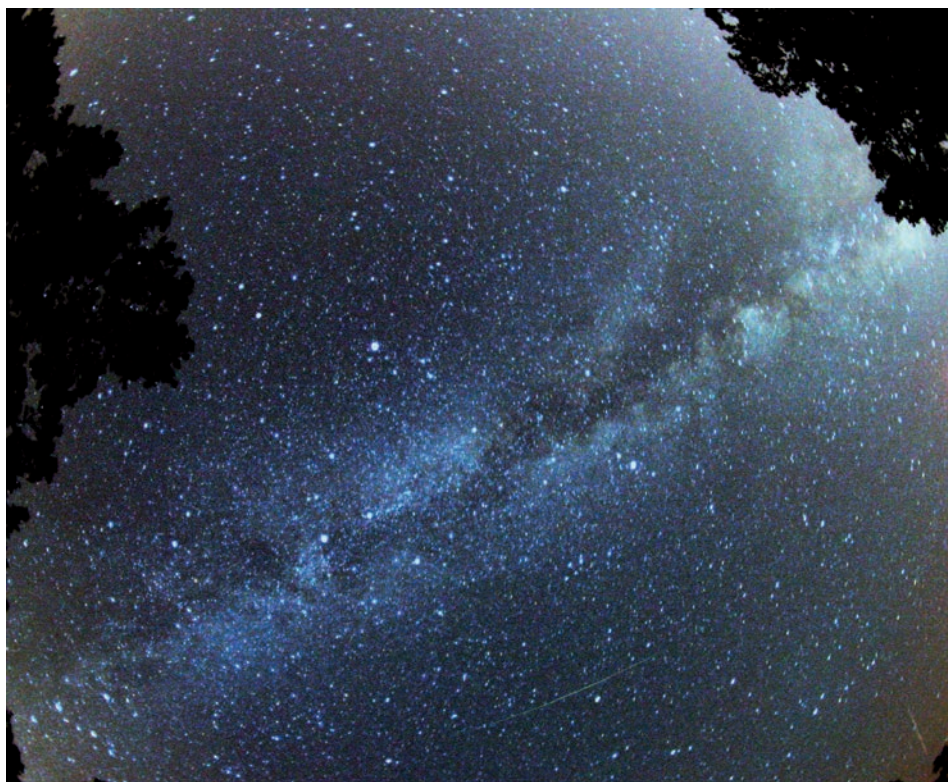


Dir. Egle BARONE VISIGALLI

Colocataires d'Amazonie



Ibis Rouge Éditions

Une partie des contributions ici réunies ont été présentées lors des deux tables rondes « Hommes et animaux en Amazonie » de 2011, qui se sont tenues à Paris et en Guyane.

D'autres travaux sont venus enrichir la réflexion centrale proposée par cet ouvrage autour des relations entre les êtres vivants, animaux, hommes et plantes, dans les systèmes de pensée amazonien et occidental.

Car « penser » cette relation, de part et d'autre de l'océan Atlantique, signifie, peut-être, apporter une pierre à l'édifice d'une meilleure compréhension et d'un plus grand respect entre les êtres et les cultures, d'où dépend sûrement notre avenir.

Les auteurs de cet ouvrage proviennent d'horizons différents : historiens, écologistes, vétérinaires, philosophes, anthropologues et archéologues nous offrent des points de vue multiples sur la relation homme / animaux / plantes.

Leurs contributions nous rappellent à quel point il est important, aujourd'hui plus que jamais, de repenser notre relation à l'existant et aux êtres vivants, d'ici et d'ailleurs, miroirs de notre humanité.

Les contributeurs de l'ouvrage : Egle BARONE VISIGALLI, William BALÉE, David G. CAMPBELL, Isabelle LECHAT, Dominique LESTEL, Federico NOGARA, Anna C. ROOSEVELT, Régis VERWIMP.

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La Voie Lactée, l'Amazone céleste des peuples amazoniens, photo © Brocken Inaglory, 2007

Colocataires d'Amazonie :
Hommes, animaux et plantes
de part et d'autre de l'Atlantique

Espace outre-mer

Sous la direction de Egle Barone Visigalli

Colocataires d'Amazonie :
Hommes, animaux et plantes
de part et d'autre de l'Atlantique

Ibis Rouge Éditions

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Nous remercions aussi vivement la Région Guyane pour son soutien à l'exposition « Les habitants de l'eau : autres histoires de Guyane » et aux deux tables rondes « Hommes et animaux en Amazonie », qui se sont tenues à Paris et à Cayenne.

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Préface

« Nous sommes des hommes : nous ne pouvons nous soustraire au langage et à la connaissance de notre propre expérience affective lorsque nous décrivons une réaction présentant une similitude frappante avec d'autres espèces... »

Stephen JAY GOULD

Une partie des contributions ici réunies ont été présentées lors des deux tables rondes « Hommes et animaux en Amazonie » de 2011, qui se sont tenues à Paris et en Guyane¹.

D'autres travaux sont venus enrichir la réflexion centrale proposée par cet ouvrage autour des relations entre les êtres vivants, animaux, hommes et plantes, dans les systèmes de pensée amazonien et occidental.

Car « penser » cette relation, de part et d'autre de l'océan Atlantique dans notre cas, signifie, peut-être, apporter une pierre à l'édifice d'une meilleure compréhension et d'un plus grand respect entre les êtres et les cultures, d'où dépend sûrement notre avenir.

Les auteurs de cet ouvrage proviennent d'horizons différents : historiens, écologistes, vétérinaires, philosophes, anthropologues et archéologues nous offrent des points de vue multiples sur la relation homme /animaux/ plantes.

Plusieurs articles sont consacrées à l'Amazonie, de la Préhistoire à nos jours, d'autres proposent un discours plus universel, tous montrent à quel point les êtres non humains nous aident à vivre, à nous construire ou à nous reconstruire, nous permettent de penser le réel, dont nous formons, avec eux, le maillage.

La spiritualité de l'Amazonie recèle en effet encore bien des ressources à découvrir...

De nouveaux constats émergent. Si les animaux sont hyper-représentés dans l'art traditionnel des peuples amérindiens, et omniprésents dans les

1 Ces deux tables rondes ont eu lieu à l'Aquarium tropical de la Porte Dorée de Paris et à la Cité administrative régionale de Cayenne dans le cadre des manifestations autour de l'exposition « Les habitants de l'eau : autres histoires de Guyane », organisée à l'occasion de l'Année des outre-mer. Cf. Visigalli Egle – Sarge Kristen, *Les habitants de l'eau : autres histoires de Guyane*, Ibis Rouge Éditions, 2011.

cosmologies, d'autres peuples amazoniens, comme les brésiliens catholiques ou protestants, acteurs du dernier front pionnier, expérimentent des relations inattendues avec eux et avec le monde végétal.

Au fin fond de l'Amazonie franco-brésilienne, les animaux deviennent de véritables compagnons de vie « à l'occidentale », sont entourés de tous les soins possibles, les fleurs et les plantes qui ornent les maisonnettes en bois deviennent symboles de statut social et de civilisation.

Le philosophe D. Lestel nous rappelle que l'humanité, pour rester telle, ne peut que déborder dans l'animalité et il affirme dans son texte que « *la capacité de garder intacts des espaces sauvages comme l'Amazonie joue un rôle essentiel dans l'hygiène spirituelle et psychologique d'un humain qui se laisse de plus en plus déborder par des systèmes urbains croissants. Qu'une vie sauvage, c'est-à-dire une vie qui est régie par d'autres impératifs que ceux de la rentabilité, du progrès et de la suprématie humaine existe encore quelque part est en effet essentielle à l'exercice même de ma liberté fondamentale d'être humain.* »

W. Balée, considéré comme l'un des fondateurs de l'écologie historique, explique comme l'environnement des amérindiens Ka'apor, avec ses multi dimensions physiques et métaphysiques, est géré et protégé depuis des millénaires et à quel point la relation sémantique et mythologique (la classification Ka'apor) à la nature aquatique et à ses habitants participe à la connaissance approfondie et à l'équilibre de l'écosystème.

Les apports africains à la pensée religieuse Ka'apor renforcent l'idée générale selon laquelle l'existant est un, l'homme est à la fois esprit et matière, homme et animal, tandis que l'élément aquatique, le fleuve, participe de la nature animale du mytique anaconda... Qui, lui, est représenté de façon presque obsessionnelle dans une grande quantité d'artefacts depuis des millénaires !

Quant à la question de la protection des espèces sauvages en Europe, celle-ci est abordée de façon originale, à travers l'histoire de l'ours Bruno victime des absurdités bureaucratiques et d'une idéologie de préservation de la nature éminemment technocratique.

À travers ces voix multiples, cet ouvrage nous rappelle à quel point il est important, aujourd'hui plus que jamais, de repenser notre relation à l'existant et aux êtres vivants, d'ici et d'ailleurs, miroirs de notre humanité.

Je vais donc conclure en remerciant tous les contributeurs, ainsi que mon éditeur, qui, encore une fois, nous soutient dans nos entreprises et nos rêves.

Egle BARONE VISIGALLI
Macouria, le 19 mai 2014

L'universel « Amazonie »

**The great anaconda and woman shaman:
A dangerous and powerful ancestral spirit from creation to today**

A. C. ROOSEVELT

Introduction

The great aquatic boa of Amazonia, the anaconda *Eunectes* spp. (“good swimmer” in Greek), is a fascinating animal with a long history of involvement in indigenous cosmology and culture in the tropical lowlands of South America. Its image and the related spiritual concepts are present in various forms in prehistory, in ethnohistory, and among living tribes. Large snakes appear first in Paleoindian rock art and, snakes identifiable as anacondas are very common in indigenous art from 2000 years ago to today. The presentation and context of prehistoric anaconda images show that it became the spirit animal of arguably the most important figure in iconography: a supernatural female shaman. In ethnohistoric and ethnographic cultures, its role is made clear by many people’s testimonies. For them, a supernatural Great Anaconda is the spirit twin of Woman Shaman, leader of the renowned Amazon women, creator of the Amazon, and the greatest of ancestral deities. In choosing the anaconda for this pre-eminent role in their cosmology and culture, Amazonians were influenced both by their acute observations of anaconda ecology and behavior and by their deep understanding of human relations with the environment and each other.

Amazonian anacondas

Anacondas are from the boa constrictor family (Mattison 2007). The largest, most common, and most widely found anaconda species in the Amazon is the Green Anaconda, *Eunectes murinus*, which has been noted in all the countries of the Amazon, the Guianas, Venezuela, and Trinidad and Tobago. There are several other species in lowland South America: the rare dark-spotted species, *E. deschauenzeei*, in the Orinoco, Guianas, and northwest Brazil, the new Bolivian species, *E. beniensis*, and the smaller yellow anaconda, *E. notaeus*, in lowland Bolivia and Argentina (Colthorpe 2009). The origin of the name Anaconda (*anacaona*) (Angera 1912:1:123-126) is uncertain but appears first as an elite indigenous woman’s name on the island of Hispaniola. The source is Peter Martyr de Anghiera (1457-1526), who, although he never went to the Caribbean or South America, was a more informed writer on the discoveries of the early explorers than

later authors, who attributed the name to south Asia. The languages, art styles, and much of the mythology of the Greater Antilles derives from that of lowland South America, and it's been confirmed by archaeology that early migrants to the Greater Antilles from South America brought cultivated trees and plants with them.

One of Amazonia's most intriguing animals, the anaconda has only been intensively studied scientifically since the 1990s (Colthorpe 2009; George 2002; Mattison 2007). Reaching over 10 meters and 500 lbs, the anaconda is one of the largest and heaviest animals in Amazonia and the heaviest of all snakes. It is one of the most beautiful of animals, the shiny scales of its greenish skin bearing bold, beautiful, dark skin patterns in squarish and criss-cross geometric designs (Figure 1 and 2). The belly is pale, with dark spots. The skin colors and patterns are like a camouflage and help the snake merge into its tropical landscape. Anacondas live in slow-moving rivers, swamps, and lakes in tropical forest and savanna but also climb up into trees, rock outcrops, and caves to warm themselves or hide. Resting during the day, an anaconda becomes active at night. It moves readily in water, nearly completely submerged, but is slow and clumsy on land, because of its great weight. Though its sight is not very good, it can detect movements and shapes. It «hears» by sensing vibrations and heat through pits and sensors along its jaws. It smells by waving its tongue in the air to collect molecules and then touching it to the scent-sensitive organ on the palate inside its mouth. With eyes and nostrils on the top of the head, the snake is well designed to keep watch while nearly entirely submerged. It can remain completely submerged for several hours without breathing and swims silently, making few ripples. Because of its cryptic behavior, leaf-like patterning, and aquatic lair, the anaconda is not easy to see, making it difficult to study in the wild.

Although solitary and shy most of the year, during the breeding season, mature anacondas become social animals that use their scent to attract and find mates. The female is larger than the male, more powerful, and aggressive. She chooses among numerous males that gather about mature females during rainy season, excited by her scent, which they can taste from a distance by putting their tongues out in the air. Sometimes the eager males wind in «mating balls» around a female for weeks. The courtship period can be as long as a month or more. During mating the successful male and the female twine tightly around one another for hours. About six months after the mating, which takes place in muddy depressions or shallow water, the females bear live young of litter size increasing from 10-20 in young adult snakes to almost 100 in some mature snakes. The little anacondas are on their own, quite ready to make their way, but have a high mortality rate from predation.

Ecologically, the anaconda is a «keystone» animal in the tropical ecosystem, a high predator whose hunting affects the density of both prey populations and other carnivores. The anaconda is an important predator

of riparian and aquatic animals, consuming animals as large as jaguars, tapirs, deer, peccaries, crocodilians, and capybaras and as small as birds, turtles, lizards, frogs, fish, and insects. Hunting is most active during the dry season. The snakes lie quietly and patiently in wait for their prey, whom they can detect from the mere traces of scent and heat from prey. Though slow and quiet much of their time and able to go for many months without eating, anacondas can move extremely fast once they have detected a prey animal passing by. They have powerful jaw muscles, sharp rows of teeth, and flexible jaw joints the better to seize and swallow prey. A large prey animal may take several hours to swallow. Except for smaller animals, which it can engulf directly, the anaconda kills prey by coiling and constricting about them to suffocate them or drown them in the water. The intelligent snake tightens a bit more each time an animal lets out a breath, until breathing becomes impossible. After a meal, the snake becomes slow and lethargic while digesting but vomits up its meal and flees, if disturbed (Renata Leite Pitman, personal communication, 2013). The large snakes are frightening to humans but are not generally thought a danger to them, as no one has authenticated anyone having been seized and eaten by an anaconda (Rivas 1999). They tend to try to flee when approached and only attack if cornered. Anacondas, though, are considered endangered by humans, who often kill the snake through fear, to protect domestic animals, or for their valuable patterned skin.

The integration of science, art, and cosmology in Amazonia

Amazonian people's deep knowledge of their ecosystem, cosmos, and the ecology and behavior of the snakes are reflected in their concepts of the supernatural Great Anaconda.

In Amazonia savants scientific knowledge of their ecosystem and societies is not separated from their aesthetic and mythological beliefs (Barone Visigalli and Roosevelt 2010; Barone Visigalli et al. 2011). Research on archaeological and ethnographic societies of indigenous Amazonia reveals the existence of an ancient regional knowledge and belief system linked to a distinctive aesthetic complex. Its name, the Polychrome Horizon, derives from the rich polychrome art style of its associated material culture. This «great tradition» has existed throughout the Amazon region for at least 2000 years and has roots going back 11 000 years (Roosevelt 1999). Unlike modern industrial culture, this indigenous tradition does not separate ecosystem, the supernatural, ritual, aesthetics, and social mores but weaves them into a powerful, multifaceted cultural whole. To gain more overall potency, the culture joins together rather than opposes social, philosophical, artistic, and environmental knowledge. It approaches interaction among people as well as between people and the environment through ritual practices as well as through superb technical and aesthetic skills. Thus, hunters and fishers use expert knowledge of animal behavior and ecology with careful religious rituals to approach and process their prey. Similarly,

artists and craftspeople conceive and carry out their work as shaman, no differently than do curers, who apply knowledge of illness and effective treatments with philosophical understandings of the body and soul and their connections to the social fabric and to ancestral spirits.

The river and the Great Anaconda

For some indigenous people in the northwest of the region, the Amazon that they inhabit is just the worldly part of the great, white supernatural river that can be seen at night as the Milky Way Galaxy (Figure 3 and 4). Tukanoan shaman reveal in their chants that the Amazon is the earthly Anaconda and the Milky Way, the supernatural Amazon (C. Hugh-Jones 1979). Just as the earthly Amazon contains a sediment-filled «white water» during the rainy season, the Milky Way is said to contain the supernatural «milk» that Woman Shaman squeezed from her breasts when she created the Amazon. Northwest Amazon people equate that milk of the supernatural river with the milky, hallucinogenic sap of the *Banisteriopsis vine*, whose thick, twining, mottled trunk they identify with the body of the Great Anaconda (Figure 5) (C. Hugh-Jones 1979). Shamans today take and give the drug that they make from the plant as a protective, curative, life-saving food.

People in many parts of the basin connect the Amazon river to the Great Anaconda because anacondas dominate the river habitat and because rivers' meanders seem to imitate a snaking movement (Figure 6). The supernatural anaconda is supposed by some people actually to have created the Amazon's sinuous riverbeds by slithering across the land. People in the northwest feel that the Amazon was the path the great anaconda took from the mouth of the Amazon when it brought the first people to live there. Tukanoan speakers in that area draw the Amazon as a huge anaconda with its head upstream and its tail downstream (Figure 7) and decorate their community house with its image (Figure 8) (Cabalar 2010).

Women and the Great Anaconda

Amazonians in many places and times have identified the Great Anaconda as a woman shaman and creator god. The story of creation is still recounted by ethnographic savants in tales about the origins and nature of the earth, of the cosmos, and of humans. Fearsome ancestral deities with combined human-plant-animal-and astral characteristics created the world, assisted by epic culture heroes who battle monsters and harsh environmental forces for their survival and success. The stories are incorporated into shamans' ceremonies, community initiation theatricals, delineated in dances, recounted in songs, and depicted in polychrome painted costumes, major artworks, and body-decorations.

In Amazonian oral histories, the Great Anaconda is a central mythical female deity active from the earliest creation time until today (de Civrieaux

1980; Heinen 1988; Roe 1982; Roth 1915; Torres and Alaza 2001; Whitten and Whitten 1972; Wilbert 1970, 1990). Amazonian Indians conceive of the huge, supernatural anaconda as an important ancestral spirit both socially and spiritually dangerous to humans even today. The Great Anaconda deity is considered a «master» or «owner» that rules over the female part of the cosmos: the waters and the underworld. As depicted mythologically in the earliest creation time, she is a cannibal god that likes to eat people, especially children. When the founding human ancestors of the Warao and the Indians of the Guianas in northeastern Amazonia kill and burn the Great Anaconda for its misdeeds and scatter its ashes, a *maloca*, a communal house community, springs up at each place where the ashes fell. For the Tukanoan-speakers of the northwest Amazon, the ancestral Great Anaconda was a snake-shaped canoe that traveled up from the mouth of the Amazon toward the northwest, carrying in its belly the ancestors of Tukanoan patrilineages (Cabalzar 2010; Chernela 1979; C. Hugh-Jones 1979; S. Hugh-Jones 1979) (Figure 5). As it coiled its way into the Rio Negro and its tributaries, the animal periodically vomited up people that it had eaten and thus founded the houses of the ancestral lineages of the people (Figure 4).

Some Tukanoans say that this ancestral anaconda came up from a large flat island on the coast, where a woman shaman ruled. Anthropologists have suggested that this island was Marajo at the mouth of the Amazon, or one of the other large islands near it, where the influential Polychrome horizon culture (Roosevelt 1991: 27-98) originated around the beginning of the common era (Elizabeth Reichel de Hildebrand, personal communication).

The creator, called Woman Shaman, is ruler of the night sky, the bowels of the earth, and the waters of the world and all their denizens. She was the leader of the Amazon Women so renowned in mythology and the creator of the primeval earth and of human civilization (Shoumatoff 1990: part 1). Woman Shaman is still worshipped in descendant Polychrome Horizon cultures such as the Shipibo of the Peruvian Amazon, the Tukanoans and Arawakans of the Colombian and Venezuelan Amazon, and the Karaja of the Brazilian Amazon. The sorceress' power comes from her alter ego, the dangerous and malevolent Giant Anaconda, whom many Amazonian shaman consider to be her all-powerful alter-ego spirit animal. And in some modern Amazonian societies of the upper Amazon, such as the Shipibo in Peru, the great supernatural anaconda is Woman Shaman (Gebhart-Sayer 1984; Torres and Alaza 2001). In Amazonian thought, the «owners» or «masters» of the animals preside over the exchange of human souls and animal prey between the current world and the underworld (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975).

At the beginning of the world, Woman Shaman created the Milky Way, which is conceived of as the original Amazon river in the sky, from which the living river now descends on earth (Figures 6 and 7). Filling the celestial river with milk that she squeezed from her breasts, she created of her milk

the first hallucinogen, which modern shaman can recreate by extracting and processing juice of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* plant (Figure 8). The resemblance of this plant's thick, sinuously curving stem to the body of the great Anaconda of the Amazon did not escape Amazonian ritualists. The plant's hallucinogenic juice is said by ritualists to be Woman Shaman's magical breast milk. They sat that she squeezed the milk from her breasts to create the celestial Amazon river – the Milky Way galaxy – from which the earthly Amazon descends. Shaman extract the hallucinogenic milk from the *Banisteriopsis* vine, for their trance journeys to see the spirit world. The drug is thought to be a restorative and protective food (C. Hugh-Jones 1979; Wright 1981).

With anaconda's help, the Amazon Woman invented religion and the arts and ruled over the earth and sky until the culture hero, Sun, defeated her and stole her fire, arts and crafts (Roe 1982). She and her female tribe invented ceremonial culture, including magic, sorcery, divination, art, and ritual curing. She and her female tribe made the first musical instruments and ornaments and created the arts of music, dance, and singing. A being born from Woman Shaman becomes the first ancestral magic flute. Native people in many areas still make these large, long wind instruments, which are kept in secret places under the waters of streams until needed for special initiation ceremonies' dances. She also invented the polychrome sacred images, which Amazonians still paint on their bodies and on artifacts, as a form of curative, safe-guarding prayer.

With this armory of art and religious power, the Amazon women ruled the world and excluded men from their society except for insemination. But led by the Sun, the men finally rose up and defeated the women shaman, took their magic and cultural tools, and thenceforth excluded them from participating in their most important rituals. In despair the defeated women fled, leaving a trail of petroglyphs along their escape routes (Cabalar 2010) (Figure 9). With her priestesses she left the earth and now rules over the night sky and the denizens living under the waters and in the earth.

As the spirit animal of the Woman Shaman, the huge Amazonian water snake is ambiguous sexually. Conceived of by Westerners as a phallic emblem, the snake commonly appears in Amazonian myths as a seducer of women, and its preferred prey are menstruating women who venture near or into water bodies. The magic anaconda enters their wombs through the vagina and impregnates them. But in contrast to Western ideas, in Amazonian thought, the spirit anaconda appears to its human victims in the guise of a beautiful young woman, who seduces her victims and carries them away to her house into the watery underworld (Wilbert 1970).

The Great Anaconda in Amazonian art

The Polychrome Horizon culture emerged from research on archaeology, ethnohistory, and ethnology of Amazonia. It is manifested in oral tes-

timonies, ceremonial performances, songs, art iconography, and shamanic practices. Polychrome images of mythological snakes that earthly Amazonians have painted since the earliest human culture in the basin dominated the imagery of Amazonian during much of later prehistory remain one of the primary decorative and representation art styles there still today.

The Paleoindians who first colonized the Amazon from Asia more than 10 000 years ago transformed entire rocky mountaintops in Monte Alegre, Brazil, in the Lower Amazon, with their polychrome images of humans, animals, and astronomical figures (Figure 10) (Roosevelt 1999). The snake is prominent among the animal images, and there are figures of women in postures similar to the petroglyphs that Tukanoan Indians believe were cut into the rocks of the Upper Rio Negro by the Amazon women when they fled after their defeat by men (Cabalzar 2010).

By the beginning of the common era, about 2000 years ago, Amazonians living on Marajo Island at the mouth of the Amazon invented the Polychrome Horizon, one of the most influential and widespread art styles of South America (Schaan 2001, 2004 ; Roosevelt 1991, 1994). It is an exquisite style that combines complex painted designs of the anaconda's skin patterns with engraved and modeled forms to depict a world inhabited by women shaman and the animals of their part of the cosmos: the great boa and other snakes, ducks, turtles, fish, etc. Images of men are rare, as are images of the terrestrial and sky denizens of the male part of the cosmos.

In the monumental Marajoara Joanes style of the fifth through seventh centuries AD, Woman Shaman is represented on large female effigy secondary burial urns (Figure 11). She wears tasseled earrings and an elaborate shirt decorated with the serpentine designs. Within her uterus there is sometimes a supernatural anthropomorphic creature. As depicted in the Marajoara Pacoval style of the tenth through eleventh centuries AD, Woman Shaman has arms of anacondas and their anaconda skin patterns on her decorated shirt (12). She is represented with deadly scorpion eyes, her mouth pursed to blow magic or whistle to call forth her protective spirits. Sometimes she is shown eating, a reference to her cannibal nature. The numerous phallic female figurines depicting her personify the shamanic rattle (Figure 13). Among the many female-associated ritual objects are cups in the shape of female breasts (Figure 14), reminders of the myth with which she filled the celestial Amazon with the hallucinogenic fluid from her breasts.

As her aesthetic culture spread west, north, and south from the mouth of the Amazon with the influence or migration of her descendants, it carried the motifs of anaconda's skin patterns as the primary motif for overall artistic decoration.

In the mid 16th century Friar Gaspar de Carvajal marveled at the polychrome painting and the female deity worshipped in the middle Amazon then (Carvajal 1934). Working along the Amazon in the late 17th and early

18th centuries, the early missionary Samuel Fritz learned from noble Omagua woman potters that the multicolored «geometric» designs they painted on the pots were the Great Anaconda's own skin patterns (Fritz 1922). As magical as the snake whose ornamentation they depict, the designs were carried still further west to the Ucayali at the foothills of the Andes in the Upper Amazon in Peru, where they appeared on first 11th century effigies of the Caimito culture (Gebhart-Sayer 1984 ; Weber 1975).

Nearby, still today, the woman painters of the matrilineal, uxori-local Shipibo identify the patterns as the ancestral anaconda's. They paint them as prayers on skin, pottery, and fabric and embroider them on fabrics.

With their statuesque, large-as-life ritual pottery effigy jars, they still honor Woman Shaman, or First Woman, as they call her, or Ronin, the Great World Boa, mother of all waters and their creatures. The pottery pattern that they identify as with Ronin is very much like anaconda polychrome skin patterns (Gebhart-Sayer 1984: 6-10). The artists show her decked out with tasseled earrings and a shirt decorated with anaconda patterns (Figure 15), like the shirts Shipibo shamen still wear for important ceremonial occasions (Figure 16). The painted shirt patterns and the ear-tassels of the Shipibo effigies of the Great Anaconda Woman closely resemble the ones ancient Marajoaran women adorned her with more than a thousand years ago at the mouth of the Amazon thousands of miles away.

The Shipibo girls' initiation ceremony celebrates Woman Shaman. Earlier, to ethnographers working with the group Shipibo revealed (Gebhart-Sayer 1984) that the polychrome designs were not just symbolic decorations but are the very patterns that shimmer on the bodies of spirit people, whom shaman see in their drug trances. For Shipibo, the act of painting on objects or people's skins and clothes is a form of active prayer and curing that transforms their state of being. Artists and craftspeople are in effect shaman, an insight that researchers had not recognized. The women who make the monumental pots representing Woman Shaman revealed to us that they prepare ritually as shaman: abstaining from sex and certain foods, chanting and blowing tobacco to propitiate the spirit of the pot.

An important but fearsome ancestral spirit even among living Amazonians, as the great anaconda Woman Shaman still seduces unwary humans and pulls them into the depths of her dark, watery world. Her dangerous power is, however, a source of Amazonian women's power even today and remains an inspiration for their art and ritual.

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Figure 1. Anaconda (*Eunectes murinus*) sunning on a rock.



Figure 2. Close-up of polychrome anaconda (*Eunectes murinus*) skin-patterns.



Figure 3. The white-water Amazon mainstream at Lago Grande de Paituna, Monte Alegre, Brazil.



Figure 4. The Milky Way Galaxy, for Amazonians, the supernatural Amazon river.



Figure 5. The thick, twisted trunk of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine, which yields the hallucinogen associated with the Great Anaconda Woman creator god.



Figure 6. Snake-like meanders of an Amazon tributary.

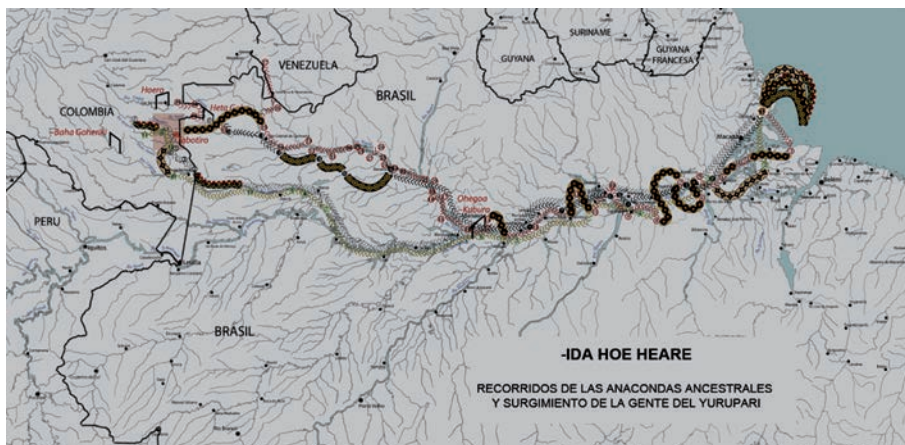


Figure 7. Map of the Ancestral Anaconda's route from Marajo Island and Rio Negro patrilineages. Courtesy (of Aloisio Cabalzar and the Piraparana Indigenous community, Colombia).



Figure 8. Piraparana community, Rio Negro, Colombia.
A. Indians and their communal lineage house with polychrome painted facade.
B. The painted house front.
C. Detail of the Great Anaconda.
(Courtesy of Aloisio Cabalzar and the Piraparana Indigenous Community.)



Figure 9. Petroglyphs near Piraparana, Rio Negro, Colombia.

A. Elaborate image of a woman.

B. Stick-figure image of a woman in childbirth.

The Indian community interprets the images as the Amazon women, fleeing after their defeat (Cabalzar 2010.)



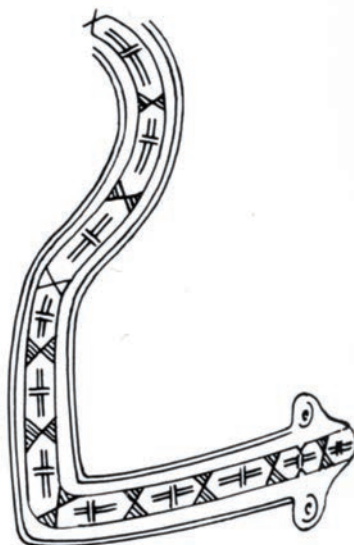
Figure 10. Early Paleoindian polychrome rock art, Monte Alegre, Brazil.
Stick figure image of a woman in childbirth, Painel do Pilao da Pedra Pintada.
Anna Roosevelt.



Figure 11. Marajoara polychrome urn depicting a woman wearing ear tassels and a shirt painted with sinuous designs. Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi. (Roosevelt 1989).



A



B

Figure 12. A. Marajoara polychrome effigy urn showing a woman with scorpion eyes, shown in the act of eating. Her shirt bears anaconda patterns, and her arms are depicted as anacondas. Courtesy American Museum of Natural History (Roosevelt 1991: 52, top left)

B. Drawing of anaconda-skin patterns on a similar urn (Schaan 2001: 122, right).



Figure 13. Marajoara polychrome phallic rattle in the shape of a female figurine. Courtesy Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi.



Figure 14. Marajoara female-associated ritual objects, with incised and painted cups in the shape of breasts at lower left. Courtesy American Museum of Natural History.



Figure 15. Monumental Shipibo polychrome female effigy jar depicting First Woman. She wears tassel earrings and a shirt decorated with anaconda patterns. The urns are set into the ground to hold fermented drinks for the initiation ceremonies of elite girls (Torres and Alaza 2001: 82, bottom).

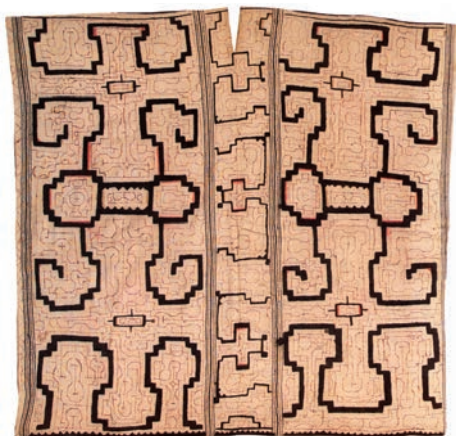


Figure 16. Shipibo polychrome shaman's shirt decorated with painted anaconda-skin patterns (Torres and Alaza 2001: 92, bottom).

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