BOOK REVIEWS

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The publication of *Mayo Ethnobotany* deserves our celebration. Combining field observations, library and herbarium research, authors Yetman and Van Devender pooled their resources to produce a comprehensive portrait of the geology, geography, history, language, culture and botany of the Mayos, an indigenous people of northwestern Mexico. As with many other cultures, Mayo traditional knowledge is rapidly being lost as the people are absorbed into modern Mexico.

The authors, who started out working in the Rio Mayo region independently and explored the land for several years unbeknownst to each other, spent six years studying the Mayo region, though their studies continue. They had previously lived and worked in the Sonoran Desert for decades, and their attention was drawn to Rio Mayo because the “desert dwindles away and merges into more tropical” systems.

The book’s contents are divided into two sections. Part one consists of a description of the people and the land, a brief ethnography of the Mayos, their history, and an overview of plant and animal life. That section concludes with an extended portrayal of “Eight Plants that Make Mayos Mayos,” nominated because they are known to all, and integral to Mayo life.

Part two, the second half the book, is devoted to an annotated list of plants arranged alphabetically by plant family. The list appears to be complete, both in species listed, and usage. The botanical descriptions are detailed and picturesque, and special attention is given to information about habitat. Culinary, medicinal, and veterinary use, industrial, construction, artifact, and every other human use are relayed. Non-native crop species are included when they make a significant contribution to the cash economy of the growers. Hence, we learn that many Mayos plant *ajonjoh* (sesame) as a cash crop. Thousands of acres of *ajonjoh* are planted in the Mayo region and almost all of the seeds are sold in the international market. They are accustomed to “interplant beans, squash and, above all, watermelon,” a practice that reminds this writer of a similar list of species intercropped with sesame in the Wadi Hadramaut region of Yemen.

Care was taken to present supplemental documentary records. A number of informative black and white illustrations are scattered through the volume. Six Appendices offer data that may be useful to future researchers. Mayo region place names and their meanings, Yoreme consultants, Gazetteer of the Mayo region, Mayo plants listed by Spanish names, Mayo plants listed by Mayo name; and Glossary of Mayo and Spanish terms. A dozen pages of notes at the end of the book provide elaboration of specific facts. Another dozen pages devoted to a thorough index follow. A five-page bibliography. Affordable and easy to read and to use, it should be added to every professional’s library.

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This book has a title that perfectly summarizes the contents—*Imperfect Balance*. There has never been the mythical “perfect balance” between humans and their environment, and the multiple contributors to this fascinating summary of pre-Columbian humans and landscapes in the Americas document the facts as now known.

David Lentz provides the introduction (pp 1–12) where he gives the “definitions and conceptual underpinnings” of the book, and the final summary and conclusions (pp 493–506). In between, 20 contributors produced the 15 chapters that discuss climate (David A. Hodell, Mark Brenner and Jason H. Curtis, pp 13–38), floristic regions (Andrew M. Greller, pp 39–88), food webs (Lentz, pp. 89–120), and various people from the Mississippi River valley to the tropical Andes and lower Amazon Emily McClung de Tapia (pp 121–146) discusses prehispanic agricultural systems in the Basin of Mexico Charles S Spenser (147–178) details water management and agriculture in Mexico and Venezuela. Nicholas Dunning and Timothy Beach (pp 179–202) tell of both stability and instability in prehispanic Mayan landscapes Charles M Peters (pp. 203–224) outlines silviculture and indigenous management of Neotropical forests Gayle J. Fritz (225–250) provides insight into the native farming systems in the Mississippi River Valley Suzanne K Fish (251–280) tells of Hohokam impacts on the Sonoran Desert.

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James L. Luteyn and Steven P. Churchill (pp. 281–310) give an overview of vegetation in the tropical Andes. Clark L. Erickson (pp. 311–356) talks about human changes in the Lake Titicaca Basin. Terence N. D'Altroy (pp. 357–390) describes Andean land use at the time of contact. Douglas C. Daly and John D. Mitchell (pp. 391–454) give an overview of lowland vegetation in tropical South America. Finally, Anna C. Roosevelt (pp. 455–492) tells of the dynamic human occupation of the region.

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As with all books with multiple authors, there is some unevenness. Some will consider that a detriment, others (like me) relish the variability in which humans communicate their ideas. However, Lentz has largely “evened out” the contributions.

I was happy to see that Andy Greller included southern Florida as part of the continent, particularly since the region was excluded in a recent book pretending to cover the vegetation of North America (Barbour, M. G. and W. D. Billings (eds) 1999 *North American Terrestrial Vegetation*, Cambridge University Press). Although he lists sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*) in the table on domesticated New World crops, Lentz does not discuss it under “Major New World Domesticates” (pp. 97–108). I would argue that the sweet potato was a “major domesticate.” It is a modern de-emphasized sweet potato that gives a false impression of its historical importance (cf. Austin 1988). Even on the northern fringe of its precolumbian range in Mexico, the *camote* remains an essential part of the *día de los antepasados* celebrated between 30 October and 2 December (Contreras et al. 1995).

This book is a major contribution to the world of anthropology, archaeology, ethnobotany, and economic botany. All who highly regard human-plant interactions and this journal (and anyone who might not!) will delight in this book.

**Literature Cited**


**Ott, Jonathan.** 2001 *Kroenengasse, II.* 4502 Solothurn, Switzerland, distributed by Leo-Centurion, Veracruz, México 91500, email leocruz3@hotmail.com. 160 pp (hardcover) US $100.00, SFR 180.00 ISBN 1-888755-02-4

If you have never heard of Jonathan Ott, by all accounts a bright, energetic man with thick curly hair and a dry wit, I suggest you type his name into any web search engine. I was surprised to find well over 21,000 pages referencing his books, research, and psychonautic bioassays (self-administration of drugs to ascertain their psychoactive effects). These electronic pages are a small reflection of his internationally recognized expertise in the field of hallucinogenic snuffs, the wider array of entheogens (entheogen meaning “god within”)—Ott uses the term as a replacement for “psychedelic or hallucinogen”, which he believes have negative connotations), and pharmacology.

One of his latest book releases is a beautiful, leather-bound, 160-page text entitled *Shamanic Snuffs or Entheogenic Errhines*. This encyclopedic volume covers the use and history of *Virola*, *Anadenanthera*, *Banisteropsis*, and *Nicotiana* snuffs by indigenous peoples of Central and South America. The book is densely packed with information, completely referenced, and reads much like a scientific paper. However, Jonathan Ott’s skill with the English language has allowed him to weave together a history of entheogen use that raises this work above the level of a mere reference text.

One should expect complete pages filled with botanical names, indigenous names, chemical identities, and only a few drawings. For those who are used to reading scientific literature, this book is packed with a wealth of anthropological and pharmacological information. I would not suggest this book as an initial foray into the topic of entheogens, as it is written more to inform than to entertain. The index is extraordinarily complete and the information within the text is well organized. Ott also includes the results of several informative self-experiments and has an opinion on the whole issue of entheogenic use that warrants wider consideration.

In discussing this book with my advisor, Dr. Scott Chilton, I was astonished to find that my own academic lineage and love of natural products chemistry is interconnected with Jonathan Ott’s scientific interests. During his undergraduate education at Evergreen State College, Jonathan approached Scott (who was at the University of Washington) about isolating pyrrolizidine alkaloids from a number of Compositae species. Scott, who was working on mushroom chemistry at the time, suggested that Jonathan extract ibotenic acid, the purported hallucinogenic component, from *Amanita* mushroom species. Dr. Chilton says in regard to Ott’s skills, “I was extremely impressed! He had only...”