Tracing Shamanism: Presence, Absence, Transformations, Possibilities

We invite scholars to reflect on the notion of traces (Ginzburg 2006) in relation to shamanism and other animistic/ecstatic practices[1]. In doing so, we take into account the idea of traces as a methodological tool to explore, map and analyze materials, narratives and practices residing "at the intersection of the seen and the unseen, sound and silence, the coming of being into the social and its recession" (Napolitano 2015: 46)[2]. Traces are in fact critical knots in a fabric where presence and absence are equally relevant.

We can take traces at face value, as archeological remains, i.e. the present as saturated with relics from the past, or in more subtle ways: in the Anthropocene, a single old tree at the center of a busy district in Kuala Lumpur could be the trace of a recently lost ancient landscape, a sign of a ghost forest; or the wolf footprints in the snow at your cottage door may hint at the presence of the animal(s) even in its immediate absence. In a similar fashion, the obsolete, the marginal, the defeated, remains as a trace from the past, a sign of the passing of time and a material knot highlighting dynamics encompassing the past, the present, and their still productive entanglement. Traces do not simply register the past; they also hint at possible futures.

From the moment the notion of shamanism entered modernity, it never ceased to leave traces: despite being an elusive, slippery concept, it kept reverberating through contexts, experiences, fields and disciplines (history, anthropology, religious studies, arts, literature, etc.), crossing borders, projecting its shadow deep into the past (i.e. the "archaic shaman", "shamanic cave art", etc.) or fast forward into the future (from neo-shamanism to techno-shamanism). The same can be said in relation to cultural and religious narratives, practices and experiences strictly or loosely[3] associated with the idea of shamanism (i.e. ecstatic cults,spirit-mediumship and oracular practices, witchcraft, possession, etc.).

We invite scholars to engage in tracing shamanic histories and historicities, to explore the intersections of remembering and imagining, to map encounters and entanglements: how do we define shamanism in relation to its traces? How do we trace or retrace shamanism? What does it mean when shamanic histories persist in things that have been moved to other contexts (e.g. objects in museums, heritage performances etc.) or as indigenous communities work to retrieve, revive or perpetuate precarious shamanic traditions? What is at stake politically in these processes? Upward or downward to the basic question: what makes something a shamanic trace?

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[1] Ginzburg, Carlo (2012). *Thread and Traces. True, False, Fictive.* Berkeley: University of California Press
[2] Napolitano, Valentina (2015). "Anthropology and traces." *Anthropological Theory* 15, no. 1, pages: 47-67.
[3] See Francfort, Henry-Paul, Roberte Hamayon, with Paul G. Bahn (2001). *The Concept of Shamanism. Uses and Abuses.* Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

Submitting papers and session proposals

We hope to see many of you in Rome. We now invite you to submit a paper title and abstract (max 250 words) or a session/panel proposal on the main theme of the conference before the **10th of October, 2023**. Please send it to the following address:

isarsconference2024@gmail.com

Session/panel organizer(s) are requested to indicate the general title of their session, and provide a brief description of the main topic (max. 300 words), as well as the number, names and affiliation of participants. Sessions should include a minimum of 4 participants and a maximum of 6.

Please note that the Scientific Committee will review and select the papers and session proposals. The selected papers and sessions will be announced in December 2023.

The official language of the conference will be English.

Visa and Letter of Invitation

Please inform us if you need a formal letter of invitation for visa or for other purposes, such as travel grant applications.

Please send your request to: isarsconference2024@gmail.com

Conference Registration

The conference fee is 140 euros (early bird: 15 January - 15 March 2024). After March 2024 the fee will be 160 euros. Modalities of payment will be announced in January 2024.

The conference fee includes: access to all sessions, conference pack, coffee and tea breaks, lunches, welcome cocktail, one banquet, excursion. The fee for accompanying family members of regular delegates is 50 euros and includes: access to all sessions, one banquet, excursion.

ISARS Membership

Please note that both, delegates presenting a paper during the conference and attendees (not presenting papers) are additionally required to pay their 2024 annual ISARS membership fee online (through ISARS website: http://www.isars.org/membership/).

Accompanying family members of regular delegates may participate in the conference without becoming member of ISARS.

The membership fee includes a printed copy of the journal SHAMAN. The fee is: Regular members: 60 euros; Student/Unemployed members: 35 euros.

Cordially,

On behalf of the ISARS Executive Board, the Organizing Committee and the host institution of ISARS 2024 conference.

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