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The colombian rock art spiral. A shamanic tunnel?

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In the center of any spiral is the calm core through which man passes to eternity.

Jill Purce / *The Mystic Spiral*

Introduction

Spirals have been found in the form of pictographs or petroglyphs in most countries and cultures throughout the world. A simple design, it's possibly the most common rock art motif in Colombia, appearing more times in the form of a petroglyph than a pictograph.

Colombian petroglyph spirals tend to be curvilinear while pictograph spirals are generally angular and painted in red; however there are many exceptions (Marriner 2002:5). Easy to engrave or paint, they may have been used for both exoteric (for the general public) and esoteric (only for the initiated) purposes in pre-historic Colombian rock art.

Identification of the Colombian rock artist and the interpretation of rock art motifs has been the theme of much controversy during the past decade. The computer age and the internet have enabled researchers to disseminate their studies and documentation of rock art sites to a wider audience of interested persons. This has created a much larger and easier-to-access data base of rock art investigations than has been previously possible.

As a result, it's now apparent that more rock art specialists accept the idea that shamans, the religious leaders of most hunter-gatherer societies, were responsible for making most rock art either directly or indirectly.

This study examines spirals and their identified uses in different cultures. It also investigates the possibility of a common underlying shamanic theme in many spiral motifs.

Please note, that for purposes of this paper, counterclockwise spirals are defined as those starting at the center and increasing to the outer limit in a counterclockwise direction. Many times counterclockwise spirals relate to rising or flying upwards. A clockwise spiral is defined as one that starts at the center and increases to the outer limit in a clockwise direction. Clockwise spirals are many times related to the concept of descending. (Figures 1 & 2)



Fig. 1 Clockwise spiral. La Huerta, Tibacuy, Cundinamarca
(Computer enhanced from Alvaro Botiva foto).



Fig. 2 Counter Clockwise spiral. El Palco, Tibacuy, Cundinamarca
(Computer enhanced by author from Alvaro Botiva foto).

The shaman's role in society

The white man Goes into his church house and talks *about* Jesus; The Indian Goes into his teepee and talks *to* Jesus. J.S. Slotkin

The role of the shaman in hunter-gatherer and horticultural societies has been written in detail by many authors (e.g. Vitebsky 1995). Generally speaking, the shaman is the tribal religious leader-healer who acquires supernatural powers, including power songs, from animals, birds, or reptiles during an initiation when he goes on a vision quest by entering a trance.

The shaman's role encompasses tribal issues that are serious and need to be resolved. A community may be starving from lack of animals, crop failure due to flooding, freezing conditions, an extended drought or a tribal member may be very sick. The shaman is consulted to find the cause of illness and cure it. He may determine that the community has done something to cause an unbalanced cosmos, the soul has been stolen from a person or an evil object has entered the body of a person causing them to be sick. Everyday illnesses and problems are resolved using chants, magical prayers, and incense. Using secret herbal potions, dances, power songs and rituals, the shaman summons his spirit helpers during a trance where he dies, is reborn, then battles and defeats hostile spirits causing the problem. He may suck a foreign object directly from the body of the ill patient to cleanse it of impurities or blow tobacco smoke on the patient.

For more serious problems the shaman uses the trance to enter an altered reality journey for purposes of healing the seriously ill, predicting the future, bringing rain or sun to ensure a cosmic balance, conferring with dead ancestors, obtaining or using spirit helpers, or obtaining supernatural powers to control certain

animals.

During his spirit journey the shaman may fly up to the sky world or down to the underworld to plead with the spirit causing the problem, ask advice from deceased ancestors, physically battle evil spirits or win debates to gain concessions. The flight is usually upward to the heavens. When the shaman triumphs, his power forces the malevolent spirit to correct the problem. He then banishes him into this air or isolates him in a container or place where he can't cause any more trouble.

After returning from this alternate reality, many researchers believe that shamans, or people under their direction, painted or engraved their visions, or symbols relating to them, on rocks (Figure 3a). One author wrote "It is probably extremely significant that the designs in many of the aspects of modern Indian artistry in the northwest Amazon are similar to or the same as those found in many of the rock-engravings... Studies have indicated that these designs...are suggested by visions experienced during the intoxication produced by caapi (*Banisteriopsis Caapi*),... There is no reason to doubt that the ancient artisans who made these rock-engravings had used the same drugs and had the same experiences as the natives of today" (Schultes 1988:80) (Figure 3b). These shamans enter the spirit world through a tunnel or spiral vortex portal and many believe that they actually pass through the stone surface at rock art sites (Turpin 85). (Figure 4)



Fig. 3a. Technique of scribing CCW petroglyph design.
(Foto and design by author)



Fig. 3b. CCW petroglyphs.
La Pedrera, Rio Caqueta, Amazonas.



Fig. 4 The Cosmos as seen by a shaman. (Drawing by author)

Trance stages

Modern studies of the brain have found that its main function is to make images. Under normal circumstances, external stimuli gathered by our sensory organs (eyes, ears, nose, skin, etc.) are received by the brain and processed.

The food we eat is the energy source used by the brain to perform its function. If external stimuli are blocked (e.g. isolation), or the food source is blocked or changed, in the case of toxins, or absent in the case of starvation, the brain reacts only to internal stimulation, and “abnormal” images are created. These images, and those caused by physical pressure on the retina, are generally called entoptic phenomena and are composed of “phosphenes” (visual effects produced by mechanical pressure on the eye or electrical stimulation of the brain) and “form constants” (specific geometric shapes originating from other parts of the optic system away from the eye).

The brain may cut off reception of some external stimuli when its “normal” food source is not available and rely more heavily on internal stimulation. In the case of dreaming, for instance, the brain continues to do its job of making images using available stimuli to create a different “reality.”

The word Reality is difficult to define since each of us perceives the same material world in a similar, but slightly different way. One person may look at a tree and focus on the leaves, while another would concentrate on the bark. An artist may look at the general form of the tree or carefully note the root system or branches.

Altered Reality or Trance is a term used to describe a state where the brain has created images when its normal process has been interrupted by toxins, fatigue, starvation or a super-saturation of stimuli such as drumming, chanting, or dancing.

Psychologists have shown us that there are three main stages plus a transitional stage to all trances:

Stage 1 is the gentlest stage. Geometric phosphene shapes are seen in the form of dots, zigzags, grills, groups of lines or parallel curves and meanders. Even with open eyes, these luminescent forms may be seen on any surface including walls and ceilings. These Stage 1 symbols are similar to many red pictographs found in the Muisca cultural zone in the high plains area of Andean Colombia where the Muisca used the drug Yopo to enter a trance state.

The following list includes some of the Colombian trance-inducing plants with similar characteristics that may have been used to enter a trance state where the spiral motif would have been seen. The list contains: a. the common name used by Colombian Indians. b. the botanical name. c. other local names for the plant. d. tribes who used the plant to enter a trance state.

- **Ayahuasca.** Bot. *Banisteriopsis caapi*. (aka: caapi, dapa, mihi, kahi, natema, pinde, yaje or yage. Tribes: Tukano, Siona, Yekwana, Kofan, Yukuna, Barasana, Guahibo. **Yoco.** Bot. *Paullinia Yoco*. Yoco is an important stimulant possibly mixed with Ayahuasca to make the narcotic **Yaje Yoco**. Yoco contains a large amount of caffeine, and is one of the most important plants in the diet of the Indians of the Putumayo and western Caqueta. Part of the stem, near the flower, has an unusual spiral shape similar to a common Colombian rock art motif (Figure 5).



Fig. 5 Yoco flower.
(Richard Schultes)

- **Chiricaspi.** Bot. *Brunfelsia chiricaspi*. (aka: chiric-sanango, borrachero). Tribe: Kofan.
- **Culebra Borrachero.** Bot. *Methysticodendron amesianum*. Tribes: Kansa, Ingano.
- **Epena.** Bot. *Virola calophylla warb.* (aka: nyakwana, yakee, parica, yato). Tribe: Maku.
- **Ucue.** Bot. *Virola theiodora*. Tribe: Murui-Muinane
- **Floripondia.** Bot. *Brugmansia arborea*. (aka: borrachero, huacacachu, huanto, makoa, toa, tonga). Tribes: Muisca, Sibundoy.
- **Paguando.** Bot. *Lochroma fuchsioides Miers*. (aka: borrachero, totubjansush). Tribes: Sibundoy, Kamsa.
- **Taique.** Bot. *Desfontainia spinosa*. (aka: borrachero). Tribe: Kamsa.
- **Yopo.** Bot. *Anadenanthera colubrine*. (aka: cohoba, huilca or vilca, sebil). Tribe: Muisca.

While Stage 1 symbols are repeated in rock art throughout different cultures, their exoteric meanings differ considerably due to local cultural influences. The Colombian Tukano Indians are one example of how some of these forms are culturally influenced. A series of brilliant dots represents the Milky Way, goal of their shamanic flights. Curved, parallel lines represent a rainbow, and sometimes the penis of Father Sun. The Tukanos selected about two dozen phosphenes and assigned each a special meaning in terms of fertility, sexuality and matrimonial norms.

A spiral may be described to the general public as an exoteric representation of the incest taboo, while the shaman may view it in another way (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978:32). The exoteric meanings of tribal symbols are taught to the general public by the shaman and painted for everyone to see. Every symbol represents an ideographic code transmitting cultural messages that refer to basic values. Esoteric meanings are hidden, secret and reserved only for initiated cult members. A Tukano spiral may also represent a whirlpool: home of ancestors; a liminary place where contact with those ancestors can only be made by entering that other reality.

Stage 2. visions evolve from Stage 1 geometric forms. During Stage 2, shamans rationalize the

geometric forms and see them transformed into objects with religious or emotional significance, depending on the emotional and physical state of the shaman. A dehydrated person may see a drinking vessel, while a frightened person may see zigzags transformed into a snake.

Stage 3. visions are realistic and three-dimensional. They are seen by the shaman to float on walls and on the ceiling. Many times they transform themselves into other objects. During this stage the shaman may transform himself into an animal such as a deer, bird, or jaguar and fly to the sky or the underworld to encounter monsters and other fearful creatures. In this stage the shaman may acquire his animal spirit helper or helpers that will accompany him throughout his lifetime. He may meet tribal ancestors who teach and lecture him. Plants and animals speak and tell him their names, uses and meanings.

Transition from Stage 2 to Stage 3. is reached by means of a spiral vortex or tunnel. The spiral is one of the most common designs reportedly seen during a shamanic trance (Oster 1970) and coincidentally probably the most common rock art motif (Figure 6). Preference is sometimes seen at certain rock art sites for a clockwise spiral such as seen at El Palco, Tibacuy where 19 out of 26 (73%) single spirals are clockwise. At other locations such as Ainsuca, Sasaima, the opposite occurs where six out of seven (86%) single spirals are counter clockwise. Near Ainsuca at Taray, Sasaima we see about an even distribution of spiral orientation preference where seven out of 15 (47%) are counter clockwise.



Fig. 6 Clockwise spiral pictograph. Bojaca, Cundinamarca
(GIPRI archives foto computer enhanced by author)

During tribal or shaman initiation trances, the novice feels drawn through a spiral and eventually sees a strong light at the end. Colombian Tukano Indians relate that tunnels and funnels are seen during their trances after consuming the plant yage (Slade and Bentall 154).

As the participant passes through, he is said to have visions of persons, animals and other elements are seen through a grillwork on the side of the spiral tunnel.

It is important to note that a common shamanic theme is death and rebirth. Initiation is death from one state and rebirth into another passing through a transitional spiral vortex or tunnel. The full fledged shaman also has the sensation of passing through a spiral vortex during shamanic flight, but in this case it is interpreted as the entrance to the spirit world. Spiraling downward the shaman enters the underworld returning to the womb of the Earth Mother for a new birth. Spiraling upward the shaman enters the sky world. The hypothesis of this paper is that the transitional stage may, at times, be represented in the form of a spiral in some Colombian rock art. (Figure 7)



Fig. 7 Shaman in flight and spiral petroglyph. Finca Castro, Alban, Cundinamarca.
(Foto and computer enhancement by author)

Spiral Symbolism

Clottes and Lewis-Williams (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 18) feel strongly that the three stages of a shamanic trance are universal and are an integral part of the human nervous system. One investigator has shown that the group of psychoactive drugs known as hallucinogens commonly used by shamans owe their activity to a very few types of chemical substances that act in a specific way upon a definite part of the central nervous system. Hallucinogens produce effects such as deep changes in the sphere of experience, in perception of reality, even of space and time and in consciousness of self. Depersonalization may occur.

The trance state is short-lived, and lasts only until the causative substance is changed through digestion or excreted from the body. The effects of different hallucinogens vary according to the way they are prepared, the setting in which they are taken, the amount ingested, the number and kinds of additives, and the purposes for which they are used, as well as the ceremonial control exercised by the shaman. But all hallucinogens have similar trance STAGES as opposed to mood modifying psychoactive drugs such as analgesics and euphorics, sedatives and tranquilizers, and hypnotics (Schultes 13,14).

Therefore, apparently all trances induced by hallucinogenic plants have a transitional stage where shamans pass through a similar spiral or vortex tunnel. Waiká Indian shamans have stated that the most important part of their trance state is the transportation of their soul to other worlds (Schultes 170).

This implies that the spiral tunnel of the transition between stages 2 and 3 plays an important part of shamanic alternate reality visions and may have been recorded in rock art symbolizing the transitional stage, just as geometric shapes in rock art could be images from Stage 1, and realistic or floating animals in rock art could be created from Stage 3 images.

Anthropologists have proved that some Indians (e.g. Colombian Barasana shamans), reproduce geometric patterns in the sand that represent visions seen during their trances and paint their visions on the walls of their huts (Waimaja shamans). Interpretation of these design motifs is believed to be culture-bound but, on the other hand, what is actually seen and recorded is controlled by specific biochemical effects of the active principles in the plant (Schultes 124).

Physiologically speaking, spirals seen during trances are caused by capillary circulation. The Tunnel Effect arises partly from the foveal cones and environing rods being smaller and more closely arranged than those of the periphery and in consequence the geometric figures perceived are likely to be smaller in the center than at the periphery (Marshall 300).

Spiral motifs and indian cultures

Spiral motifs are found in a wide variety of representations throughout native cultures. There appears to be an underlying common connection between the spiral and shamanic activity in nearly all cases. It isn't surprising that more than 90% of hunter-gatherer tribes incorporate the shamanic trance as an important part of their culture. One study concluded that 62% of 488 societies around the world had ritualized cultural patterns involving hallucinations (Bourguignon 187).

The following examples are listed to show instances where the spiral is associated with shamanic activity in native cultures. They support the hypothesis that many of the Colombian rock art spirals may represent the shaman's transition between Stages 2 and 3 of an altered reality journey to another world.

*The Tukano Indians of Colombia draw a clockwise spiral during the Yurupari ancestor-communication ceremony. An important part of this ceremony is a long curled sacred bark trumpet that leaves a spiral impression when pressed into the earth. Participants pass through the transitional (spiral/vortex) transitional trance stage to communicate with dead relatives when using the drug Yage. Tunnels and funnels are common motifs seen under the influence of Yage (Slade and Bentall 154). "Practically all decorative elements...are said...to be derived from hallucinatory imagery...When asked about these paintings, the Indians simply reply *This is what we see when we drink Yaje.*" (Reichel-Dolmatoff quoted in Schultes and Hofmann 121).

*In 1995 Medardo Largo, an Indian chief from the ancient Umbra cultural zone of Caldas, Colombia, was asked by investigators to interpret a spiral petroglyph. He said that it represented a person in a special state of concentration or “thinking” during a ritual. In other words, he was describing a trance state. (Gelmur 56).

*Mesoamerican priests used the spiral symbol to depict smoke which rises to the sky in spirals. Priests devoted to the worship of Quezalcoatl wore a “Wind-Jewel” pectoral in the shape of a spiral cut from the cross-section of a conch shell. It was emblematic of the wind god Ehecatl who represents air and sky as mediator between the heavens, earth, and underworld (Labbe 15). In other words, Ehecatl resided in the shamanic transitional zone between worlds.

*Sun shadows on spiral petroglyphs at Fajada Butte in Chaco Canyon, Utah mark solstice dates and other solar and lunar events. The winter solstice, in particular, was an important time to shamans.

The sun is at its lowest altitude at winter solstice and many shamans believe a tunnel or opening occurs on this date making it easier to transport them to the sky world in a trance state. Petroglyph spirals may have been mnemonic devices marking a special date to remind the shaman it was time for an astral journey. There are indications that sometimes clockwise rock art spirals may relate to the winter solstice and counter clockwise spirals may relate to the summer solstice (Marriner 1998:29).

Some southwestern American Indian rock used the counter clockwise spiral as a symbol for the concept of rising or going up (Martineau 6, 18, 19, 20, 30) as in the case of a shaman flying up to the celestial world, which was the direction of most shamanic trips.

The clockwise spiral stands for the concept of going down as in a shamanic trip to the underworld.

*Spiral petroglyphs may have been used as solstice markers at Ainsuca, Sasaima, Colombia, and at other rock art sites (Marriner 1998:42, 43). These may have been important shamanic trance sites marked by spirals to indicate the site’s function. Rock art spirals such as these may also have been used as mandalas.

Mandalas are designs focused on by shamans to aid them in entering a trance state more quickly. A shaman looking at a spiral mandala during a trance may reduce the time needed to transport him into the spirit world. This method of entering the spirit world would most certainly be jealously guarded by the shaman and only passed on to his pupils after their initiation. In some cultures shamans believe they actually pass through the rock at their site during a trance (Whitely 22).

A spiral engraved at the sacred site could represent the whirlpool, whirlwind, tunnel or cave experienced by the shaman during his transitional from Stage 2 to Stage 3. In some instances an experienced shaman only has to enter a cave to reproduce the effect of a spiral whirlwind that he normally experiences in an altered state of consciousness (Clottes 33).

*Some gold anthropomorphic figures from Colombia represent shamans in trance. Spiral eyes and the spiral motifs around their heads identify the shaman during a trance state (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1988) and may indicate that the shaman is in transition to Stage 3 of his trance.

*Many Colombian spiral petroglyphs along the Amazon, Orinoco, Magdalena and Cauca river valleys may be of Carib origin, made during migrations, or after new lands were settled. It is believed by the Dutch Guiana Carib Indians that an ecstatic experience can occur only as part of a celestial other-reality journey.

The Carib shaman is helped in his journey by a vulture to reach the sky by means of a spiral ladder that is an axismundi, the point where earth and sky meet (Mircea 1964:128). Other cultures use the concept of a Vortex-Tree as an axismundi (Purce 23). Here again we see the spiral viewed as a transitional device.

*A petroglyph in the United States at Mesa Verde National Park Pictograph Point of squared double spirals was interpreted by a group of Hopi men in 1942 to represent the Sipapu or emergence point from

the underworld (Jones Jr. 1994:11:160-162). In Arizona we also find the spiral representing a transitional phase from one world to another.

*Andaman Islanders call the time of the year between monsoon seasons *kimil* when frightening waterspouts and cyclones in the shape of spiraling vortices occur. Although a long distance away on the globe, this fact is very significant to our study in Colombia since the word *kimil* is also used by the islanders to stand for the transition to the alternate reality and for religious trance (Goodman 86). The association between spiral shapes and the transition state of a trance is obvious. Future studies may show that the association is more universal than we believe today.

*A Camonica Valley, Italy petroglyph of a face in the center of a clockwise spiral strongly suggests the portrayal of a shaman in the Transition Stage of a trance state, possibly indicating passage through the spiral rock “door” to another world (Anati 216). (Figure 8)



Fig. 8 Clockwise spiral petroglyph with face.
Camonica, Italy (Emmanuel Anati)

*Close observation of some primitive dance patterns used for healing and incantation are seen in the form of a spiral curve.

“Such spiral movements may be regarded as figures intended to induce a state of ecstasy and to enable man to escape from the material world and to enter the beyond, through the ‘hole’ symbolized by the mystic center (Cirlot 306).”

Here again we see the spiral associated with the transitional stage during shamanic activity.

*Some Colombian petroglyphs incorporate the spiral motif as an animal’s tail. Snakes and monkeys are the two most common animal motifs with spiral tails. Both these shamanic animals may be seen at the sides of the Transition Spiral between Stages 2 and 3 of a shaman’s trance. Since a shaman may have either of these animals as his spirit helpers, the animal/spiral association lends support to hypothesis of this paper.

*A 20th Century painting by Native American deer-dancer Michael Brown (Rising Eagle) shows the climax of a peyote ceremony when a deer hunter and a slain deer become one spirit as they travel through the portal of the vision depicted as a cross-hatched vertical spiral (Halifax 71), typical of the Transition stage (Figure 9).



Fig. 9 Peyote celebrant and slain deer becoming one spirit entering spiral portal of a vision. (Painting by Michael Brown-Rising Eagle. Joan Halifax collection)

*In some shamanic cultures “Certain forms, such as the labyrinth (a spiral form), represent the explicit experience of initiation-entry into the abyss of the mysteries, the pilgrimage of the spirit.”(Halifax 38) The Northern Aranda of Australia use a ground-painting as a sacred gateway to the Other World (Halifax 68). This confirms that some cultures used a design drawn on natural materials as a transitional device to gain access to another world, just as the Colombian shaman could have used the spiral for his supernatural portal.

*The first spiral known in the history of art is a Paleolithic talisman found at a ritual cave burial in Siberia. This mammoth ivory artifact shows a large spiral surrounded by four double spirals. The center spiral has a hole drilled through to the other side (Purce 100,101), possibly indicating an access route to the spirit world.

*Stylized spirals on Peruvian ceramics (aprox. 300 B.C.?) illustrate the hallucinogenic experiences induced by the San Pedro cactus (Schultes and Hofmann 154).

*Colombian Barasana Indians draw a labyrinth design to represent the path to the Other World. Trance participants say the ‘horizon opens like a door’ to enter the realm of spirits.

*A counter clockwise spiral petroglyph in Box Canyon, South Mountains, Arizona, is located close to a gila monster motif and what may be a representation of a bird flying. One archaeologist suggested that the spiral represents a portal into the underworld (Bostwick 98). The counterclockwise spiral more likely represents a portal into the sky world if the use of counter clockwise=rising is valid for this region.

*Historical accounts of North American Indians interpreting their rock art relate that many of the symbols seen in rock are derived from a Universal Sign Language that was understood by all Indians from coast to coast. The powerful “medicine” or supernatural power of the Medicine Man or shaman was represented in sign language by holding the right hand close to the forehead, palm outwards, index and second fingers separated and pointing upwards, others and thumb closed as the hand is moved upward and turns from right to left (counter clockwise) in a SPIRAL (Tomkins 37) (Figure 10). In other words the Medicine man’s power comes from a spiraling tunnel or vortex leading to the celestial world.



Fig 10. Universal North American Indian Sign Language for Medicine Man’s Medicine.
Note the upward spiral shape. (William Tomkins)

*The Huichol Indians of northwest Mexico speak of entering the threshold of another world during their peyote trance: “We have become new, we are clean, we are recently born.” This is symbolized by a cord rolled in the form of a spiral which is a metaphor of their journey to “the place of origin” and subsequently returning to “this world.” They have died and been re-born in the shamanic sense. “How many spirals are there represented in American petroglyphs! How many of its variants: volute, labyrinths, multiple concentric circles! How many stairs and rectangular labyrinths in its geometric paintings, are also symbols of the spiritual path of the dead (and initiates) towards the Great Beyond!” (Schobinger 67).

*The Waimaha Indians of Vaupes, Colombia state that every symbol painted on their homes, on their musical instruments and engraved on rocks represents something seen during a yage vision. They also

interpret the spiral as marking the spot where someone has passed during a hunt, migration or journey. They explain that it could be used to represent the Paye or shaman traveling to other world. A double spiral represents the spirit world to them as seen during a yage vision, and is painted on their tribal buildings (Marriner 2003).

Both neuropsychology and ethnology have been researched before suggesting a possible meaning for the Colombian rock art spiral. Since this motif is found world-wide, it is logical to assume that the reason for a universal use is more likely to be neuropsychiatric rather than ethnologic since legends and myths differ from region to region, but the effect of harmine alkaloids used for most drug induced trances is similar.

Considering the above mentioned examples taken from various cultures, one logical conclusion is that the Colombian rock art spiral may have represented the transitional stage between phases 2 and 3 of a shamanic trance. It implies a strong interaction between the shamans and the spirit world. Most certainly there are circumstances where the spiral was used as a convenient motif for other reasons, but the best-fit hypothesis is that most representations of the Colombian spiral are symbols of the vortex or spiral tunnel leading to the occult world of the spirits.

Spiral motifs are frequently found associated with stick figure motifs with raised hands engraved or drawn with three fingers and three toes. These stick figures may represent flying shamans in the act of being transformed into birds with three toes, or at times a spirit guarding the entrance to another world and access to esoteric knowledge, as in the case of some Waimaja petroglyphs.

Posture during trance affects the visions seen and may be another important aspect to consider when attempting to interpret the meaning of rock art motifs. One example showing the transformation of a shaman with raised arms into a three-toed bird is clearly seen in a Cueva Pintada pictograph in Baja California (Smith 1985:40). This posture may aid in making the shaman feel like he is flying during his trance.

Conclusions

All Colombian Indians interviewed during this study, and many others interviewed by other researchers, stated that all designs engraved or painted on rocks, or painted on ceremonial objects or tribal huts, were representations of things seen during trance visions. The spiral is a common Colombian rock art motif and also a universal phenomenon apparently seen by all shamans during the transition between stages 2 and 3 of a trance state. There is a logical connection between the experience of moving through a spiral or vortex during a shamanic trance and its representation in Colombian rock art.

Many, if not all, Colombian rock art sites were sacred places charged with supernatural power for the shaman. The shaman utilized this power to realize shamanic trips and fly into other worlds. A spiral may have been used to mark a sacred spot where an altered state of consciousness trip took place. It may have been used repeatedly by the shaman as a mandala to enter the spirit realm through a spiral carved or painted on stone at the same spot. The shaman may have believed that he was actually passing through the rock art spiral to enter the spirit world.

Visions seen during a trance state may be culturally influenced and structured but the motifs seen and recorded are pan-human phenomena.

This paper suggests one logical explanation for the widespread use of the spiral as a common Colombian rock art motif. It may have been used to represent a shaman's portal to enter the spirit world. The theory is based on a universal experience of passing through a spiral or vortex tunnel shared by all shamans during the Transition between phases 2 and 3 of a trance. World-wide, sensory deprivation (isolation, fasting, or lack of sleep) is the most common way to enter a trance state but, in Colombia, it appears that plants (seeds, leaves, flowers or roots) were the most common way shamans entered their altered-reality trances. Examples from various cultures have been presented to support the suggested use of the Colombian rock art spiral motif.

One researcher studying the imagery of hallucinogenic intoxication wrote that "...possibly no other

artistic motif conveys the concept of the journey through a tunnel as effectively as concentric circles and spirals (Benson and Sehgal 1987:3-4).”

SOME PICTOGRAPH SITES IN CUNDINAMARCA, COLOMBIA WITH THE SPIRAL MOTIF

1. Bojaca. Hacienda Chunava. Piedras Pintadas (Chivonegro).
2. Facatativa. Piedras de Tunja. Piedra No. 41.
3. Sibate-Soacha. Finca San Benito. Piedra Los Alambiques.
4. Macheta. Piedra La Flor.
5. Pandi. El Helechal.



—¿Preguntas, comentarios? escriba a: rupestreweb@yahoogroups.com—

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