

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

SAN ISIDRO de LABRADOR

In Mexico, throughout the early to mid-1960s, ‘San Isidro de Labrador’ was the most common name used by local ‘mestizos,’ when offering magic mushrooms to the hippie vagabond types who had invaded their country by the thousands in search of the famed magic mushrooms of Mexico.

A ‘mestizo’ was a traditional term that originated in Spain and Europe; however, by the mid-16th century in colonial Spanish America, ‘mestizo’ was used in a derogatory manner to demean a person of combined European and Native American descent. During the period when the Spanish Empire controlled the American colonies and Mesoamerica, the term became used to denote a racial category in the ‘casta’ system (a system based on the accepted knowledge that the character and quality of people varied according largely to their birth, color, race and origin of ethnic types). Those who were referred to as belonging to the ‘casta’ were usually considered to be inferior and the church would treat them differently and they were often cast as people of low birth.



Fig. 21. 1. Psilocybe cubensis in pasture

In Mexico, local Indians who perform mushroom Velada’s for tourists are fake shaman and curanderas and are often referred to as ‘mestizos.’ especially in villages located in and around the Mexican States of Oaxaca, Chiapas and Veracruz. And in Palenque they use the epithet, ‘San Isidro de Labrador’ when referring to Psilocybe cubensis and Psilocybe subcubensis. The epithet refers to the ‘patron saint of agriculture.’ Sometimes it is also referred to as, ‘San Isidro’ (patron

saint of the fields). In Central America, local children and mestizos also collect and sell Psilocybe cubensis to inquiring foreign tourists by referring to the species as, ‘suntiamo.’”

In Oaxaca, the Mazatec Indians refer to the species as di-xi-tjo-le-rra-Ja (divine mushroom of manure or sacred mushroom of cow dung). However, most shamans and healers (including the late María Sabina) do not use this species in sacred healing and curing ceremonies due to its association with the manure of four-legged ruminants. In fact many healers consider the species as ‘unclean.’ However, there are many mestizo charlatans who will perform ceremonies for a price to tourists who are searching for their souls or to have communion with their God.



Fig. 21. 2. Psilocybe cubensis. Fruiting in decomposed manure.

The indigenous peoples of Mexico and Mesoamerica, who are of mixed Spanish and Mazatec descent, usually refer to the sacred mushrooms as ‘nanacates,’ ‘hongos,’ and ‘duendes’ (the spirits). Those are only a few of the common mestizo epithets that are also used by foreign tourists who trek through jungle ruins at Palenque seeking to experience the magic visions of the Divine Mushrooms.



Fig. 21. 3. Bluing in Psilocybe cubensis.

Many of these intrepid travelers of the ‘subconscious mind’ also traveled to Mexico with the intent of experiencing the mushrooms and some came seeking God. Most of them referred to Psilocybe cubensis as cubes, shrooms, gold caps, golden tops, purple rings, golden teachers; epithets also used in Florida and Texas.

However ludible users in both Florida and Texas also have referred to Psilocybe cubensis as ‘blue meanies,’ an epithet usually used to describe the bluing reaction that occurs in various species in the genera, Copelandia. The major microscopic characteristic feature that separates Psilocybe cubensis from that of Psilocybe subcubensis is that the spores for the latter are slightly smaller than those of the former.

Since the early 1960s became an important pivotal point in the historical documentation of humankind’s use of entheogenic plants, it eventually became of subject of interest to the academic community at Harvard and other Northeastern Universities as students and scholars soon became aware that several known drug plants had been used traditionally for more than five thousand years in pagan-like ritual ceremonial activities. And now there were the mushrooms.

Some of these Harvard scholars then began to wonder exactly how these mushrooms might be used as a new adjacent to psychotherapy with a possibility that they might have valid medical applications as therapeutic agents for the use in treating a wide-variety of psychiatric disorders. Those learned scholars and their undergraduate students soon began to share their common interest of the mushrooms with one another by speaking openly about the mushrooms that altered ones perception of normal consciousness.

It was because of the writings of Richard Evans Schultes, R. Gordon and Valentina Wasson, Albert Hofmann, Andrew Weil, Sir Robert Graves, Timothy Francis Leary, Richard Alpert (Baba Ram Dass), Nat Finkelstein and Rolf Singer, that the world soon became aware of the mushrooms of Mexico and of the curandero, María Sabina.

María Sabina was the famed Mazatec curandero who shared with the Wasson's and his many scholarly colleagues, her secrets of the mushrooms. Sharing her knowledge had opened the door to notoriety for her when she provided her services as a *sabio* (wise one) for R. Gordon Wasson and his photographer Alan Richardson. She became the first *sabio* to perform a ritual-like mushroom 'velada' (a Mazatec all-night healing vigil) on June 30th, 1955 to Westerners; and later claimed to have known in advance that the foreigners were coming to seek out her services.

It was a secret ceremony that the Mazatec people had kept hidden from the outside world for more than 400 years. After the knowledge of the mushrooms had become public, thousands of young long-haired adults soon began a long and sometimes dangerous pilgrimage into the jungles of Mexico seeking out the whereabouts of those sacred mushrooms.

Because Harvard University allowed research that included the use of psychedelic drugs (mescaline and DMT) as an adjunct to psychotherapy while studying its possible use in the treatment of schizophrenia and other mental disorders, those controlled studies soon became public knowledge after Timothy Leary shared his experience after consuming seven small specimens of Psilocybe caerulescens in 1960 while on a vacation in a small village in Mexico.

I suppose that if anyone wanted to go out and find their own mushrooms, others might actually inquire as to how these intrepid first time voyagers knew exactly where to go in Mexico to find those magic mushrooms they so diligently sought.

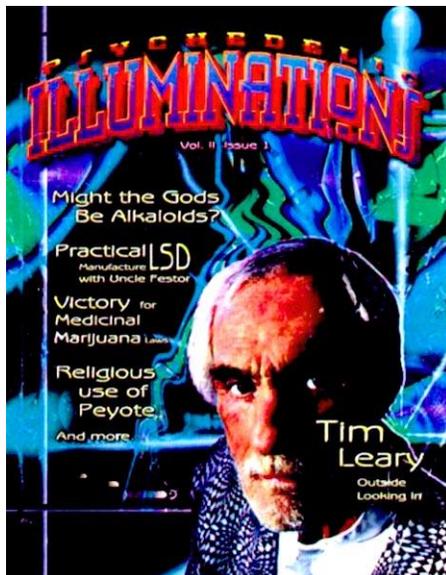


Fig. 22. 4. An unpublished cover photo of Timothy Leary (circa 1994). Photo: Ron Piper.

At the time, the only public source of knowledge regarding the existence of the sacred mushrooms came about thanks to the efforts of Life magazine's owners and editors, Henry and Claire Booth Luce.

Both Luce and his wife were advocates of marijuana and they were not afraid to voice their opinions in their publications. After they allowed the publication of the Wasson article on the use of mushrooms in a sacred healing and curing ceremony performed by a Mazatec curandero in Oaxaca, Mexico, the Luce's began to publish editorials and articles on marijuana, LSD, peyote, mescaline and other drugs. This apparently irritated the likes of anti-narcotic drug crusader Harry J. Anslinger and his cohort, J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI

In 1957, Life magazine published an epic adventure by R. Gordon Wasson and his photographer, Alan Richardson about their 1955 expedition to a small village hamlet, Huautla de Jimenéz in the montane region of the high Sierra Mazateca mountain range in the Mexican State of Oaxaca.

It was because of this article published locally in North America and in most of Europe, a month later after an International Issue of Life was released that made aware to the world, a fantastic true adventure story about the existence of certain mushrooms that were used ritualistically in Mesoamerica; mushrooms that were reportedly used in sacred healing and curing ceremonies.

In such a setting as that performed by the wise one, it allowed ones senses to attain an altered state of consciousness and through the curandero that person could be healed of a sickness; or the mushrooms would allow the curandero to find lost or stolen objects for those who came seeking her help. Even Timothy Leary had also heard about the mushrooms from that Life magazine article as well as from his friends Frank Baron and Gerhardt Braun. Remember that they were there with Timothy Leary during his first voyage into the realm of the world of the divine mushrooms that Leary had earlier experience in Cuernavaca in the summer of 1960..

Psilocybe cubensis and Psilocybe subcubensis

Cap: The cap of these two common species of Psilocybe range in size from (15-) 25-70 (-85) mm in diameter. The shape of the cap ranges from a cone-like conic shape to convex, becoming campanulate to gradually expanding to plain in with aging. The color of the cap varies from a copper tone in the center to a light golden brown in age. It is also hygrophanous in drying to a straw-yellow color with remnants of a veil present and bluing in the edge of the cap when injured.



Fig. 21. 5. Psilocybe cubensis fruiting in tiny powdered chunks of manured.

Gills: Adnate to adnexed to seceding. At first the gills are a light tan chocolate color, changing to a dark gray and becoming a deep violet gray to dark purplish brown in age. Sometimes the gills appear to be mottled with whitish edges.

Stem: The stem ranges in length and size from (40-) 70-120 (-170) X (4-) 8-13 (-16) mm. It is also very equal and hollow and the color of the stem appears to be of a whitish to a creamy white or yellow brown shade when faded, easily staining blue where damaged. Sometimes it may be fibrillose below the annulus.

Spores: The spores of Psilocybe cubensis range in size from (12-) x 7-8.8 μ while the spores of Psilocybe subcubensis range in size from (9.9-) x 6.6-7.1 μ .

Spore Print: The color of the print ranges from a light chocolate hue to a dark purple-brown with age.

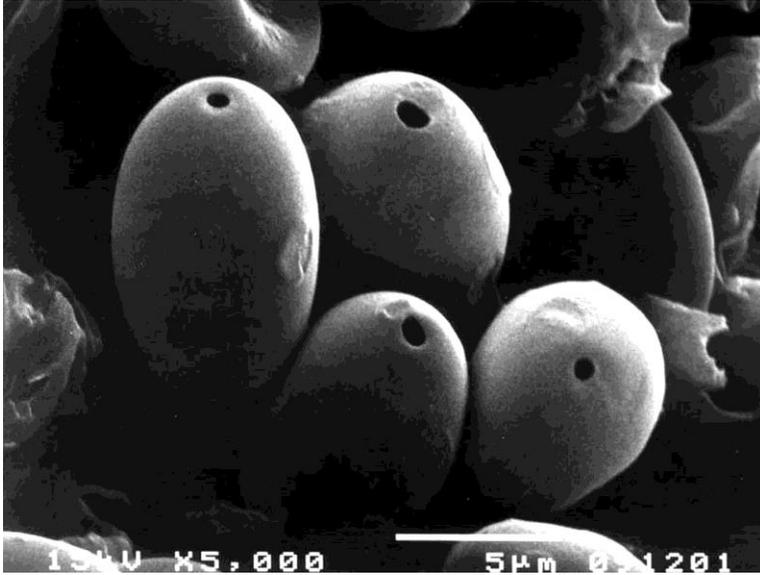


Fig. 21. 6. SEM of Psilocybe cubensis. Photo: Prakitsin Sihanonth and John W. Allen.

Habitat: Psilocybe cubensis is a species that fruits gregarious, rarely solitary or scattered and is quite common on the manure of most four-legged ruminants (buffalo, cow, gaur, elephant, and rhinos) as well in the dung of many other similar large mammals. It is rarely found fruiting on horse manure, although this species fruits well at home on horse manure and compost. Also this species at times may also occur in rich soil in pastures and meadows, along roadsides in manure heaps and sometimes in powdered manure fertilizers. This species has also been found in forest areas next to pasturelands where cattle wander into wooded areas leaving manure heaps along cattle trails leading into the surrounding forest areas.

Distribution: The distribution of Psilocybe cubensis is very common in subtropical regions, yet is unknown in the tropics. In the United States, this species is known to occur in the south and southeastern region from Texas to Florida and north from Florida to Georgia and South Carolina. Common in the subtropics it also occurs in Cuba, Mexico, Guatemala, South America, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, India, Fiji, Philippine Islands and Australia.

Psilocybe cubensis and Psilocybe subcubensis have both, in recent times, been reported from British Honduras. On the other hand, Psilocybe subcubensis is both a pantropical and subtropical species. It has been identified as occurring in Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, El Salvador, Venezuela, Australia, India, Nepal, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and on several Islands in the Philippines.

Season: Fruiting in summer these two species also appear in different seasons around the globe depending on climatic weather conditions in areas where warmer climates occur out of season after both heavy and light rainfalls begin to disappear.

In 1979, I arrived in Arlington, a suburb of Jacksonville, Florida. I had been to over 20 farms in the area and only four farms gave me permission to collect specimens on their properties. One such farm was the Dinsmore Dairy Farm outside of Jacksonville.

In recent years, Dr. Gaston Guzman of the Instituto de Ecologia in Xalapa, Veracruz has been considering to combine both species into a single species with the common Latin name of Psilocybe cubensis. As noted above, both species are macroscopically similar and indistinguishable from one another with only the spore size separating the two species.

In order to be able to collect in Florida, I was fortunate to have a Lebanese Primitive Baptist Church Minister take me and my son to this field for hunting mushrooms. At the time, the minister was very nice to me and my children. He wanted us to join his church. A church that allowed no musical instruments (piano, tambourine, etc.), for their choir and hymns portion of their Sunday Services because those instruments did not exist when Jesus roamed the Middle-East.

The minister was not aware that the mushrooms I was looking for were of a psilocybian nature. He assumed I was picking edible mushrooms for sale at the local weekend market. For two months I went two to three times a week to this farm and no Psilocybe cubensis were to be found on that property. Finally, towards the middle of April, I hit the jackpot. The weather was warmer and the shrooms popped up. So, it seems that even in Florida, there are different seasons and again, that always depends on the rain, no matter how hot, some fields will still produce mushrooms.

By mid-June, thanks to no rain and 94 degree weather, no mushrooms appeared in manure at the Dinsmore Dairy Farm because now it was too hot for them to fruit. I know that in Southeast Asia the weather can be up to 100 to 115 degrees and I still find massive shrooms because of the spring to fall monsoon rains that occur from late May through October.

And around the first week of July of 1979, I met two shroomers from the west coast of Florida and Miami who claimed that they had harvested both Psilocybe cubensis and Copelandia species during and after a June rainfall found in several pastures in those regions of the State.

Around the same period in July, I also met some shroomers from Georgia who informed me that they had, two weeks earlier, collected Psilocybe cubensis near Augusta when I could not find any in Jacksonville. So, as I speak of this species, it will grow in different areas at different times, but once they began to appear in one area, then they are usually found fruiting in many other places as well.

Dosage: One or two large mushrooms that weigh approximately one fresh ounce or 10 to 40 mushrooms weighing in at one fresh ounce would be considered an average dose. When in their dried stage, a single dried 1 gram is sometimes considered as an average dose for the majority of

those individuals who choose this species for an entheogenic experience. The most common dose for this species is three to five grams dried.

Three to five dried grams are considered a clinical dosage and are the equivalent to 15-30 milligrams of psilocybine and/or psilocine. That amount would be the equivalent of a Mazatec Indian dosage used in their healing and curing ceremonies. Although Psilocybe cubensis is not considered a good mushroom amongst Mesoamerican curanderos because of their association with manure, they are more or less used by local mestizos when catering to tourist influence in their perspective villages.

Such use is common as well as in remote regions of Oaxaca, Veracruz, Chiapas and other States in Mexico. Since the mid to late 1960s, Palenque has been known as a place to experience the magic of the mushrooms and when foreigners often arrive; they come seeking said mushrooms; hoping to communicate with their God. In Mesoamerica, no Indians had ever used the mushrooms to find God or to search beyond their consciousness for divine communication. They were only used as I previously noted, only for healing and curing and to find lost or stolen objects.

Comment: Psilocybe cubensis was first identified from Cuba in 1906 and named Stropharia cubensis. In 1958, Drs. Rolf Singer and Alexander H. Smith provided two name for the species from Cuba as, Psilocybe cubensis var. cyanescens and then as Psilocybe cubensis var. caerulescens.

Eventually with the publication of Rolf Singer's, The Agaricales (Mushrooms) in Modern Taxonomy, Dr. Singer finally emended the species as Psilocybe cubensis. I only mention this because sometimes a species might be found throughout the world by several people at the same time and they all give it a different name or place it into different genera's.

Psilocybe cubensis is known world-wide and is the primary mushroom grown clandestinely indoors for ludible purposes. (See chapter on mushroom cultivation).

In villages in and around the ancient ruins of Palenque, some shamans and healers employ Psilocybe cubensis ceremoniously. There it is referred to locally as the 'San Isidro' mushroom (named after the patron saint of agriculture). Because of its association with manure, many local shamanic healers (including the late María Sabina) did not and still do not use that species and most consider it to be inferior.

However, this species was most likely introduced into the America's by the Spanish who brought the first cattle to the New World. It is somewhat doubtful that it was here before the conquest regardless of the fact that Psilocybe cubensis has been found in the manure of most four-legged ruminants. There are more species of the sacred fungi in Mexico and Central America than in most countries around the world and the majority of species in Mexico grow in habitats other than the manure of the cattle and horses in their land.

Because of the widespread popularity in that this species is clandestinely cultivated worldwide in basement cellars and attics; this just happens to be the one species most sought after by tourists who trek through the High Sierra Mazateca into Oaxaca, eventually traveling into the Mexican State of Chiapas in search of these fungi. And once they reach Palenque it is the locals who sell this species to the long-haired foreigners for a few pesos.



Figure 21.7. Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico.