

Plant Hallucinogens and the Religion of the Mochica—an Ancient Peruvian People¹

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On the north coast of Peru, an ancient civilization—the Mochica—is renowned for its art, especially painted and modelled ceramics. During the summer of 1967, I conducted field work on traditional folk healing in this region, where hallucinogenic plants were an integral part of treatment of disease. Publications resulting from this research can be found in Dobkin de Rios 1968a, 1968b, 1971, 1973. In extending my analysis from populations currently using plant hallucinogens to prehistoric ones of the same region and their archaeological remains, I was surprised at the disinterest and superficial utilization made by a variety of scholars concerned with the Mochica, especially in terms of examining the role, if any, that such plant hallucinogens may have played in Mochica religion. Archaeologists and art historians generally have not shown an inclination to deal directly with the effects of psychoactive substances on the belief systems of prehistoric, non-Western societies (see Dobkin de Rios, 1974). This is a pattern one encounters, despite a large scientific literature drawn from the fields of psychiatry, neurology, psychopharmacology, history of religions, mythology, botany and cultural anthropology.

In this paper, I shall reverse priorities by considering what I believe to be pivotal in traditional Mochica life—namely, the use of various plant hallucinogens to achieve contact with supernatural realms and to permit the magical manipulation of supernatural forces by religious hierophants to serve social goals.

While I do not intend to argue that plant hallucinogens are the *fons et origo* of all religious systems, I would, nonetheless, insist on

the admissibility of evidence linking their presence and probability of use in a given prehistoric context. Further, I would argue that prehistorians must be flexible in permitting the testing of propositions derived from traditional societies, where plant hallucinogens are part of culture, since cross-cultural studies have demonstrated the influence of such drug effects on belief systems (see Dobkin de Rios, 1973). As Taylor (1970) points out in a critique of Furst's grandiose reconstruction of West Mexican tomb art, one must be careful not to insist upon explicit religious beliefs or themes (e.g., the God of the Mountain) which may be inappropriate at a level of specificity when little if any historical documentation exists. Nonetheless, I believe that a replicable method can be devised to interpret the general impact of plant hallucinogens on the religion of various New World peoples.

In some areas of the world, such as the Western hemisphere, we are fortunate in having available ethnographic evidence for ongoing plant hallucinogenic use which may, on occasion, have roots in antiquity. Testable propositions derived from a cross-cultural analysis of such data can be used to interpret prehistoric art forms. Strategies for such a method are complex and entail a combination of methods. The extrapolation from contemporary drug-using populations is important, since one can argue for the persistence of core elements in culture, especially in the realm of religion. Moreover, since LSD-like drugs effect the central nervous system of man in patterned ways, there is a finite number of symbols which seem to recur cross-culturally. If contemporary drug use is lacking in an area, or if known drug use no longer exists, we can turn to the art as a means of recording belief systems of extinct cultures. Botanical evidence can be crucial in initiating such a study. The best way to begin such an endeavor is to examine a region of the world where mind-altering plants are

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found. Once this is established, we have an option as to a variety of ways to proceed. We can turn to art forms such as sculpture, metal work, ceramics, writing (when available), and textiles to see if actual drug plants appear with any frequency in the art. Problems can occur here, however, in that artists often share conventions of stylization, and it may become difficult to identify a psychotropic plant merely by examination. This technique of plant identification, however difficult the pitfalls, can also be quite superficial if the analysis merely ends at this point. Cross-cultural themes recurring among drug-using societies of the world (as reported in my recent study for the National Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse, 1973) must be taken into consideration, especially as they are represented in the plastic arts. Another approach to examining the influence of plant hallucinogens on prehistoric religion is to examine current mythological beliefs and cultural values from the region's ethnography, even when explicit drug use is lacking, so as to aid in reconstructing the possible plant hallucinogenic linked beliefs of now extinct peoples.

In addition, particular attention must be given to regional variations in drug use (see La Barre, 1970). While Old World prehistoric societies based on agriculture quickly eradicated and suppressed shamanistic beliefs of earlier hunters and gatherers in their midst, New World traditional societies seem to have had a different response to the religion of the hunters. One could indeed argue for the perseverance of basic New World shamanistic core elements persisting in the religions of prehistoric civilizations, such as the Mochica to be discussed in this paper. Campbell (1964) argues that in Old World societies, mythologies and beliefs of the hunters were reduced in influence once agriculture arrived on the scene. Wallace, however, in his anthropological study of religion (1966), has argued that once new cultural forms arise, they generally overlay already existing religious elements.

These remarks serve as an introduction to the study of one ancient Peruvian people: the Mochica of northern Peru. In 1967, during my study of *San Pedro* (*Trichocereus pachanoi*) use in folk healing sessions, I was

intrigued by the possible prehistoric roots for plant hallucinogenic use. This interest remained dormant, however, until recently, when several publications on Mochica life appeared (Benson, 1972; Benson, 1974; Sharon and Donan, 1974), attempting to interpret the large corpus of ceramics left by Mochica craftsmen. Benson (1972), in particular, should be commended for the fine job that she has done in assembling in one place much of the known materials on the Mochica. However, despite the existence of a literature on contemporary hallucinogenic plant use on the north coast of Peru (e.g., Friedberg, 1959; Friedberg, 1960; Gillen, 1947; Sharon, 1972a; Sharon, 1972b), Benson has not fully integrated such materials into her studies of the prehistoric art. She mentions only occasionally the possibility of plant hallucinogenic use, or when discussing certain ceramics, she treats "hallucinations" in far too disembodied a fashion.

As I have tried to show elsewhere, for far too long, anthropologists and other social scientists have neglected the role that mind-altering plants have had on primitive society. Wasson, in his monumental study of psychotropic mushrooms (1957), has written about the disinclination of European and American scholars to realize the potency of *Amanita muscaria*. Indeed, he has an important appendix in which ethnographic reports are presented in detail that link hallucinogenic mushroom ingestion to traditional Siberian shamanistic trances.

In this paper, I would like to argue that Mochica art can best be interpreted as an interplay of complex shamanistic notions of good and evil, power and its manipulation and expression, and the magical control over nature by religious hierophants in serving their clients and community. To explore these themes in more detail, the plan of procedure is as follows: first, I would like to summarize features of contemporary plant hallucinogenic use on the Peruvian north coast, the home of the Mochica, and document the hallucinogenic plants available to that group. Then, I would like to examine the rendering of the botanical materials in their art. Hallucinogen-linked themes, documented for other New World prehistoric

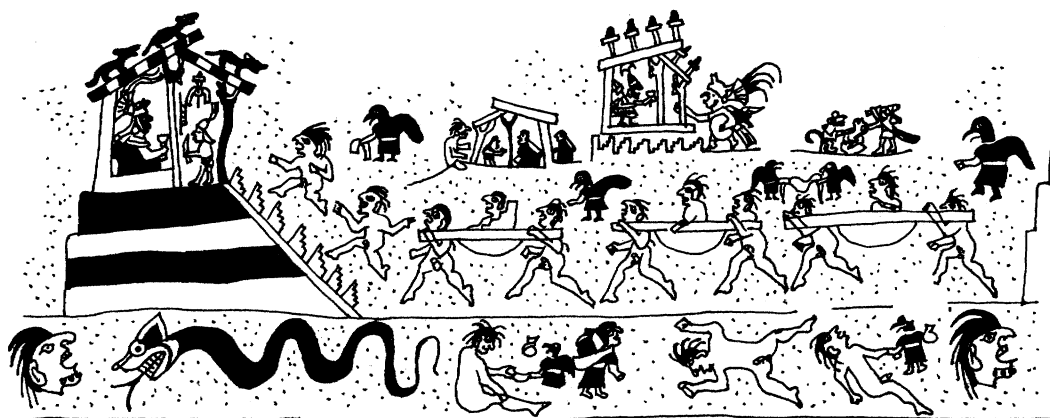


Fig. 1. Tambos of differing strata of Mochica society. Probable San Pedro sessions in each. After Kutscher, 1967:120.

populations will be discussed as they occur in Mochica art.

CONTEMPORARY HALLUCINOGENIC USE IN NORTHERN PERU

The Peruvian north coast is a dry, arid desert, occasionally watered by rivers flowing from east to west. Today, agricultural villages dot the landscape, some of which like Valleseco (a pseudonym), have become famous throughout all of Peru because they are areas where specialized healers, called *maestros*, treat disease with the use of plant hallucinogens. The most commonly used is *San Pedro* (*Trichocereus pachanoi*), containing 1.29 g of mescaline in a given sample of 2.2 lbs of fresh material. The cactus is cut into small pieces, boiled several hours with additives such as *misha* (*Datura arborea*), *condorillo* (*Lycopodium* sp.), and *hornamo* (unidentified) added to the brew. In addition, tobacco mixed with water is used as a snuff and drawn into the healer's lungs to enhance the drug's effect (see Janiger and Dobkin de Rios, 1975).

Since the 16th Century Spanish conquest, many Roman Catholic beliefs have been syncretized with traditional use of the plant. The major use of *San Pedro* at present is to treat illness believed to be caused by witchcraft. As with other hallucinogenic plants, *San Pedro* is used as a revelatory agent to make known the source of bewitchment deemed responsible for illness and misfortune (see Dobkin de Rios, 1972). Healing sessions take

place at night, in *tambos* which are wall-less shelters generally in fields some distance from houses (see Figs. 1, 2, 3 and Dobkin de Rios, n.d.²). A healer, his assistant and several patients assemble around a cloth laid on the ground, called a *mesa*. A large number of ritual items, including polished shields and staffs are set up as defenses against the evil machinations of witches, with other magical elements placed on the *mesa*. In interviews with healers in 1967, I elicited statements that polished stones are believed to assume the form of persons and animals who attack enemies. During the session, the *maestro* sings and whistles to invoke spirit forces desired to ensure healing and to aid in the recognition of disease etiology. The healers claim that visions from the cactus enable them to learn the magical illness afflicting their patients (see also Sharon, 1972a for documentation of another *mesa*).

A RECREATION OF MOCHICA RELIGION

The pre-Incaic civilization, Mochica, flourished in the north coastal area of Peru from 100 B. C.–700 A. D. The Mochica were a state society with subsistence based on intensive agriculture and the use of irrigation, enabling large populations to exploit both maritime and farming areas. As Willey has expressed it, "the Mochica built castle-like fortifications over a hundred feet high, out of thousands or millions of adobe bricks. They ran stone and adobe defensive walls for miles across the desert and built great aqueducts of



Fig. 2. Again two tambos, with sea demon and probable shamanic figure in control of the familiar. After Kutscher, 1967:119.

equal length" (personal communication). Mochica society was probably theocratically organized. There was a complex division of labor, with specializations of occupations and crafts. From the pottery, often interpreted as realistic, we find data on the regional foods, costumes and animal species known. Lanning (1967:122) has written that Mochica potters portrayed at least 35 different species of birds, 16 of mammals, 16 of fish, as well as other animals. Fishing was a major activity, in one-man canoes made of totora rushes. Throughout the ceramic representations, we see the Mochica warrior, weaver, beggar and the shaman/priest. Mochica society was highly stratified, a pattern reflected in dress, ornament and temple form. Professions were symbolized by details of dress and ornament, and variations in architecture indicate cult centers. Some ceramics are devoted to surgical and medical practices, while shamanistic sessions, very much like those described by myself and others in present-day regional healing, are found in the pottery. Bennett (1946:104) has described medicine men performing cures by massaging patients and sucking the effected part of a body to remove a foreign substance, reminiscent of present-day practices. Stylized decorative motifs on Mochica pottery described by the ethnobotanist, Friedberg and interpreted to her by the late Dr. Larco of the Larco Herrera Museum in Lima, depict what

seems to be Mochica sorcerers carrying stumps of cacti in their hands. Friedberg suggests that one such representation showed a remarkable likeness to *San Pedro*, which was easily recognized by the plant's lack of thorns (1960:42). She has also described Mochica pottery showing individuals transformed into animals, in association with a thornless cactus, a theme which will be discussed shortly. Supernatural forces of a magical nature are represented in the art, including various animals which probably correspond to the *nagual*, or animal familiar, as well as what Lavallée (1970:110) has called animal, vegetable and object demons.

Although another valuable source of data available to us comes from the Conquest chroniclers' discussion of botanical materials, many of these data, unfortunately, are based on vernacular usage and are not always faithful enough for rigorous botanical determination. Cobo (1956), for example, has described *San Pedro's* use under the name of *achuma*. As long as folk healers did not bring the Devil into their healing rites, Franciscan priests maintained some sort of *modus vivendi* and folk healers were admitted to the Church.

MOCHICA PLANT USE

Before discussing Mochica religion, it is important to reiterate the evidence for Mochica hallucinogenic plant use. As men-

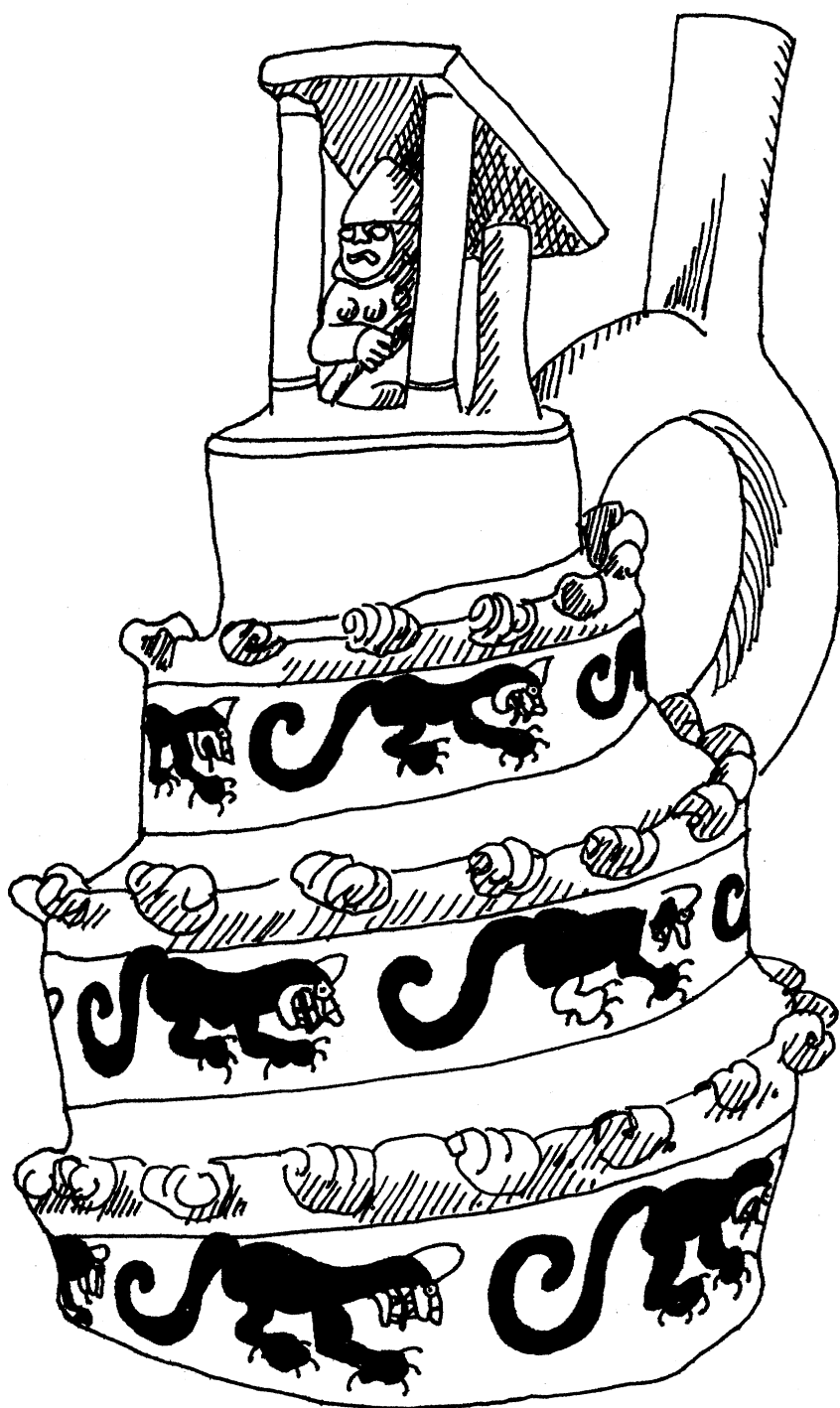


Fig. 3. A shaman figure seated within a tambo; felines in ascending spiral, probably representing shamanic voyage to nether worlds. After Benson, 1972a:41.

tioned above, various uprooted cacti are represented in the art, including *San Pedro*. Towle (1961) has written that *cereus* cacti are found frequently among the art of this region. Schultes (1967, 1972b) has referred to an ancient drink, called *Cimora* on the Peruvian north coast, which includes the cactus *Neoraimondia macrostibas*. Coca (*Erythroxylon coca*), a plant stimulant, played an important economic role in Mochica civilization. A Peruvian anthropologist, Palomillo, has observed highland coca ingestion in socially deemed excessive doses, used by shamans to induce divinatory states in their treatment of magical disease (personal communication). It is quite possible that coca may have been used by the Mochica, as attested to in numerous ceramics. Disselhoff (1967:51) has reproduced a ceramic of a man drinking chicha, a fermented corn drink, with his hand in his coca pouch. Multiple drug use, moreover, was not infrequent, and coca may have been ingested along with other hallucinogenic plants. The effects of mixing hallucinogenic plants remains an uncharted area (Schultes, 1972b). The possibility of hallucinogenic snuffs must be mentioned, especially since ongoing *San Pedro* ingestion is found with liquid tobacco nasal snuff. This, however, is yet to be documented for the Mochica.

THEMES IN MOCHICA ART

In this section, I argue that Mochica art eminently represented a combative shamanistic ethos, which was reflected in the expansionist militaristic activities of these people. Combative elements in shamanistic beliefs have been reported to me for two distinctive contemporary Peruvian drug-using regions, by Furst for West Mexico (1965) and Castaneda (1972). Despite themes of peace and love reflected in runaway American youth drug use, we must not be ethnocentric in this analysis and extend the ethos of one subculture to that of another people. Much of nuclear American hallucinogenic plant use, in fact, co-occurs in societies with overriding martial activity: to wit, the Aztec and the Inca. The use of hallucinogenic plants as a means of making the supernatural realm accessible, can be concordant with any number of different world views. Certainly, an Amer-

icanist commonplace of the last fifty years, reiterated by La Barre (1970), is that shamanistic beliefs, particularly direct revelation of the supernatural, is a dominant motif of many New World Indian populations.

In his classic study of shamanism, the historian of religions, Eliade (1958) has discussed the vital role of the shaman as psychopomp—spiritual guardian of his community, who is obliged to confront and combat his group's adversaries. A major part of his activity includes healing disease and neutralizing misfortunes that have occurred to members of the community through the machinations of enemies. In Mochica life, shamans probably had an important role as protector of seafaring activities as well (see Fig. 2). This was witnessed by a recent student of *San Pedro* use, who observed a *San Pedro* healer in Trujillo, Peru, called upon by fishermen to bless a forthcoming expedition with the cactus drink (Douglas Sharon, personal communication). Shamans are famous for their ability to transform themselves into powerful animal figures—familiar or *naguals* whom they send to do their bidding, to rectify evil or redress harm caused their clients. Amazonian shaman healers often boasted to me of their apprenticeship period when they obtained magical powers over their allies, a long, arduous and often lethal task. When the shaman emerges triumphant, he indeed is believed to be possessed of impressive power. The shaman often descends to nether worlds to consult with ancestral spirits, found in Mochica ceramics (see Fig. 3) or travels to celestial realms, where he returns with special chants and auguries of future happenings.

These general comments concerning shamanism are important in my reconstruction of Mochica religion. While we can never hope to plumb the depths of metaphor, analogy and myth that characterize all traditional religions, I think we can make a convincing argument to link the effects of plant hallucinogens to Mochica belief systems.

THE SHAMAN AS WARRIOR

As we can see from Fig. 4, what has been traditionally called the warrior of Mochica culture, may also be interpreted as shamanistic battles against adversaries. The armor,



Fig. 4. Shamanic battle—the combative motif. After Larco Hoyle, 1939:49.

maces, trophy heads and various weapons found on the ceramics may not be only the ordinary paraphernalia of war and victory, but shamanistic protection against evil forces and their vanquishment as well. Peruvian gold objects often include war materiel such as maces, which may have alternate magical or symbolic meanings. Many of the ceramics show battle scenes between two individuals, with the figure to the left often subdued by the one on the right. The relationship of left and right to good and evil has been discussed by Furst (1965:60) in global shamanistic activities. Hieratic ranking relating to shamanistic activity is shown in much of Mochica pottery, by use of details of dress and headgear, as well as step motifs and elaborate buildings where religious activity probably took place. The *tambo*, for example, represented in Figs. 1, 2, 3, 11, are found both on the Peruvian coast and rain forest, and are structures under which plant hallucinogens are ingested. I personally observed several drug sessions in *tambos* on the coast in 1967.

THE SHAMAN AS HEALER

A large number of Mochica pots presented by Benson (1972) illustrate the vital role of the shaman as healer. In many of her illustra-

tions, figures drink from chalice-like cups in public places, although Benson does not link folk healing to many of the scenes portrayed in the pottery. Benson has erred when she misses the significance of the *tambo*. Figure 1 shows an interesting variety of *tambos*, linked probably to hieratic ranking of religious practitioners within this segmented society, from the folk healer in his simple shelter to the powerful priest in a more elegant edifice. It is interesting to note in this context that it rarely rains in the north coast region, due to the Humboldt current, so that explanations of *tambos* as protection against the elements are not readily admissible as alternate explanations.

A point of contention in interpreting Mochica pottery concerns the role of the nude male, often with hair awry, who is led to a stylized *tambo*, shown under the control of another figure, or else is seated alone (see Figs. 1, 5, 6). These nude figures, likened to other such individuals found in other areas of Mesoamerican art, where militaristic conquest characterized social life, are often believed by art historians to be victims of warfare, about to be sacrificed. Although this, once again, is a pan-American trait, the figures' nakedness is cited as a sign that the nude male is being humiliated, perhaps prior



Fig. 5. Probable San Pedro and other Cimora cacti representations. After Sawyer, 1966:51.



Fig. 6. Probable defeated shamanic adversaries, led by victors. After Kutscher, 1950:179.

to his sacrifice. My initial response to such a motif was that the nudity and the presence of a coiled rope around the "prisoners'" necks might better be viewed as severely disordered patients of folk healers or priests. The latter group may have been administering brews of *Trichocereus pachanoi*, *Datura arborea*, or other plants to calm hyperactive, maniacal individuals. The clothing and weapons of the nude individuals in Fig. 6 are tied to the mace of the individual leading them. The special haircut associated with these individuals could have been to represent the mark of the insane; the ravaged faces

might have attested to mental illness, then, rather than fear at being sacrificed. In this connection, ethnohistorical data from the Aztec indicate that, when war prisoners were sent to their death, they were generally given hallucinogenic mushrooms to make them gay and happy before the sacrifice.

After visiting the Mochica archive assembled by Dr. Donan at the University of California, Los Angeles, still another explanation is possible and is drawn from a key motif available in the archive. In one ceramic motif, a figure seated under a *tambo* structure looks at a large pot which is similar to



Fig. 7. Possible highland curing scene, with shaman and patient. After Benson, 1972a:28.

those used to hold the boiled potions of the *San Pedro* and other hallucinogenic brews. Around the neck of the pot, a coiled "rope" extends horizontally in the air, becoming a double-headed snake. I argue that the "rope" found throughout Mochica pottery, often around the neck of an alleged prisoner, may be a metaphoric abbreviation for the double-headed serpent, pointing without a

doubt to a victorious shaman's animal familiar, and his success in subduing his sorcerer's adversary.

One of the major reasons to suspect that Mochica pottery has religious themes complementing more secular ones has to do with the important role of music and musicians in the incised pots. Individuals are portrayed with special costumes and instruments and

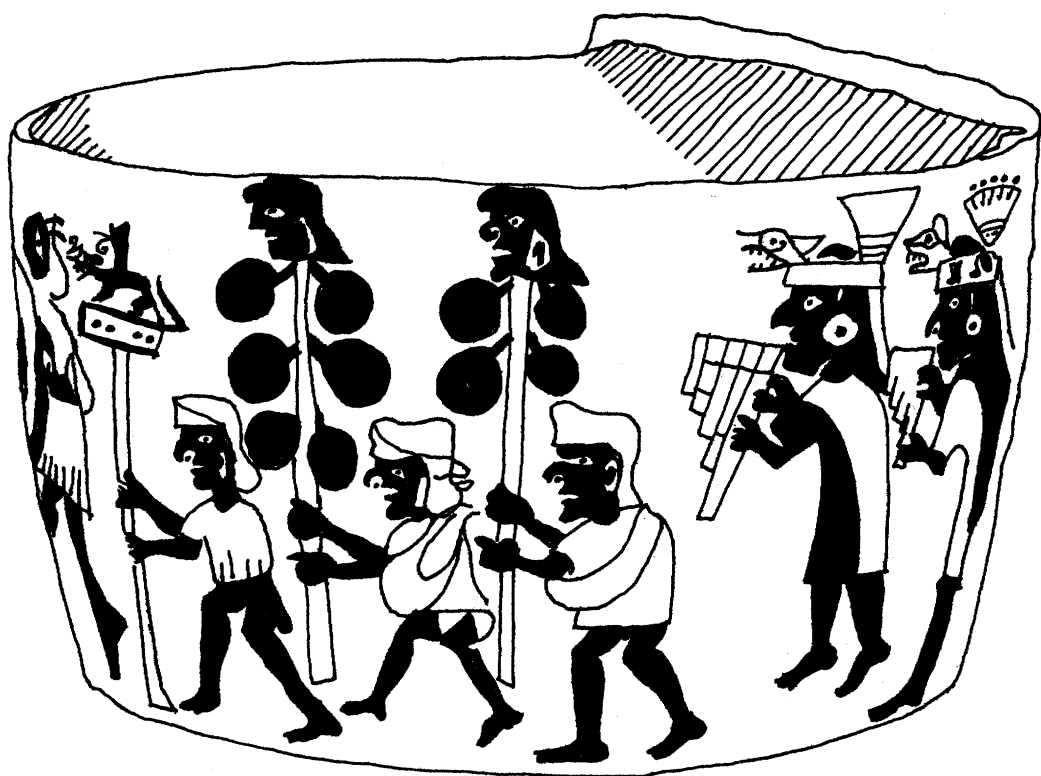


Fig. 8. Musicians in pageant, with animal familiars represented. After Benson, 1972a:112.

rattles of one type or other are often shown in the ceramics (see Fig. 8). The role of music in bridging realms of consciousness made available by hallucinogenic drugs has been analyzed by Katz and myself (1971, 1975). Generally speaking, among drug-using societies, music is an important adjunct to hallucinogenic drug use (see also Dobkin de Rios, 1973:178). The vast majority of Mochica pots are of the stirrup type, which can be made to whistle. In the tropical rain forest, I elicited information from drug-using healers that their whistling incantations evoked spirit forces (Dobkin de Rios, 1972:132).

Mochica ceramics are well known in art circles for their erotic themes (see Larco Hoyle, 1969), showing individuals in copulatory positions as well as practicing sodomy and bestiality. The presence of sexual themes in the ceramics may have shown more than a mere lusty interest in life, namely a link to shamanistic activity (see

Fig. 11). There is an interesting relationship between sex and death in Mochica pottery, which may have to do with expected social roles of the shaman in ensuring the fertility of his community's women, as well as dealing with the anxiety generated by the reproductive process in general. During my own field work in Peru in 1968–1969, I observed a pregnant woman in her seventh month take ayahuasca to discover the cause of her husband's illness. In my observations of contemporary plant hallucinogenic use on the Peruvian north coast, I interviewed healers who used *San Pedro* and spoke of their powers in treating a woman's barrenness or performing love magic. Johnston (1973) has documented the use of *Datura fatuosa* in the Northern Transvaal among the Shagana-Tsonga for purposes of ensuring fertility among girls in puberty initiation schools.

A common theme which is present throughout Mochica pottery may also indicate some link with ideas of death and re-

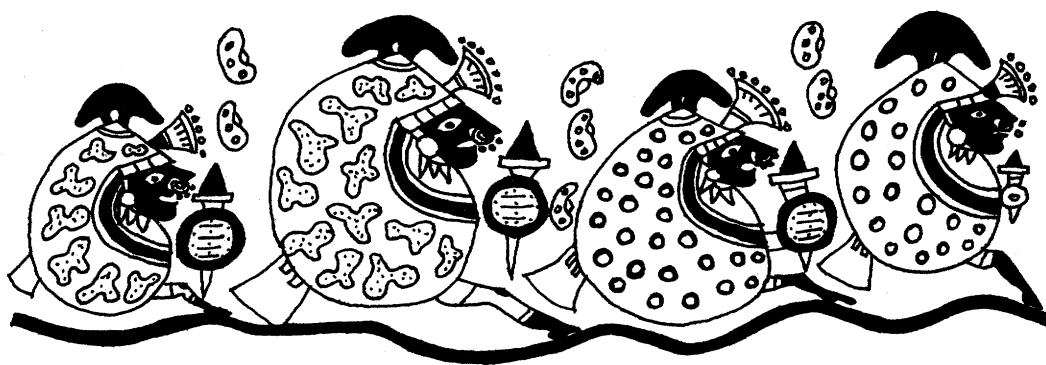


Fig. 9. Bean shamanic familiar, possibly hallucinogenic? After Sawyer, 1966:50.

birth prominent in general among drug-using societies, perhaps tied in to Benson's suggestions of male initiation drug use (1974).

THE SHAMAN AS SPIRITUAL VOYAGER AND DIVINER

Several Mochica ceramics are circular spiral pots which may illustrate the classical shamanistic voyage to nether regions, for purposes of communication with the dead or the ancestors, to bring back divinatory messages, or to seek the cause of illness or misfortune. Benson argues that death haunts all of Mochica art (1972:152), and indeed this theme may be better interpreted as the common hallucinogen-linked theme of death and rebirth. In a study of over 2,000 patients to whom he administered LSD in psychotherapy, Grof found this subjective effect a frequent one (1972:51), especially in its spiritual aspects.

Standard interpretations of Mochica pottery turn to the figure of the "bean warrior" in looking for clues to divination. Occasionally, beans are associated with messengers (Sawyer, 1966:50). Although botanical identification is still lacking, a plant known as *Camalonga* is used as an hallucinogen in the Peruvian tropical rain forest. The bean is triangular in shape. Throughout the primitive world, the association of hallucinogenic plant use and paranormal phenomena are by no means rare, although explanations within a scientific paradigm, to date, are lacking. Figures 9 and 10 indicate a theme that will be discussed shortly, linked to shamanistic metamorphosis into animal or more rarely,

plant familiars. This may be a better interpretation of the role of the bean in Mochica art, rather than for divinatory purposes.

THE SHAMAN AND METAMORPHOSIS INTO ANIMAL FAMILIARS

The metamorphosis of human beings into animals or less frequently into plants, is a common drug-linked motif and a pan-American theme in general. These resultant metamorphoses are known as spirit familiars. In Mochica art, they never appear in battle scenes, but only associated with human beings. A recent study by Pitt-Rivers (1970) on spiritual power in Central America can be generalized to interpret beliefs linked to hallucinogenic plant use. The author speaks of the term *nagual* (animal familiar) as a prototype, illustrating a type of relationship between an individual man and an animal species. The *nagual* in Chiapas and parts of Mexico has been shown by Pitt-Rivers to be linked to the spiritual power of an individual. Just as there are differences among *naguas* in strength, activity and power in the world of nature, so too do the *naguas* represent a spiritual hierarchy of individual men (1970:187). For example, the jaguar or tiger is more powerful than the dog, who is more cunning than the raccoon. The animal familiar has an analogous function in making explicit the relative spiritual power of the shaman. In many Mochica pots, animal familiars are represented in great number and include snakes, numerous felines, foxes, etc.

Lavallée's study of Mochica animal repre-

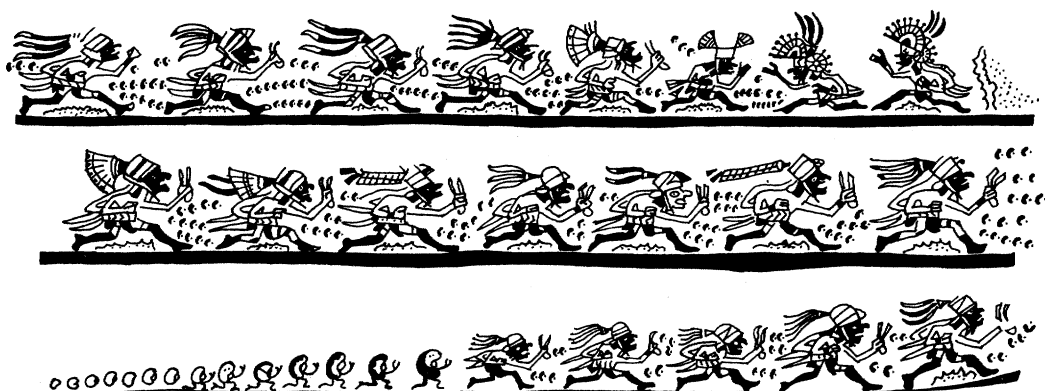


Fig. 10. Metamorphosis of shamanic figure into plant familiar. After Kutscher, 1950:181.

sentations from museums and private collections cites 44 pieces of a frog/toad motif. The hallucinogenic properties of the toad have been discussed (Erspamer et al., 1967; Daly and Witkop, 1971) and seem to have been well known by shamans all throughout nuclear America. They have been cited by me for the Maya (1974) and by Furst (1972) for Indian America in general.

The hummingbird, another frequent motif, may represent once again in an analogous sense, the aerial voyage linked to hallucinogenic drug use and shamanistic activity, when the shaman's animal familiar travels through time and space to effect his master's bidding (see Dobkin de Rios, 1974, n.d.¹). Sharon and Donan (1974) have also suggested that the sucking of the hummingbird may metaphorically relate to the animal familiar of a shaman who throughout all of Indian America, commonly treats ill-

ness by sucking at afflicted parts of a patient's body (p. 54).

The jaguar and eagle as predators when shown in their *nagual* function may credit their owners with maleficent intentions, while vegetarian animals might not. The *nagual* could also indicate the way in which an individual uses power. Certainly the parallel between the shamanistic animal familiar and the shaman's warrior nature is not surprising (cf. Benson, 1972). Pitt-Rivers, in his excellent summary article, points out that dangerous animals and high-flying birds in Central America are usually reserved for the mature individual—in particular, curers. In many parts of the New World, there is a belief that disease and misfortune are the outcome of a combat between shamanistic *naguals*. In curing, a shaman must combat his opponent's *nagual* at the same time that he is working on the corporeal presence of his

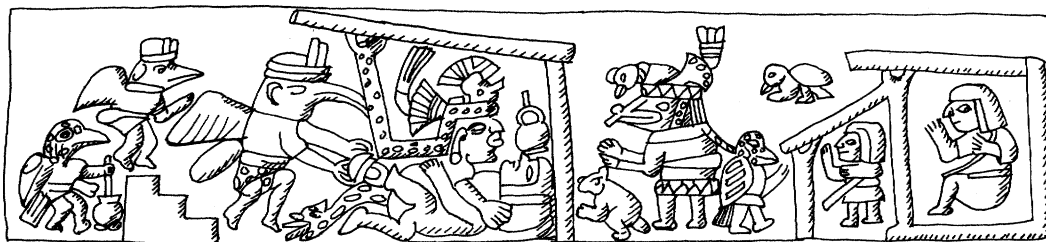


Fig. 11. Tambo scene, linkage with fecundity rituals, probable hallucinogenic drinks, and animal familiars. After Benson, 1972a:134-135.



Fig. 12. Various cacti found in Mochica pottery. After Sawyer, 1966:51.

patient, by sucking, blowing tobacco smoke and other techniques.

Shamans or witches can transform themselves into the shape of a given animal to perform evil, including the jaguar. Lavallée cites the widespread myth in South America that shamans can metamorphize into jaguars (1970:105). Several Mochica pots photographed by Benson show the process of metamorphosis or transformation (see Fig. 11).

Benson's recent study of the feline motif in Mochica art (1974:9) discusses instances of the portrayal of a trancelike state. The head of the feline is often prominent in the Mochica trophy head, and the paws and head of the feline are always somewhere near the man's head. She suggests among other alternatives a shaman's state of exhilaration or intoxication while hallucinating the feline or undergoing initiatory wounding. *Camalanga*, *San Pedro*, *Coca*, *Datura* are all candidates for a shamanistic transformation following the use of such plants. It is interesting to note in Mochica art that beans are the only vegetable appearing truly anthropomorphized, with a head, arms and legs. Benson, among others, has suggested that this plant was a representation of a warrior or messenger (1972:81), but the beans are not rendered in a naturalistic fashion; in fact, they float in the air in various ritual scenes.

When an individual transforms into his *nagual*, he demonstrates possession of a particularly powerful spiritual nature represented by the animal (Pitt-Rivers 1972:199). The *nagual*, then, is part of an analogy system in which the specific animal species defines the social personality of the man vis-à-vis other members of his community. The

plant hallucinogens, in this case, serve always as a vehicle of transformation and control.

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to reinterpret a now extinct prehistoric people, the Mochica of Peru, in light of our knowledge of contemporary regional hallucinogenic use. An analysis of Mochica pottery motifs suggests the use of a variety of plant hallucinogens which may have permitted access to supernatural realms. I have argued that studies such as this of prehistoric peoples show the central role that hallucinogenic plants have had throughout time and present a new path to the understanding of prehistoric religions.

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