The Power of Restricted Access and Hidden Images: Shedding New Light on the Lanzón and the Spread of Chavín de Huántar’s Influence

Art, in the most basic sense, is thought to be created by an artist in order to be observed, visually digested, interpreted, and read by one or more people. It is usually assumed that the larger the audience, the more an image can communicate its message, but despite this fact, hidden images occur across the world. Why would an artist or a group of people spend the time, energy, and resources to create images that will rarely or never be seen? It is impossible for any image that has been created by human hand not to be seen at least once by a human eye; therefore no image is entirely invisible. Is it the knowledge of these images, the restriction of access and elevation of its power that is appealing? Does the restriction of an image to the public proliferate a narrative or story that validates a religious or political order?

In this paper, I seek to examine the cross cultural contexts where images are hidden or made invisible through fully restricted or semi-restricted access, how this changes the perception of the image and what it tells us about the culture who created it. After a cross cultural examination of unseen objects, I look specifically at the archaeological site of Chavín de Huántar to shed light on the Lanzón (Figure 1), a
stone sculpture that has been found *in situ* in what can only be described as a hidden and restricted context.

*A Few Words About Art*

“It has often been said that in archaic societies, art is the handmaiden of religion...Although its subjects are often religious, art is, more correctly, the handmaiden of society,” Esther Pasztory (1996:319, see also 1982, 2005).

Historically, the discipline of art history has not embraced Pre-Columbian studies. In fact, when the Spanish first arrived in the Americas in the 16th century the only arts they admired were those of architecture and engineering (Pasztory 1996). It has been this very root of the idea of art in the Western sphere and the definition of art that has caused a perpetual problem when understanding the art of Pre-Columbian civilizations.

Carolyn Dean (2006) argues that calling something art reveals nothing more than how a viewer of the object values it. In her article “The Trouble with (the term) Art,” Dean reminds us of J. Alden Mason’s (1957) claim that stone sculpture was entirely missing from Inka visual culture. It wasn’t until the 20th century language of modernism and the appreciation of abstraction that Pre-Columbian objects even came to be understood as art, and it took even longer for the Inka *huacas* to be understood in this context (Pasztory 1996). It is for this reason that Dean argues, and I agree, that the term art is problematic when it comes to many of these Pre-Columbian objects. Therefore, while this paper focuses on the visibility of objects through an art historical lens, it is important to understand that the objects discussed are only considered art by our Western perspective, which elevates it to
that privileged status, and likely would not have been considered art by the people who created, interacted, and lived with these items.

Restricted Access and Hidden Images

Hidden and restricted images have a long history around the globe, and for the purposes of this paper I divide them into two categories: buried objects and living objects. Archaeologically speaking, many objects of high aesthetic value are found in burial contexts; these objects are what I refer to as buried objects. It is from these immensely decorated grave offerings and adornments that we can deduce much of what we know about ancient civilizations. However, although these tend to be the museum-quality objects that we associate most with ancient cultures, they were not visually consumed regularly by the people who entered them into the graves.

Tombs from all over the world have been opulently decorated with elaborate grave offerings. Egyptian tombs, elaborately painted and adorned with ornate objects, encapsulated ancient notions of interaction between mortals and immortals and were designed to guide and enhance such divine interaction (Bryan 2009). They were created not as a public space, but as a ritual place for the deceased and their families. In East Asia, tombs are also ornately decorated for the deceased; however, they are permanently sealed after internment (Hung 2009). These East Asian tombs were conceptualized as the home for the “wei” or the soul, and their interiors were decorated with painted murals. Each mural would have been painted not for the visual consumption from the place of the interred body, but
rather from the perceived perspective of the soul that lived within the chamber (Hung 2009). The new world also sees elaborate and ornate burial offerings, perhaps best exemplified in the Andes by the Moche culture and the archaeological findings of priestly burials at sites such as Sipan (Donnan 1976). Buried objects are not limited to contexts with human remains. Claudia Brittenham’s (2009) research on Cacaxtla paintings demonstrates that paintings had life cycles. These images were created and consumed by the people inhabiting these spaces, but when the buildings were expanded, the murals were ritually buried.

The list of examples of objects found in buried, and thus hidden, contexts is extensive and unfortunately not within the scope of this paper. Therefore, I address the second category of hidden objects: living objects. By living objects, I refer to objects that are hidden from view but not entirely out of the reach of human access. I argue that these objects have an ongoing interaction with the mortal human realm and thus are a perpetual force and life within their cultural setting. These types of images are usually sacred images, housed in sacred places, and hidden from view as part of a sacred belief system. As opposed to buried objects, living objects are not items of remembrance of a past, rather an idea of a past, present, and future. They are iconic in the sense that these objects are often representations of the intangible idea of a higher being manifested in the profane world.

In all cultures, humans have struggled with the idea of seeing God. In a chapter titled “The ‘Holy Face’: Legends and Images in Competition,” (1994) Hans Belting discusses the Mandylion (Figure 2), a Byzantine cloth relic featuring the
“true portrait” of Christ. The portrait purported to have been created when Christ wiped his face on the cloth, gives evidence of the historical life of Christ and denies any interpretations that the image was made by human hand. Belting argues that the desire to see the face of God is inherent in Christian theology; the act of viewing the object implies the desire of humans to resemble God himself. This awe-inspiring image, coupled with nostalgia for religious images, perpetuates the image, myth, and narrative.

The image of the *Mandylion* was soon face competition by the image of a relic at St. Peter’s in Rome. Images and icons in competition with one another posed challenges for the authentication of these works, and fame played an ever-increasing role. The evolution of the *Mandylion* image and narrative gave rise to the Veronica, creating new dialogues about the piece. Belting explains that some of these later images were not always referred to as sacred relics, but rather rose to this status through publicity and establishment of the cult. The establishment of this cult gave rise to religious practices centered on these images, such as pilgrimages, processions, and rituals, which in turn gave rise to more replicas of the image.

These images, rituals, narratives, and practices are founded on the idea that an object was created by the hand of the divine. Although first introduced as an un-iconic relic, its myth of supernatural origin validates it. It is only through the perpetuation and narration of the image by the people that the piece is elevated to heavenly status. (Belting 1994)
The idea of making the invisible visible is an ideological challenge for many religions that battle with the question of what constitutes reality. Marco Mosteret (2005) argues that reality consists of things that are regarded as truly existing. We can imagine things into existence, but they are inexistant until imagined. Which imagined things we believe to be real is decided by the current thought of the culture of the time. Vision plays a critical role in defining existing and inexistant entities, but when it comes to the invisible idea of a deity, this poses a problem. In order to create a visible image of a deity, one has to imagine it and only then can it be objectified and added to reality by its maker (Mosteret 2005). The moment something is imagined, it is visualized; such a moment is a critical for each religion, such as the Mandylion in Christianity.

The story of the Mandylion reminds us that the image itself was initially introduced as an un-iconic and profane object that had come into contact with Christ (Belting 1994). Cecelia F. Klein (1994) points out that in non-western cultures, the most important values and most profound ideas are sometimes expressed through forms that are not human-made, are not imagistic, and are not executed with the materials and care that we expect of great art in our Western perspective (Klein 1994). Further, Klein argues that many societies value natural, un-worked substances over finely crafted images of precious materials (Klein 1994). The idea that gods have fixed and recognizable forms and that these forms are represented in an optically realistic way has long endured and too often colored the ways Westerners look at objects that are revered by non-Western others (Dean
Keeping this in mind, I focus here on examples of hidden living objects found in Christian, Muslim and Buddhist traditions.

**Christianity**

Within Christianity, one finds an example that aligns most with our Western tradition and understanding of the sacred. Therefore I begin the discussion with an example of the Medieval Christian Communion traditions discussed through the image *The Mass of St. Giles* (Figure 3). In the Middle Ages, mass was an important part of the social sphere, and individuals attended regularly. The custom of Communion, where individuals were offered the body of Christ as bread and the blood of Christ as wine, focused the attention on the holy bread as a sacred object (Koerner 2004). During these rituals, serving the host at the moment of consecration overshadowed consuming Communion, and the ritual of ocular Communion was born (Koerner 2004). Thus, Communion was not regularly consumed by the people.

The interior architectural layout of the Medieval Church reflected this idea (Figure 4), for a wooden grille was positioned between the choir and ambulatory to restrict access to the altar and create a barrier between the audience and the holy actors (Koerner 2004). In the image *The Mass of St. Giles* we are offered a unique perspective of the altar from afar, but not quite as distant as the public view. In the image, the priest stands with his back to the audience as he prepares the Communion table while surrounded by kneeling kings and elite individuals who join him behind the altar. During the ceremony, the priest never turns to address the
audience, only holds up the “Body of Christ” briefly. This moment was highly
anticipated by the attendees, who could barely see the objects in the priest’s hands
from their respected locations (Koerner 2004).

Even the elite, who have access to the altar, have their vision obstructed via
the hanging curtains, their kneeling stance, and the angles with which they are
positioned. These veils and hangings were used to cover altarpieces and the sacred
images upon them, symbolizing the piece of precious cloth that was hung between
the columns of Solomon’s temple to separate the sanctuary where the Ark of the
Covenant was kept from the rest of the sacred enclosure (Nova 1994). Even the
church orchestrated an image-based piety by advertising seeing as an efficacious
commerce with the sacred; the altarpieces amplified this play of access and
restriction (Korner 2004).

In this example, the altar and the objects upon it (the Body of Christ, the
Blood of Christ) are the hidden objects. Christianity, of course, has other examples
of hidden images such as relics (like the Mandylion), the practice of opening of the
Holy door at the Vatican only during the Jubilee year, and vierge ouvrante sculptures
(devotional sculptures whose exteriors resemble traditional cult figures of the
Virgin and Child). I specifically draw upon this example, however, for its
performative nature and regular ritualistic significance for the religion.

Islam

Hidden objects are features of Islam as well. Inside the religious pilgrimage
center of Mecca, the sacred Islamic mosque, Al-Masjid al-Haram, holds the Kaaba
(Figure 5), a rectangular black building at the center of the mosque’s interior courtyard. The Kaaba is considered Islam’s most sacred site, and all Muslims are expected to face the direction of the Kaaba when performing salat (prayer). One of the five Pillars of Islam requires every Muslim to perform the hajj pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime (Sardar 2014). Since most Muslims do not see Mecca in their lifetime, the idea of the Kaaba becomes important.

Mecca is where God’s Words were first revealed to Muhammad (Sardar 2014). For Muslims, Mecca is more than a place where things happened in history, it is where God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad his guidance on how to lead a moral life (Sardar 2014). The Kaaba itself is an extremely visible object in the center of the most holy mosque, however its contents are hidden from view. The inside of the Kaaba has tablets laid with inscriptions, three pillars, a small altar or table set between one and the other two (Figure 6). The story, as the Islamic people know it, says that Adam, who in Muslim tradition is the first Prophet, visited Mecca and was buried there. Prophet Abraham, the father of monotheistic faiths, built the Kaaba with his son Ishmael (Sardar 2014). In some special sense, the divine power is focused in this one place, and thus the Kabba is quite simply recognized as God’s House (Sardar 2014).

The Kaaba is opened only on Mondays during the months of Shaban, Ramadan, and Shawal (just before and after the period of ritual fasting), in what is a much-anticipated event (Sardar 2014). The Sadin with the keys to the Kaaba arrives with an entourage of six people, and, as he approaches the structure, stairs are
brought and placed in front of the door. When the door opens, all the gathered pilgrims raise their hands and shout in praise, alerting the entire city that the doors have been opened. The Sadin enters alone and offers his prayers, then both wings of the door are opened, and the Sadin delivers a sermon, after which, the pilgrims are allowed inside (Sardar 2014). The opportunity to enter the House of God is considered a great privilege (Sardar 2014).

Buddhism

In Buddhism, a hibutsu, or hidden Buddha, is an object that is considered especially sacred and valuable and is usually hidden from view (Figure 7) (Rambelli & Reinders 2014). These objects are defined as a “Buddhist statute that is normally kept closed in a feretory-like shrine, hidden from public view and at times worshiped” (Rambelli & Reinders 2014:152). The power and hidden nature of these objects vary, but most hibutsu are never kept entirely secret, whereas some are never displayed, even to the Buddhist priests who are tasked with caring for them (Rambelli & Reinders 2014). Access to these objects is limited to priests, although some can be viewed during public rituals known as kaichō, known as the “opening of the curtain” ceremony (Rambelli & Reinders 2014). Even during these kaichō ceremonies, however, the hibutsu is not really visible to the public, who are only granted a far away glimpse of the object that is at the end of a dark and crowded temple hall.

These hibutsu are seen as religious mediators between the sacred and profane realm and are simultaneously actors in both; therefore they are not sacred
in the purest sense. By removing them from the view of the profane realm, they are protected, and elevated to a higher status, and situated in a context closer with the sacred. It is their invisible presence that intensifies their sacredness and the materialization of the sacred image (Rambelli & Reinders 2014).

It is unclear when the practice of the hidden Buddha's began. Some documents tell of these sacred images as early as the 10th or 9th centuries, when these powerful icons seemed to have been kept inside and hidden to most people. Around the 13th century, most became visible and available, while some became more secret, which served to enhance their value and status. By the 15th century, the temples that held hibutsu began to promote the fact that they had these objects and used this status to attract followers. (Rambelli & Reinders 2014)

Remarks

These three examples are not an exhaustive list, but they suffice to demonstrate commonalities behind hidden and restricted images. Each hidden object or space is a mediation point between the sacred and the profane, materializing and manifesting in physical form what is originally an invisible concept of the sacred. As manifestations of God, or the principal deity, they are thought to be the actual location of the deity itself. In Christianity it is the physicality of the body and blood of Christ, in Islam it is the house where God resides, and in Buddhism they are images of Buddha himself, serving as the physical location where he communicates with the human realm.

The occasional exposure of such images to the public will be addressed in further detail at a later point in this paper. What is important to note here is that
each of these examples comes from widely spread and accepted religions in the world today. While some examples are no longer are so restrictive, such as Christianity’s altar and Communion, the example comes from its earlier beginnings and prior to a much more widespread expansion. The fact that these objects are no longer restricted, in this case, is due to the evolution of Christianity itself and the transformations that it underwent during the Reformation.

**Chavín de Huántar**

I draw upon these examples of hidden objects in various cultural contexts to gain a deeper understanding of the object known in the academic literature as the Lanzón of the principal deity of Chavín de Huántar (Figure 1). The archaeological site of Chavín is located in the highlands of the Central Andes in what is today Peru. Dating to 900-200 BCE, it is the oldest major monumental center in the Andes (Stanish 2001). The site was first mentioned in the written record by Pedro de Cieza de Leon in 1549 who described a mighty fortress with sculptures of faces and human figures built into the wall (Mesia Montenegro 2013). However, it was Antonio Vazquez de Espinoza who suggested that Chavín was the seat of (what he described as) an oracle (Mesia Montenegro 2013).

> A large building of huge stone blocks very well wrought; it was a guaca, and one of the most famous of the heathen sanctuaries, like Rome or Jerusalem with us; the Indians used to come and make their offerings and sacrifices, for the Devil pronounced many oracles from here, and so they repaired here from all over the kingdom. There are large subterranean halls and apartments, and
even accurate information that they extend under the river which flows by the guaca or ancient sanctuary.

– A. Vazques de Espinosa (1616:491)

From the earliest Western accounts of the site of Chavín de Huántar, it was apparent that it was a very sacred place. The site itself is composed of open plazas, sunken courts, and a U-shaped temple that was expanded and enlarged over time (Figure 8)(Rick 2013a). The inside of this structure consisted of intricate gallery and canal systems, two systems that never intersect (Figure 9)(Rick 2013a). The galleries were clearly designed for the passage of humans, with staircases that always occurred in places of directional changes, but, in many cases are blind, so that during the descent it is rarely possible to tell what is ahead (Figure 10)(Rick 2013a). The architecture also combined other innovative elements such as ducts, niches, stone pegs, doorway stubs, and corbells (Rick 2013a) that also had specific functions for the space.

It is within these winding, narrow galleries that the figure known as the Lanzón is found. The figure, named by Juio Tello in 1923, references a “large spear or lance” due to its irregular shape and tip protruding into the ground. It is one of the few religious object that can be seen in its original setting (Cummins 2008, Rowe 1967). By its placement within the camber of the original temple (Old Temple), the sculpture indicates the importance of Chavín as a sacred center, an importance that continued up to and beyond the arrival of the Spanish and their campaigns of extirpation (Burger 1992a).
These gallery systems required a great deal of planning, as there is no evidence that they were made by tunneling (Rick 2013a). Some of the galleries interconnect, and it seems that they were usually open to each other during the main use of the temple (Rick 2013a). However, the space that they provide is too small, too inconvenient, too dark, and otherwise too limited to suppose they represent convenient construction (Rick 2013a). Illuminating the galleries over major blocks of time would have required more than an intricate mirror system, meaning that navigating these tunnels would have proven dark and difficult (Rick 2013a). Therefore the Lanzón would not have been accessible to the uninitiated or unguided individual.

To approach the Lanzón, one must first pass through a subterranean circular court, decorated by relief sculptures of humans and felines all walking in procession towards the front of the temple (Figure 11). The sunken court is believed to be a point of communal gathering for an elite group participating in the ritual, but it is after exiting the court that access becomes even more restricted. From the sunny plaza on the other side of the sunken court, one would pass into the darkened temple galleries, beyond the view of many, and travel through the winding stairways and corridors to reach the site of the Lanzón (Cummins 2008).

Upon approaching the sculpture, one is first struck by the figure’s size and shape, which appears to be exceeding the architectural space that envelops it. The special conditions and arrangement of this space must be considered as calculated, to enhance the figure’s overall awe-inspiring effect (Cummins 2008). The canal and
duct features only served to enhance these effects, by manipulating sounds of water and light filtration into the space (Figure 12). In other parts of the galleries, conch shell trumpets were also found, suggesting that sound would have been a critical element to the experience inside the galleries (Burger 1992b).

The chambers around the object open into four sections, allowing only partial, segmented views of the wedge-shaped object, so that only part of the sculpture can be seen at a time (Figure 13). The figure is incised with lines depicting an anthropomorphized animal that smiles at the visitors and holds one hand up in a gesturing act (Cummins 2008). A vertical channel leads down from the top of the sculpture into a cruciform design with a central depression on the top of the deity’s head, the a design that mirrors the layout of the Lanzón Gallery below (Burger 1992b). The top of the Lanzón could be reached by removing a single slab in this gallery, so that it would have been feasible to make offerings (Burger 1992b). Julio Tello (1960) believed that the blood of sacrificed victims was poured from the gallery above into the channel and that it ran down the sculpture into the circular depression and eventually over the image itself. Whether or not it was blood that was poured from the opening above, it is evident that there was intentional access to the sculpture from the gallery above.

Discussion

Although we cannot be sure who was granted access to the principal deity, it is evident that the access was significantly restricted and that the experience when approaching the Lanzón was carefully crafted and manipulated by the temple
organizers. This type of restricted access and structure is not too different from the restrictions we see in Christian, Muslim and Buddhist traditions of hidden, sacred objects. The question I seek to explore here is what purpose these objects served in the broader social, religious, and political sphere.

One cannot examine the idea of a living hidden object, without considering the idea of secrecy. Kess Bolle (1987) remarks that “religion in its specificity presents itself everywhere with an aspect of secrecy. There is no religion without secrets.” Clark Chilson et al. (2014) argue that there are three types of secrets in religion: mysteries, esoteric secrets, and social secrets, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Mysteries are accessible only to those granted divine revelation, esoteric secrets to those who have been properly instructed in the meaning of something, and social secrets to those who are told or shown something by those who conceal it. Mysteries and esoteric secrets involve ultimate knowledge, concealed by entities that transcend the social world, whereas social secrets are concealed by people hiding less than ultimate truths.

Ultimately secrets are always transmitted. Mysteries are transmitted by mystical experiences bestowed by the divine, esoteric secrets are transmitted by ritual or proper hermeneutical training, and social secrets are transmitted by word of mouth using conventional language or simply making something visible (Chilson et al. 2014). In the examples of communion, the Kaaba, and hibutsu one or more of these secrets and transmissions take place around the objects. In the case of the Lanzon, I believe that all three are present. However, in each of these examples, the
object itself is not a secret; rather it is the communication with the object, the word of God, and how to access the object that is the secret. This raises the issue of why create an object to be hidden, if only to later transmit the knowledge of its existence.

By the obstructing access to the object itself, which is conceptualized as the mediator between the deity and the human world, the secrets of the religion are kept close to the elite few who create and control the religious ideologies. The object then, becomes the tangible evidence of these ideologies and is carefully utilized by the elite in special situations, legitimizing authority and the ideologies they support. I believe that this is in part due to the intense sacred nature of an object created in the image of a deity or god. Objects created in this vein, such as the Mandylion, are recognized for their power and are viewed as vehicles for transmitting sacred messages.

In Jean Baudrillard’s book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994) he asks the question of what becomes of a deity when it is manifested as an icon. “Does it remain the supreme power that is simply incarnated in images as a visible theology? Or does it volatilize itself in the simulacra that, alone, deploy their power and pomp of fascination – the visible machinery of icons substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God?” (Baudrillard 1994:4). These very ideas were pondered by the Iconoclasts, who believed in and feared the power of sacred objects (Baudrillard 1994).

Following these notions about the manifestation of the sacred as an object, Baudrillard argues that there are four successive phases in the life of an image. The
first, is the reflection of a profound reality, where the image is a good appearance
and a representation of the sacramental order. This reflects a theology of truth and
secrecy to which the notion of ideology still belongs. In the second phase, the image
masks and denatures a profound reality, and considered evil because of this
subversion. This inaugurates the era of simulacra and of simulation, in which there
is no longer a God to recognize. With the third phase, it masks the absences of a
profound reality, playing at the order of being an appearance. Finally, in the fourth
phase, it has no relation to any reality whatsoever and is a pure simulacrum.
(Baudrillard 1994:6)

When and how an icon shifts through these phases of life is complex, but
what we can be sure of is that each object begins with the first phase mentioned
by Baudrillard, where the image is good and representative of the sacred order,
reflecting an order of truth and secrecy in the ideology. However, even if the power
of the object is the primary reason for restricting access and hiding the image,
restricting an object also garners word of mouth in support of the principles and
ideas they represent. This word of mouth validates it, and spreads it from person to
person, community to community. It is through this careful control of access that
the ideas are bolstered and spread, expanding its reach and its support.

In his 2013 book Contagious, Jonah Berger explores how things catch on
through the idea of social currency. Citing the notion that 40% of what we talk about
in our daily life is about personal experiences or relationships, Berger explains that
people share things that make them look good to others. In a neuroscience study by
Jason Mitchell and Diana Tamir (2012) the scholars found that disclosing information about the self is intrinsically rewarding, activating portions of the brain similar to other rewards like food or sex. Further, what people talk about affects the way others think of them, and therefore people prefer sharing things that make them seem entertaining.

Berger explains that the things people talk about have three things in common – inner remarkability, game mechanics, and making people feel like insiders; this is especially true with things that are hidden, hardly seen, and not advertised. Remarkable things get brought up more often, game mechanics motivates us to achieve tangible evidence of advancement, and scarcity and exclusivity make us feel like insiders. All of these things are social currency that people utilize in daily conversations where they continuously negotiate their status within society.

As the first expansive and cohesive cultural tradition in the Andes, Chavín de Huántar is unique (Figure 14). John Rick (2013b) explains that although there are sites found in the Andes similar to Chavín, Chavín is distinct, having a greater reach across the area. This reach was undertaken, he explains, not by military domination, but rather through highly developed religious facilities. The expansion of the population was achieved through the recruitment of an emerging elite and authorities rather than through an inclusive ideology. Rick argues, that this is a particularly difficult task, in the sense that hierarchies of this level had not previously existed and thus were not previously a part of human nature and society.
It has long been argued that Chavín was the “Mother Culture” of the Andes (Tello 1960), and although that argument has been refuted by Willey (1951), who cites many smaller ceremonial centers in the formative period, it is impossible to ignore that something different was happening at this particular ceremonial center. The question is how its influence spread and what made it so influential. I propose that it is through this concept of social currency and restricted access to the central deity, the Lanzón. Through the remarkability and the exclusivity of the experience at the ceremonial center, individuals who attended the ceremony were anxious to share with their social network. Through this practice of narration, the ideas of the religious cult at Chavín spread throughout the Andes, and consequently grew in influence and power across a more expansive sphere than ever before.

Following Jonah Berger’s principles, game mechanics would also have been at work with the Lanzón, in addition to inner remarkability and exclusivity. This is more challenging to support with evidence in the archaeological record, but, if it were possible to gain access to the Lanzón through actions or gifts that would slowly allow further access, the concepts of game mechanics, according to Berger, would be at work. The archaeological site itself includes many artifacts from elite individuals in the surrounding areas near and far from Chavín (Lumbreras 2013), and although it is impossible to know the exact nature of these gifts or offerings, it is possible that they could be the archaeological evidence that points to this idea of game mechanics.
Conclusion

If my theory is correct that the principles of Berger’s social currency are at work in the origin and spread of the religious ideology of Chavín de Huántar, this explains how Chavín was able to expand its reach and influence in the Andean region, and also is one explanation of how the origins of complex civilization came to be in this area of the world. As Rick (2013b) suggests, convincing a group of people to accept social hierarchy that was previously inexistent is a more challenging feat than changing a previously existing structure. This increase in social complexity set the precedent for all major civilizations to follow in the area; whether directly borrowed from the structure from Chavín or not, the belief in having such a structure was a precedent that Chavín set.

I do not suggest that this is the only way for complex civilizations to be born. The Olmec culture of the Mexican coast, which has been called the “Mother Culture” of Mesoamerica (Piña Chan 1989) (also refuted), exhibits almost the complete opposite of secrecy in its sculptural images. The Olmec colossal heads not only made a statement by their sheer size, but would have been highly visible and intended for many people to bear witness (Pool 2007: 110). Although rare, other Olmec sculptures, such as the altar-thrones at San Lorenzo and La Venta, have been interpreted as depictions of military force, an almost inexistent concept at Chavín, indicating a very different approach to expansion (Pool 2007:139).

As influential as the ceremonial center of Chavín de Huántar was and how widespread the ideologies traveled, it is also quite possible that the very nature of
the hidden and restricted Lanzón, and the secrets that surrounded it, were also the cause of the downfall of the civilization. Religious secrets and hidden images are a very delicate matter and would constantly need to be maintained and managed. As we see in our example of the restricted communion, the Reformation opened the altar and sacrament to the masses in an effort to increase its visibility and transparency. As the influence of Chavín grew, the ability to maintain religious secrets and the ideological followers became increasingly strenuous. Further research should be conducted into the collapse of the ceremonial center of Chavín de Huántar and its ideological reign over the Andean area to explore the possibility of if and how the Lanzón played a role in the downfall of the culture.

Just as I suggest that Berger’s idea of social currency is present at Chavín, I also believe that it is at work in other religions where hidden and restricted objects exist. This could serve as one explanation of how religious ideologies spread across territories and across lands governed by different political entities. An interesting idea to explore in future research is why some religions choose singular objects while others choose multiples. In Christianity and Buddhism the hidden and restricted objects are a phenomenon of multiples, whereas the Kaaba and the Lanzón are singular objects that are known and worshiped across the followers of the faith. I suspect that the role of a singular object versus the role of multiples have slightly different effects on the religious followers and a slightly different purpose. Nonetheless, the lives of these living hidden objects operate as the agency to society. The dialogue and narration that they generate not only allows them to spread their influence over greater territories, but also allows them to act as living entities. As
living entities they breathe life into the ideologies that they represent and link a
tangible object to a concept that is otherwise invisible.
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1960  *Chavín: Cultura Matriz de la Civilización Andina*. Publicación Antropológica del Archivo “Julio C. Tello” de la UNMSM, II. Lima

Vazquez de Espinosa, Antonio

Willey, Gordon R.

Images

*Figure 1:* Drawing of the Lanzón monolith. From Julio C. Tello 1960, p. IV.

*Figure 2:* The *Mandylion*. Moscow, State Tretjakov Gallery, *Mandylion* of Christ from Novorod, 12th century.

Figure 4: Wooden Grille, St. Bartholomew Church, London
Figure 5: The Kaaba. Granite masonry, covered with silk curtain and calligraphy in gold and silver-wrapped thread, pre-Islamic monument, rededicated by Muhammad in 631-32 C.E., Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Photo: The Kaaba in the Masjid el Aram, 2010 Tab59, CC BY-SA 2.0

Figure 6: Inside Kaaba. Sketch by Nugraha Saputra.
**Figure 7:** The Five Great Sky-Repository Bodhisattvas which are kept as secret images inside the pagoda of Jingoji, Kyoto. Wood. Average height 100 cm. 9th century. Image: Fowler, Sherry. "Hibutsu: Secret Buddhist Images of Japan." *Journal of Asian Culture* 15 (1991): 137-59.

**Figure 8:** The Site of Chavín de Huántar with color-coding denoting its expansion over time. Museum Rietberg Zurich and ArcTron 3D.
Figure 9: The Lanzón situated in the U-shaped temple at the site of Chavín de Hunatar. Image: Cambridge University Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography.

Figure 10: A well-preserved section of a typical Chavín gallery (subterranean corridor with stairs and passageways on several levels). Photo: John W. Rick
Figure 11: A recreation of the Lanzón in its chamber from the Lanzón Gallery. The illustration was generated from a digital 3D model based on data from a structured-light scan and a laser scan. Museum Rietberg Zurich and ArcTron 3D. Colored graphic based on Peter G. Roe 2007.

Figure 12: The Lanzón illuminated by incident light from a light shaft. Photo: John W. Rick
Figure 13: Four views of the Lanzón. The illustration was generated from a digital 3D model based on data from a structured-light scan and a laser scan. Museum Rietberg Zurich and ArcTron 3D.

Figure 14: The area of influence for the site of Chavín de Huántar. Image courtesy of www.newworldencyclopedia.org.