

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor,

This is a correction and clarification of an error in an article that I wrote (with Michael Winkelman) called "Maria Sabina, Wise Lady of the Mushrooms," for a 1983 issue of the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, volume 15 (3): 225-228.

In the January-March 1990 issue of your journal [vol. 22 (1): 107], I submitted the following correction to that error:

In 1936, Robert J. Weitlaner, a Mexican engineer, heard that the sacred mushrooms were still being used ceremoniously in the Oaxaca region of Mexico. He obtained some specimen and had an intermediary send them to the Harvard Botanical Museum for identification; unfortunately they arrived spoiled. In 1938, his daughter Irmgard, her fiancé Jean Bassett Johnson (1940) and two associates observed a Mazatec ceremony and collected considerable ethnological data on the rituals. In 1939, the eminent Harvard botanist Richard Evans Schultes advanced the thesis that *teonanácatl* (or God's Flesh), which was referred to by the Aztecs, could have been the divine mushrooms. The first recorded outsiders to ingest mushrooms in a native ceremony were R. Gordon Wasson, a mycologist, and Allan Richardson, a photographer, in 1955.

Later in 1955, Wasson brought his wife Valentina and his 13-year-old daughter Masha to the village. On the historic evening of July 5th, the two women became the first Caucasians to eat the mushrooms without the benefit of a native ceremony. . . .

In 1989, ethnomycologist John W. Allen read our article and noticed that we had mistakenly written that in 1936 the daughter of Richard Evans Schultes had observed a sacred mushroom ceremony in Oaxaca, Mexico. At the time we were unaware that Dr. Schultes did not marry and have children until the 1950s, after having spent nearly 14 years of research and study in the Amazonian jungles of Colombia.

However, it was actually Irmgard Weitlaner, the daughter of Robert J. Weitlaner who in 1938 observed a mushroom ceremony in Oaxaca, along with Jean Bassett Johnson and others.

Furthermore, an additional error occurred in our original paper that John W. Allen has brought to my attention in a personal communication dated May 1st, 1989. This concerned the age of R. Gordon Wasson's daughter Masha. Originally we wrote that she was 13 years of age when she and her mother became the next two outsiders to consume the sacred mushrooms. Somehow we missed that correction

so that the error appeared in our correction to the paper brought to our attention by Mr. Allen.

I would now like to submit this addition to our 1990 correction of our original (1983) article of Maria Sabina.

While I corrected the incident regarding Irmgard Weitlaner as the daughter in question and not that of Richard Evans Schultes, I mistakenly noted that Masha was 13 years of age when *she* had consumed the sacred mushrooms on July 5, 1955. Her correct age was 18. This was several days after her father had consumed mushrooms on both June 29th and 30th. Allan Richardson only consumed the mushrooms on the night of June 29, 1955 on the night of Wasson's first experience. On the night of June 30th, Richardson decided not to consume any mushrooms so that he could better photograph the events of the ceremony.

The error regarding the age of Masha Wasson was due to the erroneous writings of R. Gordon Wasson who wrote in his book *The Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Mesoamerica* (1980) that "On Friday, 1 July, Valentina Pavlovna and our thirteen-year-old daughter Masha joined us in our village" (p. 29). At the time Masha and Valentina consumed the sacred mushrooms, Masha was actually 18 years old (see *Life Magazine*, May 13, 1957).

R. Gordon Wasson passed away in 1986, however, John W. Allen had brought this error to Wasson's attention several years before his death. However, Wasson never printed a correction of this error in any later publications.

REFERENCES

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