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General

17-18 November 2003  
Leiden, the Netherlands

# Psychoactive Substances in Ritual and Religion

According to the theory of the 'entheogen' origin of religions, man would originally have known the psychoactive properties of specific plants, and religions would be based on the visions produced by these plants and substances ('entheogens') derived from them. Wasson et al. (1986) presented this theory on the basis of significant examples in ancient Indian religion (Vedic ritual) and ancient Greek religion (Eleusian mysteries).<sup>\*</sup> The theory has become of some inter-

est to a larger public, but has otherwise received relatively little attention, except in discussions of concrete issues such as R.G. Wasson's identification of the Soma plant of ancient Vedic ritual with a hallucinogenic (entheogen) mushroom – which was accepted by some (cf. Staal 2001) and contested by others (cf. Nyberg 1995).

There are examples from other religious and cultural contexts where the use of psychoactive substances is not original but provides a shortcut in vision quests etc. on which others embark without making use of them (cf. Nyberg 1995 and his entirely different view on the Siberian fly-agaric which plays a major role in Wasson's theory). Some of the substances, such

as tobacco, are currently well known for their recreational use, but elsewhere have been employed in serious shamanistic contexts, such as in rituals to contact forefathers (Wilbert 1972). A large part of the shamanistic 'experience' of contacting forefathers would seem to be either a product of cultural construction (cf. Katz 1983), or due to specific psycho-physiological preparations which recreational users of tobacco lack, or a combination of both.

The contrasts and controversies briefly outlined above suggest that not only the theories, but also the primary data are problematic, and that they are to be considered by specialists in various domains and disciplines, including anthropology, philology, religious science, archaeology,

ethno-botany, ethno-pharmacology, plant systematics, pharmacognosy, and psychophysiology.

The purpose of the 'Psychoactive substances in ritual and religion' symposium is to bring together various disciplines that take on or touch on ethno-botany and ethno-pharmacology. It will deal with specific cases of the ritual or religious use of plants or substances, or even of psycho-physiological preparations (such as fasting and staying awake) that do not require such substances. Contributors may address one or more questions such as:

- What is the identity of the plant or substance used in the religion or ritual?
- Are the plants or substances known to have relevant experimental effects,

e.g. hallucinogenic, stimulant, anti-depressant?

- If no direct botanical or chemical identification is possible, which descriptions of the plants, substances, effects and experiences are available which may be conducive to identification?
- Which contexts, procedures, devices can be identified to contribute to the conceptual and emotional construction of experiences associated with the plant or substance? <

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Note >

\* For full references to the mentioned publications, you may contact the organizers.

## Food & Foodways

Agenda >  
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18-20 March 2004  
Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Heritage Museum is presenting the Food Culture Festival in 2003-2004 with a series of exhibitions and public programmes to explore Hong Kong's food culture from different perspectives. To tie in with the festival, an international conference will be jointly organized with the Department of Anthropology, the Chinese University of Hong Kong to explore the food cultures of the city as well as its neighbouring areas.

Food provides a comprehensive insight to social relations, family and

class structure, gender roles, and cultural symbolisms, and is one of the most important cultural markers of identity in contemporary Asian societies. This conference looks at the politics of food and investigates how, by whom, when, where, and why different kinds of food are produced, prepared and supplied. We seek papers that examine how food is cultivated, gathered, farmed and mass produced, and how cuisine is invented, conceptualized, and marketed in various Asian societies. We invite scholars who are conducting research on the production of food and foodways on local/regional levels, looking into

issues such as transnational exchange, globalization and localization, ecology and natural resources management, transformation of traditions and technical interventions, ideas of fusion food, etc.

Papers should provide an ethnographic description and analysis of the production of one or more significant ingredients and how they interact with the social and political complexities in specific cultural contexts. The conference is intended to be interdisciplinary and we welcome different disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, history, and gender studies. <

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## Dutch and Japanese Encounters since the Pacific War

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General

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The Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) has initiated the three-year research programme 'Dutch and Japanese Encounters in Europe and Asia since the End of the Pacific War' within the framework of the historical research pro-

gramme 'Japan and the Netherlands', which is sponsored by the Japanese government. This programme, that aims to stimulate Japanese-Dutch scientific cooperation in this field, focuses on the general development of post-war relations between Japan and the Netherlands, and the ways their in which shared war history has influenced Japanese-Dutch encounters in Asia and Europe in the post-war period.

The programme studies different aspects of these post-war encounters. It also intends to chart Japanese and Dutch reactions to a number of post-war social processes in Asia and Europe

in a comparative perspective. The results of this research will be made available as a series of English- and Japanese-language publications. NIOD hereby invites proposals for projects within the scope of this programme.

We offer (1) funds for a Japanese-Dutch workshop and publication; (2) writing and publishing subsidies; and (3) 'matching funds' for post-graduate researchers. Proposals must be submitted by 1 September 2003. Requests for one-off subsidies for individual scientific activities from the 'contingency fund' can be made throughout the year. <

Agenda >  
Indonesia

1-2 September 2003  
Jakarta, Indonesia

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The Open Science Meeting is supported by:

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Indonesia and the Netherlands have a rich history in contemporary scientific cooperation. The Open Science Meeting 'Back to the Future' aims to show the impact of this scientific cooperation over the last decades on modern society, specifically in Indonesia.

Examples from recent history illustrate the added value of scientific cooperation for future society. Keynote lecturers and convenors will present case studies of scientific achievements as an introduction to the parallel sessions, where present-day research projects are presented.

The following fields will be concerned; technology (including energy, ICT, aerospace technology, and biotechnology), food and health, marine and coastal sciences, natural and environmental science and resource management, sustainable development and global change, and social sciences and humanities. <

## Sanskrit Manuscripts in Tibet 11<sup>th</sup> Gonda Lecture by E. Steinkellner

Agenda >  
Central Asia

21 November 2003  
Amsterdam, the Netherlands

More info >

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With the spread of Buddhism in Tibet, from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries AD, numerous Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts on palm leaves and, later, on paper were brought to Tibet and subsequently translated. After their translation, these Sanskrit manuscripts were only rarely used for study and as a rule carefully kept in special chapels. In this way, they survived until the twentieth century, when the Cultural

Revolution destroyed an unknown but substantial number of these manuscripts. Interestingly, a great number still survived, mainly due to their protection by the army of the PR China.

These original Sanskrit manuscripts rank among the world's greatest cultural treasures. Their preservation with the best available techniques and providing their accessibility to the scholarly community are of utmost importance and would constitute an invaluable contribution to international cooperation in the area of the humanities. Many of these manuscripts contain texts from the Indian Buddhist tradition that until today have only been known in their Tibetan translations or not

known at all. The enormous value of these texts in the history of pre-modern ideas for the world community of scholars, for those Asian societies whose populations are still predominantly Buddhist, and indeed for all mankind goes without say.

For many years, various individual scholars and academic institutions attempted to make the responsible institutions in Beijing and Lhasa aware of the need of making these treasures available to scholarship. Ernst Steinkellner will present a general survey of the history these manuscripts, their origins and present state, and of their possible future return to the world of knowledge. <