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Yes Virginia, There Is Gender: Shamanism and Archaeology's Many Histories

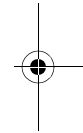
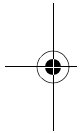
SILVIA TOMÁŠKOVÁ

HISTORIES

In December 1897, eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Sun*, posing the all-important question of her age – “Is there a Santa Claus?” – since some of her friends had been telling her that there was no such a thing. Francis P. Church, the editor, answered in what became one of the most famous editorials ever published in an American newspaper:

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except what they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.¹

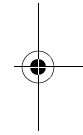
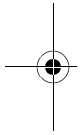
The editorial continues in this vein before delivering the now famous punchline: “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.” I wish to take my cue from this moment in journalism, not to talk about belief and rationality or innocence and jaded knowledge, but rather to take seriously its lead in reflecting on the questions we do or do not ask and the answers we find comprehensible. If we were to examine the history of our discipline





from this perspective, one of our central tasks would be to think about what it is that we have been able to see, and therefore believe in, and what has remained beyond the scope of our questions at any given moment, and therefore remains invisible. While we may live in a different skeptical age than Virginia did at the end of the nineteenth century, and direct empiricism may no longer be the only game in town, our research remains contingent upon the social, cultural, political, and material circumstances in which it transpires, encouraging some questions more than others.

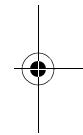
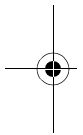
Bruce Trigger's *A History of Archaeological Thought* (1989) pioneered the study of our disciplinary history, laying out the contexts in which the discipline coalesced into a field that focused on the examination of human existence past and present, together with ethnology, linguistics, and physical anthropology. This work also boldly exposed the colonial, racist, and nationalist reasons that were the primary driving forces for Europeans' interest in their own past and that of their colonies (see also Trigger 1984). By examining the historical foundations of the house we all inhabit, the book encourages us to look at the floor plans used in its construction and, while considering them in a new context, to wonder about their rationale and the possibility of asking new questions. Moreover, by establishing a central frame of reference that recognizes the context of thought, Bruce Trigger's work reminds us that the history of any discipline is an ongoing project, like the discipline itself, one where the appearance of an authoritative, respected work marks not an end but rather a new and dynamic beginning. As Alain Schnapp notes: "No longer understood as the fruitful exploration of some terra incognita, the history of archaeology is rather seen as a complex succession of ideas and observations, of disappointments and unexpected turns and achievements, the whole integrated within local and national traditions, set in motion by often contradictory models, and crossed through by paradigms originating from other disciplines" (Schnapp 2002, 135). Such an approach to a history of a discipline repositions questions about the comprehensible and incomprehensible edges of what we think we know and how we came to know it. Instead of simply narrating the progressive development of a field, a contextual history of archaeology revisits the accounts of the past from the margins so as to reflect on the concerns of the centre. I would like to adopt this approach and consider the history of our discipline through one such edge – that of gender – a topical concern believed revealing by some and distorting by others.





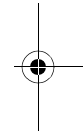
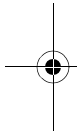
The history of European archaeology is increasingly being complicated by various counter-narratives to the dominant progressive story of a science that started with wealthy amateurs and over time involved ever more sophisticated techniques and educated practitioners (Schnapp 1996; Schlanger 2002). Numerous authors have illustrated the interrelationship between archaeology as an emerging science and the social context in which it operated (Abu El-Haj 2001; Marchand 1996; Van Reybrouck 2002; Van Riper 1993). Archaeology from its very inception was an enterprise whose social purpose was to produce knowledge, as well as material culture, with numerous potential uses. Those interested in the past were never merely curious; rather they were in search of specific knowledge that had its role and a place in the social context where it emerged (for a discussion of the antiquity of antiquity, see Schnapp 2002; Van Riper 1993). Frequently, the discussion of the ideological nature of knowledge production is deemed as either a discussion of an anomaly or a deviation from high standards, or as unnecessarily detracting from the real results, discoveries, and advances of science. I would suggest, however, that archaeology has always relied heavily on the current modes of thinking to explain the past. As discussions of such topics as human origins, successful adaptation, or hierarchy show, archaeologists take cues from the dominant paradigms of their time (Abu El-Haj 2001; Conkey and Williams 1991; Landau 1991; Moser 1998). Yet despite the recognition of the social forces operative in the formulation of research questions or interpretations of past remains, it is still far less clear how exactly such forces influence work in science. Are only certain aspects or moments of research susceptible to the whims of political pressures, or does social context influence technical practices as much as concepts or interpretations? If nationalism was a major force of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that affected archaeology, to what extent did this broad social influence interact with varying transnational intellectual movements of the day, such as evolutionary theory or Freudian psychoanalysis? And where might we position the fitful struggle for women's equality and efforts to define and redefine gender roles, also a part of the "context" of Europe during the same general time period?

In the following pages, I will suggest that while such questions about context have no simple answers, looking at the geographical and conceptual margins of archaeology can indeed help us notice patterns that have shaped intellectual trends in the field as a whole. My focus will be on the figure of the "shaman," as considered both as a





complex historical actor in many native societies of Siberia and as a significant early archaeological concept. By embodying an elemental form of magic, science, and religion amid an otherwise materially defined past centred on political economy and ecology, the shaman constitutes an ideal guide to our disciplinary understanding of gender relative to culture in the history of archaeology. Here I will concentrate on a particular, situated case within the history of European prehistory: the migration of the shaman from an ethnographic reference to a general anthropological and archaeological category. In moving from history to theory and from there into projections about the emergence of culture within the past, I argue that the shaman also altered conceptual shape, changing from an unstable form in gender terms to one quite sharply defined as male. By recognizing this gender transformation in the historical case of the shaman, we can see the outlines of gender concepts present at the contextual moment of prehistory's early definition, ones that affected the questions that archaeologists did and did not ask, and that are still embedded in the continuing context of our inherited categories. Like Santa Claus, key questions about gender may be found not in forms we can easily recognize but rather quite precisely in those we cannot.



THE HISTORY OF SHAMANS

Although the methodological practice of Palaeolithic archaeology remains steadfastly physical in orientation, as aligned with geology and palaeontology as with any of the social sciences, an interest in defining the roots of human cultural life has long echoed through its most significant theoretical discussions. Evidence of prehistoric ritual behaviour remains a central site of contest and uncertainty amid repeated appeals to ethnographic analogues. A century of research on the dating, techniques, and meaning of Palaeolithic image-making has provided us with numerous studies detailing a time and place usually considered to be at the beginning of art and, implicitly, also a new stage in human cognition. While the act of creation itself may not have been marked in terms of gender, the assorted characters cast as potential creators of images have been far more so. The paintings and engravings of rock shelters and caves have been variously attributed to artists, sorcerers, or diviners, roles classified as positions of status or power and usually defined in masculine terms when projected into prehistory. One of the central figures to capture the imagination of archaeologists has been that of the

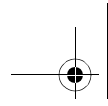




shaman, a proto-priest cast as the original producer of symbolic imagery and largely assumed to be male (in recent writings – Francfort and Hamayon 2001; Lewis-Williams 2002; Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988; Price 2001) – and longer ago – Breuil 1952; Piette 1907; Reinach 1903). The durability of this hypothesis in archaeological debates for more than a century, together with its recent forceful re-emergence, calls for a historical investigation into its own origin and into the specific circumstances that surrounded the introduction of the category of shaman into the vocabulary of scientific archaeology as a particularly gendered role.

A general pattern of interest in the origins of cognition, religious behaviour, and artistic expression runs throughout the history of anthropology, where it marks a potential dividing line between humans and animals. Versions of these questions have intrigued scholars since at least the sixteenth century and fascinated European officials involved in colonial expansion amid distinctly different societies in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. This overseas extension of European frontiers was matched by overland efforts as well. Russian colonial expansion into Siberia and further east is a topic that has only very recently been addressed by Western scholars and is still marginal in our understanding of world colonial projects (for recent research see Brower and Lazzarini 1997; Wood 1991). Yet it was detailed ethnographic accounts collected by Russian and German administrators and scientists in that region that constituted the source for a key narrative about the evolution of belief and cultural specialization. From the eighteenth century onwards, the image of the shaman begins to appear in debates addressing the origins of human spiritual behaviour, healing practice, and artistic expression (Aletphilo 1718; Georgi 1799; Gmelin 1743; Lepekhin 1802; Strahlenberg 1730; Strindberg 1879; Wreech 1725).

Prior fascination with shamanism in European circles provided nineteenth- and twentieth-century archaeologists with a figure for models of prehistoric culture (for an extended discussion of the impact of shamanism on European art and culture of the eighteenth century, see Flaherty 1992). Unlike later archaeological theory, however, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century traveller's reports record a variety of female and male shamans of various ages and abilities, a point I shall illustrate and reinforce below (Balzer 1996; Basilov 1992; Bell 1763; Bogoraz 1928; Shternberg 1936; Troshchanskii 1902). That this heterogeneity would be lost in later appropriations of the term suggests that it was not seen as a significant or defining aspect of the ethnographic example precisely when it came to be constituted as a category within the study of prehistory.



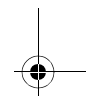
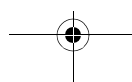
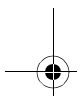
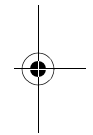
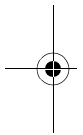
Through selective translations into the past, the shaman becomes a masculine figure, even while serving as the potential precursor to not only a priest, but also a doctor, an artist, or (in debates about cognition) an intellectual. Thus, the standardization of the shaman in prehistory constitutes a significant moment of reduction in perceptions of the roots of expressive culture, religious beliefs, and religious practices, in which gender was stabilized. Through a comparative classification of religious practice in anthropology, this standardization was then spread through the world, and through the development of Palaeolithic archaeology, it was applied to the prehistory of all human culture.

PICTURES FROM SIBERIA

Interest in the ritual life of Siberian peoples developed first on Europe's eastern margin. Starting with Ivan the Terrible in the sixteenth century, expanding with Peter the Great at the end of the seventeenth century, and fully in force under Catherine the Great at the end of the eighteenth century, Russian emperors invested resources in exploring, mapping, and, through detailed knowledge, possessing the vast land east of the Ural Mountains (Brower and Lazzarini 1997; Wood 1991). Maritime explorers in search of the northern passage, those who voyaged inland to the Mongolian and Chinese borders in the south, and Polish and Swedish military captives sent into exile in Siberia all produced diaries and accounts of the natives inhabiting the diverse continent that was the ultimate other for the people of European Russia. For the most part, foreigners, either hired by the Russian rulers or encouraged to cross Russia in search of new routes, produced the written accounts. Consequently, many of the written accounts of the first encounters with peoples of Siberia, of their customs and social norms, were written in German and later deposited in archives and libraries in Germany. Starting with Adam Brand's 1698 account of his crossing of Siberia on the way to China or Endter's 1720 detailed description of the Yakut and Samoyed peoples as the "ugliest people on earth with the most disgusting habits and no fear of afterlife" (Titov 1890, 114), these accounts provide heterogeneous early narratives about the Siberian natives.

In many ways, these encounters resonate with other moments of colonial encounter in their display of a tone of disgust, fascination, and superiority with regard to others not seen as fully human:

People who live here are called Samoyed or Malgonzei. They eat deer and fish and each other. If visitors come, they kill their own children to feed the visitors,

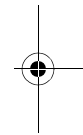
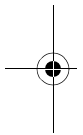




if a visitor were to die they eat him as well. They are short, flat faced, with small noses. They ride reindeer and dogs and are good shooters. Their clothes are made of deer and sable hides. In that same region other Samoyeds live as well who live in the sea all summer long, their bodies would dry out, so they have to be in the water for the whole month. Behind those Samoyeds, above the sea other Samoyeds live who are hairy from the waist down (from the bellybutton down); from the waist up they are just like other people. In that same region, behind these people, above that same sea, live other Samoyeds who have mouths on top of their heads and who do not speak. When they eat they put the meat or fish under their hats, and when they eat they move their shoulders up and down. To the east are other Samoyeds called Kamenskie, near the Iugorskaiia land who live in the mountains, ride deer and dogs, wear sable and deer clothing, and eat deer, dogs and beaver and drink all kinds of blood, including human blood. They have healers who cut open anyone who has pain inside, and take it out. (Titov 1890, 112–14)

These and numerous other accounts circulated throughout Europe from the seventeenth century on, purporting to reveal the habits, practices, and rituals of “primitives” found at the edges of Europe. European encounters with the “other” were already familiar from the colonial accounts from Africa, Australia, and the New World, which contained vivid descriptions of the otherness, the monstrosity and, simultaneously, the childlike gullibility and simplicity of the native peoples (for a review of these accounts and an extensive bibliography, see Pels 1997).

The Siberian indigenous peoples were uniquely situated in their proximity to the eastern borders of Europe. Their frequent encounters with travellers, military personnel, missionaries, and (from the nineteenth century on) political exiles made them easier to study and classify than more remote peoples, but they were also a reminder of the existence of a more primitive humanity, one that had to be placed in some distancing relationship with the existing European civilization and explained, particularly in the earlier days of colonial expansion, in theological terms. The shamanic practices of the native Siberians, read in religious terms, did not fit the traditional understanding of belief and ritual within the framework of Christianity, and were therefore depicted as backward and as deceitful trickery. Yet these practices were nonetheless sufficiently visible to require comment and explanation. Nikolaev Chaunskii wrote at the end of the eighteenth century: “Shamans are celebrated for their wisdom, explanation of dreams, gift of fortune telling,





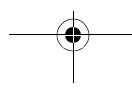
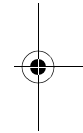
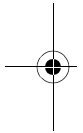
and various 'hocus-pocus' tricks. They tend to the sick, keep the healthy, start storms, keep winds, steal the moon, which causes lunar eclipses and such" (Argentov 1857, 95). The knowledge that covers healing, fortune-telling, interpreting dreams, and producing a lunar eclipse is collectively cast in a frame of "hocus pocus" tricks, revealing an uncertainty as to where such practices might fit in the known register of European disciplines.

The ethnographic problem of category translation was potentially further complicated by the fact that women were included among the practitioners of shamanism:

Shamans are frequently women ... The Yakuts, the Koryaks, and the Chukchi had polygamy and each wife had her own household. They had women "white shamans," who also took care of all household business. The men traveled from household to household but did not stay long, visiting each family for a while. (Argentov 1857, 115-16)

Women shamans used special costumes for rituals which increasingly involved metal decorations, supplied by blacksmiths – the position of blacksmiths improved over time as the costumes became more elaborate, they were irreplaceable, and their fate was inseparable from that of women shamans. (Krasheninnikov, cited in Argentov 1857, 120)

Images of women commonly performing shamanic rituals appear not only in early accounts but well into twentieth-century Russian ethnography. However, the commentary, reception, and explanatory frame of women shamans dramatically differ over time. In many initial accounts, the presence of women shamans is noted but they are not the subject of particular commentary or extensive explanation. This partial silence (recognition without comment) can be explained in several ways. All early European travellers and explorers to Siberia were men, and the first women to describe travels across Siberia were missionary wives arriving only at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Bawden 1985). Thus, an oblique reference to gender is not in itself surprising. Furthermore, the gender roles observed did not comply with European sensibilities or the colonial sense of order. Not only was the hierarchy different from that with which travellers were familiar, but the extent of power that native women may have had was unclear, since even though they were observed performing most domestic duties, among some groups they also headed their own households and performed shamanistic

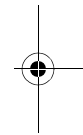
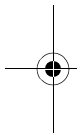




rituals. Finally, the contexts in which Europeans acquired information about Siberian shamans were themselves highly incongruous. Detailed shamanic information that was traditionally passed on within a prescribed line of descent was acquired through coercion, collected in the process of missionary conversion or through the observation of rituals that remained puzzling or bewildering to Westerners (Bawden 1985; Meyer and Pels 2003). Consequently, the heterogeneity of gender roles and relationships, though recorded, was described in the language of the colonists but was only partially and quite imperfectly mapped onto known gender patterns of Europe. The fact that women could also serve as shamans among some peoples was not, in and of itself, the most surprising thing about them.

Descriptions of gender relations, mistranslated into European patriarchal household arrangements, resulted in accounts of polygamy, of single mothers, and of the plain incomprehensible chaos of women not knowing their relations and possibly “kill[ing] their own children to feed the visitors” (Titov 1890, 72). Any of these marital and conjugal forms could be presented as an obvious sign of backwardness. Yet since the status of native women itself was not familiar or clear to the travellers, who probably spent less time with them than with men, the discussion of gender focused on questioning the relative masculinity of the native Siberian men. We can find an especially vivid example of uncertainty over the masculinity of Siberian men, as well as of possibly conscious emasculation, in the illustrations accompanying published travellers’ accounts.

Most texts that enjoyed public circulation, especially in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, include exquisite landscape illustrations featuring travellers on very slender, English-looking horses, full-page intricate pictures of the fauna and flora of Siberia, as well as images of villages and native peoples. All of these images are highly stylized, resembling bucolic German landscapes in the Romantic tradition with their excessively detailed natural features. Yet the images of Tungus or Ostyak men and women are remarkable in their gender sameness; the men in particular are lacking any signs of masculinity, and only the inscriptions below the picture give a hint that the reader is looking at an illustration of a man (see Illustrations 8.1 and 8.2). Beginning with forms of clothing that lack any gender specificity, continuing with the childlike facial features given Siberian men and women alike, and concluding with the passive postures in which all Siberians are depicted, the illustrations portray people who are unlike Europeans in the



contemporary European classificatory schema of gender. As Schiebinger notes, Carl Linnaeus declared in his lectures at Uppsala University in 1740 that “God gave men beards for ornaments and to distinguish them from women” (Schiebinger 1990, 391). The beard served not only to differentiate men from women in fundamental terms, but also to delineate types of men, whereby those men lacking this symbol of virility and leadership were lower on the scale of masculinity and even of humanity. Thus, gender characteristics served also as racial markers in the classification of native peoples (see Schiebinger 1990 for a discussion of the issue in relation to Native Americans).

The lack of clarity of gender roles among indigenous Siberians, and thereby also an ambiguity around the masculinity of Siberian men, was further accentuated after encounters with “koekchuch,” a separate category of men who by all accounts appear to be transgendered figures. As Krasheninnikov wrote in 1775, “‘koekchuch’ dress in women’s clothes, do women’s work, and have no relations with men, either because they are disgusted by men or chose to abstain” (cited in Argentov 1857, 120). This was also one of the earliest accounts to describe in great detail another kind of gender transformation, that of male shamans who became women for the purpose of performing shamanic rituals. The questionable accuracy of the description, the probable lack of understanding of just what changing gender in the particular native context might have entailed, and a likely unwillingness to accept the possibility that men would become women resulted in an even more convoluted claim: that the koekchuch may possibly have been women. The claim was supported by the argument that women’s position must have been quite high, as they were considered “the prettier gender, wiser, and that’s why more shamans are women and ‘koekchuch’ than men” (Argentov 1857, 120). In this instance, an inverted hierarchy among the indigenous populations was more comprehensible than either the possibility of fluid boundaries in sex and gender or the possibility that a man could become – or would even choose to become – a woman.

Sexuality and gender, together with eating habits and appearance, constituted the focus of attention in early discussions seeking to determine distinctive differences between European colonizers and indigenous peoples. Yet this was also a period of “unstable otherness,” an otherness in the making, which served disciplinary purposes at home as well as in colonial contexts (Pels 1997). Descriptions of gender with respect to indigenous peoples in other parts of the world, and particularly those at the margins of Europe, brought gender into the open and



Ostyak man near the Ob River. (Georgi 1799)

allowed for discussions of hierarchy and of normal, appropriate behaviour in European societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While the eighteenth century is recognized as the age of classification, it was simultaneously a time for the codification of categories with sharp boundaries, including the enduring binary oppositions involving nature and culture and reason and spirit, as well as men and women (Laqueur 1986). Consequently, European difficulties in rendering an indigenous society comprehensible, particularly one where men may become women to perform religious or medical functions, reflect a clash of incongruent philosophical frameworks. This is particularly



Tungus men in a stylized illustration. (Georgi 1799)

obvious when we compare the early descriptions of native shamans, “changed men,” and women with later ethnographic accounts, especially those from the early twentieth century.

While travellers and missionaries of earlier days may have had trouble explaining fluid gender categories and magic that resembled witchcraft, by the early twentieth century these ethnographic objects were fully domesticated and discussed in great detail. Thus, Lev Shternberg, one of the most productive Russian ethnographers of Siberia in the early twentieth century, wrote:

South Tungus, Buryat, Yakut all have both male and female shamans, chosen by a spirit for “marriage” ... Among the Chukchi, Kamchadal, and the Koryaks this phenomenon takes the form of transvestism – or gender change of the shaman. Male shaman changes into a woman – he dresses like a woman, he talks like a woman; the Chukchi even have a special women’s language – a special phonetics for women’s pronunciation. The shaman has to stop doing any kind of men’s work, and carry out only women’s tasks, and even if he remains married, he considers himself to be a woman. This could be a case of latent

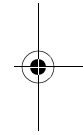
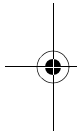


homosexuality but it could also be the case of female spirits choosing the male body to settle into and changing it to serve their purposes. This sex/gender change occurs not only among the north Asian peoples but also among the Dayaks, and the Kadyaks. (Shternberg 1936, 353)

Shternberg's writing came at a time when images of a "wild and devilish" indigenous people were replaced by images of autonomous individuals with psychological needs and desires, and when the shamanistic rituals were not judged as magical tricks, but rather were taken seriously and interpreted in the framework of individual psychology. By the end of the nineteenth century, Europeans assumed that individuals with desires and motives not dissimilar from their own populated even the most remote ends of the earth, and thus shamanic roles could be framed by discussions of sexual desire. In a treatise on religion among indigenous Siberian peoples, Shternberg addressed at length how a shaman is chosen:²

What is a shaman and where does his power reside? The shaman's power is within himself – he knows it and everyone around him knows it – his power is in all the spirits that serve him. These spirits guide him through other worlds, they help him to chase evil spirits away from a sick person, they tell fortunes. But among all those spirits is the main spirit, who chose the shaman in first place, all the other spirits are mere helpers. This main spirit chooses the shaman out of attraction – for sexual reasons. (Shternberg 1936, 353)

Shternberg and Bogoraz, the two better-known Russian ethnographers of pre- and to a limited degree post-revolutionary Siberia, left a legacy of a rich and diverse record of the heterogeneity of indigenous Siberian peoples.³ They were also active in intellectual circles of early twentieth-century Europe and well versed in the anthropological discussions of the day, whose topics included prehistory subjects as well as accounts of "primitive" peoples in colonial outposts. Through Shternberg's and Bogoraz's writing, historians of anthropology can trace the key intellectual debates about individual psychology, rationality, and cultural difference that framed the period's discussions of Siberian shamans and their relationship to the recently discovered prehistoric mind. It was in the context of such concerns, coupled with the emerging interest in Freudian psychoanalysis, that shamans would enter archaeological debates. The reduced importance of observed details amid these theoretical debates served to confirm early twentieth-century assumptions in advance of any ethnographic or archaeological record.



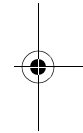
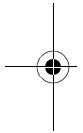


SHAMANS EMERGE IN PREHISTORY

By the end of the nineteenth century, the existence of shamans was an accepted fact in anthropological as well as popular literature. In Chicago in January 1908, Roland B. Dixon delivered the presidential address to the nineteenth annual meeting of the American Folklore Society. The address, titled "Some Aspects of the American Shaman," included these words: "In any study of religious beliefs and ceremonials of savage or semi-civilized peoples, either special or comparative, the shaman stands easily as one of the foremost figures. On almost every side of their religious life his influence makes itself felt, and his importance reaches out beyond the limits of religion into the domain of social life and organization and governmental control" (Dixon 1908, 1).

Dixon then proceeded to discuss the delicate issue of gender, framing it with twentieth-century notions of clearly defined and universal roles: "One of the broadest distinctions which may be made, in connection with the making of shamans, is that of sex, – whether the practice of shamanism is open freely to both sexes, or is more less restricted to one or the other. In this particular, America is at one with most of the rest of the world in that, predominantly, shamans are male" (Dixon 1908, 1–2). Dixon acknowledged the existence of female shamans among some groups, particularly in northern California, where he ascribed greater numbers and social importance to female shamans, and also noted the "curious custom" in Patagonia of male shamans wearing female clothing. Nonetheless, he concluded that male shamans constitute the general pattern and hence define the universal norm (Dixon 1908). Dixon's address shows us that by the beginning of the twentieth century the shaman could be presented as an accepted anthropological category, one that needed little explanation but only refinement and evidence of presence in any specific instance. Moreover, this category, in contrast to earlier ethnographic renderings, was now clearly marked at a theoretical level as a masculine one.

At the turn of the last century, archaeology and ethnology were quite closely aligned in Europe as well as North America, and thus it should come as no surprise that in wider anthropological discussions of the day we witness the emergence of "shamans" not only in geographic places quite distant from Siberia, but also amid the dark places of prehistory, particularly caves. Gabriel de Mortillet, a French socialist freethinker and museum curator (in that order), had established a sequence for Palaeolithic chronology by 1872, stabilizing the antiquity of humans into a progressive, sequential, and observable framework (Chazan

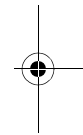
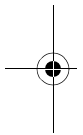




1995). Advancing his theory of human progress, de Mortillet claimed that “[q]uaternary man lived in peace, entirely destitute of religious ideas” but “towards the end of the quaternary period, in the solutrian and the Magdalenian epochs [*sic*], he became an artist” (de Mortillet 1885, 136). This perspective established a clear ground for human progress, measured by criteria drawn from contemporary understandings of “civilization.” A new generation of French archaeologists and scholars of religion, including Edouard Piette, Abbé Breuil, and Salomon Reinach, adopted a similar approach when addressing the origins of civilization. While de Mortillet may have been a firm believer in human progress in line with the new science of evolutionary theory, resistance to evolution elsewhere in France was strong (Hammond 1982). One route around this resistance was to focus on the spiritual aspects of prehistory, particularly art and religion. Thus, de Mortillet’s successors took up the new challenge of prehistory by filling the prehistoric picture not only with material remains but also with images of art and religion.

In 1903 Reinach, a newly appointed curator of the National Museum of Antiquities in St Germain and a joint editor of the *Revue archéologique*, broached the subject of joining art and magic for the first time. Writing about cave art, he suggested that “[b]y the aid of magic, man takes the initiative against things, or rather he becomes the conductor in the great concert of spirits, which murmur in his ears” (Reinach 1903; 1913; 1929, 23). Poetic as this rendition of the ritual may be, in Reinach’s writing any ambiguity about gender is utterly lost in the masculine pronoun for universal humanity. Furthermore, Reinach appears to have bequeathed to archaeology the idea of “hunting magic” as an interpretation for cave painting. In this model, later developed and popularized by Henri Breuil, hunting, creativity, religion, and masculinity all became one inseparable package (Breuil 1952; Piette 1907; Reinach 1903, 1913). Consequently, it comes as no surprise to read M.C. Burkitt’s 1921 enthusiastic description in *Man* of “the sorcerer” from the cave of Les Trois Frères:

On the surface of the wall, to the left of the window, there is a figure of a man, partly painted and partly engraved, masked with stag’s horns on his head, and with a tail behind. Here, indeed is the sorcerer himself, dominating the frieze of the engravings below! ... The great number and especially the beauty of the engravings, and the sorcerer dominating the whole, would seem to show that this place in the cave was of peculiar importance to the prehistoric hunters engaged in the magic ritual necessary to their hunting. (Burkitt 1921, 184)

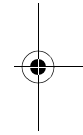
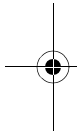




Most commentators only found further confirmation of the unquestionable masculinity of the Trois Frères sorcerer in the distinct and unabashed depiction of his genital organs, even though some noted that the putative phallus is pointing towards the back. It was not until the 1960s that Rosenfeld questioned not only this particular interpretation, but also Breuil's reproduction of the image in publications and even the existence of the body part itself in the cave painting (Ucko and Rosenfeld 1967; for a clear image of the ambiguity of the painting see Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996).

Thus, by the 1920s shamanism had transmuted from a particular ethnographic practice of Siberian peoples into an anthropological category applied all over the world and through deep prehistory. Along the way, shamans had lost any residual gender ambiguity and came to be described in sharply defined masculine terms. In prehistory, practices that had once appeared backward and primitive now became progressive when cast in an ancestral role; while Tungus or Ostyak men might have displayed ambiguous gender characteristics to early explorers, the masculinity of the creative forerunners of European civilization stood beyond question for scholars in the early twentieth century. The theoretical funnel through which these figures passed rendered them simultaneously familiar and alluring in terms of artistic and religious capabilities. This masculine image endured for most of the twentieth century, anemic in terms of historical memory but non-threatening in terms of social imagination. Hunting magic remained the dominant interpretive framework for prehistoric art, contributing to the larger narrative of naturalized gender roles common to archaeology and paleoanthropology that produced the theoretical paradigm of "Man the Hunter." The overall image of prehistoric times as thoroughly unsuitable for weaker types left the real gender of universal terms in no doubt: "He was a cold climate big game hunter. His environment was at once bountiful and threatening. Animal and plant resources abounded; but bringing down game, even with the refined and varied arsenal then at hand, was extremely difficult if not dangerous. The natural setting which enveloped the Ice Age hunter was uncommonly labile and must have seemed brutally capricious: the weather in Wurm times was fairly drastic, and the landscape was tortured by tectonic upheavals" (Levine 1957, 950).

Mircea Eliade's (1964) classic work on shamanism subsequently summarized most of the anthropological literature in the 1950s, becoming the most cited source of information on shamans for archaeologists and





anthropologists, not to mention the general public. The shamans that have re-entered archaeological literature in the 1980s, largely through the work of David Lewis-Williams and numerous reactions to it (Francfort and Hamayon 2001; Kehoe 2000), may have acquired more nuance than they were given earlier in the twentieth century (Chippindale and Tacon 1998), but the conceptual category retains a longer legacy of gender, one found not in the presence or absence of specific detail or visible evidence, but rather in the larger history of its universalization.

CONCLUSION

As Adam Kuper has shown in *The Invention of Primitive Society* (1988), the “original society” is a concept that has as much to do with the state of nineteenth-century society, colonialism, and colonial ethnography as with any existing observable “primitive man,” preserved in a distant place and waiting to be discovered. Prior fascination with shamanism in European circles provided nineteenth-century anthropologists with a figure for models of prehistoric culture. However, their translation was selective in projecting backwards, as the shaman became a masculine figure when projected through western Europe into the human past, a potential precursor to not only a priest but also an artist, a healer, or (in debates about cognition) an intellectual. Thus, the standardization of the shaman in prehistory constitutes a significant moment of reduction in perceptions of the roots of expressive culture, in which gender was stabilized. Through a comparative classification of religious practice in anthropology, this standardization was then spread through the world, and through the development of Palaeolithic archaeology, it was applied to the prehistory of all human culture.

While ethnographic accounts of Siberian shamans present us with an intriguing range of practitioners – male, female, and people who changed gender – who filled numerous roles in a household as well as the community, the archaeological appropriation of the figure has shifted an exclusive focus on public male religious leaders as standard representations of the origins of human spirituality, creativity, and knowing. As historians of science have pointed out, the neutrality of science is itself historically gendered by contexts that posit masculinity as the norm (Fox Keller 1995; Schiebinger 1999). In a similar vein, an archaeology cognizant of gender differences has to account for a gendered history of the discipline itself (Conkey and Gero 1997). A detailed historical account of the epistemological roots of gendered

accounts of the past has to provide a firm ground for assessing such claims. While social contexts and gender roles for early human prehistory may be difficult to address directly, knowledge of the history of present claims will serve as a cautionary reminder that concepts used in our research have a past in which gender plays a central role. In searching for interpretations of deep prehistory, then, we should explore a much wider range of human experience. To use Richard Bradley's (1993) term – or for that matter Francis P. Church's – we must attempt to “imagine the unimaginable” rather than only mirror the most recent arrangements and “see only that which we deem comprehensible.”

Despite considerable advances in theoretical approaches to gender and recent accounts of the historical involvement of female ancestors in the discipline, the topic continues to be a marked category within archaeology, used to denote research on women, whereas men remain as the unmarked and defining norm (Conkey and Gero 1997; Diaz-Andreu and Sorenson 1998; Gilchrist 1999; Joyce 2002). Thus women – or any people with visible gender – remain largely separated from history, social contexts, and politics, and their enclosure in a separate sphere permits the continuation of a “neutral” discipline. For all that gender may be a crucial component of human existence, it is only in the 1990s that we can find traces of a greater awareness of the context in which archaeology operates and the manner in which the historical bias of a masculine discipline may limit our vision of the lived past. In approaching our disciplinary past, then, we must understand Trigger's pioneering emphasis on context as a starting point as well as a landmark. He has challenged us to engage in a more detailed consideration of the history, not only of our theories and concepts, but also of the general framework of our intellectual *practice* and of the *questions* we do or do not pose at any given point in time. By tracing the specific deletions of detail in the emergence of key conceptual categories that we have inherited from the past, this sort of historical approach can reveal the centrality of apparently marginal concerns. Improved awareness of the history of our discipline thus allows us to accept the contingency of our knowledge in a potentially productive way; rather than suggesting absolute certainty about our subject, we may become more attuned to the potential diversity of social facts in the past, however presently “unimaginable.” To paraphrase Francis P. Church's nineteenth-century insight: “Yes Virginia, there is gender,” for sometimes “[t]he most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see.”

NOTES

- 1 Quotations from Church's text are taken from Bartleby's dictionary of quotations, found at www.bartleby.com/73/1660.html. The editorial originally ran on September 21, 1897, 6.
- 2 One of the most interesting issues raised by Shternberg is the agency given to the spirits, and hence the veracity with which he accepts the Giliak version of reality, rather than trying to understand it through the Western binary opposition of reason and spirit, or magic and reality, and provide a rational explanation of "irrational" behaviour. In an extended debate, Shternberg takes issue with Levy-Bruhl's claim that primitive people have no sense of objective reality – all is a matter of mystical images – or that they are incapable of distinguishing between the real and the mystical.
- 3 Their personal biographies are well worth the attention of historians of anthropology, and they still remain to be brought to the attention of Western readers. Both were members of the Jewish intelligentsia of the late nineteenth century, trained as lawyers and active in anti-tsarist movements, activities that led to their ten-year exile to Siberia. It was only there that they turned their attention to native peoples, learned the respective local languages, and produced volumes of highly sophisticated ethnographic accounts, in addition to carrying out academic debates with scholars in Europe and the United States.

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