

SHAMANS
AND
SYMBOLS

SHAMANS AND SYMBOLS
PREHISTORY OF SEMIOTICS
IN ROCK ART

Mihály Hoppál

International Society for Shamanistic Research

Budapest
2013

Cover picture:
Shaman with helping spirits
Mohsogollokh khaya, Yakutia (XV–XVIII. A.D.
ex: Okladnikov, A. P. 1949.

Page numbers in a sun symbol ex: Devlet 1998: 176. Aldan rock site

ISBN 978-963-567-054-3

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Published by
International Society for Shamanistic Research

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Printed by
Robinco (Budapest) Hungary
Director: Péter Kecskeméthy

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To my
Dito, Bobo, Dodo
and
to my grandsons
Ákos, Magor, Ábel, Benedek, Marcell

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to many people who have generously assisted me over the last forty years in various ways.

Anna-Leena Siikala (Helsinki, Finland),
Juha Pentikäinen (Helsinki, Finland),
A. V. Tivanenko (Ulan Ude, Russia),
Andrzej Rozwadowski (Poznan, Poland),
Maria M. Koško (Poznan, Poland),
Ekaterina Devlet (Moscow, Russia),
Loit Jokkelda (Tallin, Estonia),
Elena Okladnikova (Saint Petersburg, Russia)
Vladimir Kubarev (Novosibirsk, Russia) and

David S. Whitley (USA) with whom I met during a conference, and in an other symposium with Inga Maria Mulk (Sweden). I am very indebted to all of them.

I would like to thank to Gretchen Dunn for her kind revision of the English of my text.

PREFACE

Nowadays shamanism has become very popular as a research subject (let alone as an urban practice among some new-age groups). A great number of new books have been published in which theories on the origin of shamanism have been presented. One variant of those theories claims that cave/rock art provides a clear evidence of shamanism in prehistoric times. Recently there is growing criticism concerning the so-called primordial and universalistic forms of shamanism, and about the artistic value of the images on the rocks. According to a semiotic understanding the figures in the Siberian rock carvings can be interpreted as elementary signs and basic symbols. This sign/symbol generating activity can be seen as the fairly early representations of cognitive modeling of certain natural and social relations, and not specifically as an evidence of universal shamanic phenomena.

By way of introduction, let me quote the following statement: „The shaman and the anthropologist enjoy the status of interpreter of symbols, cultural instruments for the perceiving and arranging of reality. As interpreters in understanding manifold meanings of sign and signifying function, they also play a part in the integration of symbols as generators and stylizers of patterns of systems: religious, medical, social, and economic. They are, therefore, significant vectors of a force that produces configurations...” (Romanucci-Ross 1989: 35).

This book is the result of decades of research by the author. I first started dealing with Siberian rock drawings back in the seventies, when I met with the work of A. P. Okladnikov and A. I. Martynov, which was published a decade later in Hungarian (Okladnikov – Martinov 1972, 1983). In the seventies I mainly did comparative mythological studies in which I tried to understand the structure of mythological systems with the help of the semiology and binary oppositions (Hoppál, 1975, 1979, 1992, 1993, 1983, 2003). I must admit that my interest in rock drawings only grew in the last two decades, since these mysterious works – not to mention the most won-

derful rock paintings – (Clottes – Lewis-Williams 1996, 1998, 2001) – are most likely the first results of the conscious artistic activities of mankind, and are in some ways linked to the works of shamans.

There are of course people who dispute these connections, and we shall refer to them as well, but of course we can not write about every view, article, book or study in detail. We shall try to contribute to the further analysis of the questions that have arisen with the attached bibliography.

Concerning the methods of understanding rock drawings, we recommend semiotics. Symbols in semiotic are also preferred, as a method of studying symbols, since we are talking about the appearance and usage of ancient signs and symbols. Of course others have come to the same conclusion and mentioned semiotics, they however, didn't use the possibilities provided by the method consistently, even though it can be of great help in the understanding of ancient symbols.

It should be obvious to the reader from my studies that I am not sceptical of the fact, that searching for meanings in the symbols that were carved on rocks is well worthwhile. It is easy to deny everything, because then one doesn't have to go on searching. It's an easier path to deny something than to prove it. Luckily I am not alone on my path, on the path of positive thinking – it's worth reading the newer special literature, especially the works of Russian, Polish and other authors. Productive discussions move science forward.

July–August, 2013. Budapest

PART I

FROM THE LABYRINTH OF STUDIES



CHAPTER 1

STUDIES OF ROCK ART AND/OR PETROGLYPHS

During the last quarter of the twentieth century there was an ever growing interest in research on rock art. There are general outlines of the earliest representations of European prehistoric art (Kühn 1952, Laming-Emperaire 1959, Leroi-Gourhan 1964, 1965, 1982). There were efforts to connect shamanism and the beginnings of art (Lommel 1967a, 1967b), moreover religion and shamanism (Métraux 1949) were connected in the search for the roots of civilization and art (Marshack 1972, 1979, 1991, 1997, Sher 1998, 2000, Martynov 1991, Stolyar 1978).

It is evident that for any kind of generalization, and for building new theories more data are needed (Anati 1980, 1989, 1997, Drössler 1980, Sher 1980). More data not only on rock art, but about the “religious” world of early man, their relations to the surrounding natural world and to the cosmos (Hadingham 1984, Tedlock D. 1995). Many works on shamanism have been published recently (Flaherty 1991, Hultkrantz 1989, 1993, Atkinson 1992, Vitebsky 1995, Hoppál (ed.) 1994, 2002, 2003, Siikala 2002) and on religion (Bowie 2000). In the present study we understand shamanism as it was defined in a classic way by the Finnish scholar, Anna-Leena Siikala:

“the technique of communication used by a shaman as a creator of the state of interaction between this world and the other world in fundamentally an extatic role-taking technique” (Siikala 1978: 28, see on role taking Honko 1969).

Since the very beginning all those cave paintings were labelled as *art*, students of shamanism made use of books on visual imagery (Boas 1955, Arnheim 1969, Gombrich 1982,) and on visual intelligence (Hoffman 1998, Gardner 1982). All these topics are in a close relationship with the new theories on the evolution of mind (Eccles 1989, Plotkin 1997), all changes in the brain are in close connection of the development of language (Fodor 1983, Greenberg 1992, Gardner 1985, Donald 1993, Whitley 1998). Some scholars developed a theory on phosphenes (Hedges 1982, Hodgson 2000a, 2000b) and inner vision (Zeki 2000).

From the phosphemes there is only one step further to the hallucinogenic theory of shamanism based partly on ethnographies (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1961, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1987) The “altered state of consciousness” as a general phenomena were also recognized (Heusch 1965, 1986, La Barre 1972, Cordy-Collins 1977, Chippindale – Smith – Tacon 1993) on mushrooms (Samorini 1990, 1992). The ecstatic nature of shamanic phenomena (Eliade 1964) were extensively discussed (Boyd – Dering 1996, Bongard-Levin – Grantovskij 1981).

In Russia there are a great number of detailed studies and publications of new data, which have been explored and recorded recently. A new generation of archeologists are active in collecting analyzing these new materials with more accurate methods and techniques. They already published dozens of monographs and articles on different regions in Russia.

First of all, we have to mention A. P. Okladnikov who was the leading figure on archeology and rock art (petroglyph) studies in the Soviet times from the early 1950's till the eighties (Okladnikov 1947, 1955, 1966, 1971, 1980 just mentioning a very few of the great number of his publications!) He developed a special technique of copying rock carvings with the help of his younger colleagues are some regional/local rock sites have been published (Okladnikov et alii 1979, Okladnikov – Martinov 1972, Okladnikov – Mazin 1979, Okladnikov – Zaporozhskaya 1970). Let us quote some unique pictures from his “Petroglyphs of the Baykal” (Okladnikov 1974). (Fig. I.1a, 1b, 1c, 1d.)

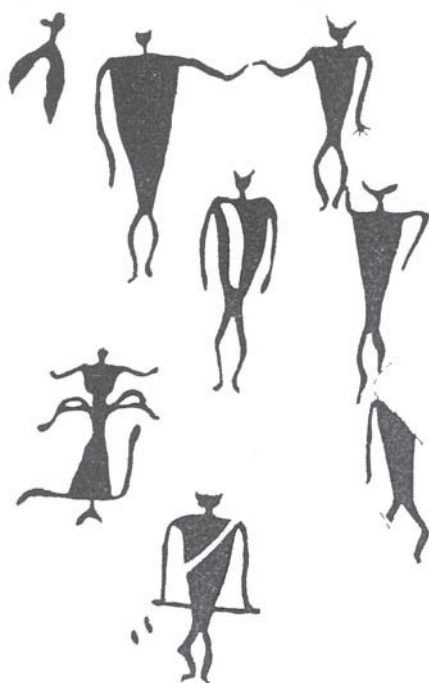


Fig. I.1.1a. Ritual scenes

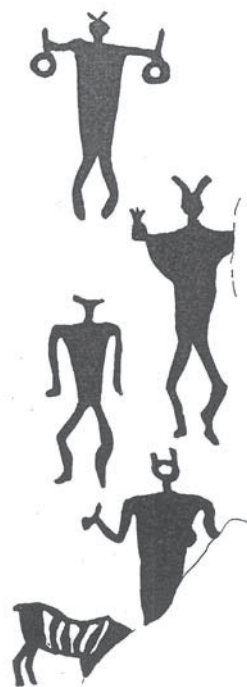


Fig. I.1.1.b. Ritual scenes



Fig. I.1.1c. Ritual scenes



Fig. I.1.1d. Ritual scenes

Academician A. P. Okladnikov was a powerful figure in Soviet times who published a book on the “Ancient Art of the Amur Region” in which he outlined the style of the rock drawings and pottery.

“The oldest petroglyphs all use the same method of pecking or pressure retouching, characteristic of the Neolithic period. The craftsman worked on the drawings in the same way as on a stone axe: he struck stone against stone, chipping off small flakes one after another, until he had made tiny depressions in the surface, which merged into a single patch or line. The result was a high-relief image, sometimes almost three-dimensional. The drawings bear the marks of great antiquity. They are often worn so smooth that it is hard for the eye to follow the outlines of individual figures. In many cases the drawing can be found only by touch: the parts which were chipped away in ancient times are smoother than all the remaining surface of the rough stone untouched by human hands. Compared with all the other, similar, archaeological monuments known to us in Asia, the petroglyphs of Sikachi-Alyan stand out as something unusual and exciting. What can we learn from these fantastic masks, these snakes and strange beasts, carved by the hand of an unknown sculptor? Among the prehistoric drawings of Sikachi-Alyan the enigmatic stylized anthropomorphic faces or masks occupy a central place. They are so varied that it is difficult to divide them into any definite groups: each mask represents a separate type, but all the same they show a certain unity of form and style and can be classified by certain definite features” (Okladnikov 1981: 13). (Fig. I.1.2.)

Many of the researcher who are active in rock art studies in Siberia were students of A. P. Okladnikov, or students of his disciples, so they share the view that Siberia belongs to the shamanic domain from time immemorial. One may say that the overall majority of Russian scholars are in favor of shamanic theories (or suggest that it is so) found in the rock drawings (Samashev 1998). E. A. Okladnikova, the daughter of the academician, who discovered a number of sites (1979, 1984, 2005) shared her opinion with me that rock art images definitely prove that shamanic rituals were practiced near the rock sites (personal communication in 1995). She finds the archeological evidence sufficient to enable us to verify or reject the earlier hypothesis. This is thanks to the work of academician Okladnikov this



Fig. I.1.2. From the "Guide Map" of Petroglyphs and Sites in the Amur Basin

colleagues who uncovered the Siberian rock drawings, including the ones from the Tom River region – that could enable us to corroborate or reject the earlier hypotheses. There are several data that suggest the drawings originate from the neolithic; but there are some as well which – out of considerations netaled to the phenomenology of religion – would lead one to put the rise of shamanism in the Bronze Age. While analyzing the Siberian form of shamanism, especially its Central Asian, Tibetan and Mongolian varieties, László Vajda (1959) came to the conclusion that shamanism comprises a whole string of elements which would, from the standpoint of the

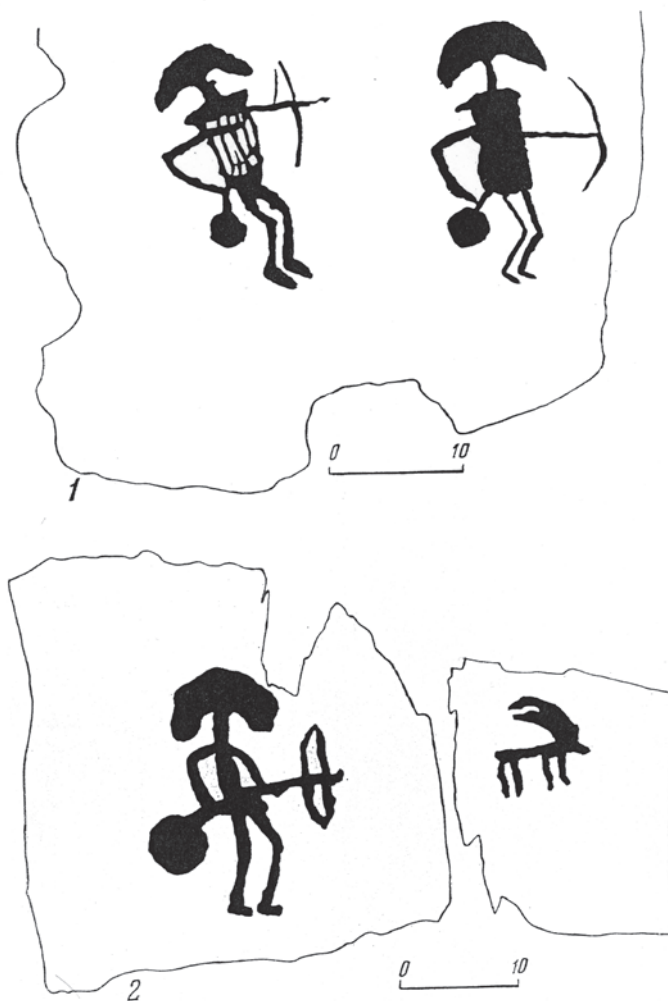


Fig. I.1.3. Warrior figures

history of religion, appear to be phenomena of a considerably later period, so that any hypothesis positing that this specially and highly organized system of beliefs could have come into being among the hunters of the neolithic period is most unlikely (see also Potapov 1978 and Ozols 1983).

There was another family of students of rock art in Russia, namely Marianna A. Devlet and Ekaterina G. Devlet, mother and daughter. Marianna Devlet worked throughout Siberia from Tuva (Devlet 1980, 1995, 1997) to Central Asia (Devlet 1992, 1998, 2000, 2001). She produced wonderful field material, which now are the basis for comparative studies (Devlet 1982, 1998). Recently they published together a collection of their

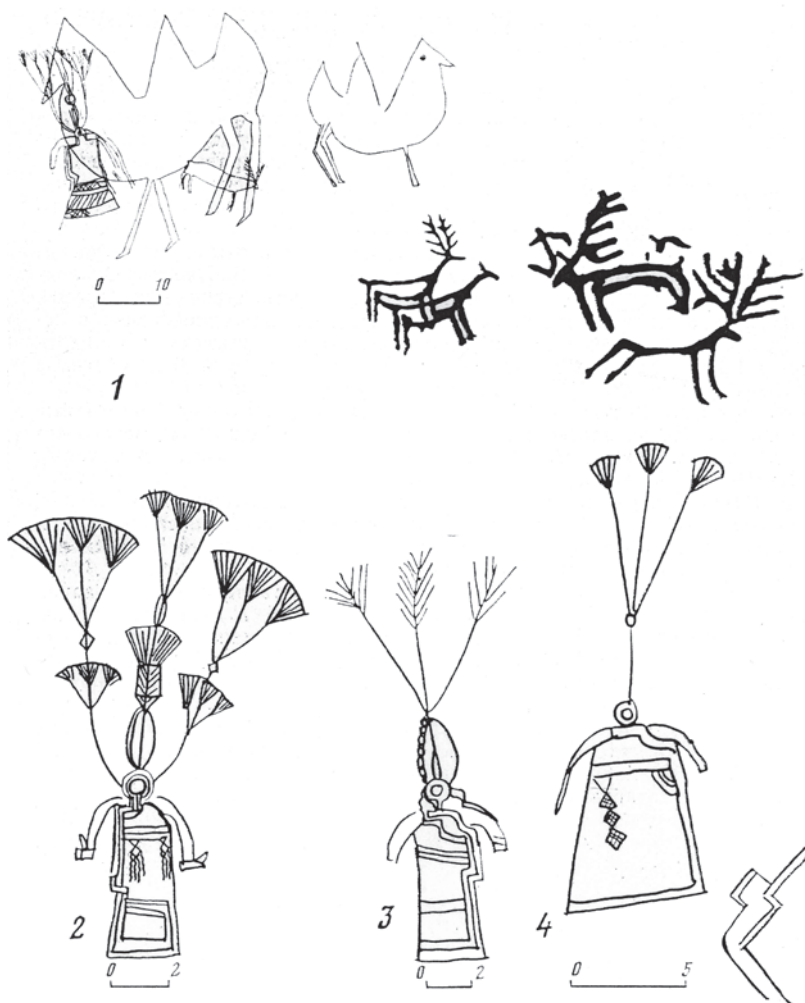


Fig. I.1.4. Humans with ritual headress

best articles (Devlet – Devlet 2000), some of which has been translated into English, and appeared in the journal of translations *Anthropology and Archeology of Eurasia* (edited by Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, Georgetown University, Devlet 2001). (Fig. I.1.3., I.1.4.)

M. Devlet, after a lifelong study of petroglyphs, turned her interests to comparing the images. Here are two of them: (Fig.I.1.5., I.1.6.)

Also an advocate, of the ancient shamanic cultural complex which can be traced back in time, is E. G. Devlet. She presented a number of images of anthropomorphic figures with X-ray style bodies, saying:

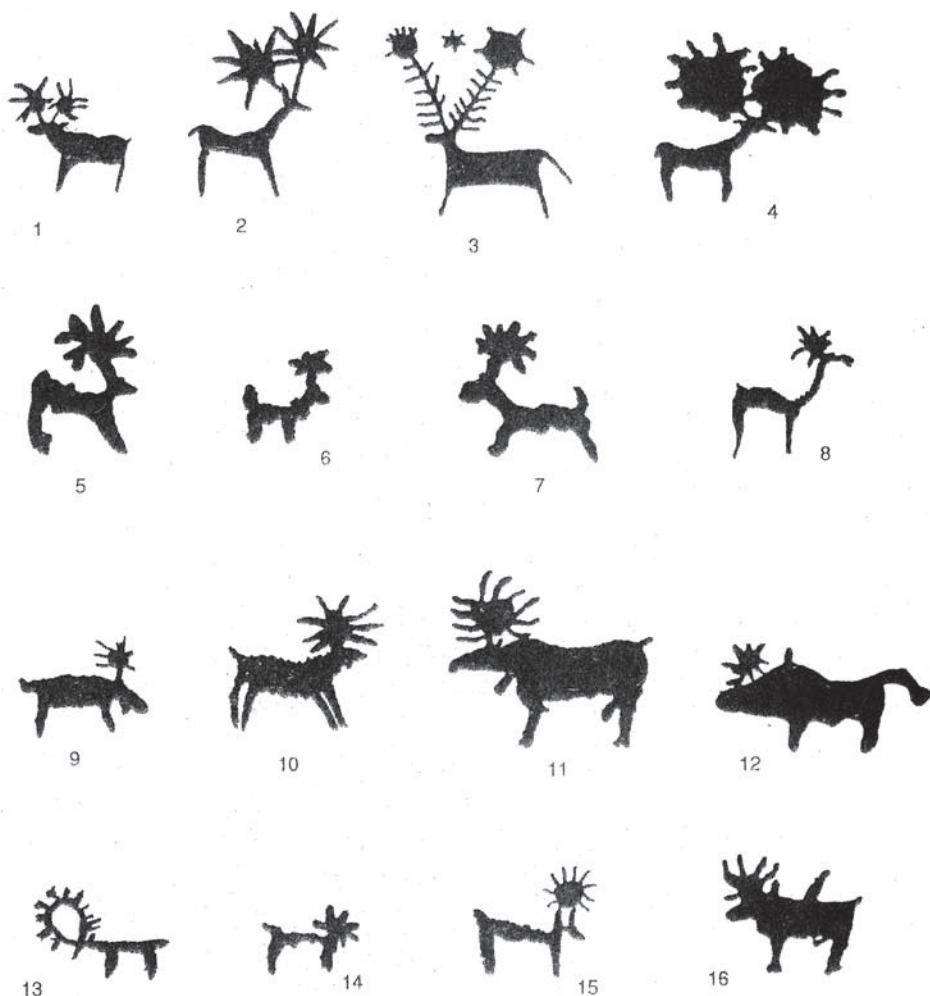


Fig. I.1.5. Animals with the symbol of sun

“The uniformity of the ideas of a shaman contemplating his own skeleton is expressed in similar X-ray style images among different peoples of the North. Some scholars have pointed out the similarity between the ceremonies for ordaining a shaman and the rites for initiating ordinary members of a community. In particular, it has been noted that the experience of death and rebirth is the tenor of all world religions, cultures and myths.

Of primary importance for interpreting the X-ray style anthropomorphic rock art images is the moment of obtaining the shamanic

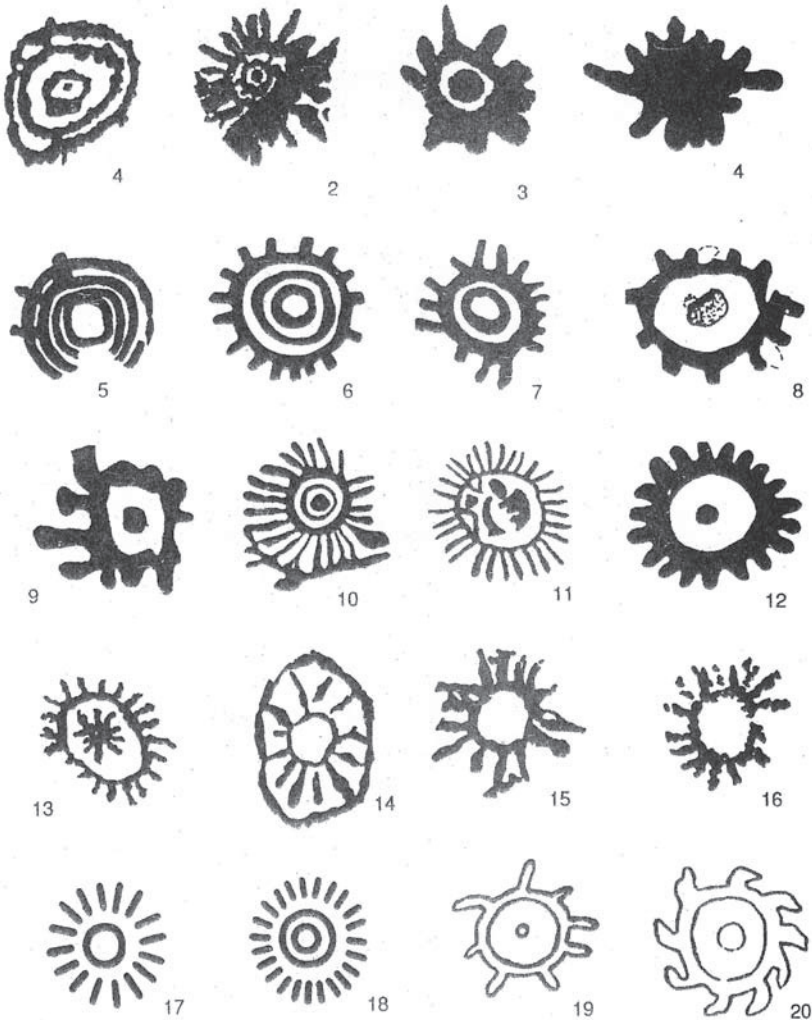


Fig. I.1.6. Symbols of the sun

gift. This is when a would-be shaman goes into a trance in order to undergo the mystical dismemberment of his body by spirits, the loss of his flesh, and to contemplate his own skeleton. The experience of death and rebirth is the most important condition for obtaining the power of shamanizing: only after this experience does a shaman reach the level at which his spirit-assistant sees fit to appear to him. The shaman's contemplation of his own skeleton requires extreme concentration of his powers." (Devlet 2000b: 88). (Fig. I.1.7.)

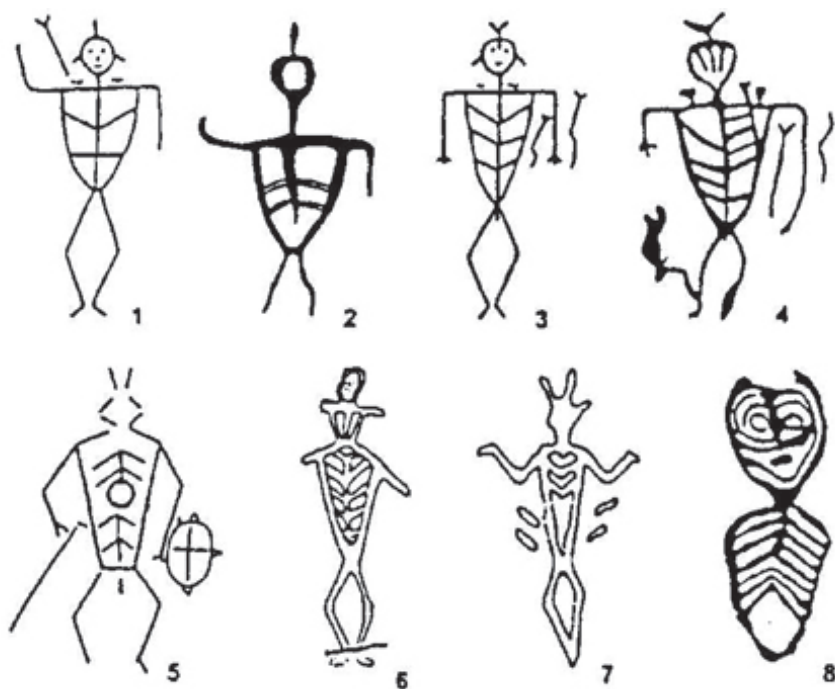


Fig. I.1.7. X-rayed human figures

Devlet presented some examples to support her thesis that these anthropomorphic figures may represent shamans and, since in Siberia the local shamanic folklore was continuous, those skeletonized, horned figures may represent the proto-shamans (Hoppál 1992:143). As signs, these anthropomorphic figures may represent an important, non-ordinary member of the community. (Fig. I.1.8.)

Esther Jacobson, is an extremely diligent and active scholar in the study of Siberian and Mongolian “petroglyphic art” (Jakobson 1990), published an excellent book on the ancient “Deer Goddess” of Siberia (Jakobson 1993). Her monograph may be seen as one of the best from a methodological point of view, as well as her articles on the “birthing woman” images in Central Asia (Jakobson 1997), and other anthropomorphic imageries in the Mongolian Altay (Jakobson 2001). (Fig. I.1.9.)

Esther Jacobson’s approach is based on the reconstruction of the ecology of culture (Jacobson 2000), of beliefs (Jacobson 1993), and of shamanism (Jacobson 2001) at least in its early forms in Mongolian Altay. (Fig. I.1.10.)

For a long period of time Mongolia was a *terra incognita* in the research of petroglyphs, but as a result of the Soviet-Mongolian academic coopera

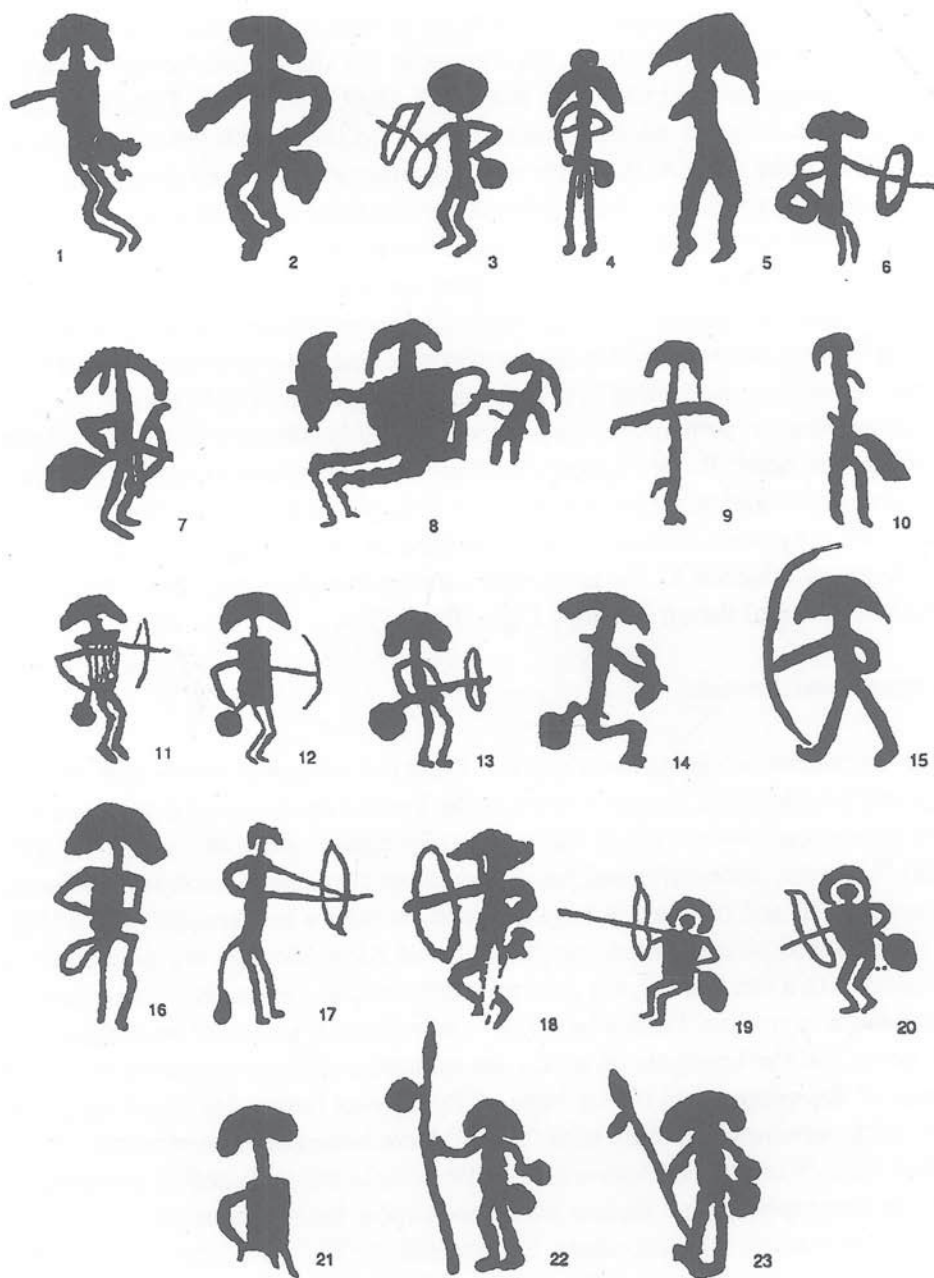


Fig. I.1.8. Anthropomorphic figures in mushroom-shaped headgear

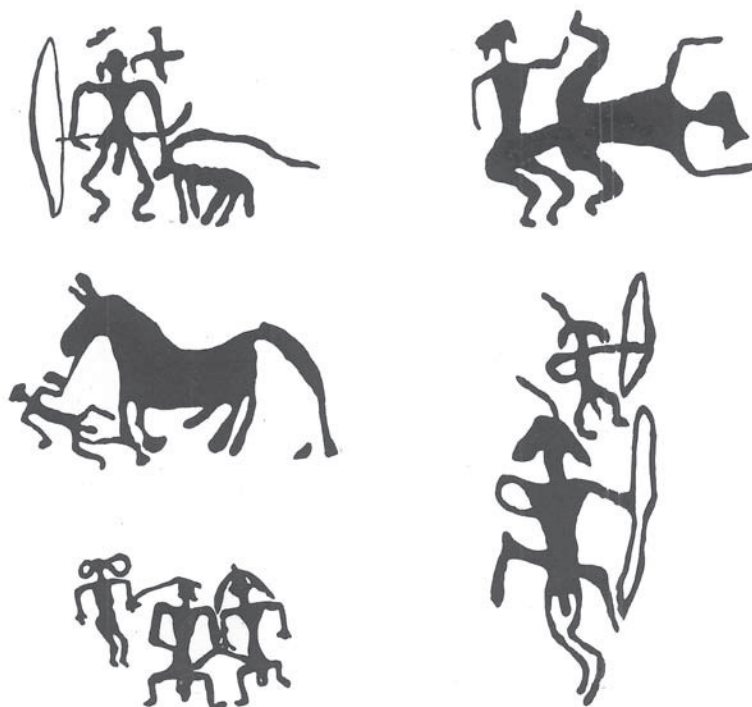


Fig. I.1.9. Petroglyphs of figures in ritual activities and of figures with “mushroom” hats, from sites in Mongolia

tion from the late 1970's. One of the best students of A. P. Okladnikov was E. A. Novgorodova who published several book on her field work findings in Mongolia (Novgorodova 1980, 1984, 1989). Her books are heavily illustrated which make them excellent source for further research. She has put together very interesting tables comparing similar images human-like figures and characteristic symbols from different epochs. (Fig. I.1.11., I.1.12., I.1.13.)

Eleanora Novgorodova made extraordinarily illustrative comparisons between cultures and epochs. These pictographs and petroglyphs can be instrumental in a deeper understanding the process of sign/symbol-producing activities of mankind, which was an ongoing historical flow everywhere. She had a keen eye in finding similar significant images for comparison. (Fig. I.1.14., I.1.15., I.1.16.)

There is a good article on the petroglyphs of Inner Mongolia (China) published in the Cambridge Archeological Journal by an archeologist specializing in Chinese art history, Paola Demattè. She went to Inner Mongolia and Ningxia provinces to examine rock art. She tried to understand the



Fig. I.1.10. Petroglyphs of ritual battles and hunts



Fig. I.1.11. Symbols of female ancestors from the earliest times to the X. Century

prehistoric and historic interactions between the Chinese world and its nomadic neighbors. Her article moves away from interpretations which see rock art as a wholly shamanistic phenomena. I completely agree with this approach since only very few rock images contain human-like figures (less than 1 percent of the total). Demattè is quite right to mention:

“The religious significance of petroglyphs, if present, may have resided in the offering or commissioning of images, rather than in their actual production, and the makers or commissioners of the images could have been devotees or specialists. The images’ function may have been related to devotional practice, recording religious events, or didactic narratives with mythical, legendary, or even historical overtones. These uses of images in religious context are commonplace in much religious art of so-called ‘higher’ civilizations, but they are rarely taken into consideration in rock-art studies. Buddhist rock art can be very informative about the processes which bring religious images into existence. Its different forms of expression range from representation of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to portraits of donors and narratives about legendary and historic events. These open our eyes to the multiple meanings which could hide behind rock art. Interestingly, evidence of such devotional offering of images is found in the Helanshan rock art. At several sites in the counties of Qingtongxia, Zhongwei and Shizuishan there are engravings of small pagodas resembling the ceramic pagoda models which in acts of devotion were buried by pastoralists devoted to Lamaistic Buddhism. This evidence seems to indicate that, at least in this instance, the carving of an image on a rock corresponded to the act of offering by burying an object. In other places, such as Helankou, inscriptions of the Buddha’s name seem to be addressing or invoking this figure, so that the written characters became the actual focus of worship... While there is indication that petroglyphs were sometimes associated with religion and ritual, other evidence shows that they were also the focus of more prosaic activities. Ethnographic sources for Inner Asia show that rock art was produced and used in a variety of contexts ranging from the ritual-religious to the mythohistoric to the utterly secular (mnemonic signs). While the ritual-religious aspect may have been predominant, it covered a wide variety of subjects including rain, hunting, puberty, fertility and initiation rituals, which did not necessarily involve ‘shamanistic’ activities.” (Demattè 2004:16.).

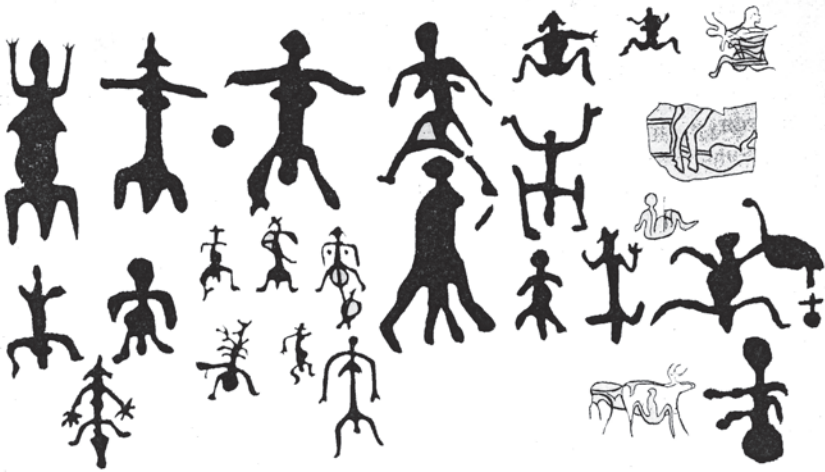


Fig. I.1.12. Images of birthing

During the last twenty-five years there has been great changes in China's academic life, which was witnessed by the present author. At the very beginnings of the 1990's shamanism was almost a taboo word but later on the international conference on shamanism was organized in Changchun. Once, after my lecture entitled "*Shamans in Rock Art*", two (then new) books were given to me. One of them was "*Rock Art and Reproductive Magic*" by Hu Xiaohui in Xinjiang (Hu 1993). The author published a number of pictures from the Yinshan site where images may be seen as clear signs of "reproductive magic" or more explicitly erotic magic (Hu 1993: 153). (Fig. I.1.17., I.1.18., I.1.19.)

In 1998 another very good book has been published, which has the enigmatic title "*Emblems of Chinese Totems*" by Wang Dayou. In the Chinese social sciences, as well as in ethnology, *totem* has a very special meaning, let me quote some lines from the English summary:

"the totem emblem in China is a kind of signs designed to pass the ideas of the ancestors to the coming generations. All the cliff paintings, coloured ceramics, jade and bronze articles with ancestors' or clans' images and used to worship the ancestors are considered as totems. The designs representing the names of clans and ancestors, the features of dwelling places, types of professions, inventions, humanistic creations are also considered as totem emblems, because they registered, simulated and passed the comprehensive information of heaven, earth and man to us. The highly condensed cultural signs are the common psychological confirmation of the people" (Wang 1998: 11).

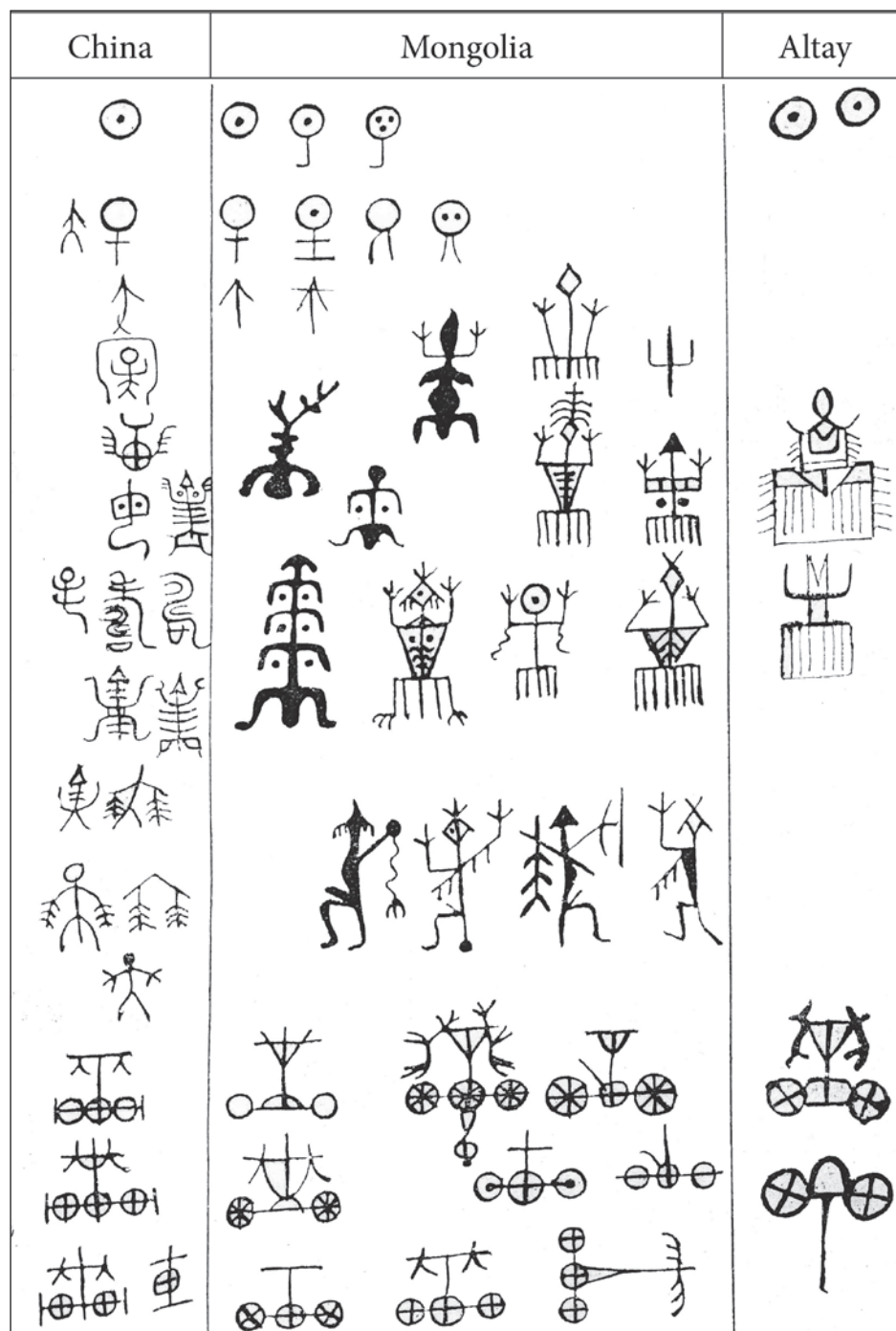


Fig. I.1.13. Pictograms of three cultures



Fig. I.1.14. Different types of the symbols of female ancestors



Fig. I.1.15. Anthropomorphic figures with three fingers and birdlike head



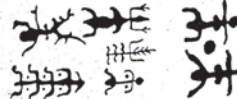












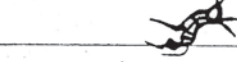




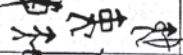












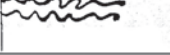


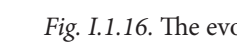
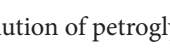

Eneolithic	Bronz Age		Early nomads	
				Sun symbol
				Erotic sign birthing
				Female figure
				Male figure
				Mask
				Bull
				Deer
				Horse
				Warrior
				Cart
				Yoke
				Sheep
				Boar
				Snake

Fig. I.1.16. The evolution of petroglyphs in North and North-Western Mongolia

This conception of totem is a bit outdated, one may say that they used it for a substitute of putio italics, or even *iconic signs* on the rocks. (Fig. I.1.20., I.1.21., I.1.22.)

China's Ethnic Groups is a lavishly illustrated English language “cultural geographic magazine”. In it, Gao Wei published an article (with photos by Wang Hongzhen) on the Jiangjunling Cliffs (Jiangsu Province, Liangyun-gang area). This site is only one small example of the unique richness of



Fig. I.1.17. Complex ritual scene

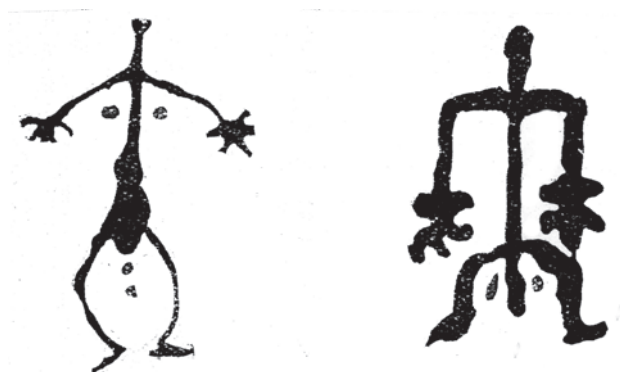


Fig. I.1.18. Female and male figures



Fig. I.1.19. Erotic scenes of Yinshan site

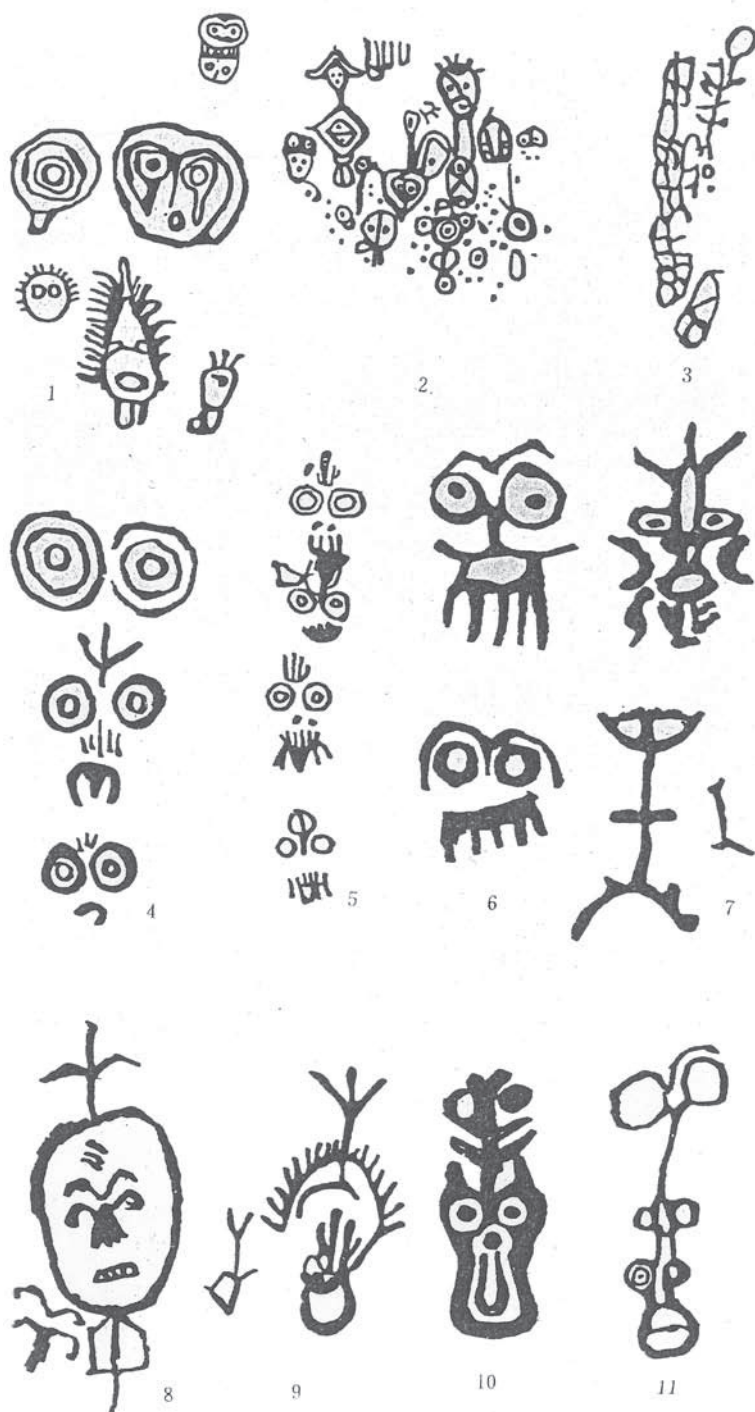


Fig. I.1.20. Masks stand for a human being

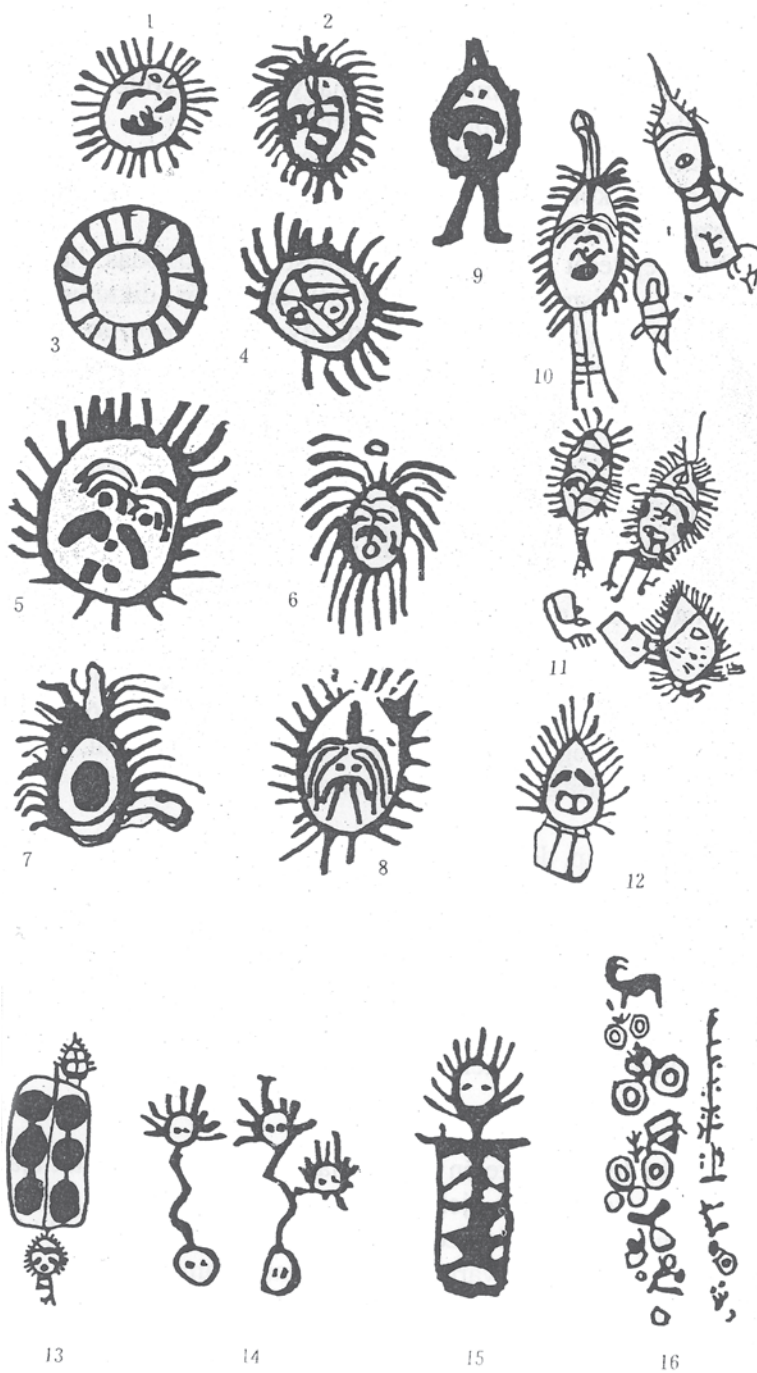


Fig. I.1.21. Masks, similar to the Sakachi Alyan images

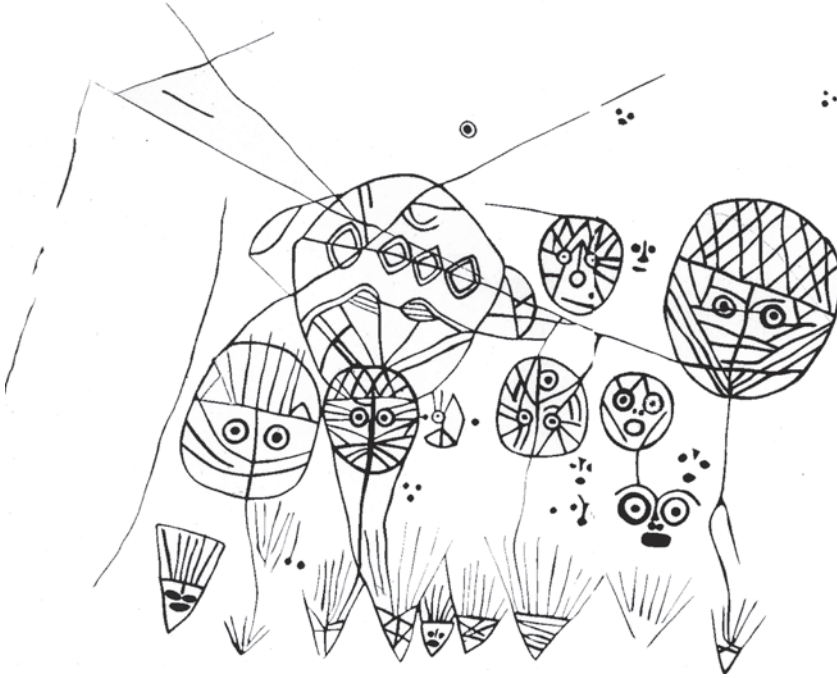


Fig. I.1.22. Marks(?) on the Jianjunling Cliffs

rock art in China, almost unexplored and unpublished. Masks, like balloons hanging in the air, be found on the surface of the flat rocks on the cliff. (Fig. I.1.23.) The history and meaning of those images is explained by the Chinese scholars as follows:

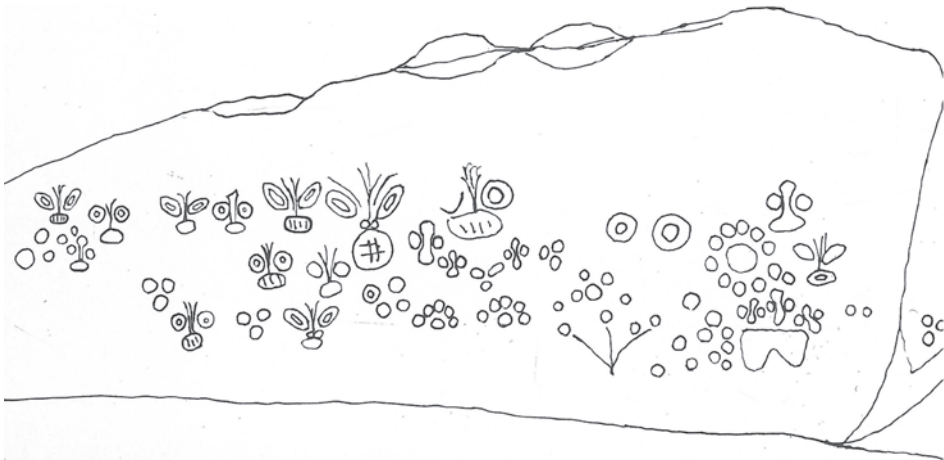


Fig. I.1.23. Small circles – to carve them require ecstatic work

“The cliff was used as an astronomical observatory by a tribe headed by Ju Mang and Shao Hao, and the tribe was a branch of the Chinese nation. The cliff was also used as an altar dedicated to Heaven and the tribe’s ancestors.

A huge rock in the shape of the beak of an eagle, which crouches on the top of the cliff, symbolizes Heaven, or the supreme ruler of the Universe. The three rocks in front of it form the symbolic base of the tribe. One of the rocks, in the shape of a bird, bears two groups of stars forming two human faces which, as Wang Dayou sees it, are the images of Ju Mang and Shao Hao. Two constellations are carved on the neck of the ‘bird’, namely, the Dipper and the Antares.

The nine suns in the west part of the altar symbolize the nine dismembered branches of the Dong Yi tribe, where Ju Mang and Shao Hao, the common ancestors of the tribes, are pictured as bird-like with human faces. Professor Wang Dayou thinks that the scripts are the earliest form of the tribe’s written language, which could mean ‘wind’, ‘humans’, ‘human-faced ancestors’. He also concludes that the Milky Way carved on the cliff is a record of Ju Mang’s astronomical observations and that the bird images are totems of the Ding Yi tribe.

Wang and other experts agree that the site is the earliest astronomical observatory and altar found so far in China – and probably in the world – with explicit tribal marks, totems and written records. It testifies to the fact that in China, astronomical observation began at least 7,000 years ago” (Gao 2007: 75–76). (Fig. I.1.24.)



Fig. I.1.24. Three different rock site but the style of the masks are the same

The sun-head as an important feature of petroglyphs seems to be relevant not only in the Amur Region but in Central Asia, as well. A. M. Mariyashev was the first who published an outline on “*Petroglyphs of South Kazakhstan and Semirechye*” in 1994.

“Tamgaly is one of the most ancient sanctuaries in Semirechye. The cliff drawings of Tamgaly contain the subjects rare for the Bronze Epoch and also those, which have no analogies in the other monuments of rock art. For several years systematic archaeological works have been conducted in the gorge, therefore the antiquities of Tamgaly are studied better than those in the other analogical monuments of Kazakhstan. The Tamgaly petroglyphs are dated from the Bronze Age. Although this sanctuary appeared later, than Sajmaly-Tash, a lot of subjects known in Saimaly-Tash have been discovered there, e.g.: the drawings of bulls, sun-gods, people in the pose of adoration; and people, standing in pairs, married couples, chariots and solar signs. Among them there are also religious subjects, well-known both in Central Asia and in Kazakhstan, reflecting the philosophy of the ancient people in the vast territory. The common features in the subjects and their stylistic similarity may be explained by the fact that the petroglyphs belong to one and the same historic period. Although the Tamgaly petroglyphs have much in common with the Central Asian images, they have a lot of subjects, unknown in Central Asia” (Mariyashev 1994: 21–22). (Fig. 1.25., 1.26., 1.27., 1.28.)

Central Asia has become a place for more thorough examinations of the details of the images. One can agree with Kenneth Lymer, when he studied in Central Kazakhstan a very special location, a pilgrimage place:

“Terekty Aulie is a sacred space where different members of a society can encounter different experiences. In the past, the images were the visions of the ancient baksy (shamans) and their interactions with the spirit world. In the present, local Islamic pilgrims visit a shrine, erected above the petroglyphs, as a part of their religious practices. Contemporary interactions uphold the sacredness of the space and demonstrate the persistence of the liminal qualities of Terekty Aulie since prehistoric times. Thus, the petroglyphs demarcated a special location in the landscape, and they, and their setting, were – and still are – an active part of the experiences and practices through which social realities are generated and constituted.

The traditional approach in the study of rock art has been to conceive it in a passive role. It has been noted by several commentators (Lewis-Williams 1987; Dowson 1994; Crook 1999) that petroglyphs can be treated as reflections of ancient societies or as frozen tableaux which silently depict the myths of ancient peoples. These researchers have advocated for a change in the way we think about rock art; the images are not outdoor art galleries but, rather, a special form of material culture that played an active part in the societies that produced and used them” (Lymer 2000: 311).



Fig. I.1.25. Sanctuary of Tamgaly Valley

It is a fact that there is a great concentration of petroglyph images on particular rock surfaces, near to natural springs. So, it is obvious that Ter-ekhtie Aulie was an ancient place of power and of pilgrimage. Earlier the local *baksy* (shaman like figure) and recently the believers of Muslim faith have visited in great numbers.

There are a great number of studies, articles, books, collection of images have been published so far, especially in the 1990's. Our Russian colleagues

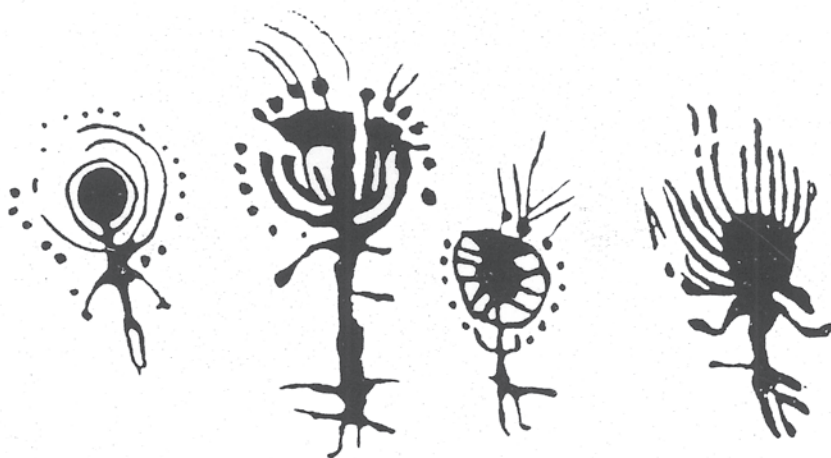


Fig. I.1.26. Central part of the Tamgaly sanctuary

were active in publishing their results – for example Kazakhstan (Mariyashev 1994, Mariyashev – Goryachev 1998, Mariyashev – Gorjachev – Potapov 1998), Northern Asia (Martynov 1991), Saimaly-Tash (Martynov – Mariyashev – Abetkov 1992), Mongolia (Novgorodova 1980, 1984, 1989, Jakobson 1990, 1993, 1997, 2001), the Shalabolino petroglyphs (Pjatkin – Martynov 1985), on some shamanic features of ancient Slavic paganism (Rybakov 1994), on Okunev culture (Savinov 1997, Savinov – Podol'skij 1995, Vadeckaja 1983, 1996, Studzinskaja 1995, Bokovenko 1995, Esin 1995), on Central Asian and Inner Asian territories (Francfort 1994, 1995, 1998, 2001, Sher 1980, 1994, 1995, Kubarev 1988, Kubarev – Jacobson 1996), Khakhassia (Leontev 1978, 1995), on Pazyryk shamanism (Cheremisin – Zaporozhchenko 1996).

Fig. I.1.27. Sun-headed deity

Here it is not our aim to review all these publications, however, it would be important



Fig. I.1.28. Deity with sun-head and an onager

to get a deeper knowledge of the findings, explorations and explanations made by the Russian scholars of Eurasian rock art. Most probably that was the hidden aim an excellent collection of essays “*Spirit and Stones: Shamanism and Rock Art*” (edited by A. Rozwadowski with Maria M. Koško 2002). The two Polish editors invited the best experts from both Russia and from the West as they wrote “for many year researchers investigating rock art in Central and North Asia have been hardly acquainted with the state of research at a global-scale, and *vice versa* – western awareness of the rock art from Asia has often been superficial” (A. Rozwadowski in the Introduction).



CHAPTER 2

A SHORT REVIEW OF GROWING CRITICISM

The new millennium started with a growing criticism against the so called “theory of universal shamanism”. In the tenth volume of *Bibliotheca Shamanistica* all the papers presented in the prehistory section of the 4th International Conference of the International Society for Shamanistic Research (held at Chantilly, France, on 1–5 September 1997) have been published (Francfort – Hamayon eds. 2001).

This section concerns ten papers covering almost the whole world where “primitive” and/or “native” art has been interpreted by the “trance theory” or “theory of universal shamanism”. The papers propose critical and alternative views to generalized shamanism in the interpretation of past societies and art. As one of the editors, H.-P. Francfort stated in his introductory essay there are three assumptions or claims which are fundamental to the theory of universal shamanism:

“1. The universal spirit present in *Homo Sapiens sapiens* brain and neurophysiological system is demonstrated by her/his ability for ‘altered states of consciousness’ (trance);

2. The universal primitive original religion of Mankind based upon this universal capacity for trance and upon the subsequent con-

cept of an universal 'entoptic' visionary sequence going from simple geometric forms to reversible transformations human <=> animal;

3. The universal internal capacity to express the above mentioned 'entoptic' visionary sequence directly and immediately into art forms.

Summarizing the main critical points the papers presented in the book strongly question the validity of such an idea of shamanism. They argue by demonstrating: 1. Contingency and current fashion: this 'shamanism' is a product of the contemporary trend (new age, post-modernism, post-processual archaeology) originating in Western societies; 2. Inconsistencies in the definitions and uses of this 'shamanism' in spite of the more or less explicit claims for its cross-cultural nature and for the universality of human spirit; 3. Problematic character of the supposed psychologically universal entoptic vision sequence and of the subsequent spontaneous direct immediate materialisation into works of art; 4. Diversity of the cultural activities that can be at the origin of the creation of art; 5. The very limited number of prehistoric images that can be related to 'shamanism' and their questionable interpretation; 6. The variety of rock art expressions and artistic motivations; 7. The historicity of 'shamanism' and its variability through space and time" (Francfort 2001: 31–32).

In sum, the debate is between two conceptions of cognition: the one (spirit) is an internal approach, spontaneist, intuitivist, the other (mind) is an external approach, elaborating, reasoning. The first (spirit) finds the universality of humankind in the altered states of consciousness, the second (mind) sees it in the conscious elaboration of the ancient societies through time, in all their dimensions, including artistic expression.

Henri-Paul Francfort posted his argument the other way round:

"the ability for alteration of consciousness, universal as it may be, must also be recognized in pre-Sapiens if not pre-Homo or animal (birds, mammals) brains. But only *Sapiens sapiens* produced art. Different areas of the brain are at work. And the universal shared ability of *Sapiens sapiens* for producing various local forms of art works must be searched in the conscious mind.

Shamanism therefore needs a definition other than the universal trance. And the archaeologists and art historians look towards the

ethnologists for an operational definition. A definition that can allow a scientific approach of ancient shamanism and save, if necessary, the concept itself for further studies” (Francfort 2001: 43).

Paul G. Bahn, who is the most ardent critic of the “new theories” of shamanism wrote a basic article for the volume *“Save the last trance for me: an Assessment of the Misuse of Shamanism in Rock Art Studies”* (Bahn 2001: 51–93). His paper provide a brief overview of the history of applications of the shamanism hypothesis to rock art, with particular attention to the three areas where it has been most publicized – Southern Africa, the western USA, and Texas – as well as to its more recent manifestation, in palaeolithic art studies. He argued that this “bandwagon phenomenon” has been a temporary aberration, which has taught us rather more about its perpetrators than about any prehistoric artists (see also Bahn 2001).

Jean-Loïc Le Quellec, who works for the Laboratoire de Recherches sur l’Afrique, Maison René Ginouvès, Université Paris-X Nanterre, wrote a vitriolic article under the title: *“Shamanism and Martians: The Same Struggle!”* (Le Quellec 2001). His paper shows: 1. that the cascade of hypotheses leading to the emergence of a “shamanic” reading of Saharan rock art only concern a minute number of images; 2. that these images are “elucidated” by means of debatable assumptions and circular reasoning; 3. that the result is the constitution of ad hoc assemblages that are claimed to demonstrate the validity of this reading, but which, in reality, merely illustrate it.

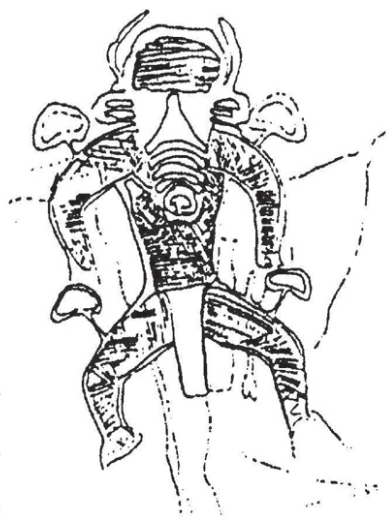


Fig. I.2.1. Round Head painting from I-n-Awanghet



Fig. I.2.2. Round Head painting at Matalen-Amazan

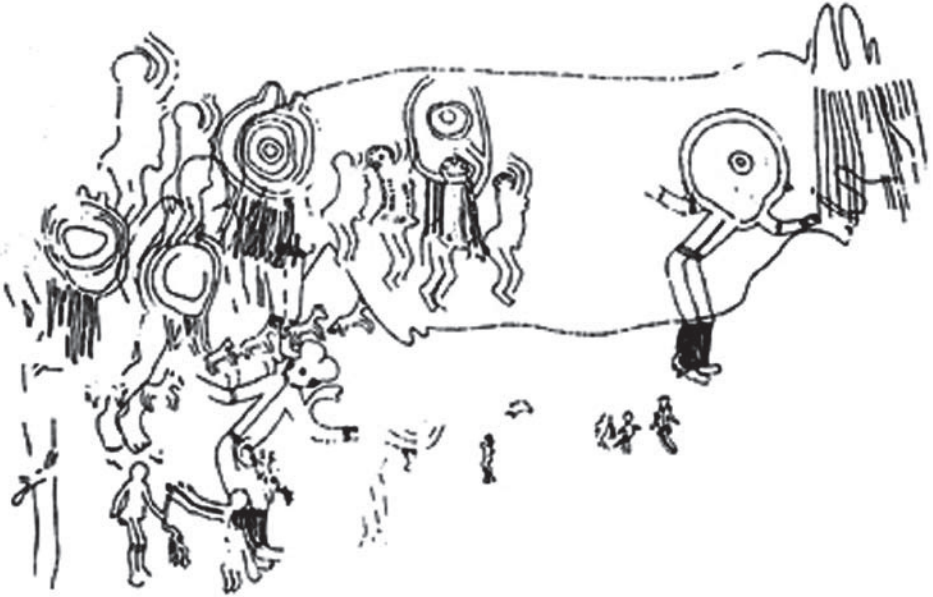


Fig. I.2.3. Round Head painting from Sefar

Anne Solomon, who has been at the Department of Archaeology, University of Cape Town (South Africa) gave an enigmatic title to her presentation: “*What is an Explanation? Belief and Cosmology in Interpretations of Southern San Rock Art in Southern Africa*” (Solomon 2001: 161–178). It seems that some, if not all, San rock art is affiliated to religious belief and ritual, but this recognition frequently masquerades as an “explanation” of/for the art. The limitations of understanding rock art that “belief” does not explain, are the topic of her essay. (Figs. I.2.1., I.2.2., I. 2.3., I. 2.4., I. 2.5., I.2.6.)

Michel Lorblanchet in “*Encounters with Shamanism*” used examples from the iconography of decorated caves and open-air engraved rocks. The author stresses the subjective nature of, and the absence of convincing arguments in favour of the shamanic theory as applied to European palaeolithic art. Moreover, an allusion to the present-day paintings produced in India by shamans shows the impossibility of such an interpretation in the absence of direct information about the creators of the paintings (Lorblanchet 2001: 95–115).

Of course, there were more critical voices published before the above mentioned volume (Bahn 1988, 1991, 1992, 1998, 2001, Bahn – Vertut 1988, 1997, Bury 1999, Hamayon 1997, Le Quellec 1999, White 2000) which deserve the attention of the reader who wants to balance his/her own view on rock art issues. “*The Northern Ojibwa Indians: Testing the Universal-*



Fig. I.2.4. Round Head painting



Fig. I.2.5. One of the „therianthropes” of Burley II



Fig. I.2.6. Round Head painting of I-n-Itenen

ity of Shamanic/Entoptic Theory” – this is the title of the chapter in which Jack Steinbring summarized decades of his fieldwork among northern Algonkian hunters. The fieldwork reviewed to assess the applicability of shamanic/entoptic constructs emanating from other cultural, linguistic and psychological contexts. The mobile northern hunting cultures have formed a unique idiom in which behaviours are governed by needs antithetical to entoptic applications. Shamanism itself is scrutinized as a model, and found to dissolve in the face of profound individualism (Steinbring 2001).

Angus Quinlan’s article bears the title “*Smoke and Mirrors: Rock Art and Shamanism in California and the Great Basin*”. A critical discussion of David Whitley’s interpretations of Great Basin rock art highlights significant problems with the shamanistic model. By relying on ethnography, Whitley’s work avoids one of the central weaknesses of the shamanistic model – its reliance on specific motifs in rock art imagery that supposedly function as cross-cultural shamanic metaphors. However, literal and metaphoric readings of Great Basin ethnography provide scant support for Whitley’s argument that rock art was made and/or used in the context of shamanistic practices. Whitley’s treatment of these ethnographies, by ignoring the impact of colonialism on Native American societies, reflects the ahistorical nature of the shamanistic model. Further, Whitley’s characterization of Great Basin shamanism seems more appropriate to South Africa, the home of the shamanistic model. Adoption of a shamanistic perspective precludes researchers from addressing significant archaeological problems in the Great Basin, particularly the issue of the dispersal of the Numic language family. By abandoning a shamanistic perspective and adopting a more minimalist approach focusing on the anthropology of ritual, the importance of rock art in understanding past Great Basin social systems can be appreciated (Quinlan 2001).

Cecelia F. Klein, Eulogio Guzman, Elisa Mandell, Maya Stanfield-Mazzi, Josephine Volpe joined in an effort to write on “*Shamanitis: A Pre-Columbian Art Historical Disease*”. Their article critically evaluates past scholarly use of shamanism as a means of understanding the function and meaning of art in selected Pre-Hispanic and Colonial Mesoamerican and Andean societies. First, it shows that art historians using the concept have necessarily used not only vague, but often multiple, often shifting, as well as contradictory definitions of shamanism that tell us next to nothing about the actual social, medical, religious, and artistic systems they purport to analyze. Second, it argues that these sleights of hand serve to falsely portray certain peoples as irrational, impractical, yet spiritually superior “Others”

who by being defined in terms different from those we use to evaluate ourselves, implicitly elevate the modern West above much of what is today Latin America (Klein et alii 2001).

Of course, for us the last two articles bear the most important insights. Esther Jacobson, who has spent long period of time discovering new rock art sites especially in Northwestern Mongolia, summarized her findings in an article entitled “*Shamans, Shamanism and Anthropomorphizing Imagery in Prehistoric Rock Art of the Mongolian Altay*” (Jacobson 2001).

Using the abundant materials of the Tsagaan Salaa/Baga Oigor rock art complex in northwestern Mongolia, her paper considers subject matter from the earliest cultural layers of northern Central Asia. The material includes a type of horned and frontal anthropomorphizing figure, birthing women, and hunters accompanied by frontal women. The regular pairing of these figure types and their association with scenes of hunting may offer clues to the ancient emergence of structured relationships which predict the much later development of “shamanism”.

Henri-Paul Francfort, who is a leading expert of rock art studies in Central Asia wrote a very neatly organized article on “*Art, Archeology and the Prehistories of Shamanism in Inner Asia*”. His paper gives a critical survey on the use of shamanism and trance for interpreting the rich archaeological remains and ancient art representations of Central Asia. Most of the shamanic “readings” seem to have used the ethnographic evidence in a questionable way, ignoring some of the basic methodological principles of archaeology and art history. This question is examined in the general methodological framework of a “cognitive archaeology” and of the psychology of art, from perception to representation, evidencing the flaws and the limits of the proposed shamanic/-istic interpretations. The last part provides an overview of the prehistory of shamanism in Central Asia, based upon the abundant art material, from the beginnings to the Iron Age.

At the end of his outline practically all evidence of an ancient shamanism in Inner Asia has been rejected.

“These elements in the rock art (divinity of fertility-fecundity, and exaltation of hunting activity) belong to the worldview of societies with a shamanic type of religion, of groups of hunters knowing the ‘chasse à l’âme’ (life force). (Hamayon 1990) Thus, it appears that the shamanic-looking images of the Bronze Age societies of South Siberia, the Altai and Mongolia (at the very least) in the perspective of

the Eurasian-American substratum, reflect a worldview of shamanic type, of course, not subsuming all the components of present-day shamanism. Paradoxically, the transformations of the economy in this societies (husbandry, metallurgy, elites, hierarchy) led to a reinforcement of the artistic expression of this symbolic system that was merely implicit in the previous period. Not one of the three above-mentioned traits (split representation, female deity, hunting) is sufficient on its own. Their combination sketches a broad shamanic-type of religious milieu, and they are reinforced by the previously observed Afanasevo-Okunevo complex of images (masks, horns, pillars, feathers, therianthropes). Is that enough for assessing the 'shamanism'? Certainly not. The 'shamanism' obtained with the help of the Asia-America substratum generalisation is too weak, all embracing and ultimately useless. Thus if we do not accept the substratum postulate and its generalized shallow shamanism" (Francfort 2001:259).

PART II

SHAMANS, SYMBOLS AND SEMANTICS



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION ON THE BEGINING OF SHAMANISM

Scholars tend to disagree on the origin of shamanism. Even such a highly respected author as Mircea Eliade supposed that recent researches have clearly brought out the “shamanistic” elements in the religion of paleolithic hunters. He referred to Karl J. Narr’s theory on the possible connection between ‘Bärenzeremoniell’ and the shamanism of Stone-Age in Europe. His conclusions are as follows:

“Animal skulls and bones found in the sites of the European Paleolithic (50.000–ca. 30.000 B. C.) can be interpreted as ritual offerings [...] and in connection with the same rites, the magico-religious concepts of the periodic return of animals to life from their bones, crystallized [...] Soon afterwards, probably about 25.000 B. C., Europe offers evidence for the earliest forms of shamanism (Lascaux) with the plastic representation of the bird, the tutelary spirit and ecstasy” (Eliade 1964: 503).

These statements about the bird, the spirit helper and the shaman – the so-called “Dead Man’s picture” – were widely accepted in the literature.

Despite of the fact that Annette Laming never mentioned shamans in her book (Laming-Emperaire 1959, Tab. 35).

In the 1950s it was a kind of scholarly fashion the write books on the prehistory of religion based on the rich illustrative materials of the European cave-art. In these books each human-like creature was labelled as “Zauberer” or demonic figure, and their supposed activity usually called “Jagdmagie” (Kühn 1952, Kirchner 1952). János Makkay, a Hungarian archaeologist, published an article in 1953, in which he interpreted a masked human portrait of the cave Les Trois Frères, as an important proof of the prehistory of shamanism. This well-known horned creature is supposed to be a sorcerer, or a shaman (Makkay 1953 republished in 1999: 56–71). (Fig. II.1.1.)



Fig. II.1.1. The Sorcerer

“The shaman performs a dance: he is in ecstasy. Having reached this state, his soul leaves his body. We hardly know anything about Upper Palaeolithic beliefs relating the soul. We might even suppose that, according to the original view, the shaman clad in animal hides did not leave his body during his ecstasy but his costume only. It is evident that dressing in animal hides precedes the evolution of shamanism even in a cultic role. Primitive man has very probably used animal masks and clothings much earlier in course of his magic ceremonies. The representation of the human body or skeleton on the costume was intended to secure the return of the shaman to his clothes or that of his soul to his body. As our source is no actual shaman costume but a cave-painting, we have to reckon with the possibility that the

design wanted to mark the presence of a man, the shaman, behind it” (Makkai 1999: 71).

Andreas Lommel went even further in the way of unsupported assumptions in his book on “*Medizinmnäner, Schamanen, Künstler*” of the early hunters (Lommel 1967a, b, Haydu 1970). Lommel argued that the arts of our times (art = in the sense of profession ex Latin) have their origin in the world of prehistoric hunters (“der frühen Jäger”) about 50,000–10,000 years ago. In a chapter on “*Art and Shamanism*” he tries to persuade the reader that the famous X-ray style of the Franco-Cantabrian prehistoric cave art had a connection with shamanism. Lommel’s book has to be read with a critical eye because his lengthy bibliography fails to mention the most relevant works, both on Paleolithic cave art and the earlier published (that is, up until the mid-sixties) Russian books on this topic.

André Leroi-Gourhan, whose valuable works on “préhistoire de l’art occidental” are well-known, pointed out how difficult it is to demonstrate the existence of shamanism during the Paleolithic time. For instance in publications on the topic, all the female figurines are labelled as “Venus” (with features of steatopygia) and the males as or sorcerers (Fig. II.1.2.), these later ones sometimes called ‘shamans’ (Leroi-Gourhan 1964, 1965, 1982).

It is, however, more difficult to pinpoint the beginning of shamanism, and some scholars believe that certain cave drawings, the date of which cannot be established, represent shamans and objects used by them. It has also been suggested that since various metals played an important role in the Bronze Age this could help us in dating (Vajda 1959, Voigt 1977). This is not impossible, but only the most recent publications provide us with new and almost countless data, that can be enumerated as tangible proofs, if any exist, in rock art.

It is for the specialists to judge the validity of the theories, based on the materials of rock art of different territories, establishing contacts between the drawings, engravings or paintings, and the magico-religious beliefs of the supposed “artists”. What seems to be certain, at least in Siberia, the *locus classicus* of shamanism, is that a theoretical possibility exists finding the first expressions of shamanistic rituals and symbols on the rocks of Central and North Asia. Moreover, Siberian rock art could be seen as the earliest documents available to us on the prehistory of Eurasian shamanism, or to use a more precise expression, these data could shed light on the religious belief complexes from which the Siberian shamanism emerged and started to develop.



Fig. II.1.2. An other half human, half animal figure from Les Trois Frères cave

During the last four decades Russian scholars discovered and published several hundred articles and books on rock drawings (*petroglyphs*) of Siberia. This brand new material has not been systematically examined, however, there have been attempts to determine the beginning of shamanism in Siberia with the help of archaeological data. A. P. Okladnikov stated that shamanism had its start as a complex magico-religious practice about the middle of the 2nd millennium B. C. in the Baikal region (Okladnikov 1955: 344–348) and about the first millennium on the Ural and Ob river territories (Okladnikov – Martinov 1972: 219, moreover Martinov 1991). Others also attempted to decipher the early anthropomorphic images of the Okunev Culture 2000–1500 B. C., as possible evidence of early shamanism (Matyuschenko 1962, Leontiev 1978, Bokovenko 1995).

Among the Russian ethnologists, the first of those who were interested in the problems of early shamanism were the students of the history of religions especially those of Turkish peoples (Potapov 1978). In an other book one can find material on the prehistory of Buryat shamanism, T. M. Mikhajlov's remarks on fertility cults, matriarchy, totemism, cult of the sun, worship of ancestors, and 'magico-religious beliefs' as reflected in the petroglyphs, are typically vague statements without any specification to any tribe or culture. There is only one exception, when he mentions (Mikhajlov 1980: 56) the human figures with horns on their head-dress as typical images of Glazkovo period (2000–1000 B. C.) and of the later shamans.

N. A. Alekseev, in his book on the early forms of the religion of Turkic peoples in Siberia, made no reference to petroglyphs as possible sources for the study of Siberian shamanism was formed under the late influence of Buddhism (Alekseev 1980). But not everybody shares this view, for instance A. N. Bernstam published some interesting carvings from the rocks of the Fergana Mountains (VII–I centuries B. C.) as evidences of shamanic rituals (Bernstam 1952: 65–68).

In the following chapters the different types of images from Siberia will be enumerated with some critical and methodological remarks, and finally some ethnosemiotic remarks will be presented.



CHAPTER 2

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF EARLY SHAMANS (IN SIBERIA)

If there is no agreement about the beginning of shamanism, then one can find even more varying opinions about the characteristic traits of the supposed sorcerers or shamans. In the followings, a tentative and preliminary typology will be presented, based on the publications of Russian scholars. It must be noted here that our outline of the literature is not complete, because it is almost impossible to gain access to the publications of different regional museums, or research institutes and universities.

I will not take into account here the almost infinite number of animal-images in the Siberian rock art, but only the anthropomorphic or human-like figures will be enumerated. It seems quite obvious that only human figures could be counted, and only those which have one or more specific traits. It is a reasonable assumption that the early shamans had some distinctive features as did their later colleagues, since they were not ordinary members of their community. What kind of features should be looked for?

These anthropomorphic figures have special markers which were deciphered by Russian archaeologists as specific signs which signify shamans, notably in the first place the whole body-image: human-like figures in a standing and/or in moving (dancing) position (Figs. II.2.1. and II.2.2). These anthropomorphic figures have either animal heads, or a simple human-head-like image, which sometimes bears horns. The other group of pictures with ani-



Fig. II.2.1. Bird-Headed anthropomorphic figures

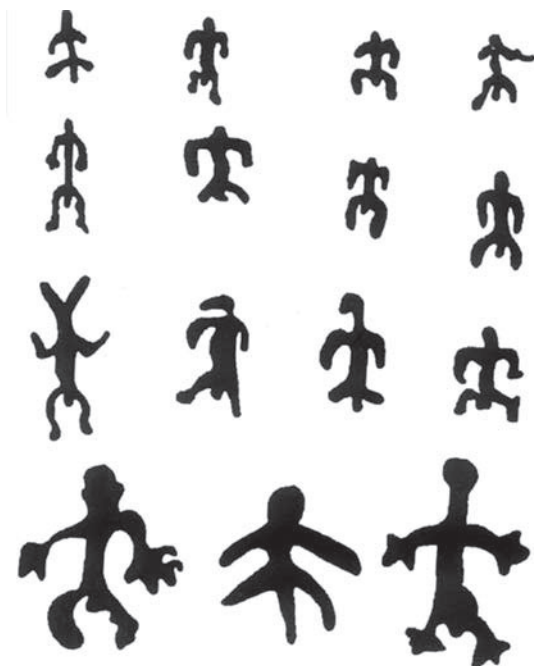


Fig. II.2.2. Anthropomorphic figures



Fig. II.2.3. Human figures with instruments



Fig. II.2.4. Dancing figures with a falcon

mal heads can be divided into two groups: creatures with bird-heads and with bearheads. In Siberia near the Tom river, schematic figures with bird-heads could be found on rocks (dated to the turn of second and first millennium B. C. see Fig. II.2.1. a and b) which were identified as being shamans by Okladnikov and Martinov (Okladnikov – Martinov 1972: 188). They argued this on the grounds that in Siberia bird-type shamans are well-known and were practising till the turn of the last century. There is a recent example from the 19th century, a rock drawing of Khakasia which clearly depicts a bird-headed creature (Kyzlasov – Leontiev 1980, Tab. 48), possibly a shaman (Fig. II.2.5). The hands of the figures also have *differentia specifica*, for example: bird's claws or human hands, sometimes holding an object, a roundshaped instrument (a drum? or bow and arrow – Fig. II.2.3., II.2.4.) or a stick like tool (Fig. II.2.9).

The style of engravings also offers another series of distinctive features for a detailed description of rock art images. For instance the 'realistic' as opposed to schematic drawings of the human body (the so-called x-ray style) can be clearly distinguished, as well as the female and male figures. These later ones are frequently depicted with an erect phallus (Fig. II.2.6). Rock drawings of the Baikal region have a phallic character (Okladnikov – Zaporozhskaya 1970: 76) and Russian researchers have made efforts to explain these images in terms of the fertility cult, or cults of the snake and of the bull, signifying human figures with phallic features.

Another set of distinctive features could have been derived from the description of acting figures and of the context. Here by context we mean the set of the immediate neighbouring images on the coherent surface of a given rock. This context could consist of human beings or animals, which, especially the latter ones seem to be very characteristic of the different cultural areas of Siberia, and clearly show sharp differences in the worldviews on which rock engravings are supposedly based (Okladnikov – Martinov 1972).

By the help of these distinctive features enumerated above (see diagrams 1) a very detailed, more or less exhaustive, description can be made on each figure of every rock drawing and it is also possible to make a tentative typology of anthropomorphic figures of Siberian rock art. According to the opinions of Russian colleagues the following main types of shamanistic images can be found on the rock of Siberia:

- (1) bird-head (dancing bird-like figures) (Fig. II.2.1.)
- (2) human-figures with phallus (Fig. II.2.1, 2.2.)
- (3) anthropomorphic figures with horns (Figs. II.2.8.)
- (4) masks with horns and antlers (Figs. II. 3.1., II.3.2., II.3.3. II.3.6.)
- (5) shamans with drum (Figs. II.3.4, II.3.5.)

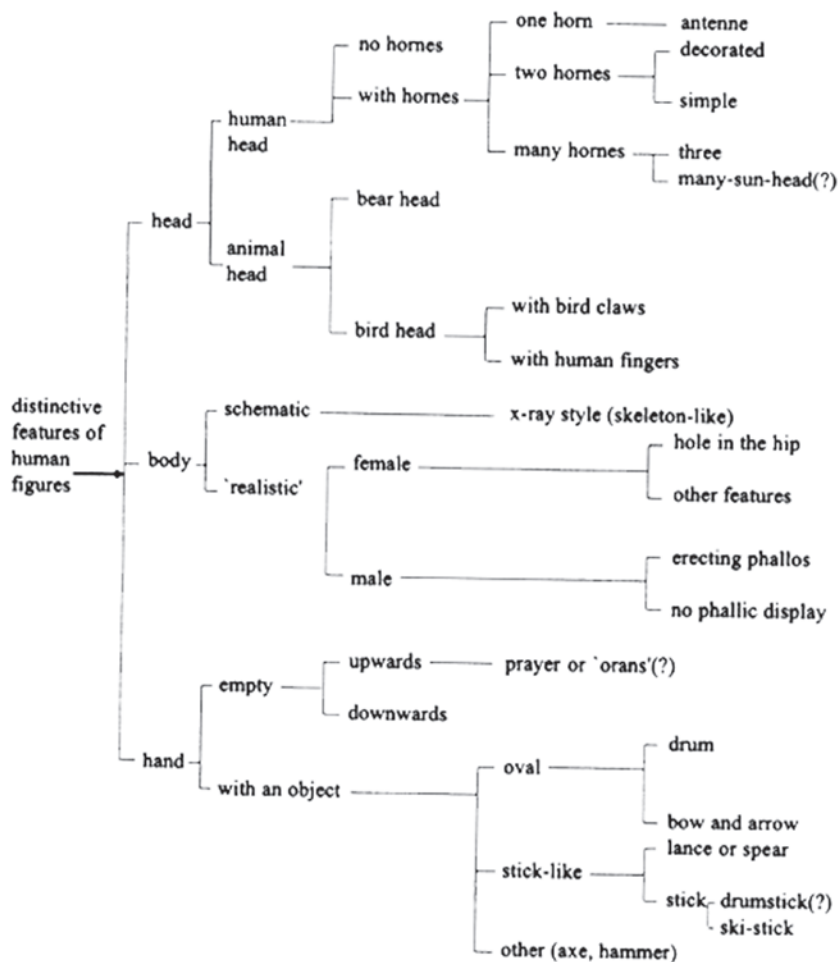


Diagram 1

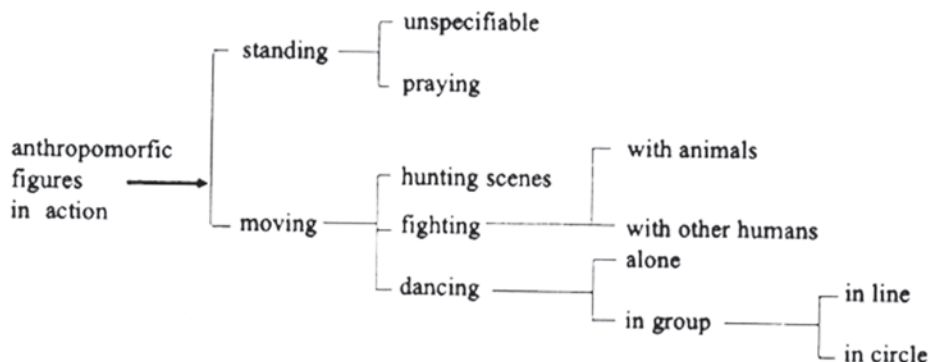


Diagram 2



Fig. II. 2.5. Shaman image: a human body with an eagle head



Fig. II.2.6. Shamans and their ancestor's helping spirit

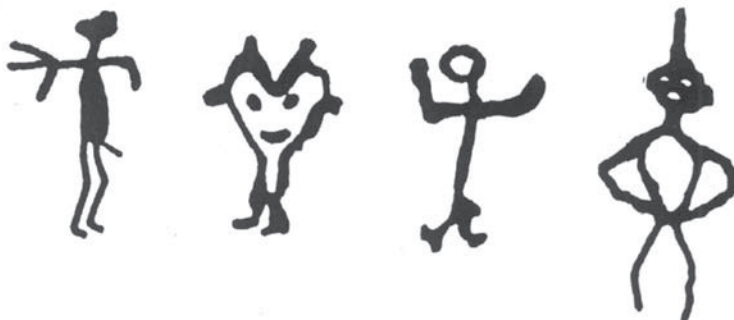


Fig. II.2.7. Anthropomorphic figures



Fig. II.2.8. Human figures with horned headdresses

Fig. II.2.9. Sun worship (?)



Fig. II.2.10. Sunheaded figures



Fig. II.2.11. Antropomorphic figure with a bear-head-mask



Fig. II.2.12. Human figures

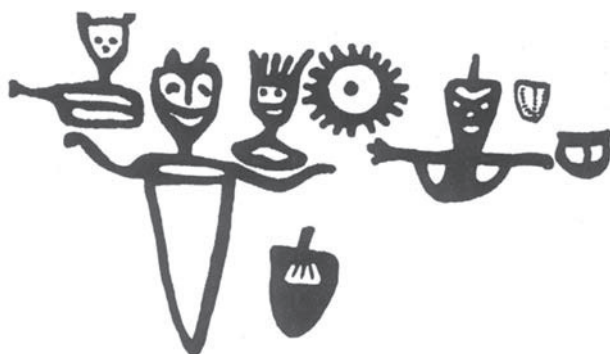


Fig. II.2.13. Masks with sun symbol



Fig. II.2.14. Sun-head mask

We have already dealt with the first two groups of drawings but there are data to prove that in the whole territory of Siberia, anthropomorphic figures with horns were carved into rocks presumably to denote shamans with antlers, since the deer-type shamans wore headgear with horns during their seance (Leontiev 1978: 111). If there are too many little horns or 'radiating rays' on the head of anthropomorphic beings (Fig. II.2.14.) they could probably be compared to the feathers of shaman head-dresses (Diószegi 1968: 310) and shaman's images on Siberian shaman-drums (Hoppál 1983:28, see figs. XXXI, XXXII, Hoppál 2002: 44–47).

There are rock pictures showing masks only which stand for the whole figure, and it is supposed that the mask is a symbolic representation of a helping ancestor of the shaman (Leontiev 1978: 109). Horned masks have a long history in Siberia.

In 1961 a Russian archaeologist, V. I. Matyuschenko published some fragments of clay vessels of the Samus IV-period (2500–200 B. C.) on

which anthropomorphic figures are found with antenna-like head-gear or crowns. These heads with their horns could be compared to the Mugur-Sargol petroglyphs, which are dated to the Bronze Age, the first half of the 2nd millennium B. C. (Matyuschenko 1961: 168–269). The petroglyphs of the ancient sanctuary were discovered at the site of Mugur-Sargol in the southern part of the Sayan Canyon of the Yenisei river (Tuva Autonomous Republic). The Mugur-Sargol sanctuary consists of more than two hundred drawings of human masks and other images. These masks, according to M. Devlet's opinion, represent the spirits of ancestors, but the special features of the masks allow a comparison of the horn-like headgear to the shamans' crown with horns. The Mugur-Sargol petroglyphs are dated back to the Siberian Bronze Age, and the drawings are associated with initiation rites (Fig. II.3.4. Masks on the rocks can be understood as the images of the ancestors of the clan (Devlet 1980). Ancestors, heroes, important or powerful persons of the community or shamans were depicted on the rocks – this is the line of association and argumentation offered by Russian scholars. Finally there is nothing astonishing about the fact that there are rock engravings which clearly show shamans with their drums.

The Khakas, a small and ancient Turkic people inhabit the valleys of the Abakan and Chulym River, the left bank of the Yenisei, and the Altai and Sayan Mountains of Southern Siberia. There are small rock engraving *tamgas*, or property signs, made in the recent past (19th–20th centuries) by herdsmen on the sacred rocks where local cults (of mountains and of fertility) were performed. Participants in these ritual ceremonies left signs on the sacred rocks in memory of their attendance.

Another group of drawings show shamans with drums and their helping spirits depicted in human or in animal forms. One example is a very interesting image: a human body with the head of an eagle (Fig. II.2.5.). The eagle was believed to be a progenitor and protector of the shamans, whose head dresses were decorated with an eagle head, with the bird's wings attached to the sleeves of the shaman's costume. Other shamans' images are so realistic (Fig. II.3.5.) with their drums that these drawings could probably serve as visual parallels to the earlier rock carvings.



CHAPTER 3

SEMIOTIC METHOD IN THE ANALYSIS OF ROCK “ART”

Except for a group of rock drawing which undoubtedly depicts shamans and which were made in relatively recent times (two centuries ago – see fig. 3.4 and 3.5.), the other groups of Siberian rock art (and their interpretations as images or even proofs of the early documents of shamanism) raise very serious questions about the methodology used in the process of deciphering.

Here we intend to discuss at least three of these questions as follows: On what ground can those anthropomorphic figures be labelled as shamans? Do those pictures have any connections with the belief system called shamanism? Why is Siberian rock drawing called art or is it art really?

To understand the meaning, and first of all to identify Siberian rock art as shamanistic, researchers often call for the help of ethnologists and students of folklore. Parallels from myths and rituals were usually cited to shed light on hidden meaning of the carved scenes on the rocks. A. P. Okladnikov, who was a leading personality in the field of rock art research, at least in Russia, had a strong conviction that there is not such a big difference between the mind and way of thinking of the early man, and of ours (Okladnikov et al. 1979: 3). Thus, recently collected folklore texts could provide help in understanding the worldview and religious practices of man living in the Siberian Bronze Age.

Generally speaking the ‘ethnographic analogies’ have been deliberately used by Russian colleagues, for instance a skeleton-like and dancing figure found on the rocks near the Oka river (north of Irkutsk) was called a shaman (Figs. 3.3.) based on the fact that one can find skeleton-like decorations on the costumes of some Siberian shamans (Okladnikov 1974: 81–82). We agree with André Leroi-Gourhan’s sharp criticism of the vague usage of ‘*comparatisme ethnographique*’ which gives no help in understanding early man in terms of Australian or any other myths and rituals – these are not equals in any sense (Leroi-Gourhan 1964: 148–149, see Layton 1987).

Somehow, there seems to be an unavoidable mistake even in the best monographs, to use folklore parallels in order to reconstruct prehistoric religion and magico-ritual worldview of early man. But probably Siberia is a place where a kind of continuity of population is beyond doubt, but even if it is true, one must be cautious since not everything on the rocks has a connection with shamanism or religious thinking.

As M. A. Devlet rightly put it:

“The figure of the proto-shaman on the Aldy-Mozaga cliffs does not have analogues among Siberian Bronze Age petroglyphs.

In the modern ethnographic period, images of shamans in the cliff art of Siberia are quite numerous. Usually they were rendered in thin, cut lines, graffiti, like the main part of the pictures on the cliffs of this time. The figure of a shaman performing a seance [*kamlanie*] with a drum carved with a cut line is found among Ustiu-Mozaga petroglyphs on the left bank of the Chinge River. Such pictures are well known among the images on the stones and cliffs of Khakassia and the Altai. Of particular interest for examining the evolution of shaman images” (Devlet 2001: 9).

A very common and serious mistake is made in the process of interpreting rock art:

“a mistake quite difficult to discover, hidden on a theoretical level, namely when analogies from studies of the history of religion are mixed with examinations of oral or written reports from members of a certain society” (Nordbladh 1978a: 202).

and usually this is the case with ethnographic reports used by the Russians, but not only by them. There is a kind of '*folklore scientifique*' among scholars firmly held by them, according to which

“the Bronze Age rock-engravings reveal a remarkable imagery, a stylized art employing a sign language full of meaning which, properly interpreted, is capable of yielding invaluable information about the religious life of the time” (Glob 1969: 386).

It is absolutely not certain that only religion reflects itself in the imagery of the rocks. Instead of ambiguous notions of religion a new, more natural concept should be proposed: '*belief system*' (Hoppál 1980).

Belief system seems to be a useful term for the whole domain of the ideological sphere of a given culture (it is somehow similar to *Weltanschauung* or *worldview*). Culture has a number of sub-systems (economy, social structure, ideology, etc.) to maintain itself with the help of the process of reproduction. A system of beliefs is responsible for the reproduction of the mythico-religious ideas within a community or society. A belief system acts as guiding force organising rituals, feasts, 'fertility cults', 'hunting magic', etc., or perhaps engraving petroglyphs as well. One can say that not only the rock images as signs, but also the sign-production, the whole cultic and not only 'religious' activity that acts as a frame, must be taken into account in the course of a modern process-oriented analysis of rock art.

Generally speaking the research on petroglyphs from a methodological point of view is not very impressive because

“the dependence on old scientific traditions is very strong, concepts such as economy, art and religion are used as static references without any attempts at precision and integration. The results are restricted to elaborate descriptions brought together with hypotheses which are not examined” (Nordbladh – Rosvall 1974: 49–50).

here we quoted the opinion of two Scandinavian archaeologists.

Only recently a more constructive point for departure would be to regard the rock carving sites as something more than just a collection of pictures. It is reasonable to suppose that the pictures are the remains of one of the complex social activities that took place on the sites, probably sacred places (Siikala 1984). As Jarl Nordbladh said: „The petroglyphs as

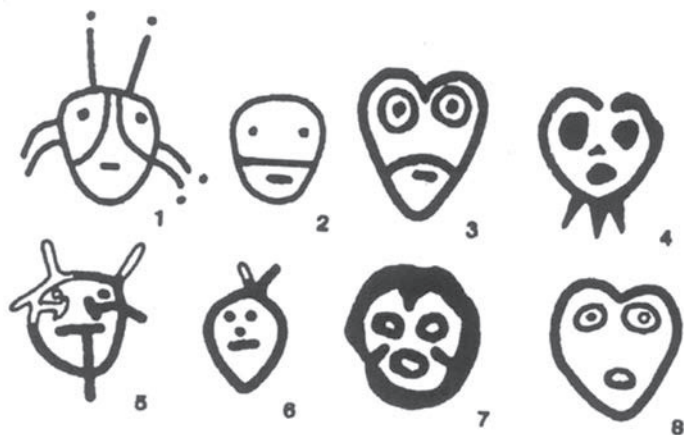


Fig. II.3.1. Masks

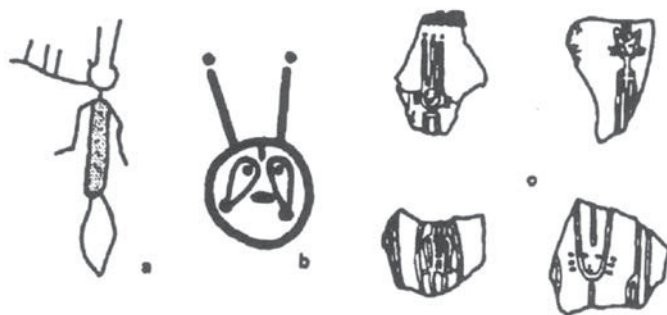


Fig. II.3.2. Masks with horns

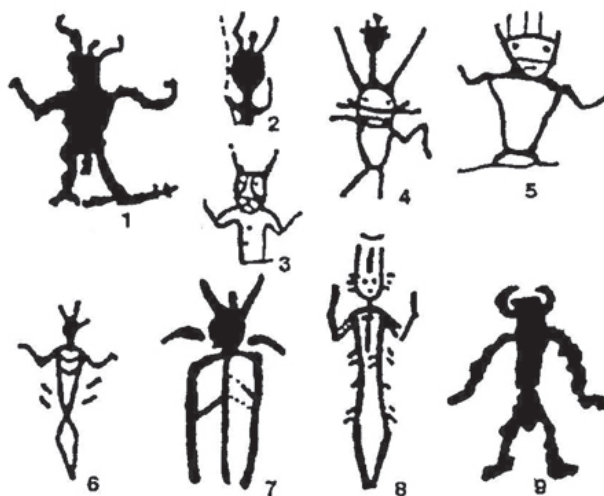


Fig. II.3.3. Antropomorphic figures with antlers



Fig. II.3.4. Shaman and his helping spirits



Fig. II.3.5. Shamans with drums



Fig. II.3.6. Masks and human figures



Fig. II.3.7. Horned masks

social phenomena could be seen as a part of communication or messages in context of prehistoric society” (Nordbladh – Rosvall 1974: 64). From this point of view, a recent and more dynamic approach focussing on *style* not as an indicator of social/ethnic boundaries, but as a component in the process of boundary-maintenance, seems to be very illuminating (Conkey 1980: 229). Reproduction of signs and symbols, and at the same time of beliefs, helps to maintain ethno-cultural boundaries, or in other words to maintain and reinforce ethnic identity and ties within the community. Again, the researcher’s interest focuses not only on the ‘individual’ stylistic patterns but also on the pattern-production as a communication process which must be reconstructed as well, within which the scheme of visual message-channelling will be understood. (Fig. II.3.9.)

On the image making activities of the early man a very good article was published more than two decades ago by Whitney Davis who stated

“spontaneous, image making is a predictable adaptation which should be coherently situated in the overall trajectory of hominid evolution. Image making was a distinctive and specific cultural achievement but can be derived logically from simple and archaic perceptual and

cognitive processes. An account of its origins does not require speculative or transcendental psychological, anthropological, or aesthetic assumptions about cognitive evolution or artistic sensibility” (Davis 1989: 193).

And he made a typology of the ‘symboling technology’ which bears the closest relation to image making (more on image making: Lewis-Williams 2004: 181–203) in the first stage marking.

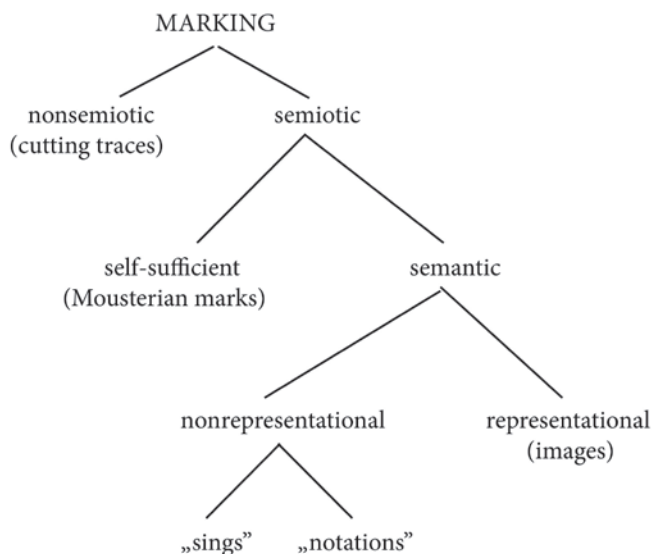


Diagram 3. Types of marking.

Years ago there were attempts to introduce a semiotic methodology into the fields of ethnography, especially into the analysis of folk art (Hoppál 1975, 1979). In 1975 the same was done first by a Nordic scholar with Scandinavian petroglyphs. In 1978 Jarl Nordbladh published a more elaborate version of his paper presented in Leicester. Here we quote:

“Prehistoric images – which are not necessarily labelled as *art* – as parts of systems of symbols could be analysed in terms of semiotics, or more broadly speaking in terms of social communication. Communication is always culture dependent and heavily based on the actual contexts in which signs and/or symbols occur. An isolated image can mean anything, but the case is not so concerning rock-art.

In spite of this fact – ie. natural setting as context and in the strict sense of the term relations between images on the rocks” (Nordbladh 1978b: 66).

In the Soviet Union there are a few archaeologists and linguists who are interested in ethnosemiotic studies and wish to introduce its methodology into the analysis of rock art. In 1980 Ya. A. Sher published a book in which he wrote not only about the questions of methodology but dealt with the problems of semantics, as well (Sher 1980, chapter 8). V. N. Toporov was also interested in the semiotic analysis of the origin of certain poetic symbols of the Paleolithic period (Toporov 1976).

By ethno-semiotics we mean the description of the production and the understanding of sign-systems used by an ethno-cultural community. According to the classic works of semiotics (by Ch. S. Peirce and Ch. Morris) there are three levels of (ethno)-semiotic description and/or analysis (see Voigt – Hoppál 2003) of the different sign-systems, these are as follows:

(1) *syntactic* studies of petroglyphs deal with the relations between signs and sign-complexes on neighbouring rocks. Presumably there are rules which govern the possible connections between signs inside a single picture frame.

(2) *semantic* studies usually deal with the relations between sign and thing depicted (or carved) on rocks. In other words presumably the different signs and symbols have meaning, they simply want to transmit a message. The main problem, however, is still unsolved: the greater majority of rock drawings have never been used in order to understand the content of rock art and its relation to reality.

The problem here is the following: in South East France, Monte Bego, about 100,000 pictures on 38,000 rocks were discovered and only some hundreds of them are published (Nordbladh – Rosvall 1974: 10–26). In the Soviet Union more than 20,000 rock drawings were published but many more have been found.

Only a little portion of the published data became known to scholars interested in rock art studies and even less to those who are specialists of comparative mythology or shamanism. This means that most of the theories based on rock *art* materials are simply unfounded, because it is well-known to specialists that only fragmentary parts of rock drawings can be considered to have (or convey) 'symbolic meaning' (see diagram 4).

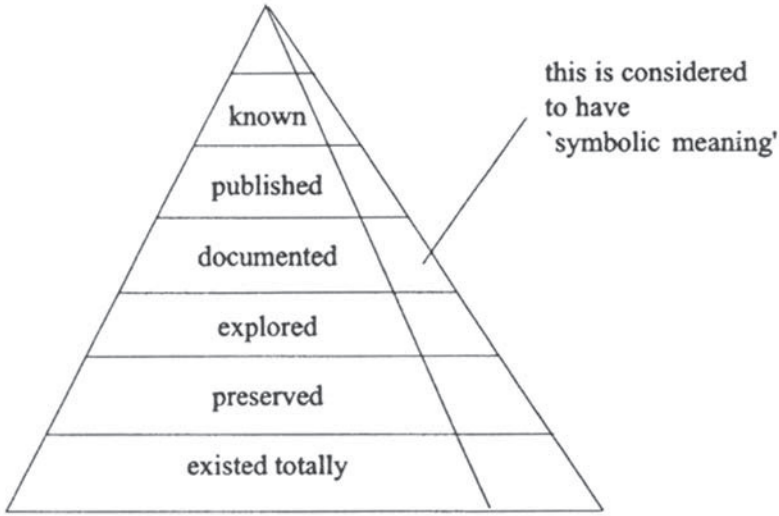


Diagram 4.

There have been considerable efforts to understand the underlying meaning of rock art through detailed semantic analysis of motifs. For instance, Anna-Lena Siikala rightly suggested that the Finnish rock paintings can be interpreted on the basis of animal-ceremonialism typical of hunting cultures and the shamanistic belief tradition associated with it (Siikala 1984). Her method is similar to what we proposed above (see diagrams 1–2), and she also wants to understand the users of the signs, thus her interpretation starts with the overall type of the cultures in question. These types of study are labelled in terms of semiotics as pragmatic analysis.

(3) *pragmatic* studies usually deal with the relations between users and images, how those signs and symbols were used, by whom, what kind of relations existed between the users themselves, etc. One can say that all the questions related to the so-called “religious” use of rock drawings belong to this domain of the pragmatic level of (ethno)-semiotic analysis.

The signs and symbols of rock “art” could be seen as only one kind of communication system among others used by the early man. As a special sign system it has the function to call together people, to create the community, the communal atmosphere during rituals at the rocks (Nordbladh 1978b: 75). Jarl Nordbladh, when he approached methodologically some problems concerning the relation between rock art, religion and society, states that petroglyphs are presented usually as a more or less isolated phenomenon without a defined place in a hypothetical society of their time (Nordbladh 1978a: 195). In his very well organized critical essay one can

find important thoughts concerning the methodological and theoretical difficulties in the interpretation of rock art – if it is “art” at all. One can also agree with Egil Bakka’s modest opinion on the pragmatic value of Arctic rock drawings. Let me quote it:

„... the various abstract patterns and figures, human figures and sexual symbols indicate that rock art should not only be explained in terms of hunting magic pure and simple. The ideas of sexuality, fertility and multiplication of the animal world must have been part of the meaning of this art. I do not regard this a contradiction of the idea of hunting magic, but rather as an important supplement to it, indicating that the purpose of rock art was a complex one, of promoting all that was of vital importance for the Stone or Bronze Age hunters and could be achieved by the use of pictures, patterns and rites connected with them” (Bakka 1975: 5).

These three different levels of semiotic analysis seems to be well-founded methodological tools for the understanding sign-systems of the rocks. As far as the origin of shamanism is concerned it can be said that only a more detailed stylistic and semantic analysis would lead from the recent pseudo-



Fig. II.3.8. Warriors with mushroom shape headgear

theories to more elaborated and well-founded hypothesis. The semiotic approach could help to understand the 'evolution' of the sign-producing activity of our ancestors, and finally, probably, some fragment of their sign-using cognitive process as well.

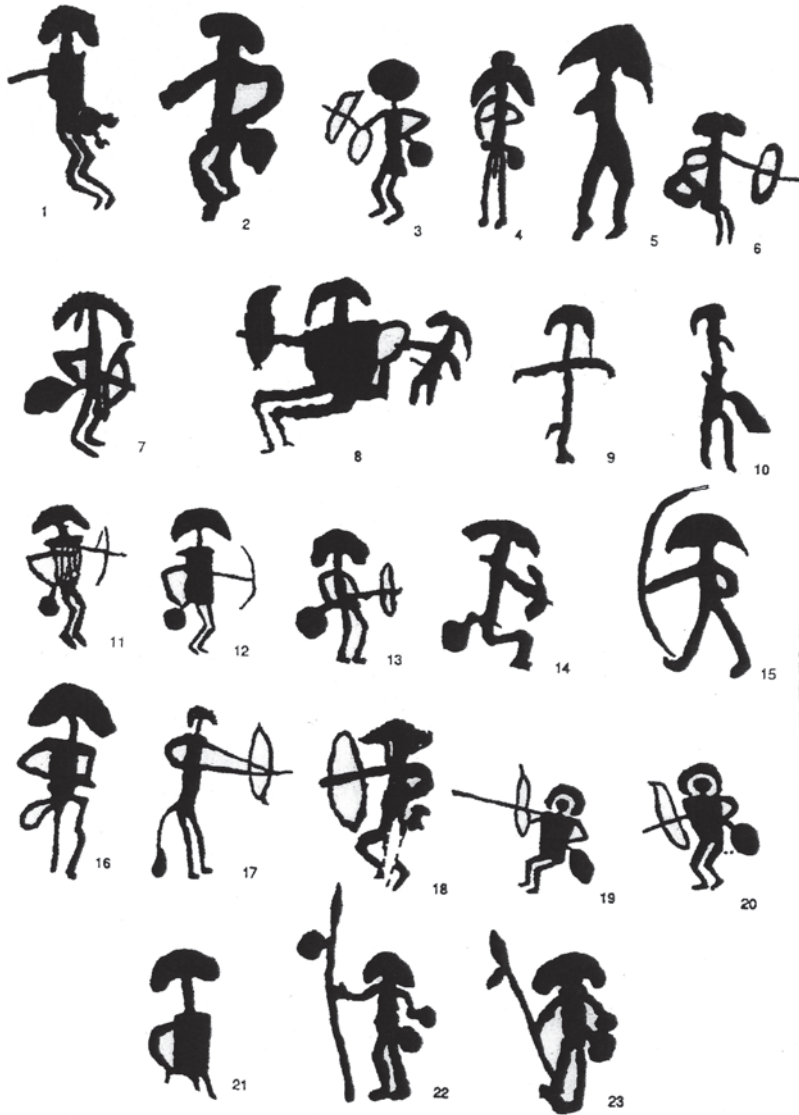


Fig. II.3.9. Depictions of anthropomorphic figures in mushroom-shaped headgear

CHAPTER 4

REMARKS ON SIGNS AND SYMBOLS OF ANCIENT TIME

If we look carefully at the features of the Neolithic rock art of North Eurasia, and within this, of Western Siberia, we can summarise that – as in Paleolithic petroglyphs – the chief theme is the depiction of animals. A. P. Okladnikov and A. I. Martynov (1972) have confirmed that this art is typified by a lively realism. However in the Bronze age a completely new method of images came into existence. These two authors stress more than once that at the end of the Neolithic age and in the Bronze age the use of signs steadily increased as did the role of symbols and the art of this period is filled with abstract and conventional symbols (on the Novoromavo Rock – II. 4.1., II.4.2.). The meaning of the earlier pictures was obscured and the early images were used as signs, and symbols. However the analysis of the symbols of that period, an attempt to prise open their meanings raises a number of difficulties. At this point we must make a brief detour about the concept of the sign and symbols.

It is worth re-examining the theory which proposes that the development of art in general moves from a realistic picture to an abstract symbol, a theory to which experts in prehistoric art so often refer (Toporov 1976). Authors of some publications have taken the position that mankind in the use of signs developed various types of signs successively, which was not



Fig. II.4.1. Tableau of elks in move



Fig. II.4.1a.



*Fig. II.4.2. A visual
statment on the
Novoromanovo Rocks*

along a simplified line of development. In other words the “invention” of the symbol can be traced back to a much earlier age than the Neolithic (Ivanov 1982). Paleolithic “realism”, which includes some really marvelously faithful “drawings” in the cave paintings, can not be placed in direct contrast to the use of simple graphic signs, since in the cave arts a whole range of symbolic representations can be found. The most important of which is the hunting magic. The latest research testifies to the clear existence of sign systems the “invention” of sign systems by the early Paleolithic period.

Okladnikov and Martinov state that Siberian rock drawings used many signs which they inherited from their ancestors, this becomes even clearer in the light of Alexander Marshack’s research (1972, 1979, 1997). He is concerned with the use of symbols at the end of the Paleolithic age and the first appearance of recognisable pictograms in the Russia on the basis of archaeological findings. He revealed scratchings that recall fish shapes on the smallest objects (e.g. Mammoth tusk fragments). He believes that these drawings should not be seen as artistic activity but as part of a cognitive process (Marshack 1979). This led man to recognise the motif-character of simple zig-zag lines, and later for example that the repetition of the seasons could be well illustrated with the help of such signs. These scratchings could be, according to these hypotheses, a record of the first prehistoric calendar. The common method of perception, the conscious use of symbol, the identified motifs and the repeated movements lead to the development of an ability for abstraction, and over a long period, to the formation of cave painting and rock art in Siberia.

For the Russian authors the above arguments about the early development of the art undoubtedly suggests an aesthetic attitude in which realism is on a higher scale than symbolic art. At the same time symbolic signs were an important step in the development of human ability, the creation of symbols is one of the proofs of the capacity for abstract thought. The conscious use of signs is an important point in the intellectual development of human beings. Therefore it is not surprising that many studies have been produced which examine the art of earliest times from the use of sign and symbol point of view (Leroi-Gourhan 1964, 1982; Ivanov 1982). The possibility for a semiotic interpretation emerged based on the obvious concept that the rock drawings at the time they were made are signs which, want to communicate, wish to notify something to other people, to the members of the community. Our task is to understand and explain this ancient sign language.

There is another approach which also contributes to the explanation of the formation of the early use of signs. Neolithic man – and his ancestors

and hunter successors even to today – met every day with signs in their most simple form: the footprints of the animals they were hunting (see on the ancient term for sign in Finno-Ugric languages – Voigt 2003: 23). In the language of semiotics this sign type's known as an index, that is a sign which was immediately connected or connects with the sign object, namely the footprints signifies the animal itself. Naturally this goes further, these traces have extraordinary characteristics, that is they bear information about the animal to those who know how to read them (for example the weight, sex, size and age of the animal). We could say that this simple group of signs were of great iconic importance, which contributed to a great extent to the formation of sign usage, and to the recognition of the iconic character of signs.

The appearance of footprints or elsewhere handprints or drawings representing them in the rock art possibly has a magical significance too, however, we believe that it is better to see them as the development of man's cognitive capabilities (Marshack 1972, 1991). In terms of semiotics the sign is more iconic – that is, it is similar to the object in at least some details – but it has broken away from it. That is, not the whole figure is depicted but just a detail, the form or a print of a hand. We could say that this type of sign is half way to being a symbol – in other words an arbitrarily selected symbol. That this truly came about at the end of the Neolithic period, the transition period to the metal age (that is at the turn of the first millennium B. C.) as Okladnikov and Martinov believe, but it is yet to be confirmed.

Here it is necessary to specify how the terms of semiotics and icon are used in this book. Probably the best way is to quote Marge E. Landsberg's nicely condensed definition:

“the term ‘semiotics’ refers to the scientific analysis of signalling systems, that is, the study of signs and sign-using behaviour; the term ‘language’ refers to any strictly human communicative system, including speech, gesture, and writing; and the term ‘icon’ has the semiotic meaning ascribed to it first by Locke (1965[1690]) and later by Peirce (1931). According to Peirce, an icon is a nonarbitrary intentional sign – a designation which is to a significant degree representational of, has some degree of isomorphism with, or bears an intrinsic resemblance to the object it designates” (Landsberg 1980: 93).

The issue is multi-faceted as André Leroi-Gourhan the great French scholar of Western European cave art, revealed during his investigation of Franco-Cantabrian cave art. He showed that even more than twenty

thousand years B. C. simple drawings appeared in addition to figural or realistic images that can be understood as signs. These include ones which are unambiguous icons of female or male features. Their meaning is clear on the one hand coming from their iconic character of the signs and on the other from the pictorial environment in which they appeared. In all cases the results of the French scholar's research made it clear that so-called realistic (iconic) and symbolic art developed together.

Apart from the earlier mentioned indexes (eg. foot print) the signs which are based on the similarity between the sign and the sign object are iconic, while the third main sign type: the symbolic are made up of completely arbitrarily selected signs, and the use of which established a preliminary (tacit) agreement among the members of the community. Clearly this supposes the most developed and conscious use of signs. This all means that this knowledge came to humanity very early. So for example the symbolic scenes of reproduction – recognisable precisely because of their iconic features – were drawn very early (Makkay 1953). With the help of these signs they believed they could ensure fertility and animal proliferation. We can say that the people of prehistory were not just “naive” materialists but conscious sign using social beings. V. N. Toporov on examining the rock paintings of the late stone age wrote about the symbol usage of Paleolithic man as if they were the beginning of the appearance of poetic symbols. He looked at Western European cave painting, the art of “underground sanctuaries” where the notion of the power of signs was developed during sacred-ritual activities by ancient peoples. The emergence of the sun sign – which is everywhere circle shaped – and its connection with other depictions is the first obvious clue that its objective was to mediate some sort of more complicated message (Toporov 1976).

As a Swedish researcher has shown in reference to rock drawings, pictorial material was a means of conveying messages for prehistoric peoples, and has remained so for us too who are interested in these depictions. The entire composition itself was a “text” of significance, the individual figures and signs can mean many different things that is why it is probable that the symbol group bore a comprehensible or perceptible meanings. So on the one hand we can start with the iconic features of the signs, with their semantic similarities in order to explain the meaning or on the other with their sharp contrasts, where the symbols of two (or more) objects which have nothing in common are placed next to each other. This is if you like the beginning of art and at the same time language, and the period of myths and the formulation of religious concepts.



CHAPTER 5

HOW TO MEAN BY PICTURES?

The basic assumption of the present chapter is that at least some of the images of rock art intended to communicate (or to mean) something. The first question is: which pictures belong to this group of pictures? One may say that by those images the intention is to mean something.

It seems that there are phenomena – similarly to that of language – in which people living in very different parts of the world portrayed the same things in the same way, like our ancestors who made the rock engravings. Such is the phenomenon of the “hunting magic”, in which it is precisely the clear usage of the sign which we deem as an important cultural historical record. To put it simply, before the hunt they drew the animal they were to hunt and then the sign of the weapon in its body (spear or arrow). The montage of these two signs is comprehensible as the assertion of an action in pictures – more exactly a request like a “speech act” (Austin 1962) or a wish for the “action” executed by a pictures. (Fig. II.5.1.) We can use as an example the wild horses and buffalo on the walls at Lascaux on which their are arrows (Laming – Emperaire 1959 abb. 16.). These pictures more than fifteen thousand year old, substituted for speech in a much wider sense than today. (Fig. II.5.2., 5.3.)

The drawing of a picture to be more precise, the hard work of engraving the rock of the hunting action was seen as a magic activity and at the same



Fig. II.5.1. From the wall of the Salon Noir/Black Salon

time it had the more ordinary function too, of communicating the practical experience of hunting to the younger generation. This usually took the form of orders in the language of pictures: “whether about hunting methods or about the making of a flint-spade, tradition had an extraordinary important role in material production which was filled with ritual-folklore semantics” (Chernetsov 1975: 95). From these visual statements the hunting rituals were developed.

A. P. Okladnikov and A. I. Martynov in their book, in a chapter entitled “The Lord of the Taiga” explain the appearance of hunting magic in the Siberian Neolithic rock drawings presumably depicting hunting scenes. It is especially interesting that on one there is a man at the top – this is clear by the depiction of the phallus – who stands opposite two elk cows. In the body of one of which a spear head is thrust – signifying that it has been wounded. There is a well known explanation for this according to which if a deadly weapon is drawn into the body of an animal than this acts as a pre-projected

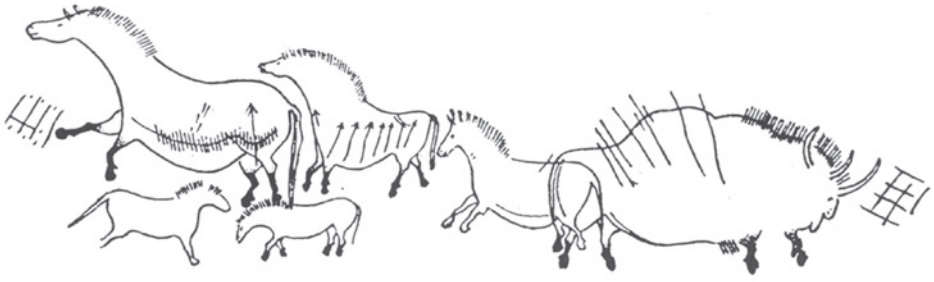


Fig. II.5.2. Hunting magic

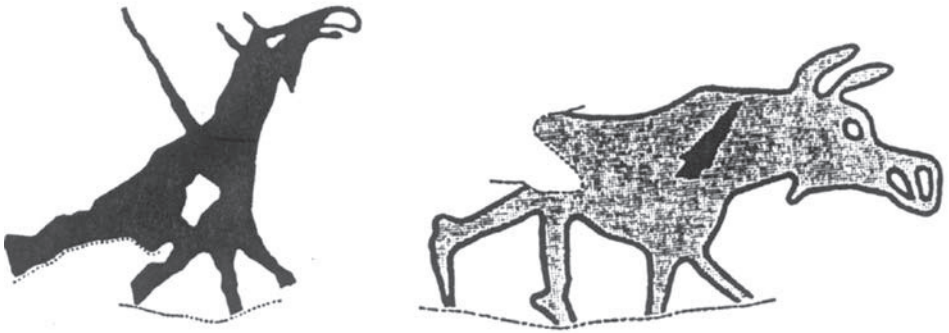


Fig. II.5.3. Wounded elk on the Tom Rives “Written” Rocks

result of the hunt. In this way the hunters of the Siberian taiga believed they could ensure the capture of their prey, obtain life-giving meat. This magical practice was known throughout the world. Leo Frobenius saw and wrote about this phenomena among African tribes (Frobenius 1913). Hunting magic in this form, as written down by Frobenius, existed among the Siberian forest dwelling hunters as one part of their belief system. (Fig. II.5.4.)

It is quite obvious that there are critiques of the “theory” of hunting magic. One of them being Paul Bahn (1991), who later criticised all kinds “new shamanic hypothesis”. However, he concluded, as follows:

“In societies without written records, the meaning of things is fluid and will certainly have changed through time, so that any attempt to decipher ‘the’ meaning of a prehistoric art motif or panel, is not only impossible but absurd. These are messages from other cultures, other worlds, and we know nothing of the artists’ original intentions or the transformations in meanings that the art has undergone, so

there is no single correct interpretation. However, since it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness, what one can certainly do is to put forward observations, interpretations, and hypotheses about the images, which can be evaluated and eventually discarded when something better comes along. There are many keys, and prehistoric art cannot be encompassed by any grand, unifying theory. Sites with rock art were probably of all kinds – the equivalent of dwellings, churches, shrines, playgrounds, schools, libraries, clubs, and meeting places. Rock art is not necessarily all sacred and mysterious. Some of it may be games or a celebration of life, narratives, or territorial boundaries. Even within the realm of the spiritual or religious, the art may have had a wide range of significance including tribal stories, myths of creation and renewal, sacred beings, rites of passage such as puberty, death, and rebirth, tribal secrets, laws, taboos, love, sorcery and transformation, prayers for rain and fertility, astronomical markers, and animal totems” (Bahn 2009: 92).

It seems quite obvious that first of all one may choose those images which are iconic their graphic picture is similar to what they stand for. Their forms can be easily recognized, and understood. For example a ship, a bird, or an erotic image has the same (almost the same) meaning for human beings everywhere.

We can also see the rock drawings as illustrations of early myths, in other words as the formulation of a belief system in pictures (on the notion of “belief system” see Hoppál 2000: 39–60). An especially good example of this is the appearance of ships (barges) for the souls of the dead across to the kingdom of the other world. The barges with people in them appear in the rock drawings along with the figure of a huge elk which in the myths of certain Siberian peoples is the embodiment of the underworld, the realm of the dead. This makes the sign montage meaningful and comprehensible. The myth and the picture as a visual text are inseparable, because both of them are parts of the culturally determined sign system. (Fig. II.5.4., II.5.5., II.5.6., II.5.7., II.5.8.)

According to a Swedish researcher (Nordbladh 1975) the system of symbol usage on Scandinavian rock drawings is an important historical source which can give clues to the “conceptual world” of the society at that time. He drew attention to the possibility that in the early period of the development of mankind, explanations of the world which opposed each other existed alongside each other just as they do today. But we must take a criti-

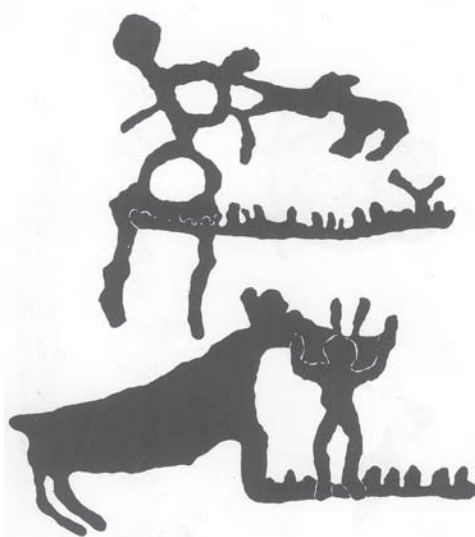


Fig. II.5.4. Boat representations



Fig. II.5.5. Masks and boats



Fig. II.5.6. Shaman (?), boat and elks with a sun symbol

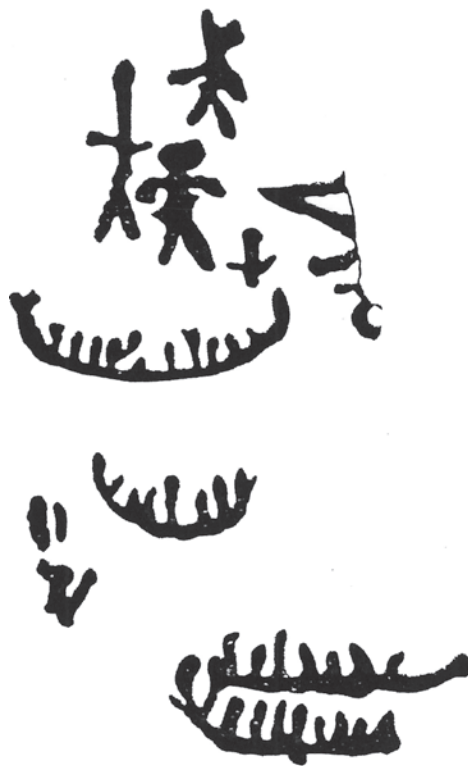


Fig. II.5.7. Sakachi – Alyan, Amur river

cal stand towards all experiments which impose today's attitudes and conceptions onto the world view of those times.

Speaking about the style of Siberian rock art one may say that it is realistic but the aim of the content is mythological. It would perhaps be better to label the whole cultural phenomena as the symbol creating behaviour, because then it is possible to understand the meaning of individual symbols, while here the meaning of the myth is condensed. (Fig. II.5.9.)

The appearance of the "holy birds" on the rock in Karelia for example can be explained as a form of creation myth. This version, according to which the world came out of an egg, takes the form of a typical dualistic myth in the oral tradition of

certain Siberian peoples (see Napolskikh 1989, 1992). Fertility and hunting magic are closely bound up with the sun cult, and the later development of this mythology was an extraordinarily important momentum for the peoples living in the vast area of Siberia (Chernetsov 1971). (Fig. II.5.10.)

In order to understand the rock art of Siberia Russian scholars use the rites and myths of the Siberian peoples from the end of the XIX. century and the beginning of the XX. century to support their ideas. Ethnographic data are frequently used in order to understand rock art by the help of cultural traditions of different peoples). They did not however stress the character

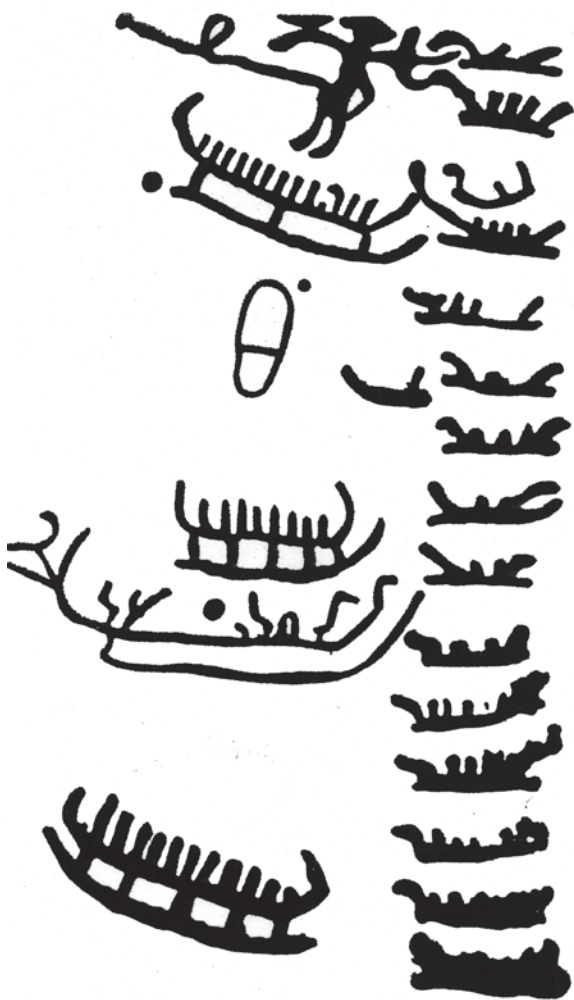


Fig. II.5.8. Asperberget, Bohuslän, Sweden

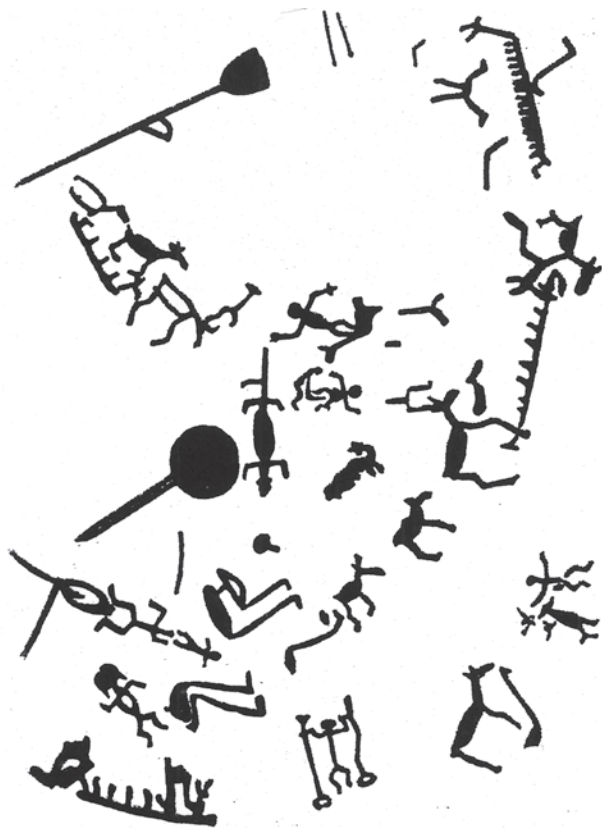


Fig. II.5.9. Complex mythic scene



Fig. II.5.10. Mythic birds



Fig. II.5.11. Erotic scenes



Fig. II.5.12. Erotic scenes



Fig. II.5.13. Erotic scenes

of fertility magic enough, of which the visible erotic drawings on the rock are obviously part. According to the Russian scholars, in the middle of the Neolithic period, when the use of symbols in rock drawings became more frequent in the Northern Eurasian territory, the thinking of the people was occupied by the notion of fertility and the practice of erotic rituals connected with it. The idea of animal fertility is then coupled with hunting magic. (Figs. II.5.11., II.5.12., II.5.13.) Their argument is supported by another find of rock drawings in the area of Lake Baykal, namely that the many drawings of elk cows on the rock express the idea of reproduction in the simplest possible way. (On birthing women see Jacobson 1993: 285. Plate XV: d; 1997). This process is also similar to certain African languages where the plural is expressed by the duplicating of the original word. Thus they could most simply express reproduction and fertility with the depiction of many animals. They correctly refer to the probable use of the general equation spring=fertility (the birth of elk calves) in ancient Siberian hunting cultures. The existence of general equations of weather and biology (as for example spring–summer, day–night, sun–moon, male–female) were natural for these peoples, and it penetrated not only their mythological thinking but their everyday actions as well (see “on semiotic oppositions” – Hoppál 2000). (Figs. II.5.14., II.5.15., II.5.16.)

It seems obvious that all these iconic representations (more on icons in semiotic theory – Landsberg 1980) had powerful messages in ancient times, and their meaning was clear for everyone since they corresponded with the facts of everyday life.

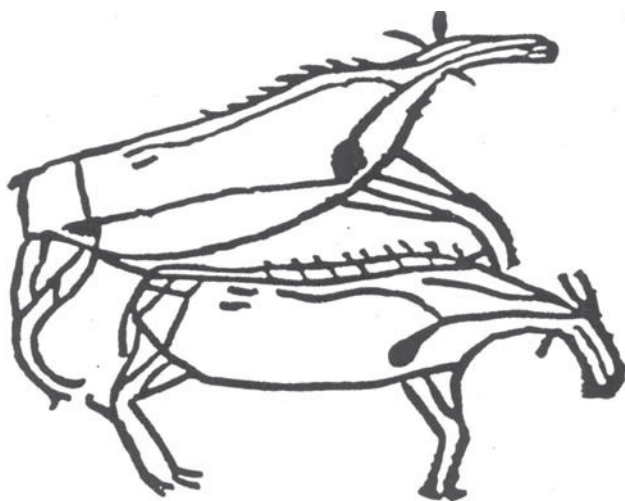


Fig. II.5.14. Copulating elks. Klöftekloss, Buskerud, Noway (Neolithic)



Fig. II.5.15. Generations of deers



Fig. II.5.16. Complex story on fertility and everyday life



CHAPTER 6

INITIATION RITUALS IN HUNTING COMMUNITIES

The human need to find food for eating, the so called *alimentary instinct*, has been basic for mankind forever. It means that the first human(oid) communities needed skilled hunters, and hunting became a more and more complex action, or even series of joint actions. Cooperation in hunting became common and important in order to have enough food. The same happened in gathering too. In order to get food they became acquainted with a great number of edible plants, but also herbs with healing properties, and plants with poisonous power, and even with hallucinogenic plants.

Andrej Wierciński, a Polish archaeologist developed a model of initiation of shamanistic type, which is relatively unknown, in spite of the fact that it was published in 1989. Let me quote his ideas here:

“Intensification of gathering and hunting among the nomadic groups, bearing the character of a joint family, led to a clearer division of biocultural roles between the two sexes and different age categories. Women, bearing children and protecting young offspring, although helped by older children, were mainly concerned with gathering around a temporary place of stay, taking care of the fire, and preparing food; whereas, men were undertaking distant hunting expedi-

tions. Their life was full of dangerous events which demanded comprehensive and detailed observation of their environment, the fauna and the flora, the landscape, weather, and the sky. All the data had to be correlated with one another in meaningful mnemotechnical whole, taking into consideration symptomatic signals (cracks of twigs, sounds and trails of animals, etc.). This paves the way for the cognitive development and for thinking, based on figurative analogizing. Hence comes an additional problem as to an intergenerational transfer of quite extensive knowledge about the environment, tool production, and hunting behavior. Next, the hunter must have had at his command a very efficient human organism which could endure physical exhaustion, thermal extremities, hunger, pain, fear, etc., and he had to develop his volitional motivation (self-control). Finally, the hunting expedition demanded a coordinated and self-sacrificial cooperation of all the members of one sex, and age groups variously related to one another. It also demanded the forms of behavior directed towards the obligatory altruism. This is why the upbringing and training of a skilled hunter should, on the one hand, cover an intergeneration transfer of the knowledge about the surrounding and of the hunting craft and, on the other hand, comprehensive perceptive and endurance tests. A complex model of the origin of shamanism is shown in the following diagram.” (Wierciński 1989: 22.)

Initiation was (and still is) an important social function which made the individuals mature for the daily fight for survival and made them more willing endure to pain, tiredness, hunger, etc. Initiation rituals forge communities more power as their members accumulated more strength and knowledge.

Exactly because of the highly complex and extremely hard initiatory process, those who passed it successfully, eventually became the leader of the group. As we know from our ethnological cross-cultural research the shaman was (and still is) the informal group leader who provides protection for the group at a physical level. And as a charismatic individual was the opinion leader in spiritual matters. As Michael Winkelman puts it:

“The shaman led the most important group activities, an all-night community gathering for healing which provided a direct encounter with the spirit world. Drumming and dancing ecstatically, the shaman recounted a dramatic encounter with spirit forces. After collapsing from exhaustion, the

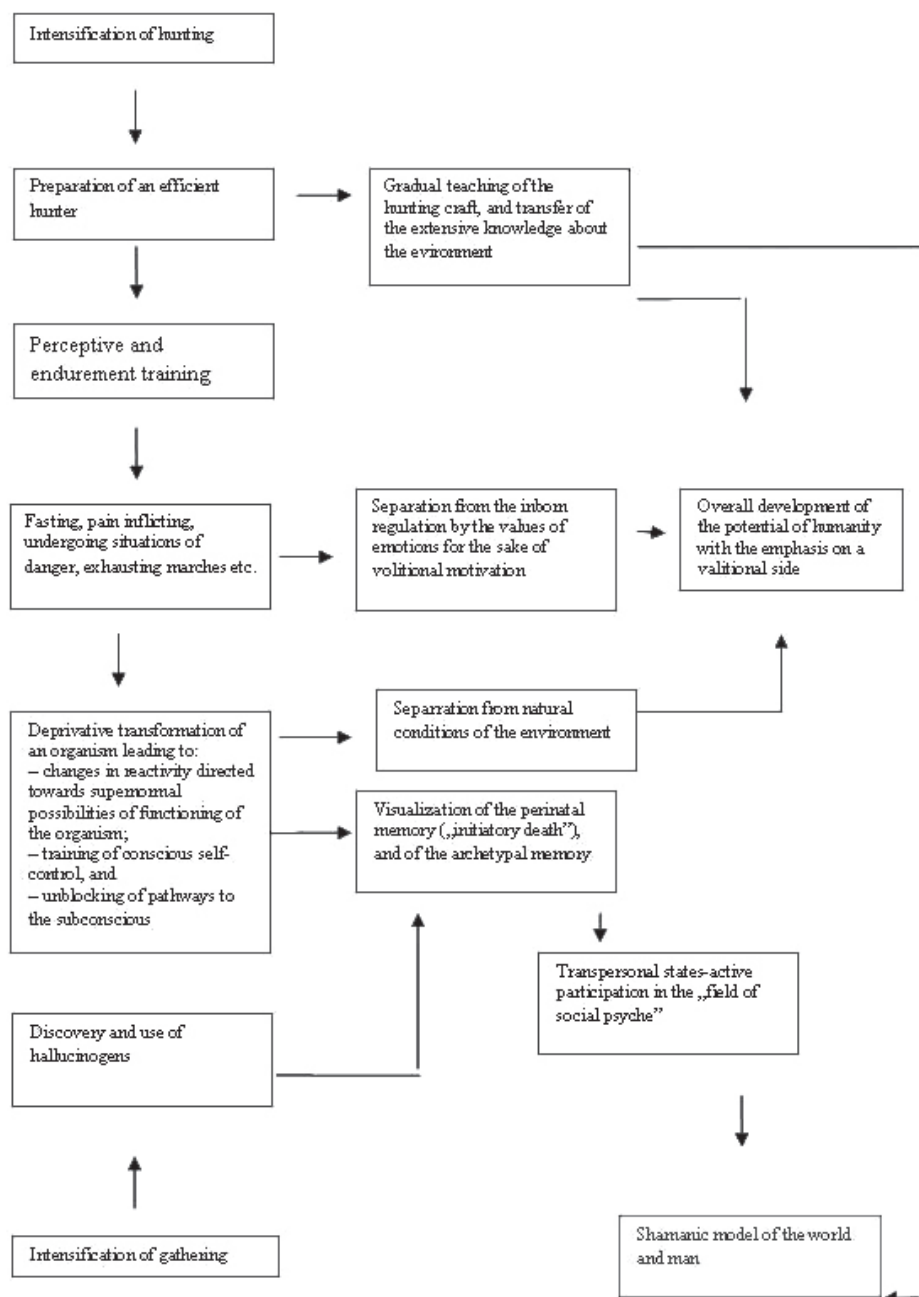


Diagram 4
Wierciński's model for initiation

shaman entered into a phase of ‘soul flight’ or ‘soul journey’, in which the shaman experienced entering the spirit world to do battle with evil forces. If successful, the shaman were able the attacks of sorcerers, or captured the patient’s soul from the spirits that had taken it” (Winkelman 2002: 72).

As psychobiological understandings of mystical and religious states of consciousness have developed, shamanism has emerged as humanities’ original “*neurotheology*” (as Winkelman 2004 labelled it in one of his papers) and biopsychosocial healing practice. He proposed that shamanism contributed to human social and cognitive evolution by providing mechanisms for enhancing symbolic thought and manipulating and integrating functional systems of the brain.

“Religious practices associated with hunter-gatherer societies worldwide involve a complex of specific characteristics, practices, ad beliefs known as *shamanism*. Universals of shamanism have their bases in innate representational structures and processes that provide representation, healing, and spiritual experiences.

This essay outlines the shamanic paradigm of neurotheology and places shamanism at the foundation of human cognitive evolution and spiritual experience. Innate representational modules and natural processes that provide the bases for shamanism are described. Shamans ritual activities and experiences (e.g., soul flight, guardian spirit quest, death and rebirth) involve fundamental structures of cognition and consciousness and representations of psyche, self, and other. Shamanism involves social adaptations that use biological potentials provided by integrative altered states of consciousness (ASC) to facilitate community integration, personal development, and healing. Shamanic processes intensify connections between the limbic system and lower brain structures and project these synchronous integrative slow wave (theta) discharges into the frontal brain” (Winkelman 2004: 194).

The universals of shamanism present a challenge to the rationalist perspective that these practices represent a delusion. The universal principles of shamanism reflect an underlying biological basis that provides adaptive mechanisms that made shamanism a central cultural institution for thousands of cultures and across tens of thousands of years. This widespread distribution of shamanism reflects its adaptive value. The first and most important social function of the shamans was healing.



CHAPTER 7

ON SHAMANIC ORIGIN OF HEALING AND MUSIC

Recently there appeared new studies which put emphasis on the shamanic origin of music and healing.

The very first element of any healing ritual is that the shaman(ess) calls on his/her helping spirits. In most cases this happens through song, and the calling melody is usually accompanied by some kind instruments. (Hoppál 2002: 17–20).

The most reliable descriptions of Siberian shamanic rituals come from researchers who are themselves members of the nation in question and, what is more important, still live among their own compatriots. Leonid Lar is a Nenets researcher who answers the above description and who has published several volumes of text collected during field work. In one of these he gives an authentic explanation of the role of shamanic song in rituals:

“An indispensable part of the shamanic séance is the shamanic song. The shaman used to call his helping spirits in song and talked with them in song, accompanying the whole process on his drum” (Lar 1998: 39).

The Nenets believed that together the sound of the drum and the song of the shaman were able to invite the benevolence of the helping spirits and

that on the final balance this had a positive influence on the outcome of the entire séance.

During the healing séance they had to find out the reason for the illness, which is why the shaman had to make a symbolic journey through both the 'upper' and the 'lower' worlds (Kazakevitch 2001) in order to bring back from either of these places the soul of the sick person. This journey was described in detail in the songs, and the song also included naming the helping spirits that they had invited and those that actually came. The tunes of the spirits were different from each other and were easily distinguished both on the basis of the melody structure and of rhythm (Seykin 1996, 2000). Onomatopoeia was a distinguishing feature of these songs as they represented animal-shaped helping spirits (e.g. the bear, the loon, the reindeer or the mouse) through imitating the characteristic sounds they make (Dobzhanskaya 2002: 84).

Some more details on the main characteristics of Nganasan shamanic music which is primarily connected with the spiritual power of sound. According to Oksana Dobzhanskaya's field research (in years between 1980–2010) which proved that shamanic music is specified by ritual functions. All elements of shaman's music (such as melody, rhythm, tempo) are guided by ritual purposes.

“The main features of Samoyedic shaman music are the following:

1. The shaman singing is accompanied by the drum, which is the main ritual shaman identifier.

2. The shaman singing is a type of a congregational responsorial singing: the solo part (performed by the shaman) alters with the ensemble (or chorus) part, performed by the shaman's helpers.

3. The basis of the shaman texts is 8-syllable verses. It is contrasted to 6-syllable verses, which are connected with secular genres of Samoyed music.

4. This 8-syllables schema is materialized in the rhythm of the shaman songs, through rhythmical formulas.

5. Each shaman melody is the tune of the shaman helper-spirit, who has an animal-like form. That is why the onomatopoeic sounds play the important role in the musical composition of shaman rituals – the sounds of voices of a reindeer, a swan, a goose, a loon, a bear, a wolf are available to hear on recordings” (Dobzhanskaya 2008: 269–270).

Onomatopoeia is actually the beginning of music, the first appearance of the musical ability of man. According to ethno-musicologists, in this fashion, the songs of shamans retain memories from the times of the original emergence of music (Rouget 1985).

An important characteristic of healing shaman music is that the helping spirits of the individual shamans themselves each have their own distinguishing tune, sometimes more than one, and this is the case in distant South America as well as in Eurasia (Walker 2003).

Thus it is barely surprising that the power of the individual shamans was measured by the number of songs they knew (more on shaman songs Hopál – Sipos 2010). In other words, the shaman's power was in his songs and the power of the instruments was only an additional force. This is the impression I received when in February 2003 I saw a Daur shamaness (Hopál 2005): after the healing séance, she went on singing to the patient for a long time, giving instructions and advice to the young girl, who hearing the dramatic song, sobbed and received the healing song kneeling and bowing to the ground. My impression was that the healing power emanated from the singing voice (Newman 1998: 267–272), and from drumming (Harnér – Tryon 1992).

There is another interesting aspect of “the sound dimension of prehistoric painted caves and rocks” (Reznikoff 1995). Taking into account the human universal ie. in all hunter-gatherer tribes every ritual is recited and sung. According to Reznikoff's hypothesis the Paleolithic tribes recited and chanted even during their rituals in the caves. The Russian scholar studied three painted caves of southwest France (in Ariège: Niaux, Fontanet, Le Portel). As far as the relationship between the location of pictures (paintings, carvings, signs) and the acoustics of locations is concerned, the following general principles have emerged:

- “1. Most pictures are located in, or in immediate proximity to, resonant places. 2. Most ideal resonant places are locations for pictures (there is a picture in the nearest suitable place). Among the ideal resonant places, the best are always decorated or at least marked. 3. Certain signs are explicable only in relation to sound” (Reznikoff 1995: 546–547).

Later Reznikoff went to Finland to study the sound value of the locations of prehistorical paintings on the rocks in the open air. He went to the area

of Mikkeli where paintings on the rocks are dated approximately 3500–200 B.C. He actually used voice, powerful singing in open air at the location of pictures in order to obtain at a given point a good echo effect. The criterion for a good sound location was the existence of at least a triple echo (Reznikoff 1995: 551). In his “semiotical conclusion” he stressed that there was a clear relationship between the natural caves, natural rocks and their sound value (Reznikoff 1995: 554).

As we see there is clear coincidence between the natural *landscape* and the *soundscape* produced by man whether they were shamans or just an ordinary member of the community performing rituals at the rocks or in the caves.

So, it is not by chance that one may find the same phenomena in Central Asia, as Kenneth Lymer encountered:

“The deer petroglyphs were part of the Sako-Scythian shamanic reality which was deeply connected to landscape and to the way Sako-Sythian society conceived the landscape. At Arpauzen there is a purposeful placement of all the petroglyphs within a specific topographical location of a few connecting foothills below the part of the Karatau mountain range which includes the Maiden Mountain. In particular, the honeycomb deer’s stone surface faces towards the Maiden mountain. This, coupled with the evidence of the kurgans, strongly suggests the Maiden Mountain and the local vicinity was a place of Sako-Scythian cosmological significance. The petroglyphs were places in discrete junctures in the landscapes and were informed by the placement of the images corresponding with dynamic multi-dimensional interactions with other features in the landscape” (Lymer 2002: 92). (Fig. II.7.1.)

As Lymer concluded when explaining the making of images on rock surfaces:

“The act of carving the deer petroglyph probably helped to focus the power of the supernatural forces for the shaman, while they were also left for the community to see and remember special songs and stories.

The honeycomb and spiral forms connected to the Arpauzen deer indicate these images were an aspect of tangible powers directly asso-

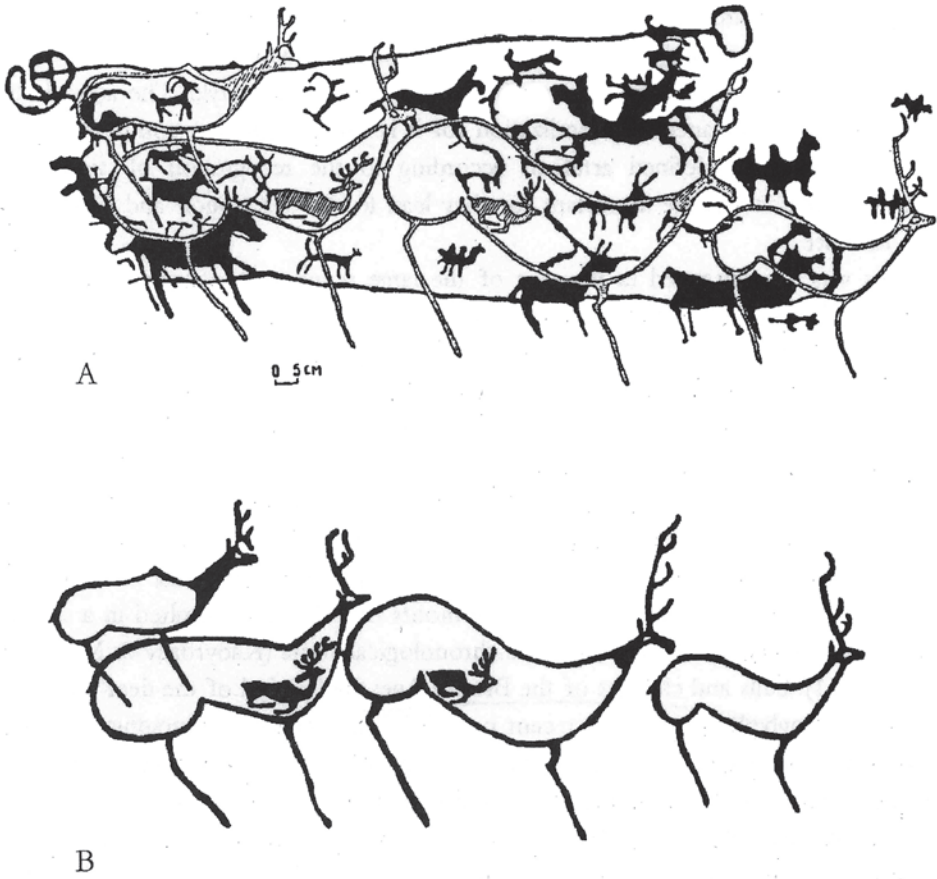


Fig. II.7.1. Arpauzen, Kazakhstan

ciated with the power of the spirits. These petroglyphs were powerful visions of the world of the spirits and were an active part of realities and experiences that they depict. The stag petroglyphs were visions that could have been part of a repertoire of practices conducted by Sako-Scythian shamans as they negotiated with landscape spirits and their communities. Furthermore, the petroglyph scenes may be seen as part of the obligations of the artists to depict these spirits. The phenomenal sensory experience of trance added to the power of the encounters with the ancient artwork. The specialness of the Arpauzen area was given greater potency by the addition of the petroglyphs, while the power of the place was amplified by the presence of the images” (Lymer 2002: 93). (Fig. II.7.2., II.7.3., II.7.4.)



Fig. II.7.2. Arpauzen V. surface 37



Fig. II.7.3. Dancing figures at Tamgaly, Kazakhstan

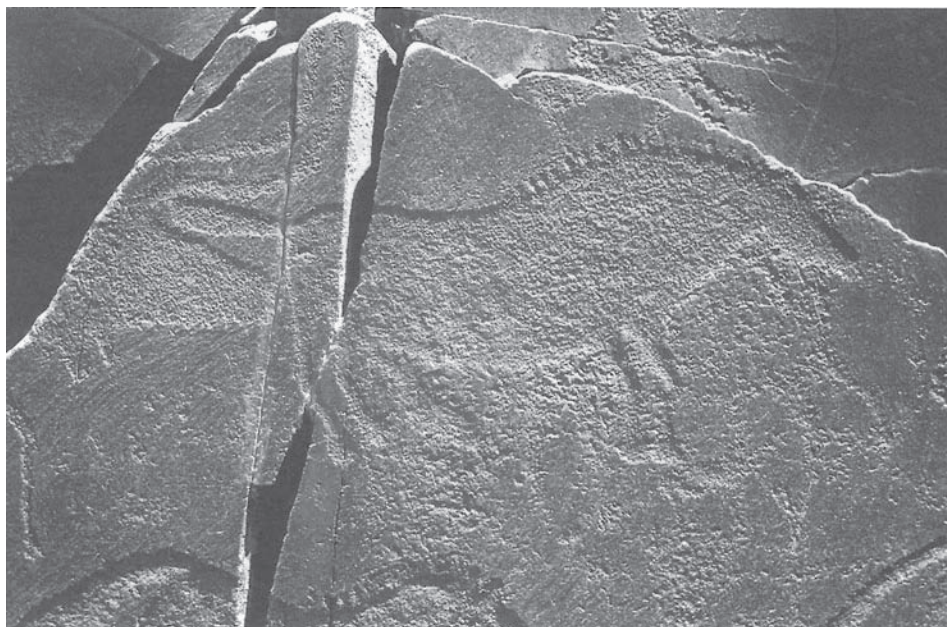


Fig. II.7.4. The technique of pecking

In Mongolia we also know of data of images of dancing. Human figures, hand in hand, dancing in line were characteristic for ages and epochs from the Neolithic to the epoch of Hunnic migrations. Eleanora Novgorodova put together an illustrative table on the dancing figures. (Fig. II.7.5.)




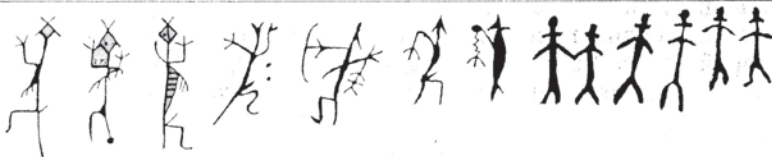
Hunnic Epoch	
Early Nomads	
Bronz Age	
Neolith	

Fig. II.7.5. Dancing figures in lines

In fact dancing is a highly coordinated group behavior, which always enhances the feeling of togetherness in the psyche of the members of the community. The main feature of group dancing (or dancing in line), is repetition.

There is another important element we must mention when talking about music in the prehistory of the signaling behaviour of mankind, ie. the birth of semiotics: it is repetition. A film about the last shamans of the Nganasan people who live far North show quite clearly that one of the most important features of the shamanic song is repetition. Among the Nganasan, who live on the Taymir Peninsula, this singing was the task of the shaman's helper (*touptusi*) (Helimski 2005). The same phenomena can be found in China, let us quote Carolyn Humphrey's evocative lines on this phenomenon, in connection with Daur shamanic song.

"The refrains, which had to be repeated by competent assistants leading the whole audience, were essential to raise the shaman's soul

energy. The shaman's body channels were opened by means of the smoke of a sacred plant to enable soul energy to travel out and spirit energy to come in. Rhythmic words, melody and vibration inspired soul energy." (Humphrey 1996: 234).

In some ways the same idea is referred to by a Finish ethno-musicologist in an article analysing Selkup shamanic songs. 'Shaman songs have somewhere an element of recurring pulse structure' (Niemi 2001: 156), which eventually lead to produce endorphins in the human body (Prince 1982).

This is the hypothesis that recent research on the cognitive evolution of our Paleolithic ancestors has been aiming to substantiate. It is interesting to quote an American researcher:

"A range of evidence indicates that shamanistic elements were already part of the cultural practices of the Middle Paleolithic. This evidence includes: 1. the homonid basis of chanting, music and psycho-emotional group ritual activities based in mimetic capabilities, and 2. the soul of shamanic practices in meeting a number of individual and societal needs for shared identity and communication. Music's effects include the induction of slow-wave brain wave patterns typical of other altered states of consciousness. Music's adaptive role includes its ability to promote group cohesion and co-ordination, enhancing synchronomy and co-operation among group members." (Winkelman 2002: 78–79).

In other words the groups of humans who banged bones together hitting on a joint rhythm (Frolov 1988: 3) were practicing simple forms of co-operation with the leadership of their shamans. Joint dances and collective drumming represented another developmental step, which led to the further development of cognitive structures, in other words they were able to distinguish different rhythms by the 'music modules' within the brain (Mithen 2006:64). There is a good example for visual representation of ancient musical experiences from the Sanctuary in Les Trois Frères where the so called musical bow, played by a half human, half animal creature, is clearly recognizable:

"not all Upper Palaeolithic depictions are images fixed in altered states of consciousness or while experiencing afterimages. Once the

initial step had been taken, the development of Upper Palaeolithic art probably followed three courses. One stream continued to comprise mental imagery fixed while it was being experienced. A second stream derived from recollected mental imagery: after recovering from the experience, people tried to reconstitute their visions...” (Lewis-Williams 2004: 195). (Fig. II.7.6.)



Fig. II.7.6. Musical-bow player figure – a sorcerer or a shaman(?)



CHAPTER 8

VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF COGNITIVE EVOLUTION AND COMMUNITY RITUALS

The purpose of our study is to offer a survey of those recent researches which deal with the signs of rock art and their symbolic meanings. The anthropological and archeological approaches differ from each other – hence it is instructive to become acquainted with the views of both groups of researchers, their methodological differences and the configurations of their results. Theoretically, we have a relatively large corpus of signs in rock drawings available to us; but there are few types of them, a fact that makes it difficult to understand their meaning and function .

The sun-deer – whether elk or reindeer – was a frequent feature and remains in Siberian mythology (Martynov 1991). A depiction of it can be seen of the rock by the Tom river – its monumental proportions seem to be a projection of the earthly and the upper worlds in the form of a deer. With the help of the Siberian Tagar Culture's bronze (and golden) deer it is possible to date fairly accurately this huge rock drawing to about the V–IV century B. C. This is the period when the ancestors of the Hungarians appeared on the Southern steppes of Siberia in the wave of nomadic horsemen. However, the little we know about the living areas and shelters of our ancestors in those

times, the Tom river rock drawings along with the Tagar culture objects, precious objects, survive and are important structural elements in the reconstruction work of the Ob-Ugrian and more generally Siberian mythology. An important task in the next decades will be to reconstruct the mythology within one big language family, namely the Uralian peoples in the Siberian area, in this task the religious notions of far distant territories are possibly of use (see Siikala – Napolskikh – Hoppál eds. 2006).

Returning to the deer and sun mythology connection, it could be said that the golden sun-deer motif was in all probability significant for the early nomads. However, but the rock drawings indicate that although the original root and formation of the symbol goes back to Neolithic Siberian culture it spread and survived to become a product of the Bronze Age. (Okladnikov – Martynov 1972: 226).

In the reconstruction of the world concept of the people who did the rock drawings the belief world, myths and legends of the still surviving ancient Siberian peoples will play an important part. Russian researchers have used this method to reconstruct the origins of the history and folklore traditions of extinct peoples. But this method and practice must be used only on the condition that it is understood that spiritual traditions have changed albeit slowly over centuries and indeed millennia, and that is why the remnant of these mythologies must be used with reservations and undergo strict scrutiny (Crook 1999).

The Neolithic art of the Siberian hunters was consequently a continuation, under new historical conditions, of the basic traditions of Paleolithic realistic art. It absorbed the artistic attainments of the preceding era. Here we find the representation of animals in profile, a convention that was formulated in Paleolithic art.

It must be emphasized that the basis of Asiatic thought and style remained as before in the north Asiatic Neolithic because the basic economy and lifeways of the hunters changed little. True, there were external discontinuities in the beginning of the Holocene. Glaciers and mammoths disappeared; the Siberian forests filled with moose, the tundras with reindeer. Hunting conditions changed. But hunting remained the base of the North Asiatic foraging economy.

The Neolithic art of Northern Asia which has survived to our times is represented basically by three creative genres: ornamentation, sculpture, and numerous depictions on cliffs. The subjects of this art reflect the economic evolution of this era and, as a whole, have the following fundamental traits: (1) animals take a primary role in petroglyphs, while man is clearly

secondary; (2) the interesting combination of live, dynamic realism and conventionalism may be observed in the artistic communication of images; and (3) the ideational, semantic basis of this art is the world outlook of hunters and hunting magic.

Most probably that kind of cognitive development was the basis of the notion of *totemism*.

We have not yet addressed its problems, however, it is extensively discussed in the literature (Layton 2000: 176–177, see his References pp. 184–186). Robert Layton wrote a long and detailed review article on Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams: *The Shamans of Prehistory: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves*. (New York, 1996). He criticized the authors' view because they used such terms and cultural phenomena as shamanism, totemism, art, magic in a manner which much more appropriate to anthropology or even in contemporary ethnography. As concluded:

“Clottes and Lewis-Williams accept that the context in which motifs were produced during the Upper Palaeolithic may have highlighted one meaning among several but argue that each motif's other meanings remained implicit. They prefer the conclusion that each species' meaning was ultimately coherent within a shamanistic world view, although they accept unrelated meanings as a less likely hypothesis (Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1996, 112). I prefer to place the emphasis on peoples' ability to use context as a means of highlighting one among several possible interpretations... The criterion for judging the appropriateness of alternative interpretations of Upper Palaeolithic art should be not be which hypothesis works best as a blanket explanation, but which hypotheses together most closely match the variability of the art. The approach proposed here undoubtedly needs further testing against ethnographically well-documented samples such as the secular rock art of western Arnhem Land, the shamanic art of the Clumbian Plateau and the totemic art of the Anasazi-Hopi before it can be said to have much predictive value. The shamanistic hypothesis is a voracious beast which can all too easily devour the world's hunter-gatherer rock art. Clottes and Lewis-Williams have tried to restrain it; they have, I hope, further tightened the least by arguing for a methodology that can begin to discriminate between cultural contexts of use without attempting to reconstruct meaning” (Layton 2000: 184.).

Robert Layton expressed his scepticism concerning the use or validity of “ethnographic parallels in interpreting Upper Paleolithic rock art”.

“A useful framework for comparing Palaeolithic with extant hunter-gatherer rock art would allow the capacity of these traditions to generate a diversity of ‘visual statements’ to be measured. Ultimately this would be of most interest if the above writers are correct in thinking social behaviour is in general governed by the same generative processes as symbolic communication. An analysis of the structure of Palaeolithic art revealed in the surviving ‘texts’ is likely to be more revealing than attempts to penetrate the exact meaning of any single motif. How may this structure be envisaged?

Two axis can be distinguished in the rules for using a system of signs which, for convenience, I will describe as *sequential* and *analogical*. For instance, a picture which states the story ‘Three hunters attacked a herd of eland’, makes a sequential statement (i.e. tells a story). A picture which embodies a visual metaphor makes an analogical statement: the king is a lion; our ancestor is that rock. It is by analogy that parallel structures are perceived between different areas of experience, making possible the construction of general explanatory schemes, either religious or scientific” (Layton 1987: 212).

As one may notice, the problems of *ethnographic “analogies”* as explanatory models in rock art (always have been debated), however, there are scholars who are “in defense” of analogies (Pearson 2002: 151–153). Most of the Russian researchers, enumerated and quoted on these pages earlier in this book, are of the opinion that recent (or any other) ethnographical data can be used to explain images on the rocks since human nature did not change that much during the last few thousand years.

In Neolithic antiquity, the cliff was usually a cultic place, ‘clan sanctuaries’ (Martynov 1991: 12). The ancient hunters evidently conducted clan festivals for their ancestors, to honor the spirits protecting the clan animals, and to the omnipotent sun. They represented the reproduction of animals, scenes of successful hunts, and the gaining of spirit favors in religious spectacles, dances, and songs. Evidently these festivals (‘animal ceremonialism’ – Siikala 1984) took place in the spring, since concentric circles representing the sun are found among the drawings (see Okladnikov – Martynov 1972: 155; Martynov 1966:33; 1970: 22).

The drawings, pecked by an able human hand and incised into the rock, are simple and truthful. They transmit in lively fashion the image of the basic *taiga* dweller, the mighty moose. In these drawings, the animal's fundamental features – the immense chest, the characteristic hump of the muzzle, the fleshy lips, the long thin legs, and the distinctive back hump – are brought out with amazing skill. Many drawings or carvings are distinguished by masterly execution. Among them are the remarkable depictions of lightly, timidly treading moose, and of bounding deer on the upper rock of the Tom' river assembly. On this upper rock, too, are pecked drawings of an owl and a crane. These are so correct and precise that even their feathers can be sensed. (see Okladnikov – Martinov 1983: 72. fig. 54.)

In this essay we examined some phenomena of community rituals, especially healing ceremonials, which are considered neurobiologically mediated, complex forms of social bonding. Recent studies in medical anthropology have pointed out that the ritual therapeutic experience relies on the patients' own healing processes by means of various altered states of consciousness that healers are able to control. As two Hungarian researcher rightly put it:

“Ritual trance invariably occurs in social context, and the healer's personality and the expectations of the community are profoundly involved in the induction of altered states of consciousness. Trance state is regarded as a result of the mobilisation of endogenous opiates, as an activation of the organism's defensive mechanisms in face of the stress of ceremonial. On the other hand, there is a growing body of evidence that opiate mechanisms are involved in social behaviour as well, especially in symbiotic bonds. It is suggested that this is the neurobiological reason why attachment facilitates trance induction.” (Freckska – Kulcsár 1989: 84).

The homeostatic factor of social relationships as a powerful regulators is also played an important role to reinforce from time to time the social relations within the community of our ancestors in the prehistory of mankind.

The presence of a community in shamanic healing practices produces therapeutic effects at psychological, social and physiological levels. The communal activities elicit psycho-social support and the mammalian attachment system provoking the release of endogenous opiates. These

endogenous opiates provide direct stimulation of the immune system, enhancing the feeling of well-being and intensifying group bonding experiences. Shamans use ritual activities and symbols to elicit physiological and emotional responses and produce healing. Activation of the opioid system produces euphoria and a sense of belongingness, enhancing coping skills, maintenance of bodily homeostasis, tolerance of stress and group psychobiological synchronization. This enhancement of community synchronization promotes identification with others and the development of an integrated sense of self (Winkelman 2004: 6).

The American scholar's theory of neurotheology is one the most promising, and it gives a new perspective in understanding of shamanic cultures, as follows:

“Shamanic traditions produced an integration of consciousness through rituals that induce psychologically-based spiritual integration, metaphoric cognitive processes and community bonding. All religions are not based on shamanism and ASC (altered state of consciousness) however, all societies have religious practice based in *shamanistic healing*, the use of ASC for healing through contact with the spirit world. Human evolution selected for these potentials because they were adaptive in mediating stress responses, producing psychological integration and enhancing social cohesion. Shamanism's experiences are among the most fundamental emotional feelings at the essence of religion” (Winkelman 2006: 110–111).

Community relations have been reinforced, enhanced which means evidently, a kind of psychobiological therapy, a group therapy which had positive effects on individuals as well. Cyclical rituals and the special ritual use of plant hallucinogenes has helped the emergence of shamans (Ripinsky-Naxon 1998:148) and the whole process evidently based on the shamanic cognitive revolution.

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Fig. 1. Position of petroglyphs on Hanin-had Mountain rock



Fig. 2. Old Turkic mounted warriors



Fig. 3. Hunting scene and funeral process on Burhantin-gazara rocks