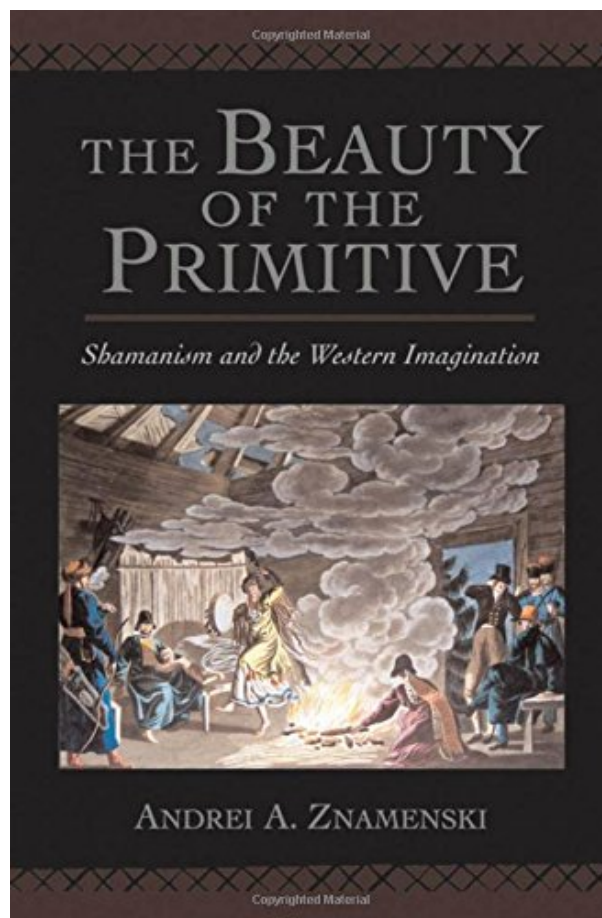


**THE BEAUTY OF THE PRIMITIVE:
SHAMANISM AND WESTERN
IMAGINATION BY ANDREI A. ZNAMENSKI**



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Shamanism and the Western Imagination



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Review

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"The Beauty of the Primitive is an admirable piece of scholarship. Erudite and shrewdly observed, it tells the fascinating tale of the interaction between scholarly anthropology and popular culture, as optimistic Westerners created their idealized stereotypes of shamans and shamanic practice. The book confirms yet again the observation that "we see things not as they are, we see things as we are." It is also a treasure trove of memorable stories."--Philip Jenkins, Author of *Dream Catchers: How Mainstream America Discovered Native Spirituality*

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For the past forty years shamanism has drawn increasing attention among the general public and academics. There is an enormous literature on shamanism, but no one has tried to understand why and how Western intellectual and popular culture became so fascinated with the topic. Behind fictional and non-fictional works on shamanism, Andrei A. Znamenski uncovers an exciting story that mirrors changing Western attitudes toward the primitive. *The Beauty of the Primitive* explores how shamanism, an obscure word introduced by the eighteenth-century German explorers of Siberia, entered Western humanities and social sciences, and has now become a powerful idiom used by nature and pagan communities to situate their spiritual quests and anti-modernity sentiments. The major characters of *The Beauty of the Primitive* are past and present Western scholars, writers, explorers, and spiritual seekers with a variety of views on shamanism. Moving from Enlightenment and Romantic writers and Russian exile ethnographers to the anthropology of Franz Boas to Mircea Eliade and Carlos Castaneda, Znamenski details how the shamanism idiom was gradually transplanted from Siberia to the Native American scene and beyond. He also looks into the circumstances that prompted scholars and writers at first to marginalize shamanism as a mental disorder and then to recast it as high spiritual wisdom in the 1960s and the 1970s. Linking the growing interest in shamanism to the rise of anti-modernism in Western culture and intellectual life, Znamenski examines the role that anthropology, psychology, environmentalism, and Native Americana have played in the emergence of neo-shamanism. He discusses the sources that inspire Western neo-shamans and seeks to explain why lately many of these spiritual seekers have increasingly moved away from non-Western tradition to European folklore. A work of intellectual discovery, *The Beauty of the Primitive* shows how scholars, writers, and spiritual seekers shape their writings and experiences to suit contemporary cultural, ideological, and spiritual needs. With its interdisciplinary approach and engaging style, it promises to be the definitive account of this neglected strand of intellectual history.

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Most helpful customer reviews

22 of 24 people found the following review helpful.

The Best Book on Shamanism

By Fu Xi

This is without doubt the best book on Shamanism I have ever read, even better than Eliade's famous one. My central interest is not shamanism but divination and early ways of thought. I had felt I needed to have a better understanding of Shamanism and so picked up this book after I met the author at a conference.

It's primary focus is modernized versions of shamanism but one learns about original forms because of the

author's considerable knowledge of the subject. He is sympathetic to modernized versions such as Harner's "Core Shamanism" but always makes clear how this version has been greatly altered to fit the interests and lifestyle of modern Westerners.

For anyone interested in Shamanism this book is the best possible start; experts too will learn from it.

I give this my highest recommendation.

11 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

Very Well Thought Out Take on Sahamanism

By S. Pactor

Probably every serious book on Shamanism is going to be written in relation to Eliade's famous "Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy." The Beauty of the Primitive is nothing different in that regard. What is difference is that this author is a Russian and he knows about the history of Shaman studies in Siberia, and that makes all the difference. He points out how Eliade, who was himself an "armchair scholar" incorporated accounts of early Russian "scholars" who were often political exiles first, and anthropologists only because they were stuck in the middle of Siberia. The success of this book lies in the linkage of Siberian shamanism studies to the rise of North American Native American Shamanism, and then, in a neat final chapter, he shows how these neo-Shamans have gone back to Siberia to "help" Native people rediscover their shamanic heritage. All along, he writes with humor and affection, and I quite enjoyed this book because of it.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Fantastic overview of the birth of neo-shamanism & western curiosity for shamanic spirituality

By M. J. O'Connell

'Andrei Znamenski, well known as a critical scholar of shamanism in various contexts, has written an extremely readable, erudite, and nuanced analysis of contemporary forms of shamanism.'

I couldn't agree more with this succinct analysis of Znamenski's text. It's a fascinating read for those who are both involved in, and curious about, modern shamanic activities and practices. I have been involved in shamanism for over 15 years and was always curious to gain the same academic insight that is so easily obtainable on the world of Buddhism, on shamanism too. This is the only text that I have found to so clearly highlight the developments and origins of neo-shamanism. Highly recommended. And although academic in scope and origin, it is highly accessible, highly readable and highly entertaining.

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The publications *The Beauty Of The Primitive: Shamanism And Western Imagination* By Andrei A. Znamenski, from basic to challenging one will certainly be a really valuable works that you could take to change your life. It will certainly not give you negative statement unless you don't get the significance. This is undoubtedly to do in checking out an e-book to get over the definition. Generally, this publication qualified *The Beauty Of The Primitive: Shamanism And Western Imagination* By Andrei A. Znamenski is reviewed since you actually like this kind of publication. So, you can obtain simpler to comprehend the impression as well as definition. As soon as even more to always remember is by reading this book ***The Beauty Of The Primitive: Shamanism And Western Imagination* By Andrei A. Znamenski**, you could fulfil hat your curiosity start by finishing this reading book.

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