

Could Chavín's Labyrinth be the Remains of the Resounding

Palace of Hades and Persephone? [Part 1]

Archaeological, Geographical and Documentary Evidences

By

Enrico Mattievich

*To the prominent Italian-born
Peruvian geographer and scientist,
Antonio Raimondi (*1826-†1890)
Who, with his monumental work
"El Perú", was my guide and master.*

Summary

Unlike the path followed by Schliemann and later by Mertz and Pellech, whom from the heroic epic poems were in search of the facts and geographical locations which would have led to these stories, I, however, followed the opposite path: From the palpable reality – the archaeological site of Chavín – an enigma since its discovery – I went to look for in Greek-Roman mythology, in search for an answer. This paper, excerpted from my book "**Journey to the Mythological Inferno**", discusses the first part of the archaeological, geographical and documentary evidences, which favors the possibility that the mysterious remains of Chavín de Huantar, in the Peruvian Andes, are referred to in Hesiod's Theogony, a Greek treatise of the gods, written in the eighth century BC.

ATLAS MOUNTAIN AND THE PALACE OF NIGHT

In geographical literature and in Greco-Roman poetry there has always existed a close relationship between the “sustaining Titan” and the “land of the setting sun”. The binomial Atlas-Hesperides is quoted in the *Theogony* – a Greek treatise of the gods – written by Hesiod around the 8th century B.C. According to this treatise, next to the Hesperides – which guarded the golden apples - somewhere in the western limits of the Earth, beyond the renowned *Okeanos*, where the Greeks believed to be Tartarus, the son of Iapetus – Atlas – transformed into a high mountain, supports the sky on his shoulders.

Hesiod describes the western divinities and their abode, next to Atlas, in the following verses of the *Theogony*. [1]

274-277: the Gorgons who dwell beyond glorious Okeanos

*at Earth's end, toward Night, by the clear-voiced Hesperides,
Sthenno, Euryale, and ill-fated Medousa,
who was mortal^a; the other two were ageless and immortal.*

517-519: By harsh necessity, Atlas supports the broad sky

*On his head and unwearying arms,
at the Earth's limits, near the clear-voiced Hesperides,*

734-747: There, dwell Gyes, Briareos and high-mettled Kottos (the tree Hekatoncheires),

*ever the trusted guards of aegis-bearing Zeus.
There, in proper order, lie the sources and the limits
of the gloomy Earth and of mist-wrapt Tartaros,
of the barren sea, too, and of the starry sky
-grim and dank and loathed even by the gods –
this chasm is so great that, once past the gates,
one does not reach the bottom in a full year's course,
but is tossed about by stormy gales;*

^a Perseus beheads her

even the gods shudder at this eerie place.

There also stand the gloomy house of Night,

ghastly clouds shroud it in darkness.

Before it [the house of Night] the son of Iapetus [Atlas] stand erect and

on his head and unwearying arms firmly supports the broad sky.

The binomial Atlas-Hesperides was sought in vain by geographers and travelers who searched western region of the earth. Three centuries after Hesiod, Herodotus – the Father of History - also searched the lofty mountain of the west. After traveling through Egypt and parts of Western Africa, Herodotus claimed to have located the famous Atlas! The incredible episode is described in his Book IV, Chap. 184.

Strabo (66 B.C.- 24 A.D.) describes the geography of Africa and indicates that, on passing through the Strait of Gibraltar, there is a mountain which the Greeks called Atlas, the same one which the Barbarians called Dyris. Known as Daran by the Arabs. [2]

This is the brief history of the mountain called Dyris or Daran by the natives of Libya which, after Herodotus, become known as Atlas. This mountain was also identified with the mythological “Silver Mountain” quoted by Aristotle, *Meteorolgorum Libri quattuor*, and Promathos of Samos.[3]

Herodotus’ report permits us to consider the credibility of mythological narratives of the time. Paradoxically, with that episode, he contributed in such a way that, later, the Atlas-Hesperides myth was considered a fable.

If there ever existed a region that inspired the verses of Hesiod, it begins at the mouth of the Amazon River and continues along the extensive water basin that penetrates the dense Amazon rain forest, up to the Andean buttress *Th*, 739: “*grim and dank and loathed even by the gods.*” Impressions of navigators who traveled along the Amazon more than three thousand years ago? “*This chasm is so great that, once past the gates, one does not reach the bottom in a full year’s course.*” *Th*,740. Exaggeration? Or would it be the length of a dangerous sea journey from the Northern Hemisphere down to the Southern hemisphere, and then sailing up the gigantic river, until the impressive gates of the Pongo de Manseriche? A deep and narrow gorge that strangles the Marañón River, through mountains that rise 600 meters “*This chasm is so*

great that, once past the gates, one does not reach the bottom in a full year's course but is tossed about by stormy gales; even the gods shudder at this eerie place." Th. 740-743.

In the Upper Marañón, within the Pongo de Manseriche and its upper course, dangerous whirlpools form with frequency.

After crossing the Pongo de Manseriche and climbing the Upper Marañón from the stifling hot rain forest, one reaches the Andean ranges. Here, the Marañón River flows tumultuously northward among steep mountains. On the left margin rises the Cordillera Blanca, named after its snow-covered mountains and glaciers. It is here that the Nevado Huascarán (6,746 m) towers over neighboring snowcapped peaks. Continuing due south one reaches the headwaters of the Marañón - and of the Amazon - in the Cordillera Huayhuash, dominated by majestic Nevado Yerupajá Mountain (6,617 m).

The extensive Cordillera Blanca, stretching southeast to the Cordillera Huayhuash, has the highest peaks in the Peruvian Andes. The icy waters descending from these ranges flow into the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This is one of the most spectacular regions in South America. According to Raimondi, in the southern part of Ancash Department, the snow-clad Cordillera is extremely impressive, and the traveler passing through this lofty region is constantly surrounded by massive snowcapped mountains, whose inaccessible peaks seem to be where earth and sky meet.[4]

In this region, with the Greek *Theogony* in hand, and by literally following Hesiod's verses, one finds the "Palace of Night"- the Gorgon's abode - in front of the high Andes. In fact, at the foot of these mountains, exactly as described in Hesiod's verses, we find a palace or, rather, the ruins of one, erected to the monstrous gods of antiquity. Ornamented with mythological monsters, this palace must have been a famous temple or oracle; the only one in the region that stands out for its impressive architecture constructed entirely of stone. In the ruins of this palace, known as Chavín de Huantar, and in museum galleries in Lima, one can see the extraordinary works of art sculpted and engraved in stone, whereby one can easily identify monstrous entities such as the Gorgon, Cerberus and other children of Tartarus.

THE PALACE OF CHAVIN

The ruins of the Palace of Chavín de Huantar are located in Ancash Department, at an altitude of 3,180 m, in the narrow Mosna Valley, surrounded by high snowcapped mountains, on the eastern watershed of the Cordillera Blanca. One reaches this site from Huaraz, the department capital, by way of the Southern Highway along beautiful Santa Valley, and then, from Catac, crossing the Cordillera Blanca (Fig. I - 1). Prior to the archaeological work initiated by Julio C. Tello, in 1919, the ruins were partially buried under a thick alluvial deposit, accumulated from the runoff of the torrential Huacheksa Stream, that descends from the snowy peaks of the Uruashraju (5,722 m) and Huantsán (6,395 m) mountains. The alluvial soil that covered and protected the ruins was suitable for farming, and eventually the inhabitants of the nearby village used the dressed stones of the palace to erect their houses.[5]

The stone edifices unearthed by Tello's excavations exhibit a clear architectural unity. Though there is evidence of construction in stages, the layout and symmetry of the whole complex of edifices, stairways, plazas and subterranean canals, reveal great planning (Illus. I - 1 and 2). The architectural ornamentation consists mostly of ashlar masonry showing mythological representations carved in flat relief over granite, one of the hardest stones available (Illus. I - 5 and 6; 10 and 11 top). On the upper wall of the façades a series of monstrous heads were tenoned at regular intervals, which probably encircled the entire palace. These granite heads, some weighing a half-ton, were supported by a rectangular tenon carved on the back, giving the impression of being suspended high on the walls without any means of support (Illus. I - 4 and 9). Two perfectly cylindrical granite columns, carved with highly stylized mythological figures, flank the Black and White Portal on the eastern façade (Illus. I - 3). The iconography of Chavín Palace is impressive for the quality of its features and the originality of its design, revealing a creator of extraordinary architectural and artistic skills, rivaling the best works found in the Mycenae (Illus. I - 11 bottom) and Orcomenos grave steles, in Greece. If this palace had been unearthed there, no one would doubt the existence of Daedalus.

THE LABYRINTH

What surprises the visitor most is the apparent absence of an entrance to the edifice, as well as the total absence of halls and spacious rooms[6]. As shown in Fig. I - 2, the

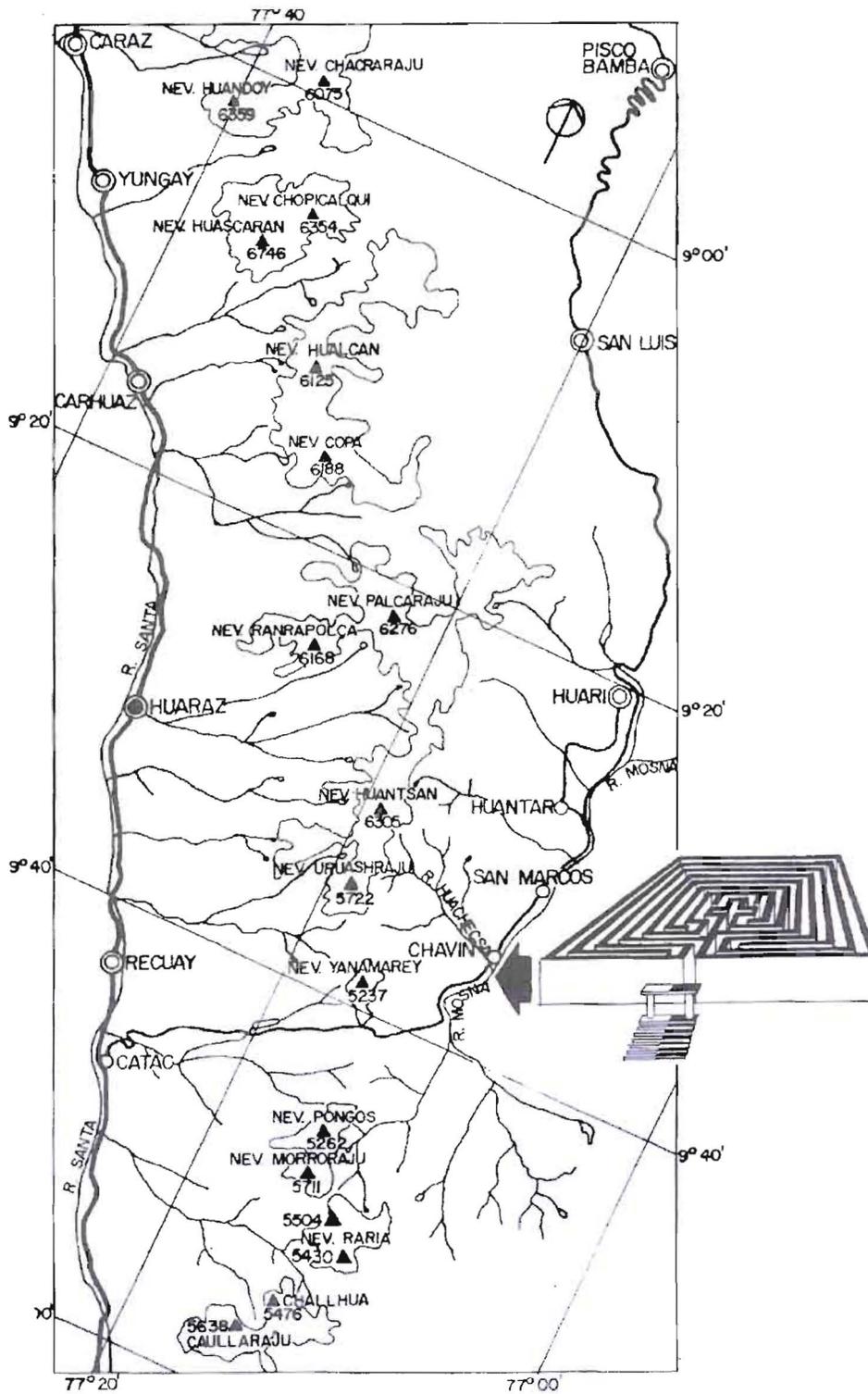


Fig. I - 1. Map of Huascarán National Park with the world's highest tropical mountains, where the ruins of the Palace of Chavín de Huantar are located.

edifice, which extends more than 10,000 square meters and reaches a height of 15 m, has only narrow corridors, giving the impression of a labyrinth.

The labyrinth is formed by a series of corridors of rectangular sections, constructed of massive rock-filled stone walls. These corridors are distributed over various levels, above- and below-ground, where it is possible to walk around easily (Illus. I - 7). Other smaller galleries link the principal labyrinth with a subterranean network which, by its inclination and lateral curvature, indicates that it was designed to convey water. These galleries converge at a central aqueduct that extends from the façade of the principal temple to the Mosna River, passing below the stairways and the main plaza. The central aqueduct is slightly inclined, and its section of approximately two square meters, indicates that it carried an appreciable flow of water. This work of hydraulic engineering, worthy of Daedalus, and for which specialists still have not found a satisfactory explanation, induces one to meditate on the apocalyptic gods represented in that edifice. This labyrinth was the starting point that led to a series of discoveries that became the basis of the present physical interpretation of myths.

THE GORGON

The architect of Chavín sculpted a terrible creature, which he placed in the middle of the labyrinth. To maintain the secret of the subterranean mansion, a myth was spread, which perhaps not even its creator imagined would survive for such a long time. The poets sang of the deed of the hero who had challenged this abominable creature. Now, dear reader, you will be taken to the Gorgon.

In fact, at the intersection of two subterranean galleries, forming a cruciform chamber, in the middle of the labyrinth stands a 4.53-meter tall diorite pillar, upon which rests the principal deity of the temple (Fig. I - 3). Due to the lance-like shape of the monolithic pillar, it was called "Lanzón." The "Lanzón" was suspended from above like a gigantic knife ready to strike. It remained in that position, held firmly between two slabs of granite (or quartzite), forming part of the floor of the room above. While cleaning the galleries, in 1919, it was loosened from its original position. With that lamentable mishap, the pillar fell and lost its original alignment.

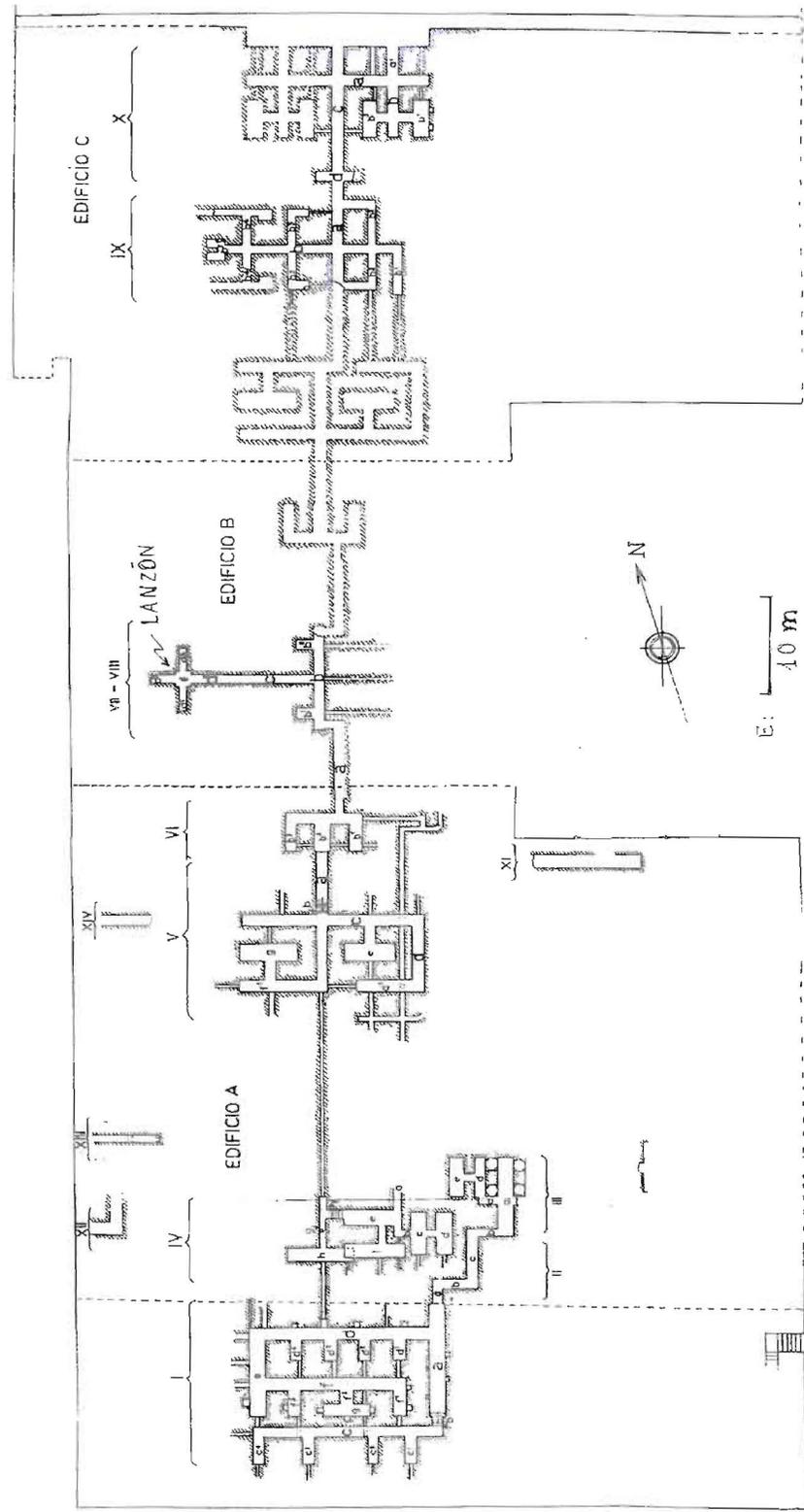


Fig. I - 2: Plan of the labyrinthine galleries of the Chavin Palace (according to J. C. Tello) with the principal edifice A, the oldest temple B, where the "Lanzon" is located, and edifice C extensively destroyed.

Curiously, the image of the terrible divinity, or rather, the Gorgon, was not represented as free to come and go as she liked. Like the Minotaur of Daedalus, the artist portrayed her chained to the middle of the labyrinth, with thick spiral cords. On the upper half she is held by the right arm, menacingly raised with the palm open. In the lower part, there are two laterally engraved cords, held doubly secure below the feet. Who kept her in that robust prison? What sacrifices was she offered to pacify her and to deserve her favors?

In the narrow room above, where once two large slabs of stone supported the "Lanzón," one finds the sacrificial room; very narrow and of peculiar shape, measuring 1.8 m in height. In this minuscule cubicle the victim was placed, after crossing a span by means of a ladder or a portable bridge. The altar upon which the victim was sacrificed was not found though, from other sacrificial stones found in minor places of worship in the Andes, one can presume that the victim's blood ran through an orifice in the floor, dripping over the frightening image of the Gorgon. Tello states that the victim's blood trickled down the front of the "Lanzón." On that side there are two deeply engraved parallel grooves in the rock which, according to the archaeologist, were used to convey the blood from the sacrificial room down to a circular depression, as if it were the third eye of the Gorgon. This depression is located in the middle of a cross engraved on top of the idol's head. The arrangement of the double grooves, states Tello, allowed the recently sacrificed victim's blood to go directly into the mouth of the great divinity, before spreading down the grooves of the stone idol. [7] Another archaeologist, Rebeca Carrion Cachot, believed that, besides blood, *chicha* (an alcoholic drink made from corn) was poured down, and that the "Lanzón" was the most ancient *paccha*, or rhyton, known in Peru. [8]

When, in January 1981, I faced the imposing stone pillar (Illus. I - 8), below the sacrificial room, I tried to imagine how horrible it must have been to see it covered with blood. If suffering and anguish could leave their marks on matter, that pillar would certainly contain all the lamentations of Hell. With that in mind, I extended my hand, closed my eyes and opened my soul. Upon touching it, absolutely nothing happened; I only felt the cold surface, like a polished tombstone, as if it had been polished over a long period of time by the hands of nameless priests, with blood, fat and *chicha*, as it was usually done in ancient Peruvian rituals. But, slowly I began to feel ill at ease. An

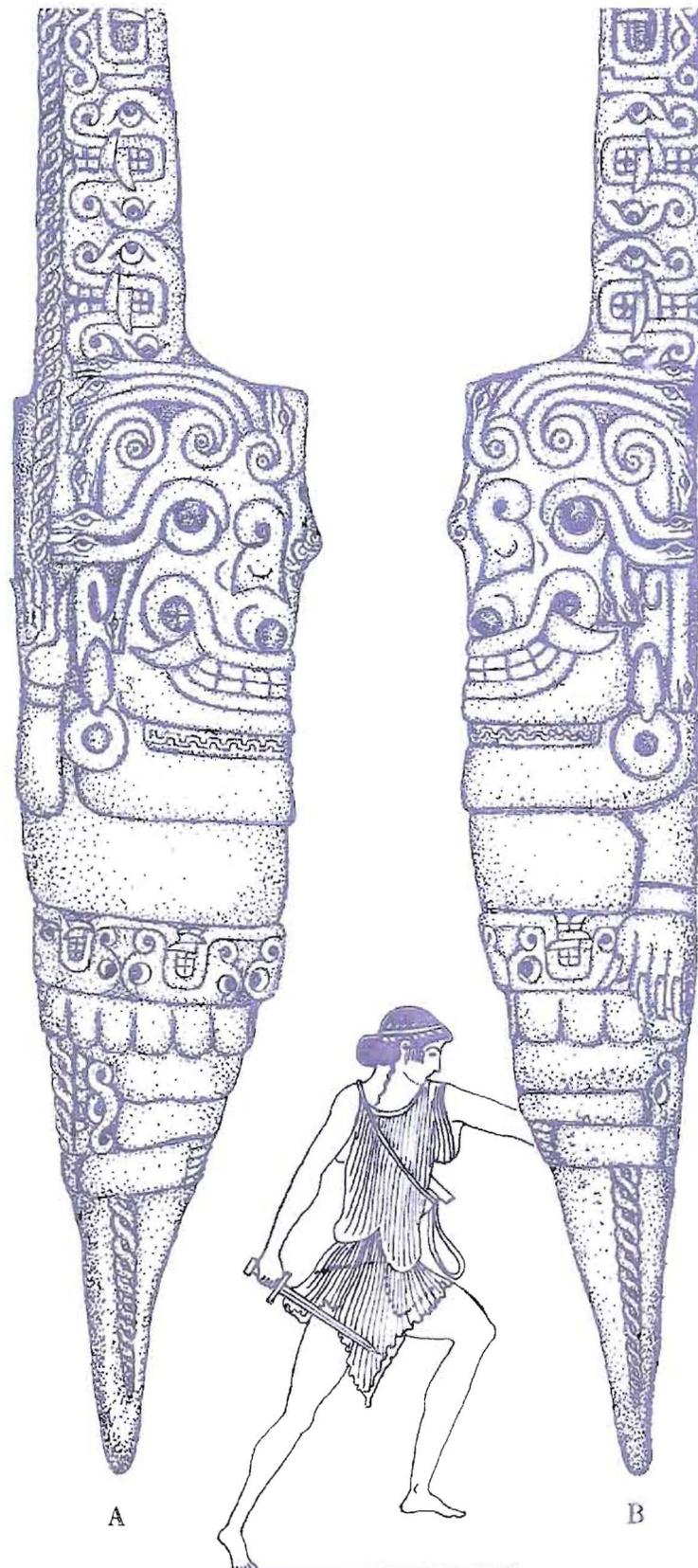


Fig. I - 3: A drawing of "Lanzón" showing South Face A and North Face B

overwhelming force entered my soul, inciting me to write without respite the results of my "journey."

CHRONOLOGY OF CHAVÍN DE HUANTAR

The oldest historical reference to Chavín de Huantar is found in the chronicles of the soldier-historian Cieza de Leon (1518-1560), wherein he describes the ancient paths leading to these lost regions in the rugged mountains, some of which chiseled through rock, and mentions the locals' custom of extracting silver from the mines. He relates that the palace appears to be an enormous fortress, more than 140 paces in width and even more in length, and that there are figures of human heads everywhere, admirably sculpted in stone, and which tradition attributes to great antiquity, executed by men of high stature (as he states, by giants), living there prior to the then governing Incas.[9]

Imbelloni, in 1926, was the first to call attention to the similarity of the "Lanzón" image to the Greek Gorgon. Comparing it with the Gorgon's head at the sacred sanctuary of Syracuse (Sicily), 6th century B.C., one notices the remarkable resemblance of these images (Fig. I - 4).

Its analysis is interesting and deserves to be transcribed at length.[10] *I don't believe that it is necessary to emphasize the similarity between the curve of the eyelids, the eyes and the nose. The relief that represents the lips forms an "ellipsoid" of the same relative size, inclusively curving its extremities upwards, with surprising fidelity. However, the greatest effect is provoked by the spirals that represent the hair (transformed into serpents!) which in both compositions curl in the same direction, and their number is identical. In reality these facts arouse unexpected reactions in the mind of the observer.*

This surprising impartially evaluated evidence would compel a competent researcher to delve deeply into the origins of the unquestionable resemblance of the images, investigating iconography and Greek mythology. But since the intention of Imbelloni was to demonstrate the impossibility of ancient contacts across the Atlantic, instead of following the logical path, he chose a dogmatic solution, stating: *"To maintain an extremely strict conduct, the author does not state that it deals with the cultural dependence of Greece passed on to America."* And concludes: *"We are at the extreme limit of what we concede to be convergence."* That is, the resemblance between

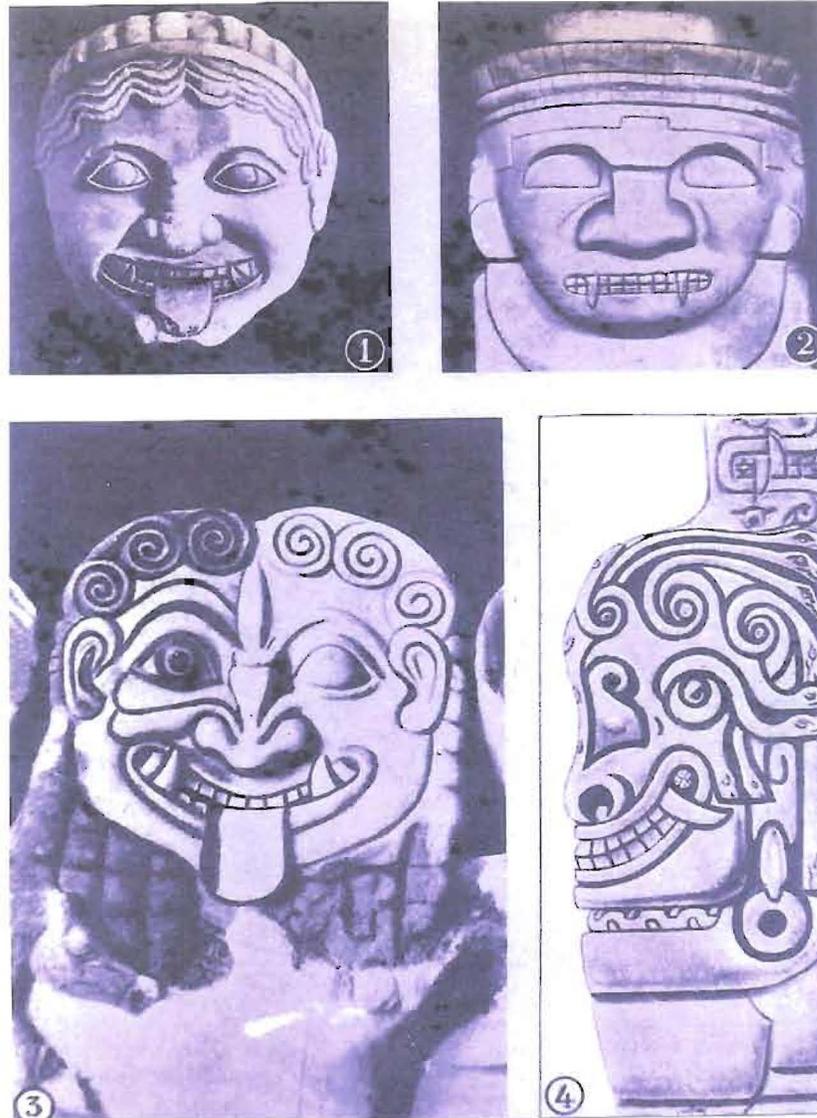


Fig. I - 4. Gorgonian images from America and the Mediterranean
 1. Athens, 2. Colombia, 3. Sicily (Italy) and 4. Peru.

the Gorgonian images was so great, that it stretched the accepted limits of belief that they were culturally independent results. In Imbelloni's time, there was no reliable method of determining the age of these archaeological monuments, and the hypothesis concerning the antiquity of the Peruvian civilization was wrong. The influential Americanist Philip Ainsworth Means, for example, in 1919, believed that in the 13th century B.C., South America was a wild and uninhabited continent.[11] One is not concerned with the origin of mankind in South America (today, its presence can be confirmed as far back as 50,000 years ago). But one is certainly interested in the origin and evolution of the large pre-Columbian civilization of the continent (particularly,

Peru), found in archaeological sites. Through radiocarbon dating, archaeologists know that the Chavín culture, in its initial or formative phase, existed in various regions of Peru, as far back 1,600 B.C.[12] However, despite the importance of this culture, there are no absolute dates available to evaluate the age of Chavín Palace.

What is most surprising is that in recent decades a considerable amount of soil was excavated from the front area of Chavín Palace. An excavation was carried out in 1966-67 by the archaeologist Luis G. Lumbreras; another was initiated in 1972, with the collaboration of the archaeologist Herman Amat and his assistant, Marino Gonzales.[13] This last excavation was motivated by the tourist potential of the site, unearthing a circular plaza, 21 m in diameter, in front of the oldest temple, where the "Lanzón" stands. However, despite the enormous volume of soil removed, no stratigraphic results or dates were presented, that could determine the age of the plaza, or at least, the period of its abandonment. This represents a real catastrophe for scientific archaeology, comparable to setting a library on fire. The only data published corresponded to a charcoal sample found in one of the galleries of Chavín Palace, known as the Gallery of the Offerings, dating back to circa 780 B.C.[14] The fact that a skull and many other human bone fragments along with other offerings were found in the same gallery, could indicate that, already at that time, the palace was completely abandoned. The galleries no longer served their original functions, merely being used as a burial site or a place to deposit ritual offerings.

Without convincing arguments, some archaeologists sustain that the northern section of Chavín's temple (considered the oldest), was built around 1,200-700 B.C.[15] Others point out that, during the Lumbreras excavations, in 1,967, several types of formative ceramics were found in the Chavín site.[16] Bennett also states that the ruins belonged to the first period of the Chavín culture.[17] By gathering together these pieces of evidence one can tentatively estimate - until further studies are carried out by a more technically capable team - that the oldest section of the palace could have been built in the second millennium before Christ, probably around 1,300 B.C.

HUARI-VIRACOCCHA, THE ANDEAN VERSION OF PERSEUS

Having identified the “Lanzón” as the oldest anthropomorphic representation of the Gorgon, and starting from the fact that it was the central deity of Chavín Palace, it is no surprise that a myth or legend regarding this important deity could have survived in the indigenous traditions of Peru.

In the Chavín region, formerly known as Conchuco, time had obliterated the significance of the stone idols and the palace, called “huacas” and “house of the huacas,” respectively, by the natives. Nevertheless, some traditions were preserved, referring to “Huari” as a god and to the homonymous heroes called “huaris” or “guaris,” endowed with supernatural powers, similar to the deity. These traditions - generally considered ridiculous or the work of the devil - were often extracted from the natives, under force or torture, by the iconoclastic clergymen. Hence, the traditions of the Conchuco region and nearby provinces, gathered in the 17th century, are considerably fragmented and confused.

The testimony of the native Domingo Rimachi to a Catholic priest, in 1,656, states that “Huari” was bearded (contrary to the beardless Peruvian Indians), and that he had come to pacify the Indians, who were killing each other over land rights. He distributed land to each family, and taught them irrigation techniques. He also added that he had a “seat” of stone to “sit on,” and that he had arrived in the form of a great and powerful wind.[18]

Another tradition, recorded in 1,619, in Cajatambo Province, south of Conchuco, makes note of the god “Huari-Viracocha,” described as a bearded giant, who came from Lake Titicaca a long time ago. “Huari-Viracocha” was feared because wherever he went, he would transform humans into stone. This ancient tradition, quoted by the French researcher Pierre Duviols, is a priceless document because, in it, we find the Peruvian version of the myth of Perseus, or rather, a fragment of it, which the iconoclasts rescued unknowingly. This interesting mythological fragment states:[19] *“The Indians from the province of Cajatambo had gathered with those of Conchuco to conspire against Huari. In order to ambush and to kill him, they deliberately invited him to a grand feast [at this point of the story the conspirators are called ‘huacas,’ the name the Indians of Conchuco gave to the stone heads of Chavín]. After the huacas had arranged everything as planned, the gathering took place; but to their misfortune they*

did not consider that Huari, being a sage, had foreseen the treacherous trap, and there and then he transformed them into stone. The house of Conchuco, where the huacas were petrified by Huari, was held in great veneration and given the name of House of the Huacas. Afterwards, the Huacas replied to the questions posed by the 'kuracas' (tribal chiefs), who came from many regions to seek advice." Through these indigenous traditions one can also deduce that the "House of the Huacas" was an important oracle.

Duviols, in publishing these important documents, did not realize they dealt with a legend parallel to the Perseus myth; neither did he suspect that the "Lanzón" was the oldest anthropomorphic representation of the Gorgon, inferring that the "House of the Huacas," where the conspirators were petrified by "Huari," is the same edifice known today as Chavín de Huantar. That identification is based on the description of the iconoclastic priest, Vega Bazan, who mentions a very large subterranean temple, constructed of large stone blocks, with extensive labyrinths, where the god "Huari" was worshipped. According to Duviols, that description coincides perfectly with the temple of Chavín, because no other temple - or vestige of one - in ancient Conchuco Province fits Vega Bazan's description, except Chavín de Huantar. Moreover, Duviols mentions the document by Vasques de Espinoza, who describes Conchuco Province without referring to any underground temple, except that of Chavín. In that document, Vasques de Espinoza describes the temple of Chavín de Huantar: [20] *"Near the village of Chavín there is a stone edifice, well constructed, of notable size, which was a Huaca. That edifice is one of the most famous shrines to the Indians, like Rome and Jerusalem is to the Christians. There the devil declared the oracles to the Indians, and to hear them, they came from all over Peru."* After the archaeological works carried out at Chavín by J. C. Tello, in 1940, a series of monstrous heads was unearthed. Considering the power attributed to the Gorgon Medusa in transforming anyone into stone, these heads with bulging eyes which formerly decorated the outer walls of the temple, like trophy heads (Illus. 9a and 9b), are petrified witnesses that allow one to identify Chavín with the abode of the Gorgons, cited in Hesiod's *Theogony*.



Illus. I - 1. The Palace of Chavín, with the main plaza (foreground) and Wachecksá Gorge (upper right corner)



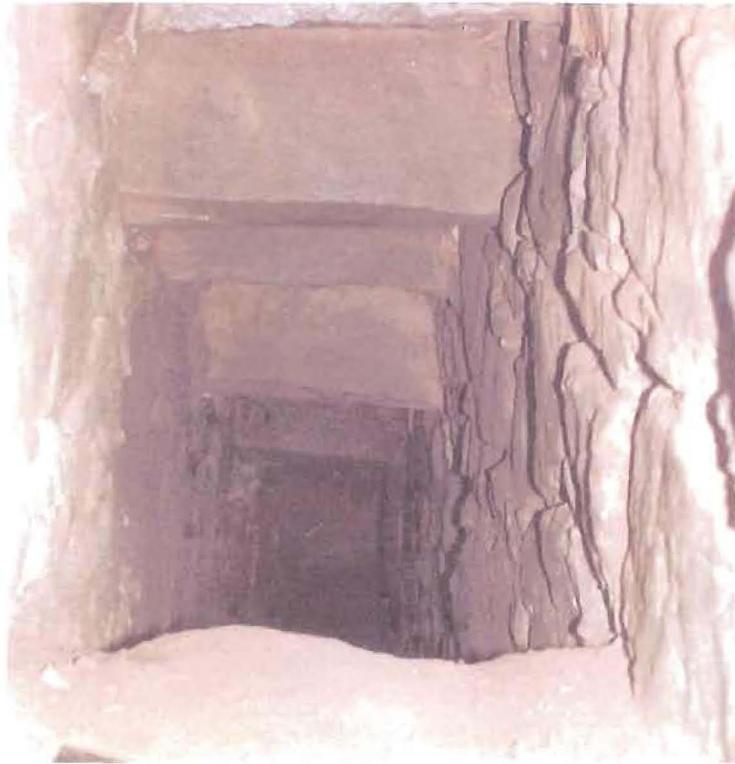
Illus. I – 2 Southeast corner of the main temple of Chavín



Illus. I – 5. Stele of a Gorgon, with 12 serpents. The hands are grasping shells, used as trumpets in rituals.



Illus. I – 6. Stele, in the circular plaza, of a three fingered Gorgon with two pair of wings, holding a club. For someone the figure holds a staff resembling stalks of the mescaline-bearing San Pedro cactus.



I -7(a)



Illus. I -7(b). Labyrinthine gallery in Chavín's Palace.



Illus. I – 8. South side of the Lanzón monolith with the Gorgon's large image



Illus. I – 9(a) Stone head, which decorated the outer walls of Chavín Palace. According to Peruvian tradition, the stone heads, tenoned on the outer walls of the Palace, represented the “Huacas” who were petrified by the god Huari. Note the bulging eyes, linking them to the power of the Gorgon head, who transformed into stone whoever gazed at her.



Illus. I – 9(b). Stone head which decorated the outer walls of the Chavín Palace.

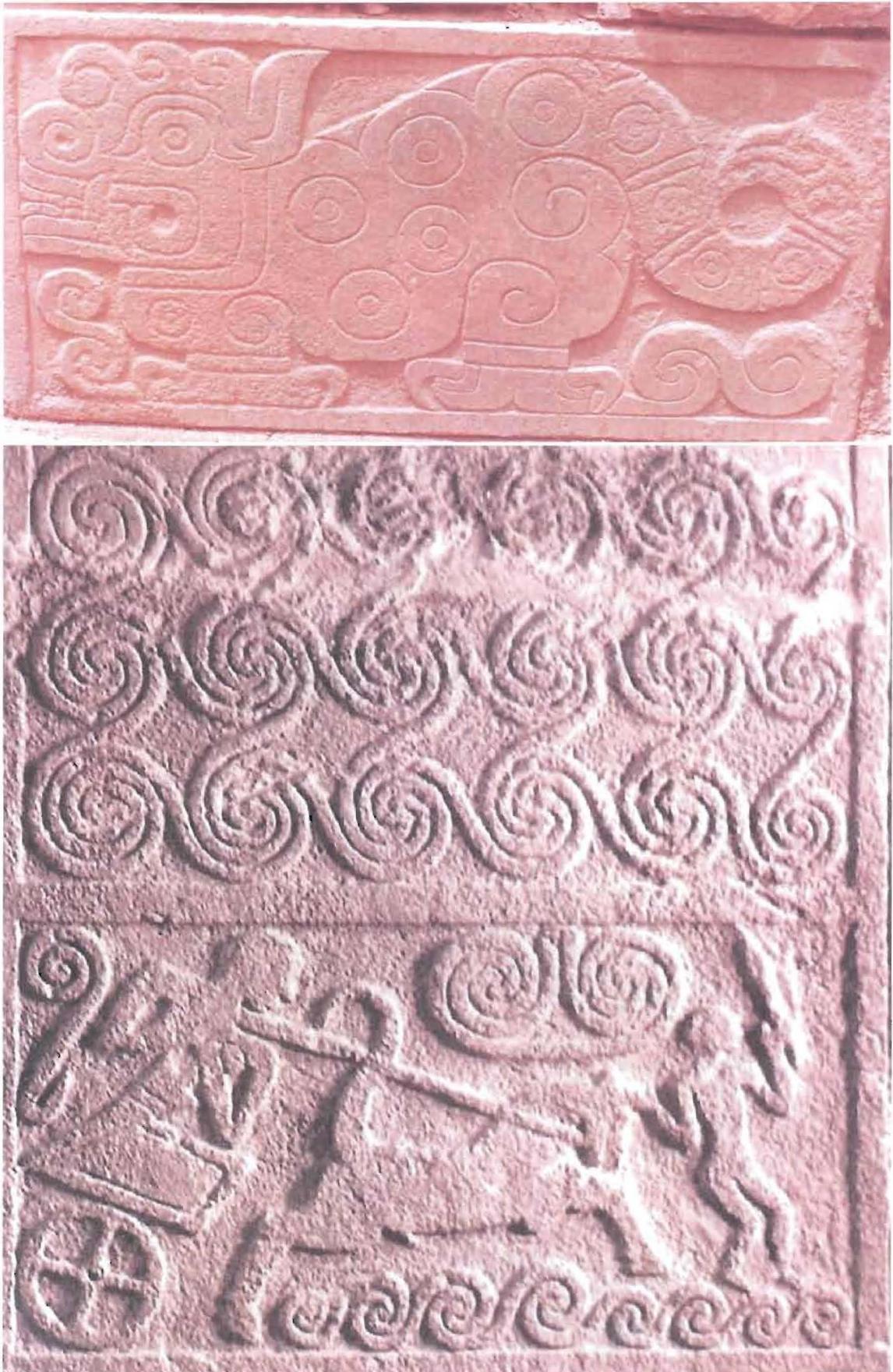


(a)



(b)

Illus. I – 10: Chavin's steles with Cerberus-like figures, located on the threshold of the Circular Plaza of 21 m, in front of the Old Temple of the Gorgon. These steles were carved in identical pairs, and it is likely that were originally seven pairs on each side of the staircase.



Illus. I – 11. (Top) Chavin's stele. (Bottom) Mycenae stele. Both with spirals and sigmoids.

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Site D: Department V: Valley; (Site)	Age (B. C)	Sample	Associated /Culture
D: Ancash V: Casma (Las Haldas)	2.820±120	charcoal	pre-Chavín ceramics
D: Lima V: Lurin (La Centinela)	1.560±70	cloth	Chavín ceramic
D: Ancash V: Casma (Las Haldas)	1.190±80	burnt plants	Chavín ceramic
D: Lima V: Omas (Mound 302)	1.110±140	cloth	Chavín ceramic and corn
D: Ancash V: Chavín de Huantar	780±110	charcoal	Chavín de Huantar (galleries of offerings)

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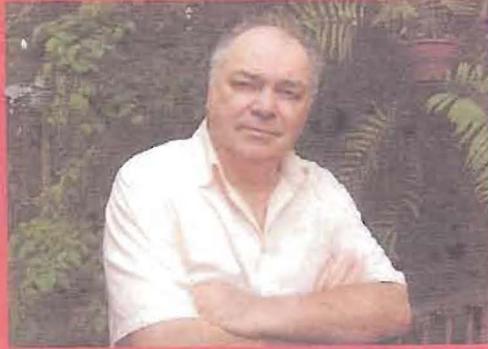
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19. Idem., p. 156.

20. Idem., p. 157.

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Since 1981, after visiting the archeological site of Chavin de Huantar, and moved by the strange art and advanced architecture of that Peruvian culture, he has dedicated himself to the study of comparative archeology and mythology.

In 2000, he was invited, by the School of Physics and Material Engineering at Monash University, in Melbourne, Australia, to conduct research on a hundred-year-old geologic enigma, the 'Zebra Rock'. Dr. Mattievich was able to demonstrate that the strange patterns of Zebra Rock (a silt stone) was formed from a liquid crystal phase colloidal solution, deposited under glacial conditions, at the bottom of the sea, in the Upper Proterozoic era, more than 600 million years ago.

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