Flesh of the Gods

THE RITUAL USE OF HALLUCINOGENS

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Tobacco (Nicotiana spp.) is not generally considered to be a hallucinogen. Yet, like the sacred mushrooms, peyote, morning-glories, Datura, ayahuasca, the psychotomimetic snuffs, and a whole series of other New World hallucinogens, tobacco has long been known to play a central role in North and South American shamanism, both in the achievement of shamanistic trance states and in purification and supernatural curing. Even if it is not one of the "true" hallucinogens from the botanist's or pharmacologist's point of view, tobacco is often conceptually and functionally indistinguishable from them.

We know that Indians from Canada to Patagonia esteemed tobacco as one of their most important medicinal and magical plants and that some employed it as a vehicle of ecstasy. We also know that everywhere and almost always in prehistoric and more recent historic times its use was strictly ritualistic. Its increasing secularization among Indians is

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a modern development, adopted from Europeans (to whom tobacco was of course unknown prior to the first voyage of Columbus). Nevertheless, ancient ritual meanings associated with native tobacco persist: in many tribes the tobacco they themselves cultivate or collect in the wild state is reserved for ritual and ceremonial use, whereas the white man’s tobacco, or “Virginia tobacco,” a hybrid domesticate of *Nicotiana tabacum*, is freely smoked.

Tobacco was and continues to be used in many ways, of which smoking (in cigarettes, cigars, or pipes) is the most common. This is related to the many esoteric meanings of tobacco smoke in shamanistic ritual, especially curing ceremonies. Zerries (1969:314) points out: “The power of the shaman is often linked with his breath or tobacco smoke, both of which possess cleansing and reinvigorating properties which play an important part in healing and in other magic practices.”

Of the techniques other than smoking, the best known are snuffing, drinking, chewing, eating, sucking, and licking. Even smoking is performed in different ways and with different meanings. Smoke may be blown (in supernatural curing or in feeding the supernaturals with tobacco smoke) or swallowed (“eaten”) in enormous quantities to induce trance states. For example, in his curing ritual, the shaman of the Tenetehara Indians of Brazil will dance, chant, and shake his rattle, stopping...

... from time to time to take deep drags on a long cigar made of native tobacco rolled in *lauri* bark. He soon becomes intoxicated from the smoke combined with the rhythm of the song and the dance. This process is known as “calling” the spirit. The spirit responds only to its distinctive songs and he himself is only prepared to receive the spirit after gulping large quantities of tobacco smoke... During this time the “spirit is strong” and he falls unconscious (Wagley and Galvão, 1949:111).

Like smoke, snuff may be inhaled for its psychoactive effect or blown out, depending on the supernatural need. Tacana shamans in lowland Bolivia, for example, blow tobacco powder into the air to repel malevolent supernatural beings threatening a patient or the community.

Sometimes tobacco is used in combination or association with true vegetal hallucinogens, such as *Datura*, *Banisteriopsis Caapi*, or psycho...

*In view of the many parallels between Siberian and American Indian shamanism, the following remarks by Wasson (1968:592) on tobacco are of interest: “Among Europeans and their descendants elsewhere it became a habit and an addiction but played no role in religion. But after tobacco reached Siberia, probably also in the latter part of the sixteenth century or at the latest in the seventeenth century, it is astonishing how quickly the tribesmen adapted it to shamanism, thus recapturing for it the religious meaning that it has always had for the American Indians.”—Eö.
Tobacco Among the Warao of Venezuela

Tobacco often serves its primary sacred function as the supernatural purifying, mortifying, and reinvigorating agent during the long and arduous initiatory training of novice shamans. This is true especially among Carib and other indigenous language groups in lowland northern South America. We have graphic firsthand accounts of these initiatory ordeals by such eminent ethnographers as Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1917–28). The young Indian shamans are deprived of normal food for long periods, during which they become emaciated almost to the point of skeletonization (ritual death and skeletonization are important aspects of shamanic initiation in many parts of Asia and America). Instead of food they are repeatedly fed large quantities of liquefied tobacco, through both nose and mouth, to induce narcotic trances. In this state the novice makes his first celestial ascent to meet face to face with the spirits inhabiting the Otherworld. Later he begins to use other psychotropic plants as well, especially Banisteriopsis Caapi, in which, one shaman told Koch-Grünberg, "resides the shaman, the jaguar." This refers to the common conceptual identification of shamans with jaguars in much of Middle and South America, an identification often realized through the use of hallucinogens or psychotomimetic substances.

Tobacco may be one of several vehicles for ecstasy; it may be taken in combination with other plants, as we have seen, to induce narcotic trance states; or it may represent the sole psychoactive agent employed by shamans to transport themselves into the realm of the supernatural, as is the case among the Warao of the Orinoco Delta in Venezuela. That Warao shamans smoke enormous "cigars" as much as 50 to 75 centimeters long has been known since early contact times, but the meaning of tobacco in Warao intellectual culture has often gone unnoticed. This is not surprising; few outsiders can expect to penetrate a culture meaningfully in the limited amount of time usually available for field work. My own experience is instructive. In 1954, after an initial period of field work, I dimly perceived the religious complexity of the Warao culture with its three types of shamans and a temple-priest-idol cult (Wilbert, 1957). Since then I have worked for more than fifteen years with the Warao shaman to whom I owe much of what follows in these pages. At first we communicated through an interpreter, later in Spanish, and more recently in his own language. Only in 1969, however, did he finally consent to lead me step by step beyond the outer fringes of Warao religion into that complex supernatural world that opens up for the shaman through the act of intensive smoking.
The majority of Warao, a typically riverine fishing people, inhabit the labyrinthine swamps and waterways of the Orinoco Delta in eastern Venezuela. Smaller groups live to the west of the Delta, in the neighboring states of Sucre and Monagas, and still others are found southeast of the main distribution area, along the swampy coastal belt of Guyana and Surinam. The Warao have lived in this region of some 17,000 square kilometers since prehistoric times, protected by their difficult environment from Afro-Europeans and other Indian tribes, neither of whom succeeded in conquering their stronghold. For this reason the Warao are among the few South American Indian peoples still surviving as a numerically substantial and culturally thriving tribal society, relatively free of genetic and cultural admixture. Counting the estimated 500 or so Warao living in Guyana and Surinam, the total population should now stand around 14,500 or even 15,000.

The Warao believe they inhabit a saucer-shaped earth surrounded by a belt of water. The "stepped" celestial vault covers both earth and ocean and rests on a series of mountains situated at the cardinal and intercardinal points. Much of a Warao Indian's life is spent in propitiating a number of Supreme Spirits (Kanobos) who inhabit these mountains at the ends of the world and who require nourishment in the form of tobacco smoke from the people.

The priest-shaman (wishiratu) visits these spirits in his dreams or in a tobacco-induced trance and, on returning from such a visit, transmits the message of the Supreme Spirits to the community. One of the four major spirits is usually present among the people in the form of a sacred stone. The annual moriche festival, called nahanamtu, over which the priest-shaman presides, is celebrated in propitiation of the Supreme Spirits who request that the ceremony be held and who will protect the community if their command is heeded. Sickness is believed to be caused by one or another of the deified Kanobos, who thereby express his dissatisfaction with man and sends his hebu (spirit) to do harm or even kill. Children especially are subject to such attacks. The priest-shaman is the only one who can intervene as curer because only he can relate directly to the Supreme Kanobos.

In addition to the priest-shaman there are two other important religious practitioners among the Warao. The "light" shaman is known as bahanarotu. He presides over an ancient cult of fertility called habitanuka. As we shall see later, the bahanarotu travels in his dream or tobacco-induced trance state to an eastern part of the cosmic vault.

* For a more detailed description of Warao culture, see Wilbert, 1972.
The celestial bridge of tobacco smoke which he frequents and maintains between his community and the eastern Supreme Bahana (spirit) guarantees abundance of life on earth. In their aggressive shamanic role, baharanoros spread sickness and death among their enemies by...
hurling magic arrows at them. Only a friendly baharanrotu can assuage such misfortune, through the use of tobacco and the widespread traditional shamanic technique of sucking out the illness-causing foreign bodies magically introduced by the malevolent sorcerer.

The "dark" shaman, known as hoarotu, maintains the connection between the Warao in the center of the universe and the powers of the West. This connection became severed in ancient times and can be re-established only by the hoarotu. The spirit beings in the West subsist through their medium, the dark shaman, on the blood and flesh of man. To procure this human food for his masters, the hoarotu kills his victims by means of magic projectiles, again through the medium of tobacco smoke.

Thus there exist among the Warao three religious practitioners who derive their shamanic power from three different cosmic sources. All three are ambivalent and can adopt either a benevolent or a malevolent role: the wishiratu can cause and cure hebu sickness; the baharanrotu hatabu sickness; and the hoarotu hoa sickness. Further, all three kinds of shaman use tobacco smoke as their principal ecstatic and therapeutic vehicle. In spite of existing regionalism with regard to underlying concepts, it is generally true that shamanic initiation, ecstasy, and curing are unthinkable among the Warao without the aid of tobacco.

The overwhelming magical importance of tobacco is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that tobacco was originally absent from the Orinoco Delta. Even today it is not generally cultivated and must be acquired through barter or purchase. Until very recently, smoking was the sole prerogative of the religious and magical practitioners, who obtained their supply from Creole settlers of the western Delta and from the island of Trinidad. Wishiratus and baharanrotus require considerable quantities of tobacco to feed the Kanobo and Bahana spirits through the smoking of their extraordinary cigars. Considering that propitiation of these spirits by means of tobacco smoke is an absolute sine qua non of Warao intellectual culture, and that shamans must use tobacco to achieve the required trance state for travel to the Other-world, one may imagine that procuring the sacred plant provided the principal impetus for Warao excursions into the hazardous frontier regions and the open ocean.

In the old days, ordinary mortals hesitated to smoke for fear of precipitating an undesirable encounter with tobacco-craving spirits. Nowadays cigarettes and tobacco in every form are smoked freely by most Warao; even the women indulge more or less freely as evening falls. But the long indigenous "cigars" are exclusively shamanic. (Strictly speaking, the Warao "cigar" is really a long tubular wrapping made of the stipule of a manaca palm, called wina moru in Warao, into
Tobacco Among the Warao of Venezuela

which plugs of tobacco are inserted and which is consumed along with the tobacco, rather than a true cigar whose wrappings as well as contents consist of tobacco.) Warao shamans must never attempt to feed the Supreme Spirits with "Virginia blends," because the foreign "perfumed" aroma is offensive to the spirits. (Unaware of this prohibition, on one ceremonial occasion I deposited a Camel cigarette as an offering in the sanctuary of the Kanobo spirits. The officiating priest-shaman immediately asked me to replace it with a piece of "black" tobacco. Not only would it be more suitable for the Kanobos, its smell would also be free of the offensive odor of the burning cigarette paper.)

The Shamanistic World of Light and Darkness

The Wishiratu

At the ends of the universe (aitona) there live four supreme spirits, three male and one female, called Kanobos, "Our Grandfathers." The Kanobo Supreme, named Karaskimo, inhabits the world mountain of the south, Kanobo Arianawa lives on the world mountain of the east, and Kanobo Warowaro on the mountain of the north. The female Kanobo is called Daunarani, the Mother of the Forest; her serpent body lives in the southwest and her spirit in the southeast.

Generally speaking, all four Kanobos are benignly inclined toward mankind, so long as men propitiate them with tobacco, moriche flour, fish or crabs, and incense. The Kanobos accept these offerings gratefully before returning everything except the tobacco to be ritually consumed by the people. The tobacco the spirits keep for themselves, for tobacco smoke is their proper nourishment. They appreciate it especially when it has been perfumed with incense. If neglected for a long period of time by the priest-shaman, the Kanobos may become vindictive and send wishi-pains and death down to earth. Pains are invisible and yet materially conceived agents of the Kanobos, who endow the priest-shaman with the power to control them—hence his name, wishiratu, literally "Master of Pains." This control over pains represents the actual power base of the wishiratu as shaman.

The Warao recognize lower- and higher-ranking wishiratus. The most prestigious wishiratu of any Warao community is always the keeper of the sacred stone image. This stone, said to measure no more than thirty centimeters in length and ten in width, with an irregular surface, is variously called "Image of Kanobo," "Grandfather," and "Son of Kanoba." Though wholly unworked, it is conceptualized by the Indians as a head, with a recognizable face. On the lower back of the head is said to be an open sore, constantly oozing blood. The Indians are convinced that if any ordinary person, whether a member of the
to a Kanobo at the end of the world. It is a difficult journey and he would surely fail were it not for an invisible psychopomp, or soul guide, who leads the way and advises the young traveler. The first station he reaches is a manaca palm. As mentioned, it is from the epidermis of the manaca leaf stalk that the Warao make the wina, or tube, for their cigars. This palm is the shamanic tree of all wishiratus, who come here to carve their mark into its bark. The novice is advised to follow the example of his predecessors and told that his mark will remain fresh as long as he lives.

Next he and his soul guide come to a place of many water holes, where each living wishiratu finds his own reservoir of water for drinking and purification. Only upon his death will his water hole dry up forever. Further along the road, the novice shaman encounters another manaca palm, and here he rolls his first shamanic cigar (the initial one having been presented to him by his wishiratu-teacher).

Then the young wishiratu has to clear an abyss filled with hungry jaguars, snapping alligators, and frenzied sharks all eager to devour him. A vine hangs down over the abyss and, grasping it firmly, the novice swings himself across. But this is still not the end of his ordeal. Soon he reaches another obstacle. The path becomes extremely slippery, so that he can hardly keep his balance. To make matters worse, on every side are threatening demons armed with spears, waiting to kill any novice who falls.

Next there are four stations where the novice is tested by groups of people barbecuing the meat of boar, deer, tapir, and alligator, respectively. He is offered the meat of all, but no matter how hungry he is and how strong the temptation, he must reject all of the proffered meat except the venison. Greatly tempting also are the women he meets next; he sees them making bark cloth for pubic covers but must not linger with them, much less have sexual intercourse.

Escaping the powerful lure of these women, the novice reaches the terrifying place where, stretched out on its back before him, he encounters the giant hawk, devourer of young wishiratus. Its beak snaps, its claws grasp, and its wings flap open and shut. Without betraying fear, the novice must step over the rapacious bird and pass by a great pile of bleached bones—the sad remains of his less fortunate predecessors.

Finally the candidate shaman has to pass through a hole in an enormous tree trunk with rapidly opening and closing doors. He hears the voice of his guide and companion from the other side of the trunk, for this spirit has already cleared the dangerous passage and now encourages the fearful novice to follow his example. The candidate jumps through the clashing doors and looks around inside the hollow tree.
There he beholds a huge serpent with four colorful horns and a fiery-red luminous ball on the tip of her protruding tongue. This serpent has a servant with reptilian body and human head whom the candidate sees carrying away the bones of novices who failed to clear the clashing gateway of the tree.

The novice hurries outside and finds himself at the end of the cosmos. His patron Kanobo’s mountain rises before him. Here he will be given a small house of his own, where he may sojourn in his future tobacco trances to consult with the Kanobo and where eventually he will come to live forever upon successful completion of his shaman’s life on earth.

After this initiatory encounter with his patron Kanobo at the end of the world, the young wishiratu awakens from his tobacco trance as a new man. He carries with him six wishi spirits to assist him in curing men who suffer from spirit sickness. This sickness is caused by a hostile wishiratu who blows a “pain” into a victim. In his shaman’s rattle, the wishiratu carries additional spirit helpers in the form of quartz crystals. These too assist him in curing by extracting sickness-causing wishi pains. As time goes by, the young wishiratu will become more and more familiar with the complex world of Kanobos and learn how to be wise in maintaining a contractual partnership between them and his people. This is a monumental spiritual obligation, weighing heavily on him, and involving a never-ending cycle of ritual observances and tobacco-induced ecstatic journeys to the ends of the cosmos.

The Bahananota

The “history of consciousness” of the Warao as a people has its origin in the “House of Tobacco Smoke,” created ex nihil by the Creator Bird of the Dawn. The House of Smoke is the birthplace of “light” shamanism, called bahana. Its materialization by means of solidified tobacco smoke took place through the conscious act of a bird spirit, who at the beginning of time arose as a young man in the East. The radiant body of this youth, his weapons, and his shamanic rattle were all made of tobacco smoke.

The following is a condensation of some twenty hours of conversation on the origin of the bahananota shaman, in March and July, 1970, with a Winikina-Warao shaman. It is not to be taken as verbatim translation, but I have endeavored to preserve as much as possible the original form and spirit of this remarkable tradition as I perceived it.

* Reminiscient of the well-known and very ancient Chinese and Indian motif of the sky dragon with the wish-fulfilling pearl.
tribe or an outsider, were to lay eyes on the sacred stone, he would instantly be struck blind. The mythic origin of the image goes back to a primordial "first time," when an ancestral shaman, anguished by death and pain in his community, undertook an arduous pilgrimage to one of the sacred mountains at the end of the cosmos to ask the Kanobo for an end to the dying. He begged him to come and live in the midst of his people rather than far away on the mountain. The Kanobo agreed to do so—in the form of the sacred stone image. He also promised to advise the shaman in the future and to refrain from sending his pains if an initial sacrifice of ten men was made and the people agreed to continue to make offerings of tobacco smoke. By the act of residing in the cult house or temple of the community in the form of the image, the Kanobo effected the actual transfer of control over pain to the first shaman and, by extension, to all future wishiratus. The ten men selected for the primordial sacrifice were laid side by side and killed by the Kanobo's jumping over them.

Ever since this first contract between the ancestral wishiratu and the Kanobo, Warao communities have identified themselves as "People of Kanobo Karoshimo," "People of Kanobo Ariawara," or "People of Kanobo Warowaro," respectively, depending on which of the three male Kanobos was visited on the primordial pilgrimage in the tradition of the local group. The temple of the Kanobo image is a small hut set apart from the dwellings and screened on all sides with palm fronds or walls of folded temiche leaves.

To fulfill the primordial promise of abundant sacrificial tobacco smoke, wishiratu smoke incessantly. Their "cigars," as we have noted, are between 50 and 75 centimeters long and contain several tightly rolled leaves of black tobacco sprinkled with the fragrant resin of the Curucay or Tacamahaco (Protium heptaphyllum [Aubl.]), called shiburu by the Warao. Incense is offered either in special incense burners or together with tobacco smoke. Small granules are wrapped into the cigar with the tobacco or else a ball of the incense is held to the burning tip in the course of smoking.

The wishiratu is not only obliged to "feed" the Kanobo whose rock spirit is housed in the village temple; he must also offer tobacco and incense to the other Kanobos living at the ends of the world. The wishiratu carries out the "feeding" of these spirits by holding the long cigar vertically and pointing it in the direction of the supreme Kanobo, all the while inhaling with hyperventilation or swallowing the smoke.

The Kanobos travel over well-conceived roads: from the dancing platform in the middle of the village they ascend to the zenith. Here lives a lesser Kanobo by the name of Yaukuware, who supplies them with fresh tobacco. From the zenith the roads lead along the curvature...
of the firmament to the cardinal and intercardinal points of the aitona— the end of the Warao universe. The roads of the major Kanobos all end on top of sacred mountains which look like giant tree trunks and which support the cosmic vault—reminiscent of the well-known Mesoamerican concept of world trees supporting the sky. Kanobos also travel along the aitona circle along the end of the world to visit one another.

A wishiratu frequents the same celestial roads but mostly visits the mountain inhabited by the patron Kanobo of his community. Here the shaman has his own little house. If he wishes to confer with his Kanobo, the wishiratu travels in the smoke of his cigar to the zenith. There, after more intensive smoking, he mounts a flying horse (beboroida, literally big dog) which takes him to the aitona. It is understood that only well-prepared and established wishiratus are able to do this—that is, those who carry three pairs of pains (wishis) in their breasts and who have successfully completed their initiatory trance journey to their Kanobo.

Yaukware, the Kanobo of lesser rank who lives at the zenith, was once also a wishiratu, the first shaman ever to make the celestial ascent (Wilbert, 1970:184-85). This wishiratu lived peacefully on earth with his mother, brother, wife, and son, until one day he came upon his wife and brother committing adultery. Deeply grieved, the wishiratu took his shaman’s rattle, called his son, and sat with him on his shaman’s box. He lit a long shamanic cigar, and, ignoring the pleading of his mother, slowly ascended with his son to the zenith within the smoke of the shaman’s cigar. From the zenith Yaukware sent pains to kill the adulterers and to make other Warao ill.

Nowadays novice wishiratus have to be taught how to ascend to Yaukware’s house in the zenith by means of smoking tobacco. After undergoing instruction in the special knowledge of wishiratus, the novice chants and fasts for several days. Then the master wishiratu hands him a long cigar charged with wishi spirits. These are to become the young wishiratu’s spiritual Kanobos and special familiaris. The candidate falls into a deep trance sleep and in this state finds himself embarking on his initiatory journey across the “Road of the Wishiratus” to the end of the world.

This maiden voyage into the Otherworld is the most crucial ecstatic flight the wishiratu will ever undertake. Not only must he overcome many obstacles, his very life is threatened by the ever-present possibility that his dream will be interrupted so suddenly that his roaming soul will not have time to return to his body. A novice suffering this fate will never get to practice and will soon die.

Once the wishiratu in his ecstatic tobacco trance has left Kanobo Yaukware’s house in the zenith he sets out on one of the roads that lead
The House of Tobacco Smoke

One day the youth who had arisen in the East spread out his arms and proclaimed his name: Domu Hohonamana Ariawara, "Creator Bird of the Dawn." With his left wing he held a bow and two quivering arrows, and his right wing shook a rattle. The plumes of his body chanted incessantly the new song that was heard in the East.

The thoughts of the Bird of the Dawn fell now on a house—and immediately it appeared: a round, white house made of tobacco smoke. It looked like a cloud. The singing Bird walked inside whirling his rattle.

Next he wanted to have four companions: four men and their wives. Rooms were already provided for each couple along the eastern wall of the House of Smoke.

"You, Black Bee," said the Bird of the Dawn. "Come share my solitude." And the Black Bee arrived with his wife. They transformed into tobacco smoke and chanted the song of the Bird of the Dawn.

"Wasp is next," called the Bird. The red Wasp arrived with his wife, transformed into smoke, and joined in the singing.

"Termite, now you," said the Bird of the Dawn. Termite's body and that of his wife were yellow. They took the room adjacent to Wasp, transformed into smoke, and learned the new song.

"Honey Bee, you are the last to be called." The Bees' bodies were blue. They occupied the room next to Termite. Like the others they transformed into tobacco smoke and joined in the chanting.

"I am the Master of this House of Smoke," exclaimed the Creator Bird. "You are my companions. Black Bee is your chief, Wasp the constable, Termite and Honey Bee are workmen." Consenting to this, each companion approached the Master and stroked his head, shoulders, and arms so as to know him well. They chanted and smoked cigars. Thus they became the bahamerso, those who blow smoke.

The thoughts of the Bird of the Dawn fell now on a table draped in white and set with four dishes in a row—and there they stood in the middle of the house, all made of smoke. The Bird laid his weapons on it and said: "Now let us finish the Game of Bahana."

On Black Bee's dish there appeared a sparkling rock crystal. On Wasp's dish there was a ball of white hair. On Termite's plate white rocks appeared, and on Honey Bee's there gathered smoke of tobacco—the fourfold set of the Game of Bahana.*

Such is the House of Smoke of the Creator Bird of the Dawn. This is how it became the birthplace of bahana, the shamanistic practice of blowing

* Crystal, hair ball, rocks, and tobacco smoke, each identified with a specific insect and color, are the principal agents of the shaman's power. Like arrows and other objects, they can be dispatched through the air as magical carriers of sickness. For the techniques used by shamans to accomplish this supernatural feat and a description of the "Game of Bahana," which is played in a kind of "tobacco seance," see below.
Tobacco Among the Warao of Venezuela

smoke and sucking out sickness. The House of Smoke is situated to the East, halfway between the junction of earth and sky and the zenith of the cosmic vault. It came about long before there lived any Warao.

Then one day there appeared in the center of the earth a man and a woman. They were good people but their minds were unformed. However, they had a four-year-old* son who was very intelligent. He put his thoughts on many things. This way he came to think about the Hoeko place in the West with its stench of human cadavers, its blood, and its darkness. "There must be something in the East as well," reasoned the boy, "something light and colorful." He decided to go and explore the universe.

Now, although the young boy's body was relatively light, it was far too heavy for flight. The boy thought much about this until one day he asked his father to pile up firewood under his hammock. For four days he abstained from food and drink. In the evening of the fifth day he lit the wood with virgin fire and went to sleep. Then with the surging heat and smoke of the new fire the boy's spirit ascended to the zenith. Someone spoke to him, saying, "Follow me. I will show you the bridge to the House of Smoke in the East."

Soon the boy found himself on a bridge made of thick white ropes of tobacco smoke. He followed the invisible spirit guide until, a short distance from the center of the celestial dome, he reached a point where marvelous flowers began meandering alongside the bridge in a rainbow of brilliant colors—a row of red and a row of yellow flowers on the left, and lines of blue and green flowers on the right. A gentle breeze wafted them back and forth. Like the bridge they adorned, the flowers were made of solidified tobacco smoke. Everything was bright and tranquil. The invisible guide ushered the boy toward the House of Smoke. From a distance he already perceived the chanting of the bahanaaro.

The bridge led right to the door of the House of Smoke in the East. The boy arrived there, listened to the beautiful music, and became so elated that he desired nothing more than to enter at once.

"Tell me who you are," demanded a voice from inside.

"It is I, The son of Warao."

"How old are you?"

"Four."

"You may enter," consented the Creator-Bird. It was he, the Supreme Bahana, who had questioned the boy. "You are pure and free of women," he said.

The boy set foot into the House of Smoke. He saluted the Creator-Bird of the Dawn and his four companions who came out of their quarters. The boy stood in front of the table with its four-part Game of Bahana and the weapons on top. He wanted to learn all about them.

"Which one would you rather possess?" the Supreme Bahana wanted to know.

* Four is the sacred number of the Warao, a concept they share with numerous North and South American Indian tribes.
"I take them all: the crystal, the white hair, the rocks, the smoke, and
the bow and arrows as well." The boy was very wise.
"You shall have them."
"Now teach me your beautiful song."
And emerging from below the floor of the House of Smoke the boy
beheld the head of a serpent with four colored plumes: white, yellow, blue,
and green. They chimed a musical note like a bell. Projecting its forked
tongue, the plumed serpent produced a glowing white ball of tobacco smoke.
"I know bahana!" exclaimed the youth.
"Now you possess it," said the Bahana. "You are a bahana-rotu."
The serpent retreated. The insect-companions returned to their chambers
and the boy awakened from his ecstatic trance. He rejected his mother's food
for four days and more.
"You will die," she warned.
But he only appeared dead. He no longer desired moniche flour, fish,
and water. He longed for the food of bahana: tobacco smoke.
On the fifth day the young bahana-rotu experienced a strange trans­
formation. His hands, his feet, his head began to glow. His arms and legs
finally his entire body turned brilliantly white. Then people appeared
around his house: ten couples of Black Bee people, ten couples of Wasp
people, ten couples of Termite people, and ten couples of Honey Bee
people. And there were also many beautiful children among them.
"He is alive," they said.
"My name is bahana-rotu," said the youth. This was the first time the
name "bahana" was uttered on earth. The bahana-rotu built a small house,
put his four-part Game of Bahana into a basket, and placed next to it his
bow and arrows. The smoke of his cigars formed a path from the center
of the earth to the zenith, where the bridge commences that leads to the
House of Smoke in the East.
The bahana-rotu kept his body light by eating very little. Tobacco
smoke remained his principal food. His parents died, and, with no fellow
Wano on earth, he married a beautiful Bee girl, a child like himself.
They lived together but did not sleep together.
The young bahana-rotu observed in the palms of his hands four dark
spots right below each of his fingers. From there, through the arches of
his arms, led paths of smoke into his breast to his four sons, the insect­
companions, who were gradually taking form. Elder Brother Black Bee
above Younger Brother Wasp was living on the strong right side of his
chest. Elder Brother Termite above Younger Brother Honey Bee on the
left. They were growing firmer while the bahana-rotu kept feeding them
smoke. In the tube of his cigar he rolled four portions of tobacco, one for
each of his sons. Had he slept with his wife while the sons were still feeble,
the spirit children would have died, and bahana would have vanished from
this earth.
Instead the young couple abstained for four times four years, until the
bahana sons had grown strong from the rich tobacco food. Then the time
had come for the bahana-rotu to talk to them.
"My sons," he said, "I will give you a mother. Do not be alarmed. Tonight I will show you your mother."

When the baharanrotu slept for the first time with his Bee wife he was very gentle. Only the head of his penis entered her vagina. The four spirit sons saw their mother and liked her. Also the mother beheld her white-smoke sons in a dream and found them pleasing and handsome. During each of the succeeding nights the baharanrotu penetrated farther and deeper. Thus the first bahana family was established.

The insect-people who had been living about the baharanrotu's home returned now to the House of Smoke.

"We should go there too," said the baharanrotu to his wife. "It is lonely here."

They began to fast so as to lighten their bodies. They smoked and smoked and after eight days the baharanrotu ascended. His wife followed shortly, but when she entered the House of Smoke, the Supreme Bahana suffered a seizure.

"I know how to help him," said the woman. Walking up to the Supreme Bahana she transformed herself into a beautiful black sea bird.* She spread out her wings, shook them like rattles, and, while blowing tobacco smoke on the epileptic body of her patient, soothed him gently with her plumes. The Supreme Bahana recovered.

"You are a baharanrotu indeed," said he. "Remain here, Sinaka Aidamo, spirit of seizures."

So there they are, the baharanrotu and his wife, smoking, rattling, and chanting in unison with the bahanaarao.

Much time elapsed, and when many people appeared in the center of the earth, they knew nothing about bahana and the bridge that reached from their village to the House of Tobacco Smoke. For this reason the baharanrotu rolled a cigar with two bahana inside and aimed it at a young man whom he had chosen to receive them. He sent Smoke for the right side of the youth's chest and Rocks for his left side. Smoke became the Elder Brother, Rocks the Younger. When they struck the youth he fell over as if dead. The bahana spirits entered his body and became his helpers. But when he woke up displaying his weapons and rattle of tobacco smoke, the people vanished from sight. They were transformed into River Crab people and became the Masters of Earth.

Finally many Warao appeared in the center of the earth. Again the young baharanrotu, who was himself a Warao, shot the same pair of bahana spirits down to earth from the House of Smoke. The young man who received them survived and learned how to travel the bridge of tobacco smoke in the sky. Here he received much advice on how to preserve his Bahana spirits and how to use them.

That is why bahana continued on earth to the present day. It is not so perfect or so powerful as it was long ago, when the first baharanrotu re-

* Probably the Magnificent Frigate Bird, *Fregata magnificens*, also known as the Man-of-War Bird, with a wingspread of seven or eight feet.
Johannes Wilbert

ceived four spirit helpers. Nevertheless, bahana prevails. And it is still very strong among the Warao.

This, in brief, is the origin tradition of the baharanotu shaman. It is the charter by which he orders his conscious existence and evidently also his supernatural experience. It is taught to him by his master in long and arduous initiatory training, and so firmly does it become fixed in his psyche that, when he is considered ready for his initiatory tobacco ecstasy, the novice shaman himself relives the primordial shamanic experience. In other words, he becomes culturally conditioned for a specific ecstatic experience under tobacco narcosis.

A young man who has decided to embark on the road of the baharanotu takes a gift to the house of an older and respected baharanotu whom he has chosen to be his teacher. If the gift is accepted, the master prepares a cigar charged with four wads of black leaf tobacco.

"Smoke this," he says. "It contains four bahanas who come to open your chest."

These four bahanas are Black Bee, Wasp, Termite, and Honey Bee. Black Bee hits hard when the smoker inhales the first charge of tobacco. Then Wasp, Termite, and Honey Bee tear painfully into his body. It is said that the smoke does not reach the stomach. Bahana spirits reside around the heart. They cleanse the novice from polluted foods.

"Smoke it slowly, very slowly," advises the master baharanotu. "You had better be cleansed thoroughly."

The smoking of this first cigar introduces four days of fasting. After successfully completing this period of purification, the novice baharanotu undergoes four additional days of abstinence, during which he incessantly smokes cigars lit from a virgin fire (i.e., a fire on which no cooking has been done).

The novice falls into a trance; the Indians say, "He dies." And in this state, "All of a sudden it happens." The unconscious apprentice perceives the sonorous vibrations of the four bahana insect spirits. Louder and louder they grow, until the trees of the forest are transformed into gigantic rattles, swinging and swaying and emitting sounds that are most agreeable to his ears. He feels exalted and, euphoric with the marvelous sound, embarks on his initiatory journey across the celestial bridge and its rainbow of colors. Buoyant as a puff of cotton, he is wafted by the breeze toward his encounter with the Bahana Supreme in the House of Tobacco Smoke.

Awakening at last from his ecstasy, the new baharanotu clutches his chest which encloses the gift of bahana: White Smoke and White Rocks. Still small and feeble, the spirits require much care. The young baharanotu eats little but smokes a great deal. For more than a month he observes celibacy and avoids the touch of blood and odors like these:..."
of roasting fish, onions, lemons, and rancid oil. In the palms of his hands small brown spots appear which grow proportionately to the growing bahanas in his body. Nowadays, unlike the first baharanotu, baharanotus have only one bahana exit in each of their hands, through which their spirit sons leave them to assist during trances or curing sessions.*

"Now swallow this small stick," orders the master. "Let your bahanas transform it."

The stick travels past the spirit in the chest and through the arm of the new baharanotu and is "born" white through the mystical hole in the palm of the hand. A second stick is swallowed which exits as a white stick through the other hand.

"Now swallow the white sticks," orders the master.

This act produces the final proof of a successful initiation. Now the white sticks travel past the bahanas in the chest and through the arms, this time to be born as white crystal beads.

"The bahana spirits are beginning to play," observes the teacher. He is satisfied. He blows tobacco smoke over the arms of his young colleague and bids him go, with this warning: "Should you take a bath now, you would drown. Should you cohabit with your wife now, you would die. Your spirit sons would return to me, whence they came. Do not send your arrows to cause evil."

But of course many baharanotus do emit magic arrows to kill or cause illness; all baharanotus have this capacity. Baharanotus can see these projectiles fly through the night like fireballs. They know that somewhere a malevolent baharanotu has swallowed a piece of glass, a twig, a human hair, a rock, or some other object and sent it on its way to enter the body of a victim and make him sick. This is done in the following way: the baharanotu ingests the chosen object and lets it pass by his bahanas in his chest and through his arms to the wrist. Here it waits, moving slowly toward the exit hole in the hand. Now the baharanotu takes a deep pull at his cigar, lifts the hand with the magic arrow to his mouth, belches out a ball of smoke and sends the projectile on its way. A baharanotu shooting magic arrows of sickness in this fashion is known as a habu-arotu, "master of the arrow."

*All this, of course, is how it appears to the Indians, who see the shamanic phenomena through the eyes of faith and apprehend them as religious reality. I am reminded of the time when I was told by Xucuna Indians in Venezuela that their shamans fly, or at least walk a foot or so off the ground. When I objected that I could see shamans walking just like ordinary people, I was told, "That is because you do not understand" (Wilbert, 1963:222). P. Martin Dobrizhoffer, who worked among the Abipon in Paraguay in the mid-1700's, had much the same experience when he tried in vain to convince the Indians that there was no such thing as shamans transforming themselves into jaguars. "You fathers do not understand these matters," was the Indians' answer (Dobrizhoffer, 1822:38).
Johannes Wilbert

works his malevolent magic during the night, when he can follow with his eyes the glowing puff of tobacco smoke in which the arrow travels. The impact of a bahana arrow is painful. It may hit any part of the body and only a benevolent baharanorotu knows how to extract it.*

If summoned to treat a patient, a baharanorotu waits until evening, when the heat of the day has cooled off. He places his hand on the affected part of the body and his bahana spirit helpers diagnose the nature of the arrow of sickness. The healer then sucks it out, inhales great quantities of tobacco smoke, and lets the magic arrow travel through his arm and through the exit hole into his hand, where it is "born" for the patient and his relatives to see.

During the night the malevolent baharanorotu appears to the curer in his dream. He tells him what it was that provoked him to send an arrow of sickness and warns the victim not to offend him again. The following morning the message is conveyed to the convalescent.

Since baharanorotus can see bahanas in the dark, they sometimes get together for a tobacco séance to play the supernatural Game of Bahana, before the eyes of the awestruck villagers. Exhaling puffs of smoke, they send the four pieces of their Bahana Game one after the other to travel like luminous bodies through the dark house. The quartet of bahana spirits delight in this game. Generally they are said to be the aforementioned "power objects"—rock crystals, hair, rocks, and puffs of tobacco smoke—but a bullet, a piece of glass, or a button will also serve as a magic projectile. They drift through the air, seeking out one or the other of the spectators, but since this is only a game, they do not enter his body. The people in the room are fearful of this supernatural demonstration of shamanic power. But the "fathers" of the roving bahanas always call their "sons" back if the game threatens to get out of hand. They blow tobacco smoke to intercept the flight of the spirits and put them back in their baskets.

Baharanorotus travel frequently to the House of Smoke in the East, and when they die they go to live there forever.

Warao beliefs concerning the ability of shamans to shoot sickness projectiles through a tube in the arm from an exit hole in the hand with the help of tobacco smoke are closely paralleled among the Barama River Caribs of Guyana (formerly British Guiana). According to Gillin (1966:173), these techniques are taught to the neophyte shaman by his teacher, who "places a spirit stone in the novice's mouth and draws it from the mouth through the shoulder and through the arm three times, in order to make the tube in the arm through which the shooting is done." Elsewhere (p. 140) he writes: "It is believed that a tube somewhat like the barrel of a gun extends from the piaiyen's [shaman's] neck to the elbow joint, and from the latter point to a small opening between the bases of the first and second fingers.... With the "shots" held above the elbow joint, the piaiyen, when ready for action, takes a long inhalation of tobacco smoke and extends the right forearm in the intended direction. The force of the smoke is believed to be the physical agency necessary for the ejection of the shot."
The Hoarotu

The Scarlet Macaw (*Ara chloropterus*) is the Supreme Hoa spirit who rules over the Abode of Darkness, called Hoebo. This place is situated at the end of the world to the West. Here live all the souls of deceased “dark” shamans, the hoarotus, as beings half human and half animal. The stench of human cadavers and clotted blood saturates the air, and the stream of hoarotu shamans who come from all parts of Warao-land with cadavers hanging head down from their shoulders is endless. It has to be endless if the Supreme Hoa and spirit companions, called hoarao, are to continue living: the former by eating human hearts and livers, the latter by devouring the bodies. All hoarao in the Hoebo drink human blood from a gigantic canoe made of human bone.

The Abode of Darkness has existed since the beginning of time. Originally the Supreme Hoa and his companions sustained themselves with human blood supplied through a long umbilicus-like artery reaching from the end of the world in the West across the water to the Warao village on earth. The artery was connected in the Hoebo to a gigantic structure of rock (or iron), where it was illuminated by one yellow and one white light. From there it followed the curvature of the celestial vault to the zenith and dangled down from the heavens over the dancing platform of the Warao village. The end of this duct was provided with a brilliant ball of light which at night sought out the heads of sleeping Warao in order to penetrate through the skull down to their hearts and drain their blood. The blood flowed through the umbilicus to the Hoebo, to nourish its spirits. No one could see this cosmic artery, nor did the Warao die after being thus drained—they felt weak but recovered.

One day this arrangement was changed through a violent act of jealousy. The bridge of blood in the sky disappeared and hoarotus became the sole providers of the spirits in the western world of darkness.

This came about as follows:

There was an old man by the name of Miana (Without Sight). As his name implies, he had no eyes. He lived alone in the zenith and begot a son whose name, like that of the Abode of Darkness, was Hoebo. Hoebo had learned to sing like his father, in order to activate the search for blood by the celestial umbilicus. One day Hoebo wanted to visit the Supreme Hoa. Father and son set out on their journey. They heard the humming chant of the Spirits of the West when they had gone only half way. They also beheld the bright lights of white and yellow penetrating the darkness of the Hoebo.

“See the hoa akutu artery,” said Miana to his son. “Listen to its humming.”

The youth became very anxious to reach the Supreme Hoa. Then his
eyes fell on a beautiful girl below him in the Warao village. He decided to marry her. But when he lowered himself head first from the *hoa ahutu* umbilicus to the dancing platform in the center of the village, a jealous rival for the girl cut off Hoebo's head. The sphere at the end of the blood duct fell to the ground and disappeared. All the people present suddenly felt sick with a sharp pain in their stomachs. The elastic blood duct snapped back to the West."

Thus was severed forever the connection between the Warao on earth and the *Hoebo* at the end of the world in the West. Hoebo's soul still remains above the village, a short distance in a westerly direction from the zenith. But the umbilicus has gone, and from the zenith to the *Hoebo* there now leads only a black road. This is the path taken by the *hoarotus*, who have to carry their human victims along it to the West in order to feed the hearts and livers to the *Hoa Supreme* and the bodies to the *hoarao* who inhabit the *Hoebo*. The victim is always carried head down, dangling at the *hoarotu*'s back from his knees; this is to express extreme mockery and ridicule for the victim.

*Hoarotus* dislike having to kill their fellow men with magic arrows. But what would become of mankind if they stopped providing human blood and flesh for the *Hoa Supreme* and the *hoarao* in the western world of darkness? All would come to an end. So there must be *hoarotus* who provide this service.

*The Hoa Snare of Tobacco Smoke*

To become a *hoarotu* shaman, a young man has to submit to severe initiatory ordeals. He feels bitterness within himself for a long time

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Cf. Wilbert, 1969: 56-60. A remarkable parallel to this concept has been recorded by Tozzer (1907:153) among the Maya of Southern Mexico:

According to the information obtained from the Mayas in the vicinity of Valladolid, this world is now in the fourth period of its existence. In the first epoch there lived the Saiyamwinkoob, the Adjusters. These composed the primitive race of Yucatan. They were dwarfs and were the ones who built the ruins. This work was all done in darkness before there was any sun. As soon as the sun appeared, these people turned to stone. . . . It was at this period that there was a road suspended in the sky, stretching from Tuloom and Coba to Chichen Itza and Uxmal. This pathway was called *kusanum* or *sabhe* (white road). It was in the nature of a large rope (*sum*) supposed to be living (*kusan*) and in the middle flowed blood. It was by this rope that the food was sent to the ancient rulers who lived in the structures now in ruins. For some reason this rope was cut, the blood flowed out, and the rope vanished forever.

It may also be noted that in the Maya area and elsewhere in ancient Mexico the Scarlet Macaw is the Sun Bird, a concept that seems to survive in attenuated form in sacred mushroom rituals of Oaxaca, for which the Scarlet Macaw feathers are considered indispensable. Both the *wishiratu*-temple-idol complex and the *hoa* complex of the Warao are in fact strongly reminiscent of Mesoamerican religion and ritual. In the context of the present paper it is impossible to include an analytical discussion of these interesting and, from an ethnographic point of view, puzzling parallels. They are presented here for the first time only as they relate to the use of tobacco.
before he finally decides to ask an accomplished hoarotu to teach him to make and cure malevolent hoa magic. If accepted, the novice is taken by the master to a small hut in the forest, where the two men will remain secluded for five days. Smoking incessantly, the candidate waits to be taken to the zenith to visit the Horbo. But first he must learn the many hoa songs—one kind to cause sickness, another to cure it. Finally the master lights a long cigar, turns it around with the fire in his mouth, and blows into it. Now the cigar contains two hoa spirits ready to enter the body of the apprentice and become his “sons.” The master hands the hoa cigar to the apprentice, and one after the other the two hoas tear violently into his body. The pain is excruciating. Now comes the first test: do the hoas want to accept him as their father? Has he kept his body strong? Will he be a good provider?

If he proves acceptable to them, the two hoa sons remain in the young man’s breast. While he continues to sing the hoa songs, he experiences increasing pressure at the base of the sternum, where his Kaidoko, the hoarotu’s snare of tobacco smoke, begins to grow. From now on, the Kaidoko tendrils will snake from the corners of his mouth each time he begins to chant or speak ritually with a loud voice.

To increase the effective length of his Kaidoko, the hoarotu novice has to fast and smoke incessantly for approximately one month. During this period he is repeatedly asked by his teacher, “Did anything happen to you last night?”

Finally one night something does happen. In his ecstatic dream state induced by tobacco, the novice meets a spirit who beats him across the neck with a heavy club.

“I was like dead,” reports the novice. “But I did not die.” His teacher is very pleased with this dream.

A second dream follows. This time the murderous spirit kills the novice and places him in a hollowed-out tree.

“But I was not really dead,” explains the novice. “I was lying there in my coffin when I discovered a small hole in the palm-leaf wrapping. Through this I escaped.”

Then the novice hoarotu has a third dream. This time the demon leads him to a human cadaver.

“Eat this,” he commands.

But the novice finds it repulsive and impossible to swallow the piece of human flesh he takes to his lips. The demon proffers a cup of human blood but the novice is revolted by it also. He lifts the blood to his lips but cannot bring himself to drink it.

The master hoarotu is pleased also with this dream.

* Warao traditionally bury their dead in dugout canoes or hollowed-out tree trunks.
"You will never die," he tells the agitated novice. "You will live forever."

Finally there comes a fourth dream. Sometimes weeks pass before the novice embarks on it. His body is so emaciated that he can hardly move or perform the most essential functions. He is truly near death. In his trance state the demonic spirit appears once more to lead him to his grave. This time it is made of stone slabs. Inside it is very cold and pitch black. The foul stench of decay and putrefaction is nearly unbearable. He feels like fainting and is terrified that he might wake up—because if that happened he really would die and remain in his grave. Day breaks and with the rising sun he discovers a crack between the stone slabs that cage him. Again he makes his escape.

The master hoarotu is pleased. He calls for his wife, who feeds the novice slowly and patiently to bring him back to life. The community has a new hoarotu, who will handle the hoarao of the West with great prudence, propitiate them, and provide them with sacrifices only when absolutely necessary.

The Kaidoko snare of a powerful hoarotu is infinite. The two front ends emerge slowly from the corners of his mouth. First they appear like short white tendrils, but they continue to grow and to travel toward their victim. Invisibly they wind themselves around his neck and begin to weaken him through strangulation. The Indian falls ill. When he has become sufficiently debilitated, the hoarotu prepares to kill him, so that his organs and his body may be fed to the spirits of the West.

"Mianaa warao akuamo saba," he sings. "Without looking it is going for a Warao’s head!"

He smokes six long cigars while singing, and with the final word of his chant he puffs out a cloud of smoke and pulls the snare shut. It

* Kaidoko-like tendrils occur also in the ceremonial art of the Maya, where they are identified as characteristics of the Sun God, and in Veracruz. Earlier still they appear on certain Olmec face masks, such as one, believed to date to a Late Olmec period, in the Peabody Museum at Harvard. Here the tendrils in the corners of the mouth are associated with a triangular toothlike projection in the center of the upper jaw. This same association is found on certain tall cylinders depicting the Sun God of the Nighl from the Classic Maya site of Palenque, Chiapas. Michael D. Coe, in a letter, points out that one of the Maya names for the Sun deity is Kinich Kakmoo, literally "Sun-eyed Fire" (i.e., Scarlet Macaw). Is the triangular projection perhaps a stylized frontal view of the macaw’s back? If so, this would strengthen the correspondence between Warao and Maya. Long ribbon-like tendrils are also associated with the Maya bat. Barthel (1966) discusses the composite Maya glyph "Schleif-Fledermaus" (ribbon or tendril bat) in connection with an anthropomorphic bat demon depicted in a Chama-style Classic Maya cylinder vase. Long tendrils emerge from his mouth. Barthel suggests that glyphs associated with this supernatural being may signify drilling or boring into, or sucking from the head—reminiscent of the function of the Kaidoko in Warao shamanism. The Maya associated the bat with the East (the rising Sun) and death, and Barthel suggests that it may have been conceptually linked by them with the Scarlet Macaw, the Sun Bird of the West.—Ed.
takes the entire next day for the Kaidoko to contract and completely return to the breast of the hoarotu. Then, during the night, the sorcerer smokes again and throws the (living) soul of the victim over his shoulder to carry it to the zenith and from there to the Hoebo in the West. Here the soul is clubbed to death, bled, and dismembered.

It is impossible for a hoarotu not to kill. For example, when the two hoa "sons" who live in his breast approach him in his dream and beg for food, he can delay and propitiate them at least four times with tobacco smoke and yuruna (moriche palm stalk). But when they come a fifth time and demand their proper food—human blood—he can no longer turn them away unsatisfied.

The following day he goes alone into the forest. In complete solitude he sits down on a log and lights a cigar. The cigar contains his hoa sons. While smoking, he chants his Miana song, and with this the ends of his Kaidoko snare of tobacco smoke slowly begin to emerge from the corners of his mouth. The Kaidoko travels toward its victim, be he near or far, and when it arrives at its destination, the hoarotu pulls heavily at his cigar, turns it around, and, holding the fire in his closed mouth, blows into it. Out come ribbons of smoke, and these now transport the hoa arrow over the tree tops to the intended sacrifice. The magic arrow enters below the rib cage and searches for the heart. And the instant that the Kaidoko snare of smoke closes, the hoa enters the heart to kill.

It is excruciatingly painful when the hoa enters the chest of the victim. And people are well aware of what is going on. They have observed the hoarotu depart alone for the forest. So, when someone in the village or in a nearby community starts complaining of a sharp pain in his breast and falls ill, he and everyone else know why.

Only a friendly hoarotu can prevent death when a person has been struck by hoa. His hoa sons know all their fellow hoas. He begins to smoke and sing the curing chants, and as soon as he divines the nature of the illness-causing hoa (e.g., the hoa of a particular species of tree, an animal, or the like), his own Kaidoko snare of tobacco smoke pries it loose from the victim. The intrusive sickness-causing object jumps into the massaging hand of the curer who blows it into the forest in a puff of tobacco smoke. This effects the cure.

Some hoarotus "kill" a person each time their hoa "sons" come and ask for flesh and blood. This kind of hoarotu kills more people than he cures. However, since other hoarotus are almost constantly occupied with curing victims of hoa magic, a kind of equilibrium between neg-

* Reminiscent of the flint knife with which Aztec priests opened the breast of the sacrificial victim in order to tear out his heart, which, like the blood, organs, and bodies of hoa victims, was fed to the gods to give them strength.
ative and positive forces is established. In some communities there is nearly perpetual competition between hoarotus that kill and others that cure—lucky the village that can rely on a powerful hoarotu who knows how to keep the Scarlet Macaw and his spirits of the West appeased with a minimum of sacrifices, while maintaining the strength of his own group by saving his fellows from the hoa snare of malevolent hoarotus.

Throughout their lifetime hoarotus travel often to the Hoebo in the West, always using tobacco as their means of ecstasy. They too have a house in the Otherworld in which they will dwell forever after death. But while the house of the bahanarotu is in the East, the land of light, that of the hoarotu is in the West, the realm of darkness.

**CONCLUSION**

So far as I have been able to determine, tobacco is the only psychotropic substance available to the three kinds of Warao shamans. The Curucay resin employed by the wishiratu, and to some extent also the bahanarotu, appears to lack any hallucinogenic properties. All three supernatural practitioners—wishiratu, bahanarotu, and hoarotu—employ tobacco extensively to put themselves in ecstatic trances. They achieve this trance state exclusively by smoking, rather than through infusions of liquid tobacco, as do novice shamans of some other Indian groups.

At the same time, as in many aboriginal societies in North and South America, tobacco smoke figures prominently in sorcery and, conversely, in curing: tobacco smoke is clearly as essential to the healing process among the Warao as it is elsewhere in Indian America—even where some other true hallucinogen is central to belief and ritual. Among California Indians we find tobacco side by side with *Datura*. In lowland South America novice shamans undergo their initiatory training with powerful infusions of liquid tobacco before they are introduced to *Banisteriopsis Caapi*. In eastern Bolivia shamans of the Tacana employ ayahuasca (*B. Caapi*) to place themselves in trances but also utilize tobacco as a magical deterrent against malevolent spirits. In northern Peru liquefied tobacco constitutes an essential ingredient in contemporary folk healing with the hallucinogenic *San Pedro* cactus.* Even in a society so totally committed to a single psychotropic plant as are the Huichol to peyote, we find tobacco playing a crucial role, not only in shamanic curing but in the peyote rituals themselves.† Indeed, just as the tobacco gourd is an identifying characteristic of Aztec priests in the codices, so it is the insignia *par excellence* of the Huichol.

* See D. Staren, below.
† See P. Funt, below.
Fig. 17. A wishiratu shaman “feeding” the kanobo spirits by directing his burning cigar to the zenith and the world directions (except the west).
peyote seeker to this day and, as Lumholtz noted more than seventy years ago, is treated with great reverence throughout the pilgrimage.

Tobacco belongs to Our Grandfather, the Fire Shaman, who led the first peyote hunt of the supernaturals and cured them of their ailments with its help. Preuss (1908:577) describes an important ritual, performed by the Huichol shaman at intervals of about ten years, which re-enacts the curing with tobacco smoke of the whole group of leading supernaturals. The ritual takes place in early summer at the beginning of, or shortly before, the rainy season. The illness of the gods consists of the fact that they are not giving sufficient rain, and the long nocturnal song cycle recited by the mare'akâme, the shaman-priest, describes the healing process. This is not very different from ordinary shamanic curing among the Huichol—or, for that matter, the Warao and other groups. Tatewari, the Fire Shaman and principal supernatural, lets the smoke from his tobacco pipe flow over each ailing god in turn, while his spirit helper, the Sacred Deer Kauyumarié, sucks out the intrusive disease object, or “arrow of sickness.” In the same way shaman and tutelary deer spirit cooperate in the curing of human patients.

While tobacco thus shares curative powers with the hallucinogenic peyote among the Huichols, there is nothing in Warao tradition to indicate that any other psychoactive plants were ever used in the past, either before or since the advent of tobacco. Naturally such negative evidence cannot be taken as definitive. In any event, the ritual use of tobacco itself is of respectable antiquity in the Americas as a whole: in Mexico, for example, the earliest clay tobacco pipes date to Olmec times, ca. 1200–900 B.C.,* and it is probably safe to assume that consumption of tobacco without the aid of imperishable instruments goes back a good deal further.

Whether or not one accepts tobacco as one of the ritual hallucinogens—and thus far neither botanists nor pharmacologists would classify it as such—it is clear that the role of tobacco as a vehicle of the vision quest in Warao shamanism does not differ qualitatively from the role which the various psychotomimetics of plant origin play in other Indian societies. Also, as with other psychotropic preparations used ritually, cultural traditions clearly influence the kinds of vision experienced by the shaman in the Warao tobacco trance. It would be too much to speak of “programming,” but there is obviously cultural conditioning toward specific ecstatic experiences that have nothing to do with the chemical action of the tobacco plant itself. Through long instruction by his master, and as a child of his culture, the novice learns the precise nature of a Warao’s "non-ordinary reality." Indeed, if the

* Peter T. Furst, personal communication.
promised cosmic landscape failed to appear for him in his trance state, the failure would be his, and he might well die. Thus there exist powerful cultural stimuli which interact with the chemistry of the tobacco plant to produce the kinds of vision required for the shaman's vital role in his society.

This brings me to another important point, namely, the nature of the initiatory ordeals of the novice Warao shaman, and the nature of Warao shamanism as such. It will have been immediately apparent to anyone familiar with the literature on shamanism that the Warao experience contains much that is near-universal, or at the very least circum-Pacific. Fasting, purification, skeletonization, symbolic death and resurrection after a trance, dismemberment, gashing, shamanic trees, celestial ascent by rainbows etc., replacement of internal organs and introduction of magical power into the shaman's body in the form of pebbles, rock crystals, and so forth, killing of the neophyte by initiatory demons, travel on flying animals, sexual abstinence, magical arrows of sickness, sucking, blowing, tutelary spirits, cannibalistic tests, animated "pains" as sources of power and causes of illness, almost all can be found in shamanistic initiation and the quest for shamanic power in a wide variety of native societies, from Australian aborigines through Indonesia, Japan, China, Siberia, across to the American Arctic, and southward through North America and Mexico into South America (Eliade, 1964).

I would like to single out the initiatory celestial quest for shamanic power of Warao neophyte shamans as a case in point. That it should closely resemble the quests of other tribes in South America and even North America is perhaps not so surprising as is its remarkable correspondence to the neophyte's quest for supernatural power among Australian aborigines—not only in general content but specific detail:

Among the Wiradjuri the initiatory master introduces rock crystals into the apprentice's body and makes him drink water in which such crystals have been placed; after this the apprentice succeeds in seeing the spirits. The master then leads him to a grave, and the dead in turn give him magical stones. The candidate also encounters a snake, which becomes his totem and guides him into the bowels of the earth, where there are many other snakes; they infuse magical powers into him by rubbing themselves against him. After this symbolic descent to the underworld the master prepares to lead him to the camp of Baiame, the Supreme Being. To reach it, they climb a cord until they meet Wombu, Baiame's bird. "We went through the clouds," an apprentice related, "and on the other side was the sky. We went through the place where the Doctors go through, and it kept opening and shutting very quickly." Anyone whom the doors touched lost his magical power and was certain to die as soon as he had returned to earth (Eliade, 1964:135-36).
Jon, nmes w,u,ert

Compare this Australian account with the m1t1atory journey of the Warao wishiratu; the candidate, we recall, has to pass through a hole in a tree with rapidly opening and closing doors. Inside is a great serpent with colored horns and a fiery-red luminous ball on the tip of her tongue; her servant is another snake whose task it is to clear away the bones of neophyte shamans who failed to clear the clashing doors.*

As Eliade (1964) demonstrates in his classic work on shamanism, the motif of the rapidly opening and closing passage (e.g., floating islands, cliffs, icebergs, mountains, knives, snapping jaws, spears, razor-edged dancing reeds, grinding millstones, etc.) is one of the characteristic themes in shamanism, found in many parts of the world in both funerary and initiatory mythologies. Along with its associated motif of the narrow and perilous bridge connecting this world to the celestial regions or the underworld, it survives well beyond the limits of the shamanistic ideology in which it had its remote origin, but most characteristically in contemporary indigenous societies which retain strong vestiges of an ancient shamanism. In a recent study of Huichol conceptions of the soul, for example, Furst (1967) identified the motif of the dangerous passage in no less than four different forms (clashing rocks, stone trap, snapping jaws, and fiery solar curtain) along the path of the soul and its shamanic guardian from this to the Otherworld. The gateway of clashing clouds that bars the entrance to the sacred peyote country is yet another version of the same theme. This multiplicity of what Eliade has aptly called the “paradoxical passage” is characteristic also of the Warao account of the neophyte wishiratu’s ecstatic initiatory journey: the snapping jaws of jaguars, alligators, and sharks in the abyss across which he swings himself on a celestial vine; the slippery path lined on both sides with demons who jab their spears at him; the snapping beak, grasping claws, and flapping wings of the giant

* An account by the Hungarian ethnologist Vilmos Díszegi (1968:66) of a Siberian shaman’s journey to the chief shaman in the Otherworld contains remarkably close parallels to the initiatory trance journey of the Warao wishiratu. The Siberian shaman reaches the supreme spirit shaman by passing through a series of trials culminating in a clashing gateway in which the spears are crushed. Also, like the Venezuelan Indian, he comes first upon a special shamanic pine tree—in this case a pine tree whose bark he and other shamans carve their symbols. “Whoever places his marking, his tamga, upon it,” Díszegi quotes his informant, “then becomes a real shaman. It happens sometimes that a certain tamga ‘falls down,’ it disappears from the tree. Then its owner dies.” This is exactly the case with the wishiratu: his mark on the tree and the shaman live a parallel existence. One cannot help but wonder whether such common experiences by shamans in widely separated regions of the circum-Pacific area are to be explained in terms of real historical relationships, survivals perhaps of some ancient shamanic substratum predating the settling of the Americas from Asia, or in terms of the unconscious and the language of symbols by which it communicates (e.g., Jung’s “archetypes”). Perhaps there is something of both here; in any event, the correspondences between Asian and American shamanism are far too close and too numerous to be explained away as mere coincidence.—Ed.
Tobacco Among the Warao of Venezuela

hawk; and, finally, the opening and closing doorway to the giant tree trunk. Universally, the promised land lies beyond the dangerous passage, and its attainment requires that the traveler be "light" and that he have transcended the human condition—i.e., become shaman or spirit.

It will have become apparent that the various forms of shamanism practiced today by the Warao with the aid of tobacco occupy a central position in tribal culture. They seem to me to constitute true survivals of a more ancient shamanistic stratum with roots in Mesolithic and even Paleolithic Asia, introduced into the Americas 15,000 to 20,000 or even more years ago. Although attenuated and certainly overlaid with more recent features, including some characteristic of more advanced social systems in Mesoamerica and western South America, they seem to belong to what some anthropologists, including La Barre, Furst, M. D. Coe, and myself, have come to see as an archaic shamanistic substratum underlying and to some extent uniting all or most aboriginal American Indian cultures.

I am convinced that a true Warao community cannot exist without this very powerful shamanistic ideology. Its loss, I feel, would seriously disturb the social and psychic equilibrium of the local community, and eventually that of the entire indigenous society. Rooted in an ancient Paleo-Indian past, and beyond that in the total human experience, with its focus on tobacco as the vehicle of ecstasy, it represents a very special elaboration of Warao culture. Its undermining through Creole and Mission contact would probably dislocate this axis mundi of the Warao seriously enough to put an end to one of the earliest and most successful aboriginal social and cultural systems in South America.
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286 Bibliography


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