
The Role of Shamanism in Mesoamerican Art

A Reassessment¹

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Increasing numbers of scholars are relying on the concept of shamanism to interpret pre-Columbian artworks without examining its origins and questioning its viability. This essay explores the historical roots of this field's romance with the shaman and offers an explanation of its appeal. We argue that by avoiding such terms as "priest," "doctor," and "political leader," the words "shaman" and "shamanism" have helped scholars to "other" pre-Columbian peoples by portraying them as steeped in magic and the spiritual. We begin with a look at when, where, and why this reductive representation emerged in pre-Columbian art studies, suggesting that it originated as an idealist aversion to materialist explanations of human behavior. We then examine the sources and validity of the principal criteria used by Pre-Columbianists to identify shamanism in works of art and look at some possible reasons for shamanism's popularity among them. We conclude that there is a pressing need to create a more refined, more nuanced terminology that would distinguish, cross-culturally, among the many different kinds of roles currently lumped together under the vague and homogenizing rubric of "shaman."

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The past decade has seen an increasing number of Mesoamericanists relying on the concept of shamanism for their interpretations of artworks created prior to the Spanish conquest. Whether these scholars are anthropologists, archaeologists, art historians, or trained in Latin American studies or the history of religions, all have drawn heavily on social scientific literature in the form of ethnohistories and ethnographic reports. It is our position that many of these writers, regardless of their disciplinary base, are using shamanism to provide predictable, easy, and ultimately inadequate answers to what are often very complex questions about the relationship of art to religion, medicine, and politics in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica.

Without wishing to diminish the important contributions of some of the work on shamanism and art, we contend that many of those who have related the concept of shamanism to preconquest Mesoamerican artworks have avoided the demands of scholarly rigor. Although the evidence that shamanism is reflected in these art objects is at times surprisingly scanty, it is sometimes used to support broad claims for shamanism's role in the understanding of Mesoamerican art. Moreover, many of these studies proceed in an uncritical manner. In particular, scholars writing about Mesoamerican art in relation to the concept of shamanism invariably fail to examine the historical origins and viability of the vocabulary and models they have chosen to use. They neither provide adequate etic criteria for identifying a person as a "shaman"—criteria that have cross-cultural (including transatlantic and transpacific) validity—nor fully disclose what is currently known about those specific individuals' roles. In particular, the internal rankings and factions within and among specific groups of religious-medical practitioners, like the economic and political aspects of their performance, are typically played down in studies of Mesoamerican art if they are mentioned at all. The result is a seductive but also reductive and lopsided portrayal of Mesoamerican art as an essentially "spiritual" affair.

For us "the spiritual," as something largely separate from the mundane political and economic spheres, is, like "shamanism," a vague Western category whose utility in analyses of Mesoamerican art is seldom defined, justified via cross-cultural comparison, or compared with indigenous, emic notions of religiosity. When it takes center stage it is usually at the expense of a historical perspective. The resulting highly romantic image of Mesoamerican religion and the art it supposedly inspired plays directly not only to uncritical lay readers but also, as others have pointed out, to self-serving nationalist and

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commercial interests both within and outside of Latin America (Joralemon 1990; Kehoe 1994, 1996, 1999; Fikes 1996).

We suggest that the representation of Mesoamerican artworks as products or reflections of a mastery of “the spiritual” has been so appealing because it reinforces the notion of the ahistorical, apolitical, irrational “Other” that was initially constructed during the conquest and colonization of the Americas. While the function of this “othering” process in colonial times is relatively well understood, its appeal for scholars working today has not received much attention. We argue that the problem originated in an idealist aversion to materialist and political explanations of human behavior and to the complexities and dynamics of human history. This aversion has long characterized both the field of “humanistic anthropology” and the humanities and has been particularly endemic in the disciplines of art history and the history of religions. Many scholars are attracted to the study of art, as to the study of religion, precisely because its making, use, and meaning have traditionally been characterized in the West as matters of ideation rather than of the material world.

In what follows we will provide evidence that this avoidance of secular, material explanations of art has been a reaction to several controversial theoretical schools and methodologies that gained academic prominence at various times in the course of the 20th century, among them diffusionism, cultural evolutionism, cultural materialism, the New Archaeology, and social and Marxist art history. Each of these approaches has, in its time, provoked serious intellectual debate and even division among scholars regarding the relative importance of idealist versus materialist explanations of human behavior, including the making of art. Whereas materialists have been inclined to acknowledge social change and cultural difference in Mesoamerican art history, idealists have tended to see ideas, especially religious beliefs, as determinants of artistic choice and to emphasize broad, even universal, and long-lasting human behavioral and cognitive similarities. Although the sharp dichotomy between materialism and idealism has in recent days yielded in some quarters to more complex and less totalizing theoretical models, we find that most scholars who interpret Mesoamerican art in terms of shamanism still appear to come to the subject from an essentially idealist perspective.

Since we see the history of art as first and foremost historical—that is, as dynamic, competitive, and contextual—we begin with a look at when, where, and, in our opinion, why shamanism first began to play a significant role in Mesoamerican art studies. We then examine the sources and validity of the principal criteria used by Mesoamericanists to identify shamanism in works of art. A look at some possible but largely acknowledged reasons for shamanism’s popularity among scholars of Mesoamerican art will follow. We conclude with some recommendations for what we hope may be a more responsible way of analyzing the interface be-

tween art, religion, medicine, and politics in this part of the Western Hemisphere and elsewhere.

Shamanism’s Entry into Mesoamerican Art Studies

The concept of shamanism was introduced into studies of Mesoamerican art at a moment of methodological crisis in academia in the mid-1960s. By that time, pre-Columbian art had come to be taught in departments of art history rather than in departments of anthropology, where it had previously been housed. In the early 1960s there were two schools in the United States that offered a doctorate in pre-Columbian art history: Yale University and Columbia University. These two programs trod very different paths. The founder and beacon of pre-Columbian art studies at Yale was George Kubler, whose approach was historicist, formalist, and, later on, semiotic; Kubler never evinced any interest in shamanism. At Columbia, in contrast, pre-Columbian art history was primarily taught by the “primitivist” Douglas Fraser, who had become an ardent devotee of diffusionism. In Fraser’s (1962, 1966) hands diffusionism aimed to identify and explain, on the basis of presumed ancient transpacific maritime contacts, the formal resemblances among Asian, Pacific Island, and Latin American images.

Diffusionism had enjoyed considerable popularity among U.S. anthropologists and archaeologists since the late 19th century, when it arose in reaction to both the notion of multiple independent inventions and the Enlightenment view of human history as evolutionary and progressive (Trigger 1989:99–100, 150–51). It had come to Fraser’s attention through the works of Asianists like Robert Heine-Geldern (1959; Heine-Geldern and Ekholm 1951), who claimed Southeast Asian origins for certain Mesoamerican and South American art forms, and a growing number of social scientists in the United States. Among the latter was the Mesoamerican archaeologist and museum curator Gordon Ekholm, who occasionally taught courses on pre-Columbian art in Fraser’s department at Columbia. Ekholm’s (1953, 1964) argument in favor of Han Chinese influences on Teotihuacan cylinder tripods, among other presumed artistic evidence of transpacific contact, exemplifies the tendency at the time to cite formal resemblance among man-made objects and images—many of which we classify as works of “art”—as evidence of diffusion.

THE SEMINAL WRITINGS OF PETER FURST

By the mid-1960s, however, diffusionism had come under increasingly scathing reproach from social scientists, historians, and art historians, and Fraser’s own confidence in this approach was severely shaken. It was precisely at this time that Fraser became aware of the work of the U.S. cultural anthropologist Peter Furst, who had begun interpreting Mesoamerican artworks in terms of the concept of shamanism. Furst’s interpretations in-

spired Fraser to turn away from diffusionist explanations of art in favor of interpretations based on shamanism, which seemed to provide a more plausible (not to mention more academically acceptable) explanation of the similarities among certain Asian, Pacific, and New World art forms. According to this model, the shared beliefs and practices represented by these visual resemblances date back to a so-called archaic substratum of shamanic beliefs and practices.

Fraser's attention was specifically called to an article by Furst that had been published in 1965 in the periodical *Antropológica*. The topic, "West Mexican Tomb Sculpture as Evidence for Shamanism in Prehispanic Mesoamerica," was derived from the research for his doctoral dissertation (P. Furst 1966), which he would submit the next year. The article identified a group of West Mexican ceramic figurines, believed to have come from deep shaft tombs constructed in Colima, Jalisco, and Nayarit during the 1st millennium B.C., as effigies of shamans who served as tomb guardians (fig. 1). Furst compared the left-turning postures and horned headdresses of some of the male figurines, who appear ready to strike an invisible enemy with their raised club, with Late Chou and Han period Chinese tomb-guardian statues, some of which likewise display a weapon. He related the West Mexican figures' curious headdresses to the use of animal horns to signify the supernatural powers of shamans among hunters and gatherers throughout the world and their sinistral orientation to the widespread Jungian association of the left side with danger and evil (1965:47-67).

Furst (1965:29) offered this interpretation as a correction to previous identifications of the West Mexican tomb figurines as "warriors" and to the widely held position of the time that West Mexican tomb ceramics in general were "essentially secular and anecdotal, free of supernatural overtones." In the conclusion to his article, Furst (p. 73) called for greater attention to comparative religion as a means to "unravel the deeper meaning that underlies the overt archaeological data." His idealist leanings emerged in his declaration that the traditional view of ancient West Mexicans as free from the domination of religion was, in his words, "sheer nonsense."

Furst's desire to position himself in the idealist camp must be seen in the context of contemporary developments within the social sciences. He was writing at a time when his own discipline was seeing the reemergence of neoevolutionary thought, some of which was directly influenced by Marx's writings. At the same time, archaeologists had begun to espouse what would become known as the New Archaeology, which focused on materialist—usually ecological and economic—explanations of culture change. In ironic contrast to Marx and Engels's understanding that culture can and does influence human history (Doy 198:28-29), this new breed of materialists ruled out ideas and religious beliefs, including their manifestations in works of art, as active forces in social change. Indeed, they dismissed them, in the parlance of the day, as "epiphenomenal." The implication of this—that the study of art and culture in general was a comparatively unimportant enterprise—under-



FIG. 1. "Tomb guardian" figure with horned head-dress from Colima, western Mexico, ceramic. Private collection. (Drawing by Eulogio Guzmán.)

standably raised the hackles of all good idealists, including most pre-Columbian art historians.

According to Gordon Willey and Jeremy Sabloff (1980:184), one of the factors that brought about these intellectual changes was "a more scientific approach" in the social sciences and some of the humanities. A probable second factor was "the change in political climate in the United States" (Willey and Sabloff 1980:184). According to these writers, it was common in the postwar 1940s and 1950s "for the spectre of Marxism to be raised by the anti-evolutionists in the heat of argument." Thus, a scholar's stand on the importance of ideas, including religious beliefs, in understanding human behavior and cultural patterns not only spoke, at the time, to the theoretical place he chose to occupy within his discipline but also implied an antimaterialist if not anti-Marxist position.

Furst's stand against the rise of materialist sentiment in the social sciences was even more clearly stated in his second study of Mesoamerican artworks, which he published in 1968. This time he relied heavily on ethnographic reports of nonagricultural peoples living in South America to interpret a group of largely unprovenienced, late-1st-millennium-B.C. Olmec male figurines with partially feline features as shamans in the process of transforming into their jaguar familiars, or

alter egos (fig. 2). In the concluding paragraph of this study, Furst (1968:170) took direct aim at what he termed "the scientific world view," to which, in his view, "we are all captive." The scientific paradigm, he complained, "makes it difficult to reach meaningfully into the metaphysical, esoteric areas of the past—or, for that matter, the present." "Could it be," Furst (1976:155) asked in a later essay, "that ideological factors played a more significant role than putative environmental limitations?"

Among the ethnographers who influenced Furst's thinking was the Austrian Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (e.g., 1961), who had demonstrated considerable interest in the impact of shamanism on the art of certain remote groups living in Colombia, where he himself lived from 1937 until his death in 1994. In 1973 Reichel-Dolmatoff began to make annual visits to the United States to teach and work with graduate students in the anthropology department at the University of California, Los Angeles (Sanmiguel 1994:290), which by that time had become home to a number of "humanist" anthropologists who shared Reichel-Dolmatoff's interest in shamanism.² Furst came to know him well and later, together with his wife Jill Furst (1981), wrote an enthusiastic review of three of Reichel-Dolmatoff's books about South American shamanism. Although Reichel-Dolmatoff (1976) often strove to elucidate the relation between art and religion, on the one hand, and ecology, on the other, the Fursts (1981:262) praised him instead for showing that "ideas are important and are capable, like faith, of moving mountains." His work served, in their view, as a welcome antidote to the current lack of attention to ideology and religion, which they attributed to "a secular and highly technologized society fascinated with economics, innovation, change, specialization, energy input and output, and what has come to be known in social science jargon as 'adaptive strategies.'" The term "adaptive strategies" alluded to the New Archaeology's view that cultures are "ecologically adaptive systems," that is, shaped by man's physical responses to his environment (Trigger 1989:278).

2. Among these "humanist" anthropologists were Furst's former dissertation adviser, Johannes Wilbert, who worked with Warao "shamans," the Moche art specialist Christopher Donnan, and then fellow graduate students Douglas Sharon, Alana Cordy-Collins, and Carlos Castaneda. In 1968 Castaneda launched a controversial career with the publication of his wildly popular *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*. The book, which was based on his dissertation, was later accused of being highly fictionalized (De Mille 1976, 1990).

Not everyone at UCLA was enthusiastic about the new model, however. In 1978 Cecelia Klein, a former student of Fraser's and by then a member of the faculty in the Department of Art, Design, and Art History (now the Department of Art History), delivered a paper entitled "Shamanitis: A Pre-Columbian Art Historical Disease." (It was not until afterward that a physician pointed out that "shamanitis," in medical terms, means "inflammation of the shaman.") Together with Josephine Volpe, the authors of the present article have since written another paper with that same title (Klein et al. n.d.).

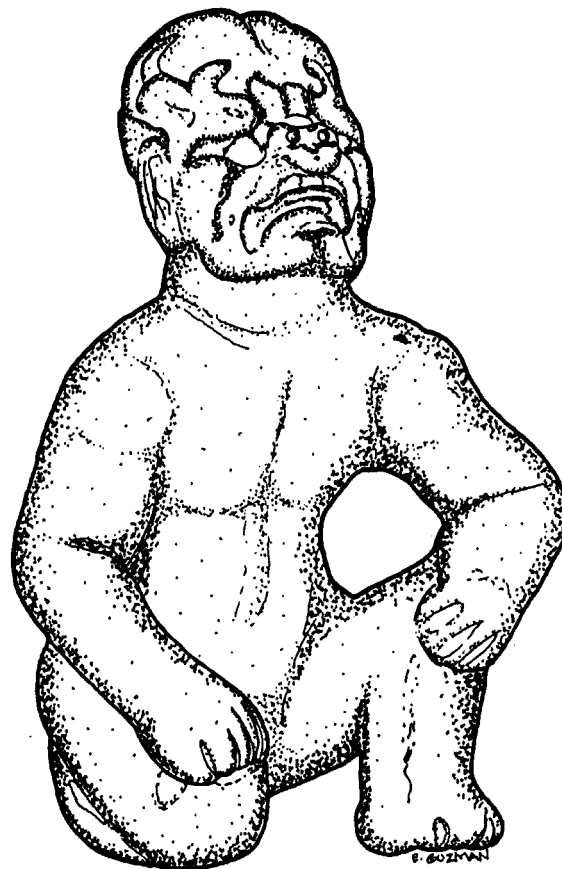


FIG. 2. Olmec kneeling man-jaguar, serpentine with traces of red pigment. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (Drawing by Eulogio Guzmán.)

MIRCEA ELIADE AND THE ARCHAIC TECHNIQUES OF ECSTASY

The work that provided the broad intellectual framework for Furst's thinking about shamanism and art, however, was written not by a social scientist but by a historian of religion. The text was Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, which was initially published in France in 1951 and appeared in English translation in 1964. By that time, Eliade, a Romanian émigré, had become the chair of the department of the history of religions at the University of Chicago and was widely recognized as a leading thinker on the topic of comparative religion.³

Because the practice of "shamanism" was best documented for 17th- through 19th-century Siberia, Eliade defined it in largely Siberian terms; it is from the Siberian Tungus that the word "shaman" (*saman*) derives. He argued (1964 [1951]:4–5) that what differentiated the sha-

3. Eliade assumed the chair of the history of religions department in 1958 and held the position until his death in 1986.

man from other magico-religious specialists was the practice of entering a state of ecstasy, or emotional intensity, which typically took the form of trance. It was in this altered state that the shaman was able to engage and control supernatural beings directly. He also discussed a wide range of "archaic" beliefs and practices that he saw as being present in many, if not all, societies practicing shamanism. These included such features as animal familiars or helpers and access to the upper and lower worlds via a Cosmic Pillar, World Tree, or Cosmic Mountain marking the *axis mundi*. All of these features represented, in his view, remnants of "a substratum of 'primitive' religious beliefs and techniques" (1964 [1951]: 6) dating back to the first migrations of peoples from Northeast Asia into the New World.

As Alice Kehoe (1996:383) has pointed out, it does not seem to have bothered Eliade that the data he used to define his "archaic substratum" largely came from ethnological reports of modern peoples. Nor did Eliade confront the possibility that many of the similarities he perceived between Northeast Asia and the Americas might reflect recent, well-documented 17th- and 18th-century contacts between Siberia and northwestern America (Kehoe 1996:381–82). Those who subscribed to his views seem to have had no problem with these facts, either. In 1976 Furst (1976:156) articulated his own belief in an "archaic substratum of hunter-gatherer Weltanschauung that extended from Paleo-Mesolithic Asia across the Americas." The German word *Weltanschauung*, "world-view," implies that sometimes very disparate peoples, regardless of time and place, can be justifiably classified together by virtue of the way they "see" the world. To many scholars working in the late 1960s and early '70s, as today, Eliade's emphasis on the workings of the "universal mind" to explain formal resemblance had tremendous appeal.⁴

The notion of an archaic shamanic substratum was predicated on the notion of extraordinary cultural continuity over a long period of time, which implied that certain (usually "primitive") peoples have long been highly conservative by nature. The pejorative effects of portraying Third and Fourth World peoples as essentially timeless and conservative have been pointed out by numerous critics of anthropology's collusion with Western colonialist and neocolonialist enterprises (Fabian 1983, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Suffice it to say here that although shamanism seemed to some to represent a "historical" explanation of current cultural semblance, Eliade's argument was anything but historical. Eliade, in fact, was intent on evading "history" as commonly defined (Allen 1998:211). He wrote frequently on such topics as "the difficulties of historicism" and "the terror of history" and argued that "archaic" peoples had no real sense of history because for them time was endlessly

4. Eliade's ahistorical model played to the same intellectual sentiments that had been earlier stirred by Sigmund Freud's concept of the unconscious, Carl Jung's notion of archetypes, and the cognitive "structures" promoted by French scholars such as the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. Fraser eventually "converted" from diffusionism to structuralism.

recycled rather than linear and progressive (Eliade 1959a [1949]). Moreover, Eliade never grounded his brand of shamanism in the specific socioeconomic realities and political pressures of the peoples he discussed. In his work shamanism seemed to float above the mundane needs, interests, and socioeconomic interactions of the people below.

Sam Gill (1998:3–19) has recently shown that Eliade's general disregard for history directly affected the way that he built his arguments, for which he drew upon multiple chronologically disparate and often contradictory sources without acknowledging that his account was a creative pastiche.⁵ Unfortunately, the failure to treat sources as historical documents, to check those sources' sources, and to determine their credibility, as Gloria Flaherty (1992:208, 15) has noted, has been characteristic of scholars writing about shamanism. The reason offered by Flaherty speaks to some of the same questionable premises mentioned above and sheds light on the ways that shamanism helps to "other" the cultures that allegedly practice it. In Flaherty's (1992:15) words, "Shamanism has not been deemed a subject worthy of history because it has often been viewed as existing only in cultures the West believed antedated by its own invention of history."

Problems with Definitions and Criteria

The problem should not, however, be understood to stem solely from the work of Eliade. The ambiguous, malleable nature of the word "shamanism," which had become popular by the end of the 18th century, was lamented as far back as 1903 by the distinguished sociologist Arnold van Gennep (2001 [1903]:51), who described it as "a strange abuse of language." Van Gennep complained, "We have inherited a certain number of very vague terms, which can be applied to anything, or even to nothing; some were created by travelers and then thoughtlessly adopted by the dilettantes of ethnopsychology, and used any which way. The most dangerous of these vague words is *shamanism*."

Little progress has been made since van Gennep wrote. As Flaherty (1992:6) has put it, the word shaman "has come to mean many things to many people." Eleanor Ott (1995:245) recently complained that the term "shamanism" can be easily slipped on, in her words, "like a second-hand sweater, even when there may be no justification for it." All of these writers imply that scholars often use the word mindlessly, either without bothering to define it or without subjecting their definition to critical examination.

5. Eliade (1959b [1957], 1973), according to Gill, constructed his version of the Australian Numbakulla "creation" story in this manner. We are grateful to Alice Kehoe for calling our attention to Gill's critique.

PROBLEMS WITH ELIADÉ'S MODEL

Since the concept of shamanism entered Mesoamerican art studies through the writings of Eliade and Furst, it is important to look carefully at the validity of their definitions and criteria for recognizing it. Eliade (1964 [1951]:3–5) was aware of the slippery nature of the concept of the shaman and, as we have seen, tried to produce a precise and workable definition of the concept. However, he clearly failed. For example, the notion of “trance,” which Eliade (pp. 4–5, 8) heralded as the definitive hallmark of shamanism, has come under scholarly attack for its imprecision.⁶ As mentioned above, Eliade (p. 5) believed that trance was a form of ecstasy proper to shamans, who specifically employed it to confront the supernatural in the otherworld. The word “trance,” however, generally refers only to an altered, somnolent state. As Roberte Hamayon (1993), who studies Siberian shamanism, points out, “‘trance’ tells us nothing about what the shaman is actually doing” and cannot, in any case, be empirically verified. Moreover, Eliade (1964 [1951]:5) himself noted that adherents of other religions employ forms of trance. Indeed, a principal duty of high-ranking Zapotec and Aztec priests was to enter into a trancelike state in order to consult directly with the gods (Townsend 1992:194; Burgóa 1989:276).

Michael Winkelman (1990:309, 311, 313, 325; 1992; 2000), who has conducted the only systematic cross-cultural comparison of magico-religious practices, finds “trance” to be present not only among those whom he identifies as “shamans” but among those whom he distinguishes as “shaman/healers,” “healers,” and “mediums” as well.⁷ Winkelman (1990:311) concludes that, as Eliade had intimated, professed altered states are common to magico-religious training and healing in all societies and at all levels. We must also wonder how meaningful our Western notion of “trance” would be to Mixe shamans in southern Mexico, who reportedly do not differentiate between the dreaming and the waking state (Lipp 1991:153). Indeed, Hamayon (1993:7) notes that “shamanistic societies do not make use of native terms homologous to ‘trance’” and “do not refer to a change of state to designate the shaman’s ritual action.” She concludes from this that “it even seems that the very notion of ‘trance’ is irrelevant for them. When asked whether the shaman is or is not ‘in trance,’ they are for the most part unable to answer.” Moreover, some individuals considered by scholars to be shamans, such as the *tan’gol*

in southwestern Korea, never enter a trance or experience ecstasy (Keith Howard, cited by Keightley 1998:771 n. 28).⁸

FURST'S CRITERIA FOR SHAMANISM IN THE AMERICAS

Furst quickly realized that Eliade’s criteria for identifying a person as a shaman did not always match the portrait of the typical American curer.⁹ As Kehoe (1999:4–5) has noted, Reichel-Dolmatoff’s archetypal shaman in Colombia had “little in common” with the classic Siberian shaman described by Eliade. The hallucinatory plants reportedly so fundamental to South American shamanism, for example, are of little or no importance for the Tungus, and narcotics, according to Eliade (1964 [1951]:401), arrived in that region only recently. Since Furst saw the use of hallucinogens to achieve a shamanic state of ecstasy as being considerably more important in the Americas, he reordered and modified Eliade’s criteria for shamanism to fit the New World data (Anzures y Bolaño 1987:29).

Furst (1976) published his list of criteria in an article titled “Shamanistic Survivals in Mesoamerican Religion.” Rather than focus on shamanic techniques, as Eliade had, Furst prioritized certain cosmological features, such as a tiered universe joined at the center by a World Mountain or World Tree, surmounted by a bird, marking the *axis mundi*. He also included among these criteria an animistic environment in which a lifelike force is intrinsic to natural objects and elements, the importance of hallucinogenic plants, and a fundamental emphasis on transformation, especially human-animal transformation. Eliade had cited none of these factors as being universal among or unique to shamanistic societies.

PROBLEMS WITH FURST'S MODEL

Despite Furst’s attempt to redefine shamanism in terms of specifically American religious beliefs and practices, the new criteria he produced have proved to be as unreliable as Eliade’s. The latter repeatedly insisted that the concepts of a universe divided horizontally into an upper world, a terrestrial middle world, and an underworld, the three tiers penetrated by a World Tree or Mountain, were virtually universal and predated the rise of shamanism (Eliade 1958:3; 1964 [1951]:3, 7, 37, n. 6,

6. See Atkinson (1992) for additional critical responses to Eliade’s term “ecstasy,” as well as to the word “trance.”

7. For Winkelman one of the few features that distinguish “shamans” from other kinds of religious practitioners is their association with nomadic hunting and gathering societies. In a 1982 article based on a paper delivered at Skidmore College in 1975, Esther Pasztory, a former student of Fraser and now professor of pre-Columbian art at Columbia University, pointed out that monumental and technically complicated art is invariably absent among hunters and gatherers. Ironically, as Pasztory (2001:18) complains in a recent essay, some Mesoamericanists have cited parts of her article as evidence that shamanism influenced certain monumental and refined works of art in more complex societies.

8. The only personal traits that Winkelman sees as distinguishing “shamans” from other religious personnel are “shamanic soul-flight” and personal “charisma” (cf. Lewis 1981). Both of these, however, occur outside the boundaries of “shamanism” (Kehoe 1996:378; Eliade 1964 [1951]:481). The same may be said of the so-called divine mandate (Kehoe 1994:5; 1996:378; Rose 1970:26–29). In any event, the position of shaman is inherited from a parent or grandparent in many Mesoamerican societies.

9. William Madsen (1955:48–49) had already observed that, in Mesoamerica at least, Eliade’s (1964 [1951]:84) criterion for a shaman as one who has direct communication with supernaturals through dreams, visions, or spirit possession is too broad, since it can apply to laymen and “witches” as well as curers.

264, 266–74, 492). After all, Christians also recognize a three-tiered cosmos, and animism has long been known to characterize many small-scale societies, whether or not they have “shamans.” In the Americas, the use of hallucinogens is not restricted to or required by all of the individuals who have been labeled as “shamans.” Among the Mixe, as among the Jívaro of Ecuador, for example, hallucinogenic plants are available to all, and everyone knows how to use them (Lipp 1991:188; Harner 1972:154). In fact, most Mixe practitioners make no professional use of these plants, and when they do it is their patients, not they, who ingest them (Lipp 1991:149–50). In Peru today, curers who use a brew containing the hallucinogenic San Pedro cactus to effect an altered state often share the concoction with their patients (Sharon 1978:37, 45, 47).

Furst, in short, redefined shamanism in terms of traits that other scholars, including Eliade, had shown to be too general or too variable in distribution to be identified exclusively with it. Nonetheless, most Mesoamericanists trying to “explain” pre-Columbian art in terms of shamanism have drawn on Furst’s criteria rather than Eliade’s as evidence of the shaman’s presence. In doing so, moreover, they typically have focused on only one or several of Furst’s criteria, usually failing to mention whether any of the others are also present. The criterion these writers most commonly cite—the ability to make direct contact with the supernatural by means of “ecstasy”—is, as we have seen, highly problematic.

THE SHAMANIC UNIVERSE

Furst’s emphasis on cosmological beliefs as diagnostics of shamanism has remained entrenched in pre-Columbian art studies to the point of becoming virtually reified in recent years. *Maya Cosmos. 3,000 Years on the Shaman’s Path* (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993) epitomizes this tendency to associate a particular cosmology with shamanism. By the time of the book’s publication, the torch for shamanistic explanations of Mesoamerican art had passed to the Mayanists, and in particular to David Freidel and Linda Schele. Schele had started out as a painter but subsequently earned her doctorate in Latin American studies at the University of Texas, Austin, and later taught in the art history department there. Freidel, an anthropologist who frequently collaborated with Schele, teaches at Southern Methodist University. According to the “personal note from the authors” at the beginning of *Maya Cosmos*, it was Freidel who had interested Schele and Parker in shamanism (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:12). He had become fascinated with the subject during his “student days” after reading Eliade’s book on shamanism, which “convinced him that shamanism is a very old, coherent, and broadly diffused mental paradigm.”

By the time that Freidel and Schele began to publish on shamanism in Maya art, the New Archaeology, with its materialist emphasis on ecological adaptation and political competition, had gained a firm foothold in Mesoamerican—particularly Mayan—archaeology. More-

over, beginning in the 1970s, social and cultural anthropologists had had to confront a theoretical bogeyman of their own: cultural materialism. As articulated by its primary advocate, Marvin Harris (1979:ix), cultural materialism was “based on the simple premise that human social life is a response to the practical problems of earthly existence.” As did the New Archaeology, it aimed for a scientific way of understanding human society and identified material processes as determinant. Although Harris rejected the historical and dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels, his acknowledgment of the overall importance of Marx’s theories of social evolution caused many humanists, as well as social scientists, to shudder (pp. ix–x).

Freidel’s reaction to these new developments was clearly articulated at length in a 1981 article titled “Civilization as a State of Mind: The Cultural Evolution of the Lowland Maya.” Freidel argued, on the basis of what was known at the time about the p-Classic Maya, that culture was an independent causal factor in the rise of civilization and the state. His position was that “social relations, subsistence practices, and technology (proposed prime movers in cultural ecological explanations) exist and affect society only as they are ‘symbolically constituted’ within the shared reality of that society” (p. 189) and that “the material expressions of religion and ideology are far from being epiphenomenal” (p. 191).

Schele similarly rejected the evolutionist, materialist premises of the increasingly numerous New Archaeologists working in the Maya area, speaking out strongly at several professional conferences against what she called their “Marxist” approach. But Schele was also battling a related dragon from within her own discipline, for what had come to be known as social and Marxist art history had begun to make its presence felt in Mesoamerican studies. In their rebuttal to Cecelia Klein’s (1988) criticism of their catalog (1986) for the exhibition “Blood of Kings,” Schele and Mary Ellen Miller (1988) rejected as a “Western, Marxist presumption” Klein’s contention that elite “masterpieces” tell us little about—and may indeed distort our understanding of—Maya commoners. In its stead, Schele and Miller argued that “Maya art and the messages encoded in it were engaged with Maya society at all levels.” This view was declared to be “the fundamental issue” in *Maya Cosmos*, where Freidel, Schele, and Parker (1993:48) expressed their concern that “if this great spiritual chasm between [Maya] elite and commoner existed, then the great artistic and intellectual achievements, the massive public construction efforts in the hundreds of ruined urban centers, must be regarded as the bitter fruit of the sustained oppression of the majority by the elite minority.” Their own work, they wrote, convinced them of the opposite: “that a unified view of Maya ritual and cosmology has endured for at least two millennia.”

Key to Freidel, Schele, and Parker’s arguments were Maya beliefs in the sacred trees and mountains that they identified as variant forms of the *axis mundi* providing access to the Classic Maya upper and lower worlds. Their interpretation of the crosslike object carved on the lid of

the ruler Pakal's sarcophagus at Palenque as a World Tree was inspired by a glyphic inscription in the Temple of the Cross at the same site, which they read as *wakah kan*, meaning "six sky" or "raised up sky" (Schele and Freidel 1990:66, 426 n. 8; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:57). Their argument that certain monumental Maya temple pyramids were symbolic mountains associated with the creation of the world and serving as the source of human sustenance was based upon inscriptions that relate the word for mountain, *witz*, to specific Mayan structures (Schele and Freidel 1990:71–72, 427 n. 16). The most commonly cited example of a "Witz pyramid" is Structure H Sub-3 at Waxaktun, Guatemala. This complex features huge modeled stucco masks on both sides of the central stairway that, according to Schele and Freidel (p. 137), depicted "a great Witz Monster sitting in fish-laden primordial waters with vegetation growing from the sides of its head" (fig. 3). "In principle," they claimed, "all Maya pyramids were Witz Monsters" (p. 439 n. 22).

In addition, these buildings, like the World Tree, hypothetically served as Cosmic Portals, giving the Maya ruler access to the otherworlds and the supernatural (e.g., Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:138–52). The danger of incautious use of cosmology as evidence of shamanism is exemplified by Brian Stross's (1994:159) interpretation of a Classic Maya pectoral as a symbol of such a portal. When the king wore the pectoral, Stross argued, he could

pass through the Cosmic Portal into the underworld to converse with the ancestral deities. For Stross (pp. 159, 166) the ruler was a "state shaman" and the portal was part of a "shamanic universe." Stross based his argument on a previous identification of quadrifoil forms in Classic Maya paintings and sculptures as places of passage between this world and the otherworld (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:215, 352, 366–67). However, the pectoral that Stross analyzed does not assume a truly quadrifoil form either wholly or in part. Moreover, although Eliade (1964 [1951]:482–86) recognized an earthly portal open to the upper and lower worlds as a frequent component of shamanic ideologies, he did not identify it as a diagnostic of shamanism. Notions of a Cosmic Portal, he noted (1958:3; 1964 [1951]:266–69, 270, 272), are, like the World Tree and the World Mountain, ancient and widespread throughout the world, having played a role in both Christianity and Islam. Thus, even if Stross's identification of the pectoral as a symbolic Cosmic Portal were better-founded, it would not support his assumption that a ruler who may have worn the pectoral was necessarily a shaman.

HUMAN-ANIMAL TRANSFORMATION

Beginning with Furst's identification of certain Olmec figurines as shamans in the act of transforming into their jaguar familiars, Mesoamericanists have been preoccu-

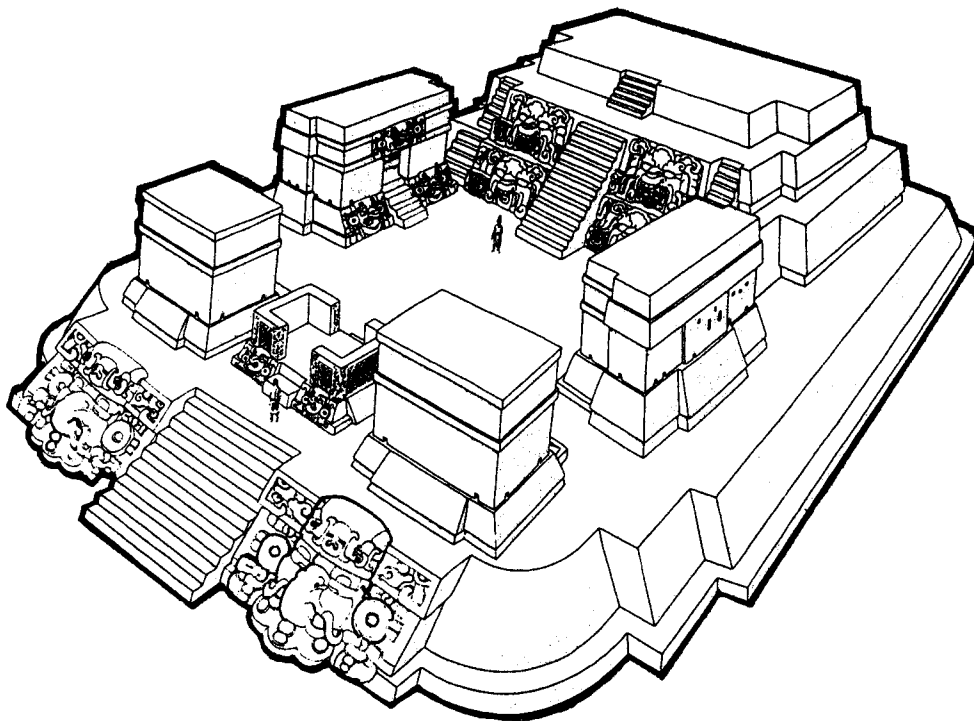


FIG. 3. Waxaktun, Str. H Sub-3, showing locations of stucco Maya *witz* (mountain) masks. (Modification by Eulogio Guzmán of drawing by Rutledge and Morgan in Houston [1998:81, fig. 18], reproduced by permission.)

ped with the theme of human-animal transformation. Their interest received a boost in 1989 with publication of an article by F. Kent Reilly, then a graduate student at the University of Texas, Austin. Although he was earning his degree in Latin American studies, Reilly had been working closely with Schele and was eventually to submit a dissertation entitled “Visions to Another World: Art, Shamanism, and Political Power in Middle Formative Mesoamerica” (Reilly 1994). Reilly’s article, “The Shaman in Transformation Pose: A Study of the Theme of Rulership in Olmec Art,” focused on an unprovenanced figurine in the Princeton Art Museum that he identified as a shaman in the process of turning into an animal (presumably a jaguar) under the influence of a hallucinogen. The novel part of Reilly’s argument was his identification of these transforming shamans as Olmec rulers who, according to him, based their right to rule on their personal charisma and professed supernatural powers. His evidence for the identification of these figures as rulers consisted of traces of red cinnabar found on the Princeton figure and several other “transformation” figurines, red cinnabar having been found at several Olmec sites in elite burials. His opinion that the Princeton figurine specifically represented what he and others have called a “shaman-king” hinged on his speculation that its now missing eye inlays were made of a shiny stone such as pyrite or magnetite. These, when in place, would allegedly have expressed the figure’s “state of self-reflection” and created “the effect of spirituality.” The subject’s “charismatic personality,” Reilly argued, was revealed by the features of its “fine head,” while its trancelike condition was implied by the poisonous toad, a member of the species *Bufo marinus*, incised into the top of its head. Bones of *Bufo marinus* had been found by Michael Coe and Richard Diehl (1980:383) at the Olmec site of San Lorenzo, and there are reports of the use of poisonous toad secretions to induce trances among modern tropical-forest peoples in South America (Schultes 1972:28n; P. Furst 1972).

Scant as solid scholarly evidence may be here, Reilly related the subject of the Princeton figure to the ancient Shang emperors of China, who, according to the Sinologist K. C. Chang (1988:44–55), served the Shang state as head shamans. Reilly was clearly unaware of David Keightley’s then unpublished critique of Chang’s thesis, an argument that has since been published (Keightley 1998; cf. Kehoe 1999:1–2). Nor did Reilly engage the still unresolved question of whether the Shang and Olmec polities were comparable in size and organization. According to most Olmec archaeologists, current evidence for that polity points toward a less complex form of government, a chiefdom (Diehl 1989:26–30) or, at best, a small kingdom (Clark 1997:215). Experts disagree about the Shang, but there are good reasons for thinking that it was a territorial state (Trigger 1999).¹⁰

10. Current estimates of the size of the largest Olmec site, San Lorenzo, place it at about 690 hectares, with a population of between 10,500 and 17,500 (Clark 1997:216–17). While the full extent of the largest Shang sites, the capital Anyang and the city of Zheng

The positive reception granted Furst and Reilly’s efforts to identify Olmec figures as shamans transforming into their animal familiars encouraged other scholars to transfer the model to other parts of Mesoamerica. In their discussion of certain Zapotec relief sculptures at Monte Albán the archaeologist Marilyn Masson and the art historian Heather Orr (1998:166)—both trained at the University of Texas, Austin—cite only three of Furst’s criteria for identifying a shaman: human-animal transformation, a three-tiered universe, and the ability to pass among the levels of that universe during trance. However, exemplifying scholars’ tendency to pick and choose only those shamanic criteria that suit their material, they discussed only two of these—human-animal transformation and magical flight. Evidence of a belief in a three-tiered universe among the Zapotec was not presented. Masson and Orr identified certain figures that appeared to be part human and part animal as royal shamans, or “shaman-kings,” each of whom had “transformed” into his animal familiar or *nagual*. That these figures might represent warriors dressed in the costumes of their military orders was rejected, and the possibility that the costumes referred to the name of the wearer or his lineage (as do certain animal costumes in the Mixtec historical manuscripts and some Maya reliefs) was not considered. As support for their claim that the Zapotecs also believed in magical flight, Masson and Orr pointed to other Zapotec reliefs, many found at other sites, in which figures assumed a horizontal—therefore, to their minds, “flying”—position. Although some of these “flying” figures had previously been identified as ancestors, an identification that would not be incompatible with that of shamans, no further evidence that they were shamans was offered.

THE NAGUAL AND THE WAY

Masson and Orr, moreover, like most scholars who use the concept of shamanism to understand Mesoamerican art, failed to confront the historical and historiographical problems presented by use of the term *nagual*, which comes from the Nahuatl language spoken primarily by the contact-period Aztec of Central Mexico. Today, *nagual* is used not just in Central Mexico but also by people living in a number of places in Mexico and Guatemala where Aztec influence was felt before the conquest but, as in Oaxaca, Nahuatl is not spoken. There it is most often used to refer to certain exceptional persons believed capable of transforming into animals for nefarious

Zhou, has not been determined, the walled center of the latter alone covers an area roughly half the size of San Lorenzo in its entirety; the bulk of the populace lived outside these walls in an area approximately nine times the size of the center. Thus, Zheng Zhou was roughly four times the size of San Lorenzo. Moreover, unlike the Olmec, the Shang had several major urban centers existing simultaneously (Lothar van Falkenhausen, personal communication, 2001; Trigger 1999:53).

purposes—not, as Masson and Orr used the term, to indicate a ruler's animal familiar.¹¹

Aztec specialists are still uncertain what *nagual* or *nahualli* meant to the pre-Hispanic Aztec. Alfredo López Austin (1988:372) has concluded that, among the Aztec, the term referred not to a person who could literally turn into an animal but rather to one who could deliberately release or separate himself from one of his three "souls."¹² George Foster (1944:95) had earlier argued that, since the conquest-period Aztecs themselves had no concept of an animal soul companion or "co-essence," the word *nagual* must eventually have become attached to the southern Mesoamerican concept of an animal alter ego. According to him, this confusion (pp. 85, 103) was probably due to the fact that 16th-century Spaniards tended to use the word *nagual* as a "convenient handle to describe what were actually a wide variety of unrelated customs." The moral character of the *nagual* changed with the passage of time as well. In the decades immediately following the Spanish conquest, *nana-hualtin* (pl. of *nahualli*) could be good as well as bad (Sahagún 1950–82:31), but over time the word *nahualli* came to be synonymous with "sorcerer." Julian Pitt-Rivers (1970:197–98, 200) suggests that Spaniards could understand the *nagual* only as a malevolent being because in Europe it was witches, seen as consorts of the Devil, who were believed capable of turning into animals.

To make matters worse, many subsequent scholars have used the word *nagual* to describe phenomena for which the texts actually provide indigenous words, in the process often mistakenly attributing to the local entity the *nagual's* transforming powers (Foster 1944:102).¹³ Foster provides example of ethnographers writing about the Zapotec, who (like Masson and Orr) use the word *nagual* instead of the indigenous words recorded by earlier observers.¹⁴ The confusion this can cause has

11. Jacinto de la Serna (1898:297), writing in 1656, said that *nagual* comes from *nahualltia*, which he translated as "to hide, to conceal, to mask, to cloak, to masquerade, to disguise oneself."

12. This soul was usually called *ihiyotl*. Once separated from it, the individual proceeded to cover the soul with some other being (López Austin 1988:372). The name *nahualli*, López Austin suggests, applied not only to the person to whom the soul belonged, as well as the being that received the soul once it had been released, but also to the *ihiyotl* itself. This rather complicated hypothesis is contradicted by Jill Furst (1998:25), who suggests that the *nahualli* may have been a kind of fourth soul among the Aztec that assumed an alternate physical—often animal—form. For her the *nagual/nahualli* had nothing to do with the *ihiyotl*.

13. Eliade (1964 [1951]:89) did not help matters, for he confused the Mexican and Central American *nagual* with the concept of a shaman's helping spirit, which usually takes an animal form in Asia. In Mesomerica today, the word *nagual*, to our knowledge, never refers to a helping spirit.

14. In some places, the *nagual*, as an animal co-essence, is also referred to as a *tonal*. Another Nahuatl word from Central Mexico, *tonal* or *tonalli* originally referred to a kind of soul housed within a person's body. Foster (1944:89) suggested that natives outside of Central Mexico, perhaps even prior to the conquest, confused the *nagual* with the *tonal*. The resulting "*nagual/tonal*" hybrid appeared for the first time in the 17th-century testimony of Aztec descendants themselves, as recorded by Hernando Ruíz de Alarcón and Jacinto de la Serna (Durand and Durand-Forest 1970).

spread to studies of Classic Maya images, in which the word *nagual* is often used interchangeably with the Maya word *way*. Stephen Houston and David Stuart (1989a) have argued that a key glyph (T539) in Classic Maya inscriptions reads as *way*, which today means "sleep" or "dream" but which they have preferred to read as "co-essence" (see also Grube n.d.). In some Maya areas the term "co-essence" connotes an individual's soul-companion or alter ego.¹⁵ Accordingly, these writers identify the strange, hybrid figures on a painted vase from Altar de Sacrificios as possible manifestations of these spiritual entities, an interpretation extended to many other enigmatic beings in Classic Maya imagery, including the large "vision serpents" on the famous stone-carved lintels of Yaxchilan. The idea has caught on with other Mayanists (e.g., Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:192; Reents-Budet 1994:17, 155, 272).¹⁶ Its fragility, however, is implied by Inga Calvin's (1997) study of the inscriptions accompanying some of these figures, which suggest to her that the figures do not represent co-essences at all. Rather, she suggests, they refer to lineage ancestors and certain locations associated with them. It follows from this that we still do not know exactly what the words *nagual* and *way* connoted prior to the conquest.

Why Is Shamanism So Popular?

If there is no single, universally valid definition of the word "shaman," it is often impossible, when one is mentioned, to know exactly what that person did or does. As Keightley (1983) has put it, "one scholar's shaman is not always another's." Although this situation necessarily frustrates attempts at scholarly rigor, we suggest that this is precisely why so many scholars still cling so fiercely to the term. In our opinion, it is the very vagueness of the notion of the shaman that makes it so attractive to so many scholars, lay people, advertisers, tour guides, museum curators, and nation-states. By allowing us to avoid certain other words and categories that would force us to confront the historical, social, and cultural specifics of the peoples in question, the words "shaman" and "shamanism" make scholars' lives easier. In so doing, however, they foster the false impression that these peoples are socially and culturally very similar to one another, internally homogeneous and harmonious, and preoccupied with the spiritual and magic. At the same time, they imply that the religious and medical specialists in all of these societies lack scientifically sound medical knowledge and exert little sociopolitical influence. In what follows, we examine some of the religious, med-

15. The "T" in T539 refers to J. E. S. Thompson, who assigned numbers to each of the Maya glyphs known at the time. In Thompson's (1962:152–53) classification the *way* glyph is number 539.

16. John Monaghan (1998:142), on the basis of work with the Mixtec and the highland Maya, relates the concept of the co-essence to the notion of a person's destiny and identifies it as an aspect of the self or personhood. To date we know of no single Maya glyph that represents "transformation."

ical, and political terms that the words “shaman” and “shamanism” often replace and argue that it is precisely by means of this avoidance of these terms that we have been able to create and preserve our Mesoamerican “Other.”

SHAMANS, PRIESTS, AND MAGICIANS

If we see certain individuals as primarily religious practitioners, for example, the label “shaman” allows us to avoid referring to them as priests. Although, to our knowledge, no Mesoamericanist has ever seriously tried to formulate a theoretical distinction between shamans and priests, the Plains Indian specialist Robert Lowie (1963 [1954]:179) took up the problem in 1954. Lowie defined a shaman as one who “acquires his status through a personal communication by supernatural beings,” whereas a priest need not have “this face-to-face relationship with the spirit world,” instead deriving his expertise from group ritual through formal training. Since this seems to be the most commonly accepted basis for the categorical distinction between shamans and priests, it is significant that, in practice, Lowie encountered difficulty in applying it to the Pawnee “medicine men” he had studied. Although these individuals were called to their office by the thunder spirits and derived their powers from animal protectors, they were trained and essentially “ordained” by Pawnee “medicine men.” Lowie (1963 [1954]:179) had to admit, therefore, that these men were shamans who were “likewise priests.” Similarly, Gerald Weiss, in his 1973 article on the personnel conducting the Campa *ayahuasca* ceremony in Peru, had to acknowledge that the behavior of the individuals he worked with combined features of both shamans and priests. And Barbara Tedlock (1992:47, 52–53) has concluded that Quiché “daykeepers” and “mother-fathers” in Momostenango, Guatemala, are best described as “shaman-priests” and “priest-shamans,” respectively.¹⁷ These examples parallel Winkelman’s (1990) insertion of the evolutionary categories of “shaman healers,” “healers,” and “mediums” between those of “shaman” and “priest” because he, too, could locate no clear-cut functional difference between the two (see also Keightley 1998:770).

If leading group ceremonies is a criterion of priestly status, then it should be noted that most Mixe healers, part-time specialists who work independently with individual clients, nonetheless come together on occasion to officiate at major feasts and crises (Lipp 1991:149). A comparable observation may be made of the Zinacantan Tzotzil *h’lol* (seer), who is typically described in the literature as a shaman (e.g., Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:127). While it is true that the *h’iloletik* (pl. of *h’lol*) effect individual cures by means of supernaturally derived powers, they frequently also come together to con-

duct ceremonies on behalf of various social groups (Vogt 1966). By excluding the word “priest” from their descriptions of these individuals’ roles, scholars not only emphasize the difference between them and Christian religious authorities but also misrepresent the range, diversity, and nature of their roles.

Why do scholars persist in repressing the priestly and social dimension of the shaman’s occupation? As we have seen, the Mesoamerican shaman is often said to operate by means of “magic”; he or she is, in other words, what many anthropologists call a “magico-religious practitioner.” However, Keith Thomas (1997:41), in his monumental study of the decline of magic in the Old World, pointed out that the belief that earthly events can be influenced by supernatural intervention “was [and is] not in itself a magical one.” Moreover, even if magic were a major strategy of Mesoamerican curers and diviners, Roman Catholicism itself, as Thomas (pp. 46–50) noted, has always depended heavily upon magic; there is no major difference in that regard between native specialists and Catholic priests and clerics.¹⁸ Indeed, rather than deny that magic existed and was effective, the church countered the magic of the Middle Ages and Renaissance with its own forms of magic (Thomas 1997:41, 48–49; see also Malinowski 1965:105).

Michael Taussig (1987:142–43) has eloquently argued that the colonial church in Latin America, as a consequence of its ethnocentric assumption that Indians were particularly prone to magic, actually imposed upon them their reputation for religious magic. Taussig has come as close as anyone to clarifying the motive for this process:

Doubtless this “it” we call magic . . . existed in third-world countries before European colonization. But equally surely this “it” from that point on contained as a constitutive force the power of colonial differentiation such that magic became a gathering point for Otherness in a series of racial and class differentiations embedded in the distinctions made between Church and magic, and science and magic. Here magic exists not so much as an “it” entity true to itself but as an imaginary Other to the imagined absoluteness of God and science.

It seems to us that this ability to create a starkly different, magician “Other” underlies shamanism’s appeal to Mesoamericanists. In their introduction to *Maya Cosmos*, Freidel, Schele, and Parker (1993:10–11, 34) state explicitly that what they seek to lay out for the reader is evidence of “a spiritual and magical world,” a “per-

17. Be this as it may, scholars writing about Mayan art seldom follow Tedlock’s lead, preferring to refer to Maya daykeepers simply as “shamans” (e.g., Stross 1994:161, 1n; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:30–33, 55–57, 129–31, 184–85, 219–22).

18. Jesús Candelario Cosío, a Huichol acquaintance in Taupurie Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlan, Jalisco, told Eulogio Guzmán that, although Huichol religious specialists are not, strictly speaking shamans, he prefers the label to that of priest. The reason: he does not want his people to be compared to Christians. Peter Furst (1994) reports that his principal Huichol informant, Ramón Medina Silva, who in the 1960s was an aspiring *mara’akáme*, had picked up the word “shaman” from a local priest who had studied anthropology in the United States and begun to refer to himself as a shaman because, since the priest pronounced the word as *shamán*, he assumed that it was the Spanish word for his own religious title.

vasively spiritual" way of life. According to them, the Maya world to which they promise to introduce their readers is "a world of living magic" that has thrived in the Maya area since earliest times. That shamanism feeds a romantic nostalgia for a supposedly more spiritual, less materialistic and rational past has been noted many times. Taussig (1987:168) and Kehoe (1996:377) both recognized it as a modern form of primitivism, a myth that, as we have seen, today appeals as much to some academics working in urban universities as it does to New Age gurus and "wannabe" shamans (Kehoe 1996: 384, 386). The image of the shaman as a magician feeds that myth. As John Middleton (1987:82) noted, the concept of magic "has almost always been thought to mark a distinction between Western and so-called primitive cultures, or between Christian and non-Christian religions." He cited Lévi-Strauss's (1962) contention that both magic and religion are subjective notions used by Westerners, in Middleton's words, "to mark off 'outside' thought as different from our own 'scientific' thought" (Middleton 1987:88).

THE SHAMAN AND THE DOCTOR

To preserve this constructed "Other," however, it seems to be equally important to distinguish the shaman from the physician. Although some scholars (e.g., Thomas and Humphrey 1994:4; Graham 1998:192) have lamented academia's preoccupation with the healing role of the shaman, few protest or explore the implications of the fact that scholars avoid standard Western medical nomenclature when they write of "shamans." When scholars identify a native who cures the sick as a shaman, in other words, they do not have to recognize him or her as a doctor or physician—that is, as a person who practices medicine rather than healing by means of magic.

Why do we want to make this distinction between the native healer and the doctor or physician, between what native curers practice and what we call "medicine"? We suggest, following Lévi-Strauss (1962), that the real distinction being made here is between shamanism and Western science. One factor shaping this desire to differentiate the Mesoamerican curer from the licensed doctor has to do with the age-old antagonism between "folk" medicine and the establishment. Keith Thomas (1997: 637) points out that during the Counter-Reformation, in particular, the church saw European folk healers, along with "magicians" and astrologers, as its "deadly rivals" because these individuals competed for the privilege of responding to misfortune. A similar competition occurred among those who cured the body rather than the soul. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English (1973) note that, during the Renaissance, Italian physicians, who were typically of privileged birth and had attended urban universities, saw themselves as being in competition with unschooled curers. Many of these "folk" healers were ultimately denounced as witches by these doctors and their patrons, an act that resulted in the former's appearance before the dreaded Inquisition. This Old World antagonism between doctor and folk healer was

brought to the New World by the Spaniards, who in both Mexico and Peru used the Inquisition to accuse and punish natives who persisted in using indigenous cures.¹⁹

In the case of Mexico, the irony, according to Bernard Ortiz de Montellano (1976:23), is that "at the time of the Conquest, health and medicine in Tenochtitlan [the Aztec capital] were at least on a par [with] and superior in some aspects to that of the Spanish conquerors." Ortiz de Montellano (pp. 2–25) argues that, at contact, the empirical aspect of Aztec medicine, which he says scholars have consistently underrated, was in fact substantial. Sixteenth-century sources indicate that the ideal Aztec healer was one who tested his remedies, for example, and that the Aztec distinguished between healers whose cures were effective and healers whose cures were not. Conversely, Ortiz de Montellano (1976, 1989) points out, European medicine, which later borrowed heavily from Aztec herbalism, at the time contained a considerable magical component, much of which the invaders probably introduced into Native American medical practice.²⁰

The ready meshing and reciprocal influences of European and Aztec magical concepts and empirical knowledge are surely due in part to the high degree of correspondence between native and European beliefs regarding disease at the time of contact. In medieval and Renaissance Europe, as in the Americas before Columbus, healing was, at least in part, a religious matter. By 1477, the Spanish monarch Charles I had granted professional *ensalmos*, or prayer curers, the same status as doctors and surgeons (Ortiz de Montellano 1976:26). Moreover, like many New World curers today, European healers believed that disease was a foreign presence in the body that had to be removed, usually by conjuring or exorcism (Thomas 1997:182). In the early 16th century the physician and alchemist Paracelsus, who established the role of chemistry in European medicine, claimed that witches could introduce disease by shooting a foreign object into the skin of a victim, a belief also documented in the New World after the conquest (Ortiz de Montellano 1976:24). Like Mexican priests and curers, European witches also covered their bodies with a potent ointment that gave them magical powers (Brinton 1894, Cervantes 1994, Ehrenreich and English 1973).²¹ Similarly, some European healers used hallucinogenic plants and were believed to fly through the air, go into semitrance in order to divine, have animal familiars, and seek assistance from spirit helpers—in their case, imps, devils, ghosts, and fairies (Aguirre Beltrán 1963:110–14; Thomas and Humphrey 1994:215, 445–46, 606–8; Harner 1973:

19. On the persecution of indigenous healers following the conquest, see, e.g., Behar (1989), Greenleaf (1969), Klor de Alva (1991), Griffiths (1996:68–93), and Silverblatt (1987:159–96).

20. Europeans also believed that epidemics were divine punishment for human sins, that specific illnesses were best cured by an appeal to specific saints, and that certain prayers could effect certain cures.

21. Engelhardt (1992) argues that the application of a dark substance to parts of the faces and bodies of ceramic figurines in Classic-period Veracruz that she thinks represent "shamans" indicates that this practice began well before the conquest.



FIG. 4. "Witches' Sabbath," showing European witches brewing magical potion and riding a goat, symbol of Satan. (Woodcut by Hans Baldung Grien, 1510, Strassburg, from Grien [1981:116, fig. 18A], reproduced by permission.)

140–47) (fig. 4). The parallels between conquest-period indigenous New World curing practices and contemporary European folk healing are so striking that it is, in our opinion, simply impossible to justify making a qualitative semantic distinction between them.

THE SHAMAN AS POLITICAL ACTOR

The tendency to play down the medical accomplishments of Mesoamerican healers parallels the common

practice of representing native religious leaders as operating outside of the political arena. Many ethnographic studies of shamans even in relatively noncentralized societies show that shamans often exercise, directly or indirectly, considerable political power (e.g., Dole 1973, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976). Evon Vogt (1966:365–66), for example, viewed as symbolic expressions of land and water rights the ceremonies conducted within local lineage or waterhole groups by the *h'iloletik* of Zinacantan.



FIG. 5. Zinacantan *h'iloletik* and elders praying during a year-renewal ceremony. (Photo by John Early in Vogt [1976:185, fig. 48], reproduced by permission.)

Because the larger “year-renewal” ceremonies held in the ceremonial center involved *h'iloletik* from each of the outlying hamlets as well as those from the center, Vogt (p. 367) saw them as “a symbolic way of relating the outlying *parajes* [hamlets] to the tribal gods in the ceremonial center” (fig. 5). In these ways, the *h'iloletik* played the political role of integrating and maintaining their communities.

Scholars’ resistance to the political role of Mesoamerican religious practitioners can also be seen in the coinage “shaman-king.” As we have seen, this term has been applied, on the basis of Olmec and Zapotec imagery, to Maya rulers thought by some to have claimed the ability to transform into a powerful animal familiar and thereby make direct contact with the supernatural. The argument’s most recent proponent is Julia Kappelman, a former student of Schele, who has transferred the notion of the shaman-king to certain figures carved in relief on Late Pre-Classic and Proto-Classic stone monuments at the Maya sites of Kaminaljuyu and Izapa.

Kappelman (1997; 2001:88–95) notes, for example, that on Izapa Stelae 2 and 4, elaborately garbed men, whom she presumes to be Izapan rulers, seem to have wings attached to their shoulders or arms and wear a headdress shaped like the head of a bird. This, she concludes, implies that they are transforming into a bird. She identifies this bird as “the nagual, or animal spirit companion, of the primordial shaman Itzamna” (p. 91), a powerful deity in the northern lowlands at the time of the conquest. As

partial support for her argument, Kappelman offers John Justeson and Terrence Kaufmann’s (1993, 1996) translation of a passage in the lengthy—possibly Zoque—inscription on the coeval stela found at La Mojarra in southern Veracruz. There the impressive figure of a winged ruler is described, according to these epigraphers, as having been arrayed as a macaw, presumably the same macaw as the one named Vucub Ka’uix in the Quiché Popul Vuh and known to students of Classic Maya art as the Principal Bird Deity (fig. 6). The La Mojarra figure is also described in the adjacent text as a shape-shifter, according to Kappelman (p. 97) yet another indication of shamanic transformation. Kappelman’s interpretation relates to Schele and Miller’s (1986:108–9) earlier identification of a curious plant that rises from the headdress of the figure on Kaminaljuyu Stela 11 as the World Tree. In their opinion, this shows that the king was identifying himself with the *axis mundi* and the Cosmic Portal and that he was professing to be able to access the otherworld by means of them.²²

Although, in the present state of knowledge, we have no way of knowing whether anyone—including the Maya ruler—took any of these claims literally, rulers in

22. Mark Graham (1998:196–97) has reinterpreted the plant on the head of the figure in Kaminaljuyu Stela 11 as a conch shell sprouting vegetation as a symbol of natural fertility and growth, thereby marking the ruler as a provider and guardian of fertility. He makes it clear (p. 201), however, that he accepts the idea that the figure is a ruler represented as the World Tree.

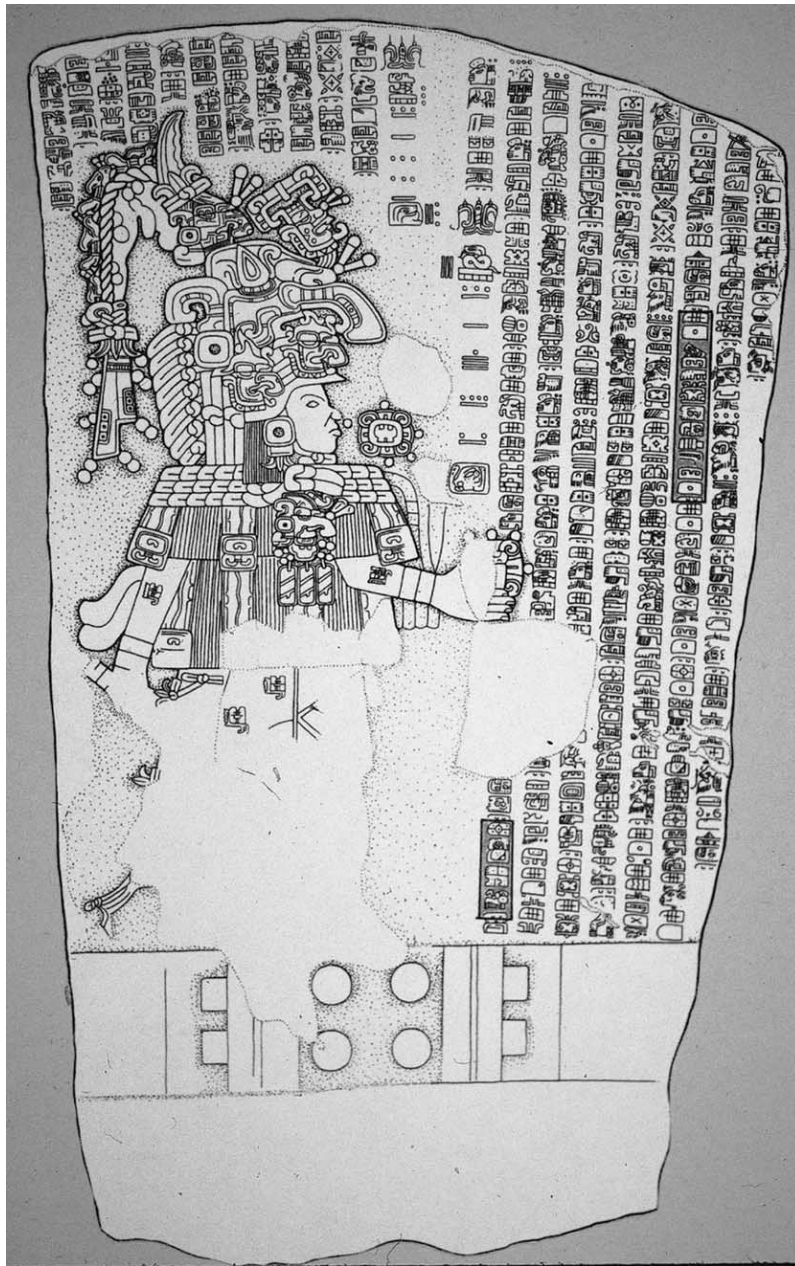


FIG. 6. *La Mojarra stela, Xalapa, with shape-shifter passages in boxes, stone. Museo de Antropología de Xalapa. (Modification by Eulogio Guzmán of drawing by George E. Stuart, Center for Maya Research [Stuart 1993: 111], reproduced by permission.)*

many places and times have professed to have special supernatural powers. Late medieval and early Renaissance kings in Europe, for example, claimed—and were believed—to be able to cure certain illnesses merely by laying a hand or bestowing a special object on the patient (Thomas 1997:192–95, 199–200; Bloch 1973) (fig. 7).²³

23. The illnesses treated by these miracle-working monarchs were collectively referred to at the time as *scrofula*. They tended to be tubercular in origin, but epilepsy and various muscular pains appear

The so-called royal touch, inherent in rulers whose descent lines were believed to be blessed by God, can be documented as far back as the 12th-century reigns of Philip I of France and Henry II of England; it was elaborated upon by England's Henry VII, making its way into the Book of Common Prayer in 1633 (Bloch 1973:14, 22,

to have been included as well (Bloch 1973:3, 11). In France they were known as *mal le roi*, while in England they were "the King's Evil" (Bloch 1973:12).



FIG. 7. Charles II of England “touching” for scrofula. (Engraving by Robert White, frontispiece to J. Browne’s *King’s Evil*, Library of King’s College, London, from Crawford [1911: opp. p. 114], reproduced by permission.)

46, 208; Rose 1970:36). The practice relates to the much earlier “laying on of hands” by Jesus and his apostles and the anointing of monarchs with blessed oil dispensed by popes and priests (Rose 1970:27–29; Bloch 1973:35–40). England’s Charles II ministered to roughly 100,000 people over the course of his reign (Bloch 1973:210–13). Outside of England, during the same period, Louis XIV of France cured almost 1,600 people in a single day, and “the king of Spain also drew large crowds of sufferers” (Rose 1970:38).

Thus there would have been nothing exceptional about Mesoamerican rulers’ basing their rule on professed magical powers. Indeed, while it is true that antagonisms are easily bred by the antithetical agendas of chiefs and religious leaders (e.g., Klein 1978; Roe 1995:127), “shamans” have not always been in opposition to the state, as Caroline Humphrey (in Thomas and Humphrey 1994: 193) has pointed out. John Pohl (1994:42, 45) has shown that the title of a second order of pre-Hispanic Mixtec priests, whose duty was to perform sacrifices, derived

from a kind of supernatural called *yahui*. Today these *yahui* are said to transform themselves into birds and animals in order to fly through the air after ingesting hallucinogenic mushrooms. In this way they communicate directly with the ancestral spirits, whose answers to their questions allow them to diagnose diseases. Pohl (1994:44, 47–51) noted that the ancient *yahui* priests, whose ideological powers were “magical,” appear in Mixtec historical codices in scenes of the founding of petty kingdoms, as well as taking responsibility for managing the royal economy and tribute collection. Moreover, a *yahui* priest apparently could assume the throne when the royal line failed to produce an heir. The Codex Nuttall shows that three Mixtec kings served as *yahui* prior to taking office, one of them the famous Lord 8-Deer.

Our point is that these rulers were no more shamans than they had been when they served as priests. Rather, they were political leaders, rulers of relatively small but centralized city-states, whose professed powers included an ability to communicate with the ancestors (Earle 1997:150).²⁴ To label them as “shamans” or “shaman-kings” once they assumed office is to underestimate their political importance, deny the political and economic basis of their power, and exaggerate the differences between them and rulers elsewhere who have made similar kinds of claims. Moreover, as David Webster (1995:121–22) argued in his review of *Maya Cosmos*, Maya kings “did not emerge because they were successful shamans, but rather shamanism was grafted onto a set of more fundamental processes . . . that selected for centralized rulership.” This resonates with Keith Thomas’s (1997:198–199) observation that the British monarchy had deliberately commandeered the older belief in magical objects “in order to build up the supernatural status of kingship,” with the result that “the ability to cure became a touch-stone for any claimant to the English throne.” As Kehoe (1996:7) pointed out, if Shang and Maya kings were “institutionalized shamans,” then without doubt so were many European monarchs. Yet we never refer to the latter as shamans.

HIERARCHY, SPECIALIZATION, AND INTERNAL FACTIONALISM

Use of the umbrella word “shaman” rather than indigenous occupational titles also circumvents our having to acknowledge the hierarchization and specializations of Mesoamerican magico-religious practitioners and the unequal distribution of power among them. Thomas and Humphrey (1994:5–6) note that one kind of medico-religious practitioner may be incorporated into the state apparatus while others are simultaneously marginalized. Given that what falls under the rubric of shamanism is so diverse in form and that shamans tend to be internally

ranked, they urge scholars to think in terms of multiple shamanisms rather than of one, essentializing shamanism. More important, they urge scholars to focus not on the metaphysical beliefs that underwrite what we call shamanism but rather on “the political importance of what inspirational practitioners actually do.”

We can see the need for this in Mesoamerican studies. The Zinacanteco *h’iloletik*, for example, sit at the table in a rank order based on their years of service (Vogt 1966:362). The highest-ranking *h’ilol* in each hamlet not only is in charge of the local ceremonies and the person who can grant permission for local novitiates to make their public debut but also gets to choose which two *h’iloletik* from his hamlet will participate in the year-renewal ceremonies in the ceremonial center (Vogt 1966:362–63). At Momostenango, Quiché “priest-shamans” are likewise hierarchized in a manner that bridges religious and governmental duties (B. Tedlock 1992:35, 37). Moreover, regardless of rank, some Zinacanteco *h’iloletik* are bone-setters, others (who are always women) are midwives, and still others are in charge of talking saints (Fabrega and Silver 1973:41–46). Here, as nearly everywhere in the New World, there are also “good” *h’iloletik* and bad ones, or “witches” (Fabrega and Silver 1973:42). In the T’zutujil Maya village of Santiago Atitlán, Robert Carlson and Martín Prechtel (1994:101) identified six different types of “shamans”: midwives, herbalists, day-keepers, spirit “sweepers,” animal-bite specialists, and malevolent witches who transformed themselves into animals. Not only did these practitioners not know all of the others’ techniques but they differed among themselves on cosmological specifics (Carlson and Prechtel 1994:94).

Specialization was even more pronounced in pre-Columbian times within the imperial boundaries of the Aztec state. López Austin (1968) has constructed a list of 40 different kinds of Aztec “magician,” which, he notes, represent only the most important of these practitioners. Interestingly, only one specialist in the list, the *paini*, was said to travel to the otherworld under the influence of a hallucinogenic plant to effect his cures (1968:102). Under the Aztec subheading of *tlacatecōlotl* (transforming witch or *brujo*) López Austin mentions 13 different varieties, which he distinguishes from the *ticitl*, or physician proper. Among those *titici* (pl. of *ticitl*) that used “magic” to effect their cures, he identifies 11 different specialized techniques (fig. 8). Nutini and Roberts (1993:95–96) have since expanded López Austin’s list. The moral of the story is clear: because there was so much variety among Aztec specialists, “generalizing about the role of the magician in ancient Nahuatl societies has little validity” (López Austin 1988:362). Kehoe (1999:5) brings the point closer to the topic of shamanism when she notes that the wide range of Aztec religious practitioners makes “the simplistic cover term ‘shaman’ . . . grossly inadequate.”

Mesoamericanists also need to do a better job of factoring in the passage of time, in particular the often traumatic changes that have taken place since the conquest. Nutini and Roberts (1993:91), for example, conclude

24. On the basis of recent archaeological work in western Mexico, Graham (1998:200) has questioned the accuracy of Furst’s identification of the armed and horned ceramic figures as shamanic tomb guardians, suggesting instead that they represent rulers.



FIG. 8. Aztec ticitl (physician) attending to man with broken leg (Sahagún 1979:book 10, folio 111v, detail, reproduced by permission).

from their comparison of present-day Tlaxcalan anthropomorphic supernaturalism with its pre-Hispanic counterpart that "it is apparent that the system has shrunk six and a half times."²⁵ That much of this change took place in the late 17th and early 18th centuries proves that attention to the immediately postconquest period is never sufficient (Nutini and Roberts 1993). Cecelia Klein (1995) has shown that European notions about women, midwives, and witches eventually altered not only the way in which female Aztec healers and indigenous goddesses were perceived and represented in colonial art and literature but also the way in which their professional women were treated. Moreover, art historians using ethnographic data to interpret pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican religion seldom acknowledge postcontact African influence on Mesoamerican beliefs about sorcery and witchcraft.²⁶ We also need to confront the implications of changes that took place prior to the conquest. Benjamin Colby (1976) suggested that at the time of the conquest some Maya, especially those living in the highlands, had recently adopted a new form of supernaturalism that involved tonalism, malevolent nagualism,

and animal co-essences. The Ixil and Yucatec Maya, in contrast, were still practicing a Classic-period form of ancestor worship.

Conclusions

We have tried to show that uncritical use of the words "shaman" and "shamanism" is symptomatic of some very serious problems in Mesoamerican art studies. One of these problems stems from deliberate avoidance of the demands of rigorous scholarship, including a critical, historiographical—and historical—approach to borrowed terms and concepts. A second problem arises from the inherent vagueness and variability of meaning of the words "shaman" and "shamanism." Unless Mesoamericanists can come to agreement on a valid definition of "shaman," we recommend that the term be dropped. Instead we encourage art historians, historians of religion, and social scientists to work together to create a more refined, more nuanced terminology that would distinguish, cross-culturally, among the many different kinds of roles currently lumped together under the vague and homogenizing rubric of "shaman." If a Mesoamerican ruler who apparently claimed to have supernatural powers is to be labeled a "shaman-king," then we should either similarly identify as shaman-kings all rulers,

25. On the shrinkage of the ancient Mesoamerican religious system, see also Aguirre Beltrán (1963:302).

26. On African influence on Mesoamerican culture, see, e.g., Aguirre Beltrán (1946; 1963:55–72, 109–10, 181, 269, 274–77; 1989) and Nutini and Roberts (1993:97, 100–102, 110–16).

throughout the world, who have professed to such powers or cease using the term altogether.

In our view, the stakes in this matter are high. By neglecting to address these problems, Mesoamericanists writing about art have for decades participated in, and indeed helped to perpetuate, the West's shameless romanticization of the indigenous past. In so doing, they have maintained, indeed reinvigorated, the ahistorical, apolitical, spiritual and irrational "Other" that was initially constructed during the years of conquest and colonization of the Americas. What we all think of today when we hear or read the word "shaman" is a "magician" from some other time or place who is not quite a priest, a doctor, or a true chief or king but combines unspecified features of many if not all of these. This individual does not qualify as an empiricist, is no different from most other so-called shamans both at home and the world over, and is immune to the everyday competitions, squabbles, and power grabs that characterize those living in the modern Western world. Indeed, the "shaman" lives in a timeless space occupied by spirits rather than by real people, a mystical space-time much like the otherworld of shamanic lore. He or she, in other words, is a phantom, a member of what Taussig (1989) has called "a made-up, modern, Western category"—a category of people who, some Mesoamericanists seem to think, are not like us at all.

Comments

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I heartily welcome the paper of Klein and associates for daring to question the idealism that has pervaded Mesoamericanist studies in recent decades and is now almost unanimously shared by Mayanists and specialists in Olmec art. Scholars working on Central Mexican cultures are less inclined to accept Furst's interpretations. Indeed, the abundant ethnohistorical information at their disposal indicates that there is no room for shamanism, be it defined by Eliade or by Furst, in their reconstructions. Klein et al.'s paper mainly addresses studies on the civilizations—and not only the art—of southern Mesoamerica. The interpretation of composite figures not as hybrids but as the transformation of a human into an animal or some other being has been determinant in the choice of shamanism as an explanation. Composite figures are plentiful in Mesoamerican iconography, some of them cosmological, such as the earth monster with saurian and ophidian features, and others supernatural, such as the anthropomorphs featuring grotesque faces or wearing masks. Does a human face with large square eyes and jaguar ears represent a human transforming into a jaguar? Are all Olmec "were-jaguars" and baby-faced figurines with jaguar mouths shamans,

or only some of them? Does a half-skeletal, half-living face express the passage from death to rebirth or from life to death, or is it an image of the fragility of human condition? The use of shamanism—an extremely vague notion, as Klein and associates demonstrate—is too quick and easy a way to answer these questions.

The T539 glyph—translated as *way*—is to epigraphy what the were-jaguar is to iconography. Half-*ahau* (a stylized human face for "lord") and half-jaguar, it has been successively interpreted as a "title for lords of a jaguar lineage," as a "phonetic decipherment" (*balan/ahau* or *balam/ahau*; why not *ahau/balam*, if I may ask?), and as "co-essence." The creation of this concept allowed Houston and Stuart (1989a) to avoid the uncertainties concerning the definition and chronospatial distribution of both *tonal* and *nagual*. However, in Yucatec and Proto-Cholan, *way* refers much more to nagualism (i.e., transforming into animals) than to tonalism (i.e., spirit companionship) to which "co-essence" is closer. Even if T539 were to be read as *way*, there is nothing about the figures on the vases that would indicate their spirit-companion nature. T539 is more often associated with emblem glyphs and places than with beings. According to Houston and Stuart, on lintels 13 and 14 from Yaxchilan the "vision serpent" of the queen is her *way*. Why, then, does the king carry this serpent, and what can be the relationship between the serpent-companion and the figure emerging from its mouth? Why is T539 written on lintel 14 and not on lintel 13? Why on lintel 15 is the serpent—here, as on lintels 13 and 14, associated with bloodletting and an apparition—the *way* of god K, not shown in the picture? These difficulties show how flimsy the *way* hypothesis—a corollary of the shamanism theory—is. It is, then, particularly surprising how readily a majority of Mayanists have adopted it.

I agree with Klein and associates that shamanism's appeal for Mesoamericanists has its roots in a "romantic nostalgia for a supposedly more spiritual, less materialistic and rational past." Furthermore, I would suggest that the believers in a "spiritual and magical world" consider themselves as belonging to it. Are they not the same people who, before filling their trenches or closing a tomb, mimic (thus likening themselves to the "Other") "shamanistic" rituals such as prayers, deambulations, incense burning, and—last but not least—bloodletting?

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Klein et al. have offered us a critique of the use that Mesoamerican specialists have made of the term "shamanism." It adds to the list of those who are uncomfortable with any application of the term outside of the core area of Siberia and Central Asia. Anyone familiar with the subject knows how hotly debated such application continues to be. Klein et al. quite rightly direct some attention to the historicity of the practices and

beliefs that the term "shamanism" has been used to cover. This is not surprising, given its rootedness in local practice. By the same token, the very character of what is called "shamanism" becomes increasingly problematic in a world dominated by state bureaucracies and universal religions. But to fall back on an already impoverished set of terms such as "priest" is hardly a solution. I also detect a plea for the use of emic terms, but such a step would only exacerbate debate over the appropriate extension of this or that term. The arguments over what is and what is not an instance of shamanism will continue unproductively as long as the focus of discourse is on the "thingness" of shamanism. I was disappointed that the authors chose to dismiss the attractiveness of usage with the label of "otherness" rather than to examine each usage on a case-by-case basis. Although that task would have greatly enlarged their discussion, it would have produced a more thought-provoking discussion (Atkinson 1992).

These difficulties should not blind us to the behavioral features centering around altered states of consciousness that the term has come to represent for many scholars (e.g., Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1998). The distribution of such behaviors by time and place would allow us to place shamanism in its historical context. Obviously, the particular beliefs and practices associated with this behavioral set have been channeled by historical precedent. Examining them in terms of behaviors has led to another problem, and that is merging them with religious beliefs and practices far removed from anything recognizable in the core area. Parsing this domain of belief is not beyond reason (Bourguignon 1973), but taking a behavioral posture would obligate one to disengage the term from its historical context. Inasmuch as Siberian shamanism is itself a historical entity, this step is not as daunting as one might think (Price 2001:5).

Evidently, the authors prefer to have nothing to do with the term, at least in the lower latitudes of the Americas. They question its applicability without addressing the increasing tendency for studies to place shamanism at the northern door of Mesoamerica (Lyon 1998). In the form of altered states of consciousness, shamanism is quite evidently involved because of the deep history of tobacco use. Joseph Winter (2000) has documented to a considerable extent the usage and pharmacology of tobacco, which in the case of *N. rustica* contains up to ten times the nicotine concentration of ordinary smoking tobacco. As Alexander von Gernet (1990, 1992, 1995) has shown, *N. rustica* is definitely hallucinogenic. The topic deserves more rather than less attention.

I lack the expertise to address the authors' critique of specific precontact applications of specifically defined constructions. But if any grasp of the history of shamanic practices is to be developed, archaeology will have to rise to the task. Thus I think it salutary that archaeologists have turned their attention to the subject. One outstanding collection of examples that focus primarily on the core area has just been published (Price 2001). With increasing attention to the subject, shamanism as a category will not go away.

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This "reassessment" usefully restates a ubiquitous truth about the societies that archaeologists study and a ubiquitous problem of method that follows. Those societies were different from those of today—a main reason we study them—but the words that we use in describing and exploring them are and must be the words of ourselves today. "Shaman" and "shamanism," it is here diligently shown, do not capture well the realities of ancient Mesoamerica; they are sham words, ambiguous and malleable, with no single and universally valid definition. But so are *all* words, and every word we might use may be torpedoed in the same way. We are told that Mesoamerican rulers are not well termed "shaman-kings," for in truth they were "political leaders." But what will be the starting-point for readers' understanding of the term "political leaders"? It must be the meanings of "political" and "leaders" in the present and as adjusted by the writer's definitions and qualifications of the terms. How could Klein et al., as they develop the notion these people were "political leaders" not "shamans," avoid the same trap?

In its title and text, this paper uses the word "art" without comment or qualification, as if it were free of these problems. But of course "art" can be proven in the same way to have fatal associations. Recently, therefore, colleagues working in Australian rock-art have asked that the word "art" be dropped and the word "marking" substituted (Ward and Tuniz 2000a) because the term "art" has "unscholarly presumptions and Western connotations" (Ward and Tuniz 2000b:6). But "marking" itself is not a neutral word and in my view itself carries so many wrong and unhelpful associations that we do better to stick to "art" (Chippindale n.d.).

Klein et al. do not mention, as they might, parallel debate over the use of the words "shaman" and "shamanism" in respect of rock-art, recent and ancient, outside that core area of Asia where shamanism in the narrow sense of the word is a recent cultural reality. The influential work of David Lewis-Williams on southern Africa rock-art seen in a shamanistic context has led to good approaches to rock-art in, for example, Palaeolithic Europe (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1998) and western North America (Whitley 2000), where the "s" word is used; duly, these interpretations have been denounced as the work of "shamaniacs."

If we write about the past in the present, using the present English language, there are three approaches. We can use contemporary words but try to clarify just which aspect of their varied modern meanings we most have in mind. We can import non-English words, which therefore have no false meanings; perhaps the word to use instead of shaman is *h'iloletik*, mentioned by Klein et al. But does *h'iloletik* itself actually match the entity that Klein et al. have in their minds? And once imported into use in English, a word begins to lead its own life

there. It is salutary to remember that “shaman,” the corrupted word at issue, itself was imported this way and, once imported, lost its purity. Finally, we can invent a word, as Lubbock invented the words “Palaeolithic” and “Neolithic” in the 1860s to name ancient entities which the English language did not then provide for. Most invented words fail, and when they succeed they suffer the same drift as do native words, so one can now say that “Neolithic” is a word with so many meanings and connotations that it is dangerously vague and ambiguous.

My own preferred way forward, a weak one, is to use the English language as best one can. I hyphenate “rock-art” (and its cognates, “rock-painting,” and so on) to show that it is something more than and different from “rock” and “art” placed side by side (and therefore rather like “shaman-king,” which Klein et al. dislike, as suggesting a concept like a shaman, like a king, but not the same as either). Paul Taçon and I, in our continuing work on Australian rock-art, avoid the wretched and corrupted word “style” and write instead about the “manner of depiction” which is characteristic of one or another body of rock-art (e.g., in Taçon and Chippindale 2001). And in writing about visionary experience and Australian rock-art we have used the phrases “clever men” and “clever men’s business,” drawing on the previous transmission into academic English of entities known by Aboriginal names, rather than the contentious “shaman” and “shamanism” (Chippindale, Smith, and Taçon 2000).

Klein et al.’s tone, with its energetic denunciation of those sad old professors who got everything wrong, reminds me of a singular ritual that enlivened my university when post- (or anti-) processualism was the passing rage. Some Famous Name in American processual theory would be invited to Cambridge to give us a seminar, invariably chaired by Colin Renfrew; in my fading memory the Name seems always to have been Lewis Binford, so I remember the whole phenomenon as “Let’s be beastly to Binford,” but surely there were others. A good seminar paper would be given, full of things to upset the radicals. Ian Hodder would ask a sharp question in his soft voice. Then the hands would go up, and followers of fashion would pile in with the toughest queries they could dream up. After an hour or two, Renfrew would bring things to an end, commending the healthy vigour with which differences of opinion had been expressed, as it was time for the Famous Name to disappear and prepare for grand dinner at high table in one of the Cambridge colleges. The mob would retire to cheaper evening meals, glad to have vanquished the old beast, who—translated away into another realm—was not seen again. This exhilarating experience was great fun for the graduate student body and much strengthened their self-confidence in the virtue and value of criticizing their predecessors, to the point that it left them with rather less time and much less inclination for the tough work of inventing better methods which would actually be exempt from the weaknesses so evident in the old masters. As befits a ritual slaying of the emblem of sin in a morality play, the Famous Name had not in truth been terminated; in the same or in a different human manifes-

tation, it would return to give another seminar some months later, at which the ceremonial battle would be repeated.

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The central thesis that Linda Schele and I proposed in *Maya Cosmos* (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993) is that the ancient Maya, like their contemporary descendants, believed that certain people among them communicated directly with supernatural beings and that it is both appropriate and productive to call those people shamans. As a corollary, we proposed that Maya kings of the Pre-classic and Classic periods were exemplary shamans. Anthropologists, my teacher Evon Vogt (1966) among them, have identified contemporary Maya shamans for more than 40 years as the basis for insight into religious beliefs and practices. As to the current legitimacy of applying the term to Mesoamerican societies, Piers Vitebsky (2001:46), an anthropologist and authority on shamanism as a general concept, recently wrote:

The shaman is a dominant figure in a great many native Central and South American societies. Despite the great distance from the Bering Strait, South American shamanism bears striking similarities to the forms of shamanism in Siberia, from where the native Americans migrated. Cosmologies are often layered, with a world tree or pillar, and shamans fly to upper and lower worlds.

Moreover, shamanism is a dynamic, politically engaged phenomenon that has functioned in the context of states as long as states have existed in the regions in which this religious practice prevails (Vitebsky 2001: 116–19). Granted that the term is conceptually problematic (Thomas and Humphrey 1994), as are most useful and broadly used comparative terms in anthropology, the caricature that Klein et al. provide at the end of this diatribe of what they “think” of when they hear or read the term “shaman” is not only offensive but yet another example of academic political posturing disguised as scholarship (see Houston 2000:136–42 for a worthwhile current review of the politics of the Maya past in Guatemala).

Schele and I proposed that ancient Maya religion was as theologically complex and advanced in its conception, articulation, and literature as any recognized world religion. That it was informed by beliefs and practice anchored in shamanism in no way implies that it was “primitive.” Confinement of shamanism to simple society, as suggested by Klein et al., is both factually wrong and wrongheaded. The argument that all rulers who ever claimed powers attributed to shamans should be so labeled, including European monarchs, is less a *reductio ad absurdum* than a superficial and naïve allusion to the complexities of belief and religious representation in-

vesting political power in states, both ancient and modern. We have been chided for not going into sufficient depth on the subject of shamanism in general before embarking on our exploration of Maya shamanism, and I take the point of such criticism (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1995). That said, the present popularity of the idea in ancient Maya studies is at least partly attributable to our brief for it. Far from being the affliction implied by the title of the present article, the perspective that ancient Maya religion was shamanistic is the source of new and productive interpretations of the archaeological record (cf. Tourtellot 2001).

As to the testing of the hypothesis that Classic-period Maya kings were shamans, in an important recent synthesis of epigraphic research in pre-Columbian Maya texts not cited by the authors, Stephen Houston (2000: 165) declares that to manifest divinity Classic Maya rulers had intensely personal relations with certain deities and that they "could conjure or summon certain deities through certain rituals." When Schele and I proposed that the ancient Maya practiced magic, we were observing what they said they did, not imposing some romantic fantasy. We investigated long-term continuities between ancient Maya religious beliefs, postconquest beliefs, and contemporary beliefs in *Maya Cosmos* against a wide range of artifactual, epigraphic, ethnohistorical, and ethnographic cases. None of those cases is effectively refuted in the article. Indeed, of those cases, only the example of the *way* glyph as spiritual co-essence is even really challenged. The authors ignore the path-breaking study of Grube and Nahm (1994) on this subject, instead pointing exclusively to the critique of Calvin (1996). With regard to what current epigraphic scholarship is doing with the idea in question Houston (2000:166) says, "Some of these gods [distinct to polities] could be linked personally to rulers: at Copan, Honduras, kings had gods who were 'seated' or enthroned on the same day as the ruler, or who might be taken captive, as apparently happened when 18 b' aa:h k'awil:l was seized by Quirigua."

Epigraphers of ancient Mayan are working with a powerful methodology, and there have been many changes in interpretation since the publication of *Maya Cosmos*. I was spectacularly wrong when I selected Justin Kerr's magnificent photograph of King Pakal the Great of Palenque for the cover of the book. As the Mexican epigrapher Guillermo Bernal Romero has recently discerned, this is actually a portrait of Pakal II, a namesake. However, the concept of shamanic kingship has withstood the test of time. As Martin and Grube declare in the most recent authoritative synthesis of Classic Maya history, "rulers and their families sought to enter the spirit world through vision and trance induced by hallucinogenic drinks and enemas" (2000:15) And again (p. 221):

Great kings had special access to the divine realm and special responsibilities to intercede on behalf of their subjects. K'ak' Tiliw's [king of Quirigua] stelae draw symmetries between contemporary time and the domain of "deep time," the completion of huge calendrical cycles measured in units of millions,

even billions of years. These unworldly events take place in specific locations and his portraits show him standing on their iconic names. No simple re-enactment, the king had been transported through time and space to relive them.

As Klein et al. suggest, the stakes in these matters are high. The real affliction here is not the idea of shamanism as applied to the ancient Americas but the need to see every Other as really "just like us."

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I suppose I should thank Klein et al. for characterizing as "seminal" a paper I published in 1965 while still a graduate student; I hadn't realized that my work was so persuasive and changed the way we look at a field so profoundly. I just wish that they had practiced some of the "scholarly rigor" they urge on the rest of us. Instead, their paper, the result of an art-history seminar taught at UCLA in 1998, is marred by errors of fact and interpretation, omissions, careless readings, bias, highly selective citations, and a generally nasty tone. A few examples: According to Klein et al., I based my interpretation of the left-facing and armed Colima One-Horns as shamans on their "curious" horned headdresses. Not so. In fact I argued that the horns were organic growths and *not* headdresses. They label as "Jungian" the left-right dichotomy, with the left, or "sinister," the direction of evil, malevolent, or inauspicious forces. This happens to be a cultural universal, and so, obviously, it owes nothing to Jung. Nor did my paper. They claim that scholars writing about Mesoamerican art in relation to shamanism "never provide adequate etic criteria for identifying a person as a 'shaman,' that is, criteria that have cross-cultural, including transatlantic and transpacific, validity." Wrong again. Speaking only for myself, I suggest that they read my introduction to *Ancient Traditions* (1994:1-28) or "The Roots and Continuities of Shamanism" (1973-74), where precisely those issues are addressed. Neither appears in their reference list. Indeed, text and references are so full of holes that one almost suspects deliberate omission of anything that might weaken their arguments.

What is Carlos Castaneda doing among the "humanists" allegedly clustered around UCLA's Johannes Wilbert? He was never Wilbert's student, nor were his novels about the art of shamanism. *The Teachings of Don Juan*, published in 1968, was *not*, as Klein et al. claim, based on his doctoral dissertation but an elaboration of a seminar paper of his from 1962 or 1963 entitled, if memory serves, "Conversations with Don Juan." His Ph.D. thesis, entitled "Sorcery: A Description of the World," was dated 1973, five years after *Don Juan*. Strange as it sounds coming from art historians, they employ "humanist" for Wilbert and others, myself included, as though that

somehow devalued our scholarship. They set up straw men only to knock them down. They misrepresent Eliade and make unwarranted assumptions about motivations (e.g., "Furst's desire to position himself," etc.). They don't like the generally positive review that Jill L. Furst and I wrote about Geraldo Reichel-Dolmatoff's books on Amazonian religion, shamanism, and ethnology, but the books themselves go unmentioned. Instead this formidable scholar is credited in the references with one 40-year-old article, while his considerable contribution to Wilbert's students is somehow made to look suspect.

Their treatment of Wilbert, one of the most inspiring teachers UCLA has ever had, whose fieldwork among South American Indians spans four decades, sounds to me not a little like professional jealousy. "Humanist," in the best sense, he may be, but as long as I have known him, which is now 40 years, he has also never ceased being the most voracious consumer of the relevant literature, whatever its language, and ever the meticulous researcher. To mention just one of his many books, with a bibliography of 1,100 entries in ten languages, his very non-"idealist" *Tobacco and Shamanism in South America* (1987) is as much hard science (physiology, biochemistry, pharmacology, etc.) as it is ethnology. They pin the same "humanist" label on the archaeologist and Moche expert Christopher Donnan. But Donnan's many publications and especially his most recent book (a study of Moche fine-line painted ceramics) are art history informed by 30 years of scientific archaeology in northern Peru, the enormous archive of Moche art he established at UCLA, ethnographic fieldwork on contemporary Peruvian shamanism with another "humanist," Douglas Sharon (a cultural anthropologist who for many years has been the director of the Museum of Man in San Diego), a keen eye, and an open mind. Would that we had something approaching its quality for Aztec art, Klein's area of expertise.

Shaman in quotation marks for Wilbert's long-time indigenous consultant on Warao religion is a cheap shot, the more so in that this specialist in the Warao sacred happens to fit all the criteria that make the "classic" Siberian shaman: sickness vocation, divine election, initiatory ordeals, recruitment of spirit helpers, ecstatic trance, journeys of the soul to the Upper- and Underworld, etc. It also strikes me that in rejecting shamanism as one key to understanding pre-Columbian art Klein et al. are stuck in a very old-fashioned idea of shamanism and the kind of society to which it is supposed to be limited, namely, hunting and gathering. In reality there is recognizable residue from an older ecstatic-shamanistic substratum even in the religions of complex societies, including that of the Aztecs, with their professional priesthood.

Nor are shamans and societies in which they serve as "technicians of the sacred" and (to borrow again from Eliade) "masters of ecstasy" steeped in "magical thinking" and mysticism. Abundant literature shows shamans to be, typically, indigenous intellectuals and philosophers, careful observers and interpreters of nature and

the natural forces of the universe, whatever metaphors they may employ to make them comprehensible to their people. To recognize vestiges of shamanism in societies on diverse levels of complexity is not to condemn them to inferior or colonial status as "the Other." In any case, I find the reference to "colonialism" to be an opportunistic red herring. As a corrective I recommend that Klein et al. familiarize themselves with a truly "seminal" paper that Weston La Barre published in 1970 in *Economic Botany*. He argued, persuasively in my opinion, that the foundation, or "base religion," of all Native American societies, past and present, is ecstatic shamanism, as an inheritance from the early migrants and the intellectual baggage they carried with them out of Asia into the Americas. The ancient ideas had survival value in part because they were verifiable and in part because, unlike the Old World, the New never underwent—at least prior to the European invasion—the profound and often violent religious transformations that drove shamanism and its practitioners underground or destroyed them altogether.

At its best, deconstruction illuminates. This bargain-basement version does the opposite.

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This article might better have been titled "A Materialist View of the Role of Shamanism in Mesoamerican Art," for Klein and her coauthors are very clear about their theoretical stance on the shamanic hermeneutic in Mesoamerican studies. Not surprisingly, then, the authors characterize the shamanic paradigm (it applies to pre-Columbian studies generally and not just to Mesoamerican studies) as being fundamentally idealistic, and the balance of their argument articulates the differences that they, as materialists, have with such a perspective. To the extent that such a dichotomy between materialist and idealist points of view remains valid (which is certainly open to argument), a good bit of their criticism is well-placed. To choose one salient example, the notion that there was a single ancient Maya worldview (encompassing *inter alia* the sanctity of the so-called shaman-rulers) that was shared from top to bottom of the social pyramid (and the archaeological pyramid as well!) is at odds with any critical model of ideology with which I am familiar; I think the basic Marxist and neo-Marxist models of ideology have by now become so widely accepted that to argue otherwise could be construed as deliberately tendentious.

But even though I share many points of view with the authors, I think they err in presenting such a determinedly negative view of the role of writing about shamanism in Mesoamerican studies. By default, they as materialist art historians associate the tradition of archaeological writing about art with idealism, which in their terms seems to be mostly a failure to agree with

their point that shamanism masks political functions of religion and associated imagery.

Much of the authors' criticism seems to me to be unduly harsh. Repeated references to poor scholarship and suspect intentions are probably more likely to create sympathy for the proponents of the shamanic approach than for the authors. An idealist view of culture is probably held by a majority of those in pre-Columbian studies, including archaeologists, now and in the past. Most materialist-evolutionary archaeologists apparently think that art is simply another ("epiphenomenal") part of ideology and not very significant in material terms. Many Mesoamerican archaeologists rarely discuss imagery beyond impressionistic statements of what they think is the "iconography" (that is, the subject matter) of this or that image. Other archaeologists appear to conceive of imagery as little more than propaganda or illustration, having no significant role in the constitution of culture and the construction of hegemonic fields. Idealist archaeologists, on the other hand, have long been attracted to issues of art in archaeology and have made this an important tradition in pre-Columbian studies. Long before Michael Coe was writing about Mexico and the Maya, Samuel Lothrop was studying stone sculpture, ceramics, carved jade and bone, and cast gold from Guatemala to Peru, and it was very clear that he was focusing on such material because of its aesthetic appeal. As a group, idealist archaeologists tackled problems of iconography, of subject matter and meaning, long before art historians.

As the authors have framed their argument, it essentially resolves into competing worldviews, which for most people living in Euro-American industrial democracies is an accepted part of liberal political thought: points of view may be different, but they are not wrong in any factual sense. So, from a rhetorical standpoint, I think that the authors lost control of their argument at the outset by framing it in what amounts to a difference of opinion, as if pre-Columbian studies were a two-party political system: Are you materialist or idealist, anti-shamanist or proshamanist? From this perspective, much of their criticism of Mircea Eliade, Peter Furst, David Freidel, Linda Schele, Kent Reilly, and others is likely to be dismissed as "rhetoric," in the common use of the term, or even as partisanship.

But there is another way in which rhetoric enters the picture. The rhetorical appeal of the writings of the "shamanists," to colleagues as well as to laypeople, is undeniable. The early writings of Peter Furst about shamanism in western Mexico are simply unlike anything else written before. His writings did in fact transform the design of archaeological and art-historical research in West Mexico, and he must be credited in part with the gradual growth of academic and popular interest in the region, whether scholars agreed with him or not. Indeed, much work in western Mexico since the 1980s is either a reaction to or a revision of the shamanic approach identified above all with Furst. Likewise, one reason that Linda Schele and David Freidel and their collaborators made such a profound impact on both the

academic and the lay public was simply that they told very compelling stories. Even if they stretched the archaeological and art-historical evidence (and I happen to think that they did), they blew past the academic boundaries and connected with wider audiences, and that, on balance, was good for pre-Columbian studies. Perhaps it is a mistake to separate the "popularity" of shamanism from the widespread human propensity for belief in supernatural beings and in all of the other defiantly irrational concepts that constitute religious belief. Rather than focusing on what are claimed to be generic weaknesses in the shamanic approach, it might have been better to counter specific problems with specific reinterpretations. Most people working in pre-Columbian studies remain very focused on positivist, specific approaches. If the so-called transformation figures of Middle Formative Mesoamerica ("Olmec") are not shamans in the act of transforming, or shape-shifting, from human to animal, then what are they? Composite human-animal images are very powerful arguments for the representation of some kind of transformation, and if not shamanic, then what? The negative argument would seem to demand a positive reinterpretation. It is something of an irony that, as materialists, the authors did not focus more on the materiality of the shamanists' writing, on their clever and compelling narratives.

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Klein et al. rightly object to the vague and uncritical way in which scholars have been appealing to "shamanism" to interpret pre-Columbian artworks for the past four decades. I fully appreciate the general and specific arguments they bring forth to refute inaccurate and unmotivated references to shamanism; they apply much beyond their field. Misuses deprive a term of any operative value. The absence of an agreed-upon definition of "shamanism" and the lack of acknowledged references make it impossible to draw any valid deduction from the identification of an object or event as "shamanic." Thus, Klein et al.'s argument makes their proposal of dropping the term from art history convincing.

However, as an anthropologist, I would stress that the problem is less crucial for anthropology than it is for archaeology. Requirements and purposes differ, at least concerning anthropological research based on field materials and focused on representations (those that underlie social institutions and practices), that is, on something symbolic, as its ultimate object. The task is to analyze the facts within their contextual framework with the help of concepts that can be adapted to fit the case. The goal is less to verify the validity of a concept as such than to implement it in accounting for the data—less to label static situations than to discover interactions and processes. Most anthropologists today are aware that general concepts only rarely fit actual situations and may, at best, serve as suggestive models for

further investigation and cross-cultural comparisons. Remembering the fate of “feudalism” or “totemism” (abandoned as general concepts, still used in specific case studies), they would at the same time willingly define “shamanism” in their research area and refuse to produce general theories of “ideal-typic” definition of the kind archaeologists request. Some justify such restriction to case studies in terms of cultural relativism, which impedes selecting a specific culture as an absolute reference for a phenomenon and the associated concept. Others blame anthropology for failing to achieve its inherent comparative and theoretical dimensions—a point that remains at issue. Still others would remind us that “shamanism” was generalized at the end of the 19th century to replace a series of words that were deemed inaccurate (sorcerer, soothsayer, medicine man, etc.); since it had not yet been defined, it could serve as a catch-all. In this line that equates it with a symbol, should we not apply to “shamanism” what W. H. Dunham (1953: 201) wrote of the British “crown”: “The vagueness of its meaning enabled the term to perform a fruitful function”? This points to a persistent pitfall in anthropology: the overlapping of literal (or realistic) and metaphorical uses of concepts. Thus the notion of “animal transformation” mentioned by Klein et al. is metaphorical: “turning into an animal,” a representation also found in Siberian shamanism, means ritually playing an animal’s part implied by the ritual’s logic. This symbolic representation was interpreted as referring to an actual phenomenon in the process of Christianization the better to discredit pagan views.

Klein et al. point out that scholars’ appeal to shamanism as an interpretive concept in Mesoamerican art was a reaction against Marxist materialism in favor of idealist and spiritual interpretations. This point is valid for other areas of the world where cultural features have also been interpreted in terms of shamanism in recent decades. Klein et al. also argue that identifying a culture as shamanic reflects an intention to “Other” it in contrast to Western cultures—that calling someone a shaman amounts to diminishing his capacity as a healer or leader in contrast to his Western counterparts. Although this was true in the 1960s and 1970s, things have evolved since then: features of “shamanism” have been “discovered” in Western cultures as figures such as Jesus, Socrates, Mozart, and the Arthurian Merlin have been deemed somehow “shamanic” and various forms of “neoshamanism” have spread in Western cities. Traditional or invented, the “shamanic” is now highly valued and exalted as “creative.” Moreover, those who identify shamanism in other cultures are mostly the same as those who “identify” it in our own. The tendency is no longer to oppose “us” and “the Other” in the present context of global culture. And I doubt that scientific reasoning can reply to such a fashionable ideology. In any case, this fashion would nullify the hypothesis of the “shaman-king” that Klein et al. deem spurious in recent Mesoamerican studies. It emerged from the contest of the clerical and hierarchical aspects of institutionalized religions in the West. It promotes shamanism as an in-

dividualistic attitude hostile to any kind of power. Now, this attitude fits the pragmatic logic of shamanism, which makes it incompatible with any type of centralization: a shaman enjoys authority not by being a shaman but by proving “useful” as such.

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Klein et al. present a well-reasoned argument for rejecting the term “shaman” and its facile application to a wide range of actions, representations, and categories in Mesoamerican art. They argue that “shamanism,” as employed by Mesoamericanists, is a reductive, ahistorical category of behavior. They demonstrate that the study of shamanism is in desperate need of descriptive criteria and historically informed evaluation. In the classical conflict between cross-cultural generalization and historical particularism, they advocate the use of native terms, attention to ethnographic detail, and appreciation of historical variation. My comments focus on (1) defining terms such as “shamanism” and (2) why cross-cultural research requires a shared anthropological vocabulary that includes the term “shaman.”

Klein et al.’s example of “shamanism” underscores the priority of definition in anthropological research and illustrates why we must abandon the uncritical use of classificatory terms. On this point, I am in total agreement with them. The adoption of the term “shaman” without acknowledging its historical antecedents is problematic at best. Similar problems have plagued the use of terms such as “ideology” without an understanding of its Marxist origins or “sex” and “gender” without an appreciation of their foundation in Cartesian dualism. History *does* matter. While the broad anthropological terms used in cross-cultural comparisons carry a wealth of connotative baggage, the solution is to define and in the process of defining to tease out the pesky historical particulars that so exercise these authors.

While I appreciate the concerns of Klein et al. and their careful review of the historical development of the concept of “shamanism” in Mesoamerica, I fear that a strategy based on historical particularism, strictly defined, may significantly impede cross-cultural anthropological research. The authors would reinstate the semantic mystery of the pre-Hispanic term *nagual*, for example, and confound efforts to identify common threads in ritual behaviors cross-culturally. The study of ritual practices in Mesoamerica has relevance for the understanding and interpretation of similar practices elsewhere in the world—in the field of comparative religion, for example. The use of broad terms such as “shaman” or “shamanism” provides a framework for the identification and exploration of behavioral similarities and differences and fosters communication across regional or disciplinary boundaries.

In sum, the desire for cross-cultural relevance neces-

sitates the use of an anthropological vocabulary in which the meanings of terms are common, shared, and explicit. This vocabulary can be both comparative and particularistic if we prioritize definition. Otherwise, we cannot utilize ethnographic research to create hypotheses that are testable cross-culturally. Nor can we build explanatory theories of human behavior. As a result, the relevance of work on a particular region or culture shrinks to encompass nothing but itself. So, while I understand why Klein et al. object to the uncritical and inconsistent use of terms such as "shaman" and "shamanism," I cannot agree that we must abandon them. Nor do I expect that Mesoamericanists will ever agree on a "valid definition" of the term "shaman." I agree that a greater appreciation of the cross-cultural variation in "shamanic" practice would be an improvement over generalized and ill-defined categories of behavior, but I wonder how a non-Mesoamericanist studying shamanism would identify an article of interest if the term *h'iloletik* were used in the title rather than "shaman."

The broad, admittedly ahistorical category of "shaman" signals a general set of practices and behaviors. Klein et al. are correct in observing that these practices and behaviors have not been defined in a uniform fashion. Nevertheless, attention to definition permits scholars to use such terms while clarifying their particular historical expressions. I do not envision anthropologists' succumbing en masse to the "impression that these peoples are social and culturally very similar to one another, internally homogeneous and harmonious."

While I believe that Klein et al. have raised a major point—the need for greater attention to the historical specifics of shamanic practice—their wholesale rejection of the term "shaman" is unwarranted. I choose to interpret their work as highlighting the dynamic and very necessary tension between two competing imperatives: that of generating cross-culturally relevant studies of human behavior and that of writing Boasian narratives of a limited portion of the human past.

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This article is an instructive account of how anthropological and historical scholarship has been conducted in the past and how it ought to be conducted in the future. Despite the modesty of the title, the value of this methodological critique is not limited to the study of art.

I was instructed by the authors' account of Taussig's argument (1987:142–43) that "the colonial church in Latin America, as a consequence of its ethnocentric assumption that Indians were particularly prone to magic, actually imposed upon them their reputation for religious magic." This scenario stands in significant contrast to that of the Jesuits in China, who imposed a vision of a natural morality on the China of the Ming and Qing that played down the role of indigenous religions. (Iron-

ically, Father Adam Schall, one of the missionaries at the Manchu court in Beijing, was sentenced to death in 1665, accused by Chinese opponents of casting his own shamanic spells [Hummel 1944:891].)

Just as it has been possible to propose that "the feudal system" was not introduced into England until the 17th century (Frederic Maitland, as cited by Brown 1974:1064) and that Confucianism assumed its "present familiar features as the result of a prolonged, deliberate process of manufacture in which European intellectuals took a leading role" (Jensen 1997:5), the present article encourages us to think of the manufacture of shamanism. Indeed, one could well argue that, in an inversion of the Mesoamerican situation, the attempts by scholars such as Chen Mengjia (1936) and K. C. Chang (1988) to assign a dominant role to shamanism in early China were, in part, a reaction against those who had "othered" the culture by seeing it in terms that were insufficiently religious. I would agree, in fact, that "the secular values and institutions" of early China "were characterized to a significant extent by habits of thinking and acting that had been sanctified . . . by the religious logic of Shang theology and cult" (Keightley 1978:212; Lewis 1999:13, 14, 16, 17). But the focus of that theology and cult (ca. 1200–1045 B.C.) had been on ancestor worship, not on "shamanism." If, as Colby (1976) has suggested, the Ixil and Yucatec Maya were, at the time of the conquest, "still practicing a Classic period form of ancestor worship," then it might be more fruitful to compare and contrast the varying forms of ancestral cult on both sides of the Pacific rather than chasing after shamanism. I have found McAnany (1995) on the ancient Maya valuable in this regard (e.g., Keightley 2002).

I had been attracted by the arguments of Reilly (1989)—and, I now see, of Furst (1976), who had interpreted "Olmec male figurines with partially feline features as shamans in the process of transforming into their jaguar familiars, or alter egos." I was not qualified to judge the Olmec situation, but the figurines did suggest that "a few marble statues, which depict tigers in a kneeling, human posture," found in the tomb of a Shang king, might be "regarded as representations of a 'were-tiger' . . . , that is, as representations of a shaman figure who had transformed into an animal" (Keightley 1998: 824–25). But such Shang statues, in any event, were few and hardly permit us to assign a central role to the "shamanic" transformers who may have been so depicted.

I am fully in sympathy with the authors' plea for "a more refined, more nuanced terminology" where "shamanism" is concerned (cf. Keightley 1998:767), but I am reluctant to accept their recommendation that the term be dropped entirely. Such a blanket rejection does not live up to the authors' own discriminating standards. For recent times, after all, the term, when properly employed, may still have its uses, for example, in considering the relatively modern Manchu practices of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) in China (see, e.g., Elliott 2001:235–41). In all such cases, to be sure, one needs to be sensitive to the cultural context (see, e.g., the comments of Lock 1980 on one major study of Manchu sha-

manism). There may well be “many kinds of shamanisms,” as Thomas and Humphrey (1994:6, 11–12) have suggested, and, if so, that makes it all the more important to specify in each case precisely what definition one is using. Whether these different “shamanisms” can then be related to one other in any meaningful way always needs to be demonstrated. And the unexamined use of the term should always be a warning flag, alerting us to the dangers of lapsing into an academic trance as we make our own attempt to communicate with “other,” unseen realms.

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This is a much-needed critique of the way some scholars have abused the terms “shaman” and “shamanism.” Klein et al. explain (1) why the use of such terms precludes an accurate understanding of Mesoamerican civilization and its art; (2) why oxymorons such as “shaman-king” distort the truth about Mesoamerican rulers; and (3) why some scholars *want* the Maya to be otherworldly, mystical, and unique—to the point that their leaders are understood not as human beings concerned with politics, war, law, and economics but only as wizards consumed with magic, fantasy, and trances.

Klein et al.’s critique raises questions about when it is appropriate to use the term “shaman.” First of all, shaman is a Tungusic term used by Siberian groups who are primarily herders and hunters. Since Siberia is vast (10 million square kilometers), there is, not surprisingly, significant variation among its nonhierarchical groups in regard to the role played by shamans. Although such shamans may be mediators, curers, diviners, or prognosticators, they are never “powerful” in the political sense. Rather, Siberian ethnographers see them as (1) helping others deal with sickness and unpredictability as part of a “psychomental complex” (Shirokogoroff 1935) or (2) communicating with spirits and thereby mediating between two worlds, the supernatural and the human (Bashilov 1992, Hultkrantz 1992).

When scholars apply the term “shaman” to depictions of Mesoamerican rulers on stone monuments, they impose inappropriate assumptions on that subject matter. One assumption is that rulers in rank or stratified societies at Izapa, La Mojarra, Kaminaljuyú, and Yaxchilán had the same belief system as shamans in nonhierarchical Siberian societies. This assumption has led some scholars to assert that Maya rulers at A.D. 800 enacted rituals that were unchanged survivals from preceramic times when their ancestors were hunters and gatherers. The fact is that we do not even know that there *were* shamans among the hunting-gathering ancestors of the Maya. And even if there were, the chances that that egalitarian institution remained intact while every other aspect of Maya life changed in the course of 12 millennia are small. In chiefdoms and especially in states like those

of the Classic Maya, self-selected mystics were replaced by trained professional priests.

The view that religion remains static while economic and political organization change is another inappropriate assumption. The anthropologist Roy Rappaport (1999) always emphasized that even when societies seek to preserve certain rituals, the rituals gradually change because they are never performed the same way twice. Religions are dynamic, adaptive, and flexible affairs in which each performance of a rite presents an opportunity for change (Rappaport, personal communication, 1990). In a similar vein, the art historian George Kubler (1969, 1973, 1977) emphasized that since both art and meaning change over time, it is a mistake to assume that continuity in depiction represents continuity in meaning.

When scholars call rulers “shaman-kings” and discuss their “mystical powers,” they draw on a third inappropriate assumption: that the power of kings is based on contacting spirits and on mediating between the supernatural and human worlds. Nonsense. Although Caesar may occasionally have consulted diviners, his *power* came from the Roman legions and the support of the Senate. “Power” is the ability to get people to do what they do not want to do, and it emanates not from a trance but from the military, economic, judicial, and legal arms of the government. Attributing a Maya ruler’s power to shamanism is like attributing the U.S. president’s power to use of the Psychic Hotline (admittedly, we did have one president whose wife consulted an astrologer!).

In Siberia, shamans are usually self-selected mystics. Mesoamerican rulers, in contrast, were entitled to their position because they were hereditary members of royal families, drawn from the upper stratum of society (Marcus 1993, 1995). They claimed descent from royal founders and previous generations of rulers and had real power that they could pass along to their offspring and other relatives by placing them in crucial positions in a political hierarchy. Shamans lack the force and power to make others do what they do not want to do.

Why, then, do scholars continue to use terms like “shaman-king”? One answer may be “some human need to reach deep, mythic spiritual levels about ourselves” (Balzer 1996:1185). Balzer’s insight suggests that the unwarranted projection of egalitarian Siberian mysticism into the Mesoamerican state may tell us more about the psychological needs of our colleagues than about ancient political systems.

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In my article “The Shaman in Transformation Pose” (1989) I advanced a series of propositions. I argued that Olmec art was a product of a Formative-period interaction sphere in which the exchange of elite economic goods was accompanied by the exchange of ideologically significant ritual objects (a hypothesis based on Flan-

tery's [1968] interaction-sphere model), that the Olmec art style was not solely generated in the Olmec heartland but a product of Formative-period regional interaction; that Olmec symbols were used by a range of Formative-period rulers, not ethnically Olmec, to validate their elite position; and that a series of green stone figures could be arranged sequentially in a tableau that depicted specific ritual episodes. Unfortunately, the authors of this article do not consider any of these propositions.

Let me state an anthropological given: All cultural systems consist of a series of interlocking cultural universals. Religion, like all other cultural universals, is a dynamic system and thus subject to change over time. Shamanism, as a religious system, also changes over time. The authors of this article seem unaware of this simple fact. A category of Taoist religious practitioners is identified as "priests"; a category of Roman Catholic religious practitioners is identified as "priests." Close examination of these "priestly" occupations reveals large differences in the functions of these religious practitioners, but no one argues about the use of the term "priest" to refer to both. Klein et al., while objecting to the "use of the umbrella word 'shaman,'" fail to recognize that the same criticism can be made for the term "priest" or, for that matter, "spirit-medium."

Citing David Keightley (1998), Klein et al. say that my references to Chang's (1988) arguments for shamanism as a path to political validation in Shang Dynasty China are unreliable. What they fail to mention is that in the same article Keightley uses my discussions of shamanic postures and ritual sequences to support his premise that the pose in which some early Chinese figures are depicted may very well be a device for artistically identifying shamanic religious practitioners. Though they find it difficult to associate shamanism with states and state formation, a series of recent publications have strongly supported this premise (Humphrey 1994, Vitebsky 2001). They correctly point out that there are varieties or hierarchies of religious practitioners that are often classified as shamans. They overlook the fact that I too recognized this problem. To solve what is in essence a problem of categorical order I suggested the term "state shamanism" to describe the distinction between the shamanic practices of bands and the shamanic survivals in state-level Mesoamerican societies. Since the publication of my article I have come to recognize an intermediate level of shamanic political and religious interaction, "institutionalized shamanism," which best describes the political function of shamanism in tribes and chiefdoms such as the Midewiwin society of the Ojibwa nation (Smith 1995:8).

Klein et al. state that I proposed the term "shaman-king" in my 1989 article, but I did not. I did, however, quote Peter Furst as stating that "the identification of jaguars with the royal lineage might go back to the identification of jaguars with powerful shamans. Perhaps we can carry this a step further and suggest that members of the royal house were shamans (Reilly 1989:21 n. 50)." I should note that David Freidel has made frequent use of the term. I find nothing wrong with it, within certain

definitional limits, just as I have no problem with the term "priest-king."

Klein et al. also take me to task for using a coating of red cinnabar as an argument for elite association. The use of red pigment to indicate status in the mortuary complex at Chalcatzingo is well documented (Merry de Morales 1987:95–113). Recent work at Copan has further demonstrated the use of red pigment for status differentiation in tombs of the Copanec dynasty. As for my linkage of charisma with portraiture, the use of strong facial features to convey personality traits in sculpture and painting the world over has been commented on so many times that it is taken as a given. The eye inlays are indeed missing on the Princeton figure, but I projected their existence because the backs of the empty eye sockets are slightly grooved so as to hold an adhesive and because two of the other transformation figures in my sequence retain traces of their magnetite inlays. Throughout Klein et al.'s article there is a strong suggestion of the unsubstantiated claim that those who accept the shamanic hypothesis reject the function of economics in state formation. For me and, I believe, many of the other scholars who are critiqued in this article, nothing could be farther from the truth. To deny the critical role of economics in Mesoamerican culture in general and state formation in particular would be not just wrong but ludicrous.

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By critiquing the indiscriminate application in art studies of the term and concept "shamanism," Klein et al. raise important and valid points. They reveal the vagueness and ethnocentricity behind the use of "shamanism" in many branches of scholarship. However, they overextend their argument to cast suspicion on other concepts in Mesoamerican religion and religious iconography, including ideas on transformation and the nature of human souls. They seem to be using the faulty "shamanism" model as a basis for calling into question all nonmaterialist interpretations of power structures in the pre-Columbian world.

The emergence of shamanism in art-historical research belonged to a general interdisciplinary trend in Mesoamerican studies of the 1960s. We should acknowledge that by this time "shamanism" had considerable time-depth in Mesoamerican anthropology. Several influential ethnographers used the term decades before Furst employed it in his interpretations of artifacts (La Farge and Byers 1931, Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934, La Farge 1947). As interpretations of art increasingly attempted to discern cultural meaning, it is understandable that some in the art history would adopt a long-standing, if flawed, ethnographic category—shamanism—as a potentially useful paradigm.

Klein et al. discuss the shamanistic paradigm as part

of the old debate between “materialists” and “idealists,” portraying the interest in shamanism as a “hostile reaction to scholarly rigor and materialist theory” (does “scholarly rigor” necessarily characterize “materialist theory”?). Their valuable critique of shamanism as a tool for interpretation suddenly shape-shifts into a sweeping argument against nonmaterialist conceptions of power in the pre-Columbian world. Rejecting the weak concept of the “shaman-king” is one thing, but taking on “idealist” views of pre-Columbian power structures is another, and not of great importance to their principal argument. Maya rulers defined and represented their political power mostly through religion and ideology (Demarest 1992, Houston and Stuart 1996), but they were not necessarily shaman-kings.

Klein et al. focus on a handful of scholars who have emphasized shamanism in their studies of Mesoamerican art, and I find it significant that three of their main targets (Furst, Reilly, and Kappelman) are researchers of the Formative period, when textual data are mostly lacking. There may exist an inverse correlation between the ease with which shamanistic interpretations are applied to images and the number of readable documents available from the time. How often, after all, is shamanism cited in interpretations of Aztec art and iconography? Shamanism comes across sometimes as a convenient fallback when more “emic” understandings are inaccessible. It is no surprise, therefore, that despite the “passing of the torch to the Mayanists” to which Klein et al. refer, shamanism has had less success when applied to the study of ancient Maya art. Freidel, Schele, and Parker’s (1993) *Maya Cosmos* talked a great deal about shamans, but there is in fact very little in the book on shamanism in Maya religion in ancient times (nearly all subheadings under “Shamans” in its index concern modern Maya ritualism).

As Klein et al. note, most arguments for Classic Maya “shamanism” center on the *way* hieroglyph, meaning “animal soul” or “transforming wizard.” Schele and Freidel (1990:45) earlier claimed that this decipherment was a direct influence on their interpretations of shamanism among the Classic Maya. Unfortunately, neither Klein et al. nor Freidel and Schele have understood the precise meaning of the glyph as my colleagues and I deciphered it (Houston and Stuart 1989b). In the ancient sources, *way* refers to fantastic animals and creatures depicted on elite drinking vessels, where they are said often to be “owned” by lords of particular kingdoms or the kingdoms themselves (the distinction is often unclear). In our original presentation of the decipherment (Houston and Stuart 1989b) we outlined the evidence and related the vessel images to the animal-like “co-essences” described in many ethnographic sources, but we never once used the terms “shamans” or “shamanism” in describing its significance. Klein et al. are mistaken when they state that *way* “today means ‘sleep’ or ‘dream’ ” but we “have preferred to read [it] as ‘co-essence.’” In colonial and modern lexicons *way* explicitly refers to an animal familiar or some similar aspect of the soul. This is therefore not an “interpretation” but a simple definition of

the type Klein et al. profess to like best—clear and specific, unlike the definition of “shamanism.” I have since suggested that the *way* figures on pottery are better understood as dream figures, related to the nightmarish “spooks,” witches, and animated diseases of Maya folklore (Stuart 1999). These are very closely related to widespread and ancient beliefs surrounding “nagualism” in Mesoamerica.

Schele and many others preferred to view these complex associations of the *way* glyph in terms of “shamanism,” whereas others have avoided the term. I strongly doubt that discarding the word would substantially affect our interpretations of Mesoamerican art, however. I agree that rigorous arguments for specific interpretations are always desirable, but there can be little doubt that many future interpretations of religious imagery will hinge on attested patterns of Mesoamerican cosmology, esoteric knowledge, and concepts of the self.

Reply

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We want to begin by expressing our gratitude to our commentators for the time and thought that they put into their responses to our essay. Special thanks go to those who stayed with the issues that we raised in our essay, thereby forfeiting their opportunity to lobby personal barbs and the usual recriminations for areas not mentioned, readings not cited, and approaches not taken. Our article was originally much longer than the version that appears above and covered pre-Columbian art in general. The reviewers and the editor of this journal asked that we focus our argument more narrowly and shorten it considerably, and we did. The result was a critical essay specifically about how scholars have been writing about the relation of shamanism to ancient Mesoamerican art. Several commentators (Brown, Chippindale, Reilly) rightly point out that some of the other terms that we used in our essay, such as “priest,” are also problematic. We chose in our essay to focus on the one that we see as being in greatest need of reconsideration at this time.

We also want to acknowledge at the outset some of the errors in our essay that have been noted by some of our respondents and attempt to clarify certain aspects of our format that have clearly led to confusion and misunderstanding. Our claim that the Classic Maya *way* glyph currently means “sleep” or “dream” was, as Stuart points out, mistaken, and Furst is quite right that there was no cause to invoke Carl Jung in our discussion of his associating the left hand with danger and evil. Fortunately, none of the errors called to our attention compromised our argument. We do regret that several of our readers found the tone of our argument to be, in Graham’s words, “unduly harsh”; according to Furst and

Freidel, it was even “nasty.” We were striving to achieve a sharp and critical tone, not a “nasty” one. Certainly, the title of our article strikes us as quite benign, in no way heralding the “affliction” that Freidel claims is implied by it.

We also realize, with hindsight, that the meaning of the quotation marks that enclose words such as “shaman” and “shaman-king” in our article has led in certain cases to misunderstandings. We added those quotation marks in response to a request from the editor of this journal that we find a way to distinguish more clearly among shamanism as a religious and ritual practice, the study of shamanism, and the belief in the importance of shamanism. One of our solutions was to enclose in quotation marks throughout the paper all of the terms that we were putting on the table for reconsideration. Reilly therefore understandably but wrongly assumes that the quotation marks around the term “shaman-king” in our discussion of his article “The Shaman in Transformation Pose” were intended to signal that he had used the term in his essay. It does not appear there, as Reilly points out, nor did we mean to imply that it had.

Our use of quotation marks has led to a much more serious misunderstanding on the part of Furst, who assumed that by placing quotation marks around the word “shaman” in our mention of Johannes Wilbert’s Warao informant we intended to diminish the informant’s stature. As we explained above, this was not the intended meaning of those quotation marks, nor could we have had any reason or wish to convey such a message. Even more important, we had, contrary to Furst’s understanding, absolutely no intention or desire to denigrate the importance of his own accomplishments or the extraordinary work of Wilbert and his UCLA colleagues and students of the 1970s, specifically Christopher Donnan and Douglas Sharon. Since Chippindale similarly perceives us as having “energetically” denounced “those sad old professors who got everything wrong,” it is clear that we must take the blame for this misunderstanding. The senior author of this article, who is herself rapidly becoming one of those “sad old professors,” has long been a campus colleague of Wilbert and Donnan and has always regarded them and their work with an admiration and respect bordering on awe. The same may be said of her feelings toward Furst’s work, as well as that of Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, a giant in the field whose contributions Furst wrongly concludes we do not appreciate. Moreover, contra Furst, we never said, nor did we mean to imply, that we “disliked” his and Jill Furst’s review of Reichel-Dolmatoff’s books. Nor did we, as Furst contends, say or mean to imply that Wilbert was Carlos Castaneda’s dissertation adviser (Wilbert did not even serve on Castaneda’s committee, although they certainly knew each other). When we began the second paragraph of our essay with the clause, “Without wishing to diminish the important contributions of some of the work on shamanism and art,” we had in mind these impressive pioneers whose innovative research and analyses made us all rethink the relation of religion to art in the Americas.

This unfortunate impression apparently derives from our declared preference for materialist explanations of art. From it, Furst concludes that we look down, a priori, on the work of all humanists, including those anthropologists who would today be regarded as “humanist anthropologists.” In fact, we are ourselves humanists, and proud of it. Humanists can be materialists—and some are. Moreover, while we tried to make it clear that we are critical of idealist explanation of culture, we never said that we, a priori, see no merit in them. We were simply trying to show that the term “shamanism” came into anthropological writings on Mesoamerican art at a time when that discipline was increasingly being penetrated by materialist, including neo-Marxist, theories and that its cause was taken up by those who, for the most part, opposed these new developments. That these scholars *were* largely unhappy about the new trends in the social sciences became amply clear at the time to our senior author from personal conversations and professional interactions with several of them. Without knowing when and how shamanism entered discussions of Mesoamerican art, it would be difficult to understand why Mesoamerican writing on shamanism and art takes the form and has achieved the popularity that it has today.

Our decision to reveal at the outset our own theoretical leanings necessarily rendered us easy prey to the accusations of “bias” (Furst), “academic political posturing” (Freidel), and “rhetoric” (Graham) encountered in some of the comments on our essay. We are beginning to understand why so few scholars today are willing to articulate their working premises; their silence on this point helps to prevent this kind of criticism. It also helps to mask any eclecticism and incoherence in their reasoning, thereby creating the erroneous impression that these scholars are necessarily more objective, more neutral, more detached from the politics of the field and the world in which they live than those who freely admit to the intellectual framework within which they operate. All scholars are “biased” in that they make a fundamental set of assumptions, however incompatible with one another those assumptions might be. By neglecting to admit that they are biased, they only obscure the ways in which their biases have helped to shape the questions that they ask and the conclusions that they reach.

We regret that our avowed preference for a materialist perspective was misconstrued by some as necessitating a lack of interest in the role of ideation, or ideology. Many materialists—New Archaeologists and most cultural materialists excepted—are by no means uninterested in ideology, and art historians are typically—and necessarily—greatly concerned with it. After all, all art is, at one level, ideological. We were therefore unprepared for Stuart’s complaint that we seem to him to be “against non-materialist conceptions of power in the pre-Columbian world.” He seems to think that we have rejected his and Stephen Houston’s highly important recent work on concepts of transformation and the self among the Classic Maya. This is emphatically untrue. We agree with Marcus that the fundamental or “real” base of political power

ultimately resides in the material world, but this does not mean that religion and belief are not major factors in consolidating and maintaining that power. Our point was simply, as Baudez emphasizes, that the precise meaning of the Classic-period *waj* glyph is still problematical and that the glyph therefore cannot be uncritically used to support claims for shamanism in Classic Maya art.

Freidel has concluded that we were accusing him and his coauthors of *Maya Cosmos*, Linda Schele and Joy Parker, of deliberately trying to “other” the Maya about whom they wrote—to portray those peoples as primitive, simple folk who were and are in some way inferior to us. This was not all the case. For one thing, we realize that intentions or motives can never be definitively recovered; only when we have a person’s own words to work with—as we did with Furst—would we even dare to speculate about his or her intentions (and according to Furst, above, we got that one wrong). But even if we thought that a writer’s motives could be unequivocally identified, we would never have suggested that any good scholar writing today about the past would purposefully strive for such an odious goal. What we were looking at was the probable *effects* of certain ways of writing about Mesoamerican art—the unintended impressions that certain words and phrases can create and their potentially unfortunate consequences. As the present exercise demonstrates only too well, despite our best intentions, we scholars are not necessarily and cannot always be aware of the ultimate effects of our writings. We regret that we did not make this distinction between intentions and effects clearer in our article so as to avoid this misreading of our argument.

We are pleased that three of our commentators (Hill, Keightley, Marcus) not only take into account our point about the importance of history and historiography when working with borrowed terms and concepts but also elaborate upon it. As Hill so nicely puts it, “History *does* matter.” We thought that we had made a good case for the importance of tracking the origins and evolution of loaded words such as “shaman” and “shamanism” before using them to try to prove a point or validate an interpretation. We also urged that Mesoamericanists remain alert to the ongoing changes and cultural mixings that have occurred over time, both prior to and since the conquest. We hope that the fact that the majority of our commentators do not refer to this part of our argument does not mean that they have ruled it out. The point is particularly important where we use modern ethnographic data to try to reconstruct and understand pre-conquest societies. It is not our position that there have been no cultural continuities between the past and the present—witness the absence of any attempt to “refute” Freidel et al.’s argument that such continuities exist. We would simply have liked to see a full discussion in their book about the nature of the problems raised by the use of ethnographic analogy and an acknowledgment of some of the uncontrollable factors that could possibly skew their reading of what is, after all, a temporally sporadic record. We all need to admit to our readers that such

tasks are invariably complicated and the results necessarily tentative.

We were not surprised to find several of our commentators expressing their reluctance to dispense with the word “shamanism” altogether (Brown, Chippindale, Hill, Keightley, Stuart). If the word had no functionality at all, scholars would not still be using it. Nonetheless, at least one of our commentators, Hill, seems to have thought that our recommendation was to do just that. What we wrote instead was that “unless Mesoamericanists can come to agreement on a valid definition of the word ‘shaman,’ we recommend that the term be dropped.” In other words, our preference is that scholars try to find a specific and cross-culturally valid definition of shamanism that they can agree on and then refrain from using the word whenever a particular situation does not match the definition.

Hill also expresses her conviction that we will never be able to agree on a definition of shamanism, a prophecy that finds support in the variety of definitions of shamanism offered in the comments on our article. If we needed proof that scholars often talk at cross-purposes when they discuss shamanism, these commentaries provide it. Marcus, for example, advocates sticking with the original Siberian model, in which the shaman wielded virtually no political power. By this sociological definition, the shaman would be found only in nonhierarchical societies such as those of hunters and herders; there could never be such a thing as a “shaman-king.” Hamayon, however, describes as both individualistic and hostile to power of any kind what she calls neoshamanism, a form of shamanic belief and practice that has penetrated many urban centers around the world in recent times. For her, shamanism can exist in the most complex societies but will necessarily remain on the margins of political life. Freidel, in contrast, discusses shamanism in terms of a belief that the shaman can fly to the upper- and underworlds of a layered cosmos united by a world tree or pillar. Since it is ideology that here defines the shaman, Freidel has no problem with the notion of a government official who is also a shaman. In contrast, Brown’s description of shamanism as an altered state of consciousness, a state that is often achieved by ingesting drugs, is based on what people actually (say they) *do*, not how they conceptualize the cosmos, their access (or lack thereof) to political power, or the kind of society in which they reside. His definition presumably therefore would not apply to those societies, mentioned in our essay, in which healers and diviners do not use hallucinogens. Chippindale, on the other hand, characterizes shamanism in subjective, psychological terms as “visionary experience,” much as Furst invokes the word “ecstatic” in relation to shamanic experience. These criteria emphasize practitioners’ personal experience rather than the social framework within which they operate.

How do we reconcile these diverse ways of categorizing human practice? Curiously, none of our commentators mentions the comparative study by Michael Winkelmann discussed in our article, which offers a graded scale of social and behavioral characteristics that sepa-

rate the shaman pure-and-simple from other kinds of “magico-religious” practitioners, including some closely related to the shaman, with whom they share certain traits. Since we were merely trying to show the need to resolve these disagreements, we were not, contrary to what some commentators (Freidel, Furst, Reilly) conclude, insisting on a particular definition, which probably explains why they disagree on which definition we were championing. However, it seems to us that to accept Winkelman’s conclusion that “true” shamans are found only in smaller, hunting and nomadic societies need not negate the possibility that select individuals in some sedentary agricultural societies have retained some of the self-proclaimed powers that characterize the shaman. Nor does it diminish the possibility that the leader of a centralized polity might claim to have shamanic powers in order to bolster his rule. Some obviously did. However, this, as we argued in our paper, is not a good reason to label these rulers “shamans” or “shaman-kings.” Nor were we, contra Freidel, advocating instead that we begin to refer to European rulers who healed as shamans or shaman-kings. All of these individuals are first and foremost political leaders and should be recognized as such. We do not derive the names for our own governmental offices from our ideologies. Why do so for Mesoamerica?

If our new, improved definition of a shaman were a good one, this would help to solve the problem of the use of different terms in Europe and the Americas to name and describe what are sometimes quite comparable phenomena. An effect of these separate vocabularies is to exaggerate the differences between the peoples living in Europe and Euro-America, on the one hand, and the indigenous populations of the Americas, on the other, a practice that can have a deleterious effect on native Americans. This, of course, is far from advocating, as Freidel suggests we are doing, the portrayal of native Americans as being “just like us.” The real problem for all of us is to figure out the best way to balance cultural differences with similarities. How do we represent peoples who are notably different from us in some regards without appearing to diminish them and separate them from the human family—without ignoring or underestimating the fundamental ways in which we are all more or less alike? This is a problem that all Mesoamericanists must wrestle with on a daily basis, and we were not suggesting that it will be easily solved.

This is not simply a matter of trying to see ourselves in the “Other,” as Westerners are often accused of doing. It is about making scholarship matter. Hill seems to think that we were advising our colleagues to retreat into historical particularism, but our position, as we have tried to make clearer here, is the opposite. In our view, there is limited merit in producing studies of local practices that do not compare them with human behavior observed elsewhere. We did suggest that, particularly in the absence of a consistent meaning for the word “shaman,” scholars should, if possible, use the indigenous word(s) for the kinds of practitioners they are discussing. On this point, Hill agrees. But writing about a Zinacan-

teco *h'ilol* rather than a Zinacanteco shaman need not mean that the study will have relevance only to Zinacantan. If we have no commonly accepted definition of the words we have depended on, then it seems to us that we should take the time to explain exactly what the people we are writing about actually do and how their behavior relates to what we (think we) know about other peoples with similar practices. In saying this, we are assuming that the ultimate purpose of scholarship is not merely to fill in gaps in the ethnographic and historical record but also to gain some kind of understanding of the larger human condition. The word “shaman” has been used by many to try to bridge this gap between the particularistic and the general, but its ambiguity has too often frustrated the attempt. All that we were asking in our essay—and are still asking—is this: Can we find a more nuanced, more specific and meaningful way to write about the intricate relationships among art, religion, medicine, and politics in ancient Mesoamerica?

As firm believers that disagreement and criticism are healthy to any field, we hoped in publishing this paper to provoke a constructive dialogue. Despite the lamentable animosity that we seem to have elicited in a few of our respondents, the wide range and overall seriousness of the comments to our paper suggest to us that this process has begun. We hope that the debate will continue beyond the confines of this journal and that it can be conducted with spirit but without rancor and resentment. If Mesoamericanists writing about the role of shamanism in Mesoamerican art would in future give more thought to some of the issues that we have raised here, we think that our field would surely be the better for it.

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