

Spirits and Stones

Shamanism and Rock Art
in Central Asia and Siberia



edited by
Andrzej Rozwadowski
with Maria M. Koško

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Front cover picture: petroglyphs from Mugur-Sargol in Tuva; drawing by M. Devlet

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Contents

Introduction	7
CENTRAL ASIA	
Shamanism: an essential component of the Kazakh worldview MARIA M. KOŠKO	13
Kazakh ethnographic engravings and baksylyk ZHUMASH ZHETYBAEV	28
“Shamanic” motifs in the petroglyphs of Eastern Kazakhstan ZAINOLLA SAMASHEV	33
Disappearing into the rock: shamanistic aspects of Indo-Iranian mythology as a context for interpreting Central Asian petroglyphs ANDRZEJ ROZWADOWSKI	49
SIBERIA	
The deer petroglyphs of Arpauzen, South Kazakhstan KENNETH LYMER	80
Traces of shamanic motives in the petroglyphs and burial paintings of the Gorno-Altai VLADIMIR D. KUBAREV	99
Siberian shamanistic rock art EKATERINA DEVLET AND MARIANNA DEVLET	120
Shamans, lamas and the social effectiveness of rock art SIMON CROOK	137

Rock art of the Middle Lena River and Eastern Siberian shamanism ANATOLII I. GOGOLEV	153
Reconsidering the rock paintings at Sinsk Village, Middle Lena River (Yakutia) ANDRZEJ ROZWADOWSKI AND PETER KNURENKO	163
Addresses of authors	173

Siberian shamanistic rock art

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Rock art from the heartland of shamanism gives us an unique opportunity to trace the roots of shamanic concepts back to their fundamental elements. The analysis of particular rock art panels in the context of ethnological records of Siberian native peoples provides the grounds for the reconstruction of the Universe as perceived by their ancestors.

ROCK ART AND THE MODEL OF THE UNIVERSE

A good illustration of spatial structure of the universe comes from the Bronze Age sanctuary Mugur-Sargol in Tuva (Devlet 1980). Analysis of the spatial distribution of the rock art motifs on the panel provides a reconstruction of the world as seen by the ancient inhabitants of the Upper Yenisei. The ancient artists presented a view of the Universe in those remote time of pre-shamanic and shamanic concepts, which later were recorded by ethnologists. According to ethnological sources among the Siberian indigenous peoples common members of the community comprehended the Universe as a three-tiered structure. The upper celestial world is the world of “light powers”, the middle world is the intermediate sphere inhabited by the living, and the lower world is one of death and evil powers.

The main panel (so called “altar”) of the Mugur-Sargol rock art site and ancient sanctuary is totally covered with petroglyphs. Artists used fissures as natural frames which separates different levels and enclosed additional spheres of the universe with its upper world inhabited by spirits-ancestors at the top and the middle world inhabited by common people at the bottom (fig. 1). The lower world of the evil powers was never depicted but rarely marked by special symbols.

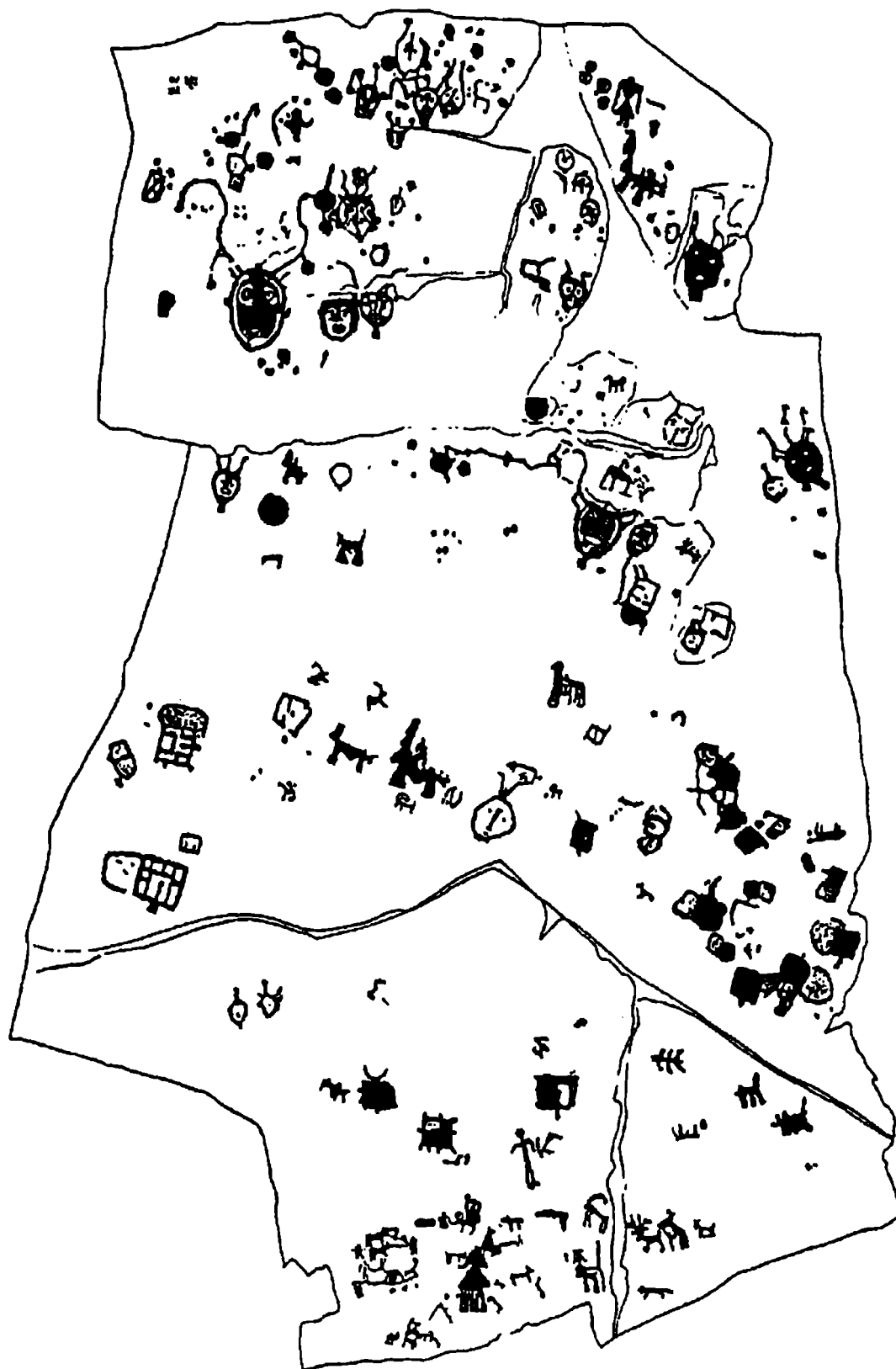


Figure 1 Central rock outcrop (so called 'altar') from the Bronze Age sanctuary of Mugur-Sargol in Tuva depicting the vertical model of the tripartite Universe. The rock art in the upper and central parts of the panel presents the upper world of spirits with enclosed additional spaces inhabited by celestials, while at the bottom part there are scenes of everyday human life on terrestrial world (after Devlet 1980)

At the top of the main surface the celestial world is represented by various mysterious creatures: creators of the universe, mythical primogenitors, and etc. Masks with anthropomorphic and fantastic features are pecked much larger than the human figures on the same surface, their symbolic importance and domination are enhanced in this way. Two of the largest masks may personify "creators" and reflect the myth of the two creators of the universe – the divine and the evil. The largest facial mask looks like a figure in bas-relief and its prominent nose follows the curves of the rock surface; it may probably depict the Lord of the Upper world. The second-largest mask was of supreme evil; the Lord of the underworld is also given extra emphasis when compared with the surrounding supernatural creatures of secondary importance by its size and terrible expression (fig. 2: 1-2). The range of spirits were conveyed in rock art by complex details, like facial features, and particular head-dresses with horns and central antenna. Being pecked on the rock during the ceremonies smaller masks with diverse details may embodied generalized sacred images of mythical ancestors, who linked people with their mythological primogenitors and deified dead relatives. Mythical ancestors were patrons of Tuvan shamans who may of performed ceremonies at the Mugur-Sargol Bronze Age sanctuary in order to obtain the protection of mythical ancestors (Devlet 1997).

Petroglyphs in the bottom of the panel shows the inhabitants of the middle terrestrial world (fig. 1, at the bottom). There are compositions of ordinary life. The images show people and domestic animals, a hunter with a bow shooting a goat and surrounded by dogs. Looking at the panel it is well to bear in mind that according to traditional view of the world there were a lot of different additional spheres and levels of the tripartite Universe. So one may discuss the composition in the center of the surface with strange anthropomorphs and zoomorphic figures among dwellings with adjoining pens as the depiction of a celestial settlement inhabited by the dead and deified ancestors (fig. 1, in the centre).

A view of the other spheres as reflections, of the terrestrial world is common for traditional Siberian cultures. People believe that inhabitants of the upper world retain material forms and customs of terrestrial life. "In the sky you will be as if among the living", states an ancient Turkic inscription. There is also another exciting example – the mother of a local archaeological team member had died and her relatives organized the funeral rites according to pre-Lamaistic rituals. The expedition leader asked the son about the funeral and was told that "Everything is all right. She established herself comfortably and works as a seamstress, as she had worked before the death". It later turned out that a shaman participated in the funeral and told the family that she found a job in the world of the deceased.

Besides special places inhabited by celestials, mythical progenitors of shamans who can influence terrestrial life, there are also heavenly bodies in the sky, in the upper world. In order to penetrate the upper sphere of the Universe the shaman had the ability of

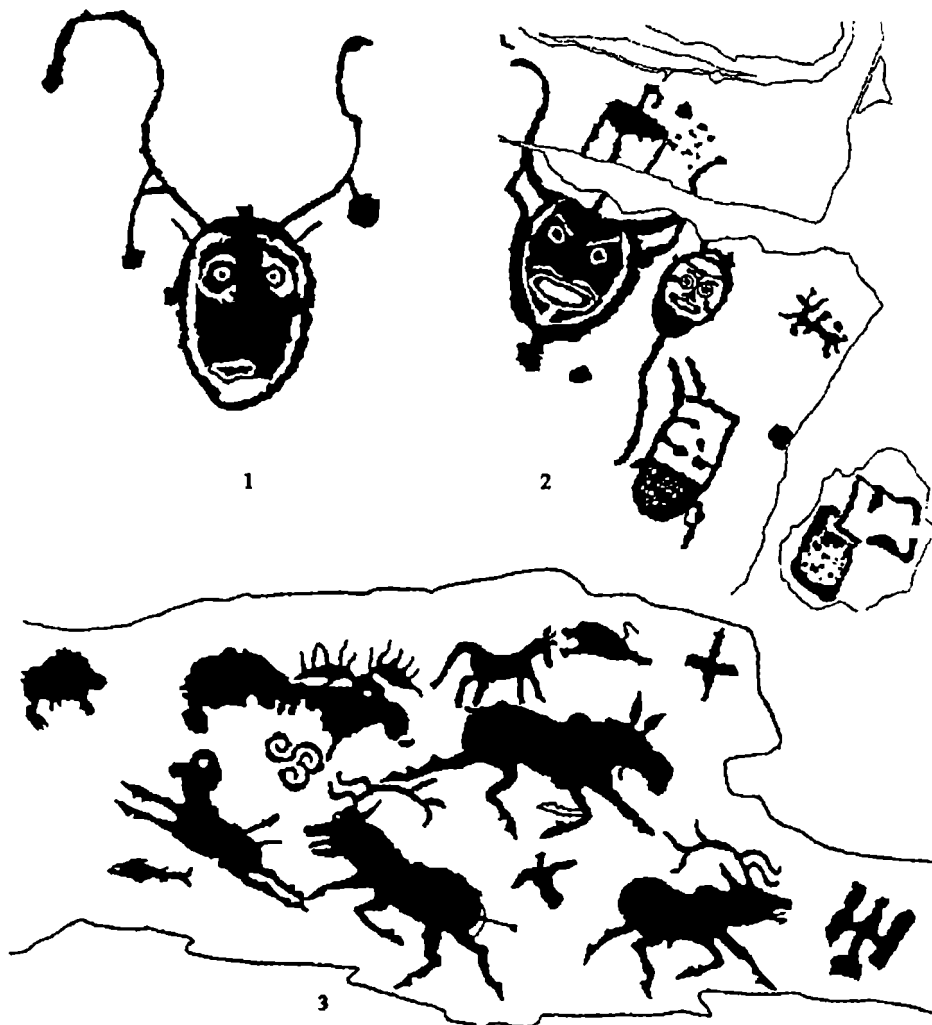


Figure 2 Rock art motifs interpreted as relating to the shamanic worldview. 1, 2 – The largest two masks from Mugur-Sargol in Tuva embody two supreme creators – the lord of celestial sphere of the Universe and the evil lord of the underworld (after Devlet 1980); 3 – The uninterrupted circle of life and death: the horizontal model of the Universe in Central Asian rock art from the Aldy-Mozaga rock art site, Sayan canyon of the Yenisei River, Tuva (after Devlet 1998)

flight. This idea may be recognized in the rock art panel from the Niuksha rock art site in Yakutia (Okladnikov & Mazin 1976: 123). One may see a shaman flying among the celestial bodies and stars (fig. 3: 1). Later this idea was retained in the coats of shamans. The aforementioned ability of flight mediated between the celestial and terrestrial parts of the universe and finds symbolic representation in the fringed part of the bottom and sleeves of the shaman's coat. It may be explained by the common fundamentals of the shamanic worldview by which the position of the shaman was a mediator between the different spheres of the Universe. Probably one may compare the shaman's function, carrying out communication between the world of people and world of spirits, with the bird as their intermediary between the ground and sky, upper and terrestrial worlds. The ornithomorphic motif was believed to be an essential representation on the shaman's costume (Prokofieva 1971).

The generalized vertical structure of the Universe as a tripartite model includes the upper world of light and associated divine powers, the underworld of evil powers and darkness, and the terrestrial world of human beings placed between them. The vertical model of the tripartite Universe has numerous additional spheres and enclosed spaces such as settlements of celestials in the upper world. Siberian aboriginal peoples comprehend the world not only as a vertical but as well as a horizontal structure (fig. 2: 3). The left is associated with the lower world and the right side with the upper world, and ethnological cases point out that the western side and downstream directions are related to death and the underworld. In the context of spatio-temporal relationships the lower world was associated with the past, the middle world with the present, and the upper world with the future.



Figure 3 Rock art motifs interpreted as relating to the shamanic worldview and anthropomorphs in the X-ray style. 1 – The shaman is flying amongst the heavenly bodies. Niuksha rock art site (after Okladnikov & Mazin 1976); X-ray style anthropomorphs: 2 – from the Aya Bay, Lake Baikal (after Okladnikov 1974); 3-4 – from the Manzia and Bolshaya Kada, the Lower Angara River basin (after Okladnikov 1966); 5 – from Mount Ukir (traced by Khoroshih and published by Mikhailov 1987)

These ideas one may keep in mind in the analysis of the rock art panel from Aldy-Mozaga: the round circle of life and death is depicted with killed animals running to the left of the world of dead, and the alive beings are looking to the right. The left side of the composition from Aldy-Mozaga may be interpreted as the world of death. The lower world is marked by carvings of fish and wild boar; the symbolism of these creatures is linked to their ability to penetrate into the underworld through the water or digging the soil. The bird, as a symbol of the upper world, is at the right side of the group (fig. 2: 3) (Devlet 1998).

Horizontal and vertical models may coexist so this view of the world, model of the Universe, is a complicated system of multiple spatial horizontal and vertical units. Only a shaman is a competent mediator between these spheres, as he is the only one who has the appropriate knowledge and abilities to orient himself in subordination of the worlds and their spatial structure.

MUSHROOM-LIKE ANTHROPOMORPHS

In the ethnographic records there is plenty of evidence for the fact that the Siberian shamans consumed poisonous mushrooms as narcotics in order to reach altered states of consciousness and to visit other spheres of the Universe. The intoxication by a sacred drink had assisted in contacting spirits, and stimulated the shaman's clairvoyance. The Mansy people of Western Siberia called the shaman "a man who eats fly-agaric".

The bright fly-agaric mushroom with its white spotted cup was named due to its pernicious influence for flies, however for some animals (for example, elk) it is a medicine, while the ingestion of fly-agaric by man can result in poisoning.

The commonly known explanation for the occurrence of the practice of fly-agaric mushroom eating considers it as the shaman's prerogative before shamanizing. However, in the past it is known that Siberian aboriginal peoples swallowed dried fly-agaric or their water solution, and even drank the urine of a person who has ingested this poisonous potion (Bogoraz-Tan 1939). Furthermore, the Russian ethnologist Yury Symchenko came to the conclusion that fly-agaric had never been used exclusively by shamans as it was also taken by ordinary members of communities with the intention of coming into contact with the spirits. He interviewed different Siberian shamans, who said that everyone, not only shamans, may eat fly-agaric and communicate with supernatural realms. Fly-agaric is mediator in these intercommunications for it is not a mushroom, and it is not a man, but "fly-agaric is a shaman for everyone" (Symchenko 1993: 64). Siberian indigenous peoples (Khants, Kets, Nivkhs, etc.) who used fly-agaric believe it to be a fantastic essence, which has human characteristics, in contrast to other poisonous mushrooms which are not just spirits but mushrooms in essence. These creatures were also described by native people as spirits, as members of a special tribe of leafing beings, as maidens, or even as degraded phalluses. Fly-agaric creatures may come in contact with

people and provide assistance, bring harm, or conduct a human being into the land of death and return them back to life. They may appear to the intoxicated or to those who have strayed in the forest. Their visible quantity may depend on the number of fly-agaric mushrooms, which had been used by a person.

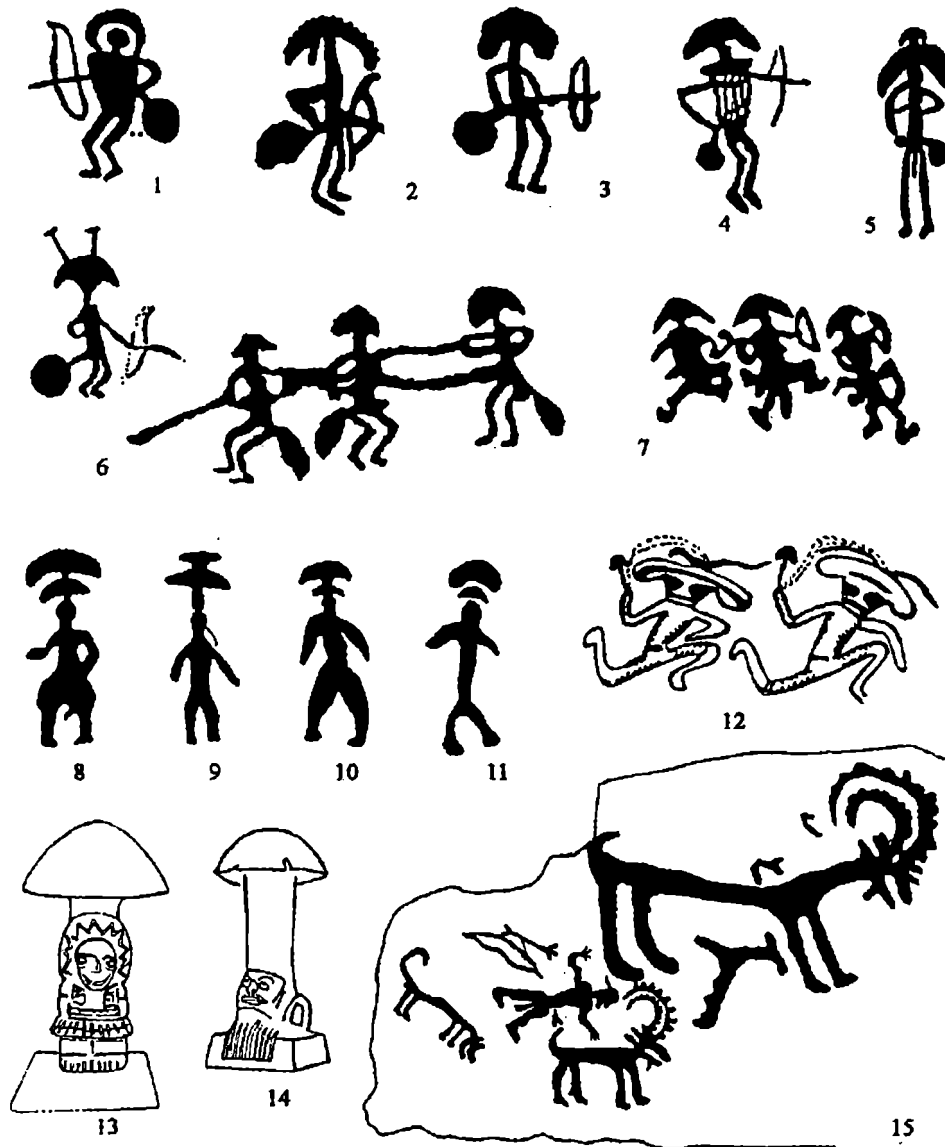


Figure 4 Fantastic male and female fly-agaric creatures: 1-5 – from the Upper Yenisei basin (after Devlet 1998), 6-7 – Khara-Chulun and Chuluut, Mongolia (after Kubarev, Jacobson & Tseveendorzh 2000; Novgorodova 1984), 8-11 – Pegtymel rock art site, Chukot peninsula (after Dikov 1971), 12 – Northern Africa (after Anati 1994), 13-14 – Central America (after Dikov 1971); 15 – composition probably depicting ritual practice from the Ustiu-Mozaga rock art site, Upper Yenisei river (after Devlet & Devlet 2000)

Anthropomorphs in mushroom-like hats form a very special subject in Siberian rock art. They are known among rock art motifs at Pegtimel, Chukot Peninsula (Dikov 1971; 1992). Numerous similar rock art images dated by the late Bronze Age (late second

millennium BC) now come known from Altai, Tuva and Mongolia, and resemble motifs that are also known in other parts of the world (fig. 4; 5) (Anati 1994; Devlet 1998; Devlet & Devlet 2000; Kubarev 1987; Kubarev & Jacobson 1996; Kubarev, Jacobson & Tseveendorzh 1996; Novgorodova 1984). In the Sayan canyon of the Yenisei river the carvings of mushroom-like dancing anthropomorphs belong to one of the most ancient motifs of the rock art and may be related to cult of fly-agaric mushrooms (Devlet 1976, 1998). The ancient roots of the idea is supported by dating of the rock art panels from Pegtimel as well as by excavation of stone plaques with engraved mushrooms on ancient sites from the Chukot Peninsula (Dikov 1971, 1992; Kiriak 1998).



Figure 5 Compositions with anthropomorphic mushroom-like creatures: 1 – from Chuluut, Mongolia (after Novgorodova 1984); 2 – Aldy-Mozaga rock art site, Upper Yenisei river. Cups are shown directly on the long necks of anthropomorphs and they even resemble a fly-agaric mushroom by the “knobbed” surface of the cup (after Devlet M. 1998)

They may be carved in a different shape and posture, and may be probably males and females. A wide-brimmed hat is an essential detail, and it may cover the head or even completely replace it. In some cases the headgear consists of two or three cups forming a vertical structure. Some figures have bags and other attributes or decorations. One figure, in particular, from Aldy-Mozaga attracts attention by its small knobs on the headgear that resemble the dotted caps of real fly-agarics (fig. 5: 2).

Recently, similar images with “knobbed” hats have been revealed at the Kalbak-Tash rock art site in the Altai (Kubarev & Jacobson 1996). There are single and groups of figures whose posture in some cases resemble the movements of dancing. Almost all of these images are pecked in the form of a front facing figure, while there are examples of “sitting figures” shown with torso *en face* and their legs rendered in profile. A sitting anthropomorphic figure with a massive torso is situated in a central position on the panels and is surrounded by smaller anthropomorphic figures – the prehistoric manner of depiction which enhances the special social position of a central figure.

There are some rock art panels where mushroom-like anthropomorphs form compositions with other similar figures or even with other non-anthropomorphic images, like those which are pecked on animals' back or facing a group of zoomorphs. Besides dancing anthropomorphs the compositions also include zoomorphic figures of lynx, goats, deer, elk, and etc. Some of fly-agaric anthropomorphs are hunting with a bow and shooting moving animals. There are also enigmatic groups of probable scenes of magic being used on animals: zoomorphs and anthropomorphs are looking each other, as if animals are coming of their own free-will to the person.

Different compositions find diverse explanation and quite often are interpreted as related with ritual use of poisonous mushrooms as hallucinogenic inducing substances. Dikov, who recorded the Pegtimel rock art, suggests the ancient inhabitants of the Chukot Peninsula depicted mythical fly-agarics and intoxicated persons who followed them into the other world (Dikov 1971, 1992). These idea resemble characters of the Itelmen folklore – nice fly-agaric maidens who lure a hero away from his wife. Some rock art compositions resemble the fact that besides shamans there were other individuals among Siberian aboriginal peoples, like narrators, healers, smiths, soothsayers, clairvoyants, and etc., who could carry out some of shaman's function but have never received the gift of shamanizing and the social status of a shaman. One may recognize these people in some rock art as mythical creatures bearing wide brimmed mushroom-like hats.

SHAMANS OR PERSONS OF OTHER STATUS?

Sometimes it is a problem to interpret anthropomorphs in rock art as shamans or recognize individuals engaged in similar ritual practices but lacking shamanic status. It is not easy to recognize and separate them out but, perhaps, the shaman should act as

a single person and stand alone, while mushroom-like anthropomorphs form scenes with other personages. We interpret the anthropomorph from panel 3 at the Ustiu-Mozaga rock art site, Upper Yenisei River (fig. 4: 15) as a person lacking the shaman's status but still possessing magic powers and abilities to contact other spheres of the universe. The anthropomorph and accompanying dog and goats have a strange aggressive appearance – a unique example in Tuvan rock art. One may suppose that this is a ritual appeal to the supernatural evil realms of the lower world.

SHAMANIC ATTRIBUTES

The shaman, being the mediator between the heaven, middle and underworld has special attributes to assist him in establishing contact with these realms and to be able to penetrate diverse spheres of the Universe. He may have a ritual costume with headgear, a drum and a drumstick. His drum was not only a musical instrument which assists him to attain altered states of consciousness, but it was his transportation to other realms as well as the sacred map of the world of spirits. These important attribute personified the Universe.

A drum, as the most recognisable attributes of the shaman, was a material form which marked his special status, the main “instrument” of shamanic ritual activity. The association of shamans and drums are found in iconographic expressions in rock art. Rock art also assists in the pinpointing of the first appearance of the shaman's drum (fig. 6; 7; 8: 1-2) (Bokovenko 1996; Grichan 1987; Devlet 1998; Kubarev 1988, 1999; Miklashevich 1998; Sunchugashev 1990; Okladnikov 1974, 1977; Okladnikov & Zaporozhskaya 1972). There is little datable information when Siberian and Inner/Central Asian peoples started to make drums for ritual activity. Ethnologists suppose that bows could have been used initially and may be reflected in rock art compositions from Oglakhty and other panels where “dancing” anthropomorphs draw bows and wear horned or “rayed” headgear (Devlet 1966).

There are rock art motifs showing the drum cross-handle as replaced by a figure with extended hands. Their decoration with pendants resemble the fringed sleeves of shamanic jackets (fig. 6: 4; 7: 2; 8: 2) (Kubarev 1988, 1999; Devlet 2001; Okladnikova 1989). Such figures in rock art resemble the ethnological cases of so-called *chalu*, spirit reservoirs (fig. 8: 3). Siberian aboriginal peoples used to make *chalu* for the representation of dead shamans whose souls troubled relatives. They sometimes created a small drum and decorated its cross-handle with an anthropomorphic figure and suspended conical metal pendants or bands. Attached to this drum was a piece of fabric cut into bands that symbolized the ornithomorphic essence of the shaman (Ivanov 1979). Anthropomorphic rock art images and representations of deceased shamans as *chalu* and other reservoirs for spirits retain the same important iconographic features (compare fig. 8: 3 with fig. 6: 4; 7: 1-3, also images at the Sinsk – see Rozwadowski & Knurenko in

this volume) (Bokovenko 1996; Grichan 1987; Ivanov 1979, 1954; Kubarev 1988, 1999; Kubarev & Jacobson 1996; Kubarev, Jacobson & Tseveendorzh 2000; Miklashevich 1998; Okladnikova 1989, 1990). Rock art images with shamanic attributes (coat with pendants, drum, drum-stick, headgear, etc.) manifest the shaman's function as mediator in a tripartite universe and marked their social position.



Figure 6 Rock-art images of shamans with drums: 1 – from Talma in the Upper Lena River basin (after Okladnikov 1977); 2 – the Sagan-Zaba bay, Lake Baikal (from Okladnikov 1974); 3 – Aldy-Mozaga site at the Upper Yenisei river (after Devlet 1998); 4 – fragment of a fine line engraving on the sandstone plaque from Karakol, Altai (after Kubarev 1988)

X-RAY STYLE

A shaman had to pass an initiation to obtain the gift of shamanizing from spirits, as well as receiving spirit-helpers and gaining recognition as a shaman among the community. Being the mediator between the world of the living and the dead, a shaman had to be marked by supernatural powers in order to experience death and rebirth. A special bone was often considered as a sign of his great vocation, as they are the most resistant parts of his body and the material embodiment of his high mission (Eliade 1996). In different parts of the world this idea resulted in similar anthropomorphic images in the so-called "X-ray style". Within the territory of the Russian Federation anthropomorphic X-ray figures (fig. 3: 2-5) are found at the following rock art sites: Sikachi-Alian on the Amur River, Basinai on the Olekma River, Ukir Mount in the Kuda steppes, Bolshaya Kada and Manzia on the Angara River, Aya Bay at Lake Baikal, Tomskaya Pisanitsa on the Tom River, and Irbitskii pisanii kamen on the Middle Ural (Chernetsov 1971; Mikhailov 1987; Okladnikov 1966, 1971, 1974; Okladnikov & Martynov 1972; Okladnikov & Mazin 1976). Important materials for the interpretation of X-ray anthropomorphic images may be found in Siberian ethnographic materials (Ivanov 1954, 1979). There are some evidence from the Ural region that dates the appearance of this motif and related ideas as far back as the third to second millennia BC, based on analogies between local rock art and images on ceramics, as well as the wooden "idol" from Shigir (Koksharov 1990, 1996; Devlet 2000).

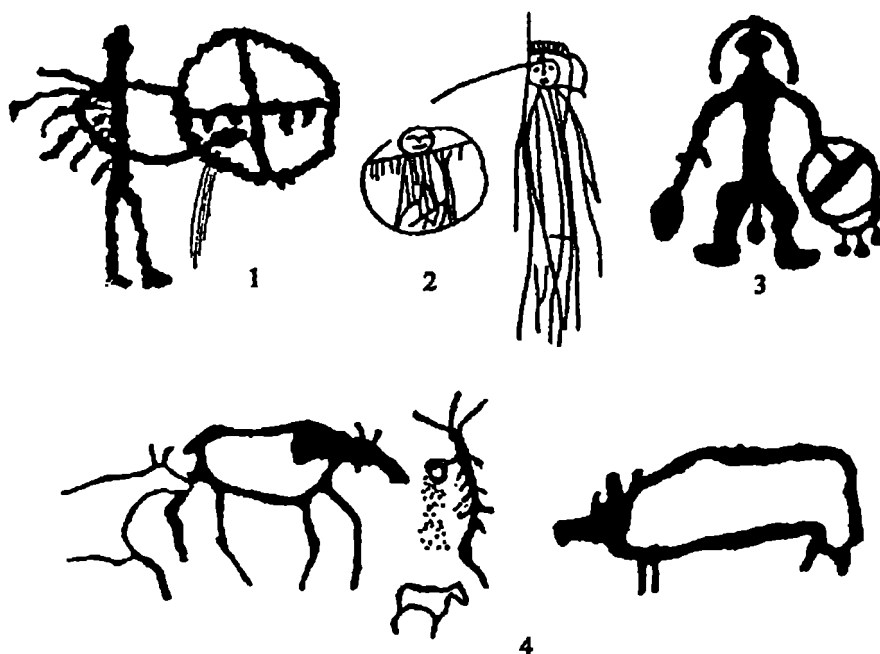


Figure 7 Images of shamans in Siberian rock art: 1 – from Oglakhti, Middle Yenisei River (after Miklashevich 1998); 2 – from Karakol, Altai (after Kubarev 1999), 3 – from Tuba, the Middle Yenisei river basin (after Bokovenko 1996), Maloye ozero, the Middle Yenisei river basin (after Sunchugashev 1990)

The shaman's first "out-of-body" experience, was based on the initial trance state which was connected with the dismemberment of a shaman's body by the spirits. It was a mystical experience of flesh loss and contemplation of one's own skeleton that is quite often shown in the X-ray style anthropomorphs. The most detailed descriptions of bodily dismemberment as a part of shamanic initiation survived among Yakuts (Direnkova 1930; Ksenofontov 1930; Popov 1947; Alekseev 1975). After achieving ecstasy the neophyte would suffer the torments of their head being cut off, the tearing of their body with iron hooks, the division of joints, the scarping of meat from the bones, and etc. Powerful shamans were dismembered three times, while weaker one passed through the grueling ordeal only once (Ksenofontov 1930: 52). This is supported by information about the stages of shamanic initiation, as each stage was marked by a particular attribute symbolizing their status (Mikhailov 1987: 99-103), and these may be traced in some rock art anthropomorphs.

The dismemberment and detailed survey of a shaman's body carried out by spirits during these ordeals was aimed to establish, whether all the bones answered his high vocation. In some traditions the presence of an odd bone in shaman's skeleton will place an obstacle in his election, while in other traditions the presence of a special shaman's bone was a necessary requirement (Direnkova 1930: 274). The "shamanic bone" is a material embodiment of candidate's spiritual abilities. The absence of this body part brought ill fortune as the shaman had to compensate by taking the life of one of his relatives. The shaman's skeleton could be marked by a broken bone. Bone loss may occur before the shamanic candidate receives their very first calling to shamanizing (Direnkova 1930: 274-275). Direnkova presents story of an old Teleut woman which provides the reasons why she was rejected for shamanizing: "She had a vision. Some people cut her body by joints and put all the pieces to cook into the copper. Two people then came. Again they cut her flesh, eviscerated it, cooked it. Then they took out meat from the copper, put it on iron board with iron claws and for a long time closely examined all parts of her body, determining if all the bones and the muscles conform with shaman's vocation. One small bone appeared superfluous, and consequently she could not become shaman" (Direnkova 1930: 274-275). After long and detailed study of the candidate's dismembered body the spirits make a decision on their potential election to shamanship, and then they integrate the candidate's parts again, resembling them joint by joint.

In summary, according to comprehensive Siberian ethnological materials the body of candidate shaman was dismembered, the flesh was cleaned off the bones and it was divided between spirits or scattered onto the roads. The defleshed skeleton was carefully examined for the presence of the shamanic bone. The bones were counted and the skeleton given new flesh. If the candidate had skeletal features confirming their high vocation, they then became a shaman after this mystical death. During the process the shaman witnessed the acts of dismembering and reassembling conducted on their body as they lay dead. This mystical death works only upon the body, but not on the shaman's

soul. The shaman sees and feels all these ordeals, while at the same time the spirits train their soul. Finally, the shaman awakes, as though they were a sleeper rising in the morning (Ksenofontov 1930: 46-47).

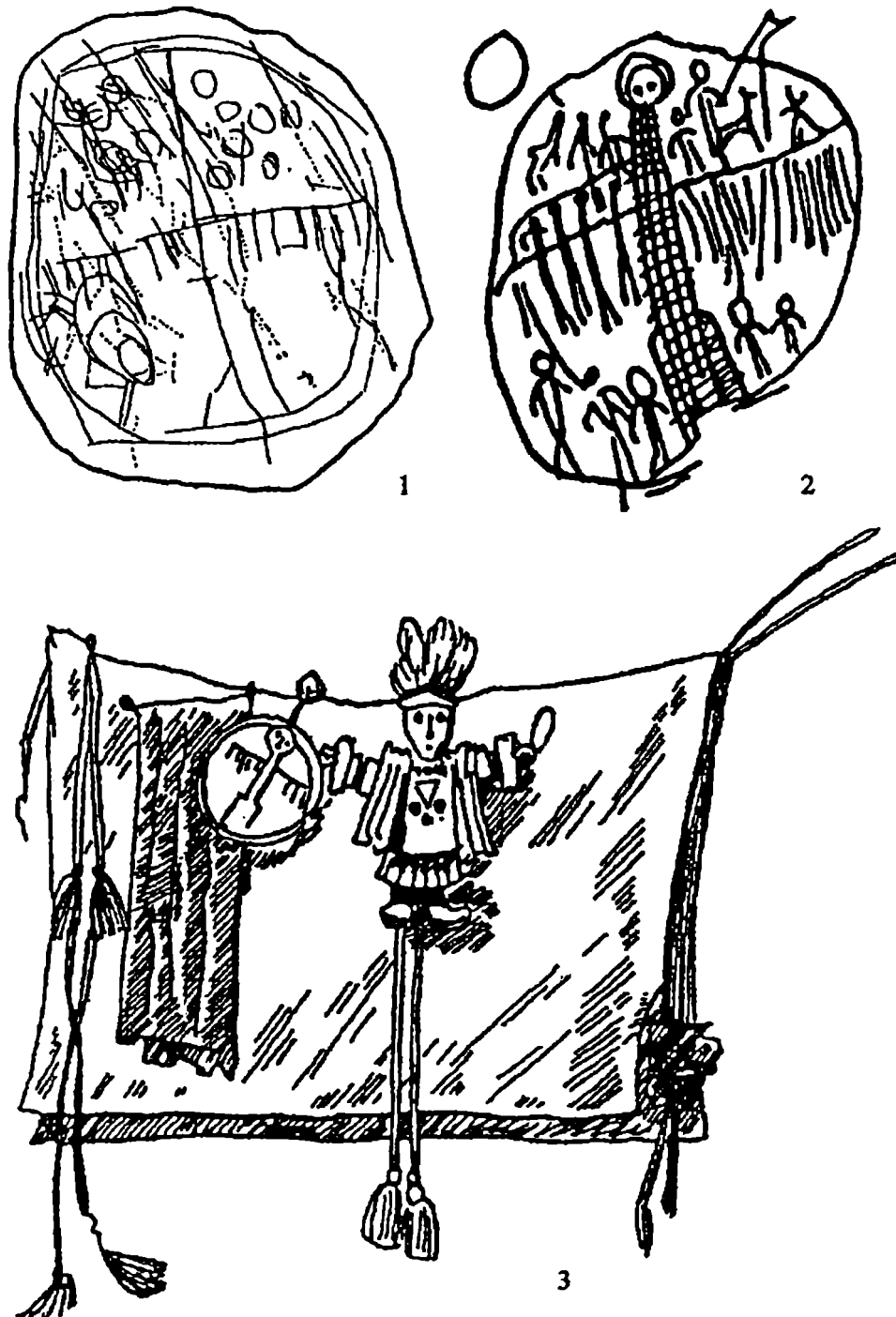


Figure 8 1-2 – A fine line depicting shamanic drums in the rock art from the historical period of the Altai (after Grichan 1987, Okladnikova 1989) and 3 – an ethnographic object used as reservoir for spirits, Altai (after Ivanov 1979)

The dismemberment of the shaman's body may be interpreted not only as terrible ordeals, which could be overcome only by the worthy, as death in one status and rebirth into the new role, but also through the victimization of the shaman by the spirits. Experienced as the descent to the world below ritual death, the dismemberment of the shaman's body signified their acquaintance with chaos. It is an essential step for not only the rebirth into a new role, but also a new life with a new level of abilities gained by the ordeal.

Direnkova considered the initial trance experience as a transitive moment in the shaman's life. Up to this moment a completely ordinary person now receives the special power and abilities and becomes distinct from all other members of the community (Direnkova 1930: 285). These changes should cover the physical essence of a person as well as their mental nature. Thus, on this is based the common beliefs about a shaman's mental regeneration after these ordeals, as well as their physical rebirth and training of the soul by spirits.

The depiction of anthropomorphs in the X-ray style indicates perhaps a translucent chest revealing ribs and the vertebral column, and all embody the shamanic worldview in the intermediate condition between death and revival; a concept which later continued to manifest in shamanic costumes. The same idea survives in details of shamanic equipment; bone pendants attached to the shoulders or skeletal decorations on the breast or back (Ivanov 1954). There are two basic interpretations of these "anatomical" motifs. Firstly, they are images of bones decorating the jacket of the owner which represents a shaman-ancestor who served the shaman as a protective shield. Or perhaps, secondly, the skeletal parts of the costume could be interpreted as representing the shaman's own skeleton as a symbol of the life after their initiation, and the death to life dismemberment of their being (Alekseev 1975: 152).

Therefore, in conclusion, there is a little consensus in the debate about the origins of shamanism and its first appearance in Siberia. The crucial problem has always been the limitation of our data, and in this context it may be seen that rock art motifs provide a unique opportunity for tracing the early roots of shamanic concepts, and the basic fundamentals of the shamanic worldview (Devlet 1998; Devlet 2001; Devlet & Devlet 2000).

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