

THE MUSHROOM IN MOMMY FORTUNA'S MIDNIGHT CARNIVAL
MORE UNSUBSTANTIATED CLAIMS OF THE HOLY MUSHROOM THEORY

“... she has them believing that poor old ape with the twisted foot is a satyr—Illusions! Deceptions! Mirages!”

- Lady Amalthea, The Last Unicorn

WINDOW PAIN

In an effort to preempt one of the more common (but ultimately shallow) arguments (“you only addressed one picture!”) against my article *Christian Mushroom Theorists vs. Critical Historical Inquiry*, I offer further evidence that these mushroom advocates are a little too quick to label something a “mushroom,” or mask lax methodology behind vague sophistry like saying that the mushrooms are hidden.¹ If my *Christian Mushroom Theorists ...* article didn’t demonstrate how flippant many of Irvin, Rush and the rest’s conclusions are, maybe the following will.



Irvin’s *The Holy Mushroom* offers this image (left) of St. Martin as further proof that artists “secretly” depicted mushrooms in their works. This window from Chartres Cathedral, France, is one of forty panes that tell stories from the life of St. Martin of Tours.

¹ See John Rush, *The Mushroom in Christian Art: the Identity of Jesus in the Development of Christianity*, (North Atlantic Books, (2011), pg. 4.

This is Panel 18 (above). Irvin recalls the legend of when St. Martin “resus-citates [*sic*] a child,” as outlined in *The Golden Legend*. He also writes that Martin is “pointing upward at the red-topped mush-room [*sic*] tree.”² For starters, St. Martin of Tours isn’t doing either.³ This seems to be a theme with Mushroom Cult theorists—say something is two things and you have two chances to get it right, right? Unfortunately, two arguments from ignorance mean two *wrong* answers from evidence. Assuming that St. Martin can’t both raise the child from the dead *and* point to an “*Amanita*” tree, what *is* he doing? The panel is admittedly obscure, but that does not automatically open a door for flimsy interpretations or baseless conjecture. Let’s begin with the fundamentals. St. Martin is not “pointing” at anything. His hand is in a *standard* Christian blessing position; the fingers are a clear Christian sign for Jesus to those who study religious history. It is an early Greek way of addressing Jesus, known as a “Christogram” (below). The bends of the fingers convey the Greek letters “ΙCXC,” i.e., “Jesus Christ.”⁴ This Christian symbol appears in numerous portrayals of Jesus throughout the ages (below are but only a few).



But Back to Chartres Cathedral ...

² Irvin *The Holy Mushroom: Evidence of Mushrooms in Judeo-Christianity* (Gnostic Media, 2008), pg. 122.

³ For a thorough treating of this panel, and interpretations of all the window images in the Chartres Cathedral, see http://www.medievalart.org.uk/Chartres/020_pages/Chartres_Bay020.

⁴ Alva William Steffler, *Symbols of the Christian Faith* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2002), pg. 67.

⁵ Hans Memling, 1481, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

⁶ Albrecht Dürer, c. late 15th-early 16th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

⁷ Artist(s) unknown, Basilica di' Sant' Apollinare Nuovo a Ravenna, c. 520 CE.

Irvin has misidentified this window as the scene from *The Golden Legend* in which a mother begs St. Martin “with weeping tears” to revive her dead child. St. Martin takes to his knees and prays, and the child is brought back to life.⁸ I can certainly see how someone might believe that this is what the stained-glass window, Panel 18, depicts.

But a little investigation reveals a more plausible interpretation of the window scene—a story first mentioned by Sulpitius Severus in his *Life of Saint Martin of Tours*. In Severus’s tale, St. Martin was traveling through Gaul when he saw a large gathering of people from across a field. Because of the distance between him and the crowd (half mile), and the heathen rites associated with “Gallic rustics in their wretched folly” at the time, Martin mistakenly believed he was witnessing a pagan sacrifice. He approached the multitude and raised the blessed symbol of Christ (the Christogram above); the crowd stood still, frozen in place. Martin was now free to see that this was not a heathen sacrifice, but a funerary procession for some unfortunate child. In this story, St. Martin does not raise the child from the dead.⁹

And there is more. The larger window, outside Panel 18, shows many other legends of St. Martin taken from the writing of Severus—not from *The Golden Legend*. The forty windows are even arranged chronologically. One could read the gripping pages of Severus’s while following the window-panels—those depicted synch like a picture book. Since it is clear that the artists were following Severus’s narrative, we can close the case on the nature of the story that this stained-glass window retells.

Irvin exhibits how a person can actually know the characters, have the scenery displayed, and *still* get the plot wrong. And the supposed “*Amanita*” that Martin is “pointing upward at” is

⁸ F.s. Ellis (ed.), *The Golden Legend*, (Temple Classics, 1931), Ch. 6. Accessed via Fordham University’s Medieval Sourcebook.

⁹ Phillip Schaff and Wallace, Rev. Henry (eds.), *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, Vol. IX: Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian (Cosimo, Inc., 2007) pgs. 9-10.

more likely just a tree; the legend specifically takes place in a field. While mushrooms can grow in a field, that is not enough to show that the tree in the window is supposed to be an *Amanita*.



Staying with the Chartres Cathedral's impressive window, Irvin includes another image that supposedly captures St. Martin alongside an *Amanita muscaria* in Panel 13 (left); he relates that the panel shows "St. Martin ... consecrated as a Bishop [*sic*]." Before addressing the validity of the "*Amanita*" trees I must point out that, once again, Irvin has the story that this panel

illustrates wrong. Panel 13 actually shows not the ordination of Martin as bishop, but the *debate* amongst his peers as to his rightful taking of the bishopric. It is flanked by another panel that also depicts this debate (15, right). On the lower right of the panel we see the same *Amanita* that appears in Panel 13. Only Martin isn't painted into either panel 13 or 15! Thus, Irvin's claim that Martin is "glaring at an *Amanita muscaria* complete with spots" in Panel 13 is wholly erroneous¹⁰; a knowledge of Severus's account of St. Martin would have served Irvin well here.



¹⁰ Irvin (Gnostic Media, 2008), pg. 123.

This is the panel (Panel 14, right) that shows Martin taking up the bishopric. It is found nestled between panels 13 and 15. It should be fairly obvious that there are no mushrooms for Martin to mingle with in this stained-glass piece that clearly takes place indoors. Therefore, while the field tree of Panel 18 *might* have secretly represented the 4th century bishop as a mushroom, Martin's absence from Panels 13 and 15, which both depict the same kind of *Amanita* mushroom-tree found in Panel 18, should be enough to reject the premise that medieval artists associated St. Martin with divine mushrooms.



There is, of course, the possibility that a lack of indoor fungi present in Panel 14 will cause Irvin to default the “mushroom motif” to the halo (or aureola) around Martin’s head. After all, it is red and “cap-like.” While anyone should be able to see that such a tactic would only typify moving the goalpost after the punt,¹¹ I feel that I should comment on it; one Mushroom Cult researcher has already made a similar argument.¹² Below is an enlarged cropping of the halo (aureola) around Martin’s head. Perhaps the halo *is* there to represent a mushroom; but there also might be a more reasonable answer. Studying the forty beatific stained-glass windows that chart the life of St. Martin at Chartres Cathedral is a treat in itself! But I also



¹¹ Irvin doesn't mention Panel 14 in his treatment of the windows decorating Chartres Cathedral. Moreover, his insertion of Martin into Panel 13 means that he had to change history to fit the Holy Mushroom theory into it.

¹² Rush (2011), pg. 34. Also, John Rush's website is also full of pictures that he believes show a mushroom cap secretly depicted as a halo. In fact, after stating rather prematurely that “[m]ushrooms occur in every piece of Christian art,” he contends that “[t]wo general analogues, surprisingly, are the nimbus or halo and the cross, with the nimbus a symbol for the *experience* of the divine.” See John Rush, *Mushroom of the Month* (2009), <http://www.clinicalanthropology.com/>

noticed something unique to Martin, evident in almost every pane: there is a red halo around his head—including panels depicting scenes from his youth and solider days.¹³ Even when he appears in panels with other saintly personages, he alone is characterized by his red halo.¹⁴ The only others present in the forty window panes that sport the same red halo are Jesus¹⁵ (below) and only two (of many) angels. But there is more. The panels that depict Martin dying are curious in their detail; *these* panels show him with a red, blue, or green, halo. Panel 32 shows him with both: his corpse wears a blue halo; his soul rejects Satan while wearing the red halo.



The red halo might represent Martin's "spirit"; or it might simply have been a way for the artists to differentiate Martin from the others in the panels so viewers could more easily follow the narrative. It is not only present in *all* the panels that show him while he lived, but also in the panel that shows his soul casting away the devil at his hour of death. Furthermore, Panel 34, which portrays the squabble between the people of Poitiers and the people of Tours over Martin's corpse, has him with a green halo. 36 sees him back to red.¹⁶ The very next panel shows the people of Tours carrying Martin's body. Although the tip of his head is interrupted by the edge of the frame that holds the panels together, it seems clear that there is no halo at all. Panel 38 shows Martin, as a child, ascending into the "Bosom of Abraham" in a red mandorla.¹⁷

Therefore, if the halo *is* supposed to be an *Amanita muscaria*, Christian Mushroom Cult theorists also have to explain all these other facts about them. Does *Amanita* have properties that

¹³ Of the forty panels making up the complete window, Martin appears in twenty-one of them. The majority of other panels either depict people listening to Martin preach, angels honoring him in death, or a cobbler making a shoe. In eighteen of the panels, Martin has the red halo (one of those times also with blue, Panel 32, when he dispels Satan); once with green (Panel 34); once with no halo at all (panel 37).

¹⁴ See Panel 14, above. Also, Panel 9 shows St. Hillaire, then Bishop of Poitiers, appointing Martin as an exorcist; Hillaire is halo-less.

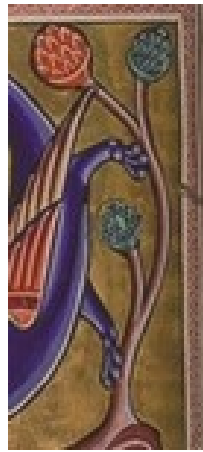
¹⁵ Although, Jesus' halo has the trademark "cross."

¹⁶ Maybe the red is a mistake? I admit it is an anomaly in the stained-glass narration.

¹⁷ Schaff and Wallace (2007), pg. 23.

make it change from red to blue to green and back to red again? What Christian legend will the Mushroom Cult theorists use to make this (his)story fit correctly into their ideas?

One of the details Mushroom Cult theorists like Irvin use to prove their case is that these improbable *Amanita* trees come “complete with spots.”¹⁸ I admit that both red trees in Panels 13 and 15 come with etchings that *could* be called spots. But then how will Mushroom Cult theorists contend with these trees from bestiaries—red capped, complete with spots?



Is this asp from the *Aberdeen Bestiary* (12th century) clinging to a “mushroom-tree?” After all, the top is red with passable “white spots.” Where do asps fit into the Christian Mushroom Cult theory? Also in



need of explanation (within a Christian Mushroom Cult perspective) is how dogs, tigresses, beavers, and wolves factor into the theory.¹⁹ Each of these animals has a unique lore surrounding it, detailing its



¹⁸ Jan Irvin, (2008) pg. 123.

¹⁹ Asp, fol. 67v; clockwise from top: a beaver clinging to a mushroom tree (fol. 11r); dogs (fol. 18r); wolf (fol. 16v); tigress (fol. 8r).

virtues and shortcomings. Some of these animals have bizarre myths surrounding them, like the tigress. Here, a thief has stolen her cub. Since the tigress can run faster than a horse, the intruder drops a mirror to the ground. The tigress is fooled by the reflection, believing that she is staring not at herself, but at her rescued cub. Satisfied that her offspring is safe, she carries the mirror back to her den.²⁰

And things don't get better when we leave bestiaries for psalters. In *The Holy Mushroom*, we are met with Plate 25, "Jacob's Vision" (below). The image is taken from the *Gold Munich Psalter* (c. 1200), an illuminating text with ninetyone pictures depicting 176 scenes mostly culled from the *Psalms*; they leave one breathless.



In *The Holy Mushroom*, Irvin credits these mushroom trees as “the provide[r of Jacob’s] vision—climbling the ladder to heaven [*sic*].”²² The resemblance to the trees in the *Aberdeen Bestiary* is palpable. But this resemblance to that secular genus of text is not the Mushroom Cult theory’s biggest problem; the biggest problem is what to do with all the other illuminations that portray mushroom trees (by the theorists’ standards, anyway) when they appear in scenes of

²⁰ “Ubi contiguum viderit, speram de vitro proicit. At illa ymagine sui luditur, et sobolem putat. Revocat impetum colligere fetum desiderans.”

²¹ BSB Shelfmark: Clm 835, Bildnr. 31.

²² Irvin (2008), pg. 129.

violence. We see, also from the *Munich Psalter*, the same mushroom trees that supposedly gave Jacob his vision. The meaning of this picture was difficult to track down, as this is not a Psalm



scene, despite its appearance in a psalter.

It is a scene from the apocryphal text

The Book of Jasher, a work that was

apparently excised, as it does not

appear in the Bible (though, this text is

referenced several times therein).²³

In this elapsed story, we are given a

follow-up of what happened to Cain after killing his brother, Abel. Lamech, Cain's great grandson in this story, went hunting one day with his son, Tubal Cain. Blinded by old age (though it would seem that Tubal Cain's vision wasn't too good either), Lamech accidentally shot Cain with an arrow.²⁴ Truly amazing is that this picture testifies to a 13th century popular familiarity with ideas long-since stamped out of Christianity! How do the magic mushroom-trees, evident in this folio, work into the parable of Lamech accidentally slaying Cain? If these trees caused Jacob's visions, they must, by any rule of fair-minded and objective scholarship, also account for Lamech's deadly mishap.

Trees of this kind appear in Latin bestiaries and numerous other nonspiritual works despite Rush's claim that "mushroom shapes are rare in secular art"²⁵; and when they do, they always represent trees. The leaves tend to appear in a variety of colors: purple, green, blue, and of course, red. Christian Mushroom Cult theorists like Irvin need to explain how they *know*

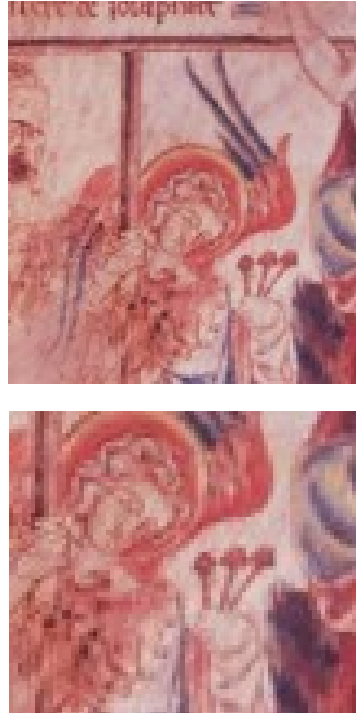
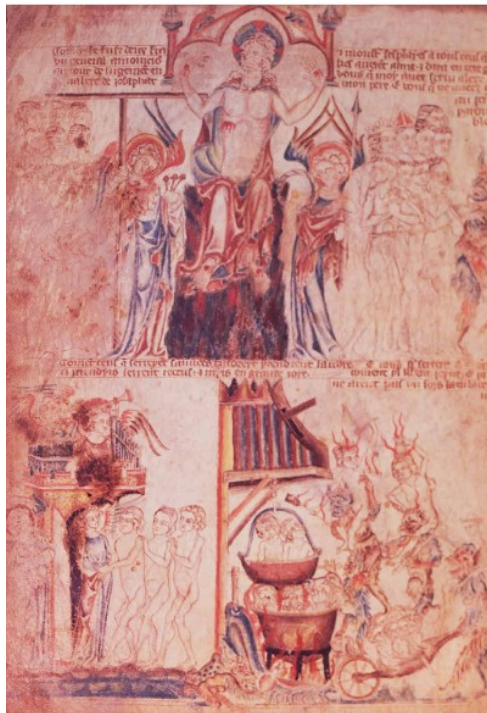
²³ Genesis 4: 23 and 5: 25, though it might be referring to two different Lamechs, this one comes from Gen 4.

²⁴ Mordecai Manuel Noah (trans.) *The Book of Jasher: Referred to in Joshua and Second Samuel* (NY: M. M. Noah and A. S. Gould, 1840) pg. 5.

²⁵ Rush (2011), pg. 76. Clearly, he hasn't even bothered to look.

these pictures are mushrooms when all available evidence says otherwise. *Gold Munich Psalter* shows a style of tree that looks very “psychedelic” indeed, but it always ends up the same: when you put the “mushroom tree” in historical context, it *never* ends up being a mushroom.

And what about the non-floral images touted by Mushroom Cult theorists, which they claim represent mushrooms? Irvin boldly calls attention to the supposed “three distinct mushrooms” that the angel to Jesus’ right holds in the 14th century *Holkham Bible*. Irvin



continues: “The blessed on the left [Jesus’ right] with the mushrooms are welcomed, while the damned on the right [Jesus’ left] are spurned and led away by a devil. Jesus is seen with both arms up, mushroom in his right hand, and an unidentified object in his

left [.]”²⁶ Irvin’s interpretation of what the angel is holding is premature. While the objects certainly *look* like three mushrooms, a careful investigation reveals something different.

This image from the *Holkham Bible*,²⁷ like so many pieces of Christian art, has been painted many times through the centuries. Irvin is correct: the scene does show the pious on Jesus’ right and the sinful to his left; but he veers over the side-rail when he the angels are

²⁶ Irvin (2008), pg. 137.

²⁷ St John’s College, Cambridge, Collection of French Works (France, second quarter of the 14th Century); f.185v of MS B.9. Accessed via: www.joh.cam.ac.uk/library/special_collections/manuscripts/medieval_manuscripts/medman/A/B9/B9f185v.htm, accessed 23 October 2009.

shrooming with the recently departed based on earthly merit. The angels are, as Irvin rightly adduces, gripping the “instruments [*sic*] of the Passion.”

It is a wonder then how he misses the *true* nature of what the angel holds ...

INSTRUMENTS OF THE PASSION

The Instruments of the Passion (*Arma Christi*) comprise several objects associated with the death of Christ. These instruments are expected to those familiar with the events leading up to Jesus’ execution. Many objects make up the *Arma Christi*,²⁸ but four specifically turn up time after time in depictions of the Last Judgment: the crown of thorns, the pillar Jesus was tied to when flogged, the spear of Longinus, and *three nails*.²⁹ When we cross-reference the *Holkham Bible* version with other versions of the *Arma*, a new, non-fungal interpretation presents itself.

This image (below) shows the *Arma Christi*, only disassociated from the Last Judgment. The



angel to Jesus’ bottom left carries both the spear of Longinus and the vinegar-soaked sponge; the angel above carries the flogging column; across the way, another angel carries the cross. Then, down by Jesus’ right foot, an angel holds the three nails driven through Jesus’ wrists and feet.³⁰ While these nails

certainly could have passed for mushrooms in the *Holkam Bible*, the Mushroom Cult theorists’ own standards do them in. For example, John Rush is fond of saying how important “pointing is

²⁸ Such Christian memorabilia includes: thirty pieces of silver, the vinegar sponge offered to Jesus, whips used to flog Jesus, the veil of Veronica, the chalice from the Last Supper, and a host of other objects.

²⁹ In some cases there aren’t three nails, but when this is the case, it is obvious that they mean to represent nails, as we shall see below.

³⁰ Image accessed via: <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/m/master/es/0mansorr.html>

take a closer look and discover what it is that these angels want us to see. The white-robed angel is pointing to Jesus' ribs, precisely where Longinus's spear pierced



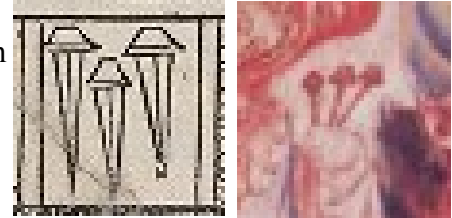
The red-robed angel—the only other angel pointing at anything—urges us to look at Jesus’ right foot. Much as this object looks like a mushroom, is it really so outlandish (and simultaneously rather pedestrian) to conclude that this angel is holding a nail? It certainly seems more likely.



³² J. Paul Getty Museum, Simon Bening Collection, MS. Ludwig, IX, 19, fol. 31v.

We do not know the name of the author that penned *Liber mortis e vite* (c. 1500; above). We do know that (s)he numbered the *Arma Christi* at twenty-six objects, each snugged in its respective box; these boxes border a portrait of the *Pietà*. Identifiable on the bottom row are several usuals in the *Arma*—the rare box showing Judas kissing Jesus notwithstanding.³³ It is also in this bottom row that a familiar Christian symbol is accounted for: three nails. These nails bear a striking resemblance to the three “mushrooms” that began our investigation.

Having determined that the more probable explanation for the three mysterious items the angel holds in the *Holkham Bible* are nails, we can move on to Irvin’s other claim—that



Jesus clutches a shroom in his right hand. This is an easy claim to verify or disaffirm. We need only enlarge the image. Much like the Mushroom Cult theorist when pressed for hard data, Jesus



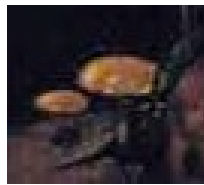
comes up empty-handed. How can Jesus be holding a mushroom, when it’s clear that he isn’t holding anything at all?

I would like to change tempo for a moment, and discuss a plate in *The Holy*

Mushroom that I believe *does* show mushrooms. “The Adoration of the Magi,” is another scene from Christian lore that was depicted numerous times over the ages. Small details change from artist to artist, but the overall theme of each painting is the same. The version Irvin serves us comes from the 17th century Spanish painter Fray Juan Bautista Maino. In the bottom right-hand

³³ MS. Rawl. D 403, fol. 1v, (Bod. Inc. Cat., XYL-30) Bodleian Library.

corner, just beneath Mary's stole, appears to be two *Amanita mushrooms*. Unlike the supposed shrooms in all the other pictures we have so far met, these actually stand a chance of being



mushrooms. Notice how they are not trippy-looking “mushroom-trees,” or have a bulbous kaleidoscopic verdure; they do not tower over the people. There are no leaps of faith necessary, and I am comfortable saying that I believe these

little morsels *are* some kind of mushroom. Alas, these most probable mushrooms do not make a case for a secret Christian Mushroom Cult. What Mushroom Cult theorists have to do is show that Maino included the

mushrooms as symbolic of Jesus. But that only leads to other problems for the theorists, as they would also have to explain why, if the mushroom is *truly* supposed to represent Jesus, Maino left this clue out of his other devotional paintings? To the right is Maino's rendition of the “Adoration of the Shepherds.”³⁴

According to Mushroom Cult theorists, Maino would have had every reason to place the mushroom in this scene.³⁵ One can certainly argue that the basket of eggs (lower right) is supposed to represent mushrooms (and by extension Jesus); but why then



³⁴ Accessed via: <http://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/galeria-on-line/galeria-on-line/zoom/1/obra/adoracion-de-los-pastores-3/oimg/0/>

³⁵ Rush (2011), pg. 97. Here, Rush makes a superficial argument about how psilocybin mushrooms grow in mangers, just like Jesus was born in a manger.

did Maino eschew eggs for mushrooms in “The Adoration of the Magi?” If the mushrooms were placed in “Magi” to signify Jesus, wouldn’t Maino have put the mushrooms in his other paintings as well?³⁶

But it might be too late anyway—the date of the painting, that is. Maino finished his masterwork around 1613; mushrooms began appearing in artwork in earnest in the late 15th century. When they appear, there is no ambiguity as to what they are.



All these above images were painted in the mid-16th through 17th centuries. Each clearly depicts a mushroom. These incontrovertible mushroom images are really the kinds of artwork that the theorists need to discover in ancient Christian art in order to advance the theory. If the theorists are going to deem these paintings as secular works, and therefore mushrooms-less, they have to explain how the *same* artistic style for “mushroom-trees” appear in other secular tomes like bestiaries.

³⁶ Nothing in Maino’s other works seems to portray mushrooms either. I have looked at “The Pentecost,” “The Recovery of Bahia (1625),” “The Resurrection of Christ (1614),” and “The Penitent Magdalene (1615).” Nothing even remotely mushroom-like is found in any of these paintings, which is probably why only “The Adoration of the Magi” appears in any Mushroom Cult theorist’s work.

³⁷ Jan Fyt, *Brussels, Musees, Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*. Accessed via: <http://www.bridgemanart.com/search/location/Musees-Royaux-des-Beaux-Arts-de-Belgique-Brussels-Belgium/792>

³⁸ Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Autumn*, Accessed via: arthistory.about.com/od/from_exhibitions/ig/arcimboldo_paris/gaml1007_11.htm

³⁹ Otto Marseus van Schrieck, *Still Life with Snake, Butterfly, and Mushroom*. Accessed via: <http://cilliebarnes.tumblr.com/post/27212020797/stilllifequickheart-otto-marseus-van-schrieck>

While two shrooms (in my opinion) have been uncovered in Maino's "The Adoration of the Magi," the fungi's absence from every other work of that artist makes it unlikely that Maino was covertly telling the world that he was a member of a secret Christian Mushroom Cult, or that he was even familiar with it. In fact, one can play the same game using the basket of eggs in "The Adoration of the Shepherds." This, too, only appears in one painting. If the mushrooms in "Magi" place Maino within the Christian Mushroom Cult, then he must also be a member of a secret Egg Cult. Since some mushroom theorists *also* believe that the egg represents the *Amanita muscaria*, what about ships?⁴⁰ Ships only appear in "The Recovery of Bahia"; conclusive proof, by Mushroom Cult theorist standards, that he was also an inducted member of the secret Ship Cult. With Maino's membership in all these secret shroom, egg, and nautical cults it's a wonder how he had the time to produce his glorious paintings.

RUSSELL'S MUSHROOM

Going to back to "The Adoration of the Magi," Irvin claims that the chalice and rock in Maino's painting are "metaphores for the mushroom."⁴¹ At this point I'd feel silly addressing this. The tactics used by Mushroom Cult theorists should be clear now: find images that *look like* they can be mushrooms (or rocks) and deem them as such without a modicum of critical investigation. Calling the chalice and rock mushrooms in disguise is just a puerile claim at this point—a currently unsubstantiated puerile claim at that, when Irvin presents evidence for, I will treat with due-diligence. The onus is on the Mushroom Cult theorists. But it seems as if a tree only counts as a "mushroom-tree" when it suits the theorists' purposes; there is no critical scholarship of any kind. Therefore, if we can't be sure that writers like Irvin seriously investigates their own hypothesis, how seriously can we take their conclusions?

⁴⁰ Clark Heinrich, *Strange Fruit: Alchemy, Religion, and Magical Foods – A Speculative History* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1995), pg. 167. The author presents *zero* evidence for this claim.

⁴¹ Irvin (2008), pg. 141.