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## AN ARTISTIC RECORD OF THE CHAVIN HALLUCINATORY EXPERIENCE

By ALANA CORDY-COLLINS

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IN AN EARLIER APPRAISAL of the Chavín art style of Peru, which flourished between 1500 and 300 B.C., I suggested that the object held by a supernatural figure carved in stone was the hallucinogenic San Pedro cactus, *Trichocereus pachanoi* (Cordy-Collins 1977). Other researchers, arriving at the same conclusion, maintain that this evidence points to the beginning of a 3500-year-long tradition of San Pedro consumption by Peruvian shamans (Sharon & Donnan 1977). However, it is quite evident that the individual depicted in the stone carving is only carrying the San Pedro, not ingesting it (Figure 2). Since this plant is used today by Peruvian shamans to achieve a trance state (Sharon 1972), and because the cactus does grow in the immediate environs of the stone carving, it seems very likely that it could have been used by Chavín shamans. Nonetheless, to date, such a conclusion is based on indirect evidence. If the concept of a continuing tradition of hallucinogen-supported shamanism from Chavín times to the present is to be accepted more direct evidence is needed to convincingly argue for the Chavín use of hallucinogens in the first place. I feel that such evidence exists.

There are numerous examples of Chavín art which I contend depict, rather than the representation of an hallucinogen, the representation of an hallucinogenic state.

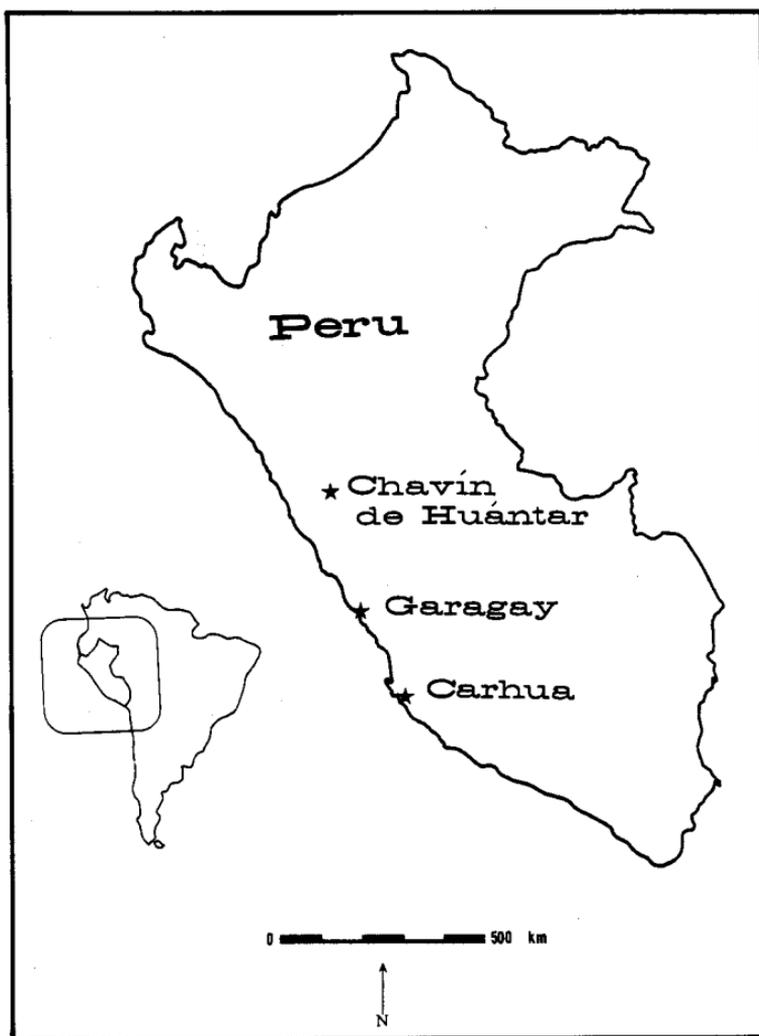


Figure 1. Map of Peru locating the Chavín sites of Chavín de Huántar, Garagay, and Carhua.

I believe that not only do these examples portray that particular moment in time, but they also refer to the use of a specific hallucinogenic substance, snuff. In each case the elements to which I call the reader's attention are the nasal protrusions (Figures 3, 4, & 5). When, in 1919, the earliest

discoveries of such pieces were made there was little attempt to explain the peculiar emanations from the nostrils. They were referred to simply as "thick cords" and "nasal appendages." Curiously, there has been no further explanation attempted since then, and obviously one is badly needed for such an unusual motif.

I believe that the proper identification of these nasal projections can be derived from an ethnographic analogy with the *Ebena*-snuffing Yanomamö Indians (Chagnon 1968:17, Figures 1-5). In fact, no one who has ever read Napoleon Chagnon's account of his first meeting with these

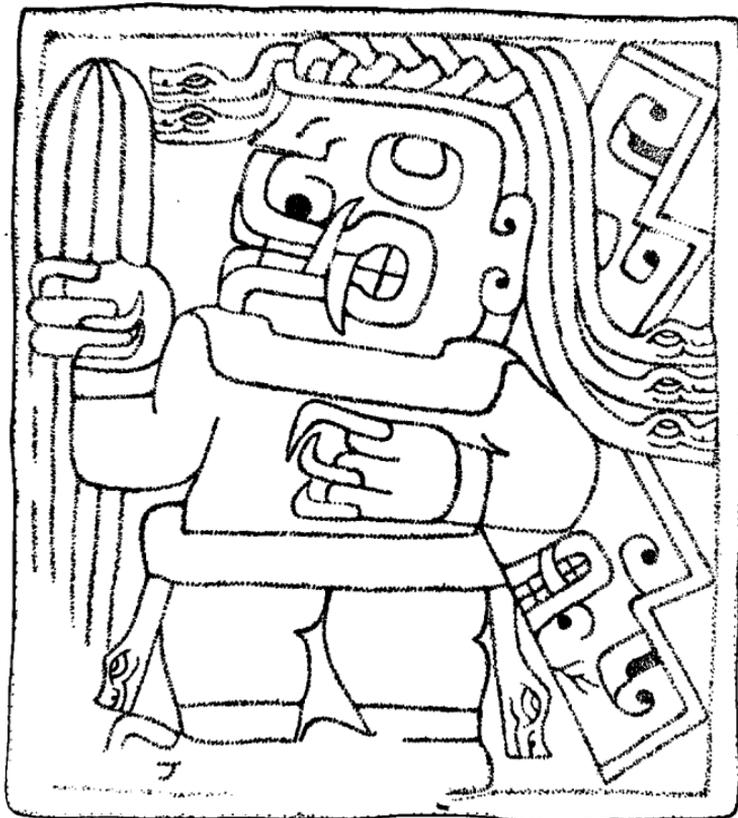


Figure 2. Author's drawing of the carved stone plaque at Chavín de Huántar. A fanged supernatural human being is shown carrying a four-ribbed San Pedro cactus in his right hand.

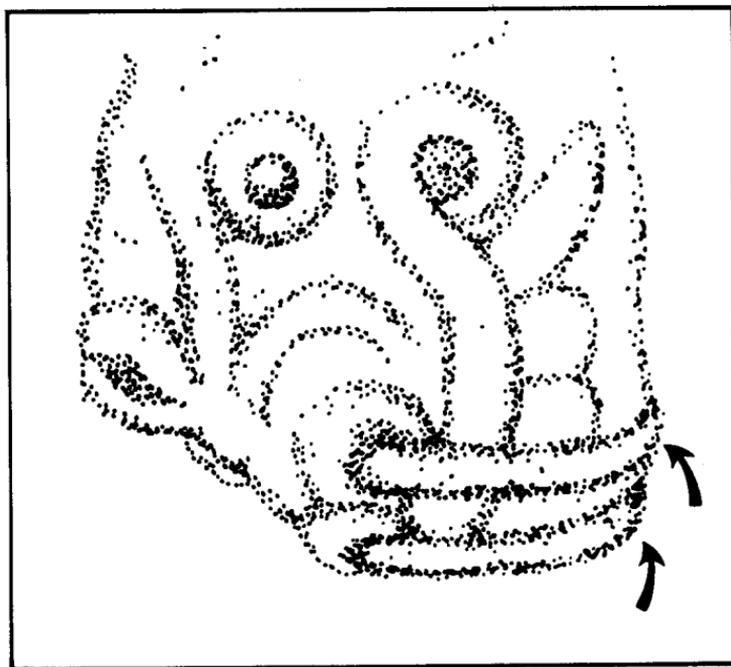


Figure 3. Author's drawing of a Chavín de Huántar stone tenon head. Illustrated here is the supernatural creature's face which shows a nasal discharge presumably brought on by hallucinogenic snuff inhalation. Phase AB.

Amazonian people is likely to forget the snuff user's appearance:

...strands of dark green slime dripped or hung from their noses. One of the side effects of the drug is a runny nose. The mucus is always saturated with the green powder and the Indians usually let it run freely from their nostrils (*Ibid.*:5).

If an artist wished to depict the hallucinogenic state brought on by the nasal inhalation of such a substance the nostrils' mucus discharge would be an ideal symbolic event, and one whose significance would be difficult to misinterpret.

It is true that often today in Andean curing sessions the brew made from the boiled San Pedro cactus is nasally im-

bibed. However, the nasal overflow—rather than actual mucus discharge—from San Pedro ingested in this fashion is considerably less than that caused by the reaction to the powdered *Ebena* snuff. Therefore, in the cases illustrated, it seems likely that an *Ebena*-like snuff is what is alluded to. There is a certain amount of data in support of the argument for Chavín snuffing of hallucinogenic agents. First, there are several small, elaborate stone mortars and pestles, carved with supernatural images, which could well have been used to grind psychotropic substances. If so, it is likely that the carving of some of these in the forms of serpents and jaguars is quite purposeful. The association of jaguars with psychotropically induced trances is well documented (Harner 1973). The relationship of hallucinogens and serpents is discussed below.

In addition to the mortars and pestles there are several examples of bone, hollowed and elegantly carved with supernatural motifs, which are distinctly Chavín in style. It is altogether possible that the Chavín could have used such

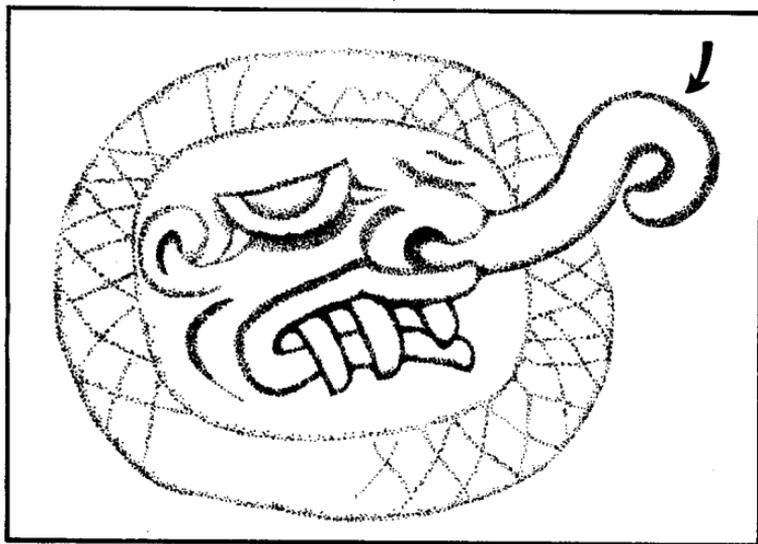


Figure 4. Author's drawing of a carved and painted adobe relief at the Chavín site of Garagay near Lima. In this case the nasal emanation is made most prominent by the fact that it overlaps the frame containing the supernatural face. Phase C.

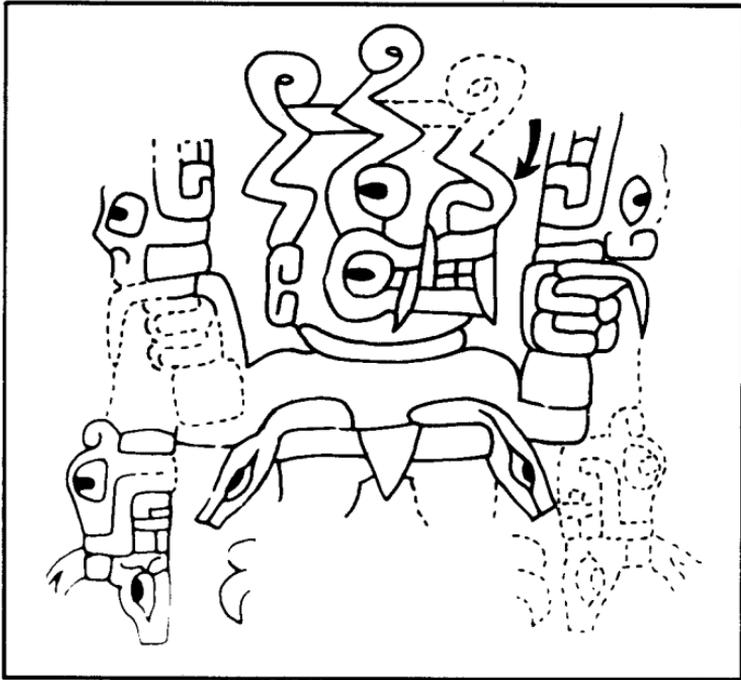


Figure 5. Author's drawing of a Chavín painted textile from Carhua. In this instance the deity known as the Staff God is shown with a nasal emanation very similar to that in the preceding carved stone relief. Curls similar to the nasal emanations have been added to the eye and the side of the head, presumably for symmetry. Phase D.

bone tubes in the same manner as the Yanomamö use cane tubes today: for the introduction of hallucinogenic snuff into the nostrils.

The foregoing evidence leaves little doubt concerning the use of hallucinogenic snuff among the Chavín; but what about the San Pedro cactus so clearly depicted on the stone carvings such as reproduced in Figure 2? San Pedro grows at altitudes from sea level to at least 3,000 meters, but does not grow in the Amazonian rain forest. Since research now suggests that the Chavín homeland was in the tropical forest of lowland South America it is unlikely that Chavín people would have been familiar with the cactus prior to their exodus into the Andean area around 2000-1500 B.C. Their

earliest familiarity with an hallucinogen is likely to have been a locally available substance such as snuff.

Therefore, it is pertinent that the earliest examples (Phase AB) of what we may term Chavín "hallucinogenic art" are several carved stone heads, such as is illustrated in Figure 3, which I maintain show a reaction to snuff. However, shortly thereafter the San Pedro carving was made (Phase B). Yet it is important to note that the apparent discovery of San Pedro did not curtail the use of the snuff, for representations of the latter continue through Phases C and D.

Unfortunately we know neither the ingredients of the snuff, whether or not they were available outside the tropical forest, nor (if they were not) what trade networks existed between the Chavín highland/coastal centers and the tropics. There are hints that the Chavín communication system was fairly elaborate, and it is also possible that the snuff ingredients were available near the Chavín centers. But it is *also* possible that the snuffing material was no longer available to the Chavín once they had migrated out of the Amazon area, and that the continued reference to nasal emanations was a generalization derived from a concrete situation which came to designate the hallucinatory state, however actually achieved.

By way of comparison R. Gordon Wasson has shown that the continued reference to *Soma* among the Vedic Indo-Europeans was one of tradition rather than fact, and that the practitioners of the *Soma* ritual eventually became unaware that the original *Soma* was a mushroom (*Amanita muscaria*) but used the term as a generic to refer to a specific aspect of Vedic religion. This switch from the original substance to proxies occurred because the practitioners of the *Soma* ritual had migrated from their original environment to one where *A. muscaria* did not grow (Wasson 1971)!

Thus it might be that among the Chavín snuff was the harbinger of the trance state *par excellence*, even when the snuff was no longer available. However, unlike the Vedic analogy, there were other hallucinogenic substances available to the Chavín people. One was San Pedro. Another may have been the vine *Banisteriopsis*. It grows both in Amazonia, where it is often called *yagé*, and in the Andean region, where it is known as *ayahuasca*.



Figure 6. The Chavín Staff God appears here in a more traditional manner, holding two bunches of serpents. Here, again, this may be a symbolic reference to *yagé* via the visual pun of zoomorphizing the ends of the deity's staffs. This drawing is the author's reconstruction based on several fragmentary images on a painted textile from Carhua. Phase D.

Pertinent ethnographic observations have been made concerning this latter hallucinogen. One report of *yagé* use among a Colombian Indian group tells of the users seeing serpents which the Indians say represent the *yagé* vines. Such serpents are seen both singly and in bunches (Chaves in Harner 1973:162). Even a cursory perusal of Chavín art will demonstrate the ubiquity of serpents which, in some cases actually appear in bunches (Figure 6). Could such images represent *Banisteriopsis*? The probability that they do (and therefore indicate the use of the plant) is increased by a statement by ethnographer Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff concerning his own experience with the drug. Some time after ingestion, with eyes closed, he had visions of a myriad of finely detailed motifs which were bilaterally symmetrical

(Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972:90). Bilateral symmetry is one of the most important conventions in all of Chavín art. In fact, one might consider bilateral symmetry a *sine qua non* of the style!

Therefore it appears that the Chavín use of hallucinogens is definitely recorded in their art. Significantly, it would appear that Chavín art was not merely reflecting a cultural phenomenon but that the art itself was a direct *result* of that very phenomenon: the hallucinatory experience (Cordy-Collins 1977). Furthermore, it has been documented that the art styles of other cultures are the result of drug-induced visions. The Tukano Indians of Colombia and the Huichol Indians of Mexico are cases in point.

Interestingly, nearly everyone experiences some sort of hallucination at one time or another for a variety of reasons, but only in particular cases are these hallucinations translated into art. Exactly when this fixing of hallucinatory images takes place in an historico-evolutionary sense has been recently postulated by the psychologist Julian Jaynes (Jaynes 1977:165 *passim*). According to Jaynes' hypothesis, the recording of hallucinated images marks the beginning of formal religion and formal art styles. Such a proposal is entirely within the framework of Chavín culture: no cohesive religious nor artistic structure existed in the Andean area before the advent of Chavín.

Exactly how the art/religion evolved out of the hallucinatory experience—or why the hallucinatory experience was sought in the first place—is the subject of another paper, but it is apropos to summarize the preceding discussion by recalling that there is now good evidence for the *use* of hallucinogens among the Chavín. There are numerous examples of nasal emanations, some becoming quite stylized, which point to the use of an *Ebena*-like snuff. In support of this contention there are several examples of mortars, pestles, and bone tubes, all of which are carved with mythological designs and which could have been used for the grinding and inhalation of a psychotropic snuff through the nostrils. Ethnographic data support this interpretation as well as suggest the use of other hallucinogens, such as *Banisteriopsis* (*ayahuasca* or *yagé*) and *Trichocereus pachanoi* (San Pedro cactus).

With the Chavín use of hallucinogens established, the

argument for contemporary Amazonian and Andean hallucinogen-supported shamanism ultimately having derived from ancient prototypes becomes quite convincing.

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## HODGE REMINISCENCES INVITED

In addition to the famous Hodge-Cushing Papers, the Southwest Museum has in its archives a truly enormous amount of memorabilia relating to the late and much-loved Frederick Webb Hodge, this institution's director for almost a quarter century. This material will be of inestimable value in the preparation of a biography of "Teluli," as the Indians called Dr. Hodge, which the Museum is planning to publish.

But there is nothing that can compare with the actual personal recollections of friends and acquaintances—particularly of those who have been associated with a scientist in his chosen work. And there are still some of the "Old Guard" alive today who knew this great and human scholar more or less intimately. They are cordially invited—indeed, *urged*—to write down whatever they can recall of their experiences with him and send it in to the Southwest Museum. Such material will be kept for incorporation into a biography that cannot be too long delayed.

The Southwest Museum has many unusual items and books suitable for gifts. Write to our sales desk for information on these.