

THE DOGMATIST’S DEBACLE:
QUESTIONING HOLY MUSHROOM HISTORY AS FOUND IN THE WRITINGS OF JAN IRVIN*

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*No one has been able to contend The Holy Mushroom.*¹

- Jan Irvin

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

- Lady Amalthea, The Last Unicorn

A FANTASY SO EGREGIOUS

One of the most attractive psychedelic theories ever hatched was the notion of the Holy Mushroom, a challenging concept that cut to the heart of Western Civilization. It started in 1946 when Muhammad Ali discovered vessels containing texts today known as *The Dead Sea Scrolls* in a cave in Qumran. Not long after, two teams of scholars assumed the duty of diligently deciphering the delicate dialectical-diamonds descended from days deceased. In 1970 one of these scholars, Oxford philologist John Marco Allegro (1923-1988), announced his newest findings to the *Sunday Mirror* (5, April, ‘70): “Thousands of years before Christianity, secret cults arose which worshipped the sacred mushroom—the *amanita muscaria*—which for various

* Much of this article has been abridged from chapters comprising the author’s forthcoming *The Holy Mushroom Theory*.

¹ Red Ice Radio, Jan Irvin “Gordon Wasson and the Secret History of Magic Mushrooms,” accessed via: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-XcsdXto7w>.

reasons ... came to be regarded as a symbol of God on earth. ... Through studying Sumerian cuneiform texts which go back to 3500 B.C., we can trace the proper names and words used in the Bible back to their original meanings.”² His philologically ingenious book, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, released that very day, would demonstrate that tucked away in New Testament language was proof that the stories found therein were mere “cover stories” to hide the holy mushroom.

Allegro was not some swindling professor trying to cash in with a sensational concept—he was a specialist in ancient languages, with credentials so impressive that his theory seemed incongruous to his intellect, leaving one reviewer to call *The Sacred Mushroom*: “A fantasy so egregious.”³ Other scholars agreed, and while the theory has been largely ignored since first decried decades ago, a small cadre of professors and amateurs has attempted a recent resurrection with new evidence that they claim vindicates Allegro. The research of one of these Allegro supporters, Jan Irvin, shall be the object of this study, as his views are considered exceptionally peculiar within the broader entheogenic research community. Since Allegro was a philologist, we will begin our investigation with the null hypothesis, testing the veracity of the linguistic approach to our inquiry by starting from zero, and building on evidence.⁴

But here we meet our first problem: Allegro fabricated much of his Sumerian vocabulary. In *The Sacred Mushroom* he included a Sumerian index of 869 words, of which 315 of them are his own linguistic inventions,⁵ causing many linguists, Semitists, Classicists, and various other

² Quoted in Judith Anne Brown, *John Marco Allegro: The Maverick of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (UK: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), pg. 202.

³ John King, *A Christian View of the Mushroom Myth* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), pg. 9.

⁴ Succinctly stated in this wise: “the burden of proof is on the person asserting the positive claim, not on the skeptics to disprove it.” See Michael Shermer, “I Want To Believe,” in *Scientific American*, July, 2009, pg. 33.

⁵ John Herbert Jacques, *The Mushroom and the Bride: A Believer’s Examination and Refutation of J. M. Allegro’s Book The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (Citadel Press, 1970), pg. 12. Some scholars like Dom Sylvester Houedard count the number at 875 with 404 asterisks; see King (1970), pg. 24.

historians to promptly dismiss his work: Henry Chadwick, Ninian Smart, Joel Carmichael, Peter Levi, Dennis Potter, Michael Green, Maxwell Warren, and Sir Godfrey Driver (among others).⁶

But we needn't even rehash their critiques; we need only consider the following hypothetical: I claim that Allegro was wrong because I have discovered an ancient Anglo inscription that reads, "Allgrowsrng." Forget that the word might have meant "All grow *in* s*p*ri*ng," (*All grow in spring*) to the people using it thousands of years ago and that corroborating evidence holds this as the more plausible translation. Still, I insist that it reads "All*e*gro w*a*s *w*r*o*ng" (*Allegro was wrong*). How long did it take you, the reader, to determine that my theory, based on incomplete word roots and predetermined bias ("Allgrowsrng" = "Allegro was wrong"), is a weak argument to show my hypothesis? Probably about as long as it took Godfrey Driver to determine that this *very tactic* (albeit a far more sophisticated and erudite version) employed by Allegro meant the same for his theory.⁷ This analogy is supported by others; Allegro's own daughter, Judith Anne Brown, is remarkably objective in assessing her father's approach:

... the clues [Allegro] was finding linked together like a web. From the critics' point of view, the logic of this was flawed: To fasten one improbable link onto others was to compound the weakness of the web, not strengthen it. ... [Another] problem was the imprecision of philology as a guide to historical events. Though fascinating for the derivation of words, it has less bearing on their meaning for users.⁸

With the case stacked against Allegro, Jan Irvin set out to find a Sumerian philologist who agreed with him; not finding one, he claimed that Carl Ruck, Classics professor at Boston

⁶ Godfrey Driver was not only Allegro's doctoral advisor, but also held views more radical than Allegro's regarding the Qumran materials. Still, his career never fell to ruins like that of his former student's did. See Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* (NY: Summit Books, (1991), pg. 63.

⁷ See also Peter Levi's argument in King (1970), pg. 19.

⁸ Brown (2005), pg. 210.

University, was that philologist.⁹ While Ruck has done some excellent work in these areas (even coining the neologism “entheogen”), he is a Classical—not Sumerian—philologist. Irvin asserts that Ruck’s fifteen page “philological argument,” *Fungus Redivivus*, vindicates Allegro.¹⁰ An emblematic Irvin exaggeration, as Ruck’s is not a philological paper, and nowhere does the author claim it such! Indeed, some of *Fungus* is devoted to some thought-provoking linguistic dissections in Latin and other European languages (as expected from a Classicist), but nothing strong enough to substantiate Allegro’s original *Sumerian* thesis.¹¹ Ruck’s best argument, however, comes in defending Allegro’s inadequate Sumerian index, which he calls “standard linguistic procedure ... to recreate the necessary missing bridges.”¹² While this is certainly a good start for showing that Allegro’s peers unfairly excommunicated him for his theory, it still does not prove that Allegro’s asterisked words ever existed. Scholars today still debate the relationship between the Sumerian language and other languages.¹³ But even if we grant that Allegro’s philology is sound and agreed upon by all manner of antiquarian, there is still a famine of supporting historical evidence, which we shall address now.

ASTROTHEOLOGY AND CHARLATANISM

The bulk of Irvin’s claims can be found in his two books *Astrotheology and Shamanism* and *The Holy Mushroom*.¹⁴ In the former, Irvin dodges the philological matter altogether, openly

⁹ www.thevinnyeastwoodshow.com/uploads/1/3/1/2/1312301/tom_makes_up_a_false_statement_and_then_create_a_false_debunking_around_it.pdf

¹⁰ See Carl A.P. Ruck, “Fungus Redivivus,” in Allegro (Gnostic Media edition, 2009).

¹¹ Ibid., pg. 381.

¹² Ibid., pg. 364.

¹³ For arguments in favor of the Sumerian language as *sui generis*, see Dietz-Otto Edzard, *Sumerian Grammar* (Boston: Brill, 2003), pg. 2-3; for arguments against, see Samuel Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pg. 21.

¹⁴ These books will be discussed in turn. He also has several articles on his website, Gnosticmedia.com.

admitting that his is “not a study of ancient languages.”¹⁵ Irvin instead offers secret symbols originating in cultures and times far removed from his own, buttressing his interpretations by citing writers whose views most scholars do not support.¹⁶

Irvin’s attempts at real history are simply flawed. For example, his need for the *amanita muscaria* to be the true Christ experience comes with the particularly bold and unsupported statement in *Astrotheology* that demonstrates his unfamiliarity with historical ecstatic experience: an unflinching claim that “Anyone saying that they [*sic*] can achieve these altered states without the use of sacred plants should be thoroughly investigated.”¹⁷ As it turns out, one such group *was* thoroughly investigated in Italy throughout the 17th century, the *Benandanti*. As conclusively shown, the *Benandanti* achieved altered states of ecstatic consciousness *without the use of drugs*, negating Irvin’s claim centuries before he wrote it.¹⁸ And they weren’t alone; Carlo Ginzburg, the Italian scholar that brought the *Benandanti* to public light, is an authority on fertility cults found throughout Eurasian history. He followed up his study of the *Benandanti*

¹⁵ Jan Irvin and Andrew Rutajit, *Astrotheology and Shamanism: Christianity’s Pagan Roots – A Revolutionary Reinterpretation of the Evidence* (Gnostic Media, 2009), pg. 58.

¹⁶ I.e., Acharya S., Gerald Massey, Jordon Maxwell, John Rush, to name a few. For example, Dr. Edwin Bryant (Professor of Hinduism at Rutgers University), calls Acharya S.’s work “complete non-sense,” offering a reappraisal of her ideas here: <http://www.risenjesus.com/a-refutation-of-acharya-ss-book-the-christ-conspiracy>. Massey is long-known to have fabricated much of the evidence he presented in *The Natural Genesis*. Holding two PhDs (Manchester, Harvard), W. Ward Gasque, investigated many of Massey’s claims. His unflattering review of Massey’s (and others’) work, “The Leading Religion Writer in Canada – Does He Know What He’s Talking About?” can be accessed at: <http://hnn.us/article/6641>. Irvin’s most credible source, Baigent and Leigh (1991), state clearly their opposition to Allegro’s ideas, which Irvin opportunistically disregards. See op. cit. pg. 61.

¹⁷ Irvin (2009), pg. 51.

¹⁸ John and Anne Tedeschi (trans.) Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). While the author of this paper agrees that psychoactive or otherwise hallucinatory ointments and elixirs to achieve ecstatic states is not entirely absent from Western Civilization, the *Benandanti* simply did not require such methods. See also Szilvia Rédey and Michael Webb (trans.) Éva Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead: A Perspective on Witches and Seers in the Early Modern Age* (Central European University Press, 1999) for an examination of non-drug using Hungarian ecstasies.

with a survey of decidedly non-drug induced ecstatic fertility cults extending throughout the ages. Irvin seems wholly unacquainted with Ginzburg's groundbreaking work.¹⁹

Another subject conveniently overlooked in *Astrotheology* is the absence of shrooms in the writings of first-century's authors.²⁰ For example, proto-Christian heresiologists fought countless theological battles throughout the centuries against Christologies they found unorthodox. The name of the heresiologist game wasn't *cover up*, but rather *expose, ridicule, and dismantle*: Irenaeus wrote five volumes titled *Against the Heresies*, and not once condemns a holy mushroom.²¹ Tertullian wrote seven discourses denouncing different deviating doctrines—all are shroomless. Justin Martyr, Ignatius of Antioch, Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius, Augustus, Jerome, and countless others wrote page after page, volume after volume, expounding their aversion to first-centuries heresies. If Irvin will claim that these proto-orthodox heresiologists labored their quills over every kind of blasphemy *except* the holy mushroom, then he simply doesn't understand how pugnaciously heresiologists wrote about beliefs they opposed. There is an embarrassment of riches regarding the writings against heretics, but far be it for the Church Fathers to expose and demystify the most profane notion of all?

¹⁹ Raymond Rosenthal (trans.), Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witch's Sabbath* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1991). Ginzburg, who also deals with medieval ecstatic shamanism and linguistic implications that may point towards the use of ergot or mushrooms, concludes the possibility is "very slight." See pgs. 303-7.

²⁰ Irvin *does* mention that medieval heresiologists wrote about the mushroom practice – *further destroying his own case for a cover-up*. And yet, he is *still* wrong: Irvin claims that Gregory IX "published a decree ... for life imprisonment ... for any heretic who had confessed to consuming a forbidden plant." (Irvin, 2009), pg. 182. This is, quite simply, bogus history. Interested readers can examine Gregory's decree here: <https://sites.google.com/site/canilup/home/gregory-ix>. Therein, Gregory writes nothing at all about consuming "forbidden plants."

²¹ What's more, Irenaeus *does* condemn the use of "poisons" and "potions" used by a heretic name Marcus to dupe women into bedding with him. However, Marcus' heresy, according to Irenaeus, had nothing much to do with these potions, which most certainly contained some kind of stupefying drug. While it is not unlikely that some heretics employed drugs for nefarious or magical reasons, this is leagues away from said drugs acting as a cover story for the Nazarene. For Irenaeus on Marcus see Book 1, 13.5. Other instances Irenaeus mentions poisonous potions: Book 1, 23. 4 (here, as an addition to other magical arts of Simon Magus); Book 1, 25. 3 (again simply as additions to other magical paraphernalia used by the heretical Carpocrates). These poisonous potions, however, played no role in Irenaeus' condemnations of heresy – he never once claims that such intoxicants were ingested as a Eucharist. Book III, 17.4 mentions "poisons," but only as a metaphor for a corruption of scripture. Accessed via: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus-book1.html>.

The battle for proper Christian belief raged for *centuries* from all manner of Christological dogmas shouting from every corner of the Empire. Where are the writings defending the holy mushroom Christology? Where are the opposing writers rejecting it? *That* would be evidence. However, this is not the same as denying that certain sects added opium, henbane, mandrake, etc. to make wine more powerful at an *agape*²²; indeed, this might be what Augustine meant when he wrote of Manichaean feasts becoming gluttonous, wine-fueled ceremonies—he even mentions Manichaeans munching mushrooms.²³ However, the context makes it hard to determine if Augustine regarded these shrooms as entheogenic or ordinary. After all, the fungi are cited alongside other “every day” foods “to gratify [one’s] appetite” like truffles, cake, and mead—that is a long way to proving that the sect members put mushrooms in their *vino* because they believed the intoxicating additive symbolized the Son of Man.²⁴

Saying it was “covered up” gets Irvin nowhere. Richard Friedman has shown conclusively that the idea of a small, elite group of priests (mushroom or otherwise) secretly controlling scripture is a futile argument; it is, in fact, a veritable impossibility.²⁵ Conversely, considering cross-cultural comparisons, we might ask why entheogenic priests and shamans in other nations never suppressed the mushroom secret from their society. In fact, there is a terminal loophole in Irvin’s argument: the fact that he writes openly about the Church’s efforts to silence whistleblowers strains the very omnipotent conspiracy he purports. Where are the Vatican police officers coming to neutralize Irvin for revealing the mystery?

²² Franco Fabbro, “Did Early Christians use Hallucinogenic Mushrooms? Archaeological Evidence,” (March, 1996), accessed via: <http://distelrath.tripod.com/fabbro.htm>. Thank you to Carl Ruck for bringing this article to my attention.

²³ Carl A.P. Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Carolina Academic Press, 2000), pg. 174.

²⁴ Richard Stothert (trans.), St. Augustine, *De moribus Manichaeorum*, Book, Chap. 13, 30. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 4. Philip Schaff (ed.). (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.

²⁵ Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (NY: Harper and Row, 1987.)

And the problems mount: even pagan detractors of Christianity never once addressed the “supreme secret”²⁶ that would have brought the whole institution crumbling, all the while slandering Christians for far greater crimes than eating fungi: cannibalism, infanticide, and insecticide!²⁷ Indeed, some pagan authors like Celsus and Julian the Apostate wrote entire treatises against Christianity that never reference the sacred mushroom.²⁸ This latter fellow presents another curiosity within Irvin’s theories that his (and no other book about ancient Christian mushroom use) addresses:²⁹ Julian was an insider, a Christian intellectual placed at the pinnacle of the privileged pyramid—raised his whole life to one day lead the Christian Rome that his uncle, Constantine, had established. If anyone would have known the secret of the holy mushroom, Julian would have. After taking up the emperorship, however, Julian converted to paganism. He encouraged division in Christianity and, had he lived, might have reconverted the whole empire to paganism.³⁰ He wrote prolifically, and his ruthless *Against the Galileans* attacks the Church—the perfect opportunity to expose the holy mushroom! Alas, like every other book criticizing Christianity in antiquity, *Against the Galileans* is shroomless.³¹ And Julian’s book was hardly destroyed by later Christians; in fact, the opposite is true: early Christians found the book so convincing that they *preserved* it so as to teach new converts how to argue against Christian detractors! If Irvin will then claim that Christians excised *only* those parts of pagan works that

²⁶ John M. Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (Gnostic Media, 40th Anniversary Edition, 2009), pg. xxii.

²⁷ Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, Cap. IX, X.

²⁸ While Celsus’ original attack against Christianity, *The True Word*, did not survive the ruins of history, his major arguments are reprinted in Origen’s *Contra Celsum*. Neither author seems familiar with a holy mushroom—the kind of accusation that Origen, the first major Christian apologist, would have addressed had Celsus already done so.

²⁹ Acharya S. makes brief mention of Julian in *The Christ Conspiracy*, but never deals with holy mushrooms or how or why Julian didn’t reveal the secret after taking power. Interestingly, Acharya shows the grinding of her axe by claiming that Julian was “murdered” because he “returned rights to Pagan worshippers” (pg. 72). An unfounded claim, as Julian was killed from a spear wound a few days after its infliction at the Battle of Samarra.

³⁰ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* (Double Day, 1990), pg. 55.

³¹ See R. Joseph Hoffman (ed., trans) *Julian’s Against the Galileans* (NY: Prometheus Books, 2004). Cyril of Alexandria, who wrote *Contra Julianum*, a response to Julian’s work, also neglects to mention a holy mushroom. Even after Theodosius II condemned him as a heretic in 431 CE, Cyril never thought to reveal the secret.

exposed the secret, than he is arguing from non-evidence.³² Even Allegro's daughter wrote that the "main weakness" of his theory was "the cover-up story."³³ In the face of this stunning lack of textual evidence, Irvin's interpretations of esoteric symbolism mean nothing.

Perhaps Irvin's problem is a predisposition to self-created historical fantasies. For example, he claims that the "Church effectively banned reading for nearly 1,000 years,"³⁴ an outlandish statement that precludes him from checking the historical record.³⁵ There is a wealth of literature spanning from antiquity to medieval times that Irvin apparently doesn't even know exists! Firstly, reading wasn't barred from the peasant class. We today consider reading fundamental; to a struggling farmer in a small village, reading wasn't pragmatic. Secondly, regarding the literate class, let's assume Irvin's imaginary book-censure began with Constantine in the 4th century—a "1,000 year" timeframe overlaps with the rise of the European university!

Finally, for Irvin to be correct, one must set up an impenetrable wall between first centuries CE Christians, pagans, and Jews like he does in *Astrotheology*: "In the eyes of the Catholic Church ... the world is either Christian or pagan."³⁶ But historians know that the ancient world was more fluid than that—Christians intermingled with and, in some cases, married pagans!³⁷ Ignoring the volumes written by heresiologist and pagan author alike (and also disregarding those Christians who *copied and preserved* pagan writings!), and the intermingling that occurred among people from these diverse groups through nuptial and business,

³² Carl Sagan, *The Demon Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* (NY: Ballantine Books, 1996), pg. 171.

³³ Brown (2005), pg. 210.

³⁴ Irvin (2009), pg. 48.

³⁵ There is *zero* evidence of the Church ever banning reading. Irvin's lack of citation of *one* papal bull or law that banned reading during the thousand-year stretch testifies to how willingly Irvin invents evidence and hopes that no one is any the wiser. For sure, some books were destroyed and/or criminalized by both Christian and pagan alike, but book burning (despicable in any form) is very different from an Empire-wide banning of literacy. Furthermore, we also have to account for the non-Christian Normans and Turks that successively invaded Byzantium throughout the Middle Ages and destroyed much of the works preserved in its libraries, some of which housed pagan works catalogued in Photius' *Myriobiblion*.

³⁶ Irvin (2009), pg. 48.

³⁷ Tertullian, *Liber II ad uxorem*, Cap. IV and V Pat. Lat., vol. 1, cols. 1294-7.

Astrotheology and Shamanism shows that Irvin's way of thinking about ancient history is simply too linear.

THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHET SEES:

Perhaps recognizing the inherent flaws in *Astrotheology and Shamanism*, Irvin followed with *The Holy Mushroom*. Therein, he successfully demonstrates that Allegro's mistakes regarding the chemical compounds of the *amanita muscaria* were really the mistakes of other scholars like Andrija Puharich, who Allegro innocently quoted. Irvin writes, "Allegro fell under disrepute among chemists, pharmacologists and psychedelic researchers because he quoted Puharich ... in regards to the chemicals present in the *amanita muscaria*."³⁸ Like in *Astrotheology*, Irvin blames the debacle on Robert Gordon Wasson³⁹ (1898 - 1986), a NY banker with a profound interest in mycology, who later "launched ... the Psychedelic Revolution," as Ruck lauded.⁴⁰ Irvin sums: "Based on the evidence presented, we can logically conclude that Wasson is the source of many present-day scholars' obstructive bias against Allegro and the idea of entheogens in Judeo-Christianity."⁴¹ Through a bit of clever sleight of hand, Irvin transfers Allegro's thesis from philological to chemical: "Their attacks have now been shown to be baseless accusations. Allegro's references with regards to entheogens, ... with mostly minor errors, are valid."⁴²

³⁸ Jan Irvin, *The Holy Mushroom: Evidence for Mushroom in Judeo-Christianity* (Gnostic Media, 2008), pg. 72.

³⁹ Irvin really has it out for Wasson. Elsewhere in *The Holy Mushroom* Irvin demonstrates his contempt for Wasson by fabricating a quote from him: "We then see Wasson [writing] to Ramsbottom, as if to say to Ramsbottom: 'Hey, I didn't intend for you to actually print in your book what I professed and wrote you about!'" (pg. 16). It should be mentioned that Irvin's invented Wasson quote was merely a forged response to a question posed by Ramsbottom—which Irvin also invented! Is Irvin really allowed to make up questions from one author and then make up responses from the other? Especially a response with such a conspiracy-laden tone? His latest claim is that Wasson secretly worked with the CIA to ignite the hippie movement. If this is true, it makes one wonder what *exactly* the point was of the FBI's COINTELPRO.

⁴⁰ Ruck, "Fungus Redivivus," in Allegro (Gnostic Media edition, 2009), pg. 364.

⁴¹ Irvin (2008), pg. 105; he makes a similar claim on pg. 103 as well.

⁴² Ibid., pg. 158.

That's great! But so what? The point is anachronistically moot: none of Allegro's peers dismissed him because of Wasson, a point cunningly left out of *The Holy Mushroom*. Irvin makes no attempt to penetrate the labyrinthine lexicon that is Sumerian philology; he simply passes the buck from Allegro's incomplete Sumerian index to Puharich's flawed chemistry. The rest of *The Holy Mushroom* merely rehashes the debate between Wasson and Allegro, regarding the latter's chemical citation of *amanita muscaria*⁴³—a highly insignificant point that none of Allegro's peers ever mentioned or cared about.⁴⁴

To account for this lapse in historical logic, Irvin appended forty plates to *The Holy Mushroom* that he assures us show the sacred fungus depicted in medieval Christian art. But sundry slides share similar snags, as Irvin's only criterion for interpreting the artwork is that if something looks like a mushroom, it is a mushroom—a weak methodology that we shall see has many problems, the first of which lets a self-fulfilling prophet see whatever he wishes.

For example: Plate 2 features a man and a woman that Irvin casts as Eve and Adam, standing beside very—we would call “abstract”—trees.⁴⁵ We are supposed to believe that these trees are really the holy mushroom, representing the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, as evinced by Eve and Adam. Yet, the couple actually represents the female and male passions of the Fire-Bearing Stones (*De lapidibus igniferis*), lustful rocks that ignite when conjoined⁴⁶; thus, even if we concede the erroneous Eden theme to Irvin, all the illumination would show was that the artist thought the “fruit” was from a Tree of *Carnal* Knowledge. Additionally, similar trees

⁴³ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁴ See Baigent and Leigh (1991); King (1970).

⁴⁵ Irvin (2008), pg. 113; Figure 2 in Appendix.

⁴⁶ *Aberdeen Bestiary* folio. 93v, date of production unknown; Figure 2 in Appendix. To be fair to Irvin, some scholars have found the couple to represent Eve and Adam. See Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). But even she admits that such a connection (Eve/Adam or just female/male?) depended on the reader of the bestiary (pgs. 123-4). Moreover, the Eden theme is not born out in folios 93v, 94r, 94v, 95r, 95v, 96r which describe the Fire Bearing Stones in the *Aberdeen Bestiary*. Thus, even with this generous concession, Irvin is still wrong.

appear in the illumination complementing the lore of the tigress in the same manuscript.⁴⁷ Either the abstract trees in the Fire-Bearing Stones illumination are innocuous foliage, or Irvin has to explain what role sacred mushrooms played in the secular traditions of the tigress.

Plate 5 offers an interesting problem: Irvin reproduces the “Story of Creation” illumination from the *Canterbury Psalter* (1147).⁴⁸ Since the Tree of Knowledge (as it appears in the *Psalter*) has mushroom-like attributes (rounded top, red leaves),⁴⁹ the claim is made. However, in another pane in the *Canterbury* “Story of Creation,” Eve and Adam have been expelled from Paradise and are toiling in the fields. The trees that represent the drudgeries of the natural world and cause Adam such intensive labors resemble the supposed Eden “mushroom” tree, meaning that this was probably just how the artist(s) of this illumination drew trees.⁵⁰ In another Eden scene (Plate 8), found in the *Bible of Charles the Bald* (9th century), debatable “mushroom trees” are also found. Only here, the denizens of Paradise aren’t eating the fruit from these trees,⁵¹ but rather from a pedestrian tree that could bear anything from apples to bananas!⁵²

Leaving Eden, Irvin invites us to tour other plates that feature inanimate objects which he mistakes for mushrooms. Take Plate 33: Irvin writes that an angel is holding “three distinct mushrooms.”⁵³ However, a careful investigation shows that the supposed three mushrooms are really the “three nails” of the *Arma Christi*.⁵⁴ He further contends that Jesus can be seen holding

⁴⁷ Ibid., folio 8r; Figure 3 in Appendix. Here, while it may look like the soldier is feeding the Tigress a “shroom” off the “mushroom” tree, he is really tossing a mirror on the ground, so as to trick the mother into thinking she has recovered her baby, which the soldier has stolen.

⁴⁸ Irvin (2008), pg. 116; Figures 3 in Appendix.

⁴⁹ And some decidedly *non-mushroom* attributes that Irvin disregards: it’s as tall as a tree; has a brown, tree-like trunk; and white, bulbous branches growing out of said trunk.

⁵⁰ Op cit., pgs. 116-17; Figure 4 in Appendix.

⁵¹ This classic would-be shroom tree is really an olive tree – compare it with the olive trees of the golden antependium of Emperor Otto II. The scene takes place on the Mount of Olives.

⁵² Ibid., 118, Figure 5 in Appendix.

⁵³ Ibid., pg. 137; Figure 6 Appendix.

⁵⁴ Otherwise known as the “Instruments of the Passion,” the *Arma Christi* is a collection of objects associated with the Passion: the cross, Longinus’ spear, three nails, the pillar Jesus was flogged upon, whips, and in some rare cases, the kiss of Judas.

“a mushroom in his right hand” in this image. But when enlarged, it is clear that there isn’t a mushroom there at all; like Irvin when pressed for hard evidence, Jesus is empty-handed.⁵⁵

In Plate 27 Irvin assures us that the donkey that carried Jesus into Jerusalem is looking, “with gritted teeth,” at a mushroom.⁵⁶ The “mushroom” is really just the neck-hole of a stole, as many renditions of this scene painted throughout the centuries show children laying various garments on the ground to welcome Jesus into the city.⁵⁷ Perhaps the “secret” symbolism behind this painting is that only a jackass can mistake a neck-hole for a mushroom?

Nearly every plate Irvin submits suffers similar shortcomings as those discussed above. Most fall into one of five categories: 1. they are either from non-devotional works⁵⁸; 2. open to alternative, naturalistic interpretations that require fewer leaps in faith⁵⁹; 3. are objects that were never intended to represent mushrooms at all⁶⁰; 4. or are so desperately lacking in their “*mushroomness*” it’s a wonder Irvin submitted them as evidence.⁶¹ 5. Finally, there are Irvin’s truly remarkable claims like rocks representing “metaphors for the mushroom.”⁶² How one goes about proving or disproving that a rock covertly depicts a mushroom is too highly sophisticated an argument, and far above the intellectual capabilities of this writer ...

Irvin’s problems with art shrooms “stem” from his methodology. If something looks like a mushroom (i.e., nails, neck-holes, *rocks* (!), etc.) then without any investigation, Irvin

⁵⁵ See “Figure 6 Enlarged” in Appendix. It is rather telling that Irvin didn’t even bother to magnify the image to check his own confirmation biases. Hardly surprising, though.

⁵⁶ Irvin (2008), pg. 131.

⁵⁷ See figure 7 in Appendix. Ironically, two other plates that bear this out can be found in Irvin’s book. See pgs. 130-132. I do not address these images here, as the points of evidence that Irvin uses to determine the “mushroomness” of the trees and other objects in the pieces are simply too loose: despite the artistic styles of some of the trees in these other images, we know that the trees are nothing more than highly abstract palm trees.

⁵⁸ Plates 2 and 4. These miscataloged secular pieces appear the least.

⁵⁹ I.e., they are trees instead of mushrooms, which also accounts for the lack of written evidence. See plates 1, 3, 10, 11 (see Letcher 2007 regarding these latter two), 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 38.

⁶⁰ Of which the *Arma Christi* nails doth similarly account. See also Plate 33. While it *looks like* St. Walburga carries a small, budding amanita, it is really a vial—as countless art pieces and stories of the saint reference. Saying that the elixir was a “mushroom” elixir gets one nowhere without supporting evidence. See also Plate 36.

⁶¹ Plates 9, 12, 16, 29, 30, 31, 34, 35, 41, 42, 43.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pg. 141.

emphatically dubs it thusly.⁶³ Irvin could offer up hundreds of images⁶⁴ and it still wouldn't matter, as his *approach*—decontextualizing history to fit preconceived notions—is spurious. After all, if he isn't going to take his research seriously, how seriously should we take his conclusions? Can it be mere coincidence that *all* of Irvin's elementary mistakes and historical blunders always curve toward his favor?⁶⁵ Furthermore, suppose an artist here or there *did* insert a mushroom into a painting.⁶⁶ Does that imply that s/he believed Jesus to really be a holy mushroom as clergymen clandestinely chronicled in the canons? Perhaps the biggest shortcoming is Irvin's lack of study in the realm of medieval art schools, some of which encouraged eccentric etchings of the natural world.⁶⁷ For Irvin to be correct, we must blindly accept that there weren't artistic people living in the past—a truly preposterous idea.

Ironically, the piece of evidence Irvin offers as the best, is actually the most damning: *The Epistle to the Renegade Bishops*. Oddly, Irvin calls this 16th century document an “ancient source” on radio shows like Joe Rogan and Alex Jones.⁶⁸ *The 16th century is ancient?! Scholars refer to that time as the Early Modern Period. Ostensibly, a lack of ancient primary sources has led Irvin to publically misdate the document to fit his agenda of proving a proto-Christian*

⁶³ Interested readers should view Michael Shermer's “The Pattern Behind Self Deception” (www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_6-iVz1R0o), an informative speech that helps explain why Irvin's mind tricks him into thinking mushrooms appear where none are present.

⁶⁴ Indeed, some of his peers have: see Rush *The Mushroom in Christian Art: The Identity of Jesus in the Development of Christianity* (North Atlantic Books, 2011), which boats 252 images.

⁶⁵ See Michael Shermer, *The Borderlands of Science*, (Oxford University Press, 2002), pg. 18.

⁶⁶ Plate 37 (pg. 141) is a reproduction of Juan Bautista Maino's “Adoration of the Magi.” Here, I agree with Irvin that there *are* mushrooms in this picture. But notice how uninteresting they appear: they aren't bigger than regular mushrooms (these are the *right* size), aren't “psychedelic” looking, and appear as nothing more than natural decoration in the scene. Maino's painting also comes almost a century after the time mushrooms (real mushrooms) start appearing in art, both secular and religious (leading to a similar problem on Plate 40, pg. 143). Moreover, if Maino did intend to insert a mushroom as Jesus here, what is Irvin's evidence of this? Also, where are the mushroom sin Maino's other pieces?

⁶⁷ See John Henry Middleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts in Classical and Mediæval Times* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1892), pg. 101. See also Hassig (1995) pg. 10-15.

⁶⁸ Irvin seemingly calls the *Epistle* “ancient” to springboard off and give credence to his claim that artistic iconography later “spread ... across Europe.” I suppose Irvin thinks that anachronistically placing an Early Modern source like the *Epistle* as the kick-starter of Christian “mushroom” iconography is a valid argument; really it's just poor history that shows a misunderstanding of evidence or, dare I say, a tampering of evidence.

mushroom cult existed in antiquity. Such deception simply does not qualify as history. Anachronisms aside, the *Epistle*—interesting as it is—only compounds Irvin’s problems. If the word of the holy mushroom was truly “pronounced throughout the entire ecumene,”⁶⁹ leading Irvin to hypothesize that “the holy mushroom had a widespread and integrated role” in Christianity, then where is all the other textual evidence?⁷⁰ All other references to the holy mushroom were destroyed *except the one* that proclaimed the sacred fungus spread throughout the ecumene? This is a real “Baghdad battery” problem.⁷⁰ Moreover, let’s momentarily concede to Irvin that the *Epistle* is a legitimate documentation of the holy mushroom, recounting an incident that occurred in the 13th century. Where is all the textual evidence between the 13th and 16th centuries? Even granting the historically implausible notion that all subsequent textual evidence *was* destroyed, it would hardly prove that the first Christians understood Jesus to be a mushroom and that this secret was carefully guarded by jealous, proto-orthodox tyrants.

Another interesting but ultimately ineffectual offering of evidence is a passage from the Mishkat regarding the Muslim prophet Mohammed that Irvin borrows from John Rush, who wrote that, “Mushrooms are a kind of manna which God sent to Moses so that we can see.”⁷¹ Putting aside that most scholars translate the word in question to mean “eye-drops,” instead of

⁶⁹ Quoted in Irvin (2008), pg. 149. Letcher’s interpretation leaves fewer gaps and questions: “Given the internal evidence of the text it seems utterly improbable that this refers to a magic mushroom cult: this is a foul polemic against apostasy in which Christians who abandon Orthodoxy for Catholicism are treated to an excoriating damnation.” See: Robert Dickins, “Literary Review: ‘The Holey Mushroom’ By Jan Irvin” (28, May, 10). Accessed via: <http://psypressuk.com/2010/05/28/literary-review-the-holy-mushroom-by-jan-r-irvin-with-jack-herer/>

⁷⁰ Ibid., pg. 150.

⁷⁰ The Baghdad battery is a mysterious device discovered in 1936 in the village of Khuyut Rabbou’a, outside Baghdad, Iraq, that can generate an electrical charge. Some have used the occasion to conclude that ancient Egyptians had electricity. It was correctly pointed out by skeptics that if the device were supposed to be a battery, then where are all the things that go with batteries: i.e., wires, electronics, remote controls, etc.? In other words, just because something has a use that we recognize today does not mean that our ancestors recognized it. The same objection works against *The Epistle*. Clearly something as important as a holy mushroom spreading throughout the entire ecumene would have been recorded elsewhere. There is also the problem of how *late* it appears in the record.

⁷¹ Quoted in Irvin (2008), pg. 151.

“mushrooms”⁷² it really doesn’t help Irvin’s case. Let’s say Rush’s translation is correct. So what? Muhammad maintaining manna meant mushrooms in the 6th century does little to prove that proto-Christians believed similarly in the 1st century.

For all his pompous talk about evidence, Irvin has yet to connect the *amanita* dots ...

INK INCLUSION

It would serve Irvin well to research other Christian iconoclasts in history like John Mill (1645 – 1707). After studying roughly 100 Bibles,⁷³ Mill released his translation of the New Testament with all 30,000 inconsistencies that he found among the texts—a claim that, at the time, proved just as scandalous to the Roman Catholic Church as anything Allegro said regarding sacred mushrooms. Mill’s detractors were outraged, and their criticisms echo in the disapprovals of Allegro roughly 250 years later: “[n]umerous representatives of traditional piety were immediately outraged, and promptly denounced Mill’s publication as a demonic attempt to render the text of the [New Testament] uncertain.” However, when “classically-trained scholars entered the fray” like Richard Bentley, J. J. Griesbach, Karl Lachmann, and Johann Albrecht Bengel to confirm or refute Mill’s assertions, they *couldn’t deny* that he was correct.⁷⁴

Most confounding is Irvin’s reaction to questions regarding his problematic history. Inquirers receive little more than a never-ending booklist of questionable titles that many scholars do not take seriously.⁷⁵ One such title is John Rush’s *The Mushroom in Christian Art*, wherein the author asks us to “look beyond any naturalistic interpretation” when considering if

⁷² A linguistic interpretation that the non-Arabic reading Rush finds difficult to accept.

⁷³ Only about one hundred were available at the time; today we have several thousand.

⁷⁴ Bart Ehrman “Neglect of the First Born in New Testament Studies,” Presidential address given at the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion in Macon, Georgia, on March 14, 1997.

⁷⁵ See fn. 16 of this study.

something mushroom-like is really a mushroom.⁷⁶ Rush writes of these Christian art renderings in terms like “a tree is not a tree, a rock is not a rock, a mushroom is not a mushroom ... the value of the [mushroom] motif is its visible invisibility”—a most elementary, non-falsifiable, and intellectually flabbergasting argument that demonstrates *nothing*.⁷⁷ Rush has apparently filled Russell’s Teapot with mushroom tea.

Not one volume on Irvin’s pretentious booklist addresses the big problems laid out in this study: 1. Lack of textual evidence describing sectarian mushroom worship (*but plenty of mushrooms in the art?!*); 2. How pagan authorities could accuse Christians of infanticide, incest, and cannibalism—far more appalling crimes than adulating a fungus—but *not* accuse them of eating a mushroom; 3. How the diverse writing styles of the Gospels indicate one hand carefully controlling all the texts, secretly inserting mushroom puns, knowing that those “initiated” would understand.⁷⁸

Recently, Irvin was denied entry into the Herbaria at Harvard University. His failed admissions request demonstrates farming for preconceived answers; Irvin writes: “I’m especially interested in missives that would show [Gordon] Wasson to have intentionally created the psychedelic movement via his ties to [Henry] Luce through the CFR (Council on Foreign Relations) and Century and the head of the CIA—Dulles.”⁷⁹ The null hypothesis is neglected for a predetermined claim—“that would show Wasson to have intentionally created”: Wasson is *already* guilty. Little wonder Harvard rejected the request.

⁷⁶ John Rush (2011), pg. 76.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 3-4. Recall that earlier, Irvin claimed that a rock secretly referred to a mushroom. Essentially, Rush needs you to distrust your own eyes and better judgment in order for his theory to work.

⁷⁸ Carl A.P. Ruck (trans.) Vincent Wattiaux, “The John Allegro Affair: Some Etymological Observations,” pgs. 5-6. Friedman (1989). Carl Ruck doesn’t buy this either (pers. comm.).

⁷⁹ Jan Irvin, “R. Gordon Wasson: The Man, The Legend, The Myth,” in John Rush (ed.) *Entheogens and the Development of Culture: The Anthropology and Neurobiology of Ecstatic Experience* (North Atlantic Books, 2013), pg. 574.

Clearly Irvin misses the biggest point: an extraordinary idea sought with clumsy criteria, disrespect for fine institutions, and prefabricated conclusions tragically disservices those very scholars—Ruck, (Mark) Hoffman, Wasson, Ott, Metzner, Harner, Grob (among others)—who have produced valid works in the area of entheogenic history. When Irvin anchors his ideas to these scholars, he gives any prejudiced reviewer an excuse to dismiss such reputable authors *a priori*. Lacking real evidence, Irvin shows that he is not a historian, but an ideologue; his books aren't mushroom history, but rather mushroom *theology*; one must take his statements on *faith*. Mushrooms are his religion,⁸⁰ and like all dogmatists, Irvin takes a scissor to any proof that runs contrary to his creed, cutting squares into evidence to fit his circular argumentation. Honest historians are then left to refit the discarded pieces that Irvin's faith bars him from considering.

Reestablishing the study of psychedelic or otherwise entheogenic research into the university is too delicate to be handled by such callous, conspiratorial claims couched within the writings of Jan Irvin. Lamenting his Harvard Herbaria rejection in a tit-for-tat way,⁸¹ it's a shame Irvin cannot see that *he* is the reason academia is reluctant to take this area of research seriously.

It's a sad story.

Perhaps even the saddest story ever told.

⁸⁰ No problems there. The religious pluralist in me hopes Irvin has a great time with his beliefs. Just don't call it history.

⁸¹ Ibid. Here, Irvin publishes Harvard's rejection letter to show that since he isn't allowed into the Herbaria there is a cover up—a "got ya last" taunt worthy of a playground.

APPENDIX



FIGURE 1: OF FIRE BEARING STONES



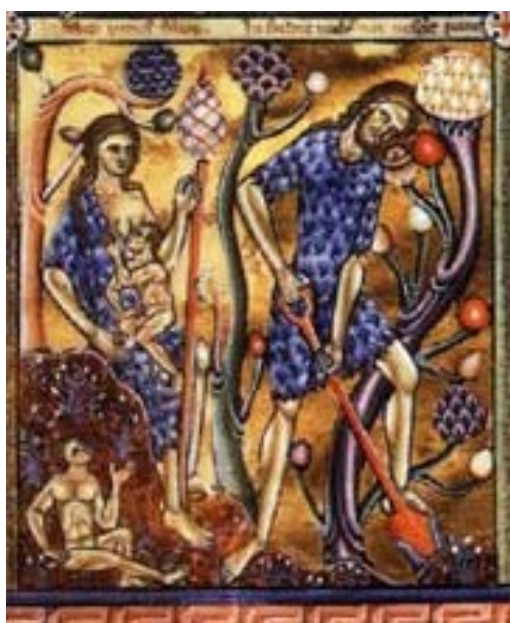
FIGURE 2: LORE OF THE TIGRESS

FIGURE 3: EVE AND ADAM IN EDEN

FIGURE 4: EVE AND ADAM OUTSIDE EDEN



¹



Two depictions from the *Canterbury Psalter* (1147 CE) showing “mushroom” trees. Why didn’t the artist distinguish Eden “mushroom” trees from outside Eden “regular” trees? They look the

¹ Images accessed via <http://entheomedia.org/21Psalter.htm>.

same, meaning it is more likely this was just how the illuminator of the *Psalter* drew trees.



FIGURE 5. The middle bottom panel shows a close up of the “mushroom” trees.

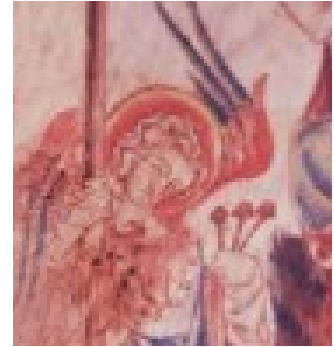
However, beside it, we see that Eve and Adam have ignored it and are eating fruit from a tree that isn’t very *mushroomish* at all! Here, the “mushroom” trees obviously represent some other kind of tree, not a mushroom; otherwise, why didn’t the artist draw Eve and Adam eating its fruit instead?

FIGURE 6: the *Arma Christi*.³ Is the angel holding three shrooms as Irvin claims, or are they three nails? Look at these other depictions (below) of the *Arma Christi* and decide for yourself:



² Image accessed via: <http://www.fineart-china.com/htmlimg/image-30366.html>.

³ Image accessed via: <http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/medieval/zoomtest.php?id=742>



Below, we see a picture of the *Pieta* from a Latin treatise titled “The Book of Life and Death,” which features an *Arma Christi* border.”⁵

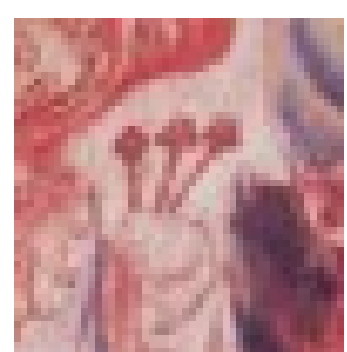
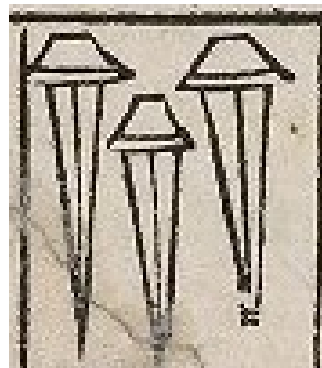


FIGURE 6 ENLARGED:
Jesus is *not* holding
a mushroom, despite
Irvin’s claims.



⁴ Image accessed via: <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/m/master/es/0mansorr.html>

⁵ MS. Rawl. D 403, fol. 1v, (Bod. Inc. Cat., XYL-30) Bodleian Library. Surrounding the *Pieta* are twenty-six Instruments of the Passion. In the bottom row, third panel from our left, we see what *could be* misconstrued as three mushrooms; alas, when it is blown up, it is clear that three nails, not three mushrooms, grace the panel.



FIGURE 7: Jesus Enters Jerusalem.⁶



⁶ *Epistolary of Giovanni da Gaibana*, Biblioteca Capitolare (Padova, Italy), fol. 40v. Irvin claims that the donkey is staring at a mushroom down by the ground. Once again, Irvin has inserted a mushroom into a scene that was never meant to show one. Accessed via: <http://microfilms-and-facsimiles.medieval.library.nd.edu/catalog/facsimile-11>.

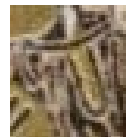
⁷ *The Copenhagen Psalter*, Thott, 143, 2 (c. 1175-1200) on hold at The Royal Library, National Library of Denmark. Accessed via: http://www.odisea2008.com/2013_02_01_archive.html (folio mark not evident from source).



8



9



⁸ "Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem," The antependium Pala d'Oro from Constantinople (ca. 1100). Here we see a similar effect of a "mushroom-like" neck hole. A similar effect is seen in a Southern Netherlands rendition of Christ's entry. See "Christ's Entry into Jerusalem," (c. 1480-90), Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, below.

⁹ Image accessed via: <http://www.tribunesandtriumphs.org/roman-clothing/toga.htm>