

SHAMAN

Articles in this volume are dedicated to

Vilmos Voigt

An outstanding scholar of religious studies,
and a member of the Editorial Board of

*Shaman. Journal of the International Society
for Academic Research on Shamanism*

on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday

Part Two

Front and back covers show motives taken from Sámi shamans's drums,
from Ernst Manker's *Die lappische Zaubertrommel* (Stockholm, 1938).

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The Self-Definition of a Community: Shaman Stories among the Nganasan of Northern Siberia

VIRÁG DYEKISS

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

Stories told among the Nganasan people of the Taïmyr Peninsula in Northern Siberia that recount the outstanding deeds of their shamans retain their central importance to this day. A significant proportion of these myths recount the unrepeatable deeds of the mythical shamans, the ur-fathers of the clans (Khoterie, Fala). The outstanding deeds of the shamans that followed him move beyond the general abilities of the shamans; they shock their audience and thus become suited for generations to recount them and to use a particular shaman story as a reference to a particular clan as well. These deeds could be positive (for example, freezing a flowing river to make it crossable, resurrecting a person who has been dead for a year and curing a deity) or negative (for example, making a drum for himself out of the skin of an orphan girl). Each of the shaman's deeds has an influence on the community with which he is entrusted. The figure of the shaman is therefore suitable to representing the entire clan.

The Nganasan people (or Nya by their endonym), who are among the Northern Samoyed peoples, has traditionally led a nomadic lifestyle in the northern part of the Taïmyr Peninsula. According to available data, they number around 1,000. They have tended herds of reindeer of relatively small size, and they were primarily engaged in hunting wild reindeer. Since these animals wandered to the north in spring, to the windswept wasteland of the tundra to avoid mosquitos as much as possible, and then in the autumn they again headed south to spend the winter in the forest-covered tundra areas richer in food, the basic experience of the Nganasan traditional lifestyle was one of migration. Moreover, catching wild geese, hunting various fur-bearing animals as well as traditional hunting and gathering also played an important role in their lives. Four or five extended families would migrate together with their sleighs filled with goods and passengers and pulled by domesticated

reindeer. These groups were separated during the spring and summer seasons and moved to independent, smaller quarters and then united again in the autumn. Following the herds of reindeer, the Nganasan traveled a migratory route of over 8,000 kilometers and thus traversed the territory of their own clan. We know of altogether eight groups that once migrated together, and they were in close contact with the Dolgan who lived a bit further south (Popov 1966, 8–9). This lifestyle marked by following the migration of the wild reindeer with the purpose of hunting and not focusing on keeping domesticated reindeer is unique in the region. The northern part of the Taïmyr Peninsula is primarily a flat area about 100–110 meters above sea level. The plain is divided by lakes and small hills of 100–200 meters in height. The most significant lake in the region is Lake Taïmyr, which is 700 sq. km in size and collects water from a number of rivers. These water courses and the catchment areas of the Rivers Pyasina and Khatanga that run into the sea played an important role in Nganasan hunting. During the hunt they would force the migrating reindeer into the rivers, at which point hunters lying in wait could easily aim their arrows at the animals scrambling about in the river and make the fatal shot. This method called for close cooperation among the hunters and ensured that they would outlive the winter. Knowing the migratory routes and the best hunting spots comprised an important part of the knowledge they required for survival.

The Nganasan of Avam, who considered themselves a separate tribe, migrated in three groups to the plain territories bordered by the Rivers Avam, Pyasina, Ugarnaia, Buotankaga and Dudypta, which were occasionally dotted with hills; the overwhelming majority currently lives in the small settlement of Ust'-Avam. The Avam Nganasan group includes members of the Momdye, Ngamtusuo, Turdagin, Chunanchar and Porbin clans. In addition to origin, a network formed on the basis of territory was also very important.¹ The other large group of Nganasan is that of the Vadeyev. Nganasan, who live further south; it consists of seven clans—the folklore material collected among them is very small.

The language of the Nganasan falls within the Northern Samoyed branch of the Uralic language family and is closely related to Nenets and Enets. The Avam and Vadeyev Nganasan speak two different dialects.

¹ For the Khanty, see Ruttkay-Miklárián 2012, 29–39.

Unfortunately, language loss is currently very much advanced, and this process seems to be unstoppable due to changing life conditions.

The traditional lifestyle of the Nganasan was not completely altered by the process of agricultural collectivization, since members of the three collectives organized in the 1930s continued to engage in fishing as well as hunting and keeping reindeer. Settling the nomad groups and building up Ust'-Avam began in 1970. In 1971, the Taimyr State Farm was established, which collected the hunters of the collective into a large organization. The prey had to be transferred to the collection centers so that they could fulfill the economic plan, so it was not efficacious to move away from urban centers (Ziker 2002). Within the state farm, an increasing number of Russian hunters arrived on the territory in the hopes of finding easy prey (Gracheva 1973). Therefore, a disproportionately large-scale destruction of the reindeer was now underway. In the 1980s, the domesticated reindeer died from contaminated lichen. The nomadic lifestyle and migration therefore came to a halt. The use of new means of transport became common among the Nganasan (motorboats and motorized sleighs), but maintenance, repair and imported parts were unavailable to them. Moreover, these means were not suitable to transporting large amounts of prey, even though traditional hunting methods enabled them to bag a great deal at once. The lifestyle of this group of people therefore changed so dramatically that it had to lead to the large-scale transformation of its culture. By now the structure of the traditional culture has broken down, and the environmental and lifestyle conditions that created it have disappeared from daily life. However, elements can naturally be found in contemporary settled environments and even urban ones as well.

Based on Nganasan folkloric texts, we also gain insight into a spirituality and worldview that was integrally tied to their traditional lifestyle. As with other Siberian peoples, the shaman occupied a central place among the Nganasan as well in dealing with the problems that had emerged in their communities. Stories of shamans play an extremely significant role in the folklore. A small proportion of these stories are about mythical shaman ancestors who lived long ago, while other stories commemorate the deeds of the shamans with outstanding talents within the various shaman clans.

The mythical shamans used to live on earth before contemporary humans and had a hand in the formation of the world. We do not find proper names in these stories, and there is no sign of these shamans

being the founders of the shaman dynasties that exist today. Two types of texts fall under this category, texts about: (1) *shaman families that departed to the upper and lower worlds* and (2) *the shaman stranded on the moon*. In the first case, one of the families, not having found prey on this earth, flew into the sky on its sacrificed reindeer, while the other headed downriver. They both found a great deal of prey, one found fur-bearing animals and the other found fish. The link between the two families was severed because during one of their meetings children from above frightened those below, saying that there was a huge number of epidemics with them and that they would therefore not meet again.² The North Star is considered to be the opening through which the family moving upwards departed, and the Northern Light is considered to be the glimmer of an axe thrown down by the people that left for the sky.

The story of the *shaman stranded on the moon* is a myth about spots on the moon. Its hero is a shaman who wanted to reach the moon, but once he had arrived, he was stranded there and now he can be seen there with his drum. In another version, the shaman became the husband of the moon (Wagner-Nagy 2002). Shamans today are unable to reach the heavenly bodies along their shaman path, and thus the husband of the moon is the most powerful shaman and the source of shaman power.

Each of the stories taking place in mythical times have contributed in certain ways to the development of the current form of the world but have no direct influence on the lives of the people today. With the passing of the mythical age, the world is no longer changing.

Texts and Legends about Historical Shamans

Nganasan folklore was first collected in the 1930s. Through his knowledge of Sakha, A. A. Popov easily communicated with the Dolgan living with the Nganasan and thus collected valuable epics recorded in both the Nganasan and Dolgan languages as well as spending an entire crop year at the Nganasan quarters along with the great shaman in the Ngamtusuo family. B. O. Dolgikh was also engaged in his

² Gracheva manuscript 1972; Labanauskas 1992; 2001; Popov 1984; Simchenko 1996, 144–6.

first fieldwork at the same time. He systemically collected treasures of textual folklore, but, because the Nganasan generally spoke no Russian, he significantly expanded the texts he had sketchily jotted down when they were published. His early field diaries can be found in Krasnoïarsk, and the materials from his collection during his later trip are held in Moscow. Iu. B. Simchenko visited the Nganasan for the first time as a student of Dolgikh and wrote his Candidate of Sciences dissertation on the Nganasan folklore texts. This dissertation has not been published, and I have thus relied on the manuscript for this study. Popov's legacy was passed on to G. N. Gracheva, who carried it on; while on the staff of the *Kunstkamera* in St. Petersburg, she made a number of field trips to the Taïmyr Peninsula. Her field diaries and research reports can be found in the *Kunstkamera* archives, and she also published a handful of folklore texts. Linguist Valentin Goussev, and his research teams aimed to record the Nganasan language. They considered all linguistic utterances important, ranging from conversations to rhymes. I owe a debt of gratitude to him for granting me access to his material, some of which can also be found on the Internet (see Sources). French researcher Jean-Luc Lambert was also a member of Goussev's research team; he primarily collected shaman traditions.

The shaman legends represent a highly significant group for every researcher of Nganasan folklore, and thus during Goussev's effort to collect spontaneous conversations his informants very often shared such stories with one another. We cannot conclude the role these texts played in the community from all this data, but it is certain that they were frequently revived and, indeed, living stories. Moreover, they comprise a group that are extant even today. The majority of the shaman legends are about outstanding deeds performed by highly significant shamans, as the community remembers them (Hultkrantz 1995). With these stories, they acknowledge their abilities and they legitimize the knowledge of both the great shaman ancestor and his descendants today. Often, the story is also about the end of the shaman's life, which stems from an error or transgression on his own part or on that of the community. The shaman appearing in the legend is not necessarily signified by name; he is merely mentioned as "the shaman." There are a number of reasons for this. The use of the name has been protected by a large number of rules and taboos among the Nganasan; younger family members were not even allowed to utter the name of older relatives in conversation when they were present, not even as a form of address. The more powerful the creature, the more

powerful the taboo under which his name falls; it is thus understandable why the names of very powerful shamans appear so scarcely. At the same time, if we do find personal names in a particular text, it aids us in linking the whole chain of stories to a clan or a person.

These stories center on three outstanding shaman dynasties; as legends, their role is to legitimize and determine value (Mészáros 2007, 63). Most of the legends are about shamans in the Kosterkin family (or the Ngamtusuo family in Nganasan). It must be noted that the members of this family have been happy to cooperate with researchers consistently from the beginning of the collection efforts—this may even be the reason for the wealth of material on them. Legends about shamans in the Ngamtusuo family are primarily associated with Khoterie, the shaman ancestor who dives below the water, and D'uhad'e, the very powerful great-grandfather. The most favored shaman legend, of which we know of over ten versions, is about Shaman Khoterie, who dives under the water. The community does not protect him properly during his journey in the underworld, and a child (or a feeble-minded person in another version) pulls out a hook holding the shaman too soon from under the ice. The confused shaman thus loses his path and is never able to return again. Khoterie, the most powerful member of the Ngamtusuo family, is the one whom every descendant calls when in need (Dobzhanskaia 2002). In each version, the story is tied to one of the significant shaman ancestors of the Ngamtusuo family. At the end of a lean year, Shaman Khoterie asks his people to cut three holes in the river ice and lower him down the middle hole having donned his shaman attire and carrying his drum. Afterwards, they are asked to migrate along their regular route and, when they return in the autumn, to guard him for a whole night and then pull him out of the hole with hooks. In some of the versions, he calls attention to the fact that it is very important to watch the hole so that children or irresponsible adults do not come too close to the hole.

Still, at night, a few children or a foolish man pull the shaman out but grow so frightened when he pops up from the depths of the water that they drop him back. The shaman can no longer return (or does not want to), and he cannot present the gifts that he brought. The name of the lake becomes Lake Shaman and at times one can hear drumming from the depths of the lake or catch a glimpse of the shaman at sunset.

The legend is known in five different versions. (K-07_Hotarye2.doc; Lambert 2003, tb_SM-06_hotarie.doc; NS-08_hoterie.doc.) Table 1 below illustrates these versions and the major motifs.

TABLE 1

VERSION	PROTAGONIST	REQUEST	TRANSGRESSION	OUTWARD APPEAR- ANCE OF THE SHAMAN	THE ENDING OF THE STORY
1.	Shaman Khoterie	That he be lowered into the depths of the water for the entire winter due to famine	Despite his request, he is left alone, the fool pulls him out and he drops him back	He rises out of the water, wearing dog fur and a headdress	The drumming can be heard for three days, and he throws out five salmon
2.	The shaman of the Nya tribe	That he be lowered to the bottom of the lake so that there should be a good life	Two young boys pull him out and drop him back out of fear	He is holding on to the rope	The people will drown in the water
3.	Shaman of the quarters	That he be lowered for three days due to famine	Youngsters pull him out despite his request	He brings a tree that grows fish, under which the shaman can be seen	Sometimes, the shaman can be seen even today at twilight
4.	Shaman Khoterie	He wishes to bag prey and goes under	At night, a fool pulls him out and drops him back in	He is covered with fish scales and reindeer fur	The origin of Lake Shaman
5.	Shaman Khoterie	He wishes to bag prey and goes under	At night, a fool pulls him out and drops him back in	He is covered with fish scales, reindeer fur and partridge skin	If it had not been for the fool, he would have brought about a good life

In the first version, the story is told by one of the descendants of the shaman. However, it does not seem to reach back to ancient times. The informant even says who was related to the fool that dropped him back and what his name was. The story is at once about a shaman with unusually great power and about the limits of the shaman's power. The shaman who remained submerged for half a year, that is, who left for a spiritual journey that lasted a number of months, had unique abilities: he suspends earthly life for such a long time and travels the netherworld, not afraid of losing his way or coming to harm since he had promised that he would return. Only a few shamans depart with such self-confidence among the Nganasan shamans. At the same time, it is not only the community that needs the shaman; it is the shaman that also relies on the community. Responsible hunters were to stand watch provided they would be able to wait for the proper moment, even though it was clear that he would emerge from the water soon. Learning to wait is indispensable for adult life among hunters since one impatient hunter in a group hunt may endanger the livelihood of the entire clan by frightening the wild animals approaching the net. The young people who are responsible for keeping the wild reindeer running in the right direction may experience particularly strong temptation during this time. They are not actively participating in the hunt, and the glory of bagging the prey is not theirs. However, their role is still very important and filled with responsibility.

In the shaman legend, the curiosity of the children (and that of the halfwit in other versions) causes the downfall of the shaman. He is pulled out of the water early and then dropped back. It can clearly be seen on the clothing and the appearance of the shaman that he is not ready to return; his appearance is animal-like, his body is covered with dog fur, reindeer fur or fish scales. He is therefore not yet part of the human world. His clothing also reflects what kinds of gifts he brings to the people: the scales and the fish-producing tree refer to fish, and the face covered with reindeer fur and the antler-like headdress refer to reindeer. Because he is dropped back, the shaman loses his way, he can never again reemerge from the lake, and thus he cannot provide a good life for the tribe either. At the end of the stories, there is usually no mention of a particular retaliation in this case, but the entire tribe suffers from this carelessness.

D'uhad'e is a member of the Kosterkin family, who is sufficiently distant in the collective memory to have become almost a mythical figure.

However, there are people today who have seen him in action, and his figure lives on in the community. The attributes and great deeds of his shaman ancestors are sometimes associated with him as well. The most important example is the attribute Sirie (White) attached to his name, which refers to the first shaman ancestor of the Kosterkin family, the first shaman who was frequently referred to as White Man or Iceman, as well as D'uhad'e's father, who also had the same nickname (Lambert 2003, 207). The narrative tied to the figure of D'uhad'e (or to D'uhad'e's grandfather) tells us that he took a wolf that had been decimating his herd and conjured it into his daughter-in-law's womb, that the child was born with the tail of a wolf, and that, besides his abilities as a shaman, he was also an excellent hunter. It is not clear whether this great deed was performed by Shaman D'uhad'e or his grandfather, but it is certain that the wolf-shaman image is associated with the name of D'uhad'e.³ D'uhad'e is strongly associated with thunder and with the god of thunder as well. According to an observation among the Nganasan, thunder is closely tied to warm summer weather since it is in the midst of intense thunder that the black spring clouds that bring warmth replace the winter sky that brings only white clouds. The change of seasons is often captured as a battle between the family of Thunder deity and the icemen. Once, the summer heat did not stop for so long that it prevented the migration of the group and Shaman D'uhad'e attempted to ascertain the cause. He learned that the younger brother of the Thunder deity was wounded during the battle against the icemen-clan and, although he was very frightened of the task, he was able to cure the deity. This refers to a particular power: as a human shaman, he was successful in curing a supernatural being (Labanauskas 2001). His name is also associated with a story in which he finds his lost children and reindeer among the Dolgan and then aids the Dolgan in return for their care, as the Dolgan have lived under poorer circumstances than his own people, and thus he aids them till the end of his days. This loyalty is characteristic of his whole family, including his children, Tub'aku and D'emn'im: they would even aid the Dolgan to the neglect of their own people (Wagner-Nagy 2002, 201).

Stories of the initiation and selection of shamans in the Ngamtusoo or Kosterkin (Russian version of the name) family are familiar in a

³ HL-89_tajbaing.doc; K-97_Tejbulaa.doc.

number of versions since the researchers put down the initiation vision of both D'uhad'e and his two sons. All three versions contain a number of identical elements and the Pox plays an important role in marking the process of becoming a shaman because he already chooses the future shaman as a baby at infancy and he puts the child in an unusual place (under a table or under a sleigh) as a sign of it being chosen (Labanauskas 1992, 57).

The female shaman Noboptie is primarily mentioned in connection with her unusual assistant spirit; her assistant was a *barusi*, a creature with a missing arm and leg who maintained contact with the dead (Lambert 2003). The figures of Tub'aku and D'emn'imie appear primarily in adventure stories and life story narratives. Since they are contemporaries of a significant number of informants, they have personal experiences with them, aiding them in difficult deliveries, successful enquiries about the deceased and curing illnesses. I will not discuss these here since my purpose is to present the stories of great deeds performed by shamans that have become stable stories and not to introduce important rituals and cures.

The story of the shaman of the Porbin family who resurrected from death is familiar in a number of versions, each of which contains four episodes: the shaman dies of the pox, but a year later he returns to his shocked younger brother, his face chewed up by mice, and they start to wander together. A river stands in their way, but under cover of night the elder brother takes the caravan across the river with a great deal of noise, while he pushes the face of the younger brother down on his resting place so he would not interfere with his conjuring. On the other bank, they are soon visited by a father who is looking for a cure for his sick daughter. The shaman cures the daughter and then marries her. In a trance that lasts a few days, he sees how particular items of clothing are prepared, and he makes the shaman clothing and the drum with the help of his father-in-law and younger brother (Dolgikh 1976). The other related plot is that he goes with another shaman to the netherworld for a dead girl and they are able to take her despite a great deal of danger, although one of the shamans dies in a number of the versions. However, these plots are not only related to the shaman with the unknown name in the Porbin family; in some of the versions they are also associated with the powerful shamans of the Chunanchar family. From this example, we can also see that it is the stories that are significant for the community first and foremost, stories of the great deeds of the shamans

that demonstrate that, even in very hopeless situations, these figures are capable of providing aid and that they are the ones to whom one can turn. The person of the shaman becomes secondary to the success story.

The Chunanchar family calls itself the Nganasan king. They were the first to establish contact with the Russians, they were more well-to-do and powerful than the other families, and the authorities also supported them. The following legends are known about one of their shamans who was called Fala, that is, Stone, because of his stone heart: once, they started their migration later because the women did not begin giving birth on time, but Fala induced their labor (Lambert 2003, 250). However, by the time they reached the river, it was already uncrossable. So he left drumsticks on the bank of the river at night, and by morning slabs of ice had accumulated to form a bridge (Simchenko manuscript). After this feat, he grew overconfident, skinned a little orphan girl with the approval of the elders of the group and made a drum from her skin. The drum made the misdeed known to the world with a powerful sound that was even heard in far and distant lands, and the girl returned during the drumming to take care of the shaman.⁴ Because of this transgression, every man dies young in the Chunanchar family, and there are very few of them—as the consequences are interpreted by members of the Ngamtusuo family.⁵ Murder performed for ritual purposes is not considered to be a transgression when the person in question should be sacrificed at the request of a deity; however, a shaman flaunting his personal glory and power leads to punishment.

The Fala (Falochera) family is the oldest one in Chinanchera.⁶ Somewhere, a long, long time, there lived an old man. His name was Falo. He had as many people as there are mosquitoes. Old Falo said:

⁴ HL-97_Duxodie.doc; D-03_EN+ES-1-doc; N-99_shaman.doc.

⁵ D-03_EN+ES-2.doc.

⁶ Chinanchera is a toponym. Its precise meaning and geographical location are unknown.

“A little *nguo*⁷ has said to me that I am a very great shaman. He has not handed me to any of the spirits of illness (*kocha*), and we lived like the hairs on a head. We (the *nguos*) will examine you now, and we will see who can catch you. If you have some human orphan, you yourself will kill it. Strangle it with a lasso, pull its skin off and make a drum out of the skin.”

There was a girl at Falochera—an orphan. The shaman wanted to catch her, strangle her with a lasso, pull her skin off and make a drum. The name of this girl was Kochomu. Then, the elders, the men of the tundra, said this:

“This is bad. There will be trouble. One mustn’t kill one’s own kind.”

“No,” said Shaman Faló, “a *nguo* told me that it would be good.”

The elders, the men of the tundra, agreed. The shaman killed the girl. As soon as the shaman pulled the skin off, he dried it and made a drum out of it. The people at the time went to chase the reindeer. They went very close to the edge of the forest. It was a clear day. The quarters were by Hinsure-Soibamy (Drum Hill). Dudybta.⁸ The people went to the hill and were able to see the reindeer. They were just looking in one direction and heard some noise.

“What is happening?” they thought. “[It sounds] like thunder.”

This shaman started to beat the drum. The shaman himself stood at a distance of five reindeer caravans, but they could still hear it.

Now the word went to the shaman.⁹ He conjured and conjured, and the drum was rumbling very loudly. The shaman was startled and said:

“The *nguo* [a helping spirit] tricked me. Now the human skin drum makes a noise which shouts to every *nguo*, ‘Help me! Help me!’ Now we will all die, only four people remain from among the Falocheras.”

These shaman stories register powerful crises and traumas that influenced the life of the entire community. They are often associated with a particular space, where they are regularly remembered. For example, Lake Shaman, along the banks of which the Ngamtusuo family made

⁷ *Nguo*: ‘deity, spirit’ in the Nganasan language. Every living being and natural phenomenon and certain important objects in particular have their own *nguo*. The shaman has a number of *nguos*, or assistant spirits, but in certain cases they may even mislead him. In such cases, it is very important for the shaman whether the community and its elders, in particular, support the road suggested by the *nguo* or not.

⁸ Dudybta is a toponym.

⁹ According to the traditional Nganasan narrative technique, the Word, Sound (*Nga-la*, that is, ‘Only the mouth’) migrates among the people and the tales are his experiences and adventures.

regular stops during their migration, continually reminded the group of their shaman ancestor who had sunk there.

The difficulties they have survived and the memory of the shaman who has made that possible defines the group and thus the community itself and the way of speaking about them. Thus the Chunanchars are noted as those whose destruction stemmed from a serious taboo violation, while the Ngamtusuo family has the reputation of being close to the Dolgan, being generous etc. These stories therefore form important parts of the collective memory of particular groups that migrated together.

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Garbal: A Western Buryat Shaman Song

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A tentative translation and interpretation of an Ekhirit Buryat shamanist invocation in alliterative verses recorded by L. Gomboin in 1932 and published in N. Poppe's collection of Buryat Mongol dialectal and folklore texts in 1936, with no indication of the circumstances of the recording, the gender of the performer and the aim of the sacrifice offered.

The words of the following Ekhirit (Bur. *Exired* / Mong. *Ikires*) shamanist song, invocation and offering to *garbal*, ancestral spirits, were recorded by L. Č. Gomboin in the East Baikalian Barguzin (*Bargažan* / *Baryujin*) area in 1932.¹ The text is in mostly alliterative verses without strophic structure but with prolific use of parallelism; it was published in a Latin-script collection of Buryat dialectal and folklore materials edited by N. N. Poppe (1936, 74–7). It is reproduced here in a slightly modified transcription,² a tentative translation³ and reconstruction of some missing lines, with textual analysis and philological commentary. Unfortunately, no background information is given about the performer of the song and the circumstances of recording. Poppe 1936 does not contain translations of the texts, nor commentary to them. From Poppe's foreword we learn that the famous Aga Buryat scholar C. Ž. Žamcarano (1881–1942)⁴ also read the proofs of the collection. The song contains some rare and unknown words, dialectal forms, archaic terms and obscure lines. The lines are usually short, most of them containing three words, some lines only one or two, some four to six. "Altaic-type" line-initial alliteration is common but not regular. Alliteration of the beginnings of the halves within a line is not rare. "Choreographic" or "directive" lines indicate the direction of the performer's motion toward the eastern or western gods, or the spirits of the upper and lower worlds (lines 29, 33, 35, 36, 39, 110, 117).

Grammatical and semantical parallelism of couplets or larger segments is one of the main organizing tools. Synonymous parallelism is seen, for

instance, in lines 3–4, “to clean what is dirty / to purify what is impure” (*buzar baixi selmee- / burtag baixii ar’uuta-*); contrasting parallelism in lines 35–6, “turned westward . . . / turned eastward” (*baruulaba . . . / züülebe*); varying parallelism in lines 17 and 20, “eight gold rings, *nine gold rings*” (*naiman altan xüree, yöbön altan xüree*); enumerative parallelism in lines 11–16 with the same predicate *barinam* “I hold . . .”, varying parallelism with crescendo in lines 30–31; 33–4 “five incantations, fifty invocations”; “four summonses, forty invocations” (*tabanban duudalga, tab’inban tamalga; dörbönban durdalga, döšönban tamalga*) or decrescendo in lines 61–2, 74 (*zuun naiman zula, tab’in naiman tax’il; döšön ulaan susal, dörbön ulaan susal*), etc. Not all the numeral attributes have a strict value; most of them are symbolic and variables. In spite of the extant catalogues of the ninety nine gods, the fifty five Eastern and the forty four Western *tengeris* of the shamanists’ pantheon, their numbers do not seem to indicate exact quantities, but approximate magnitudes, whereas ninety nine may mean a great many, a multitude.⁵

The song is essentially descriptive: the first 23 lines tell what is going on, the rest, 121 lines, relates what has been done. In its present form, the text consists of 144 lines including the reconstructed four (lines 79, 115–9, 122).⁶ It is constructed of the following units of various sizes:

- (1) Eulogy of the fir (*yodoo*), the tool of purification (*selmeexe*); the sacred space is cleansed.
- (2) Invocation to the elementary numina of the universe:
 Mother Earth and Father Heaven;
 the bottomless ocean as mother, heaven as father;
 the Milk Ocean as mother and Mount Sumeru as father;
 the fireplace;
 Mother Sun, [her consort] the Moon;
 Appeal and call: “I hold” (*bar’inam*), “I call” (*duudanam*).
- (3) Beginning of the description of what is done; the lightning-ribbons are put on.
- (4) Motion westward (*baruula-*), eastward (*züüle-*), downward (*došodoo bol-*) and upward (*öödödö bol-*) revealing the fifty-five benevolent western and the forty-four hostile eastern gods,
 the ninety-nine king spirits;
 the fireplace with the iron supports of the cauldron;
 the seven/four thunder lords;
 the five shamans and six wrestlers;
 the local spirit lords of the West Baikalian Bayandai and Olzon;

the lords of the black and the yellow oceans (Khazhan Gamba; the Yellow Scribe; Buddhas); the White Lord and the White Lady of Oikhon, their palace built, their bird (= eagle) son born; Old Man Borolzhodoi and Lady Sharalzhadai. It is not clear who, the performer or one or a pair of the invited spirits, is the subject of the couplet (lines 88–90) ending with “fattened” (?) and “belched, vomited” (*xebxen yixe targalhan / xexeren yixe böölzöbön*). It seems that from this point on the performer speaks about his or her actions in first person.⁷

- (5) The actions done: the bread risen, the cow kept being milked, the ornament *yubuun* is on the head; the double necklace is put on; the many braids tied; feast or evening party (*naadan*); dance (*xarai-* ‘to hop, to leap’); the firelighter (*xete*) pulled out; the singer’s son becoming shaman; the hut or tent occupied; the livestock grown; the spirits Doyoodoi (protector of the livestock) and Masandai summoned; the herd of horses kept together.
- (6) The animal to be sacrificed is delivered (*tušaaba*).

Text and Translation

Garbal

Ancestry⁸

yodoo

*Fir*⁹

Lines 1–2

xan uulain xatan yodoo
öndör uulain ünen yodoo¹¹

Queen¹⁰ fir of kingly mountain
True fir of high mountain

selmeexe

*The One That Cleanses*¹²

Lines 3–4 || 5–6

buzar baixii selmeexe
burtag baixii ar’ uutakka
osxii baixii
oronhon selmeexe

The one that cleanses what is impure
The one that purifies what is dirty
The one that removes (*lit.* cleans)
From the place¹³ that what is foul¹⁴

Ülgen exe, garbal; Tengir noyon, udxa

Mother Earth,¹⁵ *Ancestry*; *Lord Heaven*,
*Descent*¹⁶

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Lines 7–10

delgeren baihan Ülgen yixe exe

Great Mother Earth the one who
was widening

del'im baihan Tengir noyon

Lord Heaven the one who was spanning
(*lit.* fathom-wide)

exe büte¹⁷ garbal

Mother-like ancestry

esege büte udxa

Father-like descent

bar'inam, duudanam

I hold, I call

Lines 11–16

oyoor ügei dalayaar exe bar'inam

I hold the bottomless sea (to be my)
mother

oyodol ügei ogtorgoor esege bar'inam

I hold the seamless void (to be my) father

xizaar ügei dalayaar exe bar'inam

I hold the boundless sea (to be my) mother

x'arxag¹⁸ ügei ogtorgoor esege bar'inam

I hold the borderless void (to be my) father

Hün šara dalayaar exe bar'inam

I hold the yellow Milk Ocean¹⁹ (to be my)
mother

Hümer yixe aguulaar esege bar'inam

I hold the Great Mount Sumeru²⁰
(to be my) father

Lines 17–19

naiman altan xür'eetei

The one who has eight golden belts²¹

nayan naiman tulgatai

The one who has eighty-eight iron
supports²²

naran yixe ex'iyei gerel bar'inam

The Great Sun Mother²³: I hold
her (to be my) mirror²⁴

Lines 20–3

yöhön altan xür'eetei

The one who has nine golden belts

yiren naiman tulgatai

The one who has ninety-eight iron
supports

alma türgen harain

Holding the round swift²⁵ Moon's

tolon tuyaa bar'in duudanam

Beams of light,²⁶ I call (you)²⁷

Lines 24–8

ülgen'ii zaaduhun

Seams of Mother Earth

naya naiman zaaduhun

Eighty-eight seams

zaaduhun бүр'i möšxöö

Each seam embroidered²⁸

zaxain orgol'

The *orgol'* of the edge²⁹

zal'in zalaa xadaa

The lightning-ribbon attached³⁰

baruulaba, züülebe

Lines 29–31 || 32–4

baruulaba – tab'in taban tenger'i

tabanhan duudalgaatai

tab'inhan tamalgaatai

züülebe – döšön dörbön tenger'i

dörbönhan durdalgaatai

döšönhan tamalgaatai

Lines 35–6

baruulaba – yiren xaal'in, yöhön zerleg

züülebe – döšön tulga, dörbön tögöd

Lines 37–8

dalai toirohon doloon buudal noyon

daidii toirohon dörbön buudalnuud

Lines 39–40

baruulaba – böögei taban

böxöšüüle yorgoon⁴⁰

Lines 41–2

Bayandain baranguud⁴¹

Olzon'i olonguud

Lines 43–4

böö yixe böxöšüül

böxö yixe texesüül

Lines 45–51

xara dalain xažuuda

Xažan gamba noyon

ezen bogdo türgen

öbödög xürme haxultai

ül'mei⁵⁰ xürme zalaatai

ara düüren zalaatai

adxä düüren yodootoi

*Turned to the west, turned to the east*³¹Turned to the west, (I see there)
the fifty-five godsThose with five³² incantationsThose with fifty invocations³³Turned to the east, (I see there)
the forty-four godsThose with four summonses³⁴

Those with forty invocations

Turned to the west, (I see) the ninety
kings, the nine wild ones³⁵Turned to the east, (I see) forty iron
supports, four full³⁶ onesSeven Thunder³⁷ Lords who turned
around the sea³⁸Four Thunders who turned around
the world³⁹Turned to the west, (I see) the five
of the shamans

The six of the wrestlers

All of Bayandai⁴²(Those) many of Olzon⁴³Shamans, great wrestlers⁴⁴Wrestlers,⁴⁵ great bucks⁴⁶On the shores⁴⁷ of the Black Ocean⁴⁸(Lives) Khazhan Gamba the Noble⁴⁹

The Lord the Holy Swift

With a beard that reaches the knees

With ribbons that reach the tiptoes

With ribbons that cover⁵¹ the back

With a fistful of fir sticks

Lines 52–7

šara dalain zaxada
 šandan šara b'iseeš
 šaazan šara burxan
 aršam sagaan xenegtei
 alda sagaan xoortomtoi

doošodoo bolbo, öödödöö bolbo

Lines 57–8 || 59–60

doošodoo bolbo –
 doloon züiliin burxaar udxa xehen
 öödödö bolbo –
 öngö züiliin burxaar udxa garbal bar'ihan

Lines 61–5

zuu naiman zula bar'ihan
 tab'in naiman tax'iltai
 Oixonxai ezelhen
 ühete sagaan noyon
 öngötö sagaan xatan

Lines 66–71

hömölxöyöö yadaža
 šuluun hömö hömölhön
 šunxata ulaan xadaiya
 šurgaža huur'ilhan
 xübüülkeyee yadaža
 šubuun xübüü xübüülehen

dölin dunda

Lines 72–3 || 74–5 || 76–7

dörbön döliin dunda
 dönnöžö huur'ilhan
 döšön ulaan susalaa
 minaašalža huur'ilhan
 dörbön ulaan susalaa
 dereleže huur'ilhan

Lines 78–80 || 81–3

gurban döliin dunda
 [(?) gulamtalža huur'ilhan]⁶⁹

On the shores of the Yellow Ocean
 (Lives) the Sandalwood⁵² Yellow Scribe⁵³
 The Porcelain Yellow Buddha
 With a foot long white *xeneg*⁵⁴
 With a fathom long white *xoortom*⁵⁵

Moved downwards, moved upwards

(I) moved downwards
 Found ancestry in seven kinds of Buddhas⁵⁶
 (I) moved upwards
 Held Buddhas of various colors⁵⁷
 (to be my) descent and origin

Held one hundred and eight lamplights⁵⁸
 With fifty-eight offerings⁵⁹
 (Those who) ruled Oikhon⁶⁰
 The Hairy White Noble/Lord
 The Handsome White Lady⁶¹

Unable to find a palace⁶²
 Built a palace of stone
 Settled piercing through
 The vermilion red mountain⁶³
 Unable to bear a son
 Bore a bird as son⁶⁴

*Amidst the stones of the hearth*⁶⁵

Settled sustaining⁶⁶
 Amidst the four stones of the hearth
 Settled (brandishing) as whips⁶⁷
 The forty red burning sticks⁶⁸
 Settled reclining as on pillows
 On the four red burning sticks

[(?) Settled to keep the fire alive]
 Amidst the three stones of the hearth

gušan ulaan susalaa
 minaašalža huuhan
 gurbaan ulaan susalaa
 dereleže huur'ilhan

Borolžodoi, Šaralžadai

Lines 84–7

susal yixe dereten
 ünehen yixe d'ebt'ixerten
 Borolžodoi öbögön
 Šaralžadai xatan

huur'ilhan

Lines 88–91

xebxen yixe targuulhan
 xexeren yixe böölžöhön
 budaan yixe talxayaa
 debergeže huur'ilhan

yalaruulhan

Lines 92–5

buuragša in'eeye [-yee?]
 ebelgende bar'ihan
 xobol möngön yubuuyaa
 oroi deere yalaruulhan

xolbuulhan

Lines 96–7 || 98–9

xor'in görlöö ühiye [-yee?]
 xoišodon xolbuulhan
 arban görlöö ühiye [. . . yee?]
 ürgen doroo xolbohon

xaraihan

Lines 100–11 || 102–13 || 104–15

naiman tahag guyaa
 namtalzuulan xaraihan
 xoyor dabxar xoolobšoyoo
 züüže baiža xaraihan

Settled (brandishing) as whips
 The thirty red burning sticks
 Settled reclining as on pillows
 On the three red burning sticks

*Borolžodoi, Sharalzhadai*⁷⁰

Those with big pillows of burning sticks
 Those with big blankets of ashes
 Old Man Borolžodoi
 Lady Sharalzhadai

Settled

*Devouring,⁷¹ gotten excessively fat⁷²
 Belching, excessively vomited
 Settled rising⁷³
 The grain great bread⁷⁴

Having let shine

I have held my roan cow
 Yielding abundant milk⁷⁵
 I have let shine my hollow silver cowry⁷⁶
 On the top of my head

Have joined

I have let joined on the back
 My twenty braids⁷⁷
 I have joined under the chin
 My ten braids

Leapt

I leapt shaking⁷⁸
 My eight-muscled⁷⁹ thigh(s)
 I leapt wearing
 My double garland⁸⁰

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xolboo haixan saazayaa
zүүže-l baiža xaraihan

*xeteyee xang' ilaa*⁸²

Lines 106–17 || 108–19

ünetel⁸⁴ möngön xeteyee
üye dundaa xang' ilaa
nabtal möngön xeteyee
naadan dundaa xang' ilaa

baruulaba Line 110

[*xaraihan*]

Lines 111–13 || 114–[16]

xor'in görlöö ühiiye[e]
xor'in harain naadanda
nadxaltuulan xaraihan
nar'iin⁹⁰ xürbe⁹¹ degelee
[naiman harain naadanda
naigalzuulan xaraihan]

baruulaba Line 117

tan' uulhan

Lines 118–20 || 121–3

yöhön harai naadanda
id'ir zaluu xübüüyee
ergüütüülen böö duur'ai tan' uulhan

arban harai naadanda
[erxe zaluu xübüüyee]⁹⁵
ergüütüülen böö duur'ai tan' uulhan

ezelhen, buur' ilban

Lines 124–5 || 126–7

urdan' bolxodo
ursa geree ezelhen
ertede bolxodo

I leapt wearing
My beautifully joined braids⁸¹

*Pulled out the firefighter*⁸³

I pulled out among friends⁸⁵
My precious silver firefighter
I pulled out in the middle of the feast⁸⁶
My hanging⁸⁷ silver firefighter

Turned to the right

Leapt

I leapt fluttering⁸⁸
My twentyfold braid of hair
In the feast (lasting) twenty⁸⁹ months
[I leapt shaking]
My tight lambskin robe⁹²
[In the feast (lasting) eight months]

(I) turned to the right

Acquainted

In the feast of the ninth month,
I made my strong young son crazy⁹³
And acquainted him with the
shaman's voice⁹⁴
In the feast of the tenth month
[I made my endeared young son] crazy
And acquainted him with the
shaman's voice

Owned, settled

Previously
I owned my little hut⁹⁶
Earlier

ene-l geree ezelže huur'ilhan

I owned this very home of mine
and settled (here)

xazuulhan

Have let bite

Lines 128–9 || 130–131 || 132–3

xon'oo ödxöžö
xondoloiyiin xazuulhan
üxeree ödxöžö
übsüüyiin xazuulhan
adahayaa ödxöžö
ar'b'inyin xazuulhan

I raised my sheep and
Have let (you) bite (from) its rump⁹⁷
I raised my cattle and
Have let (you) bite (from) its chest
I raised my beast (= horse)⁹⁸ and
Have let (you) bite (from) its fat⁹⁹

ergüülebe

Drove

Lines 134–7

hoxor түрген Doyoodoi
hogtuu түрген Masandai
tab'ı naiman aduuyaa
taiga бүр'in tahalaa ügei ergüülebe

Blind¹⁰⁰ Swift¹⁰¹ Doyoodoi!¹⁰²
Half-Witted¹⁰³ Swift Masandai!¹⁰⁴
I drove my fifty-eight horses¹⁰⁵
Around all the taiga, without stopping¹⁰⁶

tušaaba

Delivered

Lines 139–42, 143–4

uutain šineen xaldagatai
urgain šineen ozogoitoi
möngön sagan xungaa
möšxüülen tušaabab
altan sagan xungaa
alduur'i ügei tušaabab

Letting (him) follow (me) I delivered
My silver-white swan¹⁰⁷
That has a scrotum¹⁰⁸ as big as a sack
And a penis as big as the lasso pole¹⁰⁹
I safely¹¹⁰ delivered
My gold-white swan

As mentioned above, the interpretation offered here remains tentative, many details are still to be decoded, but hopefully it helps to recall the spirit of an early twentieth century Buryat shamanist invocation.

Notes

¹ A part of the Western Buryat Ekhirits moved to the Oikhon island of Lake Baikal, then a part of these migrated to the Barguzin Valley, see Baldaev 1970, 1: 197–8. On the Ekhirit-Bulagat dialect spoken in the territory of the former Buryat National District of Ust'-Ordynsk (*Ust'-Ordynskii buriatskii natsional'nyi okrug*), see Matkheev 1968; Budaev

1992: esp. 13–14; on Buryat in general, see Skribnik 2003.

² Syllable final *n* = velar nasal, *nn* = *ɲn*; long vowels are marked with double letters; *e*, *ö* and *ü* represent central vowels, *ʃ* and *ʒ* indicate dorsal fricatives.

³ I am grateful to Dr. V. A. Khamutaev, Buryat historian, himself an Ekhirit native, who kindly helped me to clarify some of the obscure words. I am also much obliged to my wife and colleague Marta Kiripolská for reading and correcting my draft and for her suggestions.

⁴ See Atwood 2004: 619; Rupen 1956; Naidakov 1991; Ceween 1997, 2000.

⁵ See Bur. *yere(n)* ‘ninety’, in folklore ‘beskonechnoe kolichestvo = an endless quantity’ (Cheremisov 1973, 222).

⁶ These numbers may be modified if the halves of some longer lines (for instance, 29 and 32) are treated as separate lines, and *vice versa*.

⁷ Mentioning here *xete*, the firelighter, an accessory attached to the belt of men, may suggest a male performer, a *behete* ‘one with a belt’, opposed to *bebegüi* ‘beltless’, a woman (although there is no belt on the Buryat shaman’s ritual dress, and even Temüjin took off his belt and hat when worshipping the sacred mountain Burqan Qaldun, see *MNT (The Secret History of the Mongols)* §103, de Rachewiltz 2004–13, 1: 33, 407). Nevertheless according to Nikolaeva (2004, 161), unmarried young Buryat women used to wear a belt or sash with hanging ornaments (*hanžuurga*, *behin hantarga*, *bele*), among them tools such as pincers (*šemxüür*), an earpick (*xul’ tibša*), a toothpick (*šüidnei šegšüür*), a miniature padlock, knife, and firelighter (*xete*). For the latter, see also note 83 here below. These are also seen on color plate 79 of Georgi (1799/2005) mentioned below in note 80. The many braids (of a girl or a bride), the necklace and other ornaments suggest a female performer if not a male dressed as the bride of the spirits (see Hamayon 1990, 449–52, inversion of sex), but I have no information about such a case among Buryat shamans. In the epic, there are females who act as males, for instance, Alamzhi Mergen’s sister Aguu Gookhon (who, taking the form of her brother killed by his uncles, wins the bride for him, the bride who would revive the dead, and then flees to the taiga in the form of a stag), or Geser’s mighty consort Alu Mergen, the archer. A Buryat female shaman is shown on the color plates (82–3, opposite to pp. 386, 416) in Georgi 1799/2005. The performer’s son who is “acquainted with the shaman’s voice” may indicate both genders, but not a bride. See also the many braids hanging from the horned crown (*orgoi*) of dancing shamans in an illustration in Pallas (1771–6). A weightier argument for the female gender of the performer is the use of the ornament *yubuun*, see below, line 94, note 76, and the neck ornament *xoolobšo*, line 102, note 80.

⁸ It seems that *garbal*, deverbal noun of *gar-* ‘to go/come out, to come from’, means here matrilineal ancestry. Elsewhere it is synonymous with *udxa*. In Rintchen (1961, 147), *garbal* appears indifferently with male and female deities: *Altan Naran exe* ‘Mother Gold Sun’, *Geser burxan* ‘Geser Buddha’, *Xan šobuun noyon* ‘King Bird Lord’, *Lusun xaan* ‘Dragon King’, etc. (p. 147). There are three southern Buryat songs (prayers, *duudalga*) about the shamans’ origin, *Böögei garbal*, in Rintchen (1961, 111–13, nos. xxxix/i–iii; in the first, *garbal* is used for both genders: *exe garbal*, *esege garbal*; *Xan Šobuu noyon garbalni / Soksor xatan ežimni / zoriyim zox’ oo / xereyim xürge* ‘Kingly Bird Lord ancestor, / my Queen Mother Sogsor, / fulfill my wish, / accomplish my deal!’ According to Cheremisov (1973, 149ab), *garbal* or *garbali* ‘rodnoï = own by blood relationship’, Ekhirit *garbali axa düü* ‘rodnye brat’ia = brothers’ (presumably born by the same mother), *türel garbal* ‘rodstvennik = relative, kinsman’,

garbal = *ug garbal* ‘proiskhozhdenie = origins, ancestry’, *ibid.* 461a: *ug garbalai bešeg* = *ugai bešeg* ‘genealogiia = genealogy, family tree’. In Ekhirit, *garbali* is synonymous with *törböli*, and forms with it the compound *garbali törböli*, see Matkheev (1968, 25).

⁹ Eastern Bur. *žodoo* ‘pikhta; palka (*ili* trost’) iz pikhty = fir tree; (walking) stick (or cane) made of fir wood’, *žodoo bari*- ‘brat’ v ruki palku; *fig.* stanovit’ sia shamanom = to hold a (walking) stick; to become a shaman’, *žodoodo*- ‘bit’ palkoi = to beat with a stick; voskurivat’ = to smoke, to purify with smoke (of fir)’, *žodootoi* ‘imeiuschchiü palku iz pikhty = having a stick made of fir; *fig.* pol’zuiushchüisia vliianiem, vliiatel’nyü = influential, authoritative’, (Cheremisov 1973, 232b).

¹⁰ Bur. *xatan* ‘queen; dame; lady’, Mong. *qatan*. A less probable interpretation could be *xatan* ‘hard, steely’, Mong. *qatan*, but see *xatan yexe daida* translated by M. Tulokhonov as ‘velikaia sviashchennaia zemlia = great sacred earth’ in the epic *Alamzbi Mergen*, line 3384.

¹¹ I took the first four lines of the text in Poppe (1936) as two: four halves with internal alliteration.

¹² Bur. *selmee*- ‘ochishchat’ = to cleanse, to purify’, for instance, *xülhöö selmee*- ‘vytirat’ pot s litsa = to wipe the sweat from the face’, causative of *selme*- ‘proiasnit’ sia (*o nebe, pogode*) = to clear up (of sky, weather); perestavat’ (*o dozhdë*) = to cease (of rain)’, etc., Cheremisov (1973, 402b); cf. Mong. *čelme*-. Here it is synonymous to *ar’uuta*-, Mong. *ariyuta*-.

¹³ Bur. *oron* ‘place; country; institution’, *oro(n)* ‘bed’, Mong. *oron*, MidMong. *oron*, *oran*, *ora*. Here the meaning ‘place, space’ fits better the context.

¹⁴ Bur. *oxi* is not found in Cheremisov’s dictionary, and its meaning and origin remain obscure for me. A syllable-final *s* can remount to *c < č* before a lost short vowel other than *i*. *Faute de mieux*, I rendered it here as ‘foul’, based on the preceding parallel lines. Ramstedt (1935, 290) recorded Dörbet *ocl* ‘faul, träge, nachlässig’ and *osl* ‘träge, langsam, ungeschickt, schlecht’, but the history of these two forms of one and the same word is also unknown and they are not enough for solving the problem of the Buryat word.

¹⁵ Cheremisov (1973, 499b), renders *ülgen* as ‘prostornyi; širokii, neob’iatnyi = spacy; wide, boundless’ or, sometimes, ‘mat’-zemlia = Mother Earth’; *ülgen tengeri* ‘nebesa, vyshee nebo = Heaven’, also West Bur. *ülgenxe* ‘zemlia = earth’, which is the same as *ülgen exe* here. See also Birtalan (2001, 1055).

¹⁶ Bur. *udxa* ‘rod, proiskhozhdenie = kin, birth, origin; preemstvennost’ = succession, continuity’ (Cheremisov 1973, 463b). For Poppe (1973, 307–17, esp. 316) *udxa* is ‘die Herkunft eines Schamanen oder eines *Zajān* (Geistes)’.

¹⁷ See Cheremisov (1973, 126a); Western Buryat form of Mong. *metü*.

¹⁸ Bur. *x’arxag/xirxag* ‘kaïma, kaëmka, kromka (*napr.* platka, materii) = edge, border, hem (e.g. of a kerchief, a fabric) < *kirqay*, cf. Turk. *qırqay* in Käs̄yari’s *Diwān* (Clauson 1972, 653) ‘the selvages of a garment and its edge’, also *ibid.* 641a, *kir*. Preliminary note, quoting Radloff’s *kir* ‘edge’ (Mong. *kira*).

¹⁹ See Cheremisov 1973, 696b. This is the Milk Ocean of the ancient Indian cosmology, Mong. *sün dalai*, conveyed by Buddhism to the Mongols. See also Birtalan (2001, 1046–7; Southern Ordos *söm dalä*, Mostaert (1968, 586b), where the first word was understood as a proper name because in that dialect ‘milk’ is *üsü(n)*, see *op. cit.*, 764 (also quoting Kalm. *üsü* id).

²⁰ Another Buddhist element mentioned already in the Middle Mongol version of ‘Phags-pa’s *Shes-bya rab-gsal*, see Vladimir Uspensky (2006, 4, f. 2b, line 28, f. 3a, lines

6, 17, 22: *Sümir ayla*). Saḡang Sečen's *Erdeni-yin Tobči* uses the Old Uyğur form, *Sümir tay*. The name Sumeru has numerous variants in Mongol languages, e.g., *sömr*, *sümr*, *sömbr*, *sümbr* in Oirat (Ramstedt 1935, 333b, 340b). See also Birtalan 2001, 1044–5.

²¹ Bur. *xiür'ee* 'iron ring or belt of the support of the cauldron', cf. Cheremisov 1951, 626: Western Bur. for Eastern *xor'oo* 'ograde, izgorod = fence, enclosure', etc., and 'krug = circle', Mong. *qoriya(n)*; Bur. *xiür'ee* 'oprava (u ochkov) = spectacle frame'; Mong. *küriye(n)*. For other names of this part of the support, see the next note.

²² Bur. *tulga*, Mong. *tulya* 'iron support of the cauldron on the open hearth', the abode of the deity of fire, also symbol of family, the lineage. According to Norjin et al. (1999, 2408b, 2409a), *tulya* = *γurba-ača degegsi oçoy-i γurba-ača degegsi qasay-iyar küriyegülüün qadaju kigsen • toγoya talbiju γal tülekü jadaγai juuqa* 'open fireplace formed of more than three (iron) pillars encircled by more than three (iron) belts', *tulya tul-* 'to set down the support', *tulya-yin oçoy* or *toγoyo* 'the iron pillar(s) of the support', *tulya-yin qasay* 'the parallel iron belt(s) connecting the pillars of the support', *tulya-yin čilaγu* 'the stones below, or substituting, the support of the cauldron'; cf. Cewel 2013, 766b: *tulgin büslüür/xasag*, the belts, and *t. xöl*, the pillars.

²³ See also Bur. *yübüün dabxar xiür'etei / yiren dabxar tuyaa tataban / altan Naran exe garbal / naiman dabxar tuyaa tataban / xiüiten Hara esege garbal* "The one who has ninefold haloes / and spread ninety-fold rays / the golden Mother Sun ancestress / The one who has eightfold rays / the cool Father Moon ancestor" in Rintchen (1961, 2: 111, lines 5–7). In Buryat tradition, sun and moon were wife and husband; Sun, the female beginning, was represented by nine concentric circles, Moon, the male beginning, by eight (see Basaeva 1991, 148, quoting Galdanova). More representations of these (Sun and Moon with concentric circles) and other celestial bodies are shown in Petri (1918, 228–36; Birtalan 2001, 1071, 1087). According to Plano Carpini, the medieval Mongols believed that Sun was the Mother of Moon. In the *Secret History*, §238, the Uyğur ruler's (*Ui'udun idu'ut*) alliterative message mentions *eke naran* 'Mother Sun' in the comparison *e'ülen arilju / eke naran üjeksen metü* 'As if one saw Mother Sun / When the clouds disperse' (see de Rachewiltz 2004–13, 1: 163; 2: 847). See also Birtalan (2001, 1015), quoting *naran eke* 'Mother Sun' from the fragment of the Middle Mongol version of the Alexander Romance (*Sulqarnai*).

²⁴ Or: 'as my light'. Cf. Bur. *gerel* 'light, ray, beam of light, lighting, daylight', Western and Tümkhe 'glass; eye glasses', Standard, Ekhirit and Alair 'mirror', Selenge *gerel šel* 'mirror' (*šel* 'glass'), see Cheremisov (1973, 173b; Mong. *gerel*. As the mirror is a part of the Buryat shaman's equipment, I rendered here *gerel* as "mirror," although the next section mentions the rays of moon.

²⁵ Bur. *türgen* 'swift; energetic' (Cheremisov 1973, 445b); a frequent element in the names or epithets of spirits, see, for instance, *Xan X'uriin xübüün / Xalzan šarga morito / Muyaa türgen Manžilai* "Khan Khormusta's son / Who has a fallow steed with a blaze / The Naughty Swift Manžilai" and *xamayi türüü udirdaban / Xan Došxin Manžilai / bügüdiyi türüülehen / Büxü Noyon Manžilai* "He who headed all / Khan Wrathful Manžilai / He who overcame all / The Strong Lord Manžilai" in Rintchen (1961, 2: 139).

²⁶ Bur. *tolo(n)* 'beam of light' (Cheremisov 1973, 426b).

²⁷ Bur. *duuda-* 'to call, to summon' (Cheremisov 1973, 205b), hence *duudalga* 'invocation' (Mong. *dayuda-*, *dayudalγa*). My addition, *you*, should be understood as plural.

²⁸ See Bur. *zaaduban* ‘stolb (*v izgorodi*) = post (of a fence); zhëlob, paz = gutter, groove; shvy, shov = seam(s)’ (Cheremisov 1973, 240a); here the meaning ‘seam’ seems to fit the context. For *möšxöö*, cf. Bur. *müšxööbe(n)* ‘vshivka iz tsvetnoi shëlkovoi tkani (*na talii zhenского kbalata ili plat’ia*) = ‘patch of colored fabric of silk sewn in (on the waist of the female robe or costume’, op. cit., 309a).

²⁹ Bur. *zaxain orgol’*: the first word is the genitive of *zaxa* with two meanings, ‘kraï, konchik = edge, border, tip; vorot, vorotnik = collar’ (Cheremisov 1973, 252b), Mong. *jaqa*; the second word is unknown, and it is not likely that it is a cognate or variant of Mong. *orgil*, Bur. *or’yol* ‘ostraiia vershina, pik (*gory*) = peak of a mountain, fig. top; ostryi, zaostrennyi, ostrokonechnyi = sharp, pointed’ (Cheremisov 1973, 365a), or of *orgoi* ‘shamanskiï shlem s zheleznyimi rozhkami = shaman’s headgear’ (ibid. 359b).

³⁰ For *zal’ in zalaa xadaa*, see *zali(n)* ‘groza; grom i molniia = thunderstorm; thunder and lightning’ (Cheremisov 1973, 247a), cf. Bur. *zali*, Mong. *jali* ‘brilliance, splendor’; *zalaa* ‘krasnaia kistochka (na shapke) = red tassel (on the hat)’, op. cit., 246a, also ‘darenii platok = a kerchief as a present’, see Matkheev (1968, 33); Mong. *jalaya. Xadaa* is predicative, verbal noun of *xada-* ‘prikolachivat’ = to fasten with nails; *prishivat’* = to sew on’ etc., (op. cit. 530), Mong. *qada-*. Another Buryat *xadaa*, focus marker, subordinator, and phrase final emphatic particle (op. cit. 529b), a “decapitated” form (*nomen futuri* + dative + subject possessive marker) of *a-* ‘to be’ does not fit the given context.

³¹ Bur. *baruula-* ‘idti k zapady, napravliat’sia na zapad = to go westward’ and *ziiüle-‘ekhat’ (ili idti) na vostok = to go eastward’*: from *baruun* ‘right hand side; west; and *ziiün* ‘left hand side; east’ (Cheremisov 1973, 90a, 270a). These words may be treated as separate lines as they are later in this text in Poppe (1936).

³² The particle *-ban* after this and other numerals in the text seems to come from *aršan*, perfective noun of *a-* ‘to be’.

³³ Ekhhirit *tamalqaa* ‘a kind of shamanist prayer’, cf. Mong. *tamalu-* ‘pet’ (o shamanakh); chanter (on dit de l’enchanteur lorsqu’il prie l’esprit)’ (Kowalewski 1844–9, 3: 1644); not listed by Cheremisov, he only has derivations of *tamal-* ‘to torture’ (1973, 412a). See *tamalya* in Rintchen (1961, 108–9, *Čingisün tamalya*; the Khalkha verb *tamla-*, Mong. *tamala-* ‘böö narin ongondoo jalbirax urin duudax; baarin jereg jarim nutagt “tamagalax” gex ni bui = to pray to, to call for the spirits by the shamans; in the land of the Baarin, etc., it is also called *tamagalax’* and its noun *tamlaga*, Mong. *tamalya* in Cewel (2013, 715ab); Kalm. *tamlyrn, tamlyrn* ‘Fluch, das Verwünschen’ < *tamly-* ‘schimpfen, fluchen, jmdn in die Hölle wünschen’ (Ramstedt 1935, 377b), the latter verb in one and the same entry with the homonym meaning ‘to torture’, Mong. *tamula-* < *tamu* ‘hell’. Actually the verb meaning ‘to curse, to swear’ is a synonym of Oeet *zökö-* ‘verwünschen, schimpfen und drohen’ (Ramstedt 1935, 477b), Khalkha *jüxe-* ‘to curse’, Bur. *züxe-* ‘vozdevat’ na shest (*shkuru zbertvennogo zhiivotnogo s golovoi i nogami, pechen’iu i pochkami, s nekotorym kolichestvom sena*) = to hang on the pole (the hide of the sacrificial animal together with the head, legs, liver and kidneys, and also some hay); *protykat’, vtykat’* = to pierce, to skewer, to drive into; *fig. proklinat’, rugat’, branit’* = to swear at, to curse, to scold; *züxeli* ‘the hide of the sacrificial animal on the pole’, *taxilgata züxelite uula* ‘mountain where shamanist rites were performed’ (Cheremisov 1973, 270b); Mong. *jüke-, jükeli*; MidMong. *jükeli* in the *Secret History*, §281, see Ligeti 1973; Bese 1986; de Rachewiltz 2004–13, 2: 998–90; also Birtalan 2001, 1002.

³⁴ See Eastern Bur. *durdalga*, the same as *duudalga* ‘invocation’ (Cheremisov 1973, 203b, 205a), from *durda-* ‘proslavliat’ = to glorify; *vspominat* = to remember; *zaiknut* ‘sia = to mention; *prizyvāt* = to summon (a spirit by a shaman)’, Mong. *durad-*.

³⁵ Bur. *xaal* ‘in, cf. *xaašuuł*, *xaalinguud*, plur. of *xaan* ‘khan, tsar’, monarch’ (Cheremisov 1973, 523a); Bur. *zerlig* ‘wild’ etc., *zerlig došxon* (Cheremisov 1973, 274b).

³⁶ For *tögöd*, see Bur. *tüged* ‘complete, full’ (Cheremisov 1973, 442a); Mong. *tegüs*.

³⁷ Bur. *buudal* ‘stoianka, stan, stoibishche = stop, camp, campsite; *spusk*, *niskhozhdenie* = descent, descending; *molniia*, *grom* = lightning, thunder’; *Bokhan* ‘meteor’ (Cheremisov 1973, 117a); Mong. *bayudal* ‘station, lodging’.

³⁸ For the Buryat, this may be the Baikal.

³⁹ Bur. *daida* ‘earth’, *daida delxei* ‘world’, etc., see Cheremisov 1973, 181a.

⁴⁰ Western Buryat for Eastern *zurgaa(n)*, Mong. *ᠵᠢᠷᠴᠠᠭᠠᠨ*, MidMong. *ᠵᠢᠷᠴᠠᠨ* ‘six’.

⁴¹ Plural of Bur. *baran* (Cheremisov 1973, 86b).

⁴² Bayandai, one of the Ekhirit clans (Baldaev 1970, 1: 262–7): *Baendaev rod*, descendants of Bayandai, son of Sakhir (< *čakir*), great-grandson of Ekhirit; his great grandsons, the poor Tokhoi and the rich Khonkhoi moved to the Barguzin (*Bargažan* < *Barᠷuᠵin*) valley through the Baikal; they were the first to sacrifice horses to the lord spirit of the sacred island Oikhon. See also Tsydendambaev (1968, 168, f.n. 1b). Bayandai is also name of the center of the easternmost administrative unit of the former Ust’-Ordynskii autonomous district (*okrug*) in the Irkutsk Province (see Zhukovskaia 2001, 523) < *bayan* ‘rich’.

⁴³ The Olzon clan, descendants of Olzon (< **olʃan*), son of Sekhir (< *čekir*), great-grandson of Ekhirit, see Baldaev (1970, 1: 268–73; see also Ol’zony, with Russian plural, name of a West-Baikal settlement in the Bayandai district (*Baiandaiškii raion*) of the former Ust’-Ordynsk Buryat Autonomous Region (*okrug*), see map in Zhukovskaia 2001, 523.

⁴⁴ Cf. Hamayon 1990, 142 (quoting the Buryat proverb *böö xün ühöörxüü, büxe xün xüšerxüü* ‘Le chamane est vindicative, l’athlète est vantard’), *ibid.* 506.

⁴⁵ Or: ‘strong’.

⁴⁶ Plural of *texe* ‘kozël (nekastrirovannyĭ) = billy goat’; Tümkhe *texe yamaan* ‘dikii kozël = wild (male) goat’; Kalm. Oelet, Torgut *teke* ‘Ziegenbock’, *t. görēsṇ* ‘Gemse, Steinbock’ (Ramstedt 1935, 390a; Khalkha *tex* = *yangir yamaani er* ‘ibex’ (Cewel 2013, 801); Mong. *teke* ‘ibex’; here a symbol of manliness?

⁴⁷ Lit. ‘side’, Mong. *qajᠢᠷᠠ*.

⁴⁸ The imaginery Black and Yellow Oceans or Seas form a contrastive or complementary pair; they also appear in the Western Buryat epic *Alamzhi Mergen*, see Tulokhonov (1991, 27), and l. 100: *xara yexe dalai*, l. 3174: *šara yexe dalai*, l. 3116–7: *šara dalai, uban xara dalai*, lines 2963–4: *šara dalain šanaada / xara dalain xayaada* ‘on the bay of the yellow sea, / on the edge of the black sea’. Similar complementary pairs are the two, black and yellow, scribes of the Lord of the Underworld (see note 53 here below), or Alamzhi Mergen’s two wrongdoer uncles, Xara Zutan and Šara Zutan (actually Geser’s uncle Čotong split into two); Black Z. rules over the people of the north, Yellow Z. rules the people of the south (*aruin zoyi emxilxe; überi zoyo emxilxü*).

⁴⁹ Or: Lord. The meaning of the name is obscure; Buryat has *xaža* ‘oprava = mounting, frame’, also an epithet of the quiver (*haadag*) in the epic (Cheremisov 1973, 531), but no form with *-n* is recorded; *gambaa* is ‘vazhnyi = important, pompous’, see *op. cit.*, 144b. The whole name may be of Tibetan origin.

⁵⁰ This is the same as the Eastern form of Mong. *ölmei*, see *ül' me* and *ül' mī* 'plusna, stupnia = metatarsus, the front part of the foot' (Cheremisov 1973, 502a).

⁵¹ Lit. 'filling up the back'. Similar is Bur. *adxā dūüren hamar* 'a fistful of pine seeds' (Cheremisov 1973, 212a), cf. Kalm. *ger* (or *gerēr*) *dūry mōngᠭ* 'Silber das ganze Haus voll' (Ramstedt 1935, 107); Ord. *aru öwör dūrey xuārtā* 'le côté postérieur et le côté antérieur (de l'habit) sont tout pleins de broderies', Mostaert (1968, 171b); etc.

⁵² I tentatively rendered *šandan* as 'sandalwood', based on the older Mongol form *čindan*, though the standard Buryat form is *zandan*, also meaning 'red', see Cheremisov 1973, 250a; Ord. *jandan*, Khalkha id. (< Tib. < Skr.). Cf. also Bur. *šandamani* 'dragotsennyi kamen' (*udovletvoriatushchii vse zhelaniia*) = gem stone (which fulfills all wishes), talisman (*v skazkakh*) = talisman (in tales), Cheremisov 1973, 720a, Khorchin *šandamuuni*, Ord. *čindamu*, *čindamun*, *čindamuni*, Khalkha *čandamani*, Kalm. *džind᠋m᠋ᠨ*. Oir. dial. *zendemen* (< Tib. < Skr.), Mong. *čindamani* (< Uyгур << Skr. *cintāmaṇi*). Here 'sandalwood' may be a motif from the story about the famous sandalwood statue of the Buddha (see Lcang-skya Lalitavajra's *Jandan jowol/juu-yin domoylčadig ergiküi kemjty-e ači tusa-luy-a qamtu tobčilan quriyaysan erdeni-yin erike* "Jewel Rosary, The Legend/Jātaka of the Sandalwood Holiness, Summary of the Extent of Its Travels and Benefits," cf. Heissig (1954, no. 147; Sazykin 2003, 3: nos. 4355–7; Kudara 2004, 149–54). In the present Ekhirit shaman's song, sandalwood is parallel to *šaazan* 'porcelain'. Chinese craftsmen used to produce colored porcelain statues of Buddhist deities, for instance, of Mi-luo fo (Maitreya).

⁵³ Bur. *bēšēšē* (Mong. *bičigēčī*) 'scribe, writer, secretary': this is a reminiscence of the scribes (*šara bēšēšē* 'yellow scribe' and *xara bēšēšē* 'black scribe') of Erlen Khan (*Erlen xaan*, Mong. *Erlig/Erklig qan*; Uyg. *Ärklig*; Tib. *Gshin-rje*; Skr. *Yama*), lord and judge of the dead in the underworld, see *bišēšī* 'les scribes des mortes' in Rintchen 1961, 2: 45; Birtalan 2001, 981–3.

⁵⁴ The meaning of *xeneg* is unknown. It should mean something, the length of which is measurable in *aršim* < Russ. *aršin* 'measure of length, 71 cm' (cf. also Kalm. Dörbet *aršm*, *aršm*, Ramstedt 1935, 15a). I wondered if this *xeneg* was a typographic error for *xemneg*, Kalm. *kemnəᠭ* 'Filzrock, Filzmantel, Filz', Ramstedt 1935, 225ab, but Western Bur. *xemneg* is 'utroba (materi); anat. matka = uterus, womb' (Cheremisov 1973, 646). Cf. also Khalkha *xewneg* 'raincoat', Mong. *kebeneg* 'felt coat'. Khalkha *xeneg* = *toomjir*, *anxaaral* 'care, attention' (Bold et al. 2008, 3: 2825b) does not fit the context. Dr. Khamutaev proposed to read *xebeneg* 'an oblong case, holder', which offers a good solution. This word is not listed in Cheremisov's dictionary, but occurs in the Ekhirit invocation to the Dame of Ongna (*Onniin ezii*), recorded by Gomboin: *xehenegeer dūüren nomo baadag asaraabd' i* "we brought a case filled with bows and quivers [instead of *homo* 'arrow(s)']" (lines 24–5 in no. 9 in Poppe 1936, 77). Petri describes this quiver among the artifacts of needlework: *xehән᠋ᠨ᠋ᠭ᠋* is a high and narrow case (its height is more than one meter, its width 30–40 cm), it has a wooden frame formed of three bent wooden rods, their lower ends form the legs of the case; the two protruding ends of an upper horizontal rod serve as handles. The case is covered by horse skin with the fur outside. The orifice has a leather lid covered by red woolen cloth, embroidered, and decorated with lead plates; long leather strips are hanging from the edge of the lid. A new *xehән᠋ᠨ᠋ᠭ᠋* was made for the newly wed; it was a part of the dowry. This kind of quiver was the container of arrows kept in the household, while

baadag (Mong. *saγaday*) was the quiver carried by the archer on the waist. The old custom of making *xebññək* was later abandoned, and the Kuda Buryats substituted the *xebññək* with Russian-made wooden boxes or chests. Petri also quotes K. F. Golstunskij's definition: Mong. *keseneg* 'sumka v rode vedra dlia strel, nosimaia na spine = a bucket-shaped bag for holding arrows; it is carried on the back' (Petri 1918, 224–6, with illustrations); see also Khangelov (1958, 1: 253 f. and Basaeva (1991, 116). According to Kowalewski (1844–9, 3: 2455b), Mong. *keseneg* means 'kolchan, nosimyi chrez plecho; espèce de carquois qu'on port sur le dos', Tib. *dong-pa, mda'-shubs*, quoted from the *Manju Mongγol ügen-ü toli bičig* and another, unspecified polyglot dictionary with Tibetan equivalents. See also *keseneg* = *arasu jerge böke ed-iyer örögesün tal-a-yi qabtaγai • nököge tal-a-yi büngküyilgen olan tasuγ γarγaju üiledügsen sumu jibe düriüjü egürkü saba* 'a vessel made of leather or other durable material; one side of it is flat, the other rounded; it has many slots to hold arrows and arrowheads; it is carried on the back' (Norjin et al. 1999, 1320a).

⁵⁵ The meaning of *xoortom* is obscure. Buryat has a word of similar shape which is certainly a Russian element, see *xortoom* 'ispolu = leasing or renting for half of the revenue' and *xortoomol-* 'delat' chto-libo ispolu = to do something as a lessee or a share-cropper; to lease or rent something for half of the income' (Cheremisov 1973, 567a); Russian *körtom, kortóm, kortóma* 'hire, renting, leasing, quit-rent', etc., see Dal' (1912–1914: 2, col. 434); Russian dial. *kortomka* 'a woman living in the house of someone else'; Sakha (Yakut) *kuortam* 'rent, hire' È. K. Pekarskiĭ (2008, 1: col. 1230); but this Russian *kortom* is not applicable here, where the context requires a word meaning something measurable in fathoms (*alda* 'makhovoiia sazhen' = *sazhen*, a measure of length about two meters', *alda sagaan xerem* 'sazhennaia belaiia belka = a fathom long white squirrel' and *alda xara saazha* 'sazhennaia chërnaia kosa = a fathom long braid of black hair' in folklore texts (Cheremisov 1973, 41a). Dr. Khamutaev proposed to read *xormoitoi* 'having a skirt', cf. Mong. *qormai*, so the line should mean: 'having a fathom-wide white skirt'.

⁵⁶ Lit. 'made ancestry by . . .', see Bur. *udxa* above, note 16. Here it may mean 'lineage, extraction, descent', like Mong. *ündüsün*, Tib. *rgyud*, in Tantric Buddhist literature. The 'seven kinds of Buddhas' may be a distant echo of the seven Buddhas who preceded Gautama Śākyamuni (Mong. *doloγan burqan*, Tib. *sangs-rgyas rab bdun*), later also applied to the constellation of Ursa Major, Bur. *Doloon Übged*, Mong. *doloγan ebügen*.

⁵⁷ This is another Buddhist element. The genitive attribute *öngö züüliin* 'varicolored', is literally 'of color kind(s)'; here the Buddhas are images on painted scrolls, or painted statues or statuettes.

⁵⁸ 108 is a holy number for Buddhists; it is also the number of the beads of the Buddhist rosary. Bur. *zula* 'butter lamp' and 'candle', see Cheremisov (1973, 261b); Mong. *jula* 'butter lamp'.

⁵⁹ The number fifty-eight has no real value here: it appears as a fainting reverberation of 108, "halving it," in the sense of varying (in this case, decrescendo) parallelism, frequently used in shamanic poetry. The crescendo variant is found in another invocation in the same (Poppe 1936, 105): *tabin naiman taxiltan / zuun naiman zultan*. The motif of Fifty-Eight Offerings also occurs in a Bulagat Khongodor (*Xongoodor*) song about the Buddhas of the West (*baruun'ii burxad*), in the same collection of texts (Poppe 1936, 125): *zuun naiman zuragta zuraa / tabin naiman tax'il tar'aa* "Drawn on one hundred and eight pictures / Made (lit. planted) fifty-eight offerings" and *zuun naiman zultanaar / tabin naiman taxi-*

laar / Xongoodori saitan / burxan bolžo huur' idaa “By those with one hundred and eight lamplights (and) / By the fifty-eight offerings / The happy (folks) of the Khongodor / Becoming Buddhas, settled (here).” Ibid., in a song about the nine daughters of the White God of Strength (*Böxii Sagaan Tengeri*), the eldest daughter settles in the White City of Beijing (*Beežin sagaan xoton deer huur' idaa*) as a Buddha (*tab' ilgain sagaan burxan bolžo huur' idaa*), lights one hundred and eight lamplights and offers fifty-eight offerings. Mongol Buddhists have two kinds of Eight Offerings (Mong. *naiman takil*): one is a set of eight auspicious and venerable symbols (see Kowalewski 1844–9, 2: 597b), the other is a set of the eight sacrifices, also personified in female form (see Sodubilig 1996, 77a).

⁶⁰ Oikhon is the same as Russian Ol'khon, see Poppe (1989, 297: n. 16). Russian *Ol'khon* is the name of the sacred island on Lake Baikal and its district in the Irkutsk Province, see Zhukovskaia 2001, 534–41 (map), 530–3 (description); Zhambalova 2000. Oikhon is also mentioned in the catalogue of the sacred lands and waters in the Barguzin Ekhirit invocation (*durdalga*) in Poppe (1936, 69): *xuušan yixex daidamnai / Xudansa Xuurai xoyor belei / uzuur jixex daidamnai / Onno Zülxex xoyor b' i / xubanxan' im xüreetei / Xudar Baigal xoyor b' i / ubanxan' im xüreetei / Oixon Uula xoyor b' i* “There are the Khudansa (= Khodontsa) and the Khuurai / (On) our great old world / There are (the rivers) Ongna (= Anga?) and Zülkhe (= Lena) / (On) our peaked great world / There are the Kudara and the Baikal / (That) are encircled by birch trees / There are Oikhon and Uula / That are encircled by waters.” In another Ekhirit invocation, op. cit., 105, it reads *uban xüree Oixon / xuban xüree Xudaraa*. In a Bulagat invocation (op. cit. 126), the youngest of the thirteen sons of Erlen Khan made a birch bark boat and settled on Oikhon; the Lord of Oikhon is Daddy the Long White Noble (*Uta Sagaan noyon baabai*). The phrase “the numerous everlasting nobles of Oikhon” (*Oixonoi olo münxü noyod*) occurs in the long Aga Buryat invocation in the description of the *šanar* ritual in Rintchen (1961, 2: 133); Aga Buryat *Oixonii duudalga* recorded by Gantogtokh et al. (1998). *Oixonxai* is a compound of *Oixon* and *-xai*, diminutive or suffix expressing endearment, or *axai* ‘elder brother; brother of the husband; honorific address to elders; Western dial. young man, etc.; *dumdxai* (< *dunda axai*) ‘the middle one of three elder brothers’; substitute of tabooed names of sacred beings, for instance, the ancestral wolf (*šono*), see Cheremisov (1973, 65b).

⁶¹ These White Lord and White Lady should be the names or epithets of spirits; *öngötei* lit. ‘colored’, also ‘beautiful’.

⁶² Ekhirit *hömö*, Khorii *hüme* ‘khrām = temple; monastyr’ = monastery; *folkl.* khoromy, palaty, chertogi = palace, mansion; *Bokhan* bol’ shoe zdanie = big building², see Cheremisov (1973, 696a); Kalm. *sömö*, *sümə*, *sümü* “Tempel, Kirche”, Ramstedt (1935, 333b, 340b); Mong. *süime* ‘shrine, temple’, MidMong. *süime-yin ger*. In the eyes of the Buryats the massive, elaborate buildings of Russian Orthodox churches with towers appeared as palaces, and this is reflected in the description of the heroes’ headquarters in the epic as well, see, for instance, *düšin dürben denžitei / dürbe mingan šanyanuurtai / bežir müngün sobooroo / düinyeneži bodobo* “With a thunder he erected / his ornate silver temple / with forty-four belfries / with four thousand bells” in *Alamzbi Mergen* (Tulokhonov 1991, 66, lines 241–4). As *soboor* (< Russian *sobór* ‘cathedral’) has the subject possessive marker that requires a transitive verb, I translated *bodxobo* instead of *bodobo* (Mong. *bosqa-* < *bos-*); *denži* (not listed by Cheremisov) may be from Chin. *diàn* ‘temple, palace’ or *diān* ‘top, summit’, different from Mong. *denji*, Khalkha *denj* ‘terrace’, Ord. *denji* ‘terrace dans un ravin où coule une rivière;

accouoir de fenêtre', Mostaert (1968, 139b (< Chin. *dèngzi*).

⁶³ Bur. *xada* 'gora = mountain' (Cheremisov 1973, 529a); Mong. *qada* 'rock'.

⁶⁴ Bur. *šubuun xübiüü* 'bird son', Ekhirit *yexe šubuun* 'eagle' (instead of tabooed *bürged*), Matkheev (1968, 37). Some Western Buryats used to hold the Eagle to be their ancestor; the three eagle sons of the Lord Spirits of the island of Oikhon became the first shamans, see Khangalov (1985, 1: 363f.; Manzhigeev 1978, 33, 62; Birtalan 2001, 937, 955–6). Parallel lines *xübiüüxeyee yadaa* / *šubuun xübiüü xübiüülee* "Unable to father a son / He (*Uia sagaan noyon baabai*, Dad the Long White Lord) fathered a bird son" in the Bulagat invocation *Xaan X'irma tenger' iin gurban xübiüün* "the three sons of Khan Khormusta Tengri" in Poppe (1936, 126), also mentioning the descendants *šubuun (sagaan) noyod*, the Bird Nobles, (the White Ones). In the epic *Alamzhi Mergen*, the Eagle King (*Xan bürgüüd šubuun*, *Xan bürgüüd baabai*), son of Esege Malaa tengeri, has three daughters.

⁶⁵ Ekhirit *döli*, Western Bur. listed in Cheremisov (1973, 207b), as *düli* 'kamni ochaga (na kotorye stavilsia kotel) = the stones of the fireplace (*gulamta*) on which one used to put the cauldron'; cf. Khori Bur. *düle(n)* 'flame' (op. cit. 208a); cf. Mong. *döliü* 'flame'. There were at least three flat rocks under the iron support (*tulga*) of the cauldron (*togoo*). Tibetan Guruyoga rituals have a similar fireplace to be visualized, with three dry skulls instead of rocks, see Sa-pan's *Bla-ma'i rnal-'byor* quoted in Kara and Zieme (1977, 51).

⁶⁶ See Kalm. *dönn*- 'stützen, unterstützen; etwas tragen, einem Hilfe leisten' < *döŋ* 'Stütze, Unterstüttung, alles womit man etwas heben od. stützen kann' (Ramstedt 1935, 99a).

⁶⁷ Denominal verb from Western Bur. *minaa* 'plet', bich, knut = lash, whip, scourge' (Cheremisov 1973, 296b) with the suffix *-šAl-* < Mong. *-čilA-*. Cf. also Oir. *maliya*, Kalm. Dörböt *mal' ā*, *mal' ā* 'Reitpeitsche' (Ramstedt 1935, 254b; Krueger 1984, 591: *male*, *mali*, Mong. *milaya*; Cewel also has *malia* 'tašuur').

⁶⁸ Bur. *susal* 'obgorevshee poleno, goloveshka = burnt log, smoldering piece of wood' (Cheremisov 1973, 397a; Kalm. *tsusul* 'Feuerbrand, abgebranntes Holzstück', Ramstedt (1935, 434b); Ord. *jučali* replace le mot *gal* 'feu' chez les personnes qui observent la coutume du *nere gāla*- Mostaert (1968, 221b (substitutes *gal* 'fire' when this word is tabooed); Mong. *čučali*, Sonom Gara's *Erdeni-yin sang* 53d: *čučala*).

⁶⁹ I inserted this line to restore the parallelism with the preceding passage, taking the verb *gulamtal-* 'podderzhivat' *ogon' v ochage* = to keep the fire in the hearth alive' from Cheremisov (1973, 159b); Mong. *γolomta* + *la-*.

⁷⁰ These names are derived, with the suffix *-dAi*, from *borolžo* 'kustarnik, kusty = bush, shrubs' (Cheremisov 1973, 106) and *šaralža*, cf. *šaralza* 'bur'ian = tall weeds' (op. cit. 721a), respectively. See also the Khalkha botanical terms *borolj*, *boroljoi*, 'Ajania', *boroljigono* 'Pentaphylloides', *borolj* 'Betula fruticosa' and *šarilj* 'Artemisia sp.' in Öljiixutag (1985). Jigjidsuren and Johnson (2003) has Mong. *borolji*, *boroljai*, *boroljoyana* [one would expect *boroljajana*, like *ulajaljayana* 'strawberry', *bögereļjegene* 'raspberry'; the variant *boroljijana* means a kind of black squirrel] (not in Kowalewski 1844–9) < *boro* 'grey; brown'; different is Ordos *boroljin* 'sol plus ou moins sablonneux où il n'y a ni grandes dunes, ni herbes épaisses, mais seulement de mauvaises fines herbes' (Mostaert 1968, 81a); Kalm. *šarjdzŋ* 'Name verschiedener grosser Steppenpflanzen, z. B. *ümkē š.* 'übelriechender Wermut' etc. (Ramstedt 1935, 350b), Mong. *siralji*, *siraljin* 'Artemisia sp.' < *sira* 'yellow'. Kowalewski (1844–9, 2: 1521a), quotes this word from a Manchu-Mongol dictionary. In a Barguzin Ekhirit ritual recorded by Poppe (1936, 72: *Gal tax'ixa*, text no. 5), the lord spirit of fire

is the middle son of Heaven (*tenger' iin teel' i xübüün*), the eldest son of the Void (*ogtorgiin uugan xübüün*), the Hearth of the Fire (*galxan' i gulamta*; *-xan* is diminutive), the fate-giver of happiness (*zolxon' i zayaša*), he burned the *šbaral' zhan*-wormwood, chopped the *borol-zhon*-shrub. The parental or nurturing couple is mentioned here as Lady Sharalzhakhan and Old Man Borolzhokhon (*Šaralžaxan xatan, Borolžoxon öböğön*).

⁷¹ As the meaning of the word *xebxen* is obscure, “devouring” is a temporary substitute based on parallelism. It is not found in Cheremisov’s dictionary. The parallel word *xexeren* in the next line is a verbal adverb of *xexere-*, so *xebxen* may be the similar form of a verb *xebxe-*. Khalkha has a verb *xewxe-*, but its meaning ‘dabtax, coxix = to gorge, to hammer’, Mong. *kebki-*, Cewel (2013, 1036a), is not applicable here. It is not likely that our Buryat *xebxen* is a diminutive of *xeb* ‘form, mold, pattern’, antonym of *xebgüi* ‘shapeless’ and ‘unlimited’ (Cheremisov 1973, 638a), cf. also Khalkha *xewxen* = *xewdee*; *aajimxan, aajuxan, ert biš* ‘as usual; at a gentle pace, slowly, not too early’, Mong. *keben* (Cewel 2013, 1036a). Semantically Bur. *xübxī-* ‘razbukhat’, nabukhat’, *vzduvat* ‘sia = to inflate, to swell, to blow up’ (Cheremisov 1973, 610b), Mong. *köbkeyi-*, could be a cognate, but in Buryat the old *-Ayi-* stems should be represented by a diphthong or a long vowel; cf. also *xübe-* ‘nabukhat’ = to swell’ (Cheremisov 1973, 611a). Khalkha *xenxeg* = *xooloncor, xool maš xüsemtgii, xeterxii ix idemxii tegeed idsenee šingej čaddaggüi öwcin, ix tölöw nas ötlöxöd irne* ‘gourmand, glutton’, etc. (Cewel 2013, 1048a)—according to Bawden (1997, 490b): ‘greedy, avid; extravagant, obsessive’—would fit the context, but phonetically is too far. Dr. Khamutaev proposed to read *xebten* ‘lying, reclining’, an easier solution. See also the riddle *xixse üxer / xebten targalaa* ‘the blue(ish grey) ox became fat lying = *ünehen* ‘ashes’ in Bardakhanova (1999, 117).

⁷² The verbal noun, here predicative, *targuulhan* (*targülhan* in Poppe 1936) is probably a misprint for *targalban* ‘fattened’, intransitive, or *targaluulhan*, causative of *targal-zhired*, ‘tuchnet’; *polnet* = to grow fat, to grow plump; to put on weight’ (Cheremisov 1973, 415a). Cf. *torduul-* < *tordo-/tordi-* ‘podkarmivat’, *osobo podderzhivat* ‘pitanie (cheloveka, skot); fig. opekat’, *podderzhivat* = to feed; to take care of, to support, to foster’ (Cheremisov 1973, 430b). Dr. Khamutaev prefers the intransitive *targalban*.

⁷³ Bur. *deberge-* ‘razduvat’, *vypiachivat*, *preuvelichivat* = to blow up, to over-emphasize, to overstate’, causative of *deber-* ‘razlivat’*sia, vykhodit’ iz beregov, podnimat’ sia* (*napr. o reke*); *bit’ kliuchom, burlit’* = to overflow; to burst its banks, to flood (e.g., of a river); to gush up, to seeth’ (Cheremisov 1973, 214b) < **debür + ge-*, cf. Mong. *debül-*.

⁷⁴ Bur. *talxa(n)* ‘muká, testo, khleb = flour, dough, bread’, etc. (Cheremisov 1973, 411b–412a; in the Tugnuí sub-dialect *talxan* means ‘bread-grain’ (Shagdarov 1968, 162); Kalm. *talxon* ‘zermalmt, zerbröckelt, krumen; Oelet ‘geröstetes Weizenmehl’, Ramstedt (1935, 376a); Ord. *dalxa* ‘poudre, farine’ Mostaert (1968, 116a); Khalkha *talx(an)* ‘bread’; Mong. *talqan*.

⁷⁵ Cf. Kalm. *iwl-* ‘die Kuh (Ziege) zum zweitemal melken, nachdem das Kalb (Zicklein) schon gesogen hat’, Ramstedt (1935, 212b); Ord. *éwel-* ‘laisser sortir facilement le lait (se dit des tétines d’une vache, quand on a laissé sucer le veau pendant quelques instants avant de la traire’, *éwelge / iwelge sātā ünē* ‘vache dont on peut facilement et rapidement traire le lait’, *éwelge-*, causative of *éwel-* (Mostaert 1968, 251ab, 390b); Khalkha *iwle-* = *amitnī süü xöxöndöö buuj irex* ‘to come down to the udder (of milk)’, etc. (Cewel 2013, 420a); not in Cheremisov’s dictionary. See Mong. *ibel-*, *ibil-*, *ibilge*.

⁷⁶ See *xobol* ‘zhëlob; kanava = channel, groove’, etc.; *yubuu(n)* ‘rakovina (sluzhivshaia ukrasheniem) = cowry shell (used as ornament)’, also on the shaman’s dress, *xobol* may mean the oblong orifice of its cavity, cf. Cheremisov (1973, 574b, 782a); Mong. *qobul, ibayulibau*. From the text itself it is not clear if the cowry here was decorated with silver (*möngön*, Standard Bur. *müngen*, Mong. *mönggün*), or it was a cowry-shaped silver ornament, or ‘silver’ is an attribute indicating the color or emphasizing the value of the cowry, but according to Mitroshkina (1968, 72), for the Buryats of the Upper Lena, *yubuu* was an ornament made of a metallic plate and worn by the bride on the head at wedding (*ukrasenie iz metallicheskoj plastinki, kotoroe nadevala nevesta na golovu na svad’be*). Basaeva (1991, 162) mentions *yubuun* as the head ornament of the bride worn from the day of wedding up to the birth of her first child according to the tradition of the Oikhon Buryats. The same *yubuu(n)* is described as a little heart-shaped silver ornament (*serebrianoe ukrashenie, vypolnennoe v vide serdechka*) in Abaeva and Zhukovskaia (2004, 159). An Ekhirit riddle encoded *yubuun* as *xöndölön deer xöxösgei* ‘wagtail on the crossbeam’ (Poppe 1936, 93). According to Cheremisov (1973, 782) Bur. *yubuu* also means the ‘white spot on the forehead of an animal’ (‘otmetinka, zvëzdochka na lbu zhiivotnogo’). Lindgren (1935, 369), quotes Poppe’s Daur *čiguan yogoos* ‘white cowry’; her color pl. IIIb shows the collar of a Numinchen Tungus female shaman with numerous cowry shells. According to Gmelin’s list of wares, cowry shells, also called dragon heads, were sold at the Kiyaytu (Kyakhta) market on the Russo-Manchu frontier in the early eighteenth century: *Ibù* ‘Schlangenköpfe’ (cf. Kara 1961, 192: no. 93).

⁷⁷ Standard Bur. *gürlöö* ‘kosa = braid, plait, plaited hair’ (Cheremisov 1973, 166a), < **gürelege* < Bur. Mong. *güre-* ‘to braid, to plait’. During the wedding ceremony of the Western Buryats, married female relatives of the bridegroom combed out the hair of the bride and plaited nine plaits (*habiga* or *hanšag*) on the right and eight on the left side, see Basaeva (1991, 147 f.), also quoting Khangalov and Galdanova. According to Khangalov, the nine plaits on the right represent the ninety benevolent western king spirits (*xad*), the eight on the left—the eighty hostile eastern ones. Galdanova mentions that according to a Western Mongol tradition, the eight and nine plaits meant to wish the birth of eight daughters and nine sons. For *habiga*, see also Cheremisov (1973, 661a: ‘melkie kosichki (v pričëške nevesty) = small plaits (of the bride’s coiffure)’, Western Bur. *fig.* ‘devochka = little girl’.

⁷⁸ Ekhirit *nämtalzuul-*, Standard Bur. *nabtalzuul-*, causative of *nabtalza-* = *nabtagana-* ‘razvevat’ sia, kolebat’ sia, boltat’ sia (*o chëm-libo svisaiushchem*) = to flutter, to swing, to dangle (of something hanging)’ (Cheremisov 1973, 316b < *nabta* of *nabtayi-* etc. For *mt* < *bt*, see Ekhirit *namtar* - *nabtar* ‘low, short’, Mong. *nabtar*; Ekhirit *öndö-*, Standard Bur. *ebde-* - *emde-* ‘to break’, transit., Mong. *ebde-*.

⁷⁹ Lit. ‘(having) eight parts’, see Bur. *tabag* ‘otdel; otdelenie; komnata; pereryv = part, portion; department; room (in a building); break, pause’ (Cheremisov 1973, 419a), Mong. *tasay.*

⁸⁰ Bur. *xoolobšo* ‘ozherel’e, zhenskoe ukrashenie (iz nanizannykh monet, korallow) = necklace, woman’s ornament (of coins, coral beads etc. strung on a thread’ (Cheremisov 1973, 586a), from *xooloi* ‘throat; neck (of a vessel); voice’, Mong. *qoyolai* with *-bči*. See de Boulitchoff (1856, plate 6; Petri 1918, 220 (*xoolopsi*), 221 (fig. 4: nagrudnoe ukrashenie zamuzhnikh zhenshchin = breast ornament of married women). Basaeva (1991, between pp. 128 and 129) reproduced seven archival photos showing Buryat girls and married women in traditional dress; see also the illustrations to pp. 28, 85, and 67 in Curtin

(1909). In Abaeva and Zhukovskaia (2004, 159), a photo shows a Khori Buryat married woman in traditional dress, wearing hat, silver ornaments, and beads; see also some color plates after p. 224. The color plates (78–9) Georgi (1799/2005) portraying an Uda Buryat girl with many braids show the necklace, but also five little bells among the many hanging ornaments of the back of the dress, which usually ornate a shaman's dress. Georgi's color plates (80–1) depict an Uda Buryat married woman with two braids.

⁸¹ Western Bur. *saaza* 'kosa = braid, plaited hair' (Cheremisov 1973, 377b). According to Basaeva (1991, 85) the same word was also used for the woolen cloth or velveteen lath with buttons, coins or lead plates as well as silk ribbons sewn to the dress of the bridegroom by the girlfriends of the bride. Ramstedt (1935, 424a–5b) s.v. *tsādžī* 'Strafgesetz, Strafe', Mong. *čayaji*, *čayaja* quotes this Buryat word *sāzi* 'Flechte im Nacken'. Mong. *čayaji* is certainly from Chin. 冊子 *cezi*, *chaizi* 'registers, documents' (see also Kitan *č.ai w.un* < 冊文, epitaph). As to Bur. *saaza* 'braid', it goes back to **cāji*, possibly from Chin. 钗 *ca* 'hairpin, hair ornament'. Abaeva and Zhukovskaia (2004, 162), define Western Bur. *saaza* as 'ornament of the braid on the back' (*naspinno-nakosnoe ukrashenie*), made of corall beads (*šurag saaza*), or silver plates decorated with a few corall beads (*tümer saaza*, where *tümer* 'iron, metal'), or of black silk threads (*iühen saaza*, where *iühen* 'hair'). A dancing song (*yooxoroi duu*) in Bardakhanova (1999, 112) ends with the lines *Xadamal müngen saazamnai / Oro ruugaa xal'uuraa* "Prishitaia serebrianaia kosa / S makushki knizu perelivaetsia = The silver braid sewn on / is flowing down from the crown of the head" (ibid. 113), the note (ibid. 132) explains *xadamal müngen saaza* as a braid of ribbons with silver coins sewn on, used earlier by the Western Buryats to decorate the bridegroom who came to visit the bride's home (*lenta-kosa s prishitymi monetami, kotoroi ran'she zapadnye buriaty ukrashali zhenikha, priekhavshego svatat'sia*).

⁸² For *xang' ilaa*, verbal noun of *xang' il-*, see Bur. *xangil-* 'porot', *rasparivat'* = to unstitch, to unpick; *otryvat'*, *otdirat'* = to tear off, to tear away' (Cheremisov 1973, 546a), < *xangi*, preverb, as in *xangi tata-* 'otdirat' *otryvat'* = to rip off' (ibid. 545b), like *xaxal-* 'to split, to break', transit., and *xaxar-* 'to split, intrans., to be broken' < *xaxa*, Mong. *qayal-*, *qayara-* < *qaya*.

⁸³ Bur. *xete* 'ognivo = fire lighting device' (Cheremisov 1973, 652b), Mong. *kete*, the leather pouch that has a steel edge and usually silver decoration and contains flint stone and tinder. It was usually carried by men; it was hanging on a chain attached to the belt, together with the knife. Among some groups of the Alair Buryats, *xete* was an object of worship during the wedding ceremony: when the leader (*türüüšin*) of the bridegroom's party entered the tent of the bride's family, he payed homage to the firelighter that was hanging in the male side of the tent, see Basaeva (1991, 141). Cf. also Ord. *gete* 'la custode de cuir contenant un silex et de l'amadou et munie à sa base d'une pièce d'acier servant de briquette (la custode elle-même s'appelle *ulabči*)' (Mostaert 1968, 263a). A color photo in Abaeva and Zhukovskaia (2004) after p. 24, shows a late nineteenth-century Buryat *xete* with a pipe; see a black and white photo of another in Tulokhonov (1991, 295), further in Petri (1918, 251: fig. 93).

⁸⁴ The final *l* of this word is an emphatic particle, Mong. *ele*.

⁸⁵ Cf. Bur. *üyegüü* 'ne raspolozhennyi k družbe so sverstnikami = not disposed to have friends of one's own age' (Cheremisov 1973, 495b). Cf. MidMong. *MNT* §18 *üye qaya güüün* 'male relatives' (see de Rachewiltz 2004–13, 1: 261); Mong. *üy-e qay-a* = *nasu* •

tusiyal • *öb-iyer jörigü ügei* 'having no difference in age, rank, or heritage', *üy-e-yin nököd* 'friends/companions of the same age' (Norjin 1999, 685b, 686b).

⁸⁶ Bur. *naadan* 'igra, zabava, razvlechenie; nadan, vecher; vecherinka; postanovka, spektakl'; kontsert; shutka, nasmeshka; tok (*o ptitsakh*) = play, game, entertainment; evening party; staging; concert; joke, gibe, mockery; amusement; birds' mating place' (Cheremisov 1973, 315ab), Mong. *naγadum, naγadun*. Western Bur. *naadan* also means an evening farewell party for the bride (*vecher provodin nevesty*), see Basaeva 1991, 139; Bardakhanova 1999, 100–1.

⁸⁷ Not in Cheremisov, but cf. *nabtagar* 'svisiaushchii; navisiaiushchii (*o tuchakh*) = hanging over' (of clouds) < *nabtai-* 'viset'; *navisat'* (*ob oblake*) = to hang; to hang over (of a cloud)', (1973, 316b, and Mong. *nabtagar* 'hanging; flat', *Mongyol Kitad Toli* 1999, 338a.

⁸⁸ *Nadxaltuul-*, causative of *nadxalta-*, derived from *nadxa-* 'kachat'sia, kolykhat'sia, razvevat'sia = to swing, to flicker, to flutter' (Cheremisov 1973, p. 317b), < **nadqa-* or **nasqa-*; cf. MidMong. *niqsa-* in the *MNT* §90 hapax *niqsaqalja-* 'to stagger' (see de Rachewiltz; *zhàndòng* in the Chin. interlinear translation means 'trembling; shaking, shivering'). For the compound suffix *-qalja-*, cf. *MNT* §21 *šičabalja-*, Mong. *-γalja-* / *-balja-* / *-gelje-* / *-belje-* in *čičabalja-*, *kelegelje-*, *qulmayalja-*, *sanayalja-*, *tatayalja-*, *tatabalja-*, etc. In the corresponding passage, Blo-bzang bstan-'dzin's *Altan Tobči* has the transitive *nişqalajγul-* 'to let (the load) sway to and fro', probably distorted from *nişayaljaγul-* (with metathesis *γs - sq*)?

⁸⁹ Bur. *xor'* in 'dvadtsat' = twenty' also means 'bol' shoe kolichestvo = many' (Cheremisov 1973, 589a); here it may have been used for the alliteration only. It may also be an error for *xoyor*. If so, then the line should mean 'in the feast of the second month', and accordingly, the reconstructed line should sound 'in the feast of the eighth month'.

⁹⁰ Standard Bur. *narin* 'tonkiï = thin; uzkiï = tight; vysokiï (*o zvukakh, golose*) = high (pitch of voice); akkuratnyï = exact; iz''iashnyï = fine, delicate', etc. (Cheremisov 1973, 323a); Kalm. *närñ*.

⁹¹ Ekhirit *xürbe* 'iagnënok = lamb', Selenge Tsongol 'rodivšišia zimoï iagnënok = lamb born in winter' (Cheremisov 1973, 625b; Tsydendambaeв (1968, 172) indicates that *xürwe* 'lamb' is used instead of *xurgan* in the patois of the Kurumchi (*Xuramša*) clan of the Bulagat. Cf. Ord. *körwö* 'qui a déjà atteint une certaine taille; jeunes enfants ou jeunes bestiaux qui ont déjà atteint une certaine taille'; *körwö xurga (ešige)* 'agneaux (chevreaux) qui ont déjà atteint une certaine croissance' (Mostaert 1968, 431–2); MidMong. in the Yemen polyglot *körbe* 'petit animal née à la fin de la saison' < Turk. *körpe*, see Golden (2000, 218, note).

⁹² Bur. *degel*, Mong. *debel, degel* (> *de'el* > *dēl*).

⁹³ Causative of *ergüüte-*, Standard Bur. *er'yüüte-* 'durachit'sia, valiat' duraka, sumasbrodnichat' = to play the fool, to be wild or extravagant' (Cheremisov 1973, 775b).

⁹⁴ Bur. *duur'aa(n)* 'otzvuk, ekho, rezonans = echo, resonance', *duur'aa-* 'podrazhat', kopirovat' = to imitate, to copy', etc. (Cheremisov 1973, 206ab); Ord. *durā-*, *dūrā-* 'imiter, rassembler à' (Mostaert 1968, 163a); Mong. *dayuriyan, dayuriya-*.

⁹⁵ Tentative reconstruction of a possibly missing line.

⁹⁶ Bur. *ursa* 'konusoobraznyj shalash, chum = conical tent [like that of the Evenki]' (Cheremisov 1973, 477a); in a Barguzin Ekhirit *durdalga* (Poppe 1936, 69), the shaman invites (*ur'iyibd'i* < *uriya bida*) the celestial deities (*ogtorgoyoo / tengeryee burxaša* < *oytarγuy-yuyan / tengri-yügen burqad-i*) into his home *ursa/terme ger*. Such a tent is built

behind the Mother Tree in the *šanar* ritual, see Rintchen (1961, 2: 128). Cf. Kalm. *urtsō* ‘Hütte, Zelt ohne Rauchring, d. heisst, nur mit Dachstangen, die sich oben kreuzen’ (Ramstedt 1935, 451b), also quoting Sakha *urusa* and Russian *rocha*; Khalkha *urc* = *owooxoi*, Mong. *uruča* in Cewel (2013, 827). For *terme*, see Kalm. *termə*, *termj* ‘Wand, Wandgitter’ Ramstedt (1935, 393b); Oir. *terme*; MidMong. *MNT altan terme*, etc.; cf. also Róna-Tas and Berta (2011, 2: 901f).

⁹⁷ According to Cheremisov (1973, 583b), Bur. *xondoloi* ‘iagoditsy = testicles; zad (*che-loveka*) = buttocks (of a human); krup (*loshadi*) = croup (of a horse)’ but *xondoloi sagaan guran* ‘dikii kozěl s belym krupom = male wild goat with white rump’. Cf. Kalm. *χond^{plā}* ‘das dicke Fleisch, Steiss, Schenkel’ (Ramstedt 1935, 185a, with cognates *χond^{rtspc}*, *χond^{psxp}*, *χond^{psn}*); Ord. *xondolō*, *xondočog*, *xondorčog*, *xondorog* ‘croupe’, the last three words are also used in topographic sense (Mostaert 1968, 352a); Khalkha *xond(o)loi* = *amitni biyeiin nuruum šuu|ax ar xeseg
| |* ‘the lower end part of the back of an animal’ (Cewel 2013, 947a); Mong. *qondolai*.

⁹⁸ Western Bur. *adaba(n)* ‘skotina, domashnee zhivotnoe = domesticated animal; skot = livestock, beast; horses; loshadi, koni, tabun = herd of horses’ (Cheremisov 1973, 31a); also Matkheev (1968, 35); Mong. *adasun*.

⁹⁹ Bur. *ar’ban* ‘zhir v briushnoi polosti loshadi (*lakomoe bliudo; upotrebliausheesia v syrom vide*) = fat on the horse’s belly (a delicate dish used to be eaten raw); zhir = fat; zhirnoe briukho = fat belly’ (Cheremisov 1973, 61b); Mong. *qarbin*.

¹⁰⁰ Bur. *hoxor* ‘blind’, Western Bur. ‘krivoī, kosoī, odnoglazī = cross-eyed, one-eyed’ (Cheremisov 1973, 686a).

¹⁰¹ Bur. *türgen* ‘swift’ may also mean ‘strong, energetic, hot-tempered’, cf. above, note 25.

¹⁰² Doyoodoi: according to Khangalov, this spirit is one of the three herders of the Esegue Malan Tengri, the head of the Eastern, benevolent gods. In the Kuda tradition, he is Dobyoodoi, protector of livestock, he rides a horse, holds a quiver and a bow as well as a lasso *buguli*; he was involved in the creation of humans; Manzhigeev (1978, 43): once wolves ate a number of foals while Dobidoi was asleep, for what he was trod by his lord; Manzhigeev (1978, 67): Dobidoi’s lustful wife Samsa Khatan is the protector of sexuality, cf. Samsahan Khatan, protector of the sexual organs (organs of reproduction). The name may be from **doyo-* - *dobi-* ‘pugat’sia, izbegat’; *vzdragivat’* = to be scared; to evade; to shudder’, intransitive stem of the transitive *doyoo-* - *dob’oo-* ‘vspugivat’ = to frighten, to scare, etc.’ (Cheremisov 1973, 192b, 193a); if so, this name is derived of *doyoo*, a verbal noun, with the denominal suffix *-dAi*, cf. *düüdei* ‘younger brother’, *sagaadai* ‘white-haired’; baby-talk *maadai* ‘sheep’ < *maara-* ‘to bleat’ (Cheremisov 1951, 818); *Bayandai*, clan name; *Ulaadai*, *Xoridoi* (*Qoridai*), *Xöxödei*, *Xuašaadai*, proper names; MidMong. *Borjigidai*, etc.

¹⁰³ Bur. *hogtuu* ‘drunken, intoxicated’, Western Bur. ‘pridurkovatyī = simple-minded’ (Cheremisov 1973, 681b).

¹⁰⁴ Masandai, name of another spirit. For the stem of this name, cf. Bokhan Bur. *masa-* ‘skuchivatsia = to cluster, to crowd together’ (Cheremisov 1973, 294a), from **mačA-*, or Khalkha *maca-*, Mong. *maču-* ‘to climb; to trudge’?

¹⁰⁵ Bur. *aduu(n)* ‘tabun, kosiak, stado (*loshadēi*) = herd of horses’ (Cheremisov 1973, 32ab); here ‘horse’; Mong. *adurun*; cf. also Matkheev (1968, 35).

¹⁰⁶ Bur. *tabalaa ügei* ‘without interruption’ or ‘without dividing/separating’, cf. *tabal-*

‘otryvat’, otrezat’ = to tear off, to cut off; otgorazhivat’ = to fence off, to partition; razryvat’, pereryvat’, prekrashchat’ = to break off, to cease’, etc. (Cheremisov 1973, 419b); Mong. *tasul-*.

¹⁰⁷ Bur. *xun* ‘swan’, *xun saġaan xonin* ‘a sheep as white as a swan’ (Cheremisov 1973, 601a). Here swan is a metaphor for the sacrificial animal, a white stallion or a white ram. A white sheep was offered during the initiation of an Aga Buryat shamaness described in Poppe (1989).

¹⁰⁸ Bur. *xaldaga*, not in Cheremisov’s dictionary; its translation as ‘scrotum’ is inspired by *uuta* ‘sack’ in its attribute. Khalkha has *xaldaga* = *eriin belge*, *böldögö* ‘the male reproductive organ’ (Cewel 2103, 892). Kalm. *χald^hγvn* (syn. *šodānē arsn*) ‘die dünne Haut am Penis’ (Ramstedt 1935, 162a); Ord. *xaldaga* ‘testicles’ (Mostaert 1968, 327b). Next to the text discussed here, in an invocation to the Dame of the Agna (Ongna) River (*Onnīn ezi*), in Poppe (1936, 77–9), the female organs appear in a hyperbolic description (idem. 78): *alda saġaan xoimorto / aršam saġaan orondon’ / xeer’i šineen xexeigiin / xoimor dundan’ delgeelgeben / uutain šineen umaigiin / xülzür deeren’ delgeelgeben / xöxö utabaar / xiü xöbö tataža buur’ ilban* . . . “On the fathom-wide place of honor / On the *arshin*-wide white bed / (She) let spread the placenta as big as the grassland / In the middle of the place of honor / (She) let spread at the foot of the bed / Her womb as big as a sack / (She) settled pulling with a blue thread / the umbilical chord / . . .” In Sakha, *käyāi* ‘slizistoe vydelenie iz polovykh organov stel’ noi korovy ili zhereboi kobyly = mucuous secretion from the reproductive organs of a cow in calf or a mare with foal’ (Pekarskii 2008, 1: col. 1005), is a word from the old language of the Buryats assimilated by the Sakha, see Kažyžynski (1961, 144, quoting *MNT* §121 keke ‘amniotic fluid’ and Ord. *geki* ‘membrane enveloppant le fœtus’ (Mostaert 1968, 256b).

¹⁰⁹ Bur. *ozogoi*; Kalm. *oz^hγā*, *ozā* ‘das männliche Glied’, syn. *šodā*, Ramstedt (1935, 292a); Ord. *oġgo*, *oġogō*, (Mostaert 1968, 506b); Khalkha *oj(o)goi*; Mong. *oġoyai* ‘penis’; MidMong. in the Yemen Polyglot *oġayai* (Golden 2000, 212/9) Muqaddimat al-Adab *oġoya* id. Bur. *urġa* ‘shest s petlei (*alia lovli lošbadej ili skota*) = pole with noose (for catching horses or cattle)’, in Tünkhe ‘ukriuk, shest dlja lovli ryby = fishing rod’ (Cheremisov 1973, 474a), Kalm. Oelet *ūrġv* ‘lange Stange mit Riemenschlinge zum Einfangen der Pferde, Lasso’, Ramstedt (1935, 454b) (with Manchu *urġan*, Ewenki *ukurġa*, Turk. *uqrug*, Russ. *ukriuk*, and quoting Dörbet *tsalmⁿ* and Oelet *mōmⁱ* [*< boyomi*], both ‘lasso’); Ord. *ūrġa* ‘perche à noed coulant pour prendre les cheveux’ (Mostaert 1968, 739a), Khalkha *uurġa*; Mong. *uṛurġa*, MidMong. *MNT u’urġa*, Menggu Yiyu *uqurġa* or *uṛurġa* id. The comparison indicating the size is certainly hyperbolic, but it would better fit a stallion than a ram.

¹¹⁰ Eastern Bur. *alduur*, Western *alduuri* ‘oshibka, upushchenie, pogreshnost’ = error, omission, mistake’, *alduurigiüi* ‘besproigryshnyi = safe, risk-free’ (Cheremisov 1973, 42a); *alduuri* (deverbal noun from Mong. *alda-* + *-γuri*).

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Characteristics of the Surgut Khanty Shamans

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Among the Surgut Khanty, whose shamanism this article deals with, old folk traditions, and archaic ideas and beliefs, have been preserved, alongside people who, even today, possess special gifts; this is a reflection of the area's isolation, among other ethnocultural reasons. We cannot speak of shamanism here as an exclusively integrated phenomenon, as it is impossible to define an exclusive and cohesive method for acquiring shaman knowledge. The Khanty have long been familiar with men with special capabilities; each type had its own name. Now, unfortunately, it is not always possible to distinguish the ranges of duties or to define the differences between the methods and knowledge of those performing the cult: many things have now fallen into oblivion. In this area a person may become a shaman in various ways. He may receive the ability from his ancestors (by inheriting it), he may learn the craft from an experienced shaman, or he may be chosen by the gods. However, my own data confirm that the main way of becoming a shaman is by being chosen. One of the signs of being chosen was good fortune in hunting or fishing. On the basis of my collection work, the diverse tasks of Surgut Khanty shamans can be divided into three main groups: (1) clarifying questions related to the course of people's lives, such as shamanizing in cases of sickness, birth, and death; (2) shamanizing for the effectiveness of work activities; and (3) conducting the communal ceremonies. According to my informants, the power of the shaman depends on the strength of the god who has chosen him/her and on his/her helping spirits, although in general male shamans are stronger than female shamans. Today the number of shamans has decreased, and their knowledge is less than that of their ancestors, but the belief that in hard times, of bad health or financial troubles, they can be a help, is still alive.

Researchers have been studying Khanty shamanism with varying intensity since the eighteenth century. According to the figures given by Vladislav M. Kulemzin, a total of sixteen authors up to the present have mentioned this subject (Kulemzin 1976, 5–18). A study by Zoia P. Sokolova (1991, 225–41) on the problems of research on Ob-Ugrian shaman-

ism is devoted to their findings and work. Only two of these authors have dealt with the problem of the shamanism of the Eastern Khanty within the Khanty as a whole, namely Mikhail B. Shatilov (1931, 1976) and Vladislav M. Kulemzin (1976, 1994, 1995; Kulemzin and Lukina 1977; Kulemzin et al. 2000). The shamanism of the Tromagan Khanty of the Surgut region is a topic few have explored (Kerezsi 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001a, 2001b; Pentikäinen 1998; Dudeck 2013). An attempt will be made here to sum up the most important facts I have been able to gather on the subject over the years from my informants.

The Khanty of Surgut, among whom I have made my observations, belong to the so-called Agan-Vasiugan ethnographical group of the Khanty in a geographical, economic, and cultural sense. Before the appearance of the Russians mainly Ket and Samoyed people lived in these lands, and Khanty could only be found in small numbers. Their immigration went on for centuries and concluded only at the end of the seventeenth century (Martynova 1998, 203–9).

Among the Surgut Khanty, whose shamanism this article deals with, old folk traditions, and archaic ideas and beliefs, have been preserved, alongside people who, even today, possess special gifts; this is a reflection of the area's isolation, among other ethnocultural reasons.

Types of Shamans

The Khanty families living beside the Tromagan call their shaman *tértte ko* if he is a man and *tértte ne* in the case of a woman. The name used beside the Great Yugan (Bolshoi Yugan) is *kirta-kob*. In both dialects this word actually means “magician.”

It is impossible to comprehensively describe or characterize either shamanism or the way of obtaining shamanic knowledge for any people. We must distinguish the shamans in terms of their having particular knowledge to fulfill different tasks in society, who have presumably received their knowledge in different ways.

Consequently we cannot speak about shamanism as an exclusively integrated phenomenon, as it is also impossible to define an exclusive and cohesive method for acquiring shaman knowledge. The Khanty have long been familiar with people with special capabilities; each type had its own name. Now, unfortunately, it is not always possible to distinguish the ranges of duties or to define the differences between the

methods and knowledge of those performing the cult: many things have now fallen into oblivion.

Even in the 1950s and 1960s tale-tellers (*mont'è-ko*) could still be found in this area. They healed people by telling them tales. However, my informants did not know anything about how these people received their knowledge.

The figure of *jisilta-ku* occurred somewhat more frequently among the Surgut Khanty. This term refers on the river Tromagan to people who are able to cut themselves. Their main task is healing the sick. They are informed in their dreams that they have become “cutters” and they also feel some internal pressure to stab themselves, while remaining absolutely sure that will not suffer any harm.

Those people who are able to heal exclusively by hand are called *jošen jokb*. Dreams also play an important role in obtaining this gift, during which the man is informed about his being chosen and obtains his special capabilities. These people pass through a certain illness, which only ceases if they undertake their tasks.

The oneiromantics were called *ulom-verta ko/ne*. They were mostly women and their task was not limited to interpreting dreams; they were also able to find lost objects. In many cases they used children as mediators, whom they sank into a special conscious condition in which—as if in a dream—they saw the lost objects with precision.

The Surgut Khanty called those who were able to tell the future without a drum *moleksete ko/ne*, that is, a person who is able to feel with his/her hands. These could be both men and women. This, they believed, was also a gift from a god that lasted until death.

The term *értte ko/ne* can be translated as a knowing, feeling man/woman, and those falling into this category correspond best to the generally accepted concept of a shaman. These people, all of them have drums, get their knowledge through divine election, namely from the Chief God or the Man Supervising the World. They hear the “divine voice” about their being chosen only once in their lives, an event which is followed by a long-lasting shaman illness. The gods decide already at birth who they choose to be a shaman, although the symptoms only appear in adolescence.

Although the Khanty distinguish several kinds of knowing men, whose tasks and the ways in which they obtain their knowledge differ in several respects, there are nonetheless some recurring circumstances that can be found with each:

- (1) Every one of them believes that they have been chosen for their task by the higher powers.
- (2) The realization of the gift takes place in a special conscious condition, usually in a dream or a vision.
- (3) As soon as a person has been chosen by supernatural powers they begin to receive the knowledge necessary for performing their tasks successfully. They pass through this period as an illness that lasts until they start practicing.
- (4) Although among the Surgut Khanty we cannot speak of the inheritance of extraordinary capabilities we can observe that in some families these types of persons occur frequently, in others never.
- (5) None of the categories encompass monopolizing controllers of religious life, though there can be differences in their social standing.
- (6) The Surgut Khanty with extraordinary capabilities in a “normal” conscious condition are ordinary fishermen or hunters, just like the other people around them, but they may be wiser and more sensitive and expert in their folk traditions.

Becoming a Shaman

Among the Eastern Khanty a person may become a shaman in various ways. He may receive it from his ancestors, may learn the craft from an experienced shaman, or may be chosen by the gods (Shatilov 1931, 121). However, our own data, like those obtained by Kulemzin among the Vakh and Vasiugan Khanty confirm that the main way of becoming a shaman is by being chosen. Shamans are people who believe with deep conviction that they have been especially chosen by the gods. Leonid M. Sopochnin, for example, was chosen by Sorñi Kan iki when he was still very young. As he recalls:

I was 16 years old then, a young kid. I travelled with my reindeer to the village of Russkinskie. I was completely sober because I didn't drink a drop before I was twenty. On the way back I had reached the Pesika-imi-yagun stream, the place of the spirit there, when it began. The sun had just started to rise when some kind of creatures began to whistle and cry out to me. I couldn't see anything, but I shuddered as though someone had poured cold water over me. My reindeer were frightened too, they faltered, kept looking back and pricked up their ears,

keeping watch. I began to drive them quickly. We reached a swamp. We crossed a small stream, then a swamp, and finally I passed beside a lake. When I reached the shore of the second lake I knew I had to turn to the right, but I kept going straight ahead, I have no idea where to. It was almost light when I came to my senses. I was completely frozen and my whole body trembled. I unhitched the reindeer and lay down to sleep. Suddenly I was woken by a sound like thunder. I looked in the direction of the rising sun and everything was filled with a shining light; a very handsome young man was travelling that way. He was mounted on a beautiful white horse, and when he passed in front of me, his voice was like the sound of an arrow shot with great force. I heard a sound like a whistle. This splendid young man was none other than Sorñi Kan iki, the youngest son of the supreme god Numi Torum. From then on I began to think and see the century.¹ Up to the age of 22, I just thought about what would happen to people, I saw the century. Then they said that I had seen everything, I do not have to think any further, I know what will happen in the future. Then I began to heal people and help them. (Leonid M. Sopočin, June 1992)

One of the signs of being chosen was good fortune in hunting or fishing. Ivan S. Sopočin explained that the shaman may not use his knowledge in his own interest, but the spirits may help him even without this because “I have never heard of a poor or hungry shaman” (Ivan S. Sopočin, Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992). The first sign that this elderly head of the family had been chosen appeared in his exceptional luck at hunting right from a very early age. He was orphaned very young and went to live with his uncle, who was a heartless, wicked man. The uncle grew tired of supporting the child so when he was twelve years old he put him in a boat and took him back to his parents’ hunting territory. He gave the boy an ax and a knife and left him to take care of himself. Left alone, the young Ivan Sopočin was terribly afraid, since it was believed that a house that had stood empty for a long while was full of evil spirits (*menkvek*), who could even kill a person. This is why he did not move into his parents’ house, but made a kind of hut for himself from dry branches so that he was protected from the frosts that came

¹ This word “century” may sound a bit strange for us in this context, but this was exactly what he wanted to say. This is a special way of seeing things, an inner sight which comes from his shamanic abilities and which is hard to explain. In this case he saw the twentieth century from a special, timeless point of view, as if it was one single object that can be seen as a whole.

early. Then he blocked a stretch of the river, the way he had seen his uncle do it, and he made a fish trap and caught a great many fish. He set traps for birds and smaller animals, and his traps were always full. He lived so well that months later his uncle wanted to call him back so that they could work together, but by then he had become independent. Not long after, his encounters with the spirits began and he became a shaman (Ivan S. Sopočin, *Woki-rap-yagun*, June 1992).

There are no physical conditions here for becoming a shaman, such as being born with teeth, or with six fingers.

Just as among the Khanty of Vasiugan (Karjalainen 1927, 251), on the Tromagan the person chosen by the spirits learns in his dream through hallucinations what he needs to do and when, and how and with what song he should turn to the different spirits. The prospective shaman, in the course of the shamanic illness, which lasts for several years (usually three to seven), gets to know every spirit, god and other creature who populate the three cosmic regions, but are invisible to other people.

Whichever way he is chosen, the shaman will only be recognized as such by his community—among the Khanty usually his kin—if he is in possession of the two types of knowledge which are necessary for his successful work. One of these is special, connected to altered states of consciousness (dreams, visions, trances), while the other is a set of information that can be acquired the conventional way as well (shamanic techniques, the names and function of spirits, the mythology and genealogy of the kin, secret language). However, one of the peculiarities of the Eastern Khanty's shamanism is that these two types of knowledge are not taught by an older shaman, but the shaman to be has to learn them autodidactically. The symptoms of the calling of a prospective shaman are easily recognized. He has his head in the clouds, he seeks solitude, he has visions, he sings in his sleep. There is no public ceremony of initiation among the Eastern Khanty, which naturally does not mean there is no initiation at all. It can occur in the shaman's sleep or in an unconscious experience.

This relatively simple way of receiving the shaman's knowledge is one of the distinguishing features of Surgut Khanty shamans. V. M. Kulemzin found parallels among the Vasiugan Khanty.²

² See also Kulemzin's works cited below.

At the same time, it is probable that besides being chosen, there is also a hereditary path to becoming a shaman among the Surgut Khanty, given that it is generally found that shamans come from families where there have already been such people. For example, Leonid M. Sopochnin's grandmother was also a shaman and according to his account he learnt a lot from her. Iosif I. Sopochnin, the youngest son of the elderly shaman, regularly hears voices which keep telling him that he must become a shaman. He does not want to accept this task and so he is often sick and constantly struggling to cope with neurotic complaints. During my stay at the Woki-rap-yagun river, in the summer of 1991, his father asked the spirits what was the matter with his son and they answered that it was nothing serious, only that he was protesting against becoming a shaman.

The Shaman's Power

Iosif Sopochnin, the youngest son of the elderly shaman, Ivan Sopochnin, explained that the Surgut Khanty distinguish three kinds of shaman. The strongest shaman is one who can go into the house of the supreme god, Numi Torum, the next is one who can only reach the threshold, and the third can only go to the fence around the house.

The power of the shamans depended, according to my informants, primarily on the power of the god who chose them; this god set their tasks and directed their deeds. Apart from this god, the number and power of the helping spirits subordinated to the shaman also influenced the power of the shaman. These could be manifested in the most varied forms: an inanimate object or, most frequently, animals and birds, such as the wolf, fox, crow, or waterfowl (Kulemzin 1976, 94). As noted above, one of Leonid's helping spirits was the figure of an elk on his sacred sled, while his fighters were tiny men with swords in their hands (Leonid M. Sopochnin, Yinku-yagun, June 1993). All I was able to learn from the much more reserved Ivan S. Sopochnin was that one of his helping spirits was Nai imi in the sacred chest, goddess of the household fire, and another helping spirit may perhaps have had the form of a wolf because he told me that he was on very good terms with the wolves, and they had never harmed any of his young reindeer and did not even come near his house; if necessary, he could talk to them too (Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

The shamans are able to measure their power not only by the effectiveness of their activity, but also in their struggles with each other.

In general male shamans are stronger than female shamans. Women are able to shamanize only with the help of fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*), but the men are also able to shamanize without it (Leonid M. Sopochin, Yinku-yagun, June 1993). An entirely different opinion of this is held among other Siberian peoples with shamanic beliefs since the Chukchi, Sakha, Inuit, Buryat and Altai Turks, for example, believe that female shamans are much stronger than their male colleagues (Basilov 1984, 27).

According to Leonid M. Sopochin there are many harmful shamans among the women in particular:

The women shamans can bring an evil spell on people. Many of them shamanize by sending their souls under the earth. Only a good, strong shaman can end the evil spell. It is difficult even for him. Then the souls of the shamans have to struggle with each other. Men can also be black shamans. Their soul too goes under the earth when a spell is imposed. The gods do not intervene in the struggle of shamans. The weaker one can even die in the struggle. They shoot arrows at each other. For example, the shaman goes out to hunt and suddenly he feels as though his body has been pierced through. This has been done by the arrow of the other shaman. From outside it appears as though the shaman has fallen ill suddenly while hunting. They don't know the cause. It is a spell cast by the other one. (Leonid M. Sopochin, Yinku-yagun, June 1993)

In contrast with the good shamans, harmful shamans die after suffering from illness for a long while (Leonid M. Sopochin, Yinku-yagun, June 1993).

The Role of the Shaman

The shaman plays a central role in the religious life of the community. He is irreplaceable in any ritual that deals with the experiences of the human spirit. These are for example the sicknesses, when the spirit of sickness steals or possesses the spirit of the human, or death, when the shaman leads the spirit of the departed to the other world. But the shaman has a leading role in the economic activities (hunting, fishing) as well: they call on him if the prey gets thinner.

On the basis of my collecting work, the diverse tasks of Surgut Khanty shamans can be divided into three main groups: (1) clarifying questions related to the course of people's lives, such as shamanizing in cases of sickness, birth, and death; (2) shamanizing for the effectiveness of work activities; and (3) conducting the communal ceremonies.

The healing role of the shaman is to discover, with the aid of his helping spirits, which spirit has stolen the soul of the sick person and how it can be recovered. But since the Khanty of the Surgut region believe that the question of life and death is in the hands of the supreme deity Torum, the shaman first has to discover the will of the supreme god and can only begin shamanizing if the answer is positive.

Since it is a difficult task, the shamanizing must be done with a drum. You have to go up to our great ones in the sky and ask them. I turn to Sorñi kan iki, Torum at'i, Torum anki and Meγ anki. My soul goes away to them. I learn from them whether the life of the sick person will continue or not. If so, I will shamanize to the utter limits, I will heal the sick person. Then I turn to my own helping spirits . . . they heal the sick person in an instant . . . When I begin to shamanize, it is a big problem that the sick person is far away; I and my spirits fly there . . . The sick person begins to feel better right away, even if he has been on the point of death. But it is not good either if he recovers suddenly; it has to be done gradually, the way a tree grows. (Leonid M. Sopočin, Yinkuyagun, June 1993)

I found two basic methods of healing sickness among my informants. One was taking the spirit of sickness out of the sick person's body and the other was recovering the stolen soul from the lord of diseases. During our trip in 1993, Leonid M. Sopočin was sick for a long while with a sore throat and a fever for days on end. One morning he came to see me and told me that he was feeling better and would recover because during the night he had wrestled with an assistant in female form of Kyń iki; he had won and then he was able to take out of his throat the thick white grubs that had been devouring him.

The other method of ending sickness was much more tiring for the shaman. In such cases he had to go down to the underworld and bring back the soul of the sick person. Leonid M. Sopočin described the story of such a journey in the following way. First of all he had to reach the entrance to the underworld, which is a circular hole leading deep under the ground. Entering this, he reached a river that he crossed in a

boat. Besides this he had to overcome six other obstacles, making a total of seven; they included wild animals, fire, dense thorny scrub, and a forest. Finally, he reached a vast hall lit by the light of the fire, where Kyń iki sat on his throne in a black robe. He told him that the sick person still had much to do on the earth, and he had not yet accomplished all the tasks set for him, and so he asked him to release the soul of the sick person. The lord of the underworld agreed and the shaman returned to earth with the soul of the sick person by the same tiring route. After the shamanic ceremony ended he fell into a deep sleep that lasted several hours because he felt extremely tired and wounded. (Leonid M. Sopočin, June 1992) He was not prepared to answer the question of what would happen if Kyń iki did not want to release the soul of the sick person. However, we know from the literature that in such cases the shaman hides the soul of the sick person in the folds of his clothing or entices it to follow him and leads it out of the realm of the shades (Basilov 1984, 20). It is also the task of the shaman to find out what sacrificial gift the given spirit needs in exchange for the returned soul.

The other very important group of tasks of the shaman is related to work. The Khanty of the Surgut region still believe that success in fishing and hunting depends mainly on the will and help of the gods and spirits around them. If someone has not had good fortune for a long while, he turns to the shaman to find out which spirit is angry with him and what gift is needed to appease him. Just as in the previous cases, what gives the shaman his strength in this task is that he is able to enter into contact with the supernatural forces and tell them people's requests, that is, he is an intermediary between men and gods.

The third group of tasks is closely linked to the previous activity but is nevertheless somewhat broader: conducting the great communal ceremonies. The shamans' mediating activity between men and spirits in this case lies in the fact that they know which spirit must be approached for a rich hunting bag or an abundant catch of fish. While anyone can perform an individual ceremony of sacrifice at home or in his own family sacred grove, only the shaman can conduct communal sacrificial ceremonies. Leonid M. Sopočin explained that when they pray to several gods or guardian spirits at the same time, and make a mass animal sacrifice, several shamans are present and they work in succession (Leonid M. Sopočin, Yinku-yagun, June 1993). I saw an example of this in the summer of 1993 in the village of Russkinskie at an enormous sacrificial ceremony held for all the Khanty of the Surgut region where, besides

Leonid M. Sopochin, three other shamans participated. Each shaman stood beside a sacrificial animal, the eldest shaman began to play the drum and asked the god to whom he had sacrificed the animal to come down to men and take part in the ceremony. After the drumming and prayer, he dealt the animal a blow to the back of the head and stabbed the reindeer. He was followed by the other shamans with their own drumming, prayer, and animal sacrifice. They sacrificed a total of eight reindeer, one after the other. Originally, they were to have sacrificed fourteen: seven to the greatest gods: Torum, Torum anki, Sorñi Kan iki, Mey anki, Kyñ iki, T'ors naj imi and Wojegh ort torum, and the other seven to the greatest local communal helping spirits of the Surgut Khanty. However, lacking sufficient money, only the guardian spirit of the Tromagan river received an animal sacrifice. They gave the other spirits only smaller gifts, mainly textiles (Leonid M. Sopochin, June 1993). The shamans directed the whole ceremony, told everyone what to do and said which spirit should receive which fabric. And finally they took the gifts of the spirits to their trees in the sacred grove.

The Shamanic Ceremony

The shamanic ceremony generally began in the evening “because even the gods don’t have time during the day, they work too” (Ivan S. Sopochin, *Woki-rap-yagun*, March 1991). They close the door of the tent or house, light a fire and the shaman’s assistant begins to warm the drum. The shaman puts on a white shirt and boots while another assistant spreads smoke throughout the room to drive out harmful, wicked powers. With the help of his sacred chest the shaman finds out whether there is any obstacle to holding the ceremony and, if everything is in order, the ceremony can begin. Before commencing they give money to the spirit of the drum so that it too will help the shaman.

The men occupy a position beside the shaman and the women further away to one side or opposite. The shaman begins to play softly and slowly, then steadily faster and louder. At the peak of the ceremony he springs to his feet and begins to dance. The men begin to call the spirits with rhythmic cries of hey, hey. They continue until the shaman sits back in his place. After each song the shaman turns the drum around his waist three times in the direction of the sun’s path (fig. 1) and if the sound of the drum is not resonant enough, he gives it to his assistant to warm it (fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Ivan S. Sopochin turns the drum, August 1991. Photo by Ágnes Kerezsi.



Fig. 2. The shaman's assistants warm up the drum. Yinku-yagun, June 1993.
Photo by Ágnes Kerezsi.

The shamanic ceremony sometimes lasts several hours and at the end all of the men present play a few beats on the drum to indicate that they have accepted the shaman's activity. Leonid M. Sopochnin uses whistles and the elderly shaman speaks with the spirits in a language incomprehensible to others. Their answer will tell you at the end of the shaman ceremony.

The Tromagan shamans were not entitled to payment for their activity. Despite this, everyone generally gave them money, fur, or a reindeer out of gratitude, but the shamans themselves could not set the extent of this payment, "otherwise the gods became angry and did not help the shaman" (Ivan S. Sopochnin, Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

At such important ceremonies as the bear feast, the Tromagan shamans, like those beside the Vakh, did not play a special role at all. They were participants with the same rights and status as the others.

Shamanic Equipment and Dress

In contrast with the shamans of the Vasiugan Khanty (Kulemzin 1976, 68), those of the Surgut region did not have a specific shaman costume. They shamanized in the clothes they had been wearing beforehand, except for a white shirt they put on over their clothes and, even in summer, they put on reindeer fur boots.

They have to put on a white shirt because white is the favorite color of the gods and the boots are needed because the shaman cannot appear before the gods barefoot (I. S. Sopochnin, Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

The shamans' most important equipment is still the drum. It is circular in shape with a reindeer skin cleaned of the fur stretched over it. Only the skin of a reindeer which has been killed in an animal sacrifice can be used for this purpose (I. S. Sopochnin, Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). The frame of the shaman's drum can be made of different kinds of wood, such as birch (*Betula*), Arolla pine (*Pinus sibirica*, syn. *Pinus arolla*) or Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). The latter is the best as it gives the best sound. It is important that the wood of the shaman's drum comes only from a tree in the communal sacred grove (Ivan S. Sopochnin, Woki-rap-yagun March, 1991). The drum of the elderly shaman is from the sacred place of a helping spirit called Woki-rap-yagun imi who is also the guardian spirit of the drum (Iosif I. Sopochnin, Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). Inside the drum is a Y-shaped branch by

which the shaman holds the drum in his left hand. Three times seven coins are fixed to the inside of the frame. In earlier times small bells were also attached inside the drum to give it a stronger sound because then the gods could hear it better (Iosif S. Sopočin, *Woki-rap-yagun*, March 1991). I did not see drawings or paintings on any of the shaman drums. This is not a characteristic only of the Tromagan shaman drums because, as Kustaa F. Karjalainen (1927, 263–5) noted, the lack of patterns is in general one of the characteristics of the Khanty drums.

It is worth noting that among the Tromagan Khanty, as among the other groups of Eastern Khanty, the drum was not the shaman's saddle animal on which the shaman reaches Torum or the other gods. Nor was the drum an object protected by special bans as in the case of other Siberian peoples. Indeed, not only the shaman but anyone could have a drum here and could play on it merely for his own emotional relief, but without any sort of spiritual use, as that was the realm solely of the shaman. (Dmitrii A. Kechimov, *Woki-rap-yagun*, June 1992).

For less difficult tasks, the drum does not have to be used for shamanizing: an ax, a sacred chest with his personal helping spirits in it, or even a bucket of water can be used. The drum is needed only if someone approaches the shaman with a question that is difficult to answer, or for healing serious illness, “because in these cases we have to turn to the most powerful gods” (Leonid M. Sopočin, *Yinku-yagun*, June 1993). When shamanizing with an ax or sacred chest, they spread out a clean cloth, place the ax or chest on it and begin to ask the spirits the questions to which they are seeking an answer. Under normal circumstances, the ax or small chest can be lifted with one hand. The shaman asks the questions and after each question lifts the chest. If he can lift it, the answer to the question is negative. If the ax or chest sticks to the ground and however hard he tries the shaman is unable to lift it, the answer of the spirits is yes.

This is how they find out whether there is an undesirable person at the shamanic ceremony, or one who has been entered by the soul of a dead person, or which of the gods will be the guardian spirit of a newborn child, and so forth.

Conclusion

As is clear from the above material, among the Khanty of Surgut there was no-one who could take up religious activity as a single profession and live from it, and no-one could monopolize the control of religious life: it was shared among a set of people. People used different methods, for different goals, in different spheres of religion, working together and complementing each other, not fighting against one another, though naturally their status in the community and their standing among the people was not the same. We can only use the popular word shaman for *tértte ko / tértte ne*; for all other people with cultic functions it is best to use the terms of the given people, with the appropriate explanation.

The shamans' way of life did not differ in any respect from that of the other male members of their family; they were fishers and hunters like the others, although perhaps a little more fortunate since the success of their economic activity was one of the signs that they were chosen ones. When they died, the shamans were buried in the same place as the others and the same ceremonies were held for them as at other deaths. This was how they buried Ivan S. Sopočin too in May 1993.

The characteristics listed above, that is, the relatively limited scope of the shamans' tasks, the simplicity of their drum and dress, the way in which the shaman was remunerated, and their way of life (the same as the hunting and fishing of the other members of the community), might appear to support those who regard Khanty shamanism as a phenomenon that developed relatively late in the beliefs of this people and was not able to develop among them into the classical form. Other researchers argue their shamanism could have been as highly developed as that of other peoples of Siberia, but was atrophied to its present form as a result of the early Russian contacts from the seventeenth century. My firm belief is that the Khanty, including the Surgut ethnic group, had already developed the form of shamanism we observe today centuries ago. Even if people possessing some kind of unusual capabilities are not living among them any more, and if some ritual processes and traditions are forgotten, it is not impossible that the basic characteristics of their shamanism are still present and have been transmitted from generation to generation to this day. Probably the number of shamans has decreased, and their knowledge is less than that of their ancestors, but the belief that in hard times, of bad health or financial troubles, they

can be a help, is still alive. I have shown some examples of this from the famous Sopochin family living on the Tromagan River.

Informants

Aipina Zoia Nikolaevna, née Sopochina (lives beside the Agan river, born in 1954)

Aivoseda Tatiana (Woki-rap-yagun river, born 1954)

Ivan Dmitrievich Kechemov (Surgut, born 1946)

Dmitrii Antonovich Kechimov (Woki-rap-yagun river, born 1960)

Irina Ivanovna Kechimova, née Sopochina (Woki-rap-yagun river, born 1961)

Tatiana Aleksandrovna Moldanova (Kazym river, born 19519)

Kirill Ignatevich Pokachev (Woki-rap-yagun river, born 1944)

Fekla Ivanovna Pokacheva, née Sopochina (Woki-rap-yagun river, born 1945)

Gennadii Semenovich Russkin (Yinku-yagun river, born 1968)

Rimma Petrovna Russkina, née Tevlina (Tromagan river, born 1971)

Ivan Mikhaylovich Sartakov (Nizhnevartovsk district, beside the Yavoryah river, born 1966)

Eremei Ivanovich Sopochin (Woki-rap-yagun river, born 1952)

Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin (Woki-rap-yagun river, born in the 1910s)

Leonid Mikhaïlovich, Sopochin (Yinku-yagun river, born 1954)

Iosif Ivanovich, Sopochin (Woki-rap-yagun river, born 1958)

Agrafena Andreevna Sopochina, née Aipina (came from beside the Agan river to her husband at Woki-rap-yagun river, born 1922)

Tevlina Tamara Sidorovna, Russkinskie village.

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Shamanism and Voodoo in Togo: The Life and Acts of Sofo Bisi

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This paper explores the integration of religion, shamanism and voodoo through the life and acts of one gorovodu (voodoo of the kola nut) practitioner named Sofo Bisi among the Ewes of southern Togo. Bisi is a regional shaman and diviner (bokonosofu) with almost sixty years of experience working with voodoo spirits, plant-based medicines, and extensive ritual to protect individuals and the social order of the community. The purpose here is to espouse negative associations and misunderstandings surrounding “voodoo” and related orders, and to stake a claim for such rituals as true shamanism. This paper stems from ethnographic research into gorovodu by the author from 1996–2015; topics such as healing, spirit possession, witchcraft, topics such as spirit possession, healing, and witchcraft are evaluated and synthesized within the frameworks of voodoo and shamanism.

Introduction: Why Not African Shamanism?

The application of the term “shaman” seems to have slowly rotated toward either a hallucinogenic experience with the archetypal “Don Juan” somewhere in Central America, or a mad and ecstatic loner in the Siberian bush (Hutton 2004; Castaneda 1968; 1971). The term is derived from Siberia (Tungus), referring to part-time religious practitioners exercising possession and magic, and yet, such men and women exist the world around. In fact, Africa is the only continent on earth where the term is conspicuously absent from the record. The early work of Mircea Eliade (1964) went far to excluding Africans from the “shamanistic debate,” although early examples of the term applied to Africa are in the anthropological literature (Nadel 1946; Vansina 1958; Tanner 1955). For S. F. Nadel, quoted in I. M. Lewis, African religions “correspond in all essentials to the classical shamanism of Central Asia and Northwest America” (Lewis-Williams 1997, 120; Nadel 1946, 25).

In all three regions, the shamanic “vocation” is announced in dreams, through spirit-journeys, by way of divination, involving communication between human beings and the supernatural. Whether “speaking in tongues” or “reading the spoken tongues of others” the “voodoo priest” at one point or another adheres to all these “shamanic properties” and when it comes to diagnostic and therapeutic services the African shaman also partakes. African religious systems were deemed “different” so that the term “shamanism” was avoided even though this academic posturing is very problematic (Lewis-Williams 1997, 119).

In Africa, terms referring to “traditional” religious specialists span the gamut “Faith Healer, Sorcerer, Spiritualist, Soothsayer, Priest, Mystic, Clairvoyant, and Minister.” However, the term “shaman” rarely appears in such contexts, despite the fact that Africa possesses perhaps the most comprehensive and ancient religious specialists on earth (Turner 2004; Stoller 1989; Griaule 1970; Evans-Pritchard 1937). Shamanism is active throughout the globe and there very well may be more “shamans” in sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere on earth, and although many work with ancestors and spirits for the collective good, they also do individual work pertaining to witchcraft and sorcery. The distinction between magic and religion is based on the dichotomy of manipulation and supplication. With magic one is not “humbled” under an all-knowing god, rather, they use the “hand” (*manos*) to manipulate the natural world, to move from the realm of the natural to the supernatural. With religion there is humility, for “we are dust and into dust we return,” and with this comes supplication and the higher power of god(s). In “voodoo” and related orders, the religious specialists engage in religion (supplication).

The modalities of “voodoo” par excellence are well-known throughout the world, however most understandings are ensconced in “mystification,” or what John Berger (1972, 33) called the “process of explaining away what might otherwise be evident.” Voodoo is often equated with bloodlust, diabolism, and evil; pins and needles and curses invoked by a vengeful sorcerer—and, living in Haiti and working with zombies of course (Apter and Derby 2009; Craven 1988). This is not what “voodoo” is, instead, it’s “a way of life,” an esoteric and philosophical system as awe-inspiring as it is ancient and comprehensive (Blier 1995; McCarthy Brown 1991). Along with the mystification and misunderstandings regarding the scope of voodoo, there exists and equally flawed understanding of the scale of voodoo as well. If we were to include the many strains of “voodoo” (*gorovodu*, *vodou*, *Yewevodu*) in Africa, the Orisha of

Nigeria, and the many African strains in the New World (*Obeah, Sante-ria, Candomble, Macumba*, etc.)—then the number of “voodoo adepts” is over one hundred million, no doubt deserving the title of a true world religion (mamiwata.com).

The purpose of this paper is twofold, first, to abolish the damaging stereotypes of voodoo per se, and second, to argue for an inclusion of voodoo priests into the category of shamans. This paper follows the life and actions of one particular priest/shaman (*bokonosofo*) in southern Togo who is among the eldest and most respected in the entire region. Among the most celebrated and renowned in West Africa is Bokonosofo Bisi (High Voodoo Priest) working among the Ewes in Ghana and Togo—to whom the author has worked and apprenticed with since 1996 when first entering the University, and eventually forging an eternal bond of love and respect. Among the Ewes of Ghana and Togo there are thousands of devotees to one particular medicinal and spirit-possession order called Gorovodu or Brekete, forming at the beginning of the twentieth century during a time of economic inequality, pervasive sickness, and enormous witchcraft (Venkatachalam 2011; Allman and Parker 2005; Field 1948). From its inception until today, *gorovodu* has existed as anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian, serving as a counter-hegemonic “weapon of the weak.” The priests, adepts, and members of *vodu* shrines are on the frontlines of resisting state hegemonies and oppression, but they are also healers, diviners, and counselors.

Bokonosofo Bisi is one of the senior shamans in an order called Gorovodu/Brekete (spirit of the kola nut), which is an *atikevodu* (tree root), or healing and spirit possession cult with thousands of followers (Friedson 2009; Rosenthal 1998). Bisi was raised Catholic, but has been practicing “voodoo” for more than fifty years and is a man of many hats. He serves as a counselor, psychiatrist, physician, judge, and father and grandfather. He is well-versed in plant-medicine (*atike*) and is one of the oldest and most respected shamanic priests in all of Gorovodu. This article will articulate the “multi-vocality” of Sofo Bisi by analyzing his life history, his roles in the community, and his engagement with “magic” to invoke positive outcomes on the individual and community levels. Perhaps by unveiling the deep shamanic tool box of Sofo Bisi, he and other “voodoo priests” can garner the respect and honor they deserve among the international community of academics interested in indigenous African religion and shamanism.

The Life of Sofo Bisi

Bokonosofo Bisi from the village of Gbedala is the head of the Gorovodu shrine and cornerstone of the greater regional community of Southern Togo, Ghana, and Benin. He is perhaps the oldest master-priests (*sofoga*) in the region and is known by government officials, the military, and the greater community throughout the region. At almost 80 years of age, his gait is noticeable, but his energy and activity level is unmatched. Although many younger priests have larger congregations, glitterier shrines, and flashier possessions; Bisi remains on a level of his own due to his age, his abilities as a healer, and also his past associations with the other “voodoo masters.” Today, one finds him fulfilling his duties as a priest, shaman, and keeper of the shrine. He is also a “fetish-maker,” meaning he regularly fashions the sacred god-objects that serve as the embodiment of the Gorovodu gods. The number of gods and fetishes are numerous, and the amount of things going into their composition is mind-boggling. In fact, at last count, my colleague and I counted 125 items going into the making of one of these fetishes/gods Bangle, the warrior god from the bush. There are bullets, feathers, knives, dozens of animal parts, and even more plants. And this is true for the dozens of *gorovodu* spirits, of which there are six primary gods: Kunde (father and hunter), Ablewa (mother and market woman), Sunia Compo (daughter and trickster), Sakra Bode (big brother and horse), Bangle (little brother and warrior), and Nana Wango (grandmother crocodile). Each of these gods have their own abilities, languages, compositions, personhoods, histories, and applications. And nobody knows them better than Bisi, who learned his trade from the originator of Gorovodu, Kodzokuma in the 1960’s.

Bisi’s roles are copious and they have been outlined in great detail in both of our films *Chasing the Spirit* and *African Herbsmen* where Bisi is spotlighted (Montgomery and Vannier 2012a, 2012b). Bisi knows recipes and prescriptions for hundreds of ailments and issues, and as an herbalist he styles his own medicines (Vannier and Montgomery 2015, 2016). In fact, Bisi has been even adept at treating sickle-cell anemia with more efficacy than any allopathic medicine in the west, his efforts have been outlined by more than one anthropologists (Montgomery and Vannier 2012b; Vannier and Montgomery 2015, 2016; Mann 2010; Tete-Rosenthal 2010; Rosenthal 1998). He is a counselor and a psychologist and works with individuals on a variety of emotional or mental issues that plague them. In fact, his effective treatments for an array of orders

make his services highly sought after along the coast. He is a lawyer and judge, doling out advice and counsel or settling disputes (*kodzo*)—so, he can both detect as well as administer magic and sorcery, spending many sleepless nights keeping witches and evildoers at bay. Among the Ewes, witchcraft, jealousy, and sorcery are normal every day occurrences, therefore, any shaman or priest worth his/her salt needs to be equipped to diagnose, and eradicate malevolent acts. Bisi often visits the “Fetish Market” where an array of ritualistic goods are sold for use in traditional medicine; there are animal parts, plants, amulets, trinkets, weapons, and much more. This pharmacopeia, coupled with knowledge of sacred languages and rituals, allows the “voodoo shamans” to contend with all sorts of individual and societal issues, ranging from market magic to death magic. Witches can cannibalize your soul and bring *maso-maso* (conflict) to your life (Rosenthal 1998; ahuefa.org). So, whenever anyone is sick or bothered, they visit the shrine and divination and spirit-possession are employed to both diagnose and eradicate the problem. Sometimes the problem is purely physical and most often it is at least partially spiritual, the afflicted committed sin or taboo, or are the subject of the witchcraft (*aze*) or sorcery (*bovodu*) of a jealous rival (Rosenthal 2005; Montgomery and Vannier 2012b; Vannier and Montgomery 2015, 2016). When queried regarding his favorite activity, Bisi responded without hesitation that his first love is medicine, using plants, prayer, and magic to heal those in need. He is quite adept at it, even attracting patients from as far away as Europe, Asia, and The United States.

Bisi was born in Ghana in 1938 to a fisherman and a market woman who cultivated and sold onions and shallots. His father’s income was pretty unstable, so his mother’s measly earnings were what kept the family afloat. He was poor as a child, visiting the port and granary to hunt rats with a slingshot, even being forced from time to time to steal vegetables, just to survive. His father, Kodjobe, was born in Gbedala but followed the fishing trade all along the West African coast. As a boy, Bisi assisted in the farm and sometimes would board others fishing pirogues and leave for days at a time. In 1950, Father James, a missionary priest who established a Catholic school for boys in Aflao, took a liking to Bisi and allowed him to stay with him, he also nicknamed him Michael. Bisi speaks fondly of Father James, and says “the saints are just like the *vodus*, they have their strengths, their weaknesses, their special

attributes and histories, really, the saints are voodoo spirits at heart” (personal conversation, 2013).

In 1959, at the age of 21, Bisi joined the Ghanaian military. One year later the Congo won independence from Belgium and almost instantly the “Congo Crisis” emerged. The Congolese army mutinied against their white officers and the large Congolese province of Katanga declared independence with the support of Belgium. Nkrumah, President of Ghana, sent what would become the UN’s first ever peace mission to Congo and Bisi also served. Ghana’s role in the crisis ended in 1962 but Bisi returned early after a training accident almost cost him his right leg. The injury, coupled with severe arthritis, gives him a pronounced gait to this day. Bisi was familiar with some of the Yewe Voodoo spirits (Heviesso, Ogun, Sakpata, and Mami Wata) because of his times in Togo as a boy, and in Eastern Ghana, he was aware of the northern *gorovodus* from “the north” of Ghana, however, he never really took an interest in them. Only after experiencing a powerful revelation after finding a sacred talisman would his voodoo calling commence. Bisi has really powerful and murky blue eyes, and when prodded can retell the story of his life with incredible vividness and recall. He is not just a man of “orality,” for he possesses the ability to read and write in Ewe, English, and French. In my early twenties Bisi was asked to tell his life history as both a book and a mural, and he was asked to fill in titles for each chapter and section. He decided the book of his life would be called “Voodoo Law is the Breath our Ancestors.” Meanwhile, his mural had images of sacred geometry, *afa* divination signs, and chromolithographs of many *vodu* spirits: Bangle with his Muslim tunic and long black beard, Vodou Da encircling the globe as a rainbow serpent, and Papa Kunde with his gun, dagger, and protective dog. These stories and images helped to clarify the oral and textual religious imagination of a true shaman, and Bisi has been my sponsor and mentor on all my travails throughout Togo. The material culture and *materia medica* of Bisi’s medicine bag is wide and deep, and over the years he has shown me dozens of notebooks, sacred objects, plants, amulets, talisman, and much more (Vannier and Montgomery 2015, 2016). During his very brief military career, Bisi located a talisman in the dust along a road on his military base in Central Ghana, at the same time he was just reflecting on his mother and his time with Father James. He knew immediately the talisman was of northern origins because of the elaborate way the leather was tied to a piece of petrified wood. After leaving the base,

he took the talisman to a northern Imam to the north in Keta-Krachi and the man told him that it was a special Kadzanka talisman and that this was a powerful sign. Kadzanka is a grandfather Hausa spirit from the north, father of Kunde, and also tied to northern hunters, slaves, and slave-raiders from the Sahel and cusp of the Sahara desert. This spirit is no longer alive and well in the north but has been co-opted by the southern Ewes (Friedson 2009; Allman and Parker 2005; Rosenthal 1998). The Imam explained it was a Kadzanka talisman from the Ghana and Burkina Faso border and that Bisi should honor it by talking to older priests and studying the Gorovodu pantheon. After all, these *gorovodu* spirits are also the ancestors of the Ewes and their northern slaves who married into their patriline, therefore, honoring them was necessary because they were believed to be active in reality, bringing luck and misfortune to the living (Vannier and Montgomery 2015, 2016; Brivio 2008; Wendl 1999). From that point on, “I began working and eating with the voodoos every day, my life got better, so I persisted until I became a *bokonosofo*, or shaman.”

By the age of forty, Bisi was doing well with fishing and learning more about voodoo as he moved up the hierarchy. He was having visions and dreams from the *gorovodus* and other spirits and they assisted him with his fishing prospects and building his shrine. By the 1980's his shrine and fishing business was in full swing. He learned plant-medicine and rituals from the older priests (*togbui* means “ancestor” is singular and plural), and he used “water magic” and the possession of his adepts (*tronsi*) to heal the sick, bring fortune to market woman and men seeking work, he assisted with fertility, and became renowned for his ability to diagnose and reverse witchcraft and sorcery. Bisi was already a *bokonosofo* when he first brought Gorovodu to Gbedala village in 1971. Much was happening along the coast of Togo. The government was gobbling up local land east of Lomé to expand the port at Be Beach. Huge swaths of coconut forests and semi-rural villages were destroyed in the name of economic development. Locals were happy to sell, fishing was expanding, and there was more than enough money to be made at sea. At the time, Bisi owned a fishing boat that operated along the coast in the area. The *vodus* called him to settle and build a shrine at this small village east of Lomé. Speculators from the inner-city and sometimes government military have tried to force Bisi off the prized ocean-front land. They have used bribes and court-papers, armed military men, and even “faked” an environmental catastrophe in the 1990's to remove

the villagers from their land. And each time, through the work of the voodooos and his shamanism Bisi has deflected the external aggression and the villagers have maintained their land. In an ironic twist, many high-ranking military and gendarmes visit Bisi the shaman, to assist with their own well-being.

The best indicator of Sofo Bisi's reputation and power is his extensive ritual constituency. There are an array of individuals who actively seek Sofo Bisi out for healing, divination, blessing, and other ritual activities. People come to Gbedala seeking Sofo Bisi's powers of healing and advice. These individuals are not limited to Gorovodu adherents or even Africans. A man from Burkina Faso could not find work as an electrician and came to Sofo Bisi for ritual assistance. A woman from northern Nigeria visits him with troubles of infertility. After healing treatment, she gave birth to a son a year later and returned for the same treatment to try for another child. Those wishing to escape the oppressive regime and find greener pastures in the US and Europe also consult Bisi. Those being haunted with dreams or attached by witches in the night will access Bisi, sometimes sleeping for weeks in the shrine so that Bisi and his associates can battle the witches on their home field. I have consulted Bisi extensively for my stomach ulcers, migraine headaches, and various viral and bacterial infections. His strengths involve addiction, mental disorders, hyper tension and sickle-cell anemia (Montgomery and Vannier 2012b; Vannier and Montgomery 2015, 2016). People come from throughout the region, men, women, and children requesting his services. On any given day, there is a short line outside the shrine and his compound of those seeking his amenities. In 2005 when a coven of witches cursed the entire village Bisi was up for days making special offerings (*vossa* or *ebo*), which he placed in all four corners of the village, to deter the witches from attacking at night. When they did attack it was Bisi who astral-projected into the sky and with the sword of Bangle sliced the throats of three witches. After claiming the "curse was over," another accused woman came forth to confess her part in the ordeal. Bisi actually forgave her and after she offered a ram to the shrine, Bisi bathed her in medicinal water (fig. 1) and she passed out for two days. When she awoke she changed her ways forever, and later even apprenticed as a shrine leader. Some come seeking quick fixes to life's typical problems in work, love, and success. Others come seeking his powers as an herbalist and healer. Each and all are welcome. Payment for services



Fig. 1. Bangle adept contemplates the necessary plants and medicines for the sacred herb bath. Later children are ritually bathed in the medicinal basin. Photo: Nenevi, 2013.

is dependent on the individual or group's means, and sometimes folks do not repay him for years, and sometimes, not at all.

Sofu Bisi abstains from most meat and alcohol, eating only fish, and enjoying herbal tea very much. In one month's time in 2005 Bisi did the following activities from most to least: prayer and rituals to the spirits, making plant-medicines and treating the sick, hearing arguments and settling disputes, visiting with other priests and specialists, and finally, visiting the sacred forests and shrines of more distant communities. He collaborates with the gods to catch thieves. He hears arguments and adjudicates. He interprets dreams. He gives family or relationship advice. Bisi works less than he used to but has not had an entire "day off" in more than five years. Shamanism and Voodoo are full-time jobs, and most tend to work daily right up until their death.

Discussion: Voodoo Shrines, Witchcraft, and Shamanism

It was Kadzanka who "found Bisi" as a magical object resting in the dirt at a military base. And when Bisi was arrested for "trumped up" charges by the national government in 1991, the warrior god Bangle saved his

life. After serving two-weeks in prison, Bisi used a sacred incantation to summon Lord Bangle to assist in his release. He uttered a mantra to one of the jail-guards, seducing him into allowing his wife to visit him. He told his wife to bring him kola nut, a small fetish, and some gin from his shrine. Bisi used magic to distract the guard and after his wife brought him the necessary goods he prepared a small fetish and kept it in the corner of his cell. It was less than a day later when the guards released him, the commander even took Bisi to lunch before driving him back to his home. To this day the villagers talk about how Bisi “had the military eating out of his hand” and Bisi of course attributed his release to Bangle, whom he repaid with several goats and even more bottles of gin. Bangle rescued him when Bisi played his drum rhythms while in jail, the receptive and eclectic mind of Bisi is full of these “shamanic voodoo stories.”

Like life for Edward E. Evans-Pritchard among the Azande and Nuer, the Ewes also believe there are no coincidences and that witchcraft is a rational explanation for all misfortune and daily events (Evans-Pritchard 1937). The summer of 2003 piloted a time of unheralded drought as gardens dried up and the fish were nowhere to be found. In the shrine, group prayers were made to each god and many children were passing away. Bisi believed it was witchcraft provoked by angry ancestors and voodoos who had not been “fed” correctly in some time. At the end of a special Salah ceremony (fig. 2), Bisi gave a sermon on the many transgressions happening in the village:

Because times are bad, you all are drinking too much, many of you are being greedy and stingy, even with the young children and old kids. Some of you are stabbing your own brother and sister in the back, when times get rough, we need to come together, not fall apart.

Bisi poured water in a circle onto the ground, then his assistant passed kola nuts to everybody in attendance. Bisi took special plants from the shrine and mixed them with animal blood, soda water, and perfumed oil and powder. A large hole was dug into the sand and the children were bathed in the “herbs of Bangle” (*amatsi*), and as the *brekete* drums boomed, the villagers sang the songs of Kunde and Bangle, literally singing good times and change into existence (figs. 2, 3). Kola nut was passed around for everyone to chew and gin was poured in libation and also offered to those in attendance so they may break bread with the



Fig. 2. The warrior god Bangle enters the head of an adept outside Bisi's shrine during a Salah ceremony meant to medicate and protect children from witchcraft (*aze*) and sickness (*dolele*). Photo: Eric J. Montgomery, 2013.



Fig. 3. Sacred *amatsi* (herb water) is dispensed for the Bangle adept as she enters the throes of possession at Bisi's sister shrine in center village Gbedala. Photo: Eric J. Montgomery, 2013.

gods. After some time, two women made their way into the shrine. They admitted they broke menstrual taboos and also had been wishing bad on their neighbors. They said they were “bewitched” and could not explain their transgressions. Bisi washed them and blew medicinal smoke and gunpowder into their faces, the women were escorted to the sacred forest and by night’s end had admitted their roles in evil acts. Bisi credited Bangle for “catching the evildoers” and it was he who channeled the spirit in the Sacred Forest as their punishment was doled out.

Witchcraft and sorcery is not always individual, and as M. G. Marwick (1950, 103) reminds us it can indeed serve as a “social strain gauge.” Following Jane Parish (2011), witchcraft refers to the manipulation of forces by individuals wishing to harm others, it often works close by, and is pervasive in many cultures around the world (see Geshiere 2013), witchcraft is not a single belief system and there is no systemization of beliefs. It is rather

. . . An ambiguous fluid network of ideas and traditions that mix with a multitude of other ethnic and religious ideas . . . and revolve around the nature, meaning, and question of suffering. (Parish 2011, 306)

From this basic point of reference, more complex questions emerge. What qualifies as witchcraft? Who is practicing witchcraft and why? Who is the victim and why? The most pronounced shamans, such as Bisi, are the ones who can answer these cosmic questions that literally determine life and death in the Anlo-Ewe multiverse; emotions can be strong enough to assume a power in themselves; a power that, like all power (*nuse*), can affect other people mentally, emotionally, and physically. The principle emotion from which witchcraft draws this power is *n’bia*, or jealousy. *N’bia* is the emotion that gives birth to all social conflict (*maso-maso*). It is the sinful emotion that causes one to quarrel with their family, authorities, their friends. It is the sin that leads one to witchcraft, to *bovodu*, to sorcery. Judy Rosenthal (1998, 35) defines *n’bia* as “passionate envy” that borders on death-wish. *N’bia* is also the conscious or unconscious malicious desire to see our friends, our parents, our own children, fall into misfortune or desolation, and the implicit recognition that they may be wishing the same upon us. It is universal human nature to compare ourselves to others, which makes *n’bia* both a sin and natural emotion, both individual and social. It is so powerful it can cause illness and death in the self and in another. Once

diagnosed and detected, only the clairvoyant shamans and the possessed adepts (*tronsi*) are able to untangle the webs of witchcraft and replace the dark with light.

Though *n'bia* is a great force for destruction, through prevention and healing it can also serve as a constructive force in Ewe society (Rosenthal 1998, 228). Everyone has *n'bia* and everyone is aware of the *n'bia* of others, it is as natural as “player hating” in African-American contexts. Bisi and the voodoos can assist people in taking spiritual precautions against attracting the *n'bia* of others. Most crossroads and homes have hidden magical medicines or amulets dedicated to the deterrence of witchcraft. They are hidden in suitcases and pockets, buried in holes in the ground, and sometimes right in the open for all to see. Many of these objects are fashioned locally and the ingredients can be found at the famed *Le Marche Fetiche* where religious items from throughout West Africa are sold. Even non-believers and outsiders purchase and wear magical and occult objects, on several occasions’ pastors and ministers visit Bisi to obtain “attraction magic” to seduce people into joining their churches. Bisi works to deter witchcraft and he also knows how to invoke his own sorcery, even though he claims *gorovodu* law forbids such acts. In other words, *n'bia* may be viewed as a producer of social control or act as socio-economic leveling mechanism (Rosenthal 1998, 229–30; see also Marwick 1950). A vast amount of energy is spent preventing *n'bia* from turning into actions of witchcraft or sorcery, but it is too pervasive to stop, and accusations abound. Once *n'bia* takes hold of someone, it can impede the living of a normal life. To alleviate sin and the resultant physical suffering, it is important to confess any *n'bia* in front of the community and gods, referred to as “saying all that is on one’s stomach.” Confessions in the shrine often seem excessive to outsiders, but it is based on prudence.

Within the confines of the shrine and Sacred Forest at Gbedala village the voodoo hierarchy and adepts come together to create a voodoo multiverse where the ancestors and gods of the past are present by way of spirit possession, ecstatic trance, and through the revelatory mechanisms of divination, prophesy, and sacrifice. There is no direct translation in Ewe but the shrine can be referred to as “fetish house” (*tronfome*), “alter” (*vosamlekpui*), or “medicine house” (*atikewofe*). In the community, the shrine serves communal functions, acting simultaneously as a hospital, place of worship, a court, and theatrical stage. The builder of the shrine takes a great chance because of the cost involved,

and most have “shamans” somewhere in their familial past, for the “calling” is also tied to kinship and familial relationships. Sandra Greene (2002, 9) defines shrines in West Africa as physical places and spaces that are knowable to the senses and the focus of collective ritual activity. Inside shrines, the extensive *materia ethnographica* of imagined northern cultures represents reification of these cultures by *vodu* adherents. Over the years, Bisi has shared with me dozens of plant-medicines, their chemical and biological properties, treatment methods, and my colleague and I have cross-listed them with the scientific and ethnobotanical literature (Vannier and Montgomery 2015, 2016). The shrines are as important as the shamans themselves, and both have unique and thematic histories, spiritual significance, and meanings that evolve from the past and through modernity. Village shrines anchor moral points of reference and cultural points of memory. Meanwhile, the charisma and productivity of individual priests and shamans determines their continuation while living, and the respect their shown in death.

The shrine connected to the lineage and compound of Bokonosofò Bisi is a regionally recognized source of ritual power. It is small, well-worn, dirty and grimy when compared to other grander shrines. The salt of the ocean causes corrosion, and Bisi expresses the need for renovation and fresh paint. The aesthetic of the shrine may have faded, but the vitality of Bokonosofò Bisi has never been stronger. This year he held a large Fetatrotro (turning-of-the-year ceremony) and the top priest and shamans from Ghana, Togo, and Benin all spent the weekend consulting with Bisi and his associates.

The Role of Spirit Possession

As evidenced from the photos provided here (figs. 2, 3), spirit possession is the cornerstone and ultimate goal of *gorovodu* religion. The anthropological literature on spirit possession is rich and diverse. There is possession in “Muslim cults” such as *zār* and *bori*, in Christian charismatic churches, and by adepts (*tronsi*), priests, and shamans in voodoo circles. From Senegal to Madagascar spirit possession is as normal as the sunrise. Victor Turner (1968) argues episodes of spirit possession are “liminal” in that the usual conventions and structures of society break down, if only for a moment, and when structure is overcome with anti-structure everybody at the theatrical performance becomes “one” by reaching *communitas*. Bisi

would concur, and he is always keenly aware of those in trance, knowing that the messages they unveil come from the spirits and ancestors of the past, those joining the ranks of the undead. These occasions can be sad, joyous, or angry but meaning in life often stems from episodes of possession Tobias Wendl (1999, 120) analyzes possession as multifunctional establishment that serves as a means of therapy, theatre, social criticism, art form, memory rebuilding, and performative ethnography. An early definition given by Erika Bourguignon (1973, 12) defines possession trance as possession by spirits, involving “the impersonation of spirits—the acting out of their speech or behavior. It does not involve hallucinations, and it is typically followed by amnesia.” In Gorovodu, possession trance is but one manifestation of the gods. Indeed the body is the horse, the spirit is the rider, and they are dependent on one another. As public occasions they can be cathartic, bring fortune and blessing to the community, diagnose community-wide illnesses or misfortunes; as private affairs they are meant to open the door between the living and dead, and the shaman’s body is the vessel, although he does it in private with few watching. Bisi had not been in “trance” in several years, but he said every time he conducts rituals he is at least “partly there,” what Steven M. Friedson (2009) termed “being away.”

Perhaps the most encompassing and ambitious study of possession-trance is Lewis’ *Ecstatic Religion* (1971). Drawing upon examples from cultures around the world, Lewis situates possession into the total social and political conditions in which they occur (1971, 143) and in doing so creates different typologies of possession (1971). The spirits have significance over the lives of the living, but they are also dependent on the living for their existence. The spirits have no moral implications or significance and the women are blameless for what is said or occurs during possession because they have no knowledge or control over themselves. Yet during the possession episode the possessed individual holds high status, and when in trance the *tronsi* is said to be more powerful than the priest, unless of course they are abusing drugs and alcohol or “putting it on.” The spirits are, in most cases, outsiders, aliens, or belonging to another social group rather than autochthonous to the society in question (see also Boddy 1989). The voodoo spirits are sometimes homegrown and sometimes from faraway regions, and they have the power to afflict and heal devotees and members of the hierarchy alike.

Though Lewis’ groupings faced criticism (see for example Maynard 2001), they give us a starting point from which we may discuss posses-

sion in Gorovodu because of his emphasis on the spirits that operate upon the individual alterations (Bourguignon 1973, 28). But spirit-wives are not the only ones acting “individually” because the priests also seek altered states of consciousness to act individually. The analyses presented in Bourguignon’s edited book do not tacitly discriminate between the spirits or engage their relation to the public morality of the culture, nor do they address the different domains of possession, as Lewis (1971, 29) attempted to do. The gods are peripheral in that they are external (from the north) and also afflict mostly women in the lower “statuses” of society, yet are central because of their intense moralistic and stern nature. When in trance all barriers reeking of hierarchy disappear. And the trance of the shaman is altogether different, private, taboo, and only discussed among high-ranking priests who are trained to “read the possession.” The individual who is possessed is a god, and thus higher status than any chief or *sofo*, is possessed by the same spirits as the shaman, albeit in a different way. In possession-trance, the person experiences the mimetic embodiment of not only the god, the but also the symbolic capital that accompanies the god. All of this “capital” is signified upon to locate and eradicate witchcraft and heal the sick and desperate.

In Gbedala, each possession episode is unique, though thematic elements run through most, typologies extending beyond those of Lewis (1971) and others. Possession is mostly reserved for the spirit-wives of the various *vodus*, both of Yewe Vodou and Tron (Gorovodu), but prophesy, transfiguration, and the magic by way of the “trained hand” is the business of the voodoo priest. The *bokonosofo* will go into trance on occasion, and sometimes it is a possession episode that leads them to their calling in the first place. The *gorovodu* priesthood, supposed witches, and the vast collection of spirit-wives, transform themselves in trance, turning into owls, bats, vultures, cats, goats, and even using other human bodies. Most priests are more discreet about their “epiphanies,” but their “night flights” around the village and region to ward off witchcraft are more public, as is their ability to transfigure into various animals. Bisi tells others he does not go into trance anymore, but watching him fight of a coven of witches for nights on end in 2013 suggested something different, the mantras, drum, and sacred language all combined to put him into a semi-conscious state, even leaving his body and turning into a vulture (*kokomesatsi*, lit: “I eat everything and nothing eats me”). When the battle grew too arduous he consulted other priests to assist him in his projections and rituals, and after a week or

so they were able to diagnose, treat, and eventually abolish the witches from invoking harm on the village. And the *tronsi's* are also a part of maintaining law, diagnosing sickness, and identifying witches and black magic (*juju* or *gris gris*). The *vodus* can fall on an adept at any time, if it wishes to speak, and especially when its rhythms and songs are played during various ceremonies (Akpedada 'thanks giving'; Wizododo 'welcoming of gods'; and Fetatrotro 'turning of the year'). It is then the *vodu* will fall on a vessel and use it to speak, but the shaman does the interpreting and communicating with the spirit and some are better at this than others. They most often come when specific rhythms are drummed, their hymns are sung, and they are fed the blood of animals. The adepts in *gorovodu* are of northern provenance and sometimes come speaking in northern tongues; saying *goro*, *aga* or *aba*, Hausa words for kola and gin (Friedson 2009; Rosenthal 1998). The shamans are most adept at translating these languages, and also speak the "language of the sky" and older versions of Yoruba, Twi, Adja, and other area languages. The *tron* will then make revelations about "unseen things," and it is up to the likes of Sofo Bisi to diffuse and sometimes aggressively attack various strains of sickness, misfortune, jealousy, and witchcraft. Bisi is admired for his "ears" and intuition (*seselelame*), keen on interpreting hidden messages and symbols and talking frankly with vodu spirits, ancestors, and sometimes witches and sorcerers (Geurts 2003). Sometimes when trance comes, the congregation will grow tense or nervous and keep their distance from the adept, especially if they are feeling guilty about any violations or taboos they have created contrary to vodu law. Once revealed, the possessed and the living people tied to the event will all end up in the shrine, in front of Bisi, who consults various oracles, fetishes, and channels messages while in his own semi-trance.

Sofo Bisi and his Acts of Ethnomedicine

The shamanic complex is broad, and yet, elusive, but the exclusion of African practitioners from the debate is unwarranted. Growing research into *atikevodu* (tree root voodoo), substantiates the ethno-medical and pharmacological knowledge of Bisi and other *vodu* priests as comprehensive (Montgomery and Vannier 2012a, 2012b; Vannier and Montgomery 2015, 2016). Bisi is proficient at healing the body politic of the community, the spiritual and physical causes of sickness of individuals,

mediating between spirits and the living, defending against sorcerers, and appeasing the divine to help the living—therefore, a true embodiment of the “ways” and “elements” of a shaman (Harner 1990; Drury 1989). Bisi’s role in the community is what defines him, and being a shaman involves going beyond individual motives, for those are simply religious practitioners (Drury 1989). When queried about his strengths and preferences, Bisi and the villagers alike point to his knowledge as a healer, especially the pharmacopeia. Unfortunately research into African medicine is frequently not holistic, nor inclusive, so those working with plants and medicine work separate from those occupied with religion and culture (Morris 2011, 245). While other systems such as Indian Ayurveda and Chinese traditional medicine continue to garner the respect and attention of the world, somehow “voodoo medicine” has been relegated to the back shelf, or worse yet, entirely mystified and misunderstood. When bridges between disciplines are formed, and marginalized groups are given their fair attention, the deep scientific knowledge of indigenous practitioners can be appreciated (Morris 2011). Diagnosis, treatment, and the entire delivery system of voodoo healing (*atikevodu*) is as scientific as it is cultural. For purposes here, I focused on just on a few of the medicines used to allay physical, psychological, and spiritual afflictions to demonstrate the “science” of Bisi the healer and shaman.

Asthma is pervasive along the West African coast, especially among children, and Bisi works with several plants, sometimes preparing tea, other times enemas, sometimes even direct application into the bloodstream by way of razor cuts in the skin. When Valentino, age eight, was rushed to the shrine in 2013 he was on his death-bed, in fact, doctors in center-city had all but given up. Bisi boiled the leaves of *Paulinnia pinnata* and *Lagerstroemia speciosa* (*gbato* and *fanuglo* in Ewe). After forcing the child to drink a large glass of tea with lemon he turned sleepy and after waking up his breathing was noticeably better, to the point he attended school the following day. Both plants have been subjected to clinical trials, found to have hemostatic properties, and also efficacious on coughs and other bronchial issues (Busia 2007; Koudovo et al. 2011). Although these plants have been studied in isolation, they haven’t been studied together, and rarely is the cultural context of healing taken into account. Valentino had his entire extended family and even visiting anthropologists praying for him, songs were song to cheer him up, and this helped to give him hope, sometimes half the battle. For fevers

Bisi utilizes many plants, and for one villager in 2013 he used *Hoslundia opposita* (*evovi* in Ewe). He boiled the leaves and mixed in sugar cane juice for the woman to drink, and according to western trials this plant has analgesic, antipyretic, anti-inflammatory and anti-malarial properties (Neuwinger 2000). She was suffering from malaria and visited Bisi every time the fever grew intolerable, as she told us, “This African medicine is the only thing that works so well and fast, even Tylenol can’t reduce fever like this” (personal conversation, 2013). The “tool box” of Bisi isn’t just trinkets and animal parts, there is an exhaustive amount of plant medicines.

For my stomach aches stemming from irritable bowel and ulcerative colitis, I also consult Bisi while in Africa. At first, he treated my pain with *Cannabis sativa* and *Veronica amygdalina*, I chewed the leaves and chased it with strong gin, the juice is swallowed, the plants spit out. It alleviated my pain for a bit, but Bisi moved to other remedies. In 2005 he tried *Manihot esculenta* (*bantsi*), and this was drunk as a tonic as Bisi deeply massaged my stomach, we tried this for a week straight and the pain subsided. In 2013 Bisi switched remedies again, feeling the *bantsi* had grown less effective. This time he gave me *anyoto*, squeezing plant juice directly into my eye, and henceforth this was the best medicine. For stomach problems alone, Bisi knows dozens of more remedies, sometimes isolated plants, sometimes mixed plants, and always ritual, collective prayer, and praise singing—which are, methods unthinkable in western circles (Mann 2010).

Bisi’s recipes do not stop at physical suffering, he is also a master of dealing with psychological ailments and madness (*adava*). To gain the power of Kunde, king of the voodooos, one mixes *Cola acuminata* and *Piper guineense*, (*gorovi* and *ata*). These ingredients are ground, mixed with gunpowder and animal blood, and either chewed or placed under the tongue. Many adepts choose this because it is readily available and known to have efficacy. Both of these are known stimulants, and also *ata* has antimicrobial, antifungal, and sedative properties, helping in many ways. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of Bisi’s treatments, but rather a nutshell summary meant to elucidate the breadth and depth of his ethno-medicinal knowledge. Bisi’s repertoire is also “organic” and “homeopathic”; nothing he uses has ever been packaged, preserved, or altered. He uses lemons, pepper, cinnamon, anise, juniper, and many more easily accessible items from nature, and this precedes

the whole “greening and organic” movements in the west, perhaps by hundreds of years.

Conclusion: Shamanism and Religion in Africa

Though I am fully aware of the warnings of overexaggerating religion in African societies, it is fundamental to understanding any society, especially those in Africa, because the veil between the living and dead is paper thin. The African shaman, like African traditional medicine, seems relegated to the lower echelons of scientific and magical ways of thinking and knowing. Just as African medicine is deemed inferior to Chinese traditional medicine or Indian Ayurveda, so too is African shamanism framed as less pure or efficacious than systems from Latin America or East Asia. But why? African ways of being and knowing are the root of much of the religious thought that later made its way to Europe and the West. The structures of globalization are creating contemporary religious change in Africa and it has become clear that global economy and global religions are intimately associated (Obadia and Wood 2011, xiv–xv). Throughout, the social changes wrought by the global economy, indigenous religious belief and practices ebb and flow. Scholars of shamanism also ebb and flow, and currently African shamanism is entirely omitted from the conversation. By signifying on the life and acts of Sofó Bisi, I have argued for a more inclusive lens for African shamanism, and greater understanding of the science and philosophy that is voodoo. Despite the growth in followers of voodoo and related orders, mystification continues to surround systems like voodoo, where the agency of practitioners and shamans seems underappreciated at best, and utterly disrespected at worst.

Predicting the demise of “voodoo” or “shamanism” in the face of conversion to the “globalized” religions of Islam and Christianity remains a spectator sport for scholars, religious specialists, and lay people alike. For millennia, adherents of monotheistic religions produced discourses that characterized those of so-called “polytheistic” religions as uncivilized, hedonistic, and ignorant. Even the dichotomy between mono/poly is itself convoluted because most African believe in a “high god” but choose to reach him/her through other spirits. Often such narratives are part of deeper political–economic agendas; but the same narratives have appeared regarding all such “traditional” religions in all places,

but none have been as disrespected as voodoo (McCarthy Brown 1991). Practitioners are discursively reduced to anachronisms in such a way that assumes an underlying deviancy, ripe for conversion, secularization, or modernization. But anthropology is supposed to be on the side of the marginal, and keeping alive traditions is part and parcel of salvage ethnography. And yet, we somehow have failed to capture the diversity, credibility, reliability, and sheer magic of African shamanism, and no religious system has been more mystified than voodoo!

The ability of African peoples to use their own emic systems to move from the realm of the powerless to that of the powerful has a long history. Europeans were often bewildered to find that Africans did not behave according to the “tribal traditions” written about by leading experts. Instead “traditions” such as customary behavior, law, religious practice, and so on are constantly evolving, adapting to changing circumstances and contexts as necessary (Ellis and ter Haar 2004, 145). The questions these assumptions raise are relevant given Africa is a place “where religion constitutes the substructure of every activity” (Oraegbunam and Udezo 2012, 148). Atheism is almost non-existent. Ellis and ter Haar (2004, 2) proclaim that spiritual relationships “constitute perhaps the most important way in which Africans interact with the rest of the world.” One must caution against exaggerating the role of religion in African life, expressly at the expense of the practical (see Morris 1998, 83), but emphasizing religion and its relation to other dimensions of society, in Africa and elsewhere, is as crucial to understanding contemporary societies today as it was in the past. A great place to decode the “deep” ideas of Africa is by following the life and acts of the many religious specialists, shamans abound from Togo to Tanzania, from Niger to Namibia. And yet, the literature avoids connecting two very synonymous concepts “African religion” and “shamanism.” This is a dishonor to African systems of belief and to the anthropology of religion in general. They should at least be offered as seat at the academic table.

The most analyzed aspect of religion in anthropology is ritual, especially ecstatic ritual and the agency of the participants. Following Comaroff and Comaroff (1993, xvii), I see ritual “as an integral dimension of everyday existence—of the routine.” Yet, where in this instance they speak of secular practices of both public and private life, for *vodu* adherents in West Africa religious ritual directed at the gods and ancestors are very much a part of routinized daily “real” life. Religious forma-

tions such as drumming, prayer, sacrifice, possession, divination, and others are practiced daily in both private and public, and some shamans are more adept at “hearing the spirits” and “manifesting change in the present.” The sacred, whether we speak here of space, body, spirit, commodity, and so on, forms the permanent context of life in Gorovodu society. It is the enormous encyclopedia of physical, chemical, biological and spiritual knowledge of the African shaman that allows this religious reality to persist.

Vodu, vodun, vodou, and voodoo are terms that refer to West African and African New World Diaspora traditional religions stretching from Haiti to Ghana to Nigeria. The sacred is limitless and unbounded in West Africa, the gods, ancestors, and spirits and the beliefs and practices that surround them are part of one extensive ritual field in which people of different linguistic groups, ethnicities, religious orientations, and political-economic arenas exchange, travel, settle, and establish relationships. Contemporary voodoo is a faith, moral code, and philosophy for living. The primary carriers of this ancient knowledge are the religious specialists, the shamans. Those who are poor cease to exist, and those who help the living by bridging the gaps with the past live long and prosperous lives, this has been the case for Sofo Bisi. Voodoo is a platform for balance and well-being, but mostly, it is a magical system. The ability to manipulate the present depends on knowledge of the past and the interpretive skills of influencing the future.

A relatively modern denomination of vodu in West Africa, Gorovodu (lit.: “kola nut vodu”) is a spirit possession and medicinal order found among many cultural groups along the Bight of Benin and in the Volta region of contemporary Ghana and Togo. *Goro* is a word borrowed from Hausa, Muslim traders with whom the Ewe had centuries of contact via trade and slavery, for kola nut (*Cola nitida*), the acerbic caffeinated stimulant that acts as a digestive medicine and antidepressant and the principal sacrament that embodies the gods, sociality, and history of Ewe Gorovodu adepts. The kola nut itself is a powerful medicine, working to get rid of shingles and skins disorders, improving the circulation, and giving energy and happiness to the tired and downtrodden. As a unique pantheon of gods and values, Gorovodu began at the turn of the twentieth century, produced from a history of economic, political, and social relations between coastal groups and those in the interior that has endured in West Africa for over a thousand years. Gaining traction because it offered authority and independence to marginal-

ized groups during colonialism and post-colonialism (Brivio 2008), Gorovodu continues to blossom in the region and beyond because of its adaptability, multi-vocality, and its efficacy. The people adopting Gorovodu are diverse, and one sees great variety when comparing Gorovodu from ethnic group to ethnic group and even from village to village (Venkatachalam 2011). The “northern gods in southern lands” reality of *gorovodu* make the receptivity and interpretive skills of the shaman all the more important (Friedson 2009). Since the gods traverse ethnicity, geography, and time epochs, only the eclectic skills of the shaman can maneuver in such a complex world.

If ethnography may be defined as “a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture, and individuals) that is based on ethnographers’ own experiences” (Pink 2007, 22), sensory ethnography explores the touch, sight, smells, tastes, and sounds associated with these experiences to create a multimodality approach to ethnographic scholarship (Pink 2011; see also Stoller 1989). My research into *vodu* has tried to do just this, to enter *vodu* sensorium by embodying it with full participation whenever possible. Since I was an twenty year old college student obsessed with Carlos Castaneda and anything “mystical” I have been fortunate to be in Bisi’s shadow; evolving from a bright-eyed teenager to a forty year old anthropologist. Without Bisi’s shamanic voodoo my life would have taken a very different turn, and no doubt less informed turn, from the moment we met in 1996 I have been captivated by his charisma and personality, and mostly his ability to bridge gaps (life/death; sick/health; north/southern; past/present; black/white; religion/magic). Indeed, one of the biggest challenges to my own life was to “become voodoo” myself: divination sessions, sacrifices, initiations, judgements, healing sessions, focus groups, interviews, and countless days of participant-observation, attempting my own shamanic acts, in a multiplicity of sensorium experience (Howes and Classen 2014). Recognizing this multiplicity of both bias and experience involves long-term critical evaluation of others and myself. Bisi and his fellow African religious specialists are every bit the shaman, every bit the magical actors, as those from Siberia, Mongolia, North America, or Mexico.

For an outsider, sensing voodoo is most intense and charged when one goes full-tilt. Oftentimes, when working in the community for an extensive period of time(s), one must undergo a rite meant to make the stranger into the familiar; to bind the stranger into gift exchange relations with the gods and lineages where the stranger was adopted. In

Africa, this fictive kinship is very real, and more than one child in the village has been given my name, even though there is no blood relation. This way the community knows I am less likely to deceive, lie, or exploit community members lest he or she face punishment by the gods. And if the gods do not get you, the highly aware shaman will, and on more than one occasion Bisi has scolded me for my own transgressions: smoking ganja in the sacred forest, breaking dietary taboos, etc. Also, the community knows to whom the familiar now belongs in terms of kinship. In almost all social terms: food and shelter, marriage, defense, and so on the lineage has responsibility for the familiar and the familiar has responsibility towards the lineage in a manner recognized by the community at large. I, who has been visiting the community since an undergraduate in 1996, underwent lengthy initiations into the community/religion then and many times since, even taking scarification on the chest and promising to adhere to voodoo law. When my mother passed and I was full of tears Bisi told me he would contact her. I gave him her picture, necklace, and small lock of her hair. After Bisi journeyed to the other world and brought my mother back I somehow felt more whole, even though hearing her voice in my ear and her touch on my head was a little freaky. Bisi spoke to her and offered her a chicken and some gin. The gods appeased, everyone present was then offered to drink a small shot of gin to “break bread” with the gods and the spirit of my mother. Next Bisi’s son broke white kola nut and carefully placed on the Bangle fetishes first, then spread pieces among the other gods, tossing chalk into the *kpomes* (altars) as he did so. “When you die Eric somebody here will hang your fetish in the shrine and make these same offerings to you, it all comes full circle, dust to dust, father to son, world to world.” He insisted my mother was at peace but also intervening in my life from time to time, this gave me some peace of mind. Voodoo is religion, voodoo priests are shamans, and the life and acts of Bisi are both transformative and life-altering. His abilities as a healer, counselor, linguist, and father are every bit as scientific as they are cultural.

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Matthias Alexander Castrén, Lars Levi Laestadius and Antal Reguly: Pioneers of Northern Ethnography

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The present paper presents my hypothesis that three pioneers laid the foundation of fieldwork-based research on northern Eurasia in the 1840s in such a way that we may speak about a new research paradigm, Northern ethnography. The concept of paradigm is used in the sense proposed by Thomas S. Kuhn (1970, 1977) as a “disciplinary matrix” of “exemplars” followed in the choice of research approaches and methods. The three founders of the method are introduced in this paper: Matthias Alexander Castrén, Antal Reguly, and Lars Levi Laestadius. How their work is related to the other fieldwork-oriented research, now called anthropology, will also be discussed. A link between Northern ethnography and cultural anthropology is found in the career of Kai Donner, the Finnish disciple of the first generation of the pioneering scholars of British anthropology. Donner’s fieldwork, which took place among the Samoyeds in 1911–14, just at the beginning of the First World War, continued Castrén’s and Reguly’s Siberian studies.

Tempus fugit. Congratulations to my great friend Vilmos Voigt, whom I met for the first time in the fall of 1963 in the “Tuesday circle” initiated by Matti Kuusi during his fourth year as Professor of Comparative Folklore at the University of Helsinki. I remember how surprised Vilmos was to encounter somebody entering the seminar room wearing the uniform of the Vasa Coastal Artillery as a newly recruited soldier. This 23-year old man was myself.

We got to know each other in the “Finno-Ugric way” after this the same day in Vuosaari in eastern Helsinki—where I am writing this paper—enjoying the spirit of the *löyly* in togetherness shared by four folklorists: Bengt Holbek, our late Danish friend, Kari Laukkanen, Vilmos and myself. It was then that I also learned the lesson Vilmos has presented in depth in his various papers: *löyly* belongs to the oldest spiritual vocabulary shared by the Finno-Ugric peoples. *Lélek* in Hun-

garian means ‘breathing soul’, and is still today repeated in the creed read in Hungarian churches: “I believe in God, Jesus Christ and the *Szentlélek* [Holy Spirit].”

This Finno-Ugric spirituality has been one of the fields of interest shared by Vilmos and myself whenever and wherever we have met, while doing joint fieldwork in Hungary in 1968 and giving papers throughout the decades: in the congresses of Finno-Ugric studies, folk narrative research, shamanism, semiotics, etc. Vilmos is a great “folklore fellow” with a broad mind, whose interests are surprisingly many.

Contacts between Laestadius and Reguly are one of our joint fields. Let me quote here the English summary of Voigt’s recent paper in Hungarian about one of the initiators of Finno-Ugric fieldwork:

The initiator of Finno-Ugric fieldwork, Antal Reguly, describes in his travelogue the trip in 1840 from Hungary to Finland and Lapland. He left Helsinki by the middle of May, and arrived at Karesuando by the middle of June. For about a week he met with the priest Laestadius, who later became the father of a religious awakening in northern Fenno-Scandinavia. He was just compiling a sketch of the “Mythology” of the Lapps for the French Academy. Reguly copied pages from the first part of the work. The manuscript of Laestadius was lost and forgotten for a long time, and it was published only by Grundström (Laestadius 1959). Today there exist several excellent publications concerning Laestadius’ “Lappish Mythology.” For Reguly it was his first fieldwork trip; furthermore he formed a very high opinion of Laestadius, as regards his views on botany, mineralogy, geology, folk religion and the social situation in (tsarist) Finland. In my paper I used the unpublished text of the travelogue by Reguly and the recent international publications—hopefully correcting some earlier unreliable statements concerning Reguly’s trip. (Voigt 2012: 165)

Introduction

Over a century and a half ago, Castrén (1813–52) returned home from his second field trip to Siberia. The expedition began in January 1843 and was concluded in February 1849. The then 36-year old scholar came home to start his career as the first professor of Finnish language and literature at the University of Helsinki. When Castrén returned, however, he was a tired man, marked by the symptoms and the pains of the disease that was to lead to his death. Yet it was typical of his

broad scholarly mind that as professor in the University of Helsinki he delivered his lectures on the folklore and mythology of the Northern peoples in a way which allows us to consider him as a founder not only of Finno-Ugric studies in the broadest sense but also of the discipline of Northern ethnography.

Castrén's Fieldwork and the Search for Finnish Nationalism vs. Finno-Ugric Identity

There is a Finnish proverb, *Siperia opettaa* "Siberia teaches," referring to the Finnish exiles of the nineteenth century whose fate as citizens of Imperial Russia since 1810 was forced labor somewhere in Siberia. Siberia has been the instructor of the present author as well, who during his eighteen expeditions has seen how doing fieldwork in Siberia is not a picnic even today, to say nothing of Castrén's time. The following quotation is from his letter written in Obdorsk (modern Salekhard) at the culmination of his journey to another great pioneer of Finno-Ugric studies, Anders Johan Sjögren (1794–1855), academician at St. Petersburg at that time:

On this two-month journey I have had to suffer more and overcome more obstacles than ever on my journeys. Obdorsk, however, is for me like London, Paris and Berlin together. (Castrén 1953, 193)

While in Obdorsk Castrén was already aware of his terminal disease. After having stated this tragic state of affairs he continued in another letter:

Thus my youth's spring is already over and the grave will be the goal which I henceforth have to keep before my eyes. (Estlander 1929, 117)

In reconsidering Castrén's work we should keep in mind that he returned from his expedition exactly the same year, 1849, as Elias Lönnrot (1802–84) finished his longer version of the *Kalevala*. It was this (New) *Kalevala* which became the "Book," recognized as the only proper text of the Finnish epic. It soon replaced the (Old) *Kalevala* of 1835, which in 1841 had been translated into Swedish by Castrén. They are two different books in spite of the common name. We should keep in mind what had happened between 1835 and 1849 in Europe and in

Finland. The combined process of Romanticism and Nationalism in the spirit of the French Revolution came to call for not only a new version of the Finnish epic but a completely new interpretation of the *Kalevala*.

The *Old Kalevala* had been compiled by Lönnrot as the mythology of the Finns both in the Enlightenment mood of Christfried Ganander and earlier German Romanticism, represented for example by Johann Gottfried Herder and the Grimm brothers. The *New Kalevala* was designated the sacred history of the Finns following the guidelines of the later Finnicized National Romanticism. The historical interpretation now adopted presupposed a linear conception of time according to the model of Christianity and the Western worldview. The *Kalevala* history began with the creation and ended with the voluntary death of the hero, Väinämöinen, after he had been humiliated by the son of Marjatta, the Virgin Mary, whose son was the new god, Jesus Christ, coming to replace the old hero. The pre-Christian Finnish worldview was thus displaced by the faith of the new era. In spite of the consequent linear plot structure of the epic, the shamanic, cyclic worldview of the rune singers—with its cycle of life and death—is still, however, to be seen in the single runes of the *Kalevala*.

From the historical point of view now adopted, the northern dimension was seen as the frightening land of *Pohjola*, the Northern Land, also called *Tuonela*, the Abode of the Dead.

The preface Lönnrot wrote for the *New Kalevala* canonized the area of runic poetry in the White Sea Karelian forests. Its plot was supposed to be the war between “us,” the Finns and the Karelians—and “them” in the North, the “Lapps” of the Pohjola area. This kind of war between the two related peoples had never taken place—actually there is not a word for “war” in the Sámi (formerly called “Lappish”) languages—but it was needed to fulfill the social imperative for a narrative of the heroic Finnish past, and it clearly followed the model of a Viking Age war epic. Everything culminated in the theft of the *Sampo*—a mythical object bringing all kinds of welfare—from Pohjola, i.e. from the hands of the evil Lapps.

The shamanic poem of the singing competition between Väinämöinen and Joukahainen was, accordingly, reinterpreted as the battle between “our” *noita* (sage, witch), who, of course, was mightier than that of “them,” namely, the Lapps. The basis of the “war” between the *Kalevala* people and Laplanders is rather found in the astral mythology between the two shamans in their singing competition than in their ancient war history.

There was at this time a firm opinion that the Sámi had no epic poetry at all—and that Anders Fjellner's (1795–1876) Lappish narrative on “The Son of the Sun's Courting Journey to the Land of the Giants” (Fjellner 1849), which also appeared in the same year (in 1849) as the second version of the *Kalevala* came out, was inauthentic. This opinion was reconsidered in the 1990s and shown to be false: there is an epic and shamanic way of performing *juoiggat* (*leudd* in eastern Sámi languages, meaning a special sacred way of singing myths—the same word as *luote*, meaning shamanic incantations and songs in Finnish: *Luovuttele luotteesi!* “Give up your charms!”).

What caused this profound change in the interpretation? Probably the patriotic, National Romantic ambitions simply got the upper hand in Lönnrot's work. Lönnrot himself with his interpretations, and his *Kalevala* on its way from the Old to the New, became a part of a national “*Kalevala* process” provoked by the social order, expectations, and hopes of the young Finnish establishment.

The change of attitude was made easier by the fact that Lönnrot's most immediate circle also had changed. Such persons as Sjögren and Castrén were absent, both of whom had started in the spirit of Romanticism and had now become somewhat cooler in their nationalism as well as more scientifically grounded in their approach towards epic; Sjögren had left Helsinki for St. Petersburg and Castrén went to Siberia with the grant arranged by Sjögren through the Imperial Russian Academy at St. Petersburg.

It is time to reconsider what was happening in the scholarly thinking of Castrén and Lönnrot in the 1840s. The two scholars, who had so far been working quite closely in their Romantic research of Finnish folklore and mythology, clearly went in different directions after their joint fieldwork enterprise—partly funded by Lönnrot—ended at the White Sea in 1842. Lönnrot decided to return to his fieldwork to find epics in the area of Lake Onega while Castrén went on his travels over the Mezen tundra to the Komi. He crossed the Ural Mountains—a part of the tour which took two months, ruining his health—and continued his fieldwork among the Ob-Ugric peoples in northwestern Siberia. We can conclude that the field became his instructor and opened his eyes to observe shamanic rituals and to understand and interpret what was told to him by his language masters in Siberian villages. Castrén's fieldwork orientation was different from Lönnrot's, who was looking for rune singers. Castrén also showed much more understanding of shamans

than Lönnrot, whose attitude towards them was quite negative; maybe he considered them as his brutal rivals.

At the same time as Lönnrot was searching for the heroic Finnish past, Castrén went to the Siberian North to trace the “Altaic peoples”—Castrén’s concept of the homeland of the Uralic family of languages placed it in the Altai mountain range. We may conclude that Lönnrot’s epic worked for Finnish nationalism not only among the Finns, but among the Karelians and Estonians (see *Kalevipoeg*) as well. What became manifest in Castrén’s work accompanied by the generations of researchers sent by the Finno-Ugric Society was the emergence of Finno-Ugric studies. The search for common Finno-Ugric elements, at first in language and afterwards in other aspects of human life, even in racial and genealogical features, sometimes led to Pan-Finno-Ugric attitudes being recognized, for example in theories on shamanism as the Uralic *Urreligion*, as expressed in the debate at the Ninth International Congress of Finno-Ugric Studies in Tartu in 2000.

Castrén’s fieldwork in Siberia was thoroughly programmed by Sjögren in his advisory role as academician at St. Petersburg. Castrén was expected, during his tour among the small populations in the huge, sparsely populated territory between the Ural Mountains and the southwestern Chinese border, to record local folk songs, proverbs, historical legends and other traditions. Another linguist, Franz Anton Schiefner (1817–79) from St. Petersburg, soon published them in the magnificent series *Nordische Reisen und Forschungen* in twelve volumes between 1853 and 1862. Most of Castrén’s folklore collecting took place among the Samoyeds and was published by Toivo Lehtisalo (1940). Publications on Castrén’s voyages by Aulis J. Joki (1950) show how Castrén carried out his fieldwork. The following quotation comes from Castrén’s less well-known role as the collector of Turkic epics among the Tatars of the Minusinsk steppe at the Akaban river, a tributary of the Yenisei:

No rest is possible where several hundred cows, sheep and goats have been gathered, since so much music is born—in Väinämöinen’s words—as “breaks all the ears and sends sleep away for a week.” It was my luck that the host of the house proved to be kin to bards, entertaining me all the night with his hero tales. Their proper performance should be singing accompanied by a harp with two strings. Because a singer performing this way can never finish his song in one night—the singer like a shaman opens the treasures of his mouth during the nights only—I let this man recount the contents of his best songs only, in

accordance with his wish. (Castrén's diary 1857, 305–6, quoted after Joki 1950, 89–90, transl. from Finnish by Juha Pentikäinen)

Laestadius as a Sámi Mythologist and Ethnographer

Lars Levi Laestadius was born in Jäckvik on 10 January 1800, and died in Pajala on 21 February 1861. His life cycle can be divided into four periods, varying in their physical, social, and cultural environments, special roles and tasks, as well as specific foci of interest. Each of these periods is also characterized by distinctive personal, social, cultural, and religious identities and can be formulated as follows:

(1) Laestadius' childhood was spent at home in Jäckvik, South Swedish Lappmark and in the vicarage of his half-brother Carl Erik Laestadius in Kvikkjokk until Carl Erik's death (1800–16);

(2) With another brother, Petrus Laestadius, who was later a journalist with a strong interest in "Lappology" (a term used to denote Sámi studies), he subsequently studied in the high school of Härnösand and at the University of Uppsala, where he undertook with first joint botanic and ecological expeditions (1816–24);

(3) After his ordination in February 1825, he acted in a clerical capacity as the vicar of Karesuando and visitor to northern Swedish parishes, and served on several ecological expeditions while engaging in scholarly activities as, variously, a botanist, ethnographer, theologian, and philosopher (1825–44);

(4) After his religious awakening—dated 1844 on the basis of his autobiography and correspondence—he functioned as a revivalist minister, a campaigner for temperance, an organizer of folk education and a newspaper editor. In this way a religious movement was established in northern Scandinavia called after his death "Laestadianism." Laestadius did not regard himself as having established a new religious movement, but rather to have gathered together readers and other newborn Christians in northern Scandinavia, nourishing poor souls with the bread of life. His followers were, however, later on called *lestadianer* (Laestadians). This expression was at first used in Swedish in 1877, sixteen years after Laestadius' death (Pentikäinen 1997, 1998).

Lars Levi Laestadius spoke several Sámi languages. He learned to speak Finnish from new settlers who then arrived at formerly Sámi speaking Karesuando parish, where he had preached mainly in Sámi

until 1849, then in Finnish in the wholly Finnish-speaking parish of Pajala on the Swedish side of the Tornio river valley until his death in 1861. It was during this period that the movement gradually became Finnicized and Laestadius' famous sermons finally became the *lingua sacra* of the territory to such an extent that *meän kieli*—an archaic Finnish idiom spoken in Tornio river valleys—has been recognized by the government in 2000 as one of the five languages with an official minority status in Sweden, the others being Sámi, Finnish, Tatar and Romany.

Interestingly, this archaic Finnish idiom was the language spoken by the first wave of Finnish emigrants arriving at the coasts in Northern America from the 1850's. Since a great number of these settlers carried Laestadian Christianity as their worldview reading Laestadius' Postillas in Finnish their get-together, their "meän kieli" became among Finnish-speaking settlers in North America *lingua sacra*, surviving to this day, even to the fifth and sixth generations.

This emphasis, within debates both in the Swedish Lutheran Church and in *academe*, on the religious side of Laestadius' activities during the last part of his life has obscured his role as a prominent scholar in various fields. As far as his scientific career is considered, he could be characterized as "One man, with seven lives and scholarly expertise." He was the first Sámi author, spoke several Sámi languages, and studied botany and ecology until his last summer. He published a journal on philosophy and doctrinal history. He was a scholar with a Northern mind.

Apart from being a well-known ecologist and botanist with great expertise in Northern areas he was a remarkable and eminent representative of early Sámi ethnography. Of special importance here is his least-known work, written as a Sámi mythologist and mythographer (Pentikäinen 1999). His posthumously published work *Fragmenter i lappska mythologien* (Fragments on Lapp Mythology) did not appear in full in Finnish until as late as 1994 (Laestadius 1994) and was finally published by the Northern Institute of Folklore in 1997 in the original Swedish version (Laestadius 1997).

The volume was produced in response to a request from France in the late 1830s. The request came from Joseph Paul Gaimard (1796–1858), who was the leader of the French expedition to the Swedish Lappmarks. Laestadius was one of the five Swedish scholars hired by Charles John XIV, king of Sweden (1763–1844). Laestadius' particular role was to act as a botanist and as a "Lapp" guide who knew the language and territory

that was needed to lead this expedition when it started its wandering over the Finnmark wilderness tundra from the Arctic Ocean to the Tornio river valley. After the expedition team had recognized Laestadius' huge knowledge of Sámi history and folklore during the Finnmark tour and listened to his knowledge of Sámi narratives, Gaimard and Xavier Marmier—historian of the expedition—asked him to produce a survey of “Lapp history,” but it was the mythology that was the focus of the work that emerged. It was Laestadius' choice, since he knew his people. Their history is oral, in their mind and vocabulary, in their narratives and beliefs.

The first part of *Fragmenter*, entitled “Gudalära” (The Doctrine of Divinity), was signed off by Laestadius on 8 May 1840, and the three other chapters—including his comments to Jacob Fellman (1795–1875), vicar of Utsjoki, the most modern Lutheran parish in Finnish Lappmarks—were finally ready to be sent to Paris on 1 May 1845. The second chapter dealt with “Offer-lära” (Sacrifice), the third chapter with “Spådoms lära” (Prophecy, or more exactly, Sámi *Nåjdro*, that is, shamanism), and the fourth chapter covered “valda stycken af Lapparnes Sagohäfder” (Chosen Chapters from Lapp Saga) including a selection of Sámi folk tales.

Although the latter parts were ready by November 1844, Laestadius nevertheless decided to complete the text by appending his comments to another study of mythology which had been simultaneously worked on by Jacob Fellman (which appeared posthumously as an edition by Isak Fellman in 1906). Since Fellman published Laestadius' comments with his own *Anteckningar* (Notes), they became familiar to academic circles long before Laestadius' own manuscript—which disappeared for more than a century—was ever considered on its own.

When considering Laestadius' *Fragmenter*, it is important to remember that his personal religious awakening had taken place in early 1844. To quote the often repeated expression about the rapidly emerging awakenings in his congregation, “It burned in the snow.” Thus, the awakening occurred simultaneously with his work on mythology.

Laestadius was well aware of his Sámi roots and proud of them; he considered his profound local orientation a special strength while doing his fieldwork among the Sámi and writing his mythology. He wrote about this himself:

[I] was born up in Lappmark, was brought up in Lappmark, I now live in Lappmark and I have even, maybe more than anyone else, travelled around all the parishes in all the *Lappmarks*. (Laestadius 1997, 8)

Laestadius own field experiences and his own intellectual and spiritual ambitions are manifested especially in the third part that deals with shamanic knowledge. In his descriptions of the knowledge and practices of the Sámi *noaidi* (shaman), Laestadius raises ethical questions about his personal responsibility as a minister who has assumed the role of writing a textbook on Lappish mythology:

The author who is no Trollkarl and who does not have much desire to acquire such a capacity, must carefully scrutinize the evidence and fairly present even facts which are inexplicable to himself with respect to the traditions associated with the role. (Laestadius 1997, 137)

When discussing further the eternal problem of the existence of the spiritual world, he reaffirms his belief in its existence by referring to the French revolution (§1), according to which thoughts for “the immortality of the soul should have belonged to the madness of humankind.” He says that a distinction should be made between the authentic *Trollkarlar* and the *Charlataner* (Sages and Charlatans).

In consideration of these points, Laestadius proceeds to write only about “such people who have been regarded as *Trollkarlar* by the Lapps (§2) and who have through their witchcraft been able to do something good or bad.” Applying contemporary psychological insight to his observation of the practices of the *Trollkarlar*, Laestadius cites Tornaevs (§3) on the subject, then relates detailed “examples nearer to our time” on the basis of his knowledge of Lapp mythology (§§4–6), even going on to mention Swedenborg of Stockholm (§7) before concluding that the evidence suggests that there are things which are “unexplainable in terms of normal human understanding.”

At the same time Laestadius’ text is a testimony of his ambitious effort to establish a link between sources on ancient Lapp *Nåjdro*—as a regionalist he never uses the more universal concept of shamanism—and its psychological, rational or philosophical interpretations. Ultimately, he deems it appropriate to leave the more thorough explanations of the state of trance in the capable hands of psychologists and physiologists. It is merely his task to “demonstrate historically” that “*Spåmannen* (seers)

really did fall asleep, went into a swoon, and that in this condition were subject to fantasies, visions and dreams.

What was typical of Laestadius' mythological work was acute source criticism. This concerned both the scrutiny of the Old Scandinavian sources concerning the Sámi, earlier studies, and his own ethnographical data. He quotes hundreds of stories recorded from his informants, allowing their voices to be heard through their own accounts, which he had heard in Lapp *kotas* (cabins). All of these he mentions visiting in his "Swedish lappmarks," calling this language *kåtalapska* ("Lappish," i.e. Sámi spoken in cabins). Much information comes from his own family, sometimes from his parents or grandparents and people in the surrounding Sámi family lines and neighbors, persons whose names are given and with whom he had played and talked to about the matter.

For Lars Levi Laestadius, Sámi mythology is a reconstruction of folk beliefs, made finally by himself as an author, hence the *Fragmenter*. An important distinction is made between the knowledge held in common (today defined as collective tradition by folklorists) and the esoteric secret wisdom of the experts called *noaidis* (shamans) in Sámi.

Antal Reguly, a Hungarian Link between the Scandinavian and Siberian Arctic

Castrén's first colleague to enter the territory of the Ob-Ugric peoples was the Hungarian Antal Reguly, who carried out fieldwork among them in Siberia in 1843–5. These two men inaugurated through their fieldwork the discipline of Finno-Ugric studies. Interestingly, they lived in the same decades (Castrén 1813–52 and Reguly 1819–58) and died at the age of 39. While Castrén lectured on some parts of his collections, Reguly only collected. Castrén's manuscripts, diaries and letters were published posthumously in 1853–62, but Reguly's major collections at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest, on which editorial work was started by Bernát Munkácsi (1860–1937) and József Pápay (1873–1931), are still not fully accessible.

Castrén started his Northern fieldwork career from his home territory in Finnish Lapland in the 1830s, and Reguly in 1839–41 built up a direct Finno-Ugric link from the Scandinavian tundra fells, including Castrén's homebase in Tervola, with the Siberian taiga. Reguly travelled for some years around Scandinavia, Finland, and Estonia. In May 1840

he started his tour to the northern parts of Finland and Sweden. His diary includes reports about his experiences with Finnish peasants in the countryside. When entering Lönnrot's territories in Kainuu, he quotes in Sotkamo Frederick Schiller's words: "I must love this people because of their strength in modesty"¹ (Tervonen 1944, 18). In Nurmes, Reguly was able to record some information about local beliefs and sages. Typically, his diary completely lacks runic and other folklore texts in verse. Like Castrén, Reguly was more interested in prose narratives and ethnographical fieldwork. Reguly also speaks of Lönnrot's fieldwork. His report includes a rare contemporary report about what Reguly had heard of Lönnrot's double role as a medical doctor and as a folklorist:

Lönnrot collected many songs here. Before his arrival, he used to send a word in every direction so that rune singers would come to the minister. So they came and Lönnrot wrote down what they sang. Sometimes they brought ill people along whom Lönnrot prescribed medicine and powder to. He gave them 40–60 kopeks as their payment, according to their skill in songs. (Tervonen 1944, 19; transl. from Finnish by Juha Pentikäinen)

Reguly's diary shows how dependent he was on the information given by the local ministers on the demography and common state of the communities he visited. When this information included their folk beliefs and sorcery, it was not completely trustworthy, however. Reguly's goal was to reach Sámi territories in the north:

When I fly away like a night owl in the evening, and wake up in another remote area, the whole journey is like a dream. (Reguly's letter, quoted by Tervonen 1944, 20; transl. from Finnish by Juha Pentikäinen)

Before entering Kuusamo, where Reguly assumes he will finally be able to listen to Sámi speech with his own ears, he decided to cross the border to visit White Sea Karelia. His report on the brief stop at Lonkka, Vuokkiniemi, does not contain any rune, but rather observa-

¹ A published English translation of these lines read as follows: ". . . for I needs must love them; / They are so gentle, yet so full of power . . ." (act 2, scene 2 of *Wilhelm Tell* in *The Works of Frederick Schiller*, transl. Theodore Martin (London, 1846), vol. 2, p. 239.

tions on Karelian dialect and lifestyle. Reguly's aim was also to check the daring although unfounded theory, proposed already by his countryman Mátyás Bél (Matthias Belius, 1684–1749), that Karelia might have been the primordial homeland of the Hungarians.



Fig. 1. Antal Reguly, portrait (steel engraving on paper) by József Tyroler based on drawing by Miklós Barabás. Courtesy of the Hungarian Historical Gallery, Hungarian National Museum (Object No. 3811). Photo: Attila Király.

After this short visit to White Sea Karelia Reguly continued his journey on the Finnish side of the border. He became disappointed that Sámi speakers were no longer found in Kuusamo, Kemijärvi or Sodankylä, but plenty of mosquitos instead. It was finally in Kittilä where Reguly had his first contact with the Sámi. He even wrote down a couple of Sámi songs, but did not consider it proper to record any of the crude local songs from his Finnish drivers. Reguly actively wrote down statistics about the then disappearing Kemi Sámi based on information (some in Swedish) from ministers and lay officials in Kittilä. His diary includes folklore, for example incantations he heard from local sages in Kittilä.

Muonio(nniska) was a less attractive stop to Reguly on his way from Kittilä to Karesuando. This former part of Enontekiö, later a village community located on both sides of the Swedish–Finnish (Russian) border river, became one of the high moments during Reguly’s journey and for the emergence of the new paradigm. Reguly tells in his unpublished diary that he did not learn as much from anyone else during his whole Scandinavian tour as from Pastor Laestadius during his stay in Karesuando vicarage. Reguly’s letter to Mr. Kilpinen from Vaasa on 21 November 1840 gives additional information about the linguistic aspects of the stay:

I stayed with Laestadius for two weeks, learning as much as I could. The result is that I am still in Finland. Lappish comes much nearer to Hungarian than Finnish. I decided to learn it, because it is impossible for me to return to my home country without achieving at least some advantage for my future research, as much as possible. (Reguly’s letter, quoted by Tervonen 1944, 21; transl. from Finnish by Juha Pentikäinen)

From the point of view of ethnographical research it was a happy historical accident that Reguly happened to meet Laestadius during the most active period of Laestadius’ ethnographical career. After having concluded his tour as the Sámi guide of “La Recherche” expedition of the French Academy in 1838–40, Laestadius had settled down to write his “Fragments of Lapp Mythology,” the dream he had expressed for the first time in 1833. After having just finished the first volume of the manuscript, “Gudalära” (Doctrine of Deities), Laestadius let his guest copy extracts of the text after Reguly had promised “not to publish them before they had been published in French or in another civilized

language.” This expression is important; French probably belonged to the language repertoire mastered by both scholars.

Reguly then wrote tens of pages of Laestadius’ text in Swedish. The agreement remained in Paris, but its existence became known to the scholarly world 150 years later before the publication of Laestadius’ *Mythology Fragments in extenso: Fragmenter i Lappska Mythologien* (Laestadius 1997).

Reguly’s diary with some references to the corpus of Laestadius’ *Mythology* text are in the library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Curiously, it also contains Sámi texts recorded from Brita Kajsa Allstadius, Laestadius’ wife—a testimony to her skills in Sámi, sometimes questioned by church historians—as well as from Fjellner, “a Lapp born teacher and minister living in Maunu village in Karesuando.” This paragraph indicates that Laestadius was a polite host to his foreign guest to lead Reguly to meet the author of the Lappish epic text.

Besides mythology and Sámi ethnography, Reguly and Laestadius discussed such topics as botany (Laestadius’ main area of expertise), mineralogy, geology, and directions of psychology. Their debate included the problematical position of Finland inside Russia and hierarchies among the estates and their relations with Finnish peasants. Reguly actively wrote down the bibliographies of Sámi linguistic and ethnographical texts he found out about from Laestadius’ library, including grammars written by Rasmus Rask (1832) and Nils Vibe Stockfleth (1840), extracts from *Åbo Tidningar*, statistics on Sámi territories, life-style, morals, etc. Reguly concludes the significance of his visit in his letter to Mr. Kilpinen:

I have never discussed matters with anyone else as much as with Laestadius. I learned a lot; his speeches were like treasures I had been longing for and seeking for a long time. His every word solves questions I have been uncertain about. (Reguly’s letter, quoted by Tervonen 1944, 22; transl. from Finnish by Juha Pentikäinen)

Reguly’s search seemed to turn into a pilgrimage. His next stop was Tornio, then Kemi at the vicarage of Matthias Castrén, Matthias Alexander Castrén’s uncle; then with S. F. van Born, governor of Oulu. In spite of his particular problems, staying illegally without a passport in foreign countries and in continuous want of money owing to the delay of the grant promised by the Hungarian Scholarly Society—the predecessor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences—he was now ready to define the

goal of his life in his letter from Vaasa to his family in Hungary “as his patriotic duty with an advantage to his country”:

After having sent my last letter home I am no more an enthusiast in my present studies. I have set the goal of my life as being to deal with them as a scholar. I had doubts about my decision to devote myself to Lappish studies. I could not leave them, however, because of my inner drive, like a woman who does not listen to anything else than that. I have, however, quite often asked why I do this—and what for. If one divides his strength between matters it is not possible to achieve any proper results. I have now decided to give myself wholly to this, to live for it and work for this serious scholarly aim. I am happy after having given myself to this special goal and I clearly foresee where to put my efforts without ever surrendering. (Reguly’s letter, quoted by Tervonen 1944, 23; transl. from Finnish by Juha Pentikäinen)

The young Reguly returned to Helsinki in the fall of 1840. He was eager to proceed with his Sámi studies. His new interests included Finnish folk poetry so that he even translated an extract of the *Kalevala*. Since this seemed to happen exactly at the same time as Castrén was working with his own Swedish translation, it is again clear testimony to the intensive interaction of the two young scholars before their Siberian experiences. Reguly expressed his scholarly devotion as well as explaining why being in Finland would create the conditions for his future tasks. The following letter to his friend in Hungary indicates that the source of Reguly’s scholarly enthusiasm also lay in the principles of cultural Darwinism; it was in the primitive mind of the man of the cold north where the origins of culture should be sought:

You know my drive towards northern nature, the people and everything there. It is for this reason I have always wanted to travel to the north, not to the civilized south about which I may learn enough from travel reports. What annoyed me before was that I could not comprehend the Natural Man, or the primitive circumstances described by history, or with how few of the products of wild nature someone may be satisfied. I am happy now. This tour has shown the whole history of development of a country and a people. A Nordic tour is not only interesting for someone who wants to study magnetism and languages but for every civilized man, since it gives a proper picture of the origin of culture. (Reguly’s letter to an anonymous “Young Friend in Hungary”, quoted by Tervonen 1944, 24; transl. from Finnish by Juha Pentikäinen)

Conclusion: Three Ways towards New Understanding of Northern Lifestyle and Identity

Fieldwork carried out by Castrén and Reguly among the Uralic peoples in northwestern Siberia in the 1840s started a new paradigm, “Northern ethnography.”

Besides Castrén and Reguly, a third contemporary must be taken into careful consideration while researching the pioneers of the paradigm in this article: Laestadius, a Sámi theologian and multi-scholar. His *Fragmenter* is a very important contribution to Sámi mythology, worth remembering, indeed, in the search for the founders of the paradigm of Northern ethnography. Two symposia concerning the lesser-known roles of Laestadius—Laestadius as linguist, botanist, and ethnographer—arranged by the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters in April 1999, and another to celebrate his 200th anniversary on 10 January in the facilities of the Royal Academy of Science and Letters in Sweden led to a publication (Rydving et al. 2000) which reveals his unique roles as a Northern scholar who combined his Sámi background with his career as an ecologist, linguist and ethnographer.

Castrén may be considered as the founding father of the Northern ethnography paradigm. Compared to Lönnrot, he was closer to the research methodology of our time and less motivated by the narrow national-romantic tendencies of his era. He was a man of sound down-to-earth orientation on the one hand, and wide perspectives on the other. While Lönnrot, as the collector of the runes and author of the *Kalevala*, was the mythographer of the Finns, Castrén’s fieldwork made him both the founder of Finno-Ugric studies and finally the mythographer of all the Finno-Ugric peoples.

Castrén’s definition of ethnography is to be read in his last lectures in 1851–2 on the “Ethnology of the Altaic Peoples” [i.e. Finno-Ugric]:

Ethnography is a new name for an old thing. It means the scholarly study of the religion, society, customs, way of life, habitations of various peoples; in a word, everything that belongs to their inner and outer life. Ethnography could be regarded as a part of cultural history, but not all nations possess a history in the higher sense; instead their history consists of ethnography (Castrén 1857, 8; transl. from Swedish by Juha Pentikäinen)

The religious dimension was central in his field studies as it was in ethnography in general. Castrén described shamanism in a way that is worthy of the attention of modern researchers:

All the religion proper of the Altaic peoples has been called shamanism. Unfortunately, this far, more attention has been paid to the naming and outer features of the phenomenon than to the inner disposition, the essential nature of it. . . . I would not consider shamanism as a form of religion on its own, but rather as a stage in the development of folk religious belief. (Castrén 1853, 1, transl. from Finnish by Juha Pentikäinen).

Unfortunately, the lectures were not finished owing to Castrén's illness and untimely death. However, they highlighted some important directions for the development of ethnographical research into contemporary Siberian shamans and "shamanhood" (a new term proposed by the author at the conference of the International Society for Shamanic Research in Chantilly, France, in 1994).

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The Last Yugur Shaman from Sunan, Gansu (China)

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In Gansu Province of Northwest China, there lives a small minority, called Yugur. They consist of two distinct groups: the Kara Yugur who are the descendants of the Orkhon Uighur Empire and speak a Turkic language, and the Shira Yugur who are one of the so-called White Mongol tribes from the Amdo Region of Tibet. The Mongolic-speaking Shira Yugur follow Tibetan Buddhism while the Turkic-speaking Kara Yugur have preserved their shamanic traditions practiced by a specialist (elči) until recent times. The earliest information collected on Kara Yugur shamanic traditions date back to the beginning of the 1900s. In 2011 and 2013, I visited the Western Yugur and collected data on Korgui, the last elči to conduct the yaka ritual. I also recorded a short myth from his daughter on the emergence of the first shaman. The present article seeks to shed some light on the Kara Yugur shamans and their vanishing shamanic practices, as well as their relation to Tibetan Buddhism and the Shira Yugur religious traditions.

In August, 2011, I visited the Yugur minority of China in Sunan Yugur Autonomous County, Gansu Province.¹ We travelled 433 kilometres from Xining, the center of the Qinghai Province (Amdo)² by car across the picturesque Qilian Mountains and the Biandukou Pass (3,500 m). The Yugurs number around 15,000, and the majority of them live in Sunan

¹ On my first trip, I was accompanied by former director of the Institute of Ethnology (Hungarian Academy of Sciences), Mihály Hoppál.

² Amdo was the traditional name for the region in Tibetan. The current name Qinghai comes from the Chinese name of the great lake of the province (Köke-Naur in Mongol and Co-Ngoin in Tibetan meaning 'Blue Lake').

County.³ The center of Sunan is Hongwansi (红湾寺 Red Bay Temple) and four townships, Minhua, Dahe, Kangle, and Huangcheng (明花、大河、康乐、皇城) have a significant Yugur population (map 1). The Yugurs are linguistically not homogeneous: the Western Yugurs speak a Turkic language (in Minhua and Dahe), while the Eastern Yugurs (in Kangle and Huangcheng) speak a Mongolic language. Western Yugur has some 4,000 speakers, while Eastern Yugur has around 2,000 speakers.

The term “Yellow Uighur” is used in scholarship to designate the Yugurs (Hahn 1998). During our visit, our informants told us that the Western group was called Kara (Black) Yugur, or simply Yugur, and only the Eastern (Mongolic) group was called Shira (Yellow) Yugur.⁴ The Turkic Yugurs are believed to be descendants of the Orkhon Uighur Empire (744–840) (Golden 1992, 155–188) and its successor states (idem, 163–9) that existed here in Gansu (848–1036) with towns, like Ganzhou, Suzhou and Dunhuang. Later the Gansu Uighur state was conquered by the Tanguts and the Mongols. The Mongolic (Eastern Yugur) group is also called *inggar*,⁵ and they are probably a Monguor (Tuzu) tribe that migrated here from Amdo during the Manchu Era in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was these Yugur groups that Hungarian Tibetologist Alexander Csoma de Kőrös (1784–1842) wanted to visit, but he died during his trip to Lhasa (Ligeti 1931). The so-called Modern Uighurs (Chinese 维吾尔 *weiwu’r*) of Xinjiang Province in northwest China only adopted the ethnic name “Uighur” in 1921, and they are not directly related to the Yugurs of Gansu.

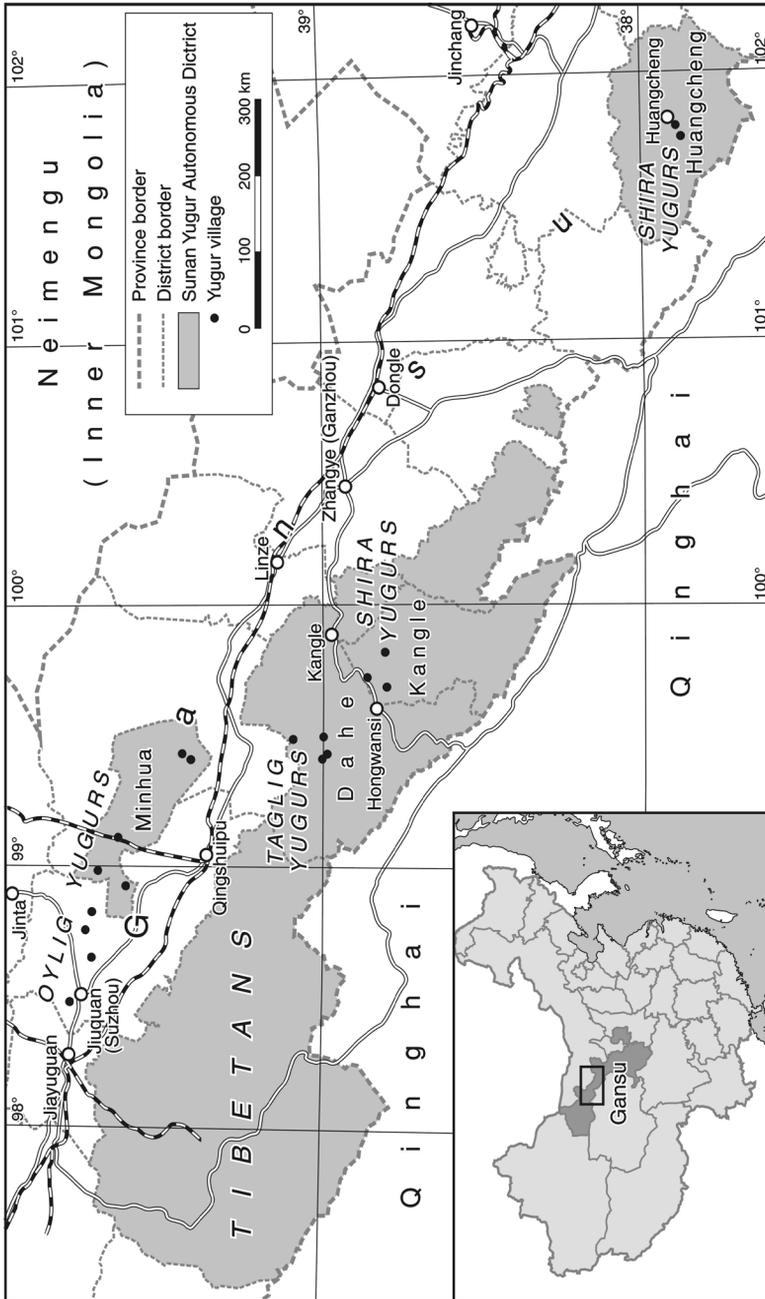
The Turkic-speaking Yugurs are also divided into two distinct groups: the Mountain (*taghg*) Yugur in Dahe and the Plains (*oyhg*) Yugur in Minhua between Jiuquan (Suzhou) and Zhangye (Ganzhou).

The center of Sunan, Hongwansi got its name after a Tibetan Buddhist temple that was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The town is situated by the Longsur (Mandarin Longche) River and

³ Sunan Yugur Autonomous District has an area of 20,456 square kilometres, its population is over 50,000: 10,000 Yugurs, 10,000 Tibetans, 30,000 Han and as well as some Khalkha Mongols, Monguors, Hui and Dongxiang. The Yugurs live mainly in Minhua (3,000), Dahe (3,000) and Kangle (2,500), Huangcheng (2,000) townships.

⁴ See also Nugteren 2003.

⁵ See also Hahn (1998, 397; Nugteren 2003, 265). The Yugur-Chinese dictionary gives three meanings for the word *inggar*: ‘hybrid calf (yak and cattle); foolish; Mongolic speaking Yugur’ (Lei 1992, 22).



Map 1. Yugur villages in Sunan Yugur Autonomous District. Drawn by Béla Nagy, 2016.

nowadays it is developing rapidly, giving way to an influx of the Han Chinese. Young generations of Yugurs switch to Mandarin, so both Turkic and Mongolic (Shira) Yugur have become endangered languages.

The Yugurs were first described in modern scholarship by Grigorii N. Potanin (1893). Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim (1911) visited them shortly in 1907, and mentioned some Buddhist characteristics of Yugur religious life, but referred to no shamans at all.⁶ It was the Russian Turkologist, Sergeï E. Malov (1880–1957) who, in turn, collected detailed information on Yugur shamans, among other linguistic and ethnographic data and folklore texts, during his field trip of 1910 and 1911.⁷ In an article Malov (1912a) gave a detailed account of his fieldwork on the *elči* shamans and their *yaka*⁸ rituals, an even photographed the ritual. Matthias Hermanns visited the Yugurs in 1935, and published an article (Hermanns 1940–1941) on the Yugur along with some linguistic data and two pictures, nos. 5 and 6, and a drawing, no. 8 in the original, connected with the *yaka* ritual. Nowadays Chinese colleagues tend to think that shamanic traditions are forgotten among the Yugurs, though Zhong Jinwen (1995) attempted to recognize some traits of shamanism in Yugur folk tales.⁹ So obviously I was curious about the current situation.

Having arrived to Hongwansi, I met two elderly sisters at a Yugur Minority social event: Chimitar (born 1939) and Renchirtan (born 1942). They were from the Yaglakar village (clan)¹⁰ of Dahe Township. I asked them if they had ever heard of the *elči* shamans and their *yaka* rituals. Soon it became clear that they happened to be the daughters of the last Yugur shaman, Korgai, who died in 1977, just after the Cultural Revolution ended. When we met them in Hongwansi, they were just

⁶ Mannerheim's account was reviewed by Malov (1912b).

⁷ For further details see Thomsen (1959) with a list of Malov's publications on the Yugur (idem, 1959, 565).

⁸ Some Yugur words like *elči* and *yaka* are pronounced with a voiced pharyngeal consonant that produced the pharyngealization of the proceeding vowel. It is indicated with a ʕ sign in the IPA system, but in order to simplify the transcript, I have omitted it.

⁹ It must be added that the Chinese author uses the term "shamanism" rather vaguely, what he speaks of in his article may better be classified as the "natural religion of the Yugur." Later Zhong and Martti Roos (1997) added some complementary linguistic notes to the data they published in their 1995 article.

¹⁰ Yaglakar was the leading tribe of the Orkhon Uighur Empire founded by Kutlug Bilge in 744.

visiting Renchirtan's son, Tümen Jastar (杜成峰 Du Chengfeng, from Sunan, Dahe), who lives in that town with his Tibetan wife.

The Elči Specialist

The following day I visited Chimitar and Renchirtan in Jastar's home in Hongwansi (figs. 1, 2), where they showed me a picture featuring their father,¹¹ and explained to me that there were two, or, more precisely, three types of *elči*. The *em elči* was a sort of healing shaman, while the *kam elči* performed rituals and evoked spirits.¹² In addition, there was also a third type of shaman, called *pör elči*, who could perform both the healing and the spirit invoking rituals. Chimitar's and Renchirtan's father was a *pör elči*.¹³ (I consider *elči* a title of respect—like Old Turkic *tarqan* and Old Uighur *baqši* from Chinese *bosbi*—given to different religious specialists: *qam* 'shaman' and *emči* 'healer'.)

Chimitar and Renchirtan also showed us their father's shamanic paraphernalia (*dorvun*),¹⁴ which closely resembled the headdress of some Tibetan Bonpo specialists (figs. 3, 4).¹⁵ It is interesting to note here that Malov (1912a, 63) remarks that Yugur shamans did not use any special attire, and that they performed ceremonies in their everyday dress.

Korgui could not pass on his tradition to his son—Malov also mentions that the Yugur shaman Sanišqap planned to pass on his knowledge to his twelve-year-old son (1912a, 61) and that it often happened that shamans' sons followed their fathers in their profession (idem, 1912a, 64)—due to the political situation during the Cultural Revolution, so the last Yugur shaman died having no pupils. Her daughters had only a limited knowledge of shamanic traditions and the *yaka* ritual, since girls were not allowed to participate at religious ceremonies. Only sons

¹¹ I took a picture of the old photograph, but its quality is too poor to be reproduced here.

¹² See also Lei (1992, 27).

¹³ Malov (1912a, 63) explains that *elči* and *qam* were two different terms for the same shaman.

¹⁴ Malov also mentioned an object, called *torvun* (1912a, 63) saying that it was some kind of "magic bag," hanging on the wall of the shaman's house, but did not report anything about its usage.

¹⁵ Bon is a religious tradition of the Tibetans that developed alongside Buddhism from the eleventh century and it was practiced by the *tertön* specialists.



Fig. 1. Daughters of the last Yugur *elči*, Korgui: Renchirtan (left) and Chimitar (right) in Renchirtan's son, Tümen Jastar's home (Hongwansi, Gansu, China). Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2011.



Fig. 2. In Tümen Jastar's home (from left to right): Chimitar, Renchirtan, Tümen Jastar and his Tibetan wife, and our Yugur guide (Ay-Kading or Zhong Li). Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2011.

could inherit the secret knowledge of the shamans but, fortunately, in our case, the daughters heard about the myth of the first *elči*, who was a shaman. During my visit I also met an old man, Bai Huanzar (b. 1910), who took part at *yaka* ceremonies before 1966 (fig. 5).

Before giving the recently collected Yugur text here, it seems to be useful and convenient to quote Malov's text of the same myth as he noted it down from his Yugur informant, Saniškap from the village of Šar-Gudir on February 4, 1911:¹⁶

Mıntan pırınta yuğur bolıyan qan deñir taqıyık tro. Yıñ pırınta pu qan deñir tattıy işke barıandıro. Tat mundako qan teñirni yus kürgök tro. Xorwe wučin a^btu kıştau, Zor taqqa öndüüristergen dro. Qan deñir mañō pēr qol işke kergendro, kerges yrılayın dro. Yırlısa, qolaqqa pēr at kistegen aynalıandıro. Andaqqan tügete:

“o! men mında kışelıy yerge yetkendaı.”

Kan deñir ya^bqası Zurıya častayın dro altırı Pay güzge tüsken dro. Pay küzde bēr anika war midro. Anika sütün yaya-yaya uzuıyan dro. Or^bq tarqo (?) qam tüs-kindro; qarnın alğas palıqqa tarduster-gendro. Andaqqan tügete qarnın işteki yaı palqa palıqqa šukop qalıyan-dro, čüçaqı šäzdıyaš, šanıyan-dro. Andan la qan deñir šäzdıqqa tüsken-dro, ksiler šäzdıqqa čalıyan-dro. Anı la ksiler anday dep-dro:

“Mıs šäzdıqqa čalıyım ere,” anday dep-dro. Anın (anıñ ?) yürse wužın, lom bučin yer ksege küčirgen-dro. Andaq qan tügete le wosa erener ilči wolyan-dro, ilči wosa, qan deñir tüsse, qamnayık-tro. Qamnatu qamnatqaš, qarı ilčiler ezertkeš yürgetkek-tro, pēr yıl mer işke yıl mer yürgetkeš. Am bosa, kep kise yumutu, yurmesın alyaq-tro. Alyan tügete am wosa pu pezik elči bop-tro. (Malov 1967, 134)

Malov gives a Russian translation of this Yugur text (1967, 135–6), and he published a summary of the myth in his main article on Yugur shamanism (Malov 1912, 62).¹⁷ I herewith attempt to give an English translation of it, based on Malov's Yugur original text:

¹⁶ Malov published his data on Yugur shamanism in his first article (1912a), where he gives the most detailed description of his subject including some scattered linguistic data embedded into his Russian text, as well as Russian translations of some prayers (Malov 1912a, 67–72 and 74). However, his original Yugur texts were only published by Édgar R. Tenishev much later (Malov 1967). There is a whole chapter of shamanic texts in the book (Chapter 5, pp. 134–160). Malov's dictionary and grammar of the so-called 'Yellow Uighur' (1957) also encompasses a shamanic vocabulary.

¹⁷ Malov also published another version of the same myth collected two years later in 1913 (Malov 1967, 137–8), which slightly differs from the previous version.



Fig. 3. RENCHIRTAN and her son, JASTAR examining the headdress (*dowun*) of the last YUGUR shaman. Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2011.

Earlier all the Yugurs venerated Kan-Deñir.¹⁸ Even earlier this Kan-Deñir went to the Tibetans, but the Tibetans treated him badly. They were shooting at him with slings and chased him to Mount Zur. Kan-Deñir went away and entered a valley, then started to cry. When he cried, his ears heard the neighing of a horse: “It seems that I have reached a place [inhabited] by humans.”

¹⁸ Kan-Deñir is the deity or spirit of the Sky that was widely venerated by Turkic and Mongolic peoples of Inner Asia. The word *deñir* means ‘sky’ and it is not an almighty god or creator, just one of many deities.



Fig. 4. Tümen Jastar even put the *dorwun* on his head.
Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2011.

Kan-Dejir settled down on the edge of Mount Zur and he went down to Bay-güz. In Bay-güz there lived an old woman. The old woman was just churning milk, and she fell asleep. Kan-Dejir turning into a *kam* came down and took her container,¹⁹ and threw it against the wall. The butter in the container stuck to the wall, the curd spilled on the woman. Kan-Dejir thus ascended [the ability] to the woman, so people venerated her but then they said:

“We should not venerate a woman,” so they said. So by faith (*nom*) [the ability] was transferred to males. After that males started to become *elči*. Having Kan-Dejir ascended [the ability] the *elči* became a *kam*. To become a *kam* they follow the old *elči* who teaches them. One year or two years he teaches and

¹⁹ A container, made of a bubble of the tripe or rumen (*karın*) of a sheep, used for storing liquids.



Fig. 5. Bai Huanzar, the oldest man from the township of Minhua (Sunan, Gansu), remembering the *yaka* ritual. Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2011.

then a lot of people gather. They accept his sacrifice [*yürme*]²⁰ and he [disciple] becomes the big *elči*.

Now let us see the version in my own translation of a simplified philological transcription, as told by Renchirtan at August 20, 2011. I recorded her account in her native Yugur tongue, and later her son, Jastar helped me to transcribe and translate the recording.

²⁰ The *yürme* was a sacrifice performed in exchange of initiation by the spirits (Lei 1992, 281).

Am la düyü-tu bir Kaṅgay digek bir yerde bar edi, ertele bir aniga alton gaş yasagan, anigaga bir ogul bar edi, künerite xos süüt sagırgan nime-di, bu süüt sagırganda la aniga ortakka yel-sıgırtkı kelgende ürkitke, anika mundakka titirege çamlap kırıptı, andan la anika bagayasın alınga, yüge esik biyen kirge, bagayanı altırakka salmas nime-di, altırakka saluwetke le degen edi:

“Uzaktan kelgen uzut bolsa, kaydan kelseñ, kaygama, birkan bolsa niyler bolsa maga lar et!” andan la örü bir karaganda küñsümnüñ bašta kök kus tüske olırgan edi, özi birkan dadıp keldi. Andan la aniga manın alıp aška la ogılga bolgay, andan kartı elçi la ogılga bolgay, andan yugur yaka bitirgen edi.²¹

In old times there was a place called Khangai. A long time ago there was an old woman in her sixties. The old woman had a son, the whole day she was milking animals. While she was milking, suddenly a strong wind started to blow and frightened her. So the old lady started to shake and shiver. Then the old lady took her milking bucket. She entered the house by the door. She had never dropped her bucket. But this time she dropped it . . . and said:

“If you are a demon (*üzüt*)²² from a distant place, go back where you came from, if you are a Burkan, tell me what you want!”

When she looked up to the top of the tent, a blue bird was sitting there. It was a Burkan. Later the old woman passed on her shamanic ability to her son. When the shaman (*kam elçi*) became old, her ability passed to her son. Since then the Yugur perform the *yaka* ritual.

²¹ When she finished the myth, Renchirtan continued by telling another short text. In the following, I give its transcription I made with the help of her son, Jastar. However, the meaning of these lines is not clear to me, and it was not understandable even for Jastar. I hope to be able to clarify this text in the future:

*Uzı bası tüinde baştı altı, kaska kaştan kasık altı,
ak üleden yıgaş altı, (ursañ baştan) ursañ duganadan dun altı,
yazı belden yastık altı, baka baştan konuk altı,
gorgulıgdan dorwun altı, kara yüsten yüyük altı,
çañ dartıp, deñ dartıp, peş dartıp, Kaṅgayga kelgen kam elçi.*

²² Besides the numerous deities or spirits of nature (*burkan*) there are two additional types of spirits mentioned in the Yugur materials: *üzüt* (cf. *üzüt* ‘zloı dukh; evil spirit’, Malov 1957, 132a) or *uzut* (cf. *uzut* ‘dusha umershego cheloveka; a spirit of the deceased’, Malov 1957, 129a) is a harmful spirit or demon, while *yil* (cf. *yil* ‘veter, vdokhnovenie, dukh – pomoshchnik shamana; wind, inspiration, the shaman’s helping spirit;) is a spirit that helps the *elçi* during its rituals and healings (Malov 1957, 40).

Regarding the Yaka Ritual

Again, let me give a short summary of Malov's account on the *yaka* ritual (1912a, 65–72).²³ Malov describes the *yaka* as the only ritual performed by the *elči*. It was performed at the request of a family at their home on a designated date of the year, the second month according to the Chinese calendar.²⁴ One week before the ritual the hosting family prepares a small tree that symbolizes the mythical *yaka* tree decorated by ribbons (*čüwek*). The *yaka* tree consists of four branches of a thorny bush (*tiken*). The branches are inserted into a hummock covered with grass, called *soka*.²⁵ The four branches are decorated with three different colors (green, white, and blue). The longest branch is called *yasıl yığaš* 'green tree' having seven green ribbons. In front of it, there is the *ak yığaš* 'white tree' with white and blue ribbons. The blue ribbon (*kök čüwek*) is also called *tır* "Milky Way." There is another small branch called *buržek* 'corner' connected to the white tree by four threads. In front of the *buržek* is the last branch of blue colour (*kök yığaš* 'blue tree') with two blue and one green ribbons. The blue tree is also called *tır* "Milky Way" like the blue ribbon of the white tree. There are carvings on each of the three branches (seven on the green, five on the white, four on the 'corner' and three on the blue tree).

The *yaka* is performed in the house of the family arranging the ritual. It is not a community event and only a few neighbours are invited by the hosting family. The *elči* sits in front of the *yaka* tree that is placed in the house by the wall facing the entrance, where the Buddhist altar can also be found usually in a niche. A dish filled with cereals (*sokpa* and *tarıg*) is placed on the ground in front of the *yaka* tree. Nine Buddhist butter lamps (*marmi/marme* from Tibetan *dkarme* or *yula* in Yugur) are put on the top of the cereals. When the *elči* arrives, the lamps are lit,

²³ The name of the ritual comes from the name of a mythological tree that connects the Middle World inhabited by human beings to the Upper World of the deities. It is called *yaka yığaš* in Yugur, and its name in Mongolian is *jaqa-yin madun* 'tree of the edge'. Mongolian *jaqa-yin mundun* can be found in epic tales (Vladimirtsov 1926, 19).

²⁴ It is the second month (*eryue* 二月) after the Chinese New Year (*chunjie* 春节) according to the lunisolar calendar (second new moon after winter solstice between 21 January and 20 February), so it starts in February or March.

²⁵ In Yugur-Chinese dictionary *soka/soga* is a type of needle-grass belonging to the genus of *Achnaterum*, called *čiy* in the Kypchak-Turkic languages.

and the shaman starts to sing a song to Altan Khan²⁶ and throws some bits that were previously cut from the four branches on the hummock. Afterward follows the sacrificing of a sheep. The animal is standing on a felt rug (*yonak*) or a sack (*sumal*) spread on the ground, and the *elči* sprinkles “white water” (*ak su*) on the animal from a big spoon (*čot kazdik*). The “white water” is a mixture of water and curd (*čužak*). If the sheep shakes itself, it means that the spirits accept the sacrifice. The sheep is killed by cutting a hole into its chest and then tearing apart its aorta by hand. The *elči* starts sprinkling milk towards the sky, while the killed sheep is carried into the house to the altar. Then the participants of the ritual take it back to the courtyard, cut off its main parts including the head, the neck, the lungs and the ribs (*pogsi*),²⁷ and cook them separately, and put them on a dish to the ground in front of the *elči*. The shaman washes the head with “white water” and rubs it with butter. The forehead of the sheep symbolizes Sumeru Mountain (*Sumur tag*),²⁸ its eye-teeth Azgash Khan and the four legs Pagdash Khan, while its tail represents the “deity holding a whip” (*čalig tutkan*). Then the shaman sings a song to the spirits and gives the *pogsi* to the *burkans*.²⁹

The ritual ends at this point for the day. The head and the legs of the sacrificed sheep are placed in front of the *burkans*, the rest is consumed by the shaman and the participants at the ritual—this happens in the evening. After the meal the shaman goes to sleep; the ritual is finished on the following day, usually not too early. The *elči* goes to the grasslands outside the house and its courtyard, and while sprinkling milk to the sky, he sings another song. The participants of the ritual bring another sheep and a harnessed horse and make them stand on a felt rug spread on the ground in front of the house. The *elči* smokes the animals with

²⁶ The name means “Golden Khan” in Mongolian. Altan Khan (1542–1582) was the leader of the Tümed Mongol State (founder of the city of Köke-qota). He proclaimed Tibetan Buddhism as the official religion and gave the title of Dalai Lama to the Tibetan theocratic leader in Lhasa.

²⁷ A similar custom exists among the Mongols who call these parts of the sacrifice *jülde*.

²⁸ The Sumeru or “Great Meru” Mountain is a mythical sacred mountain in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist tradition. Sumeru is the highest mountain and the polar centre of the mandala-like flat Earth, a complex of mountains and seas.

²⁹ Malov (1918, 64–5), referring to Saniškap as his source again, writes that the Yugur had thirteen spirits or deities (*birkan* or *burkan*) of the skies. Second rank deities number nine. Malov mentions the following deities by name: Pagdaš Khan, Azgaš Khan, Surei Khan, Mongol Khan and Ktai Khan.

some joss-sticks and offer the two animals to the spirits. The sheep is let loose immediately, but the horse is tethered in the courtyard, as it will be needed later. Afterwards, all go back to the house, where the shaman sprinkles milk on the wall and the *yaka* tree, and starts to sing again. Then the shaman sprinkles liquor with another song. Finally, the rest of the meat is consumed and all the participants of the ritual go out to the courtyard and sit down on the felt rug. The shaman also comes out from the house, holding the *yaka* tree in his hands, while one of the participants brings a tray with two cups on it: one filled with liquor mixed with black tea (*kara arakı*), the other filled with red liquor (*kızıl arakı*), liquor mixed with some reddish ingredient. The shaman makes a libation with the drinks, and touches the head of each participant with the *yaka* tree. One of the young men takes the tree and mounts the richly dressed up horse, while the women throw themselves down in front of the tree. The young man gallops out and throws the tree away outside. The *elçi* enters the house and examines the lamps to find out whether the deities (spirits) have accepted the sacrifice.

And now, let us see Rençintar' account about her father and how he performed the *yaka* ritual before 1966. Since the two daughters were young girls in those days, their father did not pass on to them his spiritual knowledge, but they saw him perform the ritual several times.

(1) *elçi la yaka bitirgende bir yılda altayda layuerdiñ altayda yaka bitirge le nime-di, yaka bitirgende la nige-gul bu sokanı turgak kazıp kelge(n), üş yıgaştı: kök, yasıl, ak yizdi oraga, ak yüñni oraga(n), o nige sokanı üzeseñge tüyge(n), andakkala yaka bitirge nime-di, biri-kusin la yaka bitirgek nime-di, soñıs kun la bir goy öliргеk nime-di, goynı moyını uşın öliрmes, goynı özegek, özeğende bu töstiñ uraga, nige gul bıçak biyen tilge, munda bir sız yonğa(n), sızdı mundakka bu yüreкке düйip берек, yüreкке düйip бергенде la goy ölip kaptı, andak kandan la goynı yene kiçig su uyn nige gul yun tanla azuz-isti, yun tanlaga kiltir-etke, am la bo goynı yakasın, içkisin alıs etke, am la goyga nokta tolaga, nokta-çilbir tolaga, am la dorwin dorwınnı gunda dümdiktiñ gundan kuzı aska la dorwin altınga salga, am la bu elçi yaka bitirgek nime-di, bitirğenden la yırlaga, lar-etke . . .*

(2) . . . *am yakanı bitirge la bir xondurga la, soñıs küni la yene bir yıgaş mañdurgak nime-di, yıgaş mañdurganda la esikti bözik aška, am la künden bir eren am la bu yıgaştı bir alay-alay la elçiğe бергенде, elçi bu yıgaştı öрі-öрі le uñşıga, kisi omanı baş xoga mundakka tiygirge, andakkandan gul yakta bir eren kisi çökıy olırganda yıgaştı бергенде la, am la dogır kisiler la goynıñ tösti alınga, mundakka kurıy-kurıy*

la ardında arakı mañdırtı nime-di, am la ça kawačık alıñgan nime, süüt alıñgan nime, yun aldırğan nime, mindakka kuryı la kirgek nime-di, kuryıya kirgende la elči ma andakka kač agıs söster, anda degende la yıgastı ündergek nime-di, etti şartka, yıgastı yene uzakka etke, anda barga.

Xosı minjar et yige, yıgastı anda döñgege salıwatka nime-di, am nime takı ma dun ayak bar edi, takı minıñ kire bir ayaktıñ işke sımak, süüt takı müñ, takı kan, am çok kasık, minıñ uzun kasık biyen la mindakka bir-bir yumırğa, yüğe le bu sımak mindakka sımak la kuryılaganya bözik mindakka yanla, elči artka karamas andak nime-di, yañ-yañ etti kök bözge tüygeške la, o minjar yigek nime-di, am la kuşkan etti tülge la, am la agıl-xolım bözik-kişiğ kisini kıydıp kelge, yigekti am la nijur kisi kelge, yüsi ma ola bitkek nime-di, andan takı bir marmı tamdırgak nime-di, marmıñ üstin biltiñ orınıñ beş yun kouxian bözik marmını kuzga la ola tamıruga la, am la oga o yaktı marmını elči karaga la nime-di, am la senin yüde nijik ürji kigiripti, kaydan ni optı, anı-xonı marmı işte karaga, takı bir yanız elči nigedir şuşu mañdırgak nime-di, kızıl öşküni öldiriwalga, dört aralgaga tilik aska, urdakka la pudege tañsıktırğa, nokta-čilbir ni kınaga, ezer, yunak kınaga, am la yene nige-gul uñşığaška la, dasıñga andakka bitinje daduwatka nime-di, bitinje daduwatka, onı la iş-kus yigergek nime-di, anda nime la kaş yanız bolıs-tır, am la bir nimesin undurup-tur oo.

(1) The shaman performed the *yaka* in the sixth and twelfth months of the year. When they performed a *yaka* they put up a *soka*. Three trees were wrapped with blue, green and white cloth and white wool. This was put up on the top of the *soka*. This way they performed the *yaka*, the first day of the *yaka* was performed there. Next day they killed a sheep, but not by cutting the sheep's neck. The sheep was killed by the diaphragm (*özek*), they cut it through the breast. They cut it by a knife or sometimes they also chipped a stake, the stake this way was stabbed to the heart. When they stabbed into the heart, the sheep died. Then the sheep was boiled in water to make some soup, they brought the soup. Now this sheep was taken to the *yakba*, its stomach was taken away. They put a halter (*nokta*) and a leading-rein (*čilbir*) on the head of the sheep. The shamanic paraphernalia was hanging down from the smoke-hole of the Yugur tent (*kara yüi*).³⁰ When the paraphernalia was taken off the shaman started to perform the *yaka*, when he performed it he was singing and talking.

³⁰ See fig. 6.

(2) . . . when the first day of the *yaka* is over, the next day another tree is taken there. When they bring the tree, they open the door wide. Now that man takes the tree and passes it to the shaman. The shaman holds the tree up and prays. He touches the head of the all the people there. Then over there a man takes a seat and passes on the tree. Then all the people take the meat from the breast of the sheep. The (shaman) says *kurui-kurui*,³¹ a spreads some milk liquor over his back. Now he takes a big spoon. They bring some milk and some wool too. He continues to sing *kurui-kurui*. When the shaman sings *kurui-kurui* he also says some words (but I have already forgotten). After saying them the tree is taken out (of the tent). They cook the meat and take away the tree and they go there. Everybody eats the meat, and they put the tree on a mound. They also take various bowls there. In one of the bowls there was kumis,³² as well as milk, soup and blood. There was a long spoon (*čot kazdik*)³³ that they used to spray (the drinks). In the house they blessed the meat with a loud *kurui* song. The shaman was performing it by turning his back. All kinds of meat were put on blue cloth and they ate it. The meat was cut and then cooked. The whole village (nomadic camp), big and small was invited.

A lot of people came to eat the meat. They ate it by the house and by an *owoo* (*üle*).³⁴ Then they lit another lamp (*yula*). Instead of the wick of the lamp they used wool (口线 *kouxian*). They made a big lamp and lit it up. Now the shaman was looking into the lamp. He could see what problems you had in your family, what happened. He could see everything in the lamp. Sometimes the shaman also sacrificed the scapegoat (*šušu*).³⁵ The killed a red goat and they cut it into four parts. That meat was eaten by the dogs and birds. They performed all kinds of things. I might have forgotten some of them.

³¹ *Xurai* (*qurui*) is a magic word for invoking the spirits during a sacrifice in Mongolian, ‘sámánénekek stb szellemidéző szava; spirit invoking word in shamanic songs’ cf. Kara (1998, 616b).

³² Kumis is the Russianized Turkic name for fermented mare’s milk, but it is called *smak* in Yugur (Chinese 酸奶).

³³ Malov writes *čok-kazdik* but the Yugur-Chinese dictionary has *čot* for sacrifice of spray.

³⁴ Mongolian *owoo* ‘heap’ is a sacred cairn built for the spirits usually at mountain paths or other sacred sites. The Yugur name for it is *üle*.

³⁵ The *šušu* is a scapegoat or animal sacrificed to take away curses and demons (see Lei 1992: *tizuichu* 替罪畜).

In 2013 I revisited Sunan with Mongolist Zsolt Szilágyi. During our short stay in Hongwansi we could not meet the two old Yugur women, but we met again Renchirtan's son, Tümen Jastar, who had hosted us two years earlier and had shown us his grandfather's shamanic dress (*dorwun*) (figs. 3, 4). We also had the opportunity to meet a local Yugur researcher and writer Khawar—his Chinese name is Dalong Dongzhi 达隆东智—who was from the inggar or Eastern (Mongolic) Yugur group and thus could not speak Western, or Turkic Yugur. However, he is an enthusiastic collector of both Western (Turkic) and Mongolic (Eastern) Yugur folklore with the help of the local native speakers. He also publishes the journal named Yovhur puchig (pronounced *yoyur pučig* 'Yugur Culture') in Chinese (尧熬尔文化 *Yao'ao'r wenhua*)³⁶ with texts of Western and Eastern Yugur folklore transcribed in the Pinyin Latin alphabet. Mr. Khawar explained to us that only the Turkic Yugur (whom they called Khara Yugur or Black Yugur) had shamans (*kam elči*) and Eastern Yugur (or Yellow Yugur/Shira Yogur as they call themselves) had no word for such religious specialists. The Yellow Yugur migrated to the Gansu from Tibet during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). They are related to the so-called White Mongols (Monguor, Chinese 土族 *tuzu*) of Huzhu County.³⁷ These Mongolic tribes were called Khor in Tibetan.³⁸ Later these White Mongol groups were conquered by the Manchu in the eighteenth century and administered by the same governor (*amban* in Manchu) together with the Yugurs of Gansu. In order to differentiate themselves from the mostly non-Buddhist Western Yugurs they started to use the term Yellow or Buddhist Yugur (coming from the color of the Tibetan Gelug³⁹ Buddhism). The Mongolic-speaking Yugurs only have a legend that the Tibetans captured the Yugur deity Kan-Deñir and confined him to the Nechung Monastery, the site of the

³⁶ 尧熬尔 *yao'ao'r* is different from the official Chinese name 裕固 *yugu* for the Yugurs.

³⁷ Mongolist Mátyás Balogh (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) who studied the Shira Yugur and Monguor languages also confirmed that the Huzhu dialect of Monguor was closer to Shira Yugur than the Minhe dialect of Monguor, which in turn related to the Bonan language.

³⁸ The Tibetan word *khor* means 'foreigner' and it was used to designate the Turkic and Mongolic peoples of the region (White Mongols/Tuzu and Yugurs) but not the Muslims.

³⁹ Gelug means 'yellow hat,' which the lamas of the reformed sect wear. The sect was founded by Tsongkapa (1357–1419) in Amdo (Kumbun Monastery) and became an official religion of Tibet and Mongolia in the sixteenth century.



Fig. 6. Traditional Tibetan-type nomadic tent (*kara yü*) (on the right) with grazing sheep and yaks behind it in the Qilian Mountains. Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2011.

state oracle not far from Lhasa.⁴⁰ Even though the Shira Yugurs do not have any *elči* specialists and they follow Tibetan Buddhism (Gelug-pa) sometimes, in case of disease and other misfortune, they used to order rituals from the Kara Yugur shamans.⁴¹

A Summary

Malov (1912a, 62) rightly wrote that the Mountain Yugurs (*taglig yugur*) had better preserved their traditions than the Yugurs living in the

⁴⁰ Nechung was the residence of Pehar, a deity of the Khor, who lived to the east of Lake Köke-naur. According to tradition, he is held to have been originally brought to Samye Monastery by Padmasambhava who bound him to protect the *dharmā*. According to a legend, the Nechung Oracle or Pehar was brought to Tibet by a Bon general, Tara Lugong, who took possession of the meditation school near Ganzhou of the Khor-pa (a tribe of Uighurs), about the end of the eighth century A.D.

⁴¹ A similar cultural exchange can be observed among the sub-ethnic groups of Altay Turkic people, the Altay Kizhi and the Telengit. The Altay Kizhi religious tradition (*ak jang*) strictly prohibits the activity of the *kam* 'shaman' but in case of serious illness and disasters the Altay Kizhi also visit a Telengit *kam* secretly (Somfai 2014, 153–4).

plains (*oylig yugur*). Among the Yugurs of Plains in Minhua, we could find only the 90 year-old man, Bai Huanzar (fig. 5), who remembered the *yaka* from his childhood (1920–30s), while Korgui from Dahe continued performing the ritual until the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Korgui, who also possessed the traditional paraphernalia (*dorwun*), had been converted to Buddhism. While the sedentary Yugurs of the plains lived in Chinese type adobe houses (*balık*), the Mountain Yugurs were nomadic and used the Tibetan type tent (*kara yü*), where the *yaka* ritual took place (fig. 6).

The Modern Yugur minority is a creation of the People's Republic of China, when Turkic Yugurs and Mongolic *inggars* (Shira Yugur) were designated as one ethnic group, although they were linguistically and culturally distinct. Mongolic Yugurs use the term Shira (Yellow or Buddhist) Yugur to differentiate themselves from the Turkic Yugurs, who were not Buddhist thus called Kara Yugur.⁴²

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⁴² The same distinction can be found among the Altay Kizhi and Telengit (*ak* and *kara jang*) or the Khori Buriad (*šarın* and *xarın šazan*).

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Common Law Customary Land Rights
as a Catalyst for the Resurgence of Orang Asli
Shamanism in Peninsular Malaysia:
Some Lessons from the *Semai* and *Temiar* Peoples

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Like many tribal communities worldwide, customary territories are the source of indigenous knowledge, religion, rituals, and social and political adaptation for Peninsular Malaysia's indigenous minority, the Orang Asli. Despite recent challenges to the vibrancy of shamanic practices due to external and internal changes impacting Orang Asli society, the Orang Asli shaman, to some degree, still represents the personal and collective life and well-being of a community and concomitantly, the community's customary territories. With reference to the Semai and Temiar Orang Asli ethnic subgroups, this interdisciplinary paper examines the potential relevance of Orang Asli forms of shamanism in the light of the relatively recent recognition of pre-existing Orang Asli land customs and usages by the Malaysian courts. These rights are established through, amongst other matters, the community's maintenance of a traditional connection with the land claimed in accordance with customs distinctive to the particular community. It is suggested that the increased awareness of the Orang Asli on the legal significance of preserving and maintaining traditional knowledge relevant to demonstrate a traditional connection with their lands may, with guarded optimism, contribute to a resurgence of land and resource-related shamanistic practices in some Orang Asli communities.

Traditionally, the worldview, customs and usages of Peninsular Malaysia's Indigenous minority, the Orang Asli (or in the English version of the Federal Constitution [Government of Malaysia 2009], "aborigines"), have invariably involved shamanic practices. The more gifted practitioners or vessels of these arts were regarded as intermediaries between people and the spiritual world who could obtain spiritual protection for an Orang Asli community and their territorial landscape. Their

intimate knowledge of a community's territorial landscape, acquired through the process of mediumship, extended from worldly natural resources to the spirits possessed by humans, animals, plants and all other natural objects within the land.

With specific reference to the *Semai* and *Temiar* Orang Asli sub-groups, this interdisciplinary paper examines the continued relevance of Orang Asli forms of shamanism or mediumship in the light of current challenges to their practice and the relatively recent legal recognition of pre-existing Orang Asli land customs and usages by the Malaysian courts.¹ This introductory paper is a collaboration between two researchers with collectively more than forty years of experience between them in seemingly disparate fields, namely, Orang Asli customary land rights and Orang Asli shamanism. Convenient compartmentalization of knowledge risks distancing academic research from practical realities and with this in mind, the authors sincerely hope that this paper can inspire more interdisciplinary enquiries into shamanic practices.

The paper begins with a contextual introduction to the Orang Asli followed by an overview of the historical and contemporary role of Orang Asli shamanic practices in Orang Asli society. Using selected shamanic practices of the *Semai* (or *Seng-oi*) and *Temiar* Orang Asli sub-ethnic groups as illustrations, the link between these practices and the relatively recent legal recognition of Orang Asli customary land rights by the Courts is then analyzed before some concluding remarks are made on the possible future of Orang Asli shamanism.

The Orang Asli in Context

The Federation of Malaysia comprises of the peninsular land that separates the Straits of Malacca from the South China Sea and most of the northern quarter of the island of Borneo. Peninsular Malaysia consists of eleven states and two federal territories. "Orang Asli"² are said to be the "first peoples" of Peninsular Malaysia (Dentan at al. 1997, 10–2). Officially, the term "Orang Asli" refers to the eighteen ethnic

¹ The law stated in this paper is current as at 1 October 2015.

² In the national language of Malaysia, the Malay language, *orang* means "people," while *asli* can mean "original, pure or natural."

Aboriginal subgroups in Peninsular Malaysia, classified into three broad categories of *Negrito*, *Senoi* and *Aboriginal Malay*.

The Orang Asli continue to face formidable challenges in realizing their rights as distinct Indigenous peoples despite being ascribed a measure of constitutional and statutory protection (Dentan et al. 1997). In multi-cultural Malaysia, ethnic Malays account for slightly more than 50% of the Malaysian population while Orang Asli account for close to 0.7%. The remainder of the population mainly consists of ethnic Chinese (24%), Indians (7%) and the natives of Borneo (11%). Malays are the numerically and politically dominant ethnic group in Peninsular Malaysia whose ancestors had formed kingdoms within the Malay Peninsula at the time of the first recorded European contact (Andaya and Andaya 2001). On the other hand, the pan-tribal Orang Asli, inhabiting the Malay peninsula before the early waves of Malay migration from around 1,000 b.c. (Adi 1985; Andaya 2002, 25–7) have for the most part, maintained aspects of their respective languages, social organizations and spiritual values, culture and customs distinct from that of the Malays and mainstream society.

Like many Indigenous minority communities worldwide, the Orang Asli have increasingly struggled to maintain their culture, identity and life that are inextricably linked with their customary territories as domestic demand for lands and resources continue to soar (Nicholas 2000). While asserting claims to customary territories through their continued customary occupation, use and enjoyment may not have been particularly necessary for many Orang Asli communities inhabiting the relative comfort and safety of the fringe and interior areas of Peninsular Malaysia in the past, such assertions have since become an essential tool in the struggle for Orang Asli cultural, spiritual and economic survival as resource extraction and land development activities encroach upon their customary territories.

Compounding matters, the Orang Asli are also arguably the most impoverished and marginalized community in Malaysia despite being under the stewardship of the Federal government who possesses legal jurisdiction over the welfare of them (see *Federal Constitution* (Malaysia): Ninth such List I, Federal List Item 16). In 2010, 31.15% of Orang Asli lived below the poverty level compared to the national average of 3.8% (Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli 2011: 30). Orang Asli, who largely reside in rural areas, have a much higher poverty rate than the national rural poverty rate of 11.9 per cent (Government of Malaysia 2006: 358).

The Orang Asli and their Lands

Anthony (Bah Tony) Williams-Hunt (1995, 35–6), a *Semai* Orang Asli activist and lawyer, has captured the essence of the Orang Asli relationship with their customary lands and waters in the following manner:

The Orang Asli share the same conception of land as other indigenous groups throughout the world. Land is a gift from God who created it to provide everything that is needed to sustain life. For the Orang Asli land and everything it contains, are the major source of food, income, medicine, fuel and all materials necessary for their existence. Land therefore is the source of life and is crucial for their continued survival. Besides its material importance, land has special social and religious significance. It defines social relations and it is through common ownership of land that a group is bound into a society. Land is closely associated with definitions of territory, history and most important of all, culture and identity. It is thus a heritage, metaphorically embodied in the statement that “*it is from the land that we come and it is to the land that we will eventually go.*” Land stands for the way of life of the Orang Asli, and symbolizes the cultural vitality and continuity of the community . . .

These lands are also sources of knowledge, religion, rituals, and social and political adaptation for the Orang Asli (Edo 1998, 26; Howell 1982, xv–xvi; Roseman 1991). For most if not all Orang Asli ethnic sub-groups, each community usually has its own defined territory which is used and enjoyed in adherence to particular customs and usages.³ For example, the *Semai* Orang Asli regard their land and surrounding environment as ruled by *adat* (customs or norms). The *adat munah* also recognizes the concept of territoriality, called *saka’* or *lengri’*. Edo (1998, 25) explains the *Semai* concept of territoriality of *saka’* as follows:

A *saka’* is a large area of land possessed by a community who have lived in the area for a very long time. They regard themselves as the original inhabitants of the area. The community who own the *saka’* is called *gu*, a cognatic descent group or ramage. Each *gu* has the absolute rights to their own *saka’*, meaning

³ See for example, Department of Orang Asli Affairs 1972, 3–4; Edo 1998, 25–6; Roseman 1998, 112–3; Nicholas 1999, 2; Gomes 2004, 33–4, 2007, 36–7; Benjamin 2014, 22.

that they are free to dwell, hunt and to use the land, as long as they follow the *adat* principle to share products among their *gu*. They, however, cannot enter another *gu*'s territory, which is regarded as *saka' mai*, or belonging to others. This agreement is only maintained by a mutual understanding and appreciation, and supernatural sanctions which are suggested by their *adat* principles. All members of a *gu* have an obligation to act according to these principles in order to maintain their social equilibrium [references omitted]

Within this microcosm, all beings on earth are believed to have spirits. In the case of the *Temiar* Orang Asli, all entities within the *Temiar* world including plants, animals and mountains are potentially "having person" or capable of being animated (Roseman 1990, 231). Similar religious beliefs can be found in the religion and cosmology of other Orang Asli groups.⁴

More generally, the Orang Asli believe that supernatural beings are superior to human beings, and are therefore deeply engrossed with the super natural or spiritual aspect of the land. They avoid activities which can upset the spirits of these beings. For example, if the spirits of fruit trees get upset, they will refuse to produce fruits, which translates to disaster for the Orang Asli. Most Orang Asli groups who deal with rice cultivation, such as the *Semai*, *Mah Meri*, *Temiar*, *Jah Hut*, *Semelai* and others believe that the spirit of rice is very sensitive (Edo 1998, 26–7; Wazir-Jahan 1981; Roseman 1991; Gianni and Bayr 2009). Consequently, these groups have to perform various rituals to appease these spirits, which need the total representation of the community.

Edo (1998, 78–82) illustrates the strong spiritual connection between the *Semai* and their *saka'* by referring to the *Semai* beliefs that certain areas within the *saka'* are the resting places of their dead relatives. Their *kikmoij* (human ghosts) are regarded as the guardians of these places. Such beliefs lead the *Semai* to adopt a high degree of spiritual affiliation to these areas, which they claim as part of their cultural heritage and identity and religious and spiritual property. In *Semai* indigenous religion, a human is composed of four elements, three of which are invisible i.e. the heart soul (*kloog*), the spirit or head soul (*ruwai*), the body's supernatural partner or shadow soul (*worz*) and only one is visible, namely the *broog* (body). The *broog* does not die but is absorbed into the earth or its origin

⁴ See for example, Edo 1998, 25–7; Howell 1982, xvi–xvii.

(*tiik*). The absorption of the *broog* into its origin contributes to the strong ties that *Semai* have with their lands, which the *Semai* consider to be part of their family and life. For the *Semai*, the concept of *sech behiib* means body and blood. The *tiik* (soil or origin) is regarded as part of their *sech-behiib* since their kinfolk's body and blood merge directly with the soil of the area. The spiritual aspects of land, which form an important basis in identifying *pasak* (indigenous) rights and identities link closely with *Chermor*, oral tradition, which also serves as an important foundation underlying the claim over *pasak* identity.

Spiritual Connection to the Land: The Shaman as an Intermediary

The Orang Asli shaman or medium is seen as the most adept intermediary between mankind and the supernatural world (Carey 1976, 96) whose role includes the maintenance and reinforcement of the strong links between the local communities and their lands.⁵

For instance, only the *pawang* of the four categories of *Semai* shamans, namely, the *pawang*, *hala'*, *malip* and *bidat* can perform the *Ngenggulang* ritual and deal with the land's guardians. In principal, this position can only be held by a special person with extraordinary characteristics (*betuah*) given by *Nyenang* (God) (Edo 1998, 62–3). Among other extraordinary characteristics are a “cool” head soul (*ruwai*) and a “cool” body (*broog*), which give the *pawang* the “power” to deal with “powerful” supernatural beings, especially the guardian of the area referred to as *Pangkal Tiik*, *Pawang tiik* or *Mai Dengri*. The *pawang* carries a great responsibility because a mistake carries potentially lethal consequences for the village but the *pawang* personally (Edo 1998, 63).

The *pawang* must also put his or her own efforts into persuading other supernatural beings to serve as his or her guide or helper, called *gunig*, to learn all kinds of spells, called *jenampi'* and *chenagoh* (Edo 1998, 63). A chosen person, namely the *pangku* has to follow the discipline of the art and complex learning procedures, and to make other efforts under the tutelage of the *pawang* in order to obtain sacred status. The *Semai* also obtain their magical knowledge, such as ritual songs,

⁵ Please see the following section on the wider roles of the Orang Asli shaman or medium.

chants, incantations, cosmology and so on, through interaction with spirit guides or *gunig* in their dreams (Edo 1998, 64). The “spirit” of dead beings, such as humans and animals, can become spirit guides. The *Semai* also believe that graves are the houses of their dead relatives and that the graveyard is the village of their relatives or families known as *kikmoij* (human ghosts). The *kikmoij* can be employed by the *bala’* as their *gunig*, and are believed to help protect human beings from other aggressive or bad *penyakit* (another way of describing supernatural beings). These beliefs once again create strong link between the people and their customary territory (Edo 1998, 79–80).

The notion that dreams are an important source of communication between human spirits and other spirits is also held by the other Orang Asli subgroups, including the *Temiar*. In dreams, the soul of the dreamer meets the soul of the trees, river rapids, tigers, and houses, who express their desire to become the dreamer’s spirit guide (Roseman 1991, 5–7). For them, experience in life is transformed into knowledge from dreams, which is then recorded in dream songs and materially manifest in ceremonies (Roseman 1998, 117).

The Orang Asli regard land as an important source of knowledge. In particular, the symbolic power of the image of the path arises from the daily travel of the *Temiar* along the land and river routes running through the jungle and settlement (see for example, Roseman 1991, 8–9). The land, especially the jungle constitutes essential knowledge of their rights.

As the Orang Asli cannot fully penetrate the spirit world, their religion suggests that human beings cannot be complete custodians of the land (including the spiritual aspect) of the land without the help and cooperation of supernatural beings. The shaman plays a crucial role as an intermediary in this regard. For instance, oral histories (*Chermor*) and cultural beliefs are the preserve of the *Semai* shaman. Shaman are required to possess the stories of all *Nyenang’s* (God) creations that exist on earth. Similar customs can also be found in other Orang Asli subgroups (Evans 1923, 264–5; Nicholas 1999, 3; Riboli 2015, 366–71) including the *Temiar* (Roseman 1998). In other words, shamans can be considered repositories of knowledge on the history and continued existence of the Orang Asli on their much cherished customary lands.

The Role of Shamans in Orang Asli Society

There is little doubt that the shaman had a very important place in Orang Asli societies with a number of early Western research documenting shamanic functions and their significance (see for example, Logan 1847). In their seminal work on the Orang Asli namely, *The Pagan Races of the Malay Peninsula*, Skeat and Blagden (1906, 175) observed that the Sakai⁶ religion took the form of shamanism and that the shaman or medicine man (*bala*) was the “acknowledged link between man and the world of spirits.” As for the northern Aslian tribes, grouped by Western researchers as *Semang* at the time, Skeat and Blagden (1906, 225) opined that “among the Semang, by far the most important member of the tribe was almost invariably the shaman . . . (called) hala.” In describing the *pawang* as one of the “chiefs” in the southern Johor *Jakun* communities, Skeat and Blagden (1906, 516) also observe “a fourth title was that of *pawang*, but it was rather a title of honor than of jurisdiction, and indicated the persons who were generally charged with fulfilling the offices of *physician* and *teacher*” [emphasis added].

Evans (1923, 210), a colonial museum curator and ethnographer in the early 1900s who worked extensively on indigenous religion and customs in the Malay peninsula and Borneo, observed that in the Malay peninsula, “the shaman is found among most if not all of the pagan tribes whether Negrito, Sakai or Jakun.”⁷ He went on to acknowledge the traditional importance of the shaman:

The shaman, who is called *poyang* by the *Jakun*, is, as among the Sakai and Negritos, a person of considerable traditional medical and spiritual importance. According to an Endau man the *poyang* possesses a familiar spirit which he may have either obtained by inheritance, or which may have come to him in a dream. (Evans 1923, 210)

⁶ An older and domestically pejorative (at least to non-Orang Asli) term to generally describe Orang Asli tribes inhabiting the central areas of the Malay peninsula.

⁷ The categories *Negrito*, *Sakai* and *Jakun* mentioned by Evans can be said to be the precursor to the current three official categories used to describe the Orang Asli, namely the *Negrito*, *Senoi* and the *Aboriginal* (or Proto-)Malay respectively. For the purposes of this paper, the *Semai* and *Temiar* officially belong to the *Senoi* category.

Benjamin (2014, 390) has reproduced a 1941 radio script of H. D. Noone, an early scholar on the *Temiar*, where Noone observes:

There are also spirits friendly to man, willing to be guards and guardians. The *Temiar* shaman, or “*bala*” is the medium between the spirit world. The “*bala*” secures his sanction during dreams. In a “*bala*” dream, a special relationship is set up between the “*bala*” and a particular spirit who promises to become his guide. These guides may be spirits from trees, crops, stones, mountains, wild animals or even ancestors. A spirit gives a revelation, according to a traditional tribal pattern to the dreaming “*bala*” . . .

. . . Some spirit guides may only give advice on hunting, new art patterns for wood carvings or the plaiting of mats, new songs and dances, performing extraordinary feats healing sickness and restoring health and peace of mind, a messianic message affecting the welfare of the group or a tribe. Or even mankind as a whole. Some of these master spirits can claim cosmic or universal significance.

The important traditional role of the four types of shaman and in particular, the *pawang* in *Semai* society has been discussed in the previous section (Edo 1998) and will not be repeated here. As for other Orang Asli groups, Endicott’s work with the *Batek* Orang Asli (1979, 81–2, 145–51) suggests that *ba’la* are necessary players in the maintenance of harmony in the *Batek* peoples’ intimate relationship of interdependence with plants, animals and superhuman deities which inhabit their forest environment and holistically, their well-being and balanced relationship with the cosmos. Couillard (1980, 20, 29, 77–8), describes the *Jah but* shaman or *pyang* as the ultimate authority with regard to the invisible world whose responsibility includes prescribing rules of carvings for *sepili*’ (effigies of illness-causing spirits for healing purposes).⁸ In addition to healing, teaching and spiritual functions, Nowak and Muntill (2004, 308) document the central role played a *Btsisi*’ (now known by the exonym *Mah Meri*) shaman in mediating the cessation of hostilities between *Jobok Siak* (literally, “Indonesians from Siak”) through the use of wit and magic in a wager that a coconut husk, rather than a stone, would sink in water.

⁸ See also Holaday, Chin and Teoh 1985.

It would therefore not be unreasonable to infer that traditionally, the shaman represented the collective conscience, voice and custodianship of a particular Orang Asli community's culture, values, environment and general well-being and concomitantly, the community's customary territories.

Challenges to the Influence of the Shaman

It must nonetheless be acknowledged that there are a number of factors that have threatened the traditional influence of local shaman. First, the increased use of modern medicine has been seen to decrease the influence of the shaman as a healer (Edo 1998, 67). Secondly, the increased involvement of the Orang Asli in the market economy rather than traditional activities has functioned to reduce the reliance of the Orang Asli on their local environment, where the shamans hold sway. More generally, Government policies for the gradual integration of Orang Asli into mainstream society and modernity do not encourage Orang Asli to determine their own economic and cultural priorities (Nicholas 2000; Gomes 2007, 50–65), let alone recognize or protect shamanic practices. Thirdly, government intervention into traditional Orang Asli decision making institutions, including the appointment and removal of a village *batin* (headman) (*Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954* (“*APA*”): section 16) and the JKKK (“Village Development and Security Committee”), has been said to divide allegiances and power structures in Orang Asli villages (Nicholas 2003).

Fourthly, the spread of monotheistic or institutionalized religions such as the Islam, Christianity and Bahai faiths among the Orang Asli can result and has resulted in the spirituality in shamanism being perceived or portrayed as sacrilegious in some Orang Asli communities. Nobuta (2009) has examined the relationship between state-led integration and Islamization policies and their impact on the stratification of Orang Asli social order and the “de-culturalization” of the Orang Asli. It has also been suggested that the difficulty in sharing and understanding the complexity of Orang Asli worldviews if compared to other monotheistic religions has contributed to younger Orang Asli who have been to school taking up more easily catechized and apparently “rational” religions (Benjamin 2014, 40). In this regard, the mainstream education system provided to Orang Asli children which focuses more

on scientific and empirical epistemologies and the increased exposure of Orang Asli to popular media are to some extent, incompatible with the spiritual and arguably anecdotal epistemologies contained shamanism and indeed, indigenous belief systems. Fifthly, the destruction and erosion of customary territories has impacted upon the power and influence of the shaman. According to *Semai* religion, the destruction of lands and resources (for example, through logging and development), renders these areas “hot.” Good spirits are said to take flight from “hot” areas while shamans lose their ability to communicate with the spirits with a “cool” head. In the meantime, these “hot” spaces are taken over by bad spirits. Put another way, the spiritual link that Orang Asli possess with their customary territories is more susceptible in “hot” areas.

Innate Worldviews

While these factors have certainly adversely impacted upon the traditional influence of the shaman, it is equally true that various facets of shamanism continue to pervade through the daily life of many Orang Asli. In respect of land, Bah Tony Williams-Hunt, the *Semai* Orang Asli lawyer, leader and activist mentioned above claims that the *Semai* still conduct the *Ngenggulang* ceremony (see above) in various villages in the state of Perak including Bt Berangkai, Air Denak, Tangkai Cermin and Kelubi (unpublished telephone interview, September 29, 2015).

Last year’s tragic floods in the State of Kelantan saw the *Temiar* of Pos Balar conducting a *sewang selumbang* ceremony (Peoples Documentary 2015) to appease the spirits of their land. Their *halak*, Along Busu played a central role in the ceremony and his son, Mustafa Along, a 28-year old man, commented (unpublished interview, September 16, 2015) as follows in respect of the ceremony:

After the recent floods, my father, Along Busu, a *halak* and the community conducted a *sewang selumbang* to appease the celestial and earth spirits and find out the reason for this tragedy. Trees are like the bones and nerves of our land that protects us from the *raja* (dragon or serpent) that resides in the lowest of the seven layers of earth. The more the land is logged, mined or destroyed the *raja* from the underworld will rise from the lower layers of the earth. They will then cause havoc as they leave as had happened in the recent flood.

Unlike modern medicine, shamanic healing can provide a spiritual dimension to human suffering by situating illness and affliction within

a wider moral framework that includes the life sustaining powers of the rain forest and its denizens, which are invoked by the shaman during a performance (Laird 2015; Benjamin 2014, 40).

Nicholas and Baer (2007, 120) observe that “[t]raditional healers and their methods are unlikely to disappear easily from Orang Asli culture” due to among other reasons, long standing perceptions that diseases as being a result of a spirit attack, Orang Asli beliefs that both their individual and their communal health are linked to broader environmental and social health, the Orang Asli concept of illness which is culture-specific as opposed to a biological concept and the relatively intimate ties between the traditional healer and the patient within the Orang Asli traditional framework.

In respect of the spread of other religions, Benjamin (2014, 339–83) observes that the local *Temiar* religion is still practiced, but is now followed syncretically alongside Islam, Christianity and Baha’i. Edo (1993) observes an identifiable core of *Semai* beliefs despite external and internal syncretization of the *Semai* religion.

The above instances of the prevalence of shamanism, and indeed indigenous religion and spirituality among Orang Asli notwithstanding changes adversely are symptomatic of contemporary Orang Asli worldviews and cosmology still by and large, hold fast to traditional beliefs. Summing up the *Jahai* Orang Asli ontology after her fieldwork and research conducted in the mid-2000s, Riboli (2015, 366–7) writes:

The belief system, which permeates all aspects of their ontology and life, is not only animistic (not in the evolutionary sense of the term, as have I explained before), but also shamanic in nature. The people’s cosmology and worldview features deep bonds and interrelations with the rainforest, natural phenomena, not-human and other-than-human beings and entities. Balance among all these spheres is the essential prerequisite for well-being, while unbalance corresponds to a state of suffering and illness, which can be healed only by shamans.

Riboli (2013, 148) also observes in respect of the *Batek* and *Jahai* Orang Asli subgroups that “decreasing number of full shamans has increased the sense of insecurity in *Batek* and *Jahai* populations, as the *balak* were responsible for preserving the balance, well-being and safety of their companions and of the jungle itself.” Benjamin (2014, 155) argues that mediumship is not only the prime religious activity of the

*Temiar*s but also that it serves as a focus in which all the different ritual strands are brought together in such a way to give coherence to life.

In terms of resilience to the pressures of a changing world, Orang Asli shamanism, or more particularly mediumship is by no means frozen in time in that it is static. Benjamin (2014, 185) describes “mediumship” as “perhaps the greatest dynamic element in *Temiar* Orang Asli culture” and “the filter through which most new concepts enter the system, and in some cases it has led to considerable changes.”⁹ Increased contact with the outside world usually leads to an enhancement of the medium’s role in digesting newer concepts (including the products of modern technology such as planes, watches etc.) so that the local culture may encompass them more easily. Respected *Temiar* mediums who have gained public acceptance of the revelations they receive through dreams and séances continue to introduce changes in traditional behavior where there appears to be little restriction in the sort of elements that mediumship can grasp hold of and make into integral components of the whole culture (Benjamin 2014, 186).

Despite shamanism still being so deeply rooted in the personal and collective life of Orang Asli society, it will be suggested in the following section that the erosion of customary territories and the gradual emasculation of their traditional beliefs pose the biggest threats to not only Orang Asli society but more particularly for the purposes of this paper, shamanism.

Loss of Traditional Lands Equals Loss of Shamanic Practices?

As proposed above, land is an important source of traditional knowledge, including spiritual knowledge on the links between an Orang Asli community and their respective territory.

In addition to constituting essential knowledge of Orang Asli history and ontology in an area, the land, and particularly the forests are also spaces where the various spirits of the land are said to reside. In *Semai* indigenous religion, any “unmediated” human desecration or destruction of a particular part of customary territory without appeasing the relevant spirits will result in the area becoming too “hot” and the local

⁹ See also Roseman 1998, 2002.

spirits taking flight to a “cooler” area. Also, the wanton destruction or damage to customary territory will inevitably result in the local shaman not being to maintain the “cool” head (or in some other Orang Asli cultures, “cool eyes” (Howell 1982, xix) necessary to make contact and gain knowledge from the non-human worlds for the well-being of the community and the environment. Such is the degree of interdependence between many Orang Asli communities, their lands and the community shamans.

The responsibility of maintaining a balanced spiritual relationship between the Orang Asli and their environment belongs to them and more particularly, the shaman rather than outsiders. In the case of the *Semai*, the consequences of any mistake that would incur the wrath of the land guardian (for example, *Pangkal Tiik*) is said to carry dire consequences for the community and more so for the *pawang* (Edo 1998, 63–4). The recent floods in Kelantan which had tragic consequences on the *Temiar* and other residents was said to be partly caused by quarrying activities in the vicinity of a limestone outcrop known as *Batu Balo'* (Peoples Documentary 2015), a spiritually significant site for the *Menraq*, *Batek* and *Temiar* Orang Asli (Benjamin 2014, 178–80).

As such, it is suggested that the power to maintain the harmony of the relationship between the Orang Asli and the environment under indigenous religions becomes even more challenging as traditional territories are destroyed and used in a way disrespectful to Orang Asli worldviews and cosmology, which in turn carries potentially disastrous implications for the more powerful shaman, and perhaps more importantly, the Orang Asli themselves.

Shamanism and Orang Asli Customary Land Rights: What is the Connection?

In this section, it is suggested that the recognition of customary land rights at common law by the Malaysian superior courts can potentially prevent the complete erosion of Orang Asli traditional territories, while contributing to the maintenance and enhancement of Orang Asli shamanic practices. Prior to 1997, Orang Asli were thought to have no legal rights to their customary territories beyond that of a tenant at will (Lim 1998), partly due to the fact that the statutory power whether or not to protect or excise such lands lay at the discretion of the individual State

Authority (Subramaniam 2013, 106–7). The problems relating to the non-gazettal, under-gazettal, de-gazettal of Orang Asli lands under the prevailing statutory land reservation schemes and their adverse impact on Orang Asli customary territories is well documented (Nicholas 2000, 32–40; SUHAKAM 2013, 131–4; Subramaniam 2013, 109–11).

Having applied jurisprudence on the survival of indigenous laws and customs from other common law jurisdictions for around a decade, the Malaysian superior courts and finally, the apex court of Malaysia, namely, the Federal Court recognized the legal continuity of the pre-existing customs and interests of indigenous peoples in respect of ancestral and customary lands in 2007.¹⁰ In the domestically adopted common law legal system of Malaysia, legal pronouncements by the Federal Court are binding and form part of the definition of “law” under article 160(2) of the Federal Constitution (Malaysia) and are accordingly legally binding. These customary land rights are not reliant or do not owe their existence to any statute or an executive declaration (see *Sagong bin Tasi & Ors v Kerajaan Negeri Selangor & Ors* [2002] 2 MLJ 591 (“*Sagong HC*”): 612; *Superintendent of Land & Surveys, Bintulu v Nor Anak Nyawai* [2006] 1 MLJ 256 (“*Nor Nyawai CA*”): 270). In Peninsular Malaysia, statutory rights under the *APA* and common law rights of indigenous people co-exist in that they are to be construed in a complementary manner (*Yebet binti Saman & Ors v Fong Kwai Loog & Ors* [2015] 2 MLJ 498, 504–6).

An important point to note is that these rights have their source in traditional laws and customs (*Madeli bin Salleh, suing as Administrator of the Estate of the Deceased, Salleh bin Kilong v Superintendent of Land & Surveys Miri Division* [2005] 5 MLJ 305: 330) and that the precise nature of these rights is determined in accordance with the customs, practices and usages of each individual community (*Kerajaan Negeri Selangor and Ors v Sagong bin Tasi & Ors* [2005] MLJ 289, 301–2). In order to prove these rights, the Orang Asli claimants must establish as a matter of fact that they: (1) are Orang Asli; (2) have been in continuous occupation of the land claimed (see *Nor Nyawai CA*: 269–70); and/or (3) have maintained a traditional connection with the land claimed in accordance with customs distinctive to the claimant community (see *Sagong HC*:

¹⁰ For a discussion of these judicial developments, see Subramaniam 2012, 195–261.

610).¹¹ To come within the definition of an Orang Asli within section 3 of the *APA*, Orang Asli claimants must establish that they are a distinct tribal division of Orang Asli as characterized by culture, language or social organization, speak an Orang Asli language and habitually follow an Orang Asli way of life and customs and beliefs.

The above requirements suggest that there may now be an added political and legal dimension for the continued practice of shamanism. Complementing the contemporary roles of shamans in addressing issues of violence and conflict faced by Orang Asli communities (Tacey and Riboli 2014), a vibrant practice of shamanism is, at the very least, relevant to and reinforces the community's occupation of the claimed land, maintenance of a "traditional connection" with the land and habitual observance of an Aboriginal "way of life and customs and practices." Applying the work of Roseman (1998) with the *Temiar*, *Temiar* dream songs mark the relationship of particular people to particular landforms, mountains, river rapids, and fruit trees, and may, in addition to the fruit-tree genealogies that link these *Temiar* to settlement sites of the past, provide a contemporary method of articulating the claimed territory and the claimant community's historical connection to it. As aptly put by Roseman:

Temiar rain forest dwellers of peninsular Malaysia sing their maps: theoretically, in their epistemology of song composition and performance; melodically, in contours of pitch and phrasing; textually, in place names weighted with memory. They inscribe crucial forms of knowledge in song: medical, personal, social, historical, geographic. (1998, 106)

Temiar ha'laa are central to mapping and mediating community relationships with the land and do so by recording landmarks of places traversed or cultivated in the songs they receive from the souls of the landscape, its flora and fauna (Roseman 1998, 111). *Temiar* dream songs result not from abstract or generic gestalts of "tree" or "mountain", but record experiences with particular trees, rivers, mountains, intimately encountered or "dwelled with" by village members (Roseman 1998, 114). Rights to geographic ranges are encoded in *Temiar* "ethnohistorical

¹¹ For commentary on these requirements see, for example, Subramaniam 2015, 435–40.

recountings,” origin legends, and the dream-song histories that mark the areas people lived on, ranged across, and, in mainstream terms, “claimed” as theirs (Roseman 1998, 114).

As suggested earlier, shamans are also the repositories of the traditional knowledge on the various *adat* (customs) relating to land and resource utilization of the community. *Temiar* practices of resource appropriation elide in dream-song composition and ceremonial performance where an adept medium receives the song and conducts that song into the human realm during ceremonies (Roseman 1998, 110). *Temiar* mediums are singers of the landscape, translating the rain forest environment-jungle, field, and settlement into culture as inhabitant spirits emerge, identify themselves, and begin to sing in dreams and, later, in ritual performances (Roseman 1998, 111). Their intimate knowledge of the *adat* is consequently invaluable in elaborating and establishing a traditional connection with the land claimed through the observance of customs distinctive to the claimant community, an underlying precept toward establishing customary rights at common law. Orang Asli shamans, as custodians of cultural values of the community and guardians of the moral world, are also important players in cementing the fact of whether the community concerned observes an aboriginal way of life and concomitant customs and beliefs, and accordingly, can be categorized as “aboriginal” for the purposes of a customary land rights claim.

Orang Asli communities who are aware of their common law land rights have been quick to appreciate the practical value of traditional knowledge in a customary land claim and have actively sought the guidance of elders and local shamans during community history and mapping exercises undertaken in collaboration with local non-governmental organizations. Anecdotally, it would also seem that there is also increased interest in local land customs among younger Orang Asli who are active in defending and advocating their customary rights. As claimed by Kamal Alee, a 30-year old *Temiar* activist and the son of a *pengbulu* (headman) from Pos Balar, Kelantan (unpublished personal interview, translated from the Malay language, September 29, 2015), “[w]e need our *ba’laa* and *adat* (customs) to defend our lands. It does not matter what religion or how modern we are.”

Conclusion

The Orang Asli have shown remarkable resilience in maintaining to a degree their beliefs in shamanic practices in an environment that can be said to be discouraging, if not adverse towards these practices. In this paper, it has been contended that the legal significance of preserving and maintaining Orang Asli traditional knowledge and traditional connections to the land may potentially function to rejuvenate shamanic practices which in any event, are still to some extent engrained in Orang Asli world views and cosmology. While the contemporary shamanic practices analyzed in this paper are largely limited to two major Orang Asli subgroups, namely, the *Semai* and *Temiar*, the authors are optimistic, based on the inextricable spiritual link that many Orang Asli communities across subgroups still possess with their customary territories, that future interdisciplinary enquiries into this topical area will reveal that shamanic practices in these groups would, to varying degrees and in different ways, be relevant in articulating a “traditional connection” to Orang Asli land, notwithstanding the endemic nature of these practices. It is hoped that researchers in this area embrace and engage the inherent tensions between the traditional certainty needed by the law and the fluid nature of customs rather than to shun them.

However, the mere recognition of Orang Asli customary land rights by the Malaysian courts in itself provides no guarantee that the special and interdependent relationship between Orang Asli, shamanism and Orang Asli lands discussed in this paper will endure unless the executive and legislative arms of government take the necessary steps to accept this relationship through the effective protection and recognition of Orang Asli customary territories. Further, there is always the possibility of a conservative Federal Court reversing or qualifying the recognition of Orang Asli customary land rights in the future as it is certainly within the judiciary’s power to do so in appropriate circumstances.¹² Practically, it must also be acknowledged that Orang Asli face

¹² Despite the initial recognition of native title at common law in Australia, the Australian courts’ relatively high thresholds for the: (1) continuity of an “aboriginal society”; and (2) the acknowledgment and observance of traditional laws and customs in assessing a “traditional connection with the land” for the purposes of assessing a native title claim in subsequent cases have functioned to defeat such claims (for detailed legal commentary, see Young 2008).

formidable doctrinal, procedural, resource and knowledge challenges in crystallizing customary land rights through an adversarial Malaysian court system (Subramaniam 2015, 430–42).

Until such time as the Orang Asli and their special link to their land gains legitimacy within the Malaysian setting, the erosion of a vast majority of Orang Asli customary territories is likely to continue as these lands get “hotter” while the Orang Asli shaman loses his or her proverbial “cool” head that maintains the harmonious balance between the Orang Asli and their lands.

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The Hunting of the *Vétt*: In Search of the Old Norse Shamanic Drum

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In stanza 24 of the Old Norse Eddic poem Lokasenna (written down some time around 1270 on the basis of earlier written and oral versions), the god Loki makes an accusation of disreputable practices against Óðinn, saying that “draptu á vétt sem vǫlur” (“you beat on a vétt like vǫlur,” i.e., female magical practitioners). The word vétt is puzzling, and its connections and derivation are unclear.¹ The tantalizing and ambiguous information that can be deduced appears to point in several directions; I attempt here, if not to disentangle the intertwined roots of this problem, at least to allow it to yield some fruits in terms of how we position Old Norse magic in its cultural context. I begin by gathering the few instances of vétt and the possibly related vitt that I am aware of, along with some contextual animadversions, a good many of which consist of summaries of well-established previous research (which it seems worth relaying and commenting on for convenience), before moving on to look at a new possibility for the interpretation of the vétt.

The Vitt

The present discussion focuses on the word *vétt*, but consideration should first be given to another word with which *vétt* has sometimes been conflated: *vitt*.

Laws

The *vitt* (or possibly *vítt*) is mentioned in the Norwegian *Den ældre Eidsivathingis-Christenret* i.24 and 45:²

¹ I attempted to set out some rather inconclusive considerations in Tolley (2009a, 534–6); the present analysis differs in many respects from my earlier treatment.

² *Norges gamle love* I, 383, 389: both spellings, *vit* and *vitt*, occur in different manuscripts.

engi maðr skal hafa i husi sinu staf eða stalla. vit eða blot. eða þat er til hæiðins siðar uæit . . .

engi maðr a at trua. a finna. eða fordæðor. eða a vit. eða blot. eða rot. eða þat. er til hæiðins siðar hoeyrir. eða læita ser þar bota

no-one shall have in his house staff or altar, *vitt* or idol, or what relates to heathen practice . . .

no-one should believe in Finnar or witches or in *vit* or idols or a root, or what belongs to heathendom, or seek remedies for himself there³

The two texts tell us different things: the first condemns the *possession* of objects related to magic practice, while the second attacks the *practice* of magic. The first text gives two pairs of objects, which appear to consist in each case of magical apparatus + pagan religious apparatus, suggesting *vitt* belongs to the field of magic. Believing in a *vitt* means ascribing to it the ability to afford magical knowledge or effects. There are two categories of object that are condemned in these passages: those that have a mundane as well as a magical purpose—the staff and the root; and those that have only a magical or pagan use—the altar and idol. It cannot be determined which group *vitt* belongs to, but the word is never found in anything but magical contexts elsewhere.

Þjóðólfr, Ynglingatal

The Norwegian poet Þjóðólfr, composing around the year 900 (but whose work is preserved only in fragmentary form, in much later written sources), uses *vitt* in *Ynglingatal*, st. 3, in the genitive plural, where a “vitta véttr” (“creature of *vitts*”), engineered Vanlandi’s death; another “vitta véttr” kills Aðils in st. 21 of the same poem. It is impossible to deduce any specific meaning for *vitt* here, but it may be noted that the word occurs in the plural, and a “being”—either someone called up by the *vitt* or responsible for their use, presumably—effects magical, and harmful, results through them. The best translation would appear to be “charms,” understood as being physical charms—objects endowed with magical potency—in the primary sense, but perhaps developing a connotation of verbal charms, in that the “creature of charms” is presumably calling on their power through incantation.

³ The latter text then goes on to condemn anyone who visits *Finnar*, Sámi.

Vǫluspá

A verb *vitta/vítta* occurs in the Eddic poem *Vǫluspá*, st. 22, where the *seiðkona* (sorceress) Heiðr “vitti ganda,” meaning that she performed some magic involving *gandar* spirits. A connection with *vitt* (substantive) seems likely (cf. *seiðr* (substantive), “(specific type of) magic,” *síða* (verb), “practice *seiðr*”): “vitti ganda” would be a verbal equivalent to the nominal “vitta vétt,” the *gandar* which are “charmed” being functionally the same as the *vétt* of “charms.” However, a denominative verb from *vétt* (i.e., “to use a *vétt*”) could take the form *vítta* (with umlaut: **webt-j-* > **wiht-*; cf. *mæta* from *mót*); in this case, the poet would be depicting the use of the *vétt*, discussed below, to send out the *gandar* on their mission (here, to find things out). Further derivations of this verb (along the lines of “send out”) are also possible.⁴ However, a direct connection between *vitt* and *vítta* (or *vítt* and *vítta* if it had a long vowel) remains the simplest solution, and one that obviates any potential confusion between derivatives of *vitt/vítt* (with “i/i”) and *vétt* (with “é/æ”).⁵

Summary

A *vitt* was a charm, and clearly functionally comparable to a *blót*, an idol, and to a root (itself apparently being used as a charm in this context), and could be kept along with idols in a house. A supernatural being is associated with *vitt* (in the plural) when it carries out deadly efficatory magic, from which it may be inferred that a *vitt* was used in efficatory spells. There is no indication of any mundane use for the *vitt*.

⁴ Heide (2006, 194) takes *vitti* as deriving from *vita* (“to point in a particular direction”), the normal preterite of which, *vissi*, appears to have been altered from **vitti* on the analogy of the preterite *vissi* from *vita* (“know”), the present-infinitive homophone of *vita* (“direct”). In this case it would be parallel to *brinda*, *renna* and *bræra* as another verb referring to the setting of *gandar* in motion to perform their task (see Tolley 2009a, 249–50)—though, as verbs initiating movement, *brinda* and *renna* take dative, and the same might be expected of *vita* used in a similar sense (though *bræra* is used with the accusative).

⁵ The word *vétr*, “creature,” is wholly unrelated—though it is possible that “vitta vétt” deliberately puns on the potential connection between charms and the use of the *vétt*.

*The Vétt**Vétt as a Chest Lid*

Cleasby and Vigfusson list five prose occurrences of the word (1957, s.v. “vætt or vétt”),⁶ defined as “the lid of a chest or shrine”; Fritzner (1886–1972, s.v. “vætt”) interprets it more specifically as “halvrundt eller ophøiet Laag (paa Kiste)” (“a semicircular or raised lid (on a chest),” which is presumably an inference in part from the usage in *Óláfs saga helga*, ch. 253, where Magnús makes a shrine to Óláfr, “en yfir uppi vétt vaxit sem ræfr ok þar af upp höfuð ok burst” (“and over it on top a *vétt* shaped like a roof and rising from it a gable and finial”; a pointed, “gothic,” roof, rather than a rounded, “romanesque,” form seems to be implied here), and in part from more modern usages. In view of its rarity, the word clearly refers to no ordinary lid, but to something found with ornate and sizeable objects like shrines and chests, presumably more substantial than a mere flat lid.

Þjóðólfr, Haustlǫng

Þjóðólfr uses the word *vétt* in the genitive (manuscript “vez”) in a kenning in *Haustlǫng*, st. 1, describing a mythological scene depicted on a shield:⁷

Týframra sék tíva
trygglaust of far þriggja
á hreingöru hlýri
Hildar vétts ok Þjaza.⁸

I see the trustless journey of three divinely eminent deities and Þjazi on the brightened cheek of Hildir’s *vétt*.

⁶ Although *vétt* and *vætt* are phonologically distinct, medieval spellings do not usually allow us to determine the precise underlying form without knowing the etymology, and the vowels also varied by dialect and period. The form in *Haustlǫng*, however, must be *vétt/vætt*.

⁷ I cite the text from North’s edition. North deals with the form “vez” at length in his commentary *ad loc.*, rejecting earlier emendations to different words, such as *fats* (“clothes”).

⁸ The word *vetts* should show assonance with *Þjaza* here. North (commentary *ad loc.*) mentions a few Norwegian inscriptions with instances of *ve-* > *vja-* (*e* does not normally break in this position), and in any case breaking (of **Þjeza* to **Þe^aza*) at this stage represented a smaller phonological change than the later Icelandic spelling indicates, such as may well have been ignored for purposes of assonance. It is, in any case, possible that for Þjóðólfr **Þeze* remained unbroken, being “corrected” to the more familiar broken form by a scribe when it was recorded. There is no need to emend *vetts* to a form such as *fats* on these grounds.

Hildir here functions both as a valkyrie name, “Battle,” and as the common noun, “battle.” The sense “curved lid” fits the context perfectly here as a description of a shield, its “brightened cheek” being the curved covering with its depictions of the myths recounted in the rest of the poem. A “curved lid of battle” suffices as a kenning for “shield,” but an image is simultaneously evoked of the valkyrie Battle wielding her shield.

It is unnecessary to look any further, and the magical associations of the *vétt* in *Lokasenna* are not necessarily present—indeed, we may be dealing with two homonyms of distinct meaning. Nonetheless, I will mention three increasingly speculative suggestions that are possibly relevant; each depends on the viability of arguments about the *vétt* presented elsewhere in this paper.

- Even if the *vétt* of *Lokasenna* is a distinct word (and all the more so if it is not distinct), Þjóðólfr could still have intended an allusion to the magical connotations of the homonym, assuming *Lokasenna* is relaying a tradition which antedates Þjóðólfr. In this case, we may see here an image of Hildir resembling the *vǫlva* (“seeress”) of *Lokasenna*, but directing battle rather than prophecy—or perhaps both, in the manner of the valkyries of *Darraðarljóð*,⁹ a *valkyrja*, taken as meaning “chooser of the slain,” is by definition an effector of fate.
- The *vétt* of the *vǫlva* might have recalled for Þjóðólfr the Sámi shaman drums, which had depictions on them, as did the shield the poem describes. I have argued elsewhere (Tolley 2015) that the painted shield may owe something to an awareness of Sámi drums; the kenning could be alluding to and reiterating this connection. The point, in this praise poem, would be to suggest an appropriation by the Norwegian prince of the powers of the Sámi magicians, directed to victory in battle.
- If, as suggested below, the *vǫlva*’s *vétt* was, mundanely speaking, a winnowing drum, a further element of symbolism would emerge in the allusion implicit in *Haustlǫng*’s use of *vétt*: as a valkyrie, Hildir separates out those that are slain—or the “choice” (*val*) warriors for the “choice hall” (*valhöll*), just as winnowing separates out the grain from the chaff; separation—of the choice morsel of

⁹ *Darraðarljóð* is preserved in *Njáls saga*, but was an independent poem of the early eleventh century; it presents the course of a battle through the metaphor of weaving on a loom, undertaken by a group of valkyries.

ox meat from the gods, and of the goddess Þóunn from their company too—forms a theme of the first part of the poem.¹⁰

Lokasenna

Lokasenna, st. 23–4, presents an accusation by the god Óðinn against the reprobate Loki, who then responds, following the same protocol as elsewhere in the poem, by throwing back the insult upon the giver:

Óðinn:

Átta vetr
vartu fyr iqrð neðan
kýr miólkandi ok kona,
ok hefir þú þar [bqrn of] borit,
ok hugða ek þat args aðal.

Loki:

Enn þik síða kóðo
Sámseyio í
ok draptu á vétt sem vqlor.
Vitka líki
fórtu verþiód yfir,
ok hugða ek þat args aðal.

Óðinn:

Eight winters
you were under the earth
milking cows, and you were a woman,
and you have borne children there,
and I thought that the nature of an effeminate.

Loki:

But they said you practiced *seiðr*
on Sámsey
and you beat on a *vétt* like seeresses (*vqlur*).

¹⁰ On the ambiguity of *val* as either “slain” or “choice,” see Dronke 1969, comm to *Atlakviða*, st. 2/3; Valhöll in its earliest usage was almost certainly “the choice hall” (or the hall for the chosen warriors).

In the form of a wizard
you went round mankind
and I thought that the nature of an effeminate.

First, some textual difficulties:

- The word “síða” (“practice *seiðr*”) is emended from the apparently meaningless “síga” (“sink”). Given that Loki must here be attacking Óðinn for his effeminacy (here associated with *seiðr*; sexual impropriety is a *leitmotif* of the poem), the emendation of just one letter to give an acceptable sense seems all but unavoidable. Yet “sinking” may not be wholly impossible: the *vǫlva* of *Vǫluspá* “sinks” (“*sökkvaz*”) after her performance, and in Finnish tradition a magician is said to *langeta loveen*, fall into a trance (possibly “fall into a cleft” originally; Tolley 2009a, 84, 436, 446). The context in *Lokasenna* is probably too vague to suggest such a meaning, however, unless a *vǫlva*’s “sinking” were such a commonplace as not to need explicit contextualization. Whilst there is a temptation to see trance as a central part of the *vǫlva*’s practice, we actually have very limited evidence for it (and her sinking at the end of *Vǫluspá* is more likely to refer to her return to the grave whence Óðinn most probably summoned her). The emendation to *síða* is thus well founded.
- *Vitka* (“wizard”) may, as Bugge (1881, 137–8) suggested, perhaps stand for *vitku* (“witch”); again, a charge of effeminacy is surely required here, which “wizard” might be viewed as failing to convey.¹¹ Óðinn, if the emendation is adopted, is being depicted here as a wandering female fortune-teller, in the way *Heiðr* is in *Vǫluspá*, perambulating the district and making herself the darling of housewives.¹² However, Snorri’s presentation of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*, ch. 7, as a male practitioner of *seiðr*, and his statement that *ergi* (“effeminacy”) accompanied the practice when performed by males, may reflect a traditional understanding of the potential effeminacy of being a male *seiðr*-performer, rather than being merely his surmise constructed on his reading of this very passage of *Lokasenna*. To be accused of being a (male) *vitki* was thus enough in itself to imply effeminacy.

¹¹ Bugge notes that in the tale of Óðinn’s seduction of Rindr, in which he used *seiðr*, he disguised himself, according to Saxo (*Gesta Danorum* III.iv.5), as a woman, *Wecha*, which may be read as *vitka*, “witch.”

¹² I leave aside any consideration of whether *Heiðr* in fact *was* Óðinn, which, as Frog points out to me, is not wholly impossible, at least as an insulting interpretation of history on Loki’s part.

- The reading “draptu á” is not in doubt, but its meaning raises some questions. Although it is most reasonable to render *drepa* as “beat,” the meaning may be wider—it is used for knocking on a door, and *drepa á* can mean “touch upon” something, with the implication of an underlying sense of something less forceful than beating, such as “tap” (see entries *s.v.* in Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, *DONP* and Blöndal 1920–4). As discussed in von See et al. (1997, comm. to *Lokasenna*, st. 24), *drepa á* may even have had the sense of the analogous *slá á* (lit. “strike on”), “make use of.” We might then readily see *vétt* as a variant of *vitt*, and the sense would simply be “you made use of charms.” Such readings are, nonetheless, rather unlikely in view of the lack of attestation of the sense required (there is no direct evidence for a sense of “make use of,” for example): it is most natural here to infer a concrete sense of beating, and that the *vétt* was, to this extent, a drum-like object.
- *Vétt* may potentially be a word distinct from *vétt* as a curved lid, but there is no initial reason to doubt the normal sense here. However, it is more likely that “lid” designated something *resembling* a heavy chest lid than actually being one. Strömbäck (1935, 24) notes that the perception of the magical drum or drum-like apparatus as a “lid” can be paralleled among the Sámi. The usual southern Sámi drum consists of a hooped frame with a skin stretched over it; it is open at the back, and hence resembles a lid to a certain extent (and is similar to the Scottish *wecht*, described below); the northern variety is even more like a lid (of the handled, curved sort that *vétt* is likely to have denoted), being a curved structure with, as a handle, a hole with cross-piece (see, for example, Lundmark 1991 for a presentation of such a drum).¹³ With regard to this northern area, Strömbäck also cites Graan as noting that in Pite Lappmark the Sámi sometimes used a bucket lid instead of a real drum; the same practice is recorded also by Forbus and Leem, and Olsen (1960, 19) notes also that in Finnmark the *bottelokk* (“bucket top”) is recorded as a (male) magician’s tool. Such evidence indicates that in this area, a magical drum was readily conceptualized, at least by outside observers, as a sort of “lid.”¹⁴

¹³ I thank Rune Rasmussen for emphasizing to me the importance of the structural differences between southern and northern Sámi drums.

¹⁴ It is possible that the accounts are correct, and the Sámi made use of mundane lids as drums, but, as Rune Rasmussen points out, it is also possible that the original information was that the drums were *like* a bucket lid (or other such objects), in reference to the lid-like appearance of the northern Sámi drums, and this has been simplified in the telling.

There are two aspects to Loki's accusation: what he wishes to imply about Óðinn's manliness, and what mythological event actually underlies the allusions, which Loki is deliberately presenting in an unfavorable light.

Óðinn first accuses Loki of gross effeminacy—to the extent of his actually *becoming* a woman and bearing children. Loki's retort to this is a show of onepmanship: what Óðinn did was still more effeminate, and this was to engage in *seiðr*, a type of magic associated primarily with women (magic in itself did not imply effeminacy, but this particular form did), as is confirmed in Óðinn's practice of it in *Ynglinga saga*, ch. 7 (though this account could itself be based on *Lokasenna*; yet even so it must represent an understanding of what the poem implies). The point of Loki's attack is not to focus on magic *per se*, but on its feminizing power: Óðinn is just as effeminate, *argr*, as Loki—or still more so.

The beating on a *vétt* is hence surely cited as a further exemplification of Óðinn's effeminate ways, an action performed within the context of female-dominated magic practices; this is indicated by the mention of *völur*, a type of female magician without any male counterpart.¹⁵ We may infer that, at least in the understanding of this author and his audience, beating on a *vétt* was a distinctive feature of the female magical practices of *völur*. Yet Loki's function in the poem is to warp the deeds of all the gods to make them look as disreputable as possible, not to give accurate information about the workings of *völur*. It is possible that inferences about *völur* are based on deliberate obfuscation on Loki's part, for example in mixing unrelated traditions or activities and implying a connection between them which did not exist in tradition outside the poem.

Many questions arise about the *vétt*. There is nothing to indicate whether the *vétt*: (a) was used by anyone other than *völur*; (b) had any other uses, such as mundane ones on a farm; (c) was a regular instru-

¹⁵ How far the characterization of certain forms of magic as effeminate is a reflection of filtering through the lens of Christianity is difficult to determine; even if we accepted the lines in question as composed in something like their extant form in a pre-Christian era (which they may well not have been), their preservation, as against many other mentions of magic that must have been lost, is obviously a selective process. Unfortunately, however, arguments cannot be built upon evidence that does not survive. The image of Óðinn and his indulgence in effeminate practices derives from the extant texts, and would seem to reflect an element of subversiveness which is deep-rooted in his overall depiction, and is hence likely to be of long standing, although the particular emphasis we encounter may reflect processes of Christian demonization as well.

ment of *vǫlur*, or used only occasionally by some *vǫlur*. The purpose of beating on a *vétt* is also not made clear. The main function performed by *vǫlur* in other texts, probably the earliest and fullest of which is *Vǫlusþá*, is divination, and this appears to have been achieved at least in part through contact with, or command of, “spirits of prophecy,” *spá-gandar* (*Vǫlusþá*, st. 29). It would thus be strange if *Lokasenna* did not intend the instrument to be in some way connected to the main, divinatory, function of *vǫlur*, involving contact with the spirit world. The drum is found widely in Siberian shamanism (and elsewhere in magical practices), where it serves various purposes, as a means to induce trance by being beaten, and as a vehicle for the shaman to travel to the spirit worlds once trance is achieved (Hultkrantz 1991); other uses in relation to spirits could easily be envisaged, such as attracting or repelling such beings, but in all instances the instrument functions as a means to effect some form of contact with the spirit realm. We cannot determine if the *vǫlva* was thought to enter trance, whether she traveled to the spirit realm herself or merely attracted spirits to her, or any other such details, but I suggest that to propose any other use for the *vétt* than to achieve contact with the spirit world on behalf of her clients would be incompatible with what we know the role of the *vǫlva* to have been (if we put any trust in our sources, which, to generalize, I would regard as preserving at least echoes of pre-Christian spiritual understanding, even allowing for post-pagan distortions).

This, of course, is to assume that *Lokasenna* refers to something that did in fact exist in the Norse tradition of magic, rather than being a poetic fabrication. Suspicions about its reality are aroused by the fact that the many instances of *vǫlur* elsewhere never mention anything like a *vétt*—which may suggest that in fact the *vétt* did not characterize the activities of the *vǫlva* in tradition outside *Lokasenna* at all.¹⁶

It is worth pursuing the note of skepticism that has been sounded about the reliability of *Lokasenna* by considering the second aspect: the

¹⁶ I have previously suggested (Tolley 2009a, 535) that the *vétt* may reappear in the trial of a wise woman, Karen Erichsdaatter, from Fosnes in Namdalen in 1660; she mentions that “min word er i wetten,” “my free soul is in the *wett*.” However, it now seems highly unlikely to me that the *vétt* is meant here; it would be the only known mention in Norwegian folk materials, and other explanations are more likely (such as “wits” or possibly “glove”). While there are many apparently archaic features in what Karen says, and the account warrants a deeper investigation, it should be left out of the discussion of the *vétt*.

underlying mythological event Loki alludes to. The myth is otherwise unrecorded (though Óðinn's wandering around as a wizard recalls his appearance in this guise in the prose framework of *Grímnismál*, where he appears in disguise to test the character and loyalty of his protégés), and hence cannot be illuminated directly from other sources. Óðinn's other encounters with *vǫlur*—in *Vǫluspá* and *Baldrs draumar*—reflect his unquenchable search for information, and hence appeal to the divinatory role of seeresses; the same motive is probable in his own undertaking of the practice. Yet *seiðr* also had efficatory purposes; this is apparent, indeed, in Kormakr's mention that Óðinn “seið til Rindar” (*Sigurðardrápa* 3 (*Skj* B1 69), composed around 960), which indicates he used *seiðr* to secure the services of Rindr, who bore him a son to avenge his other son, the slain Baldr. Hence *Lokasenna* could be intending us to infer either divinatory or efficatory purposes in Óðinn's actions, but either way it is making an appeal to tradition: what Óðinn is accused of is made credible because he always does this sort of thing as he “wanders the world,” so the audience understands.

The setting on Sámsey is now opaque. There is nothing to suggest any special connection between magic and islands in Norse tradition, but an island setting functions as a stereotypical site for a duel—a *holmgangr* (“island visit”) in Norse. Sámsey occurs in one other significant legendary context, in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, ch. 26–30, where indeed a mighty duel, extended almost to the level of a battle, takes place between Oddr and Hjalmarr on one side, and a party of berserks on the other. A magically empowered weapon and cloak play some part in the encounter. It is, on the basis of this Sámsey analogue, arguable that Óðinn was in fact engaged in some military conflict, aided through his use of magic, but Loki has chosen to downplay the heroic aspect of it and focus on the effeminate magic. Let us assume that the magic was indeed part of a military setting: what could be the context of beating on something, in a way clearly associated with women and which seems to have been viewed as magically efficatory (for victory, presumably)? The nearest analogue I know within the Germanic field is the case of the women who, according to Strabo, beat upon the wagon coverings as battle progressed among the Cimbri (*Geography*, vii.2.3); these women also had mantic powers. Also worth note is Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān's account of the Rus, whose warriors beat upon shields as a slave girl, who had glimpsed into the afterlife, was sacrificed.

Could the beating on the *vétt* therefore be a beating on shields (the Rus, as a group of Vikings, are closer to medieval Scandinavia than the rather more ancient Cimbri), associated with some efficatory magic, *seiðr*, which was traditionally associated with women but which Óðinn also engaged in? The line of argument is necessarily somewhat tenuous, but so too is the supposition that *vǫlur* customarily engaged in magical drumming (much like a Sámi shaman), which is based solely on interpretation of this same passage; nowhere else are these female practitioners said to drum, and it seems quite possible that Loki is engaging in deliberate obfuscation, accusing Óðinn of effeminacy for practicing *seiðr* and lumping the magically empowered beating of a shield in with this general predilection for effeminate magic.

If a shield is meant, why call it a *vétt*? The strong word in the line, where the semantic emphasis falls, is *vǫlva*, which focuses attention on Óðinn's effeminacy; *vétt* could well be selected for alliterative purposes. Nonetheless, it has to mean something, and was probably intended to strike a chord of allusion: allusion which surely points to Þjóðólfr's use of the word in the sense of shield in the kenning "Hildir's *vétt*" (or "battle lid")—and here I am inverting the suggestion proffered above that Þjóðólfr could be alluding to a tradition of seeresses using a *vétt*; I suggest instead that this "tradition" may be the creation of *Lokasenna*, based on Þjóðólfr's usage. *Lokasenna* appears to imply that the *vétt* belonged to the *vǫlva* in the way it also belonged to Hildir: and this implies a reading of Hildir as a sort of *vǫlva*. As noted, a valkyrie is a determiner of fate, like a seeress, and a connection between *vǫlva* and valkyrie is implicit in the valkyrie name Gǫndul (*Vǫluspá*, st. 30), connected with *gandr*, the spirit of divination the *vǫlva* controls in *Vǫluspá*. Beating on the drum would thus be to determine the outcome of battle, a role which is realized under a different image in the form of the female valkyries (notably Battle) choosing the slain; the drum and the valkyrie meet in Hildir, "Battle," with her shield, *vétt*, in *Haustlǫng*, but in *Lokasenna* it is the master of battle, and master of the valkyries, Óðinn, who beats on the "lid of battle," and is accused of effeminacy for undertaking something usually associated with prophetic females.

The *vétt* would thus disappear as a traditional part of the equipment of the *vǫlva*, and become instead a clever poetic allusion to traditions about battle and its (female) personification, with perhaps a faint echo of memories of mantic seeresses beating out the warriors' fates, as among the ancient Cimbri.

The occurrence of *vétt* as a magical accoutrement in one sole text is certainly suspicious. We thus have at least the following possibilities:

- *Vétt* stands for *vitt*, and *drepa á vitt* means “resort to charms,” a fairly platitudinous statement but contextually suitable.
- *Vétt* is a reflection of a poetic allusion to the “lid of war,” or shield.
- *Vétt* existed as part of a recognized tradition of magic performed by females, and Loki alludes to this tradition, ascribing the practice to Óðinn as part of his penchant for indulging in female magic.

If we pursue the last possibility, then we are confronted with how to explain the lack of occurrences of the word, or the practice indicated, anywhere else. There are two possibilities:

- *Lokasenna* presents us with an ancient piece of lore about the practices of the pagan *vǫlva* in Norse tradition. This is problematic in view of the entire absence of evidence from elsewhere, but is not impossible, given the general lack of information about the details of pagan practice. While the details of how *Lokasenna* acquired its extant form are open to debate, the poem certainly contains elements derived from ancient mythological tradition which are not found elsewhere (see in particular Dronke 1989, 97–108).
- The poet is ascribing an actual traditional activity to Óðinn, but he spices up his picture of the *vǫlva* by borrowing a feature from some other tradition and pretending it constitutes a traditional feature—thus the picture is an *ad hoc* fabrication by the poet, even if it derives from a manipulation of genuine tradition. Given the audience’s probable lack of familiarity with the details of magical practice, and a general expectation of magicians’ outlandishness, such an ascription could easily pass muster (note the description of the *vǫlva* in *Eiríks saga rauða*, ch. 4, which, although unlikely to be at all accurate as a depiction of a seeress from the pagan period, shows that the audience expected such figures to be exotic and were willing to believe any well-crafted description).

The most obvious place to look for outlandish magic practices would be among the nearby Sámi. The Norwegian laws, some excerpts from which were given above, show that people resorted in particular to the Sámi for their magical needs, and the poet could easily have mixed in features of Sámi magic to give some additional power to his allusion to the workings of the *vǫlva*. However, one difficulty is that the Sámi drum was an accoutrement that characterized the male shaman, where-

as the whole point of the diatribe against Óðinn is that he is indulging in female magical activities.¹⁷ If he was indeed relying on foreign models, the poet may have had more than just the Sámi in mind in his depiction of the use of the *vétt*.

The Scots Wecht

In 1591, the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, examining the presbytery of Haddington, near Edinburgh, condemned the “playing on timbrellis and wechtis on the Saboth day” (Kirk 1977, 27).¹⁸ Far from being any instrument specific to music, the *wecht* was in fact a winnowing drum, here put to something outside its primary use. It is mentioned as being put to such use elsewhere: John Jamieson, in his *Etymological Dictionary* from 1808, quotes a ballad (s.v. “wecht”):

—Ay wi’ his lang tail he whiskit,
And drumm’d on an ald corn weight.

Jamieson defines the *wecht* as “An instrument for winnowing corn, made of sheep’s skin, in the form of a sieve, but without holes.”

¹⁷ The question of female shamanism among the Sámi is in reality complex. Female shamans, of sorts, are mentioned from the earliest sources on, and some clearly wielded drums. It appears they could not conduct sacrifices, or visit sacrificial areas, however. It may be stated as almost certain that Sámi communities had a role for various different types of magician, some of them specifically female (concerned, among other things, with female aspects of life such as midwifery). We suffer from the extreme bias of all early sources, which are probably exclusively male, and issued by authority figures such as missionaries or court clerks. The role of female shamanism is certainly downplayed in these. Yet the perceptions derived in later Scandinavian sources from the male outsiders who encountered the Sámi and their magicians are likely to have been similar to those of earlier Norsemen who had dealings with the Sámi: even if female shamanism existed, it would not have been so apparent to outsiders as the social performances of male shamans. In any case, even allowing for female shamans, it is clear they did not have the *auctoritas* that male shamans did. Hence, the contrast that it is argued must have been perceived between the female-dominated Norse *seiðr* and the Sámi male-dominated shamanism remains valid. (On Sámi female shamans, see Lundmark 1987.)

¹⁸ I thank Christopher Langley for providing me with a copy of this, and for searching for any other occurrences of *wecht* in the Synod’s proceedings (there do not appear to be any).



Fig. 1. A *wecht* from the parish of Fetlar, Shetland. Reproduced by kind permission of Shetland Museum & Archives, Lerwick.

The *English Dialect Dictionary* (Wright 1898, s.v. “weight, sb2”) notes that the word is Scots, with a few occurrences in the far north of England, where it occurs in Middle English from 1183 (*wehit*) onwards.¹⁹ The dictionary defines it as follows:

It consisted of a shallow hoop 15 to 18 inches in diameter, on which a sheep or calf’s skin was stretched. Over the edge of this the unwinnowed grain was gently shaken in a draught between two opposite doors in a barn. The draught or current of air separated the good grain; the tails, the strumps, and the caff. (Caithness)

¹⁹ This is noted in *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*. The *Michigan Middle English Dictionary* only gives examples from the fourteenth century on.

Similarly, the *Scottish National Dictionary* defines *wecht* as “a wooden hoop, usually about two to three feet in diameter, with skin or canvas stretched over it so as to form a kind of tray, and originally used for winnowing corn, or now generally for carrying grain or potatoes.”²⁰ The citations given here are from various areas of Scotland, including Orkney and Shetland. The dictionary also notes, in a citation from 1808, that there were in fact two sorts of *wecht*:

The one is denominated a *windin wecht*, immediately used for *winnowing*, as its name intimates. This is formed of a single hoop covered with parchment. The other is called a *maund-wecht*, having more resemblance of a basket, its rim being deeper than that of the other. Its proper use is for lifting the grain, that it may be emptied into the *windin wecht*.

Shetland Museum and Archives, in a note accompanying pictures of sieves and *wechts*, notes that after meal had been ground it was sifted through two sieves (one rough and the other fine) onto a *wecht*. *Wechts* were also used for winnowing corn, and as dough-kneading trays.²¹ A common Gaelic term for a *wecht* was *críathbar*. Fiona Marwick (West Highland Museum) notes that “It would appear that there were two types of *críathbar*, one made of a rod bent into a circle covered with calfskin used for winnowing the chaff from the grain by tossing it into the air; the other, deeper and more carefully made, had holes pierced through the calfskin and was used for separating the sids [inner husks] from the oatmeal after grinding.”²²

The various mentions of the *wecht* (and its Gaelic counterpart) state that both perforated and unperforated (blind) examples existed (the perforated ones act additionally as sieves for waste material finer than chaff), and that its form could be adapted either to winnowing or, with deeper sides, to lifting produce. Clearly, an unperforated *wecht* would easily function additionally as a drum. The distribution is not clear, but would seem to include many of the Celtic lands; an example of an unperforated skin winnowing drum is to be found in the Ceredigion

²⁰ http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/wecht_n2_v2.

²¹ See <http://photos.shetland-museum.org.uk/index.php?a=ViewItem&ci=121397&WI NID=1463130860560>. I thank Ian Tait of the Shetland Museum and Archives for providing information and photographs of *wechts*.

²² Personal communication.

Museum.²³ In Ireland, a variety of sieves could be encountered for different grains, as well as the *dallán*, an unperforated wickerwork version with similar uses to the *wecht*, and the *bodhrán*, an unperforated skin winnowing drum, which, like the *wecht*, served also as a playing instrument (in which sense it is now widely familiar).²⁴

Winnowing Drums: The Wider Context

The *wecht* was clearly an implement that could be put to various uses, including as a general container for foodstuffs, as well as being involved in the winnowing process. Some of the descriptions of its use may in their particulars reflect surmise rather than constituting first-hand information. The process of winnowing, following the threshing of the corn, is invariably a somewhat complex process involving several stages. In many areas, the initial removal of large chaff is achieved by shoveling the grain into the wind. This is followed by sieving to remove smaller particles—though it is not always clear if the grain is retained in the sieve while the chaff falls through or is blown away, or if the grain passes through, falling onto a receptacle for further treatment (as is indicated in the case of Shetland). The use of a blind sieve or winnowing drum, such as is found in Scotland and Ireland, is somewhat unusual. Again, the specific methods employed are not necessarily clear, and may have varied over time and place: was the grain retained in the drum, or gently cast out of it to be purified in a breeze, before falling to the ground? Again, there are variants in structure and manufacture of the blind sieve: it may either be wickerwork, or made from a skin stretched over a frame; and it may have a rim all round, or, in the case of the wickerwork structure, have a flat, broad lip away from the winnower (which is easier to use, but more difficult to make). Within the area relevant

²³ Ceredigion Museum, <http://pilgrim.ceredigion.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1536>, exhibition number: Agriculture 8.1. The web page notes: “This is a shallow round tray sometimes with wooden sides and a skin bottom. The mixture of corn, chaff and straw which comes from the threshing is placed in the tray when the wind is blowing. The mixture is thrown up into the air by a quick motion of the hands; the wind blows away the light chaff and straw and the corn falls back into the tray or on the floor nearby. The last step is to clean the corn by means of a cane sieve which lets the dirt through but retains the corn.”

²⁴ The different Irish varieties mentioned here are listed, illustrated and discussed by Lucas 1951.

to the present study, I have only encountered the winnowing drum, a blind sieve made with a rim all round and with a skin stretched over—something that readily serves as a drum—in Celtic areas of Britain and Ireland. As far as I can determine, examples are not found in Norway.²⁵ Yet the blind sieve for winnowing, the *pohdin*, is found in Finland (sometimes with a rim all round),²⁶ and practices change over time: Harrison (1903, 299–301; 1904, 252) showed how the ancient Greek *liknon*, so central to the cult of Dionysus, was a blind, wickerwork sieve, which disappeared during the classical period to be replaced with the sieve (though blind sieves precisely similar to the *liknon* survived in France until the nineteenth century). Sieves in Norwegian museums are made both of wickerwork and skin; a blind sieve is an antecedent stage to the skin sieve, as holes have to be pierced in it, so a *wecht*-like implement did exist, if only temporarily in the process of manufacture. It is a small step to suppose that at some stage, non-pierced, blind sieves were put to some use. This need not, it is true, have been specifically winnowing, as the varied uses of the *wecht* demonstrate, but it is likely to have been at least related to food production.

In modern Norwegian, the term for a winnowing basket is *såld* or *sold*; the Icelandic word is *sáld*.²⁷ This is a word, with a basic meaning of “sieve,” that occurs in medieval sources, its use in winnowing being implied in the term *mjolsáld*, “meal sieve,” in *Sturlunga saga* (see Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, s.v.). De Vries (1977, s.v.) suggests a derivation from a root meaning “bind,” and on this basis supposes the original sense to have been “basket” (even if conceived as primarily a woven vessel, a less common skin-covered version could doubtless have appropriated the same term). The fact that the word also refers to a measure of corn and other materials suggests this is likely (a “basketful” is more likely to give this sense than a “sieveful”). The commonly employed implement in winnowing is indeed a basket (the use of a skin seems to be relatively uncommon), and the process may involve sieving as well as winnowing in the strict sense (separation by casting into the

²⁵ See, for example, <http://digitaltmuseum.no/>, s.v. “sold” (the normal means of lifting the grain in the first stage of winnowing was with a shovel; see examples s.v. “kasteskovl”). My researches are, however, preliminary, given that I am not in a position to visit Norwegian museums; moreover, not a single Norwegian museum I have attempted to elicit information from has responded to any queries.

²⁶ See examples at <http://www.museot.finna.fi/>, s.vv. “pohtimet,” “viljapohdin.” I thank Kati Kallio for helping me trace these examples.

²⁷ I thank Sif Rikharðsdóttir for checking this for me.

wind). However, the Scottish *wecht*,²⁸ particularly the unperforated variety, is much more reminiscent of a shallow, open drum than winnowing baskets in general (which tend, for example, to have an open side).

Magical Uses of the Winnowing Drum

As is already clear from the Synod of Lothian, the mundane *wecht* had more than merely crop-related uses. Robert Burns (1759–96), in his poem “Halloween” (1786), which portrays the partying and antics of young folk on that day and aims to relay folk customs to a wider readership, includes the lines:

Meg fain wad to the barn gaen
To winn three wechts o’ naething²⁹

To this he adds an explanation, which shows how the girl uses the winnowing drum to gain a vision of her future husband and his station in life:³⁰

²⁸ The *Scottish National Dictionary* gives separate entries to the two homophonic words, *wecht*, but nonetheless suggests that the “winnowing drum” has developed out of a specialized use of the more common *wecht* (meaning “weight”) in the sense of “a container made to hold a certain weight of grain.” Whilst a development of meaning from “container, basket” to “weight of materials held in the container” seems plausible—as took place with Norse *sáld* (see below)—it seems to me to stretch credulity to postulate the development as taking place in the opposite direction; an explanation which keeps the words apart seems preferable. A broadly comparable situation arises in Old Norse, where *vét* additionally means “weight,” but this is always regarded as a separate word.

²⁹ “Meg would like to go to the barn to winnow three *wechts* of nothing.”

³⁰ Burns also annotates another custom mentioned in the poem (a great many divinatory customs are associated with Halloween), which provides an example of a folk-magic use of roots, suggesting the sort of thing that may have lain behind the Norwegian laws condemning the keeping of a root in the house: “The first ceremony of Halloween is pulling each a ‘stock,’ or plant of kail. They must go out, hand in hand, with eyes shut, and pull the first they meet with: its being big or little, straight or crooked, is prophetic of the size and shape of the grand object of all their spells—the husband or wife. If any ‘yird,’ or earth, stick to the root, that is ‘tocher,’ or fortune; and the taste of the ‘custock,’ that is, the heart of the stem, is indicative of the natural temper and disposition. Lastly, the stems, or, to give them their ordinary appellation, the ‘runts,’ are placed somewhere above the head of the door; and the Christian names of the people whom chance brings into the house are, according to the priority of placing the ‘runts,’ the names in question.”

This charm must likewise be performed unperceived, and alone. You go to the *barn*, and open both doors, taking them off the hinges, if possible; for there is danger, that the *being*, about to appear, may shut the doors, and do you some mischief. Then take that instrument used for winnowing the corn, which, in our country dialect, we call a *wecht*; and go through all the attitudes of letting down corn against the wind. Repeat it three times; and the third time an apparition will pass through the barn, in at the windy door, and out at the other, having both the figure in question, and the appearance or retinue, marking the employment or station in life.

The terminology and custom is also documented in a quite different area of Scotland by Walter Gregor (1881, 85):

Winnowing Corn.—Go to the barn secretly; open both doors, as if preparing to winnow corn. Take a sieve or a *waicht*, and three times go through the form of winnowing corn. The apparition of the future husband entered by the one door to the windward, passed through the barn, and made his exit by the other door.

It would seem that similar notions may have existed in the Gaelic areas; the following verse is recorded as part of a rhyme about different methods of divination, published in the Gaelic-language magazine *An Gaidheal* in 1876:³¹

'Us tha e de chleachdadh aig cuid, aig cuid,
 Dol do'n t-sabhul a dh-fhasgnadh le guit, le guit;
 'S chi iad samhhladh no tannasg ' dol seachad na' dheannaibh
 'S a' dol as an t-sealladh na' ruith, na' ruith.

And it is a custom of some, of some,
 To go to the barn to winnow with a *guit*, with a *guit*,
 And they saw a likeness or spirit come hurrying past,
 and go rushing, rushing out of sight.

³¹ "Oran na Samhna" ("Halloween Song"), *An Gaidheal* 5 (1876), 293–4. The text was identified using *Digital Archive of Scottish Gaelic* (DASG), University of Glasgow, <http://dasg.ac.uk>, searching under "guit," file 102005. The translation is mine, with assistance from Caoimhin O Donaile (University of the Highlands and Islands).

Guit is defined by Alexander MacBain (1911, s.v.) as a “corn-fan, unperforated sieve,”³² clearly in reference to an object identical with or similar to a *wecht*. Indeed, it is defined as a “winnowing fan of skin stretched over a wooden hoop, wecht” (the source being Jonathan MacDonald, Kilmuir, 3 May 2011) in *Briathrachas Cultar Dùthchasach*.³³ The word appears to be confined to Scottish Gaelic (no uses from Ireland are noted). Although the authenticity of the traditions mentioned in the poem from *An Gaidheal* might be questioned, as it appears to reflect rather closely what Burns says in “Halloween,” there are other indications of comparable traditions in Gaelic areas. For example, Alexander Carmichael recorded the following:³⁴

Càthadh an Fhras Lìn. The lint seed was winnowed in the, “comh-ràth,” [at] dusk. Th[is] was done at Draoineach[,] Skye[,] by a servant girl in the house. The wife of Draoineach asked the girl whom did she see and the girl answered that she had no luck[,] that [s]he only saw her master. [“Well[,] you shall have him yet[,]”] said her mistress. The mistress died soon after and before the year was out Fear na Draoinich [the master of Draoineach] married this young girl!

The divination might sometimes involve the winnowing of objects such as silver coins, and the purpose was not always to glimpse a future husband—in 1709, a woman was arraigned in Arran for divining the identity of a thief by the use of the *wecht*.³⁵ Most, though not all, recorded uses of the *wecht* for divinatory purposes were by women; hence it appears to have been a largely female activity.

The assignment of a spiritual dimension to the winnowing basket is not confined to Scotland. In ancient Greece the *liknon*, the open, blind wickerwork winnowing sieve, played a central role in the mysteries of Dionysus (Harrison 1903, 1904). The spiritual meanings clearly stemmed from the mundane uses to which the basket was put: as well as being used as a container for grain for winnowing, it served as a cradle

³² Other words for winnowing instruments exist in Gaelic, such as *dallan*.

³³ <http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/~sm00hc/briathrachas.html>.

³⁴ The Carmichael Watson Project (notebooks of Alexander Carmichael), <http://www.carmichaelwatson.lib.ed.ac.uk/cwatson/en>, CW7/32 folio 32v, line 19 to folio 33r, line 4.

³⁵ See the blog of the Carmichael Watson Project, <http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/objects-in-focus-winnowing-riddle.html>; the divining of the thief is taken from Grant (1961).

for babies, and also as a receptacle for the first-fruits of the harvest, carried as offerings to the gods. An interactive symbolism easily developed, with the baby representing both the fecundity of the crops to be reborn next year, and the outcome of that fecundity (Harrison 1903, 314). Dionysus, as the baby in the *liknon*, embodies the power, and fruits, of the grain; it seems he was, in some areas, a god of beer (in classical texts he is more firmly a god of wine) (Harrison 1903, 323), which is the processed form of grain. The carrying of a *liknon* of fruits formed part of the wedding ceremony (Harrison 1903, 315), the *liknon* clearly a metaphor for the bride's fruitful womb, which would produce the baby, a metonym of the fruits as he lay in the basket. It is interesting to note that the process of winnowing involved both men and women at different stages. Essentially the first, rougher work of shoveling the grain was undertaken by men, but women took charge of the lighter work of sifting; as so often, it is women who are responsible for the final stages of domestication of the outside world, processing the products of men's labor to become part of the economy of the home. The place of the *liknon* within the female domain thus characterizes the baby Dionysus as also being within that realm: this is realized in his effeminate character (for example, according to Euripides' *Bacchae*, line 353, he is "the girlish stranger"), and his following of maenads ("raving women")—but also in his ineluctable power, of a type that men's force held no sway over (as Euripides illustrates in his *Bacchae*).

The uses of the basket or drum in Scotland and Scandinavia would not have coincided with those in ancient Greece, and hence the spiritual significance would have differed, but the Greek cult exemplifies how the mundane uses of the winnowing sieve might determine such spiritual symbolism; the appropriation by a male divinity of female power, through his association with a female-controlled object and its accompanying symbolism, is, moreover, paralleled by Óðinn's appropriation of the powers of the female-dominated magic practice of *seiðr* and female practitioners, *vǫlur*, one of whose accoutrements, the *vétt*, bears comparison with the *liknon*.

Magical uses of the sieve are, in fact, widespread: in particular, the practice of coscinomancy, divination with a sieve, was commonplace, including within Scandinavia. For example, Hyltén-Cavallius (1864, I §103), presenting the activities of the wise woman, notes (pp. 410–11) how a thief might be detected using a sieve held by two women, with various objects suspended from it, in particular a pair of scissors by which the

sieve is held up in the air; they utter names as they turn the sieve, and when the name of the thief is spoken, the sieve will stop or start turning counter-clockwise.³⁶ From the wider Baltic area, an example of the magic power of the sieve from Poland may be cited. The *Chronicon Montis Sereni*, s.a. 1209, mentions how, when Prince Władysław of Lubusz (on the Oder) was attacked, a witch or diviner (*pythonissa*) filled a sieve with water without it dripping through, and carried this before his army as a sign of (supposedly) impending victory.³⁷ In Finnic areas (Finland, Karelia, Ingria), the sieve (*seula* and variants) was an important apparatus for divination, and other magical uses.³⁸ Divination might be carried out, for example, by placing items such as coins, bread or coals in a sieve, and dangling a piece of yarn from it (e.g. *SKVR* I.4.541, VI.2.6335). The use of the sieve, as was the case in Greece with the *liknon*, also reflected concerns about fecundity and its preservation; thus, in Ingria, when the cows were let out in the spring, they were circled three times by a herdsman with an icon and a sieve holding an egg; the egg was thrown and broken, upon which women sang to St George to protect the herd (the Izhorian Jekaterina Aleksandrova recounted this in 1961). At weddings, the sieve was ritually blessed, and guests drank toasts to the bride and covered it with money as a blessing (see e.g. *SKVR* IV.2.2422). Finland was part of a wide circumpolar region—which does not, however, include Scandinavia—in which the Pleiades were conceived as a sieve (*seulaset*) (Berezkin 2010); the magical uses of the object may thus have had a cosmic and hence mythic dimension. This would not, however, appear to be relevant to a consideration of Scottish and Norwegian winnowing drums, in the present state of our knowledge.³⁹

³⁶ I thank Jan Freya Didur for pointing out this example, among several others.

³⁷ I thank Leszek Gardela for pointing out this example.

³⁸ I thank Kati Kallio for highlighting these Finnic examples.

³⁹ This negative inference needs nonetheless to remain tentative. It is possible to envisage overlapping cultural influences or affiliations in Scandinavia which might make the potential cosmic symbolism of the sieve relevant: the Sámi drum (which was not an agricultural sieve-like instrument) certainly carried cosmic symbolism, and could conceivably have lent such symbolism to the *vétta*, while at the same time if the *vétta* were some sort of sieve, it might attract the cosmic symbolism associated with that instrument in Finland (where Scandinavian contact has been a more or less constant feature) and elsewhere, the cosmic symbolisms absorbed from different directions reinforcing each other. This is, of course, supposition—but is perhaps not implausible, a reflection of the complex way in which cultural currents might be expected to interact.

There is, then, a widespread employment of the sieve for magical or spiritual (fertility) purposes, which makes both the Scottish uses unexceptional in a general sense, and renders it likely that any ancient Norwegian counterpart would have had similar uses.

The Wecht and the Vét

A general background of magical (and fecundity-related) uses of the sieve may be clear, but the particularities of the cases under investigation nonetheless need to be borne in mind: what is of specific interest here is the divinatory use, primarily by women, of a particular sort of “sieve” that could double as a drum, which bore a name, *wecht*, that is potentially formally identifiable as cognate with the Old Norse *vét* (on the etymology, see the appendix below). If there is a connection between the *wecht* and the *vét*, what are the possibilities?

- *Lokasenna* has borrowed the word *vét* from Scots in order to allude to the female divinatory practice associated with the *wecht*, which he ascribes to the Norse *völva* (without this being an actual part of the pagan *völva*'s practice), creating a picture that conflates the Scottish traditions with the Sámi to produce a sort of *female* shaman, credible to the audience as a depiction of the pagan *völva*; this would be assisted by the fact the *wecht* also served as a drum, even if not directly in its divinatory role. To say “borrowed” would, however, be a slight misrepresentation: the word already existed in the sense of “curved lid,” and a perception that *wecht* was ostensibly the same word (whether or not it actually was), but applied to an object with divinatory uses, would allow the poet as it were to expand its meaning to include what it covered in Scotland. It is possible the *wecht* had got its name in the first place as a result of borrowing from the Norse *vét*, “lid,” but its precise origin is not pertinent to this argument, only its ostensible identity with the Norse word.
- The *vét* was part of Norse culture, and *Lokasenna* is the only text to preserve a reference to it. The word was borrowed into Scots during the long period of Viking settlement, and it must therefore have been an object resembling the *wecht*, some form of blind skin sieve. Given the ubiquity of coscinomancy, both the Norse and Scottish versions would have been associated with some form of divination, and this, apart from the commonality of its mundane uses, would have assisted in the word being applied by Vikings to what they found in Scotland.

Of these alternatives, the latter is severely compromised by the total lack of evidence for the *vétt* as a magical drum-like object outside *Lokasenna*, whereas it presents few problems to credit the poet with the sort of inventiveness envisaged in the former. I would be inclined therefore to favor the former scenario; nonetheless, it is worth pursuing the implications of the latter. Even if the *vétt* is actually a product of the imaginative acculturation of foreign elements by the Norse poet, we will gain a deeper insight into the cultural milieu and the associated imagery which led the poet to produce this creative depiction.

The area where the *wecht* and its divinatory uses are found is one that encompassed regions of the heaviest and most persistent Norse influence within the British Isles. The Scottish practices may have preserved something, even if watered down, of magical ways once familiar in Scandinavia too. In the Viking age and subsequent medieval period, Scotland and western Scandinavia in many respects formed a cultural area with close contacts and no doubt with shared customs; it would thus be difficult to elucidate where particular practices originated—Scotland may have preserved customs that eventually died out in Scandinavia, without necessarily having given rise to them. Conversely, even if the word originated in Scandinavia, it is not inconceivable that the notion of the *vétt* as a magical accoutrement originated in Scotland; I have suggested elsewhere (Tolley 2009a, 497–8) that the depiction of the *volva* in *Eiríks saga rauða*, ch. 4, may owe something to an awareness of magical practices in Scotland, and noted that Scotland could be viewed as a likely source for magical activities, as is clear from the placing of the horrid Kotkell and his family in the Hebrides in *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 35–7. A link with Scotland in the tale related in the Eddic poem *Grottasöngur* is also inferred by one medieval writer in the localization of the magic mill Grotti to the Pentland Firth south of Orkney, where tales of the giantesses Fenja and Menja, who turn the mill in the poem, survived until relatively recently (Tolley 2008, 32). Recent research, in particular by Emma Wilby (2006, 2010), has shown how in later centuries Scotland had a rich tradition of magical practice, which has a number of features in common with shamanism as found in circumpolar regions. If Norsemen wished to turn to an exotic, but not too distant, culture to provide examples of magic, Scotland could have served just as well as the lands of the Sámi.

The Scottish evidence clearly involves the evocation of a vision of a being, which acts as a premonition of something to come; it is essen-

tially divinatory, though the warning about making sure the apparition could not shut the door and do harm suggests it may have had an independent existence, like a spirit. The Scottish practice appears, as far as the records go, to have been a “low-level” magical activity, mainly for girls to find out what their husbands would be like. Yet in *Lokasenna*, it seems that divination (or some other magical practice) with a *vétt* was something undertaken by a specialist magical practitioner, a *völva*; it is reasonable to expect, therefore, that the magic was of a somewhat higher and more varied order, of a type that untrained farm maids would not be able to master. It would seem likely that the *völva* interacted with the spirit world, as in Scotland, but whether the interaction was more involved is impossible to tell—though the summoning of spirits by (the male) Þrándr in *Færeyinga saga*, ch. 41, corresponds to the silent visions of the *wecht* summoning, and it may be that (perhaps among other activities) the *völva* called up apparitions, from whose appearance or other features she was able to discern what she needed to know.

In the case of the *wecht*, the sources indicate that the summoning of the apparition was linked to winnowing—although the *wecht* could serve as a drum, we do not have any indication that drumming played a part in the instrument’s divinatory uses; rather, the girls had to winnow nothing, or rather, they were winnowing spirits to them.⁴⁰ We do not have direct evidence to associate the *vétt* specifically with winnowing, but a few observations may be in order. Winnowing is a process of separation between good and bad; to separate in Norse is *skilja*,⁴¹ but this also means (metaphorically, as it were) to discern, to understand. Divination involved the discarding of the chaff, the irrelevant, to reveal clearly what remained, what was actually wanted in terms of knowing the future. Winnowing was also (usually) a matter of letting the wind do the separation; and a wind was understood to be a magician’s mind (*hugr*, conceived as an almost tangible entity), a carrier of supernatural power and knowledge, for example in kennings in Old Norse poetry (Snorri says, *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 70: “huginn skal svá kenna, at kalla vind trollkvenna,” “a kenning is to be made for mind (*hugr*) by calling

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note a possible underlying linguistic pun: in medieval (Irish) Gaelic, “winnowing” is *foscnaid* (and from the same root is derived *scannán*, “membrane”), and a “shade” or “spirit” is *foscad* (Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language, s.vv.: <http://www.dil.ie/>).

⁴¹ Proverbs 20: 8, 26 (RSV).

it ‘a wind of witches’; see Tolley 2009a, 188–9).⁴² The symbolism of winnowing would thus be eminently suited to the divinatory *vétt*, even if it cannot be demonstrated directly that such an association did exist.

A further notable feature about winnowing is that it is an inbetween activity, one that could easily take on a liminal character. Unlike most farm work, it appears, as an overall process, to have been shared between men and women (a glance at Old Norse and Old English references to winnowing indicates a fairly even split between men and women). It was also a half-inside, half-outside job, where the activity took place in a barn, but one with gaping doors to allow the wind in from outside; a barn also lies ambiguously on the boundary between *innan* and *útan stokks*, between the world of women and men respectively inside and outside the house area. Winnowing might also be said to be liminal in a seasonal sense, as an activity that, as the culmination of harvest, marked the passing of summer into winter (even if, as Olaus Magnus indicates in *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*, bk 13 ch. 7, the process itself might be delayed somewhat after harvest).⁴³

I suggest—still on the assumption that it was more than a poetic fiction created by *Lokasenna*—that the *vétt* was more probably an instrument that built upon women’s actual experience, exploiting what they already had control over in order to exercise still greater power in their magical practice, than something *sui generis*, removed from their lived experience. We may observe this in the other main object associated with the *völva*, the staff (see Tolley 2009a, 536–44; on possible Norse magical staffs, see also Gardęła 2008). This is ambivalent in a similar way to a *wecht*. A staff may act as a symbol of power, but for women, the most obvious staff is a distaff, which might be seen as a symbol of her authority *innan stokks*. Through its ambiguous gender assignment, however, the staff, when used in magic, may be viewed as appropriating a power exceeding that normally wielded by women; the same gender ambiguity adheres to the *wecht*. Each piece of apparatus, moreover,

⁴² Cf. the Breton wizards, “who travel on the wind as light as a feather” (F. M. Luzel, *Sainte Tryphine et le roi Arthur*, Quimperlé, 1863, 50, cited in Giraudon 2007, 6).

⁴³ The magical power implicit in liminal activities within the Scandinavian area is clear from other sources, such as the early-thirteenth-century *Västgötalagen* (Wessén 1954, 29): “Þættæ æru ukvæþinsorþ kono. ‘lak sa, at þu ret a quigrindu lösharæþ ok i trols ham, þa alt var iamrifi nat ok dagher” (“These are the terms of abuse against a woman. ‘I saw you ride on a *kvigrind* with hair disheveled, in the shape of a troll, when night and day were equal”).

relates directly to a woman's main roles, as producer of clothing and provider of food; the distaff is the first instrument used in the acculturation of the wild wool into clothing,⁴⁴ as the *wecht* is among the first instruments whereby the raw crops are processed, to then be cooked into food (which, indeed, might then be placed on the *wecht*, acting as a sort of baked-food tray).

The Scots evidence comes from a time when folk customs and farming practices were better recorded than in the medieval period, and hence references to winnowing and its divinatory uses are relatively common—a situation distinctly different from that of Old Norse sources, which scarcely mention winnowing at all. The much higher incidence of the Scots word than the Norse cannot therefore in itself be used to infer any probability of Scotland being the source of the word or practice.

We do not have direct evidence for the blind sieve being put to divinatory use in medieval Norway, other than that of *Lokasenna* (which of course cannot be adduced here if we avoid a circular argument); however, the widespread occurrence of coscinomancy, characteristic of agricultural cultures in many parts of the world, renders something of this sort likely. If it did exist, it would seem unlikely that such divination was directly borrowed between Norway and Scotland, though the shared Norse culture could have resulted in some conflation of traditions. It is most likely that the agricultural and divinatory traditions of Scotland and Norway would have arisen independently, but would have been sufficiently similar for a Norse word to pass over to Scotland for a winnowing implement. The notions of winnowing and separating as symbols of divining the truth are well rooted in both cultures, and do not imply any wholesale borrowing. In contrast, the Sámi did not have an agricultural society; their drum was also rooted in their culture, but in a quite different way, relating to beliefs about the wild reindeer which do not have parallels outside the circumpolar hunting cultures (see, for example, Kjellström 1991). It is more difficult to envisage any close connection between these beliefs and those relating to agricultural implements such as are likely to have been employed in female magical practices in both Scotland and Norway (it has been argued that the implements used by magical practitioners were more likely to have been mundane objects put to special uses than specifically

⁴⁴ Heide considers the links between female magic and making cloth in the latter part of his work (2006).

magical tools—this is a widespread phenomenon, seen for example in the later witch’s broomstick).

If this scenario is correct, we have a situation wherein the designation of the word, and the magical practices associated with it, have survived better in the place of loan, Scotland, rather than of origin, Scandinavia. This need not be specially surprising. In Norse sources, the *vǫlva*—or more generally the female magician—becomes a stereotype image of backward paganism, often situated in a backwoods area, a foil to the young male hero (often additionally characterized as Christian) who is a central pillar of the new society. We see this, for example, in the pagan rites performed by the housewife in a remote farmhouse in *Vǫlsa þáttr*, opposed by the new Christian king, Óláfr (see Tolley 2009b); or in the *vǫlva* of *Eiríks saga rauða*, ch. 4, a foil to the young woman who is ancestor to a series of Icelandic churchmen; or Steinvǫr (mother of the poet Refr), who rails against the missionary Þangbrandr in *Njáls saga*, ch. 102, claiming Þórr had wrecked his ship; or Friðgerðr against Þorvaldr in *Kristni saga*, ch. 2, of whom it is said, in verse, “in aldna rýgr gall um heiðnum stalla” (“the old crone chanted round the heathen altar”). Stereotyped as it is, there may be a perception of the way Christianity was acculturated in Scandinavia: pagan ways would almost certainly have been preserved longest in remote areas, in the hands of women, who, unlike men, had no stake in the new power structures; indeed, the role of soothsayer or magical practitioner represented a position of power for women in the pagan world which had no counterpart in Christianity, and would hence have been a focus of ire for missionaries, both as preserving pagan belief and as affording unacceptable levels of control to females. Unlike the antiquarians of much later Scotland, the Christian writers of medieval Scandinavia were not interested in recording old folk customs as such, and hence only incidental details are preserved, without giving much indication of how widespread such practices may have been.

The situation in Scotland became very different, even if it began from a similar base. One difference from the start, however, was that the country was Christian. Any supposedly pagan customs would therefore not extend beyond folk customs, practiced by the “ignorant” peasantry and tolerated as such. The farm maids with their winnowing divinations were never aggrandized into icons of paganism to be destroyed by iconoclast missionaries; they could continue until antiquarians recorded their ways. Yet the situation may in fact have been more favorable in

Scotland for political reasons too. Particularly under King Hákon IV (reigned 1217–63), Norway turned increasingly towards Europe, rejecting its native traditions in favor of the higher culture of the mainland.⁴⁵ Similarly, from the eleventh century onwards, the Scottish crown turned to its nearest main-stream culture, that of England, and underwent a process of anglicization that increased over the centuries.⁴⁶ This led, early on, to a backlash in Gaelic areas, and resulted notably in the creation of an almost independent kingdom, the Lordship of the Isles, established by the half-Norse Sumarliði (Somarled), which maintained its quasi-independence for a number of centuries, and along with it a culture based on traditional native models. The Gaelic areas were also those with the strongest Norse cultural input, and the culture that was maintained and fostered there certainly drew on both Gaelic and Norse traditions. We may note, for example, how complex court poetry, comparable in many ways with Norse skaldic verse, continued up until about the seventeenth century (indeed, it was not wholly lost until the pillage of the land by the English following the Jacobite defeat in the eighteenth century), many centuries after its equivalent had disappeared in Scandinavia. Although we cannot draw specific conclusions from this, the political and cultural milieu of much of Scotland was such as to facilitate the survival of old traditions. Even if the *vétt* existed merely as a poetic fiction, the perceived depth of tradition preserved in Scotland would have provided a fitting context from which to borrow a feature deemed characteristic of an ancient magical practitioner.

Although the traditions are better recorded in Scotland, they are also fairly limited in scope (largely divination of husbands by farm maids), whereas the context of *Lokasenna* implies a rather “deeper” use of the *vétt* in Scandinavia, linked with an array of magical practices that are ascribed to female magicians in Norse tradition; thus, the Scottish tradition could be interpreted as an attenuated version of that hinted at in *Lokasenna*. We might, then, look at Scandinavia as the center of the cult of the *vétt*, with “officials,” *vǫlur*, in charge, while Scotland merely preserved a watered-down equivalent in the hands of farm maids. This is, however, probably a misrepresentation. What is preserved in

⁴⁵ I discuss this topic, in relation to the creation in Iceland of the corpus of Eddic poetry, the *Codex Regius*, in Tolley 2013.

⁴⁶ The following brief notes on Scottish developments are based on MacInnes 1978.

Scotland is folk tradition, and it is out of folk tradition that the more elevated activities of specialists like *völur* would certainly have grown. The *völva* was a figure of female authority—as far as we may use such a term—who would find it appropriate to manipulate powers exercised specifically by women on farms, using an implement which was part of the maintenance of the well-being of the establishment, in terms of affording its food supply.⁴⁷ If the *vétt* was indeed a winnowing drum, this confirms the rootedness of the *völva* in the life and customs of her agricultural society, one similar to that found in Scotland, but differing rather markedly from the distinctly “other” society of the Sámi—from which, nonetheless, *völur* could have adopted practices to add an exotic, and hence powerful, element to their own procedures. Both Scottish and Sámi traditions thus provide material that either fed into the practices of the *völur*, or were manipulated by poets to create a fictional image of such sorceresses, or a mixture of both.

Implications of a Connection Between Wecht and Vétt

If borrowing did indeed take place, assuming *vétt* in the drum sense to have had an existence beyond the confines of *Lokasenna*, the arguments for Old Norse as the lending language are stronger than for Scots (see the appendix): *wecht* would be borrowed from an antecedent form of *vétt*. For it to be borrowed into Scots in the sense of “winnowing drum,” if this is indeed what happened, *vétt* must have referred to something more or less like a *wecht*, but this could equally be “curved lid” (but probably in a specialized sense) or “winnowing drum/sieve,” or possibly, allowing for divergence of gender, “weight (applied to vessel that holds the weight).” If the *vétt* was additionally associated with divinatory usages, this would lend weight to the probability of a loan taking place. However, the borrowing of a word does not necessarily equate in a simple way to the borrowing of a practice or its associated concepts. Various possibilities seem feasible:

⁴⁷ It should be reiterated, however, that we cannot determine just how central the use of the *vétt* was to the *völva*, or whether other people also used the instrument.

- *Vétt is borrowed from Norse; the practice is common to Norway and Scotland.* *Vétt* denoted a sieve or something similar, drum-like in form (and possibly lid-like, depending on the etymology), probably with mundane uses but in any case employed for magical practices. When the Norsemen encountered a winnowing drum being used in Scotland for divination, comparable in form to their *vétt*, they used the same term for it, whence it spread to Scots. If *vétt* is etymologically connected with winnowing, then the motivation for the borrowing would be more precise and forceful. The *vǫlva* would then have been using something from the rural environment in which she moved, as was the case with the farm maids in Scotland.
- *Vétt is borrowed from Norse, as well as the practice.* On encountering the *wecht*, the Norsemen perceived a similarity to their *vétt* and lent it the name; along with the name, the magical practices of the *vétt* were also passed on. Thus the Scottish divinatory uses of the *wecht* would derive from the earlier practices of the Norse *vǫlva*, of which they are a watered-down version, practiced primarily by farm maids in later times. Given the widespread occurrence of *coscinomancy*, and the well-recorded traditions of magic of many sorts in Scotland, this scenario seems unlikely.
- *Vétt is borrowed from Norse; the practice is borrowed from Scotland to Norway.* While the word was borrowed from Norse, a reflection of the large-scale Norse colonization, the divinatory practice of winnowing was endemic to Scotland. The use of a *vétt* by a *vǫlva* reflects a borrowing of this magical tradition, an appropriation of an outsider method within a practice already characterized as “other”; the sparseness of reference to the *vétt* would be consistent with its being a peripheral (thus perhaps borrowed) activity in Scandinavia, in contrast to its rather more frequent occurrence in Scotland. This scenario seems rather unconvincing, in supposing cultural influence to have gone in the opposite direction to linguistic influence.
- *Vétt is borrowed from Norse; the Scottish practice is fictionally ascribed to Norse practitioners.* A variant of the previous interpretation would be that the mention of the *vétt* in *Lokasenna* (and possibly *Haustlong*, more allusively) was intended to link the *vǫlva* with the magical practices of Scotland for which the area was renowned, judging by some Icelandic sources (not to mention later, British sources, reaching a zenith in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*), even if it did not represent a real practice undertaken by *vǫlur*: thus, Óðinn is characterized as “other” by linking him not so much with the Finnar as with the outlandish female magicians of Scotland, whose practices are ascribed here to native *vǫlur*. This scenario, which was favored above, is credible, but supposes *vétt* to have had a sufficiently wide mundane use to have been loaned to Scots, and then as

it were borrowed back again charged with a magical potency it lacked before; we do not have any direct evidence for the word in senses wider than “chest lid” (neuter) or “weight” (feminine), but it is feasible that the *wecht* could have been designated a “lid” by Norse settlers in view of its general shape.

- Vétt is borrowed from Scots; the Scottish practice is fictionally ascribed to Norse practitioners. This is the same scenario as the previous, but *wecht* is simply an independent word of undetermined origin, which is borrowed as *vétt* in *Lokasenna*; this obviates the need to posit the complexity of a lexical borrowing into Scots preceding a semantic and lexical borrowing by a Norse poet, but it implies an audience familiar with the Scots term, which would suggest a loosely British background to this part of the poem.
- Vétt denotes primarily the Sámi drum, and is applied by Norsemen to the Scottish drum. This theory takes the word *vétt* to denote primarily a curved lid, probably with a handle in the middle to move it by. On encountering the Sámi drum of the northern type, Norwegians applied the term to it in view of its distinct similarity to such lids. At some point the meaning was perceived to be, in this context, “drum used for magical purposes,” which allowed the term to be applied to such drums even when they did not closely resemble the lids that originally inspired the spread of the term—such as (perhaps) south Sámi drums, or the Scottish *wecht*, regarded as a divinatory instrument of this form. It might then be envisaged that the *volva*’s drum was regarded as subsidiary to the more striking Sámi drum, and borrowed its designation from it. More likely would be that the Norse did not really have magical drums at all, and their ascription to *volur* (in *Lokasenna* and by implication in *Haustlong*) was part of a characterization of such magicians as “other,” endowed with accoutrements that properly belonged to a foreign culture renowned for its magical skills; the reality of Norse magicians was perhaps only dimly familiar to the audience, so this subterfuge might work. *Lokasenna* has already been discussed in this respect; I have suggested elsewhere (Tolley 2015) that Þjóðólfr’s *Haustlong*, which uses the *vétt* in a kenning, may owe something to familiarity with Sámi pictorial drums, and it would be consistent if *vétt* in *Lokasenna* were also intended to allude to Sámi practices. Under this scenario, it would still be possible for the Norsemen to have given the term *vétt* to the *wecht* in Scotland on the basis of its similarity, not to any supposed Norse magical drum, but to the Sámi drums they were familiar with that they termed (on this supposition) *vétt*. Such a perception of similarity between Scottish witches and Sámi shamans would not be unprecedented: King James VI of Scotland, who no doubt became familiar with tales of Sámi shamans at the Danish court where he resided for some time, made this very comparison in 1597 in his

Daemonologie (Tolley 2009a, 497–8). However, the motivation for lending a term for a specific piece of (foreign) magical equipment to a mundane farm implement, which happened to have magical uses, is somewhat difficult to recognize, though it is possible.

An obvious choice between these possibilities does not stand out, but on balance the first seems preferable, if we regard the *vétt* of *Lokasenna* as more than a fiction: that the *vétt* was a mundane piece of equipment such as a winnowing drum (as well as being a term for certain types of lid), which was also put to divinatory or magical uses; it resembled the Scottish *wecht* sufficiently to lend it its name. Alternatively, and perhaps preferably, the fourth or fifth options seem the most viable if we seek the origin of *Lokasenna's vétt* in the workings of the poet (and in this case, there is no necessity to see *wecht* as borrowed from Norse at all); this is not, however, to exclude the possibility that the Sámi drum was called a *vétt*, a translation of their own term for it, which the poet was also alluding to.

The Sámi Drum

Although the *wecht* could serve as a drum, we do not find drumming as such associated with the implement's divinatory uses. As a divinatory instrument that is explicitly *drummed*, the *vétt* naturally suggests a connection with the practices of the Norsemen's neighbors, the Sámi, whose shamanic drums certainly served divinatory purposes within a wider context of their use as a shamanic instrument, and they were known to the Norsemen from at least the twelfth century, when they are described in the *Historia Norwegie*, and most probably much further back. A slight word of caution is appropriate, however. Leaving aside the arguments for a connection with winnowing drums, the only indication in *Lokasenna* that the *vétt* was a form of drum is the fact it was struck upon, or tapped—but of course many different objects might be struck in a magical ritual, and *drepa á* might be considered descriptive of what takes place in winnowing, for example.

Nonetheless, the most obvious interpretation is that the *vétt* was a drum-like instrument used in contacting the spirit world, and thus parallels the shamanic drum. An interpretation of *vétt* as a curved lid would strengthen the likelihood of a connection, as this closely paral-

lets the appearance and description of some Sámi drums, but it does not *necessitate* any connection (“lid” could be applied independently to lid-like objects). If we look to either side of the Norwegian area, to regions within the Norsemen’s wider ambit, we find skin drums, used in Scotland for divination and the summoning of apparitions (spirits, as it were), and among the Sámi for divination, and for summoning spirits in shamanic rituals. Indeed, there are even similarities in methods: among the Sámi, the drum was used for divination by placing a ring on it and seeing which depictions the ring ended up on when the drum was gently struck (e.g. Schefferus 1673, 136, citing Samuel Rheen); in Scotland, coins might be used in divination with the *wecht*.

Whilst it is not actually recorded in our meager records, Bäckman and Hultkrantz (1978, 51) consider it likely that the Sámi drum was used to collect spirits in, as was the case in Siberia. When the *vólva* beat the *vét*, she may have been summoning the spirits (residing in the *vét*?) and gaining divinatory knowledge from them or sending them on their mission (Tolley 2009a, 249).

There are, of course, differences: shamanic rituals among the Sámi were the preserve of men, whereas in Scotland and Norway, females predominated in the activities under consideration. The Sámi shaman made use of trance, but the existence of ritual trance in Norway and Scotland is far less clear. The Sámi drummed on the instrument to achieve trance, whereas the *wecht* does not appear to have been used for this purpose, though it was certainly used for mundane drumming; trance could, however, in general terms be described as a summoning of spirits (which might mean calling independent spirits to the shaman, or sending his own free soul out to gain information or perform tasks in the spirit realm), and hence parallel to what took place with the *wecht*.

Norway appears to lie at the intersection of various cultural contiguities, and it would be odd if it did not share features with cultures to either side, but precisely where it coincided with one rather than the other is unclear.

Balancing the Sámi and Scottish Links

It may be helpful to tabulate the occurrence of the most salient features of the *vét* and its parallels in the three cultures considered.

	NORSE	SCOTS	SÁMI
Agrarian culture	+	+	
Skin “drum” ⁴⁸	(+)	+	+
“Drum” has mundane uses	?	+	
Drumming	+	+	+
Divination	+	+	+
Divinatory drumming	+		+
Female divination with drum as norm	+	+	
Trance contact with spirits ⁴⁹	?		+
“Lid” (possible etymology)	+		+
“Weight” (possible etymology)	+	+	
Terms may be related etymologically	+	+	
Terms may be related semantically	+		+
High occurrence of instances		+	+

How far we see a connection with Sámi and Scottish practices depends on what we believe the stronger cultural affiliations of Norwegian society to have been. The geographical proximity of the Norsemen to the Sámi often prompts the suggestion of close links between them; however, such links are more often assumed than proven, and even when demonstrated do not necessarily indicate connections were strong and pervasive. There is reason to seek out connections between Norse and Sámi cultures, but there is also reason to sound a note of caution. The characterization of the *völva* as drumming while practicing magic may well have been influenced by Sámi practices—but if so, a gender reversal has taken place, and the depiction may equally rely on a poet, or wider tradition, conflating information about the use of the Scottish *wecht* with what he knew of Sámi practices.

In contrast, Norse settlement of Scotland was protracted, and borrowing of Norse terms into Scots is an incontrovertible feature of the consequent cultural contact. In the case of the *wecht*, we have an instrument used by females for divination, which moreover corresponds to the Norse *vétt* not only in these respects, but also formally in a lexical sense. We may make suggestions, but do not in fact know if Norsemen used the term *vétt* for Sámi drums, whereas the ostensible etymological con-

⁴⁸ Although I have not so far found a blind skin sieve in Norway, the existence of such an object is implicit in the construction of extant non-blind skin sieves.

⁴⁹ There are hints that some form of trance or possession was believed to occur in Norse, as the *völva* is described as *leikin*, “played with,” in *Völuspá*, st. 20 (see Tolley 2009, 477–8); we cannot tell whether this was accompanied by anything like drumming.

nection between *vétt* and *wecht* suggests that they did apply the term to Scottish winnowing drums. However we explain the link in detail, the initial weight of argument suggests a stronger Scottish–Norse cultural continuity than a Norse–Sámi one. Such continuity, and the likelihood of shared features, are all the more plausible given the similarly agrarian basis of the societies concerned, in contrast to the very different Sámi culture. While elements could certainly be derived from such an alien culture, they are more likely to have remained as exotic and peripheral rather than as central features of a pagan ritual practice. On the other hand, we cannot tell just how central the *vétt* was to such practice anyway, or indeed if it was largely a product of poetic inventiveness; the ostensible links with Scottish traditions, however, tend to suggest that even if it was a poetic figment it had some basis in (foreign) tradition. The word is more likely to be derived from Norse and borrowed into Scots, to allow for the early occurrence in *Haustlǫng*, and in recognition of the widescale borrowing from Norse into Scots, particularly in agricultural terms.⁵⁰ Its derivation could in principle be any of those suggested; the etymology does not greatly impact on the argument.

Yet the Sámi cannot be entirely neglected. Whilst the *vǫlva* must, like her lesser female counterparts on Scottish farms, have served the rural, agricultural community she lived among, we may imagine that the use of what amounts to a drum for magical purposes in Scandinavia might have been part of a play of *realpolitik*, acting as an assertion of authority in the area of magical power in the face of that exercised by the Sámi, to whom the Norwegian laws make it clear people were prone to resort (for divinatory or efficatory magical purposes). It seems on the whole more likely that the primary cultural affinities of the *vétt* lay in Scotland rather than Lapland, but this in no way would have prevented this magical implement being pseudo-Sámized (perceived as being connected with the Sámi), if the politics demanded. Þjóðólfr may have wished to intimate that the prince whose praises he sings in *Haustlǫng* had appropriated the powers of the Sámi by describing his shield in terms that might recall the Sámi drum, as well as making a similar connection in depicting Hildir wielding a *vétt* and thereby achieving victory. *Lokasenna*, most probably a

⁵⁰ See <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/about-scots/history-of-scots/origins/> and [/vocabulary/](#). Norse words are found even for commonplace items, such as *stot* (“bullock”). The falling together phonemically of a Norse-derived *wecht* with the word for “weight” would, in Scots, therefore be coincidental.

later composition that is rooted in ancient mythological traditions, may similarly be hinting at the Norse appropriation of the power of Sámi, and Scottish, magic in ascribing the use of the *wecht*-like and shamanic-drum-like *vétt* to the chief god, Óðinn, while at the same time ridiculing him for it, an attitude that may arguably reflect later, perhaps Christian, concerns. Although *Lokasenna* may be seen as balancing the connections with Scotland and Lapland, in a way appropriate to the geopolitical setting of the Viking age and immediately subsequent period, it is likely that Snorri was inspired by the passage, with its shaman-like drumming, to depict Óðinn as closely similar to Sámi shamans in *Ynglinga saga*, ch. 7 (see Tolley 2009a, 507–13).

Conclusions

Armed with the panoply of uncertainties outlined above, can any conclusions be drawn? Different ways might be found through the maze, but they lie on a spectrum between two polarized positions, which I will set out under two main headings, with a further position lying between, rather than considering the myriad other possibilities. The first position is that the *vétt* is wholly a figment, with no relationship to folk tradition; the second is that it is an integral part of Norse magic tradition; the position between these is that it is a part of folk tradition, but not Norse, and has been maneuvered into a poetic reworking of the depiction of the Norse seeress. The tabulation of features that follows cannot take account of all the subtleties which have been outlined in the arguments above, but may be useful as giving a general overview.

The Cheshire Cat Argument

The Cheshire Cat in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was given to perplexing discussions, before vanishing into thin air, to leave only its grin behind. This would seem an apt metaphor for at least one of the ways of looking at the question of the *vétt*, in which the word remains, staring at us from the text of *Lokasenna*, but a concrete traditional signification of a magical accoutrement vanishes. There are several variants:

CC 1. The phrase *drepa á vétt* stands for *drepa á vitt* and means simply “resort to charms,” a bland characterization of the activities of the *vǫlva*. The word *vétt*, “curved lid,” would be separate, occurring only

in non-magic contexts, including *Haustlǫng*, where the kenning *Hildar vétt* of *Haustlǫng*—the “curved lid of war/Hidr”—is an apt description of a shield.

CC 2. The word *vétt* is taken to have its recorded meaning of “curved lid.” Loki (or rather the poet speaking through him) is concerned to cast contumely at Óðinn, not to relay accurate information about Norse magic—indeed, he may well be deliberately distorting tradition to his own ends here. The events on Sámsey may have been of a warrior kind more than a magical séance, and the events may have involved (a) practicing *seiðr* (for success in battle, for example), and (b) striking on a shield; the lines of *Lokasenna* may be read as “they say that on Sámsey you practiced *seiðr* like the *vǫlur*, and you struck on a shield,” with the latter statement sandwiched before the *vǫlur* to include it within their activities by implication and hence add to the insult of effeminacy. The reason for calling a shield a *vétt* is to allude to the *Hildar vétt* of *Haustlǫng*, and thereby imply a connection with a female, a fate-bestowing valkyrie (a sort of *vǫlva*, we are to infer), and thus again to add to the charge of effeminacy.

As the *vétt* would no longer have any traditional association with magic activities outside the invention of *Lokasenna*, apart from an allusion to a traditional beating on shields as an act accompanying military conflict, there would be no reason to see the Scottish *wecht* as in any way connected; the similarity of words would be merely chance, or possibly the word may still be derived from Norse, but simply in the mundane sense of something that looked like a raised lid.

The chief weakness of CC 1 is that the supposed sense of *drepa á* as “make use of, resort to” is nowhere else recorded (even if it is similar to *slá á*), and *vitt* and *vétt* appear to be kept lexically distinct in the sources.

CC 2 is open to question in the reading of *Lokasenna*’s *vétt* as an allusion to Þjóðólfr’s kenning. This nonetheless does not seem outside the bounds of possibility; it is possible, for example, that *vétt* as a lid occurred in kennings for shields more frequently than our meager remains indicate.

Given these weaknesses, I will pass on to the arguments at the other end of the spectrum (which is not to suggest that CC1 and CC2 are fatally flawed, however).

The Humpty Dumpty Argument

In Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, Humpty Dumpty appropriates the right to assign whatever meaning he chooses to words or phrases, to produce what he terms a "knock-down argument." The second approach to uncovering the significance of the *vétt* involves continual recasting and balancing of parts of the argument, and can sometimes feel it is under Humpty Dumpty's guidance.

The starting point for this argument is to provisionally take the Norse sources to be "reliable"—which is to say we regard them as relaying something about a continuing tradition of the *vétt* rather than being primarily literary fictions.

An existing tradition of the *völva*'s use of the *vétt* need not, however, preclude an intentional poetic hint at similarities with the Sámi or Scots in these practices: it is possible that the practice was not well grounded in Norse magical practice, but the audience was nonetheless willing to accept that *völur* engaged in practices that were familiar from the Sámi or Scots.

HD 1. The *vétt* was integral to Norse magical practice—*Lokasenna* appeals to a real feature of the *völva*'s magic (which is to say one that the audience would recognize as traditionally associated with the practice); Þjóðólfr's *vétt* may also point in this direction, if he is alluding through his kenning to a recognizable figure of a female magician. Similar objects found elsewhere, for example among the Sámi or Scots, could be designated by the same term. We may make a further division:

HD 1A. The *vétt* was a specifically magical object (like the drum among the Sámi).

HD 1B. The *vétt* was a mundane object put to magical uses (like the *wecht* among the Scots).

If the *vétt* was a mundane object, any of the etymologies proposed might work (and Þjóðólfr's *vétt* could be either "lid" or "winnowing drum," as either would suit the kenning equally well); "lid" remains

the most plausible, however.⁵¹ If “winnowing drum” were etymologically correct, it would mean separating off the word in *Lokasenna* from *vétt* as a chest lid, though this need not be a strong argument against it. Whilst the curved lid has been viewed as a strong indication of a connection with especially the northern Sámi drum, this argument is inclined to be inherently circular; in fact, “winnowing drum,” of a type comparable to the *wecht*, would be an equally apt term for a Sámi drum, but more particularly the southern variety. Nonetheless, a derivation from “lid” would also be perfectly apt for a type of winnowing drum or similar implement—the identification of the mundane purposes of the *vétt* does not depend on the etymology.

If the *vétt* was a mundane blind sieve, used occasionally for divination like the *wecht*, then *Lokasenna* would be relating an actual tradition, rather than fabricating it. There could still be allusion to Sámi practices; it is possible, for example, that some basic form of divination with a sieve or the like was traditional within Norse culture, but that contact with the Sámi heightened this practice into something more significant (more robust contact with the spirit world, for example), and aligned its methods, for example to include striking on the drum-like object in the way of a Sámi shaman. In this case, *Lokasenna*'s contumely of ethnically determined otherness would be lessened, in that the object would not be so clearly foreign, but this does not radically undermine the argument.

A major point supporting HD is that if the *vétt* were not already associated with the *völva*, and if *Lokasenna* were relying on poetic rather than folk tradition for the use of the *vétt* (the Cheshire Cat argument), then Loki's attack might have seemed puzzling to unravel—an allusion works more convincingly if it alludes to something familiar rather than creates it. The weaknesses in this argument are that we do not have any mundane uses for the *vétt* recorded (other than in the sense of “chest lid”), and the evidence for the blind skin sieve is rather limited. The borrowing into Scots, however, is far more likely to have taken place if *vétt* did have a mundane use of a type suitable for applying to a

⁵¹ The suggestion that *vétt* is “weight,” however, means that the word in *Lokasenna* is distinct from that in *Haustlong* (where it cannot be feminine); to find two homophones apparently relating to similar objects, each of them with just one occurrence in this sense, is unlikely. In fact, if *vétt* were borrowed by Scots, it would naturally fall together with the word for “weight,” and there is no need to read this situation back into Old Norse; it does not weaken the arguments for *wecht* as a winnowing drum deriving from *vétt*.

winnowing drum; it might be questioned whether “curved lid” would seem specially applicable, unless it had already acquired a sense of something like a blind sieve. Moreover, skin sieves existed in Norway (in recent centuries, and no doubt earlier), and coscinomancy appears to be ubiquitous, so the supposition of some form of divination roughly similar to that in Scotland is not so far-fetched.

HD 2. The magical use of the *vétt* was characteristic of non-Norse cultures, such as the Sámi or Scots (and the term could be applied to such objects in any culture encountered); Norse *vplur* or wise women might adopt such practices. Again, we may divide the category into two: HD 2A. The magical *vétt* had no existence in Norse culture, other than as a borrowed feature. The *vétt* was a term for a chest lid, which was applied in a specialized sense to something foreign, used for magical purposes, that did not (originally) exist in Norway.

HD 2B. The *vétt* was something like a winnowing drum, with a solely mundane use in Norse culture, but served as a convenient term to describe similar objects used elsewhere in a magical capacity. This alternative would seem unlikely, given the more or less ubiquitous nature of coscinomancy, particularly, to mention but the examples mentioned above, among the Sámi (drum divination), Scots (the *wecht*) and later Swedes (with a sieve).

Favoring alternative HD 2A is the absence of evidence outside *Lokasenna* for the use of the *vétt* by Norse *vplur*. The term “lid” could be a translation of the Sámi term for their drum, or it could derive simply from observing that such drums were like curved lids; once established in this sense, the term could be applied to other similar objects, including the *wecht*, which resembled the Sámi drum (the southern, hoop variety in particular), and occasionally served a similar divinatory purpose. This is to a degree a weak point, in that the Norwegian farmers who lent most of the Norse-derived Scots lexeme are rather more likely to have been concerned with mundane objects than peripheral magical usages of these objects.

The Dormouse Argument

In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* the sleepy Dormouse sat between the Hatter and the March Hare, both of them mad, and was maltreated by his neighbors. The Dormouse is a fitting image for the argument that the *vétt* was essentially a poetic amalgam of traditions relating to the

outlandish habits of the Norsemen's neighbors, the Sámi and the Scots. There are varying possibilities within this scenario:

D 1. The *vétt* as a feature of Norse magic was entirely the creation of the *Lokasenna* poet, on the basis of traditions of magic practice among the Sámi and Scots.

D 2. The *vétt* was an object used in Norse magic, but the poet's depiction of its use is heavily informed by Sámi and Scottish practices; disentangling fact from fiction here is of course tricky. (This is the same approach as that given under the HD 1 argument, except that the foreign features are here regarded as poetic figments rather than relating to actual Norse folk practice.)

The lack of evidence for the *vétt* as a magic accoutrement outside *Lokasenna* is perhaps most readily explained by seeing the object as largely a poetic fiction. *Lokasenna*'s attack on Óðinn is based on his acculturation of "otherness"; this is realized implicitly in several ways: primarily (a) as gender otherness: Óðinn is accused of acting like a woman; (b) as sorceror otherness: the accusation of effeminacy is all the more potent for being associated with particular magic practices (magic being another realization of "otherness"); (c) as ethnic otherness: ascribing the use of a drum to magicians may represent an ethnically determined accusation of "otherness," if we assume a familiarity with the practices of either the Sámi or the Scots; the implication is that Óðinn is also acting like a (disreputable and despicable) Finn or Scots diviner.⁵² The inference would be that Loki is engaging in deliberate obfuscation, mixing up what female Norse magicians did with what male Sámi shamans did, or conflating the (male) striking on the Sámi drum with the (female) winnowing divination of the *wecht*, in order to emphasize the scope of Óðinn's self-degradation.⁵³ The application of poetic imagination to the depiction of the *vplva* could, moreover, be part

⁵² The site of Óðinn's magical activities, Sámsey, is an ordinary Danish island, but in the present context Sámsey might be taken as "Sámi isle" (though the Sámi are otherwise recorded under their own name only as *sem(sveinar)* in *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. 12).

⁵³ I have argued elsewhere (Tolley 2009a, 507–13) that the depiction of Óðinn, and his ostensible "shamanic" features, in *Ynglinga saga*, ch. 7, owes much to a familiarity with traditions of Sámi magic, which have been used in an act of artificial (i.e., largely unprecedented in tradition) character-creation. Such an appeal to external traditions need not be confined to *Ynglinga saga*, of course: the same thing may well be happening in *Lokasenna*.

of a tradition, as a comparable process might also be seen as implicit in Þjóðólfr's characterization of Hildir with her *vétt*.

I have rather playfully used some of Lewis Carroll's characters to symbolize the different sets of conclusions that might be drawn about the *vétt*, which our meager sources prevent us recovering much more than a hazy picture of. Chasing down the *vétt* in fact recalls another of Carroll's stories, *The Hunting of the Snark (An Agony in Eight Fits)*—a perpetual quest, using the Bellman's blank chart for guidance, to track down the Snark, which, if successfully completed, merely leads the successful hunter to “softly and suddenly vanish away.” To avoid this eventuality, I will refrain from identifying which of the several theories proposed actually leads to the Snark, observing merely that just as *The Hunting of the Snark* is a work whose meaning resides on a poetic level, so too is *Lokasenna*.

Appendix: Etymology

Vitt

The derivations for *vitt/vétt* mooted by de Vries (1977, s.v. “vitt”) are inconclusive and unconvincing. Pipping (1930, 2–4) seeks to encompass both *vétt* and *vitt/vétt* within a shared etymology, regarding them as variants of one lexeme. He suggests an underlying root from Indo-European *weik-* (“separate, make holy”), seen for example in Latin *victima* and Old Norse *vígja* (“consecrate”). The alternating nominal forms *vétt/vétt* are explicable as developments of **wiht-* varying according to the vowel of the following syllable (Noreen 1970, §110.3: *ih* > *eh* except when the following syllable has long or short *i* or *u*), which would no doubt have been subject to leveling. The verb *vitta* Pipping sees reflected in Swedish dialect *vīta*⁵⁴ (“bewitch”).

Pipping's suggestions would neatly explain all the recorded forms of *vitt/vétt/vétt*. A *vétt/vitt* would, in origin, simply be “a consecrated object.” Old English *wih* (“idol”) and *wiglere* (“soothsayer”) may derive from this root, indicating a possibly long-standing connection with magic or divination, though Norse words clearly derived from Indo-European **weik-* (such as *vé*, roughly “sacred precinct”) relate to the field of cult worship rather than magic. Pipping's ety-

⁵⁴ This is shortened from **vīta*: as preterite *mōtta* stands to infinitive *mōta*, so preterite *vīta* levels its infinitive **vīta* to *vīta*.

mology, however, ignores some of the basic facts about the words concerned, namely that, as recorded, we have at least two words, (a) *vétt/vétt*, which is used for a lid (on shrines and the like) as well as for a drum-like object used by the *völva*, and (b) *vitt*, which is only recorded in magical contexts, with a meaning that cannot be specified more closely than “charm.”⁵⁵ The plural qualifier in *vitta véttir* suggests, as noted, a sense of “creature of charms” more readily than “creature of (magical) drums” (even if a sense “drum” were accepted, it was presumably only aroused by one drum in each case—and there is no contextual justification for seeing drums as involved at all). The *vitt* that laws prohibit keeping in a house is also most easily interpreted as “(physical) charm”; a magical drum would be an anomalously more specialized piece of apparatus than the other items mentioned (even allowing for the staff’s magical uses).

Whilst Pipping’s suggestion of a link with *vígja* cannot be wholly dismissed, another possibility is that *vitt* is simply a back-formation from words like *vitki* (“wizard”), understood by folk etymology as “someone who works with *vitt*” (its actual etymology connects it with the lexical group denoting wisdom).

The Vétt as “Lid”

De Vries derives *vétt* as a chest lid from *vega* (“lift, move,” de Vries 1977, s.v. “vætt 2”),⁵⁶ and notes the Norwegian form *vette*, “handle in the middle of a lid.” He takes the meaning of the Old Norse word to be “das bewegliche; womit etwas bewegt wird” (“something moveable; what something is moved by”). The word exists in Icelandic (*vætt*), meaning a curved lid, or the handle which moves it, as well as Norwegian (*vette*) in a similar sense. The basic meaning in Old Norse would thus appear to be “a moveable (curved) lid (on something that is fairly immovable).”⁵⁷ Strömbäck (1935, 24), as noted, brought to light the Sámi designation of the drum as a “lid”; one Sámi word for a shamanic drum, proto-Sámi **kōmtē* (Lehtiranta 2001, entry 473), in fact means in addition “lid.”

It is possible that *vétt* is more than one word (indeed, *vétt* certainly has a homophone, but feminine rather than neuter, in the sense of “weight”), but it is simplest to take it as one, and hence the basic sense would be “lid,” whatever connotations

⁵⁵ The entry *vittafullr*, supposedly relating to a bag “full of charms,” in Cleasby and Vigfusson’s dictionary, is a spurious misreading of a verse in *Kormáks saga*, which in fact reads “urtafullan” (“full of herbs”).

⁵⁶ *Vétt* would be a variant showing the sporadic Icelandic change of *étt* to *étt* (Noreen 1970, §109).

⁵⁷ Cleasby and Vigfusson (1957) suggest the derivation implies something that moves on hinges; this notion may be dismissed.

that may have had. Strömbäck wished to emphasize possible links with Sámi magic, but it is quite possible that “lid” could refer to some object used sporadically in Norse practices without implying a strong Sámi connection, as this general designation might easily have been applied to objects of this shape independently.

The Vétt as “Weight”

The word *vétt* clearly referred, in some uses, to a heavy lid. Yet *vétt* (*vætt*) has a far more common sense (which indeed appears to be its sole meaning, as far as I can see, in the old Norwegian laws), namely “weight” (feminine, rather than neuter as in the “lid” sense), and in particular a specific measure of weight. This might appear inappropriate for a drum-like object (the interpretation is dismissed without discussion by von See et al. 1997, comm. to *Lokasenna*, st. 24, for example), but this is deceptive, as will be seen from comparable uses elsewhere: in English, for example, measurement terms such as *ton* and *bushel* referred initially to receptacles to hold grain and other materials; in Finnish, a *vakka* was a basket, but also a measure. Many other examples could easily be adduced; in particular, apart from meaning a winnowing drum, the Scots *wecht* was also the common term for “weight.”

Vétt in the sense of “receptacle for a measurement of goods” does not occur. However, the usual word for a sieve or basket, *sáld*, also has the sense of a measurement of grain and the like (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, s.v.; *DONP*, s.v. “¹sáld,” “²sáld”). If the drum-like instrument the *vǫlva* used was normally referred to as a *sáld*, it is possible that the term *vétt*, “weight,” was used as a synonym, with its meaning extended to include the wider senses of *sáld*—that is, “(measure of) weight” takes on the sense of “(blind) sieve” by analogy. This might be a one-off occurrence in *Lokasenna*, undertaken to achieve alliteration with *vǫlva*, but it could also have been in general usage.

However, Þjóðólfr’s genitive “vez” cannot derive from feminine *vétt/vætt* in the sense of “weight.” Þjóðólfr’s usage points to a base sense of “curved lid,” whether this had magical connotations or not, so if *Lokasenna*’s *vétt* is basically “weight,” it is distinct—though this does not wholly preclude a deliberate allusion to it on Þjóðólfr’s part through the use of the similar “lid” word.

Perceptions of what the *vétt* may have been, and the etymology of the word, are opened further by looking outside Scandinavia and turning to Scotland, where the *wecht* was a common implement on farms, bearing a designation which may well be cognate with *vétt*.

The Vétt as “Winnowing Drum”

Given the connections that have been argued between *vétt* and *wecht*, it is worth considering whether there could be an underlying sense of “winnow-

ing.” The word *véttr* has a passing resemblance to the verb for “winnow,” *vinza* (= *vinntsa*), and the possibility of a connection thus seems worth pursuing. The Indo-European root **b²wéb¹-* yields many derivatives in the daughter languages; the basic meaning is “blow.”⁵⁸ It forms the ultimate base for *vinza*, and it gives rise to various words elsewhere in Germanic, for example the Old English strong verb *wāwan* (“blow”), though this verb does not survive in extant Old Norse. Extended forms of the root are found, including those in *-d-*, such as Old High German *wāzan* (“blow”), and *-t-* as in Avestan *vātō* (“blow”); the Latin *vannus* (“winnowing basket”) is also derived from a *-t-* form (< **wat-nós*). Watkins (2000) lists the headword *wet⁻¹* (“blow”) under a separate entry (related to **b²wéb¹-*); this would yield Germanic **weþ-* (*/*weð-*), to which we may conceive the same formative suffix, *-þ-*, being added as is postulated in the derivation from *vega* (*-þ-* takes the form *-t-* after *g*). A form **weþþ-* would develop to **vett-* (Noreen 1970, §241).⁵⁹ Alternatively, and more simply, *vett* could be an early Norse back-formation from *vinza*, formed (clearly) after early Norse syncope had taken place, the verb being interpreted as meaning “use a *vinnt*”: **vint* would regularly yield *vett* (Noreen 1970, §§266/2, 110/1). The word *vett* would then be an ancient designation of an instrument for winnowing, parallel to Latin *vannus*. The general absence of references to winnowing in Old Norse sources would explain the lack of occurrences of any term relating to it; additionally, it is possible the word was largely archaic by the time of written records, surviving as a relic in poetic contexts. Even if this tentative etymology is rejected, it remains a possibility that a general sense of “moveable item” (or “item that moves, carries”) for *véttr* developed into the distinct senses of chest lid and winnowing drum.

The Véttr and the Wecht

The Scots *wecht* corresponds formally to the early Norse antecedent form of *véttr*, namely **wext*. Etymology may thus reinforce the likelihood of the connection implied by the similarities in the magical uses of the drum-like objects. However, the etymological links are not straightforward, and call for some discussion. The Scots and the Norse words may seem to be one and the same—but if indeed they are, which has borrowed from which? The most obvious solution,

⁵⁸ The etymological observations here are derived from Pokorny (1959, s.v. “*au(e)*”⁻¹⁰, *auē(o)*-, *uē-*”)

⁵⁹ The formation could not be pre-Germanic, since Indo-European **wet-t-* would yield Germanic **wess-* (see Ringe 2006, §3.2.3), unless the geminate was preserved on the analogy of other occurrences of **wet-*.

particularly in view of the frequency in Scots but paucity of reference in Norse, might initially appear to be to suppose a borrowing from Scots (late Anglian English) into Old Norse—and this suits the scenario in which *Lokasenna* is manipulating foreign traditions in its depiction of the *volva*—but, if the *vétt* relates to something concrete in Norse culture, for various reasons the direction of loan is more likely to have taken place in the opposite direction.⁶⁰

- Norse contact with Scotland was well established by 900 and continued for a number of centuries, so there is a broad time-span for any borrowing of loan-words to have taken place. In the ninth century, Scotland had five languages spoken within it: a diminishing Pictish in the north-east (it seems to have been reasonably close to the Cumbric spoken further south, and had probably been displaced by Gaelic by some time in the tenth century), an expanding Gaelic in the west and south-west, Cumbric (like Welsh) in Strathclyde, English in the south-east, and pockets of Norse in various areas; the further back one goes the less prominent the position of English (ancestral to Scots) was. A borrowing from Scots at this early time therefore remains somewhat unlikely.
- Early Scots shows fairly heavy borrowing from Norse (whereas the converse does not appear to be demonstrable). There were two major influxes of Norse loanwords, one directly from Scandinavia, and a later one from Anglo-Danish spoken in the Danelaw. Loanwords from Norwegian (rather than Danish) are, as far as it is possible to distinguish them, entirely rural in nature, whereas Danish words include urban items as well. If *wecht* is a Norse loan, it falls into the category of earlier, Norwegian loans.⁶¹
- If the Norse *vétt* is one word rather than two (or more), it seems to have a broader sense than the Scots *wecht*: it includes not only the divinatory tool of the female soothsayer, but also a particular sort of lid (without magical connotations). It is easier to envisage Scots borrowing a Norse word that meant

⁶⁰ The Gaelic form *guit* presents difficulties itself; as Gaelic philology is scarcely my area of expertise, I will simply make a few preliminary remarks. The word does not appear to have cognates outside Scotland, and a Celtic etymology seems open to question. It could possibly be a borrowing of Scots *wecht*, though this requires a number of assumptions about the rendering of the sounds involved. A further possibility is that, like *wecht*, it is borrowed directly from Old Norse. From whatever source, the initial *w-* would have been realized as *ghw-*, and then “unlenited” and vocalized to *gu-*, with the original *e* then being realized as a glide, resulting in a palatalized *t* (written as *it*). As Gaelic has pre-aspiration, the final *-t* is actually *-ht*, as in Norse.

⁶¹ For a fairly detailed account of the development of Scots, see the web page of the *Dictionary of the Scots Language*, <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/about-scots/history-of-scots/origins/>.

generally any curved-lid-shaped object, including a specialized sense of “divinatory drum,” in reference to the lid-shaped winnowing drum used for divination (without at the same time bringing in any reference to shrine lids and the like), than to suppose that a term for a winnowing drum in Scots should first be borrowed, particularly because of its divinatory role, and then extended in Norse to include chest and shrine lids. If *vétt* is actually two words, of course, one of them meaning a curved lid and the other a winnowing drum, this point scarcely applies, but given the general direction of borrowing, it would seem less likely that the word has moved from Scots to Norse than *vice versa*.

- The Scots word goes back at least to the twelfth century. In principle, this is old enough for it to have been borrowed into Old Norse and to appear in our sources, all of which are later, in terms of their extant written forms. If we accept the *vétt* of Þjóðólfr as genuine (not a later scribal invention), and as being the same as that of *Lokasenna*, however, this would require a borrowing earlier than c. 900. It is feasible, however, that Þjóðólfr’s *vétt* is “lid” while the *vétt* of *Lokasenna* is something different, only the latter being borrowed from Scots. This would seem rather unlikely.
- A derivation of *vétt* from *vega* gives an early Norse form **weχt*; although Norse *-χt-* had become *-tt-* by around 900, this is hardly a *terminus ante quem* for the time of borrowing, since either language could use the analogy of similar words to create correct correspondent forms for some time after this. In any case, given that pre-aspiration probably goes back to Common Scandinavian (Page 1997), a Norse form **we^ht* is likely to have given Scots *wecht* at dates considerably later than 900. A derivation from **weþ-* would give early Norse **wett*, without *χ*; but again, the likely presence of pre-aspiration would give a pronunciation as *we^ht*, which would be perceived as *wecht* in Scots. This would, however, probably imply a time of borrowing after *-χt* had become *-^ht*, when the earlier *-χt* and *-tt* had fallen together. Conversely, Scots *wecht* would easily have been interpreted as *we^ht* (giving *vétt*) by Norse speakers. In short, the forms of the words cannot determine the direction of borrowing for the relevant period.
- Tracing the form *wecht* back before about 1100 becomes problematic; an early Old English **weht* would have become **wiht* by palatal umlaut (Campbell 1959, §304), as happened with *wiht* in the sense “weight.”⁶² The vowel in

⁶² If by some means the form **weht* had arisen, it would have been subject to various further sound changes, difficult to trace (particularly as records are sparse); for example, Northumbrian Old English tended to shift *we-* to *wæ-* or *wæ-*, and *eht* to *æht* (Campbell 1959, §§319, 327, 328), though forms like *uerc*, *cneht* (Campbell §227) show **weht* as plausible (this would be a smoothed Anglian form: Campbell §222).

English *weight*, Scots *wecht* (in the same sense) was only altered in Middle English from *i* to *e* under the influence of the verb (and compare the vowel of the more common Old English substantive for “weight,” *wæg*). The form **wiht* should give Old Norse **vitt*, not *vétt*,⁶³ as is required in *Haustlong*. We would not expect a form *vétt* in Þjóðólfr if this originated from a postulated Anglian form **wiht*. It is possible, of course, that *wecht* derives from some form in Old English such as **wæht* which would allow for an early borrowing as *vétt* in Norse,⁶⁴ but the arguments for such an etymology are tenuous, and the likelihood of a borrowing into Norse at this early date is, as noted, low.

- A *wecht* is both a winnowing drum and a weight (of grain etc.). A semantic shift from “weight” to a specific piece of equipment in which a weight of goods could be held seems inherently implausible, though not impossible.⁶⁵ A separate origin for the drum sense seems more likely; this origin could either be an internal linguistic matter, or the word could be borrowed. An origin within English is suppositious, in contrast to the documented existence of a Norse

⁶³ It is tempting to see the period of shift from Scots **wiht* to *wecht* as potentially being able to give rise to both Old Norse forms, *vitt* and *vétt*, but, as noted, there is little to suggest that the two words are actually connected.

⁶⁴ An Old English **wæht* might later (eleventh century) be shortened to *wecht*. Given that in Old Norse short vowels were in any case lengthened before *tt* < *χt* (Noreen 1970, §124/1), the Old English vowel length would make no difference; **wæht* would appear as *vétt* (*vétt*). The derivation of **wæht* would require investigation, but if feasible, this would allow for an earlier borrowing of the term into Old Norse. David Stifter (pers. com.) has suggested a link with the word for “blow,” appearing in Old English as *wāwan*, though the formation is obscure; he compares German *Wächte* (“drift”), apparently derived from *wehen*—though this is “blown material” rather than an instrument for or involved in blowing. Meid (1967, §145) notes the suffix *-ixta-*; potentially a form like **wā-ixta-* might give **wæht*, but examples given do not illustrate its use as anything but as a denominal adjectival suffix.

⁶⁵ An exhaustive study would need to be undertaken to demonstrate that the name of a vessel is primary, and gives rise to a sense of what is contained in the vessel, rather than the name of the vessel developing from the measure of goods it holds. A perusal of terms in *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* tends at least to support this principle: for example, the *lippie* was primarily a unit of measurement, but was occasionally used to indicate the vessel holding the given amount; its probably etymology, however, points to the sense of “basket” being primary; the *peck* was similarly primarily a measurement, but occasionally used for a vessel; its etymology is uncertain, so the earliest primary sense cannot be determined. Whilst an unusual process might have taken place such as that suggested above for Norwegian, whereby a general sense of “weight” could develop into the name for a container by analogy in the use of synonyms, there seems no evidence for supposing this in Scots; and if we turn to Gaelic, none of the several terms used for winnowing drums or sieves means simply “weight.”

word which corresponds to the Scots form. Whatever their origin, given the words for the drum and for weight naturally become homophonous in the course of historical phonological development, the emergence of a sense of “weight” from “a *wecht* (of grain etc.)” would seem inevitable.

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Studies on Turkic Mythology: New Sources

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In the last three decades Turkologists began to study mythology increasingly. A number of dictionaries, monographs, and articles on the mythology of Turkic peoples have been published. We now have dictionaries, monographs, academic and popular publications on Azerbaijani (Şükürova 1997), Bashkir (Kotov 1997, 2006; Khisamitdinova 2002, 2010, 2011; Xesëyenov 2003; Aminev 2005; Suleïmanova 2005), Kazakh (Kondybaï 2005, 2008–11), Tatar (Urmanche 2008–10), Turkish (Ögel 1971–95), Chuvash (Salmin 2007), Sakha or Yakut (Aleksëev 1987–8, 1992) mythology, as well as the mythological worldview of Southern Siberian Turks (Sagalaev 1991). Important works have been published on the reconstruction and description of Old Turkic mythology along with its vocabulary (Kliashtrornyi 1981; Bisenbaev 2007; Stebleva 2007). Among those we should include a large collective monograph by the Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences edited by È. R. Tenishev and A. V. Dybo (2006) which, along with other thematic vocabulary groups lists names of characters, artifacts, objects of Turkic mythology.

In recent years, much work has been done to publish mythological texts. Individual books, as well as collections of folklore texts have been published on the mythology of the Kazan Tatars (Gyïmanov 1996–8), Bashkirs (Sultangareeva and Suleïmanov 2010; Khisamitdinova 2011), Sakha (Oyunsky 2007), and other Turkic peoples. Sakha researchers have prepared and published the Sakha heroic and mythological epics (*olonxoxo*) in all the official UNESCO languages due to its inclusion in the “Masterpieces of the Oral and Non-Material Intangible Heritage of Humanity” (Oyunsky 2014). It is gratifying to note that the texts and Bashkir mythological epics (*qobayır*) saw print not only in Bashkir, Russian, but also in English, German, Turkish, French and in other tongues.

In recent years, research has been carried out on the formation of terminology of Turkic mythology. Terms like “myth,” “mythology,”

“mythopoeitics,” “mythonym” have become part of the research on Turkic folklore and literary criticism, ethnography, philosophy, art history and linguistics. This suggests that the study of Turkic mythology today has taken shape as a discipline contributing to the field of reconstruction of the oldest concepts of mythological ancestors of Turkic-speaking peoples of both the Russian Federation and other countries.

Most Turkologists have now accepted the reconstruction of ancient deities, although there are some differences in the definition of their functions. For example, in recent studies by A. V. Dybo (2009), the Turkic deity Tengri is treated as a deity of oaths and public treaties.¹

Judging by recent studies as well as from the content of the two-volume encyclopedia of mythology edited by S. A. Tokarev (1987–8), mythological concepts of creation, the three layers of the universe, the origin of the Turks, etc. have become generally accepted reconstructions. However, these reconstructions are mainly made based on materials known from the Old and Middle Turkic written sources, and from folklore of the South Siberian Turkic peoples and that of the Chuvash. Unfortunately, mythological epics are still overlooked, as are the minor genres of folklore of the Bashkir, Kazakh and Kyrgyz, and those of a number of other Turkic peoples. Meanwhile, folklore of these peoples could be an additional source for reconstruction of mythological beliefs, mythical and mythological characters, objects and items of Turkic mythology.

For example, reference to the mythological epics (*qobayır*) of the Bashkir, in my view, would contribute to the picture of the three-layer universe in Turkic mythology. According to the written sources, the Universe consists of three levels: the upper, middle and the lower one. The upper region of the world is the heaven where deities headed by the supreme God Tengri and his wife, the Goddess Umay live. The middle world, according to the Turkic inscriptions, is the land on which “the sons of men” live. The lower world is hostile to the upper and middle worlds. It is Erlik’s realm, the Lord of Hell, the nether regions (Kliashtornyi 1981, 125–31; Basilov 1987–8a, 537). The Universe is described similarly in the mythologies of South Siberian Turks, too (Potapov 1987–8).

In the Bashkir epics, *Ural Batır*, *Aqbuđ-at*, *Zaya-tüläk* and *Huw-bılıw* and elsewhere, the universe also consists of three layers: the sky, the land and

¹ I wish to express my gratitudes to Anna V. Dybo for sharing this piece of information with me and sending her paper. *Editor-in-Chief*.

underwater, and the underworld layers, which have their own inhabitants. For example, in the epic *Ural Batır*, immortal celestial beings, namely, Samraw, the god of the skies and birds, and a goddess, his wife—in some sources Qoyaś, the Sun, while on some other sources, Ay, the Moon—their daughters, the swan Homaı, and her sister, the duck Ay-hılıw, as well as two heavenly horses, Aqbuđ-at and Harısay live in the upper world.

According to some Old Turkic written sources, the middle world is populated by human beings. This is also evidenced by many texts of folklore among the Turkic-speaking peoples.

Protecting spirits, who live in the vicinity of people in the middle world, are represented in large numbers in the mythology of almost all Turkic peoples. In particular, more than a hundred names of protecting spirits, patrons of various objects of the world and of human beings, occur in Bashkir mythology (Khisamitdinova 2011, 282–4). They are the “protecting spirits of the mountains” (*taw eyäbe*), “protecting spirits of the forest” (*urman eyäbe* or *şüräle*), “protecting spirits of the waters” (*hıw eyäbe*) and so on. People living in the Middle World communicated closely with the protecting spirits. Therefore, protecting spirits have particular names. Among others, the following names are known in Bashkir mythology: *Hıw-inäbe*, ‘Spirit of Water’, *Hıw-bikä*, ‘Mother of Water’, *hıw eyäbe Solayman* ‘Spirit of Water Suleiman’, *hıw anahı Hılıw-bikä* ‘Mother of Water Hılıw-bikä’ and others (ibid. 369–72).

According to the folklore of the Turkic-speaking peoples, protecting spirits, or spirit patrons can take different shapes. For example, protecting spirits of the Yamantau and Yugamyshtau Mountains, according to mythological Bashkir legends, could be seen by people in the form of a duck or two ducks. As the legend goes, the master spirit of the mountain looks of a bear (Nadrshina 1987, 38, 44).

Protecting spirits, or spirit-patrons could be linked to a specific clan or tribal group, ancestral territories, or settlements; they provided well-being and vitality. Therefore, people worshiped them, some considering them to be ancestors or cousins. For example, in the epic *Ural batır* there are lines narrating how the swan cult had appeared among the Bashkir:

They banned hunting them [the swans]
 Not to catch the noble birds
 They agreed among themselves
 That’s how these birds have grown in number.

And that's how the meat of swans
Has been a taboo to all forever. (Nadrshina 2005, 333)

The existence of similar conceptions has been reflected in folklore texts of many Turkic-speaking peoples. In the three-layer world of Turkic mythology, the nether world is an underground, underwater world. The lord of this underworld in South Siberian Turkic mythology is Erlik, and in the Bashkir epics is *Šülgän* the Spiteful, who is one of the sons of the first man on Earth. Features of *Šülgän* are given in the epic *Ural Batır* epic:

From childhood on you grew [into] an insidious villain,
Forbidden blood thou did drink,
Neglected the Word of parents Anger alone ruled thee,
Black with all thy destiny;
With demons swam thou in human blood,
The whole earth thou did flood with water,
Burned it with a fiery veil;
The country in a grand shame you plunged.
Many people drowned in water. . . (Nadrshina 2005, 312–3)

According to another Bashkir epic, the *Akbuđ-at*, the underwater world is inhabited, along with King *Šülgän*, by *Šülgän's* daughter, *Närkäs*, and with demons, snakes, a special breed of horses (*ala* 'mottled', *qola* 'piebald'), bulls, cows, as well as the dead and the forces of evil. According to legends and mythological tales of the Bashkir, the spirit of death, *Ülem eyäbe* also dwells in the nether world, and is mentioned as one of Bashkir twelve deities by the famous Arab traveler, Ibn Faḍlān (Togan 1939, 36; Kovalevskii 1956, 130–1).

The above facts encourage studies of Turkic mythology to expand its source base. Drawing materials from epics, small genres of folklore, written sources of different ages may shed light on many problems least investigated in Turkic mythology. For example, using materials on the Bashkir and the Sakha, that is, peoples resettled at great distances without contacts with each other at least for more than a millennium, allows one to raise an issue on the common Turkic origin of ideas about the universe. When you consider that mythological beliefs about the three worlds besides Turkic and Mongolic myths have also been recorded in the mythologies of Manchu-Tungus and Finno-Ugric ethnic groups, as well as in the Scythian mythology, it is possible to make an assump-

tion on the origin of the earliest conceptions of mythological Turkic beliefs about a three-layer universe. The researchers of Paleolithic cave paintings found in Šulgän-taš Cave came to the same conclusion. In particular, conceptions of the ancient inhabitants of the Southern Urals on the three levels of the universe, according to V. G. Kotov (2006, 408), had been reflected in the story of the cave drawings in Šulgän-taš Cave.

The antiquity of mythological conceptions of the three worlds demonstrates the need of a reconstruction of ancient Turkic characters of every level of their universe. As mentioned above, various works have begun to reconstruct the ancient pantheon of Turks and their pandemonium. From a wider common Turkological background, using data tapped from Old Turkic written records and from the mythologies of the Turkic peoples of Siberia, the figures of Tengri, Umay, Yer-Sub, Erlik, etc have been reconstructed. However, the number of deities of Turkic mythology should be much higher. For example, Ibn Faḍlān—the Arabic writer of an account of the embassy sent by the caliph al-Muqtadir to the king of the Bulgars on the Volga—mentions twelve gods of the Bashkirs (Canard 1971):

Some of them claim that there are twelve lords, a Lord of Winter and a Lord of Summer, a Lord of Rain and a Lord of Wind, a Lord of Trees and a Lord of Men, a Lord of Horses and a Lord of Water, a Lord of Night and a Lord of Day, a Lord of Death and a Lord of the Earth. The Lord who is in the sky is the most powerful of them, but he is in concord with the others, so that each approves what his companion does. God is infinitely above the beliefs of these lost souls! (Togan 1939, 36; Kovalevskiĭ 1956, 130–1; English translation after Lunde and Stone 2012, 24)

Information on seventeen deities among medieval Volga Bulgars was also preserved. Among these are gods of the sky, sun, fire, deity of the day, divine beings of a tree (forest), the moon, water, night, wind, thunder, rain, earth, death, drought, deities of animals and of life (Miftakhov and Mukhamadieva 1994, 31).

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century researchers wrote about forty beneficial deities of the Chuvash. In recent works, about 200 divine beings occur in Chuvash mythology (Basilov 1987–8b). Up to a hundred deities are mentioned in Tatar mythology (Gyĭmanov 1996–8, 1: 37, 38). It is interesting to note that in the mythology of the Buryats—whose culture is similar to that of the South Siberian Turks—ninety-nine

deities are recorded of which fifty-five are considered to be good, and forty-four evil, dark deities. These facts indicate that it is time to compile a full list of the names of Turkic deities in Turkic mythology. Of course, an attempt to draw up a comprehensive system of Turkic deities is not an easy task. Perhaps even a list of the highest pantheon compiled would be incomplete because each Turkic ethnic group was created on a common basis of their deities and their names. As an example, the names of deities of the Bashkir epic *Ural Batır* (superior deity Samraw) and *Šülgän* (god of the underworld) can be cited which correspond to *Ülgen* and *Erlık* of the South Siberian Turks respectively.

However, despite difficulties, Turkic mythology is challenged to undertake the task of drawing up a consolidated list of names and descriptions of deities of all the Turkic peoples to define a reconstruction of the all-Turkic characters of the Turkic pantheon, and to determine the location of each of them in a three-layer universe. In addition to written sources, the reconstruction of the ancient deities of Turks mythological stories and legends on protecting spirits can be used.

Protecting spirits in Turkic mythology are guardians of various objects, places, natural elements, spaces, objects, days and other time periods. For example, the patrons and custodians of waters, among the Bashkir were the water spirits *Hw-eyäbe* or *Hw-inäbe* 'Mother Water', *Hw-qıdı* *Hw-bılıw* 'Mermaids', *Kül-eyäbe* 'Protecting Spirit of Lakes', *Šismä-eyäbe* 'Master of Springs', etc. The spirits of water appear in mythological stories and epics as inhabitants of the lower world. Therefore, they are mainly associated with black color in the epic literature. In particular, the spirit owning the lake *Aslykul* appears in a black robe, and a black falcon sits on the pommel of his saddle. At the same time, in a number of mythological legends, stories and epics of the Turks a water fairy or the daughter of the master of waters appears as a beautiful girl, combing her long golden hair with a golden comb. For example, a brave lad *Zaya-tüläk* comes across such a character in the epic *Zaya-tüläk and Hw-bılıw*. Gold and red colors in Turkic mythology are also associated with the otherworld. Despite water spirits being associated with the lower world, in Turkic mythology they are the source of man's well-being: they provide food, heal from disease, warn of forthcoming troubles and misfortunes. Sometimes the protecting spirit of water could be angry with a person. In this case, it sends floods, dries wells and other waters, it can drag away a man to the bottom, send down diseases and so on, so there are a lot of Turkic taboos and rituals associated

with water. For example, the Khakas would arrange a public oblation for the protecting spirit of water. The Bashkirs and Tatars who lived on riversides or near other water bodies carried out rain-making ceremonies during which they sacrificed black sheep, poured water and would throw each other into water. The Bashkir epic *Ural Batır* recorded a ritual of human sacrifice dedicated to the well in which the king was once washed as a child. Spirit masters and their daughters could enter into marriage with human beings. However, this type of marriage led to the death of both the human and the spirit. For example, in the Bashkir epic *Zaya-tüläk and Hıw-hılıw*, a young man, *Zaya-tüläk* falls in love and marries *Hıw-hılıw*, daughter of the protecting spirit of water. However, they could live neither on the earth nor underwater, and thus both of them die, because, as mentioned above, a human person is a member of the middle world, and the spirit master of water belongs to the netherworld. Similar views have been noted among the Turks almost about all spirit masters.

Along with the host spirits in the Turkic mythology there were also deities of elements or objects. For example, the Chuvash know such deities as *Şıw Turri* 'water deity', *Warman Turri* 'god of the forest', *Şır aşşe* 'deity of the earth', *Wut* or *Wut ama* 'god of fire' and others (Salmin 2007, 654).

Bashkir mythology has the following mythical figures: *Yer Tängre* (deity of the earth), *Ut Tängre* (god of fire), *Agas Tängre* (god of the forest, (lit. god of the tree), *Yel Tängre* (god of the wind), etc. Beside the *tängre* and *eyä*, terms like *ata* 'father' (*yer ata*), *ana* (*yul anabı*), *inä* 'mother' (*hıw inäbe*), *xuża* 'master' (*yamgır xużaıı*), *batşa* 'king', 'lord' (*kük batşaıı*), *babay* 'grandfather' (*hıw babay*) and others are used in the dialects.

In summary, we can say that sources for the study and reconstruction of mythological concepts and characters of the Turkic mythology are numerous. Putting the latter into circulation and making use of them can shed more light on the genesis of the original Turkic system of beliefs.

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Book Review

EGON WAMERS (Hrsg.) *Bärenkult und Schamanenzauber. Rituale früher Jäger*. Eine Ausstellung des Archäologischen Museums Frankfurt in Zusammenarbeit mit den Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen Mannheim und dem Neanderthal Museum Mettmann. Regensburg: Verlag Schnell & Steiner, 2015, 120 pp. ISBN 978-3-7954-3082-5.

The subject of the catalogue discussed here, which accompanies the exhibition of the same name in the Archäologisches Museum Frankfurt (5 December 2015 to 28 March 2016), is various expressions of belief of Eurasia and the circumpolar regions in the Neolithic period and their archaeological traces, as well as “equivalents” in cultures of northern Eurasia (Fennoskandia and Northern Siberia) in historical times. The co-author and editor of the book, Egon Wamers, here establishes—not entirely without justification—a connection between “Bärenzeremoniell, Hirschtanz sowie Ren- und Elchkult” (“bear ceremony, deer dance, reindeer and elk cult”) and the “religiös-schamanischen Ritualen zahlreicher indigener Jägervölker” (“shamanic religious rituals of numerous indigenous hunting peoples”) of the regions in question. He particularly points out how very old such notions are: “Denn die Verehrung von Bären und Geweihträgern, verbunden mit schamanischen Ritualen, ist schon für die Altsteinzeit mit dem Auftreten des modernen Menschen in Europa vor etwa 40 000 Jahren überliefert” (“Since the worship of bears and antlered animals combined with shamanic rituals can be traced back to as early as the Palaeolithic Age with the emergence of modern humans in Europe about 40,000 years ago”), as stated directly in the blurb of the book). Admittedly, these statements are neither undisputed—to which no reference is made in the book—nor unproblematic. This is due, not least, to the sometimes very direct connection between expressions of belief and their relicts as well as the connection between such expressions and relicts from the Stone Age and cultures that are tangible through written sources. This is similar to the approaches of various advocates of “New Archaeology,” for example, in

which findings from recent ethnic groups are used to draw conclusions about prehistoric conditions.

After an opening message by the Swedish ambassador, Lars Danielsson (pp. 9–10), a foreword by the editor (pp. 11–12) and introductory remarks by the latter, particularly on shamanism (pp. 15–17), the book is divided into four parts, which are followed by the actual catalogue penned by Matthias Dieler and Liane Giemsch (pp. 105–12), a bibliography (pp. 113–7) and a list of illustrations (pp. 118–9). In the first part, “Mensch und Bär in der letzten Eiszeit” (“Humans and bears in the last ice age”), Wilfried Rosendahl and Doris Döppes consider the “Höhlenbärenkult” (“cave bear cult”) in the Palaeolithic Age (pp. 19–28) and Giemsch looks at humankind in the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic periods (pp. 29–31). The second part, by Bärbel Auffermann and Viviane Bolin, addresses Siberian shamanism (pp. 33–9). In the third part, Wamers discusses the bear ceremony of the circumpolar hunting peoples (pp. 41–83). This part includes photographic documentation on the bear ceremony of the Nivkh from the year 1934, which is presented here for the first time (pp. 73–7) and was handed over to the Department of Anthropology of the Naturhistorische Gesellschaft Nürnberg by Č. M. Taksami (1931–2014) in 1991. The subject of the fourth part, written by Giemsch and Wamers, is the worship of the cervids among the early hunters and the reindeer cult of the Saami (pp. 85–101).

Impressive due to its abundant illustrations alone, the book does, however, contain not a few minor errors and “rough edges.” For example reference is consistently made to “Bärenkult” (“bear cult”), including in the book’s title, for the Stone Age context. In the opinion of the reviewer, this is a little exaggerated, even if one takes into account the widespread prevalence of and correlations with, for example, the bear ceremony in later times. Here it would be more appropriate to speak of “bear cults”—which may feature certain common traits. In one conclusion (p. 27), Rosendahl and Döppes also observe that it would be going too far “von einem ‘Höhlenbärenkult’ als festem Zeremoniell und weitverbreiteter Tradition im Paläolithikum beziehungsweise der letzten Eiszeit zu sprechen” (“to speak of a ‘cave bear cult’ as a fixed ceremony and widespread tradition in the Palaeolithic Age or the last ice age”). Furthermore, small slips can be noted among the ethnonyms. For example, the Swedish ambassador Danielsson writes in his opening message (p. 9) of the “. . . heute Saamen genannten Lappen” (“. . . Lapps who are today called Saami”), which is, of course, rather misleading,

since “Lapps” is a xenonym, whereas “Saami” is the autonym and the members of the ethnic group in question have not just started calling themselves that in recent times. In other places, too, the use of auto- and xenonyms together seems to have led to several “inconsistencies”—on p. 70, for example, “Giljaken” (“Gilyaks”) as the xenonym equivalent of “Niwchen” (“Nivkhi”) is given in brackets, whereas in the case of the Nānay, the people’s name for themselves comes in brackets after the xenonym “Golden” (“Goldi”), this time not in brackets. Also slightly confusing is the rather archaic-seeming designation “Ketó” (instead of “Kéto”, as stated in the book) for the Kets on the map (on the inside of the cover). It seems to have originally been adopted from Russian (Findeisen 1929) and is occasionally found in older literature (such as in Findeisen 1931, 1937; Paproth 1962). Regarding the shaman crown of the cervide type (which is, incidentally, a term coined by the Yeniseiologist Heinrich Werner) among the Yughs (archaic: “Sym-Kets”) and Kets, see the remarks and the presentation of reconstructions in Werner (2007), p. 90 f. (cf. also Werner 2011). In addition, there are minor errors—for example, on p. 114 read “Janhunen” instead of “Jahunen”. On p. 80 we read: “Die Selbstbezeichnung: Sámi . . . hängt sprachlich mit der Benennung der nordsibirischen ‘Samojeden’ und der altfinnischen Suomi zusammen, deren Sprachen ebenfalls zur finno-ugrischen Sprachfamilie gehören.” (“The autonym Saami . . . is linguistically related to the designation of the North Siberian ‘Samoyeds’ and the Old Finnish Suomi, whose languages likewise belong to the Finno-Ugrian family of languages.”) Of course, only Saami and Suomi-Finnic belong to the Finno-Ugrian languages (namely to the Finnish branch), which themselves, together with the Samoyed languages, form the Uralian family of languages.

The admittedly rather critical comments of the reviewer should not, however, hide the fact that the catalogue discussed here is a considerable asset for anyone particularly interested in early expressions of belief and their relicts and interpretations that can be derived from these from the Upper Palaeolithic and subsequent periods. Such readers will find the insight into the world of beliefs of the people of northern Eurasia and their forms of expression invaluable. Likewise, those interested in interpretations of more recent cultures of the circumpolar regions will also find the book of great benefit, especially the overview of prehistoric traces. The catalogue’s illustrations, as mentioned, provide rich visual

material and even established experts on the relevant subjects will find some previously unfamiliar material.

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MICHAEL KNÜPPEL

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