

WEST MEXICAN TOMB SCULPTURE AS EVIDENCE FOR SHAMANISM IN PREHISPANIC MESOAMERICA (*)

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GENERAL PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION

In reading the literature on pre-Columbian art and culture history, one can almost hear the sigh of relief with which some writers pass from the esoteric, and in the main incomprehensible, symbolism of the major prehispanic civilizations to the art of Western Mexico. For here, at last, one perceives something one can appreciate and evaluate as well as describe: one sees an art which seemingly conforms to long established and accepted standards of comparison and criticism. Hence we find a persistent tendency to identify or interpret mortuary figurines and other grave goods in this area according to certain overt characteristics which appear to lend themselves more or less comfortably to material culture classification. A spherical object is a ball for playing, a club or staff a weapon for fighting. It follows that a figure which holds a "ball" must be a ballplayer, and one with a club or staff a warrior.

While this kind of superficiality can also be found elsewhere, it applies especially to the tomb art of Colima, Nayarit and Jalisco. To some extent, this may be due to the generally poor state of our knowledge and understanding of West Mexican archaeology and prehistory, which allows for certain liberties without fear of contradiction, but to an even greater degree it may be ascribed to a kind of dogma that the tomb ceramics of this area are essentially secular and anecdotal, free of supernatural overtones—in contrast, presumably, to the religious art of the theocratic or priesthood-oriented cultures of the rest of Mesoamerica. Even Miguel Covarrubias, ordinarily a man of considerable insight

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into the prehispanic art and culture history of his native Mexico, has described the West Mexican tomb sculptures as

realistic and anecdotal, concentrated in minute and detailed representations of the fauna and flora, the family life, occupations, and ceremonies of their makers, without trace of religious or symbolical concepts (Covarrubias, 1957: 87).

In this view, then —and it is one which is widely shared— the ceramic art of Western Mexico is, in general, exactly what it seems, without hidden qualities which defy easy and "obvious" interpretation, and which therefore can be judged and understood more or less according to phenomena familiar to us from the Western European cultural tradition.

It is of course quite possible to apply one's aesthetic judgment alone to many pre-Columbian pieces and decide whether or not the artist did "a good job," whether the end result of his creative act possesses those qualities which are capable of moving the beholder, even if its form and also its function are to a greater or lesser degree exotic. The emotional impact and appeal to our aesthetic sensibilities of the superb ceramic figurines from Nayarit in Figs. 1 and 2 are beyond question, even if we are utterly ignorant of the artist's motivation, the relationship between his personal aesthetics and the critical standards of his contemporaries, or the manner in which this particular piece of clay sculpture —or, for that matter, any other— related to the values and beliefs of its creator's society and time.

We may readily admit our ignorance of all these questions and still be capable of rendering a valid judgment whether an object is, by our critical standards, "good" or "bad" or even mediocre, and we may read into the object whatever meaning we choose. The concept of a universal aesthetic is certainly debatable, but even in studies of comparative aesthetics we find over and over, in the most diverse societies, certain —one might almost say universal— values, a standard of excellence which can operate perfectly well within, or side-by-side with, tradition-dictated styles and forms. We realize this more and more the further we move away from old conceptions of the "anonymous tribal artist," the validity of which is coming ever more into question. Bohannan (1961: 94), for example, speaks of the admiration of the Tiv of Nigeria for both symmetry and what he calls "tasteful asymmetry" in the works of their artists, and above all for sculptural forms which succeed in making a particular idea more intense. Here we clearly have critical standards: a recognition by his contemporaries that not every artist succeeds equally well in achieving the desired end. The art historian Robert Ferris Thompson, lecturing at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1966 on Yoruba ceramic sculpture, left no doubt of such art criticism and value judgment in tribal society. Again, we find that work of art admired by the Yoruba which succeeds in rendering a particular idea more intense, while at the same time conforming by and large to the accepted cultural norms and appealing to the prevailing aesthetic sensibilities. The study of comparative aesthetics involves appreciation of these relationships. But here is the point: how can we speak of comparative aesthetics if we do not understand what we are seeking to appreciate, and, indeed, make no effort to acquire such understanding?

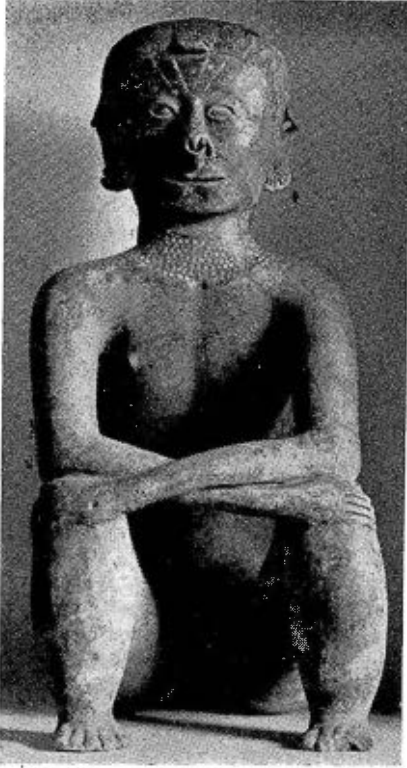


Fig. 1.—Large hollow male figurine, from a shaft-and-chamber tomb at Las Cebollas, near Tequilita, southwestern Nayarit. Dated approx. A.D. 100. H. 80 cm. W. 29 cm. Nayarit State Museum, Tepic.

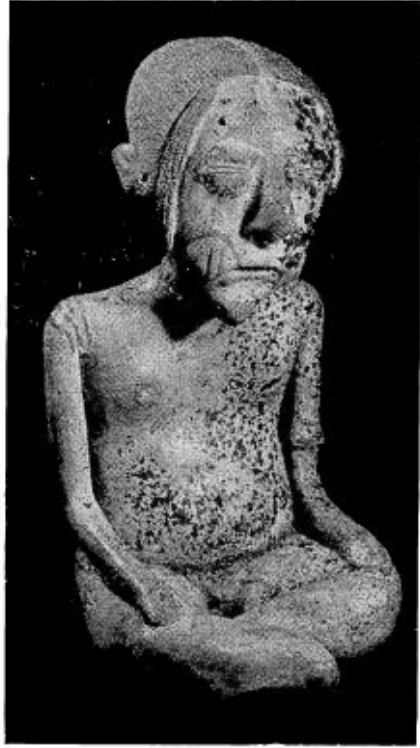


Fig. 2.—Seated male figurine, white-to-grey slip with red decoration. Exact provenance unknown, but probably from shaft tomb in southwestern Nayarit. Approx. A.D. 100. H. 27 cm. W. 14 cm. Coll. Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Price, Los Angeles.

Turning to West Mexican tomb sculpture, we have to admit a serious lack of intellectual resources for anything beyond a surface view. If we limit ourselves to purely subjective aesthetics, it can be argued that it is probably not very important whether we misunderstand a particular figure because it is mislabelled "warrior" when its real meaning and function might have been something quite different. We can judge it as a work of art for its sculptural qualities and its emotional impact; we can, in short, say that it is "good" or "bad" in an absolute sense, or, if we wish to avoid so uncompromising a value judgment, simply express ourselves about the degree to which it appeals—or fails to appeal—to us. But the moment we seek to go further, into the realm of abstract, underlying ideas, we are on very insecure ground. How are we to determine whether a particular piece of sculpture succeeds or not when we have no way of knowing its creator's motivation or intent? How are we to judge,

to echo the Tiv example, to what degree a pre-Columbian figurine reflects or intensifies an idea if we do not know what the idea might have been? It makes quite a difference whether a given piece of sculpture was meant as a god, a warrior or a priest, or whether a certain polychrome mortuary vessel was simply a container for food for the dead or actually represented an ancestor (as vessels often do in contemporary indigenous societies), a deity or even a combination of deities. Here, admiration of symmetry or pleasing asymmetry is insufficient for study of the art in its cultural context, for we have no basis for comparative aesthetics. This necessitates some familiarity with the relationship between artist and creative act on the one hand and the values and judgments of his culture on the other. And that, in turn, involves some knowledge of the ethnological context in which the art object originated.

Unfortunately, where archaeological cultures are concerned, this context is largely unknown, and this applies to the western provinces of Mexico to an even greater extent than elsewhere in Mesoamerica. From the point of view of purely descriptive historical ethnology, of course, even if the true function and meaning of a particular figure are grossly misinterpreted, it is still capable of yielding considerable information as to dress, weaponry, ornamentation and, inferentially, certain customs and fashions of its time and place. But if we are truly concerned with the creation (or better, approximation) of the historical ethnological framework, in other words, of culture history, it follows that we must be reasonably certain that a particular identification or interpretation of a figurine is indeed valid — since a misreading of the overt, or visible, evidence can only result in a faulty reconstruction of the unknown cultural context.

The so-called "warrior" figurines are a case in point. They are common as grave offerings or companions of the dead in West Mexican shaft-and-chamber tombs, particularly in those of Colima, where they occur both as unslipped, solidly-modelled miniatures holding clubs, staffs, slings and other "warlike" objects, and as large, hollow, slipped and polished redware figurines. From their frequency alone one might deduce that warfare was a common feature of life in western Mesoamerica some 2000 years ago (*). It may well have been, but unequivocal evidence is actually lacking. For one thing, grave offerings other than figurines do not typically include objects classifiable as weapons of war. Tools, such as knives of obsidian, scrapers, adzes, punches, *manos* and *metates* and so forth, are found, and so is an occasional "ceremonial" blade or a mace or staff of stone, but caches of unmistakable warriors' equipment are generally conspicuous by their rarity among shaft tomb material offered on the commercial market, in contrast to that from post-Classic burials. Since weapons of any kind are highly saleable, it is hard to believe that they would be ignored by the tomb robbers.

More importantly, however, I doubt that even the figurines themselves

(*) Recent radiocarbon dates from Jalisco, Nayarit and Colima indicate that shaft-and-chamber tombs and the well-known ceramics found in them date between the first century B.C. and the first to second centuries A.D. (Furst, 1965a, b, 1966).

lend support to a hypothesis of common warfare. Instead, I would propose that previous identifications of armed figurines as "warriors" in the usual sense of the term suffer from ethnocentric bias, and that many, if not all, of the pieces so labelled in the literature or in museums may in fact be nothing else but shamanic guardians of the dead, and so may testify not so much to a major preoccupation with warlike exploits as to a strongly developed shamanic complex. I am not implying, of course, that no anecdotal sculpture exists—indeed, it is likely that pottery house models and various types of figurines were placed in tombs to provide a familiar environment for the dead, and perhaps also to make the setting in which these dead "live" more familiar, and more easily imaginable, for the survivors. On the other hand, even such illustrative sculptures are hardly free from "symbolic concepts." What I am hoping is that the present attempt at interpretation may lead to a general reappraisal of our more facile and superficial assumptions about the meaning and function of prehispanic funerary sculpture and other mortuary offerings, especially those of Western Mexico. However, I suspect that, in the absence of documentation or proof, such reappraisals will, like these pages, always have to include a good deal of speculation—but at least it should be speculation based on relevant comparative data in addition to thorough-going stylistic and iconographic analysis. In other words, the material needs to be examined not only of and by itself, but on a comparative basis within the context of broad ethnological, religious and art historical studies.

In the present case, there was first of all a methodological need to collect large enough samples, to discover whether iconographic and stylistic details characterizing some figurines and differentiating them from others really recur with sufficient regularity to justify regarding them as markers for interpretation and cross-cultural comparison. In analyzing various modelled or painted details, such as headdress, clothing, body armor, ornaments, head, leg or hand position, weapons and "ceremonial" objects, individual creativity as well as local fashion and tradition had to be taken into account. In short, it was necessary to learn to differentiate between accidental resemblances, or resemblances based on local fashion, and those characteristics which could be understood as determinants of the meaning of an entire class of objects. It should be stressed, however, that the present study was not undertaken with any preconceived ideas or even to achieve some new interpretation of the figurines in question; rather, rejection of former classifications began to suggest itself only when certain persistent patterns were noted in the course of cataloguing tomb figurines in various private and public collections. The original purpose here was the determination of stylistic criteria which might best serve for a system of chronological, regional or individual classification; the recognition that certain features not only repeated themselves in a number of figurines but that some of these characteristics seemed to be patterned in meaningful ways was essentially an unexpected by-product. This, however, made it possible to set up some distinct classes of figurines on the basis of certain shared characteristics which clearly differentiated them from other types. Once these key features were recognized it was also found possible to interpret them, at least to some degree, by means of cross-cultural comparison. Some were found to conform surprisingly well to data on supernatural belief and practice in the ethnographic literature or collected by the writer from

native informants. Certain aspects of the archaeological figurines and other burial offerings were found to have their counterparts in archaeological as well as contemporary cultures, not only in Mesoamerica but also in South America and in other parts of the world, and thus lent themselves fruitfully to cross-cultural analysis. Finally, it was found to be useful to submit some of the archaeological specimens (or photographs thereof) to undirected examination and interpretation on the part of several West Mexican Indian or Mestizo informants whose familiarity and involvement with modern forms of shamanism or other supernatural practices lent some weight to their viewpoint, just as their general unfamiliarity with the archaeological or ethnographic literature served to ensure some degree of independent judgment.

THE HORN IN WEST MEXICO

The proposed interpretation of the so-called Colima "warriors" (and, by extension, their Nayarit counterparts) as shamans involves above all two important characteristics, one the horn, and the other a consistent leftward orientation of armed (and frequently horned) figurines. Stylistic analysis of a large number of anthropomorphic ceramics in museums and private collections, as well as those illustrated in the literature, revealed that sinistral orientation in association with horns and certain other iconographic details (headbands, staffs, trees, slings, etc.) was seemingly patterned. So consistent was this pattern found to be that some ritual function had to be assumed, rather than merely the interaction of custom and fashion with the aesthetic impulses of individual sculptors. Moreover, both the hollow, polished redware or bichrome figurines and the solidly modelled, filleted and unslipped miniatures were found to share these key characteristics, indicating a certain identity of function as well as implying contemporaneity. I shall first describe the phenomenon of the horn, as it appears in Colima, and then relate it to the problem of directional orientation.

The presence of a single horn, frequently very prominent, on the forehead of certain Colima figurines, as well as double horns on tomb sculptures from Nayarit, has of course been noted before. Curiously, however, there has been little, if any, speculation on the possible meaning of so unusual a feature. Figs. 3-9 illustrate a number of typical horned Colima pieces, whose horns may range in size from barely perceptible knoblike growths on the forehead to prominent and dangerous-looking weapons resembling rhinoceros horns. Single horns are also found in many of the small, unslipped, solidly modelled Colima miniatures, as shown in Figs. 10, 12, 13, 21, 22 and 23. Double horns, or helmet-like headdresses with two vertical horns, are typical of Nayarit (Figs. 26 and 26), where single — horned figurines are lacking. The Nayarit double-horned helmets are worn exclusively by figurines clad in barrel-shaped armor or stiff tunics which generally encase the entire upper body, including the arms. On most of these figurines only the hands holding a staff are visible outside the body armor. A man wearing such armor in life would, of course, have absolutely no freedom of movement with his arms. The "armor," if such it is, must therefore be characterized as passively defensive.



Fig. 3.—Seated horned redware figurine, facing left and holding bowl and hand weapon. From shaft tomb at El Chanal, Colima. Approx. 200 B.C.-A.D. 100. H. 37 cm. W. 30.5 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 4.—Seated redware figurine, horned, facing left and holding staff. Spout at back of head. Ornament around neck probably represents pyrite or obsidian mirror. Figure also has large disc on back. H. 36.5 cm. Coll. Sr. Federico A. Solórzano, Guadalupe.



Fig. 5.—Seated redware figurine with staff. Frontal horn serves as spout. H. 40 cm. Coll. Sr. Federico A. Solórzano, Guadalupe.



Fig. 6.—Seated horned figurine with emphasis on phallus. Black decoration on red slip, apparently representing skeleton. Headdress with two dog heads. Prov. El Chanal, Colima. H. 46 cm. W. 25 cm. Coll. Sr. Federico A. Solórzano, Guadalupe.



Fig. 7.—Horned head jar, redware, Colima. H. 18.5 cm. W. 16 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 9.—Seated horned figure with necklace of seven plates (probably representing shell). Note uneven position of eyes (left lower than right), a common characteristic of Colima figurines. H. 34 cm. Coll. Sr. Federico A. Solórzano, Guadalajara.



Fig. 8.—Horned figurine, red slip with black and white paint. Headband modelled in high relief and painted white on red. Sling or rope held in right hand, wound around left. H. 44 cm. Prov. El Chanal, Colima. Private collection.



Fig. 10.—Miniature Colima whistle figurine with second figure attached to back. This remarkable sculpture is believed to represent the combative shaman's journey through the nether world carrying the human soul (shaman as psychopomp). H. 12.5 cm. Coll. Sr. Francisco Ramos Llerenas Colima.



Fig. 11.—Armed, left-facing figurine with whistle in head and second figure attached to back. Interpretation same as Fig. 10. Probable dates of these figurines, as of larger redware sculptures, 200 B.C.-A.D. 100. H. 13.3 cm. Private Collection.



Fig. 13.—Figurine with one-horned head-dress riding four-legged drum. National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City.



Fig. 12, a & b.—Frontal and side view of buff-slipped miniature horned figurine from El Chanal, Colima. Leg position may indicate walking. H. 16 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 14.—Miniature whistle figurine with elaborate hat and headband riding long-necked bird or turtle with neck and head of water bird. Some restoration. H. 11 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 15.—Old bearded man with shell plate necklace, staff and boots of scale armor or feathers. Hat resembles that of contemporary Huichol shaman. This figure also had second human figure attached to back; of this, however, only lower part survives. Colima, 100 B.C.-A.D. 100. Museum of West Mexican Archaeology (IJAH), Guadalajara.



Fig. 16.—Singing shaman figure from Colima, with elaborate costume, necklace and high hat, holding "scepter" of deer. ... collection.



Fig. 17.—Helmeted whistle figurine, facing left, behind large rectangular shield, with dog on helmet. Ca. 100 B.C.-A.D. 100. H. 16 cm. Museum of West Mexican Archaeology (IJAH), Guadalajara.



Fig. 18.—Left-facing male whistle figurine with single wing on back and "sling" wound around left arm. Note seven feathers (three long and four short), possibly representing, as do seven shell plates in Fig. 9 and seven heads or notches on staffs mentioned in the text, the seven levels of a stratified upperworld. Ca. 100 B.C.-100 A.D. H. 10.3 cm. Museum of West Mexican Archaeology (IJAH), Guadalajara.

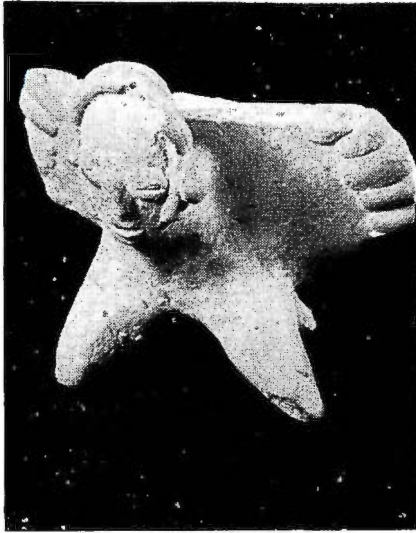


Fig. 19.—Anthropomorphic bird whistle figurine, Colima. Ca. 100 B.C. A.D. 100. H. 7 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 21.—Colima whistle figurine of orange clay, with horn on side of head and bird-headed staff. Figure clad in what may be scale armor (leather?) or feather tunic. Ca. 100 B.C.-A.D. H. 15.5 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 20.—Male standing figure, facing left, with budding tree emerging from back. Symbolism conforms to concept, still surviving in West Mexico, of shamanic tree whose growth and fate parallels that of shaman himself. Sling with which this and other figurines pull left hand against right is probably not conventional slingshot weapon but rather a "soul catcher," or else a symbolic "chain" or rope used in shamanic initiation, as in Siberia. It was so interpreted by supernatural practitioners to whom it was shown. Whistle in head cannot be blown since tree obstructs blowhole. Ca. 100 B.C.-A.D. 100. H. 13 cm. Coll. Sr. Francisco Ramos Llerenas, Colima.



Fig. 22.—Miniature whistling figurine from Colima, with headdress and horn, holding aloft perforated incense burner. Full-size vessels of this type are also found in polished redware, sometimes on backs of hollow redware dogs or held by human figurines. H. 14 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 23.—Horned whistle figurine with objects usually interpreted as *maracas* or rattles but which could also represent peyote cactus. Colima, exact provenance unknown. Ca. 100 B.C.-100 A.D. H. 11.5 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 25.—Large hollow figurine from Nayarit, with double-horned headdress or helmet, traces of black negative decoration. Helmet and armor may be of basketry. Figure holds staff or mace in hands which emerge from barrel-shaped armor encasing upper body. Exact provenance unknown; probably southwestern Nayarit. H. 48 cm. W. 20 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 24.—Bird-headed Colima whistle figure, facing left, with dog. Figure holds sling in the characteristic manner, right hand pulling against left. Ca. 100 B.C.-A.D. 100. H. 16.5 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 26.—Double-horned Nayarit figurine, ca. A.D. 100, black and white decoration on red slip. H. 26 cm. W. 12 cm. Coll. Sr. Federico A. Solórzano, Guadalajara.



Fig. 27.—Helmeted Colima redware figurine, holding staff or club, facing left, with large horn on back topped by small howling dog. Traces of black negative decoration. H. 40 cm. Private collection.

The present discussion will be centered largely on the Colima horn, since its singularity and unique position on the forehead in association with certain other features lend themselves more fruitfully to descriptive analysis and comparison. Nevertheless, the double horns of Nayarit are of great significance to our hypothesis, in that they conform more nearly to the worldwide iconography of the "horns of power".

In the course of examining horned figurines, it was noted first of all that such pieces generally represent males. A single-horned figure wearing a characteristically female wrap-around skirt was encountered in a museum exhibition. At first thought to represent a hermaphrodite with both male and female characteristics, this figure, which belonged to a private collection, was on closer examination found to have been heavily reconstructed and pieced together, the bottom half evidently coming from one figure and the top from

another, thus eliminating it from consideration. Occasionally the horn on the forehead was found to be associated with sculptural emphasis on the phallus (Fig. 6) and in one unusual but apparently authentic figure, a large horn was located on the back, surmounted by a small dog facing backward (Fig. 27).

The question arose whether these horns were meant to represent organic growths or some sort of applied ornament. Where horns on West Mexican figurines are mentioned in the literature, they are often called simple ornaments or even "peaked caps." The latter is clearly erroneous here. It is difficult to distinguish unequivocally between an applied or attached ornament and true organic growth in the small filleted miniatures, but detailed examination of many large horned figurines has convinced me that the sculptor in general meant to represent the horn as an integral, organic part of the figure—in other words, as a natural bony growth emerging from the head, in the manner of horned animals (*). The horns on the large redware pieces are usually slipped and polished in precisely the same manner as the rest of the head, and usually are in no way differentiated from it, unlike clothing or ornaments such as head bands, which are often indicated, the latter looping around the head and circling the horn.

This circling of the horn with the band is evidently of significance. On many figures the headband is simply indicated by incisions in red-on-red, but on some pieces head and headband are of different colors (buff-on-red or red-on-buff) and on still others the band is very prominent, being modelled in the round and painted to set it off against the rest of the surface slip of the head. Some few horned figurines do not have the headband, but where it occurs it is looped in a more or less identical manner, no matter what the individual style of the figurine may be—once vertically from the top of the head under and around the chin, and once horizontally around the upper part of the head, describing a circle around the base of the horn.

Single-horned figurines seem to have been most common in Colima, but a few are known from some other areas of Mexico. Two pre-Classical single-horned miniatures very similar to Colima pieces (even to the looping of a band around the horn) but originating at Cuauhtitlan in the Valley of Mexico are shown in Fig. 28. Coe (1965: Pl. 193, a and b) illustrates a remarkable white-slipped Olmec clay sculpture of an immensely fat seated male, found at Las Bocas, near Izucar de Matamoros, Puebla, and now in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Wielgus of Chicago. The head of this figure, which Coe suggests might represent the so-called "Fat God," is topped by a very prominent upward-sweeping horn-like feature reminiscent of the larger horns of Colima. Even more striking is the horn in Petroglyph 2 at Chalcatzingo, Morelos, site of the only truly monumental Olmec rock carvings yet found in central Mexico (Coe, *ibid.*; Gay, 1966). In this relief four male figures are depicted,

(*) It is curious that the Colima horn, especially the long, upsweeping and curved variety, generally resembles the horns of animals which did not exist in the Mesoamerican environment. I am, however, indebted to Prof. Charles Bennett of the Department of Geography, UCLA, for drawing my attention to a relatively rare horned bird, *Oreophaps derbianus*, also known as the Horned Guan, which is today restricted to the humid mountain forests of Chiapas, in southern Mexico. This strikingly colored, primarily terrestrial bird has a bright red, featherless horn or spike growing from the top of its head (Blake, 1953:104).

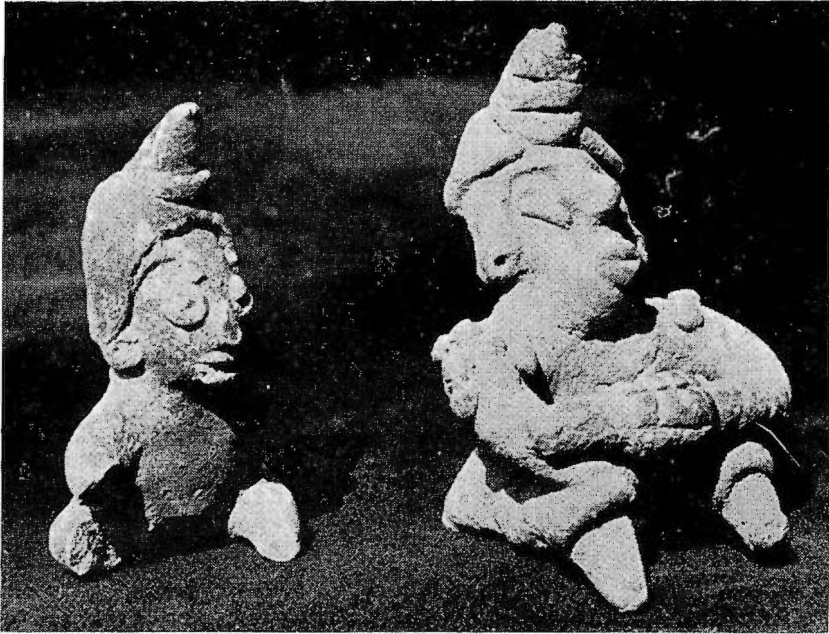


Fig. 28.—Two small pre-Classic horned figurines from Cuauhtitlan, Valley of Mexico. Left: H. 5 cm. Right: H. 6 cm. Private collection.

three standing upright, representing supernatural beings or masked dancers and the fourth reclining. Only the latter, which faces leftward and upward toward the others, is unequivocally human: bearded, nude, with erect phallus and arms and legs stretched out before him. From his forehead projects a large curved horn. This relief has been variously interpreted as an agricultural ritual or a sacrifice (the bearded man seems to have his hands bound, although he may also be wearing wrist bands), but for reasons which will become clear below, I am more inclined to view it as a depiction of the shaman's ecstatic vision, perhaps in mythological "First Times." Double-horned figurines have also been found at Tlatilco, and these, curiously, share some features with comparable early pieces from West Mexico. Single-horned figurines from later periods are illustrated in Figs. 29 and 30. A horned jade mask from Monte Alban, Oaxaca, is shown in Fig. 31.

SINISTRAL ORIENTATION OF WEST MEXICAN FIGURINES

It was in the course of cataloguing the single-horned Colima pieces that there began to emerge a patterned association of the horn with certain other features, and especially with that of sinistral orientation. It was found, for ex-

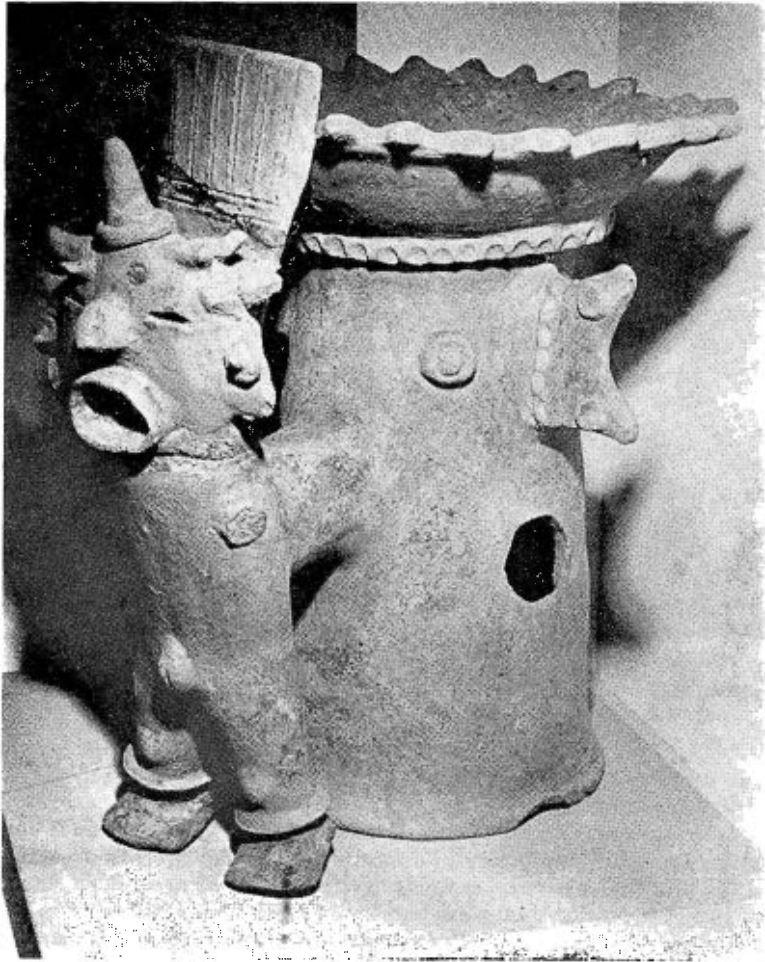


Fig. 29.—Incense burner with horned female Xipe figure, found near Ciudad Guzmán, Jalisco. In this figure and that in Pl. 30 the horn is unmistakably linked to priesthood, since in Xipe cult it is the priests who wear skin of sacrificial victim. Date unknown, but evidently after A.D. 900. Museum of Ciudad Guzmán, Jalisco.

ample, that male horned figurines of the hollow and slipped variety appear to be exclusively represented facing straight ahead or to the left but never to the right. The same phenomenon was noted in the miniature "warrior" figurines. Indeed, very few forward-facing pieces were encountered among the latter. In the larger figurines, the head may be only slightly turned, or it may be sharply twisted so that the face is parallel to the left shoulder. Male horned figurines facing to the left were generally found to be armed, frequently with

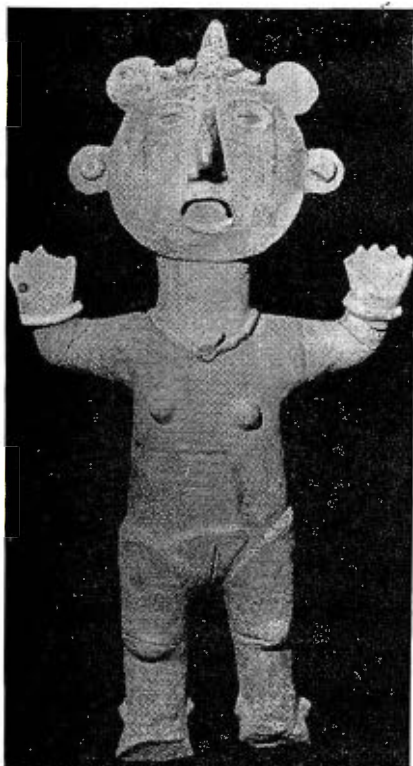


Fig. 30.—Large female Xipe figure with horn, from El Chanal, Colima. Date unknown, but evidently after A.D. 900. H. 67 cm. W. 33 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 31.—Mask of fitted sections of jadeite, with eyes and teeth of shell, usually interpreted as "bat god." Element on forehead is either highly exaggerated bat snout or horn. Mask was found in Period II tomb at Monte Alban, Oaxaca. H. 15.5 cm. National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City.

clubs or staffs or else equipped with slings. Nevertheless, their attitude did not seem to be aggressive. Rather, it appeared purely defensive, with weapons held as though an attack were meant to be warded off rather than initiated. The unseen enemy, however, was evidently always on the left, as indicated by the fact that the fighting stance is always oriented in that direction. Some left-facing figures with weapons in their hands are seated, their heads raised as though watchfully waiting and listening for an enemy—a further confirmation of the defensive hypothesis. In seated figurines, one arm is frequently raised with a weapon or ceremonial object held in the hand.

In contrast to the left-facing figurines in a defensive fighting stance, those looking straight ahead are usually without weapons, shown in attitudes of calm repose or contemplation. Some even give the appearance of death, with eyes closed. Certain of the forward-facing horned pieces hold bowls or gourdlike dishes, or are shown drinking from them. Forward-facing horned

figures, whether seated or standing, generally wear prominent necklaces of identical leaf-shaped plates, probably representing carved shell (Fig. 9). One such necklace of shell was found in a private collection; its provenance was given by the owner as Colima. Almost invariably, the necklaces on horned figures consist of seven pieces, three located on the chest, one on each shoulder and two in back. On some figures the two rear plates may be missing, but this is rare. Occasionally a left-facing figure may also be wearing such a seven-piece necklace, as do some unslipped miniatures (*).

As already mentioned, the leftward orientation of the large armed figurines is repeated in many of the small unslipped pieces. A considerable number of the latter were examined to eliminate, so far as possible, any chance of error. Without exception, these so-called "warriors" also faced left in a fighting stance, always as though warding off an enemy threatening attack from that side. Unlike the large hollow figurines, the miniature "warriors" generally have a high-pitched whistle in the head. (The symbolic rather than functional nature of these whistles is suggested by the fact that in figurines such as that with the tree [Fig. 20] the blow-hole is entirely obstructed so that the whistle cannot actually be blown. In general, it should be added that whistling [for lost souls, to disperse demons, etc.] is a shamanic trait which survives today both in Mesoamerica and in Asia.) Some of the miniatures are sheathed in protective armor, others are nude, still others are heavily clothed and booted or stand hiding behind large rectangular shields. While some have the characteristic single horn on the forehead or on a headdress, often circled by a band, others wear merely a headband which is looped vertically and horizontally around the head. In fact, the headband seems to be an essential feature. Many of the miniatures wear large birdlike wings or circular feathered discs, but certain remarkable pieces, armed with clubs, staffs or slings, carry trees and even human figures which seem to grow out of their backs. All of these also face left.

The interrelationship and, indeed, interdependence of the horn and sinistral orientation, in association with certain other specific and recurring characteristics, appear to be beyond question. It remains for us to interpret the significance of the major overt features, separately and in relation to one another. Were the evidence limited only to horns and leftward orientation, I believe the case for shamanism and against "warriors" would still be strong. As it happens, the shamanic hypothesis is supported by a whole series of iconographic details which one encounters not only over and over again in certain tomb figurines, but for which parallels exist both in contemporary native societies in Western Mexico and in other areas of the world where shamanism is or was strongly developed, such as Northern and Northeastern Asia. Among these are the already mentioned associations of humans with trees as well as the human figures attached to the backs of armed personages; scale armor,

(*) The number of necklace ornaments here conforms also to certain curved staffs or scepters of fired, slipped and polished clay with seven small modelled heads or seven notches or steps on the forward edge. The writer has examined two such objects, both from Colima, and a third, of wood, with nine notches, found in a dry cave in Jalisco.

bird-headed and notched staffs; deer antlers; beards (where these are relatively rare in the population at large); the riding of drums and birds; companion animals (especially dogs and birds); feathered discs and wings, as well as horns, on the backs of clothing; mirrors; certain kinds of headdresses and bands which circle the head; whistles; birds with human heads or humans with ornithomorphic characteristics; double-headed birds; slings, and so forth. Horns as the symbol of priestly or shamanic status are, however, the most striking common feature, as the following survey will demonstrate.

THE HORN AS INSIGNIA OF SUPERNATURAL POWER

The great antiquity as well as near-universality of the horn as the symbol of sacred, supernatural or priestly power—one might almost say, as antennae to the world beyond—are well documented. As an element in representations of the human figure the horn can be traced back to mankind's oldest art. In the so-called Cave of Les Trois Frères (The Three Brothers) at Montesquieu-Avantes in Southern France, an impressive painting dating to the Magdalenian phase of the Upper Palaeolithic was found in 1914, depicting a bearded figure of a personage, perhaps wearing a mask, with animal ears, a tail, bear's paws and large reindeer or stag antlers (Giedion, 1962: 504-505). Another antlered figure is engraved on an Upper Palaeolithic slate plate found at Lourdes (Kühn, 1929: fig. 163). Far earlier even, perhaps 60-70,000 years ago, the Neanderthals of Central Asia also seem to have attached supernatural significance to the horn, judging from the burial of a nine-year-old boy which the Russian archaeologist A. P. Okladnikov discovered in 1938 in a cave called Teshik-tash (Rock with a Hole in It) in the mountains of south-western Uzbekistan (Augusta, 1960: Pl. 19; Coon, 1962: 558-61). The boy's head was surrounded by five pairs of ibex horns, their points stuck downward into the ground, and nearby were the remains of a short-lived fire which has been interpreted as evidence of a mortuary ritual involving the ibex and its powerful horns. Ibex horn cults, incidentally, are still practiced today in parts of Central Asia.

The gods of antiquity—Anatolian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Harappan, Hittite, Phoenician, Greek, Scandinavian, etc.—were often depicted with horns, as were some of the divinities or demi-gods of Tibet, China, North America and even Polynesia (especially Fiji). The early anthropomorphic horned gods are very likely, as many authorities suggest, survivals of Palaeolithic gods in animal form or animal deities and "masters." As Hastings (1925: 792) put it,

In many of these instances there can be no doubt that the horns worn by the gods are the relic of their earlier animal forms. Earlier worshipful animals became anthropomorphic; or again, a worshipful animal was blended with a god. Myth and art retained for the god some part of the animal—head, or pelt, or hoofs, or limbs, or in this case, the horns. But these last were also a symbol of power,

naturally retained for the powerful god. In other cases, however, such symbols of strength may have been given to a god who had no animal past.

While this statement certainly holds true in a general sense, the hypothetical evolutionary shift from deities in animal form to anthropomorphic gods with animal characteristics from the Palaeolithic to the Neolithic to the Bronze Age must be seen in the light of recent studies of hunter-gatherer ideology. Zerries' work in South America, for example, demonstrates that there is no real differentiation between humans and animals in any basic sense; rather, their forms are easily interchangeable and metamorphosis from one to the other is a particular attribute of Masters (or Guardians) of the Species, on the one hand, and shamans on the other (Zerries, 1954: 1964: 247-56). Comparable studies among other surviving hunting and collecting cultures, such as Bushmen or Pygmies, indicate similar beliefs. Assuming that this represents survivals of an earlier hunter-gatherer ideology, the Upper Palaeolithic people probably also made no basic distinction between the various outer forms of divine beings, since it was the divine essence which counted and not the outer shell. Thus we might see the developmental sequence in concept and representation less in terms of an antropomorphization of earlier animal gods than as a gradual shift toward dominance of the anthropomorphic over the animal form—in other words, not a replacement but more a shift of representational emphasis corresponding to conceptual modifications as man turned from hunting to sedentary agriculture. It is not difficult to recognize the continuity between the Palaeolithic cave art of France and Spain and the horned altars and gods mounted on bulls which Mellaart (1964) discovered in the 8000-year-old Neolithic city of Catal Hüyük in Anatolia and which, in turn, lead to the horned gods of Bronze Age Europe. The horned deities, such as the Great Horned Goddess, and numerous other horned figures in the Saharan rock paintings of Tassili (Lhote, 1959) also fit into this transitional category.

In addition to the horned gods, there were, and still are, semi-divine horned beings or demons, of whom some certainly derive from earlier anthropomorphic divinities or sacred animals transformed into demons under the influence of new religions (the Devil, for example, in his goat-like form may be derived, as some folklorists believe, from the goat as the sacred animal of Donar, the old Teutonic god of thunder). Many *demi*-gods of China, both ancient and modern, also wear horns. More to the point for our discussion, however, is the widespread association of horns with men of special power. This again takes us back to the representations of the horned "sorcerers" in the cave art of the Dordogne—in other words, of shamans depicted in their role as mediators between the actual world and the transcendental, invisible forces of the universe. Recent discoveries apparently dating from the Mesolithic and early Neolithic in Western Europe again provide a link in the chain of continuity. In graves on islands off the coast of Brittany, male skeletons were found in seated position wearing headdresses of interlocking antlers or branches of stag horn arranged like a halo (Salmony, 1954: 18). A female skeleton was also found with a similar headdress. The excavators of these burials

stated that such head ornaments occur only in graves which were provided with a wealth of funerary gifts. They concluded that the dead who were distinguished by antlers must have been heroes, chieftains, or religious dignitaries, thus honored by a headdress of ritual and symbolic significance.

Horned headdresses or horns alone were frequently worn by the kings and priests of both the Bronze Age and later times, serving as the symbol of the gods from whom they derived their special status of semi-divinity, and as a magical means of protection against all manner of evil. The priests who substituted for the gods, writes Scheftelowitz (1912: 472-73),

assumed the outer form of the gods they represented in the sacred ceremonies. For this reason the Sumerian and Babylonian priests wore two horns on their headdresses. The *sabii*, Roman priests of Mars, had horns attached to their hats. Horned caps are worn also by the priests (shamans) of many primitive peoples, such as those of . . . Siberia and . . . North America. The priests of the Amurian peoples have iron deer horns as head decoration. A headdress with many horns, meant to represent the sun, is worn by Chinese priests. The priests and sorcerers of many African Negro tribes are equipped with antelope horns because they are believed to afford protection against the missiles of enemies, on the hunt against the claws of wild animals, and in everyday life against disease demons.

The horns of the god Osiris were represented on Pharaoh's headdress, while the kings of Mesopotamia wore caps encircled from behind by parallel horns curving upward in front. To what degree horns were regarded as the symbols of kingship in ancient Rome is illustrated in a story related by Ovid (Hastings, 1925: 793):

Cipus the *praetor*, looking at his reflexion in water, saw that horns were on his forehead and then found that they were actually there. Anxius to know what this portent meant, he offered sacrifice, and the augur, after inspecting the entrails and seeing the horns, addressed him as future king. Rather than consent to be king, he desired sentence of banishment; but, though this was agreed to, his head with the horns attached to it was engraved on the posts of the gate.

Horned animals and composite beings with antler headdresses are prominent in the art of the Scythians, Iron Age neighbors of the Greeks, and of related cultures of the sixth to the third centuries B.C. in the Eurasian steppe lands, as well as in Celtic art dating from the last centuries B.C. to the beginning of the Christian era. In North America, horns as the symbol of certain gods, chiefs and shamans were a widespread feature of aboriginal belief and ritual. Buffalo horns were worn by chiefs and priests of such tribes as the Blackfoot, Pawnee, Mandan, Iowa, Chippewa and others, many of them faithfully recorded on paper and canvas in the first half of the nineteenth century by the painter and pioneer ethnographer of the American Indian, George Catlin (1796-1872). Horned serpents, dragons, jaguars and other supernatural beings are well known in

Mesoamerican and North American Indian art. Representations of horned men, as well as horned and plumed serpents are especially frequent in the extraordinary cache of decorated conch shells from the Spiro Mound site in Le Flore County, Oklahoma, many of which are now in the collections of the Museum of the American Indian in New York (Hamilton, 1952). Dockstader (1961: Pl. 63) also illustrates a superb one-piece wooden face mask from the Museum's Spiro Mound (*) collection representing an antlered man. This wood sculpture has inlays of shell for the eyes and mouth and so may have served as a death mask for an important personage, perhaps a priest or shaman, rather than as a mask used in dancing. Horns and horned beings also appear prominently in the ceremonial life and art of the Indians of the Southwest, notably the Hopi and Zuni. Here it is of some interest that in addition to bison horns, single horns and deer antlers, we find vertical pairs of horns on certain Hopi *kachinas* which closely resemble those of the double-horned helmets of Nayarit (Fewkes, 1903; Dockstader, 1954). Hastings (1925: 793-94) suggests that the wearing of horned helmets may have been derived from an earlier custom of wearing a headdress composed of the skin of a horned animal with the horns attached, but that the horns on helmets were probably also intended to have some apotropaic force in the face of danger. Sardinians, Etruscans, Romans, Greeks, Celts, Anglo-Saxons, Teutons, Scandinavians, Huns, and many others wore such horned helmets. Of more than passing interest in this connection are Elworthy's observations on a thirteenth century fresco mural depicting 21 helmeted knights in the famous Cathedral of San Gennaro in Naples (Elworthy, 1900: 45-52). Of the 21 knights, 12 wear horns on their helmets, whereas the others lack this distinction. Evidently, the former were victorious in battle or tournament, whereas the latter had been defeated. The remarkable thing about the painting, writes Elworthy, is that it represents pictorially a common Italian adage, "*Tornare con le trombe nel sacco, o scornato*," literally, to come back with the horns in a bag, or deprived of horns, meaning to return defeated, with empty hands. The Italian *scornare* literally means to deprive of horns, but the noun form, *scorno*, has the same significance as its English form, scorn: contempt, disgrace, etc. In French, *écorné* (formerly *éscorné*) is used in connection with conjugal infidelity and marital disgrace, in the same sense that the wearing of horns now refers in English to the cuckolded husband. All this of course illustrates an interesting case of complete reversal of the meaning of words over the centuries, for as Elworthy (*ibid.*, p. 52) comments,

Not only is the object of the ancient custom of wearing horns completely changed from honour to dishonour, but the word by which it was denoted has become entirely revolutionised. Further, we see that the sense of the word itself has completely passed over from the object to the subject. Scorn now signifies not simply disgrace or contempt, but the contempt felt by another for him who is disgraced or *scornato* —i.e., dishorned— and by no means implies disgrace to him who feels the scorn.

(*) Dated approx. 1200 A.D. by the latest C-14 computations.

Evidently there has been no such reversal of meaning concerning the horn in Asia. Even today the Chinese refer to a man believed to have special powers or unusually good luck as having horns on his head, and horns are still (or, in some areas, were until recently) an essential part of the shamanic crown, headdress or costume (Holmberg-Harva, 1922, 1938; Hentze, 1933, 1944; Lindgren, 1935; Salmony, 1954; Eliade, 1964, etc.). Human figure representations with horns or horned headdresses first appear in Chinese art during the painted pottery period, between 2200 and 1700 B.C., and are frequent thereafter in Shang, Chou and Han times, as well as later. The Shang script has several symbols for the word deer which seem to relate this animal and its horns to the sun and fire, and one Shang pictograph also depicts a man wearing antlers (Hentze, 1943: 21; 1951: 123). Various animals and other beings, including humans, with what appear to be horns (the so-called "bottle horns") are also frequently represented in the bronze ritual vessels of the Shang and Chou periods. The Freer Gallery of Washington, D.C., has a fine example of such a vessel called a *ho*, used for pouring sacrificial wine, dating from the twelfth to eleventh centuries B.C. Its lid is in the shape of a human face surmounted by horns similar to those frequently worn by dragons on ritual vessels (Watson, 1961: Pl. 17). Bronze pole finials of human heads with horns are known from the tenth to eighth centuries B.C. (*ibid.*, Pls. 36-37). Some famous representations of human heads with horns or antlers date from the Han period (206 B.C. to 220 A.D.). A stone relief from the Han tombs of Sze-chuan in Western China, for example, shows a man wearing two-pointed antlers (Rudolf, 1951: Pl. 8). Salmony (1954: 25) describes a horned pottery head from the same area and period, with large flaring ears, bulging eyes, tusks descending from the corners of the mouth, and a long hanging tongue, surmounted by a two-pointed antler. A well-known wooden carving of an antlered human head with protruding tongue, excavated at Ch'ang-Sha, Hunan Province, and dated between the third and second centuries B.C., is in the British Museum (Salmony, 1954: Figs. 6 and 7; Watson, 1961: 71). A pair of decorated stag antlers in the American Museum of Natural History evidently was once part of such a sculpture from Ch'ang-Sha, a site which has yielded a number of other animal protomes as well as human figures adorned with horns (Salmony, 1954: 1-13). All of these have been dated to Late Eastern Chou, between 600 and 200 B.C. From the same period is a fragmentary bronze pouring vessel with a central design of two engraved figures wearing horns, surrounded by other human figures and birds, in the Seattle Art Museum (*ibid.*, Figs. 18-20). Antlered animals on certain third to first century B.C. Dongso'n drums have been identified as *Pishieh*, mythical animal, beings which repel evil spirits, rather than ordinary stags (*ibid.*, p. 16). From a later period, the fifth or sixth century A.D., comes a small gilt metal plaque in the Museum of Far Eastern Art, Cologne, depicting a man, evidently a shaman, wearing highly stylized geometric ten-point antlers on side projections of his cap. Several headdresses or crowns of this type, but made of gold, were found in graves in southeastern Korea dating to the sixth or seventh century A.D. (Hentze, 1933). It is generally agreed that these crowns, evidently inspired by the stag antler element in Chinese shamanism, belonged to shamans. In this case the stylized antlers are flanked by symbolic representations of trees.

Yet another kind of horn which has played an important role in Chinese folk belief and magic from ancient times is that of the rhinoceros (as distinct from the fabulous unicorn, although there seems to be some confusion between them in the literature). An exhaustive study of this fascinating subject and its ramifications was published by Laufer (1914: 73-173), who demonstrates the great antiquity of Chinese thought about the various species of Asian rhino and the miraculous qualities of its horns against all manner of disease of body and mind, as well as demons and other evil-working spirits. The markings, size, shape, weight, color, etc., of different horns were also believed capable, with the proper handling, of communicating with the sky and the world of the good spirits. Laufer does not believe, however, that the famous holy penitent of Hindu and Buddhist tradition known as Hermit Single-Horn can be linked to the rhinoceros; rather, he is related to the legendary Rsi Ekasinga or Ekacringa, the animal which the Greeks and Romans knew as *monokeros* (L. = *monoceros*), or unicorn. There are numerous variants of the Hermit Single-Horn legend; one of the earliest, in the *Mahābhārata*, India's greatest epic, describes the holy man with a single horn on his head, but some others give him two. In the dramatic plays of Japan and Tibet the masks of Hermit Single-Horn show him as a human being with a single, short, forked horn or with a long curved horn extending from his forehead (Laufer, *ibid.*, p. 112 and Pl. X).

The same author also describes and illustrates two clay tomb figures of shamans in fighting pose, perhaps dating from the late Chou period (Laufer, *ibid.*, p. 199 and Pls. XV-XVII). Both of these figures are clad in what Laufer has analyzed as the defensive "scale armor" of leather typical of this period, and both have their right hands raised; presumably they once held wooden spears which have, of course, long since disintegrated. One of the figures, whose head is turned slightly to the left, wears a helmet partially composed of scale armor and surmounted by a vertical, mushroom-like horn resembling the capped horns of some of the ritual bronzes of this period. The lively fighting stance and defensive body armor, writes Laufer, demonstrate that these shaman figures are engaged in battle with demons, from which we may infer that in Chou times,

as the shaman warded off pestilence and malignant spirits from the grave before the lowering into it of the coffin, he continued in his miniature form to act as the efficient guardian of the occupant of the grave.

Horns (in this case generally stag or reindeer antlers) as symbols of shamanic power are probably of considerable antiquity also in northern and northeast Asia, where they have survived as an essential part of the shaman's costume until very recent times, both in their natural form and in iron imitations mounted on the headdress and attached to the back of the shaman's dress (*). Salmony (1954: 29) mentions primitive-looking metal faces

(*) According to John T. Hitchcock (1965, personal communication), the Magar shaman of Nepal ties horns of the ghoral (gorel), a Himalayan goat, to the back of his shamanic attire along with bird skins (symbols of flight) and other objects connected with his supernatural activities. He must also use the short, black horns of this animal in the making of this shamanic drum.

crowned by antlers reduced to straight branches which were excavated between the Ural mountains and Lake Baikal, but the age of these objects is not known.

Some native West Mexican beliefs regarding the deep significance of the shamanic headdress and the shamanic horns parallel those of Siberia to an astonishing degree. The Huichol shaman actually has two different headdresses, one a broad, flat woven straw hat covered with eagle feathers (the eagle being his spirit helper or tutelary spirit) and the other a band tied around his head. The latter is generally worn indoors, during ceremonies (see Fig. 32). When asked to explain the headband, Ramon, my principal Huichol informant for several months during 1965, said that the band represents the shaman's "*cuernos*". These horns, he said, are placed on the neophyte's head during the ceremonies in which he is invested by an older shaman, and they represent his sacred shamanic power, "his power to speak to the sun and to the other gods." Ramon, it should be added, is himself an apprentice shaman. Huichol shamans, he said, must have the will to become shamans, for it is a hard life, full of self-denial and great emotional stress. Even so, only a man who has received a call from the Sun can become a shaman. This call, he said, comes when one goes alone to the sacred mountain and eats peyote. But a man might go many times before he hears Father Sun, and some men who wish to become shamans are never called at all (Ramon said this was because the Sun knew they were not strong enough to do all of the things a shaman must do). The Sun tells the chosen one how he must live, what sacred things he needs (eagle feathers, "yellow peyote," a special tobacco, gourd, containers for narcotic substances, a rock crystal wrapped in deer skin, a bow and five sacred arrows with which to defend himself against hostile shamans, *cuernos de poder* [horns of power], and, above all, his shamanic tree). Then, if he has lived a "pure life" for five years—during which he serves an older shaman as apprentice—and completed five annual peyote pilgrimages from the Huichol country to the sacred mountain caves located in the state of San Luis Potosí, he can be initiated. During this ceremony, the old shaman presents the neophyte with his paraphernalia, beginning with the horns of the deer. It is significant that the informant spoke of this part of the ritual as placing the horns "into" (*dentro*) the head of the neophyte. To make certain that there had been no misunderstanding, he was asked to explain this further. The old shaman, he said, places the horns on (*sobre*) the head, but he speaks an invocation which puts the horns "into" the head, because horns are the power of the shaman. It should be noted here that two Huichol informants independently identified the "crown" on the head of the double-headed Huichol eagle as horns as well as shamanic plumes, because the eagle is the shaman's helper as well as the bird of the sun deity (*).

Magic deer horns figure importantly in Huichol mythology and ritual, and they are used frequently by the shaman in ceremonies and curing. In one myth collected by the writer, the culture hero *Kauyumari* wears deer horns on his head and uses them in the manner of antennae to communicate with the Great Gods

(*) Horned and double-headed eagles are also known from Siberia where they serve a similar supernatural function.

of the Sea in behalf of the Sun God. The Huichols also have a *vagina dentata* myth in which *Kauyumari* grinds away the women's teeth with a magical deer horn at the behest of the gods.

Photographs of horned Colima and Nayarit figurines were shown separately to five informants, four of them supernatural practitioners of one kind or another and one, Ramon, a novice shaman. The former identified the



Fig. 32.—Huichol shaman (right, with broad headband) officiating at ceremony of the changing of the staffs of authority, in the temple at San Sebastián, Sierra de los Huicholes, Jalisco. Kneeling man at left is a *peyotero* (one who has gone on a peyote pilgrimage to Real Catorze, San Luis Potosí). Shaman's headband is said to symbolize his "horns of power." Photo: Padre Ernesto Loera Ochoa, Guadalajara.

figurines without hesitation as "shamans," on the basis of the horns, as well as certain other associated features to which I shall presently return. Ramon, to whom as a Huichol the deer is *the* sacred animal, wondered why the Colima figures had only a single horn when deer, as everyone knows, have two horns. All informants were also shown figurines which lacked horns but wore distinctive headbands. Again it was agreed that such figures "must be" shamans or *sacerdotes místicos* ("mystic priests," a term sometimes used by Mexican native or Mestizo supernatural practitioners to distinguish themselves from formally trained Catholic priests, as well as from *curanderos* or curers). Here the band, wound around and passing over the head, was regarded as the determining feature. Ramon and a second Huichol informant stated that a Huichol shaman could not exercise his power unless he wore either his shaman's hat or the headband which also symbolizes the shaman's horns. There is reason to believe that the Huichol shaman's headband was far more important in former times and that its replacement by the shamanic hat is comparatively recent).

Here again we perceive some remarkable parallels to North and East Asian shamanism which, together with others still to be discussed, add substantially to those previously recognized by Madsen (1955: 48-57). According to Eliade (1964: 154-155), among certain tribes, as for example the Yurak-Samoyed, the shamanic cap or helmet is considered the most important part of the shamanic dress, containing a great portion of the power of the shaman. For this reason Asian shamans frequently leave off their cap when asked to give performances in front of strangers, since without it they have no real power and thus give only a parody of the real ceremony. According to Holmberg-Harva (1922), in Russian Karelia the Finnish *noita* (shaman) transferred his own supernatural powers to his pupil when he placed his cap on the latter's head; indeed, in certain songs the term *lakkipää* (becapped) is used as a variant of the name of the sorcerer. The Samoyed and other shamans not only wore a special costume but also a special shamanic headdress made of strips of cloth of different colors wound around the head; sometimes the shamans also placed iron rings around their heads to contain their great supernatural powers, which they believed might otherwise burst the bounds of the skull. The Lebed-Tartars wound a woman's veil around the head while practicing the art of shamanism, but this is evidently a degenerated form of the special headdress.

About the degeneration of the once elaborate shaman's costume in recent times, Holmberg-Harva (1938: 500-501) writes as follows:

A complete shaman's costume is generally no longer found among all of the peoples of the extensive Altaic group, not even among those which still place themselves largely under the protection of the shamans. There are even some areas in which the magicians continue the ceremonies inherited from their forefathers only in ordinary dress.

Such shamans without magical clothing, but still using the drum, appear today, among other areas, in the Altai region. Radloff already mentions this, by stating that the shamans of the Black Tartars who reside in the northern Altai, as those of the Shoris

and the Teleuts, no longer utilize a specific shamanic costume. Kaarlo Hilden reports the same thing among the Lebed Tartars, noting that after the disappearance of the old clothing of the shaman, there remains as his insignia of rank only a linen cloth, wound about the head and tied in back with a knot, without which no success of shamanizing is considered possible.

This, of course, was precisely the point made by our Huichol informants: without at least the band wound around the head, symbolizing the shaman's horns of supernatural power, there could be no shamanic ceremony. It might be mentioned in passing that the scarf wound around the head as a distinguishing characteristic of the supernatural practitioner—indeed, as his only visible distinction—was also noted both by Johannes Wilbert (1965, personal communication) and by the writer among the Warao, a fishing tribe in the Orinoco Delta of Venezuela. According to Kirchhoff (1948: 492), headbands, along with thin plates of shell, were distinguishing characteristics also of shamans among Carib and Arawakan tribes north of the Orinoco River. An Andean element seems also to have been present, since these Venezuelan shamans were said to have carried one calabash with coca and another with lime.

In Northern and Northeast Asia the traditional shamanic headdress or crown frequently consists of

iron bands running around the head and crossways from four different points over the head, with iron objects like branched horns rising from the junction of the crossbands. (Holmberg-Harva, 1922: 15).

This is the type worn by the Yenisei-Ostyaks, as well as the Tungus and Buriats. Siberian shamans certainly used to appear also in complete animal disguise with fur covering their bodies, and antlers on their heads. Giedion (1962: Fig. 339) reproduces an early 18th Century engraving depicting an antlered shaman of the Tungus tribe clad in a tunic of animal fur, with the claws of a bear on both hands and feet, resembling the Magdalenian cave painting of the "sorcerer", mentioned earlier, to an astonishing degree.

Northern and Northeast Asian shamanic headdresses also frequently combine horns with bird symbolism, just as does that of the Huichol shaman today (deer horns and eagle feather hat as primary symbols of shamanic power, horns on the double-headed eagle, etc.). So, for example, the shaman dress of the Dagurs, Solons and Numinchens of Northwestern Manchuria usually includes a headdress surmounted by a metal bird perched between iron antlers (Lindgren, 1935: 335, 376-69). The frame of such "crowns" is very much like that of the Siberian types, consisting of a ring and two strips of metal intersecting at the top, where they support the antlers. The symbolic association of bird and horns is also evident in the Korean shamanic gold crowns (Hentze, 1933). A Huichol artist's conception of the shaman's eagle feather hat can be seen in Fig. 33.

It is evident that horns of power, as applied to shamans, are generally conceived as animal horns of one kind or another, the horned species shifting in accordance with the particular culture or eco-zone. In Siberia, the shaman's



Fig. 33.—Huichol artist's conception in colored wool yarn of important ceremony of calabashes which takes place in September. Two figures with hats represent shaman and helper, seated on shamanic thrones on either side of sacred drum. Above and below are horned deer, the animals of the sun, and at right is a flowering corn plant. Hats are decorated with pair of feathered "arrows" or prayer plumes which, like the magic deer horns, serve to transmit thoughts and prayers to the gods. H. 40 cm. W. 60 cm. Coll. Dr. Franklin D. Murphy, Los Angeles.

horns are usually those of the reindeer or stag; in Nepal, of the wild Himalayan goat; in North America of the deer, bison, antelope, and so forth. The two-horned headdresses of the Nayarit figurines might be representative of the latter. It is somewhat more difficult to account for the peculiar single horn of the Colima figurines, since a natural prototype is lacking, at least in the Colima region itself.

Single horns as insigniae of supernatural, divinely-inspired power appear occasionally in the Classic Mediterranean and Near Eastern world, as well as in Asia. The early Hindu and Buddhist legends about Hermit Single-Horn, the holy man (sometimes also an object of mockery), which spread into Tibet, China and Japan from India, have already been mentioned. In Japanese *No* plays, as in Chinese and Tibetan religious dramas, he is still represented by a mask with a single frontally projecting horn on the forehead. Some Siberian shaman's crowns also have a single, stylized frontal horn of iron, instead of the more common stag or reindeer antlers. In this connection, the so-called Spiro "Eagle Dancer" (Fig. 34), one of the best-known of the engraved designs on the Spiro Mound conch shells, is of considerable interest, since it does have a single, upward-curving horn which projects from the front of the headdress and which looks very much like some of the conventionalized single

metal horns on Siberian shaman crowns. Several other figures on the Spiro shells are also horned, but here the horns are more or less recognizable as stag antlers (see Burnett, 1945; Hamilton, 1952; Fundaburk, 1957). Although most of the human figure designs on these conch shells have been interpreted in the past as dancers or participants in some sort of agricultural ritual, it is my belief that they can be understood far better as elements of shamanism. The "eagle dancers" in particular are almost classical illustrations of the shaman's ecstatic initiatory ascent as he and eagle, his tutelary spirit, merge into one. Seen in this light, the stepped pyramid design into which the



Fig. 34.—Male single-horned figure with eagle characteristics, from an engraved design on a conch shell from Spiro Mound, Oklahoma, now in the Spiro collections of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York. Similar bird-man designs appear in shell, copper and other materials also in Missouri, Georgia and Tennessee. After Burnett, 1945: Pl. XXX.

man-eagle seems to rise takes on a new dimension: rather than symbolizing "lightning," as has been suggested, it is, in fact, the "soul ladder," the celestial mountain which plays so important a role in the cosmologies of Asia and the Americas.

It is not impossible that many of the so-called "eagle demons" in the Mochica vase paintings of Peru also belong in this shamanic category. These "eagle demons" are usually depicted as half-man, half-bird, with anthropomorphic lower and ornithomorphic upper bodies (or vice versa). Sometimes one or the other characteristic predominates, so that the figure may either be completely human, except for eagle wings, or completely bird, except for a human arm or leg. Frequently these figures are armed with darts, spear throwers, shields, hand axes or clubs (Kutscher, 1954: Pls. 33-40). The significance of the eagle in the *alter ego* concepts of various South American tribes and its special connection with chiefs and shamans have been discussed by Zerries (1962: 1964: 256-60), and by Wilbert (1963: 219), the latter in relation to shamanism among the Sanemá of Venezuela.

In the Spiro designs, an additional characteristic should be noted: although the "eagle dancers" and certain horned animal-headed human figures are represented in frontal view, their heads face sharply to the left. Certain other horned and unhorned janus-headed Spiro personages face in both directions at once, as does the double-headed (and sometimes horned) celestial eagle of the Huichols of Western Mexico and the Yakuts and other peoples of Siberia.

Whether the one-horned Spiro eagle man is a shaman or not, single horns as a symbol of power are evidently rare in the New World, with the notable exception of the Colima figurines. Here we might consider the possibility that these pieces do not simply represent shamans as such, but perhaps one particular shamanic culture hero, a Great, or First Shaman, whose distinguishing characteristic was a single horn on the forehead. The concept of Great or First Shamans sent by the sky god to defend mankind against disease and evil demons, and from whom sprang the so-called "race of shamans," or all future shamans, is widespread in Asia as well as in the Americas. Eliade (1964) cites numerous examples of the shamanic archetype in Asia, among them the Yakut First Shaman who was turned by celestial fire into a toad, from which in turn originated all future shamans and shamanesses, and the First Shamans of the Yenisei Ostyak, Teleut, Orochon and other Siberian peoples who were either born of the celestial eagle or else taught their art by the eagle. Some Siberian peoples also conceive of the human skeleton as the shamanic archetype, representing the family from which the ancestral shamans were successively born. Similarly, the Tibeto-Burmese peoples of the Himalayan region have their "first shamans," sent by the gods to found shamanism and guard mankind against all manner of disease and danger from demons. Occasionally the Great Shaman is identified with the sky god himself as among the Araucanians, whose *vileo*, the *machi* (shaman) of the sky, has become merged with the supreme deity, but this may well be the result of Christian influence. For the Huichols, *Tatewari*, Grandfather Fire, who is one of the great gods, is also the First Shaman who emerging from the fire taught the sacred songs to the other gods and to the Huichol

culture hero, *Kauyumari*, who in turn passed them on to the people. *Tatewari* is also the patron-god of the singing and curing shamans as well as shaman of the gods, and it was he who established the peyote customs by order of the highest deity, the Sun (Zingg, 1938: 304-05). The Caribs of South America have their first *piai* (Metraux, 1944), the Chibchan-speakers of Colombia a mythical First Shaman, *Teraca*, who owns rain and fertility (Reichel-Dolmaroff, 1961:356), etc. *Teraca* has obvious culture hero attributes, but it can also be said that culture heroes in general have shamanic attributes in that one of their prime functions is to preserve the spiritual and physical integrity of mankind and mediate between the powers of the unseen and the real world. Orpheus, too, can be understood in this light; not only did he embark on a typical shamanic enterprise, the journey to the underworld, the land of the dead, to recover a soul (his wife's), but his head, we recall, after floating to the island of Lesbos, eventually came to serve as an oracle—just as the skulls of the Yukagir shamans play a role in shamanic divination (Eliade, 1964:391).

Whatever the concept or symbolism underlying the representations of the single horn in Colima, however, it is evident that the horned figurines of Western Mexico cannot be understood apart from the near-universal association of the horn with supernatural power. Whether the one-horned figurine was meant to represent a mythological Great or First Shaman or some other personage, or whether for the Colima culture, at least, the single horn, rather than the more common two horns, embodied supernatural shamanic power, makes no difference. The evidence suggests that horned tomb figurines in general represent shamans whose frequently explicit fighting stance is related not to any earthly warfare but to the supernatural struggle against underworld demons threatening the deceased. For just as the psychic well-being of his group and its members is in the shaman's charge in life, so he defends their integrity in another dimension in the grave. It is in this light that the sinistral orientation of so many of the horned figurines becomes meaningful.

THE MEANING OF LEFT AND RIGHT

The antithesis of right and left is well known in its widespread manifestations in cosmology, ritual, magic, dream interpretation, augury, language, custom, and so forth. The right hand is preeminent: it is the side of the celestial forces, the male principle, strength, power, stability, *mana*, health, life; the left symbolizes the underworld, the earth, the female principle, weakness, disturbing influences, illness, death. A brief review of the worldwide evidence illustrates the near-universality of these associations.

In dualistic representations of life and death in Mesoamerican art, the right is usually the side of life, the left of death (see, for example, Covarrubias, 157:Pl. IV). The ancient Maya depicted a celestial double-headed dragon, the right head of which symbolized life and the left death (Seler, 1923:646-53). Like other Maya-speakers the Chorti of Guatemala, who preserve a considerable body of prehispanic ideology, equate the left hand with

the west and north, the side of death, whereas the east, as the source of life, health, good fortune, lies to the right (Anders, 1963:88). The left leg for the Chorti is

the evil leg, and sorcerers have their patron spirit in it, while curers and diviners, who are good people, have their patron spirit in their right leg, which is the good one. Sorcerers are said to stab the image of a victim with the left hand in order to make the pain more intense (Wisdom, 1940:428).

Similar beliefs prevail among the people of Aritama, a Mestizo village with strong Chibchan traditions in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in northern Colombia; here, for example,

as a general rule, nothing should be planted with the left hand because the seed would spoil (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961:392).

For the Aztecs, facing the rising sun, the realm of the dead, north, lay on the left side (*), a concept shared by many other American Indian cultures, from the Great Plains to the Tierra del Fuego. In Greco-Roman ritual the left hand offered left parts of sacrificial animals to chthonic deities, the right hand right parts to those of the sky. Birds flying or calling from the right were considered favorable omens, those from the left inauspicious (Gorbatowski, 1936). Even today, the cuckoo which calls to the Rumanian peasant from the left is a harbinger of doom, from the right of good fortune (Stratilesco, 1907:221). The pre-Christian antithesis of right and left as good and evil (as well as male and female) passed into early Christianity where it became fixed in church architecture, ritual, custom, popular belief and usage. According to Best (1898:123), the Maori of New Zealand paid careful attention to the direction of omens: those from the right were good, those from the left evil. Before battle, when opposing forces were formally arrayed against one another, a turn to the left by a ceremonial challenger rushing up with his weapon was *aituu*, an evil sign, in accord with

the common belief that the left side of a person is *taba mate* (the side of death or weakness) and the right side the *taba ora* (the side of life or strength). In like manner, the left side of a person is the *taba wabine*, or female side, and the right side is the *taba tane* or male side.

In the ritual preceding war, the Maori priests struck the right shoulders of warriors with a green branch of the *karama* shrub, for that was the side of *mana*, whereas the left was *noa*, devoid of *tapu*, the side to be used in acts connected with sickness and witchcraft (Best, 1902:25). On hunting or fishing expeditions, stumbling with the left foot or seeing a dog choose the left side of the trail were among the many kinds of *puhore*, omens of non-success in hunting, fishing and fowling (*ibid.*, pp. 132-33). In American Indian sign language, the left hand predominated in signs for death and

(*) For a significant discussion of the relationship between cosmology and ceremonial architecture in prehispanic Mexico see Krickeberg, 1950: 295-333.

things connected with death: the right hand passed suddenly under the left, for example, meant "gone below." To "make go under," in the sense of burial, was symbolized by passing the right forefinger under the left (Mallery, 1880: 21-22). A threat to kill, however, was expressed by the right hand striking the left, since the former symbolized the "I," the strong, vigorous, fortunate male ego, the latter the weak, feminine, ill-starred side. Many peoples still reserve the left hand for "lower acts," or rituals of malevolent magic, since left is the side of underworld demons and other evil forces; Arabs, for example, use the left for "unclean" functions.

The significance of right and left in dream analysis, mental disorders and psychotherapy has long been noted in the literature (Stekel, 1909, 1911; Epstein, 1911; Jung, 1954, etc.). To the therapist, the direction taken by the dreamer in performing certain acts is often significant. Right-hand turns, or the choice of the right fork in a path instead of the left, frequently symbolize correct, lawful, acceptable or morally desirable behavior, whereas the left leads to sickness, death, illegality or "immorality." As Stekel (1909:466) points out, however, the particular choice of direction and its implications are influenced and mediated by the moral viewpoint and traditions of the dreamer. Acts which would seem socially and personally desirable and morally correct to one might constitute the gravest of sins to another, so that dreaming about such acts could involve a corresponding choice of direction. As an example, Stekel cites dreams about physical intimacy with a partner of the opposite sex. If the dreamer is a man to whom such acts are forbidden by his religious faith, the direction taken in the dream might well be the left, since it is the side of immorality, sin, weakness, punishment. If, on the other hand, the dreamer is a patient wrestling with incest fantasies and the object of his dream desire is his wife or some other biologically unrelated female, the direction would very likely be the right, the side of "moral" behavior and strength.

It is not hard to see that these unconscious or dream choices are directly related to conscious folk beliefs and traditions about the significance and meaning of left and right, which are not only very ancient but which permeate our daily behavior and customs to a far greater degree than we realize. They are, indeed, implicit in our very language, in which right and left are subtly or overtly equated with good and evil.

Our "left" is derived from the Old English *lyft*, meaning weak. Its primary definition is the left side, or, as the dictionary puts it, the side "relating to the hand that in most persons is weaker." Left-handed, however, is more than just weak—its modern and archaic definitions include awkward, inept, devious, sinister, underhanded, marked by uncertain or evil intent, insincere, inauspicious, portending ill, malevolent, scheming and so forth.

Sinister, from the Latin *sinister* (left), still means left, left-handed or on the left side; as generally used, it stands for awkward, injurious, disastrous, productive of evil, unlucky, inauspicious, ominous, unfavorable, prejudicial, etc.

The right, on the other hand, is equated with law, order, justice, strength,

etc. The Latin word is *dexter*, meaning on the right side, auspicious (as in omens) and fortunate, from which we derive dexterity, dexterous and other words denoting skill, expertise or adroitness, as well as dextral as a synonym for the right-hand or clockwise direction. The dictionary definitions of right are righteous, upright, appropriate, which are also basically the meanings of the earlier forms of this word, such as the Old English *riht*, the Old High German *reht*, the Latin *directus* or *rectus* (*regere* = to lead straight), Sanskrit *raji*, etc.—hence the expression “you are doing the right (ie., straight, correct) thing.” At the same time, however, right is also the opposite of left, or relating to “the hand that in most persons is stronger.”

In Spanish, the word for left or left-handed is *izquierdo* or *izquierda*, which also means sinister, crooked or simply not straight or right. The verb *izquierdar* means to degenerate, to fall from its kind, to grow wild. *Simiestro*, from the Latin *sinister*, is also left and left side, but at the same time means vicious, sinister, unhappy and unlucky, with some secondary meanings such as shipwreck and great damage. In contrast, *derecha* means the right side, or right hand, as well as honestly, rightly, justly, or simply as things ought to be. The French word for left is *gauche*, which is synonymous with crooked, clumsy and awkward, this also being its meaning in English usage; right, on the other hand, is *droit* (from the Latin *directus*, straight), which also means direct, justice, reason and so forth (our adroitness derives from the French *droit*). The French *sinistre* means sinister, forbidding and dismal, as well as accident, disaster and casualty. The Italian *sinistre* means left, as well as sinister in its ominous sense. The Italians also have a term for a left-handed person, *mancino*, which at the same time means treacherous and underhanded.

It is interesting to note that some peoples of the Romance language family have borrowed their words for left from non-Italic sources, in contrast to right, which always derives from the Latin. The French *droit*, for example, comes from *directus*, as does the Spanish *derecha*. *Gauche*, on the other hand, developed from an old Germanic word, and *izquierda* (also used by the Portuguese) from the Basque. This could be a function of the general aura of instability adhering to the left side. At first glance this seems to be contradicted by the ancient Greek term for left side, or left hand, which is *aristeros*, literally meaning the better, of best side (from *aristo* = best), until we recall that the ancient Greeks frequently used substitute terms with opposite meanings for objects or concepts considered inauspicious or dangerous. Hence *Pontos euxinos* (from *euxeimos*, hospitable or good to strangers), as the Greek name for the Black Sea. In reality the Black Sea was greatly feared by Greek sailors for its manifold and largely unpredictable dangers. As is evident from the Odyssey, the Greeks felt that calling a dangerous thing by its proper name might bring down upon the speaker the calamity implicit in it. The euphemisms, then, magically attached desirable qualities to things feared, not to prettify or disguise their real nature (as do we by calling death “passing away”) but rather to gain power over them by naming them according to what one wishes them to be.

Direction—left to right or right to left—is of great significance in ritual circumambulation, sacred processional dances and other circular movements in

religious cults, magic, crisis ceremonies, and so forth. Comparative studies, such as those of Simpson (1896), Knuchel (1919), Oesterley (1923), and others, demonstrate the remarkable uniformity of circling rites in many areas for birth, marriage, illness, funerals, ritual propitiations of celestial or earth deities, protection of the family or group, integration of new family members, servants, cattle and so forth. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the relationship of direction in circular processions or dances to the object of propitiation—leftward for rituals connected with death, the dead or the earth, to the right for such events as birth, marriage and other rites connected with life or the celestial sphere. Repeated circling toward the right, is important, for example, in Hindu marriage ceremonies. Here a noteworthy element is the clockwise circumambulation of the sacrificial fire which is repeated three times and during which the bridegroom or officiating Brahman priest calls for the girl to be ritually separated from her ancestors (Knuchel, 1919:23). Evidently this ceremony was originally directed primarily at the ancestors with whom the bridal couple had to enter into a ritual relationship so long as religious orientation was rooted in ancestor worship. These concepts gradually changed, but the sacred act persisted with somewhat different connotations. Propitiatory triple-circling rites and dancing from left to right in marriage ceremonies are not only still practiced in India and the Near East but throughout northern, central and eastern Europe, just as are counter-clockwise movements in witchcraft or propitiatory rituals directed at the dead or the supernaturals of the underworld. This is also true in many North American Indian dances. Among the Ponca, a southern Siouan tribe, for example, the Ghost Dance was performed

in order that the living might gain contact with deceased relatives and friends. Men and women danced in large circles, facing inward, their hand joined, in order that the "power" of the dance might pass freely from one to the other. The step was a simple step-drag to the left (Howard, 1965:109).

In the women's scalp dance which the Ponca, Omaha and other tribes held after the return of a war party, the movement of the women, carrying the scalps tied to short sticks, was from right to left (*ibid.*, p. 113), but other Plains circle dances in which the dead were not the object of propitiation were directed to the right. This was true also in Mexico, and in some areas still is: in the Sierra Madre Occidental, for example, Tarahumara men, women and children, but especially shamans, dance in a counter-clock-wise direction only in round dances addressed to the deceased in death ceremonies, or to earth divinities in agrarian rituals (Bennett and Zingg, 1935:269) (*).

(*) Although the modern Huichols do not appear to identify right and left with good and evil or life and death, it is interesting that my informant Ramon, when speaking Spanish, almost never uses the word for "left" but employs euphemisms, such as "the other side," or "the reverse" (of right). Ceremonial circling of temples and corn fields seems to be exclusively in a clockwise direction. According to Ramon, sorcerers threaten the shaman from front and rear, but not from either left or right. Incidentally, in contrast to the Aztecs, for whom North was the land of darkness and death, the Huichol dead go to the West, where the Sun goes in the evening. However, the West, as the direction of the sacred and deified sea, is also identified with new life.

The ubiquity of this theme is illustrated by a custom which survived until recently in Liège, Belgium. Here a relative of one seriously ill and wishing release from his suffering circles a certain chapel three times from right to left in order to facilitate the sick person's demise and acceptance into the underworld; similar sinistrally-directed rituals to ease the passage from life to death and at the same time propitiate the spirits of the underworld are reported from Bohemia, Carinthia, Scotland, Japan, China, etc. (Knuchel, 1919:39, 44-45).

After death, circumambulation from right to left (or, as it is frequently understood, against the course of the sun) at the graveside, links the mortuary ritual with the chthonic supernaturals. Where Christian churches have stigmatized these evidently very ancient death rites as works of the devil or witchcraft, they are imbued with a certain aura of the sinister and the forbidden. They persist, nevertheless, just as does intense suspicion and even fear of left-handed persons, especially in the countries of the Mediterranean. Many peoples in southern Europe, for instance, still regard left-handedness as somehow related to the devil, the evil eye and even insanity.

The pervasive significance of the left at funeral ceremonies, as the direction of the deities of the underworld, and of leftward movements (in dances, rituals, or circling of the corpse) as propitiatory of these supernaturals, is especially pronounced today in Hindu India, but it can be found, as already indicated, in more or less attenuated or atrophied form in many parts of the world. By extension, so can the implied beneficence of the right, especially in popular beliefs concerning the "proper" conduct of religious ceremonies. In Somerset, England, for example, the leftward, or counter-sunwise direction employed in certain forms of magic had a special name, "withershins," from the German *Widerschein* (*wider* = counter to or contrary, *schein* = glów, brilliance), i. e., against the course of the sun, or from right to left (Simpson, 1896:290-91). It was vital for the efficacy of any religious ritual that there be nothing suggestive of the nefarious "withershins" activities. In his study of the evil eye and related beliefs, Elworthy (1895) illustrates the importance which rural English folk attached to the proper direction in church ceremonies with numerous examples, among them this illuminating story:

Here in Somerset quite recently, and within the writer's own knowledge, a number of children were brought to be baptized, and of course were ranged in a group around the font. The officiating minister not being accustomed to such a number, or not knowing the custom, began with the child on his right hand. . . going round to the child on his left. This action caused great indignation: some parents who had never before seen the importance of having their children baptized at all, were quite sure that now they had not been done properly, and must be taken to another church "to be done over again." Thus it was held of far greater moment that the parson should proceed from left to right, than it was that the children should be baptized or not. . . In the same direction is the belief that in Confirmation it is most unlucky to be on the left side of the bishop, and so to receive his left hand: people are

constantly warned to be careful to avoid this when their children are about to be confirmed.

It is not surprising that direction should play a vital role also in healing by supernatural means, since disease demons like the forces of death itself attack from the left and must be countered on the left side. Restorative substances, magical plants or sacred arrows and feathers (such as those of the Huichol shaman) are passed over the patient from left to right, that is to say, from the side of weakness, disease and death, to that of renewed health and life. This directional emphasis in healing ceremonies seems to be prevalent wherever there is the concept of a polar opposition of left and right and the attribution of favorable and unfavorable aspects to cardinal points equated with these directions.

Among peoples with concepts of multiple souls, the nature of these souls is frequently directly related to their location in the body. This concept is especially widespread in Southeast Asia. The Bagobo of southeastern Mindanao in the Philippine Islands, among many others, distinguish not only a long and a short but also a right-hand and a left-hand soul (Lowie, 1954:103-104). The right-hand soul, which is good, never leaves the body, constituting its shadow on the right side; its permanent separation represents death. When this happens, the right-hand soul goes straight down from the grave to the lower world, called the Great (or One) Country, where in a purified state it joins its predecessors in a life which closely resembles that of the living Bagobo. In life the dextral soul is associated with health, vigor and joy, but its left-hand counterpart with sickness, pain and death. The left-hand soul appears as the shadow on the left side and goes flying about the world when the body is asleep. It is during these flights that its owner is especially imperiled, for the soul can fall prey to cannibalistic demons, carrying its bodily container with it to disaster. At the moment of death, the sinistral soul leaves the body for the last time, joining the company of cannibalistic ogres who not only cause disease but also dig up corpses in order to eat the flesh. Similar beliefs concerning shadow souls which turn into cannibalistic demons are reported from the island of Truk, in the Carolines, but an overt right-hand, left-hand differentiation seems to be lacking there.

While some writers prefer to view the cultural antithesis of right and left, and the dominance of the former over the latter, as a logical extension of a physiological given (handedness is genetically determined, and statistics indicate a strong preponderance of right-handedness in all populations tested), others regard it more as a function of the human mind responding to observed or psychically experienced principles of dual opposition in nature and the cosmos. Man, in this view, is the microcosm which mirrors the great cosmic forces in eternal conflict, yet in essential balance, with one another. Here brain and body asymmetry are seen as an incidental rather than determining element, its primary effect being a certain predisposition toward the preeminence of the right hand in the integration of cosmic polarity into the human microcosm. Hertz (1928:127), for example, was convinced that handedness as such, and the supposed weakness and awkwardness of the left and strength and dexterity of right in the adult were often less a spontaneous development than

the result of social constraints and pressures imposed upon the human organism while it was still plastic. The price in terms of psychological damage for exacting conformity to the cultural norm in handedness has fortunately come to be generally recognized; one wonders how many of those parents and supposedly enlightened school authorities who so mindlessly forced left-handed youngsters into right-handedness realized how deeply they themselves were still imbued with ancient culturally-conditioned fears and suspicions of the left as the dark side of man and the universe.

To what extent and for what reasons culture might have acted over the millenia upon the genetic potential for handedness in favor of the right, are debatable questions. (*) The fact is that man observed or felt the presence and interaction in his universe (and within himself) of antithetical yet mutually dependent forces, to which he frequently assigned different directions. Where such was the case, we find that the right hand was invariably associated with those elements perceived as or desired to be dominant, while those which were both weaker and inherently dangerous were assigned to the left (**).

MILITARY ELEMENTS OF SHAMANISM

The universality of these associations and the equally widespread attribution of supernatural power to the horn—in the New World no less than the Old—leave little doubt that the armed tomb figurines of West Mexico are, in fact, not "warriors" but shamanic guardians of the dead against those forces which, in a cosmos conceived as operating on principles of *quai* opposition, were identified with the sinistral side. The military elements of the figurines which inspired the erroneous nomenclature in the first place thus take on a new dimension.

In the epilogue to the English edition of his definitive study of shamanism, Eliade (1964) refers to the combative nature of the shaman who, in defense of the psychic integrity of the community, must endlessly war against demons and disease, "black" magicians and all the unseen enemies of mankind. Armor, weapons, all of the elements of combat, are thus

(*) The evidence for handedness in man's nearest relatives, the large primates, is not altogether satisfactory in this respect. While a number of mountain and lowland gorillas in captivity were found to be predominantly right-handed, Schaller (1963: 77) observed his wild mountain gorillas to be *ambi-dextrous* with food directly in front of them, while several males were seen to use the right hand first in a majority of chest-beating displays. Captive chimpanzees and orang-utans also have been found to be *ambi-dextrous* when reaching for food directly ahead.

(**) In this connection it must be noted that the overt leftward orientation so typical of certain types of figurines from Colima tombs is lacking in the shaft-tomb figurines from Jalisco and Nayarit, even though all are at least roughly contemporaneous. The horned Nayarit effigies in Figs. 25 and 26 are typical in this respect: whatever they are armed against is evidently straight ahead. If these are indeed shamans, it may be that their makers shared with the Huichols (who still inhabit the same or adjacent regions) the concept that the shaman faces danger mainly directly ahead, and to the rear, but not on or from either side.

accounted for by the requirements of war against the demons, the true enemies of humanity. In a general way, it can be said that shamanism defends life, health, fertility, the world of "light," against death, disease, sterility, disaster, and the world of "darkness." (*Ibid.*, pp. 508-509).

Sometimes, Eliade continues, the shaman's combativeness becomes almost an aggressive mania. In some Siberian and Hungarian traditions shamans constantly challenge and fight each other, often to the death. Such battles are often fought by the shamans' alter egos or tutelary animals, and if one of these dies, the shaman himself will soon follow. The Yakut, for instance, believed that shamans never die a natural death but are killed in supernatural combat with other shamans; hence their extensive array of weapons (Friedrich and Buddrus, 1955:160-64).

This theme of unrelenting hostility between shamans has its echo in parts of South America. In the Tierra del Fuego, Ona shamans were commonly not only antagonistic but even in deadly rivalry (Cooper, 1963a:124). At the northern end of the sub-continent, in Venezuela, the Yancama shaman is obliged to fight shamans of other local groups, should they meet either on earth or in their ecstatic journeys (Wilbert, 1963). The Huichol shaman must constantly guard against sorcerers who threaten him by supernatural means; for this reason he reinforces his normal anti-demonic paraphernalia with weapons considered especially effective against "black" magicians, including a deerskin-backed bow (the deer being the sacred animal of the sun), "arrows" with the feathers of the eagle (his tutelary spirit as well as messenger of the sun), and slings with projectiles of meteoric iron (believed to have been sent to the shaman by Grandfather Fire or Father Sun). Here, however, the hostility between shaman and sorcerer or, occasionally, another shaman, seems to be acted out only in the supernatural sphere, in contrast to the Yanoama, whose local groups are effectively isolated from one another because of their shamans' mutual hostility.

Although the Huichol shaman is generally strong enough to defeat his enemy's magic, he seems also to have a kind of Achilles' heel. According to my shaman-informant, it is one of the functions of the eagle to warn the shaman of approaching danger, especially from sorcerers (frequently would-be shamans who failed the ultimate test at a crucial moment in their training). On certain days, however, the all-seeing eagle is unable to respond to the shaman's needs. At such times the shaman is well-advised to remain quietly indoors and not attempt to exercise his supernatural functions, lest he expose himself to surprise attack and harm. The same informant stated that it is one of the important functions of the shaman's wife to guard her husband's back against such attacks, a statement to which the informant's wife nodded her vigorous assent. Against the sorcerer the Huichol shaman also assumes a special—and highly secret—defensive position which of course is experienced only by the shaman himself and whose details my informant would not reveal. There is reason to believe that a special defensive stance by the shaman is also present in other indigenous groups, at least in northwestern Mexico, and thus is not an isolated phenomenon limited to Huichol shamanism. This, in turn, bears importantly on the interpretation of tomb figurines offered in the present paper.

The shaman faces his greatest perils, however, on ecstatic journeys to recover a lost or kidnapped soul or to escort the soul of a dead person to the afterworld in his role as psychopomp. In Asia as in the Americas the principal causes of illness were (and frequently still are) considered to be soul loss ("rape of the soul") and the intrusion of foreign objects, or spirits, into the patient's body. Among some peoples, both doctrines function side by side. The idea that the soul has strayed or been abducted by a sorcerer or demon and hidden in some secret place is by far the most widespread; its recovery, often in ferocious combat against evil magicians and demons, is the exclusive province of the shaman, for only he, through his initiatory experiences, through his ecstatic journeys to the nether regions (celestial as well as underworld),

knows the drama of the human soul, its instability, its precariousness; in addition, he knows the forces that threaten it and the regions to which it can be carried away (Eliade, 1946:216).

A Huichol may lose his soul by going to sleep under a certain tree; the soul may wander away and become lost or it may fall into the hands of a malevolent sorcerer; illness may also be sent by the Sun and other gods to punish man for failing to observe his religious or social obligations. In all cases it is the shaman's task to determine the cause of disease and bring about the cure, which may lie in the soul's recovery in actual combat or simply in learning from Father Sun the cause of his displeasure with the patient. This can be done through the eagle, or through direct conversation by means of the sacred paraphernalia which the shaman safeguards in a special oblong basket. As with many Mexican Indians, so among the Cuna of Panama and Colombia, evil spirits or illness demons may lurk everywhere, in trees, caves, mountains, forests, in the underworld and even in the heavens (Nordenskiöld, 1938:356). The Cuna world is built up of eight layers, in all of which dangerous spirits live; below are eight more layers of the underworld, also inhabited by disease demons which abduct souls and which the shaman must seek out directly or through his *nuchus*, his spirit helpers (personified in wooden images). But the shaman is also exposed to danger from magicians, called *tulekumedi*, who send their own souls on missions of murder (*ibid.*, p. 338).

Ecstatic journeys of the shaman to recover the soul with or without combat in the land of the dead, or in the region inhabited by the abductor, are documented among a number of South American tribes (Clements, 1932; Metreaux, 1944; 1949), and here again we find some remarkable parallels to the shamanic journey in other parts of the world, Old and New. Occasionally celestial ascent is involved in the recovery of the soul (as among the Taulipang) but more usually such a journey takes the shaman into the lower regions and the land of the dead. To mention but two examples, the Apinayé shaman travels to the land of the dead, frightens the spirits who retreat from him in panic and, snatching the soul of his patient from their control, returns with it to earth; on such journeys the Taulipang shaman sometimes engages the sorcerer in battle through his alter ego. In general, as in Siberia, illness demons and other malevolent spirits are not encountered in the celestial regions but in the nether world, in contrast to Cuna, as well as some Mexican Indian, beliefs that disease demons are found everywhere. After re-

viewing the evidence from South America, Eliade (1964:331-32) concludes that South American shamanism still displays a number of very archaic characteristics which are best known from Northern and Northeast Asia, including initiation by ritual death and resurrection, insertion of magical substances into the body, celestial ascent to lay the wishes of the society before the Supreme God (this, as Wilbert [1963] has shown, is a particularly strong concept among the Yanoama), healing by suction (also practiced by the Huichols), the search for the patient's soul in the nether world, the shaman as psychopomp (escort of the soul into the afterworld), "secret songs" revealed by God or birds and other animal spirit helpers, and so forth. One can also add divine election by a supreme being, possession, the shamanic hand drum and climbing ladderlike poles, which are all elements characteristic of the Araucanian *machi* (Cooper, 1963:750-52) on the one hand, and Siberian shamanism on the other. One might observe here that if all these typically archaic North Asian techniques of shamanism are still to be found in South America, it should hardly come as a surprise that they reveal themselves in 2000-year-old archaeological material from an intermediate area between South America and Northern Asia. Quite apart from the evidence already discussed—which is certainly suggestive—one could relate the Colima figurines in Figs. 10-24 to such common Siberian shamanic motifs as that of the soul on the back of the combative shaman; the personal shamanic tree on whose life the shaman is in a sense dependent (a concept which also survives in West Mexico today); the drum or the eagle as the shaman's celestial mount; the metamorphosis of shaman into bird; bird-headed staffs; feathers and wings as symbols of celestial flight; deer horn scepters as the symbol of the heavenly deer (a key element, again, of Huichol belief as well); and so forth. Even the Colima neck pieces of seven plates, and the staffs with seven small heads or notches are echoed in Siberian shaman costumes as symbols of the seven "sky people," representing the seven levels of the universe (Prokofyeva, 1963: 139, Fig. 17); it might be added here that both Siberian and Huichol shamans use models in wood and other materials of a multi-storied cosmic mountain, which at the same time represents also the world center and the ladder of celestial ascent.

To return to the shaman's supernatural war against demonic forces, it is frequently dramatized in titanic struggles which he fights in his trance and from which he may emerge spiritually and physically exhausted and even covered with blood, in full view of his audience. The Nootka of British Columbia attribute illness to the abduction of the soul by sea demons; the shaman, in his ecstatic journey to the underworld, dives to the ocean floor and returns, often with blood streaming from his nose and temples, bearing the soul in a bunch of eagle down in his hands (Drucker, 1951). Among the Thompson Indians of British Columbia, the shaman returns from his journey to the underworld with his war club bloody from combat with the evil ghosts who kidnapped the patient's soul (Teit, 1900). In Venezuela, the Yanoama shaman reappears from his celestial flight carrying the bloody arms and legs of demons against whom he struggled in defense of his group (Wilbert, 1963). This was also one of the significant points which emerged from repeated conversations with our informant Ramon; it is the most im-

portant single function of the Huichol shaman to act as the defender of the integrity of his group, no matter the cost to himself.

Once this combative element in shamanism is understood, the real significance of the weaponry of tomb figurines becomes clear, and even such action scenes as those illustrated in Figs. 35 and 36, usually misnamed "battling warriors," lose whatever "anecdotal" character they might have had at first glance. Five of these Colima pieces are known to the writer, but there may be others, in private or public collections. All come from tombs; all depict one figure in the act of subduing another. In each of the known examples, the figure on the right side, though considerably smaller, has successfully immobilized his adversary with a firm handhold on the horn on the forehead. The victor stands on the feet of the vanquished foe and twists his head backward in preparation for the decisive blow, to be delivered with a weapon held in the right hand. The antithesis of right, as the side of good and light, and left, the side of evil and darkness, and the moral superiority of the former over the latter, are obvious. The symbolism of light versus dark is further emphasized by some of the subsidiary design elements; the sea turtle, for example, can be considered as an underworld creature and the stars may represent the night sky.

It is of great interest that these fighting groups show evidence of use



Fig. 35.—Horned fighting figurines from El Chanal, Colima. Ca. 100 B.C. A.D. 100. Colima State Museum.



Fig. 36.—Fighting group from El Chanal, Colima, similar to Fig. 35. Ca. 100 B.C. A.D. 100. H. 22.5 cm. Coll. Sr. Federico A. Solórzano, Guadalajara.

before they were buried. Such prior use can be determined by examining the surface for evidence of wear and tear which cannot be attributed to erosive agents within the tombs; in this case, the red slip on the undersides was worn off in a manner explainable only by much active handling and movement on rough surfaces. This indicates that the effigies were not made merely to accompany the dead but rather that they served some specific function for the living over a period of time. This function may well have been to symbolize the ecstatic experience in supernatural healing—the shaman's journey to the nefarious regions and his successful struggle to overcome the enemy and recover the kidnapped soul of the patient. The horn on both figures in no way negates this interpretation. It is the symbol of supernatural power as such and so can be an attribute of underworld demons and sorcerers as well as "good" shamans, without implying the use to which such power is put. More importantly, however, there is the element of demon possession; shamans may ask underworld demons to be their spirit helpers and end up being permanently possessed by them so that they come to do evil themselves. Or, in ancient Colima, as among the contemporary Huichols, sorcerers might have been conceived of as near-shamans whose supernatural power and inner strength were insufficient for shamanism but still great enough to harm both individuals and the group.

Despite the documented rivalry and hostility between shamans in some areas, it is fair to state that in general the shaman's weaponry and armor are intended for the defense of mankind against the forces of evil, and not for offensive action. Though he must forever embark on terrifying journeys to retrieve a kidnapped soul in battle with its tormentors, to guide the soul to the afterworld in his role as psychopomp, or to consult with the divinities of sky and underworld, his role is essentially a defensive one. The unaggressive and defensive fighting stance of shamanic tomb figurines can thus be seen as an expression of the shaman's primary function as protector and guardian of his group, a role which is, if anything, enhanced by the greater vulnerability of the dead to attack by demons. Seen in this light, the removal of an erroneous nomenclature from a certain class of tomb figurines becomes more than an exercise in iconography. For even as we recognize the former "warriors" as shamanic guardians, we also begin to perceive something of the society, as well as the cosmological framework, the *Weltanschauung*, in which the shaman operated.

CONCLUSION

It has often been said that West Mexican prehispanic art so obviously lacks an overt reference to the supernatural that here were people "free from the control and domination of religion," in a sense, almost "people without gods." Of course this is sheer nonsense. The shaft-and-chamber tomb with its contents of vessels and figurines is itself a historical manifestation of a whole range of religious phenomena, but what it has to reveal to us cannot be understood solely in terms of the concrete archaeological or artistic evidence. To unravel the deeper meaning which underlies the overt archaeological data we need to draw on the resources of historical ethnology, and above all, comparative religion, even if our reconstruction will, at best, be no more than an approximation.

It is difficult to understand the reasoning behind a denial of strong religious concepts—even the most complex and pervasive—to the cultural setting of early Western Mexico. Absence of overt evidence in the form of deities modelled in clay or carved in stone means nothing. One could hardly imagine a native society in Mesoamerica today in which man's relationship to the gods permeates the lives of the individual and the community to a greater extent than it does among the modern Huichols. Yet if a future archaeologist were to excavate a Huichol site, he could conclude that religion was of no importance, for he would find no recognizable "proof" to the contrary. The Huichol carves his images of gods in soft volcanic stone or wood, neither of which would survive for long in the ground. Moreover, little care or artistic sensibility are exercised in the making of such images (in remarkable contrast to the Huichols' highly developed sense of color and design in embroidery) so that even if an image were to be found, it would hardly appear god-like. What archaeological evidence would there be of the great ceremonies of first fruits or the changing of the staffs of authority, the corn-deer-peyote complex and the peyote pilgrimages and fiestas, the prayer arrows and plumes, shamanic ecstasy and healing and shaman's thrones of palm and

bamboo, of sacred flowers and sacred trees, of the great myth cycles related by the singing shaman, of ritual dances and religious music, of man's deepest beliefs about Father Sun and Grandfather Fire or the Mothers of Earth and Corn, or his own place in the universe? What of any of this can ever be translated into physical form? I am reminded here of a young Huichol artist's "painting" in wool of a great bird with the heads of five writhing serpents. When I asked him to explain the symbolism, he said, "It is *Nakawé*, our Grandmother, the old hermit, in the act of turning herself into the wind to dry the earth after the deluge." Such transcendental imagery is to be found everywhere in Huichol intellectual life, just as the shamanic element and human interaction with the sky world (direct or through the shaman) enter almost every phase of Huichol existence, from birth to death. But how would one distinguish this among the pitiful material odds and ends which are all that would survive of a native culture so immensely rich and varied in the intellectual sphere?

The material remains of the shaft tomb cultures suggest, I believe, at least this as the focus of magico-religious life: the reintegration of man with his ancestors, through the mediation of the shaman, the "great specialist in the human soul," and the shaman's power to break through the barrier which separates man not only from his antecedents but from knowledge of the celestial sphere and the afterworld. This is not the place to analyze the shamanic phenomenon as such, or to attempt to determine to what extent it was in early Western Mexico itself the focus of the religious experience or co-existed with other forms of religion. What can be said is that those elements which are identifiable with a shamanic complex bear a remarkable resemblance to Siberian shamanism, as also to shamanism as it still persists in Mexico and other parts of the Americas. Moreover, the surviving shamanic complex in Western Mexico has certain close analogies in Northern Asia today. For example, a typical North Asian shamanic trait which is to be found in Western Mexico is the presentation to the neophyte of the branch of a tree whose growth parallels the shaman's own maturation and which eventually comes to symbolize both his superhuman power and his mystical connection with the sky. The shamanic tree is a particularly powerful element of Huichol shamanism, but it is present also in syncretic supernatural healing practice in which typically archaic techniques of shamanic ecstasy are heavily overlaid with symbols and rituals familiar from "folk Catholicism" and spiritualism. One such practitioner, who maintains a small temple for healing ceremonies in a poorer section of Guadalajara, described to me his own initiatory experience in the village of San Gaspar, Jalisco, almost a half century earlier, in which he said he was given the branch of a sacred tree as a symbol of his mystical vocation. This tree grew as did his own knowledge, he said, and, pointing to the center of his patio (which was empty) he added, "And now, you see, it has grown into a great tree, the tree which stands in the center." This, of course, is very much like the shamanic tree symbolism of the Huichols, but it also echoes key elements of shamanic initiation in Siberia. As previously noted, both Siberian and Huichol shamans use models, in wood and other materials, of a multi-storied cosmic mountain, which at the same time is equated not only with the world center but also with the world tree. There are also some striking parallels between Siberian concepts of the human

soul and those of the modern Huichols. The Ob Ugrians, for example share with the Huichols the concept of the human soul appearing to the shaman in the form of an insect (fly, luminescent beetle, etc.) at the conclusion of a successful soulcalling ceremony following the death of a person (Chernetsov, 1963:3-46). Unless we are prepared to ascribe all of this, and more, to parallel invention, we may have to conclude that we are dealing with survivals from an extremely ancient common sub-stratum. In any event, the virtual identity of shamanic manifestations in so many widely separated areas and across so many centuries seem to conform to Eliade's thesis that the shamanic complex in different areas should not be studied apart from that region in which it is most highly developed—Siberia. At the same time, it must be recognized that certain aspects or techniques which are typical of shamanism may arise spontaneously in stress situations, and especially where a community or individuals find themselves unable to cope with the effects of onrushing industrial civilization. Where elements of "archaic" shamanism have successfully persisted into modern times, these may well come to be adopted into syncretic forms of supernatural healing (as, for example, in the case of the shamanic tree described above).

It is hard for us to imagine, writes Eliade (1964:509), what shamanism can represent for an "archaic" (or pre-industrial) society. In the first place,

it is the assurance that human beings are not alone in a foreign world, surrounded by demons and the "forces of evil." In addition to the gods and supernatural beings to whom prayers and sacrifices are addressed, there are "specialists in the sacred," men able to "see" the spirits, to go up into the sky and meet the gods, to descend to the underworld and fight the demons, sickness, and death. The shaman's essential role in the defense of the psychic integrity of the community depends above all on this: men are sure that *one of them* is able to help them in the critical circumstances produced by the inhabitants of the invisible world. It is consoling and comforting to know that a member of the community is able to *see* what is hidden and invisible to the rest and to bring back direct and reliable information from the supernatural worlds.

These are words which the scientifically trained and oriented modern medical specialist might do well to consider carefully before demanding the banishment of the "witch doctor." In the absence of universal acceptance of the scientific view of the world, that which the shaman is able to give his patient and his community may well be indispensable. As Levi-Strauss (1950) has pointed out, societies with flourishing shamanism have suffered far fewer cases of neurosis and psychosis when faced with the pressures of modern technological civilization than those which had weak shamanism, or none at all.

The shaman's critical role as mediator between the visible and the unseen worlds in times past does not appear so overtly in the archaeological record as it does in the ethnographic data which, though rapidly diminishing, can still be collected in the field. Yet it seems to be buried there, in the

horned figurine with its club raised high, in trees and humans growing from a man's back, in bird whistles and battling effigies.

The problem may not be in the record but in its readability.

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