the glorious ancients in pre-history.

Wasson simultaneously seems to ridicule mycologists who saw the tree in the Plaincourault fresco as a mushroom, and the snake as giving a mushroom, while also at the same time asserting that the mycologists were, by a huge unconscious coincidence, correct that the snake was giving a mushroom.

Based on the authority of art historians as portrayed by Panofsky, Wasson dogmatically and absolutely takes it for granted as an unimpeachable and routine fact, that the painter only intended to portray a tree, not a mushroom – and only intended a regular tree, at that (not one associated with psychoactives). It's a dogmatic fact to him that the Christians were ignorant of the *Amanita* nature of the Eden trees. Then, Wasson acts smugly surprised when it turns out, supposedly coincidentally, that the mycologists are correct in seeing the snake as guardian and provider of the mushroom.

He acts like it's a brute dumb coincidence that the mushroom-shaped tree is comparable to the birch in that the birch is host to a mushroom. Wasson's "no inkling" passage is a wondrous monstrosity of entrenched bunk assumptions. He presents it as an unassailable fact that mushroom trees don't at all intend to represent a mushroom, and then smugly smiles at the dumb luck of the brutes who draw a mushroom shaped tree because they accidentally happen to be right, in that an accidentally mushroom-shaped tree has a snake on it, and unbeknownst to the painter and mycologists (ignorant misinterpreters), the snake actually was (in prehistory only) associated with the mushroom.

Thus Wasson presents for our critique an argument that by a complicated circuitous coincidence – if you are very in-the-know like no one has been during all of recorded history until Wasson himself – we may actually discern that the mushroom-shaped tree actually has echoes of mushrooms, unconsciously and accidentally. Sometimes labored scholarship announces with great fanfare and self-accolades, what is plainly obvious with humble common sense to the unlettered.

Wasson's take on this – the “no inkling” passage – is weird, over-elaborated and contrived. He's here sticking steadfastly to his previously stated position, that it's a misinterpretation to read the *Amanita*-like tree in the Plaincourault fresco as intending a mushroom.

## The Assumption that the Middle Ages Had to Be Ignorant of Mushroom Allusions

Wasson demonstrates a basic overarching fallacy similar to that of typical modern-era Bible scholars: he shows the result of assuming that the later religious practitioners and artists were muddle-headed and weren't masters of their metaphors and material. He demonstrates, perhaps ironically, the all-too-common, moderate-entheogen-theory fallacy of assuming that only the most ancient origin of the religions were in touch with understanding the entheogenic nature of their religion (a fallacy related to the first, basic fallacy). A safer assumption is that until 1700, Christians generally recognized and understood the Eucharist and the Eden Trees to be visionary plants.

Wasson assumes that for the ancient Eden Tree story author, *only* for way back then, the Eden tree was understood as mushrooms – but that ancient knowledge was quickly forgotten:

... when the story was composed the authentic fly-agaric (or an alternative hallucinogen) must have been present, for the fable would not possess the sharp edge, the virulence, that it does if surrogates and placebos were already come into general use. – *Soma*, p. 221

Wasson appears to think that per art historians, mushroom-shaped tree portrayals have nothing to do with mushrooms: after the Eden story was written, no one understood any more that the Eden tree indicated mushrooms; they only “fortuitously” (accidentally and uncomprehendingly) drew trees in the shape of a mushroom.

Wasson expresses the implausible view that mushroom trees don't intend to indicate mushrooms although the Eden trees really did, way back long ago, intend the Birch host tree and *Amanita*.

It is weird and implausible to read the similarity of the *Amanita* nature of the Eden tree and the particular portrayal of the Eden tree in a mushroom shape as a fortuitous coincidental accident of dumb luck. However, this is the sorry outcome of this set of assumptions which even some entheogen scholars have embraced.

The moderate entheogen theory of religion readily accepts that way back in time at the very beginning of the Bible's writing, there were entheogen initiates, but God forbid we should even *consider* the possibility that there were still authentically entheogen-utilizing initiates in the Middle Ages – for that would ruin the story everyone desires to tell, that the big bad Church at its very beginning, and even in 2nd-temple Jewish religion, had of course stamped out all knowledge of entheogens.

## The Acuity of the Unlettered versus Wasson's Blinding Assumption

Why not just accept the obvious image that is manifestly presented to us, that the artist knew everything about the *Amanita* host tree, and deliberately drew a mushroom-delivering snake in a deliberately and knowingly mushroom-shaped tree, to consciously and deliberately allude to the *Amanita* host tree and the *Amanita* it delivers? The complexity all immediately collapses; the

supposed unconscious highly coincidental accidental portrayal of the serpent (spirit guardian of the mushroom) is replaced by the far simpler assumption of comprehension on the part of the artist.

Instead of Wasson's "Wow! He painted the right thing, even though he had no inkling what he was doing!", such absurdity raises the question: why not settle for the more straightforward and plain, "He understood the *Amanita* nature of the Eden trees, so that's what he painted"? How to explain Wasson's bizarre brittleness here? Could he be pulling our leg to toe the party line of the Christian status quo, while revealing how absurd the resulting argument is?

He appears as though he has no grasp of metaphorical art, but that can't be, given that the book is about mushroom metaphor recognition. He ends up demonstrating the absurdity and blindness that results from the dogmatic assumption that the later Christians and artists cannot possibly have comprehended the *Amanita* nature of the Eden trees, and cannot possibly have understood at that later date that the serpent is guardian/provider of the psychoactive mushroom.

What would induce Wasson to take up his bizarre set of dogmatic assumptions that leads to him being surprised by the mycologists' supposed "rightness in a transcendental sense of which they had no inkling?" Perhaps this move enables Wasson to look smarter than the clumsy half-conscious oaf who painted the fresco, and smarter than the other mycologists, by introducing complicating assumptions and then announcing that he, a brilliant man, has solved the complexity, while other mycologists (simpletons) are merely confused and are right only by dumb luck. Or perhaps Wasson is speaking to us, signaling to us, between the lines.

## Wasson's Avoidance of the General Question of Christian Entheogen Use

Wasson's cultural conservatism, elitism, reserve, and image-protecting formality, and remorse about revealing Maria Sabina and the mushroom tradition in *Life* magazine may have distorted his work, and he and Allegro ended up having opposite views and strategies about the popular accessibility of entheogen research. Wasson may have wished to censor his curiosity on subjects that could jeopardize his Vedic efforts and add excessive controversy, which could be why he put forth nonsensical, self-contradictory, unbelievable or insincere public position statements, and convinced himself of them.

People claim that Allegro merely cashed in on Wasson's work and contributed nothing *to the field of 'ethnomycology'* (Ott). Allegro was accused of insincerity, harboring ulterior motives and covert strategic methods, as do Christian apologists when they pretend to be following reason where it leads them. However, based on critical analysis of Wasson's arguments about Plaincourault and his avoidance of following the tree of life into the book of Revelation, he can be suspected of a conflict of interest.

Allegro enters into the Christian questions with guns blazing; Wasson slips back away from the nest of questions raised, consciously or unconsciously desiring not to stir them up. Wasson was constrained by his own cultural conservatism (after Wasson's popular publication in *Life*); Allegro was not at all so self-constrained and gagged, self-censoring.

Wasson ran away from the subject of Christian entheogen use, but Allegro followed the direction Wasson pointed to and then ran away from, and Allegro took all the harsh reaction that in some sense should've been due to Wasson's theory had Wasson had the boldness to follow through where consistent reason and evidence leads.

Wasson kept silent on the general question of Christian entheogen use. His evasively worded comment about the Revelation passage being written in an only mushroom-like state of



consciousness amounts to an implied assertion that John was not on mushrooms – weaselly wording, not like Allegro’s forthright presentation of his own ideas (including his good and his off-base ideas).

## Critical Asymmetry in Affirming versus Denying Entheogens in Religions

Wasson applies critical argumentation well, when it comes to the subject of shamanism. Mircea Eliade asserted that the use of drug-plants by shamans is:

a decadence among the shamans of the present day, who have become unable to obtain ecstasy in the fashion of the ‘great shamans of long ago’ ... where shamanism is in decomposition and the trance is simulated, there is also overindulgence ... this (probably recent) phenomenon ... for ‘forcing’ trance ... the decadence of a technique [by] ‘lower’ peoples or social groups ... is relatively recent ... a vulgar substitute for ‘pure’ trance ... a recent innovation ... a decadence in shamanic technique ... an imitation of a state that the shaman is no longer capable of attaining otherwise ... Decadence or ... vulgarization of a mystical technique ... this strange mixture of ‘difficult ways’ and ‘easy ways’ of realizing mystical ecstasy ... produces contact with the spirits, but in a passive and crude way. ... this shamanic technique appears to be late and derivative ... a mechanical and corrupt method of reproducing ‘ecstasy’ ... it tries to imitate a model that is earlier and that belongs to another plane of reference ... comparatively recent and derivative. – Eliade, discussed in Wasson, *Soma*, pp. 326-334

Wasson demonstrates that Eliade put forth little to attempt to substantiate such a view. Eliade’s error is now generally recognized; few would confidently affirm his presentation of this issue. Wasson critiques “students of religion” on “the birth of religion” and “the genesis of the Holy Mysteries” (p. 210), and presents a genuinely critical refutation of Eliade (pp. 328-334).

Eliade’s denial of the historical normalcy of the shamanic use of “intoxicants” was in accord with reigning predominant assumptions, so his presentation did not need to carry any persuasive critical weight, and Wasson points out how it didn’t. Wasson’s critical commentary about Eliade is particularly interesting when considering the parallels with Wasson’s own uncritical acceptance of the conventional assumptions about post-Genesis Jewish and Christian practice.

Wasson was apparently the first to write a full book focusing exclusively on the religious use of plants to induce the visionary altered state. He even ventured well into the earliest possible topic of Jewish and Christian religion (Genesis’ tree of knowledge text). But regarding the post-Genesis-authorship use of entheogens in the Jewish-Christian tradition, Wasson wrote abysmally careless, uncritical comments, in his major influential writings, dismissing such use – a hasty dismissal which his audience lapped up obediently and uncritically, *because such dismissal is merely the already all-dominant assumption*.

When it comes to Vedic and Shamanic religion, Wasson went against the already all-predominant view, by asserting entheogen use. So on those topics, he had to be a critical thinker, and his audience engaged their critical thinking ability; an actual, genuine debate ensued. Wasson similarly expected his positive assertion of entheogens in Genesis’ Eden text to meet with critical objections, so he adequately engaged his critical argumentation ability.

I suppose that few at first, or perhaps none, will agree with me. To propose a novel reading of this celebrated story is a daring thing: it is exhilarating and intimidating. I am confident, ready for the storm. – Wasson, *Persephone’s Quest*, p. 74

But when it comes to the Judeo-Christian tradition after its pre-historical genesis, Wasson merely briefly affirms the status-quo, all-predominant, unreflective assumptions, requiring no actual critical writing and argumentation, nor eliciting any critical response on the part of his audience. The mere brief, surface *appearance* of critical argumentation was sufficient: sprinkle-on a dusting of a few key expressions to make it sound like persuasive arguments are being presented, such as ‘however’ and

'therefore' and 'the unanimous view of eminent, competent specialists' – never mind the lack of merit of the arguments, never mind the lack of substantiating evidence for the final strong pronouncements.

Had Wasson *denied* Vedic, shamanic, and Eden's use of entheogens, and *asserted* the normalcy of later Judeo-Christian entheogen use, he likely would've applied his critical skills in the reverse: he would've written briefly and uncritically to dismiss Vedic, shamanic, and Edenic entheogen use, and would've laid out a vigorous critical argument to assert later Judeo-Christian entheogen use. In that reversed scenario, he would've rightly anticipated that his 1968 audience would respond likewise with the lack of critical thinking regarding his assertion about Vedic religion, and with critical argumentation regarding his assertion about post-genesis Judeo-Christianity.

## Pseudo-Argument as Smoke Screen to Avoid Confrontation with the Status Quo

Panofsky's quoted assertion is just that: an assertion of a view, of an interpretation, of a certain reading; the quote of Panofsky does not present much of an *argument* based on evidence.

Wasson in *Soma* presents the name of only one art historian (Panofsky), a breathtakingly brief argument for the "only-an-Italian pine" interpretation, no criteria for certainty about the competence of the art historians regarding the question of mushroom representation in art, and all but calls these art historians incompetent to judge one way or the other on the mycologists' reading. It appears as though the glaringly obvious objection never occurs to Wasson, that since the art historians "of course" haven't read books on mushrooms, *they* might be the ones who are misreading the mushroom trees, due to ignorance about mushrooms and other visionary plants.

Given such a travesty of persuasive argumentation, one may well try to explain Wasson's strangely superficial, vague, and unconvincing presentation of the Panofsky position by speculating that Wasson had a preventative purpose and objective in laying out such a presentation in such a manner.

Such a self-confident and certain judgment on the part of the art historians, accompanied by the complete lack of any substantial argumentation from evidence against the *Amanita* or also-*Amanita* interpretation, is reminiscent of deceitful and pretense-driven Christian apologetics, where the shallow posture of argumentation is considered suitable, with no need for point-by-point argumentation quoting specific scholars and addressing the best objections and questions posed by the opposing view. Wasson's commentary on consulting art historians amounts to little but assertions from authority about the general topic of medieval iconography, right where the specific compelling arguments are most needed, given that this Eden tree looks like *Amanita*.

Wasson's treatment, this reassuring covering-over of the subject, looks more like a protective circling of the wagons in the wake of Huxley's mescaline writings and Zaehner's reaction to the looming entheogen theory thereby suggesting itself. This treatment, or rather a preventative anti-treatment of the question, served as a way of *avoiding* argumentation by providing a smoke screen of pseudo-argumentation in its place, to insulate Christianity and the bulk of its Jewish origins from the looming obvious implication were we to admit that the Plaincourault tree intended *Amanita*: to admit it would be to open the floodgates, so we must come up with pseudo-arguments to cover-over the implications and *head off* a genuine argument on the subject.

## Admitting Uncertainty Privately, Exuding Unquestionable Conclusiveness Publicly

Wasson expresses uncertainty in 1953, as Allegro's footnote highlights: Wasson wrote that *rightly or wrongly, he was going to reject* the *Amanita* interpretation of the Plaincourault tree.

Wasson privately indicates that he did not wish to admit "rightly or wrongly" publicly.

Rightly or wrongly, we are going to reject the Plaincourault fresco as representing a mushroom. – Wasson's private 1953 letter to Ramsbottom, published in Ramsbottom, *Mushrooms & Toadstools*, after the 1st 1953 printing

Reject it he did, rightly – or wrongly.

I now gather that he [Ramsbottom] was properly impressed and added a footnote, not to be found in the original edition, on p. 48. He never replied to my letter (which is not unusual with him), and he neither sought nor had my permission to reproduce what was a private letter. The letter was not drafted for publication. I had forgotten its text, which I have now looked up for the first time since it was written, and find the words you quote in it. What we wished to say we said in *Mushrooms, Russia & History* (1957) and I added Panofsky's letter in my *SOMA*. – Wasson, private letter to Allegro, September 14, 1970

Wasson appears to have regularly written Ramsbottom, often not hearing back: "He never replied to my letter (which is not unusual with him)". This helps toward understanding the relationship of the two mycologists.

Wasson privately writes Allegro "[Ramsbottom] neither sought nor had my permission to reproduce what was a private letter. The letter was not drafted for publication. ... What we wished to say we said in *Mushrooms, Russia & History* ... and ... *SOMA*." Wasson included the comment "rightly or wrongly" only in a private mail to the top mycologist, not intending it to be shown to the world. It's to Wasson's credit regarding his private beliefs, that he admitted uncertainty, but it is not to his credit that he pushed a false, pretended certainty out to the public at large – it is hypocrisy, telling people they ought to believe a particular position with full unquestionable certainty, while one does not oneself believe so confidently that position which one is trying to strong-arm or con others into adopting.

It's an apologist's move: instead of admitting one's doubts, proselytize others all the more fervently to get them to believe what you cannot manage to. Wasson's private thinking was reasonably right in being uncertain; his public self-censored writing and pretense of being completely certain was wrong and constituted scholarly immorality.

"I now gather that he was properly impressed ..." – Wasson, 1970. 16 years passed (1954-1970) without Wasson realizing that his private admission of uncertainty had been publicly published in Ramsbottom's book *Mushrooms & Toadstools*, contradicting his fake posture of immediate unquestionable certainty published in *Soma*.

When Allegro's cryptic endnote in *Sacred Mushroom* prompted Wasson to discover belatedly that much of his private letter had been excerpted in Ramsbottom's book, visible to the world for the past 16 years including during his writing of the Panofsky passage in *Soma*, and while composing his public letters of 1970, Wasson had a mixture of gladness and dismay. His uniform pose of unquestionable certainty had been visible as an illusion or ruse that entire time, unbeknownst to him.

For 16 years, Wasson mistakenly believed that he had consistently published a position statement of unbroken, steady certainty on the Plaincourault reading. Wasson was glad to discover in 1970 that Ramsbottom the top mycologist "was properly impressed" in 1953 to the extent of adding an addendum to the book. However, Wasson was dismayed in 1970 to discover that his posture and official position of perfectly steady certainty and confidence had been wrecked that whole time by the dirty-laundry expose of his supposedly private admission in 1953 that he was determined to maintain the non-mushroom reading of the tree even though it might be wrong.

## Ulterior Motives or a Conflict of Interest?

Instead of a disinterested pursuit of the truth wherever it leads, Wasson's pretense of the unquestionability of the Panofsky argument, and his loud silence on the obvious question of entheogens in Christian history, might indicate a vested interest in downplaying Allegro's book and the interpretation of mushroom trees as mushrooms.

Wasson was a businessman with the Vatican and Pope, and in some ways culturally conservative. He shows the hallmarks of being more concerned to put forth a certain relentlessly consistent public *positioning* on the subject of mushroom trees, rather than critically and fairly laying out the cases for and against the Panofsky argument.

Was Wasson acting under Vatican influence to spread the party line, that the hundreds of Christian mushroom trees certainly have nothing whatever to do with mushrooms? On his 1-sided proselytizing for this view, Wasson acted as if he were a Catholic scholar taking orders from the Vatican. He was in direct contact with the Pope at one point in his career:

Gordon's role as a credit banker gave way to new responsibilities. Eventually, as vice president, he wound up in charge of "communications, public relations – that sort of thing," recalled Peterkin. ... "Unbeknownst to most people, we for many years were one of the bankers for the Vatican," Peterkin said. "And Gordon used to have private audiences with the Pope." Though he could not recall which particular Pope, other sources later told me it had been Pius XII – and that Gordon had not liked him much." – Reidlinger, "A Latecomer's View of R. Gordon Wasson", in *Sacred Mushroom Seeker*, 1990, p. 210

There were several factors potentially distorting Wasson's public positioning on mushroom trees. Maria Sabina was ostracized after Wasson's 1957 *Life* article. The drug revolution of the late 1960s included Leary's popularizing of psychedelics, which resulted in a kind of feud between Wasson the elitist and Leary the popularizer. Wasson had reasons to keep the mushrooms low-key and away from excessive controversy about contemporary religion. He had his Establishment position at Harvard to protect, in the aftermath of the firing of Leary from Harvard. Honest scholarship is difficult under the conditions of prohibition; were prohibition removed, we'd hear different positions put forward by more scholars regarding visionary plants in religious history.

To admit that the Plaincourault tree could reasonably be seen as *Amanita* mushrooms would be tantamount to admitting the plausibility that all the hundreds of Christian mushroom trees prove that drugs played a major role throughout Christian history. That plausibility fit all too comfortably with the rest of Wasson's assertions about the plausibility of drugs in the history of religions *other than* "our own" – other religions safely in the past or in safely alien contemporary cultures.

How can one reasonably argue per Wasson that these other religions (in fact religion in general) were long inspired by entheogens, while Christianity throughout its history had to have long forgotten any awareness of such a channel for the divine? One cannot reasonably argue for such a combination of hypotheses, but Wasson was publicly committed to the policy of asserting as much, so he implicitly argued for it *unreasonably*, by proxy, by dogmatically rejecting the possibility of reading the Plaincourault tree as *Amanita*.

## Hastening to Cordon Off the Inrushing Entheogen Theory of "Our Own" Culture

For Wasson, whether consciously or unconsciously, mushrooms must not be admitted into "our own" European Middle Ages; they may only be permitted in the pre-historical ancient beginnings of "our" religion, or in the more recent religion of the primitive and alien Others – the shamans and alien folk religion. This is why Wasson takes it as a fixed dogmatic fact, emphatically not to be even

considered for discussion, that medieval Christians and their culture cannot have had any understanding of *Amanita* and its representation.

Wasson's argument is incredibly tortuous, as if he's trying to tiptoe round a dragon's lair called Religion without breathing a word about Christianity for fear of waking the dragon. – Judith Anne Brown, personal correspondence with Jan Irvin, February 27, 2006

Wasson chose to propose alternative views that would only require revising long-ago religion; this felt radical enough for him, and he didn't want to additionally take on the task of calling for the wholesale revision of religious and cultural history that comes rushing through, as with Allegro, in a tidal wave crashing against the very shores of the modern era, per the maximal entheogen theory of religion. Wasson was dedicated to publishing only a controlled, restrained, conservative entheogen theory of religion, that only the long-ago origins or roots before "our own" culture's religion – "our own Holy Agape" – may be permitted to be read as entheogen-influenced, and even then, we must always frame it as a secret that only a small handful of inner circle mystery initiates knew of:

Let us ... reconsider the archetype of our own Holy Agape. On what element did the original devotees commune, long before the Christian era? – Wasson, *Soma*, p. 220

The story [of Eden] carries the mystical resonance of the early days ... – Wasson, *Persephone's Quest*, p. 76

... the Tree of Knowledge was the tree that has been revered by ... Early Man in Eurasia ... that supplies the entheogenic food to which Early Man attributed miraculous powers. He who composed the tale ... in Genesis ... refrained from identifying the 'fruit': he was writing for the initiates ... Strangers and the unworthy would remain in the dark. ... the 'fruit' ... the initiates call by ... euphemisms – *Persephone's Quest*, p. 76

Note Wasson's choice to use the words 'the unworthy' (instead of 'noninitiates') and 'euphemisms' (instead of the neutral 'metaphors'), as reflecting Wasson's own conservative value system and sets of assumptions and connotations.

... Early Man has been discovered revering a 'Tree of Life' ... – *Persephone's Quest*, p. 77

For Wasson, 'Early Man' emphatically does not mean, and must not be permitted to mean, Christians in 1200, 1500, or 1700.

## Is Wasson Pulling Our Leg, to Toe the Party Line While Ridiculing It?

We cannot assume that Wasson believes what he writes. An old trick to get past the censors in a religious State is to pretend to believe what the censors want people to believe, by pretending to vehemently and confidently defend it, while actually demonstrating how lame the arguments in support of the party line are. It's a form of sarcasm.

Instead of saying that Wasson is stupid, gullible, and insane, it's safer to ask what Wasson's apprehensions and objectives were. It is easy to conclude that Wasson must be pulling our leg. Religious writing is often treacherous; we should be on guard against automatically buying into a superficial, uncritical, and careless reading where we assume that the surface meaning is all there is.

We don't know what Wasson *believed*; we only know what Wasson *wrote*, and we'd do well to try several modes of reading, under various assumptions about his intent. When one mode of reading and argument delivers results that couldn't even convince a gnat, and we know the author is smart, we must try a different mode of reading. For example, he could be sending us a signal by writing that

of course the art historians don't know squat about mushrooms, yet going on to write that the art historians are right on this judgment regarding mushrooms.

We need to try a different reading of Wasson regarding mushrooms in the Bible and Christianity after the Eden story was composed. He may have toned down, to the point of self-censoring, his speculations to avoid a confrontation with the Christian status quo, but Allegro didn't. Allegro went ahead with what Wasson either couldn't or wouldn't think to ask, what Wasson for whatever reason backed away from: refuting the Christian status quo.

Like about the early Christians, never write the word 'believe'. We don't know anything about what the early Christians "believed", and those scholars who chatter on and on about how the Christians believed this, and the Christians believed that, as a rule don't have the first clue what they're presuming to pontificate on. We cannot talk about what the early Christians "believed"; we only know what they *wrote*. Whenever a scholar of early Christianity writes "believed", that's a sign that they are about to fall headlong into literalism. The word 'believed' is tantamount to literalism on the part of scholars, a sort of synonym.

What did Wasson believe about the matter of mushroom trees? We cannot assume that he simply straightforwardly believed what he wrote – look at his *silent* omission of the "Italian pine" argument from Persephone's Quest, which appears to have been written shortly after he wrote *Soma*. If the Panofsky Plaincourault argument is such a slam-dunk argument as the people who brandish it present it as, why is it missing in Persephone's Quest, while the related topic of *Amanita* in the Genesis text is covered and affirmed there?

Something is fishy about Wasson's remarkably brief coverage of mushrooms in the Jewish-Christian religion after the very earliest writing of the Eden story. His approach toward treating mushrooms in Christianity is to retreat – to stay silent and to wave aside the issue with a blatantly unconvincing pseudo-argument from vague authority.

## Accurately Summarizing Wasson's Contorted Position

Reviewers garble and conflate Wasson's positions on these distinct issues because his positions on these issues are essentially incoherent and self-contradictory, forming an inelegant and unwieldy framework. Wasson makes it nearly impossible to follow his contorted set of positions on the related topics:

- The two trees in Eden in the text of Genesis meant mushrooms (or perhaps another hallucinogen), which were present when Genesis was redacted (not yet eliminated and replaced by placebos). The authors of Genesis were *Amanita* initiates who advocated Adam and Eve taking the entheogen. Tension in the story indicates that some community leaders had a virulent attitude against entheogens.
- The Eden tree in the Plaincourault fresco didn't mean mushrooms, but in fact meant a pine tree, even though it looks like *Amanita* mushrooms, which is due to impressionistic schematization of the Italian pine, a plant which was very frequently depicted in the era's religious art. But the serpent depicted in that tree did mean mushrooms, but without the artist or mycologists realizing it, and only in pre-history.
- The error of interpreting the hundreds of Christian mushroom trees in the Middle Ages as representing mushrooms is an anachronistic misreading due to the recent awareness of contemporary use of *Amanita* by shamans; the events recorded in Genesis of taking *Amanita* and depicting it in the form of a tree only occurred in remote pre-history.
- We should pay heed to the art historians as experts on art who've already formed the category of Christian 'mushroom trees', that such trees have no intended allusion to

mushrooms whatsoever. These experts are blameless for the mycologists' misinterpretation, because of course the art experts have read no books about mushrooms whatsoever, to see and correct the mycologists' error.

- *Amanita* mushrooms were venerated for millennia, but were immediately forgotten upon the start of our own era. We can look to contemporary shamans' traditional use of *Amanita* to help reconstruct how pre-history thought about it, before it was completely forgotten.
- The Book of Revelation was not describing visions from within a mushroom state of consciousness, but the flow indicates that the author was in the same state of consciousness as the mushroom state.
- The tree of life in Genesis is essentially the same as the tree of knowledge: it means the *Amanita* mushroom, which is closely associated in tradition with pine, fir, and birch trees, which are religiously venerated precisely and only because they are host trees for *Amanita* mushrooms.

Anyone who can accurately follow Wasson's dizzying system of logic he patches together, so that they could represent his views on these issues to other people to his liking, would have to be crazy, and especially so, if they're capable of affirming all of these ideas together as a whole – either crazy, or already determined to hold to a certain set of assumptions regardless of what contorted labyrinths of argumentation and piling-on of corrective epicycles is thereby necessitated.

### Wasson's Argument from Authority and His Judgment of Art-History Competence

"The art historians say it – we consult them – that settles it." A weird, suspicious bias is the way it apparently never occurs to Wasson that the failure of communication between disciplines cuts both ways. But it looks like some sort of irony when he berates only the mycologists for the ignorance resulting from the failure of 2-way communication:

Professor Panofsky gave expression to what I have found is the unanimous view of those competent in Romanesque art. For more than half a century the mycologists have refrained from consulting the art world on a matter relating to art. Art historians of course do not read books about mushrooms. Here is a good example of the failure of communications between disciplines.

The misinterpretation [by the mycologists] of the Plaincourault fresco [as *Amanita*] ... – Wasson, *Soma*, p. 180

With the wave of a hand, Wasson excuses the ignorance on the part of the art historians with "of course", while unfairly chastising the mycologists, as though mutual non-communication is a fault solely on the side of the mycologists and in any disagreement under these conditions, the art historians are immediately to be granted the victory.

It doesn't appear to occur to Wasson that the failure of communications between disciplines works against the credibility of the art historians as much as it may work against the mycologists. Two fields collide in their reading, and somehow, with no real argumentation from evidence, Wasson asks us simply take it for granted that one field – art history – automatically trumps the other, as though the failure of communications automatically gives the win to the art historians rather than to the mycologists.

Wasson pits mycologists who are ignorant of the field of art history against art historians who are ignorant of the field of mycology, and asks us to automatically take it for granted that the art historians win. But *at the same time*, he directly points out and highlights the perfect incompetence and despicable ignorance of these who are presumably "competent in art", when it comes to the

subject of mushrooms, which they yet presume to make pronouncements on, just like he shows Panofsky doing.

Why should we trust Wasson's stated judgment ("what I have found is the unanimous view of those competent in Romanesque art") and his unstated process of his finding of competence, especially when he declares that "those competent ... Art historians of course do not read books about mushrooms"? Wasson refrains from giving us even a single shred of evidence, withholding the details (assuming there are any details to withhold) that led the art historians to their conclusion – or dogma or party line – that mushroom trees aren't mushrooms. He delivers forth only the supposed conclusion, painting a scene as hazy, undefined, and unspecific as Saint Paul on the earthly life of Christ.

The argument floats in midair, with an otherworldly unquestionable authority lacking any need for mundane-realm specifics upon which the entire argument rests, or totters. Beyond Panofsky and Schapiro, what are the names of these phantasmal scholars, "those competent in Romanesque art ... the art world ... Art historians", who share an absolutely unanimous view with nary a peep of doubt, dissent, or nuanced variation of viewpoint? How exactly have these professionals become so well indoctrinated by their professional training, so heavily familiarized with 'mushroom trees', and so unanimously of a uniform and single voice that these mushroom trees have nothing to do with mushrooms?

Every one of them instantly responds such that we are "struck by the celerity with which they all recognized the art motif" (as Wasson exclaims) when asked for the professional art-expert position on mushroom trees. Are there art historians who *deviate* from the unanimous position and are, by the standards of the art historian profession, therefore not competent in Romanesque art?

Wasson crafts his presentation of Panofsky so that his total finality and absoluteness is matched only by his total and absolute lack of any specifics beyond repeating that all the competent art historians (consulted around 1952) agree that mushroom trees are impressionistic renderings of the Italian pine and therefore cannot have anything to do with mushrooms.

Wasson so faithfully and confidently puts forth Panofsky's brief statement of the established argument, Wasson appears to be mocking the flimsy position and proposition put forward by Panofsky and the art experts. If you are firmly committed to the assumption that entheogens were present in European pre-history only, but not present later, the Panofsky argument may appear to settle the matter. If not, the Panofsky argument may appear to rather miss the issues.

Have the art experts no arguments besides that chasm of logic that Panofsky puts forward? That's it; that's the entirety of the art historians' argument?! Wasson's presentation of the art historians' position and their case for it, using Panofsky as an all-too-typical spokesman for the lot of them, suggests that such is indeed the case.

## Wasson's Insulting Praise of Panofsky and the Under-informed Art Specialists

Wasson puts forth insulting praise at the expense of Panofsky and the selectively competent, selectively informed art specialists. One may imagine a tone of sarcasm at Panofsky's expense, if one tries reading in a mode that's based on rejecting being seduced by the shallow, surface reading. Could Wasson be signaling to us that something is fishy about the surface reading of his passage? He seems to hint to us other possible readings, by the sequence of sentences which we may consider together in isolation from the surrounding tale.

Here is [what] Panofsky wrote me ... Professor Panofsky gave expression to ... the ... view of [all the art experts]. ... Art historians ... do not read [any] books about mushrooms. Here is a good example of the failure of communications between disciplines. – Wasson, *Soma*, p. 180



Wasson lavishes apparent praise on the under-informed art specialists, calling them “competent in Romanesque art”. This is faint praise, delimited and finite praise, coming in at them from the very heart of the camp of the mycologists. He then draws a firm boundary between art and mushroom books and berates that boundary. Wasson is thereby, by implication, calling them “incompetent at mushroom metaphor interpretation”. Is he unaware of doing so? There is a gentlemanly art of insulting through selective praising.

Wasson offers an axiom to us for consideration: the raw assertion that to be competent in Romanesque art is to hold that the mushroom trees don’t indicate mushrooms, even though that competence is (“of course”!) uninformed by reading any books about mushrooms.

According to the logic Wasson puts in front of us, the art historians read *not even a single book on mushrooms*, yet we are to confidently believe that the unanimous views of those whose competence is in the specialized field of art – their views *specifically regarding the mushroom interpretation* – are authoritative, final, and the very sign and proof of their competence. Furthermore, we are challenged with believing that this is such a final treatment, no specific details about specific works of art or citations of published research by art historians are warranted on this important topic that is central to this book about *Amanita* metaphors, myths, and portrayals.

We must consider whether Wasson was strategically choosing his battles (*Amanita* in ancient religion) he was willing to publicly fight and win, while also caving in in the more highly charged battles closer to home such as Zaehner’s 1957 commentary against Huxley’s proposal for (re-) introducing visionary plants into the Christian church.

Wasson concedes the battle regarding the entheogen theory of Christianity with no resistance, and encourages Ramsbottom and Allegro to bow down to the authority of the art historians as well, on the topic of representations of mushrooms. But in the act of conceding, we have to wonder whether his roundabout wording amounts to hints that we’d have to be foolish and gullible to believe the Panofsky argument.

With a straight face, Wasson asks that we believe that Christian mushroom trees, Christian Eden mushroom trees, and the tree of life at the end of the Bible weren’t intended to mean psychoactive mushrooms, while we simultaneously believe that the Eden trees in the text of Genesis *were* so intended in the opening of the Bible, back when the Eden trees story was written for the edification of the mushroom initiates of that foundational era.

Wasson could be hinting that every last one of those art historians, who are all clueless about mushrooms, is hypnotized by the established dogmatic interpretations. Wasson’s emphasis on his explanation in *Soma* indicates that there are no specific arguments other than that quasi-argument, if you can even call it that, in Panofsky’s manifestly unpersuasive letter to Wasson.

When the entire field of art history is half-informed, when the experts are all so ignorant about mushrooms as Wasson points out, it’s pointless to provide specific citations in addition to Panofsky’s all-too-representative weak argument that he mailed Wasson. Wasson has done the equivalent of citing specific art historians’ names by citing Panofsky and then declaring him to be expressing the unanimous view of all the so-called “eminent, competent specialists” – experts at art, only, and emphatically not experts, in fact the exact opposite of experts – complete ignoramuses – when it comes to mushrooms in a Christian religious context, “the gradual schematization of the impressionistically rendered” *mushrooms* in Christian iconography.

## John Allegro and the Battle of the Careless Asides and Meta-footnotes

## The Attempted Dismissal of Allegro by Brandishing the Panofsky Argument

In Robert M. Price's review of Acharya's *Christ Conspiracy*, he points out that Acharya desires, with Allegro, to see psychoactives in Christianity:

Having mentioned the Dionysian associations of the hallucinogenic mushroom, it behooves me to mention [Acharya's] rehash of John Allegro's claim (in *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*) that an ancient Christian catacomb fresco depicts Adam and Eve flanking, not a tree, but a red-capped *Amanita muscaria* mushroom, implying perhaps that the early Christians cherished the forbidden knowledge of the mushroom, as the ancient Soma priests of India did. [Acharya] likes this, as a bit of New Age pot-smoking apologetics. But, unfortunately for this theory, art historian Erwin Panofsky declares that [Price here quotes the Panofsky excerpt from *Soma*]. – Price, review of *Christ Conspiracy*

Price attempts to dismiss Acharya and Allegro's broad theory by narrowly pointing out Wasson's view on one isolated aspect of the issue. Acharya favorably treats Allegro's theory that the Plaincourault fresco portrays the tree of knowledge as *Amanita* mushrooms, serving as evidence to support the theory that the early Christians considered Jesus to be none other than psychoactive mushrooms. Price wrote that unfortunately for Acharya and Allegro, Panofsky's declaration disproved that theory by disproving that interpretation of the fresco. But Panofsky's argument and Wasson's use of that argument are actually weak arguments, easy to refute.

Price attributes the Panofsky quote as follows:

(quoted in Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "The Post-Vedic History of the Soma Plant," in R. Gordon Wasson (ed.) *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*. pp. 179-180).

Price writes "an ancient Christian catacomb fresco" instead of "a chapel fresco from around 1291". He attributes the Panofsky passage to the section of *Soma* O'Flaherty wrote, instead of to Wasson. He attributes Wasson as the editor of *Soma* though Wasson wrote all of the book other than Part 2; Wasson wrote Chapter 3 in Part 3, which covers the fresco.

What is it about this fresco that has consistently caused such a break in scholarly critical precision, so much dysfunction of scholarship all around? The fresco has served as a proxy issue; a soccer ball to roughly and opportunistically kick this direction and that; a symbolic contentious issue; an ink blot to free-associate on and project meanings onto – instead of being treated as evidence that calls for careful, in-depth speculative discussion and research to spell out and follow-up with the possible ramifications. Scholars have been entirely too hasty and brief in what they write about this fresco; a volley of inadequate, too-brief passages has resulted.

Wasson presents and frames the Panofsky argument as a killer argument that instantly settles the case. Even critical readers fall for this illusion, this argument from mere general authority and from mere convention of interpretation. Price is so enjoying making fun of Acharya, he lets down his guard here and readily accepts this argument that's one component of the complicated, implausible set of assumptions Wasson is forced to posit to avoid allowing entheogens any role in Christian history while at the same time asserting that entheogens were present at the original primitive roots of religion including the proto-Jewish religion.

Even if it could be proven that Christian mushroom trees in general never intended mushrooms, or that the Plaincourault Eden mushroom tree didn't intend mushrooms, that would hardly amount to a wholesale refutation of Acharya's and Allegro's view that Christians used visionary plants. It's not as though the entheogen theory of religion rests on a single painting, so that refuting the intention of that painting would deal a fatal blow to the entire entheogen theory of Christianity.

Price's argument attempting to disprove Acharya's belief in visionary plants in Christianity also misfires because Price omits the fact that Wasson positively asserted that the Eden trees in the Genesis text *do* intend mushrooms. Price attempts to use Panofsky/Wasson in an overgeneral way as a blunt club against Acharya's and Allegro's reading of the Bible as visionary plants.

Against Price, Wasson in fact asserts that the Bible *does* have entheogens, at least in the textual story of the Eden trees. Price generalizes his critique of Acharya as: she's unreliable, a grab bag, kettle logic, an indiscriminate shotgun approach. But Price's treatment of the entheogen issue in his review is itself imprecise (an endemic tendency surrounding this fresco), conflating the general issues of whether the Bible has entheogens and whether early Christians used them while forming the Jesus figure, with the particular issue of whether the Plaincourault artist around 1291 intended mushrooms.

Furthermore, Wasson asserted that the Plaincourault fresco *does* slightly connect with mushrooms, albeit unconsciously by portraying the serpent, which in forgotten prehistory long before, used to be the caretaker of the mushroom. Wasson is wrong on this view that the Christians were ignoramuses about mushrooms and caretaker serpents, but in any case, Price's treatment is illegitimate when attempting to utilize Wasson as a wholesale refutation of Acharya's entheogen theory of Christianity. Some of Wasson's views in *Soma* tend to support, not refute, Acharya's entheogen theory of Christianity.

Price later invited proposed alternatives or rebuttals to the Panofsky reading of the Plaincourault tree.

### Accurately Summarizing What "Allegro's Theory" Is

Allegro's main theory in *Sacred Mushroom* is that Jesus and the apostles didn't exist as literal historical individuals who created the Christian religion, but actually, were secret code-names for the *Amanita* mushroom. The practices of the Christian religion were around for a long time prior to the formation of the religion we call 'Christianity' – long before the time in which the figures of Jesus and Paul are placed in the Christian stories of Church History. Visionary plant use was rare and highly secret; the official dominant culture was against the use of visionary plants, and keeping Christian practice alive required an effort to keep secret the use of visionary plants by this deviant cult.

Many scholars who comment on the theories in Allegro's *Sacred Mushroom* are unable to correctly state what his theories are.

Allegro sealed his fate in 1970 when he published *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, a book that claimed on linguistic evidence, real and imagined, that Jesus was the head of a cult that took psychedelic mushrooms, namely the fly agaric ... He went on to state that perhaps Jesus never existed at all; that the name 'Jesus' was a code-name for the mushroom ... – Clark Heinrich, *Strange Fruit*, 1994, p. 22

Heinrich's first sentence is incorrect: *Sacred Mushroom* clearly does not claim "that Jesus was the head of a cult". And his second sentence contains an error: it's not that Allegro "went on to state" that "perhaps Jesus never existed" – rather, that's *all* that Allegro proposes in the book *Sacred Mushroom*. Heinrich is attributing his own manner of thinking – his own fence-sitting – to Allegro, projecting his own tentativeness and treatment of the matter onto Allegro's book. *Sacred Mushroom* is not the least bit tentative or waffling on this point: it strictly and consistently asserts that Jesus was not historical.

Jonathan Ott doesn't introduce any such imagined tentativeness in describing Allegro's view, and he includes more of the important components in his accurate summary of Allegro's overall theory, including the hypothesis of linguistic encoding to hide the use of *Amanita*:

... *Sacred Mushroom* ... purported to demonstrate that Jesus was a mushroom, the fly-agaric, and that the New Testament had been written in an elaborate code designed to conceal the sacred mushroom cult from the Romans! ... The only evidence Allegro offered was linguistic. – Ott, *Pharmacotheon*, p. 334

## Excerpts from Allegro on Ahistoricity, Mushroom Use, and Wordplay Motive

The following excerpts from Allegro's adaptation of *Sacred Mushroom* in the *Sunday Mirror* (London) summarize his position regarding ahistoricity, use of mushrooms, and motive for wordplay about mushrooms.

The secrets, if they were not to be lost for ever, had to be committed to writing – and yet if found, the documents must give nothing away or betray those who still dared defy the Roman authorities ... The means of conveying the information were at hand [linguistic encoding in wordplay] ... From the earliest times the folk-tales of the ancients had contained myths based upon the personification of plants and trees. They were invested with human faculties and qualities and their names and physical characteristics were applied to the heroes and heroines of the stories.

Some of these were just tales spun for entertainment, others were political parables ... The names of the plants were spun out to make the basis of the stories, whereby the creatures of fantasy were indemnified dressed, and made to enact their parts. Here, then, was the literary device to spread occult knowledge to the faithful ...

Thus, should the talk fall into Roman hands, even their mortal enemies might be deceived and not probe further into the activities of the mystery cults within their territories.

What eventually took its place was a travesty of the real thing, a mockery of the drug's power to raise men to heaven and give them the longed-for glimpse of God. The story of the rabbi crucified at the instigation of the Jews was accepted as fact – as an historical peg upon which the new cult's authority was founded. What began as a hoax became a trap even to those who believed themselves to be the spiritual heirs of the mystery religion and took to themselves the name "Christian." ...

The drug was God himself, manifest on earth. To the mystic it was the divinely given means of entering heaven: God had come down in the flesh to show the way to himself, by himself. ...

Did Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ever exist as real people? Was there ever a sojourn in Egypt of the Chosen People, or a political leader called Moses? Was the Exodus historical fact? ... many other questions are raised afresh by my studies, but ... Far more urgent is the meaning underlying the myths in which these names are found. ...

If the New Testament story is not what it seems, then when and how did the Christian Church come to take it at its face value, and make the worship of one man, Jesus – crucified and miraculously brought back to life – the central theme of its religious philosophy?

... Christianity under various names, had been thriving for centuries before the supposed birth of Jesus.

We are, then, dealing with ideas rather than people [historical individuals such as Jesus, Peter, John, and Paul].. – John Allegro, *Sunday Mirror*, April 5, 1970, p. 10

... the story of Jesus and his friends was intended to deceive the enemies of the sect, Jews and Romans, it was a hoax, the greatest in history. Unfortunately it misfired. The Jews and Romans were not taken in; but the immediate successors of the first "Christians" (users of the "Christus," the sacred mushroom) were. The Church made the basis of its theology a legend revolving around a

man crucified and resurrected – who never, in fact, existed. – John Allegro, *Sunday Mirror*, April 12, 1970, p. 10

... [encoded wordplay] was an obvious device to convey to the scattered cells of the cult reminders of their most sacred doctrines ... concealed within a story ... Thus was born the Gospel myth of the New Testament. How far it succeeded in deceiving the authorities, Jewish and Roman, is doubtful. ... at least at the beginning, Jews knew full well what the “Jesus” was that the Christians worshipped [– *Amanita*]. ...

Those most deceived appear to have been the sect who took over the name “Christian” ... and formed the basis of the modern church. But by then the prime ingredient of their sacred meal had been lost – or suppressed – and its priests offered the initiates in its place a wafer and sweet wine, assuring them that before the Host touched their lips it would have changed into the flesh and blood of God. Foremost among the literary devices used to encode secret names for the sacred mushroom was word-playing or punning. – John Allegro, *Sunday Mirror*, April 12, 1970, p. 12

... when the time came for the secrets of the mushroom cult to be written down to preserve them intact in a hostile world, it was done in a kind of code. – John Allegro, *Sunday Mirror*, April 19, 1970, p. 35

... the apparently incontrovertible fact of the existence of one, semi-divine man who set the whole Christian movement in motion, and without whose existence the inauguration of the Church would seem inexplicable. But if it now transpires that Christianity was only a latter-day manifestation of a religious movement that had existed for thousands of years – what then? ...

... the stories of Jesus are no more historically real than those of Adam and Eve, Jacob and Esau and even of Moses ... thanks to these discoveries about the origin of the languages of the Bible – Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, and their related tongues – the stories of the New Testament have indeed been exposed as myths. ... when the Gospel writers speak of Jesus, Peter, James and John, and so on, they are really personifying the sacred mushroom – the *Amanita muscaria*. They are spinning stories from its cult-names. ...

The sacred mushroom cult then went underground, to reappear with even more disastrous results in the first and second centuries AD, when the drug-crazed “Zealots” (another pun on a mushroom name) and their successors again challenged the might of Rome.

A “reformed” Christianity then drove its drug-takers into the desert as “heretics,” and eventually so conformed to the will of the State that in the fourth century it became an integral part of the ruling establishment. By then its priests had forgotten the codes and the true meaning of Christ’s name – and were taking the words of the hoax literally – trying to convince their followers that the Host had miraculously become the flesh and juice of the god. – John Allegro, *Sunday Mirror*, April 26, 1970, p. 28

Clerics’ books responding to *Sacred Mushroom* include *A Christian View of the Mushroom Myth* by John C. King, 1970; and *The Mushroom and the Bride*, by John H. Jacques, 1970.

## The Importance of Allegro and Unavoidability of Discussing Him, Honorably or Not

Many people would be interested in a fresh take on Allegro. To most scholars, Allegro is the Entheogen theory of Christianity. To utter “Allegro” is to raise the subject of the Entheogen theory of Christianity, and vice versa. This problem of Allegro’s abused reputation serves as a total block for most people – most religious scholars – whenever anyone puts forth any sort of entheogen theory of Christianity or of religion. Many people effectively consider the problem of Allegro as the most

important issue possible regarding the entheogen theory of Christianity or religion; for them, the entheogen theory of Christianity or religion stands or falls with Allegro's reputation.

We've reached the point where we cannot move forward with research in the entheogen theory or the non-historicist explanation of Christian origins without passing through Allegro's theory, critically sorting out the main components and separately critiquing these components. He cannot be ignored; he can only be properly critically integrated into the corpus of new publications, with, of course, the appropriate, normal scholarly fact-checking and corrections that Allegro himself wanted and invited.

So far, the scholarly evaluation of "Allegro's theory" has been limited to a few moves: ineffectively and inadequately discuss him in asides in parentheses and footnotes; speculating on his motives and insincerity; or following too faithfully Allegro's approach of putting all emphasis on linguistics as the foundation of evidence for the ahistoricity of Jesus and the apostles. These amount to turning aside from real engagement in intellectual debate with him, avoiding discussing his theses in a mature, honest, direct, straightforward way.

But it is becoming ever less possible for entheogen theorists to pretend he doesn't exist, and quietly tiptoe around him solely on the argument from linguistics. Like the subject of entheogens as danced-around in mainstream religious studies, you can either diminish, disparage, misportray, and try to ignore the subject; or, you can analyze the main components of his thinking and discuss each of them in an honest and direct, normal way.

## Need Direct Mutual Discussion, No More Too-Brief Endnotes and Asides

Allegro merely mentions and dismisses the Panofsky argument, with 1 word: "Despite". He basically just says "Wasson himself admits he might well be wrong, and I'm against the position Wasson nevertheless commits to." Allegro treated the Panofsky argument in a careless way, enabling confusion to spread, by relegating the mention of the Panofsky argument to a vague terse dismissal in an endnote. Allegro wrote only the word "Despite", in a hard-to-find endnote, which did not amount to "addressing" Panofsky's argument.

Allegro ought to have written a pointed refutation of Panofsky's argument, to prevent what happened: the popular rumor that "Panofsky disproved Allegro" by "disproving" the reading of the Plaincourault tree as *Amanita*. Allegro would've benefited from critiquing the Panofsky/Wasson argument against mushroom trees and the Plaincourault Eden tree meaning *Amanita*, in the body of the text of *Sacred Mushroom*.

Allegro's endnote 20 in *Sacred Mushroom* cited Ramsbottom's addendum on page 48 of *Mushrooms & Toadstools*, quoting Wasson's private letter to Ramsbottom. Allegro has been improperly banished to footnotes in more recent books such as *Apples of Apollo* – but Allegro himself was surprisingly brief in dismissing Wasson's view in a buried-away endnote.

Why has there been such abuse of footnotes swirling around Allegro and the Plaincourault fresco interpretation? Perhaps it's because of the ramifications of allowing the Plaincourault tree as evidence for the normality of the use of visionary plants throughout Christian history – a scenario so radical, it would not only force a rewrite of conventional history, but would even mandate heavy revision of the presumably radical books such as that of Wasson and Allegro as well.

Ultimately, Plaincourault was too overwhelming for either Wasson or Allegro to comprehend and theorize, in its ramifications, in its disproof of even the most radical theories available as being still too moderate to handle the evidence. The errors of the modern framework for understanding Christian history run too deep for even the attempted radical revisions such as Wasson and Allegro.

Allegro and misuse of endnotes and asides have gone together – manifestations of the failure to enter into conversation on the issues. Allegro's stance that the Panofsky/Wasson argument is not

worth addressing in the body of Allegro's book permitted confusion, misunderstanding, and further dismissive too-brief footnoting and asides, which amounts to avoiding discussion and debate of the arguments.

The failure to enter into a proper debate component-by-component in the body of the books, but instead merely waving aside Panofsky/Wasson or Allegro or in a too-brief, dismissive footnote, leads to sustaining the bunk arguments against mushroom trees and Allegro's view.

## Proper Critique Requires Analyzing the Construct “Allegro’s Theory” into Components

The argument in *Sacred Mushroom* is portrayed by Allegro as all of one piece; however, to evaluate its merit, we must analyze into components and weigh each and ask how they could've better been formed and combined. That would be proper critical evaluation of a theory, per philosophy of science, which is often about adjusting theories and reconfiguring components of multiple theories together. Knowledge growth is normally and usually about selectively modifying theories, not about simple wholesale rejection of a theory – not about rejection equally of all components of a theory without any attempt to differentiate among them, as people end up doing with *Sacred Mushroom*.

What about the ‘ahistoricity’ component? Ott says not a word of it, only “Allegro contributed nothing to the field of ethnomycology”. When people “agree with Allegro’s theory” or “disagree with Allegro’s theory”, they never say which components they have in mind.

Are we to automatically take all these phrases like “Allegro’s theory” as referring to the theory formed by the following 3 components? 1) The Bible contains encoded allusions to *Amanita*, based on linguistic proof, proof that early proto-Christians used mushrooms. 2) Starting around Constantine in 313 CE, Christians became literalists; they knew nothing of entheogens and this is how the Historical Jesus illusion began. 3) The tree in the Plaincourault fresco of 1291 intends to represent *Amanita*, proving that Christianity is about *Amanita* use.

These three assertions, when joined together, constitute kettle logic on the part of Allegro and the entheogen scholars. Kettle logic here means a self-contradictory set of premises which seem to support one’s theory (that Christianity is *Amanita* use, not a Historical Jesus) but only seem to work effectively when considered each in isolation from the others.

Each scholar needs to begin identifying *which components* of ‘Allegro’s theory’ they have in mind. This would help tremendously; it’s the key to reclaiming “Allegro’s theory”, whatever that vague, magically charged phrase “Allegro’s theory” is supposed to mean – we must not be kept guessing and having to indirectly deduce this.

In the published books and articles, researchers need to be specific in addressing specific, identified components of Allegro’s theory presented in *Sacred Mushroom* & *Sunday Mirror* – his theory about “Christianity and *Amanita*”, one could somewhat vaguely call it.

Looking only at the cover of Allegro’s book (the kind of superficial sound-bite type of assessment one suspects the critics of), the message of *Sacred Mushrooms* seems to be some vaguely general theory that “Christianity was about *Amanita* mushroom use.” If one takes the phrase “Allegro’s theory” to be the theory that “Christianity was about *Amanita* mushroom use”, and people are thus debating over *that* theory or hypothesis, that would create a particular debate about a particular contended point.

However, if one takes the phrase “Allegro’s theory” to be the theory that linguistic decoding of the Bible is proof that the early Christians used *Amanita* and had to secretly encode their use to hide it

from the Romans, who didn't know anything about entheogens, and who disliked the use of entheogens, such a conception of what "Allegro's theory" is would result in a different debate.

Researchers need to distinguish between the different major components of Allegro's theory, and independently assess the greater or lesser merit of his various components, including the merit of attempting to treat the linguistic decoding as the "foundation" and "the proof" for the other aspects or components of his theory. It won't do, to utter the phrase "Allegro's theory" and say "it has been shown baseless and incorrect and unwarranted". We have to specify which aspects of the theory are weak, in which particular way. Not all aspects of his theory would be "weak" or "unwarranted" in the same way, in the same sense.

*You* may think his book asserts astrotheology, while I might not; that is, I'm blind to that component of his theory. It is a problem for Allegro's legacy, if *you* think the phrase 'Allegro's theory' refers to a particular theory about astrotheology, while *I* think the phrase 'Allegro's theory' refers to the use of *Amanita* by Christians in 100 CE and 1291 CE, and we come together to debate whether 'Allegro's theory' was right or wrong, warranted or unwarranted.

People have several different incoming angles into the Allegro-assessment debate, different angles by which people approach his work: Ott emphasizes 'ethnomycology' as conceived in some Ottian envisioning of that field; that is the vector through which he enters into the debate about "Allegro's theory", so he emphasizes only that aspect of Allegro's assertions. When you utter the phrase "Allegro's theory" to Ott, what pops up in his mind is "A bunk theory of ethnomycology, motivated by sensationalist profiteering." Ott might as well be blind to the ahistoricity component.

But many other people, such as Acharya and Price, emphasize the ahistoricity component more than the 'ethnomycology' component as Ott conceives it. Acharya and Price did not enter into discussion of Allegro through following their interest in *Amanita*; they came in through following their interest in the Historical Jesus and ahistoricity. For them, the phrase "Allegro's theory" pops up in their mind with a different emphasis, a different configuration than in Ott's mind: the theory that Jesus and the apostles didn't exist as historical individuals, but were anthropomorphizations only – specifically, anthropomorphizations of the *Amanita* mushroom's attributes.

## The Need to State Specific Agreements and Disagreements with Allegro's Theory

Instead of treating the various main aspects of Allegro's system of hypotheses as something to be affirmed or rejected wholesale, the proper and effective scholarly approach is to accurately summarize his entire overall theory, and then discuss which components of that explanatory system are valuable; which aspects are distorted, misleading, and off-base; and which components are incorrect and worthless. It is only lazy to specify some worthless aspects and then dismiss all aspects of his explanatory system.

For example, radical critics of Christian origins may heartily enjoy and affirm Earl Doherty's conclusion in *The Jesus Puzzle* that there was no historical Jesus, even while rejecting his uncritical automatic assumption that there was a historical Paul. These critics would not say that Doherty's book is worthless; they would go ahead and recommend Doherty's book as required reading for reconstructing Christian origins, with caveats about Doherty's uncritical assumption of the historicity of the Paul figure. We don't normally dismiss wholesale the entirety of a scholar's theory as a monolithic all-or-nothing system, just because we disagree with some aspects or components of the author's explanatory framework.

## Allegro's *Amanita* View of Plaincourault Mitigates His Premise of Suppression

Kettle logic is argumentation that includes contradictory components. The strong premise that entheogens were known in pre-history and were quickly forgotten results in kettle logic, particularly



when these same scholars turn around and assert that witches used visionary plants and show depictions of visionary plants from the Middle Ages.

Those most deceived appear to have been the sect who took over the name “Christian” ... and formed the basis of the modern church. But by then the prime ingredient of their sacred meal had been lost – or suppressed – and its priests offered the initiates in its place a wafer and sweet wine ... – John Allegro, *Sunday Mirror*, April 12, 1970, p. 12

The sacred mushroom cult then went underground, to reappear ... in the first and second centuries AD ...

A “reformed” Christianity then drove its drug-takers into the desert as “heretics,” and ... in the fourth century it became an integral part of the ruling establishment. By then its priests had forgotten the codes and the true meaning of Christ’s name – and were taking the words of the hoax literally ... – John Allegro, *Sunday Mirror*, April 26, 1970, p. 28

Allegro argues as follows: Linguistic proof shows that the proto-Christians used *Amanita*. Afterwards, literalism resulted from suppression around 313 CE, so Christians forgot their knowledge of entheogens. Further proof that Christians used entheogens is provided by the Plaincourault *Amanita* tree in 1291 CE.

Something must be amiss above, resulting in the contradiction among the set of propositions. The suspect factoid above is the middle assertion. Allegro needs to be clearer on how common and normal the knowledge of visionary plants was throughout Christian history. More recent researchers have, in effect, filled-out these aspects of Allegro’s theory – use of *Amanita* by early Christians and in Plaincourault in 1291 – to investigate the full extent of use of visionary plants throughout Christian history, such as Heinrich, Ruck, Mark Hoffman, James Arthur, Jan Irvin, José Celdrán, and myself.

A related misfiring of logic is found in the moderate entheogen theory of religion, which assumes that the big bad Catholic Church has successfully completely suppressed knowledge of visionary plants during the entire history of Christianity. This is expressed in a common self-contradictory set of views, amounting to the following kettle logic: Witch hunts were like our Prohibition. Entheogen knowledge in Europe was absent, because it was prevented by the Inquisition and witch hunts. Prohibition today has not prevented popular drug use; the prohibition gravy-train is profitable due to the widespreadness of drug use.

The suspect argument or “factoid” above is the middle one. Actually, heavy, active prohibition of drugs indicates a heavy presence, not absence, of drugs or visionary plants.

## Agreements and Disagreements Between Allegro and the Maximal Entheogen Theory

Allegro overstates how much the visionary plant use declined; he continues the usual predominant assumption that visionary plant usage was the rare exception throughout the historical context of Christianity. Actually, the early Christians used visionary plants, but against Allegro, they were not at all distinctive in this. The most distinctive thing about early Christianity was its effectiveness as a social support network. Use of visionary plants, combined with mythic metaphorical description of the resulting experiential phenomena, was the least distinctive feature of early Christianity.

Use of visionary plants in religion in the Hellenistic-Roman era was utterly normal, standard, and commonplace. This knowledge was completely widespread, not the secret possession of a small sect in isolation. So the entire explanatory hypothesis of the “secret encoding” motive, one of Allegro’s top themes and components of his explanatory system, is off-base and misleading, a misreading of the cultural context and situation.

The large fresco of the Eden tree as *Amanita*, and the illustrations of *Psilocybe* and Mandrake Eden trees, as well as the many other mushroom trees in Christian art, indicate how fallacious and ill-founded the assumption is that the use of visionary plants was highly secret, highly unusual in its cultural context, and soon forgotten. Despite mentioning the etymology of 'Mandrake', Allegro overemphasizes *Amanita* use, singled out as opposed to other visionary plants.

The meaning of New Testament metaphors such as the king drinking 'mixed wine' and then being fastened to a cross, dying, being renewed, and ascending, is not only the plants themselves in physical form, as Allegro's word-meanings would have it. These metaphors are especially descriptions of the experiential phenomena and the initiates' primary religious experiencing induced by the plants.

## Ott's Over-Broad Rejection of Allegro's Theories

Allegro has been rejected without warrant, even while claiming that he based his work on Wasson. In *Astrotheology and Shamanism*, Jan Irvin and Andrew Rutajit cover the scholarly debate around Jonathan Ott, John Allegro, and Gordon Wasson, regarding visionary plants in the Bible. Chapter 4 covers this scholarly debate; the chapter is a collaborative effort with John Allegro's daughter, Judith Anne Brown (Judy Allegro).

Jonathan Ott makes a broad, generalized dismissal of Allegro. In a chapter in *The Sacred Mushroom Seeker*, Ott dismisses Allegro's theories in *Sacred Mushroom* without stating in that article which theories are absurd, or supplying any evidence or argumentation there of why he considers them absurd, or specifying to what extent Allegro's theories were "based on" Wasson's research:

Perhaps most unfortunate was the appearance of farceurs like Andrija Puharich and the late John Allegro, who spun absurd theories based on the Wassons' research to make a fast buck. – Ott, *Sacred Mushroom Seeker*, p. 190

Ott characterizes Allegro as appearing to be motivated by opportunist sensationalism:

... a more profit-minded writer was to capitalize on Wasson's ideas ... specialists in the study of Biblical languages have unanimously rejected Allegro's thesis, and the fundamental assumptions that underlie it (see, for example, the reviews of Jacobsen 1971 and Richardson 1971). ... Allegro, a recognized Biblical scholar, did not present his theory in any scholarly publication, but only in a sensational mass-market book, clearly designed to appeal to the popular audience and not to scholars.[15] ... Allegro, ... was simply trying to capitalize on Wasson's revolutionary ideas. ... Allegro contributed little or nothing of value to the field of ethnomycology ... – Ott, *Pharmacotheon*, 1993, p. 334

It's unclear how Allegro could have been specifically trying to capitalize on Wasson's work. Allegro's book cites Ramsbottom more than it cites Wasson. Wasson states that it is not evident that the book builds much on Wasson's works in particular:

I think Allegro must have got his idea of the fly-agric from us, yet his book does not show any influence by us, apart from the fly-agaric. – Wasson, letter to Arthur Crook (Ed.), *The Times Literary Supplement*, Sept. 16, 1970

Ott's footnote about "appeal to popular audience" reads:

15. Allegro's book was originally serialized in an English tabloid of sensationalist stripe (*The News of the World*), a far cry from the peer-reviewed scholarly literature he normally favored. Allegro never addressed his theory to fellow specialists in Biblical philology. Allegro was paid the princely sum of £30,000 for first serialization rights (Wasson in Forte [*ReVision* journal] 1988) and at the time was apparently hard-pressed to pay some debts (Wasson, 1977). It is

difficult to escape the conclusion that he wrote *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* to make a fast buck. ... – Ott, *Pharmacotheon*, p. 352

Ott's bibliography lists "Wasson 1977" as "Personal communications, Danbury, CT." Ott echoes Forte's interview of Wasson, which also states the name of the weekly as *The News of the World* and makes many other errors about Allegro:

He was of Jewish origin, an Italian Jew. Then he went up to live in England. ...

Then along came his book, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, and he made the unforgivable blunder of selling the manuscript to *The News of the World!* *The News of the World* is the disreputable sheet that comes out only on Sunday in Britain. It is like the *National Enquirer* is here – a disreputable sheet! ... they came out week after week, with extracts from this manuscript, eight column headlines on the front page, "Jesus Only A Penis!"

His colleagues at Manchester they just... Although they have the security of tenure in England at the universities, this they could not bear. They had to get rid of him. So he retired to the Isle of Man, a rural island. It is a very lovely island. I would love to spend the rest of my days there. – Wasson in Forte, "A conversation with R. Gordon Wasson" in *ReVision*, Spring 1988; also in Forte, *Future of Religion*, pp. 82-3.

According to Judy Brown, Wasson was wrong about the Manchester professors wanting rid of him – Allegro left Manchester of his own accord, because he wanted to write freelance. His own professor, Professor T. Fish, said he was sorry to see him go. He left academia prior to the serialization and publication of *Sacred Mushroom*, and initiated the retirement.

Brown (Allegro's daughter) reports that Allegro was neither Italian nor Jewish, nor was he born outside England. Allegro was of English and French heritage. His father, John Allegro Senior, was born in France to a woman from England, and moved to England as a boy to live with her relations; he set up a printing press in the back garden of his south London home and made his living printing. Their children, including our Allegro, were born in England and went to the local schools, youth clubs, and Methodist church. Allegro left school at 16, went to work in an insurance office, and joined the Royal Navy in World War II.

Wasson criticizes Allegro for pre-publishing extracts of his book in a tabloid publication, which Ott describes as "sensationalist ... a far cry from the peer-reviewed scholarly literature he normally favored." But Allegro's manuscript was not serialized in the *News of the World*; it was actually serialized in the *Sunday Mirror*, which was more like Wasson's *Life* magazine: of medium reputability. Wasson advertised his limited, elite print run of *Russia* by his article in the comparable popular magazine *Life*, which the director forbade the editors from changing, except for the title. Similarly, Wasson's wife published her article "I Ate the Sacred Mushroom" in *This Week* magazine. Allegro describes his serialization with the words 'dramatically' and 'tabloid':

Even more controversial [than the Dead Sea Scrolls] was my study of a hallucinogenic cult and associated mythology centred on the Sacred Mushroom, the *Amanita muscaria*. This was in the main a philological study, although it was brought to public attention dramatically through its serialisation in Britain's *Sunday Mirror* tabloid. Its main importance was that it drew together in a unique way the origin of cultures and languages in the ancient Near East and the classic civilizations of Europe and Asia Minor. However, the occasion for the almost hysterical condemnation of the work was my inclusion within its scope of certain aspects of biblical mythology, even the New Testament stories. – Allegro, quoted in Irvin & Rutajit, *Astrotheology and Shamanism*, p. 178

Wasson's errors portray Allegro's serialization as sensationalizing, but actually Wasson is here doing the sensationalizing, which Ott then repeats. The only risqué heading is one with the word 'orgy', and the article text describes Jesus as an instance of a phallic deity, a standard manner of

discussing this aspect of ancient religious culture. None of the serializations made the front page; only David York's introductory article made the front page, with title "Famous scholar challenges the faith of centuries: CHRIST AND THE SACRED MUSHROOM". The serialized articles are titled mildly and are far from the front page.

Ott covers some specifics in *Pharmacotheon*, in a broad criticism of "his theory", "unwarranted conclusions", and "Allegro's specious theory". Ott bases his critique solely on Allegro's linguistics and philology hypotheses, which Allegro treated as the evidential foundation for his theory; Ott continues:

As Wasson later commented, "I think that he [Allegro] jumped to unwarranted conclusions on scanty evidence. And when you make such blunders as attributing the Hebrew language, the Greek language, to Sumerian – that is unacceptable to any linguist. The Sumerian language is parent to no language and no one knows where it came from" (Wasson in Forte 1988). This and several other points were made in the reviews of Jacobsen and Richardson (1971); see also the criticism of Jacques (1970). Nevertheless, Allegro's specious theory continues to be taken seriously by some students of entheogenic mushrooms (Haseneier 1992; Klapp 1991), and a recent German anthology on the fly-agaric (Bauer et al. 1991) was dedicated to John Marco Allegro. – Ott, *Pharmacotheon*, p. 352

Which aspects of Allegro's theories in *Sacred Mushroom* does Ott specifically have in mind? The theory that Jesus didn't exist, that Jesus was an anthropomorphization of the *Amanita*, that visionary plants were used in normal Christianity, that particular words were mushroom puns?

Irvin and Rutajit's book *Astrotheology and Shamanism* quotes Philip Davies and Anna Partington to rebut Ott's generalization that "specialists in the study of Biblical languages have unanimously rejected Allegro's thesis". Ott focuses on the etymological argumentation, as utilized specifically to describe attributes of the *Amanita* mushroom. Ott, fully occupied with the psychoactive plants rather than the historical origins of Christianity, does not state whether he rejects certain major components of Allegro's theory, such as the ahistoricity of Jesus and all the apostles, including Paul, or whether use of *Amanita* by early or later Christians was standard.

Incomplete or overgeneral criticism of Allegro's "absurd theories" omits several major components. The ahistoricity component and the question of non-etymological visionary plant metaphors throughout the Bible is ignored, as all attention is focused on what Allegro was trained in: linguistic research. Such critiques remain incomplete as long as scholars neglect to specify which aspects they have in mind; the book is not a giant formless lump.

When scholars reject too broadly the attempt to read Christian writings as secret encoded allusions to *Amanita* use, they also too-hastily discard the general principle that religious myth is largely metaphorical description of visionary plants and the phenomena they induce. The latter formulation needs to be considered even if we reject Allegro's particular, etymological manner of reading.

If Allegro made some objectionable linguistic assertions, is that supposed to make every main aspect of his book false or unjustified, without distinction between the various assertions, theories, or hypotheses in the book? Only a point-by-point direct treatment of various kinds of theories – not just etymology – in the book could possibly demonstrate whether the various assertions in the book have any merit.

## Choosing Which Components of Allegro's Theory to Retain as Contributions

Allegro's theory is a mixed bag – as is so much other scholarship, including Wasson's hasty pronouncements on post-Genesis Judeo-Christian practice; this is not automatically a reason to throw overboard "Allegro's theory" altogether, any more than we should wholly discard "Wasson's

theory” just because he was wrong about the Plaincourault tree and the premise that entheogens weren’t used in the Jewish or Christian religions after the Garden of Eden story was written. Neither does Wasson recommend ignoring Mircea Eliade’s work on shamanism just because of Eliade’s error of asserting that the use of drug-plants by shamans is a later degeneration.

Suppose Allegro’s theory-component that there was no Jesus and crew is in fact correct, and his theory-component that the early Christians used visionary plants, particularly *Amanita*, is correct, but his attempted linguistic foundation is incorrect. Would his act of combining ahistoricity and the entheogen theory then fail to be an important contribution to knowledge and understanding?

What if the Bible contains allusions to entheogens, but the allusions are based on thematic metaphorical allusion rather than on linguistic encoding? Would we then say that Allegro’s linguistic effort contributed nothing, and was simply a mistake? Allegro was right, at least on some level, in his general idea of reading the Bible as allusions to use of visionary plants, as many entheogen scholars postulate, whether or not he was right about the precise form of such allusions.

In this general sense, the Allegro view – that visionary plant allusions occur throughout the Bible, not only in the Eden story – has successfully become the normal view among entheogen scholars. Allegro is only at fault for providing such a needlessly narrow basis and narrow argument for the view that Jesus was none other than the mushroom – but he’s a linguistics expert, so this narrowness of emphasis and argumentation is at least understandable.

For those who are interested in the subjects of ahistoricity and entheogen history as interrelated topics, the thing that matters most is that Allegro was the first to attempt to fit the two areas together – that attempt is itself a contribution worth recognizing. When Allegro’s story of the reason behind the purported secret encodings is corrected and transformed into the general principle that we ought to be looking for entheogen allusions in Christian texts, these several components of Allegro’s theory are worth attention and recognition, which is not to say that we need to judge his whole theory as an undifferentiated lump. His story as a whole includes some distortion, but several major components or aspects can be profitably retained, when suitable adjustments are made.

How much and in what sense is it true that Allegro’s theories about *Amanita* were “based on the Wassons’ research”? Allegro seems more dismissive of Wasson, than building on him (at least regarding mushrooms in the Bible). A driving master thesis of Wasson is that only the pre-historical ancients and himself understood the Eden trees in the Genesis text as *Amanita*; Wasson’s position implies that unquestionably, the Christians cannot have known about mushrooms – specifically, that they cannot have known of the association of the serpent and mushrooms, or the *Amanita* nature of the Eden trees in the Genesis text.

Allegro went against some of Wasson’s assumptions, resulting in different positions regarding the relation of Jewish and Christian religion and *Amanita*. Both scholars share the same assumption that visionary plant use was relatively common in the roots of the religion (Jewish or Christian, respectively), and then was quickly suppressed and forgotten, despite the clearly *Amanita*-styled Plaincourault tree.

Wasson’s theory regarding the relation of Jewish and Christian religion and *Amanita* addresses only a few of the many possible aspects: that the author of the Eden trees story in Genesis understood the tree as *Amanita* host and *Amanita*; that no one in these religions after that understood that; and that we’re to ignore John’s eating of the stomach-embittering scrolls from the angel, with writing on them, and assume that John was in a mushroom state of consciousness without ingesting any mushrooms.

Scholars have given Allegro – and thereby, the entheogen theory of Christianity – short shrift, instead of a square response, as the following footnotes explain:

... These are the so-called “tears of Helen”: see Allegro, John, 1970: *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, .... pp. 73-4. Allegro’s work was so despised that we avoid the alphabetical necessity of listing him at the head of our list of References. It is unlikely, however, that every idea of a scholar, especially citations of ancient sources, is in error. ... – Ruck, Staples, Heinrich, and Mark Hoffman, *Apples of Apollo*, 2000, footnote 27, p. 95

... the Indo-Iranian haoma entheogen ... followed the trade routes across the deserts ... [78] [78] Heinrich 1995. So also, John Allegro. Allegro’s views elicited such a venomous response that no one has dared to entertain or reexamine them until just recently. – Ruck, Staples, Heinrich, and Mark Hoffman, *Apples of Apollo*, footnote 78, p. 116

... Merkur 2000: 152 in a footnote dismisses (but does not refute) fly-agaric as a “cavalier allegation” of John Allegro without support of any evidence; and identifies manna solely as a water soluble extract of ergot. In personal conversation, he expressed his annoyance that anyone taking up the subject of psychoactive biblical sacraments falls liable to the general opprobrium for Allegro’s theory; and indeed, we, too, have omitted Allegro’s works in our list of references; similarly Eisenman does not acknowledge Allegro’s views about the Zealot movement. Merkur’s careful and thorough scholarship demonstrates beyond a doubt that manna and the Eucharist bread were originally psychoactive. ... – Ruck, Staples, Heinrich, and Mark Hoffman, *Apples of Apollo*, footnote 237, p. 202

Allegro and the book *Sacred Mushroom* are wrongly and opportunistically treated as though they are the final word and the entirety of the argument in favor of the entheogen theory of Christianity, as though the entheogen theory rests on such little foundation that disproving a single word-meaning together with a single painting-interpretation is an effective way to immediately bring the whole theory crashing down. The entheogen theory of Christianity is not quite the same as Allegro’s theory that linguistic evidence, considered as secret encryption, proves that Jesus was none other than the mushroom.

*Sacred Mushroom* relies heavily on abstruse linguistic evidence to support the case that Jesus was none other than the *Amanita* mushroom. But there are other possible approaches, such as recognizing experiential metaphors, which requires suspending the predominant modern mode of reading and looking, to see texts and art without seeing them through the usual filtering assumptions. Instead we can consider whether a different set of assumptions – the maximal entheogen theory of Christianity and religion – reveals an ultimately more coherent reading and consistent seeing.

There is no shortage of evidence for the entheogen theory of Christianity and religion in texts and art; only the right assumption-set is needed, a reading-mode that enables the accustomed incoherence of the ancient and pre-modern texts to be replaced by a more satisfying, shimmering coherence, once we read the texts and art as metaphors for the visionary plants and the cognitive phenomenology which they have always reliably induced.

Allegro was the first to attempt to combine the ahistoricity of Jesus and the apostles, early Christian use of visionary plants including *Amanita* mushrooms, and searching Christian writings for entheogen allusions. Wasson’s book *Soma* didn’t consider the ahistoricity of Jesus and the apostles, didn’t search Christian writings for entheogen allusions, and rejected the possibility of anyone in Jewish or Christian history retaining knowledge of entheogens after Genesis was written. It is a partial truth, at best, to say that “John Allegro ... spun ... theories based on the Wassons’ research” and that “Allegro contributed little or nothing of value to the field of ethnomycology”.

Perhaps if the only thing one cares about and sees is the subject of “ethnomycology” in some narrowly considered way, Allegro contributed nothing to that field, so considered. But Allegro’s system has only a partial overlap, a minor overlap, with Wasson’s research, and several components

of Allegro's system combine to form an important, useful, and powerful set of explanatory hypotheses in an area Wasson was apparently afraid to venture into: Christianity and the Jesus figure as metaphorical descriptions of experiential phenomena induced by visionary plants, continuing, to some still-undetermined extent, into 1291 CE.

John Allegro led the way in the deliberate effort to combine these areas, forming an explanatory system which also incorporated other components, such as sex cult and secret linguistic encoding within a purportedly entheogen-hostile cultural context. Even if we dismiss or ignore the latter components of his system as exaggerated or misconceived, the remaining combination of explanatory components fit together usefully and should be retained, to Allegro's credit.

## Addressing the Broader Questions Which Wasson and Allegro Missed

Mircea Eliade allowed a historical role for entheogens only in the recent, decadent (per Eliade) phase of shamanism, where they served as imitations to artificially simulate the techniques and capacities of the great shamans of the past. Wasson is a critical reader when it comes to toppling Eliade's unsubstantiated pseudo-arguments (*Soma* pp. 326-334). He reflects on the anti-entheogen attitudes of scholars of religious history:

Now that hallucinogens are again becoming familiar to us all, ... we are vouchsafed a glimpse into the subjective life of peoples known to us heretofore only by ... artifacts. ... To weigh the effects of these hallucinogens is a formidable task, today rendered doubly difficult (perhaps even impossible) by the emotions they inspire in our own community, not least among the students of religions. Some of these seem loath to admit even the possibility that the hallucinogens encouraged the birth of religion, and may have led to the genesis of the Holy Mysteries. – Wasson, *Soma*, p. 210

Wasson had to work hard to get entheogens allowed into the pre-history of religion, only at the birth and genesis of religion – but he wasn't prepared to inquire about their role within "our own Holy Agape" after the beginning of Genesis. His strategy has its difficulties; he has to explain how entheogens were present in primitive religions including the primitive phase of the Jewish religion and in shamanism in all periods, yet were *not* present in later Jewish religion, primitive Christianity, or later Christianity. It would be easier to permit the door to swing all the way open to allow a full investigation.

### The Moderns, Not the Medievals, Are in the Dark

It's the moderns, not the ancients and pre-moderns, who were muddle-headed and confused about the nature of the Eucharist and fruit of the tree in Eden. Moderns such as Wasson and McKenna are committed to telling a sort of evolution-affirming story that in prehistory, people understood the entheogenic nature of religion, but in pre-modern history, people were stupid and didn't understand it, but only now, wonderful modern scholars have brought the truth to light for the first time since pre-history.

Here, modern era scholars have been the odd man out. Post-modern scholars are set to investigate the extent to which entheogens were the ongoing wellspring of the religions. Prehistory, pre-modernity, and "primitive" religions of all eras frequently had a practical comprehension of the efficacy of entheogens to induce primary religious experience; modernity almost completely forgot that; post-modernity will have formulated a better comprehension of the entheogenic nature of religion than ever before.

## What Was the Extent of Entheogen Use Throughout Christian History?

This article has left slim pickings for anyone who is still committed to rejecting the interpretation of the Plaincourault fresco as deliberately intending *Amanita* mushrooms. Flimsy pseudo-arguments and careless rebuttals buried in endnotes can no longer give the appearance of a serious and adequate treatment of these issues. But we need not waste further time spinning entheogen-diminishing apologetics and defending against such evasions; there is more serious research at hand.

It is most remarkable that none of these scholars – Ramsbottom, Panofsky, Wasson, or Allegro – explicitly consider and address the question, “What was the extent of entheogen use throughout Christian history and in the surrounding cultural context?” Wasson and Allegro share the unexamined and untested assumption that while entheogen use was the original inspiration for religions, it was vanishingly rare in Christianity and the surrounding culture. This unjustified combination of premises has resulted in a standoff of positions that all share the same shaky foundation, producing inconsistencies and self-contradictions in all of the competing ill-formed explanatory frameworks.

All the scholars to date have proven themselves unable and unprepared to face the issue of entheogen use throughout Christian history squarely, properly, and clearheadedly; none can write clearly nor read each other clearly on the subject. There are more complex and nuanced historical possibilities than the simple-minded options that either Christianity was always fully entheogen-using or was always fully against entheogen use. The greatest dogmatic preconception in this area today is the assumption that Christian history contains only a placebo sacrament, and that every instance of a psychoactive sacrament found within Christianity is *ipso facto* a non-Christian, foreign intrusion.

Having here shown the shortcomings of how the Plaincourault tree and the surrounding questions were handled by all the scholars involved, the way is now cleared to properly address and focus on the truly significant questions: What was the actual extent of entheogen use inside Christian practice throughout Christian history and throughout its cultural context? What was the extent of Christian metaphors and figures representing visionary plants and the experiential phenomenology induced by the plants? What was the actual extent, throughout Christian history, of considering Jesus and all the apostles as non-historical? And finally, what was the extent of considering Jesus as identical to, and none other than, entheogens and their phenomenological effects?

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