

**Archaeological Evidence for the Tradition of Psychoactive Plant Use in the New World.** (Oral Presentation)

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**Introduction**

Many scholars and scientists have proposed an early relationship between humans and psychoactive plants within a highly ritualized, ceremonial context. A survey of the archaeological record of psychoactive drug plant use in the Old World supported this hypothesis.

**Objectives**

This paper reviews the New World archaeological record for micro and macro fossil evidence for associations between humans and psychoactive drug plant species. It assesses the validity of this putative early relationship between humans and psychoactive plants within the Western Hemisphere.

**Methods**

A comprehensive review of the literature is used to evaluate the taxonomic identification of fossil remains, as well as the ancient symbolic and artistic representations of these species, in archaeological contexts.

**Results**

The data indicates a very broad geographical range of ancient use through a deep time frame, which long has and, in many situations, still does occur within diverse ecological environments. Several of the most important or well-known mind-altering drug plants in the New World have documented records of very ancient use. Examples of these species include and *Lophophora williamsii* (peyote), *Trichocereus pachanoi* (San Pedro), *Nicotiana* spp. (tobacco) and *Erythroxylum coca* (coca). The widespread distribution and antiquity of use of these and many other psychoactive drug plants is indicative of their relative importance throughout the development of human society.

**Conclusion**

This archaeological survey supports the assumption that early and even more recent use of mind-altering plants has been a widespread ethnobotanical phenomenon in the New World; and that it may have stimulated initial human religious experiences and other important cultural traditions in a wide variety of ecological environments.

**Keywords:** Fossils, artifacts, entheogens, stimulants, ritual, ceremonial use

**Selected References**

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