



KEYWORDS: *Southern Siberia – Yenisey River – Evenki spring rites – Bear restoration symbolism*

## SEASONAL REVIVAL RITES AND ROCK ART OF MINUSINSK BASIN COLONISERS (SOUTHERN SIBERIA)

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**Abstract.** This paper takes an ethnoarchaeological and ecological approach to understanding patterns of iconography of rock art observed on the Middle Yenisey River, and its tributary to the east, the Tuba River, in the Minusinsk Basin of southern Siberia. It proposes a working hypothesis for the colonisation of this region to reconstruct the cultural origin, symbolic significance, and relative dating of this rock art. Supporting evidence is based upon the author's observations in the field, reinforced by research conducted by multi-national archaeologists recently and ethnographers during historic times.

This paper takes an ethnoarchaeological and ecological approach to understanding patterns of iconography of rock art observed on the Middle Yenisey River, and its tributary to the east, the Tuba River, in the Minusinsk Basin of southern Siberia. As a member of the Siberian Association of Pre-Historic Art Researchers (SAPAR), I was invited to participate in a Soros Foundation-sponsored expedition with Kemerovo State University faculty and other SAPAR members from 28 July to 15 August 2002.

An international group of rock art researchers (Russian, French and American), around twenty in number, camped on the west and east banks of the Middle Yenisey River near Abakan, the capital city of Khakassia in the Russian Federation, north of Mongolia. We hiked, were ferried by tugboat, and rode in a 'vintage' 1960s bus to rock art sites at Oglakhty I-III, Tepsej I, Ust'-Tuba II and Shalabolino. The primary purpose of the expedition was to assess the extent of erosion and vandalism to the rock art, to propose methods of conservation, and to raise the question of eligibility of these rock art sites as UNESCO World Heritage sites (Fig. 1).

This paper is part of a broader study involving the cross-cultural analysis of Siberian and North Amerindian (proto-Numic and Ute) spring revival rites. It resulted from my research into pre-literate forms of narrative (oral narratives, ritual and ceremony, and iconography, including rock art; McNeil 1996). Based upon research in evolutionary psychology (Boyer 1994, 2001; Atran 2002; McCauley and Lawson 2002; Sperber 1996; and Whitehouse 2000), this broader project seeks to understand the cognitive and cultural causes for the recurrence of symbolic representations intergenerationally and cross-culturally.

This paper proposes a working hypothesis for the colonisation of southern Siberia in order to reconstruct the cultural origin, symbolic significance, and relative dating of this rock art. Supporting evidence is based

upon my observations in the field, reinforced by research conducted by multi-national archaeologists recently and ethnographers during historic times. First, I will describe the general features of the rock art at the sites visited and, then, discuss the Late Pleistocene or early Holocene environment, in particular, the faunal assemblages during the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM), 19 000 – 18 000 BP (uncalibrated, see Huguen et al. 2004: 202–7), as well as the broader ecological context of the Minusinsk Basin. Finally, I will discuss what is known about the demographic and ethnographic histories of the Minusinsk Basin to hypothesise who colonised the region, who created this rock art, and what it meant to them.

### Middle Yenisey rock art

In 1994 and 1995, Henri-Paul Francfort and Jacov Sher (1995) stylistically dated the petroglyphs at major sites on the Middle Yenisey River (Oglakhty I, Tepsej I, Ust'-Tuba II) and its tributary, the Tuba River (Shalabolino), purportedly from the Upper Palaeolithic (Minusinsk style) to the Neolithic (Angara style) and Bronze Age (Francfort and Sher 1995: II; Martynov 1991: 25; Okladnikov 1981: 109; Pyatkin 1998: 26–30; Pyatkin and Martynov 1985; Sher 1980: 185–93; Sher et al. 1994: IV–V, 20).

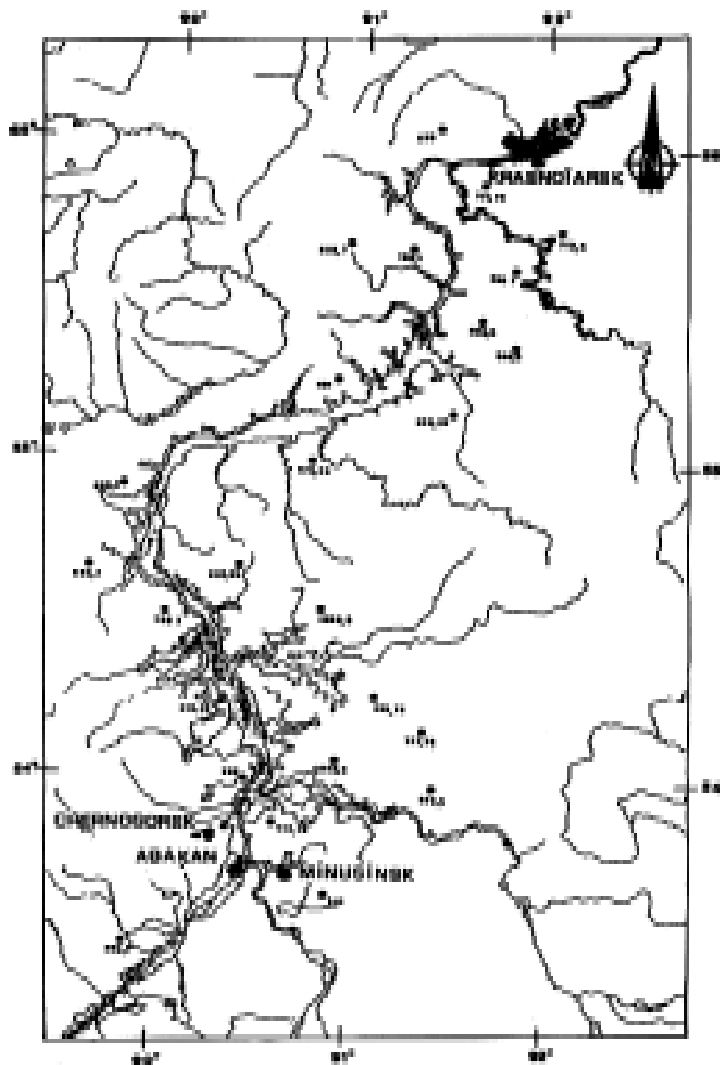
While initially persuasive, further consideration of Sher and Francfort's stylistic dating of Minusinsk attributed to the Upper Palaeolithic raises questions based upon important differences between Minusinsk style and European cave art's faunal assemblages and their respective time frames. While the two styles resemble one another in that they depict prey and predatory mammals with a heavy outline style in large (metre scale) images, significant differences in their respective faunal assemblages affect their relative dating. For example, the European pictograms include Ice Age megafauna (apparently woolly mammoth, rhinoceros and bison) in the rock art faunal assemblages ( $C^{14}$  dated between 30 000 – 15 000 BP), in contrast to the Minusinsk



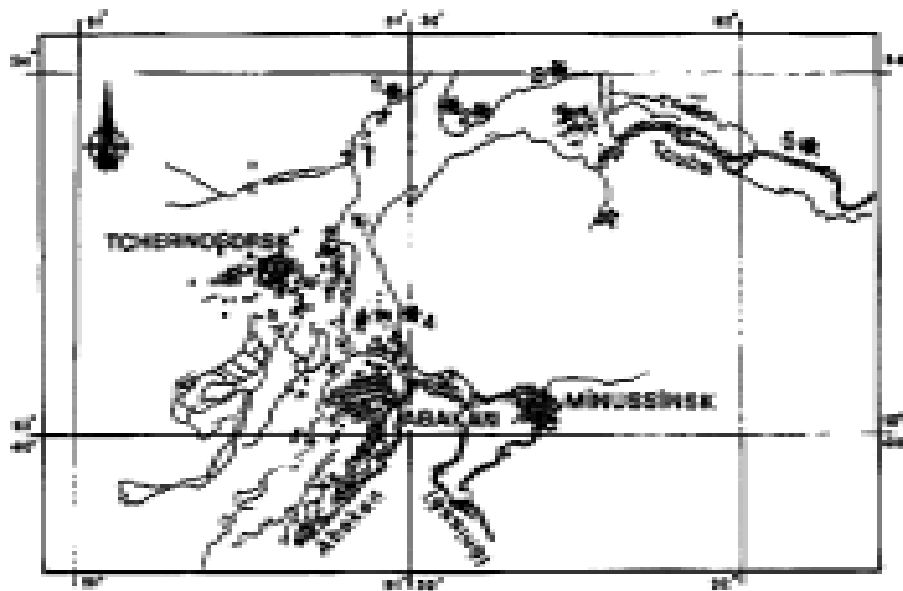
**Figure 1.** Middle Yenisey River from Sukanikha looking north with Oglakhty to the left and Tepsej to the right on the horizon. Photo by L. McNeil.

Basin petroglyphs, which are generally smaller (centimetre scale) and represent both mammoth-steppe and forest-steppe (post LGM, interglacial) mammals: apparently moose, aurochs, red deer, reindeer, brown bear, horse and wild boar (Goebel 1999; Guthrie 1990; Hoffecker, pers. comm. 2004). All identifications of rock art representations are based upon my own interpretations.

Until a more accurate method of dating this rock art can be found, a palaeo-environmental approach can help to establish an upper bound (i.e., oldest possible date) for dating this Minusinsk Basin rock art through the comparative analysis of the rock art faunal assemblage with the Minusinsk Basin palaeo-environment after the last glacial maximum and related taxa. While as the saying goes ‘absence of proof is not proof of absence’, ethnographies of the peoples inhabiting the region offer no explanation (religious or other) for the absence of Ice Age megafauna in these rock art assemblages. Consequently, this approach serves to narrow the time frame for the creation of these two styles of rock art *after* 14 000 BP, when the Ice Age megafaunal disappeared from the Minusinsk Basin. To infer a reasonable lower bound (most recent date), we need to look at ethnographic evidence concerning the transition of Minusinsk



**Figure 2** (on right). With the building of the Krasnoyarsk dam in 1969, numerous rock art sites were inundated in the valley of the Yenisey River at the confluence of the Abakan and Tuva Rivers. In Francfort et al. (1993), p. 6, with permission of the editor.



**Figure 3.** Rock art sites in the Abakan-Minusinsk Basin: 1. Oglakhty II-III. 2. Tepsej I-II. 3. Ust'Tuba II-III. 4. Sukhanikha. 5. Shalabolino. In Francfort et al. (1993), p. 12, with permission of the editor.

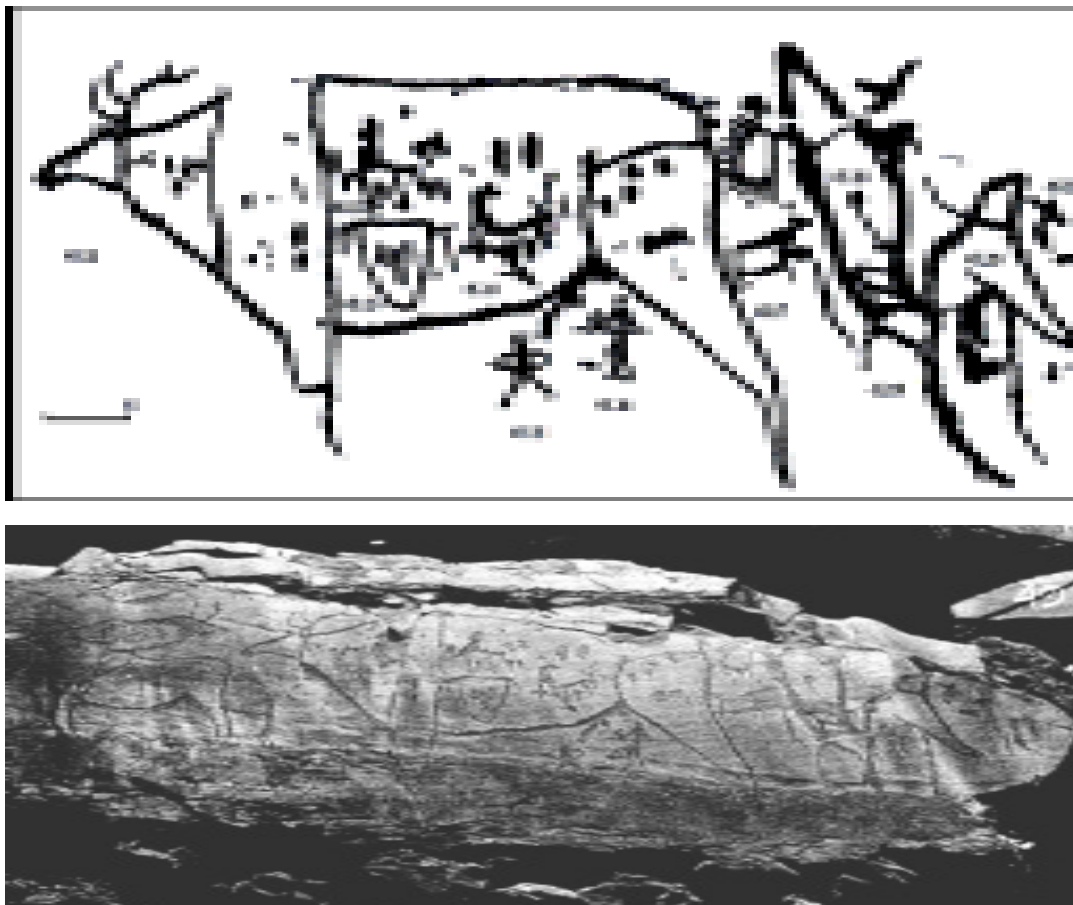
Basin colonisers.

Also, of interest for future dating, both Minusinsk and Angara-style petroglyphs are heavily repatinated (low contrast), covered with some lichen, and/or with calcium carbonate from seasonal submersion resulting from Krasnoyarsk Dam construction which raised the water levels several metres at Oglakhty I-III,

Tepsej I-II, Ust'-Tuba II, and Shalabolino (Fig. 2),

The Minusinsk and Angara-style petroglyphs, which have nearly identical interglacial faunal assemblages (apparently moose, aurochs, red deer, wild horse, wild boar and brown bear), are situated on a horizontal axis from west to east with Oglakhty, furthest west, Tepsej, Ust'-Tuba, and Shalabolino, furthest east (Fig. 3). (The ideological significance of the positioning of the rock art on an east-west axis is discussed below.) First, Minusinsk style is characterised by heavily outline-pecked, large-bodied taxa in assemblages that focus on a single large-bodied red 'deer' (*Cervus elaphus*) with antlers (on metre scale), in conjunction with smaller 'moose', and 'bear' at the Oglakhty I site (Figs 4 and 5).

At the four major Middle Yenisey River sites, the Angara-style rock art taxa are char-



**Figure 4.** Oglakhty I petroglyph of 'cosmic elk'. Drawing in Sher et al. (1994) and photo is Plate 5. With permission of the editor.

acterised by four distinct variants or sub-styles, all small (centimetre scale): outline-pecked head and chest (bust); full body outline-pecked with partial interior pecking along the head, chest and/or haunches; full body solid-pecked; and full body outline-pecked with vertical interior lines. All of the Angara-style rock art depicting forest-steppe taxa (supposedly aurochs, moose, red deer, wild horse, wild boar and brown bear) are represented in the four sub-styles. (The ideological significance is discussed below.)

In addition to the faunal assemblage mentioned above, the Oglakhty I and Tepsej I sites depict two 'brown bears' standing upright in Minusinsk (M) outline-pecked style (Figs 6 and 7) and Ust'-Tuba and Shalabolino depict approximately twenty-five 'brown bears' in Angara (A) style in the following three poses: standing upright on hind legs (full body), standing on all four legs, east or right-facing (full body), or bear head and chest (busts), right or east facing: Oglakhty I (M - one upright; A - one bust), Tepsej I (M - upright), Ust'-Tuba II (A - two solid-pecked, upright bears and one outline-pecked bear bust), and Shalabolino (A - twenty-two bear images in all these poses). In conjunction with Angara-style petroglyphs at these sites one finds canoe-type 'boats', anthropomorphic figures, some with horns, and large fish, the later of which correlates with a warmer and wetter interglacial environment.

#### Palaeo-environment and taxa

The faunal assemblage depicted in the rock art at these Middle Yenisey and tributary, Tuba River, sites correlates with Late Pleistocene/early Holocene interglacial, forest-steppe palaeo-environment and taxa that appeared after 14 000 BP when Ice Age megafauna disappeared in the faunal record (Goebel 1999; Guthrie 1990; Vasil'ev 1992, 2001; *contra* Sher et al. 1994; *contra* Francfort and Sher 1995). For example, in the faunal record of habitation sites along the Middle Yenisey River (Vasil'ev 1992), by around 14 000 BP, Ice Age herbivores (woolly mammoth, rhinoceros, and bison) are replaced by interglacial forest-steppe ruminants, predominantly at most sites reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*), followed in frequency by moose or 'elk' (*Alces alces*), red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), aurochs (*Bos primigenius*), wild horse (*Equus ferus*), and small game (wild boar, hares, marmots, fox), waterfowl (white goose, duck and loon), and anadromous fish (salmon, shad etc.).

During the interglacial in the Minusinsk Basin, the faunal record shows 'mammoth fauna' diversity of large herbivores (ruminants and non-ruminants), as well as omnivores, occupying their respective ecological niches. Nonruminants (mammoth and bison) co-existed with browsers and grazers (moose, red deer, reindeer, argali,

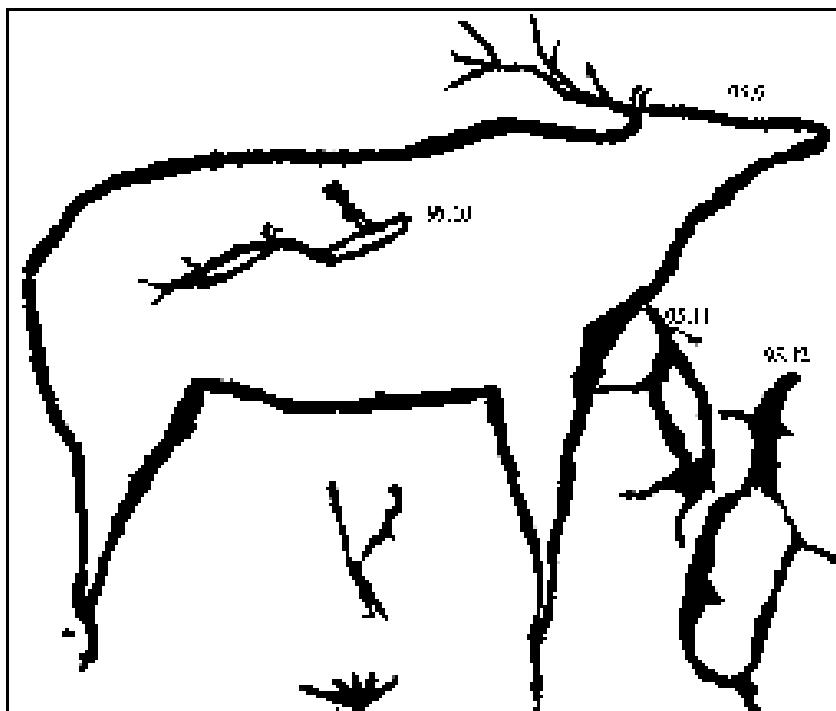


Figure 5. Oglakhty I petroglyph of a Minusinsk-style 'red deer'. In Sher et al. (1994).

aurochs), until around 14 000 BP when mammoth and bison disappeared from the Middle Yenisey River faunal record. After their disappearance or extinction, several ruminants (browsers, grazers and intermediate types) co-existed in neighbouring ecological niches into the last glacial period (14 000 – 12 000 BP).

During the interstadials, pine and deciduous forests expanded as habitat for forest types (red deer, moose, wolverine, wolf, roebuck, wild boar and brown bear) and forest-steppe (open space) types (reindeer, fox, hare, others) thrived, while aurochs occupied the steppe/prairie niche. In the ice-free rivers and streams of southern Siberia, large fatty fish became an available food source (and notably, boats, fish traps, harpoons and hooks appear in the archaeological record), as well as scrub birds (grouse) and waterfowl that migrated to the region (ducks, loons, white geese).

While the issue of representative samples and distribution make generalisations about faunal data in the Minusinsk Basin problematic, it is worth noting that large herbivores (moose, red deer and aurochs), as well as small mammals (wild boar) that are present in the rock art (moose being predominant) show a decline in numbers in the faunal record between 14 000 – 11 000 BP (Vasil'ev 1992: 351–62) at both Afontova and Kokorevo cultural sites. Not surprisingly, predatory animals (brown bear, cave lion, wolf) appear at lower numbers, than prey animals in the reported faunal records of Middle Yenisey valley sites of the Afontova and Kokorevo cultures in the Kokorevo-Novose-lovo area, often reported as *rare*, and the brown bear disappears at reported sites between 13 000 – 11 000 BP.

The Kokorevo Culture existed alongside the Afontova Culture in the Minusinsk Basin, although a bit more recently. At Afontova Cultural sites: Kurtak III (14 300



Figure 6. Tepsej site, view from boat off shore of Oglakhty. Photo by L. McNeil.

$\pm 100$  BP,  $14\,390 \pm 100$  BP, and  $16\,900 \pm 700$  BP yrs), Tashtyik I and II ( $13\,000 - 12\,000$  BP), and Kokorevo II ( $13\,330 \pm 100$  yrs BP) and red deer, aurochs, cave lion, saiga antelope, wolf, hare, and marmot are *rare*, while bear and/or moose are *absent* (Abramova 1979a, 1979b; Astakhov 1987; Vasil'ev 1992: 357–60). At Kokorevo cultural sites: Kokorevo I, layers 2 and 3 ( $15\,900 \pm 250$  BP to  $12\,940 \pm 270$  BP), Kokorevo IV ( $14\,320 \pm 330$  yrs BP), Novoselovo VII ( $15\,000 \pm 300$  BP), etc. include the forest-steppe taxa (cited above), but *no bear or moose*. This raises the question whether the apparent decline in the numbers of both predatory and small mammals implies events that caused human inhabitants to leave as well, especially since this time frame correlates with one of the proposed waves of Siberian peoples into the Americas.

Based upon available evidence, northern Evenki share material cultural features with Kokorevo Culture: seasonal habitation or aggregation sites (Kokorevo I and IV), round, rosette-style hearths associated with light above ground dwellings (huts or tents). The extent of Afontova and Kokorevo cultural sites outside the Yenisey Basin, from the Ob' basin, Altai, Angara, Trans-Baikal region, overlaps with Evenki habitation areas throughout Siberia (Anisimov 1963a on Evenki exogamous clans: 195–97; Vasil'ev 1992: 377).

Probable causes for the decline in numbers of bear might include one or more of the following: (1) a glacial interlude around  $12\,000 - 11\,000$  BP which could have sent large herbivores south or east across the mammoth steppe into Beringia and North America, feasibly followed by humans and/or predatory animals, (2) depleting wood resources necessary for fire and warmth in the Minusinsk Basin; and/or (3) over-killing of protein-rich mammals during the known massive recolonisation of southern subarctic Siberia post-LGM (Goebel 1999: 218–20; Guthrie 1990; Hoff-ecker et al. 1993: 46–53).

In any case, the decline in major food (protein) or wood sources would have stressed human inhabitants living in southern Siberia, especially in winter when having a fire for warmth and a high-protein food source would have been essential. To further compound these stresses, colonisers living in bands with low population densities would incur serious somatic and reproductive challenges. Consequently,

social adaptive responses to these marginal conditions (such as periodic aggregations, discussed below) would be crucial to cultural survival.

#### Minusinsk Basin colonisers

Archaeologists studying the Minusinsk Basin of the Upper Palaeolithic agree that Astakhov's (1966) model for "the general sociocultural pattern of life of prehistoric people" still holds, that is, "they probably lived in small bands" which "would have had its own peculiarities, reflected in the characteristics of technology, tool-types, and dwelling construction. Small bands of this kind coexisted for centuries and millennia, replaced each other at the same sites, interacted, mixed, interrelated, joined together or separated" (Okladnikov 1981: 113). The period after the LGM ( $19\,000 - 18\,000$  BP) is of most interest here, because the palaeo-environment and taxa of this period correlates best with the faunal assemblies depicted in the rock art. This was also a period of rapid recolonisation of the region, although climatically it was still subject to glacial interludes or 'cold snap' extremes.

During the final stage of the Siberian Upper Palaeolithic ( $16\,000 - 12\,000$  BP), Afontova and Kokorevo Cultures coexisted at numerous temporary habitation sites along the Minusinsk Basin, suggested by the 'absence of long-term base camps'. Archaeologists describe these sites as small, short-term camps with light above ground dwellings (or 'huts'), central rosette-style hearths, littered with little debris, which were occupied by "highly mobile hunter-gatherers" (Goebel 1999: 223; also see Okladnikov 1959: 5–16, 1981: 113; and Vasil'ev 1992: 357, 377).

According to ethnographic accounts (etic) and ancient oral traditions (emic), Tungusic-Manchu speaking (proto) Evenki colonised southern Siberia from the Ob and Yenisey River in the west to the Okhotsk Sea in the east. Made up of numerous small groups (bands), these Evenki adopted clan names, often related to their territorial rivers (Erbogachenskiye, Zapadnye or Yenisey, Podkamennaya Tunguska, Symiskiye, Vitim etc.). It is plausible that Yenisey Evenks adapted from seasonally mobile hunter-gatherers to semi-sedentary 'reindeer breeders' during the Neolithic or Eneolithic. Cultural anthropologists attribute the domestication of animals to the Neolithic in the Middle East (9000



**Figure 7.** *Tepsej II with Minusinsk-style outline-pecked 'bear' with pecked quadruped, compare with bear at Oglakhty I (Figure 4). Photo by L. McNeil.*

– 3000 BP) and typically a millennium or two later in southern Siberia (7000 – 3000 BP). Moreover, at the mouth of the Amur River, they are referred to as Kilen or Kili (Nanay's name for themselves). Around Lake Baikal, northern Evenki have interacted culturally with Buryats, Mongols and Yakuts.

Due to their wide distribution in small bands with low population densities, ethnographic accounts report that these Tungusic Evenki peoples (possibly their neighbours) relied upon aggregations of neighbouring clans for spring revival rites, effectively to address challenges in exogamous mate-finding, food-sharing during late winter scarcity, and alliance forming.

Ethnographic accounts collected in the early seventeenth to twentieth centuries from widely dispersed Evenki throughout Siberia, clans gathered for spring revival rites (Anisimov 1963a, 1963b; Vasilevich 1963, 1971a, 1971b). For Yenisey Evenki, the rock art sites on the Middle Yenisey discussed here appear to have marked a ritual clan centre, which extended from Oglakhty in the west to Shalabolino in the east. Furthermore, being situated on the Middle Yenisey River, these sites would have served as ideal interclan aggregation sites, being easily accessible by river or by land during both glacials and interglacials, as well as having access to water, game, fish (after 12 000 BP), and wood sources for fire (on the convergence of rock art and aggregation sites in Europe, see Bahn 1982; Conkey 1980, 1992, 2000; Sieveking 1979; on Paleo-Indian aggregation sites, see Hofman 1994).

These interclan revivals (*ikenipke*), although timed at the beginning of the new hunting season, were not about 'hunting magic' in the simplistic sense of performing sympathetic magic (*contra* Breuil 1952). Consequently, they should be distinguished from the small band's (microband or clan-wide) pre-hunting rites (*shingkelevun*), whose purpose was to ensure successful hunt; from *post-mortem* bear festival rites of propitiation to the revered totemic animal (Hallowell 1926); or from later shamanic curing rites or séances whose function was 'to retrieve the stolen soul' of a sick individual.

While autumn bear festival rites and spring revival rites addressed different social and economic needs, they appear

to have conceptually complemented one another, marking the antipodes of Tungusic beliefs in cosmic duality and the cyclical recurrence of birth, death and rebirth. In addition, Evenki bear restoration beliefs originated conceptually from a religious knowledge domain that informed their cosmology and symbolic representations expressed in ritual practices, myths and rock art iconography.

The Evenki religious knowledge domain uniquely reflects an amalgam of ideas originating from Mongolian (Tungusic) and possibly Ob-Ugrian (non-Tungusic) sources. On one hand, their cosmology stemmed from distinctly Mongolian belief in a three-tiered cosmological structure (upper-human-lower worlds) accessed by way of cosmic or clan tree or by a river portal and in beliefs about the cosmic balance of dualities (male-female, lower world-upper world, birth-death); as well as rites whereby dancers 'ascend to the sky' (Humphrey 1996: 247 on Buryats, and horse Evenki, and Yakuts). On the other hand, Evenki religious beliefs incorporate non-Tungusic beliefs, possibly from Ugrian-speaking peoples around the Ob River, in a bear totemic ancestor (male) who hunts the cosmic 'elk' (red deer) cow and was regarded as a spirit-helper or a cultural hero (on Ugrian peoples in Siberia: Balzer-Mandelstamm 1996 on Khanty; Chichlo 1980 on Xant [Vogules] and Mans [Ostyaks]; Kulemzin 1972 on Xant; Sokolova 1971 on Xant cited in Chichlo 1980).

#### *Evenki Bear Festival*

Numerous ethnographic accounts, including some first-hand accounts as recent as the 1940s, report Evenki (Tungusic) Bear Festival rites and myths being present from the Okhotsk Sea and Lower Amur River to the Yenisey and Angara Rivers (Anisimov 1958, 1963b; De Sales 1980; Hallowell 1926; Paproth 1976; Rykov 1922 cited in Vasilevich 1980; Shirokogoroff 1966; Sokolova 2000; Titov 1923 cited in Vasilevich 1980; Turov 2000; B. A. Vasilevich 1948; G. M. Vasilevich 1963, 1971a; 1980, fn. 5). In the autumn, after ambushing a brown bear in its den and killing it, Evenki clans and neighbours related by marriage, would come together for a Bear Festival that lasted three or more days. Only superficially related to hunting and *post-mortem* rites, the bear festival's primary purpose appears to have been to reaffirm cultural beliefs about human-bear and Evenki-non-Tungusic kinship and alliances.

In the three major regions of Siberia inhabited by northern Evenki, the name for 'bear' correlates with non-Tungusic, possibly Urgian peoples who brought bear totem ancestor beliefs to Siberia, and with whom Tungusic Evenki had contact: for Evenki of the Okhotsk Sea and Omolon River, *Torgandri* (Torgan/Torgani, possibly Daur peoples) (Vasilevich 1980: 119, fn. 27); for Evenki of the Lake Baikal and Amur River regions, *Mangi* (Mangit/Mangyt peoples) (Vasilevich 1980: 116, fn. 19); and for Yenisey (Sym and Stoney Tunguska) Evenki, *Ngamondri* (Ngamëndri, Njandri, Momondojo peoples) (Vasilevich 1980: 113, fn. 12; 115, fn. 15). Moreover, many Evenki groups have preserved traditional tales recounting the 'marriage' alliances between 'bears' and Evenki girls (Vasilevich 1980: 120). (On non-Tungusic bear festivals

see: Alekseenko 1968 on Ket; Balzer-Mandelstamm 1997 on Khanty; and Chichlo 1980; Kulemzin 1972; Sokolova 1971 on Ob-Ugrians).

A myth about the Yenisey (western) Evenki's relationship with the bear, the tale of 'Xeladan and Ngamondri' recounts how an Evenki girl, Xeladan, is abducted by the anthropomorphised frozen clan river, Engdekit, how she spends the winter with the bear, Ngamondri, and kills and dismembers him ritualistically at his request. When she returns to her village, she finds that he has made reindeer (game) plentiful, in response to which the Evenki people perform a ceremonial Round Dance in his honour (Vasilevich 1980: 110–2). The myth of Ngamondri preserves beliefs about an Evenki cultural hero (non-Tungusic) who, by dying, helped bring game to the Evenki in spring.

The Evenki Bear Festival (Sym, Stoney Tunguska, Angara, Yenisey) was comprised of a sequence of bear *post-mortem* and pre-restoration rites that enacted beliefs already mentioned about bear-human and non-Tungusic-Evenki 'marriage' alliances. From the time when an Evenki hunter found the bear's den to the skinning and partitioning of the bear carcass, he involved his wife's brother his brother-in-law by marriage or 'ally' (*nimak*) to act as intercessor between the Evenki people and bears by addressing the bear in kinship terms (Grandfather / Grandmother) and by assuming responsibility for skinning the carcass and distributing the appropriate portions of meat (*sêvên*) to the other clan members and invited guests (Anisimov 1958, 1963a: 174–91; 1963b: 99–112; De Sales 1980: 179; Paproth 1976: 139; Shirokogoroff 1966: 196; Vasilevich 1963: 60–71; 1971b: 38–40; 1980: 127). Reverently taking their share, Evenki and their allies by marriage repeated the word, *davun*, meaning: (1) an ally who marries an Evenki woman and (2) one who receives a portion of the *sêvên* (Cincius 1975: 183 on *davun*, cited in De Sales 1980: 179, 185–7 on *davun* and *mata* as synonyms; Vasilevich 1980: 134, fn. 44).

The Evenki hunter's brother-in law (*nimak*) represented the bear who 'married' the Evenki girl, thus forming a reciprocal marriage alliance in that, at least in theory, his sister would/could be married to an Evenki man. According to De Sale, the reciprocal exchange of sisters is mirrored both in Evenki language (above) and in bear festival ritual with the reciprocal exchange of bear meat (De Sales 1980: 180–2, 191–9, Figs 7, 9).

In tandem with the reverent bear carcass preparation and consumption, the bear festival (*nimngakan*, 'myth', 'story', 'legend', 'traditional narrative' in Vasilevich 1980: 130), lasted several days and was open to all neighbouring Evenki clans and allies (Vasilevich 1980: 133). The carcass was placed in camp at the base of an old cedar tree (*turu* or clan tree), its head removed and showcased, and the edible remainder cooked there over a fire (De Sales 1980: 184; Vasilevich 1980: 130). The festival included a communal feast (*sivajba*) and bear pantomime dance, whereby adolescent boys and girls imitated the gait and gestures of a bear while others sang songs about the bear ancestor and hero (Vasilevich 1980: 130).

In the final rite of the bear festival, a funeral one,

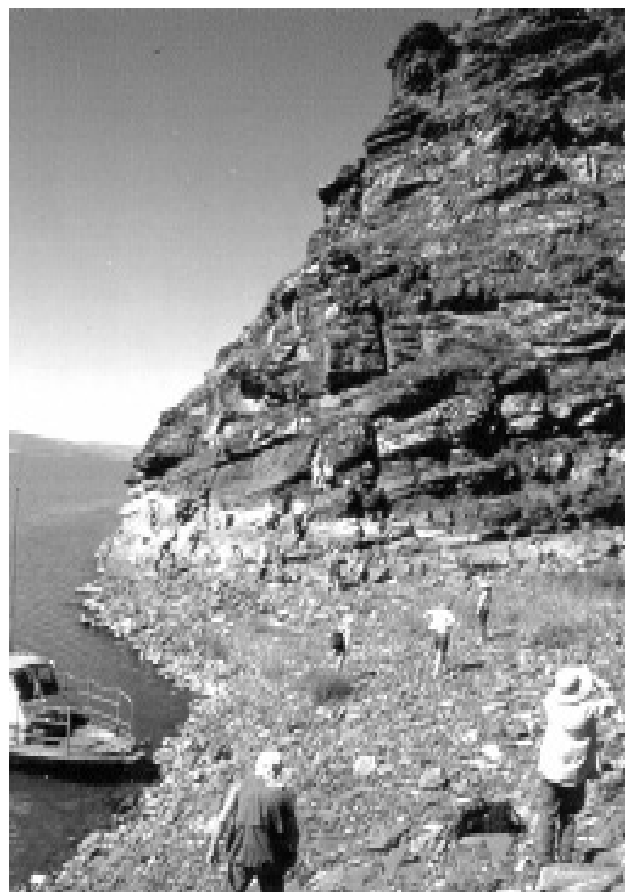
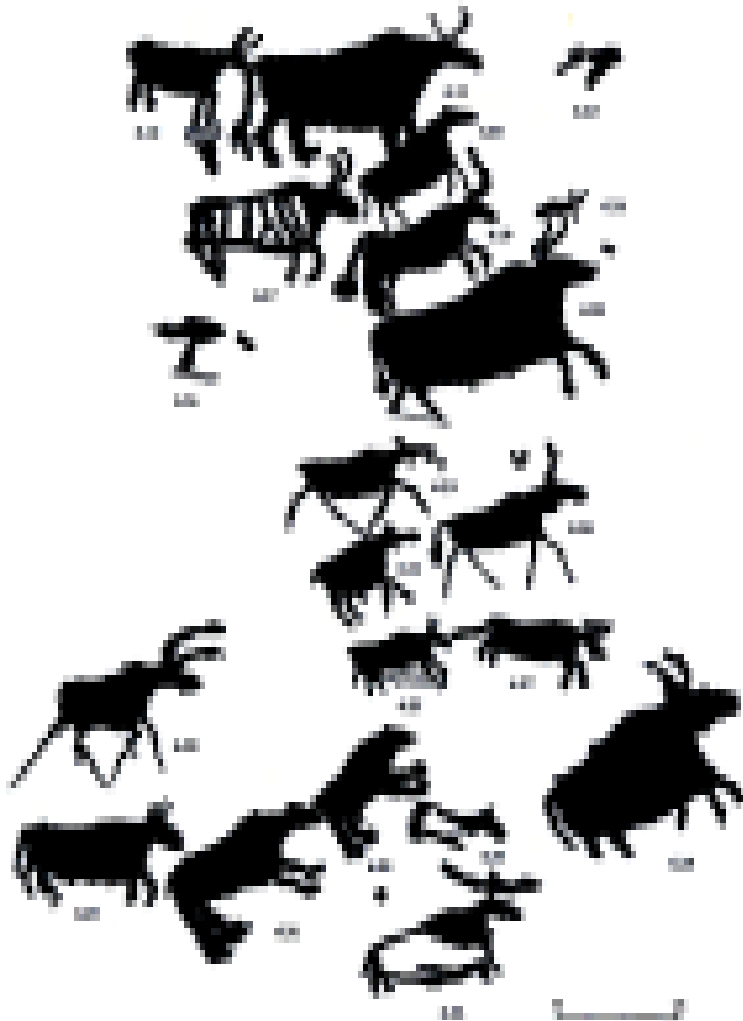
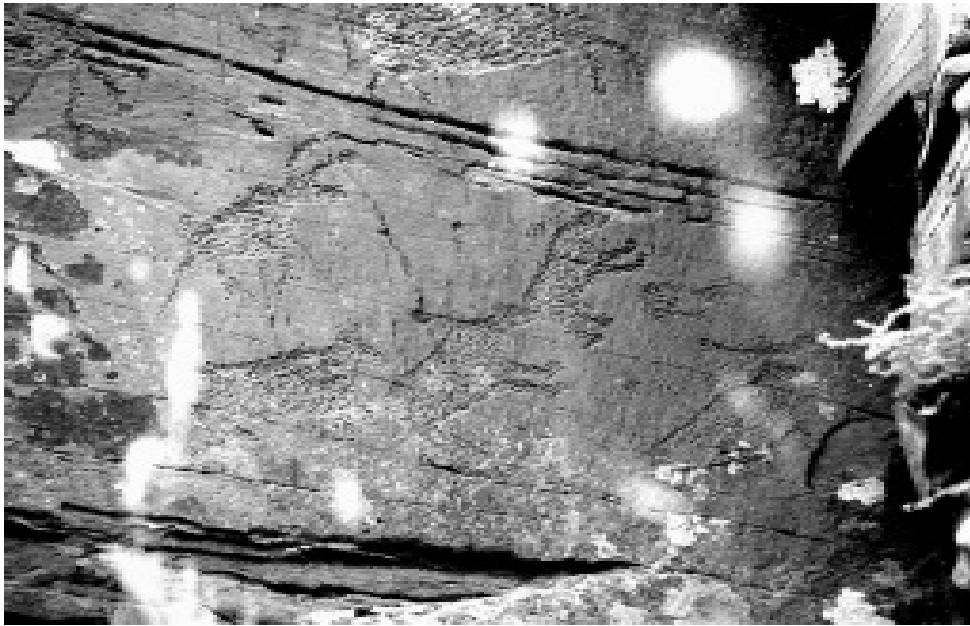


Figure 8. Ust'Tuba II site on Middle Yenisey River. Photo by L. McNeil.

the bear's skull and bones are properly and symbolically disposed of. The skull received special treatment, being taken into the forest (taiga) to a cedar tree (*kongi*) (Hallowell 1926: 60–81 on Native American use of a *kongi*; Rockwell 1991: 40–1; Vasilevich 1971a). There, the top of the cedar was shaved, leaving two spikes on top, between which the bear skull, embellished with cedar hoop earrings and colourful ribbons, was cradled, facing east to signify regeneration. This rite, called 'seeing the bear off', referred to the belief in helping the bear on its journey of ascent up the *turu* to the upper world, where it served as an intermediary between humans and the deity of the upper world (*Êksri*).

Returning to camp, all those involved in the funeral service underwent rites of purification by the 'shaman' or healer, who would have used cedar or tobacco smoke in the ceremony (Alekseenko 1968 on Ket purification rites using smoke). While Vasilevich refers to this rite as "the shaman's séance for purification" (Vasilevich (1980: 131), calling it a séance is inaccurate given the fact that the shamanic séance was limited to retrieving a lost (sick) soul, using trance to enlist the animal spirit's help. Consequently, the healer would have played only a minor role related to protection against sickness or danger. In balance with the bear festival's focus on death and funeral rites, spring revival rites completed the cycle from death to regeneration of food resources, a mate, and offspring.



**Figure 9.** *Ust'-Tuba II petroglyph of two 'bears', herd of 'aurochs' and 'mooses' with 'bear bust' in upper right corner. Drawing from Francfort and Sher 1995, Plate 39. Photo by L. McNeil.*

### *Spring revival rites*

While spring revivals were different from these other rites in their communal focus, it is important to understand that these various Evenki rites were cognitively grounded in shared, socially-constructed knowledge that informed their cosmology, beliefs, myths and rock art (Hirschfeld and Gelman 1994, on mental mapping and knowledge domains; Boyer 1994, 2001, on knowledge domains and religious beliefs; *contra* Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988, on rock art production and altered states; *contra* Winkelmann 2002, on shamanism and cognition).

Evenki dispersed throughout Siberia, before the domestication of the reindeer (Neolithic or Eneolithic), adapted a distinctively Sibero-Mongolian mythology based upon a three-tiered cosmological structure (sky world, cosmic tree, river portal); rites whereby dancers 'ascend to the sky'; and beliefs about the cosmic balance of dualities (male-female, lower world-upper world, father-mother, birth-death) of the bear ancestor and 'elk' cow (maral or moose). Early Tungusic Evenki colonists in southern Siberia appear to have combined these Mongolian beliefs with widely dispersed, Eurasian beliefs about the bear as totemic ancestor and spirit helper (Humphrey 1996: 247-8).

Characteristically Evenki spring revival rites (*ikenipke*) were communal (macroband) gatherings to ensure 'increase' construed broadly in ecological and human terms. As field work by Russian ethnographers (Anisimov 1963b; Turov 2000; Vasilevich 1971a) involving numerous clans of Evenki in Siberia reports, all religious ceremonies were clanwide and obligatory to every member of the clan; the performance of these ceremonies relates to "the care and duty of the whole clan"; the collective preparation of these ceremonies is in itself a clan festivity related to the clan's common origin; "the concepts of rebirth of nature, the multiplication of animals, and the insurance of success in future hunts are also connected with these ceremonies; "every member of the clan, without exception, is permitted to use the ceremonial shamanising equipment"; "the right to use this equipment during these ceremonies and to enter into shamanising activity with its aid is an obligation for every clan member" (Anisimov 1963a: 116; Humphrey 1996; Kehoe 2000; Vasilevich 1963: 46-47; 1971b: 40-1,

is permitted to use the ceremonial shamanising equipment"; "the right to use this equipment during these ceremonies and to enter into shamanising activity with its aid is an obligation for every clan member" (Anisimov 1963a: 116; Humphrey 1996; Kehoe 2000; Vasilevich 1963: 46-47; 1971b: 40-1,



on “to shamanise” in Tungusic Manchu meaning a performance to narrate or sing clan stories, not exclusively trance or séance).

According to Evenki three-tiered cosmology, the Mistress of Animals resides in the upper world (*ugu buga*) where she maintains control over the souls of unborn animals; humans reside in the the middle world (*duluga buga*), which includes the clan territory (defined by hunting and fishing ranges); and deceased ancestors (*buni*) reside in the lower world (*khergu-ergu buga*), in which exists the top-to-bottom reversal of the human world.

According to Evenki mythology, the bear ‘spirit of the ancestors’ (*khargi, mangi*) and Master of the Lower World ascends to the upper world by way of the clan tree, a larch (*туру*), to implore the Mistress of Animals (*Kheglen*, elk/maral) to release the souls of unborn animals into clan territory. The bear’s return to the human world with the re-born (reincarnated) game animals takes place at the clan river ‘portal’ (springs) at the clan centre (rocks and clan tree; *bugady mushun*).

### Rock art and restoration cycle

Taken together, the location of these rock art sites on south or east-facing cliffs overlooking a river, as well as the twenty-eight bear images depicted in conjunction with difficult to procure or less plentiful game animals (moose, aurochs, red deer, horse), suggests that these rock art sites were associated with clan sanctuary and spring interclan aggregation sites. Given their location in ancient (proto)Evenki territory, this rock art imagery has narrative features that relate to the mythic cycle of the totemic animal-intermediary (*khargi, mangi*) in its journey of ascent to the upper world by way of the clan tree (*туру*) in the autumn and its re-emergence into the human world in the spring, leading a herd of game animals. Notably, these rock art sites (*bugady mushun*) are situated near a dense collection of Middle Yenisey semi-sedentary Afontova Culture and short-term Kokorevo Culture habitation sites.

For Evenki, the clan river united the three worlds of the universe, consistent with Tungus-Mongol beliefs (Western and Khori Buryats, Yakuts, ‘horse’

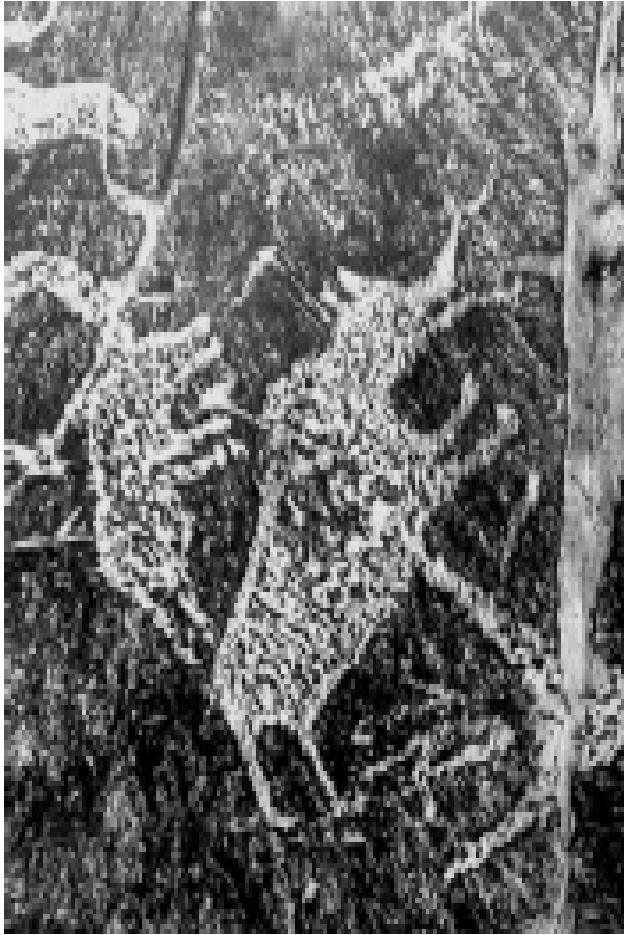


**Figure 10.** View of the Tuba River facing south from Shalabolino with river surface marked by underground springs. Photo by L. McNeil.



**Figure 11.** Mykalent copy of a petroglyph of ‘bear’ climbing a ‘deciduous tree’ (‘spirit figure’ hovering above) at Shalabolino on Tuba River. Photo from E. Miklashevich, Kemerovo State University and Museum of the Archaeology and Ethnography of Southern Siberia.

pastoralist Evenki, peoples from Altai and Tuva). As Anisimov’s Evenki ethnographic accounts report, “The headwaters originate in the upper world, on the upper course of mythical clan river being where the receptacle of souls of animals reside before birth”, which is controlled by the cosmic ‘elk’ whom

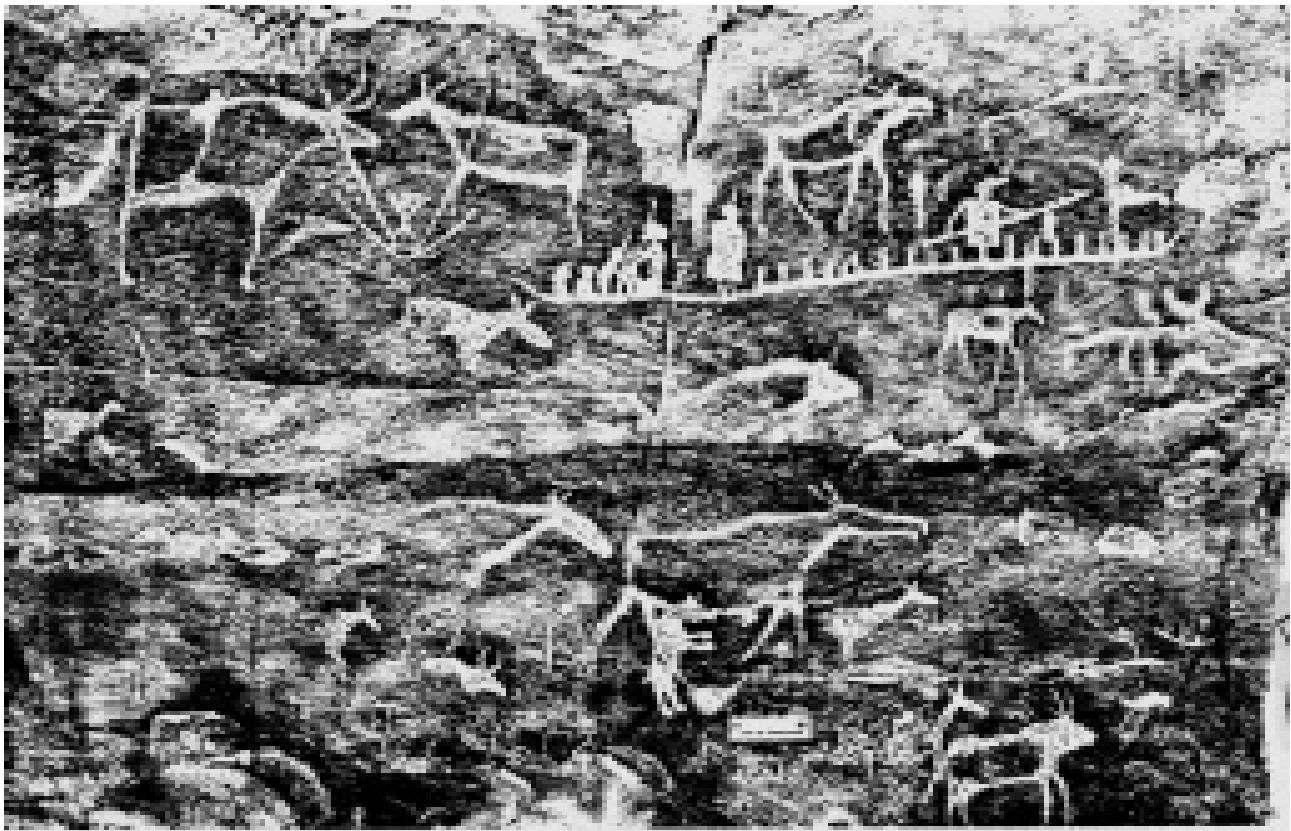


**Figure 12.** Mykalent copy of petroglyph of two 'bears' (adult and young?) standing upright at Shalabolino site on Tuba River. Photo from E. Miklashevich, Kemerovo State University and Museum of the Archaeology and Ethnography of Southern Siberia.

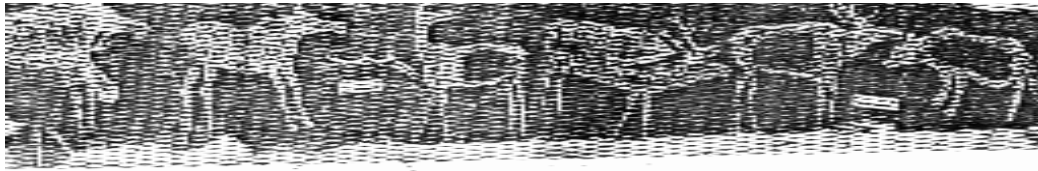
the bear solicits (Anisimov 1963b: 204–5). Oglakhty I and Tepsej I Minusinsk-style images appear to be associated with the mythic headwaters of the upper world (in the west) where the cosmic 'elk', a female red deer with antlers that signify the Tree of Life (Anisimov 1963a: 83–4; Anisimov 1963b: 112, 183; Jacobson 1993: 185, 193–4; Martynov 1991: 99–107) and ancestral bear meet (Figs 4, 5 and 7) and where the river's mouth empties into the underground sea of the nether world (Anisimov 1963b: 166).

In contrast, the rock art sites at Ust'-Tuba II-III (Figs 8 and 9) and at Shalabolino suggest sites of emergence from the lower world back into clan territory (due east of Oglakhty). These rock art sites have significance as sacred clan territorial centres (clan tree and rocks) and aggregation sites where *mangi*, completing his cosmic journey, emerges from the lower world with herds of game animals in early spring. Situated propitiously at the portal of emergence, the clan lands (sacred rocks and trees) are identified with places for hunting wild game, fish and waterfowl.

At Shalabolino, hundreds of heavily repatinated Angara-style petroglyphs grace south-facing cliffs overlooking the Tuba River, due east from Oglakhty, Tepsej



**Figures 13.** Mykalent copy of a petroglyph depicting herd of 'game animals', small 'bear' standing upright (below centre) and 'boats' carrying anthropomorphous figures at Shalabolino on the Tuba River. In Pyatkin and Martynov (1985).



























**Figure 14.** Mykalent copy of a petroglyph depicting a 'bear' (right) facing a herd of 'game animals'. In Pyatkin and Martynov (1985).

and Ust'-Tuba (Fig. 10). Out of hundreds of images, Shalabolino has twenty-two recorded bear petroglyphs apparently depicting brown bears (with shoulder hump) in several poses: a tree-climbing bear (Fig. 11); two bears standing upright, a larger with a smaller bear (adult with offspring?) next to a natural fissure (portal) in the rock (Fig. 12); single bears standing upright or walking on all fours, in either case leading herds of large game animals (Figs 13 and 14). There are also single bear busts near (and typically to right or east-facing), suggesting the bear's partial emergence from the river portal to the lower world, followed by large game animals (who are sometimes also depicted from the chest up) (Pyatkin and Martynov 1985: 159, Figs 6–12 and 160, Figs 1–15; personal field notes and photographs).

Images of boats at this site recall the Evenki beliefs about the soul's journey by boat out of the lower world, as

well as the bear ancestor's ascent back to this world via the clan river (Vasilevich 1963: 58–60 on soul's journey on the clan river, *Engdekit*). As recorded by M. Devlet (1998), Angara and Bronze Age-style rock art from the Aldy-Mozaga rock art site, Sayan Canyon of the Yenisey River, at Tuva, depicts a bear with game animals (Devlet 1998: 92, panel 30) and, most striking, a bear bust next to what appears to be an endless cycle of game resources (moose, red deer, horse, argali, birds and fish; Devlet 1998: 99, panel 40). At Sukhanikha, overlooking Abakan, an apparently Bronze Age rock art panel depicts adult and young moose and other game animals, which appear to be following or to be summoned by a handsome brown bear.

As mentioned earlier, the Angara-style petroglyphs at these sites depicting bears and game animals are represented in four distinct sub-styles: outline pecked (with some interior pecking) head and chest (bust); full body,

	Aurochs	Moose	Red deer	Wild horse	Wild boar	Brown bear
A	21 	20 	8 	4 	1 	1 
B	59 	69 	36 	11 	12 	9 
C	45 	28 	11 	12 	10 	11 
D	26 	16 	13 	2 	1 	2 

**Table 1.** Angara styles of petroglyphs. Table 1 divides Angara-style petroglyphs into four sub-styles that may relate to the cycle of emergence from the lower world. The upper left-hand corner of each square shows the total number of occurrences of that animal-style at the four sites visited: Oglakhty I-II, Tepsej I-II, Ust'Tuba I-IV and Shalabolino.

- A. Head and chest (bust): emerging of the upper body from the river portal (birthing).
- B. Full body, outline with partial interior pecking: emerging into the human world.
- C. Full body, solid pecked: fully emerged into the human world (born).
- D. Full body, outline with interior line pecking: passing through the lower world (not yet born).

	Aurochs	Moose	Red deer	Wild horse	Wild boar	Brown bear
Oglakhty I-II	73	34	36	16	5	1 (.6%)
Tepsej I-II	12	2	5	1	4	1 (4%)
Ust'Tuba I-IV	38	17	5	5	2	4 (5.6%)
Shalabolino	28	80	22	7	13	22 (12.8%)
<b>Total number</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>28 (6.5%)</b>

**Table 2.** Distribution of Angara styles of animal species. This shows the distribution of animal species at the four rock art sites, from west to east: Oglakhty, Tepsej, Ust'Tuba (Middle Yenisey River), and Shalabolino (Tuba River), furthest east. There is a steady increase in raw numbers and percentage of brown bear petroglyphs from west to east. According to Evenki mythology, the river portal out of which the bear emerges with game animals from the lower world lies in the east.

partially pecked on head, chest, and/or haunches; full body, solid pecked; and full body, outline pecked with vertical interior lines (Tables 1 and 2). Moreover, these four Angara sub-styles, when viewed in relation to Evenki bear restoration beliefs, appear to correspond to stages in the process of emergence (death-rebirth), as does the location on the clan river. The greatest number of petroglyphs showing bears with game animals, in all Angara sub-styles, appear at Shalabolino, the river site of emergence from the lower world into clan territory. Regarding the interior line style, Ekaterina Devlet, archaeologist at the Russian Academy of Science (Moscow), maintains that in Siberian rock art, the interior line ('x-ray or skeletal') style for anthropomorphic figures suggests the death-like experience of shamanic trance (Devlet 2000).

Considering Evenki communal, non-shamanic bear restoration beliefs, it is reasonable to infer that the bears and game animals are depicted in interior line style to signify that stage in their journey through the lower world, associated with the dead (or unborn). Moreover, the animal bust images suggest emergence from the river 'portal' from the lower world; interior pecking only on head, chest, and/or haunches suggests their new born stage; and in interior solid pecking represents their full emergence (birth) into the human world and clan territory.

The features of this site that testify to its importance as an Evenki clan centre and as a spring revival aggregation site, include the heavy concentration of petroglyphs with bear restoration narrative elements that correspond with Evenki-specific mythology and restoration beliefs of the bear ancestor ascending the clan tree, imploring the Mistress of Animals for the release of the unborn souls of game animals, and leading game animals from the lower world into clan territory. Another geological feature at Shalabolino that suggests that it could have been regarded as an important emergence site has to do with its abundant underwater springs (which I gladly discovered on a muggy day in August 2002). As numerous oral traditions of indigenous peoples attest, natural springs were (and still are) regarded as portals (super highways, if you will) from the under world out of which animal or bird spirit-helpers communicate with deceased ancestors.

## Conclusion

By synthesising ecological and ethnoarchaeological evidence, one can infer that Minusinsk Basin rock art sites mark a ritual centre and spring revival aggregation site for widely dispersed small bands of early Tungusic Evenki colonisers in the Yenisey River region, who called themselves 'Yenisey Evenki'. Into Historic times, northern Tungusic Evenki peoples inhabited the major river valleys throughout southern and Subarctic Siberia from the Ob and Yenisey Rivers in the west to lower Amur River and Sakhalin Island in the Russian Far East, and from Lake Baikal to the south and the Upper Lena in the north. Today, they are known as the northern or 'reindeer' Evenki, who inhabit the taiga region north of Krasnoyarsk.

The evidence presented here is expanded upon in a longer paper about the spring revival rites and the recurrence of symbolic representations of Minusinsk Basin and Basin-Plateau colonisers (McNeil 2001, 2004). Regarding the Minusinsk Basin during the Late Pleistocene and early Holocene (17 000 – 11 000 BP), spring revival rites and related symbolic complexes expressed in myths and rock art iconography emerged in response to reproductive and somatic challenges of colonisers in southern Siberia's interglacial forest-steppe environment.

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