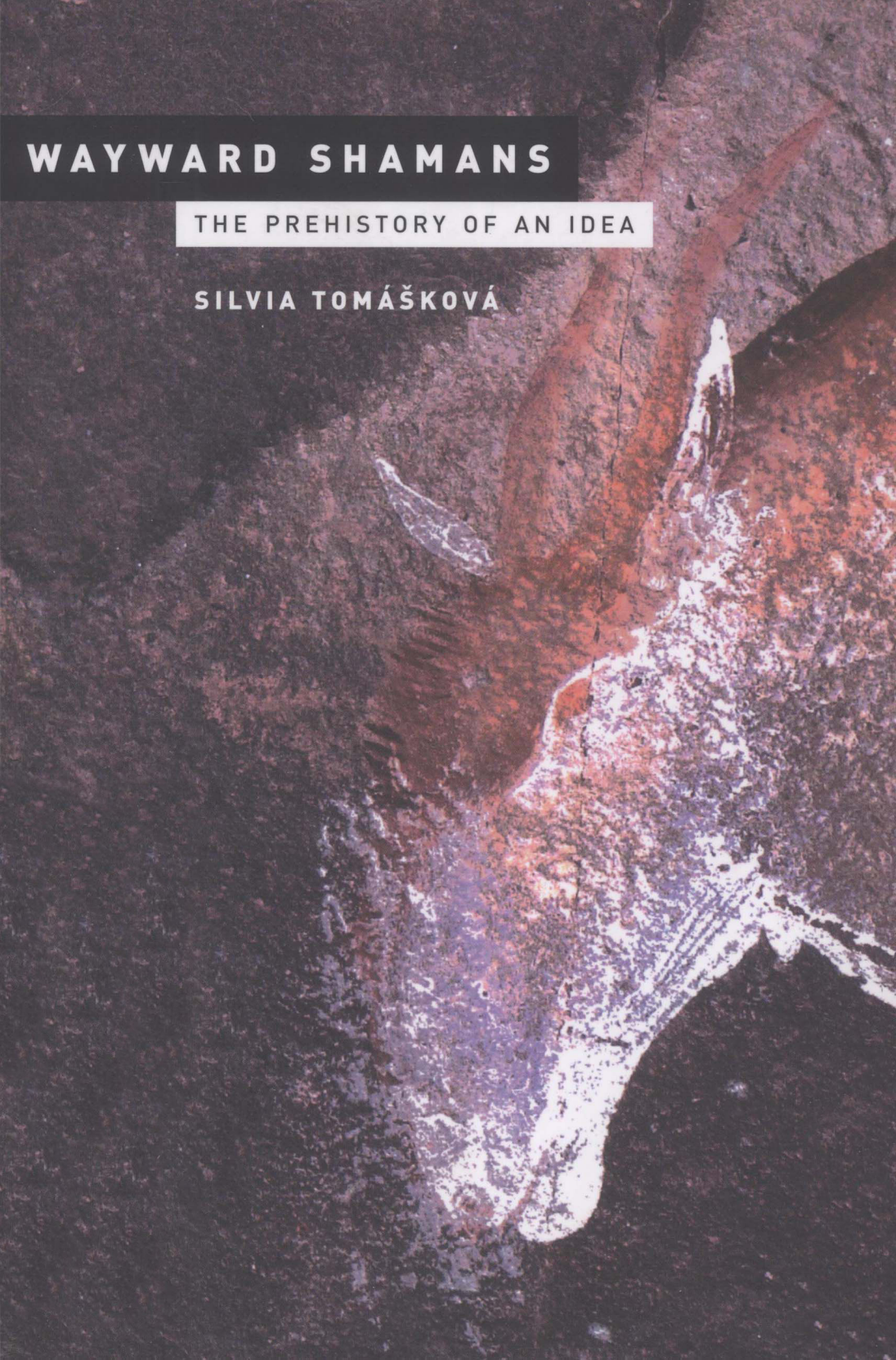
WAYWARD SHAMANS

THE PREHISTORY OF AN IDEA

SILVIA TOMÁŠKOVÁ



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Silvia Tomášková

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Wayward Shamans

To my parents, Eva Tomášková and Jaroslav Tomášek (in memoriam), who came to accept this wayward spirit.

Acknowledgments

The distance between an idea and the final book is always substantial. But the time this project took was much longer than usual as I kept uncovering new layers, new connections, new sources, and new ideas. I followed many of them much farther than anyone else would (or should). I am grateful to many institutions and individuals who provided support along the way. Several foundations and financial sources generously supported the research and writing that helped to complete this project. The Spray-Randleigh fellowship at the University of North Carolina enabled my research in Siberia, France, and Germany in 2004 and 2005. The American Council for Learned Societies awarded me the Ryskamp Fellowship in 2005–2006, the School for Advanced Research in the Human Experience in Santa Fe provided a residential fellowship in 2007–2008, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation made my stay in South Africa possible in 2010–2011. Aside from the essential financial resources, these foundations gave me the confidence that my idea was of interest and worth pursuing. Most valuable though were the prolonged periods of uninterrupted time to work on the project.

While I was conducting research in Akademgorodok, outside Novosibirsk, the librarian Tatiana Sergeevna eyed me suspiciously at first, waiting for my departure. Once it became clear that I was not going away, could speak Russian, and would gladly discuss politics, she brought out materials not in the catalogue, dusted off old files, and pointed me to books that turned out to be invaluable. The many cups of tea in between

were as kind a gesture as all the materials. The staff at the Bibliothèque at the National Museum of Archaeology in Saint-Germain-en-Laye in France deserves mention as well for facilitating access to all the boxes of personal correspondence between Cartailhac, Breuil, Reinach, and de Mortillet (even if his handwriting was truly illegible). The employees at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Bavarian State Library) in Munich provided me with archival materials and access to specialized copying technology that I did not even know existed. My research in Munich was greatly accelerated by Eva Tomášková's expert translation of old German script. The special collections staff at the American Museum of Natural History in New York generously assisted my foray through photographs and personal correspondence from the Jesup North Pacific Expedition. Kristen Mable and Barbara Mathe in particular arranged for all the proper permissions and access. Andrea Felder at the New York Public Library helped with my requests for images with amazing speed and understanding. Lisa Viezbicke from Morse Library, Beloit College, Wisconsin kindly assisted with images from the Nuremberg Chronicle. Laurie Klein of Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at Yale University provided the requested images from their collection; staff at the Houghton Library and the Map Library at Harvard University assisted with my numerous requests for images and reproductions. Kyril Tolpygo, the Slavic collections librarian at the University of Chapel Hill, tracked down, pursued, and obtained the Northern Lights Route map from Tromso University Library when I was ready to give up. His perseverance is greatly appreciated. John Robb at Cambridge University generously offered an image from his own project when I could not locate a particular reproduction. Thank you.

Stan Holwitz of the University of California Press encouraged this project from its inception, seeing in it a story worth pursuing even if it was then just an idea. When Blake Edgar and subsequently Reed Malcolm agreed to take the book over, many years later, it was a leap of faith only a few would make. I truly appreciate the trust.

Meg Conkey has been the most ardent supporter from my first year in graduate school. I will always be grateful for her constant encouragement ever since. Prehistoric art was not a research topic that I intended to pursue, but the intellectual challenge of the history of ideas led me to it despite my initial resistance. I hope that with this book I have made a contribution to the conversation Meg started, as a passionate and determined feminist scholar. Françoise Audouze was the first French archaeologist I ever met, and she set the bar high. Her kindness and mocking

observations remained a cherished gift throughout this effort. Michael Bisson has been a steadfast academic mentor and a friend much longer than anyone else, and patiently endured many permutations of this book. While many people engaged my ideas in conversations over the years, the Centennial Class at the School for Advanced Research in Human Experience (SAR) in Santa Fe in 2007–2008 was a group who became family and true intellectual companions. Tutu Alicante, Omri Elisha, Joe Gone, Tiya Miles, Malena Morling, Monica Smith, James Snead, and Angela Steusse contributed to this book in so many intangible and personal ways. James Snead, in particular, shared my passion for the history of archaeology and willingness to pursue every tangential issue. Our group could only come together due to the nurturing atmosphere created by all the people at SAR, ably led by James Brooks and John Kantner, and nourished by Leslie Shipman.

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The material in this book has been presented in numerous talks, and the response of the various audiences has helped improve the argument and the clarity. I offered a first sketch at a symposium honoring Bruce Trigger at the Society of American Archaeology meetings in Montreal in 2004. Bruce's kind comments and support in subsequent years were a major influence in my interest in the history of ideas in archaeology. My faculty colleagues and students in the Department of Anthropology,

and the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill generously listened to presentations of chapters from the book. I received valuable feedback during talks in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Cape Town, the Rock Art Research Institute at Witwatersrand University, the Archaeology of Gender in Europe meeting in Oslo, Norway, and during the South African Archaeological Society speaker series.

Whenever I was ready to toss in the towel and thought this project has grown insanely complicated, Peter Redfield pulled me through, reminding me of my own main points and English grammar. This book truly would not exist without his support. Zoë Sofia has been my travelling co-spirit for more than sixteen years, a time I have cherished no matter where we found ourselves. Anyone who had anything to say about the manuscript or the ideas within bears no responsibility for the final execution: all statements, controversial or not, are my own.

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Introduction

"Why are shamans so popular?" a team of art historians asked recently, in a somewhat exasperated tone. They were attempting to counter the rise of shamanic interpretations in Mesoamerican prehistoric art, part of a common, widespread trend.[1] In offering accounts of the origins of the human capacity for art, religion, and even science, archaeologists regularly cast shamans as the stars of their scenarios. By the early twenty-first century, tales of powerful prehistoric sorcerers have grown familiar to both scholars and popular audiences alike. The term *shaman* appears regularly in reference to ancient and indigenous forms of knowledge to describe a ritual specialist, a categorical figure imbued with wisdom. Shamans now walk through the pages of academic journals, tourist guidebooks, and New Age stores. They perform rituals, promise wisdom, and promote products. They also provide a ready answer to the question of who made the first art and what inspired them.

If newly popular, this story itself is hardly new. Rather, shamans have traveled with us for well over three centuries since emerging from Siberia. Over the years, they have played a range of roles, depending on the setting in which they were imagined. Proto-priests, religious leaders, artists, and medicine men, shamans remain ever mysterious, however instinctively familiar. In archaeology, they have primarily appeared as male figures, less by conscious design than unthinking assumption. Yet even after the rise of New Age perspectives in North America and Western

Europe that emphasize feminine spirituality, the shamans projected into prehistory continue to be a largely male crew.

Trained as an archaeological specialist in Paleolithic Europe and teaching partly in women's and gender studies, I had long been wary of the manner in which we casually project gender back into time. How well, I wondered, did this vision of shamans fit the evidence? Given that the material traces of prehistory offered few certain clues about social life, let alone gender, history seemed the obvious place to turn. What was the story behind this anthropological category? Where had the term "shaman" come from, before its popularity in both archaeology and drumming circles? How might it have changed along the way? The answer, I would discover repeatedly, was far more complex than I initially had imagined. Its details provided as many detours as certainties, and suggested as much about the evolving present as they did about the deeper past.

TRAVELERS AND SPIRITS

In many native traditions of Siberia, shamans appeared as travelers guided by spirits, people who could reach other places and other worlds, and so connect the known with the unknown. In this book, I will follow this motif with regard to their conceptual offspring, tracing some of their journeys as they crossed from Asia into Europe, from history into prehistory and back again. This was hardly a nonstop flight. Rather, it involved multiple landings, each of which altered the appearance of these figures and the purpose of their travel. The large and diverse party of Siberian shamans, as reported in sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century accounts of travelers and explorers, diminished with every stop. But their legacy of attracting attention remained, and even as these sorcerers became increasingly familiar, they continued to signal mysterious distance.

Described in vivid detail by early ethnographers and geographers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, shamans grew abstract as they left their homeland. Soon they became a category: every tribe considered outside civilization could now have at least one of them. As the term came to describe practitioners of traditional rituals, shamans migrated around the planet. Sightings were reported in North and South America, Australia, and Africa. In transforming into a universal trope, shamans suggested power, mystery, madness, and brilliance across a range of different imaginary frontiers. They now not only connected their world to other worlds, but also increasingly linked the primitive and the civilized.

European societies in the nineteenth century were judged too advanced to have shamans of their own, but archaeologists avidly debated when similar healers and religious leaders might have been part of their distant past as well. Some shamans were said to have lived in caves; some appeared reclusive, but others social. But more importantly, they now stood at the very beginning of our collective social existence, to guide us through human history, down the path that led away from them. At the same time, a few still lingered beyond the eastern edge of Europe, where we could discover them yet again at the end of the twentieth century.

Yet this book is *not* strictly speaking about shamans, let alone the peoples of Siberia. Rather it is about the *idea* of a shaman, the imagination that fueled that idea and the history that nourished and encouraged it. I offer an account of those who encountered and imagined shamans, a long story about all sorts of fascinating characters, mostly at the edges of their own maps. Out of these elements I have sought to fashion a historical mosaic, less a singular picture than an assemblage of fragments. At its center lies Siberia: the Siberia imagined as well as encountered, the beliefs about its native peoples, and the multiple appearances they made in European history and eventually prehistory. The surrounding panels sometimes overlap, and sometimes leave large gaps. I examine a few of them closely to fill in the details, while only suggesting a larger whole. To see the shaman involves peering against the light, as if through stained glass. Many layers now stand between us and the distant world of human prehistory, each imparting its own colorful vision. The images we have of shamans, after all, come to us from others, be they travelers, ethnographers, descendants, or archaeologists. To understand the greater assemblage, we must try to see through each broken piece in turn, recognizing its particular hue. Only then can we better evaluate what a general concept might capture, and what it might be missing.

THE LONG ROAD TRAVELED: MEETING THE SHAMANS

My interest in the history of Siberian shamans stemmed from encountering them in archaeological discussions of prehistoric symbolic behavior, and wondering when this explanation had first emerged. My initial task seemed simple and straightforward enough: to trace the concept from its present-day understanding back into the history of Siberia and its indigenous populations. My modest plan was to broaden the horizons of current literature by bringing writings in Russian and German into view alongside well-known ethnographies circulating in English. I

anticipated some theoretical differences based on the historical, national, and political contexts of the writers. While tensions of interpretation might appear, I thought, I ultimately expected to find a recognizable conception at the core, the ideal shaman then projected into the past. Hundreds of pages later, I found myself facing a far more daunting project: a history far more complex and knotty than I had imagined, stretching over centuries and across continents. By the end of my research, the "core of a shaman" still remained elusive, and I doubted that any definition could apply cleanly across time and place. However, I began to realize that this was the point, that the fragile instability of categories, their precarious nature, should give us pause when moving any concept across space and time.

My extended journey in search of shamans, real and imagined, started with recent accounts of indigenous groups in the broader region of Siberia. The last decade of socialism and the first years of post-socialism had opened a door for historical and ethnographic research in the former Soviet Union to a degree unprecedented for most of the century. Even if the archives were still centrally controlled and travel was monitored, Western as well as Russian scholars had an unsurpassed moment of opportunity to communicate with members of indigenous groups and decipher the records in historical archives. The resulting ethnographically rich work has revealed the immense diversity of the surviving native groups.[2] Many of these ethnographies also make it clear that the unprecedented resurgence of shamanism in Siberia in the last two decades cannot be understood without recognition of the momentous social, demographic, and political shifts of a collapsing social system. New histories and new identities emerged in the region, reassembled from a mix of ancient, new, and invented traditions.

Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, one of the early ethnographers in post-socialist Siberia, recounts a particularly telling story of a modern female shaman [who] reputedly used spirit power to fix a broken bus on the way to a meeting with Native American visitors.[3] The anecdote succinctly captures both the bricolage of present-day shamanism and the ever-evolving historical context that surrounds it. Not only does spirit power now engage with modern transportation, but disparate indigenous groups also forge transnational connections. Such unorthodox examples offer cautionary tales about any simple use of ethnographic analogy.

The incident also introduces another dimension of current concern: gender. Contemporary ethnographies commonly mention practicing women shamans. Their presence at the end of the twentieth or early

twenty-first century does not appear unusual, or particularly worthy of comment. Nevertheless, a historically minded reader would wonder whether this was always the case. Were women shamans ubiquitous throughout history, or were they the exception? And most importantly for archaeologists, how far back might we push such analogies? This was the thread I started to follow more closely, when turning from ethnographic accounts to historical archives.

MAPPING THE PATH

The chapters in this book are organized only partly chronologically. Rather than attempting a more comprehensive account, which would threaten to tax the reader as well as my own abilities, I have chosen a set of episodes that highlight shifting visions of Siberian shamans. Together they comprise a study in the geography of imagination and the wayward paths that shamans and their spirits took. My ambition is to explore the edges of possibility as they appeared to scholars of different generations, backgrounds, and orientations.

Encounters between explorers and native men and women in any colonial expansion involved a complicated alchemy of fear, curiosity, and aggression as well as a desire for knowledge. Siberia was no exception. Nonetheless, the colonial project in that part of the world possessed particular qualities meriting close attention. The history of Russian colonial expansion into the vast land to the east has not been a common part of the history of European science, nor is it commonly addressed in discussions of European colonial endeavors. Yet the threads of Siberian natives interlace the texts of European anthropology, geography, and botany. As well as traveling the world, then, shamans in this story also serve as guides through different layers of Europe's own sense of place.

In following the itinerant history of Siberian shamans, I also want to retell the history of prehistoric archaeology as it came to be defined at the end of the nineteenth century, suggesting that the search for the origin of civilization led east as well as underground. Europe, we too often forget, is a region bounded not just by coastline but also by a less certain limit on land. The practice of a more "worldly" archaeology is thus not simply a matter of moving beyond such continental confines but also reimagining them. The formation of prehistory involved a complex interplay between religion and science, alternately opposed and intertwined. Amid discussions of origins, empirical evidence met dreams about the