Principles of the Model

The origin of life lies in the sex act; hence the correlations I have explored produce the following congruences: Intercourse = taking drugs = death =orgasm (E.J. Langdon 1974, on the Siona; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971:174, on the Desana; Siskind 1973:139-140, on the Sharanahua). The energy that makes this vast cosmic machine run in the energy of sex, not as a unitary force, but as the yin-yang complementarity of opposites, the tao of life:

*Boga*, en efficacy, a power female in context like the uterus, the warm fire of the hearth, associated with river and fish. It has a complementary aspect, *tulari*, the male energy associated with the forest—the two together are fertilization and fecundity [and, as he added elsewhere (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971:45), contagion and death as well], the great current that circulates. (1971:54-55)

As this quotation indicates, the cosmos is not an inert machine. Instead it is one vast egg, a biologic perpetual-motion machine that is fundamentally animistic in the sense of the spirituality of all things. Human intrusions in this model are always expressed through the doublespeak of animal objective-correlatives. What sort of background could have suggested such a model? I have already alluded to the ecological and psychological underpinnings of the model, but what about the social organiza-
tional background of which these myths were presumably the justification and the explanation?

*The Battle of the Sexes is a Stalemate*

Much of the model’s symbolism derives from the cooperative-competitive tensions of the profound sexual division of labor that characterizes all tropical forest societies (Adams-Spell and Wood-Townsend 1975:158). The most meaningful distinctions in these societies are those between male and female, and so are the most productive distinctions upon which the model is built. After the work of Siskind (1973) and Y. Murphy and R. Murphy (1974), it is a commonplace to regard tropical forest society as being not one but two societies: one of men and another of women. Both of these societies are essentially self-contained and necessarily impinge on each other at one point only: sex. Most of a man’s or a woman’s time is spent with voluntary work or gossip groups composed of his or her own sex. Even actual residential segregation in the form of a central men’s hut surrounded by the huts of women and children is not uncommon.

Although Shipibo society by no means reflects such an extreme configuration, one is very conscious nevertheless of the separation of the sexes. Men eat at a distance from the women, hunched over their food, with backs protectively turned. Clusters of related women, mostly sisters, mothers, and daughters, will gather on the raised floor platforms of the houses within the matrilocal compound and chat happily as they engage in beadwork or the painting of textiles. Men by contrast often work alone or in the company of other males, especially sons, when they go hunting in the forest or fishing in the lakes and rivers. Even traditional times, when a village would welcome guests from other villages up- or downriver, the resident men would engage the visiting men in a ritual wrestling match separate from the women before both sexes settled down to entertain the visitors.

Taking advantage of the unique energetics of each sex, these societies have evolved a pattern of resource exploitation that is extremely efficient. Men engage in labor that involves sporadic and irregular outputs of very high caloric energy to obtain resources that are mobile, unpredictable, and yet of high-quality caloric or nutritional payoff, such as meat. The women engage in an equally important and complementary regime of regular and continuous
outputs of relatively low caloric energy to garner resources that tend to be stationary, predictable, and of rather low-quality caloric or nutritional payoff but high bulk, like cultivated tubers. In this system the women produce close to a home base the bulk, by weight, of the edible foods (Dumont 1978a:40); the men produce a far smaller contribution by weight, but one that is very highly rated because of its desirability, and they do so from greater distances away from the home base (Gross 1975). Meggers (1971) has pointed out the scarcity of animal protein generally within the tropical forest; from the ethnographic evidence, most groups would appear to concur, particularly those with greater numbers and those located near the rivers, like the Shipibo. In such societies there are often two words for hunger, one that merely means “my belly is empty,” and the other, which refers to meat hunger. The Shipibo echo this dichotomy by considering as incomplete any meal, no matter how generous, that does not include fish.

In a society that knows few other distinctions between people other than those of age and sex, it is not surprising that sex not only is the basis for technoeconomic organization but is the source of most of the metaphors of social interaction as well. I have noted elsewhere (Roe 1976, 1979) the tenacity of the sexual division of labor in jungle society in general and in Shipibo society in particular, stressing the clear-cut lines of division between man’s and woman’s work. For example in Shipibo society women are responsible for the domestic arts of pottery, textiles, and to a lesser degree, basketry; men are allocated the preparation of tools of their trade, such as arrows, bows, and harpoons, and wood carving generally. Because women are also responsible for the application of the characteristic and highly elaborated Shipibo geometric art style on items of material culture and because men are the technicians who are delegated the roughing out of functional form, the making of a traditional sword-club, or huino, makes a perfect exemplar of the interdependence of the sexes. A man will first carve the flaring, bladed form of the club out of dense chonta palm wood. Then he will hand it to a related female, such as his wife or sister, who will lightly draw the design onto the smooth surface of the club’s blade. Then she will hand it back to the man, who will carefully follow the exact lines of her sketch to incise the design into the wood. Without a female who is willing to take the time to draw a quênêa for a man, he cannot make a proper huino. And thus it goes for the rest of a Shipibo man’s productions.
A man will hunt and fish, but only a woman will prepare and cook the meat for the meal. Thus the symbolic male associations with the forest and the water and the female associations with the hut and hearth are not arbitrary but derive from the efficiencies of the sexual division of labor itself. This pattern of interdependence, with each task segregated from the inappropriate sex, is maintained by the most powerful of all social sanctions in small-scale, face-to-face societies: the power of public opinion. No Shipibo man, for instance, would dare to help his wife carry a *chomo* full of water from the bathing area on the shore of a river or lake to the village high up on a bluff of old alluvium alongside the body of water, despite the face the burden is heavy and the distance often long, because of the intimate female associations of that particular vessel form. Yet he will cheerfully help his wife carry water in a bright red plastic pail without fear of being labeled effeminate by his peers because the pail, as an industrial import of Western technology like the Briggs and Stratton inboard engine he will use to power his big dugout canoe (*peque-peque*), is something with which he can identify. Such technological items both fit the preexistent proper male categorization of task responsibility and carry not freight of indigenous intellectual baggage relating to the consequences of conflicting sex roles.

Of course, many men know how to do things normally proscribed to them because they belong to females. For example a man will cook for himself on an extended canoe trip with other men in pursuit of some masculine task such as fishing. The same man, however, will never cook when he reaches a village where he can find a woman on whom he can make demands. I shall never forget the plight of one of my older male informants, who wandered disconsolately from the hut of one daughter to another looking for some prepared food because his wife was neither speaking to him, interacting with him, nor fulfilling any other wifely duties such as cooking. She was, quite literally, on strike. Under normal conditions, then, it is quite impossible for a man to live without the economic and technological aid of a woman; nor is it possible for a woman to live without the technological and economic contribution of a man.

The normal relationship of the sexes is thus akin to a kind of barter between sovereign peoples. Since the only point where they come together is in the act of sex, that too takes on the aspect of an economic exchange. As Siskind (1973:79) points out, in its crudest
form the exchange boils down to women exchanging sex for meat. This represents a potentially perilous situation. Men are tied to women and women to men in the unavoidable embrace of both economic necessity and physiological need. Such close association obviously produces friction as well as gratification. Psychologically, jungle peoples appear to have adjusted to this claustrophobic interdependence by injecting between the sexes various spacing mechanisms in residence, task assignment, and matters of the sensibilities.

It is precisely because the sexes are so closely interwoven that they are so separated emotionally and physically. As many observers will agree, the brittleness of the marriage bond and the face that the greatest emotional involvement is made with one’s consanguines and not with one’s affines—and the latter include one’s husband or wife—both point to the paradoxical solution of converting the relations between the sexes into strictly business as usual on the one hand and into high excitement and attraction on the other. Because sexual attraction is intimately related to mystery (Wolf 1970), this removal of emotional intimacy between eligible males and females results in heightened sexual satisfaction whenever they do come together (Gregor 1977).

Anybody who has worked in the jungle will recall the lively interest in sex and pleasure with it that characterizes the average day’s activities. If all one needs is about three hours of work each day in the new alluvial niche of the tropical forest to guarantee sufficiency in food, clothing, and shelter (Bergman 1974), a good part of the rest of the time can be spent cultivating the fine arts of sleeping, resting, goofing off, having affairs, and gossiping about others having affairs. A goodly portion of my field notes from work among the Shipibo is filled with references to who is having an affair with whom. Therefore it is no accident that much of the subject matter of the myths and tales I have used is sex. In speaking of the Tupi-Kugwahiv, Kracke makes the same point: “Folktales and myths are full of sexual themes, including some that in our culture tend to be deeply repressed, such as castration in jealous vengeance” (1978a:24).

One of the few readily available resources for mythical symbolism in tropical forest society with its sparse but effective technology and ephemeral but attractive art is the body, both human and animal. Societies like that of the Shipibo have not stinted in its use for mythical purposes.
The imagery of sex in the myths, as well as its function in reality, leads one to a potentially unpopular conclusion, that comradeship is distinctly unconducive to sexual satisfaction. Instead a certain amount of sexual antagonism actually enhances satisfaction. Thus we can understand that the battle of the sexes expressed in much of the, to our eyes, overly harsh antifeminine rhetoric of the model is closely coupled with the intricate patterning of mutual dependency ordinary life dictates. It is because of the firm necessity that men feel in the mundane world for association with women that they are led, in the symbolic realm of myth, to separate men from women. It is even possible for them to maintain in myth, contrary to all the empirical evidence available to them, that life without the fair sex is possible, indeed preferable. It is the improbably struggle with this impossible idea that provides the intellectual tension needed to propel this overarching system in all of its intermeshing parts.

Thanatos and Eros in the Jungle

The model is real life reified. It is always telling men both what they want to hear—that they are superior and autonomous—and what they do not want to hear—that there is no inferiority or superiority of parts in a system of interrelated wholes. Although women are constantly linked with negative qualities and attributes, the model affirms that, although negative and positive may be terms of the system, they cannot map into inferior and superior statuses or functions.

It is ironic that as I graphed the web of symbolic associations with males and females in Figure 14 as an antidote to the rigid dyadic matrix presented earlier, I noticed that the role of women is far more elaborated than is the role of men. Because men are largely responsible for the elaboration of this model, one is struck by their fascination with and repulsion from women. This is represented by their struggle to come to terms with what are perceived to be women’s preponderantly negative connotations while at the same time they bring many positive benefits, the most important being the children who perpetuate society. Although women play little role in ritual (the Shipibo ani Šhrēati being a conspicuous exception), they occupy in men’s minds an inordinate importance and in fact monopolize much of the model’s complexity. It is almost as though men, unable to justify themselves biologically
through giving birth to children, have begotten instead an elaborately intricate work of intellectual art.

Even in cultures like the Shipibo, who are known for the importance they give to “mother right” (Karsten 1964:185), and among whom women play an extraordinary role, mythical women still fulfill an essentially negative function. Even when I recorded
myths from women, who might, as females, be expected to place characters of their own sex in the best possible light, their myths still clearly portrayed the male view. Indeed as I mentioned earlier, all of my female informants took pains to tell me they had heard their myths from some male relative, usually a father or an uncle.

Thus the primary principle of the model is that the negative is just as essential as the positive in the continued maintenance of a system based on interdependent parts. Women, as eros personified, also represent—in the dangerous connotations of their sexual functions as seducers and adulteresses—thanatos. Yet through death they engender life and love. It is the asymmetry of interdigitating parts that gives dynamism to the self-perpetuating whole rather than the static dyadic appearances of parts of its oppositionary structure. In short, sexual antagonism reflects sexual dependency as the primary principle of the model.

**Cosmic Sex: A Circuit through the Model**

Let me now make a brief if somewhat poetic tour through the cosmologic model I have constructed for the lowlands. I follow the sun to show how the model works as a continuum machine, albeit one based on a strict dualistic logic. The sun emerges in the east, white with youth. He is hard, masculine, and bursting with creative vitality. He is also too hot, too creative, and threatens to incinerate the world. His attendants are huge Yellow Jaguars and flaming red birds like the macaw. Together with phallic-beaked birds like the hummingbird and the stork, the attendants carry the sun’s benevolent gifts, chief among them masculine and civilizing fire, to the grateful humans on the earth below. At the same time they bear the sun high enough above the terrestrial disc that his fire becomes muted and warming rather than harsh and burning.

The ones who receive these gifts of the Sun Birds and convey them to the people are the good shamans who, as medicine men, travel through the levels of the heavens on their hallucinogenic trips to commune with the spirits. Like the giant harpy eagle, the sun soars effortlessly through the airy world on his ascent toward the zenith. There, in the House of Fire, built of gleaming macaw fire-feathers, in the House of the Birds, the sun is at the apex of his male vigor, shining golden yellow in the middle of the sky, his
handsome countenance unblemished. Pure quartz crystals, as white and hard as he is, emanate from him and full upon the dry earth below as fertilizing semen-rain. At earth level they are picked up by medicine men to become their jaguar familiars in a common battle against contagion. The Thunder Jaguars of the Celestial Dragon—a near counterpart of the sun’s benevolence and the Subaquatic Dragon’s malevolence—bridge the realms and bring, on the hovering wings of birds, gentle rain in sufficient quantities to fertilize man’s crops and aid the descending rays of the sun to bathe the earth in fecundity and health. In the forests of the Master of Animals, as earthly avatara of both the sun and the Subaquatic Dragon, dispenses animals freely to petitioning shamans for hunters who practice moderation in hunting; as agent of the World Tree he ejects darts and slivers of sickness to those who recklessly destroy sentient life. Either way, the Master of Animals overlaps the realms on earth as the Thunder Jaguars do in the heavens and in the earth.

Then, both despite and because of his great fertilizing power, the sun inexorably begins to age; as he ages, his penis grows and he descends in the sky. Perceptions of dire female influences multiply as the Giant Eagle of the eastern sphere gives way as companion of the sun to the Ancient Eagle—the eater of soft carrion—of the western sphere. The stench of death rises ominously as the sun sexualizes and slowly descends, limping, in the feminine west, the home of the dead. His bone, muscle, and penis turn soft with decay, and maggots teem in his myriad wounds. The sun’s face, now heavily lined, is blackened and obscured as he enters the orifices of his woman, who awaits him with open mouth, the portal of the underworld.

The sun sinks beneath the cold waters of a deep western lagoon. There the Subaquatic Dragon, hideous sexual energy in reverse, devours him—swallows him whole—and he dies. Destructive floods, excessive waters well up from under the world and sweep life away. The sun turns into a skeleton inside the fetid body of the monster, paradoxically growing younger in its womb. He becomes the night sun; his visible bones turn blue as he wears them on the outside as a celestial exoskeleton. In darkness the worlds reverse themselves in the mirror he carries, and the dead sun, now in the form of the feminine-associated, cannibalistic, and menstruation-causing pallid moon, is carried through the night sky, now a watery abyss, on a snaking river of disease and refuse.
that also becomes the transforming river of eternal youth and cyclic rebirth, the Milky Way, the way of the tapir and the deer. Black vultures, owls, and stinging wasps are his winged companions. Like them he feeds, to replenish his body, on the corpses of the dead and the souls of the living, seducing women, causing them to pollute themselves and him with menstrual blood, and making them give birth to monsters.

In the depths of the night sky = underworld = forest, the moon consorts with other libidinous adulterers, like Black Jaguars, Forest Ogres, and human bad shamans or witch doctors, to send plague and magical death to mankind. His face spotted and disfigured, the nocturnal sun now reaches the nadir, and his disarticulated bones begin to stir. He is vomited up by the hairy Dragon. He fishes himself out as it were, losing his feminine nature to the Fish Woman, and becomes the male who retrieves her and expunges her too thy sex. He takes the form of a fetus within the womb of the World Tree. As he nears the surface of the water—the sky in reverse—the eastern horizon begins to lighten in anticipation. Finally, delivered of all female corruption, the sun bursts fully formed into the air to begin anew his diurnal celestial ascent.

**Antiquity of the Model**

*The Peruvian Highlands*

If one wishes to search for precedents of the complex symbolism I have detailed from the tropical lowlands of South America, one good place to start would be with what is perhaps the pristine state of South America: Chavín. The civilization was named after the highland Peruvian site of Chavín located some 3,135 m. above sea level at the entrance of the Callejón de Conchucos on the eastern flanks of the Andean Cordillera Blanca (Roe 1974:6). There a stone pyramid, a sunken circular plaza, monumental architectural and free-standing sculpture mark the central site of a civilization that seems to have existed from roughly 1200 to 300 B.C. (Rowe 1967:73). From the highland center it spread to other Northern Highland sites like Pacopampa and Kuntur Wasi, to ceja sites like Kotosh near the montaña, to North Coast sites like Cerro Blanco and Cerro Sechin, and to Central Coast sites like Ancón (Roe 1974:6). Trade or pilgrimage also re-
sulted in Chavín influence on the South Coast at “Karwa” in Ica (Cordy-Collins 1974).

Although Chavín is usually thought of as a highland or coastal style, it actually has close connections with the jungle to the east. Its monuments present clear depictions of many of the figures discussed in this book. Tello, the Peruvian archaeologist, discovered the Chavín civilization and its cultural function as a seminal influence on all succeeding Peruvian civilizations. He first called attention to the tropical forest affiliations of Chavín iconography in 1923 with the publication of his volume, Wira Kocha. Further, Lathrap (1971a:75-76, 1974) has made a convincing argument for the identification of all the major animals in highland Chavín art as denizens of the tropical lowlands. These animals include the jaguar, the anaconda, the harpy eagle, the cayman, and the howler monkey. On the basis of these and other concerns, Lathrap concludes:

At the time of the emergence of Chavín as a pattern, the cultures of the eastern highlands and the lowland jungles were not yet fully differentiated, and were in a demonstrable sense still part of the same culture area or “interaction sphere.” (1971a:97).

This is not to suggest that all of Chavín iconography is derived from the selva. Coastal sites like Garagay (Ravines 1975) portray crustacean and other sea-oriented creatures. If some of the curious Cupisnique Sechin-like steatite carved cups and bowls (Benson 1963:345, 346) of the North Coast are authentic, then the Cupisnique variant of Chavín art actually had acquired a maritime focus visible in its iconography not unlike that of the succeeding Mochica civilization of the same region. Nevertheless, because the highland sites are earlier than these coastal manifestations not directly connected with the origin of the style’s original meaning. Instead I suggest that the earliest manifestations of Chavín art depict uniquely lowland fauna in ways that make it unmistakably clear that they were used as structural symbols in a cosmologic scheme of uncanny resemblance to the modern ethnographic one depicted in this book.

In organizing his original qualitative seriation of the Chavín pictorial style, Rowe (1967) identified changes in the construction stages of the main temple at Chavín correlated with the shifting
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importance of two different cult figures: the earliest, the “Smiling God” (more appropriately designated the “Snarling God”) represented by the Lanzón and the Tello Obelisk (Figure 11), and the later “Staff God” (and “Staff Goddess”). Lathrap (1973:96) then argued for an identification of the “Snarling God” with a dual set of figures he called the “Great Cayman of the Sky” and the “Great Cayman of the Earth” and for a congruence between the “Staff God” and the jaguar (1973:97).

Before inquiring into each of these identifications it is interesting to note that the first of Lathrap’s dual figures corresponds with my dual Celestial and Subaquatic Dragons. His latter figure, the “Staff God,” which Lathrap dealt with as a unity, we now know to have been a duality also because a female manifestation has now been recognized (Lyon 1979:99). The “Staff God” and “Staff Goddess” respectively align with my Yellow and Black Jaguars. How much do the functions deduced from the iconography of these figures correspond to the functions I have constructed for their modern counterparts? All the Chavín figures are true monsters (Rowe 1967:82). That is, each figure is a hybrid of various personage; the caymans are also part fish and snake; the jaguars are were-jaguars, human-feline composites. This stylistic convention corresponds to the similarly “architectural” way cosmic figures are constructed in the jungle as my use of the term Dragon for the cayman-anaconda-piranha composite indicates.

An early and exceptionally complex set of characters is represented by the Tello Obelisk (Figure 11). Following Lathrap’s (1973) detailed decoding of this set of figures let me highlight both my agreement and my disagreement with portions of his reading. Both figures are clearly cayman complete with elongated head and splayed feet and legs (see Roe 1974:44, fig. 7e, for a naturalistic save for the bifid tongue, version of this figure). Yet it incorporates snake and fish elements, the most obvious of which is the tail, which is a fish and not a cayman tail. This is a true monster or Dragon and not a misunderstood naturalistic cayman. In actuality there are two profile caymans presented on either side of the stela. Lathrap’s identification of the upper or A cayman as male based on the presence of a penis element in front of the hind leg (the snake head with manioc bush emerging from its mouth) seems secure, whereas his identification of the lower or B cayman as a female figure owing to the geometric form that figure carries in the same
position, is debatable but plausible. If these readings are correct we have here male and female aspects of the same mythological creature. In Lathrap’s words:

There is direct evidence that the supreme being in the Chavín pantheon was a cayman, the tropical crocodilian of the Amazon and Orinoco Basins, who was originally worshipped as the master of fish. This prime entity, who was in a real sense the whole universe, was transformed into a sky deity and a deity of the water and underworld. The Sky Cayman became the basic rain god and the Water and Underworld Cayman the source of fecundity. Both were celebrated as donors of the major cultivated plants and of these gifts the most important was manioc….In the most explicit exemplification of the Great Cayman as donor of plants, the Obelisk Tello, our friend the bottle gourd, aji, achira, and the peanut were also given honorable mention. Maize receives no notice! (1977:741-742)

Vegetation grows from the corrugated backs of this figure just as on the crevassed hide of the Mexican cipactli (Thompson 1970:217). The bush emerging from the male cayman’s penis Lathrap cogently identifies as manioc, while the element emerging from the nostrils of the small head at the hind foot of the female cayman he identifies as the bottle gourd and another small plant as aji. On the female figure B he picks out the correct (from the point of view of the model) underground food crop, achira. These identifications seem correct on the basis of the various plants’ botanical characteristics; yet one presents an anomaly in that it reverses the expected associations. In the lowlands manioc, as an under-ground crop, is associated with women while aji, an above-ground crop (i.e., the edible portions), is associated with men. Yet here a female crop emerges from the penis of the male cayman. The same crossing over is found in the “companions” placed at the head of each figure. The fish (with canines, therefore probably a stylized piranha) associated with the female figure is correct in terms of the model, but the harpy eagle in front of that is not. It should be associated with the male or celestial figure, Cayman A. The Yellow Jaguar between the two figures perfectly fulfills its intermediary function (Lathrap 1973:97).

In short, the Tello Obelisk is a complete theogony. All the expected figures are shown on it, but some appear in a strangely scrambled order. I prefer to decode this interpenetration of symbols as a graphic instance of the overlapping categories of the
verbal forms in the myths. In other words, if both figures carried only their appropriate associations, then they would oppose each other too completely to show that they were really manifestations of the same figure rather than different entities. The system, to retain its dynamism, needs a partial overlapping of associations. If this position is correct, the Tello Obelisk is a very sophisticated monument that defies any mechanistic decoding yet hints at a subtle polysemy of symbolic values compatible with the principles and elements of the model.

The second Chavín supernatural (Figure 15) is altogether easier to decode in terms of the model. It is a were-jaguar figure. Note the feline mouth, the wrinkles over the nose, and the claws hands and feet. Yet it is outlined with vegetative-serpent bifid tongue symbols. They identify this feline figure with the underworld as against a contrasting figure (Figure 16) that does not have these vegetative features but retains the same feline characteristics. This different between these two depictions is congruent with an even more important distinguishing feature, the presence of the vagina dentate and the breasts kenned (see chap. 1) as eyes on the vegetative figure and the lack of these features on the non-vegetative figure. His girdle goes straight across his waist as it does on all other specimens of this type. Further, note the presence of biheaded snake staffs, an attribute of Páez jaguar deities. They are present on both depictions, indicating along with the similar front-face posture that these figures are closely related despite their differences. Because both figures are differentiated and affiliated at the same time, I argue that they are two manifestations of the same figure. Figure 15 is the Black Jaguar of feminine, underworld connotations; Figure 16 is the male, or Yellow Jaguar, of celestial connection in the model. These feline figures carry fewer attributes, and therefore fewer anomalies, than their caymanic kin. The only partial anomaly is the association of snake elements with the male jaguar. Yet as I have shown, the snake can also be of either sex and the snake is standard Chavín stylistic fare found on many different depictions. The presence of snakes on the male figure may also represent the same symbolic interpenetration as in the case of the cayman.

If these identifications are accepted then an interesting hypothesis can be formulated regarding theological evolution in Early Horizon Peru (Roe 1978a:22-27). Cordy-Collins (1976:50)
noted that the feline “Staff God”—“Staff Goddess” represents the single largest category of supernaturals found in the relatively late Phase D “Karwa” textiles. In addition, I argued in my refining of the Rowe Chavín seriation (Roe 1974) that most of the caymanic “Snarling God” figures are earlier, Phases AB-C. Therefore a picture emerges of a gradual but nearly complete shift in popularity
from the male-female cayman as a primary cult image to the jaguar “Staff God-Goddess,” originally just an attendant-mediating figure. The increasingly anthropomorphized were-jaguar becomes the main image, perhaps in association with maize, while the old zoomorphic cayman, guardian and giver of root crops like manioc, fades. Not only does this parallel Soustelle’s (1961:102-103) suggestion of the replacement of archaic earth deities with celestial deities in ancient Mexican systems; it also recapitulates a commonly recognized process of theological change in Old World Mediterranean civilizations.

Figure 16. Chavín Staff God, karwa (Roe 1974:49, fig.15)
This trend in Chavín art is part of a pervasive and increasing anthropomorphization of such associated figures as bird guardians (significantly falcons and harpy eagles) as the style evolved (Roe 1974:9). Purely animal forms are replaced, in time, by far more transparently human configurations. It is my thesis that the early stages of Chavín iconography represented an animistic world view carried over from the tropical forest tribal-level societies that today still retain that view. In a manner Swanson (1960) might have predicted, as Chavín social structure became increasingly hierarchical (more evidence of warfare, Swanson 1960:21), the style began to express stratified human power more directly, and in the process it increasingly diverged from its original egalitarian animistic spirituality.

In this context it is illuminating to recall the contrast in cosmology between a tribal-level lowland society of Peru, like the Shipibo, and that of a remnant of the stratified Inca state, the Qollahuaya Aymara of Bolivia (Bastien 1978). In the Shipibo system one is faced with a plethora of equivalent plant-animal-were-animal figures that populate an undifferentiated cosmos expressing the dynamics of physiology (death and life--reproduction), which are not uniquely human but are shared by all forms of sentient life. Like the Desana world view (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971) the best applicable metaphor for this system is the cosmic zygote, the fertilized egg, a biologic perpetual-motion machine of vast pansexual import organized about dualistically defined male-female categories.

The Aymara, in contrast, retain many of these correlations and oppositions but overlay them and to an extent obscure them with the mountain as central human metaphor (Bastien 1978:37). In so doing they demonstrate the “cosmologic body” (C. Leslie, personal communication 1978), a system of correspondence between body parts and aspects of the cosmos (e.g., left hand = west/right hand = east). Moreover, the interrelation of the human body parts is projected outward on the cosmos to organize it (Douglas 1970). This is a much more anthropomorphic and, I argue, anthropocentric world view than the Shipibo retain. If one lives within and is aware of a hierarchical world dominated by different kinds of people (where upper- and lower-class people are conceived to have different natures)--a humanized universe--then one will perceive the world of the supernaturals in the same way. For example the Highland Quechua call their Hacendado overlords by
the same term, Wamani, that they call their mountain gods (Earls 1969:67).

Judged from this perspective, Chavín iconography seems to represent a case of culture lag in the early part of the sequence as much as the ideological components of culture tend to change more slowly than the technoeconomic and social correlates (Adams 1974). Thus early Chavín art (Phases AB-C) may reflect a world view of shamanistic tropical forest tribal animism that no longer completely explained the altered social state of priests, classes, and kings that produced it. The increasing anthropomorphization of the style in its later phases (D-EF) may thus represent the inevitable feedback process of change whereby believers, artists, and audiences-patrons alike sought to bring ideology in their art style more into accord with sociology.

There is not only a high degree of sharing between the mythological creatures depicted in Chavín art and the major figures of tropical forest animistic belief systems; there is an increasing amount of evidence that Chavín religion may have been originally based on access to hallucinogenic drugs characteristic of ethnographic lowland religions. In other words before Chavín had priests it had shamans who had a characteristically direct access to the supernatural through the use of hallucinogenic drugs. Both Cordy-Collins (1977) and Sharon and Donnan (1977) have pointed out the iconographic fact that the were-jaguar Chavín supernatural in Figure 17 holds the hallucinogenic San Pedro cactus (Trichocereus pachanoi), which is still used in Peruvian North Coast folk curing. More recently Cordy-Collins (1978) has argued that the prominent strings that emerge from the nostrils of certain Chavín sculptures (Tello 1960:295, fig. 123) represent the strings of freely flowing mucus that hang from the nostrils of individuals who have taken the potent lowland hallucinogenic snuff Anadenanthera peregrina (see Chagnon 1976:17, fig. 1-5).

Thus human-animal compounds replaced the original animal-human composites in Chavín art in a pattern similar to one documented in the ancient Near East where a great god, too remote and powerful to be dealt with directly by humans, is associated with one or more intermediary figures of profound compassion. As the worshippers’ attention increasingly turns to the mediating god within the context of an increasingly bureaucratized, hierarchical pantheon of supernaturals, the original god plays a lesser role and is represented in fewer ritual objects.
Lathrap (1977:717) sees this connection between Chavín and the lowlands as part of a larger story of the spread of a very early and effective pattern of root crop cultivation in the tropical forest of Amazonia and northern South America. Indeed the connections of culture and style reach far afield in this theory:

It is easy to show that this supreme cayman deity of Chavín religion was the same entity as Itzamná, the supreme deity of Maya religion...who was also initially a cayman, and who in his first transformation becomes a cayman of the sky and a cayman of the water and the underworld. The importance of this concept can be fully identified in Classic Maya art. It is equally obvious in Olmec art, and is abundantly illustrated in Izapa style,
the legitimate developmental link connecting Olmec to the later Classic and historic Maya. (1977:742)

*Mesoamerica*

Moving into Mesoamerica, Olmec civilization, contemporary with Chavín and probably the pristine state of Mesoamerica, seems to have played a role similar to Chavín’s in Peru as originator of many long-enduring cultural configurations. Olmec appears to have originated either in the Tuxtla mountains or in the Veracruz-Tabasco region of the Mexican Gulf Coast around 1200 B.C. and to have endured until roughly 600 B.C. Olmec monumental, as against portable, art is confined to the plazas and pyramids of the three great ceremonial centers of San Lorenzo, La Venta, and Tres Zapotes. San Lorenzo, the earliest, is characterized by a huge platform built on a natural eminence and adorned with hundreds of basalt sculptures. Ceremonial activities apparently ceased at the site around 950 B.C., and the monuments were mutilated and buried according to a deliberate plan. La Venta, situated on a small swampy island in Tabasco some 75 km. from San Lorenzo, was the next center to attain eminence. It has been dated to 800-400 B.C. La Venta is known for its huge irregularly shaped conelike pyramid and buried serpentine earth sculptures. When it too was destroyed, Tres Zapotes to the north then took the lead, and it is from there that the early bar-and-dot Long Count date of 31 B.C. comes (Willey 1966:98-99, 102-104).

Olmec art spread westward and northwestward across Puebla, Morelos, and Guerrero, apparently along with trading colonies specializing in the exchange of tropical commodities for highland jade (Joralemon 1971:5). In the highlands of Morelos and Guerrero the cave sites of Oxtotitlán and Chalcatzingo are oriented to these trade routes with the Gulf Coast. On the basis of this and other factors Grove (1970:32-34) argues that a dating of 900-700 B.C. for the Oxtotitlán paintings and the shift in power on the coast from San Lorenzo to La Venta. From this mountainous region of Mexico’s Pacific Coast the style is found on the Pacific slopes of Guatemala and Salvador to the south. Isolated Olmec jades have even turned up as trade items as far south as Costa Rica (Balsor 1958:5).

An understanding of Olmec iconography is complicated by the historical factor that the jaguar component of its refined
naturalistic art was at first given almost exclusive notice; “a were-jaguar, or anthropomorphized jaguar, was the central theme” (Willey 1966:99). Recently Luckert (1976:13) has asserted the opposite: that the jaguar seldom if ever appears and instead all depictions are of serpents. His best case for the snake identity of previously designated jaguar figures in Olmec art is the extraordinary La Venta buried earth sculpture, Mosaic Face 2. Originally described as a mosaic-pavement jaguar mask, Luckert argues that it is really a stylized but still recognizable depiction in green serpentine of the small green Central American rattler *Crotalus durissus* or the similar form that extends into South America, *Crotalus durissus terrificus*, the *cascabel*. Given my bias for the analogy in myth and art between specific living animals, their form, and their behavior and humans, I applaud his assertion that he is “now convinced that many so-called ‘abstract’ art forms of Middle America are realistic copies of divine animals which are still around” (Luckert 1967:24).

In terms of the model, note the correspondence of the color green with the subterranean realm both in this sculpture and in the later myths already explored. It might seem puzzling at first that such an elaborate piece of art was intentionally buried beneath the surface of the earth where no human could see it until one realizes that it was probably intended to commemorate the Subaquatic Dragon in whose realm it was placed.

In pursuing the Earth Dragon figure one notes that the World Tree concept may be present in Olmec art as well (Coe 1972:9) and that as a Dragon Tree it is associated with underground plants. I have already shown that the relative unimportance of manioc in Central America resulted in the bifurcation of the role of corn, the immature “green” plant being associated with the underworld and serpents, the mature or “yellow” stage being linked with males and the sun. Therefore Luckert’s analogizing between the bifid form of the serpent’s tongue and the shape of young maize shoots (1976:66-67, figs. 18, 19) seems attractive, especially given the mater Aztec association of maize with the rattlesnake *Chicomalotzin* (1976:69, fig. 121). He further makes the case that mountains are serpents’ bodies and that the mouth of a volcano, which the main pyramid at La Venta may have symbolized, represents the serpents devouring mouth. In Luckert’s poetic vision he state:

In the beginning of the Olmec World was the great Earth Serpent--or several serpent manifestations. The Earth Serpent raised his volcanic
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heads, and from the open mouths at the top of these volcanic heads rose smoke. Fiery streams of lava flowed from these mouths and split. Clouds formed above their craters and calderas. In thin serpentine streaks fell the rain, and, uniting with greater snakelike rivulets, the rushing waters periodically washed heaps of volcanic ash and cinders down and outward on the alluvial fans (1976:70).

From the point of view of the South American data, Luckert makes the further felicitous association of the dual aspect of the serpent--phallus and vagina--by noting that women may have been identified with the serpent’s mouth via the *vagina dentata* motif (1976:67-68). A famous Olmec relief, Chalcatzingo Relief I (Figure 12a) seems to corroborate these associations. Whether it is adjudged a volcanic earth serpent lying on its side and spouting smoke and fumes (1976:46) or a stylized cave in the form of a serpent’s mouth as I view it, either interpretation links it with both serpents and the earth. In fact the Warao *Urupare* myth (Armellada and Napolitano 1975:132-133) of a man being swallowed by a huge serpent-Dragon, the bringer of tempest and rains, might best account for the symbolism shown in this basalt relief. In this Olmec depiction a priest is shown seated on a (snake) scroll and, holding another one, is contained within the huge U-shaped mouth of a serpent with plants sprouting from its jaws and vapor or smoke issuing forth, kenned as a bifid tongue from its mouth. Above, triple-tiered cumulus cloud symbols emit stylized rain. Though this is normally called a “jaguar-monster” (Grove 1972:160), I agree with Luckert that it looks like a snake.

If so, then Figure 12b, the Chalcatzingo Relief IX, offers a problem, for it clearly represents the same beast, complete with lined jaw and vegetative symbols; yet it has a cat’s nose. It appears, full-face, at least as much a feline as it is a serpent. In my model one way to reconcile these difficulties is to identify it as the typically Mesoamerican Black Jaguar aspect of the Dragon.

Yet, as these two reliefs show, too exclusive a connection with the earth world would not do justice to the Olmec serpent’s dualistic aspects. Thompson (1970-269), for example, stresses the Olmec origin of the rain cult--world and directional indicators developed from snakes and other ophidian imagery--to indicate that a balanced and partitioned world view in which cells are created that must be filled by contrasting figures is at least as old as Olmec. A key figure in this discussion of dualism is the Olmec “Dragon” from Painting I-C at Oxtotitlan (Figure 18). As Grove (1970:16)
noted, this agnathous (and therefore caymanic, Lathrap 1971b) figure shows that both *cipactli* and “feathered serpent,” or Celestial Dragon, traits. The *cipactli* is the later Aztec Subaquatic Dragon (Hunt 1977:75).

Related to this effort of teasing out the features of Olmec mythical personages is Joralemon’s (1971) study in which he identified 10 of the most prominent Olmec gods based on an exhaustive iconographic and stylistic analysis. Although his analysis may be a bit too fine-grained in that he has indicated by the use of letter subscripts figures what may be merely different manifestations of the same figure, I nevertheless use his system in the following discussion. Lathrap (1971b) is probably right in equating his God I-A with the Celestial Dragon and not the jaguar (Joralemon 1974:35). His God VIII, the Feathered Serpent (1971:82), plays a somewhat similar role and perhaps can be identified with Venus as it was in ethnohistorical times. If God I-A is the Celestial Dragon, then Joralemon’s God I-B (1971:49) is the subterranean Subaquatic Dragon complete with vegetative symbols. God IV is the subterranean dwarf companion of this figure, and Joralemon (1971:71) is probably correct in identifying him with rain (1971:90).

Yet not even Luckert (1976) can explain away all the jaguar characteristics in Olmec art. His Figure 2 from Necaxa, Puebla, a “tiger-mouth jade figuring” that was the basis of Vaillant’s original designation of the ocelot or jaguar as central in Olmec art, is a transparent were-feline figure. Its position has nothing snakelike about it, the figure being crouched with hands forming a fist so that the knuckles look like paws and having a snarling, albeit toothless, mouth. This type of sculpture is linked to a carving from
the Gulf Coast of a jaguar having sexual relations with a woman (Stirling 1955:8). Both Stirling (1955:19-20) and Coe (1965:14) have related this depiction to the mythical creation of were-jaguar children through the primordial intercourse of the first woman with a jaguar. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1972b:58) shows the clear South American affinities of this belief and the parallels between the Mexican *chaneques* (dwarfish beings who live in cascades and sexually persecute women) and the Páez Thunder Jaguars (who do the same thing). We have actual pictorial proof the sexual congress of human and jaguar, only this time with the sexes reversed, in the famous Oxtotitlan Painting I-D (Figure 19). Here, instead of a male

![Figure 19. Olmec Standing Man and Jaguar, Oxtotitlan Painting I-D (Grove 1970:17, fig. 13)](image-url)
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jaguar dominating a woman, a man is dominating a female jaguar. In the painting a *black painted* man with a drooping erection salutes with raised right hand a spotted jaguar, which rears away from him on its hind legs, its tail sprouting from his loins. The jaguar has curious scrolled detailing in the pelvic area that looks like a vaginal canal. As Grove notes, “a sexual union between the two is undoubtedly illustrated” (1970:17-18). Coe (1972) equates the jaguar cult with the ruling strata in Olmec society, and this painting certainly seems a social charter.

Such monuments as Altar 5 from La Venta (Willey 1966:100) show priests carrying the struggling tiger-faced dwarfish issue. Both of Coe’s explanations for their peculiar appearance--the notch in their heads replicating the furrow running down the middle of the jaguar’s scalp or being the exaggeration of the incomplete closure of the skull bones in certain birth deformities--may be right. In the cognate systems of South America deformed children are often thought to be the monster children of women who have had sex with supernatural (sometimes jaguar) spirits. Instead of killing them, as is common in the South American lowlands, the Olmec could have made a cult of them connected with the underground = rain Black (licentious) Jaguar.

As in South America this notion could be related to the concept of shamanistic transformation as Furst (1968) and Grove (1972:155) suggest, because hallucinogens, that mainstay of South American lowland shamanism, appear to have been present with or outside of the still-differentiating Olmec priesthood. Figure 20, Oxtotitlan Relief III, seems to show a cat (probably a puma) licking what could be a hallucinogenic cactus. Chalcatzingo Relief IV (Figure 21) shows what may be the later, paranoid stages of a drug experience where jaguars consume the living body of the celebrant (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972a).

Last, as an associate of the jaguar we have the harpy eagle, another lowland South American denizen. Lathrap (1971b) is correct in identifying Joralemon’s God III eagle (1971:67) with the harpy eagle. Joralemon’s description of that eagle’s probably function as “the messenger or perhaps the harbinger of the great fire deity” (1971:90) also echoes its South American role. Figure 22, which Grove (1970:9), its discoverer, identifies as the screech owl with large eye and feathered “horns,” may also be the crested harpy eagle. If this bird is an eagle, as its recurved beak and long, powerful wing feathers indicate, then it could be seated on the
jaguar, its South American associate in its Yellow phase. If the bird is an owl, then it is seated on the Black Jaguar.

Lathrap (1971b) synthesizes these two conflicting tendencies by pointing out that the identification of the jaguar with the Olmec ruling house may have skewed the various aspects of their ideological heritage by deemphasizing the Dragon in the lowlands of Veracruz, where, if it functioned as a rain deity, rain would never have been a problem. That original heritage continued to be important in the highlands of Morelos-Guerrero, where the Dragon could have helped as a rain god in an area where rainfall is occasionally below that needed for secure agriculture.

![Figure 20. Olmec Jaguar Licking a Cactus, Oxtotitlan Relief III (Joralemon 1971:88, fig. 260)](image-url)
Figure 21. Olmec Jaguars Dominating Humans, Chalcatzingo Relief IV (Grove 1972:156, fig. 2)
As already mentioned, the major connecting link between Olmec and the later Maya culture was the Izapa style. Though no mere passive transmitter of the Olmec themes (Quirarte 1973:32), the Izapa style clearly added onto a basic Olmec heritage and transmitted to later civilizations the resultant composite. This monumental art style, similar to the Olmec art of Tres Zapotes, has been found on the coastal plain of Chiapas at the eponymous site and also in the Guatemalan highlands of Kaminaljuyu. The impor-
tant site of El Baúl on the Pacific slopes has an Izapan monument with the bar-and-dot Long Count date of A.D. 36 (Willey 1966:106). Willey calls attention to the resemblance in style between Izapa and both the earlier Olmec and the later Classic Maya, although his identification of that link, “in the face of a deity which is a long-lipped or long-nosed metamorphosis of the man-jaguar” (1966:106), is open to dispute. I suggest, instead, that this figure is Thompson’s Itzam Na, the Dragon of the Mayas. Figure 7 shows Izapa Stela 25, the first manifestation of this figure as none other than the Dragon Tree aspect of the South Amerindian World Tree. Here a naturalistic black cayman complete with agnathous jaw is upended, its head placed near the feet of a human priest-officant while its upper legs and tail are transformed into the branches of the World Tree. These branches come complete with leaves and the anticipated bird. The up = bird equation is further reiterated by the presence of a huge perching quetzál bird on the top of the celebrant’s staff on the same level as the bird perching in the Dragon Tree. Indeed, given my earlier musings on the World Tree as phallic staff, we see here a double representation of both aspects of the World Tree on a single relief. The World Tree as a female-associated “devouring” Dragon Tree is placed side-by-side with the World Tree as phallic staff with a male celestial bird symbol sitting atop it. One is hollow, one is solid; one is fat, the other is thin. Together they form the male-female dyad of the system.

Figure 23, Izapa Stela 2, dated by Miles (1965:273) at 100 B.C.-A.D. 1, restates the upper = bird/Dragon = below symbolism of Stela 25 in a vertical rather than a side-by-side arrangement. Here a figure I regard as an eagle-man (perhaps the same figure as the Olmec birdman in Figure 22) falls head downward upon a squatting Dragon Tree with agnathous jaw and a single leg. Moreover this short-hand Dragon Tree is heavy with round fruit, thus broaching another aspect of this symbol’s range, the Food Tree.

The caymanic or aquatic associations of the World Tree are reinforced in Figure 24, Izapa Stela 1, dated by Miles (1965) at 400 B.C. It shows an agnathous-mouthed anthropomorphic figure with possible clouds of water vapor or even, given Luckert’s arguments, plumes of volcanic fire emanating from his mouth. He holds a latticework basket in which an aquatic creature is found and from which pours water. Given the South Amerindian data this may be a ritualized fish-poisoning act. On his back the principal figure also carries a basket with water flowing from it. The
water enters the earth below his agnathously kenned feet. This subterranean stream comes complete with naturalistic fish. The water pouring from his hand and his back baskets forms a U enclosing the figure in aquatic symbolism. The central sash of his loin cloth ends in a snake head, restating the model’s association of snake = cayman = fish. This stela can be interpreted cosmically as the underground river of the dead flowing from its initial pools of entry and exit on either side of the earth by a now-anthropomorphized Dragon surrogate of the central Dragon Tree. He carries fish in his basket rather than fish in his belly, as the Dragon Tree does. He is the World Tree = Dragon Tree = Food Tree = Staff Tree uniting the central planes of the Izapa cosmos while providing the water that courses through its veins like blood.

Badner (1972:23) makes the best case for specific stylistic correspondences between Izapa and the earlier Chavin culture of South America, but I think the similarities between these two styles are mostly thematic because the syntax of the respective traditions, which gives each of them their own character, is so

![Figure 23. Izapa Dragon Tree with Fruit, Stela 2 (Badner 1972:35, fig. 20)](image)
Figure 24. Izapa Crocodilian water Pourer, Stela 1 (Willey 1966: 106, fig. 3-36)
different. Thus, when evaluating the semantic congruences among Chavín, Olmec, and Izapa, I follow Willey (1962:5) in seeing them as geographically distant manifestations of the same archaic or formative cultural cosmologic base. Lathrap (1977:742-744) makes an even stronger case based on the analysis of art styles, shared horticultural systems, and the identification of certain South Amerindian languages as developmental from Proto-Mayan. He suggests contiguous ethnic groups located in “the alluvial lowlands of northern Colombia” moving north and south respectively to form the ancestral protocommunities of Olmec-Izapa and Chavín. In essence this position is an end run around the difficult-to-prove thesis of direct diffusion. It provides a mechanism for the shared conceptual scheme of Willey. Whether the “strong” or the “weak” reconstruction of the iconographic similarities between these ancient styles and the modern ethnographic cosmos I have sketched prove to be correct, the detailed nature of the similarities necessitates some form of shared cosmos.

Successor Cultures in Peru and Adjacent Lands

Having compared, however sketchily, the fate of the model in the early styles of Mesoamerica, I now need to return to the highlands and coast of South America to see how post-Chavín styles handled its basically jungle-oriented themes. Appropriately midway between the Olmec and Chavín florescences but with no clear stylistic link to either one of them (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972c:120) is the monumental stone sculpture and associated tumuli and cist graves of the San Augustín culture. These sculptures of somewhat crude cast are found in a large complex of sites in the Colombian highlands at the headwaters of the Magdalena River. The chronology of the culture is very tentative, the earliest C-14 dates at the site ranging into the sixth century B.C. Maximum population growth; architectural activity; and the appearance of intrusive, perhaps southern (Ecuadorian-Peruvian) ceramic traits--shallow bowls with negative-resist decoration and double-spout-and-bridge bottles--all are associated with the Isnos Period (1972c:119). The Isnos Period may correlate with some of the stone sculpture. If so, that indicates a continued occupation into the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. (1972c:120).

San Augustín stone sculpture reveals a few traits that Reichel-Dolmatoff has related to tropical forest mythology and
that are consonant with my model. One of them is the presence of the ubiquitous feline mouth with prominent canines. (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972b:52) that indicate supernatural status for the were-animal figures. There are also statues that show the alter-ego motif stages within the shaministic transformation of humans into animals via the ritual use of hallucinogens (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972c:108, fig. 75). A jaguar overpowering a woman and holding onto a small child on her back (1972c:61, fig. 31) could relate to the original rape of a woman by a jaguar that Reichel-Dolmatoff has used to illuminate the Olmec data. In addition, many of the San Augustín figures grasp staffs (1972c:99, fig. 67) that jaguar figures wrest from each other in Páez mythology. In short, the intermediary archaeological evidence from San Augustín shows the same marked tropical forest influences I have noted for the ethnographic groups of the Colombian Andes while it reflects mythical themes from far to the south (Chavín feline mouths) and the north (Olmec jaguar children).

The same theme of a shamanistic protective alter ego is found in the highland and coastal cultures of Recuay and Gallinazo, which flourished in the Peruvian highlands and coast after the collapse of Chavín power to the south (Benson 1974:7). This could represent a new infusion of tropical forest traits inasmuch as the notion was not present in Chavín art (1974:7). These cultures—particularly Recuay in its preference for negative-resist decoration—show intrusive Ecuadorian highland affinities and therefore pertain to a world not far removed from San Augustín. The alter ego theme is also present in the Vicus culture (1974:9) and in the early and related Moche I style of the northern Peruvian coast (1974:10). By Moche IV times this symbolism changes; the jaguar clearly pounces upon and bites a naked and bound human prisoner (1974:20), reflecting a progression from egalitarian shamanism to hierarchical conquest-based superiority within the Moche state.

The Mochica (Moche) culture is a direct descendant of the Chavín heritage found on the arid Peruvian North Coast and mediated only by the brief Gallinazo-Salar interregnum. Its beginning date can be placed in the late first century B.C., and its end is found in the mid-eighth century A.D. (Benson 1972:10). It was an aggressive and expanding militaristic state or set of states based on irrigation agriculture. The Moche achievement is characterized by sophisticated pottery, metallurgy, and the erection of huge
adobe pyramids. Benson (1972:16) hypothesizes that the Mochica state may have originated in the unexplored area between the Piura and Chicama valleys or even in the Piura area itself. Meanwhile the Gallinazo style endured in the Viru Valley to the south long after the Moche style was established in the Chicama and Moche valleys (1972:16).

The Moche culture continues the Chavín preoccupation with the jaguar, chiefly in the presence of the jaguar’s snarling mouth, which, as in the older style, marks the special status of human and nonhuman supernaturals. Moche art also adds evidence of a new lowland element (perhaps present before but never clearly shown): the man-jaguar transformation. Figure 25 shows a man-jaguar composite figure opposing his prey, the deer, while above him looms a serpent. The body of the figure is a naturalistic cat complete with spotted jaguar pelt and clawed extremities. Only the head is recognizably human, although even it carries the jaguar’s snarling mouth. The scene painted here represents the middle

Figure 25. Mochica Were-jaguar (Kutscher 1954:74, A)
stage in the transformation process referred to in the Páez myths wherein humans change into jaguars and vice versa, perhaps in the context of the use of hallucinogenic drugs (cats are depicted with cacti, some of which could be San Pedro).

Moche pottery is graced with perhaps the most complete record of life ways, from technology and warfare to sexual habits and theology, of any prehistoric culture. Yet because the Moche lacked writing, the message these extraordinarily vivid pots convey remains enigmatic. We only have written records for the Chimu, their Late Intermediate descendants, as recorded by the missionary Antonio de Calancha after both Inca and Spanish conquests. Though the Chimu were related to the Moche, as the Moche were to Chavín, there will always be the problem of whether Chimu beliefs can be legitimately ascribed to the Moche as well (Grieder 1975). Nevertheless I opt for continuity and so refer to the Moche iconographic evidence using the Chimu data. Otherwise one must depend on what scholars like Benson, Donnan, and Kutscher have done to decode the iconographic evidence, always a risky and indeterminate process open to many conflicting interpretations.

One of the major mythological figures of the Moche was a deity called Ai Apaec (or Ai-Apec) after the Chimu name for the figure. As Benson describes him:

An anthropomorphic deity with feline canines and snakes emerging from its belt appears in Chavín art, and some descendant of this deity (if it was not assumed to be the same deity who had earlier been worshiped in the mountains) was taken over or inherited by other Peruvian peoples, including the Mochica on the North Coast. The Mochica deity had--in addition to the feline canines and the snake belt--round, wide-open eyes, snakehead earrings, and, most commonly, a headdress with a jaguar head at the front. (1972:24)

Having already seen how staring eyes are a jaguar trait, all one needs to add to this description is the presence of a heavily lined face on this figure--perhaps indicative, given the model, of the superfluity of vital force he possesses. I call this figure the “Tusked God” after his formidable canines. Though often referred to as one god of obvious mountain or highland associations (Sawyer 1966:52-53), Ai-Apec is clearly more than one deity. He would benefit from a Joralemon-like stylistic decoding to tease out all the different deities or aspects of a set of deities hiding behind a bewil
dering wardrobe of kilts, togas, breastplates, and headdresses (Figure 26). Benson has begun such a task by distinguishing two figures within the Tusked God complex:

I am assuming a single deity, although this was undoubtedly a dual, if not a tripartite, deity--that is, there was a god-the-father and god-the-son, if not god-the-father and twin sons. God-the-father was presumably a creator god, the god of the sky, the sun, and the mountains...[of] fresh water, of the rivers that came down from the mountains to make agriculture possible in the coastal desert. God-the-son was an active god, most frequently depicted fighting the battles of the coastal people; he was the super-Mochica who fished or fought a shark-monster or a crab-monster. He probably came down from the mountains and was another aspect of the supreme creator god. (1972:24)

I utilize this system based as it is on the following stylistic aspects:

Figure 26. Sun Jaguar Manifestation of the Mochia God Ai-Apec (Kutscher 1950: 122, fig. 7)
The creator god is shown frontally and symmetrically, wearing a sunrise headdress and staring off into space, whereas the active god is in profile, has knees bent in action, wears trunks rather than a long garment, and wears a simple jaguar headdress rather than the sunrise version. (Benson 1972:28)

I further identify the “creator god” with the sun, not only because he wears a helmet that shows the rays of a rising sun but because he emerges from a cave in the side of a puma- or jaguar-paw range of mountains with two jaguar-snake heads peering out on each side of him. In a good depiction (1972:29, fig. 2-2) his “son,” whom I identify with the Yellow Jaguar sun intermediary, is on the side of the mountain also peering at him. I use the highland data (Zuidema 1964:143) to suggest that this depiction shows the rising sun, emerging fully formed from the exit of the underworld—a cave—in the east prior to beginning his celestial voyage across the sky. Frequent depictions of the sun god show him in full toga seated beneath the mountain while women sacrifices with falling hair are thrown down near him (Benson 1972:28, fig. 2-1; Tello 1924, lámina 280), perhaps to “energize” the sun so that he can begin his movement. The mountain can also be of maize cobs (Benson 1972:29, fig. 2-4), for his head is shown emerging from a pile of corn cobs, thus associating this masculine, solar god with maize, as the model predicts.

His divine intermediary, the Yellow Jaguar (god-the-son), is also shown on mountain substitutes—pyramid step-scrolls—in the same act, but his onlooker is the lizard (Kutscher 1954:79, figs. b,d). This is anomalous because the lizard is an associate of the Subaquatic Dragon in its seductive (H. Buechler and J.-M. Buechler 1971:32, on the Aymara) and libidinous (Holmberg 1957) connotations. Yet in a nonanomalous way, the bird headdress the lizard wears represents a vulture (Benson 1972:35, fig. 2-9), an animal congruent with the lizard in its symbolism. The Yellow Jaguar (god-the-sun) acts in an acceptable fashion when he has intercourse with a female (earth?) deity aided by the appropriately solar-associated hummingbird while the lizard looks on, perhaps as an attendant of the female (Benson 1975:110, fig. 3). God-the-son also acts according to the model when he subdues evil aquatic spirits (Figure 26). At the same time this depiction indicates a more maritime orientation in Moche art than was present in highland Chavín art. On the other hand this orientation toward the sea may just be a direct intensification of the maritime themes of Cupisnique art, the antecedent coastal Chavín manifestation.
This coastal orientation could be the reason for the appearance of a new supernatural in late Moche times (or actually the new importance of an old figure). Ubbelohde-Doering (1954) first identified this figure with the moon god Si of Antonio de la Calancha’s chronicle. According to that account of the coastal Chimú civilization, the kingdom of Chimor, they differed from the highland Inca, who worshiped the sun, by worshiping the moon. Although male, this god was associated with the sea, an expectable linkage. Iconographically this god is the “Radiant God” or the “God of the Aureole” (Kutscher 1950:123) from the rays that surround his body and end in little snake heads (snake = moon). Benson describes him thus:

He wears a warrior’s dress and helmet with a knife, and has radiances that often end in snake heads projecting from his body. His armor seems to reflect an increasing spirit of Mochica militarism….Like the fanged god, he also has feline dentition and is sometimes accompanied by a jaguar. He is always associated either with a litter or a raft. (1972:39)

I identify this figure, because of its feline associations, as the Black Moon Jaguar, an appropriately bloodthirsty creature. This identification depends on the acceptance of the association of the figure with the “moon monster” that frequently predates it in early Chimú and Recuay pottery. This is a feline, in one case a transparent jaguar, and, significantly, is in most cases painted black. It is shown “riding” inside a crescent moon and surrounded by star-like symbols (Kutscher 1954: figs. 44, A, B). This transition is a clear case of the lunar Black Jaguar anthropomorphizing into a human jaguar according to the same logic used in the Chavin sequence. If so, one can approach a complex scene of Chimú iconography involving the Black Moon Jaguar god, a “presentation theme” (Donnan 1975) with a hope of decoding its symbolism.

Figure 27 shows this moon god of the aureole. The first image one notices is the huge double-headed serpent that horizontally divides the scene. Benson calls this a “sky monster,” indicating the demarcation between earth and sky (Benson 1972:44). From other depictions that show it arched over a supplicant who stands on the ground (Kutscher 1950:122, fig. 5) and from the abundant lowland data, we know that the “sky monster” is the rainbow, the double-headed serpent of the sky, and a manifestation of the Dragon. So far the equation seems correct--Dragon = rainbow = moon--and to it can be added the equally congruent association, drugs = Dragon = rainbow = moon, as that depiction shows ritual coca.
Figure 27. Mochica Black Jaguar Moon God Si (Kutscher 1950:123, fig. 8)
The moon has left his litter below (in the underworld?), where its rails are also double-headed serpents. Below, next to the litter, a demon and a human tear out the hearts of bound human prisoners. Above the rainbow, in the night (?) sky, we see the moon being offered a drink over the body of a small jaguar. An anthropomorphized hawk is offering it to him, the same hawk who can later ride in the litter in the absence of the moon (Kutscher 1954:79, fig A). This is another anomaly, as was the lizard, because hawks are associated with the sun in the model. The matter is complicated, however, because this is a complex scene; the sun is also present. I interpret the figure who approaches behind the hawk with a “prayer” gesture to be the solar creator god (god-the-father). Thus we see the sun paying homage via his bird intermediary to the moon when the moon has replaced him on his celestial travels. Paranthetically this scene may also depict the emerging preeminence of the lunar god over the solar god in later Mochica theogony.

If a specific scene decodes well, general themes may do so also--ones present in many different scenes. I have already associated, as in the lowlands, drug (coca) taking as metaphorical death with the rainbow. Benson concurs in associating the cult of coca with death (1974:29). Women are further associated with that symbol of death, the owl (Sharon and Donnan 1974:53, on the Trujillo Mestizo), and the owl with powerful “medicines,” one of which could have been coca.

The image of decay in life and vitalism in death from lowland cosmology is nowhere better stated visually than in Mochica art (Benson 1972:154, 1975:140). This dualism is shown particularly well in a symbol the Desana would view with the same ambivalence: the phallus. In Moche pottery the penis, symbol of fertility and life, has a human face modeled on its shaft, beneath which the testicles are the folded knees of a complete human figure, usually in “prayer” pose. Why is the male face modeled on the phallus figurine always so heavily lined (Benson 1972:142; Tello 1924, lámina 277)? The generative organ-man is so old because of that lowland equation, excessive generative power = mortality. Similarly, as if to repeat the rather puritanical sentiments of the Desana, many of the so-called pornographic pots may actually have been severe moral lessons on the sanctity of the marriage rules at the same time that they counseled fecundity. A naturalistic woman masturbates a skeletal man, defleshed save for his member (Ben-
son 1972:139) in a structurally perfect inversion of the Christian European conception of the late 16th-century artist Abraham Bloemart shown in Figure 28. In that depiction of the Devil’s Gateway, a naturalistic man makes love to a skeletalized woman. Whatever or whoever possesses the vital force in abundance, these
disparate examples seem to say, should also exhibit, in a transparent (i.e., skeletal) fashion, the ephemerality of its vigor.

Rather than go into the iconography of the succeeding Huari-Tiahuanaco empires of around A.D. 1000 (a difficult task in any case, given their stylized nature), I merely point out that this set of styles carries on many of the themes of Chavin art such as staff gods and winged-bird guardian figures. Similar things can be said about the Late Intermediate styles such as Chimú that lead into the time frame of Inca civilization already investigated ethnohistorically. Suffice it to say that archaeological evidence, however tentative, seems to indicate a world not unlike that seen from the ethnographic evidence of the same and neighboring areas and gives a very respectable antiquity of some 3,000 years for growth and development of the cosmic zygote.

Conclusions

After viewing this motley zoological parade across centuries and between regions, one asks oneself why there are so many figures in South Amerindian mythology. They all seem to fulfill very much the same function. Why are not just the most impressive figures like the jaguar and the cayman the sole occupants of the mythical stage, endlessly repeating their same messages in myriad episodes? For example there is the anaconda, who plays a malignant, disruptive, animalistic role in many stories connected with the dire consequences of untamed sexuality. But there is also the tapir, the maned wolf, the frog, the Black Jaguar, the cayman, the anteater, and the piranha, to name only a few, who have functions in the stories quite closely overlapping those of the anaconda. One expects mythical redundancy, but why so much?

One answer may lie in the fact that the minor figures that cluster about the major figures refine the dominant symbol’s meaning by extending it into new realms of mythical action where the major figure could not naturalistically penetrate. For example one finds the tapir playing the aquatic seducer role of the Dragon when the action takes place on land. Land is clearly a foreign element for the anaconda but not for the tapir. Similarly, the meaning of the dominant symbols is extended by having animals of different appearance take over some of their roles. This allows a
dominant symbol to take on new meanings such as humor in the anteater’s altering of the sinister anaconda’s function.

This explanation may be true, but I do not think it is the whole answer. There is another explanation that could act in tandem to provide the multitudinous cast of characters of the myths. It may have something to do with the theory of metaphoric replacement outlined in the introduction of this work: the need for metaphoric novelty in an oral tradition. These stories are a form of verbal art, like rhetoric (Weiss 1977) pitched to maintain the active interest of an audience, and novelty is essential to art in any form. Hence the powerful demand for novelty—but novelty within the narrative tradition and according to the dictates of an accepted model of the universe and the characters it contains—will also be felt in the telling of tales. Why tell or listen to endless stories of the cayman when the same message can be conveyed and even extended by using subsidiary symbols of different appearance, character, and associated behavior, such as the anteater, the tapir, or the anaconda? The same story is told: the same morals inculcated; the same theories expounded; but now with new and exciting imagery. Thus audience and teller interest is maintained according to a pattern of theme and variations that is both fulfilling and elaborating.

To descend into a world of popular North American imagery as bizarre, if not as earthy, as anything illustrated in this book yet more familiar as minor oddments in our common cultural baggage, one has only to look at the incredible proliferation of superhero characters in that most egalitarian segment of the popular press, comic books. Based on a similar Superman theme of honest opposition to crime and barbarity by a strong yet virtuous character, we now have an endless assortment: Superwoman, Superboy, Batman, Spiderman, Captain America. Although it is true that this proliferation is a special case of commercial interests playing on and feeding a central cultural myth by artfully inventing new characters who do fairly much the same thing, the desire for novelty that makes their success possible is not the creation of those interests. It is a part of the audience—any audience—although of course it is not above a little self-interested cultivation. Many of the characters in lowland South American myth, as well as their mutual redundancy, have their origin in the same desire, the desire for metaphorical novelty. Old forms permutate into new
ones, themselves destined to be replaced and amplified by others. This process entails a veritable succession of figures of speech as well as the objects of speech.

In addition to the aesthetic desire for novelty, religious reasons for generating both an endless set of characters and plural manifestations of each character may also be at work here. Therefore, even my amendment of the previously supposed unitary nature of many supernatural figures, like the jaguar, into a duality does not go far enough in accurately expressing the complexity and plasticity of these figures. Mythical reality will always be sloppier or more fluid than any analytical account of it precisely because of this metaphorical mode of growth and function. One can only echo Hunt’s summation of the “pantheistic” aspect of Mesoamerican theogonies and apply it to the lower Central and South American cognate systems as well:

In their view, as in those of all pantheistic cultures, reality, nature, and experience were nothing but multiple manifestations of a single unity of being. God was both the one and the many. Thus the deities were but his multiple personifications, his partial unfoldings into perceptible experience. The partitioning of this experience into discrete units such as god A or god B is an artifice of iconography and analysis, not part of the core conception of the divinity. Since the divine reality was multiple, fluid, encompassing the whole, its aspects were changing images, dynamic, never frozen, but constantly being recreated, redefined. This fluidity was a culturally defined mystery of the nature of divinity itself. (1977:55-56)

Although this statement applies best to the complex civilizations both archaeological and historical that I have compared this tribal model to, it is also true that tribal symbolism is fluid, but for a different reason. There, rather than a sophisticated awareness of the one in the many, one sees a concern for many characters behaving according to one principle.

Yet for all those who are dissatisfied with the restating of chaos under the label of analysis, I offer this mind game in search of that principle. It provides structure, but structure that is self-consciously fragile. Like a ladder of glass it may help to life the interested student to a new level of both perplexity and understanding, but it will have shattered in the process. Let the ladders that succeed this one, preferably in the form of the Shipibo double chain of arrows, carry the student to higher levels than the House of the King Vulture, to where the sun shines in darkness.
An examination of a possible cosmologic model composed of these metaphorical figures underlying many disparate tribal mythologies in the tropical lowlands of South America east of the Andes reveals that from a biogenetic structuralist perspective mythical content is not just a function of mythical algebraics. Symbols like the Yellow Jaguar or the Subaquatic Dragon have a real content to those who enunciate them. Partly based on similar psychological responses to similar environments, and partly based on readily perceived behavioral or formal similarities between these animals and human beings, the animals are used as objective corollaries that express, on a different dimension, the tensions of a societal form based on a pervasive sexual division of labor while riven by the profound battle of the sexes that interdependence entails.

This model is not based on some kind of “Zen Marxism,” as Murphy (1969:53) intimated Lévi-Strauss’s seminal attempt was. Rather, to be equally puckish, the model is firmly rooted in a kind of “Hegelian Taoism.” It translates strictly defined dyads, each pair representing dualistic manifestations of a single concept, into a continuum model based on the notion that life is death and death, life (Wilbert 1975a:169, on the Warao). This is done by postulating the asymmetrical interdependence of the chains of dyadic correlations and oppositions. Specifically, in the two key symbols of the model, the Jaguar-Dragon opposition, a positive and a negative manifestation of the Jaguar is created and opposed to a positive and a negative aspect of the Dragon. But instead of four static cells of a square, a dynamic system is constituted by weighting one element of each set of dyads; the Dragon’s negative aspect is emphasized and contrasted with the equally stressed positive aspects of the Jaguar. The other two aspects of these two major figures, the positive and negative ones respectively, are to an extent equated and interpenetrate to keep the model in perpetual movement. This produces a continual process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis that transforms, by the overlapping of the major figures’ aspects, what might at first appear to be a static oppositional system into a dynamic scheme of endlessly ramifying transitive relations. In its most complex forms this world view approximates a sophisticated Manichaeism, for as Reichel-Dolmatoff specifies of the Kogi:

In order to guarantee the existence of Good it is necessary to foment Evil because if the latter should disappear—finding no justification for its existence—the principle of Good would disappear as well. It is deemed
necessary then that a person should occasionally commit sins which bear
witness to the active existence of Evil. (1974:295-296)

The result of this cosmology is as self-contained and complex a world--
one that spins off characters constantly to play on each other’s ambiguities and
fill in the process many uninhabited niches of the mind--as the ancient and
resilient tropical rain forest that inspired it. This mythological mind world is a
lush and exotic place, much more so than this arid and tedious description can
convey, full of vibrant colors, pungent odors, and rotting insect carapaces
iridescent against the dark mulch of thinly hidden desires and needs. Yet it is
disciplined by a dualism so basic that its limits are only just beginning to be
explored.