

Extrasensory Perception and the Paranormal in Shamanism

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D. Scott Rogo explores the extrasensory perception of the Shaman and the paranormal aspects of the experiences in his essay "Shamanism, ESP, and the Paranormal," which is included in Shirley Nicholson's Shamanism: An Expanded View of Reality. The author questions why anthropologists have never dealt seriously with the accounts of accidental equipment failure during ritual or testing the accuracy of predictions. The author points out that most scholarly books on the subject deal with the sociological or psychological perspective of shamanism, and they do not even consider the likelihood that the ecstatic states and ghosts encountered might be real.

The author goes on to reference several cultures that Eliade identified as specifically focusing on a certain supernatural power and suggest that there is good reason to believe that shamans develop this supernatural power. While this does seem a bit biased toward acceptance of supernatural beliefs without hard scientific evidence, the author uses first person eyewitness accounts of the event to come to this conclusion. First person eyewitness events have always held up in courts and in historical research; thus, perhaps these accounts should be taken into serious consideration.

The author spends some time focusing on the accounts of Vladimir Bogoras. Bogoras claimed that what he witnessed had to be some form of trickery, but he could never explain it. The author tells of two instances where Bogoras witnessed supernatural powers at work. During one of these rituals, a skin that was placed over the shaman's back began to levitate. The author says:

The part draped over the shaman's back began elevating and contorting about, although it never actually left the shaman's shoulders. Bogoras finally grabbed the skin to see how the trick was being done, but found he could not pull it off the shaman's back. . . . Bogoras himself was even thrown about the tent by the skin's contortions (Nicholson 137).

While the researcher's scientific bias does seem to make the report seem more real, there are instances where atheists have religious experiences and become church ministers. The problem with an eyewitness account is that what may be real for one person, even though that person tries to disprove it,

might be easily uncovered by another. Also, this experience happened in 1904, a time when scientific technology to accurately measure certain events was not yet reliable. For instance, the Bogoras also made recordings where voices seemed to speak directly into his microphone. At that time, such portable recording devices were done on wax cylinders, an analog type of crude recording device that is very, very poor in quality and range. It reminds me of how people who do paranormal investigations refuse to use digital cameras because it does not pick up the same sounds, mainly because digital cameras reproduce the image exactly like it was recorded, unlike analog cameras.

The author goes on to the subject of extrasensory perception. The author cites many instances of extrasensory perception that are more credible than those of the previous section. What captures my attention the most is not the stories, but rather the fact that Adrian Boshier, an amateur anthropologist who lived among African tribesmen for several years, had been viewed by the tribe as destined to be a shaman. The author goes on to say:

Because he was epileptic and refused to take medication for his seizures, the local natives believed that he had a special talent for shamanism, and even apprenticed him to a sorcerer for extensive training (Nicholson 141).

Here was have another instance where a culture uses illness to verify the chosen one. This type of verification still amazes me and I find it so interesting that they equate an illness with shamanistic qualities. In Europe during the Middle Ages, such an illness for cause for the “work of the devil.” It makes me wonder whether the Europeans were just labeling everything that did not fit into Christianity as the devil again or that simply illness and divinity have no connection.

Regardless, the author continuously asserts that these eyewitness accounts could no way be false. I believe the author relies too heavily on older data, although some of the modern data does seem more credible.