The Archaeology of Shamanism

Edited by Neil S. Price

London and New York

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The meaning of 'shamanism' has been debated for almost three centuries, ever since the term was coined to describe the activities of those who attained altered states of consciousness in order to mediate between human beings and the supernatural world. The ritual practices that characterised these perceived contacts with other realities have left highly physical traces in the archaeological record of prehistoric peoples, and the potential for the recognition of shamanic belief systems in the past is now being realised as never before.

In this timely collection, Neil Price provides a general introduction to the archaeology of shamanism by bringing together recent work on the subject. Blending theoretical discussion with detailed case studies, the issues addressed include shamanic material culture, responses to dying and the dead, shamanic soundscapes, the use of ritual architecture and shamanism in the context of other belief systems. Following an initial orientation reviewing shamanism as an anthropological construct, the volume focuses on the Northern hemisphere with case studies from Greenland to Nepal, Siberia to Kazakhstan. The chapters span a chronological range from the Upper Palaeolithic to the present and explore such cross-cutting themes as gender and the body, identity, landscape, the social perception of animals, prehistoric 'art', and shamanism in the heritage and cultural identity of indigenous peoples. The volume also addresses the interpretation of shamanic beliefs in terms of cognitive neuroscience and the modern public perception of shamanism in the past.

This book is an essential study of ancient shamanism through its material remains. It serves as a source of front-line case studies for specialists, while making these discussions accessible to a broader public. Archaeologists, anthropologists, historians of religion and psychologists will find the volume a valuable work of reference, as will those interested in alternative religions and spiritual philosophies.

Neil S. Price is a Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Uppsala, Sweden. He has written extensively on the Viking Age, and has conducted research projects in France, Iceland, Russia and Sápmi (Lappland).

Frontispiece. Ivory maskette, 500–1 BC, Tyara, northern Québec. (Photo: Canadian Museum of Civilization; KbFk-7:308).

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Howard Williams is a Lecturer in Archaeology at Trinity College, Carmarthen, Wales. He has published a series of articles on early medieval cemeteries, social memory and burial archaeology, and has recently completed a doctorate on early Anglo-Saxon cremation practices. He is currently editing a book entitled *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, and co-directing a research project on Roundway Down, Wiltshire.

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The core of *The Archaeology of Shamanism* is formed by a series of papers presented in a session of the same name which I organised for the 5th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA), held at Bournemouth in September 1999. However, the idea of the book in fact pre-dated the conference, and several of the contributors who did not attend the session had already agreed to write for this volume: rather than a collection of conference proceedings, it should instead be seen as a structured work of which certain parts were aired in preliminary form at a meeting along the way. As organiser, I would like to thank Tim Darvill and Eileen Wilkes whose administrative work made the EAA session possible; as both organiser and editor, I would like to thank all the contributors for their hard work and commitment to this project, which began life as a long series of emails sent out from Uppsala to various corners of the globe in late 1998.

One participant in the EAA session did not contribute to the book, one non-participant who had originally agreed to contribute had to pull out at a later stage due to other commitments, and two would-be contributors patiently remained on my 'stand-by list' until it was clear that the session and/or book were full. All of them nonetheless made their mark on the project, and I would therefore like to thank Tim Bayliss-Smith, Robert Layton, Inga-Maria Mulk and David Whitley for their understanding and encouragement.

An important part of this book developed during the spring of 2000 on a combined conference and field-trip visiting sites of shamanic rock art in the Drakensberg, Waterberg and Magaliesberg of South Africa, under the guidance of David Lewis-Williams and his colleagues from the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI) at the University of the Witwatersrand. The experience of discussing the shamanic world-view with some of its most brilliant interpreters is always invigorating under any circumstances, but the memory of these conversations in the specific context of the rock shelters, as the sun set on the Berg, or around the fire as the constellations of the southern sky appeared overhead, will remain long in my mind. My thanks to all at RARI, and to all the friends and colleagues who were there.

The project of bringing this volume to fruition has run parallel with the latter stages of producing my book on the belief systems of the early medieval North, and the academic advice and assistance that I have received for the latter has inevitably affected the former: I therefore refer the reader to the more extensive acknowledgements given in *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Price in press). However, for very specific contributions to the present work, bestowed in various forms from a kind word to long nights of conversation, I would like to thank Amanda Chadburn, David Miles, Adrian Olivier and Andrew Sherratt. I am also grateful to my colleagues and students at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History at the University of Uppsala, whose lively engagement with the ancient mind has been

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Neil Price
Uppsala, at the turn of winter, March 2001

Part One

The Archaeology of Shamanism

Cognition, Cosmology and World-View

Chapter One

An archaeology of altered states: Shamanism and material culture studies

Neil S. Price

Introduction: šaman/sama:n/shaman

When a dissident priest called Avvakum arrived in the lands of the nomadic, reindeer-herding Evenki in the early 1650s, having been exiled to central Siberia by the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, no outsider had ever heard of a *šaman*, let alone written the word down or explored the cosmological understandings that underpinned its meaning. By the time of his execution for heresy in 1682, Avvakum's descriptions communicated during his sojourn among the Evenki had already laid the foundations for what anthropologists would later term the study of shamanism.

Over the following 150 years, as Siberia was traversed by missionaries, political exiles (often highly educated intellectuals), Tsarist agents and European travellers, more and more stories were recorded of the intriguing beliefs and practices to be found among the tribal peoples there: from the Nenets, Mansi, Khanty, Ngansan and Enets of the Uralic group around the Yamal peninsula, the Ob and Yenisei river basins and the north Siberian coast; the Turkic-speaking Yakut and Dolgan on the lower Lena; the Tungusic–Mandchurian peoples of central Siberia, including the Even and the Evenki themselves; and the Yukaghir, Chukchi, Koryak and Itelmen of eastern Siberia and the Pacific coast, amongst many others.

The tales told by these early voyagers were startling, and aroused intense interest in Russia and Europe. A fragmentary picture emerged of an 'ensouled world' in which everything was alive, and filled with spirits – animals, natural features, even what to Western eyes were inanimate objects. To such beings could be linked almost every aspect of material life: sickness and health, the provision of food and shelter, success in hunting, and the well-being of the community. The maintenance of good relationships with these spirits was thus of crucial importance, and the most striking of the travellers' stories concerned the special individuals who attained states of trance and ecstasy in order to send out their souls to communicate with these beings, to enlist their aid or bind them to their will, sometimes even to engage them in combat. The operative sphere of these people, whom the Evenki called *šaman*, was revealed as a world of mediation, of negotiation between the realm of human beings and the adjacent, occasionally coincident, planes of existence in which dwelt the gods, the spirits of nature, and the souls of the dead. The complex variety of equipment used in these ceremonies was also described: the strange headgear and jackets hung with jingling amulets, the fur and feathers of animals, metal images; the masks and veils; the effigies and figurines; and above all, the drums.

Some of this data was published and widely discussed in scholarly circles, and during the eighteenth century the Evenk concept of the *šaman* was taken up in Russian as a useful collective for the similar figures that were encountered from one tribe to another across the region. From the phonetic constructions used to record these concepts (the indigenous Siberians had no written language), *šaman* or *sama:n* was soon normalised via Russian to the western European languages, creating the more conventional 'shaman' (the Evenki pronounced the word with the accent on the second syllable, 'sha-márn', but the alternative forms of 'shár-man' or 'sháy-man' are now more common). At first, there were few that associated these individuals, and the role that they played within their communities, with 'religion' in the sense of an organised system of worship. The notion of a collective pattern of belief – shaman*ism* – arose first when the Christian missions began to seriously target the Siberian peoples for conversion, and thus sought to identify a pagan religion towards the overthrow of which they could concentrate their efforts (see Thomas and Humphrey 1994, and Znamenski 1999, for recent studies of church/state perceptions of indigenous belief).

Shamanic research in Russia and beyond

This interpretation of exactly what shamanism was/is has been central to shamanic studies from the very beginning. Already in 1853, the Finnish scholar Castrén challenged the idea that shamanism could be described as a religion rather than as a pattern of behaviour, and this debate continued throughout the late 1800s when the first major Russian works on the subject appeared. By the beginning of the twentieth century, this social, psychological and (arguably) religious phenomenon was already the subject of an established body of literature (see, for example, Shashkov 1864; Potanin 1881–3; Agapitov and Khangalov 1883; Radloff 1884; Pripuzov 1885; Mikhailovski 1895; Shimkevich 1896; Sieroszewski 1993 [1896], 1902; this period of early research is summarised in Hultkrantz 1998).

Similar practices had earlier been described from other parts of the northern hemisphere, for example in Schefferus' influential book *Lapponia* (1673) on the Sámi of Fenno-Scandia, but it was not until the early 1900s when the American Museum in New York launched the Jesup North Pacific Expedition that the beliefs of other circumpolar arctic and sub-arctic cultures began to be specifically – though tentatively – described in terms of shamanism. The link to Siberia was eased by the widespread accessibility of English-language publications such as Bogoras' (1911) and Jochelson's (1908) reports from the Jesup Expedition, Czaplicka's 1914 survey of the region, and Shirokogorov's classic *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus* (1935). Through the early twentieth century the notion of shamanism spread slowly in North America, being applied to the 'medicine-men' of First Nations peoples, but even here the definitions common in Siberia were being adapted to local circumstances (e.g. Dixon 1908).

Although shamanism was widely adopted as a psychological and psychiatric concept in the years between the world wars, as Hultkrantz has noted, 'it is difficult to find surveys of [non-Russian] shamanism before 1950' (1998: 61). There were, however, many foreigners working on the Siberian material. Finnish researchers were particularly active (e.g. Holmberg [Harva] 1915, 1922, 1927, 1938; Granö 1919–21; Donner 1922; Lehtisalo 1924, 1937; other significant Western works include Stadling 1912 and Nioradze 1925), and post-Revolutionary Russian research continued within the strict ideological frameworks of Marxist interpretations (see Hultkrantz 1998: 65–7 and Balzer 1990). Until the fall of the Soviet Union, or at least the late 1980s, the division between Western and Eastern studies of shamanism was almost total.

Soviet writers such as Zelenin (1936, 1937, 1952) and Anisimov (1963) sought to explain shamanism in terms of a particular concentration of power and shifting control of production,

with an additional emphasis on medical interpretations often based on notions of mental illness. The explanation of shamanism as due to a kind of 'arctic hysteria' induced by cold and deprivation was raised by Ohlmarks in 1939 – significantly in the political climate of Nazi Germany – and together with the idea of the shaman as mentally unbalanced psychopath this was adopted with enthusiasm in Soviet Russia, where it became fundamental in the policies of suppressing this perceived threat of independent thought and spiritual allegiance. Ethnocentric 'explanations' were also given prominence, while other Russian scholars sought refuge in collecting raw data which did not need to be forced into an ideologically inspired interpretative straitjacket (the research from this period is summarised in Popov's bibliography from 1932, listing some 650 Russian works on shamanism; a German-language version appeared in 1990). The scholars who maintained a most strictly empirical line, and thus avoided the regime's appropriation of their work, are now bearers of the tradition of Russian research in the post-Soviet era (e.g. Vajnstein and Basilov – see Hultkrantz, 1998: 66, for an assessment of these writers' significance).

At the socio-political 'border' of Russian scholarship, another major block of work developed, again building on research from the late 1800s and focusing on shamanism among the Nordic and Sámi populations of Scandinavia. More than 300 publications have appeared on the shamanic complex of *seiðr* and related rituals in Old Norse belief (collected and discussed in Price in press, with further treatment in Price 2000a and b, 2001b; see also DuBois 1999 for a recent cross-cultural study of Scandinavian religion). An even greater number of publications, over 800, deal with Sámi religion (collected in Rydving 1993b; the works of Bäckman, Hultkrantz, Manker, Mebius, Pentikäinen, and Rydving himself are especially central). Case studies of the Norse and Sámi demonstrate particularly clearly the use of specialised shamanic practices for aggressive ends, and also the prominence of sexual elements in shamanic rituals; importantly, both of these traits are relatively common among the arctic and sub-arctic peoples, a fact that belies the common association of shamanism almost exclusively with healing that has characterised Western perceptions in the wake of Eliade's classic work from 1964.

The research history of shamanism in Western anthropology, comparative theology and related disciplines has been charted many times, and this is not the place for yet another introductory essay on the 'meaning' of this phenomenon (useful texts in this regard include Eliade 1964, into the orbit of which most subsequent works have been drawn; Lessa and Vogt 1965; Wallace 1966; Edsman 1967; Motzki 1971; Furst 1974; Hultkrantz 1973, 1979, 1993, 1998; Humphrey 1980; Lewis 1981, 1989; Atkinson 1992; Ripinsky-Naxon 1993; Vitebsky 1995; Pentikäinen 1998; Pentikäinen *et al.* 1998; Bowie 2000: 190–218; Larsson 2000). We may, however, note the importance of two key themes of relevance to the archaeological interpretations of the present book. The first of these concerns the relationship of shamanic belief systems to their environmental setting (e.g. Hultkrantz 1965; Pentikäinen 1996; Bowie 2000: 118–50), explored further below in a landscape context. The second focuses on the links that are sometimes postulated between shamanism and another, equally hotly debated anthropological construct: totemism (the classic introduction can be found in Lévi-Strauss 1962; see Layton 2000 for a recent review of this discussion). As the study of northern shamanism has ebbed and flowed in popularity during the last century, three main forms of interpretation have predominated. The Nivkh ethnographer Chuner Taksami, himself an ethnic Siberian and acquainted with several shamans, has perhaps stated it best (1998: 14):

> Shamanism is an historical phenomenon within a system of traditional faiths distinctive of nearly all Siberian peoples. Some people consider shamanism as a variety of primitive religion; others tend to think of it as a set of beliefs and customs centred on the shaman's personality; and others still associate shamanism with witchcraft and magical spells.

Retrospective reviews of these changing fashions of interpretation, and more recent responses to them, can be found in the international journal of shamanic research, *Shaman*, and in a series of influential conference publications from the last three decades (e.g. Diószegi and Hóppal 1978; Hóppal 1984; Hóppal and von Sadovszky 1989; Hóppal and Pentikäinen 1992; Siikala and Hóppal 1992; Hóppal and Howard 1993).

One major trend however continues to polarise shamanic studies: the question of geographic frames of reference. Even now, echoing the debates of the early twentieth century, some historians of religion strongly resist the use of the term 'shamanism' beyond certain regions of central Siberia. In one sense these objections seem baffling, given that – as we have seen – the concept of shaman*ism* has always been an externally imposed construction, and does not exist anywhere at all other than in the minds of its students. Not even the Evenki have an overall word for what the *šaman* does, though like several other Siberian peoples they have a broad vocabulary for the different components of the shamanic complex. As both a term and a notion, shamanism is entirely an academic creation, and as such it is certainly a useful tool serving to describe a pattern of ritual behaviour and belief found in strikingly similar form across much of the arctic and sub-arctic regions of the world. Even within this broad understanding, the meaning of shamanism is entirely a matter of consensus, discussion and continuing redefinition; this extends to terminology, many scholars now prefering to write of 'shamanhood' or 'shamanship'. The essential question is to whether we can truly speak of shamanism beyond the circumpolar sphere.

It is here that we enter a broader framework of interpretation, which moves outward from Siberia and the circumpolar region on a sliding scale of inclusion to embrace shamanistic traits in the ritual practices of South America, Oceania, Africa (particularly controversially), and ultimately the globe – an approach recently typified by the work of Piers Vitebsky (1995). In many cases this is still rooted in scholarly discussion, but in the broadest and most popular understanding 'shamanism' has latterly come to cover virtually any kind of belief in 'spirits' and the existence of other worlds, states of being or planes of consciousness – a definition that of course encompasses the majority of the world's religions, organised or otherwise, ancient and modern. In this context the term 'shaman' has similarly been used to refer to almost any kind of mediator, in any kind of medium, between one perception of the world and another. As a result, those popularly described as shamans have included an astonishing variety of individuals ranging from Jesus to Jim Morrison.

These are not the shamanisms of this book. Instead we follow the general direction taken by related academic disciplines, as summarised by Mathias Guenther: 'the view held generally by scholars in the anthropology of religion and in comparative religion . . . [is] . . . that shamanism is a religious phenomenon that can be formally delineated and differentiated from other, more complex religions' (1999: 426). Considering Taksami's identification of shamanism as an *historical* phenomenon (1998: 14), how far is it reasonable to talk of shamanism in the prehistoric past? The answer, of course, can only be sought in studies of material culture, and thus archaeology.

Shamanism and material culture studies

The inclusion of shamanism in archaeological interpretations has in general run parallel with its adoption in anthropological and comparative theological circles, as discussed above. Until relatively recently, however, such work was largely confined to the study of prehistoric 'art', especially in the context of the Palaeolithic painted caves and the early identification of their images as artefacts of 'hunting magic' (see Bahn and Vertut 1988; cf. Lommel 1967). In the 1960s and 70s, a concern for the material culture of consciousness received new impetus with explorations of narcotics and hallucinogens in the archaeological record (in later years the work

of Andrew Sherratt has been particularly important here, e.g. 1987, 1991). From the 1980s onwards, shamanism has reappeared in archaeological interpretations with some regularity, mostly in the context of the post-processual concern for ancient symbolism and the meaning-content of material culture. Latterly, the emphasis on cognitive archaeology has increased this trend. Individually, the 'shamanically relevant' publications of recent years run well into treble figures, making separate citation meaningless here: what has been missing in this work is an overview of the field as a whole – the stated purpose of this book.

There are, of necessity, many omissions. We do not discuss the rich shamanic heritage of the Classical world, the ecstatic cults of the Greeks and Romans; to an extent, some aspects of early Christianity and the desert religions of the Middle East may also be viewed in this light. In many parts of Europe even down to relatively recent times, there were traces of shamanism in the agrarian cults and local folkloric observances of the rural population (see Ginzburg 1983, 1990 and Klaniczay 1990: 129–50 for examples from the Mediterranean, the Baltic and the Balkans). Similarly, available space sadly did not permit a discussion of African and Pacific cultures, nor do we touch upon the belief systems of the central and southern Americas. The 'shamanic world', in all its diversity, is vast, and is impossible to cover comprehensively in a volume of this kind – nor is this our aim. The shamanic traditions of all of the regions represented here, and those that are not, could and do form the subject of book-length studies in their own right.

Instead, this volume has been conceived as an introduction to the field, focusing deliberately on the northern hemisphere while taking occasional diversions to follow specific lines of enquiry and interpretation. We begin with Siberia and Central Asia, the 'cradle of shamanism' discussed above, which has been curiously neglected in recent archaeological works on this aspect of early belief. We then move eastwards to North America, Canada and Greenland, and conclude by moving out of the arctic and sub-artic territories to Northern Europe and a group of papers that explore new dimensions, even new definitions, of shamanism outside this circumpolar sphere.

The geographical organisation has been chosen advisedly, because all of shamanic research is characterised by cross-cutting themes that would soon render redundant any attempt to draw them out in individual sections. In allowing the regional variations of northern shamanism to emerge, we hope to simultaneously provide the reader with a comprehensive survey of archaeological approaches to specific shamanistic themes through studies of prehistoric 'art', both portable and parietal; constructions of gender, identity and the body, including their articulation in dress and costume; landscape; architecture; mortuary behaviour; and human–animal relationships. We also address issues such as the interpretation of shamanic beliefs in terms of cognitive neuroscience, and the response to ancient shamanism among modern Pagans.

Shamanism and rock art

The field of rock art research is a special case, as it is here that the archaeological employment of shamanic interpretations has undoubtedly been most prominent in the last two decades. Perhaps as a result of the considerable influence that this exciting work has exerted on shamanic studies in a broader sense (see Price 2001a), the application of shamanic metaphors to parietal art has also aroused surprisingly vitriolic reactions from a small minority of researchers. However, such Pavlovian responses have earned little sympathy in the wider profession, and most recent collections exploring the current state of rock art research have included appropriately detailed reviews of shamanic approaches (e.g. Helskog and Olsen 1995; Chippindale and Taçon 1998). For this reason we shall not concentrate on this material here.

However, the very significant prominence that rock art interpetations have assumed in the archaeology of shamanism does require an overview of this work, here provided in chapter 2 by David Lewis-Williams, the pioneer of these approaches in southern Africa and one of the most internationally influential scholars in shamanic research. We here go back to the source for explanatory models that have been much imitated in the subsequent work of others, tracing the development of ideas that have set the pattern for this branch of shamanic interpetation in archaeology: from entoptic phenomena and altered states of consciousness, dreams, transformation and spirit animals, to the crucial concept of the rock surface as a membrane between the worlds, through to recent work emphasising the past and present political context of the art; Lewis-Williams' paper also includes a bibliography of the major literature within this field.

The first of the papers on Siberia and Central Asia, by Katja Devlet (chapter 3), also considers rock art, but from a quite different perspective to the 'southern African School' by putting forward an empirical discussion of imagery related to ritual costume and the shamanic coat. Western readers in particular may be astonished by the detail of the motifs presented, in many cases for the first time in an English-language publication: there surely cannot be a closer correlation between recent, ethnographically recorded data and archaeological finds from the distant past, though the exact (causal?) nature of their relationship is intriguing. Andrzej Rozwadowski takes a different approach in chapter 5 by reviewing the above-mentioned discussion of entoptic phenomena 'ten years on', presenting a critically-aware reappraisal of images in the rock art of Kazakhstan, focusing not on individual motifs but on their combination and landscape context.

Shamanism and portable art

The focus on shamanic interpretations of rock art has tended to obscure the role played by images on portable objects, and by material culture related to shamanic practices but not directly part of the shaman's 'equipment'. In chapter 11 Thomas Dowson and Martin Porr move directly on from discussions of Upper Palaeolithic cave art to the plastic decoration of sculpted anthropomorphic figurines found in Germany, arguing that they must be seen in a similar shamanic context to the paintings that have received more attention. Their detailed analysis of markings on the carvings, and their themes of human-animal transformation, suggest new interpretations of early Stone Age beliefs. Patricia Sutherland analyses a different, and far more extensive, repertoire of shamanic artefacts, from the Palaeo-Eskimo cultures of northern Canada. In chapter 9 she reviews a wide range of objects, some puzzling, all beautifully carved, that chart the arctic hunters' relationship to their prey and the other beings (both real and in spirit form) that seem to have populated their environment. Again, themes of transformation and trance visions recur in this material, and we can trace a dim ancestry between the 'X-ray' depictions of animals and similar motifs in Siberian shamanism. Our third example of portable shamanic 'art' comes from Siberia itself, where in chapter 4 Natalia Fedorova surveys a century of interpretations that have been applied to the cast bronze figures of warriors, birds and bears that emerged in the first century BC. She examines the case for shamanic iconography in the metalwork in the light of changing ideologies and social stratification during the Iron Age, and presents a new conclusion.

Shamanism and landscape

In chapters 6 and 7 we take a long step back from the individual, and examine respectively the shamanic landscapes of the modern-day Siberian Khanty and the hill tribes of the Nepal Himalayas. Peter Jordan and Damian Walter examine shamanic ritual and its practitioners in

relation to space, both of performance and of perception: Jordan traces the significance of different zones within the landscape, decoding their combined association with shamanic belief and the seasonal procurement round; Walter contrasts two different types of ritual practitioners – shamans and lineage mediums – and examines how their respective spheres of influence are linked to spatial perceptions.

Both authors focus on the role played by material culture in articulating and expressing these ideas, and confront the archaeological implications. Like Håkan Rydving's innovative studies of Sámi religion (e.g. 1987, 1993a), these works look further to the reconstruction of a partly lost shamanic perspective from the memories that it has left behind, working within a 'post-shamanistic' thought-world in which the old ideas are still potent but obscurely transformed. This can even involve a kind of shamanism without shamans, which can perhaps best be formulated as a 'shamanic approach to life' (Willerslev In press, on Yukaghir hunters in Siberia; additional examples of the same phenomenon can be found in other accounts of recent fieldwork among Siberian groups, such as Humphrey 1983 and Pentikäinen 1998).

Shamanic architecture

Leading on from the broad canvas of landscape and 'shamanic space' we come to essays on architectural constructions specifically built in connection with shamanic practices. In chapter 10, Hans Christian Gulløv and Martin Appelt provide one of our most extraordinary case studies with their report of excavations in High Arctic Greenland, more than 1,000 km north of the arctic circle at the point where the first immigrants are believed to have crossed over from northern Canada. Referring to detailed ethnographies and archaeological data on the ancestral Inuit and their predecessors, they discuss the construction of a megalithic stone structure used for collective shamanic rituals, preserved largely intact by the freezing conditions for over a millenium. In chapter 12, Aaron Watson similarly breaks new, though utterly different, ground in considering the aural dimensions of shamanic practice. His sonic experiments inside megalithic structures from the British Neolithic suggest that their design incorporated elements that caused sound to behave in unusual ways, and that altered states of consciousness – even trance – could be induced through drumming and other percussive practices. His demonstration of how the movement of the drummer affected the sonic patterns and thus the neuropsychological responses of the listeners is startling, as is the realisation that sounds made inside one structure could be heard inside another nearby, while nothing could be heard by those standing outside. What was the role of sonic performance in the function of megalithic architecture in the Neolithic and early Bronze Age?

Shamanism and identity

From the earliest observations, scholars of shamanic practice have focused on the highly complex gender constructions that are associated with almost all such rituals (see Schmidt and Voss 2000 for recent overviews). The so-called 'soft-men' of Siberia and the 'berdaches' of the Native Americans are well-known, if somewhat misleading, archetypes in this context, and the sexual elements touched on above in relation to Scandinavian shamanism are of vital importance here. These have formed the primary focus of attention for generations of Russian researchers, as well as for more recent scholars such as Bernard Saladin d'Anglure and Sabine Lang. This material is reviewed here by Sandra Hollimon in chapter 8, who argues that the systems of multiple gender that characterise(d) many First Nations peoples in North America should be accepted as the rule rather than the exception when examining the earlier prehistory of the continent.

The theme of social identity and the deliberate construction of shamanic experience is echoed by Howard Williams, who in chapter 13 discusses the evidence for an 'ideology of transformation' manifested in the mortuary behaviour of the early Anglo-Saxons. Using shamanic metaphors, he argues that the social identity of the dead was renegotiated through their cremation together with specially selected – perhaps even specially bred – animals, merging different aspects of their natures in the transformative medium of fire.

Variation and change in shamanism and its sources

Another theme running throughout the book is the dynamic nature of shamanic practice and belief – in all the examples presented these patterns of behaviour are never static, but instead both change over time and vary from one region to the next. The common elements that empower a shamanic interpretation are discussed alongside the individual traits that distinguish its culturally specific expressions. We hope that this variation is also emphasised in the range of contributions here, from the remote prehistory of the Upper Palaeolithic to fieldwork among modern peoples. The use of anthropological analogy to bridge sometimes immense gaps of time and location is a great temptation in shamanic research, and the scholars whose studies are presented here all work with a deliberate concern for the distinctions between ethnographic data and archaeological sources.

Many definitions for shamanism are offered in these pages, but all are individually outlined by reference to the long tradition of shamanic research sketched above and ultimately dating to the ill-fated Avvakum's first observations among the Evenki in the seventeenth century. At all times, this archaeology of shamanism remains sharply aware of its human sources: the indigenous peoples on whom virtually all our understanding of shamanism is based. This is important, as is the observation that the current resurgence of shamanic interpretation among archaeologists is firmly a part of this tradition, and is unrelated to the growing popular interest in shamanism in the context of alternative spiritual philosophies.

In this volume we have deliberately sought not to avoid this aspect of shamanic perceptions, but wish instead to promote dialogue, believing that a willingness to meet – in a balanced way – the challenges brought by these new perspectives on the past is a fundamental prerequisite for archaeologists working in this field. For this reason, considerable space is devoted here to a discussion of these issues, linking to a more extensive review later in the book.

Modern Paganism and the archaeology of (neo-)shamanism

Several scholarly works have appeared in recent years treating the emergence of neo-shamanic movements in the Western world (a selection are reviewed by Bowie 2000: 209–13; see also Vitebsky forthcoming). However, modern Pagans of all persuasions have themselves been active in publicising their beliefs, and some of these works, such as the monumental alternative survey of prehistoric Britain produced by the musician and poet Julian Cope (1998), are certainly worthy of serious consideration by archaeologists: a close reading makes it clear that the latter share a surprising majority of concerns – if not approaches – with Pagans (see Darvill 1999). An offhand academic rejection of differently-framed perspectives ironically risks alienating a part of archaeology's public which is actively interpreting, using and experiencing the past in precisely the way that many theorists have long been advocating. It should also be noted that a promotion of dialogue in no way obstructs archaeologists' critical evaluation of different views of the past (the spectre of ultimately empty relativism conjured up by many opponents of post-processualism has long since been laid to rest).

Many academics react with alarm to any association of their work with alternative religious beliefs and the perceived professional ridicule that can attach to them, while others strive for increasing dialogue and collaboration with groups of 'neo-shamans' and others working within the broad traditions of modern Paganism. The contributors to this volume fall into both camps, and the balance of papers is intended to reflect this ongoing debate and tension in archaeological shamanic research. The majority of academic archaeologists probably see themselves as somewhat astride this division, being generally materialists maintaining a deliberately wide distance between their own work and the beliefs of modern Pagans, while hopefully remaining open to dialogue. Clearly, mutual respect must form the foundation of any effective reciprocity, but beyond this three distinct issues – often wrongly conflated – emerge in the relationship between neo-shamanists and archaeologists.

First, there are debates centring on the right of open interpretation and access (in every sense) to the past, especially as physically represented by ancient monuments. This is the area of broadest archaeological agreement with the position taken by many neo-shamanists, who request a proportionate level of consultation on heritage management policies relating to the public interpretation, and perhaps excavation, of places seen as spiritually significant. Unfortunately polarised positions have occasionally been adopted on both sides here, but there are indications of increasing mutual comprehension and sympathy. There are clearly also questions of balance to consider, remembering that this does nevertheless concern a minority interest – if 16 per cent of visitors to Avebury outside the periods of Pagan festivals come there for spiritual reasons (Wallis, this volume), presumably 84 per cent do not – but this viewpoint could perhaps be equally applied to sites associated with other faiths. Particularly in the wake of the controversial excavations at 'Seahenge', the Bronze Age timber structure discovered in 1999 at Holme-Next-The-Sea on the east coast of England and discussed by Wallis below, there are signs that archaeologists and Pagan groups are moving into more productive positions in their relationship.

The second main issue in this context concerns the specific interpretative contribution of neo-shamanist groups. Many Pagans argue that their beliefs, and particularly the ways in which these are put into practice, provide them with a unique insight into the nature of what they perceive as similar beliefs in the past. It is here that many archaeologists differ sharply from neo-shamanist opinion, finding it hard to credit any link (beyond basic inspiration) between ancient practices and modern neo-shamanic rituals often given the same names by their adherents. This is not in any way an expression of doubt as to the sincerity of modern Pagans, but merely to question the privileging of their understandings of ancient religion above those of anyone else. From a purely academic viewpoint, with all its inherent biases and limitations, it is almost always impossible to 'reconstruct' ancient shamanic rituals; the claim that this can be achieved by other means – operative and spiritually empowered – remains to most archaeologists an article of faith, with all its inherent biases and limitations. Here, too, there are those who argue for greater common ground than is readily perceived, but there is little doubt that any progress (as defined variously by the different parties involved) will be slow.

This question of shamanism as a *living* belief system lies at the heart of the third area of concern, namely the relationship between the traditional cultures from which almost all our knowledge of shamanism derives, and those who transform this knowledge into new practices firmly rooted in the developed nations of the West. Many indigenous peoples regard neo-shamanism as little more than an expression of 'consumer religion', an essentially familiar process of cultural imperialism and carefully selective appropriation played out in a new form by spiritually jaded Westerners, and exclusively on their terms. Harsh though this assessment sounds, it is worth stating clearly, as there is a widespread sense of frustration among indigenous groups who feel that archaeologists prefer to play down such differences in the cause of a liberal

pluralism within the discipline. The multitude of stresses placed upon indigenous cultures around the globe, very many of which are the inheritors of shamanic traditions in various manifestations, frequently threaten the very continuation of their lifestyle in its most fundamental form. In this context, the depth of bitterness felt towards neo-shamanists, who are seen as collaborative agents of this process of cultural oppression, truly has to be seen to be understood. As noted above, archaeologists in general have usually been bystanders in this conflict, perhaps unjustifiably, as material culture studies has long been implicated in many aspects of the debate on indigenous rights; however, those archaeologists who work closely with indigenous groups almost exclusively take their part in these discussions – a further dimension of the tensions between academics and neo-shamanists.

In this as in other aspects of these issues, we should of course note the difficulties of generalising about 'indigenous peoples', 'neo-shamanists' or, indeed, 'archaeologists'. All these terms naturally cover a multitude of organisations and individuals, and here it should be emphasised that the vast majority of neo-shamanists clearly have nothing but respect for the indigenous groups who accuse them of stealing their spiritual heritage. They are profoundly saddened by what they feel to be a misunderstanding of intent, and indeed regard their embracing of neo-shamanism as a sign of even deeper commitment to the values of what they often see as more psychologically healthy cultures, a way to greater harmony with the environment and their fellow humans that is in active opposition to the very agenda with which they are often identified by traditional peoples.

However, indigenous spokespeople have been quick to point out that 'good intentions' also abounded among the European empires that had the most devastating impact on their way of life. There are, furthermore, darker sides to a small minority of neo-shamanic groups, who take their beliefs into the realm of explicitly political appropriations of archaeology, especially on the far right of the political spectrum. The activities of such groups, particularly in North America, further complicate the relationship between modern Pagans (the vast majority of whom abhor such extremism) and archaeologists. Another factor also arises here, as Piers Vitebsky (1995: 151) has noted when he describes how the values commonly found as a fundamental part of neo-shamanic lifestyles – though by no means exclusive to them (such as vegetarianism) – are frequently at odds with those prevailing in traditional shamanic cultures. He warns of a worrying trend in which, because of this, a few neo-shamanic groups are beginning to look unfavourably on the practices of indigenous peoples, and to find them wanting. This is clearly a problem, and one which again goes to the core of related concerns in modern archaeology, as articulated in the growing awareness of post-colonial context and the necessity of acknowledging the indigenous voices of the Third and Fourth worlds.

In the final chapter of this volume, Robert Wallis addresses all these questions, arguing persuasively from his dual position as both an academic archaeologist and active neo-shaman. Clearly, modern Paganism can no longer be ignored by archaeologists working in this field, any more than we can disassociate ourselves from other political issues of race, sexuality and gender. Wallis claims that the archaeology of shamanism must in some way begin with the archaeology of neo-shamanism: few archaeologists may agree with this controversial assessment, but many are coming to see that such perspectives must at least be recognised and included in their work.

Conclusion

The research history of shamanic studies, in any discipline, has always followed a cyclical pattern of definition and redefinition: the archaeology of shamanism is no exception to this. However, as with the development of theoretical perspectives in archaeology, the incorporation

of ideas that originated in anthropology, comparative theology and related areas of research inevitably involves their transformation into something new, and uniquely related to material culture studies.

Much has been written in recent years about an 'archaeology of mind', with various permutations of cognitive approaches on offer, and the search for ancient thought patterns, 'world-views' and 'mind-sets' is now part of the archaeological mainstream. However, there can be few areas of archaeology so intimately bound up with these aspirations as the study of shamanism, itself definable as a view of the world, a particular perception of the nature of reality. We should not forget that in the shamanic societies contacted and documented through early modern ethnography (and still existing under cultural siege in many parts of the globe), the understanding of 'shamanism' that the community shared with the 'shaman' provided the ultimate basis for the continuation of existence: the essential pattern of what it was to be a human being in those cultures. There can be little doubt that this kind of perception – and above all its impact on the material traces that constitute our research base – is fundamental for our own comprehension of prehistoric peoples and the worlds in which they understood themselves to move.

Through an archaeological examination of shamanism we necessarily draw nearer these intangibles that are so important a part of our research but yet so difficult to close with. The papers in this book demonstrate a variety of avenues by which to approach these elusive mentalities, and it is hoped that they may serve as a introduction for others wishing to pursue a similar goal – a true archaeology of altered states.

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