



The Long Trip: A Prehistory of Psychedelia

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Many people assume that experimentation with hallucinogens began with Timothy Leary and the psychedelic revolution of the fifties and sixties. In fact, as this illuminating study demonstrates, psychedelics have been used by human societies in every part of the world for ritual and spiritual purposes for millennia. As Paul Devereux points out, our modern culture is eccentric in its refusal to integrate the profound experiences offered by these natural substances into our own spiritual life and traditions. Modern Western culture's recent experimentation with psychedelic drugs raised the awareness of archaeologists and anthropologists, leading them to recognize the use of hallucinogens in surviving traditional societies and in the archaeological record. Devereux reveals dramatic new evidence - from linguistics, ethnobotany, biology, and other fields - for the psychedelic experiences of various prehistoric cultures, and ponders the implications and effects of psychedelic revelations on our contemporary worldview, linking them to out-of-body and near death experiences, shamanic trances, even memory and dreaming.

The Long Trip: A Prehistory of Psychedelia Details

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David says

Most people assume that human usage of hallucinogens began during the psychedelic revolution in the 1960s. Devereux puts forth a satisfying effort to demonstrate the long span of time that these substances have occupied a part in humanity. Psychedelics have been used in every part of the world for ritual and spiritual purposes for millennia. Our modern society is unique in its refusal to integrate these experiences into our own life and traditions. In *The Long Trip: A Prehistory of Psychedelia* Devereux provides evidence for the usage of hallucinogens in various prehistoric cultures.

The book begins with a glossary of terms that are common in psychedelia. The set of terms is “archaeology, ecstasy, ethnology, hallucinogen, prehistory, psychedelic and shaman.” I knew these terms and their meanings, but it was a great inclusion to the book’s introduction. Once the reader is prepared to understand the rest of the book, Devereux dives into the evidence of hallucinogens in Stone Age Europe, the Old World, the New World and an extremely in-depth analysis of psychedelic art found in caves.

I found a lot to be learned in this book, although it wasn’t necessarily an easy read. I wouldn’t really suggest reading it unless you are interested in the history of psychedelia, but for those of us that are interested, it is one of the best books I have ever read on the subject.

I really enjoyed the following excerpt from the book’s epilogue:

The human body is an open system, taking in material from the environment and expelling matter into it all the time, and we really shouldn’t think of taking chemicals for visionary and mind-expanding functioning as any different, any less natural, than taking in gases from the air for their chemical benefits to the body, or chemicals and compounds in animal and vegetable matter to provide food, or fermented fruits and vegetable matter to provide delicious, refreshing or inebriating beverages, or vitamins to augment healthy functioning, or medicines when we are ill, or caffeinated teas and coffees when we want to be energised.

Ard says

Vey interesting and extremely readable account of mankind's history with mindaltering substances, focussing on its use in prehistory and the role of shamans in applying the unusual states they give access to. I'm pretty familiar with the history of psychedelics, but this book offered a lot of new insights. Excellent.

Reread this in June 2017 as I was going to visit the megalithic monument of Gavrinis in France. This book was how I first learned about this very intriguing passage grave from the Neolithic era. The island of Gavrinis, and basically the whole area of Brittany (Bretagne) is well worth the visit for anyone with an interest in history and prehistoric monuments.

Sean Murray says

By the time anyone found this book, they will have heard all this before. No facts regarding prehistory, just the usual blah blah that rock carvings of spirals and wavy lines are hardcore proof that prehistoric shaman made the images while on magic mushroom, and that carvings of phallics are in fact mushrooms, carved bowls are all bongos, ef etc. As a matter of truth in advertising, be aware that half this book is accounta of extant hallucinogen use. Fully half the book. Then, naturally, the "obvious" conclusion that this means it was the same way in prehistory.

I have a category of books entitled "Interesting, but probably bollocks". This fits neither. Its not very interesting, and it's total bollocks, no probably about it. Go smoke another fatty, Paul Deveraux.

Erik Graff says

Paul Devereux was the editor of a journal dedicated to ley lines for fifteen years. Being a bit of a sceptic myself, this was hardly a recommendation, but, in fact, while seriously discussing straight-line archaeological phenomena in this book, he dismisses almost all British ley line enthusiasm as unsubstantiated. Indeed, his discussion on this matter is more presentation than explanation.

The Long Trip, however, is not ostensibly about ley lines at all. The first two-thirds of it is an argument for the thesis that ecstatic religions worldwide have employed conscious-changing plants and practices since the palaeolithic era. This hypothesis conjoined with some evidences from perceptual psychology proves fruitful in accounting for much prehistoric art as well as familiar religious imagery and symbolism.

Only the last third of the book is about straight-line phenomena and this is the weakest and least interesting as it bears little connection to the central thesis. One feels that he tacked on the material.

My interest in Devereux' speculation stems from a reluctance to dismiss the world's religions as based on lies and insanity. The use of psychoactive plants goes far towards crediting the foundations of humanity's major belief systems.

Nathan says

A thorough exploration of the influence of psychoactive substances on humanity, based primarily on archaeological and anthropological evidence. A bit dense in parts and less substantiated in others; I recommend sifting through sections the reader finds cumbersome, and skipping the ley line chapter altogether. Fascinating and compelling reasoning for studying these substances, and their influence on mankind, further!

Erik says

So damn good. If you believe it.

Justin says

For the images associated with this review: <http://jritchie.com/805>

On my recent trip to the American Southwest I was thrilled to learn of the prevalence petroglyphs held in the region. Here was an opportunity to see into the actual minds of the humans that forged the original path for our species many generations ago.

When I found my first set of petroglyphs at Dinosaur National Monument in Utah, music from the 1960s Planet of the Apes movie filled my head as I envisioned my predecessors carving out these images on these rugged hills. I could see with cinematic production quality the frantic artist, these images did not strike me as the work of a reserved and slow artisan but of someone that struggled to express either something that was important or something that he/she could not describe to the others.

What surprised me about the petroglyphs were their relation to the content of Paul Devereux's The Long Trip . Devereux describes in The Long Trip the evidence of the relationship between humanity and visionary plants. The details provided in The Long Trip of the visions induced by these ancient rituals matched my observations of these petroglyphs exactly. On p. 164 of the 2nd edition (published 2008 by Daily Grail Publishing) a useful chart shows the three stages of entoptic and visual phenomena from the cultures of three separate continents. Fig 11.31 below isn't as neatly laid out as the one in The Long Trip but demonstrates a similar concept, relating entoptic phenomena to cave art, making the case that ancient art is often depictions of visions of these trance states.

The rock art at Dinosaur National Park corresponded all the stages of trance that Devereux summarized, including spirals (basic entoptic phenomena) and transformation into animals (one of the final stages of trance states). The picture below appears to depict a shaman's transformation from lizard into human form,

Petroglyphs aside, one major aim Paul Devereaux had for writing The Long Tail was to demonstrate that modern civilization is a grand exception to the history of humanity because we do not have a ritualized context for accessing visionary states. Even more recent civilizations in Greece had the socially accepted Mysteries of Eleusis. Since Aldous Huxley and Humphrey Osmond coined the modern term for these visionary substances as psychedelics, the associated plants and visionary tools have become stereotyped and abused before being outlawed by the United States with many other nations following suit. Devereux looks to make a case for their integration into our society.

Devereux begins by laying a groundwork for the modern context of these visionary experiences. The modern era of visionary substances began when Dr. Albert Hoffman synthesized lysergic acid diethylamide-25 (LSD). These experiences connected with the past when explorer Gordon Wasson sent morning glory seeds to Hoffman in 1959. These morning glory seeds (of the *R. corymbosa* and *I. violacea*) were used in ancient rituals throughout Mexico. Hoffman discovered that the seeds contained the indole compounds related to LSD, lysergic acid amine... the same as LSD but about 10-20x less potent.

Anthropologist Andrew Sherrat's model of ancient intoxication is that the, "inhalation of fumes preceded the 'drinking complex' and was the most ancient method of taking in aromatic and psychoactive substances. " And throughout ancient life smoked opium and cannabis sativa were prevalent. Moderns can know this through analysis of through Herodotus' descriptions of Scythian Kapnobatai (shamans) "howling with

pleasure” during their rituals with cannabis. Old World Europeans encountered smoking only when they reach the New World and witnessed natives smoking tobacco. However in the ancient world liquid psychoactives were also available, Cypriot pots shaped like opium buds (where opium was prepared in an olive oil mixture) have been found as far back as 1550-1337BC in Egypt. Consequently, prehistoric opium and hemp seeds and pollens have been found around the globe. A Neanderthal man was even found in northern Iraq with Horsetail pollen, Ephedra the source of the nerve-stimulant ephedrine.

The accounts of ancient drug use that most greatly differ from our modern culture are the descriptions of the *Amanita muscaria*. This mushroom, known as the fly agaric, is the stereotypical toadstool. A red cap with white dots all over it, the eating of which is noted to produce euphoria and later hallucinations after inducing extreme physical strength and endurance. From p. 82 of the book, “A Russian anthropologist Valdimir Bogoras observed a Chukchi tribesman take off his snowshoes after eating some of the mushroom, and deliberately walk for hours through the deep snow just for the sheer pleasure of conducting exercise which caused no sense of fatigue.” Even the reindeer craved this mushroom, passing these effects on to those that ate their meat. Since the active constituents of the *A. Muscaria* remain intact when passed through a person’s bladder the reindeer will swarm down men that urinate in the open. Fellow tribesmen would collect this urine and use it to attract the reindeer or to drink at a later time to obtain the desired effects.

One mystery surrounding these visionary substances is in their geographic location. In late 1970, anthropologist Richard Evans Shultes wrote, “...only about 150 [of the world's flora:] are known to be employed for their hallucinatory properties... nearly 130 species are known to be used in the Western Hemisphere, whereas in the Eastern Hemisphere, the number hardly reaches 20.” South America is filled with various snuffs, brews and plants that produce hallucinogenic effects like ayahuasca, the world’s most ancient example of a designer drug combining an MAO inhibitor in *B. cappi* and many various admixtures, many of which contain the potent naturally ubiquitous dimethyltryptamine.

I found the details that Devereux presented on the psychedelic’s influence on myth to be the most interesting portion of the book. One example is of Richard Rudgley’s suggestion that the middle eastern psychedelic syrian rue contributed the designs to the carpets before propelling its users into flights of ecstasy... the flying carpet myth incarnate. The myth of Santa Claus may have derived from use of the *Amanita Muscaria*, the red and white colors of the mushroom, the idea of Santa clambering down the chimney like the entry of smoke into the Siberian yurts during the winter, the reindeer pulling the sleigh reminiscent of the animal’s connection with the substance and the flight through the sky the description of the basic shamanic experience of leaving the body, traveling through the air. My primary interest in psychedelics lies around their relations to ancient religious experience such as in Zoroastrianism and early Christianity, an example being in the taking of the Eucharist. This book didn’t deal heavily in these issues, with only a few mentions of Zoroastrianism. So in that sense it left me a little disappointed but that’s why I’ll need to read Jan Irvin’s *Holy Mushroom*, a good follow up to this book.

An excellent history of humanity’s tendency to intoxicate with pharmacological plants and to seek visionary experience, *The Long Trip* was deep with rich information, a strong section of notes and references. This book is filled with interesting tidbits that may have escaped those deeply interested in the field but provides an incredible gateway for those with cursory experience. In a non-threatening way, Paul Devereux succeeds in providing the general public an introduction to our ancestors and their use of ritual hallucinogens.

Keith Menichols says

There's not much history here, certainly nothing linear. The author is all over the place, sometimes he starts out well then he goes on and on about some tangential thing. Not that there isn't any good information here, just that you have to filter out the nonsense. There's also a lack of information about Asian psychedelia. There's also very little about African psychedelia. This book is not as comprehensive as I would have liked. The introduction is 45 pages long, that should be a chapter. However, the epilogue has some good thoughts in it, I don't agree with everything he says, but I felt it was the best part of the book.
