

# Review of: "Sacred Plants and Their Miraculous or Healing Properties"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

## COMMENTS

### Sacred Plants and Their Miraculous or Healing Properties.

By

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The article is a rare, and very scholarly study on psychoactive plants and their extracts used in native medicine and shamanic practices throughout the world. It is timely, and of interest to anthropologists, archaeologists, botanists, educators, students, and the interested public in general. The introduction is good, easy to understand, and puts the reader into the flow of the article, and I recommend its publication in *Qeios*. I have only a few comments below, and I suggest editing of the English; a few sentences were a little difficult to understand. I suggest the author use part or all of what is written below:

Psychoactive or entheogenic plants are considered pernicious in the EU and USA, as well as some other countries, and are prohibited (except within the USA's Native American Church). The whole subject of entheogenic plants, including research, has been taboo for many decades following the 'Flower Power' movement of the 1960s, and especially after the publication of Gordon Wasson's 1957 article in Life Magazine on his discovery of the present use of the *Psilocybe* mushroom among the Mazatec peoples of the Sierra de Huautla in Oaxaca, Mexico. This resulted in crowds of hippies, mainly from the USA, descending upon the small mountain town of Huautla de Jiménez, causing social mayhem. However, this anti-entheogen taboo is not so in many Latin American countries, where it is considered part of indigenous culture, and churches such as the Santo Daime and Uniao do Vegetal (UDV) in Brazil have founded churches such as the Santo Daime and Uniao do Vegetal (UDV), where an extract of the Ayahuasca vine is used as a communion. There are recent political schisms within the UDV (see <https://chacruna.net/udv-clashes-religion-politics/>). Entheogenic plants have played an important role in healing, religion, ritual life, and recreation, dating back thousands of years, and have been consumed by many cultures, cults, and groups during religious rituals, initiations, and ceremonies. It might be worth mentioning that in Peru, there are registered camps for therapy retreats under the supervision of shamans, with the use of entheogenic plants, mainly Ayahuasca (*Banisteriopsis caapi*).

See <https://www.tambopatajungletoursperu.com/ayahuasca-ceremony>.

I also suggest a paragraph on the use of the very toxic *Brugmansia* spp (floripondio, borrachera or burundanga) that is a common ornamental plant in Latin America and elsewhere. See: Bussmann, R.W. (2016). Magic Plants. In: Albuquerque, U., Nóbrega Alves, R. (eds) Introduction to Ethnobiology. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28155-1\\_24](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28155-1_24)

P. 4. 5th paragraph: I suggest the author distinguish between drug and entheogen. A drug is any substance (other than food) that is used to prevent, diagnose, treat, or relieve symptoms of a disease or abnormal condition. Drugs can also affect how the brain and the rest of the body work and cause changes in mood, awareness, thoughts, feelings, or behavior. A drug has an anesthetizing, pain-killing effect, whereas an entheogen (divinity within) is quite the opposite. Entheogens are psychoactive substances that induce alterations in perception, mood, consciousness, cognition, or behavior for the purposes of engendering spiritual development or otherwise in sacred contexts. In Aldous Huxley's words, 'opens the doors to perception'.

P. 21, Fig. 16. Check illustration. *Atropa belladonna* has fused petals forming a tubular flower.

See <https://www.naturalista.mx/taxa/55619-Atropa-belladonna>.

P. 24. It might be worth mentioning that rye ergot, when ingested with rye cereal grains infected by the fungus *Claviceps purpurea*, causes Holy Fire disease, also known as St. Anthony's Fire or ergotism, and if left untreated, can cause gangrene (tissue death) and seizures. A good account of St. Anthony's Fire can be found in 'Famine on the Wind' (1967) by G.L. Carefoot and E.R. Sprott, Rand McNally & Co.

P. 28. The author discusses the use of peyote or hícuri by the Huichol, Cora, and Yaqui peoples of western and northwestern Mexico and mentions their pilgrimage to the deserts of San Luis Potosí to collect the cactus, I suggest she adds that boys as young as 8 or 10 years are also initiated into the peyote ceremony during these pilgrimages (pers. com. Sr. Juan de la Cruz, mara'akame (Huichol shaman)). I also recommend the author read and cite 'The Doors of Perception' by Aldous Huxley (Harper Perennial Modern Classics), who describes his experiences after taking mescaline, the active alkaloid of the peyote cactus *Lophophora williamsii*.

Sincerely,

A. Vovides