An Ayahuasca Ceremony among the Matsigenka (Eastern Peru)

by

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In December 1961 W. W. SNELL*) was able to observe an ayahuasca ceremony among the Matsigenka1). This took place in a house in the Paratoari settlement on the River Manu. Since the Matsigenka had been visited and described in earlier decades principally by Dominican priests and since, for obvious reasons, these priests had little opportunity to attend shamanistic sessions, direct and indirect observations and descriptions of such sessions have remained the exception even till today2).

For this reason entries concerning an ayahuasca ceremony taken from SNELL's diary are reproduced here without appreciable change; to help toward a better understanding of the text the order of individual passages in the original text was changed: SNELL's description: "17th December, 1961 — Matsigenka house in Paratoari, Manu. Drinking of ayahuasca. This house accommodates five families of which three are here. There are two radial fires. House built 7 m × 11 m × 12 feet to peak. There is abundance of feathers, baskets and bags hanging from the roof, 18 bottles with kerosene and salt. Other salt wrapped in leaves hanging from the roof. The arrows are the large type, each man has two to three harpoons. There are two large cooking pots, several smaller ones. Yuca served in baskets. The food hangs over the... (?) to prevent rats from coming down. Over the fire there is tapir liver... A small fishnet, two guacamayos stretched, fish cord, and esteras3), pretty well complete... Completely dark; fires completely extinguished. Woman came to get small clay pot from under... (She) put it in middle of room, then lit a small lamp. The one man put an estera down, went back to his bed and began humming. Then he called his brother. Then four men gathered around pot. One drank a little, returned to his bed. One man, evidently leader, keeps humming. Another drinks. They continue laughing and conversing with us. Leader fills up on coca4). Leader climbs up ladder and gets leaves, gives to man nearest.

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1) The Matsigenka inhabit a territory which lies between 11° 20' and 13° 41' south latitude and 70° and 73° 30' west longitude. It consists principally of the drainage area of the Upper Urubamba (including the upper reaches of the Yavero/Perucoriambo), parts of the Upper Manu and Upper Madre de Dios.

2) The Matsigenka tribe is roughly 5,000 strong according to various estimates. Their language belongs to the Arawak group and is closely related to that of the Campa. (cf. WISE (1971:231): "Nomatsiguenga is a member of a closely related subgroup of Pre-Andine Arawakan languages which comprises 1) Ashaninka Campa which is spoken by persons living along the Apurimac, Ene, Tambo, and Perene Rivers, 2) Pajonal Campa, 3) Machiguenga, and 4) Nomatsiguenga. Nomatsiguenga is mutually unintelligible with all of the other languages in the group. Although most Nomatsiguenga men are bilingual in Ashaninka Campa and their own language, the converse is not true because of sociological factors.

Speakers of Ashaninka Campa and Pajonal Campa call themselves ashaninka or asheninka 'people', while speakers of Nomatsiguenga and Machiguenga call themselves matsiguenga 'people'. All except the Machiguenga, however, call themselves Campa when talking to outsiders.

Nomatsiguenga seems to be somewhat more closely related to Ashaninka Campa than to Machiguenga in structure and vocabulary, but detailed comparative work may show that the greater degree of similarity should be attributed to geographical proximity of the Ashaninka rather than to historical closeness."

Since the Pajonal Campa also call themselves "asháninka", WEISS (personal communication) considers the term "Asháninka Campa" most unfortunate, and he prefers the term "River Campa".

3) Mat for sleeping or sitting on.

4) It is noteworthy here that coca (leaves), not tobacco, are mentioned, see below.
They are then placed between the two. Pot is covered, and man who drinks returns to his bunk. Leader stops and continues humming. Is only one with cushma\(^5\). Well, the program lasted five hours, terminated at 11.55. Only two men continued drinking 15 min. after the humming or chant began. The leader climbed up the ladder which went to the roof. [Ladder] with only one rung 1m from ground. He went up ten times, and the other one who continued three times, the other two dropped out. During the ceremony the leader went outside and vomited once during this time, and while he was drinking, she [scil. his wife] remained silent. About half way through, he went out and came back without his cushma\(^6\). Up on the platform he would jump 1—3 times, making quite a sound each time he went up there; he kept right on humming. He shook his leaves during the humming. As soon as the stuff was gone, they laid down and went to sleep. No apparent effects other than sleepiness in the morning . . . They ate breakfast, yuca and tapir, with the rest of us. The same for supper before the ceremony."

II

SNELL's description of the ayahuasca ceremony poses many questions. It is sketchy, i.e., it is limited to a registration of external facts and contains no information about prerequisites of the ceremony, about possible preparations for it, or about the relationship, familial or other, between those taking part in the ceremony — with the exception of the statement that a brother and the wife of the leader of the ceremony were present.

For this reason, the general framework of the scene must first be defined. Subsequently, the scene will be compared with data on the shamanism of the Matsigenka collected by BAER in 1968/9 and finally the attempt will be made to interpret the scene described by SNELL.

The Framework

An American study which appeared recently\(^7\) deals with the connections which exist between the taking of hallucinogenic drugs and shamanism. Several essays are concerned with conditions in the South American Montaña. HARNER writes with reference to the tropical forest area of the Upper Amazon (1973: 1—5): "The four papers in this section\(^8\) are all based upon work among American Indian tribes of that area, where shamanistic practices typically involve the ingestion of a hallucinogenic tea or brew made from the Banisteriopsis vine.

The drink, commonly called yagé or yajé in Colombia, ayahuasca (Quechua: "vine of the dead") in Ecuador and Peru, and caapi in Brazil, appears to be prepared, in part at least, always from one of the several known species of Banisteriopsis, a genus belonging to the Malphigiaceae, or from genera closely related to Banisteriopsis . . .

The biochemistry of Banisteriopsis drinks, particularly because of the variety of admixtures involved, is not well known . . . The alkaloid harmine has been known for some time to be a constituent; more recently harmaline and d-tetrahydroharmine, also alkaloids, have been found in Banisteriopsis caapi . . .

Typically, Banisteriopsis is taken by South American Indian shamans of the tropical forest in order to perceive the supernatural world and to contact

\(^{5}\) Sack-like male and female cotton garment, square in outline. Two widths of cloth are sewn together in such a way that the "sack" is open below and so that small openings are also left for the head and arms.

\(^{6}\) This paragraph is at the end of the diary entry. We can assume, however, that the "he" at the beginning refers to the leader.

\(^{7}\) HARNER (1973).

\(^{8}\) KENSINGER, HARNER, SISKIND, WEISS, all of which appear in HARNER, (1973).
and to affect the behaviour of particular supernatural entities, as in locating and withdrawing a supernatural object from a bewitched patient.

In many tribes, non-shamans, most commonly males, also take ayahuasca for such reasons as to obtain visions, to achieve supernatural power, or to accompany a shaman in a curing or other ritual. Depending upon the culture and the purpose, the person taking Banisteriopsis may drink the mixture alone or as member of a group."

HARNER advances the following definition of a shaman in his introduction:

"A shaman may be defined as a man or a woman who is in direct contact with the spirit world through a trance state and has one or more spirits at his command to carry out his bidding for good or evil... One of the most typical aspects of the shamanistic experience is the change into another state of consciousness, often called a trance, with the shaman feeling that he is taking a journey."

HARNER's statement that the taking of ayahuasca does not necessarily imply a shamanistic session seems to us to be of special importance. WEISS's paper treats this problem from a particular point of view.

III

The Collecting of Data on the Shamanism of the Matsigenka

As was mentioned above, there are relatively few scientific studies concerning the cosmological ideas and religious frame of reference of the Matsigenka or concerning the influence of the shaman in their society. This circumstance was one of the reasons why BAER, as part of a research expedition financed by the Schweiz. Nationalfonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung, decided to collect material on the mythology and shamanism of the Matsigenka and the Piro, two neighbouring Arawak tribes.

Access to the Matsigenka was made considerably easier by Wayne W. SNELL and his wife Betty, who had travelled constantly in the area from 1952 on and who had kept up close contact with the Matsigenka in the periods in between. BAER also received support from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (S. I. L.) and from members of the Swiss Indian Mission (S. I. M.). All concerned are thanked here for their support.

IV

Constituent Elements in Matsigenka Shamanism (Data collected by BAER)

The material collected by BAER, partly verified by SNELL in subsequent conversations with various Matsigenka informants, resulted in the following picture of the constituent elements in Matsigenka shamanism:

a) According to Matsigenka ideas, man has a soul which can separate itself from the body in dreams, in trances induced by hallucinogens, in certain illnesses or accidents or at the onset of death.

8) op. cit.
10) WEISS (1973). In this paper ecstatic shamanism and ritual priesthood are compared and the author investigates the ways in which shamanistic practice can change into a form of priesthood.
12) A detailed description of Matsigenka cosmology is in preparation.
13) Matsigenka is the term used by tribe of the same name for "people", "humans".
14) If a child falls down, for example, his soul can become separate from the body in this way and can "wander" into the ground.
b) In addition to gods called *tasorintsi* who unite in themselves some of the characteristics of cultural heroes and tricksters as part of their nature and who are remarkable for their great strength or power (*iragaveane*), the Matsigenka are also familiar with a number of spirits who cannot be seen by them in the course of ordinary reality but who can appear to the Matsigenka by transforming themselves into human or animal form, which serves them as a veil. The category of "good" spirits, that is, spirits who behave in a friendly way to ritually pure people but who can punish the errant, is called *saankariite*, i.e., the "invisible ones".

The *saankariite* are of special importance for the understanding of Matsigenka shamanism, since the shaman (*seripigari*) communicates with them during his trance. The consumption of hallucinogenic drugs and of thickened tobacco-syrup enables him to "see" the *saankariite*, that is, to register their presence and to establish contact with them. The *saankariite* are imagined as being similar to humans but are remarkable for their small size. It is therefore said of them that they are "like children" or that they are the "same size as a child". The *saankariite* live as the Matsigenka do, i.e., they are divided into male and female, grown-ups and children, though it appears that sexuality,

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14) The soul’s place of entry and exit is the crown of the head. If it is suspected that the soul has separated itself from the body, the shaman puffs at this spot with tobacco-smoke and rubs it with achiote, i.e., a red dye obtained from the fruit of the Bixa orellana.

17) Cf. WEISS (1969:107) and (1972:162) on this point: "At the pinnacle of the hierarchy of good spirits stands a small number of beings, the most powerful of the universe, whom we may identify as gods. The Campa term for them is *tasorintsi*, the substantive form of the verb ‘to blow’. The Campa believe that these beings have the power to transform one thing into another, that the typical way they effect such a transformation is with a simple puff of breath, and that the universe as it exists today is partly the result of many such transformations.”

18) CASTANEDA (1968) introduced the two terms “ordinary reality — non-ordinary reality”, which have shown themselves to be most useful in our context.

19) Cf. WEISS (1969:92), (1969:96) as well as (1972:168): "... the Campa say the body is only the ‘clothing’ or ‘skin’ of the soul.”

20) In this paper only the *seripigari* is discussed, not the *matsikanari*, who must be described as a magician or wizard. The etymology of *seripigari* is still unclear at present; "seri" signifies “tobacco” which could mean that the shaman is distinguished among other things by the consumption of tobacco. It seems important to stress here that *seripigari* and *matsikanari* are not mutually exclusive categories (matsi or maci is the Campa word for a witch according to WEISS (1969:166 f) and (1972:167). Rather there are stages between the two where a *seripigari*, say, can change into a *matsikanari* through some unfortunate circumstance and where a *seripigari* can harm or even kill a member of his own group. One could perhaps say that the *matsikanari* represents a certain aspect of the *seripigari*, namely that aspect of his persona which casts spells and kills exclusively, whereas the *seripigari* only casts spells and kills intermittently. See also notes 53 and 77 of this paper.

21) Above all ayahuasca, i.e., Banisteriopsis, which the Matsigenka call *kamaranpi*, also *saaro* or *hayapa/jayapa* (*Datura*); as well as *kavuniri* (Campa: *kavineri*, which is "tobacco-like" according to WEISS (1969:101). It is more likely that this last is a bark brew. In any case BAER collected pieces of branch, still surrounded by bark which the Matsigenka called *kauniniri*.

22) In the Matsigenka view, only the taking of hallucinogens leads to a trance: "The *seripigari* cannot disappear through tobacco (alone).” The consumption of tobacco is, however, important to gain strength or power (*iragaveane*), indispensable in dealing with spirits, see note 43.
especially the use of the sexual organs, plays a secondary part in their lives. The *saankariite* children become adult in a very short time, often in the course of a few weeks.

The *saankariite* do not always appear in human form. They can assume the shape of animals especially that of certain birds, the *tsivito*, the *kirigeti-ni*, and the *matsipanko*. *Tsivito* and *matsipanko*, according to the Matsigenka, are the in-ato of the *saankariite*, that is, their "owners" or species-masters.

The *seripigari* generally associates with the different *saankariite* in various ways. He associates with them as with a member of a friendly tribe in which he has a near relation or close friend. This relation or friend introduces him to his own family and takes him on visits to other relatives and friends. This close *saankariite* friend or relative of the shaman's is his protective spirit or guardian (*inetsaane*). The *seripigari* has a particularly close relationship with him, so close, that if the *inetsaane* turns away from the shaman or deserts him, this can lead to the death of the shaman.

The *inetsaane* supports and protects the shaman in dangerous situations. This protection is given especially when the shaman is threatened by demonic spirits, above all by the spirits of the dead (*kamagarini*, *ivegaga*) and other spirits whose presence and influence can lead to the death of any human who is near them.

Apart from the spirits of the dead already mentioned, other spirits of this kind are the demonic spirits partly consisting of beings considered to be theriomorph, such as the *kentivakori*, *kasunkatini*, *segama*, *ka(t)suvare-tini*, *maniro*, *mamaro* and other night birds, *tunchi*, *tsuvani* and many more, especially all those animal demons whose name ends in -niro, for example *shintoriniro*, *matsontsoriniro* and *oshetoniro*. These demons are considered especially dangerous.

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25) Cf. WEISS (1969:102/3): "As with mortals, there are both male and female spirits, and they have offspring. The good spirits, however, are equipped with diminutive genitalia, lack the passion of lust, and reproduce by means other than sexual union." However, BAER found indications in a Matsigenka myth that *saankariite* and humans can unite sexually and conceive children.

26) WEISS (1972:161): "Furthermore, they [the good spirits] are spared the burden of infant and child care; their offspring are born standing, and reach adulthood in a single lunation or so."


28) Not identified.

29) The *konpero* is said to have a red breast (species not identified) and to be "like a human" and at the same time invisible, that is, a *saankariite*. He raises wild pigs (*shintori*) to be his "dogs". At the request of the *seripigari* the *konpero* sends the Matsigenka a pair of wild pigs, which increases to a herd on its way to the humans. This happens as long as the Matsigenka treat these animals well. If they do not use the meat and even the skin of the pigs economically, the animals will be kept away and the people will hunger. Cf. WEISS on this point, (1969:101) and (1972:161).

30) The *kirigeti-ni* is described as a "carpintero", i.e., as a member of the wood-pecker family.

31) Described as "raven with bifurcated tail"; it is said to be like the "gallinazo".

32) This term is derived from the verb "to visit" (e.g., *j-netsaa-ke-ri", "he visits him"). Those *saankariite* who are close to the *inetsaane* are counted also as being the shaman's *inetsaane*. They visit the relatives of the *seripigari* when he or his soul is visiting the territory of the *inetsaane*.

33) These are seen as being anthropomorphic and are said to live in the region of high rocks and deep gullies, i.e., in the hills and mountains.

34) The *kasunkatini* is supposed to be like a human being, to live in caves or at the foot of rocks and to have a huge penis. Cf. WEISS (1969:151) and (1972:166).

35) Described as being "like a horse".

36) Probably to be distinguished from *katsivorerini*, the "comet". The *ka(t)suvare-tini* makes himself heard in the night by whistling and is sometimes identified with the machanporoni-bird. Cf. also WEISS (1969:149) and (1972:163), as well as (1969:149).

37) *Maniro* is the term for deer. The deer is feared as being a potential seat of the spirits of the dead (*kamagarini*) of the Matsigenka and other neighbouring tribes such as the Piro and the Campa. The Matsigenka seem to kill deer but not to eat the meat.

38) *Mamaro* are owls; cf. WEISS (1969:157) and (1972:168).


40) A bird which is considered a "malaguero", i.e., a bad omen. Probably identical with the civani-bird (*tsivani*) of the Campa, i.e., with Piaya cayana according to WEISS (1969:157).

41) *Shintoriniro* are the demons of wild pigs, *matsontsoriniro* are the demons of jaguars and *oshetoniro* of spider monkeys, cf. WEISS (1969:162).
The *inetsaane* very often does not give his protection directly but through his spirit helpers, who have been lent to the *seripigari* by the *inetsaane* at his initiation or on his entry into office. The shaman’s spirit helpers live in stones (*imapukite, kovoreari, iserepito*) which the shaman always carries with him or in wooden idols (*iserepito*) which have a human shape and obviously represent the appearance of the spirit helpers. In moments of danger or threatened danger\(^43\), the shaman blows at these stones or wooden idols with tobacco smoke, perhaps also at times only with his breath\(^46\). This has the effect, according to the Matsigenka, of turning the spirit helpers who live in the stones and idols into jaguars, which then eat the dangerous demons. The connection between spirit guardians and spirit helpers is very noticeable here, since the *saankariite*, from whose ranks the *inetsaane* are recruited, raise the jaguars (*matsontsori*) themselves and keep them as their “dogs”. Just as desertion by the *inetsaane* means the death of the shaman, so does desertion by the spirit helpers lead to death shortly after. There therefore exists an unbreakable relationship between the three categories of shaman, spirit guardians and spirit helpers. The well-being or the ruin of the shaman is at the mercy of this relationship.

c) The choosing of the shaman. In contrast to the shamanism of Siberia and Central Asia the *seripigari* is not chosen by the spirits nor forced to take up office against his will\(^44\). He chooses this office because he himself wants to (self-determination). His desire to become a shaman can be influenced by the wish of one of his parents\(^45\) to have a son\(^46\) able to protect the family from demonic powers.

The desire to become a shaman can express itself by a Matsigenka’s beginning to drink the bitter brew made from ayahuasca (*kamaranpi*) and other plants\(^47\). The trance induced by the consumption of active agents containing alkaloid makes contact with the *saankariite* possible. One condition for being a shaman is therefore fulfilled. The taking of *kamaranpi* alone would not be enough to qualify for the practice of the shaman’s office. As a rule, only he is recognised as a shaman who has been trained by another experienced and usually older shaman. Whether there are exceptions to this rule could not be determined\(^48\).

d) Training, apprenticeship. The experienced shaman and his apprentice (*irogamere*) drink ayahuasca together. At the beginning of the apprenticeship

\(^{43}\) E. g., if the demonic spirits force their way into the house from below through the floor or from above by coming down the shaman’s ladder.  
\(^{44}\) The wooden idols are puffed at on the crown of the head, that is, on the place where, in the Matsigenka view, the soul enters and leaves the body. It is said expressly of the stones which protect the shaman and his family and which serve as the seat of the spirit helpers that they must be “fed” regularly with tobacco. If they receive no tobacco, the spirit helpers will desert the shaman and he will die. The idea here is probably that the spirit helpers themselves receive tobacco as food, just as the seripigari also consumes tobacco regularly.  
\(^{45}\) See note 10 of this paper for the corresponding literature.  
\(^{46}\) According to information from José Epifanio Pereira, a son of Fidel PEREIRAS’s, such a wish often proceeds from the mother.  
\(^{47}\) Dorotea Pereira, José Epifanio’s sister, told of a woman called “Marquesa” who took over her husband’s spirit helpers and protective stones on his death and who was active as a woman-shaman (*curandera*).  
\(^{48}\) It is possible that the active agents of other plants containing alkaloid are added to the *kamaranpi*-drink (*Banisteriopsis*).  
\(^{49}\) BUTT (1962) reports that according to the Akawoio of British Guiana the souls of dead shamans can act as the teachers (*ladoi*) of a novice. Whether the Matsigenka have similar notions is not known. In contrast to this is the statement METRAUX makes on the choosing of a shaman-novice among the Campa (1949:391): “Campa apprentice shamans also disclaimed receiving their training directly from a human teacher, and feigned to learn their art from the soul of a dead shaman. As they put it, the shaman’s soul appeared to the novice in his sleep and persuaded him to practise shamanism; if the man consented, the soul repeated its visits every night to instruct him in all the necessary skills”.


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the apprentice is given a drink which, in comparison to that of his master, contains only a slight concentration of active agents, that is, he receives a weak plant-brew so that he can become accustomed to its consumption. The apprentice’s trance, if it appears at all in the early attempts, will be imperfect and of short duration and the saankarite will not appear to him at first. According to the statement of an informant, the apprentice “who has drunk ayahuasca many times, has visions and gains strength and power (ishintsitake) gradually. After a short while he has real power or strength (iragaveane) at his disposal and is then a shaman. He goes to the river and meets a ‘man’ there (saankarite). The man gives him stones (imapukite, kovoreari, iserepito) and these stones are jaguars (matsontsori); with them he defends himself and his relatives from other jaguars (matsontsorino), from the spirits of pigs (shintoriniro) or from segamai-demons. He gives tobacco to these guardian stones. If he loses the stones, he must die.” The scene on the river reported by our informant, is reminiscent of the shaman novice’s encounter with his personal spirit guardian (inetsaane). The presentation of the protective stones or the winning of spirit helpers seems in our view to constitute the initiation of a shaman.

It emerges from reports about the apprenticeship of the future shaman that the apprentice (irogamere) is instructed by the older, more experienced shaman and also by his guardian spirit (inetsaane). Dorotea Pereira said on this point among other things: “The older man gives the younger ayahuasca, the boy listens, sings, learns songs ... The older man takes ayahuasca and goes away; his inetsaane comes down, teaches the boy so that the boy can become his curandero later.” There is no contradiction inherent in the fact that the novice is trained by the older shaman and by his guardian spirit at the same time, as we will show; both types of training must be seen as complementary. That they are complementary is further emphasized by the fact that the “inetsaane who comes down” appears in the form of the master and sings and speaks with his voice.

The course of training is probably divided into different phases and takes place in different localities: in the bush, where master and apprentice are alone, and in the shaman’s house where the apprentice has the opportunity of becoming acquainted with the master’s different types of activity, with his inetsaane and with other participants in the séance, especially with the women.

49) The brews are usually prepared by women, in particular by the shaman’s wife. It must however be assumed that in some cases the shaman himself brews medicinal and magical plants and hallucinogens.

50) Pedro Vicente, a teacher in Shimaa, Río Konpiroshiaato (Upper Urubamba).

51) Although the novice’s physical organs are neither changed nor renewed at his initiation (ELIADE, 1951), the stones appear to be in a sense organs removed to the outside, since they are always carried on the body and since their loss leads to death.

52) That is, he goes on an estatic journey (“a trip”).

53) The Matsigenka usually translate the term seripigari by “curandero”, i.e., “healer”, “medicine man”; this is to a certain degree contrasted with “brujo”, i.e., “magician”, “wizard”. Although the matsika-nari are always referred to by the Matsigenka as “brujos”, they also translate seripigari by “brujo”.

54) It is not possible to deal with Matsigenka cosmology here. It must however, be mentioned that, in the view of the Matsigenka, the cosmos is divided into different horizontal layers, the sky consisting of several layers. The saankarite/inetsaane live in various layers, but especially in the higher ones, that is in the layers of the sky, but the saankarite who inhabit the hills and mountains, again higher than the Matsigenka themselves, have an especially prominent place in their world picture. Cf. WEISS (1972:160). See also p. 70 and notes 66/7 of this paper.

55) Dorotea Pereira said once of the apprenticeship: “[The apprentice] sits down and listens in the house of the old curandero, just next to the ladder (igenanpiro). [This goes on] for about a month. Afterwards he takes ayahuasca himself until he is completely paralysed; he goes into the bush; he loses himself there for 2–3 days. When he comes back he is a curandero. Now he knows everything and can do everything.”

56) Between the seripigari’s inetsaane and the shaman’s wife dialogue and songs with alternating voices begin to develop. Other women present can also take part in these. See p. 71 and note 68 of this paper.
Several informants were in agreement that the older shaman and his apprentice would share the master's protective stones during the latter's lifetime and that the apprentice would take over these stones on the master's death. This information contradicts to a certain degree that of Pedro Vicente in which the novice himself receives protective stones from a saankariite\(^57\), but the possibility cannot be ruled out that the novice shares the master's protective stones and spirit helpers and that he also gains spirit helpers of his own.

The sharing of the stones means, however, that the relationship of dependence between the shaman, his protective spirit and his spirit helpers is extended to include the apprentice, since the master is also dependent on the correct behavior of the apprentice, on account of the latter's using the same stones\(^58\). The circle of mutual dependence which is connected with the practice of his office, however, is even greater than this, as will be seen.

e. Appearances in public

It is not known if the shaman's first appearance\(^59\) is of any particular importance. The reports of informants dealing with the change-over from training to initiation and from this to appearance in public would seem to doubt this, but these reports are in the main not complete. However, they give the following picture of a shamanistic séance: When the shaman has drunk ayahuasca (kamaranpi) and falls in a trance, he begins to hum or to sing\(^60\). He takes a bunch of leaves (shigementontsi) which consists of bamboo leaves (kapiro oshi), of yuca leaves, or leaves from maize husks and mounts the shaman-ladder (igenanpiro)\(^61\) with them. From there he jumps onto the roof-platform\(^62\). He continues humming or singing and shakes the bunch of leaves\(^63\). Later he comes down again. He may ascend and descend the ladder several times\(^63a\).

This description of a séance naturally reproduces only one aspect of reality and at that an aspect to which a Matsigenka would attach no special importance. In his view, this is what really — in the sense of non-ordinary or inner reality\(^64\) — happens: in a trance induced by kamaranpi or other hallucinogens, the seripigari sends his soul (isure) into the land of the saankariite\(^65\), in order to visit the family and other friends and relatives of his spirit guardian (inetsaane). His soul is received there and he is served yuca, i.e., manioc, and masato (yuca beer). The shaman's spirit guardian (inetsaane) in the meantime visits the shaman's house and is received there as a guest. He brings

\(^{57}\) Cf. p. 69 and note 50.

\(^{58}\) One cannot speak of “ownership” of the stones, since the power of the shaman over them is strictly limited.

\(^{59}\) Special importance is often attached to the first public appearance of the shaman in Siberia and Central Asia, this is partly true also of S. America. See for example BUTT (1962:46/51).

\(^{60}\) Cf. SNELL’s observations, quoted on p. 63/4 of this paper. The seripigari’s humming and singing have apparently a double function: The saankariite/inetsaane are “attracted” by it. (The shaman then tries with the help of his inetsaane to get as many accompanying spirits as possible to appear. These are then also referred to as inetsaane [‘visitors’].) On the other hand, the humming and singing are also seen as having been inspired by, taken over from, or executed by the saankariite/inetsaane, since the singer, during the trance, is considered to be the shaman’s inetsaane; see p. 70/1 of this paper.

\(^{61}\) Cf. SNELL’s observations. The shaman’s ladder, which can have one or two steps, but which is sometimes merely a pole, is regarded as being a path (“camino”) which leads “him who sees” into the land of the saankariite.

\(^{62}\) Cf. SNELL’s observations. The loft or so-called “barbacoa” is meant here.

\(^{63}\) Cf. SNELL’s observations. In the cure for certain illnesses the patient is fanned with a bunch of leaves; this is done, for example, when the shaman’s apprentice has taken too much tobacco-juice or drunk too much ayahuasca; the fanning helps him to recover more quickly.

\(^{64a}\) Cf. SNELL’s observations, quoted on p. 65/4 of this paper.

\(^{64}\) See note 19 of this paper.

\(^{65}\) On the ecstatic journey or soul-journey the shaman does not “fly”, i.e., the Matsigenka do not consider him to have “wings”. Important, however, is the conception of the “lightness” or “weightlessness” of the seripigari or his soul. It was said, for instance: “If the wind rises, the seripigari’s soul or he himself will go away with the wind”. See also remarks on p. 71.
gifts, such as bananas, as well as medicinal and magical plants (ivenkite, pocharoki, etc.). The inetsaane has assumed the shaman's shape and voice, that is, he appears in his form. According to the Matsigenka he has taken possession of the seripigari's body which is "without life" or "empty" after the soul has been sent off\(^6\).

According to an alternative Matsigenka theory which appears just as often as the first, the seripigari does not send his soul off in his trance; instead he vanishes "body and soul", i.e., completely. In this case his inetsaane "represents" him in his own house and is given hospitality by those present, especially by the shaman's wife.

In both of these theories a song for alternating voices or group singing begins to develop between those present and the inetsaane\(^6\)); furthermore, questions and answers are passed to and fro between the visiting spirit and those present. The spirit, who has assumed the form of the shaman, greets his wife by calling her "mamantsiki", an archaic term for 'mother's sister'\(^8\).

On the occasion of an ayahuasca ceremony, the shaman may wear a plaited head-ring in which macaw tail-feathers have been stuck. This head-ring is referred to as a "corona" or wicker-crown. According to one informant\(^6\)) this "corona" spreads light and brightness in the night. Another informant\(^7\) said of the ayahuasca ceremonies: "A shaman who really knows his business can give his guests light in the house by singing". The same man said that "some of the inetsaane resemble lamps. When they are alight, it is bright as day; then they sing". Significant here is the light symbolism, which is also associated with the shaman elsewhere\(^7\)), as well as the connection between light symbolism and song.

A further point which can only be touched on here concerns the relationship of the shaman to his wife\(^7\)) and to women in general. When our informants report for instance that a seripigari has to abstain from spiced foods\(^7\)) and also from women\(^7\)); when they go on to say that the blood of menstruating women adversely affects the power of the shaman if it touches him, and when many myths report how powerful seripigari are destroyed through the enmity or stupidity of a woman, for instance the wife of the shaman, then one cannot doubt the ambivalence between the shaman and his wife.

From this point of view it is especially noteworthy that, in the eyes of the Matsigenka, the life and death of the seripigari are dependant on the correct behaviour of his wife and that, vice versa, the shaman must also behave

\(^{6}\) This type of trance contains therefore elements of ecstasy and of possession. Audrey BUTT (1962) was the first to recognise and describe this type.

\(^{7}\) Several inetsaane are also possible. Cf. Note 60.

\(^{8}\) Elise Simon, who comes from the Rio Manú region.

\(^{7}\) Several inetsaane are also possible. Cf. Note 60.

\(^{6}\) WEISS (1969:821) gives "mamanciki" as the Campa term for 'male ego') and "ina" for 'my mother'. Mamantsiki is the Matsigenka name for "peñolerias" (rock formations, rounded rock-tips (f) where the dangerous in-ato ('owner-spirits', 'species-masters') of infectious diseases like pox or measles are kept prisoner. According to SNELL (1964:11), the Matsigenka term for 'mother's sister' is ina (voc.) or pino (your mother's sister), so that the terms for mother and mother's sister are homonymous.

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\(^{7}\) Or to his wives. Polygyny is frequent among the Matsigenka and occurs in an estimated 20—25% of all marriages. The shamans are no exception here; it seems rather as though they in particular often have more than one wife (or had at an earlier time).

\(^{7}\) Marcellino stated that the seripigari had to 'fast', i.e., to abstain from aji (pepper) and other sharp spices "so as not to become savage and kill people". According to information from Venturo, a seripigari can also become "savage" if he imbibes too much tobacco; he is then transformed into a jaguar and kills people.

\(^{7}\) The abstention from spices and women should last at least 2 months according to Marcellino.
properly to his wife if he does not want to risk death\(^75\). In fact, the traditions of the Matsigenka do report that adultery on the part of the wife of the seripigari, as also on the part of the shaman, can lead to his being abandoned by his inetsaane, so that he then dies.

One point emerges gradually: the activity of the seripigari cannot be seen as the isolated activity of an individual; it must rather be regarded as the behaviour of a whole group of mutually dependant persons who are again dependant in their turn on the behaviour of the protective and auxiliary spirits. Apart from this the mutual interdependance of these persons seems to follow a certain hierarchical order, in which the shaman’s wife has a higher place, astonishing as this may seem, than her husband, since sometimes she seems scarcely affected by the wrong behaviour of the others or of herself: it appears as though she often were to a certain extent “invulnerable”, completely in contrast to her husband, the shaman, and his assistants. The question arises, however, as to how far the Matsigenka group as a whole\(^76\) influences or controls the behaviour of the wife of the seripigari. On this point nothing is yet known.

f. The function and status of the seripigari.

In spite of all the influences of Western civilisation, the sickness and death of a Matsigenka are still regarded as having been caused by demons or by human enemies, whereby the human enemies, principally the matsikanari\(^77\), can also use demonic beings\(^78\) as their tools. For this reason the seripigari is still regarded today as the protector of his group\(^79\). He is capable of protecting the members of his group because, thanks to his connection with the saankariite/inetsaane, which is achieved through partaking of hallucinogens, he can grasp extra-ordinary realities and can ‘see’ in this sense. This seeing enables him to recognise, behind the shell of appearances\(^80\), the real powers and figures or causes of these appearances.

The protective function of the seripigari can be defined thus:

aa. He protects the group from the spirits of the dead and from other death-bringing demons.

bb. He diagnoses the diseases caused by the influence of the spirits of the dead, of other demons in human or animal form or of human enemies\(^81\).

cc. He takes care that his group should not suffer from hunger. Since the saankariite are owners and protectors of wild game\(^82\), the shaman functions

\(^{75}\) It must be assumed that fidelity in a polygynous marriage extends to all the partners. More exact information is not yet available on this point.

\(^{76}\) This can mean the extended family, the local group, or a group which includes several local groups.

\(^{77}\) Cf. notes 21 and 23. Shamans are often regarded as seripigari by their own group and as matsikanari by other groups.

\(^{78}\) The matsikanari is in touch with deathbringing spirits (cf. note 36), especially with the ka(t)-suva'erenini. It is also said that the matsikanari sends the mahanporoni-bird out to kill his victims. The mahanporoni, often associated or identified (cf. note 36) with the ka(t)suva'erenini, then forces its way into the victim and kills it from within. Another demonic bird associated with the matsikanari is the tsvanini.

\(^{79}\) Cf. note 76.

\(^{80}\) Cf. note 20.

\(^{81}\) The Matsigenkas’ idea is that the sick person is cured not by the shaman but by his inetsaane. In the curing of illness, medicinal and magical plants (ivenkite), whose owners are again the saankariite/inetsaane, play an important part. The ivenkite grow, as was said, a) in the Matsigenka territory, b) in the plantations of the seripigari, and c) as wild or cultivated plants in the areas inhabited by the saankariite. In the treatment of illness the shaman uses the technique of blowing or puffing at the sick person with tobacco smoke and that of sucking out the foreign body. Parallel to the visible actions of the seripigari there follow actions, according to the Matsigenka, which remain hidden to whoever cannot “see”. These “invisible” actions are regarded as the decisive ones.

Finally it must be mentioned that group-cures, in which several seripigari are active, are also known.

\(^{82}\) Cf. note 28. It is said for example (information from Marcellino): “If the kovuva-bird appears”, i.e., if the seripigari has the kovuva appear as his inetsaane, “then all the animals of the forest appear.”
in the matter of food-procuring as an intermediary between them and his own group. Through this mediation, i.e., through requests directed to the saankariite/inetsaane, game is brought to the Matsigenka.

Even though the function of the shaman is principally that of protector of his group, one should not overlook the fact that he is at the same time the keeper of the religious and social traditions of the Matsigenka and that he adapts these traditions to new demands. On his ecstatic journeys, he or his soul passes through cosmic regions, overcomes difficulties and presumably survives even battles with inimical powers. On his return the shaman reports his experiences to the group; he tells of the nature of the regions he visited, the extent of the area travelled being proportional to his power (iragaveane). From these reports of the seripigari, the knowledge of the cosmos as it appears to the Matsigenka is kept alive. In this way, the seripigari succeeds in keeping up traditions, and functions therefore in the interests of cultural continuity.

Shamans of the most varied kind have been described as "psychotherapists" and also as catalysts of social tensions. Whether the seripigari releases and removes social tensions by the "reaction" or projection of his energies onto a background determined by tradition, or whether, through his seerlike qualities and through the power or influencing spirits and of threatening inimical persons, he does not rather contribute to the polarization of social tensions, cannot be answered definitely.

That the seripigari indeed does create social tensions is not only to be related to his role of determining the causes of sickness and death, nor yet to the potential dangerousness of the seripigari, who can begin to cast spells and to kill instead of to heal. When various myths report that the Matsigenka gathered around a seripigari as followers, in order to unite themselves under his leadership in ritual purity with the saankariite and to go with these into their country, then a longing for salvation, built into the Matsigenka culture becomes apparent and with it a tendency to turn away from concrete political and social problems. This tendency is very closely connected with the function of the seripigari. It creates social tensions by turning away from the realities of everyday life. These tensions between the demands of ordinary and extra-ordinary reality are present and were present, indeed, as far as we know, in very many of the present and past cultures of the South American Indians.

Although it was relatively easy to determine the role and function of the seripigari in society from the statements of informants, even though direct observations by the authors are mostly lacking, the lack of such observations becomes really felt when one tries to characterize the resulting status which the seripigari enjoys. Furthermore most of what can be deduced from the reports of informants applies to the recent past, rather than the present.

It is unassailable that the seripigari has political influence. In individual cases he may be the religious and at the same time political leader of his

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84) LEVI-Strauss (1949), (1958) and (1972:199 ff).
85) It is said for instance that the seripigari, out of revenge, can steal the souls of young women who do not return his interest and can deposit these among the inkiyari/trishibinanka, i.e., female spirits who live near the star spirits. The body then grows weak and becomes yellower and paler from day to day. If the mother notices the condition of the young woman, she will advise her to live with the shaman. On doing so, the woman becomes well again, for he fetches her soul back, again (informant: José Epifanio Pereira).
86) The preparation for the condition of ritual purity consists among other things of sexual abstinence, the taking of tobacco brews (liquid or thickened), of hallucinogens and of masato, i.e., yuca beer. It is generally accepted that the saankariite mingle with those taking part in a masato feast. Before dawn the saankariite return to their own land. If the Matsigenka are ritually pure and prepared, they vanish with the saankariite. "They are carried away [as though] by the wind." The myths, however tell (almost) without exception of the failure of such attempts to become united with the saankariite.
group\(^{88}\)); in most cases, however, religious and political leadership are kept separate. This separation may be connected with the ambivalent feelings with which the seripigari is regarded. That these feelings are strengthened by among other things, open or secret doubts of the capabilities and of the power of the shaman to enter into contact with the spirits is shown by a story: A young boy, who doubts the power and ability of a shaman, looses an arrow at him at night during his ayahuasca-séance and hits, instead of the seripigari, the inetsaane, who is the only visitor. The shaman then takes the boy with him and both of them meet the wounded inetsaane in the land of the saankariite. The inetsaane soon recovers. The boy is then thrown to the "dogs" of the saankariite, i.e., the jaguars, and devoured. The end of the story is significantly that this tale was told by the shaman himself and that the people do not dare to check on whether the shaman does really vanish in his trance and whether he has his inetsaane come or not\(^{89}\).

In general one can say that one of the problems of the Matsigenka shaman, and perhaps of any shaman, is that he is a specialist in relationships, both human and superhuman, that he gains power through these special relationships and that this power, if it becomes too dominant, threatens to destroy relationships with human and with non-human beings, that is with spirits. In this regard, it is reported by the Matsigenka that at the Pongo de Mainique\(^{90}\) there sits a tasorints\(^{91}\) who was once a powerful shaman but who did not attain immortality on account of an error and died. As one cause of the error, the informants expressly mentioned the presumptuousness and arrogance of the seripigari.

V

Interpretation of the ayahuasca ceremony observed by SNELL

If we review SNELL's observations, we see that the scene described in his diary contains the following elements:

- Ayahuasca ceremony at night in a house inhabited by five families; three families are present at the time of the ceremony.
- The interior of the house is dark; a small lamp, however, is burning.
- A woman brings ayahuasca in a small pottery vessel and leaves it in the middle of the space.
- A man fetches a mat to sit on, lays it on his sleepingplace (platform), sits or lies on it and begins to hum.
- The man calls his brother.
- Four men gather around the small pottery vessel.
- One of them takes some ayahuasca and returns to his sleepingplace; the leader of the ceremony continues his humming. Another man drinks ayahuasca. Laughter and conversation, also with those standing outside (observers).

\(^{88}\) The political leader of a large Matsigenka group is called \textit{itinkami} ('the first', 'the chief') or also koraka (Quechua loan word). The chief usually tries to convince his group of his point of view by addressing them directly and to guide the activities of the group in this way.

\(^{89}\) Informant: José Epifanio Pereira.

\(^{90}\) This place constitutes the division between the Upper and Lower Urubamba. The river, coming from the south, has broken through an east-west rise at this point and at the point of the breakthrough, forms a series of rapids; the rocks are close together and water shoots through them at great speed in the rainy season. Many a Matsigenka who has tried to cross the Pongo on a balsa raft has lost his life there.

\(^{91}\) Cf. p. 66 and note 18 of this paper.
The leader of the ceremony takes coca. The leader climbs on the shaman’s ladder (igenanpiro), takes the bunch of leaves (shigementontsi) and gives it to the man next to him. The bunch of leaves comes to rest between the two men.

The pottery vessel is covered. The man who has drunk from it goes back to his sleeping-place.

The leader stops what he is doing, but continues humming.

Only one man wears a cushma.

Only two men go on drinking for about a quarter of an hour after the beginning of the humming or singing.

The leader mounts the shaman-ladder ten times. He jumps several times (from there) to the loft-platform, makes noise in doing so, hums and shakes the bunch of leaves.

The second man who keeps on drinking climbs the ladder three times.

The other two men drop out.

His wife, who is present, stays silent during the drinking.

The ceremony lasts five hours, from 19—24 hours. After about two and a half hours the leader leaves the house and comes back without his cushma, that is, he is naked.

When the ayahuasca-pot is empty, they all lie down and go to sleep.

No traces or noticeable symptoms are to be seen next morning in the participants at the night session, only tiredness. They eat a normal breakfast of yuca and tapir-meat.

In interpreting this scene we can exclude the possibility that the ayahuasca ceremony was performed in connection with the healing of a sick person, since no such person was present. In our view, three other possibilities of interpretation remain.

1. The scene in question was a priestly ritual in WEISS’s sense.

2. The scene shows an experienced shaman training an “assistant” (irogame-re).

3. The scene contains elements of 1 and 2.

I: WEISS describes a typical ayahuasca ceremony among the Campa, who are direct neighbours of the Matsigenka and who speak a related Arawak language. WEISS writes as follows (1973: 43-6): “Campa shamans take ayahuasca frequently, often keeping a supply on hand for this purpose. But in addition, from time to time, by decision or request, they conduct a group ceremony involving ayahuasca, which we can refer to as the Campa ayahuasca ceremony. This ceremony is essentially a shamanistic séance, but of a somewhat distinctive kind.

Coca (Erythroxylon coca) comes, say the Matsigenka, from the saankariite and is supposed to have the power to prophesy future events. See BAER (1969a:367-8). Completely in agreement with this is the passage in STEWARD and METRAUX (1948:549): “To ascertain the perpetrator of witchcraft, the Campa shaman spits coca into his hand, shakes, and ascertains the guilty person through its configuration” (ORDINAIRE), 1892(148)). STEWARD and METRAUX also mention, that coca is used by the Campa to heal illnesses: “To cure, he blows tobacco smoke and rubs coca on the patient, and sucks out the ‘bone’ which the witch has put inside the person.”
The Campa ayahuasca ceremony begins at nightfall since the drug requires darkness to produce its visual effects. A quantity of the drug, in the form of a thick liquid, is prepared in advance and set aside for use in the ceremony. The drug itself is called kamarampi in the Campa language, from the verb root — kamaran —, which means "to vomit", reflecting its extremely bitter and sometimes emetic qualities...

At nightfall, those who are present convene, arranging themselves sitting or lying on mats out in the open of the settlement clearing, or else under a house roof, the women separated from the men in the Campa fashion. The shaman is the center of attention, with the vessel containing the kamarampi by him. Using a small gourd bowl, he drinks a quantity of the liquid, then gives each of the other participants a drink — a procedure that will be repeated at intervals until the supply is consumed. About half an hour later, the drug begins to take effect, and the shaman begins to sing. He sings one song after another as long as he is under the influence of the drug, and the séance may last until dawn. There is a distinctive quality to the singing of a Campa shaman under the influence of kamarampi, an eerie, distant quality of voice. His jaw may quiver, he may cause his clothing to vibrate. What is understood to be happening is that the good spirits have come to visit the group that has called them: They come in human form, festively attired; they sing and dance before the assembled mortals, but only the shaman perceives them clearly. It is further understood that when the shaman sings he is only repeating what he hears the spirits sing, he is merely singing along with them...

Even while the shaman is singing, his soul may go on a flight to some distant place, returning later. Some shamans move from the sight of the rest of the group during the ceremony and then pretend to disappear bodily on such a flight, only to return later. The soul-flight of the shaman is an optional concomitant in any case, and in its usual form is a personal experience that does not intrude upon the actual performance of the ceremony.

The songs mainly extol the excellence and bounty of the good spirits... The entire atmosphere of the ceremony is one of decorum without frenzy, even though the shaman is in a drugged trance. The ceremony, following a definite if simple format, presents the appearance of a group of people reverently making contact with the good spirits under the leadership of a religious practitioner, even though it is true that they remain passively appreciative spectators of the shaman's virtuosity...

WEISS (l. c.) comes to the conclusion that the ceremony he describes is ambivalent: "the same behaviour looks like a séance one moment and like worship the next". He finds this ambivalence confirmed in a local variant of the ayahuasca ceremony in which "the ceremony proceeds as described, except that the men take turns singing so that the shaman remains the director of the ceremony but is no longer the only virtuoso. In addition, the men and the women separately and together dance and sing in praise of the good spirits. Here the arrow of communication is unambiguously from mortals to immortals rather than the reverse, and it is in the form of adoration".

If we compare the Campa ayahuasca ceremony with the ceremony SNELL observed among the Matsigenka, we discover a whole series of parallels. These parallels make it seem most likely that on the whole the ceremony SNELL described corresponds to that of the Campa and that it, like the Campa ceremony again, contains elements of shamanistic activity and of worship.

In the Matsigenka ceremony, however, there are traits not mentioned in WEISS's paper on the Campa: a) the mounting of the shaman-ladder by one or more persons and b) the shaking of the bunch of leaves.
This leads us to ask the significance of these elements.

II. The fact that the leader of the ceremony remains the centre of the activities, although he leaves the house twice during the ceremony, that he climbs ten times onto the shaman-ladder in order to jump several times from there onto the loft-platform, that he waves the bunch of leaves, sings, hums and makes noise, as well as the fact that a second man also mounts the ladder (three times) while the other two men present “drop out” after a while and that the woman also present merely sits silently throughout, allows us to assume that the whole scene also contains elements of instruction, in other words, that the ayahuasca ceremony was among other an opportunity for the leader to instruct a Matsigenka in the shaman’s art. It is possible that the second man who mounted the ladder was an assistant or apprentice of the leader. That the leader had to vomit does not necessarily mean that he was less experienced. In any case we do not know at the moment how the Matsigenka would regard this vomiting.

III. The remarks made in discussing points I and II allow the conclusion that the scene SNELL observed in 1961 is an ayahuasca ceremony like the one WEISS describes (1973) but that the Matsigenka ceremony was used by a (family) shaman to instruct a pupil or at least an interested party in the shaman’s art.

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