
X-Ray style anthropomorphs in Rock Art: the challenge of interpretation

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Résumé

Rock art anthropomorphic images in X-ray style depicted with their ribs and vertebral column, producing an impression of their translucent chest, reflect the shamanic beliefs about the state intermediate between death and revival, the concept, which later persisted in shamans' costumes. The same idea has been preserved in details of the shaman's equipment; in bone pendants attached to his shoulders, and in decoration of breast or back textile attachments with a skeleton motif (Ivanov, 1954; Devlet, 2001). The depiction of skeletons on the breast-plate or on the plate attached to the back of a Siberian shaman's coat is a common and remarkable feature of ritual attire (Ivanov, 1954). There are two main interpretations of these anatomic motifs. The first one assumes them to be images of the shaman-ancestor's bones that served for the owner of the garment as a shield, protection and armor, the guarantee of his/her survival. The other interpretation explains the skeleton parts of the costume as representations of a shaman, brought back to life after his initiation following his dismemberment; thus, skeleton parts on the costume represent his own skeleton (Alexeev, 1975, p. 152; Devlet, 2001). The same concept may be traced in rock art anthropomorphic images in X-ray style.

Mots-Clés: rock art, X, Ray

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