

and articles. His book *Słownik Kultury Biblijnej* was published by Edycja św. Pawła (Częstochowa, 2004), and Eerdmans published *Flights of the Soul: Visions, Heavenly Journeys, and Peak Experiences in the Biblical World* in 2011. (<http://mysite.verizon.net/pilchj/pilchculturalworld>)

## In Search of Shamanic Themes in Eastern Siberian Rock Art (Sakha/Yakutia Republic)

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*This article is based on new research which was undertaken by a Polish–Yakut team in the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic between 2001 and 2003. Accepting that shamanism is an archaic cultural practice of the Sakha people, and that it is also present in the wider territory of Siberia, it is assumed that some common topics of Siberian shamanism can provide a semantic context for elucidating the social or semantic meanings of rock art in the territory of the Sakha Republic. After a general characterization of rock art in Yakutia, the paper analyzes the possible shamanic overtones of some rock images from southern parts of the country, mainly along the middle Lena River basin, and in the northern territory, on the cliffs of the Olenëk River. Attention is also paid to the contemporary veneration of sites with rock art, where ritual offerings are still practiced.*

The antiquity of religious phenomena in Yakutia, commonly described as shamanism, is enshrouded in the mystery of archeological data. Undoubtedly, archeological sources of evidence are difficult to interpret from either a religious or a symbolic perspective. Commonly found artifacts, such as stone tools or ceramic vessels, are usually recovered from contexts whose potential religious significance is difficult to discern. Although they may be utilitarian objects, this, of course, does not rule out the possibility that they could have also been used for ritual purposes. However, there are archeological artifacts that have a greater potential for investigations of symbolic content, and rock art is one such important category. These are the images painted or engraved by people on to natural rocks in the landscape. Recent advances in global rock art research, such as in Africa, the Americas, and Australia, have effectively demonstrated that the rock art there is often related to local religions or beliefs (Rozwadowski 2009). Thus, it can be argued that the rock images of Eastern Siberia also have potential in providing valuable

insights into the religious sphere of life of the prehistoric and historic inhabitants of the territory that is now located within the boundaries of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia).

Rock paintings and engravings (petroglyphs) are found across Siberia, including the territory of Yakutia. Rock paintings and petroglyphs are well preserved in the Baykal region, from where the ancestors of the Yakut the Kurikan, came (probably between the sixth and tenth centuries A.D.), as well as in the middle parts of the Lena River which flows through the center of Yakutia. Currently, there are about 118 known rock art sites within the territory of the Sakha Republic (Kochmar 1994). The majority (approximately 115) are situated in the southern part of Yakutia around the catchments areas of the Olekma, Amga, Maya, Aldan, Chara, Tokko, and Buotama rivers. Ancient artwork at these places consists almost exclusively of rock paintings, which is in contrast to Southern Siberia and Central Asia, where petroglyphs predominate. The area along the middle reaches of the Lena River, within the vicinity of Yakutsk, constitutes a distinct geographical boundary that delimits the extent of the distribution of rock art, as the images become rare in territories farther to the north. However, there are a few known northern sites: one is located along the lower part of the Indigirka River, while two other concentrations are found along the Olenëk River. This disproportion in the number of known rock art sites between the south and north may reflect to some extent the fact that more intensive research activity has taken place in southern Yakutia.

Taking into account the uncertainty of the linguistic (pre)history of the region and the problem of establishing the precise chronology of the rock art, ethnic identification of the artists remains a difficult and complex issue. Much of the rock art belongs to times past that are difficult to pinpoint from cultural and ethnic perspectives. Despite the fact that the Tungus peoples lived in the area prior to the appearance of the Yakut in Eastern Siberia (ca. thirteenth and fourteenth centuries A.D.), it is still hard to determine the beginnings of the Yakut occupation of the region.<sup>1</sup> The presence of a small enclave of Yukaghir people living along the Kolyma River has led some researchers to argue that in pre-Tungus times, a period which is chronologically difficult to define, large parts of Siberia were populated by peoples who spoke tongue(s) probably

<sup>1</sup> See Borisov 1999; Gogolev 1993; Ksenofontov 1992b.

belonging to the Uralic language family. This assumption is based on the observation that the Yukaghir language—whose very position in the linguistic “forest” of Arctic Asia is extremely enigmatic—seems to be somehow related to the Samoyedic languages that are part of the Uralic family (Vasilev 1994). Despite the great difficulties in reconstructing a detailed history of the ethnic sequence of the region, ethnographic research has demonstrated that all the people practiced shamanism (Koško 1990). It is then reasonable to claim that shamanism in Siberia is a supra-ethnic ritual and religious tradition, an interpretation that offers an important interpretative context for rock art in Yakutia.

Local archeological discoveries have demonstrated that there has been a continuous presence of rock art in Siberia throughout prehistory and the historical period (e.g. E. Devlet and M. Devlet 2005; Sher 1980). The rock art images of the latter, i.e. historical, period are particularly interesting as they correlate to ethnographically documented forms of Siberian shamanism, particularly from the point of view of ritual attributes, like the images of drums, drumsticks, or ritual caftans worn by the shaman (Devlet 1999; E. Devlet and M. Devlet 2002; Kubarev 2002; Rozwadowski 2009: 243–275). Shamanism thus provided a symbolic context within which at least part of the rock art was created. The most spectacular examples come from Southern Siberia, especially within the area of the Sayan-Altay (figs. 1, *a–c*). Similar iconography, however, is also found in Eastern Siberia, particularly within the territory of Yakutia (fig. 1 *d*).

The most impressive site with rock paintings is that in the vicinity of Sinsk, a village on the right bank of the Sinya River. The site is close to the river's mouth where it connects with the Lena River, about 200 km west of Yakutsk (fig. 2). The images were resurveyed by a joint Polish–Yakut expedition in the year 2000. These images are famous as they are the most often cited examples of Siberian rock art representing shamanism (e.g. Hoppál 1992: 147, fig 21; Vitebsky 1996: 29). The most notable scene (fig. 3) depicts a group of human figures and two oval designs with perpendicular lines inside. Okladnikov and Zaporozhskaia were the first to publish these paintings in their book on the petroglyphs of the middle Lena River (1972: 270); however they placed them at Mokhsogollokh-khaia, near Pokrovsk on the Lena River, which is actually 100 km from their correct location. During our resurvey (Rozwadowski and Knurenko 2002) it was noticed that there were discrepancies between our findings and Okladnikov and Zaporozhskaia's original documentation. Significantly, we observed that the anthropomorphic

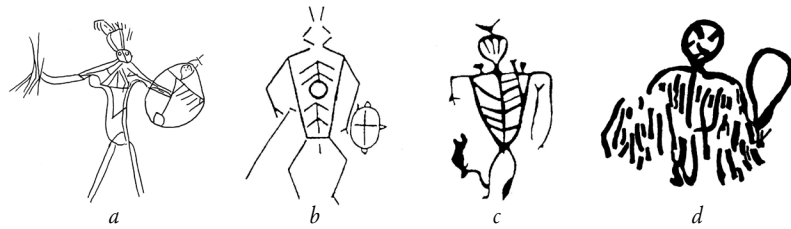


Fig. 1. (a) Kara-Diungur, Altay (after Kubarev 2002: 117); (b) Mount Ukir, Buryatia; (c) Aia Bai, Lake Baykal (b and c after E. Devlet and M. A. Devlet 2002: 124); (d) Elanka, Yakutia (after Okladnikov and Zaporozhskaia 1972: 223). Not to scale.

figure in the lower part of the composition was absent. This was probably due to the fact that the paintings had not been preserved in their original form. Today the paintings are poorly discernable and, according to one of the inhabitants of Sinsk, the condition of the paintings had recently deteriorated. We were told that they had been more visible just a few years previously. The deterioration might have been the result of natural weathering processes acting on the rock. Black patches on the rock surface also complicate the recognition of particular motifs as the images were painted in black.

Okladnikov and Zaporozhskaia were not only the first to document the paintings, but they were also the first to suggest their connections to shamanic symbolism (Okladnikov and Zaporozhskaia 1972: 97–98). They pointed out that the central figure with lines spreading downward from its arms has characteristic elements resembling the clothing worn by Siberian shamans. Also, the oval designs, an integral part of the composition, bear a resemblance to the form of shamanic drums. Cross-like motifs are sometimes painted on Siberian shamanic drums, while the shape of a handle mounted on the inside of a drum takes the form of a cross. Furthermore, the motif of a row of human figures placed below the central “shaman” in the Sinsk panel is similar to characteristic images that “decorate” the front or back of ritual coats worn by Siberian shamans.<sup>2</sup>

About 100 meters from the aforementioned paintings there is a group of images painted in red (fig. 4). In these, the human figure on the far

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Alekseev 1984, photo 5; Vitebsky 1996: 57.



Fig. 2. The rock with the paintings at Sinsk Village on the middle Lena River, Yakutia. Photo: Andrzej Rozwadowski, 2000.

right holds a stick in its hand, which also touches an unidentified rectangular object. The object itself is divided on the inside by six horizontal lines. The next figure to the left is also exceptional in terms of its size. It is associated with an object reminiscent of an arrowhead or the tip of a spear. The figure’s torso is decorated with a grid-like ornament, which might symbolize the shaman’s ritual attire. Furthermore, the heads of both figures have horns or protruding ears, which are also confirmed motifs found in the shamanic tradition of Siberia (Devlet 1998: 202–207).

Between the figures and the elk on the far left there are four small anthropomorphic figures. Their spread-out arms and legs may indicate that they are dancing. One of them is holding an object which can be associated with a bow (or it might possibly be a drum). If the association is correct, it is necessary to add that the bow has played an important ritual role in shamanic practices among Eastern Siberian cultures. Furthermore, several researchers argue that, from a chronological perspective, the bow is a more archaic shamanic attribute than the drum within the region of Siberia (Sagalaev 1984: 23; Devlet 1998: 207). This fact can be confirmed by paintings on gravestones that were preserved in the cemetery discovered at Karakol in the Altay Mountains,



Fig. 3. Rock paintings at Sinsk Village (traced by Andrzej Rozwadowski).

dating back to the beginning of the second millennium B.C. (Kubarev 1988). The Karakol paintings provide a valuable strand of evidence in our discussion because of their very possible relationship to shamanism (Kubarev 2002). The images of human figures discovered at Karakol are very distinct because of their sophisticated clothes and elaborate headdresses. These headdresses, in essence, have strong associations with birds, which are a symbol vital to Siberian shamanism. The fact that the images are directly related to burials is also of importance, since shamans balance themselves between life and death and often participated in funeral ceremonies to help the soul of the deceased find the right way to the afterlife (Eliade 1994: 209–218; Hoppál 2007).

On the far left-hand side of the set of paintings from Sinsk there are two elks and an almost illegible oval-shaped painting (fig. 4). The animals are facing the human figures. If we interpret the scene semantically, we can perceive the setting as a moment of contact in which the



Fig. 4. Rock paintings at Sinsk Village (traced by Peter Knurenko; after Rozwadowski and Knurenko 2002: 168).

elks are coming toward the (dancing?) people. Have the elks been summoned by shamans celebrating a ritual ceremony? We know that the object of many shamanic activities was to ensure a successful hunt. It is also known that in the shamanic tradition of the Yakut the elk appears as the shaman's "animal-mother" (Ksenofontov 1992a: 69), and that having such an animal-mother was the privilege of the most powerful shamans (Ksenofontov 1992a: 55). Significantly, in numerous myths the elk often appears in the animistic form of the shaman's helping spirit (Aleksiev 1984). Although it is impossible to fully decode the semantics of these images, we cannot deny their potential shamanic symbolism. An interesting analogy is provided by a rock art panel on the Tokko River (a tributary of the Lena River), where the relationship between human and elk is of a special sexual nature (fig. 5). The round object held by the man could be a drum, although its size does not correspond to a real drum. The ithyphallic character of the person, however, can be related to sexual arousal, which has often been recorded as a real or metaphorical expression of shamanic ecstasy.

Another new scene found at Sinsk (fig. 6) has images that seem to be abstract rather than realistic. The upper part of the lowest image in the group evokes associations with the schematic depiction of a human face (the crossed lines located between two short lines). Meanwhile, it is conceivable that the other images may schematically portray a shaman wearing ritual attire. The long lines in the lower parts of the images resemble ribbons such as are historically attested to have adorned the costumes of shamans.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, analogous rock images where human

<sup>3</sup> See Mazin 1984; *Shaman's Costumes* 2004.

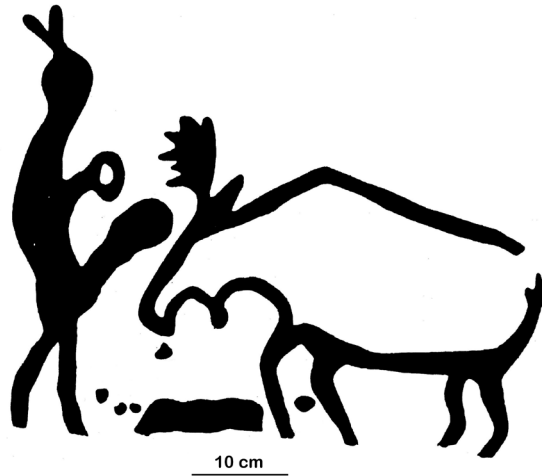


Fig. 5. Rock paintings (fragment) at Tokko River, Yakutia (after Kochmar 1994: 66).

figures were dressed in costumes resembling shamanic attire can be found among other rock paintings in Yakutia (fig. 7) and in the Altay region of Southern Siberia (figs. 8 *a*, *b*). There are also similar images at Tangaralakh on the Olenëk River in northern Yakutia (see below).

Returning to Sinsk again, one of the figures in fig. 3 displays, as was noted above, a known feature of shamanic art: anthropomorphic figures with bodies in the so-called “x-ray style” (as seen in the examples from the Altay, see figs. 1 *a* and 8 *a*, *b*). Thus, the interpretative context for this Sinsk image may relate directly to the shamanic rite of initiation that is described in the legends of the Yakut. In these legends, in order to become a shaman the candidate has to receive a special gift from the spirits that will protect the initiate and induce them to lend their powers to the candidate when requested. The shaman is a mediator between the human community and the world of spirits, and he or she has to obtain extraordinary powers that facilitate interactions with the supernatural. To gain these abilities, the candidate has to undergo the process of shamanic initiation, which involves the experiences of death and rebirth. It involves the initiate partaking in a metaphysical journey where they leave their body to meet the spirits (death) and return to this world in a new body (rebirth). The latter was given to the candidate by



Fig. 6. Rock paintings near Sinsk Village (traced by Andrzej Rozwadowski).

the spirits, which meant that he or she was bound to them from that moment on.

The initiation rite was often a very painful process and it could last for a long period of time, even continuing over the course of several years (Cherkova 2006). This is at odds with the common Western perception that it is a religious initiation that lasts little more than a day. The so-called “shamanic illness” experienced by a person who has been chosen by the spirits can continue for a very long time. Sometimes a person

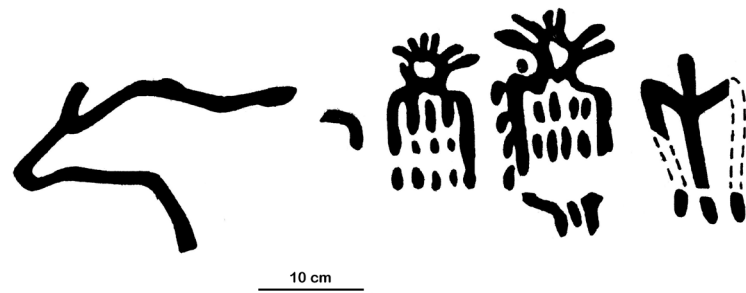
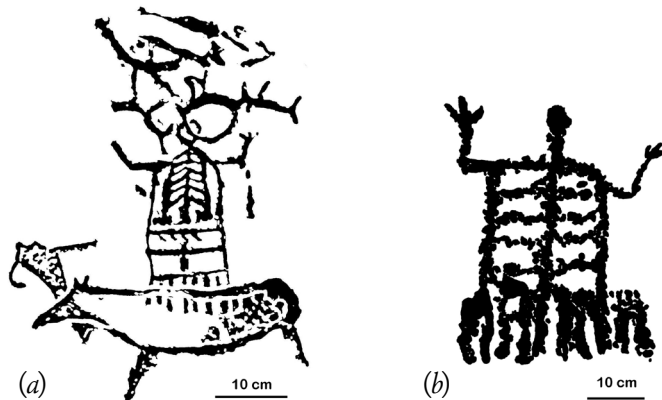


Fig. 7. Rock paintings at Tokko River, Yakutia (after Kochmar 1994: 162).

does not recognize a physical illness that is in fact a symptom of the shamanic calling, and this is why the initiation process can continue for years until the candidate is sure that they have been chosen by the spirits. In other cases, which are frequent, the person consciously resists the call from a real fear of accepting such a powerful but dangerous gift. However, a person's mortal powers can be too weak to oppose the will of the spirits, and in the end they have to submit to the shamanic call. Shamanic legends known among the Yakut, Evenki, and Buryat (Ksenofontov 1992a; Lommel 1967: 54–59) tell us about the future sha-



Figs. 8 *a, b*. Petroglyphs (fragments) at Kalbak-Tash, Altay (after Kubarev and Jacobson 1996: figs. 150 and 311).

man's journey into the world of spirits, where his or her body undergoes a process of dismemberment (Yakut *ettënnii*, see Ksenofontov 1992a: 42). Their head is cut off, but the person retains their bodily functions as their eyes keep continual watch over the dramatic event. Their body is then torn to pieces with iron hooks and the muscles are stripped off the bones. Finally, when the skeleton is cleaned of all its organs and muscles, it is given a new body (usually boiled in a cauldron) and the candidate, in a new form, returns to the human world.

It is important to note that after the journey the candidate is a completely new person and he or she becomes a shaman. A person could undergo the process once, twice, or even three times. Those who were “reborn” three times were treated as the greatest and most powerful of shamans. While the muscles were being torn from their bones, the spirits would examine the person's skeleton in order to find a special feature—which usually meant that there was an additional, “extraordinary bone.” For that reason individuals whose skeletal defects were visible to the naked eye were believed to be “chosen by spirits” at an early age and evidently destined to become shamans. The motifs of the “extraordinary bone” and that of the “bodyless skeleton” (representing the climax of the initiation) are reflected in Siberian rock art (figs. 1 *a, b, c, d*; Devlet 2000; 2001). These human figures have torsos marked with lines reminiscent of a skeleton and they can be credibly associated with the above-mentioned process of shamanic initiation. Moreover, in some cases such figures possess other typical shamanic attributes, such as drums. It is also interesting to point out that it is also possible to find images of human figures with an unnatural number of fingers that suggest anatomical features related to the “extraordinary bone” (Devlet 2000: 90).

The symbolism of the shamanic rite of initiation is also reflected in the ritual caftan worn by shamans while performing ceremonies. One of the most characteristic motifs is the representation of ribs that are embroidered or applied as decoration on the shaman's caftan:<sup>4</sup> these clearly invoke the symbolism of dismemberment. Caftans decorated with images of ribs are ethnographically attested to be worn by Yakut (Alekseev 1984: 223) and Evenki (Mazin 1984: 73) shamans. The chronological time span between the Siberian “x-ray” rock images and historically recent Yakut

<sup>4</sup> See *Between Worlds* 2006: 102, 104, 109; Lommel 1967, photo 3; *Shaman's Costumes* 2004: 30, 58–62.

shamanic cloaks is, most likely, quite great; however, the analogous nature of the connections cannot be ignored. It is important to point out that shamanism is an ongoing family tradition: the ritual attributes connected with shamanic practice are usually passed down from generation to generation. If they undergo a process of change or destruction, they can be recreated or renewed once again. Their recreation, however, is not a disingenuous personal act but is done strictly according to tradition as in this way the “genetic pattern” can be retained. This can be seen in the case of the continuity of the shaman’s coat. Its “common” form has been retained over the centuries among different Siberian peoples, even among those who faced significant influences from other incoming religions. The Mongols can serve as an example here as more than 500 years of coexistence with Lamaism has not eroded the “pan-Siberian pattern” of the shamanic cloak in their culture (Heissig 1980: 17).

The Yakut myth of dismemberment described above expresses the most essential shamanic experience of symbolic death. The very motif of death is, most certainly, the universal conceptualization of ecstatic experiences when the shaman undergoes trance. From the viewpoint of the phenomenology of shamanic trance (Wierciński 1997; Rozwadowski 2003: 161–177) it appears that the culmination of the ritual ecstasy, due to its painfulness, is commonly conceptualized as death. Therefore, when the shaman enters trance, he or she dies and is reborn.<sup>5</sup> This experience, which is hard to describe in rational terms, is accompanied by other universal sensations like the sense of flying or traveling through air, sometimes for long distances. From this perspective, it seems not to be a coincidence that the bird is a common symbol of numerous Siberian shamanic traditions, including those of the Yakut. The bird appears to be a metaphor for shamanic flight, and shamans would often identify themselves with it. That is also why the shaman’s coat was usually rich in bird-like symbolism. For instance, objects and ribbons hanging from the sleeves symbolize the feathers that enabled the shaman’s flight.<sup>6</sup> Some rock paintings on the Maya River in Yakutia (fig. 9) seem to express this metaphor graphically: the spreading arms of the anthropomorphic figures give an impression of spread wings ready for flight.

<sup>5</sup> See Hoppál 2007.

<sup>6</sup> See Mazin 1984: 73.

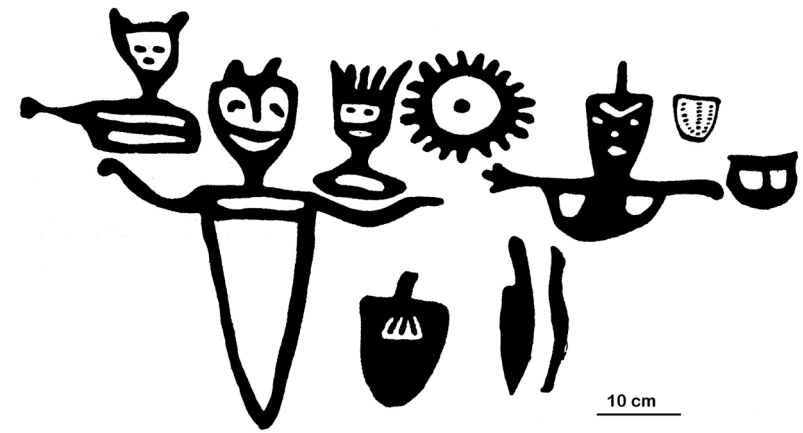


Fig. 9. Rock paintings at Maya River, Yakutia (after Arkhipov 1989: 102).

In the Sinsk paintings (fig. 4) the image of the elk is highly suggestive of a graphic attempt to visualize a shaman’s helping spirit (see also fig. 5), while the accompanying schematic figures could be shamans. The motifs are analogous to the paintings at the rock art site of Toyon Ary, on the Lena River between Sinsk and Yakutsk. Here there are a pair of elks, a male and a female (as can be inferred, respectively, from the presence and absence of antlers), surrounded by poorly visible schematic images which are suggestive of human faces (fig. 10). The images have been painted in a manner similar to the Sinsk paintings and, according to local archeologists, they date back to the Bronze Age, i.e. they are 3,300–2,400 years old (Kochmar 1994). Interestingly, local tradition has preserved a fascinating legend about the origin of the paintings. Once there was a great shamaness who fought against the spirit of chickenpox. Shamaness and spirit transformed into two enormous elks who battled each other until the spirit of the illness was defeated. To commemorate her victory, the *shamanka* (female shaman) created the rock paintings (Pesterev 2000: 17). There is no way of proving that the legend, or even a part of it, is actually true; however, what is noteworthy is the fact that these drawings have become an inherent part of local shamanic tradition. No matter how old the story is—maybe it is an echo of a much older oral tradition—it is significant that contemporary local

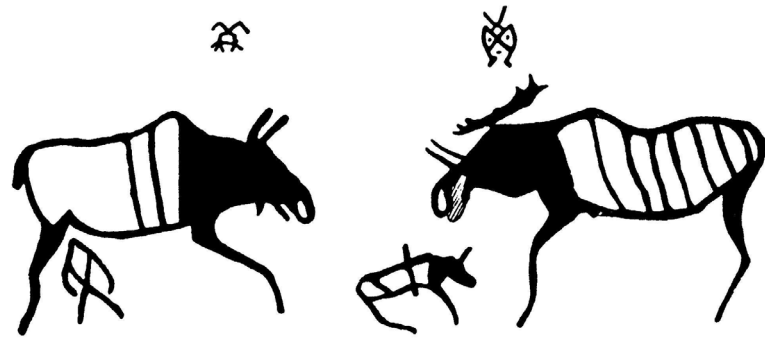


Fig. 10. Rock paintings at Toyon Ary, middle Lena River, Yakutia (after Pesterev 2000: 17). Not to scale.

people associate the rock art with shamanism. This fact proves that rock art has played a dynamic role within shamanism which has not been completely forgotten nor has been sidelined by contemporary culture.

Potential shamanic images can be found in both southern and northern Yakutia. In the north only two such images have been discovered, at Tangaralakh (fig. 11), along the middle of the Olenëk River, by Nikita Arkhipov (Arkhipov 1989). They were reanalyzed by a Polish–Yakut ethno–archeological expedition in 2001. The paintings on the Olenëk River, although not numerous, deserve special mention as their shamanic overtones seem to be particularly vivid. Basically, the images depict two human figures, along with a few traces of other paintings preserved in vestigial form (figs. 12 *a*, *b*). One of the paintings (fig. 12 *a*) is clearly an image of a shaman dressed in a ritual caftan. The tassels hanging from the lower part of the caftan, are easily recognizable, and are typical of a shaman's attire. The spread arms give a distinct impression of flight, a common metaphor for shamanic ecstatic experience. According to Arkhipov (1989: 117–119), this image shows close stylistic similarity to an iron shamanic figurine *emeget* (or helping spirit—images of *emegets* were sawn on to the shamanic dress) discovered in 1987 in the burial of a shaman, dated to the eighteenth century and situated at the mouth of the Senke River, the right tributary of the Olenëk River.

The second group of images (fig. 12 *b*) have been preserved in vestigial form. One of them represents only a human face with two eyes, while the second depicts a more complete human (the lower part is probably



Fig. 11. The rock with paintings at Tangaralakh, Olenëk River, Yakutia. Photo: Andrzej Rozwadowski, 2001.

spoiled—remnants of the paint visible below may be part of the original whole painting). The latter has a rectangular-shaped head. Arkhipov assumes that the image depicts a shaman wearing a mask, similar to masks which were used by Evenki shamans. He consequently claims that the Tangaralakh paintings were created within the sphere of Evenki culture and that they can be dated to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The name of the place is also of importance, since *tangaralakh* in the Yakut language means ‘divine’ (Arkhipov 1989: 117) or can be explained as—so we were informed by local people—“the place with god’s depiction.” The word *tangara* can be translated as meaning “icon,” that is to say, “a picture of god’s image.” Hence, local Yakut refer to the mountain as “the place with an icon,” that is, “the place with god’s image.” We can assume that according to local tradition the place was considered sacred even before the arrival of the Yakut in the territory, and that its contemporary name is an attempt to describe this ancient “divinity” from the perspective of the Turkic sky “God” Tengri, or even from the perspective of the sacredness of an icon of the Orthodox Church.

Therefore, we touch upon the question of worshipping the sites with rock art, which indicates that these localities were considered sacred in



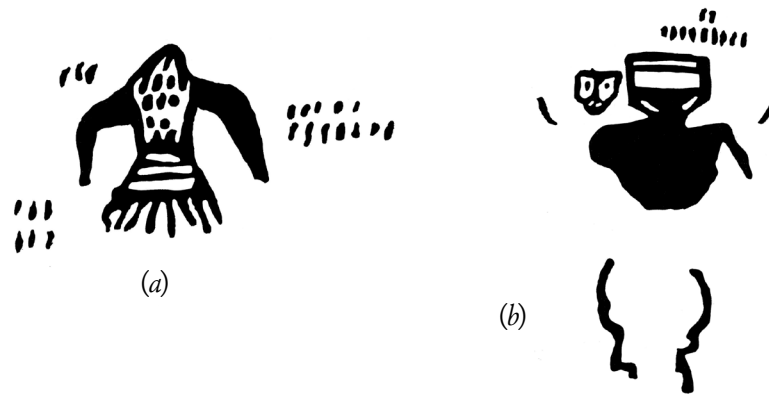


Fig. 12 *a, b* Rock paintings at Tangaralakh, Olenëk River (after Arkhipov 1989: 118–119). Not to scale.

even older times. If we assume that shamanism constituted the basic religious context of past communities in the region, it follows that we should suppose that their sacredness is the heritage of an ancient shamanic tradition. Even now many such places are venerated by local people and they make offerings at these rock art sites. The offerings, however, are not as spectacular as an outsider might expect in that the main offerings are tufts of horsehair which people insert into rock crevices near the paintings. Sometimes they leave money on a nearby rock projection or insert it into a crack. Other offerings may be votive pieces of cloth or “rags,” which are a very common form of veneration across Asia and are sometimes directly associated with rock art sites, not only in Siberia but also in Central Asia (Lymer 2004; Rozwadowski 2004: 104–110). The rag offerings made by the Yakut are usually white in color, which symbolizes spirituality. We also came across such offerings by the aforementioned paintings of elks at Toyon Ary (fig. 13). Moreover, the fact that there are rock art sites where contemporary acts of veneration take place clearly indicates that they have been utilized as sacred places since antiquity. If we assume that shamanism constituted the basic religious context for past communities in the region, then we can suppose that their sacredness is a reflection of the heritage of an ancient shamanic tradition.

Furthermore, among the offerings left near rock paintings along the Olekma River there are objects which deserve our closer attention,



Fig. 13. Offerings at the rock with paintings at Toyon Ary, Middle Lena River, Yakutia. Photo by Andrzej Rozwadowski, 2000.

namely *shenkens* (also called *shinken*, or *shingken*<sup>7</sup>). These are wooden, schematic models of a spirit who acts as a mediator between people and the world of spirits. According to ethnographic accounts, this practice of creating wooden figures derives from Evenki cultural traditions (Okladnikov and Mazin 1976; 1979), as there are Evenki groups who live in the southern part of Yakutia. Mazin was the first to notice *shenken* offerings during his field study of the rock art in the Olekma River basin. He discovered club-shaped *shenkens* made from branches or tree trunks of mainly birch, but also larch—trees that are considered particularly sacred by Yakut. Even today the larch is still perceived as the “shaman’s tree.” These *shenkens* were placed within the vicinity of rock paintings. Sometimes they were simply laid by the rock, while at other times they were inserted by one end into rock crevices near the paintings. It is necessary to point out that they were not always located directly by the rock paintings; sometimes they were placed at certain places along the rocks as a separate gift. They were left by the rocks in

<sup>7</sup> See Kochmar 1985: 181–182.

order to venerate a spirit, or to make a request of the spirit which was believed to live in the rock.

In particular, natural rocks are believed to be inhabited by the female spirit Eneke bugady, who is the ruler of the taiga, rivers, and animals. Eneke bugady is one of the greatest gods among the Evenki of southern Yakutia, and is supposed to dwell in sacred places where family cults were practiced, the “rocks-*bugady*.” To contact Eneke bugady for her assistance one had to get the support of an auxiliary god, who was called Baralak by the Evenki of the Vitim and Olekma rivers and *belley* by the Evenki of the Yenisei River (Kochmar 1985: 182). Usually Baralak was represented in wood as a small anthropomorphic figure devoid of hands or in the form of an elk. In order to empower the *baralak*, the sculpture was decorated with *shenken*-amulets, which gave it special magical powers. Such amulets were usually made of animal body parts, like the noses of sable, dried elk hearts, bones, claws, or fangs. Ethnographic accounts tell us that the *shenkens* were particularly valued for their power to ensure hunting success (Kochmar 1985).

*Shenkens* found within the vicinity of rock art sites in southern Yakutia usually take the shape of a simple wooden club fashioned from larch with a human face sculpted at the end. Since mixed forests are common in the region, we can assume that larch was intentionally chosen because of its particular symbolic value. It is highly probable that these *shenkens* left near the rocks acted as mediators between people and the rock-dwelling Eneke bugady. It is worth mentioning here that the cult of rock and mountain veneration is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of numerous Siberian peoples and as such provides an important symbolic context for rock art in various parts of Siberia (Devlet 1998).

Kochmar’s research in Yakutia has revealed more than a hundred such *shenkens* that were left at 16 rock art sites as well as places where rock art was not present (Kochmar 1985: 183). The largest number of *shenkens* was discovered in the valley of the Amga River, where they accompanied almost every example of rock art. When Kochmar tried to acquire information about their function and meaning, the local Evenki were of little help. They appeared to have no knowledge of when and why the objects had been left by the rocks. This fact, however, allows us to assume that the tradition of placing *shenkens* by rock art is rather old, older than the memory of the present day inhabitants of the region. Their precise age, however, remains a mystery. The *shenkens* are wooden objects left outside in the forest and subject to natural fac-

tors like deterioration and weathering. Thus, it seems reasonable to reject one hypothesis—that the *shenken* ritual is a relic from prehistoric times. More importantly, the *shenkens* clearly demonstrate that rock art is directly related to local beliefs and that the rock images constituted a part of the religious sphere of local culture.

If we consider all known rock art sites in Yakutia today, there is undoubtedly a diversity of motifs and subject matter. Shamanic motifs are found, but they are not a predominant subject. Still, when making such a statement, we have to consider our ability to identify shamanic art (Rozwadowski 2009: 211–281; 2012a; 2012b). As seen above, there is a recognizable iconography that draws upon analogs from ethnographic accounts of Siberian shamanism. However, these examples certainly do not exhaust the potential complexity of shamanic relationships and we need to acknowledge that various aspects of ancient shamanic practices and beliefs remain largely unknown. Perhaps the rock art image of a boat, for example, could be a graphic metaphor of shaman’s journey into the spirit world, as referred to in the mythology of the Evenki. As some studies suggest (Martynov et al. 2006; see papers in Rozwadowski and Koško 2001), shamanism and rock art were related phenomena in the cultural traditions of Siberian peoples. They influenced and permeated each other, and their interrelations would have been diverse and complex both synchronically and diachronically.

In Yakutia today there is no tradition of image-making upon rocks. It cannot be excluded that, to some extent, this could relate to the gradual disappearance of shamanism not only in Yakutia but also in other parts of Siberia (I am thinking here of historical times; on the present revival of shamanism see e.g. Kharitonova 2006). Although its cult is present in contemporary Yakut culture, true shamans are very scarce and their practice has undergone serious transformation under the pressures exerted by the Orthodox Church as well as by the anti-religious ideology of Soviet times. Nonetheless, when we look at Siberian rock art in its broader context, we can say that shamanic values, many of which have been described above, have been preserved in the rock art from various periods of prehistory. All in all, rock art then provides a valuable contribution to understanding the religious antiquity of Yakutia.

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## Shamanism and Arctic Hysteria in Works of Marie A. Czaplicka

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*The article presents an analysis of the features of shamanism in the research of Marie Antoinette Czaplicka, including her hypothesis on the origins of arctic hysteria. During her research, Czaplicka concentrated at first on Russian, Polish and other non-English works of ethnographers from Eastern Europe not previously known by English language scholars. She presented a complete picture of the shaman, starting from the shaman's vocation, the basic equipment, the classification of shamans and then described an important factor, "woman's nature," that is necessary to be a perfect medium between the worlds of spirits and humans. The second part of this article is related to arctic hysteria, which is, according to Czaplicka, strongly connected to Siberian shamans. Arctic hysteria was treated by European and American scholars as a kind of nervosa, but for the inhabitants of Siberia it was simply the result of contacts with nasty or benevolent spirits and a kind of possession. Czaplicka noticed that usually women are more endangered by the attack of hysteria, because of their natural sensibility. The hypothesis and classifications of Czaplicka were important for Anglophone scholars, who had no previous opportunities to get this information on shamanism, because of their lack of knowledge of Slavonic languages.*

Marie Antoinette Czaplicka's anthropological and ethnological works are an important part of Polish scholarly heritage. Writing as a young scholar, she brought a new approach to the study of shamanism and other subjects related to Siberia. Among all her books and articles, one is especially worth of mentioning, *Aboriginal Siberia* (1914). This book is a sort of source book; Czaplicka collected a lot of information from books and other materials produced by scholars of Russia (146 authors), of Poland and other countries. The selection of the sources is similarly important for Anglophone scholars: most of the materials used in the Czaplicka's book had been unknown to them. The book is divided into three parts, the last one is on the shaman and the most important