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Varieties of Deer Imagery: Gender and Cosmology in Prehistoric Belief Systems of Central Asia and South Siberia.

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VARIETIES OF DEER IMAGERY:

GENDER AND COSMOLOGY IN PREHISTORIC BELIEF SYSTEMS OF CENTRAL ASIA AND SOUTH SIBERIA

Honors Senior Thesis

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VARIETIES OF DEER IMAGERY

I. INTRODUCTION

My thesis concerns the rock art and archaeology of Central Asia and South Siberia, especially those features representing the pastoral-nomadic cultures of the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age (ca. 900-500 BCE) in western Mongolia and the larger southern Siberian region surrounding the Altai Mountains. In the spring of 2011 I began my thesis research with a project funded by the McNair program entitled, "Identifying and Analyzing the Language of Mongolia's Flying Deer". At the center of the visual and stylistic analysis carried out in this project I took a special interest in the Mongolian deer image, a fantastic stylization present on standing stones and rock art panels across Mongolia and in parts of South Siberia and eastern Kazakhstan. Funded in part by ETSU's Undergraduate Summer Research Fellowship, the following summer of 2011 I travelled to Bayan Olgii aimag in western Mongolia to document Mongolian deer images and others at the impressive Biluut Rock Art Complex. My goal has been to develop a better understanding of the ritual, mythic, and cosmological importance of petroglyph imagery, i.e.**,** figures pecked or incised on natural rock panels. Petroglyphs offer a glimpse into the worldviews and self-expressions of prehistoric cultures that have not, until recent decades, received attention as major players in world history.

In this regard, traditional methods of scholarship come up short for a lack of historical documentation; it becomes necessary to evaluate cultural material in order to establish credible accounts of the values and beliefs of preliterate peoples. This is not a history, anthropology, or archaeology thesis, however**.** I deal with these subjects only so far as they are necessary for an understanding of the philosophical and/or religious orientations of belief systems belonging to prehistoric shamanic or, possibly, pre-shamanic traditions that arose on the Eurasian steppe and in the Altai Mountains during the first millennium BCE. Considered within their proper

archaeological contexts, petroglyphs in particular provide important clues to cosmology, religion, and larger social, economic, and political structures. My thesis engages critically with recent interpretations of the semantics of deer imagery in the art of the Early Nomad cultures and their predecessors in Central Asia and South Siberia. At stake is the meaning and role of the values, beliefs, and ritual practices—especially the centrality of the cosmological and political-economic status of gender—that influenced the ancestry of the great Turkic and Mongolian empires of written history.

In respect of my initial foray into the field of rock art, my thesis focuses on the Mongolian deer image in particular, but also, necessarily, on the larger context of prehistoric deer imagery and associated archaeological features in Central Asia and South Siberia. One of the foremost scholars of Central Asian rock art, Esther Jacobson (now Jacobson-Tepfer), has written a compelling treatise on this topic, which she calls "the ecology of belief". In *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia* (1993) she argues for the prehistoric Siberian origin of Central Asian deer imagery; from the beginnings of this imagery she identifies an "Animal Mother" mythic tradition centered on the female deer as the source of life and death. According to this account, the female symbolism associated with deer imagery connects the people of the Siberian Baikal Neolithic (ca. 3000 BCE) with today's Siberian reindeer herders and their shamans. Ultimately, as Jacobson has it, this provides evidence of an essentially matriarchal cosmogony among early steppe nomads. Such views directly challenge another important and more pervasive line of reasoning that relates Early Nomadic society, the larger Scytho-Siberian culture, and earlier Eurasian cultures to the chariot-driven invasions of an Indo-Iranian warrior elite. Thus two poles strain the interpretation of deer imagery: one concerned with patriarchy, the other with matriarchy. Striving to reach middle ground, I examine Jacobson's "Deer Goddess" argument in

detail. I identify the key premises and stages of her argument, evaluate strengths and weaknesses, and offer several challenges to the "Deer Goddess" theory in the direction of less gender-oriented interpretations.

My main line of criticism concerns Jacobson's treatment of the Mongolian deer style and deer stones; ultimately, I highlight incongruities in viewing this figure-type as a sign of female power. I identify further inconsistencies in Jacobson's excessively broad and undiscriminating account of female continuity in religious belief over time and across cultures. My criticisms amount to a statement of poor definition; I claim that the "Deer Goddess" is granted too general a formulation, with the result that it is not clear what lies outside its scope. I support my critique by providing a less ambitious, but more culture-specific, interpretation of the Mongolian deer as a male image that appears in the context of the late Bronze Age cultural family identified by another prominent scholar, William Fitzhugh, as the deer stone-khirigsuur complex (DSKC). In doing so, I discuss the relevant Bronze and early Iron Age deer imagery at Biluut. Because of my particular focus on the DSKC tradition of Mongolia, I have chosen to investigate Mongolian shamanism rather than the related Siberian shamanism in Jacobson's study. I conclude that the significance of the Mongolian deer, though male in definition, does <u>not</u> reside in an association to gender, whether masculine or feminine in character. I will suggest, rather, that the Mongolian deer's cosmological significance as a non-gendered dependent symbol — as far as one can reasonably infer — emerges in the emphasis of stylistically exaggerated dear features, especially those represented in syncretic elaboration.

II. BACKGROUND

The Mongolian deer style represents an important stage in Central Asian deer imagery. It can be found in South Siberia, the Altai region, and the Gobi Desert, but it has been named for its frequent appearance on classic Mongolian deer stones. These standing stones have been connected with *khirigsuur* burial mounds as part of the deer stone – khirigsuur cultural complex (DSKC) ca. 1200-700 BCE (Fitzhugh 2009d). Field studies lead to a number of important rock art sites and rock art complexes throughout Central Asia and southern Siberia. In the Altai Mountains of far-western Mongolia near the convergence of China, Kazakhstan, and Russia, the Biluut Rock Art Complex contains over 10,000 petroglyphs, hundreds of burial mounds of different types, and a number of deer stones of simpler style than the classic Mongolian deer stone on which the Mongolian deer appears. Biluut's Mongolian deer are found among other petroglyph image types on varnished rock panels scattered over three large hills.

The recent implication of research at Biluut and other sites is a much larger role in history for Mongolia than previously realized. Young writes that Mongolia "may have been a central refuge and source of animal species and a hearth of human peoples and cultures that repeatedly migrated into other parts of the world. Scythians, Turks, and Mongols are only the most recent of these diasporic peoples" (2009:50). Fitzhugh even suggests that Mongolia "may have led in the introduction of complex social and religious organization, at least in the eastern steppe region" (2009b:379). To discover the beginnings of Mongolian history it has become necessary to study the DSKC; this cultural complex appears to have influenced the Scythian cultural horizon of the 1st millennium BCE, which makes Mongolia significant to world history before its great empires ever rose (Fitzhugh 2009d:183). Bosson explains the impetus behind Mongolia's beginnings: Cycles of drought or especially harsh conditions endured over thousands of years

sparked cultural development in pastoral-nomadic clans (2009:52). The competition for territory, increasing skill with horses, and the development of related technology were strong expedients to local skirmishes, the consolidation of tribal power, and imperial campaigns.

About 5,000 years ago, prehistoric Mongolians domesticated a variety of local animals including sheep, goats, cattle, camels, and horses. This initiated the herder's lifestyle that is looked to for ethnographic insights today. Large numbers of Mongolia's present-day people still live in felt tents, called gers, where they enjoy ancient meals and customs that have likely survived the predictable climate extremes of steppe life over the millennia. As Bosson explains, "the Mongolian heartland was a natural fortress" of mountains, desert, and endless plains; the nation's development "depended mostly on its own internal affairs. . . . [For] nomadic tribes who had adapted to these harsh conditions . . . barriers were easily passed, and the one-way traffic helped preserve an indigenous life-style" (2009:47). Horse riding provided the nomads the mobility they needed to travel where sustenance could be found, relocate their herds in cycles, carry their belongings on person, and raid neighboring groups. Such raids eventually became a major issue in Northern China in the 2nd c. BCE. Unfortunately, due to their lifestyle, "Nomads leave few physical remains to be found by archaeologists; neither do they commonly leave written records" (Bosson 2009: 46). The Nomads of the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age certainly left none. What is known about these particular nomads comes from foreign sources that often display unflattering or otherwise biased perspectives. On both ends of the Eurasian steppe, the early Iron Age nomads were considered uncivilized barbarians. With patience, more objective conclusions will emerge as scholarship connects the dots of the remains that do exist. The following sections provide brief sketches of the Early Nomads, the DSKC

people, and the lesser-known people of the middle Bronze Age, moving backwards through each culture.

The Early Nomads at Pazyryk

From the Pazyryk burials (ca. 400BCE; Fig. 1), Rudenko confirms Herodotus' account of the customs and rituals of the Black Sea Scythians (1970:279-92). First of all, it is apparent that the Pazyryk dead were mummified with special care taken to remove innards and seal incisions. In the grave, the embalmed dead were laid to the east with heads positioned so as to take a westward view. This suggests an orientation to the setting sun. The dead were accompanied by domestic furnishings, jewelry and clothing, food, horses, and other personal belongings from their daily lives, as well as elaborate plaques, articles of clothing, and headdresses that suggest ritual value rather than ordinary function. There is a possibility that concubines were placed alongside males, although it can only be said for sure that certain burials contain both a male and female together. Importantly, Rudenko found hemp seeds and the materials necessary for a kind of smoke tent that may indicate the purification rituals of the Scythians mentioned by Herodotus; at the same time, the presence of this material alongside other domestic items may indicate a more common practice of smoking hemp outside of the burial context. Overall, the Pazyryk people appear to have prepared their dead for an existence after death; as such, the log structures in which the dead rested at last may even refer to similar dwellings in life. Apart from the ornate animal representations found in burial artifacts, the best image source from which to approach ideas of religious structure may be found specifically on a decorated felt carpet. On this carpet a horse rider approaches a larger woman seated on the left and holding a special flowering branch.

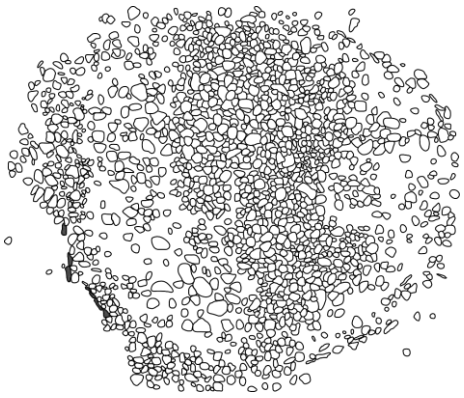


Fig. 1
Sketch of a Pazyryk burial mound
at Biluut, top view

(Fitzhugh 2012)

The Deer Stone – Khirigsuur Complex

As connections to Early Nomadic and Scythian culture become more evident, the deer stone – khirigsuur complex (DSKC) continues to be the subject of much research. Deer-stones are anthropomorphic stelae, or standing stones, identified by at least three distinct styles: the "classic" Mongolian-Transbaikal, the Sayan-Altai, and the Eurasian (Fig. 2). According to Fitzhugh, "the Mongolian deer stone is a square or rectangular slab of hard rock—usually granite but sometimes of greywacke or diabase, usually having an angled top, with carvings on one or multiple sides with deer images wrapping entirely around all four sides" (2009b:387). Deer stones have three ornamented sections: a "face", "torso", and "lower body" section. While this anthropomorphic formula is a general rule, the arrangement of deer stone elements varies, which suggests individualization for important human figures.

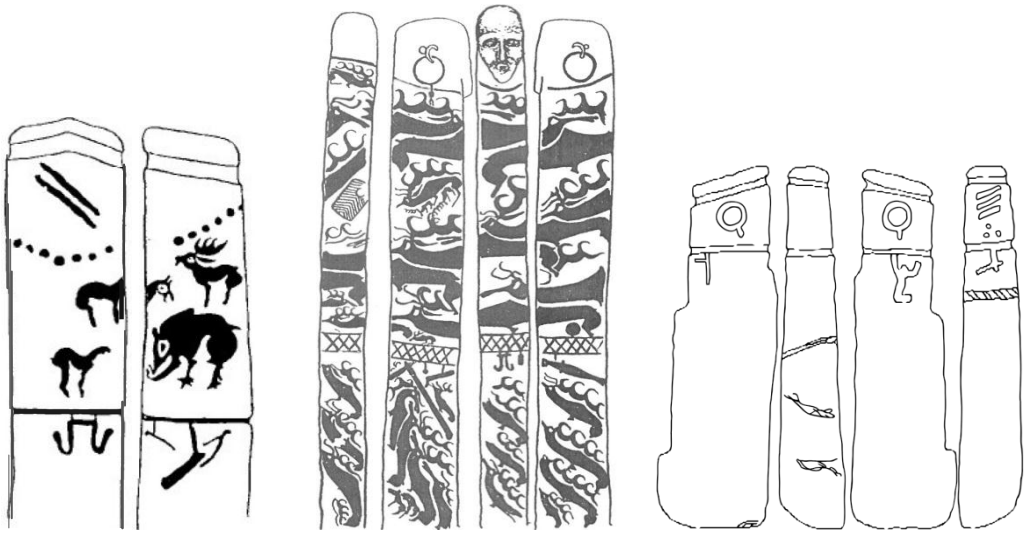


Fig. 2
Left to Right: Sayan-Altai, Mongolian-Transbaikal with rare face,
and Eurasian deer stones from multiple angles

(Fitzhugh 2009d, 2009b; Fitzhugh 2012)

In a few rare cases Mongolian deer stones have clear faces with rounded mouths; these have been interpreted as a depiction of singing shamans. By analogy, the three slash marks that are found more often at the top of deer stones have been understood to symbolize a face. Hoops with dangling ornaments are usually found on opposite sides of the face. These have been interpreted as earrings with pendants, or solar and lunar symbols. A line of circular indentions beneath the face has been interpreted as a necklace. The torso section carries stylized Mongolian deer images which Fitzhugh identifies as abstractions of the Asian roe deer, also known as red deer, elk, or maral (*Cervus elaphus sibiricus*) (2009b). These deer are often stacked in intertwining patterns and angled upwards at slants that suggest ascension. Smaller deer may be inserted to fill the torso space. The Mongolian stylized deer is defined in more detail in the next section of my thesis; for now, it suffices to say here that the style is often considered a mythological "flying deer" with ties to shamanism. It may be a protector and helper spirit that

conveys the souls of dead warriors to the afterlife, or it may be a sign more generally of the cycle of life and death as Jacobson suggests (1993).

Other torso motifs on deer stones include bows, quivers, "suns" and "moons", and a chevron image that may represent a shield or may be a shamanic reference to a skeletal symbol. The lower body section is designated by a geometrically patterned belt from which hang daggers, axes, swords, fire starters, or other such implements suggestive of a warrior. The Sayan-Altai deer stone follows the same general formula as the classic stone but incorporates a more naturalistic style of animal imagery including deer and caprids, as well as a simpler expression of common deer stone features. The Eurasian deer stone is absent of animal figures, is sparse in its incorporation of tool and weapon images, and demonstrates overall the least complexity in design. When interpreting the various deer stones, one should acknowledge Fitzhugh's suggestion that motifs may intentionally have held dual or multiple meanings (2009d:187).

Deer stones are often associated with *khirigsuurs*, a type of *kurgan* or burial mound of stones (Fig. 3). In some cases deer stones have been found directly within *khirigsuur* constructions, or within later slab graves, suggesting their reuse for spiritual power. According to Frohlich, *et. al.*, "*Khirigsuurs* are places of human burial, each consisting of a single individual. The classical *khirigsuur* includes a central burial mound inside of which is a single burial chamber containing the remains of one deceased human being" (In Fitzhugh 2009a:196). These central mounds are 4-8m in height, made of boulders, smaller stones, and flat slabs of rock further surrounded by square or circular 'fences'. Between the fence and central mound a pavement of rubble may often be found. Circle *khirigsuurs* are usually perfectly round, while square *khirigsuurs* often adopt trapezoidal proportions with smaller mounds at their corners. Square *khirigsuurs* may be marked by a standing slab. Both circle and square *khirigsuurs* are

accompanied by two types of satellite features. Outside the eastern fence smaller sacrificial mounds are found, trailing into the south and north sides when space has been taken up. Most often, under these mounds a horse skull faces east along with vertebrae and hooves. On the northern and western sides outside the fence, hearth rings are sometimes found with buried charcoal and the burnt remains of the bones of sheep, goats, and larger mammals. Sometimes *khirigsuurs* appear to line up with "keystones" found outside the fence, perhaps facing certain hills, mountaintops, or even celestial positions. Fitzhugh (2009b, 2009c) concludes that these burial mounds have strong eastern orientations. Their complexity and size (up to 400m in diameter) reflect complex social structure and hierarchy. The number of horses sacrificed and satellite features present seems to indicate the distinguished social status of the buried individual; in turn the sacrifice of one's horse to a *khirigsuur* ritual seems to establish one's place in the community (Fitzhugh 2009d:195). In a few cases bodies and simple artifacts have been uncovered, but due to the shallow burial practices and high occurrence of looting, remains are not often found.

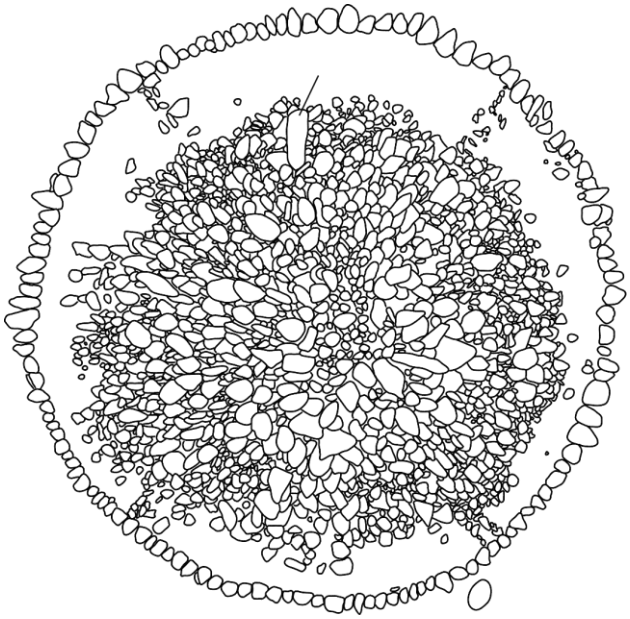


Fig. 3. A khirigsuur with radials at Biluut; though not shown here, khirigsuurs are associated with smaller hearth rings and horse-head burials.

(Fitzhugh 2012)

For their male anthropomorphic references, diversity of elements, and common association with *khirigsuurs*, deer stones are considered to be cenotaphic monuments to specific honored members of the DSKC culture, probably warriors and chieftains. Certain deer stones have been reliably dated by their association with horse-head burials—a feature shared with *khirigsuurs.* This has established a cotemporaneous link between deer stones and *khirigsuurs*. In Khovsgol region and surrounding areas, radio carbon dates for classic Mongolian deer stones have been calibrated to a 500 year period between 3200-2700 B.P. (1200-700 BCE) during the late Bronze Age as a result of the nine year Smithsonian-Mongolian Deer Stone Project (Fitzhugh 2009a). These dates indicate the DSKCpresence in Mongolia at 300-500 years before early Scythian sites first appeared in the Altai region.

Fig. 4: A Mongolian Deer petroglyph from Biluut

(Kortum 2012)

The Stylized Mongolian Deer

The highly stylized Mongolian deer has been most noted in its appearance on classic deer stones, but it also appears commonly in petroglyphs. Fitzhugh (2009a-d) identifies the deer behind this rendition as the Asian elk, also known as the Altai maral. The Mongolian deer is an elongated, slender version of the natural deer from profile view (Fig. 4). A round hind curves into one hind leg with a large thigh tapering into a thin calf. The underbelly stretches into the neck and up to the jaw in a fine contour to which a single foreleg attaches halfway through. Both legs can be reduced to a vestigial point where the calf would usually join, but they may also fold under the

body in a recumbent fashion, or support the deer as it stands upright. The back of the figure curves upwards from the rump to a fine withers, or peak, directly above the foreleg. The neck maintains a smooth contour, often doubling the length of the deer's body. The deer's muzzle is prolonged into a tube-like snout that opens in a bulbous mouth. The forehead is usually squared or trapezoidal with two forward tines protruding and a large rack of wave-like antlers sweeping back over the full length of the body. A single round eye is distinct.

Distinguished by its forward tines and long, swept back antlers, this is not the reindeer or moose, which nonetheless appear as supplementary figures to the Mongolian deer on some deer stones and in rock art (Fitzhugh 2009c). Since only the male maral possesses antlers, the Mongolian deer should itself be male, although this may not be a necessary element in its symbolism. The Mongolian deer has been interpreted as flying due to its special combination of features. It does not look like a realistic form, but instead it suggests some transformative being of a zoomorphic nature, a deer-bird. The deer's snout has been interpreted as a bird's beak opening to call out or sing. Similarly, the antlers suggest wings, and the vestigial legs suggest those of birds. These features, in consideration with the deer's slanted rise upwards on deer stones, suggest flight. Fitzhugh elaborates: "spiritual transformation experienced in shamanic flight in the passage from earth to sky, or the passage of the soul of a deer stone personage from earthly life to the heavens after death" (2009c:77). It is possible that Mongolian deer imagery appeared in tattoos on the bodies of the people immortalized by deer stones. To fully understand this deer image, it is important to consider modern shamanism and the Bronze Age traditions surrounding the DSKC complex; as one of the largest concentrations of middle Bronze, late Bronze, and early Iron Age features, one can turn to the Biluut Rock Art Complex.

III. BILUUT ROCK ART COMPLEX

The Biluut Rock Art Complex demonstrates a range of cultures from potentially as early as the Paleolithic (ca. 8,000 BCE) through the most recent millennium. Modern herders still practice forms of a pastoral-nomadic lifestyle here. Kortum describes his discovery of Biluut and provides a survey of the complex's ecology and manmade features (2005). At the foot of the Altai Mountains, near the convergence of China, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Russia, the three Biluut hills lie along Khoton Lake. From atop the hills on a fair day, one can spot another hill, Aral Tolgoi (documented by Jacobson). At Biluut petroglyphs stand out in bright contrast on purple, red, brown, and black metagraywacke stone backgrounds, or, with lesser contrast on the grey granite boulders and bedrock panels scattered around the complex.

The three Biluut hills run northwest to southeast, as Kortum first noted (2005:10-11). Biluut 1 spans 2.5km in length at180m above the lake, or 2,261m altitude; at its southern base bedrock panels extend 30m from the water. A narrow valley separates Biluut 1 and 2, in which *khirigsuurs* and other burial mounds, stelae, and balbal lines (small standing stones) are found. Biluut 2 spans 2km at 125m above the lake, or 2,206m altitude. The final hill is separated by a plain of about 1.5km, through which streams carry the spring snow melt and rain water, as well as fresh fish. Biluut 3 is the most massive of the hills at several kilometers long and 208m above the lake, or 2,289m altitude. From this hill's peak one should appreciate the true 360 degree view-shed; the Altai Mountains are visible for miles. Petroglyphs are found primarily on the western and southwestern faces of the three hills with smaller numbers at the hilltops (Kortum 2005).

Biluut is home to a variety of images types. Tallies from 2011 confirm that ibex are, in fact, the most frequent image type on Biluut 2 and 3, constituting roughly 30% and 40% of the

hills' imagery, respectively (Kortum 2012: 111; Biluut 1 remains to be documented systematically in Summer 2012). Many of the ibex images are crude and commonplace; this is no surprise, as the mountain setting has probably been home to scores of rams over the millennia. On the other hand, there are finer examples, such as an ibex with its head turned back in a manner suggestive of Early Nomadic and Scythian art. Supporting this connection, a gold foil argali ornament was discovered in the bottom of a Pazyryk grave at Biluut dating to cal. 2120-1980 BP (Fitzhugh 2012: 49-50). It is clear that both the DSKC and Pazyryk cultures reached Khoton Lake and the Biluut hills.

Most of the images at Biluut appear to be from the Bronze Age with more recent Iron Age additions and superimpositions. In addition to ibex, the animal types identified from all ages include: "aurochs, oxen and other wild and domesticated bovine, wild goats, rams, . . . argali, boar and wild pig, bear, camels, wild and domesticated horses, dogs, wolves, male and female deer, reindeer, male and female moose, ostrich, a long-necked swan and other bird-like creatures, symbolic creatures with 'sunburst' or feathered manes or heads. . . ." and many others (Kortum 2005: 12). Hunting scenes can be identified with bowmen in a number of arrangements: seen individually, in line, or in groups, and often on horseback or wheeled vehicles. Dogs sometimes accompany these archer figures. Wheeled vehicles appear in simple 2-wheel and more elaborate 4-wheel designs with or without spokes, driven most often by horses but occasionally by oxen. Jacobson has made evident a strong community presence in these Bronze Age images (1993, 2002). It is likely that cattle cults concerned with fertility and the success of domestication left their marks at Biluut. One must wonder what length these people went to in praise of the cow and bull. Did they generalize masculine and feminine qualities into larger beliefs about the nature of reality and the marks of prosperity in this world view? The

petroglyph record does not immediately indicate the significance of one gender over the other; both male and female animals of the wild and domestic spheres are evident.

A community would be incomplete without human representatives. Including a number of different archers, Kortum counts more than eight unique human figure styles (2005:12). Many appear to convey shamanic imagery, and some may be female. Though generally more common in the Bronze and Iron Age imagery, some archaic human figures can be found. A special "birthing woman," (Fig. 5) was discovered in the summer of 2011 among several hundred more petroglyphs on a section of Biluut 3 previously believed to be bare (Kortum 2012: 112). This figure type may hold a ritualistic importance to a Neolithic or early Bronze Age culture as a sign of fertility: a woman in full-term pregnancy, if not labor, lies on her back or squats, possibly, with legs bent and spread from the hip and arms raised above her head; her breasts appear to be swollen, as if with milk, and her vagina, the entrance for new life into the world, is fully exposed. Around her can be seen a number of circular gouges that may represent astronomical references or some other kind of spiritual presence. She is the only known case of the style at Biluut, although archaic male figures found elsewhere display a similar pose. Admittedly rare, this figure is noteworthy in consideration of Jacobson's (1993) Deer Goddess argument, concerned first with the Neolithic period. The 'birthing woman' represents fertility without any association to deer imagery, but her role in cosmology is obscure. She does not appear to possess any unnatural qualities, herself, but the gouges around her suggest more than meets the eye. Without other examples to generalize, however, it is impossible to infer the actual nature of this representation.

Other important and more common figures include "mushroom-hatted" and helmeted figures, and even figures that appear to be attired in long robes and tall hats suggestive of

Fig. 5: 'Birthing Woman' at Biluut, Neolithic?

Scythian or Early Nomadic style. Jacobson-Tepfer suggests that the latter elements may actually indicate the presence of the Andronovo people (ca. 13th-11th c. BCE) in western Mongolia at a time predating the Early Nomads, but she also warns us of the complexity involved in dating Bronze Age petroglyphs (2002). Along with the Pazyryk materials excavated in 2011, these petroglyphs may in the end prove to be evidence of the Early Nomads at Biluut.

Perhaps the most impressive, and certainly the largest of Biluut's human figures, are five stylized horse riders and three other horses near the base of Biluut 2B, as well as a single stylized horse **on** Biluut 1D (Kortum 2005:13). All of these figures, postdating the Early Nomads in the Iron Age or later, measure over 2.4m in length. The riders wear distinct hats "atop of which either a full or crescent moon is affixed on a short stem" (Kortum 2005: 13). These later figures may not relate directly to Early Nomadic culture, but they are important to providing a cultural bracket for stylistic dating. 'Mushroom' headed figures appear to represent the middle Bronze Age, and horse riding images indicate the late Bronze, early Iron Age, and Iron Age on. Any Early Nomadic petroglyphs would have to fall in the middle of this range.

Most important to my purposes, Biluut has at least 36 Mongolian deer images in a number of variations that indicate, along with *khirigsuurs*, the presence of the DSKC culture. In light of the presence of Mongolian deer petroglyphs, it is surprising that no classic deer stones have been found near the *khirigsuurs* lying between the hills of Biluut. There do appear to be Eurasian stones, however, but these lack deer imagery. Perhaps some of the Mongolian deer petroglyphs stood in for the missing classic deer stones one would expect (Kortum, personal

communication). A more certain element of *khirigsuurs* at Biluut is the presence of radials, or lines from the outer fence to the inner mound. Radiocarbon dates for two radial *khirigsuurs* give a calibrated range from as early as 3130 to as late as 2720 BP, which falls as expected within the larger DSKC timeframe (1200-700 BCE).

At least some of Biluut's Mongolian deer must date to this, though others must be early Iron Age variations. Biluut's Mongolian deer are close to authentic deer stone versions, lending credence to the idea that the petroglyphs replaced the deer stone here, while also highlighting those deer that exhibit strong variation. One pair of Mongolian deer on Biluut 3, where our 2011 petroglyph team spent most of its time, may be associated with a square *khirigsuur* and a circle *khirigsuur* visible at the foot of the hill below. Unfortunately, Mongolian deer at Biluut are often incomplete or broken off, which complicates dating. It is noteworthy that of the 16 found on Biluut 3, four appear in pairs (**two** pairs total), while the others appear individually. Elsewhere at Biluut larger numbers appear together in compositions, including one composition in which the deer are interlocked with each other in a manner strongly suggestive of classic deer stone representation. It could be assumed that the Mongolian deer at Biluut have the same ritual significance as those found on deer stones. If this significance is to be understood as shamanic in origin, then the traditions of Mongolian shamanism must be considered. As much as ethnographic materials offer insight, they provide further need for caution in interpretation.

IV. SHAMANISM

Mongolian Shamanism

Time and history have not always been kind to the Mongolian shaman. According to Buyandelger, when Tibetan Buddhism began spreading northward in the sixteenth century,

shamanism lost sway in southern and central Mongolia, and even disappeared completely in certain parts (2009:66-67). Conversion among Mongol elites led to the persecution of shamanist practices, though shamanism remained entrenched in the north among the Buryat, Dukha, and Darkhad peoples who had different cultural backgrounds and were mobile between Russia and Mongolia. Sometimes shamanism was practiced alongside Buddhism. In other areas, shamanism was persecuted through the destruction of religious paraphernalia and the removal of livestock, for example. Buddhist lamas assumed shaman roles by adapting the practices of Bon shamanism to Mongol life, enacting spiritual possessions, and introducing *ovoo* worship (a type of cairn) and new protector deities, especially personalized lamaist deities that replaced shamanic guardians and ancestor spirits (Buyandelger 2009: 66-67).

In the 20th century, Soviet suppression of religion targeted both Buddhism and shamanism. Lacking religious institution, and freely-flowing around the domestic sphere of life, shamanism survived underground to meet the Mongols' demand for healing, guidance, and grounding rituals during a time of cultural upheaval. As Buyandelger explains: "Although Buddhism was officially established throughout Mongolia and became the dominant religion by the early twentieth century, shamanism remained covert . . . . It is particularly in resistance to Buddhism that Mongol shamanism developed creative and undercover strategies that enabled it to endure socialist suppression" (2009:67). Because of the gender-equal status of shamanism, female shamans were able to compensate for the removal of male shamans. While males were targeted as threats to the agenda of Soviet atheism, females were passed over. Nonetheless, shamanic practice remained clandestine as a dangerous activity requiring haven in the mountains and forests, or the privacy of well-secured homes. Shamanism was only able to reemerge publicly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but today it offers guidance and cultural identity

amidst new changes brought to Mongolia by democracy and capitalism (Buyandelger 2009:68-71). In the political world, shamanism can be seen as a resilient and adaptive religion.

The shaman mediates between the spirit realm and the earthly world to counteract supernatural responses to human disturbance and to preserve both individuals and communities. According to Buyandelger, "Rock art and archaeological finds of human figurines, drums, mirrors, and mouth harps, suggest shamanism has existed in central Eurasia since the Upper Paleolithic period, beginning about 30,000 years ago" (2009:65). In his comprehensive account "Mongolian Shamanism," Purev places the religion's *organization* at seven-to-five thousand years ago (2008:23-24). During the basic stages of social development, ancient man dealt with nature directly, relying upon physical force. By the Matriarchal Age or Old Stone Age, during which shamanism emerged in Mongolia, the wisdom to explain phenomena had gained an important role. Both male and female shamans gained power. From ancient times shamans were divided into White and Black groups that dealt with positive and negative forces respectively. To this day Black shamans invoke spirits that struggle against evil, protect the people, and carry out vengeance. Historically, they have dealt with issues of warfare, striving to maintain peace and strengthen alliances, but remaining ever-ready to use force. In contrast, White shamans invoke peaceful spirits and regulate the daily concerns of life, maintaining public affairs, and caring for the people's health (Purev 2009:23-26).

According to Buyandelger, from at least the 13th century male and female shamans, *boo* and *udgan* respectively, performed rituals of milk offering and blood sacrifice to appease *ongguts*, or shamanic gods and spirits (2009:65-66). These spiritual forces pervaded the Mongols' world, from the home to the landscape and skies. They were capable of providing protection from death, sickness, and disaster. *Ongguts* were idolized as figurines and masks

made of skin, leather, felt, metal, wood, silk, felt, or other fabrics. In shamanic cosmology: "Eternal Heaven and its entourage of gods, demigods, and spirits, constitute a shamanic ruling hierarchy that can be called a celestial court that oversees the rest of the spirit world. The origin spirits and landscape spirits occupy the lower part of this hierarchy and shift freely between the spirit and human worlds" (2009:66). At the origin of the hierarchy, Mongolian shamanism explains the creation of the universe as a split between heaven and earth (Purev 2009:96-101). Heaven and earth were originally united, but in their division masculine and feminine power emerged. "Heaven-Father" animated life, and "Earth-Mother" gave all things form. The two creators were both necessary to the world's existence.

Eventually, the universe came to be understood in terms of three worlds: an upper world of holy spirits, a middle world of men and animals, and a lower world of evil spirits. It is no surprise that the middle world is torn between the powers of good and evil. Interestingly enough, "It is evident that the Shaman believers have prayed to [Shaman] trees since the Matriarchal period, for the first Shamans were women and these trees are known as 'Etuggen (originator) Mother's Tree' " (Purev 2008: 76). These trees are important spirits among other land, water, and animal spirits. All came to be subject to worship of Heaven or the sky "as the main source of life, the source of intelligence and the master of all things in the universe" (2008:106). Despite matriarchal origins, Mongolian shamanism seems to have pushed the emphasis of its cosmology toward masculine power. It must be noted, however, that the understanding of Heaven is often divided into a number of different conceptions indicating different aspects of the world, both masculine and feminine in nature.

Buyandelger notes how shamanic rituals alter a believer's perception of the world (2009:66). Shamanic paraphernalia are used to summon spirits and evoke a seemingly

incredible, but ideally believable, experience that an audience can partake in through the medium of the shaman practitioner. Such paraphernalia includes mirrors, drums, headdresses, gowns, and capes or aprons. Performances involve poetry chants that describe the broader shamanist cosmology and specific figures and spirits relevant to the ritual at hand. In Buyandelger's words, "Shamanic ritual condenses the political, historical, and economic spheres of life into a single cultural event" (2009:66). Thus shamanism establishes a historical memory in which *ongguts* speak through shamans about past lives. These origin spirits reside in the places of their burial and protect the landscape—all of its mountains, cliffs, and rivers. Through communal worship under the leadership of shamans, the Mongols perpetuate ancient history. Indeed, "where the origin spirits had become communal *ongguts*, their myths and stories make up regional and clan identities" (2009:66). This reflects on the importance of community to shamanism. Shamans are religious leaders, both male and female, whose status and power resides in the voluntary participation and recognition of the community.

Before the Xiongnu period (ca. 300 BCE), Purev writes that the shamanist religion "played a coordinating role in the establishment of public order, protection, unification, and spiritual orientation of the people" (2008:30). The fire-hearth was a major component of social structure, serving as a focal point around which subordinates gathered before rulers, which consolidated clans and tribes. When aristocracies began to take power from the tribes, it was necessary for a state structure to provide security. Shamans were crucial in establishing the divine nature of leaders who rose to power through organizational ability. By the time of the Xiongnu period, "the shamanist religion provided the organizational basis of governmental, administrative and military activity" (2008:35). In this period Shamanism matured and became an official state religion. A "Three Pillars" or "tripod" belief formed the basis of the shamanist

ideology, consisting of White and Black symbols of the state, rituals of family hearth superiority, and the belief in the soul or spirit. By the 13th century C.E. shamanism had become the dominant religion in Mongolia due to its endorsement of the ruling system of khans. Deeply rooted in the community, it is evident that shamanism infiltrated every aspect of Mongolian life; thus, as communities became major political forces, shamanism shaped their progression.

Shamanism and Politics in *The Deer Goddess*

Jacobson explains the imagery of pre-historic South Siberia through analogy to modern ethnographic material on Siberian shamanism, which has many parallels with Mongolian shamanism (1993). The material she makes most use of comes from the mythic traditions of the Evenk and Ket peoples of South Siberia, who may have descended directly from the pre-historic cultures of South Siberia, including the Early Nomads. In their myths and shamanic practices, Jacobson claims to identify distinct archaic elements carried over from pre-shamanic cults of the hearth and other domestic cults (1993:179). To her, the intertwining of pre-shamanic and shamanic cults suggests a tension between the sexes**.** This tension reflects "slowly changing political structures dependent on an ancient shift of political power away from a female-centered clan structure, and the reintegration of that power within a male tribal elite" (1993:180). On this premise, the political background of Jacobson's Deer Goddess becomes obvious.

Jacobson believes that the Early Nomads (ca. 4th c. BCE) were in the final stages of pre-shamanic belief; she defends this throughout her book by discrediting the presumptions of male dominance in DSKC and Scytho-Siberian cultures. Emphatically: "We can neither conclude that the head of the household, of the lineage, or even of the tribe was male, nor can we claim to have the materials that would allow us to assert that military activities dominated nomadic society and

were restricted to males" (1993:42). Jacobson warns against the immediate assumption that weaponry in burials or representations indicates a male centralized political power. Furthermore, in the absence of shamanic artifacts, "It is at least a possibility that the powers accorded the modern shaman were originally lodged in all individuals and that the order invoked by the shaman was in [the Early Iron Age] still considered the anticipated deathright of each person" (1993:211). In the later monopolization of political power and religious power, Jacobson sees a departure from a matriarchal society that apparently did not privilege individuals over the community.

Some two thousand years after the Early Nomads, in the time of the Evenk and Ket peoples, the pre-shamanic Deer Goddess who had once commanded power over life and death was relegated to the status of a shaman helper spirit. She remained present in the drum rituals used to initiate shamanic trances and in the very attire of the shaman. The deer's importance to Siberian shamanism goes back to the Evenk concept of *bugady enintyn*, the 'Animal Mother' who gave birth to all humans and animals, and who devours them to continue the cycle of rebirth (1993:192-194). Commonly, she is portrayed in the oral tradition as a figure resting at the bottom of a *turu*, or Tree of Life, that grows from her antlers. This tree marks the place of clan origins and connects the upper and lower worlds. The Ket tradition demonstrates a parallel in its Khosedam/Tomam duality—this female opposition of life and death forces may reflect an original unity, in Jacobson's view (1993:197). Khosedam was associated with wild reindeer, and she ate the souls of the dead so that they could be reborn. As a sign of life, Tomam was associated with spring and birds.

Jacobson generalizes these beliefs within Siberian cultures. If one surveys "the Siberian mythic tradition, one finds an insistent reference back to ancient traditions by which the original

progenitor is a female animal, an animal-woman, or a being with aspects of both women and animals" (1993:196). One final belief from Evenk and other forms of Siberian shamanism will be important to my later discussion of Jacobson's argument, i.e., a belief that "the soul of the deceased would be transported by the shaman down the river to the land of the dead" (1993:195). Before this could happen, apparently, the shaman would have to get permission from a woman guarding the river. This involves a special ritual, but it is not important to go into specific detail.

The Siberian shamans' rituals generally invoke a transformation into a deer spirit much like the very deer which they believed originally spawned their ancestors. Embodying the deer's powers, voyages into the spirit realm enable shamans to facilitate important religious acts or events for people, such as the safe passage of the soul. Jacobson writes, "The shaman's ecstatic journey presumes that the significant universe was formed in a system of layers ranged along a central pole, or World Tree" (1993:209). It is important to note that the general use of deer drum as steed in these rituals is common to both Siberian and Mongolian shamanism. In Mongolian shamanism, however, the steed becomes the mount of the *ongutt*, or *ongon*, spirit rather than the shaman himself or herself. The Mongolian shaman is believed to travel metaphysically through use of a mouth harp. Furthermore, the Mongolian shaman's drum may represent any mount such as "elk, deer, hind, bear, wolf or reindeer," depending on the exact tradition and the animal skin chosen for the drum (Purev 2008:211-212). But from Siberian shamanism it is still clear where Jacobson draws the Tree of Life symbol she believes the Early Nomads made use of. Furthermore, the connection between deer and tree becomes obvious. These concepts are major components of Jacobson's Deer Goddess argument, which I will now turn to.

V. *THE DEER GODDESS* ARGUMENT

The following summarizes Jacobson's Deer Goddess account.

As South Siberian Neolithic and early Bronze Age peoples migrated southward and transitioned from hunting to pastoral economies, their societies mythologized prehistoric beliefs originally developed in forest homelands. Their mythic traditions merged with new belief systems in the steppe during the middle Bronze Age. By the early Iron Age a widespread belief system connected the Early Nomads in the eastern Altai Mountains to the Saka Scythians in northern Kazakhstan and the Black Sea Scythians in the western Pontic steppe.

The "Deer Goddess" first emerged in Neolithic petroglyphs as an antlerless elk "Animal Mother" associated with boat petroglyphs at major sites on the great Siberian rivers. As mother, she was the source of life and sustenance, but tied to the boat as a symbol of death, her role extended to the afterlife. In the Aeneolithic and early Bronze Age this elk disappeared, but a general bovine-human goddess emerged in her place. She held the power of fertility and vitality, all the while maintaining a role in death due to her association with ritual sites best exemplified by carved stele in the Minusinsk Basin of South Siberia. Moving into the middle Bronze Age, cults of cattle and deer placed emphasis on community rituals and domestic life. Inherited from early Bronze Age traditions, the Deer Goddess continued in bovine form, but the strong return of deer imagery in petroglyphs recalled the goddess's beginnings.

In the late Bronze Age the goddess fully resumed her preeminent form on the deer stones of Mongolia and South Siberia. As the defining feature of the deer stone, the goddess commanded the homage of anthropomorphic stelae across Eurasia. Even where the deer or other female indicators were absent on standing stones, the goddess's presence was referred to by her male subjects. In the early Iron Age, the deer's mythic status was acknowledged within an

archaic formulation of animal predation and transformation dependent on a bilateral axis. This axis marked the joining of the realms of life and death, which the goddess had ruled over for thousands of years. Her final formulation within Scytho-Siberian art as a woman seated under a tree or holding a mythic branch was the result of the early nomads having reached Hellenic and Persian influences. Modern ethnographic accounts of shamanic traditions from Siberia reflect the archaic origin of the Deer Goddess as the source of life and death.

Jacobson's argument is highly technical and relies upon art-historical perspectives, archaeology, ethnography, and perhaps a keen imaginative faculty. I have outlined the argument below as simply as I can without omitting major steps. I have also provided some of Jacobson's (1993) images, as well as images from outside sources, to help illustrate the points.

Neolithic Elk Tradition, ca. 4th-3rd millenia BCE

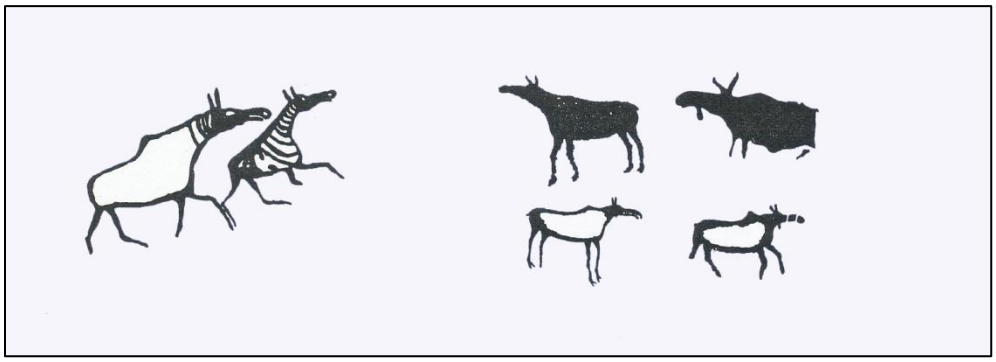


Fig. 6: Neolithic female elk from Siberian river sites (Jacobson 1993: 277)

1. **Claim**: Thousands of repetitions of elk petroglyphs at major Siberian river sites attest to the centrality of the elk in Baykal Neolithic beliefs. This monumental elk represented in full stride to the right is found on cliffs facing south and overlooking sacrificial hearths (91).

2. **Claim:** The "chronological primacy of the female elk image over a vast stretch of South Siberia surely indicates an ancient belief system in which that animal held a central place" (96).
3. **Claim**: These Neolithic elk almost always have no antlers; thus they are female (96).
4. **Interpretative Claim**: As a religious female symbol, the Neolithic elk must refer to the source of life (92).
5. **Interpretative Claim**: Boat petroglyphs at river sites are symbolic of the passage to the afterlife, as they consistently face south to warmer lands, while they contain vertical lines that have been interpreted as representing human souls.
6. **Conclusion**: Since female elk appear alongside these boat petroglyphs, elk are associated with both life and death; "the female elk must also have been invoked in funerary rituals" (92, 97).

Aeneolithic/Early Bronze Age Tradition, ca. late 3rd-2nd millennia BCE

1. **Connecting Claim:** By the early 2nd mil. new petroglyph images emerged at South Siberia river sites and along the Chuluut Gol (river) in Mongolia: "forms which seem to combine human and animal elements in what could only have been mythic references" (97). Examples include 'bird women,' 'loop-heads,' and other horned figures or figures with possible feathered-headdresses (102).
2. **Interpretative Claim:** The Minusinsk stelae, or standing stones, also represent these new impulses as bovine-anthropomorphs. In fact, "the elements on the Minusinsk stones taken altogether strongly suggest the presence of a female deity" with both human and animal aspects: bovine facial features, large breasts & swollen

stomach, and other stylized references (112). Importantly, the masks on these stelae face east (107).

3. **Inference following 2:** The appearance of these stelae within sacrificial contexts indicates the "significance of this deity within the life of the community and the belief that on her timely propitiation depended the order and well-being of the universe" (112).
4. **Claim:** The "frontality of mask-like images and the particular combination of animal elements indicate some significant connection between the images on the Minusinsk stelae" and masked petroglyphs from Siberian river sites (112).
5. **Conclusion:** "Whereas the female elk was the central image for that earlier [Neolithic] culture, within the new culture an anthropomorphic deity of bovine and bird characteristics—a female associated with death and with the fullness of life—personified fundamental principles of belief" (113).
6. **Connecting claims**: Okunev figurines—small female idols found in early Bronze Age burials, possibly protector deities—recall the Minusinsk stelae but show a concern for realism that anticipates and transitions into the South Siberian Bronze Age petroglyph tradition. New representations come to include bulls, cattle, deer, caprids, human figures, and wheeled vehicles—in seemingly ritualistic settings (115-116).

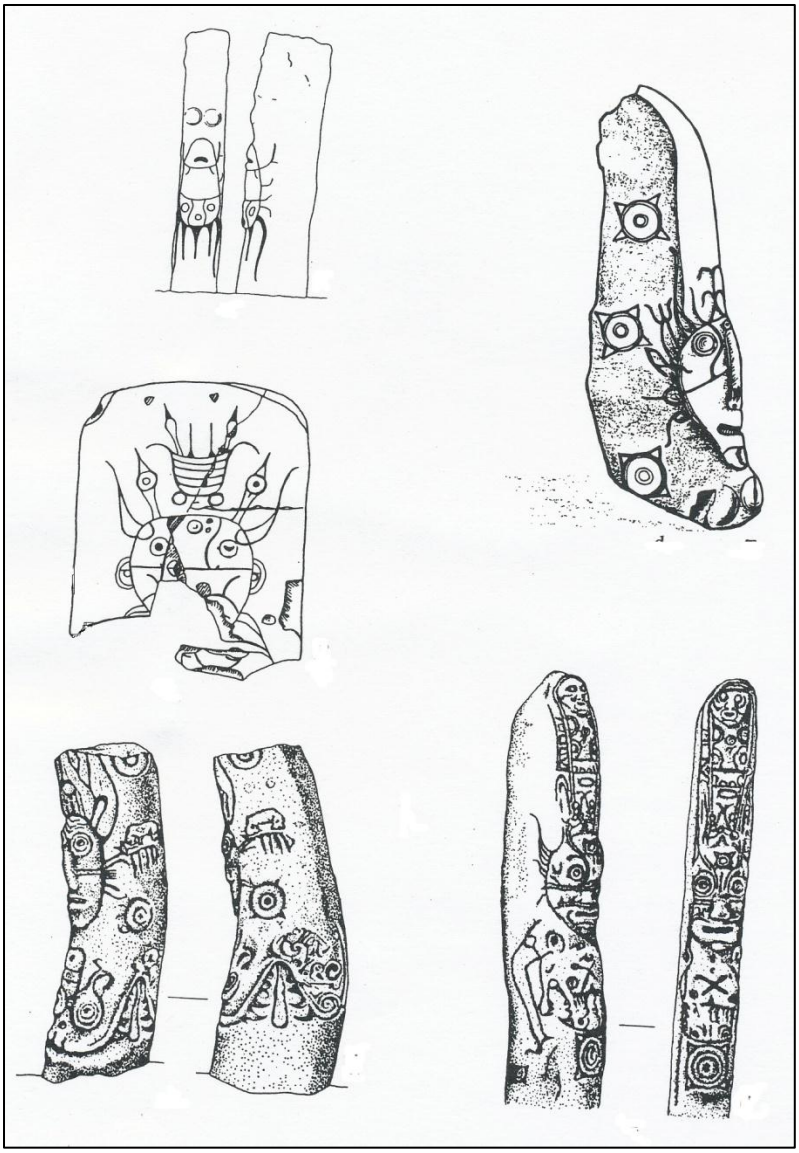


Fig. 7: Minusinsk stele (Jacobson 1993: 280)

Middle & Late Bronze Age, ca. 2nd- early 1st millennia BCE

1. **Claim:** Bovine and deer petroglyphs of South Siberia and Mongolia date to the 2nd mil. BCE; "deer are often, but not always, antlered. Within a group of animals impressive antlered individuals may frequently be found. Together with cattle,

deer are among the most common zoomorphic images datable to the Bronze Age" (118).

2. **Interpretative Claim**: Sometimes deer/bovine syncretic forms appear. "It seems certain that the pictorial merging of bovine and cervid must indicate the interweaving of symbolic values adhering to each animal and thus the interweaving of cultural traditions" (119).
3. **Supporting claim for 2**: Appearance of deer-cattle alongside pure deer and bovines suggests the two animals "represented two different spheres of reference in the cultures' belief systems" (119).
4. **Claim**: Wheeled vehicles & mushroom-headed anthropomorphs also appear to be part of the South Siberian Bronze Age vocabulary as part of an "emergence of compositions of interacting figures, or of figures and animals" (120).
5. **Interpretative claim following 4**: "[M]ushroom-hatted figures must be associated with the middle Bronze Age, . . . the period of the Andronovo-Karasuk cultures" (124). Such human figures are not associated in any meaningful way with earlier Neolithic imagery or Minusinsk stones, or later Scytho-Siberian/Early Nomadic art.
6. **Interpretative claim**: Overall, "nothing in the petroglyphic images allows us to arrive at a decisive conclusion regarding the nature of the two-wheeled vehicle . . . . Identification of the animals used to pull the vehicles suggests . . . carts or . . . generalized concepts" (126). Relevant wheeled vehicles are not part of combat scenes (at least not any Jacobson knows of) (129).

7. **Conclusion:** Relevant wheeled vehicle petroglyphs and human figures datable to the Bronze Age do not indicate the intrusion of a warrior class, specifically an Indo-European invasion; however, as part of the larger petroglyph context of the Bronze Age, they suggest "a gradual intrusion of peoples from the west and southwest into northern Kazakhstan, the northern Altay, and Mongolia" (137).
8. **Point of clarification**: The Andronovo moved eastward into South Siberia, bringing the Indo-European culture of the western Timber-grave culture; as Andronovo met the autochthonous Karasuk, customs and beliefs were confronted and reshaped (137).
9. **Conclusion**: "In considering this vocabulary of symbolic forms, one senses a world in which ritual had come to signify not only the reaffirmation of cosmogonic myth, but also the reaffirmation of culture and society" (124). Culture was pulled between the two poles of bovine/pastoralism and deer/hunting. Bronze Age imagery, including wheeled vehicles, reflects "community as identity, the cart as a sign of household well-being, and the community reaffirmed by rituals" (140). Cattle referred to a newer pastoral economy, while deer referred to "continued physical and spiritual dependency on forest animals" (140).

Late Bronze Age Deer Stones, ca. early 1st millenium BCE

1. **Claim:** On deer stones, "The vast majority of these [Mongolian] deer images are antlered and most lack any indication of gender" (141). Only in late cases of petroglyph imagery is gender differentiated.

2. <u>Defense of claim in 4</u>: Jacobson states: "although there are a few cases in which the male deer is distinguished by the indication of his sex, such definition is unusual, and belongs, I believe to a late phase in these representations" (157).

3. <u>Statement of Okladnikov's Interpretative Argument</u>: Associated with funerary monuments, classic Mongolian-Transbaikal deer stones represent male warriors because of their weaponry; these warriors must have been leaders due to the effort required to erect monuments. The Mongolian deer is a reindeer because of its pronounced forehead tines; thus the reindeer functioned as the sign of a patriarchal social organization privileging the male warrior.

4. <u>Kubarev's Sayan-Altay stones, interpretative claim</u>: The more naturalistic Sayan-Altai animal representations "suggest animal-shaped plaques that could be worn hanging from the belt or as part of a necklace or pectoral" (152), such as those later found in Early Nomadic burials. In virtue of shared anthropomorphic references, classic stones may also relate to Early Nomadic art.

5. <u>Claim from 4</u>: "The deer stone tradition of South Siberia and Mongolia appears to indicate the source of what came to be known as the Scytho-Siberian animal style. The very image of the deer—stylized, monumental . . . would seem, necessarily to precede the deer images of the Early Nomads and the Scythians" (157).

6. <u>Supporting claim for 4 & 5</u>: "The deer, boar, and feline images from certain stones from Tuva and Mongolia . . . are replicated on many objects from Early Nomadic burials . . ." (153). [See deer stone to left.]

8. <u>Claim following 4-6</u>: "The deer stones confirm that the deer image also had to have derived from South Siberia and northern Central Asia" (157).

9. <u>Conclusions</u>: Deer stones may represent armed males, but no explicit sign of belligerence is present even in their animal imagery (158); at the latest, deer stones date to the beginning of the Scytho-Siberian period. Since the Mongolian deer does not appear on Sayan-Altai stones, whose stylistic references more closely suggest the development of Scytho-Siberian imagery, Jacobson believes that the Mongolian stones appeared first.

10. <u>Connection to Neolithic elk</u>: "The deer of the Mongolian deer stones referred in fact to the female of the species: first to that of the reindeer, but through a process of generalization of reference also to the female maral and elk as well **. . .** endowed with magnificent antlers indicative of her pre-eminent mythic position" (169). This explanation is not developed any further; Jacobson asserts that the later indication of male gender displays a de-mythologizing and misunderstanding of Mongolian deer imagery.

11. <u>Supporting claim/sub-argument for 10</u>: Scythian baba (stone men with rhyta) indicate the presence of a seated female depicted in certain Scythian, Saka, and Pazyryk burial artifacts; the absent female figure is referred to by the male figure holding a rhyton or cup in consecration (169).

12. <u>The Absence Argument, following 11</u>: Thus, in the ritual context, even baba without rhyta can refer to the female goddess. This female's "presence was indicated in effect by her absence . . . . This absent presence suggests that the South Siberian-Mongolian deer stones also encompassed a similar distinction, but in a more generalized form" (169-170).

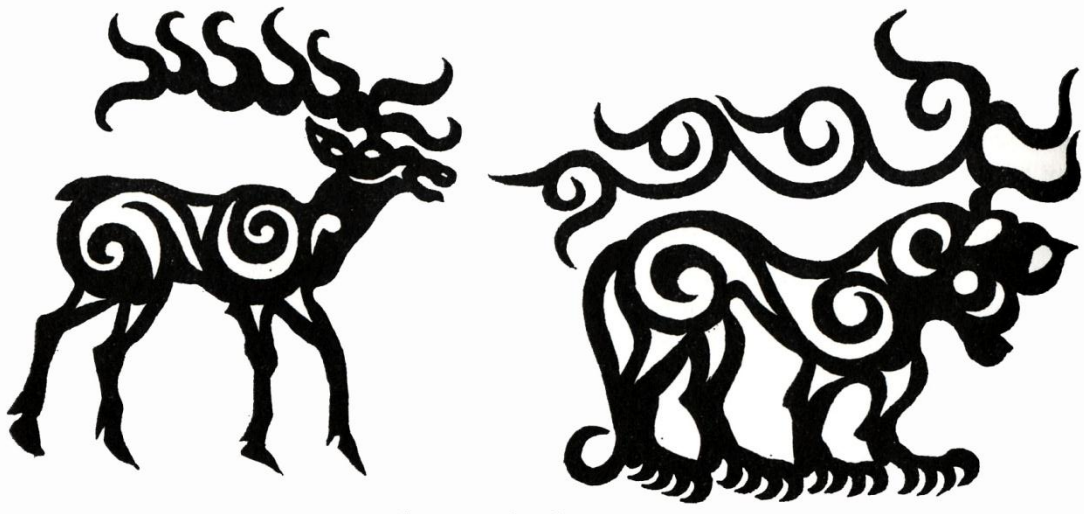
12. <u>Final conclusion</u>: In the late Bronze Age "the deer stones served as the signs of a presence intimated in the body of the deer," a female power going back to the Siberian Neolithic (170).

<u>Early Iron Age Scytho-Siberian culture, ca. 1st millenium BCE</u>

To preface this portion of the argument, it is useful to quote a longer passage:

> [T]he deer image inherited by the Early Nomads and elaborated into the center of their symbolic systems was a sign of the ecology of belief. It referred back not to a solar hero or to Indo-European values but rather to the emergence and gradual disappearance of a truly Siberian cosmogonic source—the Animal Mother, the source of life and death. . . . The general reasoning behind the 'Siberian connection' is straightforward: the animals which dominate the archaic Scytho-Siberian style are all animals of the northern forest or forest-steppe. Furthermore, it can be reasoned that the archaic nature of the early nomadic style and images indicates not only a tradition of bone and wood carving but also a tradition of zoomorphic representation that goes back as far as the Siberian Neolithic (Jacobson 1993: 31-32).

Fig. 8: Deer and feline with antlers from Early Nomadic Tuekta barrows (Rudenko 1970)



1. Claim: The beginnings of Scytho-Siberian art depict a monumental and archaic style of animal representation (50).

2. Claim: Powerfully defined images of deer, felines, caprids, and eagle-like birds—represented in isolation or indicating interaction only through posture—are present throughout the development of Scytho-Siberian art (51).

3. Claim: "Throughout Scytho-Siberian art, the motif of animal predation constitutes the central representational formulation" (53). Furthermore, "Implicit or explicit, predation indicates the essential motif of the symbolic system of the Scytho-Siberians in general and of the Early Nomads in particular" (54).

3 Basic Formulations

1. Most archaic – crouching felines and recumbent deer (Kelermes, Arzhan)
2. Wolves confronting startled deer (Early Nomads, Pazyryk)
3. Explicit attack – predators directly engaged with prey

4. Claim: Zoomorphic transformation was another major theme of Scytho-Siberian art, especially among deer-bird syncretic forms and most importantly deer with bird-headed antlers (54-55).

5. Claim: In burial materials one can infer an implicit central vertical axis of imagery, usually coextensive with the head and body of humans—apparent in the arrangement of tattoos, clothing plaques, and headdresses—and of horses, in the arrangement of headgear and regalia (57). A plaque's central axis framed or coincided with the antlers of cervid prey, on either side of which predators are found. The central axis also coincides with representations of bird wings and trees.

6. <u>Claim</u>: In the Altai Mountains, the Early Nomads buried the dead with headgear ornamented with gold zoomorphic images; both common and distinguished males and females received these rites (confirmed at Ulandryk-Tashanta and Pazyryk) (73). Headdresses offer two forms of vertical axis: 1) bilateral symmetry of foliage, wings, and antlers; 2) mountain representation topped by caprid or caprid horn (Tuekta and Issyk).

7. <u>Interpretative claim following 4-6</u>: The repetition of specific themes organized around a central vertical axis indicates symbolic systems beyond regular ornamental concerns; these systems were necessary at the time of death and interment (74).

8. <u>Claim</u>: Later images of a seated female in Early Nomad burial felts and other related Scytho-Siberian plaques demonstrate an association of female with a tree, branch, or altar. In certain cases, "a male on foot or on horseback addresses a seated woman as if in the position of a suppliant or worshipper. In each instance, also, the woman is associated with a tree, a branch, or an altar" (79).

Fig. 9: Scene from a Pazyryk tapestry: Seated woman holding a branch, approached by rider. (Rudenko 1970)

9. <u>Claim following 8</u>: As Scythians, Sakas, and Early Nomads developed ties with Greece, Persia, and China their art style gained a sense of realism and naturalism; in Scythia, Hellenic realism heavily influenced animal style (51-52). This explains the change from deer and caprid imagery to the imagery of seated females, the two types connected by association with trees: "It is possible to understand the deer's bird-headed antlers as a metaphor for the branches of trees. . . (83).

10. <u>Interpretative claim from 3 & 7</u>: In the Pazyryk finds, the central vertical axis "must have referred to the joining of realms of being, and the acts of predation

and the processes of transformation. . . were reaffirmed as essential parts of the journey signed by that axis" (69).

11. **Interpretative claim following 10**: The seated female refers to a mythic tradition involved with the process of death; material from Pazyryk and other Scytho-Siberian sites indicate that "representations of seated women addressed by males carrying rhyton or cups and in association with altars or branches were in some manner appropriate to the rituals accompanying death" (80). With a narrative quality, "The scene creates the impression that death has called one of the riders, and that the moment of death is somehow bound to the figure of the woman under the tree" (80).

11. **Conclusions:** The consistency of vertical axial order, bilateral symmetry, and themes of predation and transformation refer to a "significant mythic order" (85). Burial headdresses reaffirm these symbolic systems and indicate the association of antler with foliage and bird, and horn with mountain – ultimately references to the Tree of Life and World Mountain that join the living world with the spirit realm. Wolves and felines were the symbols of death, but caprids and deer were "the most fitting symbols of the unity of destruction and renewal encompassed by metamorphosis and passage" (86). Gradually, as Scytho-Siberian art was influenced by realism, the deer-bird was replaced by the seated female holding a branch or represented under a tree (87).

VI. CRITIQUE OF *THE DEER GODDESS* ARGUMENT

In the following I address points of contention, or areas in the argument that could be strengthened; I follow the enumeration presented in the outline according to each section.

Neolithic Elk Tradition, ca. 4th-3rd millenia BCE

1. Jacobson does not cite numbers for these elk petrogylphs. While this may be a difficult statistic to provide, it would be at least useful to have some general percentage to compare female images of elk to male.

2. From the petroglyph record alone, it is difficult to establish with certainty that the female elk was the Neolithic figure of central focus; it would be useful if the image type could be associated with material culture, other than hearths. The Neolithic date given is fairly broad, which makes it difficult to identify any specific cultures. Simply by association with rivers and images interpreted as boats, it is difficult to see an obvious or defining visual connection with either life or death, or their sources. Could the elk images simply signify rich hunting grounds, or breeding grounds? Their monumentality comes in part from their realistic representation—this could suggest a focus on the living animal rather than a mythic reference. The 'belief' here could be something as simple as, 'many elk can be found here'.

3. Again, some statistics or approximate percentages would be appropriate. It is difficult to deny that an antlerless elk is female, but Jacobson is able to provide clear examples of male elk. It would be useful to know more about these male images if one wants to draw conclusions about the significance of gender.

4. If the elk is female, it is possible she could represent a mother. But one might expect to see smaller elk representing calves, on the other hand, or some other marker of motherly

significance. Nothing other than the lack of antlers emphasizes feminine qualities or powers, motherhood included. The female elk is further characterized as a religious figure due to association with "enigmatic circles," but this only offers a vague context at best.

5. The interpretation of these boat petroglyphs depends entirely on modern ethnographic material; it is not clear whether vertical lines on boats signify souls. Unfortunately, Jacobson provides few images of the elk, itself, and none of elk with these boat petroglyphs for consideration.

6. Perhaps the female elk functions as "a metaphor for the ever renewed source of human sustenance" after all (95). But it is uncertain whether a spatial association with boat petroglyphs, even taken as symbol of the passage of death, qualifies **as** a conclusion of the elk's significance in funerary rituals. Again, material culture would strengthen such conclusions. However, Jacobson does not indicate any burials associated with these petrolgyphs. The funerary inference is weak.

Aeneolithic/Early Bronze Age Tradition, ca. late 3rd-2nd millenia BCE

1-2. From the images Jacobson cites, it is not clear that the figures are necessarily or always female. While some may be female, even that weakened generalization is not immediately clear from their features. Jacobson mentions "the modeled indications of breasts" and "the full womb of a female body" on "a considerable number of the masks" on these stones (111). One has to wonder whether the other stones indicate feminine qualities in any way at all. Is it possible that in the larger context, these stones represent both related male and female deities? Jacobson only asserts that the horns are those of a cow based on the other supposedly female references—could

certain Minsusinsk stones indicate a bull, and thus another presence in the form of masculine power?

3. Jacobson's interpretation of religious significance is somewhat vague, even if only a suggestion. It is not clear what powers or functions this deity represents. What is its influence on life and death? Or its role? Is it actually another mother figure? Unfortunately, these questions cannot be answered from visual analysis alone.

4. Perhaps there is a significance between the mask petroglyphs and Minusinsk stones, but it is not necessary that this amounts to identity or a synonymy of meaning.

5. Again, there is a vagueness in Jacobson's esteem of the Minusinsk stone's significance as a deity. This makes the connection between the Neolithic elk and the Minusinsk stone more difficult to appreciate, especially since there is no formal continuity between the two traditions of representation.

Middle & Late Bronze Age, ca. 2nd- early 1st millenia BCE

1. I will not push the issue of statistics further; the important point here, and for later, is that the deer of the Bronze Age are represented as both male and female. The phallus is a common feature among these images as a clear marker of the male gender; that is not to say it is a necessary formal convention. The phallus in this context seems more likely to come from a concern with realistic depiction rather than reaffirmation of masculinity. The female gender, at least in deer, is apparent from the complete lack of male features. As for reindeer imagery, one cannot be certain of gender reference in images with antlers and no phallus. (One cannot even be certain a reindeer is being represented! The antlers in Bronze Age deer imagery demonstrate high frequencies of variation.) I will contend, however, that any generalization of deer imagery along

the lines of gender should indicate antlers as male references. In both moose and red deer, only males have antlers; furthermore, the female reindeer has smaller antlers than the male.

2-3. These deer/cattle syncretics are less common, as Jacobson notes (119). Perhaps they do represent the merging of symbolic values, but it is difficult to say much more without material culture. The deer's frequent association with archers indicates the hunt, just as cattle led by humans indicate a domestic significance. Deer/bovine images may represent some kind of actual ritual, but there is currently no way to verify this in the archaeological context. While these are only literal readings of the petroglyphs, the potential for mythic significance complicates interpretation.

5. I will not challenge the general association with Bronze Age peoples, but it is important to highlight the discontinuity in imagery from the Neolithic period to Bronze Age. Jacobson emphasizes a ritual significance in Bronze Age imagery, especially anthropomorphic imagery: "**One** senses a world in which ritual had come to signify not only the reaffirmation of cosmogonic myth, but also the reaffirmation of culture and society" (124). It is not clear what the contents of these cosmogonic myths are in this paragraph, but one can guess Jacobson is referring to the Neolithic elk tradition. If so, what indicates a continuity of myth, or even general mythic significance, pertaining to the female deer? Bronze Age deer imagery, as noted, is an eclectic mix of male, female, and gender-ambiguous figures. Likewise, the cattle representations indicate both male and female references. Where is there a strong and independent female presence?

6-9. The next criticism follows from 5 above. While there may be no clear patriarchal context, neither is there any indication of a matriarchy, unless one assumes that domestic life privileges

the feminine. However, if one wishes to discredit the legitimacy of assumptions about masculinity, as they apply to prehistoric contexts, then it is no better to make new assumptions with the opposite result of excluding male figures or masculine qualities from domestic scenes. From the archaeology of the Andronovo people (ca. 1800-1200 BCE) it is not immediately clear that either men or women were socially privileged (Anthony 2007: 448-450). Karasuk (ca.1300-1100 BCE) archaeology presents the same vagueness, if we maintain that weapons are not a necessary sign of male dominance. In an article on Bronze Age petroglyphs, Jacobson-Tepfer indicates that the Karasuk culture is not represented by archaeological finds in western Mongolia or Tuva in South Siberia, though there are burials in the Minusinsk Basin (2002:34). What becomes evident from Jacobson-Tepfer's later discussion is the highly tentative nature of cultural conclusions drawn from petroglyph data when said petroglyphs do not correspond directly with typologies of datable artifacts.

Late Bronze Age Deer Stones, ca. early 1st millenium BCE

1 & 10. Only female reindeer can have antlers, but deer stones appear to depict stylizations of the Asian maral (red deer) if any one deer in particular (Fitzhugh 2009d: 186). More recently, Jacobson-Tepfer (2001) adopts this view of the Mongolian deer and Sayan-Altai style deer: Indeed, "the deer of the Mongolian and Sayano-Altai formulations are clearly those of True Deer (maral or elk, ***Cervus elaphus sibiricus***)" (48). Also:

> The animal referred to here and commonly in Western scholarly sources as deer is more accurately designated an elk (Cervus elaphus) known also and variously as True Deer, Red Deer, Noble Deer, ***cerf*** (French), or *maral* (Russian) (*Cervus elaphus sibiricus*). Second only to a moose (*Alces alces*) in size among cervids, the elk is a heavy, powerfulanimal with antlers that are large and widely branching, sometimes extending more vertically, sometimes vertically and back over the animal's spine. In contrast to reindeer, only males develop antlers. Moreover, elk develop two clearly recognizable

> forehead tines, while the racks of reindeer (like North American caribou) are characterized by one fore-head tine (34).

Interestingly, despite dropping the reindeer claim crucial to placing Mongolian deer within the Deer Goddess argument, in this newer article Jacobson-Tepfer nonetheless suggests, albeit briefly, that the mythic or cosmological significance of Mongolian deer may be explained by her 1993 account (2002:56). However, she refers to her Deer Goddess simply, and vaguely, as "the fundamental sign of both origins and end" (2002: 56). She maintains the line of reasoning that the Mongolian deer tradition leads into the Early Nomadic art tradition. Yet, to deny the female significance of the Mongolian deer is to either displace it from the Deer Goddess scheme, or to contradict the Deer Goddess scheme in a damaging way.

A male cosmogonic force in the DSKC (ca. 1200-700 BCE) directly challenges Jacobson's (1993) definition of the *female* source of life and death. This poses a further consequence in detaching the important connection to the Minusinsk Stone tradition of the Okunev period (ca. 2 mil. BCE). Without a strong female reference to relate the two traditions—already separated by significant time, space, and difference in formal convention—it becomes less likely that anything but a coincidence can be made of the choice for each to carve stele. This would be nearly as flawed as asserting a cultural continuity between petroglyph traditions simply because each had chosen to create petroglyphs. Or, more absurdly, imagine that someone tried to claim a cultural or semantic continuity between a phrase of English and one of Mongolian simply in virtue of each representing natural language as a form of expression, and without knowing the actual meaning of the phrases at hand.

Obviously, Jacobson-Tepfer wishes to maintain the legitimacy of the Deer Goddess argument even in light of a male Mongolian deer (2002). It is unfortunate that she does not

anticipate my criticism in her article. The best counterargument might be to reinterpret the Mongolian deer as a gender-neutral figure, then reassert a reference to the Neolithic female elk as source of life and death. Even so, one must concede that reference does not necessarily constitute meaning. The Mongolian deer may not have the same semantics as the Neolithic elk simply in virtue of referring to it, or referring to the same basic animal which the Neolithic image refers to. In fact, the styles are so different from each other, in ways that suggest such different aspects of deer, that it may be best to consider each in its own context without assumptions about larger belief systems before imposing interpretations with religious or socio-political significance. The Neolithic elk's realism hardly anticipates the syncretic form of the Mongolian deer, whose primary significance must lie in the context of burial ritual.

Unfortunately, Jacobson's (1993) understanding **of** DSKC archaeology lacks the benefit of modern scientific studies, including radiocarbon dating. For example, Fitzhugh's recent work in Mongolia challenges Jacobson's view that "the [*khirigsuurs*] give no clues regarding social ranking or gender reference" (2009a-d; 1993:43). Fitzhugh's conclusions about DSKC burial practices indicate hierarchy, with prestige accorded to the dead based on size of burial, number of associated horse-head burials/hearths, and spatial relation to visible features of natural landscape and deer stones (2009d). Jacobson makes her assertions with a misunderstanding of the *khirigsuur's* function as a burial mound. The fact that *khirigsuurs* are burials would, were it not for the Mongolian deer's likelihood of being male, actually support Jacobson's simplistic reasoning that a figure's association with death indicates that it is the actual source of death.

11-12. Jacobson reasons somewhat cyclically from Scythian babas and Cimmerian man stones that the Mongolian deer stones portray the deer as a female power. The absence argument here

assumes that the image of an enthroned female at Pazyryk and Scythian representations is the later manifestation of the Mongolian deer and Neolithic elk, absent from Scytho-Siberian standing stones. In general, anthropomorphic stele are taken to indicate an important female power, whether that power is visually depicted or not. The Minusinsk stones serve as the first instance of such a tradition in Jacobson's account. If one recognizes the Mongolian deer as male, however, the analogy between Minusinsk stones and deer stone becomes questionable; similarly DSKC and Early Nomadic/Scytho-Siberian anthropomorphic stele lose their explicit feminine connection. Now it seems that neither refers explicitly to a female presence, and it is not clear at all how the deer stone refers indirectly to any female presence. In sum, an analogy to Scythian babas and Cimmerian men, whose image suggests an association with the seated female, cannot be extended back in time to the deer stone tradition in which no clear female representations emerge.

The absence argument is stated more explicitly near the end of the book: "Even if her material form or image were absent, she was indicated by one of her own attributes, or by the body or attributes of others. In other words, if the tree or the post symbolized the goddess, then the bull and the chariot may also refer to her presence" (227). In the final chapter, Jacobson considers the Deer Goddess as an analog to Near Eastern female goddesses. This ties in the early Bronze Age bovine cults, and introduces the possibility of a larger symbolism related to the Deer Goddess. Jacobson is prompted by Herodotus' statement that the Scythian's primary goddess was Hestia, the Greek goddess of the hearth (Herodotus book IV, 59; Godolphin: 136). This identity should be treated cautiously, however, as Herodotus claims that the Scythians used "no images, altars, or temples, except in the worship of Ares" (136). Perhaps Herodotus extrapolated from the nomads' use of hearth ritual a worship of Hestia. It is not certain what the reliability of

his claim is, as he was a foreign author who likely chose to put the Scythians' religious views in terms of Greek culture, assuming he had not already encountered them in such a biased transmission.

After the Neolithic female elk disappears, one begins to wonder how long the goddess as deer can remain absent without losing her sway. To maintain, nonetheless, that a deer stone with a male deer refers to the missing female deer as a source of life, one would have to acknowledge that the male deer had gained a more prominent place in the symbolism of cosmology. It would even be reasonable to conclude that the male deer had become the sign of life and death by assuming the archaic female's role. This would demand a new formulation of Jacobson's scheme: Neolithic female elk, to early Bronze Age cow/woman deity, to middle Bronze cattle and deer of both genders, to late Bronze male deer, to early Iron male deer (inheriting the late Bronze significance), to Scytho-Siberian Deer Goddess anthropomorph. This does not invalidate the cultural influences Jacobson identifies with an art-historical eye, but it complicates any clear and consistent association of deer with a specific gender.

Early Iron Age Scytho-Siberian culture, ca. 1st mil. BCE

Whether there is **any** significance **in the** gender in deer stones and early Iron Age standing stones, the influence of the deer stone tradition on Early Nomadic art is difficult to challenge. Even recent work at Biluut confirms this connection (Fitzhugh 2012; Kortum 2012). In her analysis of Early Nomadic and Scytho-Siberian art, Jacobson (1993) offers important insight into the formal consistencies of their symbolic systems, or to say it with less implication, their artistic conventions, themes, and motifs. Some form of vertical axis, whether symbolic or not, emerges in all of the stele traditions discussed so far. This may be a simple structural consequence: the

stones needed to be visible, and they needed to display a general anthropomorphic shape. On the other hand, it is still important that in the Early Nomadic tradition both humans and horses could be crowned in a manner that indicates the importance of bird, deer, and tree.

Even so, it is not clear before the purported Early Nomad female deity emerges in representation, whether animal figures have any clear association with gender. Jacobson can only identify Scytho-Siberian and Early Nomad deer as female by their historical appearance between late Bronze Age Mongolian deer (presumed to be female) and the seated female of the early Iron Age. She says little about the gender of the related ram (caprid) image. As in the Bronze Age petroglyph and deer stone traditions, one should ask if gender really had a defining influence in the meaning of animal symbolism. Considering the concern for realism, if there is still a significance to gender, the emphasis of horn and antler in Scytho-Siberian and Early Nomadic art suggests the male deer and the male caprid. If one insists upon attributing religious significance to gender, the seated female may represent a feminine aspect of the afterlife distinct from the masculine natural world as dominated by predators and death. What emerges there is an understanding of the world as volatile, but the afterlife as a stabilizing realm. The female might still symbolize renewal and the continuation of life, but it becomes less certain that she is the *source* of death. It must be pointed out once more that an association with death does not establish a figure as being itself the source of death. In this pictorial scheme, the goddess does not call men to death; that is the natural world's role.

VII: CONCLUSION: THE MONGOLIAN DEER SPIRIT

Inspired by the natural grace of the antlered maral, the Mongolian deer's male aspect was de-emphasized by omitting phallic representations. This is a de-emphasis because the phallus seems to be a common feature of Bronze Age deer imagery until Mongolian deer appear; we also see distinct female deer (doe) images throughout the Bronze Age. The later introduction of clear and distinct male and female references in the petroglyphic record helps to show the de-emphasis of gender, in general, for classic Mongolian deer imagery, especially on deer stones. However, the large antler still frustrates any understanding of female symbolism. If we understand antlers and phalluses as separate and distinct male references, we must acknowledge that removing only one male reference among two does not amount to an obvious female reference. If one still wants to insist that the deer emphasizes gender, this will count as a strike against Jacobson's Deer Goddess, but it does not hurt an understanding of the deer as a natural spirit or a shamanic reference. A male deer can still be used to emphasize the basic qualities of the deer, though certainly not distinct feminine qualities. The classic formulation of the deer with wave-like antlers, long snout, fine legs (if any at all), and curvilinear torso indicate, I believe**,** the graceful nature of the deer in general. These conventions define the Mongolian deer, but its variations demonstrate the potential for its use in different compositions and situations. Ultimately, the deer seems to have had significance both within and outside the burial context.

To look outside the burial context, I studied Mongolian deer in petroglyphs. My 2011 McNair research built on the classic definition of the Mongolian deer and analyzed a number of figures, mostly Mongolian deer variations (Fig. 10). Five hundred twenty-one total figures were documented in 106 petroglyph samples found mostly in western Mongolia (Jacobson-Tepfer *et al.* 2001; Kortum 2005, 2008, unpublished). Eighty-three images of stylized deer/animals (16%)

and a few other animals of similar features were represented in at least 10 varieties of scenes including nine hunts with archers pursuing deer on foot or on horse/camel (8.5%), 15 attacks by wolves/dogs individually or in packs (14.5%), four domestic scenes (4%), and four "flying" (two in hunt scenes) (4%). Thirty-seven static or solitary scenes make up most of the imagery (35%), then 27 mixed animal groups (25%). Most intriguing were an extremely rare mating scene, a caravan scene, and a figure riding a deer.

In most cases, deer face right, often in front of other figures when present, as if leading them somewhere. In such cases, stylized deer appear most often near the top of scenes (18%). Some noteworthy varieties were documented: 13 deer without antlers (16%), 16 deer with penises (19%), five bulls (6%), five moose (6%), and one horse (<1%). In composition, one impressive "mosaic" deer was observed, six deer outlined, and five partially pecked. The body part most varied seemed to be antlers, although styles and percentages are difficult to establish due to the diverse range in qualitative features. Overall, most figures were pecked, or at least filled in, completely. Exact techniques could not always be discerned from silhouette replications.

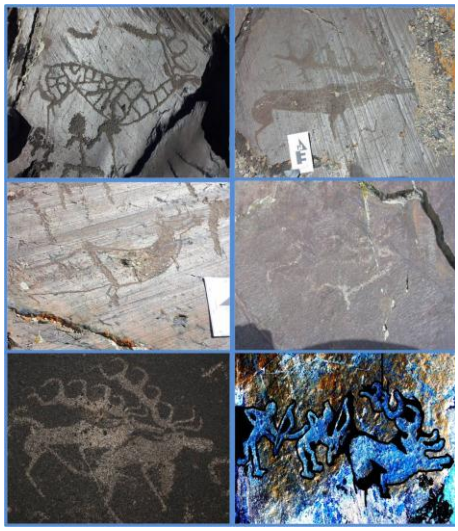


Fig. 10: *Mongolian deer variations in western Mongolia*

(Richard Kortum)

Most variations in Mongolian deer imagery seem to occur in the Iron Age, when the deer often appear to be cruder representations. The linguistic system created in my 2011 studies demonstrated a significant variability in Mongolian deer figures of the early Iron Age. It seems that as the imagery was produced farther away in time from the classic period (approximately 1300-800BCE), the regularity of its style gave way to

less-formulaic representations. The Mongolian deer may have been de-mythologized, or simply devalued by new cultures; or it may have been recognized as an important figure to be utilized in new fashions. An image of two archers aiming at a Mongolian deer might indicate aggression or disapproval of the figure type; on the other hand, the Mongolian deer' s power might be invoked for a successful hunt by a later culture who recognized its general significance, perhaps, as a spirit helper. In light of the popularity of the "flying" deer interpretation related to shamanic views, it is surprising to find many deer without bird-like beaks, even in more authentic classic-style Mongolian deer. I believe this reflects a more natural understanding of the deer in its earth-bound form. As for scenes of wolf attacks, hunts, deer without antlers or with penises, and deer in other mundane situations, one may suspect devaluation or change in the meaning of the "flying" deer as a religious symbol over time, if that is what it truly was in the late Bronze Age. On the other hand, one might interpret certain scenes as a sign of the deer's extension to new roles and areas of life. In that sense, these varieties lend themselves to an understanding of the deer as a helper spirit. Following the references on deer stones, whether shamanic or pre-shamanic, the interpretation of the Mongolian deer as a spirit figure offers the most insight into the DSKC people. Its power seems to come from a connection with the natural world—the earth and the mountains—and the sky as heaven, or spirit realm.

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*_Mongolian Shamanism_ was originally published in the Mongolian language using Cyrillic script. Unfortunately, the English copy of the book appears to not indicate the publisher, unless it does so in Cyrillic, which remains illegible to me. I have searched online for the publisher and will continue to do so. The credibility of this source has been personally assured to me by Dr. William Fitzhugh, Director of Arctic Studies at the Smithsonian Institute and author of numerous materials cited in my thesis.

*Vitebsky (2005) is not cited in-text, but it is an entertaining read on modern Siberian reindeer herders.