This volume of SHAMAN provides an overview—though perhaps incomplete—of current Polish research on shamanism.

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The Editors
Babulal threatens the onlookers, unable to control the supernatural being which has possessed him. Photo: Diana Riboli, 199? 

*Front cover:* Rock paintings at Maya River, Yakutia (after N. D. Arkhipov) 

*Back cover:* Rock paintings at Toyon Ary, middle Lena River, Yakutia (after V. I. Pesterev) 

Illustrations from: “In Search of Shamanic Themes in Eastern Siberian Rock Art (Yakutia/Sakha Republic)” by Andrzej Rozwadowski
Articles
The Power and Authority of Shamans in Contemporary Altay
AGNIESZKA HALEMBA 5
The Shaman’s Curse: Maria A. Czaplicka
and her Studies of Shamanism
GRAŻYNA KUBICA 27
The Way of the Shaman and the Revival
of Spiritual Healing in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan
DANUTA PENKALA-GAWĘCKA 57
The Felicitas D. Goodman Institute:
Neo-shamanism or Religious Ecstatic Trance?
JOHN J. PILCH 83
In Search of Shamanic Themes in Eastern Siberian Rock Art
(Yakutia/Sakha Republic)
ANDRZEJ ROZWADOWSKI 97
Shamanism and Arctic Hysteria in Works of Marie A. Czaplicka
 STEFANIA SKOWRON-MARKOWSKA 119
Shamans and Scholars: Constructing the Supernatural,
Confronting the Enigmatic
JERZY S. WASILEWSKI 133

Field Report
Black Shamans of the Turkic-Speaking Telengit in Southern Siberia
DÁVID SOMFAI KARA and LÁSZLÓ KUNKOVÁCS 151
Book Review

DIANA RIBOLI and DAVIDE TORRI (eds) Shamansim and Violence: Power, Repression and Suffering in Indigenous Religious Conflicts (Vilmos Voigt) 163

Plates after page 168
In this article (based on field research conducted in the Republic of Altay between 1994 and 2008), I argue that the way in which the Telengit shamans are situated among other religious specialists in the Altay, makes them ambivalent and unlikely leaders of ritual efforts centered on communal identity and community protection. Although Telengit shamans are obviously well-integrated members of local and descent groups, their activities are mainly directed towards individual protection and healing. Community matters are a prerogative of other religious specialists, known under the generic term biler ulus (knowledgeable people). Moreover, particular characteristics of the Telengit shamans make them reluctant to practice with each other and therefore to get involved with Western shamans visiting present-day Siberia. This situation in Altay contrasts with other parts of Siberia (e.g. Tuva, Sakha, Buryatia or Khakassia), where associations of shamans have been organized, members of which meet, sometimes practicing in the same place and at times participating in common rituals. They also travel internationally and receive Western shamans as guests in their lands. In the Altay, it was not shamans, but other religious specialists (the biler ulus), who were mostly involved in the creation of religious associations. People called kam (shaman) are rarely (if ever) openly involved in public life. They also avoid communal activities and only exceptionally agree to conduct communal rituals. It is important to stress that my argument does not concern the question of authenticity.

In her 1992 review of research on shamanism, Jane Monnig Atkinson (1992: 308–309) pointed out the basic divergence in the literature between works that provide models of what shamans and shamanism might be, and ethnographic studies that focus on the understanding of one particular cultural tradition. While studies of the first type treat shamanism as a pan-human reality, the workings of which need to be understood, the second type frequently uses the label of “shamanism” only in references and literature review sections, as their authors do...
not wish to suggest any pan-human character of the phenomena under examination, instead focusing on the workings of particular traditions. In the latter studies, the word “shaman” is seen as a label applied externally to a wide range of diverse specialists.

While I am sympathetic to the latter approach, one has to remember that the labels “shaman” and “shamanism” have long functioned both outside academic circles and outside the context of European interest in things “exotic.” Indeed, they are used by those very people whom others have billed as “shamans” or “shamanists.” This is particularly true in the areas of bi- or multilingual communication, where the term is used by practitioners in e.g. English or Russian in addition to a variety of terms existing in local native tongues. Such is the situation in the Republic of Altay, which is part of the Russian Federation, and in other Siberian regions, where the Russian and English expression “shaman” coexists with such terms as kam, bö or oyun. It happens then, that, to use Atkinson’s expression (1992: 309), “shamanism” as a pan-human phenomenon meets “a historically situated and culturally mediated social practice” that has, however, now adopted the term “shamanism” in self-reference.

In this article I reflect on the way in which contemporary Altaian kams (shamans)\(^1\) operate, and show how this influences their participation or reluctance to participate in international shamanic networks. I argue that the way in which the Altaian shamans are situated among other religious specialists in the Altay makes them ambivalent and unlikely leaders of ritual efforts centered on communal identity and community

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\(^1\) I use here the term “Altaian shamans” although most of the people who are called kam in contemporary Altay live in the districts inhabited by the Telengits, who since April 2000 have a status of a “small-numbered indigenous people”; before this date they were regarded in Russian legal documents and academic works as a subgroup of the Altaians. The relations between the Telengit and Altaian identities are complex and my own research shows that, in general, the Telengits deem themselves to be part of the larger Altaian nation. As the particulars of the Altaians’ ethnic composition go beyond the scope of this text, I just use the expression “Altaian shamans” here, although most of my material comes from the regions inhabited by the Telengits. For more information on complexities of Altaian ethnic composition, see e.g. Potapov 1969; Halemba 2006; Donahoe et al. 2008.
The Power and Authority of Shamans in Contemporary Altay

This is in general not surprising—in many areas of Siberia “shamans” act much more as healers and trouble-shooters than as community leaders (e.g. Shirokogoroff 1935; Siikala 1987), although other researchers underline the role of shamans for and in their communities (Hoppál 2004; Hamayon 1994). Altaian shamans are obviously well-integrated members of local and descent groups, but their activities are mainly directed towards protecting and healing individuals, and not only those belonging to their own clan or territorial group. Community matters are a prerogative of other religious specialists (known under generic term of biler ulus ’knowledgeable people’). Still, there are situations today in which shamans are faced with requests for protection for a community, ritual leadership or participation in international networks. My research to date suggests that Altaian kam-shamans have until now tended to reject such involvement, in contrast to shamans in some other Siberian regions. I attempt here to provide an initial understanding of this situation, taking two examples into account: the first concerning a revival of a land-worship ritual in Altay; the other concerning participation in an international shamanistic conference. In contrast to places such as Tuva and Khakassia, in the Republic of Altay not shamans (kam) but other religious specialists were involved in creation of religious associations, members of which meet and sometimes practice in the same places or participate in common rituals (Halemba 2006). Those referred to as shamans (kam) are rarely openly involved in public life. They also avoid communal activities and only exceptionally agree to conduct communal rituals.

It is important to stress that my argument does not concern a question of authenticity. I do not want to enter a debate on “real” and “traditional” versus “not real” and “neo-” shamanism (Johansen 2001) and I am far from suggesting that by rejecting communal leadership or refusing to meet with Western and Russian shamans, Altaian shamans are more or less “authentic” than e.g. Tuvan ones, who work in associations and travel internationally. Instead, I want to observe that a term “shaman,” both as a self-reference and as an externally applied label, is a politically loaded marker, bringing with it a whole range of various

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2 This article is based on field research conducted in Altay between 1994 and 2008. Most of the research took place in the district of Kosh-Agach, which is inhabited by Telengits (see Donahoe et al. 2008; Halemba 2006), while some research was conducted in the districts of Ulagan, Ust’-Kan, Onguday and in the capital city of Gorno-Altaisk.
expectations that depend on who labels whom and for what reasons. Around the world, the term ‘shaman’ is used to refer to a whole array of religious specialists who practice at different times and places (Hutton 2001). Instead of arguing against this broad usage, I want to show how the poly-dimensionality of the label leads to complex situations when “shamans” from different places meet. Moreover, internal diversity and polyphony can be also seen as an inherent feature of a shamanic approach to spiritual life, one that is flexible and that deals with matters as they arise, without relying on dogma and fixed social hierarchies.

Altaian Shamans and a Shamanic Conference

In the Altaian language the word *kam* is used, which is usually translated into Russian and English as ‘shaman’ by local people and researchers alike. It is through this act of multilingual communication that such a *kam*-shaman first becomes part of the global discourse and practice of “shamanism.” In 2003 the “Altaian shamans” were invited to participate in global “shamanism” during a conference entitled “The Sacred in Traditional Culture” that was organized in Altay by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Science in Moscow. The conference was one of a series of similar meetings initiated in the 1990s by Valentina Kharitonova that were attended by social scientists, natural scientists investigating the physical and psychological background of shamanic experiences, shamans from the West and shamans and healers from various parts of Russia. Initial meetings were organized in Moscow, but in 2001 it was decided that the conference would travel to various parts of Siberia so that the participants could converse with local shamans at the actual locations of their practice. In 2001 the conference traveled to Khakassia and Tuva, and in 2003, the decision was made to organize it in the Altay.

When I arrived at Gorno-Altaisk, the capital of the Republic of Altay, in mid-June 2003, I immediately found myself caught in the middle of a pre-conference organizational commotion. The Surazakov Institute for Altaic Studies was responsible for the local organization there. Apart from various logistical matters such as transport, maintenance and the evening program, there was one crucial issue to be solved. The guests from Moscow and from the West were coming to Altay to meet local
shamans, to converse with them and to see their rituals. The situation, however, was difficult and complex. The organizers wished, of course, to please their important guests, and it was also a perfect opportunity for the local people to speak to an international audience. But would the Altaian shamans be open to this type of communication? And who should be invited to represent the Altaians?

There are many religious specialists in the Republic of Altay, and some of them would probably be quite willing to participate in such an event. While some active leaders of various religious movements and groups willingly participate in public life (Halemba 2006; 2008), they, although claiming some spiritual abilities, are neither called nor call themselves kam-shamans. The label kam is used in contemporary Altaian carefully, sparingly and is reserved for those who use a special device called tüngür that allows them to make specific deals with and have power over dangerous körmös spirits. Tüngür is a name given to the shaman’s drum (pl. 1), but also to a piece of white material with a map of the shamanic world drawn on it (D’iakonova 2001: 168). Since kam is translated as ‘shaman’, should they then be invited to the conference (pls 2, 3)?

Svetlana Petrovna Tiukhteneva,4 a researcher from the Institute of Altaic Studies, was given the task of solving the organizational problems related to local shamans’ participation. She had indeed known the Moscow organizers of the conference well and was expected to understand their wishes. Svetlana first contacted her friend, a young urban shaman called Dzhana Maevna.5 They spent several evenings discussing the conference and possible organizational strategies; there were various things to take into consideration. Firstly, they assumed that the guests explicitly wanted to meet shamans, so that inviting other types of religious specialists could pose a problem, despite their expected willing-

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3 It must be pointed out that it was a local understanding that foreign guests wished to meet only shamans and not other practitioners. As far as I can judge from Valentina Kharitonova’s works, she would probably be equally pleased to meet other practitioners, although she is most interested in those who are purported to enter so-called altered states of consciousness.

4 After consulted with Svetlana Petrovna, I have provided her real name here.

5 In her book, Kharitonova (2006: see unnumbered photographs between pp. 319–320) mentions Dzhana briefly in a photo caption and calls her not a shaman but instead a neme biler kiži (a person who knows something). However, Dzhana was invited by local organisers to the conference because at that time she was referred to locally as a kam.
Agnieszka Halemba

ness to come. Secondly, both Dzhana and Svetlana agreed that it would be ideal to invite older, experienced and respected shamans, but Dzhana was almost sure that they would refuse to participate. She herself had doubts about whether she should attend; as a shaman she was reluctant to take part in a large gathering of people. Svetlana had promised that she would be provided with a separate room where she could have time for herself and that she would not be required to conduct any important rituals—only sprinkling milk here and there, a few simple blessings and no more. Although she had mixed feelings about the need for such an event at all, Dzhana decided that, being a modern young woman, she did not want the Altay to close itself off from external influences and that she would therefore attend. She did, however, add that gathering shamans—and their spirits—in one place was something not to be undertaken lightly.

From an Altaian perspective, shamans are always potentially dangerous, as they deal with capricious spirits, and only with great effort and difficulty. Dzhana doubted whether spirits serving different shamans could be peacefully summoned to the same place without a disastrous outcome. Moreover, some of the foreign visitors were also referred to as shamans. What kinds of spirits would they bring with them? Would they come with good intentions? And if so, would their skills be sufficient to prevent the disruption their capricious spirits could bring to the Altay spiritual balance? This was therefore another reason to have powerful Altaian shamans at the conference: not so they could share their knowledge with the guests, but because they could protect Altay and its people from any unwelcome influences brought, even unwittingly, by the foreign guests.

Following those discussions, I accompanied Svetlana to Kosh-Agach (fig. 1), the region where I conducted most of my fieldwork, and we invited two respected older female shamans to the conference. We were received well in their homes, but I suspect this fact was more due to the indirect way in which Altaians express refusal in general than to any positive attitudes towards the event. Even as one of them agreed to be picked up by car a day before the conference, no one was at home when the car arrived and, as we subsequently found out, the female shaman had left to visit some relatives. The other female shaman apologized that she could not come because of her poor health and important previous commitments.
Although Svetlana and Dzhana also made other attempts to invite shamans, at the end of the day Dzhana was the only shaman to attend the full conference program. Apart from her, another urban shaman, Nadezhda Moisheevna made a brief appearance, refusing straight away to conduct any rituals and holding a speech very critical of the event. Dzhana’s role was, however, very important, acting as a buffer between visiting Russian shamans, who conducted rituals next to a river, and people from a local village, who were terrified at hearing the beating of a drum next to a sacred waterway. Still, why was she alone in this role? Why did the Altaian shamans not come as well?

One answer to this question, in line with the general image of shamanic practice as a site of secrecy, could be that the Altaian shamans did not want to share their knowledge. However, such an answer presupposes a particular vision of shamans as religious specialists whose source of authority lies in the possession of a specific kind of identifiable knowledge, which can be guarded and handed down and that might be stolen or illicitly accessed. As I have shown in my previous work (Halemba 2006) and repeat below, I believe that such an understanding does not do justice to the shamanic practices, power and ways of
knowing in the Altay, as a flexible process of negotiation with spiritual realms and not an identifiable “body of knowledge” is most important for the shamans. Another explanation for the absence of Altaian shamans could be that they did not want to take part in what they could perceive as “just a show” (pokazuha in Russian). There may be some veracity to this statement for some shamans; still, I think that in general they treated the dangers of the foreign shamans’ activities as earnestly as the inhabitants of local villages and the Altaian organizers of the conference, who were afraid that annoyed spirits could attack them. The Altaian shamans were after all asked to come to protect the Altay. Such a request cannot be turned down lightly, even if the event is dismissed as “just a show.” Besides, as Laurel Kendall (2006) shows, in other places, the participation of shamans in on-stage performances is not judged unfavorably and does not exclude them from negotiating with spirits on other occasions.

If we regard the issue of participation (or lack thereof) in this conference not as an isolated incident but look for other cases in which Altaian shamans refused to participate, we can see that other explanations are possible as well. It was not the first time that contemporary Altaian shamans were asked to become involved in issues of communal well-being and protection, and refused or had problems with such a request. In all these cases they were asked because they are considered to be the most powerful religious specialists in the contemporary Altay and because local people generally associate the label “shaman” with power and skills unattainable by other religious practitioners. However, the kind of spiritual specialization that is a domain of Altaian shamans does not make them suitable leaders for conducting rituals aimed at group identity and protection. I suggest that at least part of the reason for the shamans avoiding the conference lay in the specific position of the religious specialists known as kam in Altay and who, in the process of multi-language communication, became equated with the “shamans” of other times and places.

Community and (In)dividual in Altaian Shamanic Practice

It is often assumed, if not explicitly stated, that shamans are responsible for their communities and that it is on behalf of the communities that they deal with the spirits. Piers Vitebsky (2001: 110), for example,
writes: “the shaman is not a private mystic, but exists to serve a community.” Still, what does it mean to serve a community? If “shaman” is a cover-all term used in reference to many different kinds of religious specialists, this may indeed entail many different kinds of involvement in community life. We can then ask in what sense do Altaian shamans “serve the community”? Do they take care of group identity and group survival? Can they protect a community from external threat and/or internal fissions? Or are they more focused on the well-being of the community’s individual members? Was Svetlana on the right track in her hope that the shamans could protect the Altay from the evil intentions or mistakes of the conference’s shaman guests?

On the one hand, Altaian shamans are obviously a part of their communities both through locality and through kin. They most often receive their shamanic gift through matrilineal descent. They are, however, also personally chosen by the spirits—shamanic ancestry is a necessary but not sufficient precondition to becoming a shaman. Like all persons in Altay, they can be conceived as individuals, i.e. as the plural and composite sites of the relationships, whose very existence is a function of their relations with persons and things (Strathern 1988). Nevertheless, I argue that Altaian shamans are not concerned with group matters in their ritual practice, but rather focus on the well-being of particular members of the community. As a rule, they do not conduct rites aimed at long-term group well-being. Moreover, they largely restrict their activity to inside their houses and the houses of their clients, leaving rituals conducted outside the villages to other religious specialists. This is especially important in the case of Altay, where the land—the Altay Mountains—forms the basis of group identity and religious life. This group identity and the relationship between people and the land are sustained most importantly through rituals of land worship conducted outside the human settlements. The worship of nature and especially of Altay forms a basis of both Altaian group identity and Altaian religious life and yet remains outside the spiritual and ritual tasks of Altaian shamans.

In my previous work I analyzed one striking example of discussions concerning land worship and the role of shamans in such worship (Halemba 2006, Chapter 8). I explored contemporary attempts to revive a ceremony of land worship, locally referred to as *Altay tagḯga*, Altay
etkeni or Altay ködürgeni as part of a category of so-called oboo rituals (Humphrey 1996; Sneath 1992; Abaeva 1992; Mongush 1992), which are important events all over Inner Asia. To summarize my argument, in the midst of a “national-cultural revival” after the collapse of the Soviet state and of official atheism in 1990s, a discussion emerged on the revival of Altaian religion, with one of the most important questions concerning the revival of communal celebrations of land worship on behalf of particular groups, whether clans, localities or the Altaian nation as a whole. Such rituals were present in Altay before the October Revolution and were also conducted clandestinely during the Soviet era, especially up until the 1960s. I have argued that the shamans (kam) were often at first taken into consideration in those discussions but were subsequently judged as too precarious to become ritual leaders of such ceremonies. As I explain below, while they were seen as the most powerful ritual specialists in the Altay, they were also viewed as lacking the necessary authority to lead the rites celebrating the identity of stable social groups.

In Inner Asian studies, ceremonies that are performed on a regular basis, directed at nature spirits, especially mountains, and performed for the community’s benefit in fixed places at a specified time are usually referred to as oboo ceremonies. Caroline Humphrey (1996) suggests that most oboo rituals stress a tie between men and their land and are aimed at blessing male-defined groups—both in terms of territory and kin. As oboo ceremonies are focused on the unity and power of the group, in some cases they are organized at the state level as well. Sacrifices for Bogd-Uul Mountain in Mongolia were performed twice a year in accordance with the official order of the ruler (Tatar 1976: 11). In Inner Mongolia, the sacrifices are organized at all levels of territorial division (Sneath 1992). Ultimately, the most important feature of the oboo ceremony is its communal character and its support of stability. It is aimed at stressing the unity of the group and its link with the land. It occurs in a regular and repetitive manner and tends to be fixed and stable in terms of place and time. The place of the ritual is permanently marked in the landscape and cannot be easily moved or removed, which again

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6 Tagil is a name of a stone altar; tagilha means ‘on a tagil’. Taki- in Mongolian means the ‘bending of the knee’. Daur Mongols used the word taki- for respectful rituals (Humphrey 1996: 178). In Altaian, taki- means ‘to repeat’. Altay ködürgeni has the literal meaning of ‘uplifting’ or ‘holding up’ in Altaian. It is a word used also to mean ‘showing respect’. Altay etkeni literally means ‘making’ in Altaian.
links the community to the place and gives stability to its boundaries (Humphrey 1995). In regions where Buddhism is strong or dominant, lamas usually conduct oboo rituals; in other regions they are most often conducted by the elders.

During the discussions on the revival of Altay tagïlga, the matter of who would be the ritual leader of such a ceremony was one of the most important and most difficult questions to be resolved. Shamans are widely considered in Altay to be most powerful religious specialists but can they conduct oboo-type ceremonies? And if religion is to be a basis of common Altaian identity are the shamans the right type of ritual leaders? My research, including interviews with contemporary Altaian shamans, shows that it is widely recognized that the leader’s authority is crucial for legitimization of the ritual. Shamans, as powerful religious specialists, were at first considered to be potential leaders. However, the flexible nature of their knowledge, the fact that they deal with dangerous powers and especially the fact that their actions are constantly under question, always challenged, resulted in either the shamans themselves refusing to conduct communal oboo-type land-worship rituals (fig. 2), or in other religious specialists being asked to do it. And, a few times that the shamans did conduct such ceremonies, the outcomes were judged as precarious or even disastrous (Halemba 2006: 178–182).

Generally speaking, when shamans are at all involved in communal ceremonies outside settlements, they usually conduct a different type of ceremony called tayilgan in Altaian but also in many other places (Khangalov 1958; Tugutov 1978). These ceremonies often include blood sacrifices and are performed upon special request, for example when someone has offended the spirits of the place, or the area has been afflicted by a natural calamity. Tayilgan is most often performed when the need arises, precipitated by either individual or communal requests. The group of people who request the ritual does not have to form a stable social unit—people can come together for this special purpose, although clans, groups of relatives and villages can indeed request tayilgan as well. Since the ceremony is aimed at solving a specific, immediate problem, the group can constitute itself temporarily and disband after the ritual. The ritual does not have to be repeated at any particular intervals. Although stone altars are built at offering places, and the skins of sacrificed animals are suspended from poles erected at these sites, these places and their constructions are not maintained and are
allowed to fall apart. The demarcation of the landscape is thus only temporary, and old *tayïlgan* places in fact tend to be avoided later.

As during the Soviet era, *tayïlgan* and *tagïlga* were both either abandoned or conducted extremely rarely, clandestinely and with little participation, in the early 1990s there was indeed some uncertainty regarding what kind of ceremony was actually needed. Once there was agreement on the main goal and the ceremony was defined as a communal land-worship ritual—to be repeated on a regular basis as a general blessing of the Altay and not as a means of alleviating a particular disaster or problem—it soon became clear that what was needed was an *oboo*-type ceremony. The leadership was therefore not to be placed in the hands of the shamans.

If they are not, however, concerned with communal rituals, what is the main task of contemporary Altaian shamans? They are mainly focused on dealing with the particular problems of community members, conducting rites in their houses and establishing spiritual protectors in them. They are masters of negotiations with capricious spirits with whom a careful deal has to be struck as they can provide support but can also, almost at a whim, turn against people as well. The mark-

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Fig. 2. A cairn (*üle*) of the type gathered next to important roads, springs and mountain passes in the Altay. A particular spot is thus marked for the worship of the land. Photo: Łukasz Śmyrski, 1999.
ers of shamans’ activities can be seen on the walls of many houses in the region of Kosh-Agach, including pieces of plain or unusually stitched and braided fabric, leather and threads. They are called turguzuun (pl 4 a, b) in the region (literally, ‘standing one’) and are markers of spiritual protectors that were placed in the house by a shaman. Turguzuun is a generic name for all such markers, covering a range of specific items (D’iakonova 2001: 180; Halemba 2006; Revunenkova 1995). There is no one standard “collection” of protective spirits to be found in any house7 and some of them do not even have to be marked by turguzuun, as I explain below. Their number, character and the offerings required differ depending on the particular needs, family histories and clan memberships of the host and the particular abilities of the given shaman. The following is a list of the spirit helpers placed in the main room of a respected man’s house in a Kökörü village, as viewed from the door:

(1) A large piece of black material was to the left of the door. This was called karaš (pl. 5 a, b), a capricious protector, to which a blessed (iyik)8 goat was offered9. An offering of water had to be made to karaš at the end of the lunar month.

(2) Left of Karash stood a female spirit-helper belonging to the Almat clan, who had to be given tea at the beginning of the lunar month. She was not marked with a turguzuun.

(3) On the wall to the left, there was a spirit helper of Bulut Khan (see below), which had to be sprinkled with vodka.

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7 Interestingly, in central regions of the Altay (Onguday, Ust’-Kan) that were a center of the Burkhanist movement in the early twentieth century, which is regarded by many researchers as a step towards the unification of the Altaian religion, the Altaian nation or even towards monotheism, there is much more uniformity with regard to the protective spirits placed in individual houses (Znamenski 1999; Danilin 1993). Principally, one protective spirit called a Jayik is established in a single house. These protective spirits are, however, established not by shamans but by so-called jarlıkbi, religious specialists, who explicitly avoid dealing with dangerous körmös spirits and instead focus on spirits of nature and other benevolent beings. Jarlıkbis can also be leaders of communal repetitive ceremonies.

8 Iyik mal is an animal blessed by a shaman and allowed to live freely among the household’s herd. It cannot be slaughtered (unless by special permission granted by a shaman) and is treated with care and respect.

9 The Altaic word karaš has at least two meanings: (1) Karash, the name of a spirit in the underworld and (2) karaš ‘a vessel marking a place for a spirit’.
(4) Next to this, one could find ogoš čačïlu, which belonged to the Sagal clan, and to whom a blessed horse was given.

(5) On the wall opposite the door there was jarïk, which was to be offered milk at the new moon with a sheep blessed and dedicated to it. 

(6) In the right-hand corner of the wall opposite the door there was the skin of a rabbit, which stood for Bulut Khan and had to be fed with milk and given a blessed (ïyïk) sheep.

(7) To the right of the door stood a male spirit-helper from the Sagal clan, who had to be given vodka. He was not marked with any object.

This list is just one of many possible combinations of spirit-helpers that could be placed in a house. While, however, the spirits influence the events in the house and possibly interact with its other inhabitants and visitors, they are linked primarily not to the house but to the particular person for whom they were set up. After the death of this person, at the latest, a shaman is asked to remove all the turguzuu and unmarked spirits. The material markers are taken away and placed outside the village, in a place that people rarely go to, adding to the number of locations that are marked in the landscape by the activities of the shamans and are thus later avoided by people.

The lack of strict rules governing the placement of spirits in the house, the unpredictable nature of the spirits’ actions and the uncertainty accompanying the shamanic practice lead us towards the conclusion that shamans can particularly help in situations in which flexibility and attunedness is required. Shamans, with their rituals, are, by contrast, less capable of providing group stability. The worship of land, which forms a basis for group identity in Altay, requires not shamanic flexibility but continuity and stability, as expressed through strictly prescribed ritual actions that are not the domain of shamans and their bargaining and negotiating skills.

Power and Authority

In his study of Tibetan Buddhism, in which he reflects on the interaction between Buddhist lamas and shamans, Martin A. Mills makes a useful distinction between authority and power. He writes:
in many writings, the terms power and authority are treated as synonymous; this however neglects much of the term’s etymology as a word semantically akin to “authorship.” So, for the purposes of this work, let me start by making explicit how I define the term: authority is the formation of statements which are widely accepted as true within certain social field, organized around particular persons in particular circumstances. (Mills 2003: xiii)

In an analysis of the position of Altaian religious specialists, including shamans, one should also make a distinction between their authority and their power as social attributes. I define authority not unlike Mills, stressing its dependence on a given social field. It is the domain of a person who is trusted with knowing and/or undertaking the right kind of action in a given situation. The recognition of power, on the other hand, is an acknowledgement that religious specialists have the ability to influence the spiritual world, while not, however, presupposing the outcomes of their knowledge and actions. Power is therefore understood here as a socially recognized quality of a person; authority is the socially recognized ability not only to form statements that are recognized as true (as Mills writes) but to act in a way that leads to desired and certain outcomes.

Power is also perceived in various degrees along a scale, i.e. religious specialists can be imbued with more or less of it. Shamans are considered to be the most powerful religious specialists with the greatest potential to interact and negotiate with the spiritual worlds. The problem is that the outcomes of such negotiations depend on numerous factors that are difficult or impossible to control. While other religious specialists, including elders, various types of biler ulus (knowledgeable people) (fig. 3, pl. 6) and Buddhist lamas (locally called nama) are viewed by Altaians as having authority in various particular areas (usage of specific ritual techniques, foretelling the future, healing), the domain of the shamans is viewed as comprising negotiation, bargaining and even the manipulation of spiritual forces. While the outcomes of the actions of elders or biler ulus are seen to depend on their correctness (i.e. a positive outcome is certain if an offering to a spirit is performed correctly), the outcome is never certain for shamans, as there is no way of being sure that the actions are correct under the circumstances. Instead, shamans are involved in complex, individualized and varying negotiations with the spirit worlds. Although very highly valued for their power, shamans are also viewed as potentially dangerous not only because they deal with
dangerous spirits, but also because the actual outcomes of their activities can never be predicted.

Firstly, the spirits with whom they deal are capricious, unpredictable and only vaguely known to shamans; they often come to shamans in disguise, try to cheat them, pretend to be someone else or change (kubulup) their appearance. One of the most well-known female shamans active during my fieldwork could only hear the spirits who came to her. During each ritual she spent considerable time trying to determine the kind of spirit present and whether it could be a dangerous imposter. Secondly, the power of the shaman, although received through descent, is closely linked to each particular person so that one shaman cannot be easily replaced by another one. In a way similar to that described by Humphrey (1996: 183) for Manchuria, Altaian shamans are not talked about and remembered as a category, but as individuals, each with a specific aura, way of singing and personal character. Typically, people develop a relationship with a particular shaman, to whom they turn with their problems and in whom they place their trust despite the uncertainty of ritual outcomes. On the other hand, in the case of the nama (lama), for example, Altaians see replacement as relatively easy—as their authority

Fig. 3. A biler kiži (knowledgable person) from Kyrlyk presenting a vessel to her most important spirit helper. Photo: Łukasz Smyrski, 1999.
is, after all, perceived to be based on their ability to read and understand a sacred *sudur* book, which is the source of their knowledge. Having mastered a particular body of knowledge, they can, therefore, form authoritative statements (Halemba 2003).

Shamanic Power and the Protection of Altay

The analytical distinction between authority and power, although meaningful and necessary, is often, however, conflated in practice not only by researchers but by local people as well. In situations of urgent and dire need for spiritual protection, people looking for solutions clearly look to powerful shamans to provide it. Recourse to shamanic power is a luring option, but it does not come without a cost.

As I have written above, the protection of the Altay and its people was one of the main reasons why the Altaian organizers wanted to have Altaian shamans at the conference in 2003. They were to provide protection against the dangers of alien spiritual influence and disturbance. From the very beginning, however, there was also a sense that it would be inappropriate for the shamans to be involved in such an event. Dzhanana herself had doubts about how all the shamans with their diverse and capricious spirit helpers could peacefully reside and practice in the same place. The Altaian shamans who were invited did not come, leaving to us the task of trying to understand the background of their decision. I must, however, also admit that I have no real way of being certain that the Altaian shamans did not in fact attempt to protect the Altay and its people. They might indeed have conducted protective rituals from the safety of their homes, while still avoiding participation in the gathering and public celebration. They do not, after all, have to travel physically to the conference, but can travel instead by other means or send their spirit helpers to deal with potentially disruptive foreign influences in an effective and subtle manner.

Still, the non-participation of Altaian shamans remains interesting especially if we consider the attitudes of shamans from other Siberian regions towards participation in similar events. As we can gather from a report of the Moscow-based organizer of the 2003 Altay conference, Kharitonova (2006), cooperation with Tuvan, Khakass and Buryat shamans was much easier. They not only attended the conferences organized in Moscow but were also accommodating hosts when foreign
shamans came to visit their homelands. Although Kharitonova has not analyzed the question of shaman participation in her own conferences *per se*, she suggests that the participants in communal rituals are local *neo*-shamans, i.e. people who turned towards shamanic practice in the course of the late Soviet and post-Soviet national and cultural revival. She distinguishes between sacrificers/priests (Russian *zhrets*), who lead in offerings and various kinds of collective rituals, and shamans, who are mainly concerned with healing, fortune-telling and dealings with the spiritual worlds (Kharitonova 2006). She also explains that contemporary *neo*-shamans usually “confuse” these two types of actions in their practices. Although I do agree that one should distinguish between those two categories of religious specialists in the southern Siberian context and that communal rites are not always the domain of contemporary shamans, I would be wary of speaking of confusion in this regard, and would prefer to talk of transformation instead. In his review of five recent works on shamanism, Kocku von Stuckrad points out that

... the investigation of political, military, economic and religious factors that led to an astonishing variety of shamanic cultures in Eurasia is still a scholarly desideratum. While phenomenological approaches abandoned historical change from the outset, anthropological explanations—mostly in colonial, missionary, and Marxist contexts—fixed “the other” in a timeless mental space, as Mary Louise Pratt would say. (2005: 125)

At least if we talk about historically and politically related areas such as Tuva and Altay, to attempt to trace the background of the diversity in contemporary practice is a reasonable approach.

In another section of her work, Kharitonova (2006: 177) comments on a passage written by a Tuvan researcher Marina Mongush, who claims that contemporary Tuvan shamanism cannot compete with Buddhism because of a “lack of institutionalization of shamanism” (Kharitonova 2006: 177). Agreeing in principle with Mongush, Kharitonova comments nonetheless that

... in my approach, based on differentiating shamanism and priesthood (*zhrechestvo*), shamanism should not compete with any confession, because this is a task of a priesthood. In a situation as it is now, the lack of effective competitiveness is a feature of the specific conglomerate of shamanism and priest-
hood, which is present in contemporary variants of revival, as these are attempts to create a confession from a shaman-healer, fortune-teller, seer, adding to his functions those of a priest-sacrifier. (2006: 177)

I agree that, nowadays, we can see attempts at expanding the activities of shamans to include leadership in communal rituals, but the relative success of some such attempts in some regions (such as in Tuva or Buryatia) in contrast with the relative failure in others (such as in Altay) should not be attributed to “confusion” among local practitioners. Instead Tuva and Khakassia have seen a transformation of shamanic practices as they have been coerced into interaction with institutionalized religious confessions (respectively Buddhism and Christianity) and compete with them on a public arena. This leads to transformations in religious practices, turning, one can argue, kam-shamans into another kind of religious specialist (Halemba 2003; 2006). Still, apart from showing that contemporary Altaian kams did not turn into priests (which was, in my opinion, one of the most important reasons that they did not attend the conference organized by Kharitonova) the important point to be made is that, despite all academic discussions, a wide range of different people—Dzhana Maevna, the Tuvan members of shamanic associations, practitioners living in remote Kosh-Agach villages, Russian practitioners and those living in Austria, Germany and the United States—are all called shamans and meet or at least are expected to take part in a global culture of shamanism.

Final Remarks

I agree with Kharitonova’s insistence on the need to differentiate among the types of specialists who conduct various rituals, provide healing or offer protection. Serious consequences can indeed be expected when a flexible, idiosyncratic and dangerous negotiator with the spiritual worlds, who provides custom-made solutions to (in)dividual problems, begins to conduct rituals with other leaders or to interfere with the powers that should provide a stable and secure foundation for the lives of the people. However, one should not dismiss such a combination by attributing it to confusion. I do not think that the Altaian shamans who refused to participate in the conference and who generally avoid institutionalization are any less “confused” that the Tuvan members of
Agnieszka Halemba

shamanic associations whose behavior does indeed suggest that we are dealing with a transformation of shamanic practice. On the contrary, Tuvan shamans struck me as very confident and sure of their ambitions, goals and means. I am interested in showing that the two approaches in the literature on shamanism mentioned by Atkinson (1992), one treating it as a pan-human phenomenon, the other focusing on idiosyncratic differences that should, according to her, inform each other, actually already meet in practice, when very different specialists are invited to participate in the same network of “global shamanism.”

The fact that Altaian kam-shamans do not conduct communal ceremonies focused on group identity and that they find participation in networks of global shamanism problematic does not mean that they do not, to return to Vitebsky’s words, “serve a community.” Still, as shamans, they seem not to be concerned with a community as such, with its stability and survival, even as they do serve the community by attending to the particular needs of its members. I italicized as shamans, because as inhabitants of a given village or citizens of the Republic of Altay they may well be concerned with the fate of the Altaian nation or be active participants of local identity-building events. As religious specialists, however, they are instead committed to healing, purifying and establishing protection for particular people within their homes. There has yet to be the sort of transformation that would lead to the institutionalization of shamanism in Altay. It may, however, be possible that, in the future, the title “shaman” will be adopted by those who conduct communal rituals. As Kharitonova writes (2006: 325), an international interest in shamanism is indeed an important incentive to this end.

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The Shaman’s Curse: Maria A. Czaplicka and her Studies of Shamanism

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The paper presents the explorer and researcher of Siberia, Maria A. Czaplicka, and her studies on shamanism throughout her short career (as they appear in her academic texts, travelogue, photographs and museum collection). Her pre-fieldwork study, Aboriginal Siberia, reflected the discourse of the time: ethnocentric and medicalized, which she enriched with a relativistic perspective. In her own ethnography she disposed of the “pathologizing” of shamanism and presented it as a regular magico-religious phenomenon. In the paper Czaplicka’s concepts and research are based on the historical and theoretical context of the time, and are assessed in terms of contemporary theory.

The Polish–British anthropologist Maria A. Czaplicka (1884–1921) was born in Warsaw (in the Russian part of partitioned Poland), studied at the clandestine Polish Flying University, and was interested in geography. She was a contemporary and friend of the later famous anthropologist, Bronisław Malinowski, and, like him, came to England in 1910; both studied under Charles Seligman and Edward Westermarck at the London School of Economics. A year later, however, Czaplicka moved to Oxford and worked under Robert R. Marett. She obtained a Diploma in Anthropology in 1912. It was Marett who discovered that her linguistic and intellectual abilities might well be turned to the composition of a book presenting the findings of Russian and Polish scholars about the indigenous tribes of Siberia. This was her Aboriginal Siberia.

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In 1914–1915, Czaplicka went to Siberia herself, and leading the Yenisei Expedition, where she became an experienced fieldworker and collector for the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Her expedition was a survey study of a very broad territory. In many places she was the first European woman ever seen. She and her American companion, Henry U. Hall, lived in chums (tents) with the local people, observed their customs and made anthropometric measurements. Unfortunately, the report of the expedition was never completed. However, both anthropologists published several scholarly articles about it. Czaplicka also wrote the interesting travelogue *My Siberian Year* as well as other popular texts; in addition, she composed a public lecture she delivered in various cities in England and Scotland, entitled “Through Arctic Siberia with my Camera.” It was illustrated with lantern slides made from her field photographs.

Czaplicka (fig. 1) was the first female lecturer in anthropology at Oxford University (1916–1919). But she was also a tragic figure without a secure academic position. In 1921, she committed suicide in Bristol, where she had held a temporary teaching position. She was only 37 when she died.²

This paper aims to present an overview of Czaplicka’s studies on shamanism, which makes up a major part of her work. I try to cover theoretical issues, and assess them against the background of contemporary studies of the problem. I start by presenting Czaplicka’s first book together with its conceptual foundation in Marett’s theory of religion. The second part depicts shamanism as it was presented in her writings and photographs resulting from her fieldwork in Siberia. I finish with some general ideas which emerge from Czaplicka’s works. Her first book is well known to specialists on shamanism, but her fieldwork materials are rarely consulted. The comparison of her early study and her later texts based on research shows an interesting development of her ideas. My own paper is based on various sources of information: her published texts, archival materials and collections, and the literature on shamanism.

² For more biographical details, see Collins and Urry 1997; Kubica 2007.
Fig. 1. Miss M. A. Czaplicka, a portrait study by E. O. Hoppe. After *The Ladies' Field* (London, UK: George Newnes), November 27, 1915, p. 19
An Armchair Study of *Aboriginal Siberia* and its Mentor

It was Robert Ranulph Marett (1866–1943), Edward Burnett Tylor’s successor in the chair of anthropology at Oxford, who was Czaplicka’s main mentor during her studies and later. This scholar’s importance for the development of anthropology is now considered to be negligible (Rivière 2006), and he is mentioned mainly in a historical context (e.g. Bengtson 1979; Phillips 2001). However, at that time, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Marett played a major role in British anthropology. He was an outstanding representative of the transitional generation between evolutionism and functionalism: he severely criticized the former and was ahead of the latter (cf. Lowie 1936). This was the generation whose members still remained in their armchairs, but already had a clear awareness of the importance of field research conducted by anthropologists themselves and were preparing their successors for this role.

Marett, a proponent of the concept of the pre-animal stage of the development of religion, also questioned evolutionary theories on the basis of methodology. According to him, primitive man was not just a bad philosopher, as previously maintained. At this stage it was not the idea that became a cause of action, but it was action that gave rise to ideas. Marett put this into a much-quoted sentence, that “savage religion is something not so much thought out as danced out” (Marett 1914a: xxxi).

Marett claimed that for primitive religion the motor and emotional sides were more important than the reflective one. At the early stage, pre-animalistic religion could not be distinguished from magic, so Marett postulated using the phrase “magico-religious phenomena” to avoid problems. He preferred for both the Melanesian word *mana* that anthropologists had added to their dictionary. Edward Evans-Pritchard believed that this had disastrous consequences because, for its original users, it did not mean impersonal forces in an almost metaphysical sense—as anthropologists understand them (Evans-Pritchard 1965). Marett summarized his idea:

My theory, then, of the nature of this experience [of rudimentary religion] is that it is ultimately a binary compound, a duality in unity, consisting in what may be comprehensively termed a *tabu* element and a *mana* element. The former is predominantly negative in its action; what is negative being the world of
The Shaman’s Curse

the workaday, the word of ordinary happenings. Thus its function is chiefly to
provide the experience with its outward limit. The action of the other is pre-
dominantly positive; what is posited being something transcending the ordinary
world, something wonderful and awful. Thus its main function is to supply the
experience with its inward content. (Marett 1914a: xxviii)

In his book Anthropology Marett formulated his basic idea in a very
functionalistic manner: “Psychologically regarded, then, the function
of religion is to restore men’s confidence when it is shaken by crisis”
(1912a: 221).

Czaplicka was a faithful disciple of her mentor. This is not evident,
however, in the footnotes to her texts: she did not refer to his works at
all. But the influence of his ideas is clearly discernible in the content:
her focusing on religious issues; her use of specific terms (such as mana
and taboo); not differentiating between religious and magical phenom-
ena, but using the phrase “magico-religious”; and the psychologically
functional concept of religion. Yet the main influence Marett had on
his student consisted in encouraging her to take an interest in Siberia.

At the end of May 1912 the Congress of Americanists took place
in London, attended among others by Franz Boas, as well as Lev
Shternberg and Waldemar Jochelson, former political exiles in Siberia
and researchers on the Siberian peoples. The Russian ethnographers
familiarized their British colleagues with the results of their many years
of observation. Marett was impressed by their work, and assigned to
Czaplicka the task of writing a book reporting on the state of knowledge
of the peoples of Siberia, based on Russian and Polish sources unavail-
able to British anthropologists. It was in this way that the book Aborigi-
nal Siberia. A Study in Social Anthropology came about, published in 1914
by Clarendon Press, Oxford. The book is to a large extent dedicated to
magico-religious issues, especially shamanism.

In his preface to the book, Marett pointed out the originality of
Czaplicka’s approach and her own contribution, which went beyond
a mere critical elaboration of her sources. He focused on three issues.
Firstly, Marett wrote that “her classification of ethnic groups is, so far
as I know, her own” (Marett 1914b: vi); she had distinguished between
Paleo-Siberians (ancient inhabitants of the country), and Neo-Siberians
(tribes that came there later). According to Marett, this was a very
important distinction, because it stressed the similarities caused by
cultural contact. He also noted that there were certainly various racial types within each group.

Secondly, in Marett’s opinion, Czaplicka presented the problem of the nature of shamanism in a very novel manner. The difficulty in this case lay in the fact that some anthropologists were using the word “shamanism” as a general term for the magico-religious life of primitive peoples, in which “possession” plays an important role. Others applied it only to determine the specific type of religious experience limited to north-east Asia and with no analogies in other parts of the world. “Miss Czaplicka, however,” wrote her mentor,

. . . deftly steers the middle course, doing justice to the peculiarities of the local type, or (shall we say?) types, and yet indicating clearly that a number of elements common to the life and mind of primitive mankind in general have there met together and taken on a specific shape. (Marett 1914b: vii)

Here, Marett draws attention to the problem, about which Evans-Pritchard wrote critically, of anthropologists taking over some indigenous expressions, simplifying them and using them for similar phenomena in other parts of the world (Evans-Pritchard 1965). He considered this an abuse, and something that flattened the wealth of local meanings. It seems that Czaplicka was also aware of the danger. Marett, however, described her position as a compromise, something which I disagree with. Czaplicka used the term only in the Siberian context, and drew attention to the diversity of meanings of various indigenous names for a shaman.

Other achievements of Czaplicka’s mentioned by Marett were her own interpretations of some “strange phenomena.” One of these was what had sometimes been called the “sexual ambiguity of the shaman.” Her mentor believed that the theory of the young scholar attributing shamans to a third or neutral sex would explain much in this regard. Finally, according to him Czaplicka gathered first-hand information about the unusual facts of “mental pathology” contained in the handy category of “arctic hysteria.” “This side of her work is all the more important, because, apart from these facts, it is difficult or impossible to appreciate justly the religious life of these Siberian tribes” (Marett 1914b: viii). It is important to note that this may have been Marett’s own belief, because Czaplicka’s text is not that clear-cut.
I will not summarize the whole book here, but show how it is constructed and focus on some important problems. The main and longest part of *Aboriginal Siberia* is devoted to “Religion” and consists of several chapters: “Shamanism” (definitional problems); “The Shaman” (functions, vocation, preparatory period); “Types of Shaman”; “The Accessories of the Shaman”; “The Shaman in Action”; “Shamanism and Sex” (female shamans, sex reversals); “Gods, Spirits, Souls”; “Some Ceremonies.” All the material is broken into two parts, pertaining to the Paleo-Siberians and the Neo-Siberians. The final part—the shortest one—is called “Pathology,” and consists of only one chapter: “Arctic Hysteria” (quotation marks in original). This is quite an important issue, as some commentators (including Mircea Eliade) expressed the view that, *inter alia*, through Czaplicka’s book the notion of the “psychopathological phenomenology of Siberian shamanism” was cemented (Eliade 2001: 35). But what did Czaplicka actually write about the issue?

The chapter begins with an overview of diseases that Siberian natives are prone to: first of all, “syphilis and the so-called ‘arctic hysteria’’. Under the latter name the several different nervous maladies are usually included by writers who deal with the subject” (Czaplicka 1914b: 307). Moreover, Czaplicka lists other diseases: leprosy and *sibirskâia iazva* (anthrax, carbuncle). She gives information about the symptoms of these diseases, and focuses on mental ones:

Many writers have noticed the extreme liability of primitive peoples to hysterical diseases. Apart from hysteria, which underlies many magico-religious phenomena, travelers have noticed the prevalence of similar nervous affections, which have no connection with religion, among primitives in all parts of the world. (Czaplicka 1914b: 308)

She points out that “arctic hysteria” was mentioned by previous authors—Georg Wilhelm Steller, Stiepan Kraszeninnikow, Johan Georg Gmelin and Peter Simon Pallas—and fuller descriptions could be found in the works of Vladimir Bogoraz, Richard Otto Maak, Wacław Sieroszewski, Vasili Prikolnski, Leopold von Schrenck, Bronisław Piłsudski, Nikolai Kharuzin, Harry Whitney, and especially Jochelson. Czaplicka writes later that cases of hysteria, which are related to the religious life of the natives, and which they regard as “inspiration,” were mentioned in the chapter on shamanism, and there she wanted to focus “on those forms which the natives themselves recognize as symptomatic of dis-
“arctic hysteria” (Czaplicka 1914b: 309). This is a very important observation. The author did not wish to impose European categories, but instead proposed seeing the problem as the users of those cultures did. Here again, one can see the influence of Marett, who recommended that the facts be reported from the perspective of the natives (Marett 1912b: 252–253).

She then cites the most characteristic descriptions of various authors, coming to the conclusion that “arctic hysteria” refers to various diseases. Some researchers (Prikłonski, Sieroszewski and Jochelson) tried to sort this out, distinguishing above all two ailments. First, with *menerik* (the Yakut name), an affected person gets spasms, or goes into a trance, yells and dances, which sometimes ends with an epileptic attack. The natives believed that this happened under the influence of spirits. Second, with *amurakh* (again a Yakut word), oversensitivity, a feeling of fear and timidity, a patient shouts obscene words, and runs away. A tendency to repeat all one’s visual and auditory impressions was another symptom.

Czaplicka also mentioned other diseases: singing while asleep, an attack of dyspnea, erotic mania, melancholia and voluntary death. She pointed out that none of the authors describing the afflictions was a psychiatrist. Taking all material into consideration, she tried to find some regularity. Women and shamans were more prone to these diseases. *Menerik* particularly affected young girls and some boys, especially those who were training as shamans. On the other hand, *amurakh* affected older people between 35 and 50 years of age. These two diseases were more frequent among the Neo-Siberians and Russian settlers, while Paleo-Siberians suffered rather from melancholia and voluntary death. Nomads and reindeer herders suffered less, but this may have been as a result of their better material situation.

Czaplicka concluded that the whole of Siberia was a region where people suffered from nervous diseases more than anywhere else. However, only there was the institution of voluntary death “looked upon as praiseworthy” and hereditary hysterical individuals—the shamans—respected. However, she stressed that neither the institution of voluntary death nor the hysterical attacks of shamans could be called diseases, as natives themselves did not consider them as such. It was a part of “their nature—pathological from our point of view, but normal or supra-normal from theirs” (Czaplicka 1914b: 319). But some mental disorders were considered a disease even in the eyes of the natives. It was hard to say for her what they thought was the boundary between the disease and inspiration. In all cases of *menerik*, the disease was
attributed to evil spirits, but the shaman was supposed to fight against the evil and exercise in silencing these spirits, while a mere mortal was just a “sick person.”

It is true that with the shaman no nervous disease, even menerik, can be developed so far as to cease to be under his control. If a shaman cannot control and invoke the spirits at the right time, he ceases to be a shaman. Even if we call the hereditary shamanistic gift a hereditary form of hysteria, or a hereditary disposition to hysteria, which very often develops only during the trying preparatory period, it is never of such an advanced form as to be called by the natives a disease. (Czaplicka 1914b: 320)

Next, she considered the term “Arctic” and observed that most of these symptoms also occurred in Europe, with the only specific symptom being amurakh, mania to imitate. She then pointed out that earlier authors had attributed these forms of “arctic hysteria” to arctic conditions: the dark days of winter and bright summer nights, severe cold, the silence and monotonous landscape, the scarcity of food, etc. However, such cases could also be found in the equatorial regions, and she cited a detailed description of latah, Malay disease. She came to the conclusion that the cause of the disease was not specifically the arctic climate, but climate extremes. Another cause could be a factor of race: amurakh mainly affected the Mongol tribes. Later, she also wondered whether the term “hysteria” was at all appropriate for amurakh, because the attacks were unconscious.

Thus, Czaplicka in fact deconstructed the concept of “arctic hysteria” and showed that it was a term invented by European travelers and applied to identify the various pathological symptoms in the European sense. Natives themselves did not consider some of these phenomena as diseases at all, but rather something worthy of respect. In her opinion, what might possibly be named “arctic hysteria,” namely amurakh, was not specific to the Arctic climate (but to extremes), and in fact was not really hysterical (because unconscious). However, she did not renounce the pathologization of shamans’ behavior, but rather the use of the European nomenclature. She used the typical arguments of cultural

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3 All texts of Czaplicka cited in this paper are reprinted in Czaplicka 1999.
relativism: not to apply the word “normal” or “disease” in a Western sense to other cultural contexts.

Later authors referred to Czaplicka when they wrote about the “neurotic-epileptoid” world of northern shamanism (Radin 1937: 110), or compared it with similar phenomena elsewhere (Layard 1930; Benedict 2005/1934), but at least one author viewed her position in a more nuanced way (Chadwick 1936). Nonetheless, many later writers held Czaplicka (together with others, like Bogoraz) responsible for the psychopathologizing of shamanism (e.g. Eliade 2001; Znamenski 2007; Wallis 2003; or Szyjewski 2005).

Yet this responsibility should be considered in the broader historical context, as was done by Alby Stone. He poses a question: if shamans were apparently in good physical condition then why were they portrayed as “neurotics or madmen by keen-eyed anthropologists” (Stone 2003: 34)? He argues that at the end of the nineteenth century the belief predominated among intellectuals that primitive peoples in general were particularly prone to neurosis and other forms of psychopathology, not just those who lived in cold climates. And he cited Czaplicka as an illustration: “many writers have noticed the extreme liability of primitive peoples in hysterical diseases” (Czaplicka 1914b: 308). Thus it was quite understandable that shamanism was seen mainly in terms of “arctic hysteria.” As a second reason, Stone refers to the fact that psychiatry, which developed in the nineteenth century, has allowed many deviant and unusual behaviors to be interpreted in terms of mental illness. Anthropologists have also succumbed to this attitude, and used this language (Stone 2003: 34). This might have been the case with Czaplicka, as she consulted her book with specialists whom she had known personally: Sir William Osler, a famous physician; and William McDougall, a psychologist (see Czaplicka 1914b: 324), who perceived the problem in medical categories.

In this context, Andrei A. Znamenski recalls the figure of Sergei Shirokogoroff: “While Czaplicka was putting together her Aboriginal Siberia in England, he and his wife were doing fieldwork among the Evenki people” (Znamenski 2007: 88). In his main work Shirokogoroff rejected Western interpretations of hysteria as misconceptions. What was unusual and bizarre to the people of the West was quite normal to the indigenous cultures. According to Shirokogoroff, the Tungus “routinely wrapped intimate information in the language of the fit performances.” The fit was a convenient form in which to dramatize their
The Shaman’s Curse

fears, expectations, and sentiments” (Znamenski 2007: 88). Thus, in the case of Shirokogoroff it was his long and intensive fieldwork that made him skeptical toward the theory of the psycho-pathological character of Siberian shamanism.

What was the case with Czaplicka and her own personal and experiential encounter with Siberia?

The Yenisei Expedition and My Siberian Year

The expedition consisted of four people: Czaplicka herself as a leader; Maud D. Haviland, an ornithologist; Dora Curtis, a painter and photographer; and Hall, an American representing Pennsylvania University Museum, who was to help the expedition leader in her anthropometric measurements and collecting artifacts. They traveled by the Trans-Siberian Railway as far as Krasnoiarsk on the Yenisei, and later by a steamer down the river to its mouth at Golchikha, where they stayed for the summer and met native inhabitants, mostly the Nenets (Samoyeds, as they were called then). Later the English ladies went back and the anthropologists stayed for the winter, traveling eastwards to the Limpiĭsk tundra, where they studied the Evenki (then termed Tungus). On their way back they stopped at Abakan Steppe. By the time they returned to Europe World War I was already in full swing.

The first information on shamanism which I found in Czaplicka’s materials appears in her letter to Miss Emily Penrose, the principal of Somerville College, Oxford, which sponsored her journey, at the end of the first part of the expedition spent at the mouth of the Yenisei:

I have come across only one shaman and a shamaness. The latter was, as it turned out, my rival, for I have a number of patients to treat every day and our Burroughs Wellcome equipment is half empty already. (dated September 16, 1914; Collins 1994/5: 71)

In her lecture delivered in January 1916 and published in Journal of the Manchester Geographic Society, she recalled that during their stay at the mouth of the Yenisei they had had no major problems with securing anthropometric measurements, and collecting tales with a help of a native interpreter, but it had been much more difficult “to observe
the customs, or shamanistic ceremonies” (Czaplicka 1916a: 30). Of the nature of these difficulties, her companion Curtis wrote:

In the summer of this year I heard from far off the beating of the magic drum, and saw the head of a sacrificial reindeer impaled on a stake after a ceremony held over a sick body. But the natives scattered on our approach, and refused to admit they had been shamanising. The Orthodox Greek Faith has not taken root amongst these people and the icons they carry about and place in their “chooms” (tents) are regarded as of little account. (Curtis 1915: 622)

An old Samoyed told them that a few years previously there had been an epidemic of smallpox and measles. His eldest son had become ill and the father had gone to a medical expedition, which was in Golchikha, but found the doctor so drunk that he was unable to come. He then threw the icon out of the tent and went to the shaman. This story is also described in Haviland’s book (1916).

Czaplicka, in her article about the Evenki published in the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, writes:

On the ceremonial costume of the Tungus priest or shaman, we find representations of many animals which they do not possess in the north, and in fact the forms of these are in some cases so much degenerated that I would scarcely dare to define them without native help. I remember once examining the figures of animals carved in driftwood and placed at a deceased shaman’s grave. (Since the shaman has all the universe at his service when he prays to the highest being, all the universes as seen by the Tungus must be represented at his grave.) I asked a friendly Tungus who was explaining to me the meaning of the figures what two particularly shapeless forms represented. (Czaplicka 1917a: 294)

One of them was a mammoth, another a dromedary. And later she presents some generalization:

In their religious ideas, oral literature, and decorative ornaments, the Tungus are typical of a migrating people. In spite of a formal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church, nearly all the Tungus still practise Shamanism, but there is not found among them the deep-rooted belief or the richness of ceremony that are characteristic of Samoyed Shamanism. The only Shamanistic performances they still practise are those which are supposed to produce fertility. (Czaplicka 1917a: 301)
Czaplicka authored several entries in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, where she described various Siberian tribes. Information is also given about shamanism, but this is quite general. This is the only passage which is more personal and based on her own experience:

The actual shamanistic performances are very similar in type among all the natives of N. Siberia (the Ostyaks of N. Siberia include the Ugrian Ostyaks and the Ostyaks of the Yenisei), and anyone who has once seen a shamanistic ceremony and received an explanation of it can follow quite easily the ceremonies of a totally different tribe, even though ignorant of their language. With some variation and addition, there are several chief points which appear in all the ceremonies: the wandering of the shaman to the upper and lower worlds, his struggle or merely argument with the spirits upon whom the fate of the man for whom the ceremonies are being performed depends, the return of the shaman, and the communication to the man of the result of his interview with the spirits, sometimes also the foretelling of the future of various people present at the ceremony. (Czaplicka 1917b: 580)

Still, the main source of information concerning the Yenisei Expedition and its scientific results is the popular travel book *My Siberian Year* published by Czaplicka in 1916. In an interview, Habeck, an anthropologist who carried out his fieldwork in Siberia, described it as follows: “the style was nice, entertaining, good to read, at times chatty, but nonetheless—valuable scientific material.”4 I have tried to sift out those elements that are related to shamanism. What is especially interesting is a detailed description of a shamanic séance that Czaplicka attended together with Hall. In fact, they ordered it, because it was the only chance to observe such a procedure. The same “trick” was adopted by Jochelson with a Koryak shaman (see Czaplicka 1914b: 229), and Elsie Parsons with native healers while she was working among American Indians (Schumaker 2008: 279).

I managed to find several versions of the description of the séance Czaplicka and Hall took part in. One of them was included in the second edition of the book by Edward Clodd (1840–1930), *A Brief History and Examination of Modern Spiritualism* (1917). The author was a very

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4 An interview with Joachim Otto Habeck carried out in Halle, Max Planck Institute, in January 2010 (transcript in my archives).
interesting character: a banker, writer and anthropologist, founder of
the Folklore Society, a supporter of Charles Darwin, and a friend of
Thomas Huxley and Herbert Spencer. He had a large circle of acquain-
tances, whom he received at his home in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, at Pente-
cost. It is possible that he also hosted Czaplicka, whom he might have
known via the Folklore Society.

The relevant fragment was included in the chapter entitled “Mrs.
Piper” (after Leonora Piper, a famous medium). Clodd wrote that dur-
ing the session the observer noticed changes in her face: eyes fixed,
lower lip twitches, as if asleep. “To this,” Clodd observed “insightfully,”
“savage culture supplies a crowd of parallels, from which a few examples
may be given” (Clodd 1917: 193), and he cited cases from Fiji, Uganda,
Patagonia and finally:

Perhaps the most striking example is that told me by Miss Czaplicka, who dur-
ing her intrepid travels through Siberia cleverly secured admission to a shaman-
istic séance. The shaman sat near a low fire in the tent, the sitters ranged round
him. None must touch him nor move, lest the spirits should be disturbed. He
beat the drum gently at the start, and then by degrees more loudly—the drum-
ming is called “the language of the spirits,” whereby they are summoned. He
accompanies this with chants, sometimes with imitations of voices of men and
animals, of winds and echoes (for the shaman is a skilful ventriloquist); he sings
songs, and dances; then the drum is no longer beaten and the fire is put out.
Gentle raps or taps of the spirits are heard; the shaman makes a rushing noise,
as if escaping from the tent. After an interval of a quarter of an hour or longer
he bumps on the ground to indicate his return. Sometimes he affects exhaustion
and waits a while before telling the sitters what message he has brought from
the spirits. (Clodd 1917: 194)

Later, Clodd refers to Tylor and his *Early History of Mankind*, and
indicates the similarity of savage sorcery with its “childish instruments”
(drums, rattles) and that they are “in full consistency with the theory
that both belong to the infancy of mankind” and the spirit-rapper with
the African *mganga*, or “Red Indian medicine-man.” He then mentions
that Andrew Lang referred to Mrs. Piper as the survival of wild phe-
nomena (Clodd 1917: 141).

This way of thinking presented by Clodd is a very good example of
the approach to religion by evolutionists criticized by Evans-Pritchard.
Descriptions of some rituals from different regions taken out of context
are put together in order to illustrate a previously formulated thesis. Clodd did not bother, for example, about such details as to what Siberian tribe the shaman belonged, or what his name was. He was interested in showing the affinity of various “childish” behaviors.

In her travel book, Czaplicka gave another version of her encounter with the “big Samoyed shaman Bokkobushka.” She starts with the remark that though she had already spent over three months among the “northern natives” and had close and friendly relations with them, they did not consider her enough of an “insider” to be able to participate in a shamanic ritual. But the reader can deduce that she finally managed to.

This took place on an island on the Yenisei, not far from the mouth. They were traveling on the Oryol steamboat up the river to Monastyr, where they were to begin their winter trip to the country of the Evenki. This was shortly after parting with her companions, who returned to England by ship via Kara Sea. Czaplicka was very worried about their fate, because they were at risk from ice floes and German mines.

Bokkobushka had spent the summer fishing on the river, and we found his chum [tent] a few yards from the water’s edge. We went in and paid our respects to his wife, who sent to call the shaman from his task of cobbling his net. Soon he came in, a little dark man, with a single eye gleaming from under a heavier brow-ridge than one usually sees in a Samoyed. His piercing glance seemed to be trying to search out my most inward thought, as I greeted him and put my request. It was necessary to offer a pretext for requiring him to shamanize, and groping as I was in the dark for some, for any, solace to my anxieties, it was not without a dim fantastic stirring of belief and hope somewhere in those obscure depths of consciousness, where lurk in all of us the shadowy remains of far-off ancestral faiths, that I asked Bokkobushka to “look into my way,” to tell me what the future held for me.

How did I know he was a tadihay (Samoyed for “shaman”)? Why, everyone on the river had heard of Bokkobushka.—But there was a pope5 on the steamer.—Yes, but no more boats were coming ashore, and we would guarantee the batyushka should not hear of it, if he would shamanise for me. The Samoyed have not forgotten the rigorous persecution of their shamans by the Church authorities some years ago, though at present they are not much interfered with. I went on to urge that I was very far from home and very anxious to know how

5 A priest of the Orthodox Church in Russia.
I and my people would fare before I returned to them. At last Bokkobushka consented to call up his spirits, and the performance began.

He seated himself cross-legged on the ground, while his assistant, a young Yurak brought up in a Samoyed family, threw over him a cloth, which completely concealed him from view. After some moments of silence, broken only by the crackling of the driftwood fire in the centre of the chum, a low sound of chanting arose from the cone-shaped bundle that was all we could see of Bokkobushka. His chant rose progressively in pitch and volume to the middle of a long verse or rhythmical sentence, on two or three notes smooth and monotonous, broke into a quavering staccato, then sank again smoothly to the end of the verse, and paused to await the similarly chanted response from the assistant. This continued for some five minutes, and then the tadibey inquired, through his assistant, whether one of us had not been ill during our journey down the river. I had, and said so. Had we not, one or both, some dark spots on the right arm? I confessed to a mole. “Ah,” said Bokkobushka, “the spirits know you.”

Silence again, followed by a low moaning sound, which gradually became articulate as the chanting was resumed, to be followed by another short silence. Then the result of this second colloquy with the spirits was communicated to me, again through the assistant. There would be “much business” for me when I returned to my country (which I should reach safely), and where I had left one home, I should find three homes made one. Prophecy strangely—and sadly—fulfilled since, though I do not suppose that Bokkobushka had any conception of a wider sense of “home” than was actually involved in his use of the Samoyed word for “tent.”

First we had had divination, and then prophecy. The shaman now threw off his cloth, and began the third stage of his shamanising—a contest with the spirits of disease. The same antiphonal chanting, broken this time by sentences uttered in a conversational tone—a dialogue with the evil spirits. When this was over, the shaman dipped his fingers into a cup of water and touched my cheek below the left ear three times. He had requested the spirit of small-pox not to touch me, but the spirit would make no promise, and, indeed, had declared its intention of paying me a visit. Therefore, Bokkobushka, to thwart him, wrought this charm. Now the malicious bringer of disease would not dare to come near me. (Czaplicka 1916b: 197–201)

Another description of the event, slightly shortened, I found in a manuscript of the lecture which Czaplicka gave on her return in many centers in the United Kingdom. There is a specified date and place of the séance:
It was on the tenth of September, at Seliyakina Pyesok, during one of our trips ashore from the Oryol, that we witnessed a typical shamanistic performance in the chum of the shaman Bokkobushka, a Khantaisk Samoyed. (Czaplicka’s Papers, Lucy Cavendish College Archives, Cambridge University)

Hall’s text *The Siberian Expedition* gives more details:

Before setting out upon the winter journey to the Tungus territory [. . .], we consulted the Samoyed shaman Bokkobushka, saying that we wished to know how we should fare on our way. I am bound to say that we did not receive any very definite information, the only thing in the nature of a prophecy spoken by the seer being a cryptic utterance addressed to Miss Czaplicka which might be interpreted as having a certain bearing on political conditions in Poland brought about by the war. (Hall 1916: 39)

It could be understood that reborn Poland would emerge out of the three parts into which it had been partitioned in the eighteenth century. Apart from the description of the séance, in her travel book Czaplicka discussed many important issues connected with shamanism and presented her views, which were based on her deep understanding of the problems, but she did so in an accessible and interesting way. One such important issue was the functioning of religion: the official Orthodox Church and underground shamanism. Czaplicka called it the indigenous religion of Siberia, and saw the influence of Christianity only in the fact that the native pantheon of deities was enriched by yet another one (the Christian God), and that some new superstitions, those of Russian peasants, were added to those of the natives. In her opinion, the weak efforts of missionaries could not put a strain on the strong relationship between wild nature and paganism, which was an expression of it. The author criticized the position of some Russian scholars who maintained that the natives and Sibiriaks who rejected membership in a particular religion were atheists. According to her, they still had “a belief in the unearthly, the something outside oneself towards which men, especially in primitive conditions, turn in moments of stress or crisis. And to the man who has to face harsh nature almost bare-handed such moments are of frequent occurrence” (Czaplicka 1916b: 196). She went on to add that an observer who saw what almost all the indigenous tribes did before going hunting and fishing, or when the sun returned after the winter darkness, or when they went for a long trip, or when someone
Grażyna Kubica

got sick, could not be accused of atheism. Here again, Marett’s theory is clearly visible: religion was already present in faith in non-human powers, to which a person turned in times of crisis. And also we can assume that she herself was the observer and could see all those proceedings.

According to Czaplicka, not all the natives were experts on their religion; this was the role of a shaman, who was usually “a person of strong will and remarkable imaginative faculty, [who] strongly impresses by his personality any one who comes under his influence” (Czaplicka 1916b: 197). This introduction was followed by the description of Bokkobushka’s session, which I have already quoted. There is no mention of any “hysteria” or other “psycho-pathology.”

She then focused on the Evenki, who were “rather cynical and cold-blooded” in their approach to religion. She cited a number of specific situations. One was the story of a young Evenki named Myanda, whom they met at Lake Chirinda in February 1915, at the time of munyak (the Evenki native council). He had just come from another lake, which was about four days away, where he had visited a shamaness: “I shall shoot many reindeer this season. She said so,” goes the quotation in the book. And he pulled from under his robes a figurine of a reindeer carved by himself in wood and dipped in the blood of reindeer killed for spirits intended to guarantee good luck during the hunt. The author concluded the story: “So the Tungus, too, reaches out into the unknown with faith at moments when he feels that life or livelihood are at stake” (1916b: 203). Here again her interpretation is very “Marettian” in showing the psychological function of religious beliefs.

In discussing the duality of good and evil forces, Czaplicka cites a story which showed that with a shaman not everything was always clear-cut. The great Evenki shaman, Langa, was the grandfather of Michika, her dame de compagnie. The same story was told by Hall in his short text on shamanic figurines (Hall 1919: 10):

The shaman Langa, of the Hukachar family group of Limpiisk Tungus, one day about fifty years ago, fired with the patriotic idea of putting out of the way as many Russians as he could, went in, so the Tungus say, from the tundra to the Yenisei, ostensibly to exchange fox and ermine pelts for supplies at the nearest trading post on the river, really to work disaster to all the white men living along the stream. Langa’s spirit helper, or one of them, was, it seems, the smallpox spirit. He sent this to the Russians—after concluding his deal in furs—and they began to die off “like sick reindeer.” After a time the smallpox spirit appears to
have got beyond control and taken to killing Tungus in the tundra. So Langa, they say, sent the bird away to the north, to the Dolgan and the Samoyed.

During meetings of more people, Czaplicka wrote, sometimes there would be fights between shamans to test their powers, as was the case with some Nenets and Yakut shaman who competed with each other for years: on earth and in the sky, in the water and below. Nenets lived to see the death of an enemy, but was eventually defeated by him, which was a confirmation of the superiority of the Yakut culture. Czaplicka heard the story told by the brother of the defeated shaman.

Even more dramatic was the story of Chunga Hiragir, who belonged to one of the two most powerful clans of Limpiĭsk Evenki and was several times a “prince,” and who offended a Chapogir shaman. Chunga was drunk when he said that the Chapogir were savages and had no powerful shamans. The shaman cursed him in response. Chunga’s family started to encounter disasters, even though the shaman died shortly after the event. The Limpiĭsk shaman’s effort did not help. Chunga was to be “all alone like a finger.” Czaplicka told the story very vividly and in detail, showing how strong belief in a prophecy made it real. She recalled that at the request of Chunga she had lent him 50 rubles, which he had paid back just before her departure from Turukhansk. And she concluded with the following self-effacing remark:

And even now it makes me shudder to think—it is absurd of course—that perhaps I, too, was drawn into the meshes of the web spun for Chunga’s undoing, and made an unwitting instrument of the dead shaman’s vengeance. (Czaplicka 1916b: 224)

Here, the author uses a rhetorical device which showed that she was a European scholar who did not believe in miracles, but she also shows the power of suggestion, of which she was, in a sense, prey. For us, as readers who know the tragic end of her life, the story and the final sentence have another meaning: we can see in her suicide another confirmation of an Evenki shaman curse, or the potency of suggestion. Or another impressive rhetorical device.

And this is more or less everything that Czaplicka writes about shamanism in her travelogue. Most striking is the lack of “psychopathological” discourse in relation to shamanism. There is no mention of any “arctic hysteria,” or other morbid sources of shamanic vocation.
Czaplicka writes about these people with respect, without exoticizing, or succumbing to moral panic. She describes specific people and specific situations, but there are also some generalizations and remarks at a macro-sociological level. Religions are not shown as separate paradigms but as overlapping and mutually conditioning processes which have an official side and a private one. The concept of religious syncretism would be fitting to describe the situation, although she does not use it.

Shamanism in Czaplicka’s and Hall’s Photographs and Collections

The photographs published in Aboriginal Siberia came from the collections of Piłsudski and the St Petersburg museum the Kunstkamera. There are none that represent shamans or their accessories.

The collection of photographs of Czaplicka at the Pitt Rivers Museum and Hall at Pennsylvania University Museum contain a few photos which are relevant here. One of them shows the “Tungus shaman in his ceremonial dress.” There are two versions of the image: in the first (which is in the Pennsylvania University Museum collection, and published in Hall 1916 (fig. 2) a man is standing in front of a door and log wall, dressed in a coat and an apron with lots of rattles, a cap with long fringes, in one hand holding a kind of fur club, and with the other resting on the drum sitting on the floor. The second picture shows the same man in a sitting position (it was published in Czaplicka 1916a and Czaplicka 1916b, and is not part of her collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum). Both pictures are technically very good: the figure of the shaman is properly exposed and focused, and they are better than other images made by Czaplicka. She did not take them herself. They have been copied from pictures made by Finnish ethnographer and explorer, Kai Donner (published also in Hoppál 2009: 74).

The second set of two pictures shows the “Yenisei Ostiak Shaman,” and was taken in Turukhansk (according to the description in Hall’s collection at Pennsylvania University Museum). The whole figure is visible, once in front and once to the side. The picture was taken inside in front of a white wall, probably in the house the anthropologists occupied after returning from their summer stay at the mouth of the Yenisei, and before embarking on the winter trip to the Limpiisk tun-
Fig. 2. "Tungus shaman's costume and drum." H. U. Hall Collection, image no. 25300. It is a copy of a photograph taken by Kai Donner. Reproduced here by permission of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology & Anthropology.
dra, or, possibly after returning from there. The shaman is wearing a fur jacket and trousers, and a kind of “frill” of metal plates and fringes. In his right hand he holds something like a lollipop, and in the other hand an angular drum. He has no cap or any other head covering, only long black hair. The picture was probably taken with a flash, as there is a shadow of a model in the wall falling on the right side, so the light source (exploding magnesia) had to be on the left. Because of the flash the image is well lit and sharp. Both images (negatives) are in Hall’s collection at Pennsylvania University Museum; they were published by him (Hall 1916, see fig. 3) and Czaplicka (1916b). There are also two photographs of the grave of a Tungus shaman at Chirinda Lake in the Hall’s collection.

In Czaplicka’s collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum there is an image of a shaman with a drum. He is standing in front of a tent in the snow. The picture is quite dark; it was taken at night with a light (flash or fire). The clothes are not visible, but only a sort of a fur coat. The intent gaze of the shaman is conspicuous. The image was not posed; it was a snapshot. It is reproduced on the display board in the museum depicting the theme of “Magic & Religion,” and the picture itself is titled: “Shaman with drum Tungus? Musical instruments.” Therefore, the ethnic affiliation is not certain, but it is quite likely, as it was taken in the winter when the expedition visited the areas of the Evenki. There is only a print of this image at the Pitt Rivers Museum, but they probably also used to have a negative, because Czaplicka wrote to Henry Balfour, the curator of Pitt Rivers Museum, about it:

If you do not mind my making the suggestion, I think he [the photographer, Kettler] would get better results with the shaman using paper with a dull surface and giving a strong white and black contrasting effect. (A letter of 15 December 1915, Pitt Rivers Museum, Balfour Coll., C.4.)

She had extensive knowledge on the subject and suggested the way the photograph should be developed to make it more readable.

It is unlikely, then, that any of these images represents Bokkobushka. There is another picture in the Pitt Rivers Museum (B 59/22c) of a “shaman’s chum (dwelling) with hut in front in which he ‘shamanizes’ with pole for sacrificial offerings.” No tribe is mentioned.
Fig. 3. “Siberia Turukhansk. Yenisei Ostiak shaman, full face.”
H. U. Hall Collection, image no 25314. Photographed probably
by Maria A. Czaplicka. Reproduced here by permission of the
University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology & Anthropology.
The collection of Siberian artifacts deposited in the Pitt Rivers Museum by Czaplicka is quite rich in shamanic elements. I have ordered descriptions of them by tribe.

Evenki (Tungus):
(i) “Djur, shaman’s single-membrane drum, Llimpijsk Tungus”
(ii) “reindeer-skin cover of a shaman’s drum, Llimpijsk Tungus”
(iii) “Oli, wooden model of a raven, from the grave of Nakte, a Tungus shaman of Yakut origin, Lake Chirinda, East of Yenesei; (also model of a fish from the same grave)”
(iv) “Haman gus (shaman’s eagle), iron figure from the coat of a shaman Chiragir Tungus, Llimpijsk tundra”
(v) “iron model of a bird, diver (Colymbus), haman ukang (shaman’s gagara or diver), from a shaman’s coat, Chiragir Tungus, Llimpijsk tundra”
(vi) “iron ‘sun’ symbol attached to skin of a bear’s head, hamabek dela-cha (shaman’s sun), from the ceremonial coat of Hukachar Langa, a deceased Tungus shaman, Llimpijsk district”
(vii) “iron staff, daradgi (face) used by shaman when meditating (tutau-tsyevun), Tungus, Lake Turukunda. Belonged to a family of hereditary shamans (Turiisk) [rather: Turylsk]”
(viii) “Gihu, drum-stick of a shaman’s drum. The back of the beater has a strip of recycled metal on it. Tungus, belonged to a deceased shamaness, Bahalakan Oyogir; bought from her grandson near Ulurukta”
(ix) “bone-headed arrow used in shamanising, Pankagir Tungus”

Kets (Yenisei Ostyaks):
(i) “Head ornament Bird figure, shaman’s head-ornament with iron figures of divers (Colymbus), Ostyak-Samoyed, Sim R., middle Yenesei (material: iron, bead, animal leather skin)”
(ii) “shaman’s apron with iron figures of sun, divers and fish (the lateral pendants), Ostyak of the Yenesei”
(iii) “wooden figure of Parde, a secondary shaman’s spirit, bought from Baishinski, an Ostyak-Samoyed, Yenesei River”
(iv) “old cast-bronze figure of a god, found on the bank of a tributary of the Yenesei, near Golchika”
(v) “Shaman’s crown of iron surmounted by small imitations of reindeer horns, Samoyedic-Ostyak of the Taz, between Yenesei R. & Ob R.”
(vi) “shaman’s staff of iron in trident staves. Same data as above (Samoyedic-Ostyak of the Taz, between Yenesei R. & Ob R.)”
(vii) “Nunga, shaman’s single membrane drum, with drum stick, kapchen, Yenesei Ostyak”
(viii) “wooden model of shaman’s iron staff, Ostyak-Samoyed, Yenesei R”.

Tatars:
(ix) “Tuda, wooden imitation of the support and handle of a shaman drum. This now takes the place of the drum itself (which is forbidden by the Russian authorities). Kachints or (Minusinsk Tartars), Abakan R. Minusinsk.”\(^6\)

This list reveals further details of Czaplicka’s contacts with her Evenki and Nenets friends: Chunga (Hiragir), Michika (grand-daughter of the shaman Langa), and others. She had close relationships with these people, so the origin of these objects could have been well documented.

Hall’s collection also contains some shamanic elements (drums and other objects). In his report he wrote about contemporary changes in shamans’ equipment:

It is curious to note the manner in which the persecution of shamans has influenced the forms of shamanist accessories. The shaman’s drum and coat were the chief objects of ecclesiastical prohibitions. Thus, while many shamans have now abandoned the use of the ceremonial coat, all the symbolic figures that normally would adorn the coat now appear upon the apron. (See photograph of Yenisei-Ostiak shaman.) In some places, e.g. on the river Sim, in the middle Yenisei valley, and in the south, some shamans use, instead of the drum, a short wooden truncheon, with symbolic carving, very similar to the drum handle of the Ostyak-Yenisei and “Tartar” shamans. One of these implements, still known as “drums,” is to be sent from Minusinsk to the University Museum. (Hall 1915)

In another text he wrote about the symbolism of the shaman’s drum:

In the middle of the tympanum of this Yeniseian drum is painted a representation of the shaman. The lines radiating from his head symbolize winged thoughts: with admirable economy of effort the artist merely forks the ends of the rays to suggest the wings of birds. Winged rays also proceed from the sun, to

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the left, and the crescent moon to the right, of the central figure. To a wooden bar which extends across the inside of the drum are usually attached small iron figures of birds: the two-headed eagle, teacher of the first shaman; the swan, sacred to Ess; and three divers, messengers to Khosadam. (Hall 1919: 212)

Shamanic objects and images of shamans and related items compose important parts of both collection. They were thoroughly searched for, because it was not easy to get anything of that sort.

Conclusions

Anthropologists who study religion are supposed to answer the question of what the cultural sense of the religious phenomena they investigate is. What would Czaplicka’s answer be as far as Siberian shamanism is concerned? In her *Aboriginal Siberia* she wrote:

> Shamanism seems to be such a natural product of the Continental climate with its extremes of cold and heat, of the violent *burgas* and *burans*, of the hunger and fear which attend the long winters, that not only the Palaeo-Siberians and the more highly cultivated Neo-Siberians, but even Europeans, have sometimes fallen under the influence of certain shamanistic superstitions. (Czaplicka 1914b: 168)

As a geographer she was prone to environmental determinism (see Czaplicka 1914a), but she was also very “Marettian” in stressing the psychological function of shamanism. She was conscious that religion is not a matter of a clear-cut distinction between various religious systems but a matter of overlap and syncretism. I would venture the proposition that Czaplicka’s implicit theory of the cultural sense of shamanism stresses its major role in reducing uncertainty caused by harsh climatic conditions.

Czaplicka’s case, and mainly her involvement in arctic-hysteria theory, is also a very good example of the problem Evans-Pritchard (1965) put forward: early theories of religion were not (and could not be) tested in the field. In her armchair study Czaplicka devoted a lot of attention to the “psycho-pathological base of shamanism,” but in her texts which she published after coming back from the field the problem of arctic hysteria vanished. She started to deal with shamanism as contemporary anthropologists do: studying what people say...
and think about their beliefs and practices, and what role they play in human life (Bowie 2006: 175).

Another interesting problem is connected with the reception of Czaplicka’s ideas. Her book *Aboriginal Siberia* was frequently referred to by scholars until quite recently. Usually the book was consulted as a reservoir of specific examples and data for authors’ own theories (e.g. Nora Chadwick, Ruth Benedict, Paul Radin, Ian Lewis and numerous others). Piers Vitebsky told me in an interview that the book served as a Siberian compendium for Anglophone researchers until they could do fieldwork there themselves. Sometimes, authors claimed the book was the result of Czaplicka’s own fieldwork (Wasilewski 1985; Tomásková 2013), which can be justified only by superficial reading. In recent years Czaplicka’s work has been assessed historically in the broader context of contemporary theories of shamanism (Znamenski, Stone, Jeroen Boekhoven), but that is done mainly by historians or religious scholars. There has been no attempt to assess her work as far as anthropological theory is concerned. I am trying to fill this gap in my biography of Czaplicka (which has just been completed) and, partially, in the present paper.

Some contemporary historians of shamanism call her an “armchair anthropologist” (Znamenski 2007: 75; Boekhoven 2011). The label seems apt as far as the first period of her research is concerned, but I have some reservations. The term is usually used nowadays to criticize Victorian evolutionary scholars who collected information gathered by travelers, or missionaries, put them into some categories regardless of the region the information came from, and in this way produced fantastic theories on the genesis of religion. Czaplicka was certainly not this type of scholar. She worked with materials gathered by good ethnographers in the course of long-term fieldwork; the materials were not from all over the world but came from a specific area; her approach was critical and analytical; her theoretical impact consisted rather in her organizing the material and proposing some interpretation than inventing her own theory and seeking “proof.” But she did write her first anthropological book without leaving her library. This is the reason why I have used the phrase “armchair study” to describe *Aboriginal Siberia.*

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7 An interview with Vitebsky carried out in Cambridge, Scott Polar Research Institute, in March 2012 (transcript in my archive).
8 A recent Polish book about Czaplicka did not meet this expectation (Skowron-Markowska 2012).
Nevertheless, what is crucial in her case, and usually neglected by those who refer to her work, is that she actually went out to the field herself and carried out extensive research among the Nenets and the Evenki. She did write about this, but it was not an academically disciplined text but a travelogue. She was supposed to compose a regular monograph, but the plan was not realized. Her fieldwork materials and notes were sent after her death to Hall to complete the task. Again, this was in vain. Ethel John Lindgren tried to find them later, but she only managed to ascertain that they had disappeared (Kubica 2006). A shaman’s curse? Perhaps.

But despite all this, as I have tried to show in this paper, it is possible (at least partially) to figure out how Czaplicka studied shamanism and what she discovered.

References


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Another research area is connected with her fieldwork in Silesia in Poland. She has recently published a second book about the region: Śląskość i protestantyzm (Silesianness and Protestantism, 2011). She is also a photographer and visual anthropologist.
Despite many years of Soviet rule in Central Asia, traditional medical beliefs and practices were not eradicated and their revival has been noticeable in the independent republics of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Religious and magical healing, including shamanism, are important parts of this renewed tradition. This article, based on extensive fieldwork conducted in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and its vicinity between 1996 and 2000, and in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, between 2011 and 2013, examines the revival of healing, including shamanism. It focuses on the way of a shaman and of other spiritual healers—the process of recognizing the call of spirits and gaining skills and power, peculiarities of their spiritual development and its social conditions. Additionally, I present this kind of healing in the context of complementary medicine in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which, generally, has achieved a strong position in these countries. I discuss complex factors that influence its popularity and official recognition, as well as observable fluctuations in the attitude of the authorities to non-biomedical methods of treatment. On the basis of my analysis I conclude that tradition plays a crucial role in the revival of spiritual healing.

Introduction

This paper discusses the importance of spiritual healing, including shamanism, in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Referring to the context of economic, political and social changes following the collapse of the Soviet Union, I present this phenomenon as a significant part of the Kazakh, Kyrgyz and other Turkic groups’ traditions that have been gaining growing in popularity in the independent states of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. I focus here on the process of becoming a shaman or other spiritual healer, “the way of a shaman,” which has retained its gen-
eral pattern despite some changes that reflect influences of the overall transformations.

The general object of the research that I carried out in Kazakhstan between 1995 and 2000\(^1\) was medical pluralism and the role of complementary medicine in this new post-Soviet state. My further research in Kyrgyzstan in 2011, 2012 and 2013\(^2\) was focused on health-seeking strategies of the inhabitants of the capital city, Bishkek. I studied the reasons for the growing interest in complementary medicine among the public, but was also interested in the attitude of the authorities to different non-biomedical methods of treatment. Spiritual healing belongs to those complementary methods that are highly valued and commonly used in both countries. Although the degree of official recognition differs according to a particular branch of complementary medicine and undergoes some fluctuations, the general stance of the authorities may be characterized as positive or—from time to time—even supportive. This policy contrasts sharply with the previous condemnation and long struggle of the Soviet regime against traditional Kazakh and Kyrgyz medicine and religious healing practices in particular.\(^3\) One of the questions that I address in this context concerns the continuity of tradition. Has it survived despite many years of persecution directed against mullahs, shamans and other religious/spiritual healers? Or is what we observe today in fact quite new phenomena that may be regarded as “invented tradition,” to use Eric Hobsbawm’s (1983) term?\(^4\) The main

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\(^1\) I conducted fieldwork in Almaty and its vicinity. Almaty (previously Alma-Ata) had been the capital city of the Republic of Kazakhstan until the end of 1997 when the capital was transferred to Akmola (former Tselinograd), now renamed Astana.

\(^2\) Research in Kyrgyzstan was funded by the National Centre of Science in Poland (Narodowe Centrum Nauki) through a grant N N109 186440.

\(^3\) In her pioneering book Paula Michaels (2003) discusses thoroughly the issues of the communist campaign against traditional religious and medical practitioners, especially mullahs and shamans, during the first decades of the Soviet regime in Kazakhstan. She also addresses the efforts of Soviet medical propaganda to persuade the local population to distrust traditional healers.

\(^4\) This concept has become fashionable among anthropologists and is often misused. Alain Babadzan (2000: 141) reasonably emphasises that “... the adaptation of traditions need not be confused with the invented traditions.” He notes that according to Hobsbawm’s (1983) ideas, “evolved traditions” (adapted traditions, syncretism, borrowings, reinterpretation or transformation of tradition) should be distinguished from the invented traditions.
The Way of the Shaman and the Revival of Spiritual Healing...

object of my analysis is the process of becoming a healer. I argue here that in the case of spiritual healers, although the continuity of local traditions was disrupted, special strategies have been developed to re-connect the links of that broken chain, so that this process may reasonably be called “the revival of tradition.”

Complementary Medicine and its Official Status in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

Before I present my arguments in more detail, let me map briefly the local field of complementary medicine. Complementary medicine has many forms in Kazakhstan and in Kyrgyzstan which may be roughly grouped into the following categories. First, treatments rooted in what can be generally named local “small medical traditions,” comprising such diverse methods as folk practices of herbalists, midwives and bone-setters as well as spiritual healing of pre-Islamic origins, like shamanic séances or divination combined with healing. There are additionally religious Islamic methods, practiced mainly by mullahs, interwoven with other kinds of spiritual assistance. Another category of complementary therapies consists of numerous practices derived from the various so-called “great medical traditions” of Asian origins, namely Unani, Chinese and Tibetan medicine, Indian Ayurveda and recently adopted Korean medicine, closely related to Chinese practices. Their reception and adaptations well exemplify the process of glocaliza-

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5 I use the term “spiritual healers” in reference to those practitioners who appeal to the spirits (mainly spirits of ancestors and saints) in their activities and whose healing methods are generally of religious-magical nature.

6 Such practices were widely described by Argynbaev 1995; interesting data are published in a collection edited by Sharmanov and Atchabarov 1978, see also Penkala-Gawęcka 2009.

7 Apart from the earlier ethnographic sources from the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, materials on Kazakh and Kyrgyz shamanism can be found, among others: Gonopolskiĭ and Alimkhanov 1978; Basilov 1992; Mustafina 1992; Toleubaev 1997; Garrone 2000; Privratsky 2001.

8 The well-known differentiation between great and small medical traditions (Leslie ed. 1976) seems suitable in this context.
tion (Robertson 1995). Third, we should mention medical traditions of various ethnic groups who immigrated or were deported to this region during the times of imperial Russia and then, on a much larger scale, during the Soviet period. Because of their mutual contacts, it is often difficult to differentiate the origins of particular treatments, however, there are some traits characteristic respectively to Turkic and Slavonic groups. Fourth, there are many new or relatively new methods of treatment and self-treatment that have arrived in recent decades and continue to arrive from Russia and other countries of the former USSR as well as from the West.

There are no clear boundaries between these categories, as practitioners eagerly draw on different sources. Parts of the great medical traditions, recognized officially as “traditional medicine,” have been incorporated into the state system of medical services and are taught at some medical universities in Kazakhstan as well as at the Almaty Institute for the Advancement of Physicians. In Kyrgyzstan medical doctors can get additional training in acupuncture or manual therapy at the Department of Physiotherapy and Traditional Medicine of the Kyrgyz National Medical University in Bishkek. Folk medical practices, including spiritual ones, have also been accepted and even promoted, although doctors are not as unanimous about their value as in the case of so-called traditional medicine. Nevertheless, the acts of parliament About the Health of the Nation of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 1992, 1997 and 2003 confirmed the positive official policy on folk medicine. As for Kyrgyzstan, presently the act of 2007 About Preservation of Traditional Knowledge seems to be especially important for recognition of such methods of treatment. This attitude is clearly associated with the overall rehabilitation of local traditions of the titular nations; similar processes have been observed in other post-Soviet Central Asian states, e.g. in Uzbekistan (Kehl-Bodrogi 2006; 2008; Hohmann 2010).

Since the beginnings of independent Kazakhstan, folk healing has been recognized as an important complement to the state medical system and, at the same time, the Ministry of Health has devoted considerable effort to control and regulate the activities of healers. The Republican Center of Eastern and Contemporary Medicine in Almaty (founded in

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9 See Penkala-Gawęcka 2002 for a description of glocalization of various forms of Korean medicine in contemporary Kazakhstan.
1990 as the Center of Folk Medicine) has been entrusted with the task of training and licensing healers. The official approval of unconventional methods of treatment, supported in further programs and actions, substantiates the use of the term complementary medicine\(^\text{10}\) for this body of methods and practices in contemporary Kazakhstan. They are not only complementary from the point of view of patients but also from the perspective of the authorities. This attitude has been partly motivated by the nation-building policy, but practical reasons have also played an important role. Certainly, the dramatic deterioration of the health care system in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union influenced the turn to inexpensive and easily available non-biomedical methods of treatment. It is worth noting, however, that—as recent investigations in Kazakhstan reveal—although the situation of health care in Kazakhstan has improved, the position of complementary medicine and Kazakh folk medicine in particular remains strong (Grzywacz 2010: 43–47).

Similarly, the Center of Traditional Medicine “Beyish” (which means ‘paradise’) was organized in Frunze (now renamed Bishkek) already in 1990, before the proclamation of the independent Kyrgyz Republic. It was very popular among the people and its services ranged from acupuncture and herbal treatment practiced by Chinese doctors and their local followers, through Korean acupuncture, Ayurveda and various manual therapies, to folk healing, controlled and regulated by a special commission. Whereas methods used by medical professionals have received full legitimization, the present position of folk healers seems rather unstable, since the process of their professionalization has been interrupted. Although healers work and compete freely in the market, reorganization of the former “Beyish” into an Academy of Experimental and Traditional Medicine in 2011, which resulted in folk healers leaving this place, suggests that the official stand of the authorities towards folk medicine has been gradually changing.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{10}\) Ursula Sharma, who used the concept of complementary medicine in the context of British society, limited this field to “those forms of therapy which most nearly approximate to a form of medicine as that term is generally understood in western societies.” However, she noticed that there is no impermeable boundary between them and “other health-promoting activities.” (Sharma 1992: 4–5)

\(^{11}\) During the opening ceremony the Deputy Minister of Health at the time announced that a new academy should redirect the activities of the former center where “quacks, extrasensy and often common charlatans” had worked before.
An Outline of Spiritual Healing in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

In this part of the paper I briefly focus on spiritual healing practiced in Kazakhstan, mainly by Kazakhs and Uyghurs, and in Kyrgyzstan by Kyrgyz healers. Such methods, with the addition of divination with the help of spirits, enjoy great popularity among the public. As stated above, the source of the official recognition of this kind of healing lay in the politics of the authorities of the new state, promoting traditions considered the national treasure, the core of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz identities. Together with other methods of treatment perceived as belonging to the national heritage, spiritual healing was practiced openly and even encouraged. The interest and confidence in spiritual methods of dealing with illnesses and other aspects of misfortune grew during the 1990s. Significantly, at the Republican Center of Eastern and Contemporary Medicine in Almaty it was just Kazakh folk medicine, and spiritual healing in particular, that was in the repertoire of the majority of practitioners.

Spiritual healing can be clearly distinguished from other traditional kinds of treatment. Methods as herbal therapies or bone-setting are regarded as practical skills which can be acquired by learning, whereas spiritual methods are attainable only by people with special abilities. There are two main categories of such healers. First, there are shamans (called in Kazakh baqsı,12 Uyghur bakhshi, Kyrgyz bakshi or bübü13) whose power is considered extraordinary and rare. Second, there are “weaker” healers (Kazakh täwip, Kyrgyz tabip) who usually combine spiritual healing with fortune-telling. They use a traditional method of divination with beans or small stones (previously sheep droppings) called qumalaq in Kazakh and Kyrgyz, qumilaq in Uyghur, and therefore people often refer to them, respectively, as qumalaqshı, qumilaqchı, qumilaqchı (fig. 1).

What all spiritual healers have in common is their presumed ability to contact spirits and use their help in treatment. They invoke spirits of the ancestors and Muslim saints; they also recite incantations to God and prayers from the Qur’an as part of their treatment, which clearly illustrates the process of Islamization of this sort of healing. While the qualities necessary to become an “ordinary” spiritual healer are not uncommon,

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12 I use the transliteration of Kazakh words as proposed by Privratsky 2001.
13 This term is sometimes used to refer to a female shaman.
the shamanic gift (which is called, together with shamanic practices, *baqsılıq*, *bakshılıq*) is supposed to be extremely rare and valuable. Shamans are thought to have special connections to the spirit world. As one of my informants put it, “they act as a bridge between earth and heaven.” They can obtain the help of many powerful spirits. It was traditionally believed that the strength of a shaman depended on the amount of spirits he/she was able to collect. Shamans may also have the gift of clairvoyance, but usually do not practice divination like *qumalaqshı*. Moreover, the uniqueness of their healing séances makes them exceptional.

Bruce Privratsky (2001: 216 ff.) maintains that *baqsılıq* is not a living tradition anymore among the Kazakh. He made only brief references to “living Kazak shamans” and in most cases expressed doubt over their shamanic identities. He also stresses that the healers (*tawiıp*) whom he met “… think in Islamic terms and display therapies that are similar to curing styles in other Muslim societies” (Privratsky 2004: 573). Contrary to his experiences, I encountered a few healers who called themselves *baqsı* and were recognized as shamans. Paweł Jessa (2006) and Zuzanna Grzywacz (2010) mention others whom they met during their fieldwork in Kazakhstan. In my opinion, Privratsky’s skepticism springs from his tendency to search for
“the authentic baqsı” (and he tends to identify him as a figure similar to Siberian shamans). A visible Islamization of shamanic practices induces him to regard them as “. . . faint images of archaic practice vaguely understood by Kazak healers themselves” (Privratsky 2001: 227). It should be remembered, however, that the process of Islamization of shamanic practices was well advanced already in the nineteenth century, and Privratsky (2004: 571) himself quotes shamans who lived and practiced in the second half of the twentieth century. In my opinion, we should adopt an emic perspective and not disqualify people’s opinions about who is and who is not a shaman.

Shamans were and still are highly esteemed, which contrasts with the popular attitude to other spiritual healers. The latter are usually treated with respect mixed with disapproval because people are aware that divination is forbidden by orthodox Islam as connected with black magic. Nevertheless, this ambivalent attitude to spiritual healers does not seem to decrease the popularity of such practitioners. People ask them for help, especially if they have health problems that they attribute to “evil eye” (Kazakh, Kyrgyz köz tiyū, Russian sglaž) or spells and also in other kinds of misfortune. They search for a renowned shaman only in the case of serious and persistent troubles, especially if they are believed to be a result of the interference by evil spirits (like jın or albastı in Kazakh, albarsti in Kyrgyz) or particularly harmful black magic, the so-called porcha (in Russian) which is widely feared. In common opinion today’s shamans are much weaker than those of earlier days and people maintain that many charlatans usurp the name of shaman. However, if someone who claims to be a shaman does not have particular charisma in the eyes of the community, she/he has no chance to establish a successful practice.

Although the role of shamans as mediators between the human world and the world of spirits is exceptional, beliefs about the process of becoming a shaman and a “weaker” spiritual healer reveal the same pattern. The recruitment of contemporary spiritual healers well exemplifies how the traditional ways come to life again.

14 For a description of the relationships between “ordinary” spiritual healers and shamans among Uyghurs in Almaty see Bellér-Hann 2001.
15 People always refer to this harmful magic and its deadly consequences using this Russian term.
On becoming a Shaman/Healer: Specificity of Spiritual Calling

I will examine a career of the spiritual healer in contemporary Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, with some comparisons to the traditional shaman as described in the ethnographic sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This discussion is based mainly on the narratives of a number of spiritual healers to whom I talked, mostly women of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uyghur, Tatar and Uzbek ethnic backgrounds. There were two bakhsbi among them, an Uyghur woman in her late forties, Rakhilyam, and her daughter Mahira. They lived together in a village near Almaty.

The process of becoming a spiritual healer can be presented as a kind of initiation, a rite of passage, in accordance with Arnold van Gennep’s well-known scheme. It begins with an episode of “shamanic illness” which usually induces separation of the afflicted individual from the community. Such a sudden and acute illness may be provoked by a traumatic event. It is sometimes connected with serious physical afflictions, like the loss of sight or paralysis, as in the case of Rakhilyam. The signs often include strange dreams and visions, unusual behavior, and inexpressible suffering, together with a tendency to isolate oneself from other people. Sometimes the symptoms are not so violent, nevertheless they hardly ever fit into the frames of the biomedical disease classification. All in all, such ailments can be characterized as an “initiation illness,” in Mircea Eliade’s (1951) understanding.

Traditionally, shamanic illness was easily recognizable. The shaman’s abilities could be transmitted both patri- and matrilineally to someone who belonged to the next generation or to the generation of grandsons and granddaughters. Some researchers claim that the latter was more typical of Kazakhs. However, the tradition demanded that the

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16 Shamanic beliefs and practices of the Uyghur show similarity to those of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz, although, as Basilov (1992: 188 ff.) noticed, they reveal some peculiarities. In the opinion of Bellér-Hann (2004b: 643), the use of the term “shamanism” to refer to the Uyghur “set of healing methods” is questionable. I agree that the same is true about the Kazakh or Kyrgyz spiritual healing, but it does not mean that we cannot observe the presence of shamans among spiritual healers.

17 Toleubaev (1997: 196), for example, maintains that the shamanic gift was more often transmitted to the generation of grandchildren.
successor should be chosen by spirits. According to Vladimir N. Basilov, a specialist in Central Asian shamanism, it was commonly believed that after a shaman’s death the ancestor spirits (Kazakh arūaq, Kyrgyz arbaq) should designate his/her successor. If someone from the shaman’s descendants fell seriously ill, it was taken as a sign given by the spirits (Basilov 1992: 128–129). People thought that during that particular illness a candidate was taken by the spirits to some isolated location, taught and put to severe tests. As we know from ethnographic sources, the future shaman had to endure painful experiences and it was believed that his body was cut up in pieces and then repaired and resurrected. Thanks to the continuity of tradition the signs of shamanic illness were clear and meaningful to both the future shaman and all members of the community. We may say that within that traditional frame just getting ill (with specific symptoms) marked entering the liminal phase of the rite of passage because it was synonymous with the recognition of this state as shamanic calling.

At present such signs are usually classified as symptoms of a mental illness and when doctors cannot find any organic disease, they send such a person to a psychiatric clinic. Otherwise an afflicted person stays at home, isolated because of strange behavior, and does not understand the nature and cause of those afflictions until she/he visits an experienced shaman or other spiritual healer. Such a specialist explains to the patient that she or he is a person chosen by spirits and those strange dreams and visions are revelations (ayan) of her/his ancestor spirits who want to pass the healing gift to their descendant. Then it is made clear that such a person—after a process of spiritual purification—should herself/himself become a healer, since the only way to recover is to comply with the spirits’ will. If someone ignores their orders, not only will this disobedient person be severely punished, but her/his close relatives may suffer and even die as well. This motif was constantly repeated in the stories of the spiritual healers to whom I talked. They described their intense sufferings, visions and recurring dreams in which they saw old men clothed in white. Doctors could not help them; illumination, relief

18 For more about ayan as omens or signs sent by the ancestors in dreams, see Louw 2010 and Aldakeeva 2009.
19 I describe in another paper how the traditional discourse on “shamanic illness” as the call of spirits—and not mental illness—has been revived in Kazakhstan (Penkala-Gawęcka 2013).
and then eventual recovery came only when they visited a healer, often on the advice of some close relative or friend.

Rakhilyam, for instance, had such illness episodes twice. The first time, after a short stay in a psychiatric clinic, she was treated with some success by an old Uyghur shaman. As she maintained, he had not revealed the truth about her abilities, because then, at the end of the 1980s, he was still afraid to talk about it. Rakhilyam worked as an accountant in a kolkhoz (a form of collective farm in the Soviet Union) and he felt that it would be improper to tell her such things. But when she visited the same shaman some years later, complaining of various strange symptoms again, he explained to her the meaning of her visions and sufferings. As a wise man, a bearer of tradition, that old shaman revealed to Rakhilyam that she had the shamanic gift, “shaman’s blood,” and the spirits wanted her to accept this gift and then act to help people in need. I heard similar stories from many spiritual healers (Kazakhs, Uyghurs, Uzbeks) working at the Center of Eastern and Contemporary Medicine in Almaty as well as from Kyrgyz healers in Bishkek. They differed in sex, age, and education. A number of them had higher education in such disciplines as history, medicine, economy, law or arts. Their special abilities were revealed either by a healer in the course of treatment or by a mullah (molda, moldo)\textsuperscript{20} or another deeply religious person. For instance, a young Kazakh woman, Bayan, was illuminated about her abilities by an old, pious woman whom she had met near the shrine of the famous Muslim saint Ahmad Yasawi in Turkistan.

Traditionally, shamanic illness occurred mostly during adolescence, especially in the case of “strong” shamans.\textsuperscript{21} Today it often strikes a person of middle age who lived many years having no idea of her/his potential. It is quite understandable considering that the shamanic traditions had been obscured. However, sometimes, as in the case of Mahira, the traditional pattern of an early revelation was observed. She had been offered a shamanic gift when she was only seventeen, but since she did not feel ready, she “passed that gift” to Rakhilyam, her mother and the transmission was postponed until her twenties. The motif of postponement is well known from the literature on shaman-

\textsuperscript{20} Mullahs also perform healing, mainly through reading Quranic verses.
\textsuperscript{21} According to Toleubaev (1997: 197), such exceptional candidates could be designated by spirits even in early childhood.
ism in Central Asia. Another healer, Ainagul from Bishkek, told me about her early experiences as a child, when she used to leave her home unknowingly at night and wander around without purpose, which made her relatives worry. It was much later that her vocation was recognized by an experienced healer.

When Rakhilyam established herself as a shaman, she began to follow the same pattern, this time as a wise, competent healer, able to distinguish a person with extraordinary qualities. Let me present some points of one of her healing sessions that I observed in the autumn of 1997, which resulted in the appointment of a patient as a prospective healer. Elmira, the patient, was a nineteen-year-old Uyghur girl, studying English and working for a foreign company in Almaty.

At the beginning of the séance, Rakhilyam summoned her helping spirits, entered a trance-like state and began to chant, whistle and laugh. She was also twisting, stamping, flapping her arms like a bird, and then she advanced her hands toward Elmira’s body as if to remove something. She repeated those gestures several times and after about twenty minutes finished the séance by expressing gratitude to her spirits and to God.

However, it was the shaman’s subsequent talk with Elmira that was particularly important, as it revealed the nature of the patient’s illness. Elmira came with complaints of a stomachache that she described as “a stone in her stomach” and referred to drinking too much soda water. Rakhilyam explained that the actual cause of the ailment was *sglaz* (evil eye) which had afflicted Elmira already in her childhood and had further consequences to her health. The *bakhsbi* added that the girl was a “spiritual” person (which means that having close connections with spirits) and therefore she was particularly vulnerable. During her life “she had been collecting dirt” from other people and did not know how to clean herself, and this was the main cause of her troubles. The main point of the séance was to purify Elmira from the pollution, which was performed by the spirits through Rakhilyam’s actions. Next, the shaman explained that Elmira, as a person with special abilities, was offered two gifts. First, the spirits predicted that she would be able to heal people with prayers, second—she was promised to obtain, in heal-

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22 It is often explained by experienced healers that previously they had suffered because they did not know how to heal themselves and only then, in their further career, they learned that skill from their helping spirits. See also Privratsky 2001: 203.
ing, the help of the spirits who would come to her exclusively in the shape of birds. The shaman maintained that all those revelations were transmitted to her by the spirits during the séance, which had started with the diagnosis of Elmira’s illness. Rakhilyam tried to convince her patient to accept the gifts of the spirits, telling her that otherwise she would not recover and her illness would even get worse. Elmira had to attend a number of successive sessions, which she did. However, I do not know if she eventually accepted the offer. I have only heard that she was afraid and tried to avoid taking up the challenge.

I observed many other of Rakhilyam’s séances and two of them also revealed candidates for healers with special abilities: a young Uyghur man Parkhat, a journalist, and a Tatar woman, specialist in technology (fig. 2). They were more eager than Elmira to accept that they had been “chosen by spirits,” as Rakhilyam put it. When she mentioned that Parkhat must have had strong spiritual healers as his ancestors, he confirmed that immediately. Pointing to the ancestors—shamans or other spiritual healers, and also mullahs—is an important part of the procedure of revealing prospective healers. Usually they seem not to remember them and it is the shaman or other spiritual “master” who
makes them recall such predecessors. Such recognition of being lineal kin of a “spiritual person” is an important part of traditional legitimation of future practitioners. However, it is spirits of the ancestors who are believed to choose and appoint someone from their living descendants. It is worth stressing that, although the Kazakh and Kyrgyz trace descent patrilineally, they think that this spiritual gift can be transmitted in both filiation lines, which remains in accordance with the traditional notions.

To conclude this part of the discussion, I would argue that in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan experienced healers play a crucial role in revealing and legitimizing spiritual healers, including shamans. They give meaning to the symptoms of an indefinite illness and it is their diagnosis, presented as the appointment by spirits, that marks separation as beginning a liminal phase of this rite of passage. They are also obligated to make a person chosen by spirits accept this calling.

Further Development of a Shaman/Healer:
Strength of Tradition and Present Modifications

Once a candidate accepts the appointment, she/he should fulfill some further requirements. First, such a person has to pass through a series of healing séances usually performed by the same healer who had revealed her/his vocation. This is seen as a necessary process of purification. Moreover, the candidate’s status changes entirely. Usually future healers must abandon their former professions and it is not rare that entering the new path leads to dissolution of their marriages and other family ties. This was the case of Rakhilyam and her daughter who had to divorce their husbands. However, both women found new candidates for marriage, men who showed them much more understanding and support than their former husbands. My other informant, a fifty-year-old Kazakh woman named Katia, told me about the costs of her decision to pursue her recently discovered vocation for healing. She had to quit her job at the Institute of History and to leave her husband, who was against her plans. Strikingly, the traditional belief that a person chosen by spirits is obliged to sacrifice everything and begin a new life is still maintained, and this is also explained to a neophyte by an experienced healer in the process of preparation to the new role. Such was the case,
for example, of Kunduz, a healer from Bishkek, who had been satisfied with her work in a bank in Talas and did not want to accept the spirit call. She asked her master to take away that burden from her and was eager to offer her own spirits to this experienced healer. However, Kunduz eventually had to agree to take up her new appointment and after some months of purification and preparations she began to heal people.

This process may be called an apprenticeship, as a prospective healer must accompany, watch and, gradually, begin to help the master during healing sessions (fig. 3). Other obligations comprise giving sums of money or/and other gifts and accompanying the master healer in a series of pilgrimages to the shrines of saints and other sacred places (mazar) that serve as a means to get assistance of powerful helping spirits.  

As Rakhilyam said, a candidate should “follow her,” and comply with her instructions. The apprenticeship of a healer–diviner to the shaman and their common pilgrimages were described by Bellér-Hann (2001; 

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23 Researchers often stress that healing at the mazars is considered more effective due to the close assistance of spirits, see Duysheymbiyeva 2005; Aitpaeva 2006; Adylov 2007.
I would like to add that according to the ethnographic sources, there was previously no such apprenticeship in the case of the shaman, contrary to, for instance, däriger (herbalist). I would argue that, in the past, as collective séances were customary, all members of the community were well acquainted with the details of healing. The long period of Soviet rule brought about a considerable disruption to tradition; shamans and other spiritual healers went underground. Now they can practice openly, but séances are usually performed without an audience, except for close relatives of the patient. Ordinary people do not have knowledge about the conditions and demands of healing, thus the role of the master–teacher who introduces the newcomer into the profession has significantly increased. Although such apprenticeship seems obvious to the researcher, from the point of view of healers it is the spirits who actually teach and guide candidates, and the role of the master is limited to giving them some necessary assistance. This was also noticed by Bellér-Hann (2001: 88–89) who reported that two Uyghur healers in Almaty, staying in an apparent relationship of master and apprentice, denied any formal apprenticeship.

The process of preparation may continue for quite a long time and during that period a future healer remains in the transitional, liminal stage. As the healers themselves put it, a candidate should “open” herself/himself, and it seems to mean not a simple act but a process leading to the complete acceptance of the gift and submission to the spirits’ wishes. The end of this stage and the change of the status are clearly marked by a special rite, the blessing ceremony (Kazakh, Kyrgyz bata). As a rule, a future healer receives bata of her/his master. Then the healer can start independent work, however, it is desirable that she/he maintains contact with the master. Rakhilyam expressed her regret at the improper behavior of some of her apprentices who had not followed her advice and fallen under control of the adepts of black magic. Similarly Kunduz, the Kyrgyz healer, said that she decided not to take apprentices because they were often ungrateful and did not follow religious obligations. “Their sins are your shır,” her spirits warned her, and she obeyed

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24 This was confirmed by Basilov (1992: 119–121) who maintained that in Central Asian shamanism apprenticeship had been recorded only occasionally and, in general, a candidate was only obliged to get a blessing from an experienced shaman. Nevertheless, Bellér-Hann (2004b: 645) writes that healers could learn their profession as apprentices.

25 The word shır means here: ‘deadly, unforgivable sin’ (from Arabic shirk).
their will.” Although it is important to receive the first, ceremonial blessing of a prestigious healer, bata from other persons might be added as well as blessings from spirits. It is noticeable that some ambitious healers, like Rakhilyam herself, understand their way as the process of continuous development and seek successive blessings of other strong, famous healers. As she explained, spirits of ancestors and saints might also bless the healer and their help could be obtained during pilgrimages to the shrines. The assistance of many mighty spirits is thought to be particularly valuable as a means to continue and develop healing.

In my opinion, the process of emergence of spiritual healers in Central Asia, although modified, has preserved its basic traditional scheme. Some motives have disappeared, for instance the belief in death and resurrection of the future shaman. However, we may say that during the liminal stage the candidate experiences the death of her/his previous life and enters a new life as an entirely new person. The crucial elements of this rite of passage have survived, namely the shamanic/healer’s illness and the blessing ceremony that mark transition to the next stage. This traditional method of recruitment of spiritual healers is decisive in establishing their credentials. Someone who independently proclaims herself/himself a healer is usually regarded with suspicion as a usurper. Also the new, bureaucratic way of legitimization at the Center of Eastern and Contemporary Medicine in Almaty is not valued. Healers tended to treat a certificate from the Center as a formal requirement if they wanted to practice legally, but it was the blessing ceremony that gave them social recognition. What is more, I also heard opinions that the official legitimization procedure might be an obstacle in the way of a shaman or another healer. For instance, Rakhilyam deeply regretted her earlier decision to strive for a certificate as a “theopsychotherapist,” which was an official name for the profession of spiritual healers, including shamans, at the Center. She claimed that the spirits had been strongly against that idea and her disobedience obstructed her further development as a shaman. In today’s Kyrgyzstan, two women healers to whom I talked told me that they had tried to comply with the official

26 See also Kehl-Bodrogi 2008: 209–219. The author stresses the importance of such “initiatory illness” and a blessing among contemporary healers in Khorezm.

27 Bellér-Hann (2001: 91–93) gives an illustrative example of such unsuccessful attempt to get recognition as a healer made by a fifty-year-old Uyghur woman who did not respect the renowned healers and tried to discredit them.
demands, but were bitterly disappointed. They showed me certificates that confirmed that they completed a special course for nurses, and diplomas obtained in Almaty from the Association of Spiritual and Folk Healing of the World—as “specialists in spiritual healing.” The women complained that just after getting those documents they were expelled from the Center “Beyish.”

In my opinion, the way of recruitment of new healers is particularly illustrative of the strength of tradition in spiritual healing in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The persistence of tradition is demonstrated in the etiological concepts and in the beliefs about the role of spirits, as well as in healing practices such as shamanic séances. Although the most characteristic attribute of the Kazakh shaman, a special musical instrument called qobiz, is not used anymore, some other traditional utensils like the whip (Kazakh qamshi, Kyrgyz qamchi) and the knife (Kazakh pıshaq, Kyrgyz bıchaq) still belong to the equipment of the Kazakh as well as the Kyrgyz healer. Among other objects, the Qur’an and Islamic prayer beads (Kazakh täspi, Kyrgyz tespe) serve to emphasize the Muslim identity of healers and their methods (pls. 7, 8 a). In her outline of Kyrgyz healing Jipar Duyshembiyeva rightly points out: “Most of the healers today associate their healing power with Islam.” (Duyshembiyeva 2005: 38)

As I stated above, collective shamanic séances were abandoned, because of Soviet suppression and individual sessions seem typical of contemporary healing. However, there is some evidence for the revival of collective healing practices. They were introduced in Kazakhstan in the mid-nineties as part of the activities of new informal religious organizations called Aq Jol (white/pure way). Their main purpose was the revitalization of Muslim religiosity at the grass-roots level, but this process was closely connected with séances of ritual purification and healing performed in groups of people by charismatic spiritual leaders-healers. Moreover, those leaders organized series of pilgrimages to the shrines of saints which served as a means to reinforce piety and moral values of the followers (Jessa 2006). It is interesting that at the meetings of Aq Jol members the acts of revealing prospective healers by the experienced, prestigious leaders place this
on a larger scale (Jessa 2006: 363–366) and that could result in further increase in the number of healers.28

Obviously, through appointing new candidates for healers, experienced practitioners contribute to the revival of tradition of spiritual healing. It brings about, however, considerable tension between established healers and the candidates. On the one hand, it is crucial for the practitioner’s successful career to develop regular contacts with several chosen patients who may then become her/his apprentices. On the other hand, the emergence of new healers is likely to endanger their vital interests, especially if they work in the same neighborhood.29 A subtle interplay between these factors was insightfully presented by Bellér-Hann (2001: 87–88) who described the strategies used by a master–shaman to prevent candidates from starting independent practice. From my own research I learned that the main obstacles that the experienced healers usually stressed involved the young age of a candidate, insufficient potential, pressure of evil spirits or being “blocked.” The argument that someone cannot “open” herself/himself was used very often and the assistance of the master in the laborious process of “opening” (or “opening someone’s way,” i.e. healing way) is thought to be necessary. An effective means to limit the range of competitors is accusation of black magic. I heard numerous stories told by the healers about their rivals who had submitted to evil spirits, practiced black magic and tried to deprive others of their strength.

Hybridization of the Beliefs and Practices of Spiritual Healers

Contemporary spiritual healing in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan does not repeat unchanged patterns of tradition; it may be rather called adopted or transformed tradition. The traditional frame has been preserved, but parts of tradition are forgotten and new elements have been constantly added.

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28 In 2009, the Aq Jol movement was criminalized, which can be seen as evidence of a changing attitude of the Kazakh government to some local expressions of Muslim religiosity, especially if they take on more organized forms.

29 Practising complementary treatments, including spiritual healing, was quite a good option to earn a living, especially in a difficult period of transition to the market economy.
For instance, the pantheon of Rakhilyam’s helping spirits was enriched with new personalities like saints or gods of other religions, epic heroes or even heroes of popular culture. Caroline Humphrey quotes similar “innovations” that she met in her research on Buryat shamanism.\(^\text{30}\) As some researchers of Siberian shamanism, e.g. Marjorie M. Balzer (1999) and John Baker (1999) correctly point out, such innovations and eclecticism prove that today’s shamanism has strong adaptive abilities. The same may be said about Central Asian spiritual healing. In the case of Rakhilyam, who added to the Islamic saints and ancestor spirits several Christian saints and even Jesus Christ, that served as a means to widen the circle of her clientele. She claimed that thanks to such a wide range of helping spirits she was able to heal also Orthodox Russians or Catholic Germans and not restrict her activities only to Muslim patients. Moreover, she appealed to many other personalities, beginning with the spirit of a famous Bulgarian clairvoyant Vanga and finishing with Japanese karate fighters and an Indian male film star. She actively searched for their support, undertaking a series of pilgrimages not only to Mecca and numerous Central Asian shrines of Muslim saints, but also to the Holy Land, Bulgaria and to India, where she tried to obtain the blessing from a local guru, the “living saint” Sai Baba. In this way she strived after perfection in her performance and expected to gain worldwide fame some day. Rakhilyam was an excellent example of a shaman of the age of globalization and at the same time her beliefs and practices were deeply rooted in local tradition.\(^\text{31}\)

It should be mentioned that such a wide perspective on one’s healing mission is characteristic of strong, sometimes charismatic shamans/healers, while the majority seems rather modest in this respect. Mahira, who was a beginner in the profession then, declared that she had to limit her circle of helpers to Islamic spirits and she was not able to heal non-Muslims, as her mother did. Ainagul and Kunduz from Bishkek claimed that they could help also Russians and other non-Muslims (and I observed

\(^\text{30}\) According to Humphrey (1999: 7 ff.), Buryat female shamans have among their helping spirits such personalities as Archangel Michael, epic heroes and Japanese samurai.

\(^\text{31}\) I corresponded with Rakhilyam for some time after I came back to Poland—she wrote about her future plans as a shaman. In 2008 I received sad news from my M.A. student, Zuzanna Grzywacz, who tried to contact her in the village where she lived. Rakhilyam died of breast cancer and—as my student learned—before death she visited Sai Baba in hope of being healed.
séances with such patients), but the latter healer told me about her contacts with spirits of non-believers. She was sometimes offered additional gifts by spirits of Russian women who wanted to teach her chiromancy and other “alien” methods. She never accepted that, on the excuse of the difference in religious beliefs: “You are Russian . . . my faith is entirely different,” she answered when the spirit kept trying to persuade her.

The process of cultural hybridization\textsuperscript{32} is noticeable in the complex of methods and techniques used by spiritual healers. Their repertoire includes, besides invocations to spirits and Muslim prayers, practices characteristic of other traditional local healers, like massage or herbal treatment. However, that was also common among traditional shamans of “old times.” Contemporary healers eagerly introduce numerous techniques derived from alien traditions as well as various novelties. During my recent research in Bishkek I was surprised to meet a healer who combined traditional methods with bee sting therapy. Moreover, she put this kind of apitherapy into the traditional frames of healing, claiming that it was also a gift that ancestors passed to her in the same way as other healing abilities. Privratsky (2001: 207–209) described a female healer from Turkistan who practiced Muslim spiritual healing, Kazakh folk methods and Russian herbal treatments that she had learned from an old Russian woman, together with invocations to the name of Jesus. I observed, both in Kazakhstan and in Kyrgyzstan, that spiritual healers often used concepts and techniques of the so-called extrasensory treatment based on the belief in “bioenergy” (Russian biotok) that can be employed in healing. This kind of complementary therapy, conducted by healers called ekstrasensy, became very popular in the Soviet Union since the 1980s and is still widespread in post-Soviet Central Asia. Nevertheless, I noticed that some of my informants—Rakhilyam and her daughter in particular—did not use that method, and, on the whole, their séances looked more traditional. Presumably this may reflect a larger degree of tradition in shamanic healing, though it is difficult to generalize on the basis of this data. Besides, whereas Rakhilyam’s séances seemed to preserve more traditional traits, her “army of spirits,” as I described before, was extremely eclectic (pl. 8 b).

\textsuperscript{32} I use this term following Nederveen Pieterse (1994) who reasonably argued for viewing globalization as a process of hybridization, contrary to its understanding as westernization. The concept of cultural hybridization refers to “intercultural cross-over” blurring distinctions between categories of different cultures.
Conclusion

In my opinion, healers as “the agents of tradition” play a crucial role in the revival of shamanic practices and other forms of spiritual healing in contemporary Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This tradition was preserved by shamans and other healers who secretly continued to practice during the period of persecutions, but only its faint traces survived in common social consciousness. The majority of post-Soviet healers had not grown up within this tradition and accepted it recently as a revelation changing completely their lives. It is the experienced, wise healers who interpret the signs and designate those whom they consider “chosen by spirits.” They also play an important role in the liminal stage of the future healer’s career, which creates a kind of master–apprentice relationship, continued, in a way, even after ceremonial blessing. Such apprenticeship, as I tried to show, functions as a means to restore what was partly forgotten. Nevertheless, the revival of tradition has been possible, thanks to the persistence of some beliefs being a prerequisite of the existence of shamanic practices and other forms of spiritual healing. These are beliefs in the spirit world and especially in the spirits of ancestors who constantly interfere with the life of the living.33 While not engaging here in the discussions on the differentiation between “official” and “unofficial” Islam, I argue that healing practices or visiting sacred sites, deeply rooted in old Turkic traditions, should not be separated from other forms of Muslim religious practices. It is important that they are considered Islamic from the point of view of local people.

The persistence and adaptive abilities of the Turkic tradition of spiritual healing prove that it still meets the needs of some segments of the population in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Certainly the poor condition of the state medical system in the post-Soviet Central Asian republics was one of the reasons for the wide use of various complementary methods of treatment. However, the factors that have brought about the popularity of particular branches of complementary medicine should be thoroughly examined and defined in each case. As for shamanic practices and other forms of spiritual healing, the force of tradition seems to be of primary importance.

References


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The Felicitas D. Goodman Institute: Neo-shamanism or Religious Ecstatic Trance?

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While the work of the late Felicitas Goodman and the Institute she founded in 1978 is frequently associated with neo-shamanism, the members and activities of this Institute are more accurately described as conducting research in religious ecstatic trance induced by sensory overstimulation while holding ancient ritual body postures to facilitate specific experiences such as healing or sky-journeys and the like. A brief review of the ASC experiences of Joseph of Cupertino and Faustyna Kowalska help to construct an appropriate context for appreciating religious ecstatic trance.

The term “Neo-Shamanism” appears to have at least two meanings (Hoppál 1998: 197–209). One and perhaps the primary meaning is the description of the re-emergence of shamanism in a region in which it was indigenous but “went into hiding” for political or other reasons. Or in another variation, it is the appearance of shamans in cities to help city-dwelling fellow humans with their healing powers. Such an occurrence is called urban shamanism, but adaptations are made which justify naming it a type of neo-shamanism. Two, it describes various Western adaptations of classical shamanism, e.g., that of Michael Harner (1980). Mihály Hoppál (1998: 199) correctly notes: “It is open to debate how far shamanism, when uprooted from its original cultural context, remains identical with itself.” This may explain why the term neo-shamanism in general is considered pejorative (Kehoe 2000: 81–89). Indeed, it is frequently associated with “New Age.” Whatever that polyvalent term might mean, it, too, has a negative connotation. Hoppál (1998: 209) listed ten (then) recently published books “on new-age shamanism.” Where Spirits Ride the Wind, by Felicitas D. Goodman (1990a) was on that list. (Znamenski 2007: 213, n. 28 considers that book an example of neo-shamanism.) Hoppál intended to evaluate these later somewhere.
else. Being unable to locate that evaluation among his published works (Hoppál 2007) and not knowing what his evaluation might be, I nevertheless would like to present the proper context for understanding Goodman’s work. In conjunction with this, I will present two subjects of my current research (Saints Joseph of Cupertino and Faustyna Kowalska) as illustrations of what Dr. Goodman and her Institute teach about religious ecstatic trance. The work of the Institute is not shamanism, neo-shamanism, nor new-age shamanism.

Felicitas D. Goodman (1914–2005)

Born in Hungary of ethnic German parents, Felicitas trained initially as a linguist (Heidelberg, 1936). She married an American and moved to Ohio. At the age of 51, she enrolled at Ohio State University where she earned a master’s degree in linguistics (1968) and a doctorate in cultural anthropology (1971). From 1968 to 1979, she taught linguistics, cultural anthropology, and comparative religions at Denison University, Granville, Ohio until her forced retirement at the age of 65. In 1978, she founded the Cuyamungue Institute in Santa Fe, NM to continue her research and share with others her insights about religious ecstatic trance (Pilch 2007). Her two major contributions to anthropology are her definitive work on glossolalia (speaking in tongues; Goodman 1972/2008) and her research on religious ecstatic trance (Goodman 1990a; 2001).

She considered herself a “linguist and psychological anthropologist” and a “researcher on religious behavior” (Goodman 1994: 71). Her major abiding research interest was religious ecstatic trance (Goodman 1990b; 1994: 69; Gore 1995: ix-xiv; 3–23; 2009: 16–25). At the very beginning of her graduate studies, she became interested in “various expressions of the religious trance, beginning with the phenomenon of speaking in tongues.” From her research on glossolalia, she concluded “that humans involved in religious ritual cross-culturally utilized only a single one of the many altered states of consciousness available to them, the one which we call the religious trance” (Goodman 1994: 71). This is a very important discovery because human beings are capable of more than thirty five different states of consciousness (Pilch 2011: xiii, 54, 58, 64, 72, 153, 162). Clearly, she used two phrases interchangeably: ecstatic trance and religious trance and sometimes she combined them into one:
religious ecstatic trance (Goodman 1994: 69) or religious alternate state of consciousness (Goodman 1994: 71). She called these trance experiences “religious” because “observation shows that it is the one occurring in religious context, that is, when contact is made with the alternate, the sacred, reality” (Goodman 1990a: 9).

This common human tendency to use words and phrases interchangeably—even by scientists and scholars—is reflected in Hoppál’s use of neo-shamanism, urban shamanism, and new-age shamanism in similar fashion. It may also explain why some scholars might think Felicitas’ research and the work of her Institute is neo-shamanistic (Znamenski 2007: 213, n. 28). For ten years (1986–1996), Felicitas participated and gave presentations in the annual Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing sponsored by a friend and colleague, Dr. Ruth Inge-Heinze, at San Rafael, California. In her presentations and their titles, Felicitas used the words shaman, shamanic journey, and the like. For example, in 1988 she reflected on “The Nature of Ego in Experimental Shamanism.” Yet already from the first time she participated in this conference (1986), she distinguished the work of her Institute and its members from what is known of Siberian Shamans. A major difference concerns the duration and effect of the experience.

Our experiences last only 15 minutes each, but the shamanistic initiates, as mentioned before, remain in intermittent trance for hours, days, sometimes a season or even for several years. And while our subjects report uniformly beneficial results and often surprising cures, the shamans tell of black and blue marks appearing on their bodies, foam pouring from their mouth, blood oozing through their skin and coagulating on their clothing—or at least seeming to do so—and some become severely emaciated or even crippled for life. (Goodman 1990b: 82–83)

What she wrote in an article in 1997/1998 suggests that she may have been frustrated with those who continued to link her work with shamanism.

The laboratory exploration of the “shamanic” altered state of consciousness became possible due to a discovery we made in 1977. We discovered that if a non-ordinary body posture represented in non-western art was assumed by an experimental subject and if rhythmic stimulation, that is photic driving, was
added, a visionary experience resulted which involved exiting the body, that is
the quintessential spirit journey. (Goodman 1997/1998: 71)

By placing “shamanic” in quotation marks in the above citation, she clearly disagrees with the use of that word relative to her work. Indeed, long-time associates of Dr. Goodman agree. Linking her work with “shamanism” in discussions would cause her to become agitated. In 1986, she concluded her presentation at the California conference by saying that comparing her work with ancient practices illustrate “a historical evolution which took a special turn” (Goodman 1990b: 84). In other words, while her methods and the results they produce seem similar to shamanic practices, regional and cultural elaborations of those practices produce methods that are distinctively different from shamanism.

Hence following the practice of anthropologists, we ought to respect the Felicitas’ emic statements and be very cautious about various imposed etic interpretations (neo-shamanism; new age shamanism; and the like). Ideally, the anthropologist seeks to come up with an appropriate derived etic interpretation (Pilch 2011: 5-7). As just noted shamanism, neo-shamanism, and new-age shamanism are inappropriate derived etic interpretations of Goodman’s work. Znamenski (2007: xi) prudently chooses either to use the phrase “New Age” in quotation marks or to replace it with a more neutral synonym: “mind, body, and spirit.”

Shaman and Holy Man

The word ‘shaman’ describes a native spiritual practitioner in Siberia first described for Europeans by eighteenth century German and German-speaking explorers. The origin of the word is debated, but many believe that it derives from the Tungus (Evenki) word saman. Shaman, therefore, is best understood as a species of the genus “holy person—man or woman” (Pilch 2011: 61). All cultures recognize such a person who has easy access to the spirit world and who brokers gifts from that world to fellow humans. Two of the most important gifts are healing and knowledge (insight, advice, direction in life, and the like). In the Moroccan Arab world, such a person is known as a Marabout. In the ancient biblical world, such persons were known as sedaqqim or hasidim. Jews of Morocco know of more than six hundred “holy rabbis”
(ṣedaqqim) buried there to whose graves they make pilgrimage in order to seek favors. In the New Testament, the very first title ascribed to Jesus (by a spirit) is “the Holy One of God” (Mark 1: 24).

In the Roman Catholic tradition, officially recognized “holy persons” are called “saints.” The Church has a process for determining and officially declaring that someone is a saint, though many “saints” from the earliest times were simply recognized as such by the people. The popular judgment is, of course, “unscientific.” Sometimes, in fact, it is rooted in legend. Until the nineteenth century, the story of the unnamed Samaritan woman who met and dialogued with Jesus at a well (John 4: 1–42) was considered to be a factual report. Through the centuries, the woman was given a name, Photina, five sisters, and two sons. She lived with the younger son, Joseph, in Carthage, while the elder, Victor, pursued a military career in the Roman army. All died for their faith in Jesus. The Eastern Orthodox celebrate the feast of St. Photina on April 2nd, the Western tradition celebrates it on March 20th. Contemporary biblical scholars doubt that the story in John’s gospel is a factual report (Pilch 2006).

In the sixteenth century, John Bolland, a Jesuit, was asked to complete the work previously begun by a Dutch colleague to evaluate information available about the saints more critically. Bolland resolved to use the work of his predecessor and thought he could complete the task alone and in a short while. When it became overwhelming, he recruited assistance from fellow Jesuits who eventually became known as the Bollandists. The first critical evaluation of sources (Acta Sanctorum, or Lives of the Saints) was published in 1643, and the process continued through a bumpy history. In the nineteenth century, the project was oriented along more strictly scientific lines particularly in line with new philological methods, and it continues until today. The Bollandists presently play a role in “vetting” candidates for canonization. Relative to St. Photina, the Bollandists sorted through the data and concluded that the evolved tradition was spurious and unreliable.

Felicitas, a Lutheran, was educated as a young girl by Roman Catholic Ursuline nuns in Hungary. She was ever grateful that they believed in educating girls. While the Catholicism of that era to which she was exposed combined elements of pious superstition with dogma which she criticized later in her career, nevertheless she learned about God, Jesus, Mary, and Saints as understood in the Catholic tradition. Though she nowhere to my knowledge acknowledges this influence, one can reasonably conjecture that it contributed to her understanding of religious
ecstatic trance long before her graduate studies and acquaintance with shamanism. Her disappointment in learning that ecstatic experiences were not considered to be an ordinary part of the life of a Nun persuaded her to restore this dimension to human life which seemed to be disappearing (Goodman 1990a: 4). Her insights about religious ecstatic trance help to understand Catholic Saints and their experiences. Here is a brief review of two Saints who illustrate that their religious trance experiences had absolutely no connection with shamanism but bear some similarities to it.

St. Joseph of Cupertino (1603–1663)

What are we to think of St. Joseph of Cupertino, a Franciscan, who in his life-time is reported to have had numerous alternate states of consciousness experiences including levitations? The Bollandist information about Joseph is located in volume five of the September collection on September 18th, the day he died. The Acts of Beatification documents seventy instances of levitations or flight, not counting those at daily Mass which sometimes lasted two hours (Pastrovichio 1918: 33)! Since all of this information about Joseph predates the nineteenth century when more scientific criteria were applied by the Bollandists, a prudent skepticism is in order. However, it is still useful to reflect on what is reported.

Joseph was born June 17, 1603, in Cupertino (in the boot of Italy) which at that time was part of the Kingdom of Naples. The family was very poor. As a youngster he was sickly and slow witted. In school he was a poor student. He often couldn’t complete a sentence, and he frequently gaped for long periods causing his fellow students to nick-name him “the gaper.” Frustrated with him, his mother entrusted him to an uncle who was a Conventual Franciscan, and eventually—after being accepted, rejected and reaccepted—he was ordained.

According to the reports in the Acta Sanctorum he was very pious, perhaps simplistically so. This is understandable given his limited education. The mere mention of God, Mary, Jesus, St. Francis, or other such persons were triggers that caused him to cry out and “lose his senses” (enter an alternate state of consciousness). This “cry” preceded his ASC experiences whether ecstasy or levitation. People around him were thus alerted to his shift in consciousness. The role of music in his ASC experiences is worth noting (Pilch 2011: 89–105). Not only did
hymns and songs induce trance in him, but he also composed poems and songs inspired by his trance experiences. Sometimes the Friars heard him singing in his cell (Acta Sanctorum 1041). On occasion, the Friars saw him in ecstasy in his cell for six or seven hours as if dead. It would seem as if he were in trance almost all the time.

One Christmas eve, when he heard the shepherds play their bagpipes and flutes, he began to dance wildly in the middle of the church. Then he flew as a bird into the air 7 ½ feet from there to the high altar (Acta Sanctorum 1021a; Pastrovicchio 1918: 30 seems to report the wrong page in Acta Sanctorum). He remained there in rapture for fifteen minutes. Reports of his “flights” sound strange and unbelievable to the modern reader. One biographer prefers to report (without a basis in the documents) that he “leapt” here and there. Those familiar with ballet might find this plausible though remaining suspended in mid-air as Joseph was reputed to have done has not been experienced by any ballet dancer. Joseph however was seen to levitate in Copertino/Cupertino, Nardo, Monopoli, Naples, and Assisi.

One incident gives pause. The Minister General of the Order took Joseph who was in Rome at the time to pay tribute to the Holy Father, Pope Urban VIII. As he knelt to kiss the feet of the Pope, he was overwhelmed with the awareness that this is the Vicar of Christ. Immediately he went into ecstasy and levitated until the Minister General ordered him to descend. The Pope said that if Joseph were to die during his Pontificate, he would personally testify to this event (Acta Sanctorum, 1021f; Pastrovicchio 1918: 34–35). At another time, Joseph predicted the death of this Pope (Acta Sanctorum 1031a). Further research on the seventy levitations of Joseph reported in the Acts of Beatification would be necessary but beyond the scope of this article. However, given the statement of Pope Urban VIII, it seems reasonable to conclude that some if not all of them are not only plausible but veridical.

According to Reginald O. P. Garrigou-Lagrange (1989/1947: 604–605), the Bollandists relate other cases of levitation besides that of Joseph of Cupertino. These include St. Philip Neri, St. Peter Alcantara, St. Francis Xavier, St. Stephen of Hungary, St. Paul of the Cross, and many others. By levitation, he means “the phenomenon of elevation of the human body above the ground without any apparent cause and in such a way that it remains in the air without any natural support. This phenomenon is also called ascensional ecstasy, ecstatic flight, or
ecstatic walking when the body seems to run rapidly without touching
the ground.”

Garrigou-Lagrange notes that “suggestion or autosuggestion of a
hysterical person has never been able to provoke levitation.” He con-
cludes his observations with the instructions of Pope Benedict XIV
(1740–1758) about evaluating reports of levitation. The event must be
conclusively proved in order to rule out trickery or deception. In the
case of Joseph, the statement of the eye-witness Pope Urban VIII—
among others—would seem to do this. He continues: because of the law
of gravity, levitation cannot be naturally explained. Second, devils and
angels can lift bodies up. Third, one must rule out diabolical inter-
vention and then consider whether divine or angelic intervention is at work.

In the case of Joseph of Cupertino, it would seem that divine inter-
vention was certainly at work, since he also was able to exorcize spirits
and resist temptations from them. In other words, if witnesses saw
Joseph levitate, and this could only occur with divine or diabolic inter-
vention, given Joseph’s characteristics defining him as a holy man one
must conclude it was divine and not diabolical intervention which in
turn confirms his identity as a holy man. Similar experiences by holy
men and women can be found in all cultures.

The research of Goodman on sky journeys refined by Pilch (2011:
48–60) contributes a fresh perspective on Joseph’s levitations. While
the law of gravity is one way of evaluating Joseph’s experiences, another
approach is possible. Anthropologists recognize that levitations fall in
the category of soul flight or sky journey which is an ASC in which
some aspect of the experient—soul, spirit, or perceptual capacities—is
thought to travel to or be projected to another place, generally a spirit
world. Joseph remained in this world, but there is no doubt that his
experiences took place in alternate states of consciousness and that his
mind or spirit was in intimate union with God or the spirit world. The
reports, like the ASC itself, could be veridical or imaginal. If they were
veridical, it would seem that those who witnessed them would have to
be in an ASC as well. If the reports were only imaginal, the sheer num-
ber of them strongly suggests this is an experience familiar to people
of this time even if they personally had not experienced it. Thus the
observations of Garrigou–Lagrange and Benedict XIV would have to be
modified to include these anthropological considerations.

A final note about Joseph is, of course, that the Bollandist documents
indicate he behaved like a true holy person during his life time. He had
the ability to read hearts, that is, he often knew a sin that a penitent had forgotten or was hiding in confession and reminded the penitent of it. He healed sick people, gave wise counsel to others, and experienced numerous apparitions (ASCs). In other words, he not only had facile access to the spirit world but brokered many gifts from that world to needy fellow humans. One of these gifts was prophecies based on what he learned in the spirit world.

With regard to Poland, Joseph foretold that Jan II Kazimierz Waza, the son of Zygmunt III Waza (1587–1632) would someday be King of Poland (*Acta Sanctorum* 1035a). Five letters from Jan Kazimierz to Joseph have been preserved. In 1641, Jan joined the Jesuits and was eventually made a cardinal, but he resigned both in 1647 and was elected King of Poland 1648 succeeding his half-brother Władysław IV Waza (1595–1648). After a reign of twenty years, he abdicated the throne in 1668 to rejoin the Jesuits. He died December 6, 1672 (Parisciana 1988). Thus Joseph of Cupertino is recognized by the Catholic Church as a Saint, a holy man, who was clearly favored by God with gifts such as numerous ASC experiences including levitation. Though there may be similarities between the behaviors of shamans and holy persons or saints such as St. Joseph, as Goodman has argued, there are also significant differences.

**Sr. Faustyna Kowalska (1905–1938)**

Helena Kowalska was born in Głogowiec, Poland, on August 5, 1905 (Kowalska 2002).1 She was the third of ten children. The family was poor but devout. Her first ASC encounter with Jesus took place in 1912. It was an invitation to enter the convent. Others followed. After completing just three years of elementary education (1917–1920), Helena took a job as a nanny in 1921 to help support the family. Her parents were opposed to the idea of her entering the convent. To her great dismay, she was rejected by many Congregations to which she applied, in large measure because of her limited education. Finally in 1925 she was accepted by the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Warsaw.

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1 The following information is drawn from the Introduction by Sr. Siepak and Sr. Kowalska’s diaries.
She was given the name Mary Faustyna. In the convents where she was assigned, she served as a domestic: in the kitchen, bakery, the garden, and the like.

No one except her confessor was aware of the mystical life she was leading. It began after an experience of a “dark night of the soul” which lasted a while. The Blessed Virgin appeared to her with Jesus on her arms and encouraged her to be faithful. Afterwards, God bestowed on her the gifts of contemplation, deep awareness of the mercy of God, visions, revelations, hidden stigmata, the gift of prophecy and ability to read hearts, and most precious of all the gift of a mystical marriage. All of this is recorded in her diaries, which her confessor instructed her to write. She suffered much physically and eventually died of tuberculosis on October 15, 1938.

When her diaries were discovered after her death, the Convent sent them to Rome for evaluation. The basic message she was told to give to the world was that God wants to have mercy on the world. Jesus also instructed her to draw a picture of him as he appeared to her: in a long white robe, with his right hand raised in blessing and his left hand pointing to his heart out of which came two rays: red color on the right, and white color on the left. This too was sent to Rome. Pope Pius XII (1939–1958) refused to condemn the visions and diaries. Some theologians found them to be heretical and vigorous debate ensued. The principal objection was that her message revealed nothing more than was already known and believed about God. Eventually, Cardinal Ottaviani placed the diaries on the Index of Forbidden Books (1959–1978).

In 1958, Cardinal Wojtyła became assistant to Archbishop Eugeniusz Baziak of Kraków who permitted the picture to hang in the convent at Łagiewniki, a suburb of Kraków where Faustyna died and was buried. Wojtyła was impressed with Sr. Faustyna and the mercy devotion. When he became Archbishop of Kraków in 1964, he permitted the devotion to Divine Mercy to be practiced. In 1965, he opened a canonical investigation into the possibility of having Sister Faustyna beatified and sent the recommendation to Rome in 1967. Rome opened its investigation in 1968. In 1978, when he became Pope, Wojtyła lifted the ban on reading her diaries. Two miracles through the intercession of a candidate for sainthood are necessary for canonization. Sr. Faustyna was beatified in 1993 (she was credited with the
The story of St. Faustyna is interesting for many reasons. Given her limited education, she was entirely unaware of shamanism and its practices. Her formation was in the Roman Catholic tradition and the spiritual practices of her religious community all colored by Polish ethnic-cultural—even peasant—outlooks. Certainly the spiritual gifts she documents in her diaries indicate she was a holy person with facile access to the spirit world, the realm of God. From that realm she brought to the world a renewed focus on the mercy of God. However, the period after her death in 1938 to the introduction of her cause in Rome in 1968 indicates differing judgments about her status and her message. As she records in her diaries, even during her lifetime her confessor and her superiors were concerned that she might be deluding herself. She was not well educated and she was of frail health. Ultimately, the Church judged that she is indeed a holy person, a Saint, on the basis of two miraculous healings.

The second of these healings—Fr. Pytel’s congenital heart problem completely disappeared in 1995—was indeed documented by medical science as “medically inexplicable.” Theologians and the Pope concluded that it was a “miracle” through the intercession of Sr. Kowalska to whom Fr. Pytel had a devotion. His parish, Holy Rosary, in Baltimore, MD is the location of the Archdiocesan shrine to Divine Mercy. Fr. Pytel was present for the canonization of Sr. Kowalska in Rome, in 2000. In 2003, Fr. Pytel was diagnosed with kidney cancer which had spread to one lung but not the brain leaving hope for a cure. Surgery, however, indicated it was too late, and he died three months later, in November, 2003.

Fr. Pytel’s death raises no question at all about the holiness of Sr. Faustyna, or her status as a holy person, a Saint, and the gift the Church says she brokered for Fr. Pytel from God. It raises questions about how human beings interpret human experiences such as sickness, disease, healing, cures, and miracles (see Pilch 2000). As a holy person, a Saint, Sr. Faustyna had an abundance of ASC experiences as noted above. It is difficult to know whether they were spontaneous (initiated by God, Jesus, or Mary), or induced (i.e., she established and maintained the context which God seems to favor for communicating with human beings, see 1 Sam 3: 1). At least some of them seem to be real because information in her diaries indicates those events which
others witnessed. If some were real, all could well be real. In any case, Sr. Faustyna was totally unaware of shamanic or neo-shamanic practices but simply followed her religious devotions very meticulously and obediently. She was a holy person, a Saint, but not a neo-shaman. Goodman’s insights about ASC experiences also help understand St. Faustina’s experiences.

Conclusion

Shamanism, neo-shamanism, urban shamanism, new-age shamanism, and similar movements are realities which deserve to be analyzed and interpreted by social scientists. However, given the negative or pejorative connotations of neo-shamanism and new-age shamanism, one must be careful in assigning these labels. The work of Felicitas Goodman and the Institute she founded ought not be labeled neo- or new-age shamanism mainly because she explicitly rejected them. Her insight about the “historical evolution” that takes place from ancient practices (be they shamanism or Christian devotion) to modern counterparts is a useful tool for analyzing these similar contemporary experiences. Felicitas was convinced that what she and members of her Institute experience and continue to research is religious ecstatic trance, that is, experiences in and with beings in alternate reality.

References


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

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

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

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

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

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1 See Borisov 1999; Gogolev 1993; Ksenofontov 1992b.
belonging to the Uralic language family. This assumption is based on the observation that the Yukaghir language—whose very position in the linguistic “forest” of Arctic Asia is extremely enigmatic—seems to be somehow related to the Samoyedic languages that are part of the Uralic family (Vasilev 1994). Despite the great difficulties in reconstructing a detailed history of the ethnic sequence of the region, ethnographic research has demonstrated that all the people practiced shamanism (Koško 1990). It is then reasonable to claim that shamanism in Siberia is a supra-ethnic ritual and religious tradition, an interpretation that offers an important interpretative context for rock art in Yakutia.

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

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

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

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

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

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2 See e.g. Alekseev 1984, photo 5; Vitebsky 1996: 57.
right holds a stick in its hand, which also touches an unidentified rectangular object. The object itself is divided on the inside by six horizontal lines. The next figure to the left is also exceptional in terms of its size. It is associated with an object reminiscent of an arrowhead or the tip of a spear. The figure’s torso is decorated with a grid-like ornament, which might symbolize the shaman’s ritual attire. Furthermore, the heads of both figures have horns or protruding ears, which are also confirmed motifs found in the shamanic tradition of Siberia (Devlet 1998: 202–207).

Between the figures and the elk on the far left there are four small anthropomorphic figures. Their spread-out arms and legs may indicate that they are dancing. One of them is holding an object which can be associated with a bow (or it might possibly be a drum). If the association is correct, it is necessary to add that the bow has played an important ritual role in shamanic practices among Eastern Siberian cultures. Furthermore, several researchers argue that, from a chronological perspective, the bow is a more archaic shamanic attribute than the drum within the region of Siberia (Sagalaev 1984: 23; Devlet 1998: 207). This fact can be confirmed by paintings on gravestones that were preserved in the cemetery discovered at Karakol in the Altay Mountains,
dating back to the beginning of the second millennium B.C. (Kubarev 1988). The Karakol paintings provide a valuable strand of evidence in our discussion because of their very possible relationship to shamanism (Kubarev 2002). The images of human figures discovered at Karakol are very distinct because of their sophisticated clothes and elaborate headdresses. These headdresses, in essence, have strong associations with birds, which are a symbol vital to Siberian shamanism. The fact that the images are directly related to burials is also of importance, since shamans balance themselves between life and death and often participated in funeral ceremonies to help the soul of the deceased find the right way to the afterlife (Eliade 1994: 209–218; Hoppál 2007).

On the far left-hand side of the set of paintings from Sinsk there are two elks and an almost illegible oval-shaped painting (fig. 4). The animals are facing the human figures. If we interpret the scene semantically, we can perceive the setting as a moment of contact in which the
elks are coming toward the (dancing?) people. Have the elks been summoned by shamans celebrating a ritual ceremony? We know that the object of many shamanic activities was to ensure a successful hunt. It is also known that in the shamanic tradition of the Yakut the elk appears as the shaman’s “animal-mother” (Ksenofontov 1992a: 69), and that having such an animal-mother was the privilege of the most powerful shamans (Ksenofontov 1992a: 55). Significantly, in numerous myths the elk often appears in the animistic form of the shaman’s helping spirit (Alekseev 1984). Although it is impossible to fully decode the semantics of these images, we cannot deny their potential shamanic symbolism. An interesting analogy is provided by a rock art panel on the Tokko River (a tributary of the Lena River), where the relationship between human and elk is of a special sexual nature (fig. 5). The round object held by the man could be a drum, although its size does not correspond to a real drum. The ithyphallic character of the person, however, can be related to sexual arousal, which has often been recorded as a real or metaphorical expression of shamanic ecstasy.

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

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³ See Mazin 1984; Shaman’s Costumes 2004.
figures were dressed in costumes resembling shamanic attire can be found among other rock paintings in Yakutia (fig. 7) and in the Altay region of Southern Siberia (figs 8a, b). There are also similar images at Tangaralakh on the Olenëk River in northern Yakutia (see below).

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

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

Fig. 6. Rock paintings near Sinsk Village (traced by Andrzej Rozwadowski).
does not recognize a physical illness that is in fact a symptom of the shamanic calling, and this is why the initiation process can continue for years until the candidate is sure that they have been chosen by the spirits. In other cases, which are frequent, the person consciously resists the call from a real fear of accepting such a powerful but dangerous gift. However, a person’s mortal powers can be too weak to oppose the will of the spirits, and in the end they have to submit to the shamanic call. Shamanic legends known among the Yakut, Evenki, and Buryat (Ksenofontov 1992a; Lommel 1967: 54–59) tell us about the future sha-
man’s journey into the world of spirits, where his or her body undergoes a process of dismemberment (Yakut ettenii, see Ksenofontov 1992a: 42). Their head is cut off, but the person retains their bodily functions as their eyes keep continual watch over the dramatic event. Their body is then torn to pieces with iron hooks and the muscles are stripped off the bones. Finally, when the skeleton is cleaned of all its organs and muscles, it is given a new body (usually boiled in a cauldron) and the candidate, in a new form, returns to the human world.

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

The symbolism of the shamanic rite of initiation is also reflected in the ritual caftan worn by shamans while performing ceremonies. One of the most characteristic motifs is the representation of ribs that are embroidered or applied as decoration on the shaman’s caftan4: these clearly invoke the symbolism of dismemberment. Caftans decorated with images of ribs are ethnographically attested to be worn by Yakut (Alekseev 1984: 223) and Evenki (Mazin 1984: 73) shamans. The chronological time span between the Siberian “x-ray” rock images and historically recent Yakut...

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

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

\(^6\) See Mazin 1984: 73.
In the Sinsk paintings (fig. 4) the image of the elk is highly suggestive of a graphic attempt to visualize a shaman’s helping spirit (see also fig. 5), while the accompanying schematic figures could be shamans. The motifs are analogous to the paintings at the rock art site of Toyon Ary, on the Lena River between Sinsk and Yakutsk. Here there are a pair of elks, a male and a female (as can be inferred, respectively, from the presence and absence of antlers), surrounded by poorly visible schematic images which are suggestive of human faces (fig. 10). The images have been painted in a manner similar to the Sinsk paintings and, according to local archeologists, they date back to the Bronze Age, i.e. they are 3,300–2,400 years old (Kochmar 1994). Interestingly, local tradition has preserved a fascinating legend about the origin of the paintings. Once there was a great shamaness who fought against the spirit of chickenpox. Shamaness and spirit transformed into two enormous elks who battled each other until the spirit of the illness was defeated. To commemorate her victory, the shamanka (female shaman) created the rock paintings (Pesterev 2000: 17). There is no way of proving that the legend, or even a part of it, is actually true; however, what is noteworthy is the fact that these drawings have become an inherent part of local shamanic tradition. No matter how old the story is—maybe it is an echo of a much older oral tradition—it is significant that contemporary local
people associate the rock art with shamanism. This fact proves that rock art has played a dynamic role within shamanism which has not been completely forgotten nor has been sidelined by contemporary culture.

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

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

Fig. 10. Rock paintings at Toyon Ary, middle Lena River, Yakutia (after Pesterov 2000: 17). Not to scale.
spoiled—remnants of the paint visible below may be part of the original whole painting). The latter has a rectangular-shaped head. Arkhipov assumes that the image depicts a shaman wearing a mask, similar to masks which were used by Evenki shamans. He consequently claims that the Tangaralakh paintings were created within the sphere of Evenki culture and that they can be dated to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The name of the place is also of importance, since tangaralakh in the Yakut language means ‘divine’ (Arkhipov 1989: 117) or can be explained as—so we were informed by local people—“the place with god’s depiction.” The word tangara can be translated as meaning “icon,” that is to say, “a picture of god’s image.” Hence, local Yakut refer to the mountain as “the place with an icon,” that is, “the place with god’s image.” We can assume that according to local tradition the place was considered sacred even before the arrival of the Yakut in the territory, and that its contemporary name is an attempt to describe this ancient “divinity” from the perspective of the Turkic sky “God” Tengri, or even from the perspective of the sacredness of an icon of the Orthodox Church.

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

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

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7 See Kochmar 1985: 181–182.
In particular, natural rocks are believed to be inhabited by the female spirit Eneke bugady, who is the ruler of the taiga, rivers, and animals. Eneke bugady is one of the greatest gods among the Evenki of southern Yakutia, and is supposed to dwell in sacred places where family cults were practiced, the “rocks–bugady.” To contact Eneke bugady for her assistance one had to get the support of an auxiliary god, who was called Baralak by the Evenki of the Vitim and Olekma rivers and belley by the Evenki of the Yenisei River (Kochmar 1985: 182). Usually Baralak was represented in wood as a small anthropomorphic figure devoid of hands or in the form of an elk. In order to empower the baralak, the sculpture was decorated with shenken-amulets, which gave it special magical powers. Such amulets were usually made of animal body parts, like the noses of sable, dried elk hearts, bones, claws, or fangs. Ethnographic accounts tell us that the shenkens were particularly valued for their power to ensure hunting success (Kochmar 1985).

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

Kochmar’s research in Yakutia has revealed more than a hundred such shenkens that were left at 16 rock art sites as well as places where rock art was not present (Kochmar 1985: 183). The largest number of shenkens was discovered in the valley of the Amga River, where they accompanied almost every example of rock art. When Kochmar tried to acquire information about their function and meaning, the local Evenki were of little help. They appeared to have no knowledge of when and why the objects had been left by the rocks. This fact, however, allows us to assume that the tradition of placing shenkens by rock art is rather old, older than the memory of the present day inhabitants of the region. Their precise age, however, remains a mystery. The shenkens are wooden objects left outside in the forest and subject to natural fac-
tors like deterioration and weathering. Thus, it seems reasonable to reject one hypothesis—that the shenken ritual is a relic from prehistoric times. More importantly, the shenkens clearly demonstrate that rock art is directly related to local beliefs and that the rock images constituted a part of the religious sphere of local culture.

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

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

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Shamanism and Arctic Hysteria
in Works of Marie A. Czaplicka

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

Marie Antoinette Czaplicka’s (fig. 1) anthropological and ethnological works are an important part of Polish scholarly heritage. Writing as a young scholar, she brought a new approach to the study of shamanism and other subjects related to Siberia. Among all her books and articles, one is especially worth of mentioning, *Aboriginal Siberia* (1914). This book is a sort of source book; Czaplicka collected a lot of information from books and other materials produced by scholars of Russia (146 authors), of Poland and other countries. The selection of the sources is similarly important for Anglophone scholars: most of the materials used in the Czaplicka’s book had been unknown to them. The book is divided into three parts, the last one is on the shaman and the most
important features of shamanism, like the shaman’s vocation, obtaining shamanic abilities, and the description of accessories. Czaplicka also described some rituals and ceremonies that simply could not be performed without the presence of the shaman, and some demons and spirits, who helped to communicate between the human and spiritual worlds. A very important part of the book is related to shamanism and gender. Czaplicka placed here some pioneer ideas and interpretations.

At the beginning of her book she describes various definitions of shamanism, on the basis of works by W. M. Mikhailowski, N. Kharuzin, Waldemar I. Jochelson, Waldemar G. Bogoras and Dmitri Klemenz. They thought that

Shamanism is understood by some people to be a primitive form of religion or religio-magic practiced by the aborigines of northern Asia as well as by all other aborigines in other parts of the world. [. . .] Others hold that Shamanism was only one form of expression of the religious cult of northern Asia, practised in order to avert the evil spirits. (Czaplicka 1914: 166)

She didn’t want to create her own definition, but she included in her text and also commented on those opinions that were definitely the most suitable to describe shamanism as a phenomenon:

The reader must decide for himself whether Shamanism appeals to him as a cult peculiar to this region, or whether it is part a very general primitive magico-religion. It appears to the author personally to be as difficult to speak in general terms of primitive religions as it would be to speak of Christian religions. This might be the task of a separate work—to determine whether Shamanism in its conception of the deities, nature, man, and in its rites, forms a special “sect” in the Animistic Religion. (Czaplicka 1914: 168)

She also engaged in polemics with some authors, like Dordji Bazazaroff, who believed that this religious form belonged only to the Mongols. She stressed that shamanism in its extent also can be found in Northern and Central Asia, not only in Mongolian territory (1914: 168).

Czaplicka compared the level of advancement and complexity of shamanism in two groups in her classification of Siberian peoples: the Paleo-Siberians (Chukchee, Koryak, Kamchadal, Itelmen, Ainu, Gilyak, Eskimo, Aleut, Yukhagir, Chuvanzy, and the Ostyak of Yenisei) and the Neo-Siberians (Finnic, Samoyedic, Turkic, Mongolic and the Tungusic
Fig. 1. A photograph of Marie A. Czaplicka, given by Beatrice Blackwood, one of her best friends at Somerville College (Oxford, UK), to Antoni Kuczyński. The photograph is now in possession of Stefania Skowron-Markowska.
tribes) (1914: 15–22). She emphasized that according to the present state of knowledge

... the Paleo-Siberians may be considered as possessing the simplest, and the Neo-Siberians the most complex, form of Shamanism. (1914: 167)

Those differences were related with different stages of evolution of social institutions and spiritual culture. Another factor in advanced evolution of Neo-Siberians would be a cultural transmission between the traditional tribes and other, non-Asiatic influences (1914: 168). The first contact probably took place during the trade with Russian merchants, then with other European peoples without any intervention in the social system. Probably that contact and some closer relations in one moment force or allow for some changes and brought innovations in shamanic practice. Certainly, there were some changes in clothes and accessories of the shaman, thanks to the accessibility of new decorative patterns. Czaplicka didn’t estimate those forms, but asserted:

That the dissimilarity between the Shamanism of Paleo- and Neo-Siberians is no doubt due to the differences in the geographical conditions of northern and southern Siberia seems to be proved by the result of a careful study of certain Neo-Siberian tribes (Yakut) who migrated to the north, and of certain Paleo-Siberians (Gilyak) who migrated to the south. The ease with they absorbed the customs and beliefs appertaining to their new surroundings shows that there was no fundamental difference between their shamanistic practices. The differences, being due to environment, disappear in migration. It cannot be said that the change is due to contact, since this, in many cases, is very slight. Indeed, Shamanism seems to be such a natural product of the Continental climate with it extremes of cold and heat [. . .] (1914: 167–168)

Here we find strong connections between Czaplicka’s concepts and geographic and environmental determinism. But simultaneously, she also showed that dissimilarities simply disappeared because of those geographical differences. It was possible because of common background of beliefs in both of groups, but it definitely demanded time.

The most important person, who personified the spiritual and magic power of a tribe or society was the shaman (seldom a female shaman). Czaplicka (similar to Waclaw Sieroszewski) thought that
Shamanism and Arctic Hysteria...

...a good shaman should possess a lot of amazing abilities, but the most important is the power, adapted by the knowledge and intuition. (Sieroszewski 1961: 311)

That internal power decided the respect among the tribesmen.
She described the shaman very precisely, stressing the fact that many male members of the family had their own drums that were very helpful in communication between two worlds:

...one member of family has the duty of beating the drum during certain ceremonials. ... Of course, we cannot call this member of family a shaman, but a master of the ceremonies, &c., who imitates the shaman; we can call shamans only those individuals having special skill and vocation, whether or not they are shamans by heredity. (1914: 170)

Then she discusses the problem of shamans’ vocations, describing the circumstances of the spirits’ call, but also the consequences of refusing the vocation. Czaplicka used Sieroszewski’s example, shaman Tiuspiut, who described his vocation as follows:

When I was twenty years old, I became very ill and began “to see with my eyes, to hear with my ears” that which others did not see or hear; nine years I struggled with myself, and I did not tell any one what was happening to me, as I was afraid that people would not believe me and would make fun of me. At last I became so seriously ill that I was on the verge of death; but when I started to shamanize I grew better; and even now when I do not shamanize for a long time I am liable to be ill. (1914: 173)

The spirits were very dissatisfied with the shaman and made life unbearable for him until he accepted his duties. The candidate became more and more sensitive, mentally unstable, quite often isolated himself, and forgot about reality. Sometimes the apprentice simply went insane or broke down, tortured by the spirits until he/she surrendered. The candidate

...passes through the horrible torments, loses his mind, becomes an idiot, goes insane and dies because of this kind of attack, or commits suicide. This state of “shaman’s illness” passes the moment the shaman takes his drum and starts to shamanize. (Rosiński 2003: 40–41)
Many of those shamans’ vocational symptoms Czaplicka (after Bogoras: 1904–1909: 421) connected with *arctic hysteria*, making this mental phenomenon an indicator of people who are predestined to be the spirits’ servants:

To be called to become a shaman is generally equivalent to being afflicted with hysteria; then the accepting of the call means recovery. “There are also young persons who, having suffered for years from lingering illness (usually of a nervous character) at last feel a call to take up shamanistic practice and by this means overcome the disease.” (1914: 172)

In this situation to accept the vocation is the key to being a chalice filled by shamanic potential, and a way to be “healthy.”

Czaplicka also quoted some examples collected by Bogoras and Leo Sternberg during their travels in Siberia. They often met the shaman’s candidate in phase of changing, so could observe some special signs of internal mental fight: nose bleeding, bloody perspiration. She also reconstructed, according to materials, the final part of changing: death and rebirth. Those traumatic initiation memories deeply influenced the candidate. During his “death” he was learning how to distinguish the illness, traveling between the world of man and spirits:

But his old body simply wasn’t suited to new tasks, so the candidate had to accept that his body had to be destroyed and that he would then be reborn with new eyes and ears and supernatural perception. He would also be able to travel between the worlds when he was in the state of ecstasy. First, it was necessary for his flesh to make a meal for the demons of illnesses if he wanted to fight with them in future. Thanks to altruistic torment and “death” in initiation, he would be able to cure and destroy the evil, the demons, dangerous for the rest of his society. (Rosiński 2003: 44)

But an attack by strong spirits wasn’t the only sign of a vocation. There were other symptoms, like having extra fingers, or it also could be a person struck by lightning (Rosiński 2001: 74).

The spirits started the anthropophagy process, tearing apart the body of candidate. But there is one more person in this unique theatre and Czaplicka stressed that fact: the master-shaman. He served with his knowledge and experience, supporting the candidate in difficult moments. She also emphasized the role of the shaman’s tree in the pro-
cess, the birch, the Siberian *axis mundi*, which is a “ladder” between the Upper, Central and Lower Worlds (Czaplicka 1914: 188).

For shamans some spirits were extremely important—they helped them in shamanic activities. The spirits were called *ämägyat* and *yekyua* (Yakut) (Czaplicka 1914: 182). According to V. F. Troshchanski (Czaplicka 1914: 183), *yekyua* means ‘mother-animal’. In the shamanic tradition, the shaman’s soul (*kut*) is placed in animals (stallions, wolves, dogs) and those animals are called “shamanic *yekyua*”:

If one of these animals kills another of its species, then the corresponding shaman will die. (Czaplicka 1914: 183)

This *kut* is placed in animal body during the ceremony. Czaplicka suggested that even the weakest shaman had his own assistant. Those spirits were invisible for ordinary people, to feel them was possible only for gifted persons. The *yekyuas* of female shamans were especially harmful (1914: 183).

Czaplicka also presented and analyzed some ways to classify shamans, their types and kind of “duty.” She emphasized the shamans’ “specialization” in their duties and in powers. In some more advanced tribes shamans played specific, selected roles. The rest were working in a “comprehensive” way (1914: 191). At first, she focused on Banzaroff’s concept, stressing the fact that Banzaroff’s shaman was “perfect” and very rare. This kind of shaman joined together functions of priest, prophet and medicine-man. As a priest he knew the will of gods and performed the social and family ceremonies. As a medicine-man he took care of the group; he could read the secret signs from bones as a prophet (Czaplicka 1914: 191). Czaplicka compared Banzaroff’s concept of the shaman to that of Jochelson’s. She described his division of “family” and “professional” shamans. The most powerful was the second group, where shamans were more versatile. Family shamans were usually connected with home. The professional shamans probably evolved from the family shamans. But Czaplicka decided to complete this classification with a third group, the “communal shamans”:

These shamans have to deal with a group of families taking part in important ceremonials. (1914: 192)
Indeed, this third category “reduces” some duties of family shamans and it is also a step toward becoming a professional shaman. It was usual that professional shamans performed social ceremonies, while family shamans avoided these activities. So communal shamans represented a stage between the two different types of specialization. As a following step in expanding the theory of shamanism, Czaplicka presented Bogoras’ typology of Chukchee shamans. In his typology all shamans were “professionals,” divided into ecstatic, prophetic and incantatory shamans. The last group was the most powerful, because they were doing the most dangerous part of the shaman’s work. Some of them could even do harm to people (Czaplicka 1914: 194).

In the Neo-Siberian group this division was definitely easier. Czaplicka accepted Troshchanski’s typologies, namely, that there were “black” and “white” shamans—and the difference came from spirits related with the priest, according to Sieroszewski: in Yakut society there were great, medium and small shamans. Here the power was crucial (Czaplicka 1914: 196).

Using Troshchanski’s typology, Czaplicka analyzed the position of female shamans. According linguistic studies and the theory of the great sensitivity of women, she accepted the hypothesis of relationship between female shamans with primitive “black” shamanism. The evidence could be found in languages but mainly in the shaman’s dress, where some symbolic physical features were visible, i.e. iron plates on an apron shaped as breasts, and a woman’s hairstyle. Also the basic, or family shamanism, was evidence of primary female shamanic function (1914: 198–200).

The shaman simply couldn’t take up his or her duties without special accessories. Czaplicka described the dress in details, the drums and some items, but she also gave her own interpretation of those paraphernalia. She analyzed the shamanic ceremony as a theatrical and religious communication between the shaman and the audience. All elements of shamanic dress, hairstyle, and drum were parts of a special cipher. Without a key it was impossible to understand it, and only those, who knew the symbols could “read” the ceremony. But the special dress and the drum without the shaman’s power were nothing, they had to be united:

They are of great importance, for the spirits will not hear the voice of shaman unless the right dress and implements are used, and the drum beaten; they are sacred because of their contact with a supernatural and often dangerous power.
Being sacred, these accessories must not be used by any one but a shaman, otherwise they are impotent to produce any result. It is only a good shaman, a real one, who can possess the full shaman’s dress. (1914: 204)

The drum was the most important among the accessories. Czaplicka gave some examples of drums of various tribes, and even some advice how to keep and preserve them. The most interesting part of her description is the way of reading the special “map,” created on drums by the shaman. The drawings and mystic signs showed the hidden way between the worlds and gave the drum some additional power (1914: 220).

Another chapter in Czaplicka’s book was very innovative and daring, when we consider the specific period and its cultural patterns. In this part, entitled “Shamanism and Sex,” (Chapter 12) she wanted . . . to deal not only with the male and female shamans and their relation to each other, but also with a curious phenomenon—the mystical change of sex among shamans, by which a male shaman is “transformed” into a female, and vice versa. (1914: 243)

The basic matter was the fact that among the majority of Siberian tribes the first mediums between the spiritual and human world were women. According to some scholars, like S. P. Krasheninnikov (Czaplicka 1914: 243), who did research among the Itelmen, in some primitive societies women were in majority in shaman’s practice. Bogoras also stressed the fact that women didn’t need to prepare for this function as long as did men. It is the special sensitivity of women—they are under the great influence of emotion—that is useful in shamanic training and practice. She also pointed out that many pieces of linguistic evidence can be found, if we analyze the names of female shamans in various tribes: they are very similar, whereas the male shamans’ names differ from each other. According to Czaplicka, this special state of female shamans could be a survival of an ancient mother cult, when the women’s status in society was privileged (1914: 243–244). During the description of this amazing transformation process, she was trying to explain related phenomena, like cross-dressing: there are some female spirits in parts of garments, so they can be carried on men. But this explanation she thought was too androgenic and quite unjust for women, creating some hierarchy between them and men. She rather agreed with the thesis of great women’s sensitivity.
The female shamans were definitely better mediums than shamans, but didn’t have the gift of ventriloquism (1914: 244–248).

Sex changing was sometimes part of a shaman’s vocation. The most important was the mental change; the physical ones were also important, but they were only the first stage:

The change of the habits of one sex is shown when the man “throws away the rifle and the lance, the lasso of the reindeer herdsman, and the harpoon of the seal-hunter, and takes to the needle and the skin-scaper.” He learns the use of these quickly, because “spirits” help him all the time. Even his pronunciation changes from masculine to feminine. His body loses its masculine appearance and he becomes shy. (Czaplicka 1914: 249)

They sometimes even got married, but society, in fact, never fully accepted this marriage. Since the transformed person could be very dangerous, the group didn’t interfere in this situation. The Chukchee sometimes had “kele-wives” or “kele-husbands,” that is, a supernatural spouse. Czaplicka also gave an interesting example of a widow who transformed into a man, being under the spirits’ influence. She cut her hair, started wearing male dress and became a shaman, and even found a young girl who decided to be her “wife” (1914: 250, after Bogoras 1904–199: 2, 455).

Female shamans’ position in Siberian societies was definitely more privileged than that of ordinary women.

Arctic Hysteria

In Czaplicka’s opinion, arctic hysteria was one of the two most dangerous diseases in Siberia, the second being syphilis (1914: 307). The broad scale of this phenomena was shown by Jochelson, Peter Simon Pallas and Bogoras. Czaplicka collected pieces of information and analyzed them, trying to answer questions on the origin and reasons of this amazing “disease.” At the end of nineteenth century and at the beginning of twentieth, hysteria was treated as a kind of neurosis and as religious and magical anomalies. Some travelers and the first observ-

1 After Bogoras 1904–2909: 2, 451.
ers of shamanism classified shamanism as a sort of “neurosis” at the very beginning. The causes of this “sickness,” according these scholars were simple: long, dark winter days, “white nights,” and monotonous scenery. Malnutrition and vitamin deficiency were also important factors. Some of the scholars noticed that the specific religious life of inhabitants of Siberia would be also significant for creating this kind of neurosis (Czaplicka 1914: 321). Among the selected tribes (Tungus, Itelmen, Lapp) some panic attacks occurred. The attack was induced by the sudden appearance of someone, by touching the person, or even by a whistle. In that situation the panicking person was occasionally ready to attack or kill the supposed perpetrator of the attack. There were some traditional methods of curing: a sick person should sniff burned reindeer skin or fur. Then the person fell asleep, sometimes for a long time (1914: 313, after Pallas 1788: 18).
The term artic hysteria includes many similar diseases, called in various ways among the Siberian tribes. In her work, *Aboriginal Siberia*, Czaplicka distinguished the most popular one: ämürakh, menerik (Yakut, singing while sleeping), Japanese *shaku*, melancholy (voluntary death), Malay *lâtah*, and Eskimo *problokto* (*pibloktoq*).

Ämürakh occurred among the Yakut (among Yukagir it was called irkunii, Tungus *olan*, Ainu *imu*) and was accompanied with strong convulsions. Ämürakh attacked usually calm, shy and fearful persons. During the attack, the person behaved in an obscene way. Similarly, a shaman who abandoned his vocation, or who had contact with lepers and syphilitics, was endangered. Probably, losing contact with supernatural powers could be the reason of this kind of harassment. In Czaplicka’s opinion, the symptoms of these diseases suggested to the scholars a new, common term, “arctic hysteria” (1914: 315–320).

Contemporary scholars defined four main stages through which every attacked person must pass. The first one, the phase of announcement, occurs one day to two hours before the attack, the victim starts getting nervous or he/she withdraws. Then he/she suddenly becomes excited—this is the second phase—can tear apart clothes, scream, do obscene things. In Siberia, that person often escaped to the tundra or jumped into snowdrifts, sometimes risking his/her life. After this excitement there followed the third phase, the time of convulsions or dead sleep or even a state of coma. The last stage was the moment of recovery. Sometimes the attack returned within a short time (Hsu 1961: 262). Czaplicka describes similar stages of artic hysteria in her work. She also notices that this kind of hysteria occurs in specific groups, especially women, girls and young boys (menerik), people aged between 35 and 50 (ämürakh), and furthermore, both forms, menerik and ämürakh, were quite common in societies of Siberian “newcomers,” that is, the Yakut and the Russians. Czaplicka noticed that some tribes were immune to hysteria, especially nomadic tribes and reindeer herders. She connected it with their better circumstances, and with the fact that they spent more time out of the most “hysteric” regions, that is, Northern Siberia (1914: 320). In her analysis of arctic hysteria Czaplicka also found other examples of similar diseases outside of Siberia, like *lâtah* in Malaysia. *Lâtah* attacked both men and women, people suddenly losing their temper, starting to imitate sounds and gestures they noticed before the attack. The basis of both phenomena was, according to her, the same: the acute nervous state. That’s why she stated that the most important
Shamanism and Arctic Hysteria...

factor was climate, not only arctic, but one extremely difficult for survival. So she suggested changing the term “arctic hysteria” to “hysteria of extreme climate.” As a next step in research, she proposed investigate both Americas and Africa, to find and describe similar occurrences (1914: 323). Those studies should be done by psychiatrists, who would be able to observe and estimate correctly the character of the disease. Czaplicka stressed the fact that the first travelers and scholars had not been educated in this matter, so they could not describe it properly. But psychiatrists had to be very careful: they can also make a mistake and not distinguish mental sickness from the shamanic state, this is one of the risks. So Czaplicka advised keeping minds open (1914: 320).

Czaplicka’s works are still valuable sources of knowledge on shamanism. Her classifications and conclusions are still quoted and analyzed by scholars of our days. The most popular are the pieces of information on women’s role in shamanism, and the problem of sex transformation during the process of becoming a shaman. Eliade (1994: 81; 2001: 35) pointed out that Czaplicka was one of the first scholars, together with Bogoras and N. Y. Vitashevsky (Mikołaj Witaszevski), who decided to face this problem. He also used her knowledge on shamans, their spirituality, classification and magical shaman flight (1993: 103). Other scholars similarly decided to use Czaplicka’s book to prepare materials on shamanism and arctic hysteria (McNiff 2004: 185; Ramet 1996: 174, 179; Harvey 2002: 252, 258; Morris 2005: 26). The description of the shaman’s vocation was also used as a starting point to analyze the phenomenon of insanity (Szyjewski 2005: 37–38; Sieradzan 2005: 83, 86).

Aboriginal Siberia is not Czaplicka’s only work on shamanism. In My Siberian Year, her second book, one she wrote for the general public, Czaplicka described some situations when she met male and female shamans and conversed with them. But these descriptions have a popular character; probably Czaplicka originally planned to write a scholarly book on her expedition in Siberia 1914–1915. Unfortunately, she did not write this study before her suicide. Thus, Aboriginal Siberia is the best source of shamanism of Czaplicka’s works.
References


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Shamans and Scholars: Constructing the Supernatural, Confronting the Enigmatic

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Shamanic actions are believed (by “natives”) to be manifestations of the supranatural, in the same way that shamanism is often defined (by scholars). Are any such supranatural occurrences present (or constructed) in contemporary shamanic activities? How are they perceived by the viewers, and how do academics, including myself, react when confronted with supposed proofs of the reality of spirits? The cases presented here come from the Tukha reindeer-breeders of the Mongolian taiga, from the Siberian North (Sakha–Yakutia), and from Seoul, Korea.

Occasional encounters with a few shamans—and, whether we like it or not, occasionality is the usual mode of confronting and studying shamanism, with séances only seldom being prepaid events, organized according to a predictable schedule—well, such sporadic meetings may inspire someone to build larger theoretical constructions on shamanism. In my case, if this disclaimer is necessary at all, they gave rise to a series of minor observations only. My “meetings with remarkable men” (and women) took place among the Tukha/Tsaatan reindeer-breeders of the Mongolian taiga, in Sakha-Yakutia in the Siberian North, and in Korean Seoul during the last decade or so. Although they did not add up to any systematic study, some of them brought experiences unknown before, evoking mixed emotions and ambivalent reflections.

An episode that occurred in Yakutia was for me a challenge to confront a problem that I had never before taken seriously, namely of a presence of something “supernatural” in shamanic séances. A certain “shamanic enigma” brought me face to face with uneasy questions and finally provoked uncomfortable confessions, including the one below.

Any ethnologist/anthropologist, no matter how confused or helpless he or she may feel in the field, should be able to cope with these
ambivalent perceptions by formulating them in the discursive language of the discipline. The ambiguity perceived by a scholar is often a sort of cognitive dissonance, with two, and often more, conflicting values in operation. I suppose that in cases like the one I am describing these interplaying values might be identified briefly as follows: the first, academic rationalism; the second, a current, no less academic, critique of the first stance as a Western cultural bias; the third, a readiness to assume that whatever one is told or shown makes some sense (which does not necessarily mean accepting it always as true—such an assumption would be simply naïve); the next circumstance, reprehensible as it may be, is a temptation to experience something extraordinary in distant places, if only pour épater les bourgeois at home; and finally, a mundane feeling that a grain of common sense would do no harm in confronting any mystery.

In order to express my ambiguous feelings in an academic way, I will transform them into the two following questions. First, given that shamanism was ever since its beginnings believed to be an arena for various manifestations of the supranatural, one would like to know whether it is still so today: are there any manifestations of something (believed to be) superhuman, otherworldly, extrasensory, etc.; do participants perceive, see, or feel such phenomena, what do those manifestations look like (in the eyes of the beholders), and how are they explained; in brief, how is the supernatural constructed? This last word, and the very implication that some images we call “constructed” other people may believe to be “real,” brings the second question, the perennial problem: what should an anthropologist think, of his interlocutors as well as of himself and his own thinking (and maybe also of the nature of the reality around him, although this is not so much a matter of his professional competence), when he is told by his “native” contacts about the occurrence of some supernatural phenomenon?

Questions like these might be multiplied. Let us begin by describing the case that was my point of departure, preceding it by some necessary background related to the situation of shamanism in Sakha–Yakutia.
Encounters in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia): The Evenki Shaman Savey

Ironically, my very first encounter with this matter was rather unpromising. It was during a walk in the forest outside the capital city of Yakutsk that I came across a small wooden palisade, newly built to imitate an old construction, where there was a young man, crying wildly and making other strange noises with something in his hand. He was dressed in nondescript, worn-out clothes and was shaking a big plastic bottle filled with pebbles to produce this noise. A psychotic, a self-styled pseudo-shaman, a mock-oyun? “No, no,” explained he in Russian, “we are playing RPG [role-playing games] here. Tolkienizm, you know.” So, it was not even any personage from the local cultural tradition that he was impersonating. He did not care to equip himself with anything referring to Siberian shamans, like a drum or headgear. No, he was just playing a generalized wizard from Tolkien’s fantasies. So much for shamanism in Yakutia, I thought, they have some “tolkienizm” instead. One should rather study globalization here.

Fortunately, as it soon turned out, much more than that is left of shamanism. At a certain point on my path toward it I was accompanied by Anatolii, who became later my guide and doorkeeper in the field. A fascinating personality, an Evenki himself who was brought up in the taiga but now lives in the capital, he has for several years remained in close contact with a renowned shaman, his kinsman Semën Stepanovich Vasil’év. Known under the name of Savey, he is considered by some to be one of the last “true” shamans in Yakutia. Anatolii told me that Savey indeed has supernatural powers; moreover, not only are they manifest during his performances, but they also are recorded on the photos that Anatolii was allowed to make after several years of mutual cooperation.

Those photos, made during Savey’s séances or shortly before and after, were really surprising (pls 9, 10 a). Unusual golden and orange streaks of light are visible around the shaman, who is either dancing in a completely dark interior or posing in full electric light. On some pictures these irregular, blurred shapes exit as wide flames from the shaman’s drum or from the iron bowl where the purifying fire was lit at the beginning; in others they cross the frame, running through the interior of the room as thin, looped lines. At times they are accompanied by dark spots, in which Anatolii saw either a bear’s head, or a bird, or a human hand. He explained that the effect appeared only after years of
their mutual cooperation, along with the shaman’s gradual increase in power which enabled him to reach the twelfth level of heaven and not just the ninth.

The photos were really captivating, and not only because of the obvious beauty and sheer artistic value of some of them. It was an enigma—inexplicable images, their intriguing character intensified by elaborate verbal comments. Anatoliĭ was so self-assured when convincing me about the supernatural character of these phenomena—and I will return to his words further down—that all this induced in my mind, if only temporarily, an uncanny state of perplexity. Since I could not possibly at this point understand how this special effect was achieved, I could not dismiss it easily as trick or fake.

This was not the first time that I was shown such pictures. Visiting Sakha (Yakut) families, I used to look through their albums, with souvenir photos from various celebrations. On a few of those unpretentious Polaroid photos there would be some small, golden spots, which the viewers would interpret as recordings of a supernatural power that had manifested during the ceremony. Parenthetically, I also had similar experiences in Poland. I remember the case of my fully trustworthy colleague, an ethnographer and a good photographer, who made photos of Buddhist (Lamaist) mystical tsam ceremonies in Nepal. On one, above the head of the ecstatic seer, appeared a yellow spot. After careful examinations of the film, the camera, etc., by qualified technicians, my friend predicated with an absolute conviction that this unexplainable spot must have been a manifestation of gurtum’s supernatural power.

We know those phantoms from respectable publications on shamanism as well. Piers Vitebsky in his widely known book presents a photo from a shamanic ceremony of appeasing evil spirits in Nepal that shows yellow and orange flame-shaped streaks and blurred lines, exactly like the ones around Savey. In his caption the author relates a highly surprised commentary by one of the photographed shamans, who stated that that was exactly how they saw deities and witches, and wondered how a camera could have registered a picture that should be visible to their eyes only: “That must have been an excellent camera!” he is reported as saying.1

Let me postpone for later the further consideration of this predicament and describe the very séance during which such phenomena were recorded. As I said, Savey is an Evenki and lives in the countryside, but since his clients are mainly in the cities he has to visit the capital from time to time. The demand for his divinatory and healing practices is steady. He himself had supposedly asked the spirits whether there are still any shamans in Yakutia, and their answer was that he was the only one. Having no followers among his kin, he passes on his vocation to two Sakha: his female assistant, middle-aged Oktiabrina (her telling name being a relic of the old Soviet-revolutionary fashion), and his young disciple Soduot.

So, it is a late evening, but not yet dark as in March dusk sets in at 9 p.m. An old, dilapidated, one-storey building is twisted and deformed here and there from the movements of the thin, shifting soil layer on top of the permafrost. There are outhouses and sheds in the courtyard, cramped two-room flats in the building. We enter the dining room through the kitchen. Assorted snacks of local delicacies brought from the country are laid on the table: smoked reindeer meat, sausages, preserves. There are also fish prepared in several ways, including the greatest Siberian delicacy stroganina—pieces of raw, deep-frozen fish, whittled from along from the tastiest part of its back.

The shaman has to eat well as he has a long trip ahead of him, so all the public eat together. We also drink some vodka, which is forbidden to him. There are 17 persons altogether and somebody remarks that this is favorable, being an odd number. All the real clients are women (apart from three ethnographers, two men are the accompanying husbands), half of them Sakha, the other half Russians—or rather persons of various nonindigenous origins and identities. They are from the city, and the most prominent among them has come all the way from Moscow, where she is an artist in show business. She is a big woman, with fluffy blond hair. This séance, the benefits of which we shall also profit from (although we have paid a fee), has been organized specially for her. She complains about her legs feeling heavy, but she is also explicit in saying that she feels somehow insecure about her career and generally confused as far as her future is concerned. Parenthetically, it is this kind of motivation that is spoken of most often by clients in all the areas of shamanic activity that I know of; my impression is that what brings most people to them is not so much a particular illness (which might be treated by
other specialists, e.g. doctors) as, rather, a general feeling that one's life is full of obstacles, hindrances, and bad luck.

Savey goes to the adjacent room, which we enter one by one to present our requests. My own plea is for health for my newborn daughter. As the shaman does not speak Russian, his assistant explains to him that I am asking for protection for her from spells and the evil eye.

It gets dark and we can start. We take away the table with the rest of food to the kitchen and sit down in the living room on the floor and on the chairs. We are told to keep our hands lying loose on our knees with palms up. The shaman and his assistant put on leather clothes, profusely embroidered with colored threads. His coat is bedecked with iron pendants. The assistant lights a fire in an iron bowl, and as he is doing this the master yawns and hiccups while voraciously smoking a cigarette. Finally he takes his drum, which has been drying over the electric oven, and starts drumming rhythmically at a pace of circa 120 strokes per minute. He will not stop nor alter the tempo during the next hour. First he sits, then his assistant helps him get up and he starts a clumsy dance with frequent bending to the ground and less frequent half-turns, all accompanied by quiet, interrupted chanting—or, rather, completely unintelligible wailing.

The divinatory phase starts; the shaman throws the drumstick toward each one of us and Oktiabrina, basing her judgment on whether it fell with the correct side up, informs us if the oracle is good or bad. My understanding is that the drumstick has to fall in front of each person correctly three times. Since this does not come easily, there are several dozen attempts altogether. Parenthetically speaking, as in so many divination procedures, the point is not just to read the future—good or bad, whichever is in store—but rather to ensure its positive course by conducting a rite properly, without failures, even if it is necessary to repeat it.

Healing of the sick lady from Moscow begins. She puts her hands on the drum and the shaman together with the assistant take the illness off her body, using a white cloth. In a moment they have the materialization of her sickness—and they show us the dirt that has appeared on the cloth. In the next move, her illness will be extracted by the drum passed slowly over her. Again, quite an amount of dust and small pieces of dirt will be collected on the inside of the drum and demonstratively scattered upon the cloth.

An hour has passed since the beginning of the séance. Savey takes off his garb and headdress and passes them across, together with the drum,
to the sick lady. Now she is supposed to take over the shamanizing for a few minutes. After her, several women take turns with the accessories. In some cases, their dancing is more lively and the drum sounds louder, struck even harder than when it was in Savey’s hands. Although I would by no means call it a trance, their enthusiasm is great and their energetic movements are really impressive. It is obviously not the first time that these ladies have had a chance to practice shamanic dancing; theoretically inclined anthropologists may discuss whether such activities might be labeled as an enculturation of Russians (and other nonindigenous inhabitants of Siberia) into the local culture.

The shaman himself is obviously tired, sitting on the floor in the corner, resting with a rag on his head to cover his eyes. Finally he goes out to the other room, together with the Muscovite, who probably will tell him, as she later told us, that she felt better instantly. In return, Savey would give her his final instructions.

Once again we sit down to eat in the kitchen. The women, specially the Russian ladies, are excited and joyful, whereas the Sakha take their meal more calmly. When parting, all say their goodbyes effusively. Though it would seem that we had met by chance, they say, there are no coincidences in life, and the Lord, Gospod, has directed it all. The Christian God, I presume.

In the meantime Anatolii was hesitating over whether he actually saw flames during the séance; his hope was that the photos he was taking during the séance would show. A few days later, while showing those photos—another series of the kind I saw earlier—he was enumerating his ideas and hypotheses about what was going on here. Shamanic helping spirits? Trajectories of the shaman’s own spiritual powers? Traces of energies which had remained in space left by the dead who were summoned during the séance? An image of the Evenki “Hearth Mother” Tov mubonni? Anatolii accepted all these explanations simultaneously, pelting me with self-explanatory terms and concepts: astral body, Kirillian effect, the wave-corpuscular nature of light, streams of electrons, Maxwell’s and Heisenberg’s equations, something called Kozyriev’s space—and just as mysterious a concept, the energy of time. “Truth is multivariant and reality manifests in mirages”; he enjoys repeating such statements after those contemporary Russian mystics-cum-academics whose works now fill the local market of ideas.

“Multivariance of truth” is a concept that suits Anatolii’s tricksterian nature. Being an Evenki through and through, a late transplant to the
academic society from the taiga, having had a rich life, he unites far-reaching cognitive ambitions with a fantastic sense of humor, due to which he is a master of nonnormative speech (obviously the Russian language offers a talented speaker great possibilities). He also has the cunning of a native who will be glad to con a foreigner just to show him the superiority of his own culture. Wouldn’t he act just like the shaman who shows a previously hidden piece of dirt as a materialization of a just-extracted illness and at the same time believe in the veracity of his actions?

I am debating these personal details only because I suppose there is a more general mechanism at work here, that of the contemporary promotion and marketing of shamanic practices, in the sense of Dean McCannell’s “marketing of the wilderness.” Although Anatoliĭ has an inimitable style of his own, I can only assume that there are others working as promoters of local shamans, their personal managers or impresarios. Such persons not only bring a shaman to the city and help him there, but they also elaborate on his image, spreading among the public exciting news and commentaries, praising the supernatural potential of their charges. In producing their own “scientific” explanations or interpretations of shamanic mysteries they take into account the contemporary city public (including foreigners) and their taste for “modern” rationalizations accompanying archaic practices.

Although it cannot be said that Savey is an urban shaman, Anatoliĭ’s presence at his side turns his craft, or their shared work, somehow into this direction. If this is not a singular case, then we might think of it as a kind of urban shamanism where the shaman may not be urban, but his promoter is.

I am bringing to your attention this pair of characters, emphasizing the dual cooperation of the shaman and his “impresario,” because this duality seems to correspond to a significant change in the shape of contemporary shamanism. I mean a certain “division of labor” within the shamanhood of today concerning the supernatural: whereas the contemporary shamanic performance, the séance itself, does not involve any visible extrasensual elements (i.e. evoked or constructed by the shaman, if only as a sleight of hand, or fake, if you will), these are appearing in the narratives around the ritual, narratives created not so much by shamans as by their promoters themselves (and, later, by all those transmitting the narratives).
As we have seen, during the séance Savey did not perform anything that could be labeled as a trick, intended to visibly prove his superhuman, miraculous, "otherworldly" powers. Looking at this from a broader perspective, it would be interesting to check a supposition that such tricks are going out of use among the shamans, at least in Siberia. It would be difficult to substantiate this claim statistically, and one could easily dismiss such assumptions by bringing opposite examples, mentioning obvious cases like the Philippine miracle healers, bare-hand surgeons, etc. But those are different procedures and different specialists (hardly shamans at all), so let me stay within the confines of continental Asia and the countries there that I have visited myself.

Hence, my tentative and cautious contention would be as follows: such actions that were supposed to prove the shaman's paranormal abilities (a reader assured of his/her rationalistic position may call them straightforwardly tricks or hoaxes, or at least manipulations) are being superseded or displaced by narratives, thus moving in a sense from the behavior to folklore.

Shamanic tricks were often mentioned—although they were by no means common—in the old literature on the subject. I am not sure whether contemporary authors would have that many observations, although they might quote some stories told by "almost-eyewitnesses." In Northern Mongolia, for instance, I was observing séances performed by old-style Tukha shamans like Suyaan (aged over 95 at that time) or Ganzorig; none of them was performing any "miraculous" action (pl. 10 b).

One may rightly observe that there is no clear difference between what would be an intentionally miraculous, ostensibly supernatural acting or behavior (which I claim was missing in those séances) and a highly impressive ecstatic behavior where the shaman demonstrates, in a sense, superhuman qualities. These are obviously still present, for example when he or she jumps tirelessly, or when in their wild movements—despite being blindfolded—they manage to avoid, as if miraculously, crashing into the stove and other furniture in the tent. To prevent such misunderstanding I would limit the relevance of my remarks to shamanic "miraculous" manipulations only.

A lack of those in the séances does not mean that shamans are not considered powerful beings. Quite the reverse, it suffices to mention the innumerable horrific stories telling how mighty they are (e.g. Vitebsky 2003). In fact, one may wonder how it is that so many clients are not afraid to participate in séances, although they know from the narratives
how malicious some shamans might be. I am aware that the statement that no fear accompanies shamanry may sound too hasty—shouldn’t it rather be assumed that some fear must have been an indispensable element of shamanic performance, this being, as it were, a practice of getting in touch with the supernatural, including the spirits (Wasilewski 2008)? Nevertheless, in the cases that I witnessed, participants never showed any visible dread ahead of or during the séance. Instead, there was a certain fear factor accompanying the telling of the shamanic narratives, especially those episodes in which spirits and the dead operate in places close and familiar to the people.

The motif of shamans convening in great numbers awakens a special apprehension. Such an event happened in Namsy—which, incidentally, is the settlement where the Polish exile-turned-ethnographer Wacław Sieroszewski had lived in custody a century before, working on his monograph Yakuty (Sieroszewski 1896), in fact the first complete ethnography of this nation. In 1992, during the high tide of the restitution of Sakha traditions, a shamanic convention was organized here. For my informants ten years later the very idea of bringing a hundred shamans together in one place was reprehensible: “How could it be allowed that so much shamanic power was gathered in one spot? In the past a shaman would avoid coming near another shaman . . . that would bring too much power together, it would inevitably cause an explosion!” That’s why, it was said, the local stream, in which no one had ever drowned before and where even children bathed, suddenly became a place where people drown, one after the other. It was stressed with horror that although everyone knows about it and avoids bathing there, it happens nevertheless; unexplained car accidents and other misfortunes also happen right there.

Dreads and apprehensions are even greater in the case of dead shamans, as many folkloric memorats register. In the local museum of Ytyk Kyuel (capital of the Tattinskiĭ ulus, Central Yakutia) a mannequin in shamanic attire is on display. Fascinating as it is for the visitors, it is barely standing upright, leaned carelessly against a corner, covered with dust, since no museum worker dares to touch it and set it straight. The shaman’s garb, along with his skull (which is still somewhere in the museum), were brought from a tomb half a century ago; the museum employee in charge of the operation died soon afterward, thus confirming the still enduring idea that anyone who digs tombs will suffer a sudden death.

The enduring fears of provincial museum staff are by no means unique; similar emotions are to be encountered in the republic’s cen-
Shamans and Scholars

Ent museum, where numerous shamanic paraphernalia are collected. After every inspection of the shamanic attires in the Iaroslavskii Museum the keepers purify them with incense in an act of expiation and explain to their former owners why the disturbance was necessary. It is said that a certain young employee once donned such a garb pretending he was a shaman and went crazy soon afterwards. When one of the local museums asked at another place for a shamanic drum which they needed to complete the whole set, a series of suicides broke out, ceasing only when the drum was returned. Horrific stories connected with shamanic remnants abound.²

Tales of the Tukha of Northern Mongolia: Black Shamanic Powers

Horror stories of another type, namely those of inter-shamanic hostilities, also abound in the memory of the Sakha.³ Similarly, among the Tukha of Northern Mongolia tales documenting the ability of black shamans to kill an enemy are still quite often heard. Rivaling shamans conduct a duel at a distance, just by long simultaneous drumming, audible to all those living in the area; in effect, one of the rivals is forced to give away his assistant spirits to the winner and eventually dies. I cannot refrain from a supposition that perceptions of this kind, with mutually antagonistic shamans feeling an intense, even explosive hostility toward each other, correspond to the more realistic, in terms of psychology, emotional profiles of those personalities. Given that shamans are outstanding individuals, more often than not fully assured of their charisma and power, of being uniquely “chosen by the spirits,” some of them can come to hate their rivals and become barely able to stand any necessity of sharing the audience’s recognition with other competitors.

Apart from these psychological and sociological determinants, other fears of the Tukha are also expressed in horror stories. The hostile shamans—and suspected in the first place are those coming from the neighboring Tuva, although the Tukha themselves are in fact a branch

² See e.g. Fedorov 2003: 214–215.
³ See e.g. several narratives published recently by Vasiliev 2010.
of the Tuvinians—are accused of murdering innocent people in a most cruel way. One of the narratives that I heard repeatedly refers to a real case, when a family was attacked by a hungry bear in their own tent. The animal dared to enter the tepee, extinguished the fire, destroyed the interior, and finally killed and tore apart the bodies of the grandmother and her grandchild, thus bringing some other members of the family to a state of permanent mental illness. For the Tukha there is no other explanation for such an unusual behavior than that the bear must have been in fact some malicious shaman from Tuva who took shape of this animal.

A Jesa Ceremony in Seoul, South Korea

The third area to which my direct observations relate is the contemporary South Korean shamanism, musok. The female shamans mudang that I was observing in Seoul do not in fact perform any tricks to suggest their supernatural abilities. Unlike their predecessors, they do not swallow meters of animal guts, hold heavy pots miraculously affixed to their lower lips without even touching them with their hands, or climb ladders made of sharp knives. What they do instead is give demonstrations of craft rather than power, in which they show their skills as entertainers. At those few séances that I saw in Seoul I observed only one trick, not even a serious one—in fact a comic play on the idea of a shamanic “miracle.”

Let me recollect one of those jesä ceremonies—a big social event for the whole neighborhood, although staged and controlled top-down as it is financed and attended by the local administration. Immediately after the neo-Confucianist libation, a solemn, formal, and exclusively male action performed by costumed city officials, a much more entertaining shamanic ceremony began, run and attended almost exclusively by women. At a certain point the female shaman had to put a huge eviscerated hog in the local shrine as a sacrifice. The stretched-out animal body was impaled on a big pitchfork, which had then to be placed vertically, with the hog upright, in front of the altar. Keeping this heavy and unstable ensemble balanced was considered a proof of the shamaness’s supernatural abilities. To help her to accomplish this, she was inviting local businessmen to make offerings of money: thick packets of banknotes on one side of the hog were supposed to keep the whole
thing standing in equilibrium. She was teasing the men, dragging them on to the podium with laughter and forcing them to buy themselves out of their predicament.

Similarly, shamanic oracles in Korean séances lack any supernatural character. Instead of being ominous messages from the other world, or disturbing glimpses into the future revealed by mysterious powers or deities, they are mundane comments and everyday advices, such as admonitions to watch out when crossing a road, directed lightheartedly by the shamaness mudang to each and every elderly lady present at the séance.

Concluding Remarks

If it is really the case that in contemporary séances shamanic tricks are less frequent and less serious than in the past, then from among several possible explanations the most obvious would be the one suggesting that the public of today is less susceptible to prestidigitation. I am aware, though, of the paradox that the same audience that would refute such conjuring as a hoax still accepts (believes in, or at least hopes for) some efficacy of shamanic actions in general.

Were tricks much more popular among shamans of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? A history and ethnography of those manipulations remaining to be written, any numerical comparisons are impossible, but what has changed for sure is the attitude of the observers. Paradoxically, whereas among the general public we might assume, rather than observe as manifest, some increased criticism or scepticism, this is not always the case with scholars and students. Their—or rather our, in fact—attitudes have changed from the times when the first investigators, when seeing shamanic tricks, tried to expose them and reveal their fraudulent nature. The authors of today are usually more careful in voicing their suspicions.

Józef Kopeć, one of the first Polish prisoners of war in Siberia, who described Tungus and Kamchadal shamanic performances as early as 1775, dismissed their tricks as deceitful conjuring, although not without some overtones of devilish intervention. Over a century later Waldemar Bogoraz, witnessing Urunge, an Asiatic Eskimo shaman, in performance, easily explained away her bare-hand surgery by assuming that she had some seal’s blood hidden in her mouth so as to place it at the right moment on the patient’s body; and Franz Boas learned
exactly the same from his Quesalid (and, through him, Claude Lévi-Strauss in his memorable study on the sorcerer and his magic). But the inquisitive Bogoraz had to give up any hope of understanding another of Urunge’s tricks, in which she easily, with her fingers alone, squeezed a bunch of small pebbles out of a big stone, which nevertheless remained undiminished and unchanged. Moreover, she was able to repeat this trick at his every request, in the daylight, with the top half of her body naked, etc., leaving him frustrated in his efforts to uncover how it was done. Old descriptions of how in the interiors of shamanic tents “some invisible hand” (this from Maria Czaplicka) would throw pebbles, ice, or animal manure straight into the viewers’ faces, or of Siberian shamans, Turkoman porkhans, or Buddhist (Lamaist) ecstatic seers (čoidžin in Mongolia) driving axes, swords, or knives deep into their bodies—all these facts, “stylized facts,” or “factoids” remained unexplained, apart from very general suggestions of hypnotizing, special resistance to pain when in trance, and so on.

Obviously, the old question “do shamans sham” is also being put today (Harvey 2003: 14), but the answer is seldom unequivocal. When one is risking heavy-handed positivist epistemology and political incorrectness, abstaining from any rationalization is preferred. “When in doubt, leave it out”—the English saying is still valid. In the aforementioned case of the alleged spirits on the photo published by Piers Vitebsky, the author chooses not to provide an explanation, quoting only the surprised indigenous shamans that I cited earlier. Marjorie M. Balzer (2003), another trustworthy researcher, fully realistic in her ethnographies of Sakha–Yakutia, also refrains from assessing her informants’ reports on supernatural occurrences in a séance that she too witnessed: remaining fully sympathetic with her Sakha friends, she leaves uncontested their claims that the shaman appeared as an eagle, saying only that she had not noticed this phenomenon. A perfect understatement indeed.

As for my own perception of the enigmatic photos from Savey’s séances, it is within the context of all such reserved comments (or lack of any) that I see nowadays my (then) restraint and insecurity in assessing them. To be precise, I never ventured to consider them real, leaving me pinned, so to speak, in a gray zone. Obviously, the fact that my uninitiated eyes of a sceptical Western observer did not notice anything unusual during the séance, and that the photos made at the same time by my Polish colleague did not show any flames, all this did
not encourage me to become a fervent believer. What prevented me from dismissing the whole thing from the very beginning was a certain respect for the indigenous, a trust, on the one hand, and a simple lack of photographic competence on the other. At that time I had only a vague idea about special effects in photography, including the one called “light painting,” which can account for the emergence of such images. As I learned later, this is a quite simple technique of “freezing” the picture with flashlight during a long exposure; but until I learned this I did not feel entitled to refute other people’s claims. So, the first of the circumstances remains to be analyzed—a trust, or a compulsion to believe (as long as it is not disproved) that is in operation here; it is much more subtle than the technical one, as much as it is a corollary of the way we, as anthropologists, think.

Our language, to begin with. Many authors are used to speaking about shamanizing in a way that suggests that the concept of “alternate reality” means for them a reality. We never explicitly refuse shamanic spirits the right to exist—why should we, after all? Would we ever question the existence of Buddhist or Hindu deities, even those multihanded or elephant-headed deities? But more than that: we include those spirits, not necessarily proven as existent, into our academic definitions of shamanism, despite the risk of a methodological fallacy.

When reading general literature on the subject, one is struck by how often the terms “shaman” and its corollaries are defined through the concept of spirits. “The shaman is a master of spirits, he must control them,” or, conversely, “he is controlled, possessed by them,” or—my favorite, the most impressive one—“shamans engage with significant other-than-human persons.” Defining is as easy as that, and I only wish I could believe that all those expressions were consciously intended by their authors as metaphors, mental short cuts, as just abridged versions of the statement that the shaman is believed by his kinsmen to have such qualities.

In this context let me remind you of the firm stance, in fact quite an extreme one, that has been taken several times by Roberte N. Hamayon, that shamanism should not be defined by psychical phenomena like trance or ecstasy, these being ill-defined and too elusive to serve as touchstones for identifying this complex sociocultural institution (Hamayon 1993; 1995; 2000). Although I do not adhere in full to the author’s criticism (with what other criteria for distinguishing shamanism are we left then? Must “real” shamanism be embedded in the hunt-
ing-gathering lifestyle? Hardly, these days), I subscribe to her concern for the clarity of explanatory premises, or explicanses. When the spirits are referred to by scholars, we have a very strong case against such definitions: in comparison to trance, spirits are infinitely more elusive and unknowable. Defining *obscurum per obscurum* is not any defining at all.

But today is not a good time for demanding clarity in definitions and, excuse me the word, rationality in perceiving cultural realities. We all know that anthropology is very much a reflexive business. A self-scrutinizing of the author’s own intellectual premises—with the idea that “rationality” be on top of the list—is *de rigueur* in any anthropological elucidation worth its name. An ethnologist from Central/Eastern Europe, like myself, must feel especially obliged to follow the leaders (from Western academia, obviously), just to avoid reproaches of parochialism and remorse of conscience for being out of date. Under such a pressure any scholar would eagerly admit that what seems rational to him may lose its obvious, self-explanatory character when confronted with other ways of thinking, if not rationalities.

The current requirement for reflexivity forces us to look at our rationality almost as a prejudgment or prejudice. Leaving aside the vast and influential general anthropological debate on rationality, even reading the specialized literature on shamanism may bring one who still clings to this obsolete idea into a state of moral panic. Might it not just be a Western/bourgeois/colonial/male/patriarchal fallacy?

There are also examples of those who encourage us to go boldly on to the wild side. One of the most impressive cases is, needless to say, Edith Turner, who is proud enough to confess that she several times felt the presence of the spirits during African rituals, and that based on those experiences she is absolutely certain that they really exist (e.g. Turner 2003). It is also hard to forget Michael Harner, a student-turned-practitioner, the first in the long line of those to penetrate, their own drum in hand, the Altered States of Consciousness—indeed, an Alternate Reality. Wouldn’t it then be too presumptuous of me to explain away all their experiences and claims by assuming that they were inaccurate, manipulative, or dishonest, or to easily dismiss them, saying something to the effect that they just “went native” too far? When doing ethnography, how can you tell how far is too far?
It is difficult not to be afflicted by those drums. It was exactly the pressure from the two opposite directions that had me sitting on the fence when confronting my dilemma. The scholar (here I am referring to my own failings only) wants to have the best of both worlds: to enjoy the academic prestige of science, accuracy, and criticism and at the same time to be praised for being “open to strangeness.” But doesn’t the blessed virtue of desirable relativism border on an unacceptable naïvety? Shouldn’t I rather learn from the “teachings” of Carlos Castaneda?

But what exactly should I learn, given that it was a double lesson: one can draw conclusions not only from Castaneda’s fall from grace so many years ago, but also from his current revival in academia, despite it. A recent handbook on the anthropology of religion devotes a chapter to his writings (Bowie 2006); the university publishers, republishing them after all those years, keep us still fence-sitting when advertising the new anniversary edition as a book “for those dissatisfied with the limitations of the Western worldview . . . controversial for the alternative way of seeing that it presents and the revolution in cognition it demands, [w] hether read as ethnographic fact or creative fiction” (Castaneda 2008). Just as if they did not know best . . .

So, we are advised to revolutionize our cognition no matter whether all this is true or fake. For those students who seek in academic publications guidelines for the epistemological stance they should take, it would be one more lesson worth learning: the publishers must cater for so many different tastes these days, so you might be left in your ambivalent position, fence-sitting. I do not wonder, then, that whenever I ask my students what they think—is there “something” in those mysterious lights in my shamanic photos—a half of the auditorium votes, albeit with hesitation, for.

*Mundus vult decipi, ergo . . . decipiatur?*

References


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4 See Turner 1968.


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Black Shamans of the Turkic-Speaking Telengit in Southern Siberia

DÁVID SOMFAI KARA and LÁSZLÓ KUNKOVÁCS  BUDAPEST

In September of 1995 two Hungarians, ethnologist Dávid Somfai Kara, who wrote the article and László Kunkovács, who took the pictures, visited the Republic of Altay (Russian Federation). The Republic of Altay, founded as the Oyrot Autonomous Province (in Russian oblast') in 1922, has a population of around 200,000, according to the last census (2010). About 70,000\(^1\) of the population (34\%) are native Altaians, or Altay kiži, as they call themselves. The Altaians were officially called Oyrot (Golden 1992: 412) until 1948, because they once belonged to the Oyrat (Jungar Ζöün Πar) Empire (1620–1758) (Atwood 2004: 622; Golden 1992: 341–342). But, unlike the Mongol-speaking Oyrats (Kalmyks), the Altaians speak a Turkic language, closely related to Kirghiz and Khakas. The Telengit is basically a sub-ethnic group of the Altaians, and they share the same language and customs. The Telengit started to separate from the Altay kiži during Oyrat times when they were placed under the Jaisang leaders of the Ööled tribe. Later the separation was strengthened by religious movements among the Altay kiži. Some other South Siberian Turkic peoples (Telenget, [or Russian

\(^1\) The ethnic name “Altaian” (Russian altaets) is quite dubious since it is a name of the major Turkic-speaking people in the Republic of Altay, but it is not accepted by other smaller ethnic groups: Telengit, Tuba, Kumandy, Chalkandu and Telenget (in Russian Teleut). It was reflected in the last census (2010): 4,000 Telengit, 2,000 Tuba, 1,000 Chalkandu and 1,000 Kumandy identified themselves as a separate ethnicity from Altay kiži although they were still included to the official Altaian ethnic group. The Telenget (Teleut) although included in the Altaians, live outside the Republic of Altay in Kemerovo (Kömür) Region, with a population around 2,600. The majority of the Kumandy (around 1,500) also lives outside the Republic of Altay, in Biïsk District in the Altay Kraï.
Teleut], Kumandy, Tuba, Chalkandu) were also included in the concept of “Altaian,” although they do not live in the Altay Mountains and their languages compose a dialectical chain between Altay kiži and Khakas (Yenisei Kirghiz) languages.

We followed the route of Vilmos Diószegi (1923–1972), a famous Hungarian ethnologist who conducted research on shamanic traditions in the Altay Province in 1964. He visited the Kumandy living by the Biy River in August and September 1964, and then the Telengit of Kosh-Agash County in October of the same year (Somfai Kara 2003: 298). The Kumandy people have gone through a heavy acculturation in the last fifty years, so we decided to visit the Telengit of Kosh-Agash district. First we traveled to Barnaul (Altay Kraï) and then to Gorno-Altaïsk (formerly Ulaluu or Oyrot-Tura), the capital of the Republic of Altay. Before we reached Kosh-Agash, situated 455 km from the capital, we traveled through the villages of the Kan-Oozï and Ongdoy districts, inhabited by Altay kiži (fig. 1).

Burkhanism

Unlike the Telengit, the Altay kiži of the Western part of the Republic of Altay (Kan-Ooožï, Köksuu-Ooožï, Ongdoy, Mayma, Chamal and Shebalin districts) reformed their folk religion at the beginning of twentieth century. In 1904, an Altay kiži from Kan-Ooožï by the name Čot Čolpon-Uulï (Chet Chelpanov) (Vinogradov 2003: 1–4) had a vision of an old white man (Ak Burkan, cf. Mongolian Tsagaan Öwgön), who predicted the return of a mythic hero, Oyrot-Kaan. One thousand Altay kiži gathered to pray to Ülgen, spirit of Sky (Üč-Kurbustan) (Potapov 1991: 245–246) for the return of Oyrot-Kaan, their savior. The preachers of the new religious movement (Ak Jang) (Halemba 2003: 168–169) were called jarlïkčï (Baskakov and Toshchakova 1947: 49). They preached that people should turn away from shamans (kam), who were sacrificing animals (jükeli) (Potapov 1991: 252) to Erlik, the lord of the Lower World. Instead of attending rituals performed by shamans, people

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2 Ulaluu (Russian Ulala) was named after Ula, a small river. The settlement was founded by Russian settlers in 1824, and soon became the center of the mission of the Orthodox Church. From 1932 till 1948, it was called Oyrot-Tura.

3 Verbitskiĭ wrote (1893: 65) that people used to sacrifice a horse to Ülgen as well.
started to worship the spirit of the Altay Mountains (Altay eezî). To worship Ülgen, they set up altars dedicated to the spirit Jayîk (pl. 11), who is a mediating spirit between Ülgen and the people. We even met a jarlikčî in the village of Kurlik (Kan-Oozî district), who showed us his Jayîk altar and the former site for worshipping (küree). When we asked about shamans, he told us that when Ak Jang, the “White Custom,” was accepted by the Altay kiži, they chased away all the shamans, who practiced Kara Jang, the “Black Custom.” People do not even talk about shamans (kam), it is taboo. If still they mention them, they use the phrase neme biler “who knows something.”

However, the Telengit tribe living in the Kosh-Agash and Ulagan districts preserved the so-called Kara Jang “Black Custom,” and they still attend shamanic rituals. The Altay kiži believe that shamans practice black magic, e.g. stealing human souls (kut), or replacing them (tolunta

Fig. 1. Along the Chuy River from Gorno-Altaisk to Kosh-Agash (Republic of Altay). Photo: László Kunkovács, 1995.

4 Some sources mention this spirit as Ülgen’s son (Potapov 1991: 248).
and toluu) with somebody else’s. During the revitalization of religious traditions of the Altay region, a new type of specialist emerged, who called themselves white shamans (ak kam) as opposed to the black shamans (kara kam) of the Kara Jang. These white shamans do not sacrifice animals to Erlik or to ancestral spirits (tös). Nor do they fall into trance to travel to the Lower World. They only conduct worshiping rituals to the spirits of the mountains (tayga eezï) and Ülgen. They heal people by burning (smudging) juniper (arčïn) and by washing them in sacred springs (aražan). But some serious diseases, especially mental ones, are believed to be cured only by black shamans. In such cases, Altay kiži secretly still visit the “black shamans” of the Telengit.

So that is why Diószegi visited the Telengit of Kosh-Agash after collecting briefly among the Altay kiži, who lived closer to Gorno-Altaïsk. We also traveled to Kosh-Agash and I was really lucky, because on the bus I met a Telengit woman, who was about to visit one of the last traditional shamans (initiated before post-Soviet times). She agreed to take us to the village of Kök-Örüü, a place Diószegi also visited in 1964. Unlike the Altay kiži, who live in the forested Northern valley of the Altay Mountains in their birch-bark tents (sodon or tos ayïl), the Telen- git are nomads of the steppe and live in felt houses, or yurts (kiyis ayïl) mixed among the Kazakh (fig. 2, pl. 12). The Kazakhs of Kosh-Agash are part of the Kazakh Middle Horde (Orta Jüz) tribes of Jungaria and the Altay, who migrated here after the fall of the Jungar-Oyrat Empire (1757) due to Russian colonization in the nineteenth century (Golden 1992: 342–342). They numbered around 12,000, 55% of the total population of the district in 2010.

Various Terms Denoting the Soul (Kut and Jula)

The woman I met was suffering from a disease called ürjen jula ‘runaway soul’ (Somfai 2003: 299). Her mother died a couple of years prior to our visit. After her mother’s death she fell into depression. She did not want to work or socialize. Older members of the community advised her to

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5 I have more data on this in my still unpublished fieldwork material, and see also Anokhin 1924: 32.
6 Diószegi (1970: 97–99) wrote only one article as a result of his fieldwork in the Altay; he published two libation songs (čačïlga), collected by himself in September, 1964.
visit Ariman, an old shaman from the village. Ariman immediately told her that her soul had been taken away by the soul of her dead mother. The Altay kiži and the Telengit believe—as do other Siberian Turkic peoples—that the source of life is breath (tïn) but humans and animals receive a soul (kut) that protects their well-being, luck and health (Potapov 1991: 63). After death, the kut leaves the body in seven days; this “leaving soul” is called üzüt (Anokhin 1924: 20; Potapov 1991: 31). It is very important that the üzüt leaves the place of the dead person in a proper way forty days following the death. Otherwise it can turn into a harmful spirit, or can steal the soul of other people or livestock. So according to the shaman, something went wrong with the üzüt of the mother and it took the jula ‘soul’ of her daughter.

Some Semantic and Lexical changes

It is interesting to observe how the meaning of kut ‘soul’ is changing among Turkic-speaking peoples. Among the Muslim Turks kut only

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7 See also üzüt bayramı ‘burial feast’ (Anokhin 1924: 20).
means ‘fortune’ and ‘good luck’, since their notion of soul changed fundamentally after the acceptance of Islam. The Turks of Southern Siberia are also losing the original meaning of kut, replacing it with other words. Tuva-Urianakhay groups prefer to use the Mongolic term sünezin (cf. Classical Mongolian sünesün). The Altay kiži and the Telen-git use jula or süne and sîr instead of kut (Anokhin 1924: 19–20; Potapov 1991: 30). Only some Khakas groups (Khaas, Khyzyl, Sagay, etc.) have preserved the word xut for ‘soul’, but süne and sîrün are also in use as synonyms (see also Sakha kut-sür). All these forms (sünezün, sîr, etc.) are the Mongolic variant of the concept of ‘soul’. Similar phenomenon can be observed with other important concepts of their traditional belief. The spirit of Sky was called tengri in Turkic, which simply meant ‘Sky’. It was also the one of the major spirits of Turkic mythology, or a sort of deity. Muslim Turks have forgotten the original meaning and they use tengri as ‘God’ along with Persian Xudā and Arabic Allāh. South Siberian Turks still worship the spirit of Sky, but use taboo names for it: Altay Turkic Ülgen or Üç-Kurbustan (Potapov 1991: 245), Tuva Kurbustug (Mongolic Qurmusta/Qormusta from Soghdian Xwrmzd and Avestan Abura-mazda) (Nadeliaev et al. 1969: 637). Again, only the Khakas groups worship tegir ‘Spirit of the Sky’. So Muslim Turks preserved the word, but its meaning has changed, while South Siberian Turks preserved the concept, but use other synonyms due to the taboo of the sacred term. The same thing is true about the kut soul.

One of the Last Telengit Shamans (Kam)

We spent a few days in Kosh-Agash, before the Telengit woman from Kök-Örüü invited us to visit Ariman, because shamans in the Altay only conduct rituals during the so-called “New Moon” (ay jangïzï), that is, the period between New and Full Moon. The Telengit woman agreed with the shaman that we could take part of the ritual conducted to “catch the runaway soul” (ürgen jula).

Ariman was born in 1928. He was a short man in his late sixties when we visited him. He was about twenty years old when he became a shaman by obtaining a shamanic drum (tüngür). The Telengit do not have any special initiation rituals, one becomes a shaman by receiving a drum. The shamanic drum was initiated by a certain ritual where it was dedicated to a spirit (tös), who after that becomes the owner of the

In Soviet times KGB agents searched for drums in the region. They confiscated them and prosecuted their owners, the shamans, for making anti-communist propaganda. When KGB agents started to investigate Ariman, he threw his drum into the river and wanted to give up his shamanic activities to avoid being arrested by the KGB. But soon after giving up his drum and shamanic practices, he began to have mental and physical problems. He developed a humpback and lost his consciousness.
regularly. His invisible helping spirits (*körmös*) (Anokhin 1924: 1) made him ill and forced him to resume shamanizing. But this time he decided to make a drum that can be easily disguised from the KGB.

Although he allowed us to take part in the ritual, he did not permit us to take pictures during the shamanic séance (*kamdaarï*). However, he agreed to take his picture with his shamanic dress and paraphernalia before the ritual started (pl. 14). He was wearing a traditional gown (*ton*) similar to Mongol *deel*. He was wearing a traditional hat (*börük*) (Anokhin 1924: 48–49) made of wool but with special shamanic ribbons, called *čačak*. The ribbons were decorated with plastic pearls (*jinji*) of white, yellow and red colors (pl. 15 a). Traditionally shamans decorated their hats with cowry-shells (*jïlanbaš* or *jïlamaš*) (Anokhin 1924: 48) but they were replaced by plastic pearls during Soviet times. He also showed us his new “drum” but to our great surprise it was not a traditional shamanic drum of the Telengit people.

The Drum Made of Cotton Cloth (*Bös Tüngür*)

Ariman’s drum was not an actual drum, but rather a device used to achieve the state of trance similar to the way shamans use their drums. It was a piece of cotton cloth (*bös*). The sacred cotton cloth that represented the drum was tied to a handle that was decorated with pearls (*jinji*) and had seven small rattles (*kongko*). Other ribbons (*jalama*) and nine braided strings (*manjak*, cf. Mongolian *manǰilga*) (Baskakov and Toshchakova 1947: 108; Anokhin 1924: 29) were also tied to its handle, which was just a twine (pls 14, 15 b). Traditionally, strings represented the snake-like creatures of the Lower World and the shaman wore them on his shamanic robe (*kültük manjak*) (Potapov 1991: 85).

On a piece of cloth the shaman drew a red circle symbolizing the drum with red paint. The design was similar to the paintings we find on real drums depicting the three-fold layers of the World. Ariman also painted the Seven Daughters of Erlik Biy, the Lord of the Lower World (*altïï oroon*) (Anokhin 1924: 2). There was also a man with an axe and a yak. The yak was the form in which one of Ariman’s helping spirits appeared to him. The axe was also some kind of sacred device.  

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8 Incidentally in 1996 I met a Kazakh shaman in the Mongolian part of the Altay Mountains, who used an axe when shamanizing.
The bös tüngür, that is, a “drum” made of cotton cloth, was a substitute for a real drum but in the Altay–Sayan region it is quite common to use small idols (Mongolic onγon, Tuva eeren) for shamanizing. They do not replace shamanic drums completely, but shamans use them sometimes instead of drums, especially during daytime, when they are not allowed to invoke the spirit of the drum. Actually onγon and eeren are not real terms for idols, they simply mean something ‘sacred’. The replacement of the shamanic drum (tüngür) by a similar hand-idol was, of course, also caused by the ideological and political situation in the region. Shamans needed a device that was easy to hide (Vajnštejn 1978).

The Ritual of Catching the “Runaway Soul”

Kunkovács was not allowed to take pictures during the ritual, so he went back to Kosh-Agash. I stayed in Kök-Örüü with the woman and the shaman. The ritual started after sunset. First the shaman lit the fire and expressed his gratitude (alkïš) to the spirit of the fire, who protected his house. He also put some meat on the stones of the fireplace and sprinkled milk and milk-liquor (arakï) on the fire to feed its spirit (ot eezi).9 The ill woman had to sit by the fire gazing into the flames. Having invoked the spirit of his idol or symbolic drum (tüngür eezi) the shaman started to call his helping spirits, the invisible forces (körmös), as Telengit call them. The körmös are usually the spirits of deceased shamans (tös), who mediate between the shaman’s soul (jula) and the spirits of the Lower World. The shaman stood by the fire and waved his idol as the pearls and rattles made special sounds that symbolized the conversation of the shaman with the spirit World. The körmös spirits took the soul of the shaman, who fell into trance. His soul traveled to the gates of Lower World, where he was stopped by the guards of the gates, the nine daughters and seven sons of Erlik (Anokhin 1924: 3–6). Each time he was stopped the shaman had to perform a drink-offering to the guards by pouring it into the fire. The spirit of the fire was mediating the sacrifices to the Lower World. Finally, the shaman found the spirit of the deceased mother who had “stolen” the soul of her daughter and asked her to give it back. Then he

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9 Potapov (1991: 66) mentions it as ot-ene ‘Mother Fire’.
returned to the Earth and the soul was reunited to the body of the ill woman, who received it with great relief.\textsuperscript{10}

Ariman was singing during the ritual, but I was not allowed to record, so understanding the words of the song was quite difficult. After the soul was retrieved, Ariman stopped singing and waving his idol. He put out the fire and the participants of the ceremony burnt some juniper (arčïn) to chase away harmful spirits. Then he put away his paraphernalia and thanked his helping spirits before seeing them off.

Later I found a similar “catching the soul” ritual song, recorded by Diószegi among the Kumandy of the Biy River in 1964. Finding stolen souls in the Lower World is well represented in the folklore in Siberia and its adjacent regions, including Mongolia or Manchuria. One of the most famous examples is the story of Nisan shaman, who also traveled to the Lower World to find the soul (fayangga) of a dead boy (Novak and Durant 1977: 85).

Concept of Well-Being and the “Free Soul” (Kut)

In South Siberian Turkic belief, the concept of well-being and the cause of illnesses are tightly related to the so-called free-soul (kut) that can leave the body (Potapov 1991: 39–47). While in Central Asia Turks believe that illness is caused by external things (cursing, evil-eye, demons), in Southern Siberia it is an internal change that causes illness. People are rarely possessed by demons or illnesses, although spirits and demons can distort the “free soul” of a human being, which ultimately can cause death. “Souls” can be moved in and out of a body and between human and spiritual worlds. Only shamans are capable of manipulating these souls by the help of their spirits. They can make them return to the bodies they belong.

There is the “soul exchanging ritual” (tolunta or toluu) that we mentioned earlier. The Altay kiži believe that some of the black shamans conduct rituals to replace the soul of a healthy person with a dying one. If someone is fatally ill, that person can offer a jükeli (cursing sac-

\textsuperscript{10} A very similar text was collected by Vilmos Diószegi among the Kumandy in 1964, now kept in Diószegi’s manuscript legacy (unpublished), Archives of the Institute of Ethnology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
If Erlik accepts it, they can choose someone else’s soul to substitute for their own. In that case, a healthy person dies, while the ill person lives on with another soul. A similar ritual can also be found in the *Secret History of the Mongols*. When Ögödei was fatally ill, shamans replaced his soul with his younger brother Tolui’s (Rachewiltz 1972: 163).

Religious specialists (such as bakšï) in Central Asia conduct rituals to chase away evil forces (*jin*), while in Southern Siberia the shaman strives to regain balance, which means that the soul (*kut*) stays with the body. In the Altay–Sayan region, shamanic ecstasy also means that the shaman’s free soul travels to the spiritual world. In the Buryat shamanic tradition the shaman is possessed by the helping spirit. Muslim spiritual specialists invoke spirits (*arwak*) in the rituals who can chase away the demons. So we can see that although Siberian or Inner Asian shamanic traditions are often treated as a homogeneous belief system, there are significant regional differences in the basic notions of these local traditions.

References


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11 Data I collected from a 45 year-old informant from Kïrlïk village (Kan-Oozy district, Republic of Altay) in 1995.


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Book Review


It is perplexing to write a review of an excellent collection of no less excellent papers where one third of the authors belong to the editorial board of Shaman. Moreover, the volume is a further step in recent Italian shamanism studies, and is devoted to the legacy of Neil L. Whitehead (who suddenly passed away in March 2012), a voice stressing the importance of analyzing the violence in, for, and behind of shamanism. Ten chapters in the book address Siberia, China, Korea, Nepal, Malaysia, etc. but there are important reflections too concerning Mongolia and the Amazonian basin. The very carefully edited book brings all the necessary references and illustrations to the chapters, a comprehensive “Index” has been added, and the voluminous references to each chapter are united into a “Bibliography” at the end of the volume, with more than two hundred entries, which are mostly up-to-date and relevant. The style and the “cool” English tone of the book are outstanding. Unfortunately, in our days we must wonder about such a careful publication.

I was tempted just to finish my review with the above sentence. But it would be unfair to my colleagues not to reflect upon their important and innovative contributions to actual understanding of comparative shamanism.

Notably shamanism is flourishing worldwide nowadays, and studies of shamanism are flourishing no less. Recently, no longer do Siberian reports dominate, supplanted instead by reports from Korea, China, Nepal, and Malaysia. Various South American religious phenomena have recently been reinterpreted as forms of “shamanism.” Long-term fieldwork and theoretical conclusions mark this new trend. I find the topic “violence” an intriguing one. I will not conceal that I like the very traditional publications about shamanism, e.g. descriptive or compara-
tive studies on drums, “crowns” (head-dresses) of the shamans, or about
classificatory terminology of various strata of “shamanizing” experts etc.
But I found “violence” a term fortuitiously chosen, originally as the title
itself is a vague and opaque term in social sciences. Michael Taussig in
another seminal publication (1987) called it “terror.” The term embraces
war, torture and sexual abuse at the same time.¹ Initially the reviewer
asks whether we find all these features in shamanism? But after the
reading the book, one may conclude (a mild) “yes” on this question. Sha-
manism is typically a concept found in small and less developed societies:
where we do not find great battles between armies, and shamans do not
torture their competitors; they do not form cannibalistic societies—thus
we cannot say at the first glance their societies are regularly exercising
violence. But after that “not-war-like” general judgment about shaman-
ism—we gradually may understand how often the shaman’s séances use
violent “vocabulary” and “scenography.” The shaman has specific weap-
ons, is dressed up with them, and is fighting against evil forces, which
finally will be vanquished. And the next time the battle starts again.
Male and female shamans take part alike in the struggle. Shaman songs
follow the same textual pattern: describing the fights. These “military”
scenes follow the same models found in the “higher” forms of religion.
Wrestling with God, or with his “angels” is a widely known pattern in
religion—and the similar textualization reminds us also of the texts
within shamanism.

In societies where we encounter shamans, everyday and primary con-
licts determine life. The later religious super-constructs are patterned
also according to that model. Jesus Christ defeats demons, exorcism is a
very actual part of today’s religion.² The more and more collected clink-
ing metals of the shaman’s robe resemble the medals of fake/true war
heroes, including Göring, Tito, Brezhnev, and Idi Amin and their like:
their number, voice and power drive away enemies.

This is why the book as a whole is a good innovation in shamanistic
studies. If we use sociopsychological terms, a dichotomy of competition/

¹ See the excellent book by Robert Muchembled (1989), from the point of view of
French “historical anthropology,” giving a detailed analysis of archival sources, using the
same terms, but in different perspective, as the shamanism-anthropologists do.
² See e.g. the activity of Padre Pio (1887–1968), showing the stigma, i.e. the wounds,
not received as signs of disease, but as the wounds, signs and marks of a warrior.
cooperation is visible, and when in “shamanizing societies” the everyday life is based upon cooperation—the religious sphere prefers competition, expressed by the “inner” violence manifestation. Other societies often look down upon the “shamanizing” ones, and “outer” powers want to conquer them. Both phenomena are presented in the chapters of the book.

Regarding parts of the book, the two editors wrote an essay introducing the theme: shamans as soul-hunters, warriors using magical weapons who battle bravely against evil forces (p. 1). If we list works in which that aspect occurs—the number is higher than one would immediately think. If we follow the research history, we often find that already the very first “outer” descriptions of shamans use a “battle vocabulary,” and later political or religious groups herald now the “battle against shamanism.”

The second half of the “Introduction” summarizes the chapters. Such remarks are today very common in foundation-supported publications, and are—also very commonly—superfluous: they just repeat abstracts of the chapters. The book under review is an exception: it makes comparative references and stresses theoretical and terminological issues. However, I do not see explained more precisely what is “structural violence” (p. 9)? The term was initiated by the Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung (1969) in peace research, and today it is widely used and commented in social sciences (with various meanings) as “institutionalized social injustice.” As for shamanism in my view all violence and shamanism is more or less “structural.” In my view all violence and all shamanism is “structural.”

Andrew J. Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart (Strathern) (“Dark and Light Shamanisms: Themes of Conflict, Ambivalence and Healing”) make a distinction between “dark” and “light” shamanism—quoting data from different cultures and continents. It is a fine “theoretical” paper; that is why I may mention that in all religions the “bipolar” action is observable. Not only does Latin *sacer* mean both ‘blessed’ and ‘damned’, Christ was struggling against “old” forms and peacefully building “new” forms of religion. “White Magic versus Black Magic” is not only a common phrase, but also a common situation. Michael Oppitz (“Enchantment and Destruction”) quotes cases from different cultures (Mongol, Naxi, Magar, and Kami) proving the thesis of the warlike nature of the shaman’s job (p. 25). Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer (“Shamans Emerging from Repression in Siberia: Lightning Rods of Fear and Hope”) addresses repression of shamans in Siberia (mainly
during the Soviet time). Striking fieldwork notes are published here. My favorite repost is, when the “informant” speaks of a talented “religious expert,” and Balzer asks: “As if she was out of Greek tragedy?” whereupon the informant agrees: “Yes, she was like a Cassandra” (p. 39). Another cherished reference is about the “multi-generation-curse” effectuated against NKVD (the Soviet secret police) officers (p. 40). Peter Knecht’s paper (“Experiences of Mongol Shamans in China: Victims and Agents of Violence”) describes the actual situation of Mongolian shamans in China—where the authorities today do not know for certain whether shamans are hostile mongers of superstitions or treasurers of folk traditions? Daniel A. Kister (“Variations of Violence at the Vital Core of Chinese and Korean Shamanic Ritual Worlds”) compares Oroqen, Naxi and Yi rites in China with rites in Korea. It is interesting to note that Han Chinese are envious of “harmony in China’s minority peoples” (p. 75), they do not find in Han ritual. We can add: violence is social practice, often contrasted with “harmony,” which is a key notion in Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Galina Sychenko (“Words of Violence: A Shamanic Curse in a Sagay Text”) observes that we have little data on violence in shamanic texts. Her samples are from the Sagay, a sub-ethnic group of the Turkic-speaking Khakas, living in Southern Siberia. Laurel Kendall is a specialist in Korean exorcism (kut), which—in American media—can lead to death. The author denies those reports: Koran shaman’s practice does not end with death—on the contrary, Korean Christian rites may be fatal (“Exorcism Death in Virginia: On the Misrepresentation of Korean Shamans”). Something similar has happened in the Khotan District of Eastern Nepal, where Christians destroyed an altar, see chapter 8 by von Alban von Stockhausen and Marion Wettstein (“Contesting Power, Negotiating Influence: Rai Shamans and New Religious Movements in Eastern Nepal”). This complex has many ramifications. Davide Torri (“Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Himalayan Encounters with Human and Other-Than-Human Opponents”) describes how violence in shamanic cultures of the Himalayas is expressed through myths and folk tales (p. 120). As Diana Riboli describes (“Of Angry Thunders, Smelly Intruders and Human-Tigers. Shamanic Representations of Violence and Conflict in

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3 One of the very few shamans I have seen once quoted Academician George Vernadsky’s remarks on “noosphere.”
Non-Violent Peoples: The Semang-Negrito [Malaysia]), the Orang Asli in Malaysia are generally described as peaceful and shy. These rain forest hunter-gatherers see their own surrounding peaceful and safe—whereas the area of the “Others” outside is hostile. Orang Asli, Batek and Jahai are today under threat—and not only from tourists, who for their money want to see naked and wild aborigines. A one-page sketch by Neil L. Whitehead (“Appendix: Divine Hunger – The Cannibal War-Machine”) closes the book.

As we turn the pages of this book, which exposes diversified descriptions and multi-level theories, we understand why the bibliography and the index are so large and carefully unified and detailed. The book gives close descriptions, and meditations about general issues of violence, culture and today’s shamans. That variety of facts and theories combined alone makes the book an important contribution to actual understanding of shamanism.

The chapters are not clones of one single leading theorem. They differ by topic and style from each other. From all of them we learn much about violence and by the end of the book we are tempted to “believe” violence is world-wide an important ingredient of shamanism, and can be traced comparatively, as some of the papers have already demonstrated. We read in different chapters on various items in the cultures: alcohol, ancestors, blood, death, dream, healing, hunting, myth, power, prayer, rite and ritual, soul, trance, weapon etc. (It is evident that the shaman’s weapons are archaic, or may even be called archaeological.) The semantics of the violence is rich, and, of course it is not always clear what is the difference between battle, conflict, fighting, oppression, war etc. How can we differentiate the violence against the “hostile world” with that against a “social enemy”? In the index (p. 176) the editors differentiate between a dozen kinds of violence: as social exchange, cathartic, constructive, creative, cultural, destructive, physical, political, psychological, social, spirit, suicidal, symbolic. If we add that most of these are parts of binary systems, we understand how rich the conceptual frame of the book is.

The book appears in a series called “Religious Studies/Anthropology.” The intention of the editors is to show how studies in shamanism enrich the general understanding of religion and anthropology. The book fulfils that task. It is good reading for scholars of religion—also beyond the studies of shamanism proper. And that is why the reader
will often return to the publication: both for its spectacular facts and its solid theorems.

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VILMOS VOIGT
Plates
1 A tüngürçük (vessel for a spirit) in the form of the reverse of a shaman’s drum in the village of Kökürü. Vessels in this form are extremely rare today. Photo: Łukasz Smyrski, 1999.
2 A Telengit kam with his tüyür, Kökörü village.
4 a A shaman (kam) from Beltyr explains to a new shaman candidate how to make a type of turguzuu (vessel for spirits). Photo: Agnieszka Halemba, 1999.

5 a A kam (shaman) from Beltyr (left) explains to a new shaman candidate (center) how to make a karaš (vessel for a spirit). The young adept was introduced to the kam by a biler kiži (knowledgable person) from the Ust'-Kan region (right), who recognised that her own practice does not lend itself to the training of this young man. Photo: Agnieszka Halemba, 1999.

5 b An older version of karaš, a marker of a capricious spirit, whose presence is nowadays most often indicated by a piece of black fabric. Photo: Łukasz Smyrski, 1999.
6 A biler kiži (knowledgable person), who has brought a new shaman candidate to a kam from Beltyr, making an offering at the kam's stove. She has his tüüür draped over one shoulder. Photo: Agnieszka Halemba, 1999.
7 Healing session in Bishkek, combining prayers with burning candles, using a whip, a knife and prayer beads. Photo: Danuta Penkala-Gawęcka, 2012.

8b Mahira (on the left) conducts the purification séance for her mother, Rakhilyam, at their place in a village near Almaty. Photo: Danuta Penkala-Gawęcka, 2000.
9 Shaman Savey in action (Yakutsk).
Photo: Anatoliĭ Álekseev, around 2005.
10 a Shaman Savey and his assistant (Yakutsk). Photo: Anatoliĭ Alekseev, around 2005.

10 b Suyaan, a Tukha shaman during a séance (Baruun taiga, Khövsgöl aymag, Northern Mongolia). Photo: Lech Mróz, 2001.
A so-called Jayïk idol that protects the family from evil spirits (kara tös) in Telengit houses, Küzïl-manï, Kosh-Agash district. Photo: László Kunkovács, 1995.
13 A Telengit drum in the V. N. Anokhin National Museum in Gorno-Altaišk. The handle of the drum has a human face representing an idol (čaluud), the spirit of the drum (tungūr eezi).

14 Ariman, the Telengit shaman from Kök-Örüü holds his böös tüngür in his left hand, before performing the ritual “chasing the runaway soul” (ürgen jula), Kök-Örüü, Kosh-Agash district.
15 a Ariman, wearing his headwear (börük) decorated with some ribbons (čačak) and plastic pearls (jinji), Kök-Örüü, Kosh-Agash district. Photo: László Kunkovács, 1995.

15 b Ariman shows his bös tüngür with some barely visible red drawings on it, Kök-Örüü, Kosh-Agash district. Photo: László Kunkovács, 1995.