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CHAPTER ONE

General Considerations. Recruiting Methods. Shamanism and Mystical Vocation

Approaches

SINCE the beginning of the century, ethnologists have fallen into the habit of using the terms "shaman," "medicine man," "sorcerer," and "magician" interchangeably to designate certain individuals possessing magico-religious powers and found in all "primitive" societies. By extension, the same terminology has been applied in studying the religious history of "civilized" peoples, and there have been discussions, for example, of an Indian, an Iranian, a Germanic, a Chinese, and even a Babylonian "shamanism" with reference to the "primitive" elements attested in the corresponding religions. For many reasons this confusion can only militate against any understanding of the shamanic phenomenon. If the word "shaman" is taken to mean any magician, sorcerer, medicine man, or ecstatic found throughout the history of religions and religious ethnology, we arrive at a notion at once extremely complex and extremely vague; it seems, furthermore, to serve no purpose, for we already have the terms "magician" or "sorcerer" to express notions as unlike and as ill-defined as "primitive magic" or "primitive mysticism."

We consider it advantageous to restrict the use of the words "shaman" and "shamanism," precisely to avoid misunderstandings and to cast a clearer light on the history of "magic" and

"sorcery." For, of course, the shaman is also a magician and medicine man; he is believed to cure, like all doctors, and to perform miracles of the fakir type, like all magicians, whether primitive or modern. But beyond this, he is a psychopomp, and he may also be priest, mystic, and poet. In the dim, "confusionistic" mass of the religious life of archaic societies considered as a whole, shamanism—taken in its strict and exact sense—already shows a structure of its own and implies a "history" that there is every reason to clarify.

Shamanism in the strict sense is pre-eminently a religious phenomenon of Siberia and Central Asia. The word comes to us, through the Russian, from the Tungusic *šaman*. In the other languages of Central and North Asia the corresponding terms are: Yakut *ojuna* (*oyuna*), Mongolian *bügä*, *bögä* (*buge*, *bü*), and *udagan* (cf. also Buryat *udayan*, Yakut *udoyan*: "shamaness"), Turko-Tatar *kam* (Altaic *kam*, *gam*, Mongolian *kami*, etc.). It has been sought to explain the Tungusic term by the Pali *samaṇa*, and we shall return to this possible etymology (which is part of the great problem of Indian influences on Siberian religions) in the last chapter of this book.[1] Throughout the immense area comprising Central and North Asia, the magico-religious life of society centers on the shaman. This, of course, does not mean that he is the one and only manipulator of the sacred, nor that religious activity is completely usurped by him. In many tribes the sacrificing priest coexists with the shaman, not to mention the fact that every head of a family is also the head of the domestic cult. Nevertheless, the shaman remains the dominating figure; for through this whole region in which the ecstatic experience is considered the religious experience par excellence, the shaman, and he alone, is the great master of ecstasy. A first definition of this complex phenomenon, and perhaps the least hazardous, will be: shamanism = *technique of ecstasy*.

As such, it was documented and described by the earliest travelers in the various countries of Central and North Asia.

1 Pp. 495 ff.

Later, similar magico-religious phenomena were observed in North America, Indonesia, Oceania, and elsewhere. And, as we shall soon see, these latter phenomena are thoroughly shamanic, and there is every reason to study them together with Siberian shamanism. Yet one observation must be made at the outset: the presence of a shamanic complex in one region or another does not necessarily mean that the magico-religious life of the corresponding people is crystallized around shamanism. This can occur (as, for example, in certain parts of Indonesia), but it is not the most usual state of affairs. Generally shamanism coexists with other forms of magic and religion.

It is here that we see all the advantage of employing the term "shamanism" in its strict and proper sense. For, if we take the trouble to differentiate the shaman from other magicians and medicine men of primitive societies, the identification of shamanic complexes in one or another region immediately acquires definite significance. Magic and magicians are to be found more or less all over the world, whereas shamanism exhibits a particular magical specialty, on which we shall later dwell at length: "mastery over fire," "magical flight," and so on. By virtue of this fact, though the shaman is, among other things, a magician, not every magician can properly be termed a shaman. The same distinction must be applied in regard to shamanic healing; every medicine man is a healer, but the shaman employs a method that is his and his alone. As for the shamanic techniques of ecstasy, they do not exhaust all the varieties of ecstatic experience documented in the history of religions and religious ethnology. Hence any ecstatic cannot be considered a shaman; the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld.

A similar distinction is also necessary to define the shaman's relation to "spirits." All through the primitive and modern worlds we find individuals who profess to maintain relations with "spirits," whether they are "possessed" by them or control them. Several volumes would be needed for an adequate study of all the

problems that arise in connection with the mere idea of "spirits" and of their possible relations with human beings; for a "spirit" can equally well be the soul of a dead person, a "nature spirit," a mythical animal, and so on. But the study of shamanism does not require going into all this; we need only define the shaman's relation to his helping spirits. It will easily be seen wherein a shaman differs from a "possessed" person, for example; the shaman controls his "spirits," in the sense that he, a human being, is able to communicate with the dead, "demons," and "nature spirits," without thereby becoming their instrument. To be sure, shamans are sometimes found to be "possessed," but these are exceptional cases for which there is a particular explanation.

These few preliminary observations already indicate the course that we propose to follow in order to reach an adequate understanding of shamanism. In view of the fact that this magico-religious phenomenon has had its most complete manifestation in North and Central Asia, we shall take the shaman of these regions as our typical example. We are not unaware, and we shall endeavor to show, that Central and North Asian shamanism, at least in its present form, is not a primordial phenomenon free from any external influence; on the contrary, it is a phenomenon that has a long "history." But this Central Asian and Siberian shamanism has the advantage of presenting a structure in which elements that exist independently elsewhere in the world—i.e., special relations with "spirits," ecstatic capacities permitting of magical flight, ascents to the sky, descents to the underworld, mastery over fire, etc.—are here already found integrated with a particular ideology and validating specific techniques.

Shamanism in this strict sense is not confined to Central and North Asia, and we shall endeavor later to point out the greatest possible number of parallels. On the other hand, certain shamanic elements are found in isolation in various forms of archaic magic and religion. And they are of considerable interest, for they show to what extent shamanism proper preserves a substratum of "primitive" beliefs and techniques and to what extent it has in-

novated. Always endeavoring to define the place of shamanism within primitive religions (with all that these imply: magic, belief in Supreme Beings and spirits, mythological concepts, techniques of ecstasy, and so on), we shall constantly be obliged to refer to more or less similar phenomena, without implying that they are shamanic. But it is always profitable to compare and to point out what a magico-religious element similar to a certain shamanic element has produced elsewhere in a different cultural ensemble and with a different spiritual orientation.[2]

For all that shamanism dominates the religious life of Central and North Asia, it is nevertheless not *the* religion of that vast region. Only convenience or confusion has made it possible for some investigators to consider the religion of the Arctic or Turko-Tatar peoples to be shamanism. The religions of Central and North Asia extend beyond shamanism in every direction, just as any religion extends beyond the mystical experience of its privileged adherents. Shamans are of the "elect," and as such they have access to a region of the sacred inaccessible to other members of the community. Their ecstatic experiences have exercised, and still exercise, a powerful influence on the stratification of religious ideology, on mythology, on ritualism. But neither the ideology nor the mythology and rites of the Arctic, Siberian, and Asian peoples are the creation of their shamans. All these elements are earlier than shamanism, or at least are parallel to it, in the sense that they are the product of the *general* religious experience and not of a particular class of privileged beings, the ecstatics. On the contrary,

2 In this sense, and only in this sense, do we regard identifying "shamanic" elements in a highly developed religion or mysticism as valuable. Discovering a shamanic symbol or rite in ancient India or Iran begins to have meaning only in the degree to which one is led to see shamanism as a clearly defined religious phenomenon; otherwise, one can go on forever talking of "primitive elements," which can be found in any religion, no matter how "developed." For the religions of India and Iran, like all the other religions of the modern or ancient East, display a number of "primitive elements" that are not necessarily shamanic. We cannot even consider every technique of ecstasy found in the East "shamanic," however "primitive" it may be.

as we shall see, we frequently find the shamanic (that is, ecstatic) experience attempting to express itself through an ideology that is not always favorable to it.

In order not to encroach on the subject matter of the following chapters, we will here say only that shamans are persons who stand out in their respective societies by virtue of characteristics that, in the societies of modern Europe, represent the signs of a vocation or at least of a religious crisis. They are separated from the rest of the community by the intensity of their own religious experience. In other words, it would be more correct to class shamanism among the mysticisms than with what is commonly called a religion. We shall find shamanism within a considerable number of religions, for shamanism always remains an ecstatic technique at the disposal of a particular elite and represents, as it were, the mysticism of the particular religion. A comparison at once comes to mind—that of monks, mystics, and saints within Christian churches. But the comparison must not be pushed too far. In contrast to the state of affairs in Christianity (at least during its recent history), peoples who profess to be shamanists accord considerable importance to the ecstatic experiences of their shamans; these experiences concern them personally and immediately; for it is the shamans who, by their trances, cure them, accompany their dead to the "Realm of Shades," and serve as mediators between them and their gods, celestial or infernal, greater or lesser. This small mystical elite not only directs the community's religious life but, as it were, guards its "soul." The shaman is the great specialist in the human soul; he alone "sees" it, for he knows its "form" and its destiny.

And wherever the immediate fate of the soul is not at issue, wherever there is no question of sickness (= loss of the soul) or death, or of misfortune, or of a great sacrificial rite involving some ecstatic experience (mystical journey to the sky or the underworld), the shaman is not indispensable. A large part of religious life takes place without him.

The Arctic, Siberian, and Central Asian peoples are made up

chiefly of hunters-fishers or herdsmen-breeders. A degree of nomadism is typical of them all. And despite their ethnic and linguistic differences, in general their religions coincide. Chukchee, Tungus, Samoyed, or Turko-Tatars, to mention only some of the most important groups, know and revere a celestial Great God, an all-powerful Creator but on the way to becoming a *deus otiosus*.[3] Sometimes the Great God's name even means "Sky" or "Heaven"; such, for example, is the Num of the Samoyed, the Buga of the Tungus, or the Tengri of the Mongols (cf. also Tengeri of the Buryat, Tängere of the Volga Tatars, Tingir of the Beltir, Tangara of the Yakut, etc.). Even when the concrete name of the "sky" is lacking, we find some one of its most characteristic attributes—"high," "lofty," "luminous," and so on. Thus, among the Ostyak of the Irtysh the name of the celestial god is derived from *sänke*, the primitive meaning of which is "luminous, shining, light." The Yakut call him "Lord Father Chief of the World," the Tatars of the Altai "White Light" (Ak Ayas), the Koryak "The One on High," "The Master of the High," and so on. The Turko-Tatars, among whom the celestial Great God preserves his religious currency more than among their neighbors to the north and northeast, also call him "Chief," "Master," "Lord," and often "Father."[4]

This celestial god, who dwells in the highest sky, has several "sons" or "messengers" who are subordinate to him and who occupy lower heavens. Their names and number vary from tribe to tribe; seven or nine "sons" or "daughters" are commonly mentioned, and the shaman maintains special relations with some of them. These sons, messengers, or servants of the celestial god are charged with watching over and helping human beings. The pantheon is sometimes far more numerous, as, for example, among

3 This phenomenon, which is especially important for the history of religions, is by no means confined to Central and North Asia. It is found throughout the world and has not yet been entirely explained; cf. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, pp. 46 ff. If only indirectly, it is hoped that the present work will throw some light on this problem.

4 See Eliade, *Patterns*, pp. 60 ff.; J.-P. Roux, "Tängri. Essai sur le ciel-dieu des peuples altaïques."

the Buryat, the Yakut, and the Mongols. The Buryat mention fifty-five "good" and forty-four "evil" gods, who have been forever opposed in unending strife. But, as we shall show later,[5] there is reason to believe that both this multiplication of gods and their mutual hostility may be comparatively recent innovations.

Among the Turko-Tatars goddesses play a rather minor role.[6] The earth divinity is not at all prominent. The Yakut, for example, have no figurines of the earth goddess and offer no sacrifices to her.[7] The Turko-Tatar and Siberian peoples know several feminine divinities, but they are reserved for women, their spheres being childbirth and children's diseases.[8] The mythological role of woman is also markedly small, although traces of it remain in some shamanic traditions. The only great god after the God of the Sky or the Atmosphere [9] is, among the Altaians, the Lord of the Underworld, Erlik (= Ärlik) Khan, who is also well known to the shaman. The very important fire cult, hunting rites, the conception of death—to which we shall return more than once—complete this brief outline of Central and North Asian religious life. Morphologically this religion is, in general, close to that of the Indo-Europeans: in both there is the same importance of the great God of the Sky or of the Atmosphere, the same absence of goddesses (so characteristic of the Indo-Mediterranean area), the same function attributed to the "sons" or "messengers" (Aśvins, Dioscuri, etc.), the same exaltation of fire. On the sociological and economic planes the similarities between the protohistorical Indo-Europeans and the ancient Turko-Tatars are even more strikingly clear: both societies were patriarchal in structure, with the head of the family enjoying

5 Below, pp. 184 ff.

6 Cf. Eveline Lot-Falck, "À propos d'Ätügän."

7 Uno Harva (formerly Holmberg), *Die religiösen Vorstellungen der altaischen Völker*, p. 247.

8 Cf. Gustav Ränk, "Lapp Female Deities of the Madder-Akka Group," especially pp. 48 ff.

9 For in Central Asia, too, we find the well-known transition of a celestial god to a god of the atmosphere or of storm; cf. Eliade, *Patterns*, pp. 91 ff.

great prestige, and on the whole their economy was that of the hunters and herdsmen-breeders. The religious importance of the horse among the Turko-Tatars and the Indo-Europeans has long been noted. And the most ancient of Greek sacrifices, the Olympian, has been shown to possess characteristics of the sacrifice practiced by the Turko-Tatars, the Ugrians, and the Arctic peoples—precisely the typical sacrifice of the primitive hunters and herdsmen-breeders. These facts have their bearing on the problem with which we are concerned. Given the economic, social, and religious parallels between the ancient Indo-Europeans and the ancient Turko-Tatars (or, better, Proto-Turks),[10] we must determine to what extent the various historical Indo-European peoples still preserve shamanic survivals comparable to Turko-Tatar shamanism.

But, as can never be sufficiently emphasized, nowhere in the world or in history will a perfectly "pure" and "primordial" religious phenomenon be found. The paleoethnological and prehistoric documents at our disposition go back no further than the Paleolithic; and nothing justifies the supposition that, during the hundreds of thousands of years that preceded the earliest Stone Age, humanity did not have a religious life as intense and as various as in the succeeding periods. It is almost certain that at least a part of prelithic humanity's magico-religious beliefs were preserved in later religious conceptions and mythologies. But it is also highly probable that this spiritual heritage from the prelithic period underwent continual changes as a result of the numerous cultural contacts among pre- and protohistorical peoples. Thus, nowhere in the history of religions do we encounter "primordial" phenomena; for history has been everywhere, changing, recasting, enriching, or impoverishing religious concepts, mythological creations, rites, techniques of ecstasy. Obviously, every religion that, after long

10 On the prehistory and earliest history of the Turks, see René Grousset's admirable synthesis, *L'Empire des steppes*. Cf. also W. Koppers, "Urtürkentum und Urindogermanentum im Lichte der völkerkundlichen Universalgeschichte"; W. Barthold, *Histoire des Turcs d'Asie Centrale;* Karl Jettmar: "Zur Herkunft der türkischen Völkerschaften"; "The Altai before the Turks"; "Urgeschichte Innerasiens," pp. 153 ff.

processes of inner transformation, finally develops into an autonomous structure presents a "form" that is its own and that is accepted as such in the later history of humanity. But no religion is completely "new," no religious message completely abolishes the past. Rather, there is a recasting, a renewal, a revalorization, an integration of the elements—the most essential elements!—of an immemorial religious tradition.

These few remarks will serve for the present to delimit the historical horizon of shamanism. Some of its elements, which we shall indicate later, are clearly archaic, but that does not mean that they are "pure" and "primordial." In the form in which we find it, Turko-Mongol shamanism is even decidedly marked by Oriental influences; and though there are other shamanisms without such definite and recent influences, they too are not "primordial."

As for the Arctic, Siberian, and Central Asian religions, in which shamanism has reached its most advanced degree of integration, we may say that they are characterized on the one hand by the scarcely felt presence of a celestial Great God, and on the other by hunting rites and an ancestor cult that imply a wholly different religious orientation. As will be shown later, the shaman is more or less directly involved in each of these religious areas. But one has the impression that he is more at home in one area than in another. Constituted by the ecstatic experience and by magic, shamanism adapts itself more or less successfully to the various religious structures that preceded or are cotemporal with it. Replacing the description of some shamanic performance in the frame of the general religious life of the people concerned (we are thinking, for example, of the celestial Great God and the myths about him), we sometimes find ourselves amazed; we have the impression of two wholly different religious universes. But the impression is false; the difference lies not in the structure of the religious universes but in the intensity of the religious experience induced by the shamanic performance. The shaman's séance almost always has recourse to ecstasy; and the history of religions is there to show us that no other religious experience is more subject to distortion and aberration.

1. *General. Recruiting Methods. Mystical Vocation*

To close these few preliminary observations here: In studying shamanism we must always remember that it values a certain number of special and even "private" religious elements and that, at the same time, it is far from exhausting the religious life of the rest of the community. The shaman begins his new, his true life by a "separation"—that is, as we shall presently see, by a spiritual crisis that is not lacking in tragic greatness and in beauty.

The Bestowal of Shamanic Powers

In Central and Northeast Asia the chief methods of recruiting shamans are: (1) hereditary transmission of the shamanic profession and (2) spontaneous vocation ("call" or "election"). There are also cases of individuals who become shamans of their own free will (as, for example, among the Altaians) or by the will of the clan (Tungus, etc.). But these "self-made" shamans are considered less powerful than those who inherited the profession or who obeyed the "call" of the gods and spirits.[11] As for choice by the clan, it is dependent upon the candidate's ecstatic experience; if that does not follow, the youth appointed to take the place of the dead shaman is ruled out.[12]

However selected, a shaman is not recognized as such until after he has received two kinds of teaching: (1) ecstatic (dreams, trances, etc.) and (2) traditional (shamanic techniques, names and functions of the spirits, mythology and genealogy of the clan, secret language, etc.). This twofold course of instruction, given by the spirits and the old master shamans, is equivalent to an initiation. Sometimes initiation is public and constitutes an autonomous ritual in itself. But absence of this kind of ritual in no sense implies absence of an initiation; the latter can perfectly well occur in dream or in the neophyte's ecstatic experience. The available documents on shamanic dreams clearly show that they involve an initiation

11 For the Altaians, see G. N. Potanin, *Ocherki severo-zapadnoi Mongolii*, IV, 57; V. M. Mikhailowski, "Shamanism in Siberia and European Russia," p. 90. 12 See below, p. 17.

whose structure is well known to the history of religions. In any case, there is no question of anarchical hallucinations and of a purely individual plot and dramatis personae; the hallucinations and the *mise en scène* follow traditional models that are perfectly consistent and possess an amazingly rich theoretical content.

This fact, we believe, provides a sounder basis for the problem of the psychopathy of shamans, to which we shall soon return. Psychopaths or not, the future shamans are expected to pass through certain initiatory ordeals and to receive an education that is sometimes highly complex. It is only this twofold initiation—ecstatic and didactic—that transforms the candidate from a possible neurotic into a shaman recognized by his particular society. The same observation applies to the origin of shamanic powers: it is not the point of departure for obtaining these powers (heredity, bestowal by the spirits, voluntary quest) that is important, but the technique and its underlying theory, transmitted through initiation.

This observation seems important, for more than one scholar has sought to draw major conclusions concerning the structure and even the history of this religious phenomenon from the fact that a certain shamanism is hereditary or spontaneous, or that the "call" that determines a shaman's career appears to be conditioned (or not) by his psychopathic constitution. We shall return to these methodological problems later. For the moment we will confine ourselves to reviewing some Siberian and North Asian documents on the "election" of shamans, without attempting to arrange them under headings (hereditary transmission, call, appointment by the clan, personal decision), for, as we shall presently see, the majority of the peoples with whom we are concerned have more than one method of recruiting their shamans.[13]

13 On the grant of shamanic powers, see Georg Nioradze, *Der Schamanismus bei den sibirischen Völkern*, pp. 54–58; Leo Sternberg, "Divine Election in Primitive Religion," passim; id., "Die Auserwählung im sibirischen Schamanismus," passim; Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen*, pp. 452 ff.; Åke Ohlmarks, *Studien zum Problem des Schamanismus*, pp. 25 ff.; Ursula Knoll-Greiling, "Berufung und Berufungserlebnis bei den Schamanen."

Recruiting of Shamans in Western and Central Siberia

Among the Vogul, N. L. Gondatti reports, shamanism is hereditary and is also transmitted in the female line. But the future shaman exhibits exceptional traits from adolescence; he very early becomes nervous and is sometimes even subject to epileptic seizures, which are interpreted as meetings with the gods.[14] Among the eastern Ostyak the situation appears to be different; according to A. A. Dunin-Gorkavich, shamanism is not learned there, it is a gift from heaven, received at birth. In the Irtysh region it is a gift from Sänke (the Sky God) and is manifest from earliest years. The Vasyugan also hold that one is born a shaman.[15] But, as Karjalainen remarks,[16] hereditary or spontaneous, shamanism is always a gift from the gods or spirits; viewed from a certain angle, it is hereditary only in appearance.

Generally the two forms of obtaining shamanic powers coexist. Among the Votyak, for example, shamanism is hereditary, but it is also granted directly by the Supreme God, who himself instructs the future shaman through dreams and visions.[17] Exactly the same is true among the Lapps, where the gift is transmitted in a family but the spirits also grant it to those on whom they wish to bestow it.[18]

Among the Siberian Samoyed and the Ostyak shamanism is hereditary. On the shaman's death, his son fashions a wooden image of his father's hand and through this symbol inherits his powers.[19] But being the son of a shaman is not enough; the neophyte must also be accepted and approved by the spirits.[20] Among

14 K. F. Karjalainen, *Die Religion der Jugra-Völker*, III, 248.

15 Ibid., pp. 248–49. 16 Ibid., pp. 250 f.

17 Mikhailowski, p. 153.

18 Ibid., pp. 147–48; T. I. Itkonen, *Heidnische Religion und späterer Aberglaube bei den finnischen Lappen*, pp. 116, 117, n. 1.

19 P. I. Tretyakov, *Turukhansky krai, evo priroda i zhiteli*, p. 211; Mikhailowski, p. 86.

20 A. M. Castrén, *Nordische Reisen und Forschungen*, IV, 191; Mikhailowski, p. 142.

the Yurak-Samoyed the future shaman is marked from birth; infants born with their "shirt" (i.e., caul) are destined to become shamans (those born with the "shirt" covering only the head will be lesser shamans). Toward the approach of maturity the candidate begins to have visions, sings in his sleep, likes to wander in solitude, and so on; after this incubation period he attaches himself to an old shaman to be taught.[21] Among the Ostyak it is sometimes the father himself who chooses his successor among his sons; in doing so, he does not consider primogeniture but the candidate's capacities. He then transmits the traditional secret knowledge to him. A shaman without children transmits it to a friend or disciple. But in any case those destined to become shamans spend their youth mastering the doctrines and techniques of the profession.[22]

Among the Yakut, W. Sieroszewski writes,[23] the gift of shamanism is not hereditary. However, the *ämägät* (sign, tutelary spirit) does not vanish after the shaman's death and hence tends to incarnate itself in a member of the same family. N. V. Pripuzov [24] supplies the following details: One destined to shamanship begins by becoming frenzied, then suddenly loses consciousness, withdraws to the forests, feeds on tree bark, flings himself into water and fire, wounds himself with knives. The family then appeals to an old shaman, who undertakes to teach the distraught young man the various kinds of spirits and how to summon and control them. This is only the beginning of the initiation proper, which later includes a series of ceremonies to which we shall return.[25]

Among the Tungus of the Transbaikal region he who wishes to become a shaman announces that the spirit of a dead shaman has appeared to him in dream and ordered him to succeed him. For this declaration to be regarded as plausible, it must usually be accompanied by a considerable degree of mental derangement.[26] According to the beliefs of the Turukhansk Tungus, one destined to

21 T. Lehtisalo, *Entwurf einer Mythologie der Jurak-Samojeden*, p. 146.
22 Belyavsky, cited by Mikhailowski, p. 86.
23 "Du chamanisme d'après les croyances des Yakoutes," p. 312.
24 Cited by Mikhailowski, pp. 85 f.
25 Cf. below, pp. 113 f. 26 Mikhailowski, p. 85.

become a shaman has dreams in which he sees the devil called Khargi perform shamanic rites. In this way he learns the secrets of the profession.[27] We shall return to these "secrets," for they constitute the essence of the shamanic initiation that sometimes takes place in seemingly morbid dreams and trances.

Recruiting among the Tungus

Among the Manchu and the Tungus of Manchuria there are two classes of "great" shamans—those of the clan and those independent from the clan.[28] In the former case the transmission of shamanic gifts usually takes place from grandfather to grandson, for, engaged in supplying his father's needs, the son cannot become a shaman. Among the Manchu the son can succeed; but if there is no son the grandson inherits the gift, that is, the "spirits" left available after the shaman's death. A problem arises when there is no one in the shaman's family to take possession of these spirits; in such a case a stranger is called in. As for the independent shaman, he has no rules to obey.[29] We take this to mean that he follows his own vocation.

Shirokogoroff describes several cases of shamanic vocation. It seems that there is always a hysterical or hysteroid crisis, followed by a period of instruction during which the postulant is initiated by an accredited shaman.[30] In the majority of these cases the crisis occurs at maturity. But one cannot become a shaman until several years after the first experience.[31] And recognition as a shaman is bestowed only by the whole community and only after the aspirant has undergone the initiatory ordeal.[32] In default of this, no shaman can exercise his function. Many renounce the profession if the clan does not recognize them as worthy to be shamans.[33]

Instruction plays an important role, but it does not begin until

27 Tretyakov, p. 211; Mikhailowski, p. 85.
28 S. M. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 344.
29 Ibid., p. 346. 30 Ibid., pp. 346 ff. 31 Ibid., p. 349.
32 Ibid., pp. 350–51. On this initiation, see below, pp. 111 ff.
33 Ibid., p. 350.

after the first ecstatic experience. Among the Tungus of Manchuria, for example, the child is chosen and brought up with a view to becoming a shaman; but the first ecstasy is decisive: if no experience supervenes, the clan renounces its candidate.[34] Sometimes the young candidate's behavior determines and hastens his consecration. Thus it may happen that candidates run away to the mountains and remain there seven days or longer, feeding on animals "caught . . . directly with their teeth," [35] and returning to the village dirty, bleeding, with torn clothes and hair disheveled, "like wild people." [36] It is only some ten days later that the candidate begins babbling incoherent words.[37] Then an old shaman cautiously asks him questions; the candidate (more precisely, the "spirit" possessing him) becomes angry, and finally designates the shaman who is to offer the sacrifices to the gods and prepare the ceremony of initiation and consecration.[38]

Recruiting among the Buryat and the Altaians

Among the Alarsk Buryat studied by Sandschejew shamanism is transmitted in the paternal or maternal line. But it is also spontaneous. In either case vocation is manifested by dreams and convulsions, both provoked by ancestral spirits (*utcha*). A shamanic vocation is obligatory; one cannot refuse it. If there are no suitable candidates, the ancestral spirits torture children, who cry in their sleep, become nervous and dreamy, and at thirteen are designated for the profession. The preparatory period involves a long series of ecstatic experiences, which are at the same time initiatory; the

34 Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex*, p. 350.

35 Which indicates transformation into a wild beast, that is, a sort of reintegration into the ancestor.

36 All these details have an initiatory bearing, which will be explained later.

37 It is during this period of silence that the initiation by the spirits is completed, concerning which Tungus and Buryat shamans supply most valuable details; see below, pp. 75 ff.

38 Shirokogoroff, p. 351. On the continuation of the ceremony proper, see below, pp. 111 ff.

ancestral spirits appear in dreams and sometimes carry the candidate down to the underworld. Meanwhile the youth continues to study under the shamans and elders; he learns the clan genealogy and traditions, the shamanic mythology and vocabulary. The teacher is called the Father Shaman. During his ecstasy the candidate sings shamanic hymns.[39] This is the sign that contact with the beyond has finally been established.

Among the Buryat of Southern Siberia shamanism is usually hereditary, but sometimes one becomes a shaman after a divine election or an accident; for example, the gods choose the future shaman by striking him with lightning or showing him their will through stones fallen from the sky; [40] one who had chanced to drink *tarasun* in which there was such a stone was transformed into a shaman. But these shamans chosen by the gods must also be guided and taught by the old shamans.[41] The role of lightning in designating the shaman is important; it shows the celestial origin of shamanic powers. The case is not unique; among the Soyot, too, one who is touched by lightning becomes a shaman,[42] and lightning is sometimes portrayed on the shaman's costume.

In the case of hereditary shamanism, the souls of the ancestral shamans choose a young man in the family; he becomes absent-minded and dreamy, loves solitude, and has prophetic visions and sometimes seizures that make him unconscious. During this period, the Buryat believe, the soul is carried off by the spirits—eastward if the youth is destined to become a "white" shaman, westward if a "black." [43] Received in the palace of the gods, the neophyte's soul is instructed by the ancestral shamans in the secrets of the profession, the gods' forms and names, the cult and names of the spirits, and so on. It is only after this first initiation that the soul

39 Garma Sandschejew, "Weltanschauung und Schamanismus der Alaren-Burjaten," pp. 977–78.

40 On "thunder-stones" fallen from the sky, see Eliade, *Patterns*, pp. 53 ff.

41 Mikhailowski, p. 86.

42 Potanin, IV, 289.

43 For the distinction between these two types of shaman, see below, pp. 184 ff.

returns to the body.[44] We shall see that the initiatory process continues long after this.

For the Altaians the shamanic gift is generally hereditary. While still a child, the future shaman, or *kam*, proves to be sickly, withdrawn, contemplative. But his father gives him a lengthy preparation, teaching him the tribe's songs and traditions. When a young man in a family is subject to epileptic attacks, the Altaians are convinced that one of his ancestors was a shaman. But it is also possible to become a *kam* of one's own volition, though this kind of shaman is considered inferior to the others.[45]

Among the Kazak Kirgiz (Kirgiz-Kaisak) the profession of *baqça* (shaman) is usually transmitted from father to son; exceptionally, the father transmits it to two of his sons. But there is a memory of an ancient time when the neophyte was chosen directly by the old shamans. "In former days the *baqças* sometimes enlisted very young Kazak Kirgiz, usually orphans, in order to initiate them into the profession of *baqça;* however, to succeed in the profession a predisposition to nervous disorders was essential. The subjects intending to enter the *baqçylyk* were characterized by sudden changes in state, by rapid transitions from irritability to normality, from melancholia to agitation." [46]

Hereditary Transmission and Quest in Obtaining Shamanic Powers

Two conclusions already appear from this rapid examination of Siberian and Central Asian data: (1) that a hereditary shamanism

44 Mikhailowski, p. 87; W. Schmidt, *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee*, X, 395 ff.

45 Potanin, IV, 56–57; Mikhailowski, p. 90; W. Radlov, *Aus Sibirien*, II, 16; A. V. Anokhin, *Materialy po shamanstvu u altaitsev*, pp. 29 ff.; H. von Lankenau, "Die Schamanen und das Schamanenwesen," pp. 278 f.; W. Schmidt, *Der Ursprung*, IX, 245–48 (Altaic Tatars), 687–88 (Abakan Tatars).

46 J. Castagné, "Magie et exorcisme chez les Kazak-Kirghizes et autres peuples turcs orientaux," p. 60.

exists side by side with a shamanism bestowed directly by the gods and spirits; (2) that morbid phenomena frequently accompany both spontaneous manifestation and hereditary transmission of the shamanic vocation. Let us now see what the situation is in regions other than Siberia, Central Asia, and the Arctic.

It is unnecessary to dwell at length on the question of hereditary transmission or spontaneous vocation in the case of the magician or medicine man. In general, the situation is the same everywhere: the two ways of access to magico-religious powers coexist. A few examples will suffice.

The profession of medicine man is hereditary among the Zulu and the Bechuana of South Africa,[47] the Nyima of the southern Sudan,[48] the Negritos and the Jakun of the Malay Peninsula,[49] the Batak and other peoples of Sumatra,[50] the Dyak,[51] the sorcerers of the New Hebrides,[52] and in several Guianan and Amazonian tribes (Shipibo, Cobeno, Macusi, etc.).[53] "In the eyes of the Cobeno, any shaman by right of succession is gifted with a higher power than one whose title is due only to his own seeking."[54] Among the Rocky Mountain tribes of North America shamanic power can also be inherited, but the transmission always takes place through an ecstatic experience (dream).[55] As Willard Z. Park observes,[56] inheritance seems rather to be a tendency in a child or other relative to acquire the power by drawing from the same source as the sha-

47 Max Bartels, *Die Medizin der Naturvölker*, p. 25.

48 S. F. Nadel, "A Study of Shamanism in the Nuba Mountains," p. 27.

49 Ivor H. N. Evans, *Studies in Religion, Folk-lore, & Custom in British North Borneo and the Malay Peninsula*, pp. 159, 264.

50 E. M. Loeb, *Sumatra*, pp. 81 (the northern Batak), 125 (Menangkabau), 155 (Nias).

51 H. Ling Roth, *The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo*, I, 260; also among the Ngadju Dyak, cf. H. Schärer, *Die Gottesidee der Ngadju Dajak in Süd-Borneo*, p. 58.

52 J. L. Maddox, *The Medicine Man: a Sociological Study of the Character and Evolution of Shamanism*, p. 26.

53 Alfred Métraux, "Le Shamanisme chez les Indiens de l'Amérique du Sud tropicale," pp. 200 f.

54 Ibid., p. 201. 55 *Shamanism in Western North America*, p. 22.

56 Ibid., p. 29.

man. Among the Puyallup, Marian Smith remarks, the power tends to remain in the family.[57] Cases have also been known in which the shaman transmits the power to his child during his own lifetime.[58] Inheritance of shamanic power appears to be the rule among the Plateau tribes (Thompson, Shuswap, southern Okanagon, Klallam, Nez Perce, Klamath, Tenino) and those of northern California (Shasta, etc.), and it is also found among the Hupa, Chimariko, Wintu, and western Mono.[59] Transmission of the "spirits" always remains the basis of this shamanic inheritance, in distinction from the more usual method among most North American tribes—acquiring "spirits" by a spontaneous experience (dream, etc.) or by a deliberate quest. Among the Eskimo shamanism is occasionally hereditary. An Iglulik became a shaman after being wounded by a walrus, but in a sense he inherited his mother's qualification, she having become a shamaness as the result of a fireball entering her body.[60]

The office of medicine man is not hereditary among a considerable number of primitive peoples, whom it is unnecessary to cite here.[61] This means that all over the world magico-religious powers are held to be obtainable either spontaneously (sickness, dream, chance encounter with a source of "power," etc.) or deliberately (quest). It should be noted that nonhereditary acquisition of magico-religious powers presents an almost infinite number of forms and variants, which are of concern rather to the general history of religions than to a systematic study of shamanism; for this type of acquisition includes not only the possibility of obtaining

57 Cited by Marcelle Bouteiller, "Du 'chaman' au 'panseur de secret,' " p. 243. "A girl known to us acquired the gift of curing burns from an old woman neighbor, now dead, who taught her the secret because she had no family but had been initiated herself by an older relative."

58 Park, p. 30.

59 Ibid., p. 121. Cf. also Bouteiller, "Don chamanistique et adaptation à la vie chez les Indiens de l'Amérique du Nord."

60 Knud Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, pp. 120 ff. Among the Diomede Islands Eskimo the shaman sometimes transmits his powers directly to one of his sons; see E. M. Weyer, Jr., *The Eskimos*, p. 429.

61 Cf. Hutton Webster, *Magic*, pp. 185 ff.

magico-religious powers spontaneously or deliberately and thus becoming a shaman, medicine man, or sorcerer, but also the possibility of obtaining such powers for one's own safety or personal advantage, as is the case almost everywhere in the archaic world. The latter method of acquiring magico-religious powers implies no distinction in religious or social practice from the rest of the community. The man who, by using certain rudimentary but traditional techniques, increases his magico-religious potential—to ensure the abundance of his crop, to defend himself against the evil eye, and so on—does not intend to change his socio-religious status and become a medicine man by this act of reinforcing his potential for the sacred. He simply wishes to increase his vital and religious capacities. Hence his moderate and limited quest for magico-religious powers falls in the most typical and rudimentary category of human behavior in the presence of the sacred. For, as we have shown in *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, in primitive man as in all human beings the desire to enter into contact with the sacred is counteracted by the fear of being obliged to renounce the simple human condition and become a more or less pliant instrument for some manifestation of the sacred (gods, spirits, ancestors, etc.).[62]

In the following pages the deliberate quest for magico-religious powers or the grant of such powers by gods and spirits will concern us only in so far as it entails a massive acquisition of the sacred destined to make a radical change in the socio-religious practice of the subject, who finds himself transformed into a specialized technician. Even in cases of this kind we should discover a certain resistance to "divine election."

Shamanism and Psychopathology

Let us now examine the relations allegedly discovered between Arctic and Siberian shamanism and nervous disorders, especially

62 On the meaning of this ambivalent attitude to the sacred, see Eliade, *Patterns*, pp. 459 ff.

the various forms of arctic hysteria. From the time of Krivoshapkin (1861, 1865), V. G. Bogoraz (1910), N. Y. Vitashevsky (1911), and M. A. Czaplicka (1914), the psychopathological phenomenology of Siberian shamanism has constantly been emphasized.[63] The last investigator to favor explaining shamanism by arctic hysteria, Å. Ohlmarks, is even led to distinguish between an Arctic and a sub-Arctic shamanism, according to the degree of neuropathy exhibited by their representatives. In his view shamanism was originally an exclusively Arctic phenomenon, due in the first place to the influence of the cosmic milieu on the nervous instability of the inhabitants of the polar regions. The extreme cold, the long nights, the desert solitude, the lack of vitamins, etc., influenced the nervous constitution of the Arctic peoples, giving rise either to mental illnesses (arctic hysteria, *meryak*, *menerik*, etc.) or to the shamanic trance. The only difference between a shaman and an epileptic is that the latter cannot deliberately enter into trance.[64] In the Arctic the shamanic ecstasy is a spontaneous and organic phenomenon; and it is only in this zone that one can properly speak of a "great shamanizing," that is, of the ceremony that ends with a real cataleptic trance, during which the soul is supposed to have left the body and to be journeying in the sky or the underworld.[65] But in the sub-Arctic the shaman, no longer the victim of cosmic oppression, does not spontaneously obtain a real trance and is obliged to induce a semitrance with the help of narcotics or to mime the journey of the soul in dramatic form.[66]

63 Ohlmarks, *Studien zum Problem des Schamanismus*, pp. 20 ff.; Nioradze, *Der Schamanismus*, pp. 50 ff.; M. A. Czaplicka, *Aboriginal Siberia*, pp. 179 ff. (Chukchee); V. G. Bogoraz (Waldemar G. Bogoras), "K psikhologii shamanstva u narodov severo-vostochnoi Azii," pp. 5 ff. Cf. also W. I. Jochelson: *The Koryak*, pp. 416–17; *The Yukaghir and the Yukaghirized Tungus*, pp. 30–38.

64 *Studien*, p. 11. See Eliade, "Le Problème du chamanisme," pp. 9 f. Cf. Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen*, pp. 452 ff. See also D. F. Aberle, " 'Arctic Hysteria' and Latah in Mongolia." On ecstasy as a specific characteristic of Arctic religion, cf. R. T. Christiansen, "Ecstasy and Arctic Religion."

65 Concerning these journeys, see the following chapters.

66 Ohlmarks, pp. 100 ff., 122 ff., etc.

1. *General. Recruiting Methods. Mystical Vocation*

The thesis equating shamanism with mental disorder has also been maintained in respect to other forms of shamanism than the Arctic. As long as seventy-odd years ago, G. A. Wilken asserted that Indonesian shamanism had originally been a real sickness, and it was only later that the genuine trance had begun to be imitated dramatically.[67] And investigators have not failed to note the striking relations that appear to exist between mental unbalance and the different forms of South Asian and Oceanian shamanism. According to Loeb, the Niue shaman is epileptic or extremely nervous and comes from particular families in which nervous instability is hereditary.[68] On the basis of Czaplicka's descriptions, J. W. Layard believed that there was a close resemblance between the Siberian shaman and the *bwili* of Malekula.[69] The *sikerei* of Mentawei [70] and the *bomor* of Kelantan [71] are also neuropaths. In Samoa epileptics become diviners. The Batak of Sumatra and other Indonesian peoples prefer to choose sickly or weak subjects for the office of magician. Among the Subanun of Mindanao the perfect magician is usually neurasthenic or at least eccentric. The same thing is found elsewhere: in the Andaman Islands epileptics are considered great magicians; among the Lotuko of Uganda the infirm and neuropathic are commonly candidates for magic (but must, however, undergo a long initiation before being qualified for their profession).[72]

According to Father Housse, candidates for shamanship among the Araucanians of Chile "are always sickly or morbidly sensitive, with weak hearts, disordered digestions, and subject to vertigo. They claim that the divinity's summons to them is irresistible and that a premature death would inevitably punish their resistance

67 *Het Shamanisme bij de Volken van den Indischen Archipel*, passim.

68 "The Shaman of Niue," p. 395.

69 "Shamanism: an Analysis Based on Comparison with the Flying Tricksters of Malekula," p. 544. The same observation is made in Loeb, "Shaman and Seer," p. 61.

70 Loeb, "Shaman and Seer," p. 67.

71 Jeanne Cuisinier, *Danses magiques de Kelantan*, pp. 5 ff.

72 And the list could easily be extended; cf. Webster, *Magic*, pp. 157 ff. Cf. also T. K. Oesterreich's lengthy analyses, *Possession*, pp. 132 ff., 236 ff.

and infidelity." [73] Sometimes, as among the Jivaro,[74] the future shaman is only reserved and taciturn in temperament or, as among the Selk'nam and the Yamana of Tierra del Fuego, predisposed to meditation and asceticism.[75] Paul Radin brings out the epileptoid or hysteroid psychic structure of most medicine men, citing it to support his thesis of the psychopathological origin of the class of sorcerers and priests. And he adds, precisely in the sense of Wilken, Layard, or Ohlmarks: "What was thus originally due to psychical necessity became the prescribed and mechanical formulae to be employed by anyone who desired to enter the priestly profession or for any successful approach to the supernatural." [76] Ohlmarks declares that nowhere in the world are psychomental maladies as intense and as prevalent as in the Arctic, and he cites a remark of the Russian ethnologist D. Zelenin: "In the North, these psychoses were far more widespread than elsewhere." [77] But similar observations have been made in respect to numerous other primitive peoples, and it does not appear in what way they help us to understand a religious phenomenon.[78]

Regarded in the horizon of *homo religiosus*—the only horizon with which we are concerned in the present study—the mentally

73 *Une Épopée indienne. Les Araucans du Chili*, p. 98.

74 R. Karsten, cited by Métraux, "Le Shamanisme chez les Indiens de l'Amérique du Sud tropicale," p. 201.

75 M. Gusinde, *Die Feuerland Indianern. I: Die Selk'nam*, pp. 779 ff.; *II: Die Yamana*, pp. 1394 ff.

76 *Primitive Religion*, p. 132.

77 *Studien*, p. 15.

78 Even Ohlmarks admits (ibid., pp. 24, 35) that shamanism is not to be regarded solely as a mental malady, the phenomenon being more complex. Métraux saw the crux of the problem better when he wrote, in regard to the South American shamans, that temperamentally neuropathic or religious individuals "feel drawn to a kind of life that gives them intimate contact with the supernatural world and allows them to expend their nervous force freely. In shamanism the uneasy, the unstable, or the merely thoughtful find a propitious atmosphere" ("Le Shamanisme chez les Indiens de l'Amérique du Sud tropicale," p. 200). For Nadel, the problem of the stabilization of psychoneurotics by shamanism remains open ("A Study of Shamanism in the Nuba Mountains," p. 36); but see below, p. 31, his conclusions concerning the mental soundness of the Sudanese shamans.

ill patient proves to be an unsuccessful mystic or, better, the caricature of a mystic. His experience is without religious content, even if it appears to resemble a religious experience, just as an act of autoeroticism arrives at the same physiological result as a sexual act properly speaking (seminal emission), yet at the same time is but a caricature of the latter because it is without the concrete presence of the partner. Then too, it is quite possible that the assimilation of a neurotic subject to an individual possessed by spirits —an assimilation supposed to be quite frequent in the archaic world—is in many cases only the result of imperfect observations on the part of the earliest ethnologists. Among the Sudanese tribes recently studied by Nadel epilepsy is quite common; but the tribesmen consider neither epilepsy nor any other mental maladies to be genuine possession.[79] However this may be, we are forced to conclude that the alleged Arctic origin of shamanism does not necessarily arise from the nervous instability of peoples living too near to the Pole and from epidemics peculiar to the north above a certain latitude. As we have just seen, similar psychopathic phenomena are found almost throughout the world.

That such maladies nearly always appear in relation to the vocation of medicine men is not at all surprising. Like the sick man, the religious man is projected onto a vital plane that shows him the fundamental data of human existence, that is, solitude, danger, hostility of the surrounding world. But the primitive magician, the medicine man, or the shaman is not only a sick man; he is, above all, a sick man who has been cured, who has succeeded in curing himself. Often when the shaman's or medicine man's vocation is revealed through an illness or an epileptoid attack, the initiation of the candidate is equivalent to a cure.[80] The famous Yakut shaman Tüspüt (that is, "fallen from the sky") had been ill at the age of twenty; he began to sing, and felt better. When Sieroszewski met

79 "A Study of Shamanism," p. 36; see also below, p. 31.

80 Cuisinier, p. 5; J. W. Layard, "Malekula: Flying Tricksters, Ghosts, Gods and Epileptics," cited by Paul Radin, *Primitive Religion*, pp. 65–66; Nadel, p. 36; Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen*, p. 457.

him, he was sixty and displayed tireless energy. "If necessary, he can drum, dance, jump all night." In addition, he was a man who had traveled; he had even worked in the Siberian gold mines. But he needed to shamanize; if he went for a long time without doing so, he did not feel well.[81]

A shaman of the Goldi (Amur region) told Leo Sternberg: "The old folks say that some generations back there were three great Shamans of my gens. No Shamans were known amongst my nearest forefathers. My father and mother enjoyed perfect health. I am now forty years old. I am married, but have no children. Up to the age of twenty I was quite well. Then I felt ill, my whole body ailed me, I had bad headaches. Shamans tried to cure me, but it was all of no avail. When I began shamaning myself, I got better and better. It is now ten years that I have been a shaman, but at first I used to practice for myself only, and it is three years ago only that I took to curing other people. A shaman's practice is very, very fatiguing." [82]

Sandschejew had come to know a Buryat who, in his youth, had been an "anti-shamanist." But he fell ill and, after vainly seeking a cure (he even traveled to Irkutsk in search of a good doctor), he tried shamanizing. He was immediately cured, and became a shaman for the rest of his life.[83] Sternberg also observes that the election of a shaman is manifested by a comparatively serious illness, usually coincidental with the onset of sexual maturity. But the future shaman is cured in the end, with the help of the same spirits that will later become his tutelaries and helpers. Sometimes these are ancestors who wish to pass on to him their now unemployed helping spirits. In these cases there is a sort of hereditary transmission; the illness is only a sign of election, and proves to be temporary.[84]

81 Sieroszewski, p. 310.

82 "Divine Election in Primitive Religion," pp. 476 f. The remainder of this important autobiography of a Goldi shaman will be found below, pp. 71 ff.

83 "Weltanschauung und Schamanismus," p. 977.

84 "Divine Election," p. 474.

1. *General. Recruiting Methods. Mystical Vocation*

There is always a cure, a control, an equilibrium brought about by the actual practice of shamanism. It is not to the fact that he is subject to epileptic attacks that the Eskimo or Indonesian shaman, for example, owes his power and prestige; it is to the fact that he can control his epilepsy. Externally, it is very easy to note numerous resemblances between the phenomenology of *meryak* or *menerik* and the Siberian shaman's trance, but the essential fact remains the latter's ability to bring on his epileptoid trance at will. Still more significantly, the shamans, for all their apparent likeness to epileptics and hysterics, show proof of a more than normal nervous constitution; they achieve a degree of concentration beyond the capacity of the profane; they sustain exhausting efforts; they control their ecstatic movements, and so on.

According to the testimony of Belyavsky and others, collected by Karjalainen, the Vogul shaman displays keen intelligence, a perfectly supple body, and an energy that appears unbounded. His very preparation for his future work leads the neophyte to strengthen his body and perfect his intellectual qualities.[85] Mytchyll, a Yakut shaman known to Sieroszewski, though an old man, during a performance outdid the youngest by the height of his leaps and the energy of his gestures. "He became animated, bubbled over with intelligence and vitality. He gashed himself with a knife, swallowed sticks, ate burning coals." [86] For the Yakut, the perfect shaman "must be serious, possess tact, be able to convince his neighbors; above all, he must not be presumptuous, proud, ill-tempered. One must feel an inner force in him that does not offend yet is conscious of its power." [87] In such a portrait it is difficult to find the epileptoid who has been conjured up from other descriptions.

Although shamans of the Reindeer Tungus of Manchuria perform their ecstatic dance in a yurt crowded with onlookers, in a very limited space, and wearing costumes that carry more than thirty pounds of iron in the form of disks and other objects, they

85 Karjalainen, *Die Religion der Jugra-Völker*, III, 247–48.
86 "Du chamanisme," p. 317. 87 Ibid., p. 318.

never touch anyone in the audience.[88] And the Kazak Kirgiz *baqça*, when in trance, "though he flings himself in all directions with his eyes shut, nevertheless finds all the objects that he needs."[89] This astonishing capacity to control even ecstatic movements testifies to an excellent nervous constitution. In general, the Siberian and North Asian shaman shows no sign of mental disintegration.[90] His memory and his power of self-control are distinctly above the average. According to Kai Donner,[91] "it can be maintained that among the Samoyed, the Ostyak, and certain other tribes, the shaman is usually healthy and that, intellectually, he is often above his milieu." Among the Buryat the shamans are the principal guardians of the rich oral heroic literature.[92] The poetic vocabulary of a Yakut shaman contains 12,000 words, whereas the ordinary language—the only language known to the rest of the community —has only 4,000.[93] Among the Kazak Kirgiz the *baqça*, "singer, poet, musician, diviner, priest, and doctor, appears to be the guardian of religious and popular traditions, preserver of legends several centuries old."[94]

The shamans of other regions have given rise to similar observations. According to T. Koch-Grünberg, "the Taulipang shamans [of Venezuela] are generally intelligent individuals, sometimes wily but always of great strength of character, for in their training and the practice of their functions they are obliged to display energy and self-control."[95] Métraux remarks concerning the Amazonian shamans: "No physical or physiological anomaly or peculiarity seems to have been selected as the symptom of a special predisposition for the practice of shamanism."[96]

88 E. J. Lindgren, "The Reindeer Tungus of Manchuria," cited by N. K. Chadwick, *Poetry and Prophecy*, p. 17.

89 Castagné, "Magie et exorcisme," p. 99.

90 Cf. H. M. and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, III, 214; N. K. Chadwick, *Poetry and Prophecy*, pp. 17 f. The Lapp shaman must be perfectly healthy (Itkonen, *Heidnische Religion*, p. 116).

91 *La Sibérie*, p. 223. 92 Sandschejew, p. 983.

93 H. M. and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, III, 199.

94 Castagné, p. 60.

95 Cited by Métraux, "Le Shamanisme chez les Indiens de l'Amérique du Sud tropicale," p. 201. 96 Ibid., p. 202.

1. *General. Recruiting Methods. Mystical Vocation*

Among the Wintu of California the transmission and perfecting of speculative thought are in the hands of the shamans.[97] The intellectual effort of the Dyak prophet-shaman is immense and denotes a mental capacity well above that of the collectivity.[98] The same observation has been made concerning African shamans in general.[99] As for the Sudanese tribes studied by Nadel: "No shaman is, in everyday life, an 'abnormal' individual, a neurotic, or a paranoiac; if he were, he would be classed as a lunatic, not respected as a priest. Nor finally can shamanism be correlated with incipient or latent abnormality; I recorded no case of a shaman whose professional hysteria deteriorated into serious mental disorders." [100] In Australia matters are even clearer: medicine men are expected to be, and usually are, perfectly healthy and normal.[101]

And we must also consider the fact that the shamanic initiation proper includes not only an ecstatic experience but, as we shall soon see, a course of theoretical and practical instruction too complicated to be within the grasp of a neurotic. Whether they still are or are not subject to real attacks of epilepsy or hysteria, shamans, sorcerers, and medicine men in general cannot be regarded as merely sick; their psychopathic experience has a theoretical content. For if they have cured themselves and are able to cure others, it is, among other things, because they know the mechanism, or rather, the *theory* of illness.

All these examples bring out, in one way or another, the exceptional character of the medicine man within society. Whether he is chosen by gods or spirits to be their mouthpiece, or is predisposed to this function by physical defects, or has a heredity that is equivalent to a magico-religious vocation, the medicine man

97 Cora A. du Bois, *Wintu Ethnography*, p. 118.

98 N. K. Chadwick, *Poetry and Prophecy*, pp. 28 ff.; H. M. and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, III, 476 f.

99 N. K. Chadwick, *Poetry and Prophecy*, p. 30.

100 "A Study," p. 36. One cannot, then, say that "shamanism . . . absorbs mental abnormality at large" or that it "rests on uncommonly widespread psychopathic predispositions; it certainly cannot be explained merely as a cultural mechanism designed either to achieve the former or to exploit the latter" (ibid.).

101 A. P. Elkin, *Aboriginal Men of High Degree*, pp. 22–25.

stands apart from the world of the profane precisely because he has more direct relations with the sacred and manipulates its manifestations more effectively. Infirmity, nervous disorder, spontaneous vocation, or heredity are so many external signs of a "choice," an "election." Sometimes these signs are physical (an innate or acquired infirmity); sometimes an accident, even of the commonest type, is involved (e.g., falling from a tree or being bitten by a snake); ordinarily, as we shall see in greater detail in the following chapter, election is announced by an unusual accident or event—lightning, apparition, dream, and so on.

It is important to bring out this notion of peculiarity conferred by an unusual or abnormal experience. For, properly considered, singularization as such depends upon the very dialectic of the sacred. The most elementary hierophanies, that is, are nothing but a radical ontological separation of some object from the surrounding cosmic zone; some tree, some stone, some place, by the mere fact that *it reveals that it is sacred*, that it has been, as it were, "chosen" as the receptacle for a manifestation of the sacred, is thereby ontologically separated from all other stones, trees, places, and occupies a different, a supernatural plane. We have elsewhere [102] analyzed the structures and the dialectic of hierophanies and kratophanies—in a word, of the manifestations of the magico-religious realities. What it is important to note now is the parallel between the singularization of objects, beings, and sacred signs, and the singularization by "election," by "choice," of those who experience the sacred with greater intensity than the rest of the community—those who, as it were, incarnate the sacred, because they live it abundantly, or rather "are lived" by the religious "form" that has chosen them (gods, spirits, ancestors, etc.). These few preliminary observations will find their application after we have studied the various methods of training and initiating future shamans.

102 See Eliade, *Patterns*, passim.

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