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 One

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

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Professor Vilmos Voigt

Vilmos Voigt was born on January 17, 1940 in Szeged (Hungary). He studied in Budapest, graduating in 1963 from the Faculty of Arts of Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest), having majored in Ethnography, Folkore and Hungarian Philology. He worked at the same university until his retirement, holding the Chair in Folklore, and was Director of the Institute of Ethnography. He became Professor Emeritus in 2010. He was honored as a Dr. Sc. of the Hungarian Academy of Science, was an Honorary Professor at the University of Bucharest, and was a doctor honoris causa at Tartu University. He reecieved numerous awards in Hungary and abroad, and was a visiting professor at several universities in Europe and America. Voigt's main research interests were: Hungarian and comparative folklore; the theory of literature; Finno-Ugric studies; comparative religion; and cultural semiotics. He is the founding president of the Hungarian Association for Semiotic Studies and of the International Association of Finno-Ugric Semiotics. Voigt is an honorary member of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, Semiotic Society of Finland, Eesti Semiootika Selts, and other societies, as well as a member of the Executive Committee of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, member of the International Society for Academic Research on Shamanism, vice chairman of the Hungarian Association of Scientific Study of Religion (Magyar Vallástudományi Társaság), and a board member of Hungarian Division of the International Society of Thomas d'Aquinas Studies (Magyarországi Aquinói Szent Tamás Társaság).

His bibliography until 2014 comprises altogether 2,440 items, published in *Voigt Vilmos könyvészete*, 2 vols. [A Bibliography of Vilmos Voigt]. Edited by Róbert Keményfi. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Néprajzi Tanszéke, 2010–14.

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Vilmos Voigt's Publications on Shamanism and Closely Related Topics

1962

"Elemente des Vorstellungskreises vom »Herrn der Tiere« im ungarischen Volksmärchen (Der König der Tiere)." *Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 11(3–4): 391–430.

1963

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1964

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Review of *Loki in Scandinavian Mythology*, by Anna Birgitta Rooth (Lund, 1961), *Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 13(1–4): 433–4. [in English]

1968

"Ivar Paulson 1922–1966." *Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 17(1–2): 169–70. [in German]

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1969

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1970

Review of *"Edda" i rannye formy eposa*, by Eleazar M. Meletinskiĭ (Moscow, 1968), *Filológiai Közlöny* (Budapest) 16: 220–4. [in Hungarian]

1971

Review of *Faune et flore sacrées dans les sociétés altaïques*, by Jean-Paul Roux (Paris, 1966), *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 66(7–8): 410–2. [in German]

1972

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Review of *Draumkvedet: Folkevise eller laerd kopidikting*, by Brynjulf Alver (Oslo, 1971), *Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 21(1–2): 218. [in German]

1973

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1974

"A magyar folklorisztikai finnugrisztika története [History of Hungarian Folklore Studies within Finno-Ugric Studies]" (pp. 75–92) and "Die Geschichte der ungarischen folkloristischen Finnugristik" (pp. 147–9). In ifj. János Kodolányi and Vilmos Voigt (eds) *Bán Aladár emlékezete – Aladár Bán zum Gedächtnis. 1871–1971.* Várpalota and Budapest: Várpalotai Tanács VB. Művelődésügyi Osztály and Magyar Néprajzi Társaság.

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1976

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1977

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1978

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1979

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1980

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1982

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1983

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1984

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1985

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1986

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1999

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2000

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2001

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2002

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2003

A magyar ősvalláskutatás kérdései [Questions in Research on the Early Hungarian Belief System]. Vallástudományi Tanulmányok 4. Budapest: Magyar Vallástudományi Társaság.

2004

A vallási élmény története. Bevezetés a vallástudományba [History of the Religious Experience: Introduction to the Study of Religion]. Budapest: Timp Kiadó.

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2005

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2006

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"Könyv az eurázsiai sámánokról [A Book on Eurasian Shamans]. Hoppál Mihály, *Sámánok Eurázsiában* [Shamans in Eurasia]. Budapest, 2005." *Néprajzi Hírek* (A Magyar Néprajzi Társaság Tájékoztatója, Budapest) 35(3–4): 58–62. [in Hungarian]

2008

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2009

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2010

"A magyar *beteg*, a „javak összeszedője", meg az *orvos* [The Hungarian Patient, the 'Gatherer of Goods' and the Physician]." In Éva Pócs (ed.) *Mágikus és szakrális medicina. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben* [Magical and Sacred Medicine: Concepts in Religious Ethnology with an Interdisciplinary Approach]. Budapest: Balassi. 669–76.

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2011

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European Association for the Study of Religions. Budapest: King Sigmund College and the Hungarian Association for the Academic Study of Religions. 203–19.

2012

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2013

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2014

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How To Disappear Completely: Community Dynamics and Deindividuation in Neo-Shamanic Urban Practices in Colombia

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This essay reflects on some community dynamics underlying neo-shamanic practices, starting from a review of fieldnotes taken by the author in the course of an ethnographic experience conducted in an urban context, in Colombia. The observation of the social and ritual procedures played by neo-shamanic therapists in postcolonial contexts reveals how indigenous performance has had to transform itself to survive the cultural pressure imposed by the hegemonic rationalism of modern mechanisms of knowledge. Urban shamanism, as an emerging social phenomena, appears as a hybrid creation, synchronizing forms and contents of the traditional shamanic practice with the postmodern needs of disciples (and clients) looking for their psychosocial balance in a climate of growing deindividuation. If ethnobiological knowledge were the core skill of traditional shamanism, neo-shamans prefer to strengthen their social position thanks to the tools offered by the same modernity (such as the ICT) and to confirm their social role of mediators and therapists through the development of a syncretic paraphernalia and a community of faithful aficionados.

. . . Mauro is tall, long haired and he is always smiling. With a certain vanity, he avoided revealing his age, concealed by his youthful and sophisticated features. Maybe thirty, maybe forty years old. Mauro is Italian, but grew up in Colombia. Mauro is a shaman, yes, an Italian shaman . . .

First Steps on the Path of Ecstasy

This short essay is not aimed to describe the umpteenth ethnographic experience conducted with an hallucinogenic substance in a shamanic context. It is neither a study about ethnobiological topics nor a digression about shamanic tourism. This article, especially edited for the

Shaman's readers, contributes to the emerging discussion about neo-shamanism as a "counterculture" starting from a critical analysis of ethnographical data, seeking to describe the social context facilitating the empowerment of neo-shamanic therapists, to reflect about some community dynamics underlying their practices, and to understand the process of deindividuation (and the subsequent loss of individuality and sense of self) that accompany such a kind of ritualism.[1] To explain better the logical procedure used to reach certain conclusions, I used a phenomenological approach and a personalized narrative, to give the readers coming from different disciplines all the instruments and data needed to follow the complexity of a line of reasoning which has been developing throughout the course of a research that implied a radical turn in my anthropological approach to social phenomena.

Confessions of a Young Anthropologist

Ten years ago, I started this research knowing almost nothing about shamans, visions, ecstasy or entheogens. As an undergraduate student, I had the opportunity to speak on a few occasions with Professor Alfonso Di Nola ("the eminent satanologist," as some colleagues called him) and, as a child, I had followed Father Gabriele Amorth, a mediatized exorcist, performing the functions of altar boy in the parish of Saints Aquila and Priscilla, in Rome, where he used to officiate. Despite these precedents, all I knew about altered states of consciousness and the related sociocultural dynamics was limited to some extemporary reading without any scientific basis.

Everything began when, during my very first ethnographic field-work—with a Kuna community in San Blas archipelago, in Panama—I met Alex, a French singer who told me about his cocaine addiction and his plans to travel to the Amazon "in search of the sacred plant" that would free him from vice, and that would allow him to "find himself." Well, everything started right there. When I finished my research work in Panama, I moved to Colombia, and settled in Bogota. Holding a contract as a research associate at a prestigious local university (which,

[1] A first version of this article, more focused on the character of the neo-shaman and his personality, was originally published in Spanish under the title "Dejé el Chianti por el Yajé" (Alì 2011).

in Colombia, is the equivalent to something like a passport to access realities and contexts otherwise precluded to the common man), I began to ask my new Andean colleagues if they knew something about a certain "sacred plant" that freed one from all evils. The responses generally ranged from an alarmist "be careful with that stuff or you will die!" to a more (or less) progressive view "that is a stuff for underdeveloped indios." Others, told me stories about friends of friends who had turned crazy, or worse, who disappeared into thin air because of the evil generated by the shamans. Only after several weeks, and as a result of my naive insistence, someone decided to reveal me in a whisper the name of this "shamanic secret": the *yajé*.

With that emblematic attitude of the ethnocentric explorer, able to build exotic representations on unfathomable or incomprehensible phenomena, I considered to have found a valid research subject, sufficiently "mysterious" to proclaim the vain eureka typical of those who think they "discovered" what was previously unknown. It is a real defect polluting the anthropological reflection since the foundation of the discipline, acting as a parasite on the minds of many novice ethnographers (as I was): we are committed to "discover" tribes, languages, dialects, customs, traditions, social norms and structures (as in archeology someone has been sure to discover Machu Picchu or the *moai* of Easter Island). In fact, we do not discover anything and maybe we just make (more) visible what has already been there: but ten years ago I was not used to this kind of thinking. Let's face it: the ethnocentric gaze, added to the desire for "exotic" discoveries, seemed the most obvious approach for the young ethnographer I was. I remember the disappointment that accompanied me while, throwing a quick look at bibliographic databases, I realized that there was solid academic literature about *yaj*é and that, in the end, this "shamanic secret" did not represent exactly a mystery. Thousand of researchers in Latin and North America, Europe, Asia and Oceania had already made extensive research on *yajé*, from different disciplines

(above all ethnology, ethnobiology and ethnomedicine)[2] but, actually, most of them share a common vision about the subject, treated basically as a shamanic and indigenous—not to say "wild"—topic.[3] According to them, the *yajé* exists, though only in the jungle. I seemed to find myself in front of a kind of knowledge that, in Aristotelian terms, could be located between the esoteric and the exoteric domain.

The *yajé* (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) or *ayahuasca*—as it is known among aficionados in Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, as well as in the US and Europe—is a vine endemic to the Amazon rainforest. It was identified relatively recently and its first botanical classification was defined in 1852, by the British explorer Richard Spruce (Schultes and Hofmann 1979). The shamans of many indigenous communities of northern Amazon extract from its stem a decoction that is consumed by individuals or groups in the course of therapy sessions. The *Banisteripsis caapi* excerpt has emetic and laxative properties and, if consumed alone, does not cause hallucinations or disturbances in consciousness. The Amazonian shamans cook it with a few leaves of *Psychotria viridis* or *Diplopterys cabrerana*, two plants known as the *chacruna,* with a high content of dimethyltryptamine (DMT), an active ingredient with hallucinogenic properties. *Banisteripsis caapi* merely acts as an inhibitor of monoamine oxidase (MAOIs), allowing the body the proper absorption of tryptamines contained in *chacruna* leaves, leaving them to act at a neurophysiological level and, finally, to generate visions. In fact, the term *yajé* is currently used to refer to the compound obtained from the two plants. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975) stressed that the *yajé*, and the hallucinations that it is able to generate, would allow the shaman to experience that allegorical flight perceived as an expression of his superhuman powers. According to him, the shaman is, therefore, a superior being, although he needs *yajé* (or other entheogens) to "fly."

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[2] In December 2014, I used the keyword "yajé" for a combined search within the most relevant free databases used by academic scholars (Bielefeld SE, Chabot College, Docuticker, Jurn, ERIC, US Gov. Documents, Infomine, IntechOpen, JSTOR, LibGuides, DOAJ, OAJSE, OpenDoar, Ref.Repository, RefSeek, and Virtual LRC), obtaining more than 84,400 bibliographic references: articles in peer reviewed journals, chapters of books, books, Ph.D. dissertations and lectures presented at academic meetings. Using the keyword "ayahuasca" the results were almost 698,000 and with "Banisteriopsis caapi" (the scientific name of the plant) I found more than 35,600 scientific sources.

[3] An outlook adopted, for indeed, by Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975; Furst 1976 or Fericgla 1997.

A review of the available sources on the subject shows that shamans and their "observers" are involuntarily dancing an awkward choreography since the time they came in contact, back in the fifteenth century. Although in the last fifty years a growing number of observers has been starting to take them seriously, it seems in fact that there is still a "force field" that makes us skeptical about shamans, these embodiments of exotic spirituality, conceptually difficult to digest for those who, like me, were formed under the auspices of the academic positivist rationalism.

As a result of this skeptical departure, I became easily a victim of the fascination for *yajé* as an "anthropological mystery." Therefore, during five years, I found myself visiting homes of shamans and *tomadores*,[4] herbal shops, temples of indigenous medicine, local markets, biological analysis laboratories, libraries and slums of Bogota. I collected data, stories and testimonies about the cult of *yajé* and, finally, I "discovered" the obvious: that *yajé* cults prosper (and not only in Colombia) because there are both a culture—an underground culture, perhaps—and a social structure serving as humus and giving sense to this kind of practices. During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to participate in a series of *yajé* ceremonies with a group of fellows led by a shaman, an Italian shaman. This short article aims to share with *Shaman*'s readers some observations gathered in the course of my ethnographic journey with them and the reflections generated by my personal analysis of their neo-shamanic community, treated as a local expression of a wider global phenomenon—almost a *fait social total,* to use Mauss' terms (1970)—which could be considered "mysterious" but that, on the contrary, has become an emerging practice in America, Europe, Asia and even Oceania. From this perspective, the rise of neo-shamanism demonstrates the process of hybridization involving the shamanic figure which, caught between tradition and progress, is transformed into a postmodern provider, able to offer his services as a master of ceremonies to a community of entheogen users composed by full members of the global village.

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[4] The literal translation from the Spanish, is consumers (or endusers): a definition that is certainly not neutral, due to the fact that is charged with a certain element of judgment (negative, in this case). Consequently, I preferred to use the term with which the participants at the shamanic sessions call themselves (and its synonyms *yajecero* or *ayahuasquero*).

A Journey Through the Transcendence on a Ramshackle Bus

It was Andrés Morales, a renowned Colombian psychologist, who gave me the right contact. Actually, he did even more: that I got invited to a session (*toma*) organized by some of its customers. I remember it was a Saturday, at noon, when I received his call: "There's a special session, tonight: they want to know you." So, without abiding by the ritual fasting that is supposed to precede the ingestion of the sacred plant (as described in the ethnological literature I mentioned above), I found myself taking one of those shabby and shaky buses, the *buseta*s, which represent the Colombian folklore of public transport. A strange context to begin my ethnographic trip to the legendary "purgatory" of the Amazonian shamans: no dugout as in the memories of Wade Davis (1996), no hut in the jungle, as in the *yajé* correspondence exchanged between William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg (1963), the Beat Generation prophets, no traces of the mystical silence reported in Castaneda accounts (1968). Bogota, the megalopolis, ran behind the windows of the *buseta* while the radio launched a very loud merengue, the driver argued with a passenger about football and Andrés, tired after a day of work, read the newspaper. I thought "the 'others' are waiting, they are waiting for me" and the anachronistic situation in which I was, it seemed almost a relief. The meeting with the shaman was not provided in a remote corner of the tropical forest, but in a comfortable house located in a small Andean village on the outskirts of Bogota: at more than 2,000 meters above sea level and with mountain weather. When we knocked on the door we were welcomed by Julio, who would became the host of my first contacts with the "vine of the soul."[5] After a few informal pleasantries, he asked us the 35,000 pesos (almost €10) required to take part to the ritual and he stated that the *toma* in which we were about to participate was "a special occasion, with few people, only the intimates." We were ten: Andrés and me, Julio and his wife, Mauro—the shaman—accompanied by his wife, his daughter and his three assistants: Alfonso, Carlos and "El Pibe."[6]

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[5] In Latin America *yajé* is also known as the *bejuco del alma* (vine of the soul).

[6] Generic term of endearment, it can be translated as "the kid."

The Ethnographer's Notebook: Scattered Notes

January 26, 2006, 19:30. I've been here two hours. Mauro is preparing the room for the ceremony. Alfonso, Carlos and "El Pibe" are helping him. Julio talks to everyone and his topics of discussion range from the powers of *yajé* to reflections on existence. In their chat, the words most often pronounced are "energies" (declined in the plural form), "spirituality," "mystical," "holistic," "soul," "travel" and "find himself." In this community, the undisputed leader of the group seems to be the supernatural.

20:00. Julio and the other men are wearing casual clothing: jeans, hiking boots and flannel shirts. Women seem to follow a certain dress code: long skirts and white shirts with flowers full of color. I am feeling as if I was in a faded photo taken from the family album, with a seventies touch like *déjàvu*. As I look around, I get the feeling that the protagonist of this session . . . is me: I was invited to be watched, observed and analyzed to assess whether I could to be part of their community, and I could share the path of *yajé* with them. I feel like Susan Sontag's anthropologist: uncomfortable and under control.[7]

20:15. Mauro came out of the room where we would officiate: the salon of Julio's house. Julio asked him something, but he did not answer back. He came to me asking "*Paisà*,[8] you are Italian, right?" A terrible blow to my mimetic desire to go unnoticed: I did not want to be seen as "the usual *gringo*,"[9] the foreign tourist in Colombia longing for the trip with *yajé*. And yet . . . He called me "*Paisà*" . . . and that accent . . . yes, Mauro is Italian, he is as well, like me. An Italian shaman in Colombia?

21:00. Mauro invited me to sit with him by the fire. We talked a few minutes. He asked questions, I answered. Topics discussed: the performance of the Italian football team, the unequivocal value of Italian gastronomy, ending with a quick rumination on the vices and virtues of Italian cheeses. Then, he got up and went to the bathroom. There is some movement in the room. The atmosphere is transforming: Julio and the others are literally decking up, with a certain formality, rings, bracelets, anklets, necklaces, crowns of pearls and feathers. I recognize the drawings: they are stylized representations of the visions, the *pintas*, generated by *yajé*. Like the ones I saw on Richard Evans Schultes' books and in the cases of the Museo del Oro.[10]

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[7] The reference is to the famous Sontag's essay (1966) "The Anthropologist as Hero."

[8] A dialectal Italian expression meaning "fellow countryman; compatriot."

[9] A generic term used to refer to US tourists (often extended to travelers from Europe, Australia or Israel).

[10] It is an important museum of Bogota, which contains the largest collection of Latin American pre-Columbian gold art.

Julio wears a necklace with shark teeth: "It is from India. I bought it on eBay," he says, informing me as if he were responding to my curious eyes. Andrés and I maintain our "urban" uniform, which makes us feel even more uncomfortable and "different." Who are the "others": us or them?

22:00. The ceremony starts.

January 27, 2006, 07:00. On a *buseta*, way back. Last night, I did not sleep, but I get the feeling that I had just woken up. I do not remember exactly what happened during the previous hours. I drank several cups of *yajé*, I threw up, I had complex visions, I have resurfaced memories of past times. It seemed as if I was reconstructing, in a different order, the course of my life. A chaotic tour through the lightest and darkest moments of my mundane existence. I do not feel like writing anything more . . .

First Impressions of a Rationalist on the Ground

I must admit that, at the first reading of the notes taken during that night of postmodern shamanic initiation, I had the impression that I acted as an involuntary actor of a bizarre theatrical *piece*. As an undesirable and unavoidable side effect of the work on the ground, the way back generated nostalgia, critical opinions and cold reconstructions of the observed reality that could mislead and produce distorted generalizations: as an ethnographer, I learned the lesson after some years. The truth is that my hosts—the shaman and all this impromptu circle of *yajé* followers—seemed so artificial that, in a first moment, I simply archived the case as a farce. With the experience acquired over the years, I now understand how I did nothing but repeat the same impressions of the first Europeans who came into contact with shamans. Traditionally, the colonial discourse—it is worth remembering—had a highly negative opinion of the shamanic universe.

Indeed, since the fifteenth century, Western explorers traveling in search of unexplored lands, wherever they arrived, met people who claimed to communicate and interact with spirits and otherworldly beings, especially with therapeutic or divination aims. The documentary colonial legacy shows how the explorers (and the missionaries who accompanied them) chose to record these characters with the names that were given in the native languages, finding no equivalent in European languages: *page*, *angakkut*, *arendiouannens*, *piayé* or shamans (Narby and Huxley 2001). That did not prevent the European authors from charging the original language definition with a number of derogatory adjectives (clowns, acrobats, junk thaumaturgists and miracle-workers). In the second half of

the seventieth century, the archpriest Petrovich Avvakum (1938: 16), who has provided the first ethnographic observation of a Siberian shaman, described him as "a vile magician who invokes the demons."[11] Europeans, in their encounter with shamans, tended to view them as impostors who needed to be unmasked. And me, what was I doing?

The Shamanic Personality

Early anthropologists observed the shamans as if they were an "exotic" version of the mentally ill. They treated them as schizophrenics believing that the hallucinations they were suffering were real and tangible, persuaded to communicate with the spirits and experts in reproducing voices and languages which did not belong to them. So it was then that, along the decades, anthropologists limited their analysis of shamanic practices to a unique topic: the mental health of the shamans.[12] The discussion took a turn when Claude Lévi-Strauss, with his refined style, revolutionized the matter and concluded that the shamans had to be compared to psychoanalysts rather than to psychopaths. In fact, the father of modern anthropology signaled the existence of a contact point between the shamanic universe and the psychoanalytic field in a famous essay entitled "The Effectiveness of Symbols" (also known as "The Symbolic Efficacy" 1963).[13] In his analysis, which refers to the transcript of a shamanic ses-

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[11] Leader of the Old Believers conservative faction, archpriest Avvakum is also considered to be a pioneer of modern Russian literature. His colorful autobiography, written between 1672–3, is considered a masterpiece of seventeenth-century Russian literature. Numerous manuscript copies of the text circulated for nearly two centuries before its first printed edition in 1861.

[12] The famous Hungarian–French ethnopsychiatrist Georges Devereux adopted a Freudian position that might seem extreme: he considered shamans as "culturally dystonic," "problematic social units" and, as the saints of the religious tradition, "social hecklers" (Devereux 1961; 1967). In retrospect, it is clear that the shamans suffer temporary "mental imbalance" and provisional alterations of consciousness (which must be considered in a "shamanic" perspective as the attainment of a more or less ephemeral state of ecstasy).

[13] The original version of this essay, dedicated to Raymond de Saussure, was published with the same title twenty years before, in the prestigious *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* (1949, 135/1: 5–27). Given the lack of distribution the magazine suffered, Lévi-Strauss decided to update the text and make it appear as a chapter in his seminal volume *Structural Anthropology*.

sion with a Kuna indigenous community, in Panama,[14] Lévi-Strauss established the difference between the practical symbolist (the shaman) and the structural therapist (the psychoanalyst), clearly distinguishing them by their respective *modus operandi*: the shaman speaks, the analyst listens. Moreover, Lévi-Strauss emphasized the role of enchantment and fascination acting in shamanic sessions to which he was referring. Indeed,

> . . . the shaman does more than utter the incantation; he is its hero, for it is he who, at the head of a supernatural battalion of spirits, penetrates the endangered organs and frees the captive soul. In this way, like the psychoanalyst, becomes the object of transference and, through the representations induced in the patients mind, the real protagonist of the conflict which the latter experiences on the border between the physical world and the psychic world. (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 180)

Visions, Ecstasies and Shamanic Charisma

January 27, 2006, 6:00. I look at Mauro while I pack my bag. He sleeps, tired. I realize that throughout the night he has been "working," leading us, driving us, guiding us. This Italian–Colombian Charon followed us on our journey and took care of our hallucinations, our visions, our imbalances. A real hero. However, I have not seen spirits, I did not perceived presences or, even less, witnessed any miracles. . . . I remember the nausea and phosphenes[15] . . . But I had already read this somewhere else.

In structuralist terms, the *pinta* generated by *yajé*, *id est* the visions it produces, can be traced to physiological causes that stimulate the underlying cultural structures.[16] Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, meanwhile, distinguished two types of visions:

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[14] The Mu-Igala, a medicine song collected and translated by Holmer and Hassen (1947).

[15] The luminous images produced by the mechanical, electrical, magnetic or chemical stimulation of the retina.

[16] Benny Shanon (2002) proposes a different approach—based on the cognitive psychology and on a purely phenomenological analysis of the altered state of consciousness generated by *yajé*—to understand what he consider, paraphrasing Aldous Huxley, the *Antipodes of the Mind*: the regions of our psyche that could be reached with the assumption of *ayahuasca*.

> The first, with a neurophysiological basis, consists of luminous sensations that appear as flashes in the visual field, even if you are in total darkness. Generally, this involves lines and dots, stars and circles, namely geometric and non-figurative motifs technically defined as phosphenes. Since all of us, human beings, we have the same brain structure, consequently we all feel the same sensations, independent of the external lighting. Such phenomena are common under the stimulus of a hallucinogenic drug. . . . The second category of hallucinatory visions have a cultural—and not biological—basis since they consist of figurative images that the person projects depending on the accumulated experience, on a background of colors and movements caused by drugs. (2005: 47–50, translated by the author)

If the Reichel-Dolmatoff's perspective emphasizes the inherent power of the hallucinatory substance (as a veritable engine of ecstasy), Mircea Eliade, the famous Romanian historian of religions, offers another interpretation, diametrically opposed, about the vehicle of ecstasy. According to him:

> . . . narcotics are only a vulgar substitute for "pure" trance . . . The use of intoxicants is a recent innovation and marks the decline of shamanic techniques. Poisoning by narcotics serves to produce an imitation of that state that the shaman is no longer able to obtain by other means. (Eliade 1964: 401)

During decades, specialists have largely debated about this point and many have considered the use of the term "decline" as Eliade's very personal perspective. The criticism focused mainly on his generalizations concerning the concept of narcotics[17] and the fact that Eliade refused stubbornly to recognize the central role of hallucinogens in many forms of traditional—or rather, premodern—shamanism (Furst 1994).[18]

However, Eliade sensed the reason why the shaman would be converted into a such important figure in the second half of the twentieth century, at a time of dissatisfaction with traditional religions, which is

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[17] Nowadays the buzzword is "entheogens," a neologism from Ancient Greek defining the substances able to "create a god within us."

[18] Actually, we must add that the anthropologist Peter Furst, who knew Eliade, reported that the Master, during the later stage of his life, confessed on more than one opportunity that "he had abandoned his preconceptions about the use of hallucinogenic plants as a form of degeneration of the shamanic techniques of ecstasy" (Furst 1994: 20).

demonstrated by his affirmation that shamanism is "the religious technique par excellence" and that "the shaman, and he alone, is the great master of ecstasy" (1964: 30). Eliade's presage about the postmodern spiritual crisis would be confirmed by the advent of such a "return to the origins" that has materialized in the cults of rebirth: from the neo-Druidism to the neo-Satanism, passing through several *New Age* "-isms," a plethora of newness that, after all, is nothing more than a reference to a legendary golden age in which religion rhymed with physical balance and mystical experience. In all these cases, the figure of the charismatic leader plays a key role not only as master of ceremonies and therapist, but especially as counselor and guide: a stable reference point, worthy of authority and gifted with special powers (the *energies* about which I spoke with my traveling companions) considered of otherworldly origin.

Prodromes of the Neo-Shamanic Culture

I believe that it may be interesting, at this point, to briefly reflect on the strong correlation existing between the development of the so-called counterculture and the democratization of practices related to the consumption of psychoactive substances. Despite the use of botanical preparations acting to modify the consciousness having been described long ago, it was only after the immediate second postwar period that writers, researchers and travelers began search for "another dimension": something absolutely different from the experience obtained with the drugs already available on the European and American market—opium, morphine, cocaine or cannabis derivatives—generally associated to specific therapeutic functions (especially in the field of pain management) or to certain artistic circles.[19] When the first Western psychonauts discovered the effects of entheogens such as the Mexican *peyote* (*Lophophora williamsii*), African *iboga* (*Tabernanthe iboga*) or Siberian *amanita* (*Amanita muscaria*), they realized that these plants could radically alter the human consciousness and the perception of the surrounding reality. It was a fundamental insight, demonstrating how these hallucinogens

[19] In such a context, drugs fulfill an instrumental function aiming to obtain inspiration and drive the artistic creation, but also for more nihilist purposes, such the estrangement or, eventually, self-destruction.

were acting by the alteration of chemical and neurological structures and not as a mere result of a psychological suggestion: the hallucinatory experiences induced by the entheogens showed that these plants were causing similar effects both on local and "traditional" consumers and on Western and "modern" consumers (who theoretically were not subject to the influence of superstition). These observers, when invited to attend and participate in healing sessions, realized that they could experience feelings and visions similar to those described by shamans: the only difference lay in the fact that while shamans were preparing for rituals with resistance tests, fasting, sexual abstinence and meditation, European and American explorers showed in general a less mystical approach and a focus solely on drugs.[20] Therefore, for these early psychonauts the sacrificial dimension of such hallucinogenic rituals was limited at the strict time lapse corresponding with the consumption of the substance and at the emetic or laxative crisis that often accompany these experiences. Rereading these first observations on the ground, we realize how their solipsistic narrative tends to fall back merely on the author's experience, on his personal trip and his sensations, devoting little attention to the figure of the shaman and to his powers.[21]

For this article, it is interesting to consider the case of Gordon Wasson, a wealthy American banker[22] and enthusiastic mycologist. During a research trip to Mexico in 1955, he had the opportunity to participate in a ceremony that included the ingestion of mushrooms containing psilocybin (another hallucinogenic active ingredient), under the direction of the Mazatec shaman Maria Sabina. Two years later, in 1957, Wasson published an extensive report in *Life* magazine, in which he described his extracorporeal "shamanic flight." In his article, Wasson writes that:

> . . . the effect of the mushrooms is to bring about a fission of the spirit, a split in the person, a kind of schizophrenia, with the rational side continuing to reason and to observe the sensations that the other side is enjoying. The mind is attached as by an elastic cord to the vagrant senses. (Wasson 1957: 108)

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[20] Acts of contrition prior to the ritual sessions were carefully avoided and dietary prescriptions regularly broken, cf. Wasson 1957.
[21] The works of Furst (1976) and Narby and Huxley (2001) include numerous extracts from the original reports of the first Europeans psychonauts.
[22] He was vice president of the investment bank J. P. Morgan & Co. Incorporated.

With Wasson's report—the first journalistic account of altered states of consciousness generated by an entheogen—*Life* magazine drew the attention of hundreds of thousands of readers to the details of a shamanic experience: a topic that, until then, had been reserved to academic literature and to a small, very small, circle of scholars. Obviously, a number of readers wanted to follow the example of Wasson, which caused considerable problems for the wise Maria Sabina. The first wave of "psychedelic tourism" in search of the legendary Mazatec shaman brought thousands of foreigners to the villages of southern Mexico, looking for *los niños* (the hallucinogenic mushrooms, literally, "the children"). As she told to her biographer:

> . . . without doubt, Wasson and his friends were the first foreigners to come to our village looking for "los niños." They did not suffer from any illness. The reason was that they ate them to find God. Before Wasson, nobody ate the mushrooms just to meet God. We eat them to heal sick people. (Estrada 2003: 8)

Although the term "shaman" is borrowed from the Evenki (Tungus) language, the first ethnographers considered that there was a common thread linking the forms and contents of both Asian and American native medicine (which is why, nowadays, the term "shaman" is commonly used with reference to the indigenous therapists of the American continent), distinct from the models, schema and mental frames typical of other colonial territories, such as Africa, and of course from the religious structures and beliefs widespread in the US and in Europe. In Italy, France or Britain, the cults of dissociation—especially between the nineteenth and twentieth century—became visible through the flowering interest in so-called mediums and spiritualists: professional communicators with the afterlife, paid to act as intermediaries between the world of the living and the spirits (the chthonic underworld). The European version of the dissociative cults—based on modern and positivist premises—did not refer to a cosmological system, nor to music or lights or other sensitive sources of experience. It was satisfied with its paraphernalia of amulets, magic mirrors and relics of dubious origin. Participants were generally confined to the role of mere "spectators" (Talamonti 2001). On the other side, the possession cults in Africa and America (and the syncretic variants appeared in the days of colonies and of the slave trade, as in the case of Voodoo, Vodou, Winti, Orisha, Obeah, Umbanda, Santería, and Candomblé) rely on a complex system of beliefs and on a ceremonial scheme allowing a high level of action to the participants (especially physical:

dance, trance, screaming, music, cf. de Heush 1965; Walker 1972). Nevertheless, whether they are magicians, spiritualists, sorcerers, seers or shamans, the real stars of the ritual performance are always the actors and psychopomps,[23] therapists and heroes (or, at least, perceived as such), they are the lone protagonists of the mystical action.

Counterculture, Psychedelia and New Age Spirituality

Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live
Exodus 22:18

If the Wasson experience contributed to popularizing the shamanic issue, it was only towards the end of the sixties, in correspondence with the student demonstrations of 1968, that the psychedelic counterculture began to take hold, especially in the United States (and more partially, in the United Kingdom and France). In the same period, a certain Carlos Castaneda appeared, a Peruvian anthropologist who claimed to have studied with a Yaqui shaman in Arizona and Mexico, converted into a "Sorcerer's Apprentice" (Castaneda 1968). Castaneda's works have generated a multitude of controversies about their scientific validity and, nowadays, are considered literary products rather than ethnographic monographs (Fikes 1993). Nevertheless, his books were translated into dozens of languages and obtained a remarkable publishing success during several decades, helping, as did Wasson, to make even more popular the shamanic issue. Castaneda called "wizard" (*brujo*) his Yaqui "Man of Knowledge," with the intention of emphasizing his powers of divination (although this term generally defines those persons whose powers were gifted by otherworldly or demoniac beings, also in Spanish). Indeed, Castaneda found that his master was more than a therapist (as in Lévi-Strauss' terms): he considered the wise Yaqui as a man of knowledge who wanted to gain power or rather, more accurately, a "power point." It was exactly this search of a mystical "power point"—combined with the description of the shamanic techniques that

[23] The figure of Charon is not exclusive to the Greek tradition. The mythologies of many cultures refer to psychopomps: semi-human beings (or quasi-human or super-human, depending on the version) responsible for the transport of the departed souls to the afterlife.

readers could replicate comfortably in their living room—which stimulated the imagination of millions of Castaneda's aficionados. Such elements as the use of peripheral vision or the ingestion of hallucinogenic mushrooms gave to his "followers" the exciting impression that they could be real "sorcerer's apprentices" and enjoy a homemade shamanic experience. In sociological terms, Castaneda books contributed to popularize the collective fascination for the most folkloric aspects of native medicine (and world vision), strengthening the underground culture which contributed to the flourishing of neo-shamanism. The fact that Castaneda's books continue to be regarded as the manuals of the *New Age* movement is certainly not fortuitous.

The Appearance of the Shamanic Tourism

The neo-shamanic discourse providing the structure of reference for hundreds and thousands of *yajé* communities has now spread not only to all the countries of Latin America, but also in North America, Europe and Oceania, despite the existing legal limits: *Banisteripsis caapi* is listed in the legal systems of most of the states as a plant which cultivation and consumption are considered unlawful. The limited diffusion it has had in Asia is probably a reflection of the limitations mentioned above, as well as an effect of the impossibility of cultivating the vine locally (there are, however, some clandestine communities in South Korea, Japan and Thailand). Indeed, as in the days of Wasson, Burroughs, Ginsberg and Castaneda, neo-shamanic tourism continues to fuel the *yajé* circuit in those regions where the plant is endemic. The psychotherapist and anthropologist Marlene Dobkin de Rios (1994), who has studied the ethnobotanical characteristics of *yajé* for more than thirty years, notes that since the early '90s, the flow of foreign travelers in search of Amazonian shamans has soared. A large number of people move to Peru, where there is a well developed touristic infrastructure to receive

psychedelic travelers.[24] There are also several rehabilitation centers for drug addicts based on *yajé* therapy (as the Takiwasi Center, directed by the French physician Jacques Mabit) and "shamanic lodges" managed by European and American investors (Salak 2006). The Brazilian case should be considered separately, since the local *yajé* culture is associated with the syncretic neo-Protestant cults (such as the Church of Santo Daime and the União do Vegetal), in which the figure of the shaman is replaced by that of a "psychedelic pastor" (Weiskopf 2002). In Colombia there is still a good number of native therapists "in the wilderness," especially in the southern and western regions, but the greater offer is proposed in the capital and in some secondary cities (Medellin, Cali, Cartagena, or Santa Marta), where a legion of shamans practices their profession. Most are mestizos, others are descendants of the African diasporas, some hold "real indigenous credentials" but almost all of them are children of the same rural people transplanted in suburban areas as a result of internal migration and forced displacement caused by the armed conflict and the violence perpetrated by drug-traffickers and criminal organizations. Their public (followers and customers) is absolutely nonindigenous: city shamanism attracts an urban population.[25]

The case of Mauro, the Italian shaman in Colombia, is significant for its uniqueness. Firstly, because of the role played by the self-perception on his shamanic activity: Mauro is strongly committed to his mission and he considers himself a powerful energy catalyst, a talented therapist, a real heir of the Amazon shamans. On one occasion, I heard Mauro defining himself as a "soul warrior," who was able to deliver sick spirits

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[24] Professor Evgenia Fotiou (2010a) analyzed the phenomenon of shamanic tourism in Peru to describe how Westerners "pilgrims" conceptualize *ayahuasca* ceremonies and how they integrate the psychedelic experience in their existing worldviews. Even if our ethnographic works have a different social and geographical focus, we share similar conclusions: in neo-shamanic praxis, ritual is not aimed to reproduce symbolically a specific social structure (existing or desirable) but to foster "self-transformation" and to challenge the participants basic assumptions about the world.

[25] As a matter of fact—despite the effects of ethnic transfiguration produced by colonization and modernity dynamics—even at the present day, it would be very difficult for a person perceiving himself as an "indigenous (id)entity" to accept the authority of a therapist with whom was not established a deep human relationship based on a shared world-vision and a common interpretation of the notions of health and illness. In other words, to be effective the indigenous shaman must personally know the "patient": an inconceivable rapport in the framework of the market system that relates urban shamans and their clients.

from evil.[26] Secondly, because of a personal background that Mauro himself summed up as: "wealthy origins, peaceful childhood, rebel adolescence" and a youth dedicated to experience "everything was available on the market [referring to drugs]." Thirdly, because of the composition of his mystical community: over the course of time, I found out that most of its members belonged to the group of opinion leaders, influencers, agenda setters and decision makers that feed the Colombian media and political environment. Academics, journalists, public officers, artists and businessmen flocked to Mauro's session looking for relief from disorders generated by their daily routine. Mauro said that:

> . . . when I met *yajé* my life changed dramatically. I stopped taking all the stuff I took in before. Thanks to *yajé* I decided to learn how to grow up spiritually. So, I went training with real Amazon shamans, the *taita*s,[27] in the wilderness. I ran into debts with my family and friends to pay for the trip to Mocoa and Puerto Asis,[28] where I sojourned several days to learn with them, the *taita*s.

When speaking about his apprenticeship, Mauro is more vague:

> . . . a lot of exercises, *paisà*, and fatigue, tiredness, reflection . . . and silence. And the purges. Every day . . . It was not a bed of roses!

To understand better Mauro' discourse, it is important to note that among Amazon cultures the training of a shaman is a process of human—and surely not divine—order, based on practical exercises and on refining skills. In such a context, the "enlightment" with which many urban shamans claim to reach the spiritual ascesis cannot make

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[26] It is interesting to note that Professor Fotiou (2010b: 192) considers that ". . . in the Amazonian cultural framework, local *ayahuasca* users tend to interpret any negative or dark experiences during ceremonies as attacks, by malevolent shamans, hired by other members of their community. The more individualistic Western cultural framework leads Westerners to interpret these experiences as part of their own psychic processes . . ." but also that this pattern has to be challenged, because "Western shamanic apprentices have integrated the concepts of sorcery and shamanic warfare into their worldview . . ." and ". . . that, in many ways, a shamanic apprenticeship for a Westerner involves a radical shift in interpretations of shamanic experience."

[27] A synonym for shamans.

[28] Two villages of the Putumayo department, in southern Colombia, corresponding to the northwestern sector of the Amazon basin. This area hosts a large number of indigenous communities, including Inga, Siona, Awá, Embera, Paez, Kichwa and Cofán.

sense. Even if the selection of the future shaman is based on "tangible" signs considered to be of supernatural origin (a difficult birth, a stain on the skin, a form of albinism), his instruction follows the classical educative pattern that unites the "peoples of the wilderness": to observe a process (as executed by an expert person), to repeat the action (under the gaze of the expert) and, ultimately, to act independently (Ailincai, Jund and Alì 2012).

Postmodern Shamans, Ministers of the Extraordinary

Mauro has never read the Bible. He prefers the *I Ching*—the classic text of Chinese mysticism—and interpreting of the Tarot. However, on his altar always appears a pair of holy pictures (St. George and the Virgin of Guadalupe), and a wooden crucifix. Mauro does not perceive himself in religious terms, although his performances present some resemblance to the priesthood. In Mauro's social discourse (the representation of himself that this postmodern shaman offers to "others"), the shamanic ministry is aimed to offer his life for *yajé* and to act for the salvation of his community (and, incidentally, of all mankind). According to him, *yajé* is "a spiritual plant, because it is made of spirit and exudes spiritual energies," as well as a consecrated Host assuming mystical value through transubstantiation. His ministry is aimed primarily to the treatment of the spirit (although the effects of his work will remain uncertain and intangible), rather than the resolution of any contingent physical or mental imbalance. Already twenty years ago, the American anthropologist Eleanor Ott pointed out that:

> In present days, many of those who call themselves shamans certainly do not belong to cultures or communities integrated by a real shamanic perspective. It would be more correct to speak of common people of the present generation, which, ultimately, seek themselves. Which is why many neo-shamans are ill-prepared to engage with customers who rely on their powers to heal a variety of physical, psychological and spiritual ailments. The indigenous shaman, the traditional one, can count on the experience and knowledge accumulated by generations of therapists connected to the same cosmological tradition: this is what allows to make sense of both the disease and the healing process directed by the shaman. (1995: 245)

According to Ott, postmodern shamanism is a form of autology, an autoanalysis based on individual reflections developed in communitarian (often sectarian) contexts, contrasting with "classic" shamanism (based on ethnobotanic science), which can be thought as an eterology focused on the "analysis of the other," cosmic reflection and, paraphrasing Schumpeter, the "creative destruction" of community order.

The *yajé* sessions directed by Mauro always end with time dedicated to reading and interpreting the Tarot. For community members, it is a very special moment dedicated to deconstruct—and reinterpret—the visions experienced and confirms the protagonist role of the shaman, able to offer explanations, reflections and some advice to his psyconaut fellows. During these sessions, participants gather in a circle, so that not only the discursive contents, but also the forms to which their bodies are subjected, clearly remember the performances proper of group therapies. Mauro is terribly talented in psychoanalytic observation and, despite never having read Sigmund Freud's works, he can recognize the thin veil of psychopathology that permeates the daily lives of the members of his community. He listens and offers his findings, identifies sources and solutions to the problems displayed and, above all, knows the right words to say to each participant. The cultural origin and the social experience of Mauro constitute a set of skills that allows our urban shaman to always have "something interesting to say."

Which confirms, once again, that the therapist's personality (both shamanic or neo-shamanic) cannot be reduced to an individual or congenital factor, but should be considered in social and cultural terms, that is, as the effect of a given sociopolitical ecosystem that molds and gives sense to the shamanic performance. The shamanic endowment must be viewed as a social act, with which the community members transfer a part of their individual sovereignty—the one charged with the otherworldly relations—to preserve social well-being and to maintain a satisfactory level of relations with the unknown or the extraordinary. The shaman lives "a peripheral life" because he performs those functions that no one else could or would play: Charon's role has never been attractive, despite the prestige that it entail. Still, his views may have huge influence. Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff considered highly plausible the hypothesis that "the source of violence and destruction typical of many chiefdoms" in pre-Columbian times was to be sought in the hallucinatory experiences of shamans (Reichel-Dolmatoff 2005: 67). Due to the absence of irrefutable archeological proofs, we may not be in agree-

ment with the hypothesis just mentioned, but the case of Mauro shows us that, even today, shamans can influence other influential people.

Shamanism, Postcolonialism and Globalization

Mauro is constantly accompanied by two apprentices: an assistant, "el Pibe," and an aide, Alfonso. Both studied law at a prestigious private university, both came from families belonging to the Colombian economical elite, and both came in contact with Mauro through the Internet. As explained by Alfonso:

> . . . go on Google, type in *yajé*, *taita*, Bogota and you will see how many shamans we have here in the capital!

The shamanic training of Alfonso and "el Pibe" has been achieved, above all, thanks to data, forums, articles and websites freely available online.[29] Alfonso tells me that this is the way they learned to cook *yajé*, "as well as it is cooked by the shamans of the jungle." In fact, the mass of information on *Banisteriopsis caapi* available on the World Wide Web is accessible to all, without discrimination, so that anyone can learn how to prepare the hallucinogenic decoction without ever having known a shaman, nor having to suffer the discomfort of the forest. By now, the postmodern psychonaut no longer needs to fear mosquitoes or Amazon leeches: he simply needs to link his terminal (or tablet or last generation smartphone) to the global telematic network, to connect to an e-commerce website dedicated to the trade of entheogens and to conclude the transaction by credit card. A few days after, he will receive directly at home a sober, anonymous, and tax free pack: *et voilà, Mesdames et Messieurs,* postmodern shamanism in its fastest and aseptic version.

The Urban Circuit of Yajé in Bogota

Adopting a psycosocial outlook, Vélez and Pérez (2004) have analyzed the neo-shamanic circuit in the Colombian capital, proposing a clas-

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[29] Indeed, on forums and social networks dedicated to the *yajé* aficionados, there is an extended offer of varied nonscientific shamanic literature: how-to-books on magic and spirituality, textbooks on self-help and personal growth, psychedelic cooking handbooks and countless reports of "sorcerer's apprentices" (see, for example, Sombrun 2006).

sification of "users" that will help us to understand the expectations driving postmodern *yajeceros* to pursue the path of the vine of the soul. According to them, there are four key reasons explaining the growing interest of urban people for *yajé* ceremonies:

(1) *Therapy*: when users attribute to *yajé* a curative power offering an alternative and natural solution for their personal—mostly psychological—problems;
(2) *Spirituality*: motivated by the willingness to "know the original truth" and to "find one's self." In anthropological terms, it corresponds to the search for a transcendent level of personality development;
(3) *Curiosity*: ascribable to the search of "excitement" and new experiences, it is focused on the aesthetical exploration of visions, trances and ecstasies;
(4) *Research*: is my case, that sums up the position of scholars, doctors, journalists and other "professional meddlers" who take part in the shamanic sessions as participant observers with the aim to investigate topics related to anthropology, ethno-medicine, toxicology or addictology.

All those expectations correspond, in economic terms, to a demand for shamanic services that meets in Bogota a consistent market supply adapted for all tastes. Actually,

> . . . if you come to Bogota, you have to know that every day is easier to find *yajé*. You no longer need provisions from a *taita*: now you can buy it bottled at not more than 10,000 Colombian pesos [about €4]. (Sanin, Sanchez and Chalela 2006: 238)

Even Colombian tour guides advertise homemade shamanism, a sector that does not compete with the informal network of *curandero*s, healers and miracle workers who base their sessions on *yajé*. Also, Bogota hosts a small community of indigenous shamans who came to the capital to escape from the violence of the war. They enjoy great social prestige and are very present on the media, such is the case of Don Antonio Jacanamijoy and his son Benjamin, Taita Oscar Roman, Taita Querubin or Taita Diomedes Díaz. Mauro calls them *los Abuelitos* (the grandparents): he knows them personally, all of them, and holds a souvenir from each of them:

This feather of *macaw* is a gift of the *abuelito* Diomedes, this puma tooth belonged to Taita Oscar and this is the *yajé* who offered me the old Querubin to be tasted with you.

In the district of San Victorino, near the historical center of Bogota, there are many herbalists' shops operated by indigenous people—most of them belonging to Inga ethnic communities displaced to the capital fleeing from the violence and poverty of their ancestral territories—offering *yajé* rituals in their back shop for a very reasonable price (15,000 pesos for session, about €6). Their clients have medium-low income levels and, after the first session, they tend not to repeat the experience. Recommended by friends and acquaintances, they try the *yajé* experience to heal (especially, but not limited to) long-standing pain or love crises. Young professionals, as well as the middle classes and the curious with sufficient economic availability, prefer another type of establishment, a little more sophisticated. These are the "temples," such as the famous Templo del Indio Amazonico—the "Temple of the Amazon Indian," which was the forerunner of its kind, with more than thirty years of commercial activity—(fig. 1): those real supermarkets of the supernatural, carefully decorated—often with a certain kitsch taste—that offer the purchaser and the passing tourist a huge set of accessories dedicated to shamans, sorcerers' apprentices, magicians, devotees of the occult, consumers of *yajé* and other hallucinogenic plants. The prices are not cheap and a session (with a nonindigenous shaman) could cost more than five hundred thousand pesos (€200).

Artists, journalists, students (and academics) do not frequent these places. They prefer to organize themselves into groups to carry out the ceremony at the home of one of the community members. The meetings are usually held in the "alternative" and hipster neighborhoods of Teusaquillo, La Macarena and La Candelaria or, as in the case of Mauro's community, in some rural villages near Bogota (Neusa, La Calera, Sesquilé, Funza, Silvana, Anapoima). Appointments are given by phone, at short notice, using a coded language and never using the word *yajé*. A level of secrecy that awakened my curiosity, especially because in Colombia, unlike other countries, its consumption does not constitute a violation of law. Then, why so many secrets?

The Yajé among Terror, Therapy and Self-awareness

Banisteriopsis caapi is one of the most mysterious and inscrutable elements of the Colombia imagery. *Yajé*, it works: or, at least, that is what the followers of the vine of the soul interviewed in the framework

Fig. 1. The leaflet of the "Templo del Indio Amazonico": a visual paraphernalia mixing shamanic tradition with popular superstition.

of this research claim. But its healing mechanism, controlled by the "supernatural" powers of the shaman, remains incomprehensible when taken out of the shamanic system of beliefs (Shanon 2002).[30] Neither allopathic nor homeopathic, the *yajé* seems to give the desired effect after a few sessions.

It is a shock treatment, similar to a primal scream therapy, and it works only if you believe in it and if you are accompanied by a real shaman.

Mauro tells me, leaving me to understand that, obviously, he consider himself as a member of that small élite of "real" shamans, gifted with skills that give him the ability to interact with the human body, this enigmatic universe—both physical and psychic—that under the influence of *yajé* seems to take on a transparency that allows the therapist to seek out and destroy evil. However, if in traditional therapy indigenous thaumaturges were used to confront predominantly physical malaises and diseases, in the case of neo-shamanism the challenge hovers against the illnesses and imbalances (mainly psychosocial) induced by our Western civilization and our stunning modernity (Barou and Crossman 2004). The Australian ethnologist Michael Taussig considers contemporary shamanism in terms of a postcolonial structure reinterpreting the Catholic cosmology: a "wild" response to the violent horror of the Conquest, a mimesis that has transformed the wise original therapist into an absolutely modern warrior of the supernatural (Taussig 1987). So modern, says Taussig, that his magic has turned into a commodity, an object of fetishism and, in Marxist terms, into a product of a hegemonic process of dispossession and proletarianization. Therefore, there are many contact points between the interpretation of shamanic power that offers Taussig, De Martino's perspective about superstition and magic among subaltern rural workers and, finally, the position of Di Nola about the persistence of Devil cults in marginalized contexts: they represent a form of bottom-up resistance, a product of the popular creativity and a symbolic arena for the struggles opposing the identitary forces belonging to the "local" (rooted and radical) and "global" (mod-

[30] A discussion in toxicological perspective about the medical effects of *yajé* would fall outside (and exceed) the limits of this short essay. The reader interested in exploring this fascinating subject of analysis will find a wide selection of bibliographic resources in Fericgla's works (1997).

ern and positivist) sociopolitical universes (De Martino 1959; Di Nola 1976). In a landscape of poverty and injustice, such as in Colombia:

> Diseases defined as "partial decoding" of the cultural order acquire a status that escapes to the medication. It is not only the loss of individual organic health that needs to be healed, but also (and especially) the breaking of codes that govern the order of cultural progress. These diseases are called syndromes of cultural affiliation (witchcraft, evil eye, jinx, bad luck, theft of the soul, fear, panic, etc.).[31] These syndromes should be read as a cultural strategy aimed at maintaining the social order. So that the patient is conscripted into a growth dynamic of the economy of violence, as it would be right to distribute through him the aggressiveness generated by the internal and external conflicts of his ethnic group. Witchcraft is the best example of this situation, given that the "bewitched" is the receptacle for excellence of the aggressiveness flows, and considering that the attacks of witchcraft are always directed against those who defy social norms. (Pinzón 1988: 6)

By now, "indigenous science" is considered, at a global level, as a transrational solution to the illnesses caused by technological progress (Uribe 2002). The disillusionment of many urban citizens towards the efficacy of allopathic medicine against "spiritual diseases," as well as the presence of a deregulated economic system in which the access to goods and services is defined by the mere monetary value of the merchandise, it has facilitated the emergence of a market pattern in which the person suffering from one of the syndromes mentioned above, faces a range of solutions ranging from unscrupulous quackery (and the eventual circumvention of incapable people) to holistic solutions offered by alternative therapies, passing through the "quickly and all inclusive" cures proposed by commercial companies offering experiences halfway

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[31] Commonly defined as ethnopsychiatric, culturally determined or culture-bound syndromes, they consist on patterns of disordered behavior typical of certain sociocultural ecosystem. The fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) developed by the American Psychiatric Association, keeping the names which are locally known, includes the following: Fan death, Running amok, Ataque de nervios, Bilis (or cólera), Bouffée délirante, Brain fag syndrome, Dhat syndrome, Falling-out (or blacking out), Ghost sickness, Hwabyeong, Koro, Latah, Locura, Evil eye, Piblokto, Zou huo ru mo (or Qigong psychotic reaction), Rootwork, Sangue dormido, Shenjing shuairuo, Shenkui, Shinbyeong, Spell, Susto, Taijin kyofusho and Zār (Paniagua 2000).

between shamanism and the health spa. However, if the urban patient would choose to try the *yajé*, it will receive a simplified version of "jungle therapy," with neither prior training nor physical preparation: the exercises that traditionally precede the ingestion of *yajé* will be limited to a minimal fasting and a few minutes of meditation (Mauro, shaman of the global village, proposed a personal version of the *Padmasana*, the lotus position of the yoga tradition).

Dealing with Postmodern Psychopathology

Mauro likes to sing during "his" ceremonies. He and Julio strum the guitar and have composed several songs to play during the sessions. Among their repertoire, the composition that catches my attention the most is titled "Jesús Cristo muéstrame el camino del *yajé*" (Jesus Christ show me the path of *yajé*). The text is easy: the title is repeated a dozen of times, alternated by a short refrain to invoke the Great Spirit of the Forest, to be gifted with the right dose of visions, *ad libitum*.

May 16, 2006, 23:30. Mauro and Julio play continuously for at least an hour. The audience is limited to pronounce some "Heeeee! Hoooo!" to support the shaman effort. We already had the first cups of *yajé* and many of us (including myself) have already received the first triptaminic discharge. Catatonic, my eyes settled on the shamanic altar, dominated by the usual prayer cards (this time someone added a Last Supper and a Sacred Heart), a few crystals of quartz, amethyst and fluorite, Tarot cards, a crown of feathers and a Yanomami flute. A variegated cocktail of Catholicism, animism, alchemy, magic and sorcery, or perhaps the polyhedral expression of the same multifaceted phenomenon. I was almost starting to "fly" when a cry in Julio's home garden interrupted my trip. "Blessed Christ! Blessed Virgin!" Cries are repeated, louder and louder. Mauro stood up, slowly, to check on what is happening outside. A young man, Alfonso, continues to cry out, he rolls on the ground, squirming. Mauro is at his side. He begins to sing an *icarus*, a slow and repetitive shamanic song, that Mauro's interpretation transforms into a sluggish succession of syllables: maaaaa, moooo, beeee, baaaa, noooo, nuuuu . . . Mauro takes over an hour to calm him, still singing. Julio assists his Master, with a fan to cools Alfonso's face. The others remain in the house, lingering in the grip of their hallucinations. Everything is quiet, now. Alfonso is sleeping and I smoke a cigarette with Mauro. He explains that the *yajé* can lead to such a state of disorder when the soul of the "disciple" (using Mauro's terms) is not clear and when his spirit "is not in balance."

May 17, 2006, 8:00. On the bus. I bring Alfonso home. He sleeps peacefully and well. He told me that the night before, he saw the image of the Death, all black, and then Christ's, all white, and the Virgin's, all blue. He saw "the death of his spirit." When I asked him if he was Catholic he said he wasn't, that his parents are Jewish and that he has never attended to a Mass.[32]

The North American anthropologist Michael Brown (1989: 10) wrote that "shamanism affirms life, but at the same time also spawns violence and death." And Alfonso's hysteria, appeased by Mauro and the hypnotic power of his *icarus*, brings us back to the starting point, to the evidence of the first European observers, who saw in shamans the representatives of the devil: they, like Mauro, could speak *inter pares* with the demonic forces that had seized the sick (and by mimesis, could empathize with the patient himself, acquiring his possession and liberating him: it was exactly this "transfer of possession" that most frightened the Spanish Conquerors). Mauro, a product of the X Generation, freed himself from Alfonso's possession with a Marlboro between his lips.

When Shamanism Meets Neo-shamanism

In March 2007 I was invited to a ceremony where Mauro was not the main celebrant. With great joy to all the participants, Mauro had invited "just for us" his buddy Taita Oscar, a likeable and nice fifty-year-old Inga shaman, born and raised in Puerto Leguizamo. I thought that I was finally going to meet a "real" indigenous shaman. I was not be the only one to think so, since that night there were sixty people to welcome the wise Amazonian shaman. Taita Oscar benefits from a strong reputation as a therapist, especially in the treatment of

[32] The case of Alfonso, apparently anomalous, has to be analyzed into the context of the very Catholic Colombian culture. The hallucination of which he was prey (his visionary catabasis) should be read as the effect of "a deep contact with a powerful force, divine or higher, corresponding to the cultural context from which the consumer derives (for example, an approach to God, as it is conceived in the Catholic religion, with all the cultural charge that implies)" (Vélez and Pérez 2004: 324). In a certain way, rather than the microsystems of reference (family, friends, school, workplace), they are the exo- and macrosystems (cultural norms, power structures, economic logics and relations of production) that define the course and evolution of the psychic visions.

migraines, kidney stones, unfair dismissals and matrimonial infidelity. Among his most loyal customers he can rely on ministers, businessmen, intellectuals across the political spectrum, and people from the world of show business.

I remember the ceremony began with the recitation, the look pointed towards the sky, of the Our Father, and of the Hail Mary. The distribution of the cups filled with *yajé* was preceded by the sign of the cross, while Taita Oscar kissed the little image of the Sacred Heart hanging around his neck. As Mauro, Oscar sang, talked, listened and sprinkled us with balms and ointments (to increase the effect of vaporization, he held back a swig and then blew it on our bodies). Throughout the night he provided to the wellness of all participants, searching and finding the right opportunities to talk to each of us. When necessary, he shouted against some "intruder" spirit and some negative *pinta*. He danced and wiggled, while I felt I was flying. He did not read the Tarot cards, but he invited us to discuss our visions with a coffee in his hands and his continuous digressions on Colombian politics, environmental topics or the value of solidarity and justice.

Shamans (and neo-shamans) should be observed not only on the basis of their therapeutic function, but as people capable of processing complex meanings, as well as influencing attitudes and behaviors relevant to the social structure of reference. In the case of postcolonial (and modern) shamanism, the ceremonial of these thaumaturges must be interpreted as a real therapeutic endeavor, which shows epically the struggle between the human will (more or less ordered) and the entropic and fleeting reality: a struggle that will be fought with the weapons of terror in order to gain the control of the social order (or, more exactly, the ecosystemic structure) and to recover from the hallucinatory and violent context trapping since centuries that allegory of death represented by the Colombian nation.[33]

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[33] For a more extensive reflection on the subject, see the works of Taussig (1987) and Uribe (2003). In the interesting analysis authored by Carlos Pinzón about the history of witchcraft in Bogota, we found this sharp consideration: "violence and witchcraft have been knotting themselves as part of a new reality: the interethnic and class relations subjugate the constructions of the popular culture, which in turn will change in sync with the social, economic and political structures of the Nation" (Pinzón 1988: 6, translated by the author).

Thanks to Mauro, Taita Oscar and other *taita*s I worked with, I have learned to consider the shamans as chronic illusionists,[34] in the sense that their "shamanic condition" make them capable of controling different levels of consciousness at the same time, and to act in a performant way (often introducing innovations and "exotic" elements) to confirm their authority. Exactly, thanks to the virtue of these illusions, the "shamans of the forest," such as Taita Oscar, survived oblivion, moved to the cities, learned Spanish, Portuguese, English or French, told their stories to reporters and have been invited into the most prestigious forums (by international governmental and nongovernmental organizations, universities, research centers and charitable foundations), maintaining not only their own ethnic identity—and conceptualizing themselves as representatives of the pure indigeneity—but also their role of mediators between different orders of reality. Their experience proves once again their ability to move from one universe to another, and nothing makes us believe that shamanism possess fewer weapons than other belief systems to deal with the complexities of a troubled modernity, even if it maintains a "refractory" perspective and an antimodern *Weltanschauung* (while skilled to use the tools of modernity). The shaman knows how to wear histrionically the right outfit for every occasion.

From Agape to Deindividuation

In 1784, the theologian and philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1966) mentioned the shamans in his *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*. His look was certainly more indulgent than those of most of his contemporaries: Herder noted that the shaman, to deploy his personality (and his powers), needs a community of believers and understands the importance of the collective imagination in the ritual domain proper of shamanism. My experience with Mauro and his community confirmed that Herder's conclusions remain valid today, in the third millennium. Although Mauro and *yajé* may share (more or less equally) the leading role on the stage, in fact, it is the community itself (or the notion that each of us has built about the topic) that acts as a pole of attraction for its members. Julio, Alfonso, Carlos and "El Pibe" have confirmed this conclusion when they admitted that:

[34] I do not use the term in a derogatory sense: I would only underline their power of enchantment and their ability to fascinate their audience.

. . . our community is a true communion of feelings and emotions. We feel like fellows of an astral travel: we are not merely friends.

After all, none of them feels awkward to deal alone with the higher (and more difficult) levels of the *yajé* path, without the guidance of a "real" shaman and the support of a group. Mauro's agape is a manifestation of a global ecumene, which brings together, in different forms, expressions of the same dynamic: the spiritual quest in a group setting, under the supervision of a guide and with the help of psychoactive substances.

From a social psychology perspective, the routines practiced by this neo-shamanic group—and its cohesiveness—seems to generate the typical state of decreased self-evaluation and decreased evaluation apprehension that is commonly defined as deindividuation. Such a notion, generally applied to community dynamics causing extremely anti-normative conducts (violent crowds, lynch mobs or online piracy),[35] describes the perceived loss of individuality and personal responsibility that can occur when someone acts as part of a group (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 2002). In fact, Mauro's fellows plainly admit their preference to lose their sense of self, to "disappear" and give way to the overwhelming identity of the group. Due to reduced feelings of accountability, and increased feelings of group cohesion and conformity, urban psychonauts could act in more disinhibited ways, accepting nonnormative behaviors (such the use of illicit, or almost-illicit, substances) and formalizing the boundaries between them and "the others." But the price they pay is particularly high and it corresponds with the social construction of a hybrid identity which obliges them to jump acrobatically from their urban—and mundane—daily life to the mystical *hic et nunc* of their community, with results that, as far as I know, have never been deeply analyzed by psychological research. If traditional shamanism, as practiced by native communities, was inscribed in a social structure with a shared cosmology (the clanic or tribal group) and was assigned a well defined purpose (the homeostatic balance within the community, with the neighbor groups, and with the natural environment), neo-shamanic communities, on the contrary, suffer the effects of an irreconcilable

[35] Even if early theorizations were focused on the negative impact of top–down manipulations, more recent perspectives, such as the Social Identity model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE), have been underlying the role played by both mass and groups processes in developing positive behaviors and experiences (Reicher, Spears and Postmes 1995).

asymmetry separating the professed ambition to spiritual well-being and transcendent consciousness and the capitalist way-of-life led by most of their members. In Marxist terms, it could be considered as the umpteenth display of a mainstream commodity fetishism disguised with a mystical make up, associated with an antiliberal (and "countercultural") discourse that tries to hide a very uncouth reality: that neo-shamanism, in most cases, is a commercial enterprise that ascribes human qualities (the shamanic values) to a commodity (the shamanic service), persuading its fellows (treated as users) to take part in deindividuating community dynamics (which require an economic investment) to benefit the shaman's power. In other words, if a user does not contribute sufficient economic resources (the 35,000 pesos I paid to Mauro or the 500,000 pesos asked by the Templo del Indio Amazonico), and if he (or she) is unable to accept the irresistible identity of the group, he (or she) will never take advantage of the spiritual comfort offered by the neo-shamanic community. It is not a question of holism, magnetism or energies: it is a simple commercial enterprise.

Conclusion: The Resilient Character of the Shamanic Culture

When I lived in Colombia, I loved getting lost in the corridors of the immense collection of pre-Hispanic gold artifacts conserved into the Museo del Oro, in Bogota: a perfect retreat for those who, like me, want to reflect in peace upon the shadow of the History. Visiting its never-ending display of objects devoted both to "shamanic flight" and the figure of the shaman impressed me because it shows the level of importance that these acrobats of the supernatural had taken in the different cultures that inhabited the Andean and Amazonian landscapes. Nowadays, the powers of the shamans are definitely perceived in a different way, especially if we take into account that in a premodern context they were considered as "the center of the world" by members of their communities, which would be unthinkable in the neo-shamanic discourse, characterized by its emphasis on the power of community as a multiplier of energies. The shamanic performance (as well as the *habitus* and skills deployed by its professionals) has changed, according to the different registry and cultural capital of the new consumers: as an effect of a selective process of elimination, the ethnobotanical knowledge has given way to the ability to analyze the globalized context, the use of advanced communication tools and the effective management of economic

relations in an open market system subject to the limitations imposed by the exosystemic structures of power.

A few years ago, the British anthropologist Piers Vitebsky (1995) wrote that shamanism was a chameleonic and elusive phenomenon, seized in a continuous process of adaptation to find a stable position within the margins offered by the capitalist system and the global village economy. The intention of this essay was to confirm that, in our view, shamanism has been able to adapt appropriately, surviving the impact of modernity and postmodernity, and that to do so, it has been able to change its clothes with a certain dexterity.

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Sámi Shamanism, Fishing Magic and Drum Symbolism

FRANCIS JOY ROVANIEMI, FINLAND

Such was the impact of the Lutheran Church's conquest against the Sámi, the indigenous people of the Lapland, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries that the Sámi noaidi *drums which were tools used to assist the shaman in out-of-body journeys, trance, healing and divination, were sought after, collected and destroyed in their hundreds. The zones or borders painted on the drum head divide the instrument into cosmological zones or structures in which recordings portrayed as symbols were made of scenes related to hunting, fishing and trapping practices. Of the remaining drums found preserved in museums throughout Europe, researchers still face difficulties regarding the analysis of complex intricate and artistic symbolism portrayed on the drum skins of particular drums where there are no records of ownership and interpretation of the drum content which is what this paper addresses.*

Today, the indigenous people who live in the northernmost areas of Finland: Utsjoki, Inari, Enontekiö and parts of Sodankyla municipality are referred to as the Sámi/Saami:

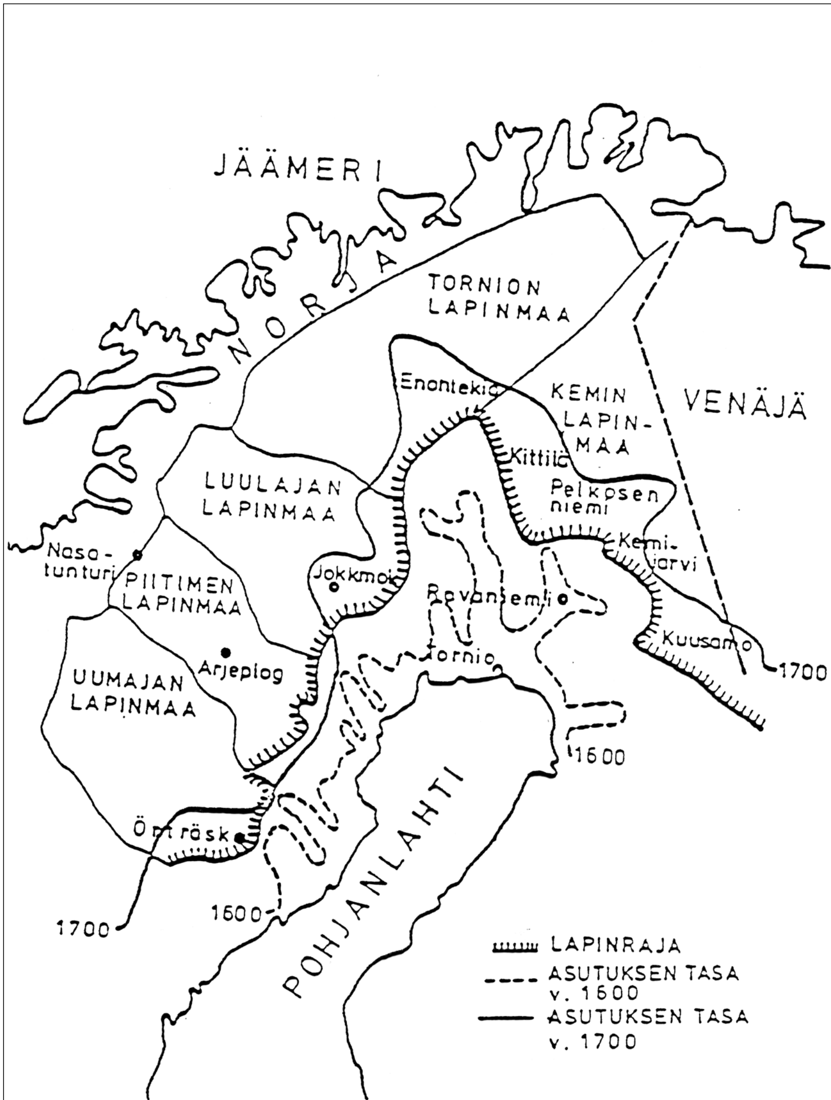
> The present-day dwelling area of the Sámi (the Sámi region) extends from the northern parts of the Kola Peninsula in Russia to the north of Finland, Norway and Sweden, over both sides of the Kölen mountains towards the south to Trondheim in Norway and Idre in Dalecarlia, Sweden. (Aikio et al. 1994: 50)

The Sámi Home Lands throughout Scandinavia are known as Sápmi, and these areas have within the past thirty years undergone significant change due to climate change and globalization, which have contributed to change locally. In modern society, many Sámi people run successful businesses through the service sector and modern working sector in general, as well as tourism enterprises which have helped accelerate certain developments within the culture. In many cases tourism is combined with other economic activities.

Traditionally, Sámi were hunters and fisherman peoples both on the lake and water ways as well as coastal areas around the Baltic and Arctic seas for at least the past seven thousand years (map 1). The Sámi are chiefly recognized today through their current occupations which are reindeer herding, hunting and fishing, and have their own language and culture. Wild reindeer hunting turned at some point in the past into reindeer pastoralism. In modern times, traditional society consists of reindeer, Siida and land, in which many elements of the old hunting culture can still be found.

Research into the history of the practice of shamanism amongst the Sámi in Lapland has drawn widespread interest from all major academic traditions, with regard to understanding the role and function of the *noaidi* in Sámi society, who is today referred to as the shaman. Extensive investigation based on accounts provided mainly by priests and missionaries involved in eradication of Sámi religion and religious practices throughout the four nations of Lapland: Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula, Russia, has demonstrated why the *noaidi* and his/her drum was such a threat to the Swedish Church. For example, apart from the belief in a multitude of spirits and beings in different realities in which humanity co-existed, the drum was used as a tool for ecstatic enterprise by those who specialized in such a vocation. The presence of these two elements in Sámi society was in direct opposition to the worldview and doctrine of the church and state. The diversity of Sámi religion is encountered in the most comprehensive way through the paintings on the head of the *noaidi*'s magical drum. A typical drum served as a type of cognitive map on which the *noaidi* portrayed different aspects of both the physical and spiritual aspects of tradition and culture, exhibited through two distinct types of designs made from pine and spruce tree wood of which the forests of Lapland are abundant:

> The frame-drums, *gievrie*, from the South Sámi area were made in an oval shape. . . . On the smooth skin [made from reindeer hide] the cosmos one inhabited was drawn or painted. On the back, the part of the drum that was turned towards the body, were hung different amulets of silver and brass, or pieces of bone and teeth from different animals. They gave the drum power and noise. . . . In the northern area the pine and spruce were also used, but there it was



Map. 1. A seventeenth-century map of Scandinavia showing the division of the northern parts of the Swedish Empire divided into the five Lappmarks. The map also shows the Lapland border: Lapinraja. The Lule area can be seen at the left (Luulajan Lapinmaa). The grid lines noted below (right): "Asutuksen Tasa [describe the settlement area in the 1600s, and the settlement area in the] 1700s. Map and text republished here after Vahtola (1982: 155) by courtesy of the Research Institute of Northern Finland, University of Oulu.

the boles and knots of the roots that formed the body of the drum. *Goabdes* or *meavrresgarri* are the names for these bowl-drums. (Westman et al. 1999: 10)[1]

It was not just in the shape of the drum but also in the pictures themselves that the southern and northern traditions were different. In the center of the frame-drum, the southern drum was a squared cross with four radiating lines which symbolized *Beaivi,* the sun and its power. Round the edges of the drum were then grouped the different pictures and figures. In the North Sámi areas they chose instead to divide the drum-skin into different "fields," in layers: the upper, lower and middle worlds. . . . On the drums from the Central Sámi area the two traditions were combined. (Westman et al. 1999: 11)

An extensive explanation of a typical search for adequate materials for the building and construction of different drums in explained in the work of Swedish ethnographer Ernst Manker (1938: 182–93).

The role and function of the *noaidi* in Sámi society was that of an intermediatory between the world of ancestors, animal kingdom and both male and female spirits. In the middle-physical world communication was sought between spirits who took up residence in boulders and rock formation on the landscape known in Sámi language as Sieidi. Sieidi, in certain cases portrayed human and animal like physical features, and were appeased through sacrificial offerings in relation to hunting where the drum was consulted as an oracle through divination. A second and what might be considered as more dangerous vocation was the task of making out-of-body journeys and liaising and negotiating with the ruling spirits and occupants in the world of the dead, for example, for the recovery and healing of sick and injured persons who has lost their souls. Each *noaidi* was said to possess a number of guardian or helping spirits:

The helping-spirits were animals with whose assistance the *noaidi* could make his soul journeys, and the protective-spirits were dead relatives who could aid him with advice. . . . He could use . . . [the drum] to help his community in times of crisis, but he could also use it for his own purpose, both good and bad. (Westman et al. 1999: 13)

[1] Birch wood was also widely used in the construction of drums throughout Lapland.

Communication was also established with the Varalden and Radien families who were higher spirits in the upper or celestial world. Sacrifices were often made to both of these spirits ". . . to obtain luck in reindeer herding, and to slow down the coming of the end of the world" (Helander-Renvall 2005: 20). In addition to the use of the drum for divination by the Sámi *noaidi*, rhythmic chanting in the form of yoiking has also been a practice which has contributed to the inducement of trance when shamanizing and healing. The themes embodied by the *noaidi* when yoiking are consistent with those of animals for example: reindeer, wolf, bear, dog; and special places in nature such as rivers, trees and boulders, to which lyrics were sung in the form of stories related to the landscape remembrance and hunting.

Activities such as these noted above were interpreted as allegiance to the Christian Devil by the priests of the northern districts in Lapland who, therefore, sought to eradicate Sámi religious practices through corporal punishment and death sentences to those who refused to give up their native religion and convert to the ways of the church. During this cultural upheaval and the drive by the apostils of the Church of the majority populations, the Christian belief system was subsequently administered throughout Lapland via high taxation and destruction and confiscation of hundreds of *noaidi*-shaman drums, during the colonialism period, which were collected and burned by the priests.

Such was the consequence and response to the loss of Sámi culture and traditions caused the arrival of Christianity in Lapland that some three hundred years after the first drums were collected, examinations of symbols and figures from amongst the surviving "71 drums" (Itkonen 1943–4: 68) to be found in the archives and display cases of museums throughout Europe, has been extensive. This is a way that both the Sámi themselves and also scholarly research have tried to understand and interpret the culture of their ancestors. Each of these drums is found in Britain, Italy, France, Denmark, Germany and Sweden (see Manker 1938), and tell their own stories of a hunting, fishing and trapping culture which translated a relationship with nature into art. Close observation of the content of many drum heads shows various Christian symbols and figures such as Jesus Christ, Mary and other biblical characters and metaphors that are present. These symbols reflect the reality of the enforcement of an imported religion upon a nature religion. Birgitta Berglund informs us that:

On occasion the Saami tried to fit their drum to the Christian religion. As Rydving (1995: 161–2) has shown this does not mean that the religions of the Saami and the Christians were mixed. The reason was to make the drum more harmless and thus avoid punishment. The reason why the missionaries collected the drums was [because of] their reputation as the most important witchcraft tool that the Saami had. (Berglund 2005: 137)

Research into literature from the colonialism period has to some degree helped scholars in their understanding of how important the drum was for the Sámi and also the crucial role it played in helping to structure Sámi society and worldview. However, because much of the information about the use of the drum and study of the pictorial events on the drum head was compiled through a number of unreliable sources provided by people from outside Sámi culture, namely, the priests and missionaries; a fair amount of ambiguity exists regarding translations of figures and symbols, their contexts, meanings and interpretations by persons who collected the drums, and even the Sámi themselves. Additional evidence supporting this reality is described by Sámi historian Veli-Pekka Lehtola who makes reference to:

. . . the violent changes in connection with Christian missionizing in the 1600s and 1700, [whereby] most of the symbolism of the *noaidi* drums was lost; [and because of this] it is difficult to reconstruct completely, the old world-view from sources written by outsiders. (Lehtola 2002: 28)

The use and application of language in the form of songs in Sámi society in relation to culture and identity has played a major role in narrative and oral transmission of cultural history and cosmology throughout antiquity which includes songs used during hunting and fishing, as well as the reenactment of cultural myths, during reindeer herding, life cycle rites, healing and journeys to the realm of the dead. In Sámi society, everyone has participated in the singing which was passed down from generation to generation. It may also be said that the use of the yoik has been instrumental in the inducement of trance, the use and application of magic in cooperation with the use of the drum.

During the *noaidi*'s ritual activity, the yoiking which is a form of narrative was also used to help cast a spell, enchant or bewitch a person or animal or direct punishment to a thief to make him pay for his actions. The songs and their content were not features Christian priests con-

ceived as being important, because by association, with the use of the drum and inducement into a shamanic trance, the songs were seen by the church to be used for the practice of malevolent magic and conjuring up the Devil as Norwegian scholar Rune Hagen reports:

> Christians immersed in demonological concepts of shamanism believed that Satan himself gave these drums to the Sámi. The drum, an instrument of the Devil, enabled a sorcerer to summon his demons, which were believed to reside in it and were revived by striking it . . . the witches of Lapland were known to cast their evil spells across vast distances. Their spells could even be carried upon the northern winds to provoke illnesses among people far to the south in Europe. (Hagen 2006: 626)

Therefore, the yoiking was just as despised by the priests as the drums were and because of:

> . . . this connection to the Sámis' pre-Christian religion [it] is also the reason why the Sámi yoik has been banished from schools in Sámi areas all the way up to the present. (Solbakk 2007: 11)

From observation, the yoik has at least two recognisable dimensions to it, the first is singing to help establish an altered state of consciousness and the second is how the *noaidi* sings about his calling of the spirits and out of body travelling to other dimensions. Another important point is that scholarly research shows that one of the very early ways Sámi pre-Christian religion is also evident throughout the Nordic countries is through rock carving and rock paintings, especially in Finland where some paintings are thought to be 7,000 years old. Scenes of trance, flying, out-of-body travel and interactions with spirits and animals painted on rocks and boulders share many parallels with symbols painted on *noaidi* drums.

All the surviving Sámi *noaidi* drums are decorated with a range of symbolism which is complex and varied with the exception of those that have faded because of their age. The pictorial content of the original versions were painted with red dye from alder tree bark which had been boiled or chewed before usage:

> The red colour of alder bark, symbolizing blood [is a substance which was utilized as a medium that acted as] a key to control the elements. (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2006: 60)

The red colour of alder dye also had religious significance for hunting, and was seen through the deity who is called:

> . . . *Leaibealmmái*—the alder tree man [who] was the God of Hunting. The alder tree was regarded as a sacred tree. With dyes made from the bark, the people painted figures on the *goavddis*—drum. *Leaibealmmái* had control over the wild animals of the woods. (Solbakk 2007: 34–5)

Aims of the Research

In 2010, the author conducted an investigation into a number of publication errors relating to symbols and figures on a selection Sámi *noaidi* drums which were collected by priests and missionaries during the Witch hysteria era from between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries in Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian Lapland (see Joy 2011). The careful study was for the purpose of being able to rectify the ways in which Sámi religion and culture in Lapland has been portrayed and therefore, interpreted such as the relationship of the *noaidi* to the spirits which was recorded as information representing metaphors and combined features of sacred narratives belonging to an oral tradition that spanned thousands of years.

As a further study to what the author has carried out previously, the proposed research in this paper has two aims which are as follows. The first task is an attempt to fill in a number of gaps in previous research that examine the role of the art of a Sámi *noaidi* within the context of sacrificial activities in relation to the pictorial content of a drum (number 63 from Manker's 1938 inventory) that has its origins in the Lule Lappmark area of Swedish Lapland which is located close to the border with Finland, and has survived the colonialism period. Lule has been a significant place of interest for scholarly research into Sámi history with regard to the campaign of the Church. According to Norwegian scholar Håkan Rydving:

> Parts of the Lule Saami areas were for a long time looked upon as "the most heathen" by the ecclesiastical authorities. It was the religious situation in the northeastern part of the Lule Saami area which dominated the debate in Swedish Parliament of 1738–1739 and resulted in the establishment of an official state agency for ecclesiastical work among the Saami. (Rydving 1995: 23–4)

Analysis herein is undertaken through an investigation into the decorative symbolism painted on the drum head, with regard to defining the overall context of the art, which as will be demonstrated, relates to a portrait of fishing magic exhibited through the way the owner of the drum perceives the nature of reality and relates to the world. Beforehand, and as a way of acknowledging the need for the relevant ethical considerations during research involving culturally sensitive material, which is in this instance are the drums figures. The author takes into account the holistic worldview or perspective on reality that coincides with approaches used when involved in research into indigenous artifacts and culture. The way ethical considerations are followed herein is by giving recognition to the importance of relating to the data within "the practice of Indigeneity as a 'whole system' . . ." (Jonsson 2011: 103). Through comprehension of the nature and context of the research material in relation to shamanism and Sámi art, it is imperative that "all aspects of life, both tangible and intangible [are understood, and furthermore, how these] are interconnected and cannot be separated from one another" (Jonsson 2011: 103). Emphasizing these points helps to clarify the approach and methods used and how they relate to the research material under investigation. Only by placing the data within a holistic worldview; it is then possible to gain a wider interpretation of the content and nature of events that are under examination. By contrast, previous research undertaken into the drum in question by Manker (1938) and Gustav Klemm (1894) has not allowed for the possibility of holistic interpretation of events on the drum head which means that the spiritual aspect has quite often been falsified, denied or misunderstood, especially by the clergy.

The focus of the research is directed towards strengthening contextual evidence which through interpretation of the activity painted on the drum head attempts to link the related events as being associated with a portrait concerning the use of power to secure a successful outcome for catching fish. This intention is expressed artistically by the drums owner at some time prior to engaging in fishing, trapping and hunting activities. By associating the artistic content of the overall scene, with Sieidi spirit involvement that is also portrayed in the picture, a number of parallels appear to become evident which the author makes clear, thus supporting the theory of the use of magic. Being able to identify what these parallels are demonstrates their significant meaning and value in the wider picture, and can be placed within the content of activities of

the *noaidi*, who from an evaluation of the structures in the symbols on the drum, has extensive knowledge of magical practices which could be associated with a type of fishing narrative in relation to the fishing and perhaps the coastal Sámi. The drum presented in the research is one of "the remaining 71" (Itkonen 1943–4: 68) Sámi *noaidi* drums collected by priests and missionaries.

The motivation for presenting an alternative explanation in addition to what has already been presented concerning the events on the head of the drum through previous research by Manker and Klemm, and what might give further support to alternate theories, is that within the field of the study of religions, if we link religion and religious art together which also includes magic, the term "Dynamism" becomes applicable to magical art within this context. Dynamism is a scientific word that loosely defined means it seeks to explain:

> . . . a universal, immanent force or energy underlying—either logically or chronologically—all religious (and/or magical) beliefs and practices. [It is believed] that dynamism at its earliest, religion comprised a belief in a multitude of supernatural, personal beings with whom human beings interacted. (Alles 1987: 527–31).

A second applicable description of how this force is encountered for example in relation to the *noaidi*'s interaction with the Sieidi sacrificial boulders is found in a description by Sámi scholar Elina Helander-Renvall, who uses the term "Animism" in relation to how human persons relate to their environment. Moreover, an animistic perception of the use and direction of power is seen depicted on the drum head whereby in relation to inter-species communication and the creation of ritual art:

> It is important to understand the role and function of the landscape and certain places and features within the landscape in specific areas. This is because within these places, communication, and what will be referred to as mythic discourse, takes place between humans and non-humans, and this dialogue is known to benefit human beings in their daily lives and activities. (Helander-Renvall 2009: 1)[2]

Finally, the worship of natural features on the landscape that hosted supernatural powers as well as the beings who resided in the mythical

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[2] Scenes from this discourse has in the past been painted on the drum heads.

underworld called Säiva can be traced as far back as the Neolithic age in Finland where prehistoric rock paintings are located. These powers were not comprehended through the concept of linear time as is the case in the Christian worldview, but the movements and shifts within nature were encountered as a cyclical chain of events. Therefore, this concept of time and space with regard to cosmology, structure, positioning and thinking, and presentation of an indigenous cultures religious symbolism differs remarkably from how religious symbolism is presented and analyzed in Western schools of thought, which is how the research was conducted by and large by priests. Another main reason for these differences is that in Sámi culture the *noaidi* when viewed as an artist have ". . . organized their experiences of the world into narratives" (Moen 2006: 4). This type of organization seems evident through the illustrations on the head of drum number 63 (see figs. 1, *a*, *b*, *c*, 2, 3).

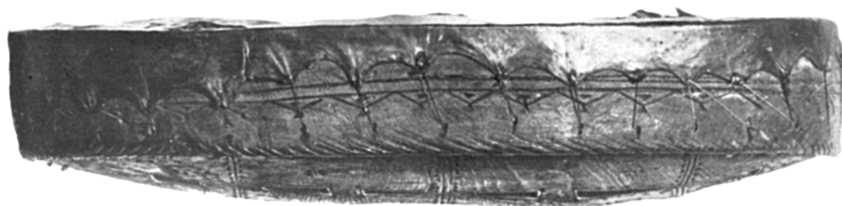
The second aim in the research is concerned with Sámi Cosmology and seeks to bring to light, evidence to what is perceived as a loss of culture and worldview in relation to the author's recognition of the absence of the water element and related content, such as fish, water birds, and other animals on the heads of the remaining drums which have survived the Christian purges (see the chapter below: "What Studying Drum Number 63 Has Revealed about Sámi Shamanism and Cosmology?"). These observations have been made by making comparisons with drums that have a high content of reindeer, moose, bears and snakes for example, and explains the theories behind how the destruction of hundreds of drums has contributed to this loss from amongst the coastal or fishing Sámi.

The Material of the Study, Approaches Used and Previous Interpretations

The pictorial content of the drum under investigation is recorded in Manker's monumental work (1938; 1950). The book which is a collection of the surviving drums and ethnographical inventory describes each one, how the different types were made and ". . . their individual history in addition to typologies, and origins and description . . ." (Joy 2011: 117). The instrument which is catalogued as:

> . . . number 63, is a bowl type drum made from birch wood is currently the property of The Ethnographical Museum of Dresden, Germany (Museum für

a



b

Figs. 1 *a* (top left), *b* (below left) and *c* (above top), are photographs of bowl drum number 63 from Lule when viewed from different angles. The illustrations on the skin of the drum head are barely visible. On the rear and side profiles of the drum, the attachment of the reindeer hide to the birch frame can be seen and also the decorative patterns that have been cut out to give the drum its own character and signature. These photographs have been added for the benefit of the reader so the extent of the fadedness and condition of the skin is evident; giving proof as to why it is not possible to refer to the original illustrations in this case (after Manker 1938: 782–3).

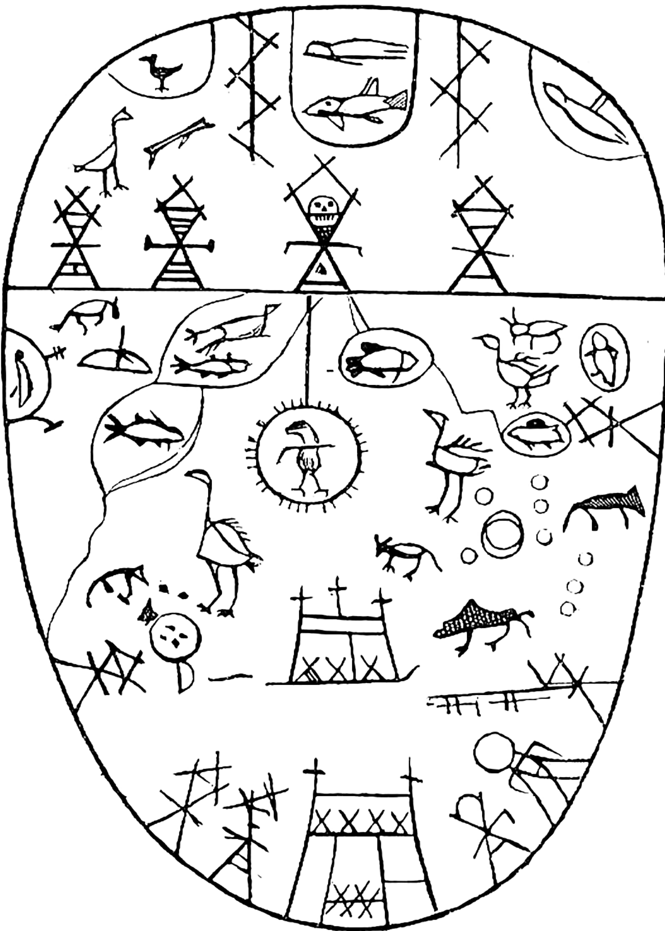


Fig. 2. From Manker's (1938: 60) inventory drum number 63. The bird like figure is evident in the Sun-light as are the net like strands which surround the fish and birds. A Sun symbol in this location appears unusual, but it may well be associated with Säiva, the mythological underworld of the Sámi. Quite often, the *noaidi* summoned a Säiva bird to help him, with his out-of-body journeys, and this encounter often took place in a tunnel, portal or opening from which spiritual light from the mythical world of Säiva was visible. In the upper section in the third structure from the left, a spirit figure is visible in a sacrificial boulder that appears to have a link with the bird in the Sun motif.

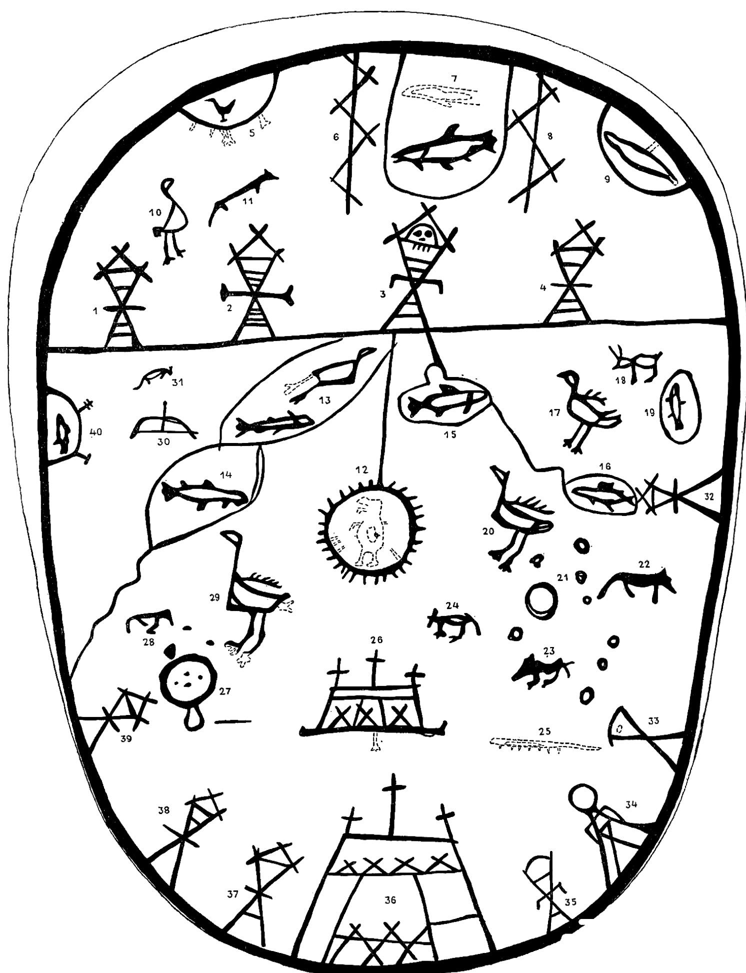


Fig. 3. Drum number 63 taken from Manker's second volume (1950: 410), where each figure on the drum head is numbered. There are clearly some discrepancies between the two figures in the Sun symbol; this image could be compared to a spirit figure which characterizes an animal with human features and this is not an unusual occurrence found in shamanic phenomenon, as spiritual birds may have some features that are human-like.

Völkerkunde Dresden); the drums history can be traced back to 1668. (Manker 1938: 780–1, translated from German by Martina Schäfer)

Information about the drum is very fragmented as is described by Manker, and there is no indication as to who owned it and what it was used for, other than the artistic content on the drum head. A description of all the individual figures on the painted skin is given by Manker (1950):

> Manker's second publication discusses, in addition, the positioning of painted human, animal and divine figures, trying to illustrate how the Sámi world-view was presented and how it varied considerably, firstly by region and area; and secondly, according to the *noaidi*'s experience and interaction with the spirits in these zones and the way in which this was then documented on the drum which served as a kind of Cosmological Map prior to and during hunting. (Joy 2011: 117)

The author's analysis of the drum and the methodological approach is kept within the context of a local study in relation to narrative-story telling, and is applicable because narrative is a common theme associated with shamanism and mythical discourse, which relates to the events that are presented through the pictorial content on the drum head. The main focus of the analysis of the drum symbolism is placed, firstly on a bird like figure located inside a light or Sun symbol at the center of the drum head. The bird in this instance is an unusual feature. From observations, the animal appears to be interacting with a spirit residing in a Sieidi sacrificial boulder, positioned on a border area between the water and land. In this case the border area separating the land from the water or the middle world from the lower one is defined by a mythical line that transverses across the drum head. Quite often, certain deities took residence in Sieidi boulders, which were appeased and subsequently sacrificed to by the *noaidi*. Manker has also documented these spirits in his 1938 edition.

To support the investigation, submitted in the paper are two illustrations as pictorial evidence that are sketching's of the original drum. The purpose for using the drawings instead of photographs for this particular study is because the original black and white photographs presented in Manker's 1938 edition are very faded and not reliable or suitable for presentation, and it is very difficult to make out the images. On both of the sketched illustrations (fig. 2 is from the 1938 edition and fig. 3 is from the 1950 edition), the content is somewhat clearer and portrays the drums symbolism more transparently, showing a significant number

of fish and water birds in both sections of the drum, as well as Jabma Aimo, the world of the dead which is characterized by crosses. There are some slight variations between the two drawings of the bird in the center of the sun in each picture. Regardless, the main focus for the study is to examine the relationship between the bird figure in the Sun symbol and the lines and structures in which fish and water birds appear to be encased or captured-trapped. The use of the material in this format helps with attempting to present a wider interpretation of the significance of the events through the use of narrative, as an overall explanation in relation to the content of what could be described as a rare account, portraying magical activity presented through the Sámi *noaidi*'s art. The positioning of the birds have proven earlier, as Manker has stated, to be something of a mystery with reference to the roles they are playing, as well as their relevance on the drum head.

Earlier theories presented by Manker and Klemm which appear as straight forward and logical given the ethnographical approach used. However, and as will be emphasized, the content of the whole picture has to be interpreted from a broader perspective when considering the role of oral narrative and magic featured in hunting epics in Sámi society. Manker refers to the bird in the sun symbol as "a sacrificial animal, Klemm thinks it is a human and Edgar Reuterskiöd says it cannot be known" (Manker 1938: 411), which provoke further points of interest for the discussion.

A Portrait of Sámi Magic or Something Else?

A study of the material below has revealed that drum number 63 is the only drum photographed and documented in Manker's inventory portraying a large number of fish. The instrument and its content has a strong and recurrent theme with water and the features are encountered through what initially looks like a type of portal observed via a membranous layer of some kind, where fish and water birds are connected together as if trapped or under selection by means of a spell, influence or enchantment. The presence of this unusual web-like structure seems like it could be a representation of a circuit of power in the scenery; suggesting a type of magical interaction with the water element and fishing and can be observed within the content of the lower section on the head

of drum. Rydving (1995: 62) believes the drum "probably belonged to a hunter or fisherman."

The content of drum number 63 is interesting by contrast to the other 70 drums in Manker's inventory which still have skins on them, mainly because of the number of fish present in the top and upper section of the middle zone. What appears unique about the imagery of the black and white illustrations on the two sketching's is the instrument has perhaps one or two reindeer images in view, and the rest of the layout and positioning of other animal figures can be associated with water. Therefore, the content which consists mostly of a mixture of fish and water birds informs us how the drum can be primarily linked with river-lake or the coastal area where fishing and trapping were prevalent.

Another significant feature in the center of the instrument is what appears as the sun-like symbol with bird type figure inside it, distinguishable by its legs and feet. The bird figure gives the impression as if it has been drawn in such a way that there are the human features of two arms present across its body, and clawed feet, which makes an interesting point because it is not usual to see this type of image located in the middle of the Sámi *noaidi* drum in the rhomb or sun symbol, if this is what it represents. Typically, it is more common to find a reindeer in the center of the symbol as a representation of "Beaivi or Beaivvás the Sun [who] is one of the most important spirits or gods of the Sámi" (Helander-Renvall 2009: 5), but there is no evidence to suggest that Beaivi is portrayed here with what look like the features of a bird. Instead, it is probable the bird figure is associated with the mythical world of Säiva.

Furthermore, the image could be suggesting the bird is a representation of a diver or something similar, making it an intriguing illustration in this location because the diver bird in such a form could be indicative of one of the helping spirits associated with the Sámi *noaidi* and his work. Moreover, birds are known to have associations with the symbolic descent from the physical world by swimming down to the mythical underworld of the Säiva people to reach them and vice versa. For this reason, the image could be placed into the category where it is portrayed as that of a bird who has been summoned from Säiva to help the *noaidi* perform his work. In Sámi society, establishing contact with the mythical Säiva people from the lower or underworld is known to have been important for helping to secure success with fishing and trapping, as some of the pictures on the drum head are indicative of. The

Säiva people were considered to have supernatural abilities as ancestral beings and spirits who helped the *noaidi* where necessary.

If the lower section of the drum is examined closely, we can see that one of the contributory factors for this type of journey was because the souls of the fish and birds were understood to reside in the Säiva realm, and therefore, contact was made with the supernatural powers located there through sacrifice and magic to help influence events during fishing and trapping to ensure a favorable outcome.

To give additional support to this theory, the use of spirit birds as helping allies of the *noaidi* in Lapland is well known, and is mentioned by Lars Levi Laestadius in his *Fragments of Lappish Mythology* where the shaman had an ". . . underworld bird, sorcery bird" (Laestadius 2002: 210–11). A more recent contribution from a source found in another publication is provided by Sámi scholar John T. Solbakk (2007: 25) who gives a description from what is described as a typical shamanic séance where the Sámi *noaidi*, at the start of the shamanizing ". . . called his *noaideloddi* (*noaidi* bird)" whose job is to go and bring the *noaidi*'s helping spirits from the world of the dead (Säiva) to assist him with the task ahead. It appears too that birds are found as a common feature as helping spirits of shaman's as Mircea Eliade (2004: 479) informs us how in many cultures and in certain ritual events "the symbolism of magical flight [and] two important mythical motifs [that] have contributed to give it its present structure [are] the mythical image of the soul in the form of a bird and the idea of birds as psychopomps," and this adds a further point of interest for the narrative due to the fact that birds are associated with both the upper and lower regions of the cosmos in the shamanic worldview. However, and according to Finnish scholar Risto Pulkkinen, "the Saami shaman did not act as a psychopomp, a conductor of the soul of a dead person to the next world, which was generally one of the functions of the shaman in Siberia (Pulkkinen et al. 2005: 387). If this is the case, it means the Sámi *noaidi* would not have undertaken the role of psychopomp in the guise of a bird.

Giving further consideration to the above, what the image of the bird in its present location on the drum head is indicative of, is in addition to the connection between the spirit in the Sieidi, in the top section of the drum, third from the left, and the line which runs vertical below joining the sun symbol with the bird inside it together, the symbolism of the image offers a further explanation. The picture seems as a typical portrait showing the co-operation between the Sámi *noaidi* and the

spiritual being whose joint effort is helping to secure the fish and birds as food sources. Through the projection of magical power, in a similar way to how lightening descends, to both render the fish and birds helpless or to direct them through manipulation towards the *noaidi* in some way which he will be able to catch them.

My theory when placed alongside the earlier interpretation by Klemm and Manker's, presents a wider interpretation whereby the illustrated events in one sense confirm a trapping scene taking place, but the very essence of the content might illuminate a mythical–narrative story of the *noaidi*'s soul's journey into the world of the souls of animals to communicate with them. A narrative activity found the world over in shamanic cultures, when there is a need to secure luck in the search for food. In helping to give support for determining the latter, this type of narrative of travelling between worlds, has in a similar fashion, been recognized at rock art locations previously where sacrificial acts have been performed (Joy 2007).

Given the fact a type of sun symbol with a bird figure inside it is located in the center between the two lines, demonstrates to us how the bird has a central role in orchestrating the events taking place in the spiritual realm with assistance from the Sieidi spirit whose power helps secure success in the hunt before these actions become apparent in the physical reality sometime after. The bird could also represent an alter ego of a *noaidi*, and simultaneously also a bird ancestor, *lodde-máddu*, or 'a soul of the prey'. Sámi believe that animals/birds/frogs have a *máddu* (soul) of their own. The bird within the Sun in this sense would be a spirit who helps a *noaidi* to spirit travel in a safe way and gives him/her information to secure successful fishing and hunting.

Concerning the line formation in the lower zone of the drum which has several circular structures to it; initial observation gives the description of what resembles a type of net or something similar. In Manker's (1950) edition, Manker refers to Klemm's interpretation of events on the drum head at the point in the top section where the lines meet and the spirit figure whose face is visible in the third structure from the left as being "the god in the picture [who] has a human face and a link to the *Noaidi*, and is a symbol of a link to the magical world" (Manker 1950: 409–11). This for me would seem like a reasonable interpretation.

However, what Klemm also refers to with regard to the circular structures containing the fish and water birds, is clearly visible in the picture and has a further explanation consistent with sorcery. Klemm's

interpretation of the lines is they are "water lines—lines of the river" (Manker 1950: 409–11, translated from German by Martina Schäfer).[3]

My understanding of the events taking place and the interpretation of the lines circling around the game animals is they are symbolic representations of strands of magical energy-power sometimes referred to as *mana*; and *mana* has associations both with spiritual beings and their powers as well as human beings who have strong magical abilities, such as the shaman or witch. Through closer observation and given the fact the lines appear to originate from directly below the Sieidi spirit, which according to Manker, "judging by the double hammer-like arms, [might represent] the Thunder god Tiermes. . . . Reuterskiold's reference to figure 3 is Thor" (Manker 1950: 409, translated from German by Martina Schäfer). With the summoning of electrical power the lines then descend into the lower section of the drum but not the top section; the two lines below can in a physical sense be associated with the way the water flows indeed as Klemm suggests. However, a more holistic explanation is these rapids or currents had value and purpose beneficial to the *noaidi* when directing/summoning magical power to capture prey and perform trapping techniques, as water also has associations with shapeshifting in mythical cultures. Furthermore, the spirits at the edge of the water were known to travel from Säiva into the physical reality when summoned by the *noaidi* through sacrificial offering, and some Sieidi sacrificial places were believed to be entrances to this mythical realm.

Giving further consideration to these new interpretations, the imagery on the drum is an indication of a person who as Rydving (1995: 62) has suggested, ". . . [the instrument] probably belonged to a hunter and fisherman," but someone who was also a *noaidi* as well, and whose skills in magic are presented in what appears as a rare and unusual narrative-portrait of events. Through the illustrations we see how the focus is directed towards the mythical underworld and the utilization and harnessing of the power of water in addition to the assistance of the Sieidi spirit for trapping luck. The work of the *noaidi* when viewed in this sense is that with the assistance of the bird spirit and Sieidi, he

[3] There is no mention of Klemm in the bibliography in the book, but in Manker's (1950) volume, the following reference to Klemm is found "Klemm, Gustav, 1894. Allgemeine cultur-Geschichte der Menschhert III Leipzig." Also, in Johannes Schefferus's accounts in chapter on the Gods of the Sámi (1674: 40; 1971: 37–45), he discusses three main ones, Thor, the Sun and Storjunkar.

used magic to "... capture the soul of the prey and led it to the hunting ground of his people" (Pulkkinen et al. 2005: 388).

A further point of interest with regard to the type of phenomenon on *noaidi* drums from Lapland is the association with Säiva, the mythical world which was sometimes portrayed upside down. In the upper section of the drum head there are three birds and a fish inside a structure similar to the ones in the lower section, but there are no lines associated with these as is the case with the fish and birds below in the lower section. On the drum at the right side in the top section a bird is pictured upside down.

Another question needs to be asked here as to whether or not this animal is associated with one of the Säiva animals in the mythical underworld of the Sámi, as it remains something of a mystery but, and has been described by Pulkkinen, according to sacrificial offerings which were made to the spirits in this region. The "sacrifices to the Säiva spirits were made upside down ..." (Pulkkinen et al. 2005: 375), because they mirrored the world below. A further development with regard to the significance of those animals in the top section of the drum positioned up above the Sieidi spirit is they have had a soul counterpart in the heavenly realm as well, as it is not uncommon either in shamanic cultures that the duality of the soul has existed, and in this way some birds have mythical counterparts in the upper or celestial region of the cosmos too.

At this point, it seems important to ask the question as to why there are so few drums which can be recognized as belonging to the sea-coastal or fishing Sámi by origin in Manker's inventory which show wider aspects of fishing and trapping practices where the presence of water is as strong. This is by comparison to those drums through which the content is consistent with reindeer herding and hunting of land animals and the mythic stories and portraits symbolizing interaction with reindeer herding, pastoralism and the tundra?

What also has value and is important to try and piece together within the portrait on the head of drum number 63, is the coastal-fishing Sámi made widespread use of the sacrificial fishing Sieidi boulders' to secure luck for fishing at the beginning of the spring and autumn seasons when the hunting and trapping time commenced, on occasions as a substitute for the drum. In the picture, what the images of these sacrificial platforms or Sieidi formations actually reveal to us is two different aspects of the same sacrificial tradition. This is visible where the use of the drum is indicated through

the *noaidi*'s journey in trance down under the water with assistance from the bird, to capture the souls of the game and these he has documented on the head of his drum, and also the interaction and possible role of the Sieidi which looks as if it is supplying power to help the *noaidi* in his task.

When this portrait of events is given further consideration in addition to the involvement of the Sieidi spirit, we see how the process is intricately woven together through the use of magic and what might appear as the application of certain visualization techniques often depicted in out-of-body shamanic spirit journeys. Although Sieidi worship is linked with securing a successful outcome in fishing, trapping and hunting matters, the drum in Sámi society has primarily been used as an instrument for trance, but as noted above, also widely used for divination when needed, especially when seeking out food sources.

Furthermore, the practice of shamanism amongst the Sámi was not only linked to drum usage. Sieidi worship has been a common form of shamanic communication where at times, the *noaidi* used singing and chanting (yoiking) to induce trance or ecstatic possession on certain occasions as the act of shamanizing was reinforced and then executed by making sacrificial offerings to the spirit who resided in the boulder or the Sieidi in the form of a wooden post. In all cases, the activity was a way to acquire power for making spirit journeys, through the application of rituals associated with hunting, fishing and trapping where the *noaidi* agreed to share the catch with the resident of the boulder or by covering the boulder with fat and blood beforehand as a way of feeding it and establishing contact with it. This is why many families in Lapland have at one time in the past had their own private Sieidi which also protected the members of the family and their property and the spirit was summoned to help with hunting and other tasks, when needed.

In helping to determine the latter further, the presence of the bird in the sun symbol, as well as the presence of the Sieidi spirit, and the lines encapsulating the fish; all of these three elements portray the main structures for making not only narrative possible, but also an act of magic. In each case, transcending time and space, thus showing not only how the picture illustrates the location and position in the inner and outer worlds of the person who decorated the drum head, but, a real life fishing-trapping drama-epic taking place which appears to have dimensions to it both above and below the landscape. The nature of the events pictured are commonplace within magical cultures and societies where the practice of

shamanism has been used during hunting and fishing activities that are also intimately linked to narrative and mythic stories.

Another point that has relevance for this part of the discussion is if we look back on reflection at the early literature written about the Sámi and involvement with water and animals from this realm, the earliest recorded account of a drum which bears any significance of the Sámi *noaidi*'s relations to animal powers who reside in the water and the presence of the concept of narrative, this is provided through a description of the interaction with water in the:

> . . . oldest document that describes a shamanistic séance, [and is from] the eleventh-century *Historia Norvegiae*; the markings on the drum are mentioned as containing only figures representing whales, a harnessed reindeer, skies and a boat with oars. They have been interpreted as representing the means of transport for the shaman [*noaidi*] on his journeys or his spiritual assistants (whales). (Pulkkinen et al. 2005: 73)

The content of this account reveals that water animals-mammals have carried much importance much earlier for the coastal-sea Sámi.

It should be added too, that what is viewed as an act of magic within the overall content of the drum head, inside the top section at the center is the spirit or god type of figure on the sacrificial platform or wooden structure which is located close enough to the edge of the water is important to acknowledge as well, because the zones or border areas where the land meets water are known for being important focal points and meeting places for the Sámi *noaidi* and the spirits. In other words, these areas are where earth, heaven and water meet. Moreover, these areas were understood as transitional points where sacrifice was made in particular which in turn helped to influence events so the spirits power could help yield a successful outcome as might be the case here. This is why many Sieidi boulders and rock paintings are found located at the edge of lakes and rivers, between the worlds figuratively speaking. Throughout Lapland as has been widely known that through the use of magical practices amongst the Sámi:

> . . . the desired affect is conceived as of being obtained mechanically by the correct performance of a particular procedure, for example, the casting of a spell. (Pulkkinen et al. 2005: 39)

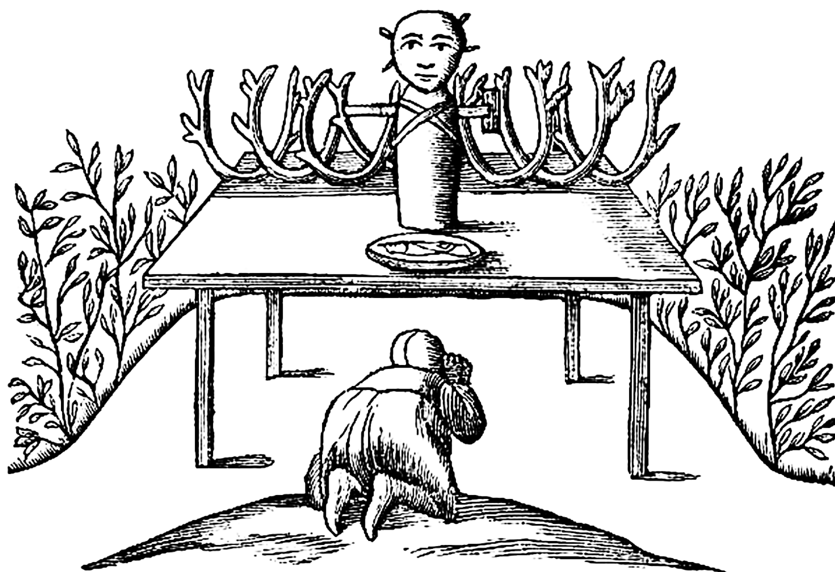


Fig. 4. An illustration taken from Johannes Schefferus's *The History of Lapland* (for a more comprehensive description visit: http://old.no/samidrum/lapponia/illustrations.html), which shows a table that has been constructed from wood. Both large boulders and smaller stone Sieidi as well as wooden Sieidi were situated by the water.

Of the remaining drums, number 63 is one which appears to have this type of content portrayed on it.

In addition to analysis of the figures and interpretation of the events taking place on the head of drum number 63, a further discussion with regard to Sámi cosmology is included below. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight how the pictures on the drum head also has a similar landscape features which has been a part of cultural identity to the *noaidi*'s of Lapland for hundreds if not thousands of years, which is portrayed through the relationship to ancient culture that had strong ties to water. In this case, the Sieidi's and similar figures in rock paintings which are located at the water's edge in Finland.

The illustrations in fig. 4 above has a similar theme to it as is seen on head of drum number 63 except there is no visible evidence of the direction or currents of power coming from the Sieidi-spirit figure in the center of the table who is surrounded by reindeer antlers. The fish offering is clear though in this case which symbolizes an act of sacrifice.

It appears that the literature which has been written with regard to sacrificial activities and Sieidi worship in some sources (e.g. Schefferus 1674; Holmberg 1964), lacks the kind of holistic understanding and interactions between the human and spiritual realms, as seems evident through the content depicted on the drum head. One of the reasons for this lack of knowledge is because the illustration on fig. 4 above, which was given to Schefferus, was one of two images of the Lule Sámi engaged in the sacrificial act and was drawn by Samuel Rheen who was a Swedish clergyman and ethnographer. Rheen, whose Christian worldview varied considerably from that of his counterpart, the *noaidi*, whereby, there may have been no personal encounter or experience of the realm of the supernatural. The priests were for the most, lacking in knowledge and understanding with reference to their comprehension of the animistic nature of the Sámi holistic worldview which was cyclical, as has been explained above. A further point and one that has additional value in bringing this discussion to a close is within the content of the drum head, as I have already mentioned, we are presented with a rare insight and account of the use of magical power by the Sámi *noaidi* and to some extent how this works with reference to hunting, fishing and trapping practices in this individual case. Therefore, and for the most, the essence of witchcraft-shamanism and the use of benevolent magic taking place is captured through the pictures on drum number 63, portraying the finer details of how magic is used in this case to achieve its means.

Evidence from both the segmental and the bowl types of drums shows extensively how the pictographs and figures on the instruments have helped the Sámi form their visual culture through their relationship to water and the landscape. Water has been of the utmost importance for helping to define zones and mythical borders between the physical reality, sky and the lower worlds of Säiva and Jabma Aimo, and using such motifs as: boats, Sieidi structures, fish and water birds to represent these. As noted above there is additional evidence the Sámi drum pictures from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are intimately linked with rock paintings too because there are many parallel symbols and figures between the two types of art. In the case of the Skolt Sámi from the Kola Peninsula from the Russian north, there are similarities between the contents of rock carvings and paintings. One could argue how these symbols are part of a chain, which links present to the past; a formation of structures that were only known to, and comprehended by Arctic cultures, and these were the primary symbols used in the transmission of culture

from one generation to the next. Moreover, in prehistory when the rock paintings and carvings were created, the east and western directions (axis) appear to have had a broader significance in the worldview from that time because of the role and function water played.

The Finnish scholar Anna-Leena Siikala (2000: 129) notifies us that "mythic traditions have been slow to change; they carry the voices of the past to the present day." Furthermore,

> . . . the most basic fundamental areas of cultural consciousness are related to the community's worldview and basic values; mythology is constructed as a representation of precisely such basic structures of consciousness. (Siikala 2000: 127)

For the most, water appears to have two main dimensions or levels to it, the first is the necessity of food for survival in the physical realm where for example, fish, game birds, seals and beavers that were hunted for their skins, dwell, and then the second and much deeper dimension was the myths surrounding the *noaidi*'s excursions to the land of the dead: Jabma Aimo, and Säiva the mythic underworld. Apart from being located at the bottom of the lakes these realms were furthermore characterised by an island or cave beneath the water or in a mountain, lake, river and sea where mediation between the *noaidi* and the spirits took place in times of need. "The water route leading to the other world, particularly the land of the dead, may be a feature shared by all Uralic groups" (Siikala 2000: 132), and another common feature from ancient Sámi culture which is evident in the coastal areas where the Sámi have lived at one time and affirms the significance of water in relation to the dead are where stone burial cairns can be found.

It is important to acknowledge these points, because the mythical lines painted on drum heads marked the border between the living and the departed. The choosing of the locations for the creation of rock carvings and paintings are also significant because the sites are mostly found close to the shorelines of lakes and rivers throughout the Nordic countries and Sámi areas in the Russian north, also affirming the concept of a mythical line between worlds. When Christianity began to influence the way people were buried after death, a transition occurred from the edge of the waterway which was substituted and directed towards the church yard (inland), it may well be that some of the drums show this whilst other do not, as in many cases, the place of the dead is located in the south on the drum head number 63.

At the site of the Taatsi Sieidi in Mounio in western Lapland where there are no rock paintings, and also at Hossa-Värikallio in northern Karelia, Finland, where there are many rock paintings, additional evidence of Sieidi sacrificial boulders resembling human and animal faces and profiles have been found at the water's edge. In both cases ancient rites of sacrifice and hunting activities are evident directed towards water as are cosmological structures in the decorative art.

What Studying Drum Number 63 Has Revealed about Sámi Shamanism and Cosmology?

Before embarking upon further discussion concerning Sámi shaman drums with regard to Sámi cosmology and sacred narrative, it is beneficial it this point to inform the reader how the next chapter in the article is intended to highlight one of the missing gaps in research into Sámi cultural history. The way this has been done is by presenting the findings from recent observations which have become apparent through analysis of a number of sources previously published about the Sámi shaman drums and Sámi culture. My intention is to build on previous claims that a comprehension of a shared or fixed unified cosmology as well as a common religious belief system (Rydving 1991: 28–51) amongst the Sámi is not immediately evident in relation to fishing activities when considering what has been written about the *noaidi* drums and the drum symbolism from the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries. According to the *Cultural Encyclopaedia* of the Sámi:

> Cosmology is the name given to the total complex of mythological concepts explaining the structure of the universe (cosmography), its origins (cosmogony) and its end (eschatology). Cosmology comprises myths concerning the origins of natural and cultural phenomena and of man's relations to them and mythical concepts explaining the interaction between man and the cosmos. (Pulkkinen et al. 2005: 53)

On the other hand, according to another definition:

> Sami mythology is a local expression of a larger pattern of ideas, knowledge, beliefs, rituals, legends and symbols. Many myths are connected to shamanism. According to the Sami worldview, nature and the entire world are alive. This

explains the existence of many spirits and divine beings. These spirits reflect the consciousness, creativity and purpose of the cosmic world that we live in. The drum symbols tell a lot about the Sami worldview. (Helander-Renvall 2009: 3)

From within the artistic context of Sámi history, of both drum symbolism and rock paintings each of these mythic discourses are governed by the artistic symbols and lines on the drums dividing the content into zones or segments. These lines help give meaning and structure to the drum head in a similar way to how the ancestors of the Sámi who made the rock paintings, have related to their environment and expressed their relationship between the culture and nature. The decorative symbols and zones on the Sámi *noaidi* drum make up a complex form of networks that link many aspects and dimensions of the physical and spiritual realities from a distant and more recent past together. A good example of the variation of material is seen through drum number 63, the content of which is unlike any other drum where the events appear to transcend time and space.

Within this context, reference is made outlining the importance of the relationship between the pictorial content of Sámi *noaidi* drums and rock paintings and sacrificial Sieidi stones with regard to visions and out-of-body journeys. As emphasised above, it is known that the Sámi relied extensively on assistance from Sieidi spirits who resided in boulder and rock formations close to rivers and lakes, which were often, appeased for help with fishing and trapping luck. By contrast, the absence of, in particular, hunting scenes related to water from the majority of the surviving drums may indicate what could be regarded as missing pieces of historical information. This information concerns the lack of a wider understanding in relation to how, on many of the existing drum heads, there appears to be a deficiency of the types activities and related symbolism representing the close ties with the water element and fishing activities. Bringing this point to the attention of the reader within this chapter is for the purpose of highlighting how the locations of many sacrificial boulders and almost all the rock paintings in Finland are located close to water, and what this actually tells us? It tells us that reliance of Sieidi has been documented for example by Schefferus (1674) and Laestadius (2002), but yet, if Sieidi worship and sacrificial activities have also played a significant role and function in Sámi society and worldview in relation to narrative and story-telling and fishing and trapping activities there appears to be a large gap in

pictorial art with regard to these events painted on the heads of the remaining drums.

For example, the appearance of such a diverse number of symbols of reindeer, moose, bears, beaver, foxes, wolves and martens, depicted on the remaining Sámi *noaidi* drums, as well as the presence of moose and reindeer that are recognizable in rock paintings suggest the following. These symbols indicate the influence and status those particular animals had amongst the forest and mountain Sámi by comparison to the needs and lifestyle of the Sámi who lived by the waterways and coastal regions.

With such variations like the ones presented by the animals on the drums, it may be argued that it is not immediately evident the Sámi have shared a unified cosmology in the past, but the structure and focus for their religion and cosmology was dependent on where the ruling spirits lived and functioned in relation to the relationship to the landscape, sacrificial traditions, ancestral relations, previous myths and cultural conditioning. It is by acknowledging the possible absence of iconography which is related to the fishing Sámi who lived close to the waterways, and their worldview, by comparison to the worldview of the Sámi who lived in the forests and travelled the tundra, it might be possible to interpret this as a loss of traditional knowledge and culture in relation to colonialism.

In Manker's (1938) inventory of the remaining drums, a number of variations within the different types are evident and seen in the different processes involved in construction as well as drum symbolism which mostly depict animals such as reindeer, bears, wolves, foxes, moose and a variety of water birds that have similar representations to each other in their locations. These animals can be found on travel routes and within the oral history associated to a greater extent with inland hunting. With the exception of a few, many of the remaining drums and their cosmological content show the importance of the north–south connection which is typically longer in design than the east-west pathway to the horizon. This of course, is also by comparison and when contrasted for example, to the drums of the southern Sámi which indicate the importance and indeed vertical significance of stellar and lunar observance as central themes in their totemic understanding of the influence of zodiac-animal signs and their positioning in the heavens. These are depicted through hunting myths associated with different star constellations and cosmology, as well as the spiritual beings that dwelt in Säiva.

Such signs in the heavens appear to have been influential in the way animals were painted on the drum heads in their respective locations.

Typically, in the center of many of the surviving drums are symbols representing the four directions. We can see how the four directions, not just north and south (the vertical points) have been important and have an equal place in Sámi cosmology and worldview. However, it seems that when describing the *noaidi*'s journeys to meet the spirits of the middle world on the horizontal axis (east–west), which would be consistent with activities around the rivers and lakes with regard to fishing and trapping, the contrast in content is lacking significantly by contrast to the vertical axis.

These aspects of the Sámi worldview portrayed on the drums does provide a fair amount of information about the vertical aspects of Sámi cosmology but not the horizontal ones, because the focus has been in most cases the study of the Sámi *noaidi*'s journey from north to south and visa-versa.

Another indication as to why a wider representation of the interaction with water element and fishing is not portrayed as one of the central themes in Sámi cosmology on the drum heads with reference to the symbolism which supports this hypothesis, is the drums that once belonged to the fishing Sámi and which I am suggesting is a crucial piece of information missing here, is presented by Juha Pentikäinen in his research into the *noaidi* divination drums from Lapland:

> A greater collection of drums was sent by Von Western to Copenhagen where, however, about 70 of them were burned in a fire in 1728. (Pentikäinen 1998: 34)

As I understand it, Thomas Von Western was instrumental in converting the coastal Sámi of Norway and Sweden to Christianity. Therefore, during these events, in addition to the hundreds of drums which were burned before the fire in Copenhagen, and those which were hidden in the forests as Sámi religion went underground, it would be conceivable as to why there are so few drums portraying a similar level of ritual symbolism on them which is consistent with the worldview and activities associated with Sámi culture, fishing-trapping and the water element.

A further point of interest in this matter is in her research into the origins of Finnish shamanism undertaken by Siikala. She makes a clear

distinction about the role, importance and function of water in early hunting cultures in the north:

> I came to the conclusion that the oldest layer of religious imagery does not represent an Arctic but a subarctic culture, existing in the milieu of the northern "taiga" type. It was a culture, furthermore, in which waterways occupied a crucial role. (Siikala 2000: 130)

This, in addition is no less true for the Sámi and their cosmology. One of the elements which characterized sacrificial activities amongst the Sámi is the relationship with water and fishing–trapping, because the powers associated with it are considered to have been linked to the reciprocal relationship to the ancestors and spirits of the mythical underworld of Säiva and the powers that dwell there who features prominently in everyday life and activities:

> The *saiva* lakes and mountains were inhabited by both human and animal beings. The names for the human inhabitants of the *saiva* in the old sources were *saiva olmah* (*saiva* men) and *saiva neidah* (*saiva* women). The *saiva* spirits selected, taught and empowered the Saami shaman (*Noaidi*). (Pulkkinen et al. 2005: 374)

What appears evident is that at some point during the middle ages, there may alternatively, have been some type of change where there was a shift inland from the coastal areas, and at the present time this is not fully understood. Having made this point, what could be the perceived loss of many drums belonging to the fishing and coastal Sámi may have relevance for what might be a piece of crucial historical information which is missing, where the fragments of Sámi cosmology have disappeared.

Concluding Remarks

I have attempted to show that passing underwater has been one of the main activities for gaining access to and from other realities which exist outside of time and space within Sámi culture. All the elements and animals in ancient culture associated with the watery realm have been of key importance in both a material as well as spiritual sense. The pictorial events on the head of drum number 63 has demonstrated that fishing magic may have been used in order to secure quarry through

inter-species communication, and the role Sieidi stones and their indwelling spirits have played. Yet, a wider context of this phenomenon is by and large missing from Sámi pictorial art on drum heads where fishing is concerned.

The use of magic by the Sámi, whether benign or malevolent, contributed to the Witch hysteria that spread throughout Europe throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of the documentation about the use of magic has come from priests and church records, through which the culture has been represented. This information has not been reliable in many cases, but in the case of drum number 63 the interpretation of the scenes depicted on the head of this drum, based on what little has been known previously from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has sought to provide a more comprehensive interpretation and insight into the use of what appears as benevolent magic by the historical and elusive Sámi *noaidi* from this time. Furthermore, if the lines on the drum head which surround the fish and water birds were on their own without the presence of the bird in the Sun type of symbol, then Klemm's interpretation would have been more convincing. But, and because of the location of the bird with its human like features and its connection to the spirit in the Sieidi stone, these characteristics and actions make a wider interpretation possible which could be shamanistic in their very essence.

Due to the brutal and sustained campaign against the Sámi by the Church, the events did in time, lead to the loss of Sámi traditional worldview, knowledge and cultural practices which resulted in a change of the traditional way of life that had been characterized by the relationship to the animal kingdom, hunting, fishing-trapping and natural world, and this is what the paper has attempted to bring to the attention of the reader.

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Reconsidering the Role of Shamans in Siberia during the Early Soviet Era

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The aim of this paper is to analyze changes in Soviet textual practices regarding the role of shamans in Siberian indigenous peoples' lives and in conflicts between power structures and natives during the 1920s and 30s. The genre of a text has a secondary importance in reflecting the dominant discourse. At the same time, it has significant influence on shaping realism and fabulation in the studied texts. This paper will conclude with the argument that the truth in descriptions of Siberian shamans' lives and actions during the 1920s and 30s can be best estimated when taking into account the themes of the discussed texts.

In the Soviet writings of the 1930s, shamans were always depicted as the main enemies of the communist regime among the indigenous peoples of the North. Soviet antireligious policy was modified periodically, but it remained basically the same. The 1930s was the period of especially harsh measures aiming to liquidate religion completely in the Soviet Union. Basically, authorities managed to make religion (including shamanism) disappear from the public sphere. But in the 1920s, it was still not clear that Soviet policy was making this conclusive turn. In fact, shamanism grew stronger during the 1920s in many regions of the North; but then in the 1930s, shamans became repressed. One must also consider that in some regions the repression had already started in the 1920s.

As this early Soviet period is decisive for the later development of Siberian shamanism, it is important to discuss how this anti-shamanic turn was executed. I argue that the key for understanding significant aspects of this process lies in the understanding of textual reflections on it that were made simultaneously with the antishamanic movement. This textual production resulted in archival documents as well as scholarly, fictional, and popular literature in the 1920s and 30s.

The antishamanic battle is an abundantly covered topic in scholarly research, but the available data is often processed with little critique or abandoned as quite worthless. The approach to the sources has depended on a particular author's scholarly agenda and the political contextualization of research in general. The fate of Siberian shamans during the 1930s is a very important question in the northern peoples' recent history; and every piece of information is valuable, even if it is a politically motivated model description loosely connected to real events. The simulacrum of socially powerful and spiritually evil shamans created in the 1930s by Soviet authors had rather severe consequences on indigenous communities, for this model was used as grounds for antishamanic repression (Golovnev 1995).

Soviet reforms in the Arctic have been approached through the analysis of shamans as ideologically constructed enemies in Marxist–Leninist philosophy (Sundström 2007; Mosel 2011). It is important to consider this general discursive frame of image production. The way in which shamans based their reactions to the Soviet reforms on peculiarities of vernacular religion has been a topic of my earlier research (Leete 2004; 2005).

In this paper, I make a rough distinction between everyday shamanic actions and the involvement of shamans in major resistance efforts. By doing so, I aim to demonstrate how descriptions of shamans have been created depending on the character of events these texts are related to. These problems are essential for a better understanding of the whole process of the conflict between shamans and the Soviets. Sometimes researchers trust their sources too little and sometimes too much. I intend to elaborate on a few methodological tools one can use when using the Soviet sources of the 1930s in research. I point out what needs to be considered as relevant or problematic, and what the threats and opportunities of these archival, public official, academic, and fictional narratives are.

The main sources for reconstructive analysis of the role of shamans in the events of the 1920s and 30s are literature, archival materials and the indigenous oral heritage. As events behind the texts analyzed here are tragic and influenced the lives of Siberian indigenous people profoundly, it is not enough to concentrate exclusively on the poetics of the available narratives. It is important to combine the analysis of poetical narrative strategies with questions about truth. The analysis of poetics serves as a tool for improving the possibilities of detecting the truth in these texts. It is common knowledge among researchers that Soviet sources are not too reliable. The question concerning reliability is central when

we have in hand competing descriptions of the same incident and how it is related to tragic events. However, depictions of shamans are often connected to resistance events and processes that are emotionally heavily loaded episodes in recent Siberian history. In these cases, researchers are very much aware that revealing the truth from the available sources is a complicated task. Scholars have also recognized that Soviet documents actually consist of much information about shamanic misconduct. The Russian ethnographer Andreĭ Golovnev argues that security police officers aimed to gather all available data about violations committed by shamans. Thus, though documents of the 1930s include a huge amount of factual information, it was interpreted in terms of a specific agenda (Golovnev 1995: 165). It is reasonable to assume that in their documents, the Soviet officials did not miss any real wrongdoings by shamans. However, it is problematic to estimate the borderline where descriptions of real troubles became fiction. Soviet sources extensively exploited the topic of class struggle among the indigenous Siberian population. Although social opposition and contradictions really existed among native communities, this issue remains the most stereotypical in the literature and archival materials of the 1930s. During that decade, shamans were considered exploiters among the working population of the northern peoples (Sundström 2007: 209; Mosel 2011).

Most of the facts and details of conflicts between the communists and shamans are complicated to establish. Description of real events is difficult due to the tendency of sources to sympathize with the Soviet side. The Russian historian Vladimir Shishkin argues that the factual part of evidence concerning indigenous anti-Soviet uprisings can be considered more reliable than descriptions of everyday shamanic deeds and their psychological configuration. Soviet sources clearly stress the empirical side of conflicts in terms of the direct depiction of immediate causes of revolts and events and their direct outcomes. If there were also improper acts committed by shamans, these episodes are described cautiously, but one-sidedly, being silent in regard of official misbehavior. One cannot find much information about the ideological and sociopolitical character of such uprisings or their demographic, moral, or psychological aspects. Shamans' actions are described exclusively in a negative way as political and criminal behavior, with all evidence concerning the anticommunist terror and vandalism perpetrated by shamans and their supporters presented carefully. However, actions of the Soviet side are presented exclusively in a positive way, with officials and soldiers characterized

as brave, but also tolerant towards the indigenous population, arrested shamans, and kulaks.[1] Damage done by shamans to the Soviet side during indigenous uprisings is described abundantly, but Soviet repression against local inhabitants after a revolt is not usually touched upon (Shishkin 2000: 7–8; Sundström 2007: 209). As a result, in the Soviet sources of the 1930s descriptions of violent conflicts between indigenous groups and Soviet officials became homogeneous and involved no major contradictions. The official model of interpretation produced during the 1930s continued, moreover, to dominate during later decades. Soviet scholars explained the social basis for early Siberian anti-Soviet uprisings as springing from a class of exploiters. It was assumed that "kulaks" (including shamans) forced the "working masses" to participate in these revolts (Shishkin 2000: 6–7).

If one combines analysis of historical evidence with available knowledge about traditional features of Siberian shamanism, it is possible to estimate the degree of probability of episodes and events presented in the sources of the 1930s. In describing serious conflicts in official documents, it was important to reveal facts about violent acts perpetrated by the indigenous peoples; but in descriptions aimed simply at depicting everyday situations, a poetic approach was more prominent. It is necessary to take this into account in order to properly understand the character and value of the sources of that decade. Poetics can be used as a tool for revealing truth.

Olle Sundström defines a shaman in the early Soviet context as:

> . . . a leading person among the peoples of the North who resisted the socialist reconstruction by referring to his or her indigenous worldview, ritualizing this resistance in accordance with that worldview. (2007: 210)

It was this image of shamanism that provided the background for Soviet repression against indigenous religious leaders among the northern peoples. To understand the character of this image, I propose to apply Iuriĭ Lotman's concept of the "aesthetics of identity." Lotman identified a poetic strategy that produces structures which employ

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[1] *Kulak* ('fist' in Russian) was a Soviet term designating usually wealthier peasants who employed farmhands and were thus defined as exploiters of workers. *Kulak* became soon a general concept for denoting all class enemies of the Soviets who acted outside of towns and cities.

intratextual connections. Real social diversity recedes before the aesthetic strictures of such a narrative strategy. The aesthetics of identity is a collection of certain principles which are based on the complete identification of the phenomena of life as depicted in the texts with clichés or models that are already known to the audience and that have been incorporated into the system of "rules." Application of the aesthetics of identity thus involves a perception of life phenomena through identification with postulated models. Random and individual traces are discarded, and phenomena are described through their essence as identified in terms of a gnoseological model. The textual strategy of the aesthetics of identity is carried out through generalizations and abstraction (Lotman 1964: 174–81).

I aim to analyze to what extent the discourse about shamans was shaped by the Soviet system of rules. I also try to reveal the way in which this poetical approach was connected to the context of social processes and practices. In addition, I sketch the relative degree of truth that one can find in descriptions of different contents, such as contemporary depictions of shamans and written narratives about their actions in different conflict situations. I intend to demonstrate how it is possible to estimate the degree of truth of the role of shamans in early Soviet sources. To provide a comparative perspective, I choose texts from different genres—official documents, scholarly works, popular science, and fiction—along with descriptions of various kinds of events—everyday deeds, small-scale conflicts, and large uprisings. I choose samples of obvious lies, of definite truths, and of complicated cases where it is difficult to establish the truthfulness of a text. My supposition throughout is that in this way it is possible to sketch an adequate methodological outline for the analysis of shamans' roles in Siberia during the 1920s and 30s. Reasonable methodology can give rise to a careful estimation of which descriptions of shamanic resistance to the Soviets reflect actual events and where the border area between facts and fiction lies. It is important to interpret the functional principles and poetic rules which constitute the mechanics of antishamanic discourse.

Soviet Antishamanic Discourse and Action during the 1930s

During the 1920s, ethnographers approached shamans rather neutrally (Mosel 2011); and the Soviet policy towards the northern peoples in general and shamans in particular was somehow hesitant. Perspectives on the Arctic peoples' development were ambivalent, and the same applied to shamans. During this period regional antishamanic legislation was adopted (Il'iakhov 1998: 90–1; Glavatskaia 2001: 21); but in general, the political situation favored shamans more than in the tsarist period, and they became relatively visible in local society (Sundström 2007). By the early 1930s, however, it became clear that the soft line of indigenous policy, led by the prominent ethnographer Vladimir Bogoraz-Tan, was losing ground. The initial policy of cultural autonomy left indigenous peoples of the north with a limited right to practice shamanism (Grant 1995: 163–4); but from the 1930s on, Soviet policy against backwardness and exploiters sharpened (Slezkine 1994: 144; Mosel 2011), and shamanism became explicitly denied in public discourse and political action. This turn was best exemplified in Bogoraz-Tan's article (1932) about the role of shamans, which amounted to instructions for antishamanic action. Shamans were from that time treated as exploiters who forced ordinary people to obey them and pay for services, fraudulently claiming that they had exclusive access to the spirits (Mosel 2011). The historical–materialistic understanding, represented predominantly by Soviet scholars, approached shamanism as a religious ideology of preclass society, a historical phenomenon brought about by cultural factors (Siikala 1987: 23). Since the 1930s, all Siberian indigenous groups were defined as class-specific societies; and shamans became prominent candidates for the position of exploiter. This discursive logic became fatal for Siberian shamans as a class.

The Usual Image of Shamans

During the 1920s, but to a lesser degree also in the following decade, Soviet authors described shamans outside of the framework of class struggle or any particular conflict situation. These descriptions help reveal a basic attitude towards shamans because they indicate how the authors of the time characterized them as such, without contextualizing investigative understanding by providing descriptions of the supposed anti-Soviet practices of shamans.

In the early 1920s, for example, the shaman's role in Chukotka was depicted as rather strong by the Soviet medical doctor G. G. Rudykh:

> Antishamanic activity is not going well. Our conversation and personal performance had little effect on people. The elders had a strong influence on all the young and middle-aged people. It is impossible to assure the elders that shamans have a bad influence on them, and youngsters obey the old men's instructions blindly and without any argument. (*Bor'ba za vlast'* 1967: 133)

Even at the end of the decade, Soviet authors' descriptions of shamans were relatively neutral, without any essential political critique. For example, Samokhin (1929: 18–19) writes that the Tungus had no real chance to see doctors. Samokhin even complains that there are only a few shamans available and that the Tungus must travel 50–100 kilometers to them in order to be healed. Until the beginning of the 1930s, Soviet authors explained shamanism as a form of psychological illness and described northern ethnic groups as mentally unstable. Samokhin (1929: 18) argues that among the Tungus various kinds of psychoses were spread as a result of cultural degradation. Doctor Kytmanov, who worked for five years among the Tungus, claimed that at least 8% of them had functional neuroses (hysteria, neurasthenia, psychaesthenia, neurosis in the form of fear). These neuroses were caused by the monotonous domestic conditions of the Tungus and the fact that they had little privacy. A sick person spends time with other people, who then start to imitate the sick one. This copying may turn into epidemics of shaman illness (Kytmanov 1930: 82–5). According to Vladimir P. Evladov, the shamans among the Yamal Nenets were more willing to aid the rich than the poor. Shamans helped to catch thieves (i.e. the poor) and were lavishly rewarded for this with gifts of reindeer. One of the reasons for this, in Evladov's view, was the fact that there were fewer persons among the poor who still believed in shamans. The rich, by contrast, devotedly kept the old customs and recognized the authority of shamans (Evladov 1930: 60).

In the course of the 1930s, empathic and psychological approaches were replaced by a discourse that depicted shamans as the most prominent social and political enemies. Shamans and kulaks who obstructed Soviet reforms were labeled as "class-hostile elements," as "Trotskyist, Zinovevist, Bukharinist and other bandits, paid spies of the Japanese–German fascism, enemies of our homeland" (Pastukhov 1937: 51). This new Soviet discourse treated shamans as jealous exploiters of the

northern peoples. During the 1930s, the process of shamans' decline was noticed and promoted by a number of authors.[2] Later authors are in general agreement that shamans were marginalized during that decade, although evaluation of this social fact depends on the spatio-temporal position and individual theoretical choices of the researcher.[3] The attitude of Soviet authors towards shamans changed rapidly and significantly around the turn of the 1920s and 30s. From that time, the established official image of shamans remained stable for decades. Against this background, it is possible to estimate the relationship between real life events and descriptions of shamans in later periods.

Shamans in Small-Scale Conflicts

Authors of the 1930s have provided numerous descriptions of shamans' antisocial behavior. Sometimes these descriptions are related to supposedly supernatural intentions or to explanations of the shamans' anti-Soviet actions, such as opposing Soviet hygienic practices, education, and products. It was argued that Chukchi and Yup'ik shamans convinced people not to do laundry because if one hangs wet clothes to dry, it will cause bad weather and loss of hunting luck. On the Taĭmyr Peninsula, shamans threatened people who sent their children to school, saying that those who study will be boiled in copal after their death while those who do not will go to Paradise. The shamans were blamed for scaring people into not sending their children to school, saying also that they would actually be sent to war and killed as a result (A. I. 1938: 108–11). Nenets shamans in the Mezen Tundra burned sugar; and if it turned red, they claimed that the Russians produced it from human blood (A. I. 1938: 108–11). In most cases, descriptions of shamans' misdeeds focused simply on what where presumed to be profane evil intentions. Their actions were depicted as just antagonistic

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[2] See Vlasova 1935: 60; Dokuchaev 1935: 80; Semushkin 1936: 84–5; Tabelev 1936: 14; Stashevskiĭ 1936: 103; Krongauz 1937: 124; Margolin 1937: 73; Brodnev 1937a: 86; 1937b: 95; A. I. 1938: 107–10).

[3] See, for example, Kolarz 1954: 75–8; Sergeyev 1964: 500; Vdovin 1965: 291; Alekseenko 1967: 225; Taksami 1967: 62; Balzer 1983: 641–3, 647; Forsyth 1989: 81–3; Pimanov and Petrova 1997–8; Fondahl 1998: 59; Petrova and Hariuchi 1999: 84; Rethmann 2001: 38–9, 62–3.

anti-Soviet actions in the context of class struggle, without any specific supernatural shamanic agenda or religious argument. A. V. Vol'skiĭ argued that shamans stayed hidden in the Taĭmyr Tundra during the 1930s, but secretly expressed their anti-Soviet mood by burning down the first "cultural *balok*"[4] that had been brought to the region (Vol'skiĭ 1937: 67). The Chukchi shaman Alitet was accused of attempting to discredit the local integrated cooperative organization by hiding sea mammal's fat with reindeer excrements inside it on the shelves of a food store (Margolin 1937: 73). It was also claimed that Chukchi and Yup'ik shamans threatened to shoot Soviet officials. Supposedly, one shaman, named Taiugi, actually killed Attugi, the chairman of a local soviet. In the Big Land Tundra, Nenets shamans were accused of convincing people not to join kolkhozes, but at the same time joining a kolkhoz themselves and secretly selling the collective reindeer. In a novel, written by Tikhon Semushkin, a Chukchi shaman claims that Soviet documents caused people's deaths and that all Chukchi wanted to leave the local soviets.[5] Although this is fictional, it does not differ from the cases depicted in official writings. In the 1934 annual report of the Executive Committee of Berezovo District, there are two laconic notes about major anti-Soviet incidents in the Kazym River region: the Kazym uprising and an episode in which a shaman hit a Soviet activist (GAKhMAO, f. 111, l. 1, f. 9, p. 9). Interestingly, the episode of personal shamanic violence is described in more detail; and the Kazym uprising gets less attention, despite the fact that the uprising spread over the whole region and hundreds of Khanty and Forest Nenets people were involved. It is obvious that the Soviet authors of the 1930s were eager to stress class hostility as exemplified in the unfriendly individual actions of single shamans. It is rather complicated to estimate how much, if any, truth is reflected in these pieces of information. In Soviet texts of the 1930s, shamans were presented as having the features of the principal antagonists of the state, who sometimes applied supernatural arguments in their anti-Soviet ideology, though this aspect was not essential.

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[4] A *balok* is a wooden hut built on sledge runners. The notion concerning the "cultural" character of a *balok* is related to the issue of socialist innovation. Soviet officials introduced it relatively recently to reindeer nomads as a more civilized form of housing instead of traditional conical tents. Thus, this hypothetical terrorist act was targeted against the symbol of Soviet progress.

[5] Sjomuškin 1950: 222–8; see also Kolarz 1954: 75–6.

Shamans in Indigenous Uprisings

During the 1930s and 40s, a number of indigenous uprisings sprang up in the Russian North, Siberia, and Far East; and shamans' involvement in these events has been documented to differing degrees. Golovnev argues that shamans participated actively in West Siberian uprisings of the 1930–40s (Golovnev and Osherenko 1999: 92–3; Golovnev 2000: 146–7). Material concerning shamans' participation varies, but the largest amount of data about their actions is available on the Kazym uprising, the armed conflict of the Khanty, and the Forest Nenets people against Soviet power between 1931 and 1934.[6] From the numerous episodes of the Kazym uprising, I chose for analysis the problem of a hypothetic white chief of the indigenous rebellion. The reason for this is that there are various data available, the information is intriguingly contradictory, and there have also been previous attempts to interpret the problem of a supposed white leader of the uprising. This makes it possible to make a comparative analysis and to estimate the value of the information carefully.

A Soviet historian with a security police background, Mikhail Budarin, wrote that in Berezovo in 1933 posters were sold with an image of *Narkomvoenmor* (the minister of defense in the early Soviet Union) Kliment Voroshilov in a white navy uniform with warships in the background. The "kulaks" and "shamans" bought these posters and told the indigenous tundra inhabitants that the "white chief" would arrive from the upper courses of the Irtysh and Ob rivers. After him, twenty steamboats full of soldiers and cannons would appear to the north; the Soviet power would disappear soon; and the Tsarist government would return. During this shamanic anti-Soviet campaign, a Khanty member of the Komsomol (Young Communist League) recognized Voroshilov in the picture and wanted to reveal that this was a provocation; so the kulaks killed him (Budarin 1968: 220–2). Later during the uprising, a rumor spread that during a collective séance in a conical tent Khanty shamans had visions concerning the arrival of the whites (supporters of the tsar) on ships and the dismissal of the red (communist) government (Golovnev 1995: 172; Balzer 1999: 112; Ernykhova 2003: 71). A collec-

[6] See Golovnev 1995; Balzer 1999; Ernykhova 2003; 2010; Leete 1998; 2004; 2005; 2007.

tive sacrificial ceremony was held in a sacred grove, and two shaman chiefs involved in the uprising announced after the ritual that the spirits promised the return of the tsarist rule and the disappearance of Soviet power. As a result of these messages, many of the local Khanty and Forest Nenets decided to move to the upper course of the Kazym River and wait until the whites would arrive (Golovnev 1995: 172–3; Balzer 1999: 112; Ernykhova 2003: 71–2).

Arkadiĭ Loskutov, a young schoolteacher who was at the Kazym cultural base during the uprising and took part in the suppression of the revolt confirmed in later manuscripts that shamans released such messages after the reindeer sacrifice. According to Loskutov, the shamans claimed that a god had promised the end of the Soviet regime and restoration of the tsar's rule. In addition, a god had ordered people to gather in the tundra (GMPiCh, Loskutov l, 5). In Loskutov's manuscript, there is a confession quoted from the leader of the rebels, the Khanty shaman Efim Vandymov, who according to various sources had a Khanty name Yänkow Iki or "White Head Elder." In this fragment of his confession, Vandymov admitted that a sacrificial ritual had been carried out and the message about the white tsar had been delivered. Intriguingly, Vandymov also testified that this spirit message was actually a trick of class-enemies:

> I know pretty well that according to our custom, the shamans do what has already been decided by the *duma*,[7] the gang of kulaks. After the ritual, the shamans announce to the people that they received the message from a god. But this is a deceit, of course. (GMPiCh, Loskutov: 1)

Vandymov's statement shows a good understanding of the proper vocabulary for describing social phenomena in terms of class struggle. This kind of politically correct confession is rather unexpected for a shaman from the woods. Since Loskutov wrote his memoirs in the 1960s when he had the file on the accused in his hand, it is reasonable to conclude that the above quote is not genuine when it comes to describing shamans' traditional relationship with their people. But could there have been real visions concerning the white tsar?

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[7] *Duma* is a council of decision-makers or advisors in Russia.

As for the historian Budarin's statement noted above that the kulaks killed a Khanty member of the Komsomol, that seems highly unrealistic. Since all killed Soviet activists are carefully listed in documents, one can easily conclude that no indigenous member of the Komsomol was killed during the Kazym uprising. However, shamans' messages concerning a white chief are reported by other sources as well and this part of Budarin's story seems believable. Marjorie M. Balzer (1999: 257) notes that as Budarin had access to the Soviet security police files, he could focus on such a report as something that is truly incriminating and that demonstrated that indigenous leaders were incompetent, believing as they did in the unrealistic return of the Whites.

The notion of a white leader of the Kazym uprising also surfaces in Eremeĭ Aĭpin's (2002) novel *God Mother in Bloody Snow*. In Aĭpin's fictional narrative, a former white officer hiding in the forest tundra acts as the ideological supporter of indigenous efforts to resist Soviet pressure. At the end of his book, Aĭpin publishes extracts from archival documents; and from these documents, it is clear that indigenous people really expected the arrival of the Whites from the upper courses of the Ob and Irtysh Rivers (Aĭpin 2002: 288). The motif of a white officer was also employed by Aĭpin in a few short stories that make reference to folk narratives (Aĭpin 1995: 112, 116–22, 162). During my fieldwork, I have also documented stories about white military officers who participated in the uprising (FM 1991–5).

Evidence provided during interrogations in jail may seem unreliable, but one fact suggests that it can actually be reliable. Soviet investigators employed native speakers to interpret conversations between officials and arrested indigenes. Besides guaranteeing a better understanding between the arrested Khanty or Forest Nenets and Russian investigators, this served another purpose as well. Prosecutors had found that indigenous people consider it proper to lie in Russian, but in their native languages they feel obliged to tell the truth. Thus, employing native interpreters served as a way to force participants in the uprising to reveal desired information (GMPiCh, Aksarina). The exact phrasings and mood of the statements of the indigenous persons could be manipulated, however, as we may deduce from the information provided above by the young schoolteacher Loskutov.

Another important point in this regard is that the color white is rather important in the Khanty and Forest Nenets mythological worldview. White is the color of the heavenly gods who inhabit the upper courses

of rivers, the Ob, the Irtysh, and their tributaries, including the Kazym (Leete 1997). From the perspective of shamanic beliefs it made perfect sense for indigenous people to expect help from the gods in a crisis and escape by moving closer to these gods. The heightening of religious feelings during social crises is in accordance with the concept of intensification of beliefs when a group is exposed to a serious threat (Leete 2004; 2005). During the uprising, the Khanty and Forest Nenets organized sacrificial rituals more often than on the average; and the visions of shamans were intense and in significant accord with each other. It may thus be possible that in an emotionally extreme time, the intensified shamanic visions became related to indigenous people's antagonists. Golovnev (2000: 146–7) proposes that in indigenous Siberian uprisings shamans brought to peoples' consciousness the war experience, war ethics, and mythological understanding of war from earlier centuries. If this argument of constructing war ethics on the basis of mythology is correct, it strongly supports the possibility that white gods and spiritually prominent (white) leaders were believed to be connected to the indigenous resistance effort and that their images appeared in shamanic visions. Curiously enough, the seemingly absurd statement by the historian Budarin may possibly include a significant grain of truth. If we exclude the unsupported piece of information concerning the murder of a Young Communist League member, the story about a shamanic vision involving the return of white leadership is coherent with the indigenous worldview and resembles information provided by other sources.

The labels "kulak" and "shaman" are used often, but applied randomly in the file on those accused of participating in the Kazym uprising. Essentially, these terms are interchangeable and do not reflect indigenous social reality. In public discourse and official documents, the term "shaman" became extensively used, starting in the 1930s; and slowly everyday thinking and the expressions of ordinary people adopted the same commonplace poetics. For example, in 1991 a Mansi grandmother (b. 1916) recalled her own memories from the Kazym uprising as follows:

I saw it myself. They were sentenced here [in Khanty-Mansiĭsk]. Some of them were transported to Tobolsk immediately—at that time they transported people

to Tobolsk.[8] But some of them were left here. Perhaps, they were not so guilty. Perhaps they were not even shamans. (EA 234, Leete 1991: 81–2[9])

This short note demonstrates that in the later Soviet period people became used to thinking about shamans as high-ranking antagonists of the Soviets. It was a social role forced upon shamans first by ideologists and officials, but later by common understanding within society. Furthermore, one did not have to actually be a shaman in the original indigenous sense in order to be labeled as such. Accusations of shamanism became a formal reason for arresting any native person (Krushanova 1993: 211; Glavatskaia 2001: 21). For example, the Forest Nenets writer Yuri Vella describes in a short story the case of a security police officer arresting the Khanty elder Kapityaai for being a shaman, although he just simply knew a number of folk tales (Vella 1998: 38–9).

Although the narrative model for describing shamans in post-1930s Soviet Union was relatively simple, it also included a few ambivalent aspects in application. As a rule, shamans were depicted as class enemies who employed religious ideology in order to ensure their influence over ordinary indigenous people. But in some cases, this model, though usually quite removed from reality, led to documenting the actual events correctly. These coincidences complicate analysis of available data about shamanic activities of the period since one cannot easily establish in what cases the data accords with reality. In any case, to various degrees this interplay of abstract model and facts enables us to trace moments of truth in textual production of the 1930s.

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[8] Between 1923 and 1932 Tobolsk was the center of Tobolsk Region of the Ural Oblast'. The region also administratively covered the Khanty-Mansiĭsk area. Later Tobolsk remained a district center without administrative connection with Khanty-Mansiĭsk. The informant recalls events of 1934 or 1935, thus confusing the facts a little. However, the main argument about transporting the "real shamans" away is not influenced by this minor misunderstanding.

[9] Manuscript of my fieldwork notes, now kept in the Ethnographic Archives of the Estonian National Museum.

Discussion

There are no basic differences among accounts in Soviet sources of the 1930s since they all employ a similar model for the description of shamans. Archival data, popular literature, scientific papers, and fictional novels all express a unified understanding of the shamans shaped by the communist ideological scheme. At some point, this model also entered people's memory habits so that they came to remember shamanism according to these old rules of understanding it. This means that information concerning shamans in all of these sources can be studied from a unified point of view because the particular genre of a source makes no significant difference. I thus propose that it is relevant to apply methods of folklore and literature studies to understanding and evaluating the texts of the 1930s, even in the case of archival material.

In the 1920s, shamans were described as essentially spiritual leaders of the Siberian indigenous peoples. They could be considered objectively wrong, misguided for example by mental illnesses or a lack of scientific knowledge; but they were depicted as respected and outstanding religious leaders in their communities. From the 1930s, however, they began to be characterized as materially oriented exploiters who consciously used religious arguments though they knew they were false. From that time on, shamans became products of a poetical strategy of the aesthetics of identity in all literary genres that were shaped by unifying policy. The model of a shaman as a spiritual class enemy was introduced, and audiences quickly learned the rules of the discourse. It thus became possible to present shamans as arguing in vernacular religious terms and acting in ritual forms while essentially keeping an anti-Soviet agenda in mind and aiming to exploit the working masses. As readers already knew that this image was "true," it became easy to exploit it over the decades, though in the 1930s, this approach actually served as a proper tool enabling morally justified repressions against shamans.

In any event, there are certain qualitative differences in the descriptions of shamans in the frameworks of various kinds of events. Taking into account divergent ways of contextualizing shamans' characters and actions, it is possible to estimate the relative degree of truth in the textual productions of the 1920s and 30s. My argument is that shamans' aggression was most often overestimated in seemingly neutral writings where no conflict was described. In the descriptions of small-scale conflicts, the exaggeration of violence was also prominent since there was essentially no difference

between the large and small misdeeds of shamans in contemporary texts. The closest to reality are descriptions of shamans related to large indigenous uprisings. There are two practical methodological reasons for assuming this. Firstly, shamans really committed acts that could be interpreted as anti-Soviet; and officials were eager to document such acts carefully. Secondly, we have more opportunities to compare different sources in the case of uprisings and verify matters. In the descriptions of other events, however, officials, scholars, and writers all made up things across a much wider scale; and we have fewer chances to validate anything.

This conclusion must be taken with some caution, however. Not all information concerning shamans' actions during uprisings can be treated as truth. I argue that there is a greater chance to find truth in these descriptions when compared to shorter isolated notes about shamans. In order to detect the truth, however, one must carefully examine every depicted episode and apply a variety of methods and compare different sources. It is also important to take into account the available information about the indigenous worldview that frames any possible shamanic agenda. In sum, this means that the proposed methodological stand provides only a rough guideline for orientating research, though it does enable calculated choices to be made in complicated research situations.

As it appears, there is no essential difference in the image of shamans presented in texts of different genres: archival documents, scholarly and popular scientific articles, or fictional novels. Poetic rules of that time were so strict that no divergence was allowed. Simply put, in archival sources there is no more truth about shamans' personal and cultural traits than in anecdotes. In archival texts, the connection with reality is absent or minimal. In the characterization of shamans, such texts tell us something about the established discourse, but very little about indigenous social reality itself. It may well be that later researchers, and our fieldwork partners as well, have somehow internalized this Marxist approach. In research papers and interviews, they may thus overstress the role of beliefs and rituals in early Soviet indigenous resistance under the influence of Soviet ideological images of shamans as an effect of the aesthetics of identity. The difference is that though the Marxist ideologists of the 1930s considered religion, including shamanism, intentionally false, ethnographers' informants and scholars themselves interpreted the shamanic worldview as a real issue in these conflicts. The communist ideology saw shamans as producing formal religious arguments, and Soviet officials and authors labeled people as shamans

with the same degree of formality; but researchers and their informants interpreted shamans as acting in accordance with their actual understanding of the world's functional-spiritual integrity.

The methodological approach that I propose here enables a researcher to reconsider the body of literature about the role of Siberian shamans in early Soviet everyday life and resistance episodes as well as the sources for these studies. Nonetheless, since this methodology supports less the analyses of large events and general processes, it must be confined to a microlevel approach or to testing the reliability of information concerning single key-moments of larger developments.

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Abbreviations

EA = Ethnographic Archives of the Estonian National Museum.
234, Leete, Art 1991. Teateid mansidest, 56–104. (Manuscript)
FM = Fieldwork materials of the author.
GAKhMAO = Gosudarstvennyĭ Arkhiv Khanty-Mansiĭskogo Avtonomnogo Okruga Iugra.
GMPiCh = Khanty-Mansiĭskiĭ Gosudarstvennyĭ Muzeĭ Prirody i Cheloveka
Aksarina = "Vospominaia proshloe. Voevali dlinnokosye muzhchiny. Besedovala s N. M. Aksarinoĭ A. Glukhikh." (Manuscript)
Loskutov, A. N. "K istorii." (Manuscript #2352/537 in the Archives of the GMPiCh)

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Astral Themes in Some Norse Myths

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I analyse the two myths found in the extant part of the Old Norse poem Haustlǫng, composed by Þjóðólfr of Hvinir around 900, along with later retellings by Snorri Sturluson from the 1220s. These concern the abduction of the goddess Iðunn by the giant Þjazi, and the contest of Þórr with the giant Hrungnir. I look at possible seasonal concerns, and make tentative suggestions about possible astral aspects of these myths. I look briefly at potential cultural currents of influence to explain the development of these myths, hinting at links with both the Arab and Sámi worlds.

Þjóðólfr of Hvinir (in south-western Norway) composed the poem *Haustlǫng* ("Autumn Long") around 900 (see North 1997: xli). Two myths are related in the extant portions of the poem: the abduction of the goddess Iðunn by the eagle-giant Þjazi, and Þórr's contest with the giant Hrungnir. I aim here to discuss possible astral aspects to these myths, as told by Þjóðólfr but also in later retellings by Snorri Sturluson from the 1220s. Neither of these myths has any overt astral context within the poem, yet Snorri's fuller versions do refer to stars, either explicitly or implicitly. Snorri may, of course, have invented these additional facets of the myths, but, without going into repetitions of well-rehearsed arguments over this, I approach Snorri as someone who manipulates traditional stories in the light of his own understanding and the religious and philosophical background of his time, but does not (at least generally) wholly invent new myths.

Germanic folk tradition in general is rather weak as regards star lore, and most of what has been recorded clearly derives from fairly late direct influence from classical traditions (Bächtold-Stäubli 1987; s.v. "Sternbilder II" in the Nachtrag). Occasional mentions of less obvious star groupings such as *eburðring* ("herd of pigs") in Old Saxon may hint at early notions (but are ambiguous: this may be a translation of

the Greek Hyades), but traditions are largely focused upon three star groups: the Great Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades. Native names (at least ones recorded sufficiently early to be reasonably interpreted as predating the time of strong and clear classical influences) are absent for the last two. The classical legend of the hunter Orion has no close counterpart in Germanic heroic or mythic tradition, and there is no evidence to suggest the constellation was envisaged as representing any such character (indeed, some designations, not particularly early, recorded from Sweden link the constellation with the goddess Frigg; Grimm 1875–8: 604); attempts to link it with the god Þórr (as by de Vries 1956–7: §432) have no foundation. I shall not discuss these star formations any further here.

The apparent paucity of star lore is almost certainly deceptive. Practical observation of the heavens was clearly important to ancient Scandinavian society; this is scarcely a surprise in view of the part sea-faring played in many Scandinavian communities (see e.g. Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 2000 on Old Norse evidence for the determination of hours using the azimuth of the Sun). This attention is reflected in myths that grew up around or at least became associated with such observations. This mythic interest was not, of course, scientific, in the way a modern astronomer is interested in establishing objective facts about what is observed in the sky; the focus was rather upon practicalities—*Vafþrúðnismál* 23, for example, describes Moon and Sun as functioning "ǫldum at ártali" ("for the counting of seasons for people")—or upon the heavens as offering visible testimony to a myth, which I suggest is the case with the myths under consideration in this article. Here, a myth might be seen as providing a story to explain what is observed in the sky, but the deeper purpose of the narrative could (and, in all cases I am aware of, did) lie elsewhere than in mere explanation of natural phenomena, and any discussion aimed at elucidating these myths calls for a focus on mythology more than astronomy—a point that applies to the present article too.

A few points of approach should be stated from the outset. "Norse myth" is shorthand for "certain Norse mythical traditions"; it is not to be inferred that any uniform monolith of "myth" existed at any stage within Scandinavia (and less so within the wider Germanic-speaking world), and it is also to be understood that poets always adapted traditions which were themselves known over a greater or lesser area and time, and which the vicissitudes of fortune have left to us as a

fairly random selection. A myth may be adapted to convey different meanings and emphases of meaning at each retelling, according to the context and purpose of delivery; its meaning cannot be divorced from its form and the context of performance (thus, my approach is essentially a nominalist one).

There is no reason for the sky to be peopled with mythological personages and imagined narratives linked with them—yet anyone would be hard-pressed to find a culture that does not do this. Given that such an ascription of myth to the heavens is widespread, the entities concerned—beyond the most obvious, namely the Sun, Moon, and Milky Way—may most readily be expected to be individual planets and stars, with asterisms (close combinations of stars such as the Pleiades) a close second. Constellations—groupings of disparate stars stretched over large swathes of the sky, perceived as mythological beings—are far less likely to heave themselves into the human imagination; without entering into the complex question of historical astronomy, it is worth noting that, with possibly just a few exceptions such as occur in Homer, in general constellations appear to be the product of the ancient Mesopotamian civilization (with independent systems developing in Egypt and China, largely irrelevant to present considerations), whence they spread to Greece (and then Rome) in the second half of the first millennium B.C. (Rogers 1998; Thompson 2014, offering a critique of Rogers; Schaefer 2006). Until codified in the classical world, a process culminating in Ptolemy's list in his *Almagest* (see Peters and Knobel 1915 for a presentation and discussion of Ptolemy's list), the constellations were not precisely fixed (the patterns are, after all, quite random in general). When there is evidence of constellations, particularly ones resembling the classical forms of Ptolemy, in non-Mediterranean cultures, along with a mythological understanding of them comparable to that of the classical world, it is incumbent on us to ask whether there is likely to have been cultural influence taking place. I have mostly focused on single stars/asterisms in the present article: it is possible that wider constellations existed in early Scandinavian understandings of the heavens, but demonstrating this would add yet another level of uncertainty to an already tentative series of arguments.

Þjazi

The tale of the giant Þjazi is told by Þjóðólfr in st. 1–13 of *Haustlǫng*, and by Snorri Sturluson in *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. G56. The text of the poem is somewhat corrupted (see North 1997: liv–lv), and Þjóðólfr's version is moreover difficult to summarize, given the dense poetic diction, but essentially he relates that Þjazi, in the form of a vulture or eagle, flies to where some gods are preparing to put an ox on the fire to cook it. The meat will not come off the bones (it has not cooked, we assume), and Óðinn declares that something is causing this. Þjazi speaks from an ancient fir-tree, asking Hœnir to deal out his share, while it is Loki's job to blow the fire. Óðinn orders the meat to be divided out, and Loki serves up four portions. Þjazi eats the ox (all of it, presumably) from the roots of the oak, and Loki strikes him with a pole between the shoulders. Loki is stuck immovably to the eagle, which flies off with him a long way. Near to exhaustion, Loki begs to make a deal with the giant. Þjazi asks him to bring the girl who has the medicine of old age for the gods (Iðunn, not yet named). Later, Loki gets the girl into Þjazi's courts, which gladdens the mountain-dwellers (giants). The gods are looking ugly, old, and grey as they deliberate in assembly; then they meet Þjazi (as North argues: but this is not wholly clear), and (we are to understand) Loki's part in things becomes evident, at which one of them angrily tells Loki that he will be tricked out of his mind unless he uses trickery to get Iðunn back. Loki uses a hawk feather costume to trick Iðunn back, and Þjazi pursues him in bird form. The gods light wood shavings (kindling for a fire), and Þjazi gets singed.

Snorri's rather more filled-out version runs:

Hann hóf þar frásǫgn at "þrír Æsir fóru heiman, Óðinn ok Loki ok Hœnir, ok fóru um fjǫll ok eyðimerkr ok var ilt til matar. En er þeir koma ofan í dal nakkvarn, sjá þeir øxna flokk ok taka einn uxann ok snúa til seyðis. En er þeir hyggja at soðit mun vera, raufa þeir seyðinn ok var ekki soðit. Ok í annat sinn er þeir raufa seyðinn, þá er stund var liðin, ok var ekki soðit. Mæla þeir þá sín á milli hverju þetta mun gegna. Þá heyra þeir mál í eikina upp yfir sik at sá er þar sat kvazk ráða því er eigi soðnaði á seyðinum. Þeir litu til ok sat þar ǫrn ok eigi lítill. Þá mælti ǫrninn:

"'Vilið þér gefa mér fylli mína af oxanum, þá mun soðna á seyðinum.'

"Þeir játa því. Þá lætr hann sígast ór trénu ok sezt á seyðinn ok leggr upp þegar it fyrsta lær oxans tvau ok báða bógana. Þá varð Loki reiðr ok greip upp

mikla stǫng ok reiðir af ǫllu afli ok rekr á kroppinn erninum. Ǫrninn bregzt við hǫggit ok flýgr upp. Þá var fǫst stǫngin við kropp arnarins ok hendr Loka við annan enda. Ǫrninn flýgr hátt svá at fœtr taka niðr grjótit ok urðir ok viðu, [en] hendr hans hyggr hann at slitna munu ór ǫxlum. Hann kallar ok biðr allþarfliga ǫrninn friðar, en hann segir at Loki skal aldri lauss verða nema hann veiti honum svardaga at koma Iðunni út of Ásgarð með epli sín, en Loki vil þat. Verðr hann þá lauss ok ferr til lagsmanna sinna ok er eigi at sinni sǫgð fleiri tíðindi um þeira ferð áðr þeir koma heim. En at ákveðinni stundu teygir Loki Iðunni út um Ásgarð í skóg nokkvorn ok segir at hann hefir fundit epli þau er henni munu gripir í þykkja, ok bað at hon skal hafa með sér sín epli ok bera saman ok hin. Þá kemr þar Þjazi jǫtunn í arnarham ok tekr Iðunni ok flýgr braut með ok í Þrymheim til bús síns.

"En Æsir urðu illa við hvarf Iðunnar ok gerðusk þeir brátt hárir ok gamlir. Þá áttu þeir Æsir þing ok [spyrr hverr annan] hvat síðarst vissi til Iðunnar, en þat var sét síðarst at hon gekk út ór Ásgarði með Loka. Þá var Loki tekinn ok fœrðr á þingit ok var honum heitit bana eða píslum. En er hann varð hræddr þá kvazt hann mundu sœk⟨j⟩a eftir Iðunni í Jǫtunheima ef Freyja vill ljá honum valshams er hon á. Ok er hann fær valshaminn flýgr hann norðr í Jǫtunheima ok kemr einn dag til Þjaza jǫtuns. Var hann róinn á sæ, en Iðunn var ein heima. Brá Loki henni í hnotar líki ok hafði í klóm sér ok flýgr sem mest. [E]n er Þjazi kom heim ok saknar Iðunnar, tekr hann arnarhaminn ok flýgr eftir Loka ok dró arnsúg í flugnum. En er Æsirnir sá er valrinn flaug með hnotina ok hvar ǫrninn flaug, þá gengu þeir út undir Ásgarð ok báru þannig byrðar af lokarspánum, ok þá er valrinn flaug inn of borgina, lét hann fallask niðr við borgarvegginn. Þá slógu Æsirnir eldi í lokarspánu en ǫrninn mátti eigi stǫðva er hann misti valsins. Laust þá eldinum í fiðri arnarins ok tók þá af fluginn. Þá váru Æsirnir nær ok drápu Þjaza jǫtun fyrir innan Ásgrindr ok er þat víg allfrægt.

"En Skaði, dóttir Þjaza jǫtuns, tók hjálm ok brynju ok ǫll hervápn ok ferr til Ásgarðs at hefna fǫður síns. En Æsir buðu henni sætt ok yfirbœtr, ok hit fyrsta at hon skal kjósa sér mann af Ásum ok kjósa at fótum ok sjá ekki fleira af. Þá sá hon eins manns fœtr forkunnar fagra ok mælir:

"'Þenna kýs ek, fátt mun ljótt á Baldri.'

"En þat var Njǫrðr ór Nóatúnum. Þat hafði hon ok í sættargjǫrð sinni at Æsir skyldu þat gera er hon hugði at þeir skyldu eigi mega, at hlœgja hana. Þá gerði Loki þat at hann batt um skegg geitar nokkvorrar ok ǫðrum enda um hreðjar sér ok létu þau ymsi eptir ok skrækti hvárttveggja við hátt. Þá lét Loki fallask í kné Skaða ok þá hló hon. Var þá gjǫr sætt af Ásanna hendi við hana.

"Svá er sagt at Óðinn gerði þat til yfirbóta við hana at hann tók augu Þjaza ok kastaði upp á himin ok gerði af stjǫrnur tvær."

He began the story where "three of the Æsir, Óðinn and Loki and Hœnir, left home and were wandering over mountains and wastes, and food was hard to find. But when they come down into a valley, they see a herd of oxen and take one ox, and set about cooking it. Now when they think that it must be cooked, they scatter the fire, and it was not cooked. And again, they scatter the fire after a while, and it was not cooked. They talk among themselves, asking what it might mean. Then they hear a voice in the oak up above them, saying that the one sitting there was responsible for the fire not cooking anything. They looked thither, and there sat an eagle; and it was no small one. Then the eagle said:

"'If you are willing to give me my fill of the ox, then it will cook in the fire.'

"They agree to this. Then he lets himself float down from the tree and he sets himself by the fire, and the first thing he does is to grab himself the two hams of the ox, and both shoulders. Then Loki got angry, and snatched up a great pole, and brandishes it with all his strength, and drives it at the eagle's body. The eagle reacts to the blow and flies up. Then the pole was stuck fast to the eagle's body, and Loki's hands to the other end of it. The eagle flies up high so that Loki's feet knock against stones and rock-heaps and trees below, and he thinks his arms will be torn from his shoulders. He cries out, and begs the eagle desperately for peace, but he says that Loki will never be released unless he will swear to him to get Iðunn to come out of Ásgarðr with her apples, and Loki agrees to this. Then he is freed, and goes to his companions, and nothing more is related about their journey until they come home. But at the appointed time Loki lures Iðunn out of Ásgarðr into a certain wood, and says that he has found some apples that will seem to her to have some value, and he asked her to bring her apples with her and compare them with these. Then Þjazi the giant comes there in his eagle's plumage and takes Iðunn and flies away with her, off into Þrymheimr to his home.

"But the Æsir were in a bad way at the disappearance of Iðunn, and soon became grey and old. Then the Æsir called a meeting, and they ask each other the last they knew of Iðunn; and the last that had been seen was that she had gone out of Ásgarðr with Loki. Thereupon Loki was seized and brought to the meeting, and was threatened with death or torture. When he had become scared, he said that he would seek after Iðunn in Jǫtunheimar if Freyja would lend him the hawk's plumage which she possessed. And when he gets the hawk's plumage, he flies north into Jǫtunheimar, and comes one day to the home of Þjazi the giant. He had rowed out to sea, and Iðunn was at home alone. Loki turned her into the shape of a nut and grasped her in his claws and flies as hard as he can. Now when Þjazi came home and couldn't find Iðunn, he takes his eagle's plumage and flies after Loki, and drew an eagle-draft in his flight.

But when the Æsir saw how the hawk flew with the nut, and where the eagle was flying, they went out below Ásgarðr and carried loads of plane-shavings down there, and when the hawk flew into the citadel, he swooped down close by the castle-wall. Then the Æsir set fire to the plane-shavings, and the eagle could not stop himself when he missed the hawk. The feathers of the eagle caught fire, and his flight ended. Then the Æsir were nearby and slew Þjazi the giant within the Gate of the Æsir, and that slaying is very famous.

"Now Skaði, the daughter of the giant Þjazi, took a helmet and byrnie and all the weapons of war and off she goes to Ásgarðr to avenge her father. But the Æsir offered her reconciliation and atonement: the first article was that she should choose for herself a husband from among the Æsir and choose by the feet, without seeing any more of him. Then she saw the feet of one man, outstandingly beautiful, and she says:

"'I choose this one: there will be little that's ugly in Baldr.'

"But it was Njǫrðr of Nóatún. She also had in her settlement that the Æsir must do a thing she thought they would not be able to: to make her laugh. Then Loki did this: he tied a cord to the beard of a goat, and the other end around his genitals, and each gave way in turn, and each of the two screeched loudly. Then Loki let himself fall onto Skaði's knee, and she laughed. Thereupon reconciliation was made with her on the part of the Æsir.

"It is said that Óðinn did this by way of atonement to her: he took Þjazi's eyes and threw them up into the heavens and made two stars out of them."

In dealing with these two versions of the myth, we are left with the insoluble problem of Snorri's inventiveness. Þjóðólfr's poem is a response to, a reflection upon, what must have been a well-known story—without this background knowledge his audience would have grasped little of his poem, and it would not have survived. How far the story known to Þjóðólfr resembled Snorri's version is another matter, however. Snorri has, for example, clearly filled out his narrative from other poems: the meeting of the gods to decide that Loki is guilty is taken from *Vǫluspá*; the giant out rowing is likely to be from *Hymiskviða*. The probable antiquity of the conjunction of narrative elements that underlies Þjóðólfr's myth is borne out by a comparison with the Finnish-Karelian *sampo* cycle, which suggests an interrelated Baltic–Scandinavian mythic tradition of long standing (as suggested by Frog, pers. com., on the basis of work for his forthcoming monograph), though the elements must have been considerably reworked in each tradition. This is a topic that calls for more detailed discussion, but in essence (using the *sampo* poem

of Arhippa Perttunen, recorded in 1834: *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* I.1.54) I would outline the narrative thus:

Loki, held hostage by giant in eagle form,	Väinämöinen, stranded in Pohjola,
promises to deliver Iðunn, source of fecundity, to giantland	promises to deliver the maker of the *sampo*, source of fecundity, to Pohjola
and is released.	and is released.
Loki tricks Iðunn into going to Þjazi	Väinämöinen tricks Ilmarinen into going to Pohjola
luring her with new apples.	with the promise of wooing a girl there.
Iðunn is playmate to the giant.	Ilmarinen makes the *sampo* for Pohjola.
Loki steals back Iðunn.	Väinämöinen steals the *sampo*.
Þjazi follows as an eagle	The mistress of Pohjola follows as a wyvern
and is killed trying to retrieve Iðunn.	and is killed trying to retrieve the *sampo*.

Þjóðólfr does not mention either apples or nuts explicitly; these again are Snorri's surmises, yet the apples appear to be Iðunn's traditional attribute (Snorri, *Gylfaginning*, ch. 26; they may be mentioned also in *Skírnismál* 19, but this depends on emendation: see Dronke's comm. *ad loc.*)—though it is difficult not to think that the tradition, at some point in its development (but more likely before Snorri), has been influenced by the apple of Eden. Þjóðólfr acknowledged that Iðunn provides medicine, *lyf*, to the gods, and, whether in the form of apples or something else, a physical item for consumption—in other words, a form of food—is surely implied; nonetheless, it is clearly Þjóðólfr's intention to subsume the drug within the girl: it is the girl that the giant wants (the goose that lays the golden egg, rather than just the egg, so to speak).

Snorri similarly marks a greater separation between food and person in Iðunn's conversion into a nut, as opposed to Þjóðólfr, where she is the *leika* of the gods. This is a suggestive word: it can mean "girl" but also "plaything, doll" (Iðunn is the gods' darling, but is also played upon by them), and is recorded in modern Icelandic in a sense of female pudenda

(Blöndal 1920–4: s.v.); the related verb *leika* is "play" but also "delude, bewitch"—which hints at the strong element of delusion and probably bewitchment in the dealings over Iðunn (she is the object of delusion, but herself bewitches). The element of sexual abandon and witchcraft are well established with regard to the main fertility goddess, Freyja (see, for example, my discussion in Tolley 2009/1: 161–2). The "doll" characterization of Iðunn may suggest she is envisaged as a harvest corn-doll (see North 1997, comm. to st. 12/2), but not without the further meanings the word suggests. Nuts have a comparable suggestiveness; their role in Germanic folklore traditions is well documented by Bächtold-Stäubli (1987: s.v. "Hasel" esp. §§6, 8; "Walnuß" esp. §5). They are very clear symbols of fertility, and of sexual abandon, with sayings such as "going to the hazel bushes" meaning to make love (something reflected in the illicit meeting of Guðrún and Hrappr in a nut wood in *Njáls saga*, ch. 87; I thank Frog for pointing this out), or commenting on the number of pregnant women or illegitimate children by noting there are plenty of hazels around. Nut shells were used directly as fertilizer, being scattered at propitious times like Christmas to increase the yield of trees or fields. Nuts were also widely used as medicine, reminding us of the medicine of old age that Iðunn provided, and in magical charms. Thus, both nut and corn-doll are variant manifestations of the bounty of harvest, and both point to the fertility goddess's links with sexual license and probably witchcraft: they would each serve similar structural purposes within the myth. I will stick with the apples and nut in the discussion to follow, but these are really shorthand for whatever form these items took at different stages in the development of the myth; I am not intending to imply that specifically apples and nuts were always present.

A further point is that Þjóðólfr does not indicate the means by which Iðunn was got to Þjazi. Details of the deluding of Iðunn with tales of apples in the woods are perhaps Snorri's invention, but that she was put into a situation where Þjazi could abduct her seems more likely to be traditional (and Loki is referred to as someone who "led" her away in *Haustlǫng* st. 11), and the Finnish-Karelian parallel suggests that an element of delusion, involving an object or guarantor of fertility (apples, girl), may be an ancient narrative element at this point. Þjazi coming in the form of an eagle here would make up a typical folktale threesome of eagle swoops by the giant (though admittedly this could be an adaptation by Snorri to make the tale fit well-known story

patterns), and it emphasizes the equivalence between the ox and Iðunn as prey for the giants.

It is, then, worth outlining a few points about the *motif*, *theme* and *structure* of this myth, taking both versions into account (but bearing in mind the provisos just mentioned).

The main motif is the *theft of the guarantor of youth and immortality* (often a goddess), which is a recurring theme in Norse myth as it is in many of the world's mythologies; in Norse the same motif occurs in the threat to give Freyja to the giants, a scheme that is finally frustrated, and in Óðinn's retrieval of the mead of poetry (which is a refinement of the elixir of life within certain mythical traditions: see Doht 1974), which similarly ends with a giant pursuing the retrieving god, both in bird form (on the relationship between the Þjazi and mead of poetry myths within Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál*, see North 1997: lvi–lvii; I also discuss the mead of poetry more fully in Tolley 2009/1: 434–50).

This motif is realized through the theme of *food*, and who has control over it: the first thing that is stated is that it was hard to find, and when the gods do find some, they are unable to avail themselves of its nourishment. A struggle follows, in which Iðunn, whose special role was to provide the gods with the food of youth in the form of apples, is promised and delivered to the giants. Iðunn herself is turned into a nut, another form of food, but also of renewal (as a seed). The ox that forms the food of the first episode in fact presages Iðunn: it is the bounty of plenty sought by the giant, just as she is herself, and the giant's power over it results in the gods' receiving no benefit from it, just as they are about to have their rejuvenation, afforded by Iðunn, curtailed by the same giant. Þjóðólfr moreover points to the connection in one of his descriptions of the ox as "ár-Gefnar mar" ("horse of harvest Gefn"), Gefn being a fertility goddess equivalent to Iðunn. The main part of the myth is also framed with fires: the one for cooking (but which leads to calamity), the other for destruction. The appearance of the giant's daughter, in Snorri's addendum to the myth as told by Þjóðólfr, adds further themes of revenge, recompense, and settlement which were presumably seen as irrelevant to the compact presentation Þjóðólfr wished to give.

The myth has a tight and well-balanced structure, especially in the form that appears to underlie Þjóðólfr's succinct formulation (as argued above, taking account of Snorri's likely input and bearing in mind the levels of uncertainty in some elements of this table, as discussed):

Outside giants' realm	*Outside gods' realm*
OX	(NUT → IÐUNN)
Fire which frustrates gods	Fire which frustrates giant
Giant eagle, victorious	God hawk, victorious
Loki ("flying"), compromised by trick	Þjazi (eagle), overcome by trick

Gods' realm to giants' realm	*Giants' realm to gods' realm*
APPLES	NUT
Eagle + Iðunn	Hawk + Iðunn
Hawk chases after	Eagle chases after

Giants' realm
IÐUNN → NUT
Loki retrieves Iðunn

Another structural aspect of the myth is its three swoops: Þjazi to seize the ox, Þjazi to seize Iðunn, and Loki and Þjazi swooping to gain access to Ásgarðr—all of these involving a forced attempt by a giant to lay hold of the gods' possessions. It is to be noted at this point that it is only Snorri that makes the manner of Iðunn's abduction specific, as a swoop by the eagle Þjazi; all that can be inferred from Þjóðólfr is that Loki used some form of trickery to get her to the giants' courts. Given that Þjazi is presented consistently in eagle form, however, I would take this form of abduction to be implicit, rather than just Snorri's surmise. The retrieving of Iðunn by Loki might be considered another "swoop" but it is not clearly presented as such, and anyway is an act of salvation (from the gods' perspective) rather than robbery; moreover, as it occurs in giantland (not just on the way to giantland), it is, I would argue, "off-stage" from the gods' perspective. Its action is, in any case, subsumed within the chases preceding and succeeding it (the abduction to and from giantland, viewed from the realm of the gods). We are therefore left with a core of three swoops involving the giant eagle, Þjazi (three, as noted, being the typical number of iterations in folktales).

A further aspect of Þjóðólfr's myth is rightly emphasized by North in his edition of the poem: the emphasis upon seasons—the motivation for this being to emphasize the fecund prosperity of his host who had commissioned the poem:

> It seems clear that Þjóðólfr delivered this poem at a *haustǫl* [autumn festival], and that his method of connecting his shield with the bounty of Þorleifr, its bestower, was to elaborate on the three or more images on the shield with oblique reference to the farming year which led up to this occasion. (North 1997: xxxi)

The title of the poem ("Autumn/Harvest Long") in North's view (1997: xxiv) is more likely to have been given by the audience, merely in reference to how long the poem took to compose; this seems unsatisfactory as an explanation. While we do not have a secure knowledge of naming conventions for poems exercised by the poets themselves, the other examples cited by North of titles which do not commemorate a poem's dedicatee are enough to suggest the title could well be Þjóðólfr's own. Making an allusion in the title to the superficial fact of a supposedly lengthy composition period seems unlikely. The reference to *haust*, harvest, is surely integral to the content and purpose of the poem—a point otherwise made strongly by North.

North (1997: xxix) is surely correct to link the opening scene, the cooking of the ox, with the autumn slaughter of excess livestock before winter, the feast taking place in roughly mid-October. Interestingly, Þjóðólfr spans the seasons in referring to the ox: it is harvest-Gefn's horse, a dung-reindeer (dung being raked out of byres at the end of winter to spread on the fields), a whale of spring, i.e. an ox plowing in spring; autumn is implicit in the feast itself, presented in st. 5. The gods are not so much lacking a meal, as being deprived of the whole season's bounty in their failure to cook the ox. On the other seasonal aspects of the myth as presented by Þjóðólfr, I agree with North that these are part of a deliberate emphasis on the poet's part, but I would differ over some of the specific points of argument:

(*i*) North argues (1997: xxix) that when Iðunn comes from the south to giant land (st. 10), the mountains become bright with new sunlight while the valleys below, it is implied, begin to suffer the growing darkness of winter. The mere mention of bright mountain tops in fact suggests nothing more than that the Sun is shining on them, at any time of year; the only point being made is that the goddess who brings fecundity, symbolized by sunlight, is now there.

(*ii*) The fire that is lit to burn Þjazi North (ibid. xxx) sees as linked to a festal seasonal fire; while evidence for Midsummer fires is strong, he prefers to link it with mid-April spring-time fires, recorded in Scandinavia, but rather poorly, and not in Norway. I do not see the need to

find any such connection as pressing: within the poem, this is a trick, a destructive fire, not a festal one, and its presence is determined for structural reasons, to match the ox-fire at the beginning.

(*iii*) North (ibid.: xxxi) sees the nut into which Iðunn is turned as symbolizing spring, the time when seeds are sown, and hence he places the goddess's return in spring. I would argue, on the contrary, that a nut encapsulates autumn, the time of harvest. It seems to me important here to assess just what sort of goddess Iðunn is. North summarizes the main characteristics as presented in the poem as: female beauty, harvest, beasts that help men provide it, rejuvenation of gods, wealth and creation of treasure, nourishment, generation of love or life-force, sexual pleasure, abundance of corn, and eddying water. Her overriding defining feature more generally is, of course, her apples (the medicine for old age), which afforded perpetual life to the gods, and were the reason for the giants to want to abduct her. It seems to me unhelpful to characterize Iðunn merely as a "fertility" goddess: she is, above all, a goddess associated with harvest, which is to say the successful garnering of produce to maintain people's existence. Her time of strength is therefore autumn, *haust*, rather than spring, and the time of her return is better seen as roughly similar to the time at which the poem opens, and as being counterpoised with this.

This leaves the question of the time of her abduction. The fact that she is carrying apples does not tell us it must have been autumn (immediately after the opening ox feast): whilst apples, the fruits of harvest, indicate her intimate connection with autumn, they are produce that keeps over winter, and hence they embody the principle of continuing bounty *after* harvest. The most likely time for a goddess of bounty to be sought is precisely when this bounty runs out for most people; and the most trying time of year in agricultural communities is late winter to early spring, before any of the produce of the new year is available. It was at this time (around mid-February) that the traditional festival of Þorrablót took place (*Fundinn Nóregr*), presumably as an offering made with the explicit purpose of propiating the gods at the most dire point of the agricultural year (we may also note that the Christian fast of Lent begins around this time, making the best of the general lack of food at this time, and putting a spiritual gloss on it). Moreover, a myth is recorded in *Hversu Nóregr byggðisk* and *Fundinn Nóregr* (essentially, variant texts of one tale of how Norway was established), in which Gói, the daughter of the eponymous celebrant of the Þorrablót, Þorri, went

missing precisely at the Þorrablót; a search was launched, and she was recovered three years later, having become the spouse of a giant's son. The resemblance to the abduction and retrieval of Iðunn is not, I think, coincidental. In short, I would place the abduction of Iðunn around the time of the Þorrablót. This would leave the gods in their withered state over the *spring and summer*, the time of growth, which is rather more poignant in terms of its contrastive imagery than a winter ageing; it is also in line with the imagery used in other traditions for the effects of the absence of the fertility goddess (see for example the Homeric Hymn 2 to Demeter, where nothing will grow after Persephone is snatched away to the underworld in early spring, marked by her plucking of meadow flowers, lines 305–13, and Demeter is pictured as an aged hag in this period of distress, lines 91–104).

Let us now look at any possible astral aspects to this myth. The only ostensible link with any interest in the stars is the conversion of Þjazi's eyes into stars—something told only by Snorri, and in the Eddic poem *Hárbarðsljóð* st. 19 (possibly Snorri's source, but equally likely to be derived from Snorri, depending when the poem is dated). This may simply be an ad hoc explanation of the origins of two stars without any connection with the rest of the myth; however, it is also possible that this tale has become attached to the myth because of an erstwhile awareness that the whole myth was pictured in the heavens.

In order to suggest a connection with the stars, the myth must contain some feature that can be linked to the heavens in a physical sense: and it is the three swoops that afford such a feature, suggesting the descent towards (and rise from) the nadir of the north point of the meridian. Such "swoops" apply to any star that is visible at the appropriate time; some further information is needed to narrow down the possibilities. The other notable and suggestive physical phenomenon in the myth is the fires. In terms of the heavens, this can surely only be represented by the Sun. Essentially, then, we are looking for two stars (eagle and hawk) and the Sun to act in a way that is consistent with the outline of the myth (although other characters appear, they are either carried, and hence do not suggest a presence as independent stars, or are effectively bystanders). By "star" is meant a star or close asterism—bringing in constellations is probably unnecessary when considering the Þjazi myth, and would be an unhelpful complication. The other factor to bring into the argument is the time frame, as outlined above.

I have examined the sky as seen at Hvinir on three dates in 899–900: 8 October (for the opening ox feast), 8 February (for the abduction) and 8 September (for the return of Iðunn), using the computer program Stellarium; snapshots at hour intervals throughout the night are given in figs. 1–3 respectively.[1] For purposes of the present argument, the precise year is not of significance (given that only fixed stars and the Sun are considered), and the precise date within the month is also not critical—though, interestingly, it emerged that the following arguments do not always work quite so well for around the mid-month points; however, the dates of seasonal festivities and the calendar in general were almost certainly somewhat flexible, so this is unlikely to be a particularly significant issue.

The opening scene indicates that the gods light a cooking fire, and only later notice an eagle or vulture sitting in an ancient fir-tree. In astronomical terms, this suggests the Sun (the cooking fire), which then sets, making visible a star, possibly in something like an ancient fir-tree, which then swoops down. As the Sun sets on 8 October 899, there are only really two noticeable stars which become visible in the vicinity and then swoop down: the closest is Altair, then, starting from a higher point, Vega (Deneb might also be included, but is rather more distant). Both begin their journey positioned in or immediately beside a directly upright Milky Way, standing somewhat to the left of where the Sun has set, and which bears a passing resemblance to a withered old tree. Taken on its own, this scene suggests Altair as the most likely candidate for Þjazi, but the other scenes, to be considered presently, prompt an identification of Vega as the eagle as being more probable. When Vega swoops down, it moreover has time to begin its ascent before becoming invisible in the rising Sun; this could be seen as reflecting the eagle's departure flight, carrying Loki with him, with Loki's release from the magic bond being reflected in the dissolution of the stars in the dawn light. The main difficulty with Vega here is that it takes a good few hours to sink down towards where the Sun has set, it does not come right down to the horizon (the "ground"—though the eagle is envisaged rather more as snatching the meat than landing), and its lowest point is some distance around the horizon from where the Sun in fact set. The identification nonetheless seems to me to be just about plausible.

The scene of the abduction seems to be suitably reflected in the heavens on 8 February 900. One point needs to be made here, however.

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[1] Figs. 1–3 may be viewed at http://www.isars.org/shaman/vol23/tolley/

Þjóðólfr states quite explicitly (st. 10) that "vas Ið[. . .]unnr nýkomin sunnan" ("Iðunn was newly arrived from the south") among the giants. It is impossible, astronomically, for stars to swoop down and "seize" something in the south: this can only take place on the northern meridian. It is possible to swoop up on the southern meridian, but it seems unlikely this is what would have been envisaged; certainly, the other two swoops take place in a downward direction. The clear statement may indicate that Þjóðólfr was not interested in any astral aspect the traditional tale may have borne, but neither is it merely a statement about Iðunn's geographical origins: "south" contrasts with "north" and "east"—the recurrent mythic descriptions of the whereabouts of the realm of the giants. Anything "southern" was exotic and bounteous; this is seen, for example, in the "southern" maidens of *Vǫlundarkviða* st. 1. Hence "from the south" essentially means "from among the (bounteous) gods." Moreover, the reason for the choice of south as opposed to any other direction is that assonance is required by the *-unnr* of Iðunn's name at the beginning of the half-line. No great "factual" evidence is therefore inherent in her origin in the south.

On 8 February, Vega appears, swooping down, just to the west of north, and then continues high into the sky in the east. Some time later, Altair appears, rising over the horizon, and "pursuing" Vega. Both disappear in the dawn light as they proceed towards the south-east. Vega thus fulfils the role of Þjazi, seizing Iðunn and proceeding back to giantland; he is followed some time later by Loki in the form of Altair.

The scene of Iðunn's return calls for Loki (Altair) to make it back to Ásgarðr while Þjazi (Vega) is consumed, the vital separating point being that a fire is lit in between, i.e. the Sun rises. Such a situation exists at the beginning of September. It would appear to be impossible to represent exactly the scene of the myth in astronomical terms, but what we see in the sky is Altair swooping down to the horizon before dawn and setting: hence, we may view Loki as making it to his destination (Ásgarðr being marked by the horizon); Vega, higher in the sky, follows in pursuit, but never sets: it is consumed by the rising Sun.

With these times of year in mind, the myth covers the yearly cycle of the harvest (Iðunn): it begins with enjoyment of the bounties of harvest in the form of the ox feast—except that on this occasion, we are presented with the upsetting of the norm, which justifies the presentation of the myth and calls for a resolution; the time when the harvest bounty finally runs out is marked by the abduction, taking place, like that of

Gói, around the Þorrablót; the return of Iðunn marks the beginning of another harvest, symbolized in the nut, the first-fruits of what will resolve the situation of conflict presented in the myth.

The identification of the particular astral formations discussed here stems essentially from looking at the night sky within the terms of the parameters set out earlier (the Sun and two stars, the implied times of year). Yet it cannot have escaped the attention of those with a knowledge of star names that Altair is "the flying eagle" and Vega is "the swooping eagle"; these are Arabic names that were later translated into Latin as *vultur volans* and *vultur cadens* (the distinction between eagles and vultures being vague; we may note that Þjóðólfr himself, quite independently, refers to Þjazi as both an eagle and a vulture). Altair has been an eagle since Mesopotamian times: it is almost certainly the star or asterism (with the two flanking stars) referred to as A-mushen ("Eagle") as far back as 1000 B.C. (Rogers 1998: 16). It is one of only four stars named by Ptolemy in his *Almagest*, as Aetos ("Eagle"). It seems quite feasible that its identification as an eagle could have spread to northern lands at an early date. However, Vega does not have this pedigree as an eagle. For Ptolemy, it was the Lyre, and it is likely that for the Mesopotamians it was the Goat (Rogers 1998: 16). Its identification as a bird of prey appears in the Arab tradition, as recorded by al-Sūfi (1874: 75–6) in the early tenth century, whence it spread to the West long after Þjóðólfr's time. Any influence on Scandinavia via the "learned" route is out of the question. If there is any substance to the suggestions offered here, the identification of Þjazi as an eagle with Vega is either pure chance (and al-Sūfi seems to imply (1874: 106) that its identification in Arab lore may have been ad hoc, a result of seeing the Eagle asterism as a bird with open wings, and the nearby Vega one as a bird with folded wings), or it reflects some contact at an early date with Arab star lore. I will not enter into complex discussions of contact with the Arab world, but we need only remember texts such as ibn-Fadlān's description of the Vikings in Russia to remember that such contact did indeed exist.

Classical myths focused on the Eagle star of Altair furthermore match themes found in the Norse. As Hyginus tells us (*Astronomica* 16), the Eagle is the bearer of Ganymede to the gods; Ganymede was a young man that Zeus was so besotted with that he made him the cupbearer of nectar, the drink of immortality (Homeric Hymn V to Aphrodite, lines 202–6). He is hence the counterpart of Iðunn, and the hawk Loki's bringing (back) of Iðunn to the gods is parallel to the bearing of Ganymede by the eagle to

Olympus. This myth has further counterparts elsewhere, notably in the Indian Garuḍa eagle, whose myth matches that of Þjazi in a number of particulars: the eagle is forced to deliver the nectar of immortality to the serpents, who are holding his mother hostage, but in the end he tricks the demons, offering them the nectar, but enabling Indra to steal it back for the gods while the serpents are preparing to consume it (*Mahābhārata* I.29; cf. *Rig Veda* III.48.4). In Norse, the myth of Óðinn's retrieval of the mead of poetry from the giants, where the god in eagle form is pursued back to Ásgarðr by the similarly transformed giant (Snorri, *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. G58), is directly comparable to the Þjazi myth. The bird of prey as bearer of the nectar of immortality (or embodiments of it) appears, then, to be an ancient mythologem, probably of Indo-European origin, or at least one with a broad areal spread in antiquity. Whether its possible association with Altair in Scandinavia is better seen as a very ancient heritage or the result of contact with the classical traditions in the Roman or early medieval period is a moot point, and not one to be pressed for fear of begging the question.

What of Þjazi's eyes? Here, Grimm's suggestion (1875–8: 603) is surely the most likely: they are the twins, Castor and Pollux. These form by far the most obvious twin asterism in the sky, and are likely to have been remembered (if we assume Snorri has not simply invented the association). The identification may seem random, with nothing to do with the rest of the myth, but this may not be the case. Castor and Pollux are at the opposite side of the sky to Vega, and placed a similar distance from the Milky Way. They as it were occupy Vega's mirror position. As Vega sinks, marking Þjazi's demise, they rise, marking the giant's indelible place in the heavens even after his death—a fitting recompense offered by Óðinn to Þjazi's daughter. Yet this is not all. If we turn to classical mythology, we find that the tale of Castor and Pollux bears many striking resemblances to the myth of Þjazi. In brief (the main source being Apollodorus, *The Library*, III.10.7, III.11.2; see also Frazer's extensive notes and references to other sources in his edition):

Castor and Pollux were the children of Zeus, who took the shape of a swan, and Leda; it was said that they hatched from an egg. They were involved in a tale of abduction and retrieval comparable to that of Iðunn: their sister Helen was taken by Theseus, whose kingdom they attacked to rescue her (here the classical story adds complexities, with Theseus' mother being taken back by the brothers and made into a servant to Helen). Castor and Pollux also engaged, with their cousins, in a cattle raid, and they roasted a calf to eat, but the four fell out over the division

of the meat; Idas suggested dividing the herd of cattle into two rather than four parts, on the basis of which cousins finished their meal first. Idas quickly finished his portion, along with that of Lynceus: Castor and Pollux had been fooled, but agreed to bide by their word, while vowing vengeance. Afterwards, a fierce fight takes place, which ends with Zeus blasting Idas with his thunderbolt. In due course, the brothers were turned by Zeus into the twin stars bearing their names.

Isolating just those parts of the long and involved tales of Castor and Pollux that are relevant to the present discussion perhaps gives a false impression of how close their myth (or rather parts of it) is to the Norse tale of Þjazi over all, yet the points of resemblance surely suggest the possibility of a connection existing, such as a reworking of elements of the narrative within oral tradition to match the expectations of an audience with a different cultural background. In the classical myth, we have two protagonists born of a bird, in the Norse the protagonist and antagonist both assume bird form; a beautiful female kinswoman of the protagonists is abducted in both cases and then retrieved; four heroes argue, in both cases, over the division of a calf or ox that is being cooked, leading to conflict and finally death of the protagonists' enemy at the hands of the gods, though this element is unconnected to the abduction in the classical myth. Even the name of the abductor, Þjazi, which is of opaque etymology in Norse (none of the uncertain possibilities cited by de Vries 1977, s.v., being at all convincing), bears an uncanny similarity to that of the Greek abductor, Theseus, especially in its prebroken form, **Þeze*.[2] In Þjóðólfr's time Norse society was effectively almost wholly oral; if any link with the classical tales exists it would have come from (travelling) story-tellers, whose materials would have been adapted and reworked through repeated tellings; yet it is not unlikely that in such a scenario the particular point about the stellification as a conclusion to the tale would have survived, transmuted as it is in the Norse version to apply to the eyes of the antagonist. I would regard it as unwise, however, to elevate these tentative suggestions to any higher degree of supposed certainty.

[2] Noreen (1970: §95) places breaking of *e* > *ja* at 650–900; as the sound *ts* was already merging with *ss* by 1150 (Noreen 1970: §274), the "z" may possibly in fact represent *ss* rather than an original *ts/ds*.

Hrungnir, Þórr's Whetstone Fragment, and Aurvandill

Haustlǫng st. 14–20 relates that Þórr clattered through the sky, drawn in his chariot by his goats, setting the heavens ablaze and lashing the earth with hail, on his way to a duel with the giant Hrungnir. At the instigation of spirits, Hrungnir placed his shield beneath him, but did not have to wait long for Þórr's mutilating hammer to strike him. Part of his whetstone flew into Þórr's forehead and remains there still, until such time as a nursing-Gefjun of wounds (Gróa) can remove it.

Snorri's account (*Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 17) is much fuller, containing many details not relevant to the present discussion. According to Snorri, the origin of the strife between Þórr and Hrungnir was a horse race between Óðinn's horse Sleipnir and Hrungnir's steed Gullfaxi, which inflamed the giant so much that he stormed into Valhǫll and threatened to destroy the realm of the gods, save for the goddesses Freyja and Sif (Þórr's wife), whom he would take home with him. As North points out (1997: xix), *Ragnarsdrápa* calls a shield the leaf of the footsoles of the abductor of Þrúðr (Þórr's lover), so the tradition that Hrungnir abducted or wished to abduct a goddess closely connected with Þórr appears to be ancient. We are therefore presented with a motif comparable to that of the myth of Þjazi's abduction of Iðunn.

I have argued elsewhere (Tolley 2009/1: 281–3) that the shard of whetstone in Þórr's forehead is to be linked with the fictional accounts of high-seat pillars, *ǫndvegissúlur*, dedicated to Þórr and endowed with *reginnaglar* ("divine nails"). Þórr appears to have functioned as a world pillar, and the nail atop the pillar dedicated to him may be seen as standing for the North Star. The variation between nail and whetstone is a reflection of steel and hone forming a complementary pair of implements. In Sámi representations of an idol probably derived from or influenced by images of Þórr, the nail at its head was used for striking fire (a metonym of lightning); a nail would need a hard substance such as a whetstone to spark. As I have noted (Tolley 2009/1: 283), that Þórr was indeed associated with the striking of fire in the Viking period is indicated by the discovery of fire-striking sets of steel and stone alongside Þórr's hammers (see Koch 1990 and references there). The myth of Hrungnir may therefore be seen as an astral myth, an explanation of how the North Star came to be (or, put mythologically, how the world pillar acquired its axle point).

Snorri's account of the myth of the whetstone continues with an episode told more fully than in *Haustlǫng* (which does not mention Aurvandill):

Þórr fór heim til Þrúðvanga ok stóð heinin í hǫfði honum. Þá kom til vǫlva sú er Gróa hét, kona Aurvandils hins frœkna. Hon gól galdra sína yfir Þór til þess er heinin losnaði. En er Þórr fann þat ok þótti þá ván at braut mundi ná heininni, þá vildi hann launa Gró lækningina ok gera hana fegna, sagði henni þau tíðindi at hann hafði vaðit norðan yfir Élivága ok hafði borit í meis á baki sér Aurvandil norðan ór Jǫtunheimum, ok þat til jartegna at ein tá hans hafði staðit ór meisinum ok var sú frerin svá at Þórr braut af ok kastaði upp á himin ok gerði af stjǫrnu þá er heitir Aurvandilstá. Þórr sagði at eigi mundi langt til at Aurvandill mundi heim, en Gróa varð svá fegin at hon munði ønga galdra, ok varð heinin eigi lausari ok stendr enn í hǫfði Þór; ok er þat boðit til varnanar at kasta hein of gólf þvert, þvíat þá hrœrisk heinin í hǫfðu Þór.

Þórr went home to Þrúðvangar, and the whetstone was stuck in his head. Then the *vǫlva* called Gróa came up, the wife of Aurvandill the brave. She sang her charms over Þórr until the whetstone became loose. But when Þórr realized that and there seemed a hope of getting the whetstone out, he wanted to pay Gróa for her healing and make her happy, and he told her the tidings that he had waded from the north over the Élivágar and had carried Aurvandill in his basket on his back from Jǫtunheimar, and as a proof one of his toes had stuck out of the basket and was frozen, so Þórr broke it off and threw it up into the sky and made the star out of it which is called Aurvandill's toe. Þórr said it would not be long before Aurvandill was home, but Gróa became so happy that she couldn't remember any charms, and the whetstone came no looser, and still sits in Þórr's head; and there is a warning against throwing a whetstone across a floor, since then the whetstone in Þórr's head moves.

I have discussed Gróa and Aurvandill elsewhere (Tolley 2009/1: 283–5); I repeat a few of the points here. If the whetstone represents the North Star, Gróa is bound not to remove it—the North Star remains fixed in its position; the remark on the whetstone in Þórr's head moving may well relate to the movement of the North Star in the sky: while for us today it is all but on the celestial polar axis and does not move, a millennium ago it made a small circle about the pole. In *Svipdagsmál*, Gróa ("Growth") is mother to Svipdagr ("Sudden day"), whose father was Sólbjartr ("Sun bright"); this all suggests a close connection between Gróa and sunlight, which in any case is implicit in the "growth" of her name. The derivation of *Aurvandill* is not clear, and is, I would argue, obfuscated by repeated reinterpretations of the myth in which he features over many centuries. However, his name clearly relates him to Old English *earendel* ("shining light, ray," a gloss of Latin *Oriens*, the rising star, hinting at the Morning Star, in *Christ I*, line 105),

and the first part of the name is more remotely linked to Latin *Aurora*, Sanskrit *Uṣas* ("Dawn"). I suggest that a proto-Germanic **Auza-wandalaz* was formed from the word for "dawn" combined with a derivative from the root **wand-*, "go, turn, circle" (for the formation, see Meid 1967: 84–8): hence he was the one that hovered around the sky at dawn (a precise description of the Morning Star). His toe may have been conceived as the Morning Star itself. If the whetstone in Þórr's forehead indeed refers to the North Star, then Aurvandill may have become associated with him through the stellar aspect of his own myth. Before their conversion, according to Bede, *De temporum ratione*, ch. 15, the English worshipped a goddess Eostre, especially in the time around Easter; she can scarcely in origin be anything but "Dawn" (West 2007: 227), which suggests that the year is viewed as a macrocosm of the day, springtide marking the increase in light (as argued by Helm 1950: 9),[3] and of growth spurred on by it, as Gróa becomes excited at the approach of Aurvandill.

[3] The connections outlined here are questioned by Shaw (2011: ch. 4), who, on the basis of little more than the occurrence of arguably the same name element, prefers to see in Eostre a local goddess, possibly connected with Eastry in Kent; he is keen to point to the local nature of divine names recorded on Latin inscriptions on the Rhine, while ignoring the fact that most divine names recorded from Tacitus onwards (Nerthus, Woden/Óðinn, Þórr, Freyr, and so on) are essentially abstract or general in meaning. Shaw rejects the idea of a connection between dawn and Easter; yet he accepts the underlying idea of dawn as being present etymologically in "East" and "Easter"—even if this is evidenced at a pre-Germanic stage (whether the connection continued to exist cannot be demonstrated etymologically). He wholly fails to address the issue of why, if Easter is not etymologically suggestive of the spring, her festival should occur in spring—which was, for him, apparently a matter of chance. Shaw also rejects the idea that deities had "functions," seeing them rather as simply local figures. This poses a series of problems, which cannot be discussed here, but recorded traditions about deities, particularly where well-developed poetry exists, as in the Norse area, or even more so in India, indicate that the names of deities were not arbitrary (or merely reflections of the names of whatever group happened to worship them, as Shaw appears to argue), but were sources of ideas about roles carried out by the gods (roles, it is true, not necessarily being identical with functions), and their interconnections. While Shaw is keen to argue for a linguistic analysis of deities' names, he is peculiarly blind to the poetic uses of language and names that occur within living traditions; similarly, he studiously eschews any consideration of comparative mythology or religion. In short, the cogency of Shaw's arguments depends to a large degree on his selective use of evidence. Thus, whilst it is true that the metaphoric (or perhaps metonymic) basis of Helm's argument cannot be directly demonstrated from ancient witnesses, it still appears, as part of the wider analysis offered here, to offer greater insight than Shaw's arguments to the contrary.

Interpreted in astronomical terms, this suggests that a star or asterism representing Þórr descends to the horizon and sets or vanishes close to the Sun as it rises, marking the presence of Gróa, who must surely be envisaged as situated on the sunlit earth horizon. The star is of course invisible during the day, but this is when Þórr speaks of Aurvandill. Gróa ceases her spells (the Sun sets?), awaiting the arrival of her mate. Aurvandill appears as the Morning Star (Venus), and Gróa pursues him, symbolized in the growing light of dawn. The Morning Star appears for different lengths of time and at different times of year, and for this reason it is impossible to assign any particular asterism to Þórr in this myth, though some may fit better than others; the fact that he indicates Aurvandill is on his way, but not yet present, suggests that Gróa may have to wait some time: hence, a visit in winter or very early spring is perhaps indicated, which is consistent with the emphasis on the extreme cold that froze Aurvandill's toe—though as Þórr is consulting "Growth" the absolute depths of winter do not seem likely. The Morning Star tends to be evident for longer in the autumn months, but the shorter time, of around an hour, when it is visible in the early spring in fact probably suits the myth better, as it creates a more obvious connection between the Morning Star and the rising Sun, and it also presages, on a macroscopic scale, the coming spring. It would be burdensome in the present context to detail precisely the years and lengths of visibility of the Morning Star, but for example there was good visibility for an hour or so (roughly 5 to 6 am) around the beginning of March in 895 and 898 at Hvinir (the myth of course is not Þjóðólfr's, but Hvinir is a fairly central location in western Scandinavia). It is notable that visibility decreases as spring progresses into April and beyond: the Morning Star certainly seems to presage not just the coming day, but the coming spring too (and this grounds Helm's view of the growing day as a metaphor for the spring in observable natural phenomena).

The connection between Þórr and Aurvandill is certainly a strange one. Aurvandill is brought from giantland, but is he a giant, or someone Þórr has rescued from there (he is treated kindly, rather than being smashed to bits like Hrungnir, after all)? Why could he not make his own way back, rather than being carried in a basket? The strange narrative suggests a bringing together of established motifs into a unity which may not be particularly old. That Þórr and Aurvandill are linked by their (arguable) association with stars has been noted; the connection may lie in the whetstone shard, appearing ritualistically (in a wide

sense) as the *reginnaglar* in the high-seat pillar, from which, in Sámi tradition probably derived from or related to earlier Norse notions, fire was struck, just as lightning strikes from the heavens, which turn about the North Star. Þórr was thus, perhaps, seen as guardian of the heavenly fire, with whom it would hence have seemed appropriate to associate Aurvandill, the Morning Star and harbinger of light.

The crossing of the Élivágar relates the myth to the primordial time of creation from icy waters; I have shown Aurvandill's possible connections with the creative deathly waters elsewhere (Tolley 2009/1: 284–5). It would not be quite accurate to say that Aurvandill travels from the world of the dead (this is distinct from the world of the giants); more precisely, he is brought into the world of life from its cold, deathly antithesis, as crops emerge each spring in the growing light and warmth. Aurvandill fulfils, it would seem, the role of instigator of growth (the action of Gróa)—and the emergence of a fertility being from water is well documented (see Tolley 1996). His being brought in a basket also perhaps hints at the theme of fertility in this mythologem: the basket is the commonplace holder of the harvest bounty in folk tradition (Bächtold-Stäubli 1987: s.v. "Korb"); for Norse, cf. Snorri's depiction of Iðunn keeping her apples in an ash-wood box (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 26).

Þórr is still more obviously characterized as crossing (cosmic) waters in most of his myths. His Indian counterpart Indra, with whom he shares many characteristics, carries the tribal forefathers, Turvaśa and Yadu, over waters (*Rig Veda* VI.20.12). The saving of a beneficent being from the realm of the giants is to be seen as part of Þórr's role as *Miðgarðs véurr* ("protector of the middle world," *Vǫluspá* 53). This motif is, in itself, probably ancient, but it could nonetheless have become associated with the Aurvandill myth at a relatively late date.

Whilst a general resemblance exists, it would be wrong, I think, to regard the Aurvandill myth as closely parallel to myths such as that of Iðunn, or of the mead of poetry (a female, or elixir, abducted to the land of the giants and saved therefrom). Here, the fertility goddess (Gróa) remains independent, and her male consort is the one who is lost. This, of course, is directly parallel to the myth of Mardǫll and her mate Óðr (with the difference that we are not told if Óðr is recovered or not; but given that he is likely to be a manifestation of the wandering Óðinn, the answer is surely affirmative), which is preserved only in a highly summarized form by Snorri (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 35; I discuss the myth in more detail in Tolley 2009/1: 450–5). There are probably more parallels than the depletive forms of the myths

as preserved allow us to draw with any certainty: for example, the oceanic element is not obvious in the Mardǫll myth, but *mar* means "sea" (and gold is referred to not only by the kenning "Mardǫll's tears" in reference to the tears she wept when searching for Óðr, but also as "fire of ocean"), and both goddesses are associated not only with the regenerative powers of nature, but also with magical activities of prophecy or healing (taking Mardǫll to be an avatar of Freyja, as Snorri does; for Freyja this aspect is clear); Mardǫll is presented as a wandering deity, and while this is not explicit in Gróa's case, her characterization as a *vǫlva* perhaps suggests this, as *vǫlur* are typically peripatetic. In any case, at its most simple the female deity is here deprived of her mate, representing something essential to her function. In the case of Óðr, the emphasis is on the soul, the animating force, but Aurvandill suggests light (he is the light of the Morning Star, a forerunner and harbinger of the light of the Sun). It is perhaps just the result of the vicissitudes of what has survived, but the Mardǫll myth shows the first stage of a tale, focused on loss and weeping, and the Gróa myth shows its joyful dénouement as the lost mate is found.

Ancient mythic elements may hence be uncovered in the tale of Aurvandill. Yet quite when the myth emerged in the form preserved by Snorri must be left open. Its resemblance to the St Christopher story is patent. It is possible that this is coincidental: the Christopher motif itself probably has its origins in traditions, of great antiquity, such as have been presented above; moreover, our own familiarity with the saint carrying Christ over a river primarily post-dates Snorri's time, deriving largely from the late-thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea*. Yet the tale was familiar, to a degree, before this, occurring, for example, in German sources from the twelfth century (see Bächtold-Stäubli 1987: s.v. "Christophorus, hl.").

The fact that the Aurvandill tale only occurs in Snorri is an impediment to viewing it as being a widespread myth of great antiquity in quite this form, and the likelihood of its having been influenced by the Christopher legend is surely high; given the traditional elements it contains, it seems less likely that it is a pure fabrication, a lifting of the Christopher legend with merely the names changed. One of the most suspicious elements of the Norse myth is the presentation of Þórr as a gentle giant, kindly helping out a weaker individual in need: this is precisely how Christopher is presented in tradition, but it is wholly uncharacteristic of Þórr. It would seem most probable that some mythographer, aware of various traditional elements of Þórr and Aurvandill, has used the model of the Christopher legend to adapt these elements into some-

thing resembling the tale preserved by Snorri; this is unlikely to have taken place much before Snorri's time, particularly as familiarity with the relevant parts of the Christopher story is difficult to trace back to much earlier times. Viewed from this Christianized perspective, Aurvandill, the dawn light, would act as a sort of antetype for Christ, the True Light (a characterization of Christ exploited, for example, in the Old English *Christ I*, which is based on the Latin liturgical O anthems of Advent, and which contains the word cognate with Aurvandill, *earendel*). Hence Þórr's carrying of the forerunner of the light was perhaps supposed to be seen as a form of *praeparatio evangelica* operating in the North. It is improbable, if this is the case, that this particular aspect of the myth (the carrying by Þórr over the icy Élivágar) would have any astral facets beyond the already existing individual associations of Þórr and Aurvandill with stars, as has been discussed.

Shields and Drums

If astral concerns played a part in the two myths recounted in *Haustlǫng*, and expanded in Snorri, we are confronted with the problem of Þjóðólfr's apparent indifference to this aspect of the myths he describes. How is it that, among the many Norse myths recorded, it is precisely the two that are found in *Haustlǫng* that appear to hint most strongly at underlying astral concerns, and that in the fuller and later retellings by Snorri have explicit or arguable star associations? The key consideration to bear in mind here, it seems to me, is that ultimately Þjóðólfr is not the source of the myths: he explicitly states he is *describing* myths depicted on his host Þorleifr's shield. Therefore, an earlier mythographer made the selection of myths to put on the shield, and his choice could well have been directed by concerns other than Þjóðólfr's. The cultural milieu in which this shield mythographer was working is perhaps hinted at by Þjóðólfr in his kenning for the shield in question: it is a *Hildar vett* (st. 1), a drum of Hildr (personified War) (see North 1997, comm. to st. 1/8). The word *vett* occurs rarely, but is associated with *vǫlur*, the pagan Norse seeresses, who are said to beat on the *vett* (*Lokasenna* 24); hence Hildr takes the place of a *vǫlva*, whose "drum" is thus a shield. This topic has been discussed by Kabell (1980), but I would argue against many of Kabell's extreme conclusions. Nonetheless, the use of the word *vett* does suggest that we should look to the work-

ings of the drums of the Sámi, the practitioners of magic *par excellence* within the Nordic sphere. We have some difficulty here, in that we have no Sámi drums anywhere near as old as the tenth century, and we cannot be certain when depictions began to be placed on them; nonetheless, depictions were already present in the twelfth century, when they are described in the *Historia Norwegie*, and are likely to go back a good while before this (see my discussion in Tolley 2009/1: 522–5).

Now, one of the characteristic features of Sámi drum depictions is that they represent the spirit-filled cosmos, with deities and other beings placed according to their position in it; the position of the Sun is often marked by a central "hole" (which on a shield would be the boss) (on the Sámi drum see Ahlbäck and Bergman 1991; Pentikäinen 1984). The purpose was often divinatory, but the shaman was also believed to travel through the depicted realms by means of his drum. The Norse painted shield may be the result of currents of cultural influence from many quarters, but it seems natural, in a Norwegian context so close to the Sámi, to envisage some of this influence as coming from this direction. In the case of Þorleifr's drum, I suggest this could have taken the form of a choice of myths with strong astral and seasonal associations. How far the myths themselves should be seen as in some way "Finno-Ugric" is another question, but the narrative sequence and the overall topic (seizure of the guarantor of fertility) of the Þjazi myth correspond to the Finnish-Karelian *sampo* cycle, and the Hrungnir myth appears to relate to an image of Þórr as world pillar with the North Star at his head, which corresponds with depictions in later Sámi tradition of a deity whose name, Hovrengaellis, derives from "Þórr karl" (see Tolley 2009/1: 275).

Conclusion

Many societies have a deep interest in astral myths, with a desire to see a concrete verification for beliefs spelled out in the heavens; it is impossible to exemplify anything comparable from the scant remains of ancient traditions stretching back to pre-Christian times in Scandinavia, yet it would be odd if the lack of interest in the heavens in Norse mythological texts were anything more than apparent. I have selected a few myths to look at in more detail here, to see if any astral focus can be discerned beyond the already explicit mentions of stars within them. The materials are lacking in the detail and specificity that is needed to prove

the case for astral concerns, so the results are, to put it mildly, merely tentative. The situation is made still more inscrutable by the need to rely on Snorri's versions of myths, without any means of verifying how traditional these are. The occasional explicit mentions of astral myths in our sources do, however, indicate an interest in the symbolic meanings of the stars, and one way of explaining the erstwhile clearer focus on astral concerns implicit in these myths has been proffered, in the form of suggestions about the origins of Þorleifr's shield. The argument for seasonal concerns, expressed through myth, as being delineated on the vault of heaven will, I hope, be seen as at least plausible, if not proved.

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Conceiving the Supernatural through Variation in Experience Stories: Assistant Spirits and Were-Tigers in the Belief Narratives of Assam

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The article explores the narrative tradition of the supernatural among the healers (bej) *in rural Assam, North Eastern India. Whereas stories about assistant spirits, birās, concern the contemporary life of the villages, the were-tiger tradition tends to be projected onto the historical past. The article argues that the supernatural world is actualized and evoked through the practice of storytelling and verbal communication, which also forms the framework for magical practices. Variation of details about people, objects and events in narratives creates a liminal world of uncertainty, where the storyworld coalesces with social reality and extraordinary events become real.*

Introduction

Assam, a state in North Eastern India, belongs to a region that is culturally and linguistically extraordinarily diverse. Its religious landscape also exhibits great variety. Historically known as Kāmarūpa (the realm of passion) it is one of the cradles of Hindu tantrism with its famous Kāmākhyā temple at Nilāchal hill in Guwahati—the main center of goddess worship, where the traditions of *kaulā* tantra are carried on by small circles of Brāhman families and other adherents. Multiple forms of goddess, from the pan-Hindu Durgā and Kālī to the local deities such as Kāmākhyā and Kechāi-Kāthī,[1] are associated with worshipping Śiva, who appears as their consort. Bānāsura, the mythical king of

[1] Kāmākhyā is a Tantric goddess who assimilated goddesses from mainstream Hindu mythology and local goddesses, worshipped by tribal peoples, into one complex figure (Urban 2011: 46–7). Kechāi-Kāthī (the one who eats raw [meat]) is a ferocious local goddess, once in need of human sacrifices—today sometimes identified with Kālī.

Sonitpur (today Tezpur) was, according to tradition, a devotee of Śiva. However, Bānāsura was defeated in a great war by the god Krishna, an *avatāra* of Vishnu. Symbolically this conflict reflects the confrontation between the brahmanic cult in temples and the neo-Vaishnava bhakti movement during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The latter was introduced by the charismatic intellectual Śankaradeva (1449–1569), who reformed the religious life and village society in Assam. Today *Shrimanta Shankardev Sangha*—the society of his followers—has grown into a tremendously popular and influential religious body, which contests idol (*mūrti*) worship in the temples and many other aspects of brahmanic Hinduism. In addition to these Hindu movements Assam is rich in indigenous religious traditions, found among the local tribal peoples such as the Bodos, Misings, Karbis, Tiwas and Garos. The ethnic and cultural identities of these "people of the margins" are complex and sometimes overlapping (Ramirez 2014). Often they live in close contact with the Assamese caste Hindus and have frequently adopted their language and religion. Islam is the second religion in Assam as regards the number of adherents and Christianity in its different confessions has also gained ground, mainly among the indigenous peoples, who do not belong to the Hindu population.

Outlining some basic traits of the overall religious landscape seems necessary to shed light on beliefs and the related practices in contemporary rural Assam at the grassroots level of Hindu society. This article explores the supernatural traditions of the village healers and magicians (*bej*) in the historical region of Mayong in the Marigaon district of Assam. These places on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River have been widely known for magical practices, mantras and charming for a long period of time. Although seemingly not different from other rural areas of Assam with its paddy-fields, small shrines and village lanes fringed with palm trees and bamboo groves (figs. 1, 2), Mayong has a special attraction for visitors who come with the intention of meeting the local healers, semiprofessional experts in magic (*bejāli, tantra-mantra*). People from several regions of North Eastern India visit these *bej*es for magical treatment, to find solution to problems in marriage and relationships, to deal with mental and psychological imbalances, to handle misfortunes, remove the effects of black magic and evil eye, to search for lost objects, get predictions about their personal futures, and many other reasons. Some *bej*es specialize in certain fields of expertise, such as snakebites, love magic or exorcism, and although

Fig. 1. Mayong village scene. Photo: Ülo Valk, 2009.

Fig. 2. Work in the Mayong paddy fields. Photo: Ülo Valk, 2012.

there is some rivalry between them, they can also cooperate in exchanging knowledge or sending patients to other *bej*es who have the reputation of handling particular problems. The current article does not study these actual magical practices, but discusses the related belief narrative tradition, which forms the generic context of magical arts (see also Valk and Goswami 2013). My source material comes from six field trips made to Mayong between 2008 and 2014. These stories, which often contain supernatural motifs, cannot be properly understood without their social and discursive context—the life world of villages (on the text–context relationship in folklore, see Voigt 1999a). I have chosen the stories of two *bej*es and will try to show how they position themselves in relation to the world of the supernatural and how they bring together their individual life stories and the tradition of vernacular belief narratives. My focus here is not on supernatural experience but on its representation in storytelling and on generating related knowledge in verbal communication. As I talk about belief narratives and the genre of legends, I do not assume that native ontologies should be reduced to storytelling or that spirits should be explained away as fictional characters or metaphors. Belief as a category is here not contrasted with rationally grounded knowledge but is considered as a fluid modality towards certain ontological statements and empirical reality, which appears in multiple forms. In order to take "animism seriously" (see Willerslev 2007: 181–91) it is not very helpful to consider every single experience story about extraordinary events as a factual report and to reduce storyworlds to the antecedent "real" events. Close and comparative attention to the details of verbal expressions reveals a nuanced world of experience in this interim sphere of utterances where words coalesce with social, psychological and physical reality. Native ontologies are revealed in communication and reaching the genuine and original experience beyond words seems hardly possible. However, storytelling itself generates narrative experiences, which need analytical reflection.

It has been claimed that in India some basic traits of shamanism, such as the soul flight in trance, are generally found only among marginal tribal people (Vitebsky 1995: 38). However, the religious world of Hindu folk healers in Assam, who have been living in contact with tribal peoples, also manifests aspects of shamanism and animism as two closely related belief systems. Typical features of animism, according to Philippe Descola, are the endowment of plants, animals and other elements of the physical environment with subjectivity of their own and

"capacity of metamorphoses attributed to beings who have a similar interiority: a human can take the shape of an animal" (Descola 2011: 19–20). In this article I study two sets of beliefs that have been characterized as shamanic. First, I address vernacular beliefs about assistant spirits (*birā*) who serve *bej*es in their professional activities; secondly I discuss belief narratives about human–animal transformations. In Mayong these motifs transcend the limits of the fictional storyrealm to the extent that they become a part of the rural life world. I have found inspiration in Vilmos Voigt's article (1999b) "Why Do People Lie? Origins of the Biographical Legend Pattern," in which he discusses the relationship between facts of life and fictional events in storytelling. When answering the question, formulated in the title, Voigt shows that both "lie-like non-lies" and "lie-lies" inherently belong to the genre of "true" stories and that there are various forms "of not-true biographical stories, which cannot be called lies" (ibid.: 170). The current article about vernacular beliefs in Assam discusses a few ambiguous cases in which supernatural elements become part of biographic narratives and the individual memories of the narrators blend into the storyworlds.

Birās *as Assistant Spirits: Personal Experience Stories*

During my fieldwork I have interviewed around ten *bej*es, some of them several times. None refused to answer my questions, although I have never approached the *bej*es as a patient or a customer, but as a folklorist who asks permission to document their knowledge. Of course, I can only guess how much is kept hidden from me in these interviews, because of certain restrictions concerning the secrecy of magic. I have recorded oral mantras but I know that many of them have not been recited completely in order to maintain their power. Some *bej*es have not been willing to show me their ancient magical manuscripts (*mantra-puthi*) that have been handed down within the family circles, sometimes for centuries. When they say that ants have destroyed their old manuscripts, which is a common answer; it is difficult to know if this is really the case or only a white lie. In 2009 one *bej* proudly demonstrated to me a collection of his ancient manuscripts (fig. 3), including texts, such as the *Bisar-Mantra-Puthi, Sunjara Mantra, Sudarshana Cakra Mantra* and others. In 2013 when I asked him about the manuscripts he told me that they had been eaten up by ants years ago, although it is not likely

Fig. 3. Magical manuscripts *mantra-puthi*s belonging to the *bej*es of Mayong.
Photo: Ülo Valk, 2009.

that these well-preserved books—kept throughout centuries—could have been destroyed in such a short time. Another frequent explanation as to why *bej*es cannot show their *mantra-puthis* is that they no longer exist after having been thrown into a river or a stream. Indeed, there is a common belief that preserving *mantra-puthis* requires the following of regular rituals and blood sacrifices to the deities, whose power is contained in mantras. If *bej*es are unwilling or unable to follow these rituals, the magic power can turn against them, their families and homes. However, owning ancient *mantra-puthis* proves that a *bej* belongs to the lineage of tradition carriers and increases his social capital. Secrecy about these manuscript books, and the question of whether they still exist or not charges beliefs in the effect of mantras and magical prescriptions contained within them with special power. As we shall see below, uncertainty, ambiguity and touching the liminal realms of the social and public world are inherent qualities of magical practices and the supernatural.

In addition to owning old *mantra-puthi*s there is another source of magical power, which is often suspected and seldom admitted, and which is even more ambiguous than putative or real manuscripts. Namely, it is widely believed that some *bej*es cooperate with spirits who can accomplish various difficult tasks, including those of black magic. The contemporary vernacular demonology of Assam forms a rich and complex realm of supernatural creatures whose roles and functions sometimes overlap. *Birā*s are evil spirits who sometimes inhabit certain places in wild nature. Folklorist Benudhar Rajkhowa (1872–1955) in his book *Assamese Demonology* (1905) characterized them as a dreadful class of *khetar*s—presiding spirits of fields who live in open spaces (1972: 131–2). Rajkhowa notes: "It is very hard to save a man from the grip of this monster" (ibid. 132). In contemporary Assamese belief *birā*s can be domesticated by *bej*es and used for various purposes, such as collecting information from faraway places, stealing something from other households or to attack rivals and enemies physically—beating them, pulling their hair or disturbing them by throwing stones on the roofs of their homes. *Birā*s can find out personal details relating to the clients of the *bej*es, including their property status. This belief makes customers suspicious as *bej*es can easily demand that they pay more than necessary or turn them into regular clients.

Rumors and legends about *bej*es who own *birā*s circulate in the villages. In Mayong there is a Muslim *bej* who is considered to be a very powerful healer and who, it is claimed, keeps five *birā*s. The man belongs to the recent immigrants from Bangladesh who had settled nearby on the bank of the river Brahmaputra. Due to erosion of land they lost their homes and came to Mayong to rent land there, where they have remained strangers to other local inhabitants due to their ethnic and religious belonging. When interviewed in January 2014 this Muslim *bej* claimed, not unexpectedly, that he does not have any *birā*s, that he only uses verses from the Koran for healing and that ultimately his power comes from God (*bhagvān*), who is one for Muslims and Hindus. However, he said that he knows a *bej* on the other side of the river who does have a *birā*. It seems to be a common strategy among *bej*es to acknowledge that *birā*s are active in the neighborhood but they do not

admit their ownership—at least not in public conversations.[2] On the one hand *birā*s give enormous power to their masters and raise their status as *bej*es, while on the other hand, they are considered dangerous and aggressive, and people might be afraid of going to *bej*es who keep *birā*s.

On January 23, 2014 we met Mr. Jatin Deka (fig. 4)—a *bej* who had had personal experience with *birā*s and who admitted that a long time ago he had kept a *birā* in his service. Jatin Deka was born and grew up in Mayong and learned magic (*bejāli*) from his father. He had gone to school for four years and was later employed by rich people near Tezpur, where he captured wild elephants in the jungle. Jatin Deka is married but was alone at home when we visited him because his wife had been hospitalized. Their two sons live in towns and work as drivers. He did not know his exact age but guessed that he might be around sixty, perhaps even close to seventy. When asked about *birā*s, he said that he had given up keeping them 30 to 40 years ago because of a tragic event in the family. *Birā*s are very demanding and need regular blood sacrifice (*boli*), food and the holding of *pūjā*s for them. Because of some negligence from the side of Jatin Deka, its master, a *birā* attacked his son, a very handsome boy at the age of seven or eight. The son had vomited blood and died within an hour. Thereafter Jatin Deka sent his *birā*s away, ordering them to stay in a certain place in nature. He had told them: "Go there, there is a place, stay there! You live there and eat there! Don't do harm to any people!"

The interview is rich in details about *birā*s. Jatin Deka said that there are different kinds of them. Some are spirits of those people who have died unnatural death. These spirits (*pretātmā*) keep roaming around and can be captured through the power of *sādhanā*, *pūjā* and mantras. Thus, they can be domesticated, but they need special attention. As Jatin Deka said, "For some *birā*s human beings should be offered, for some *birā*s goats should be offered." Because of his tragic experience he knows the dangers connected with *birā*s and says that they are very harmful (*khyatikar*). He said that some people who live near the Kolong River

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[2] Pallavi Dutta, a Ph.D. student of folkloristics of Gauhati University, told me that she had interviewed a *bej* in Upper Assam who had the fame of having a *birā*. However, he said that this is not true, because he had given his *birā* to someone else because his family suspected that the *birā* had caused the suicide of the youngest daughter. On the next day in private conversation the *bej* said that he still has the *birā* but he keeps it secret from the family.

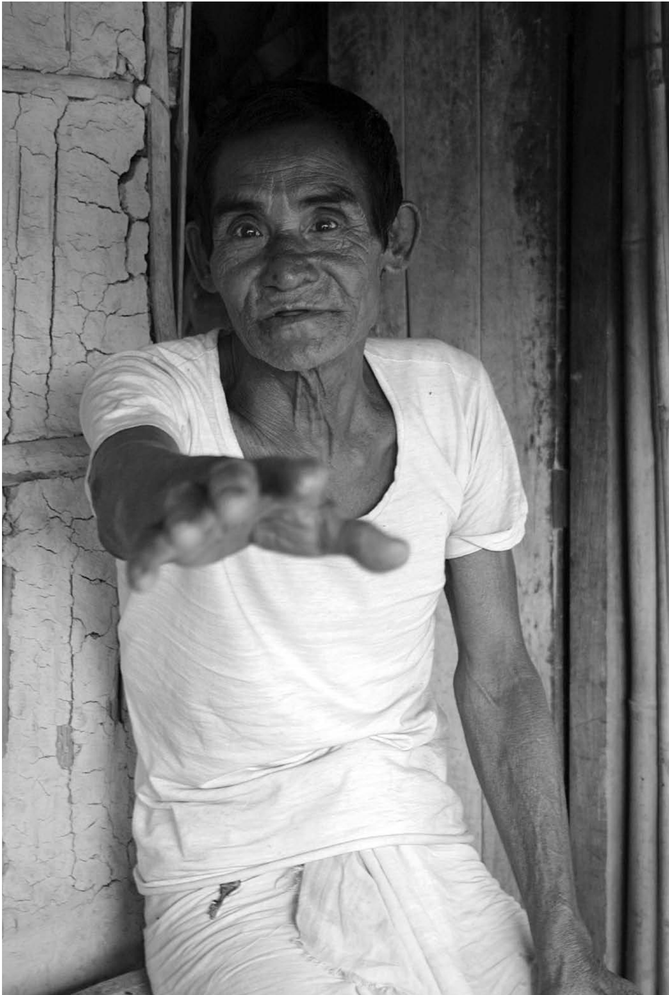

Fig. 4. Jatin Deka, a healer and wizard (*bej*) from Mayong. Photo: Ülo Valk, 2014.

and own a brick factory had recently visited him and asked if he could provide them a *birā*. Jatin Deka had warned them and recommended not to take a *birā*, however, he had guided them to the Muslim *bej*, who might have been willing to help them.

According to Jatin Deka *birā*s are either male (*birā*) or female (*birāni*) and they tend to abduct good-looking people of the opposite sex. He

told a story about a girl who lived in the neighborhood and had disappeared for a week because she had been kidnapped by the *birā* of the Muslim *bej*. The girl's family had consulted an *āi* (mother), a female healer and fortune-teller, who had helped to rescue the girl.[3] There had been another incident years ago when a *birāni* had kidnapped Deben, a healthy and handsome young man, and kept him hanging on top of a bamboo trunk for a whole week. Mr. Utpal Nath, a teacher in the local college, who guided us during the fieldwork in Mayong and participated in the interview, remembered Deben well. He also knew the place—the bamboo grove in Kobiram's garden—where the incident had happened. During the week that Deben was hanging in the bamboo, the *birāni* had fed him with *rasgullā*s (ball-shaped sweets) which were actually made from earthworm dung. Jatin Deka said that he had been actively involved in saving Deben from the *birāni*. Together with another *bej*, who was an expert in treating snakebites and saving people from *birā*s, they cut the bamboo and Deben was rescued.

We can see that many beliefs about the supernatural are transmitted in short narratives, which represent somebody's personal perspective and individual experience, in stories that folklorists call legends. Whereas events—either factual or fictional—are unique; the ways of narrating them take multiple forms. Another variant of Deben's experience with *birāni* had been told by Jatin Deka a year before, on February 12, 2013, when folklorists of the University of Tartu were doing fieldwork in Mayong. Surprisingly, whereas in 2014 Jatin Deka claimed that he had given up *birā*s long ago, the interview of 2013 reveals that his *birā*s were still with him. He said that he can see them and described them as creatures with huge bodies, long hair and very big feet and hands. According to his words they look so frightening that if someone else would see them, the person would fall down and die. Jatin Deka also said that *birā*s are known under different names—some people call them *bhūt*s, other call them *jinn*s. They are inclined to abduct humans: "If a *birā* is female (*māiki*) then she kidnaps male persons (*motā mānuh*) and if a *birā* is male (*motā*) then he kidnaps females (*māiki mānuh*)." He also told of the supernatural phenomenon of moving bamboo (*ghurā-*

[3] One informant explained that such women with power to predict the future and to heal are called *āi* because they had been possessed by the smallpox goddess Āi, who had thus granted them their magical abilities.

bāh): "You must have heard about it even if you have not experienced it—that sometimes people see that bamboo has been bent on the road. When someone steps over it this bamboo raises and lifts up the person, who will eventually die." According to Jatin Deka, this is the work of a *birā*, and this had happened to poor Deben: "A female *birā* (*maiki birā*) kidnapped Deben and kept him on top of a bamboo trunk, which was in the grounds of Kobiram's home. *Birā* kept him there for a few days and Deben was sleeping on top of the bamboo. The *birā* supplied good food for him and Deben stayed alive." Remarkably, while in 2014 Jatin Deka had said that he had personally been involved in rescuing Deben, in the version of the story from 2013 it was his father, accompanied by another *bej*, who saved Deben.

Should we consider the discrepancies in Jatin Deka's interviews as cases of creative variation or as lies in biographical storytelling? I prefer to see these inconsistencies as examples of creativity and filling the gaps to make a good and convincing story for a particular storytelling event. After all it does not matter much if the hero was Jatin Deka himself or his father who had taught him magic (*bejāli*). Both versions are told as true, personal experience narratives. It is through real individuals as actors and real places as scenery for the supernatural events that the storyworld and web of beliefs are blended with social reality. Resources of memory and of oral tradition load the everyday environment of storytellers and their audiences with meanings and connotations.

Were-Tigers in Mayong: The Experience of the Elders

Jatin Deka's interview of 2014 is rich in stories about supernatural events that have taken place in the area. It includes cases of transformation of humans into tigers, which is a popular topic in the belief narratives of Mayong. According to Jatin Deka old *bej*es "did not teach such things to the next generation, because they are dangerous and harmful," and therefore these practices declined around fifty years ago, when he was still quite young. Below is a passage from his interview, where he talks about bygone days:

Do you know, there are some shrines (*thān*), where men practiced this [transforming humans into tigers]. Those magical arts (*bejāliya*) are not very good. In

Borghat, in the shrine of Kechāi-Kāthī[4] *bej*es turned human beings into tigers. The Kechāi-Kāthī shrine was famous for changing humans into tigers. Different shrines are famous for different magic. Ancestors used to put one banana leaf in rice flour and on that banana leaf (*kolpāt*) they performed *pūjā*. On that banana leaf the *bej* offered *pūjā* with rice flour and turmeric. They needed many things like this. *Bej* applied a mantra on a *gāmosā*[5] and kept it. After that the *bej* would give a date—for example after one month or six months. Next the human being was turned into a tiger and the *bej* gave him the date to come to that particular place. On that day the tiger would come back to the shrine. Suppose, the tiger is from my family, and the *bej* gives the *gāmosā* to my family members. When the tiger would come on that date to the shrine, these family members should be present there. When the tiger comes, without any fear and hesitation, they should give the *gāmosā* to the tiger. After that he turns back into a human being.

Seventy years ago one were-tiger (*mānuh-bāgh*) was shot. A hunter shot him. This were-tiger had come back to the shrine, but people were scared to give him the *gāmosā*. Therefore the tiger went back to the jungle and started hunting cows and buffalo. The village people were very disturbed. After that a hunter shot him and people found a ring on the tiger.

The story above represents the genre of warning legends about unfortunate cases when something goes wrong with human–animal transformation and the outcome is tragic. These stories tend to be projected back into the time period of at least half a century ago, which is still remembered by the elder generation of tradition carriers, who are also the most authoritative *bej*es. Obviously, during these years Mayong was surrounded by jungle and wild tigers roamed in the area. By now most of the forest has been cut and although there is the wildlife sanctuary of Pobitora nearby with a dense population of rhinos, the tigers have disappeared from the region. Storytelling traditions reveal massive hunting of tigers, often including magical binding of the animals to certain places through the power of mantras, and catching them with nets. The whole village was said to gather to watch and make fun of the trapped tiger, who was finally killed with a spear. Elderly people

[4] See footnote no 1.

[5] *Gāmosā* is a piece of white textile with red woven patterns. It is often used in ritual contexts but also as a scarf and a towel, and within the context of were-tiger beliefs as a magical device to perform the transformation from animal back into man. As an important symbol of Assamese culture it can be interpreted as a sign of human civilization.

still remember how the great *bej*es of Mayong captured tigers and how they had participated in the subsequent celebrations. Most successful in hunting tigers was the legendary Shurabej, who must have been a historical person with extraordinary abilities. Fantasy and memories often blend in stories about him. According to oral history Shurabej was seen holding a wild tiger by its ear and walking around like this.

There is a whole set of stories and magical knowledge about controlling and hunting wild animals. Thus, special mantras are known that are believed to make a human invisible for wild animals and he or she can walk safely in the jungle. There is also a group of mantras meant to bind tigers magically so that they cannot leave a place. Beliefs about were-tigers and human–animal transformations are related to the beliefs about controlling and hunting animals and stories on these topics are often told together. There are four clusters of main motifs about were-tigers. First, there is a set of traditional instructions on how to turn into a tiger: choosing a solitary place, undressing, drawing stripes on a banana leaf and rolling oneself on it while reciting mantras. In addition, an agreement is made with someone in the family about the subsequent time when the tiger would return. Second, the ways of turning back from a tiger into a human are often discussed. As a rule, the *bej* needs an assistant who would sprinkle water on the tiger, read mantras and throw a piece of clothing on the animal—usually a *gāmosā*, which is the most typical piece of clothing of Assamese men. Thirdly, the actions of tigermen are described, such as hunting wild and domestic animals, as well as the dramatic or tragic end of their adventure. Sometimes the tiger is wounded and the person is later identified due to the scars on the human body; sometimes the were-tiger is caught and killed. In this case, it is usually a ring (for men) or earrings (for women) that reveal the human nature of the tiger. Another common belief about detecting the were-tiger is through its footprints: normal tigers have five toes on the front paws and four on the hind paws, but were-tigers have five toes on all feet. Very often these beliefs are expressed in narratives that talk about particular cases of transformation, including place names, approximate dates, and witnesses. Today many people in Mayong tend to link the were-tiger traditions to the local tribal peoples, such as the Tiwas, Garos and Karbis. It is true that those and many other ethnic groups in Eastern India and North-Eastern India share beliefs about

were-tigers, although the actual traditions and the position of were-tigers in society vary to a great extent.[6]

Next, let us have a closer look at stories about were-tigers that circulate in the villages through the repertoire of one storyteller, Mr. Prabin Saikia (fig. 5), who lives in Mayong. He belongs to the *mahājan* caste of merchants (*baishya*) and is a well-known *bej* whose family has lived in Mayong for many generations. His wife also comes from the region nearby. Prabin Saikia learned magic from his paternal aunt's husband (*pehā*), who was a famous and powerful *bej*. I met Prabin Saikia for the first time on the January 21, 2009. The interview with him includes the following guidelines on how to transform from a human into an animal:

> You need a long, tender, curled banana leaf, one with a black node at the top end. This can be cut only on certain auspicious days (*tithi*), as marked in the *panjikā* (astrological almanac). Then one has to open the banana leaf and be sure that it won't be torn. Then lay it on the ground. Put stripes on it with vermilion (*sindur*) and mustard oil (*mithā tel*)—making it like a tiger. Place the leaf facing north. You must be in a very lonely place, completely naked and lie down on the leaf, uttering mantras. You have to keep turning from left to right, and suddenly you become a tiger.

Prabin Saikia said that although he knows all these necessary details, he does not know the mantra that is needed to accomplish the transformation. His *pehā* had kept saying that he would give this mantra to him, but he died suddenly before he could teach it. Answering the question of what was the purpose of such transformations, Prabin Saikia said that as there were no guns in those days, some people used to turn into tigers in order to hunt pigs and deer either for food or to keep them away from damaging crops in the fields. He told a tragic story about a tribal man, Leteru, who turned into a tiger and caused a terrible accident:

> There was a Mikir [Karbi] man here in Bura Mayong who used to do this. Before turning into a tiger he would enchant a new *gāmosā* with mantras and give it to his wife. She would have to stand on the roof of their house and when he came back after having killed the deer, he would put the deer in the courtyard

[6] See Beggiora 2013; Bora 2000; Hutton 1920; Kharmawphlang 2001; and Lyngdoh 2015 (forthcoming).

Fig. 5. *Bej* Prabin Saikia, wearing *gāmosā*, a typical Assamese men's shawl. Photo: Ülo Valk, 2009.

and go around the house calling out, and then the wife would have to throw the *gāmosā* over him. Then he would fall asleep and become a man again. . . . When the wife tried to throw the *gāmosā* over the man it did not fall over his body. So she tried to take a hooked bamboo pole to pick the *gāmosā* up, but the tiger snapped at the hook and pulled the pole—the woman fell down and the tiger ate her up. Since then this has stopped here. It had gone on for a long time till then.

Prabin Saikia said that he had heard about this event from his father as a young boy, when such stories were still widely circulated in the village. Someone had reported the accident with Leteru's wife and come running to say that she had been eaten by a tiger. During the same interview Prabin Saikia also told another story about a woman who turned herself into a pig. He explained that for the transformation into a pig, one has to follow the procedure described for a tiger. Only instead of using vermilion and oil one has to pour coal and ash on the banana leaf. The story is as follows:

> One day a woman became a pig and went to eat paddy. When she was coming back, the owner of the field saw the pig eating paddy and shot at the pig. The bullet did not hit anywhere else, but pierced her ear. We have seen her, she was very old then, she did not die, we saw her when we were very small.

Prabin Saikia said that as the woman knew a particular mantra, she could easily turn back into human. According to him such things still happened in his childhood but they stopped, when "the light of civilization came to the village" and people understood that such practices were not good.

On January 31, 2012 I interviewed Prabin Saikia again, asking questions about human–animal transformations. His basic instructions about turning into a tiger were similar, only a few details varied. He said that before the transformation the man has to lie on the banana leaf with his legs towards its top and head towards the pedicel, which has been cut. "He has to be completely naked and has to go to sleep, saying mantras. He continues to say the mantras and it will be as if he is falling asleep.[7] Then he will growl three times and when he gets up, he has become a tiger." Next, the story about a Karbi couple that lived in Bura Mayong and wanted to eat deer meat followed. The plot is identical with the first version but at the end, after killing and eating the wife, the were-tiger touches the enchanted *gāmosā*, which lies on the ground. He turns into man again and sees that he has eaten his own wife. Prabin Saikia said that because of such tragic incidents

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[7] Falling asleep in order to go through the transformation from man to tiger and back to human refers to the related belief system about the soul journey, which is central in the were-tiger beliefs of several tribal peoples of North-Eastern India. About the were-tiger beliefs and dream world (*ramia*) of the neighboring Khasis, see Kharmawphlang 2001 and Lyngdoh 2015 (forthcoming).

these practices were stopped and they were not taught to the next generation. He said that he knew the name of the couple involved—it had been a share-cropping family—but he had forgotten. Whereas in 2009 Prabin Saikia mentioned that he had heard the story from his father, when he was a boy, and it seemed that it was about a contemporary event in the village, in 2012 he said that the story was told him by his *pehā* (paternal aunt's husband) and that the tragic event had happened much earlier—in the early twentieth century when his *pehā* was still young.

On February 9, 2013 we visited Prabin Saikia again and asked questions about human–animal transformations. He said that such practice has been common among the Karbis, not among the Hindus. Tigers eat cows and as the Karbis are Christians, they can do it as well, differently from the Hindus. Next, not surprisingly, Prabin Saikia told the story about the Karbi couple and the man as a were-tiger:

Do you know since when this practice stopped? There were a husband and a wife and both knew how to do it. One day, the wife went . . . that was a time of scarcity of food—they were very poor people. So she went as a pig to eat paddy. The owner was waiting with a gun—he saw the pig—he was very drunk—shot at the pig and pierced its ear, tearing it into two. She went home and told her husband what had happened. He scolded her for going there and said that it had served her right.

Another time, they wanted to eat deer meat. There were lots of deer all around and they would make a lot of noise. He told her: "Take this *gāmosā*!" . . . He took the *gāmosā* and enchanted (*jārā*) it, gave her a ladder and asked her to climb to the roof with the *gāmosā*. "When I'll come back put the *gāmosā* over me with this bamboo stick and I will become human again."

To become a tiger, you have to take a banana leaf that has a black node at the top. Take turmeric (*hālodhi*) and *kājal* (black colorant, made from oil and soot)—make it yourself—put stripes on both sides of the banana leaf, and also add vermilion (*sindur*). Then recite the mantra, take off all your clothes, go to the back of the yard when nobody is there, and nobody can see you—do it there, and then lie down with your stomach down on the leaf and keep reciting the mantra. Suddenly he will stretch himself out and growl like a tiger and become a tiger.

As a tiger he went to get the deer, caught it and came back with the deer. He was growling so the wife knew that he had come back with the deer. He put the deer in the courtyard—the tiger has some [human] consciousness even then—and he is roaming around the house. The woman heard him and got on top of the roof. She tied the *gāmosā* to the stick—if she just threw it, it might

fall somewhere else—so she tied it to the bamboo stick. Then she tried to throw the *gāmosā* over the tiger from the roof. The tiger pulled the *gāmosā*, the woman fell down from the roof and the tiger ate her up. . . .

The cloth was still there, tied to the stick. As it touched the body of the tiger, he became a man and saw what he had done and what a big thing had happened. From that time they stopped it totally—the people had a meeting and it was agreed by everyone to end that practice. Even if you know the mantra you should not practice it anymore. From that time it has stopped. But the story has lived on till today of how a man became a tiger. The person, who kept this mantra in his house, has shown it to me and [has explained] how it has to be done. . . .

This happened about 70 to 80 years ago, a few years before I was born. Maybe this happened in the 1940s. Then when we grew up, in the 1960s this story was in full circulation, everyone was talking about it. My *pehā* was on very good terms with that man—they were good friends. I went with my *pehā* to meet him, he was very old then, and I asked him: "How does one become a tiger, you know it, father (*deutā*)?" He said: "Yes, I know." And then he explained it to me. But he refused to teach it [the mantra] to anyone, not to you or anyone, it will die with me. And it has gone now . . . There were many such people.

When I asked the name of the man who had killed his wife as a tiger, Prabin Saikia fell into deep thought and tried to remember it. Then he said: "He is from Bura Mayong, we are in Raja Mayong, they were Karbi people. . . . Bhotoka is the name."

Again, we can see differences from the previous versions. On the first occasion Prabin Saikia spoke about two cases of transformation—a man who goes to hunt as a tiger and a woman who turns into a pig and goes to eat paddy. However, it remained unclear, if or how these two episodes were connected. Now Prabin Saikia made it clear that the two stories were about the same married couple—a wife and a husband who were experts in magic. In the first version the storyteller claims that he had seen the woman who had turned into a pig, while in the last version he claims that he had met the tigerman. On the first storytelling occasion Prabin Saikia said that his father had told him about the tragic killing of the wife, while on the second occasion he referred to his *pehā* as the source of the information, and during the third interview he revealed that years ago the story was widely spread in the village. Indeed, it does not matter much from whom Prabin Saikia heard the story, it is a traditional narrative and probably he heard it several times from different people. It is more remarkable that

the name of the Karbi man, the were-tiger, changes from Leteru in the first version to Bhotoka in the last story. Only in the last version did Prabin Saikia make it clear that he has personally spoken with the tigerman, who had taught the basics of human–tiger transformation to him. Thus, he minimizes the distance between his life story and the storyworld of were-tigers. His childhood and youth passed in the legendary period of great *bej*es, who had initiated him into the secrets of magical knowledge.

Creating Uncertainty and Conceiving the Supernatural: Concluding Remarks

Kaarina Koski (2008) has discussed the levels of distance between the narrated world and the real world and how this distance is adjusted in legend telling. First, she describes stories that are realistic and address the social reality, the sphere of the "here and now." Secondly, she characterizes stories that comprise of nearby taleworlds of extraordinary and dramatic events, located in the close surroundings.[8] The more out-of-the-ordinary these events are, the further they shift from social reality to the level that Koski calls the distant taleworld. These stories are located far away from the storyteller and the audience in time and space and the narrated events are incongruent with everyday reality (Koski 2008: 342–5). However, as Koski (2008: 347–9) shows, even these fantastic stories are not detached from the actual beliefs and from the real world.

These observances about narrative distance and supernatural elements in legends can help interpret the stories of Jatin Deka and Prabin Saikia, who conflate their life stories with the taleworld. They become actors in the world of traditional legends and appear in contact with participants in the supernatural events. The distance between the remote taleworld and the everyday life is thus diminished. Legends appear as accounts of real events, because they include precise details about the witnesses and references to the social and physical environment. Legend scholars have usually claimed that such elements of factuality should be considered a strategy used by the

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[8] Taleworld is a term coined by Katharine Young (1987), referring to the time-space of narrative events, which is made manifest through the storyrealm, the social situation of storytelling.

narrator to convince the audience that the story is true (Dorson 1972: 160; Bennett 1988: 25; Oring 2012). This statement can hold true about each particular storytelling event, although if we consider the whole tradition of belief legends in its multiplicity, it might need revision.

As we compare different versions of stories told by Jatin Deka and Prabin Saikia, we can see considerable discrepancies in the factual data of their narratives. How is it possible to convince the audience of the veracity of the event if there is no consistency in factual evidence and the stories contradict each other? We noted that in Jatin Deka's rendering the protagonist who saved Deben from the *birā*'s trick was altered and it remained unclear who had taken Deben down from the bamboo—was it Jatin Deka or perhaps his father? Moreover, Jatin Deka's relationship with *birā*s remained ambiguous. In 2013 he seemed to imply that his *birā*s were with him, but in 2014 he said that he had sent them off thirty or forty years ago.[9] Similar kinds of discrepancy are expressed in Prabin Saikia's belief narratives about the were-tiger who killed his wife. The name of the protagonist changed from Leteru in the first version to Bhotoka in the last. The time period of the tragic event remained inconsistent. In the first story it seemed that the event had happened in Prabin Saikia's childhood, in the second version at the beginning of the twentieth century and in the third version in the 1940s, a few years before the storyteller was born. In addition, there are some contradictions about the contact between the storyteller and the man who had killed his wife as a tiger. Did they actually meet, or perhaps not?

In short, these stories, told as true about the same events, diverge in important details. Whereas the plots remain more or less stable, the factual data—the elements that are supposed to enhance the credibility—work against their veracity, as instead of consistency we find growing confusion. Discrepancies in the factual data of the stories must be evident not only for folklorists but for the tradition communities as well. And these are the same stories, told by the same

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[9] The matter became even more complicated later, when a student from Assam told me that she had consulted with Jatin Deka in 2013. He had invited her to his place to perform a *pūjā* on Saturday night to find solutions to some problems that the student had. Jatin Deka had said that another girl would appear in the darkness and would answer all her questions. The student thought that the other girl could not be anyone other than Jatin Deka's *birā* and refused to go to this dangerous meeting.

narrators. How extensive can the variation of factual data become if we study stories as they circulate more widely in the village?

It is time to ask again what the function of factual data is in legends—do they enhance belief in the supernatural or undermine it? It seems that each story reveals something about the supernatural powers, although as the stories contradict some former statements, they keep the listeners equally in darkness. Variation of factual details in traditional stories told as true produces uncertainty. We cannot be sure if *bej*es still own manuscripts of magic or if these books have been destroyed. Is it ever possible to find out if a *bej* actually has a *birā* in his service or not? Can we know if a particular story about a were-tiger has been created after a real event, involving real individuals, or is nothing more than a ripple in the continuous stream of tradition? And what about the tigers who have disappeared into nature while still roaming the storyworld—not as ordinary animals but as were-tigers who are claimed to have tangible, live bodies. To which realm do they belong? It seems that such ontological liminality and the supernatural inherently belong together. It is difficult to find evidence for the claim that spirits exist, but equally difficult to prove the opposite—especially within a social environment where the supernatural powers and the related narrative tradition thrive and spirits appear both in personal experience and the related narratives. Sometimes they take tangible forms but usually remain invisible and immaterial. Spirits both exist and do not exist. They can be controlled through sacrifice and *pūjā* and they cannot be controlled, as they can easily turn against you. It is possible to own a *birā* and at the same time have nothing to do with this ownership. There are true stories in circulation that provide evidence for all these claims—true stories that taken together produce uncertainty, doubt and suspense. Things that are known and unanimously agreed upon lose their narrative attraction, although what is not known, what remains controversial, unclear and ambiguous, gets attention and appears in new stories. The interplay with contradictory factuality in belief narratives hardly convinces an experienced listener or reader that the stories are true. Rather, it undermines and relativizes their veracity and creates a liminal space where the storyworld coalesces with social reality, evoking and conceiving the supernatural, and thus making it real.

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The Dancers Complied, the Chicken Denied: Explorations into the Pragmatic Work of Rituals among the Dumi Rai of Eastern Nepal

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Asking what is relevant in a ritual process and to whom, this article follows in detail a short sequence of an agricultural bhume *ritual performed by the Dumi Rai of Eastern Nepal. On the basis of this example, it is suggested that moments of excitement or bewilderment among our local key partners can provide points of entry for a deeper understanding of their culture. Discussing the conceptual difference between correct and perfect ritual action, the article arrives at a pragmatic approach to the "work of ritual." Based on the locally perceived equivalence between ritual work and other, everyday work, it is suggested to employ by analogy a notion of a ritual "working contract" between today's living community and the ancestors who are addressed in the greatest part of rituals among the Rai.*

What is relevant in a ritual process and to whom? Which are the crucial moments and why? These questions cropped up time and again during my research[1] among the Dumi Rai, and most clearly in one particular incident I observed during a *bhume* puja, a ritual for a soil deity, a few years back. The Dumi Rai, which according to the 2001 census consists of 5,271 people (Central Bureau of Statistics 2002), are one of roughly

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[1] Research project headed by Martin Gaenszle: "Ritual, Space, Mimesis: Performative Traditions and Ethnic Identity among the Rai of Eastern Nepal" at the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, University of Vienna, funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF, 2011–2015), in collaboration with my research partner Alban von Stockhausen, who I thank for his companionship and valuable input. Many thanks also go to Chatur Bhakta Rai for his great support and collaboration in my research for over a decade. Transcriptions of Dumi terms follow, as far as possible, the *Dumi–Nepali–English Dictionary*, for better readability adjusted to standard Romanized Nepali (DKRF 2011).

30 Rai subgroups. They mainly live on the Baksila ridge of Khotang District in Eastern Nepal, some also on the slopes of Jalpa on the other side of the Tap River and on the slopes of Makpa on the other side of the Rawa River. They originally spoke Dumi, a language of the Tibeto-Burman family, but nowadays this has been largely supplanted by Nepali (van Driem 1993). The Rai, together with the Limbu, Yakkha, and Sunuwar, are subsumed under the ethnonym Kirat. Ethnographic and anthropological research on the Rai is still a small field. Published monographs are only to be found on the Mewahang (Gaenszle 1991; 2002), the Lohorung (Hardman 2000), and the Kulung (McDougal 1979; Schlemmer 2004; Nicoletti 2006), while most other research has been linguistic (Allen 1975 on Thulung; Ebert 1997a, b on Camling and Athpare; Bickel 1996 on Belhare; van Driem 1993 and Rutgers 1998 on Yamphu; N. K. Rai 1985 on Bantawa; Tolsma 2006 on Kulung, as well as many locally produced dictionaries, in our context the most relevant one being DKRF 2011). Comparative anthropological approaches are rare (Allen 1974; 1976 with early attempts, Ebert and Gaenszle 2008; and Bagdevi Rai 2008.)

Asking what is relevant for the people who actually perform the ritual, ideally we as anthropologists must acknowledge that opinions on this question may even differ within the studied community, at times greatly so. Likewise in small local communities with relatively independent ritual systems and ritual specialists—such as the one on which I am focusing here—the question of which ritual aspect, which performative element is meaningful, relevant and effective, may be contested. Ethnographers are often informed by an ideal of how to handle such issues which involves diversifying as much as possible—observing as many rituals and talking to as many members of the local community as they can. On the basis of such data, it is common practice to formulate descriptions that are conceived of as average or cross-sectional representations of a local community, its practices and worldviews. However, in many cases, as is well-known, our own opinion as researchers is shaped by our principle "informants," by a key interview, or by single moments that provide deeper access to another culture. This article treats one such moment of revelation and reflects on its relevance from different perspectives. By taking a short sequence of a ritual and following the recorded field data in detail, it tries to interpret ritual from an emic perspective, and in this way ends up approaching the "work of ritual" in the literal sense of the term.

Introducing the Bhume *Ritual and the* Sakhela *Dance*

On 21st May 2011—the season of bhume *rites was in full swing—I sat on the earthen step of the veranda of a traditional Dumi Rai house observing the dances going on in the courtyard in front. My research task was to document the goings on outside the house while my research partners were sitting inside, where a local priest performed offerings and recitations at the same time by the hearth. All of a sudden one of our local research partners pushed his way through the crowd and in a state of great agitation observed what was going on in the courtyard. After a short moment he relaxed and a smile appeared on his face as he nodded with satisfaction. I was curious to learn what had prompted this otherwise coolheaded man to get so excited. Sitting on the other side of the veranda, I hoped to reach him without disturbing the ritual process before he disappeared back into the house.*

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The *bhume* ritual is an agricultural ritual and festival performed by the majority of Rai groups in Eastern Nepal, some of whom only celebrate it at harvest time, while others also do so for sowing. It is an offering to the *bhume* deities, who in most cases manifest in stones. Their support and goodwill are considered to be essential for the fertility of the soil. Among the Dumi Rai, a local priest (*nāgire nakcho*) leads the ritual assisted by specially designated ritual helpers (*tāyā*). Here, the stones in which the deities—male or female—manifest are small and round and usually placed underground in special locations, the *bhume thān*. Initially, a *bhume* deity must reveal itself to a local *nāgire* priest or a 'shaman' (*sele dhāmi*).[2] This can happen spontaneously, which means on the initiative of the deity itself, or on request, which means if the local community asks a *nāgire* to find, if possible, a hidden deity who is favorable to them in the landscape. A nightlong ritual, which is comparable in structure to a healing ritual (*cintā*), will be conducted by the priest or shaman to locate the deity. Shortly before dawn, the physical search for the deity commences and the ritual specialist digs up the stone in which the deity has manifested itself. The *bhume* deity is now "installed" at its

[2] *Dhāmi* is a local designation often used as umbrella term for all types of ritual specialists, but when necessary (in certain types of rituals), people make a difference between the *nāgire nakcho* (who performs the agricultural and life cycle rituals) and the *sele dhāmi* (who performs the healing rituals). Many ritual specialists can perform both functions.

new *thān,* often under a large *banyan* tree, and given its first offerings. After these celebrations the stones are buried again, and remain there until the next season of *bhume* rituals. From now on the deity must be worshipped with offerings by the *nāgire* and the community at least once a year.

The *bhume* rituals have many local variations among the Rai, and even within the subgroup of the Dumi Rai the traditions vary from village to village. Usually the rituals start at the house of the *nāgire*, who will begin by offering, among other things, local brandy (*raksi*) to the three fire stones and the fire in his own house while reciting parts of the so-called *mundhum*,[3] an ancestral tradition which

> . . . comprises histories of the origin of the ancestors, beginning with the primal creation of the universe and the emergence of natural and cultural orders and continuing to the settlement of the ancestral territory. It also concerns the proper means of communicating with ancestors and ritually maintaining the order they have established. The term, then, has an additional meaning: it evokes a way of life predefined by the ancestors, a self-enclosed world rooted in the past. (Gaenszle 2000: 224)

In a procession including ritual helpers, drummers, singers and dancers, the *nāgire* walks or dances to the *bhume thān*, chanting parts of the *mundhum* at every crossing along the path, at every water source, and at other important spots. Arriving at the *bhume thān*, the stones representing the *bhume* deity are presented with small, preliminary offerings of uncooked rice, small coins, and *raksi*, before the main offering takes place: cocks from every family in the village, brought by the representatives of the households, and a communal offering in the form of a female pig. Part of the ritual consists in most cases of the *sakhela*[4] dance, which is led by a dance leader and performed in circles, preferably around the *bhume thān* or at a spot in front of it. A second ritual on the same day, which is performed before or after the *bhume* puja, is the *jālim* puja, the offering of fresh maize plants. This is likewise performed by the *nāgire* together with the ritual helpers and dancers. Depending

[3] Also designated by other cognate terms, and recited in a special language register that differs from everyday Dumi language.

[4] Also pronounced *sakela, sak(h)ala, sak(h)ewa.*

on local custom, it is held either at a specially designated place for the whole village, at the house that is regarded as the first house of the settlement (*tupsumi kim*), or in every household in the village. After a taboo against planting paddy for three days after this ritual day, the actual rice planting season begins.

Fig. 1. People looking at the deity stones that have just been dug out the ground by the *tupsumi*, the man inhabiting the first house of the settlement, during the *bhume* puja. Sabru village, Eastern Nepal, 21st May 2011, 15:18:32 pm. Photo: Alban von Stockhausen (research record NP11_Ph5D2_2738).

The *sakhela* dance is performed by many Rai groups during these ritual events, but not by all. It is found in every village among the Dumi Rai, although some older people remember a time when the dance was not performed, and suggest it was introduced in the early twentieth century and came from "the Jalpa side," which means the region bordering the Chamling Rai. The Chamling and some of the Bantawa Rai are in fact regarded as the "main dancers" among the Rai groups. The *sakhela* dance, or *sakhela sili* as it is called locally, is performed in a circle by men and women moving around a ritual center represented by a leafy branch stuck into the ground, and inaugurated with some small recitations and offerings of liquor. The dance consists of a basic

step and many additional units of movement, which are performed synchronously by the dancers following a dance leader. In former times, only specially designated ritual dancers were dance leaders, the *masume* (f.), the *madume* (m.), or the *masumadi* (pl.), and the dance had a purely ritual purpose. But in recent decades the dance has become popular, mainly because it was propagated by ethnic activist groups (Wettstein in press). While the ritual parts of the dances are still led today by the *masumadi*, the day of the *bhume* ritual has also a festive character, and especially the village youth enjoy dancing far into the night on the local village grounds. The young dance leaders often incorporate dance movements adopted from other Rai groups, and slowly (but still tentatively) newly invented movements find their way into the repertoire.

The repertoire of movements not only differs from one Rai group to the other, but often also varies among the villages within the same group. To date I have been able to document roughly 180 different gestural dance units in 20 different Dumi Rai villages—including the complete repertoire of three dance leaders and a number of movements from the neighboring Chamling Rai communities. The units of movements are mostly imitative and include themes such as agricultural techniques, craft techniques (especially weaving), mythological animals, leisure time and flirting. The themes as well as the dance as such are linked to the myth of the cultural hero, Kakchilipu, and his older sisters Toma and Khema, as they are called among the Dumi Rai. They invented agriculture and all of the crafts, and provided the models for every ritual, worldview and social structure.[5] The sequence of the dance units is up to the dance leader to decide, but usually follows a certain logic. Among the Dumi Rai, the dance movements that are performed by the *masumadi* during the *bhume* puja and *jālim* puja are those of the agricultural cycle, which corresponds to occasions when the ritual is performed as a request for prosperous fields and good crops. But all other dance movements can be observed as well at the simultaneous social dance events on the festival grounds in the villages.

The songs that are sung with the dances either comment on the dance movements and the dance as such, make references to mythological tales, or tell of love and longing. Depending on the type of song and the subject of the lyrics, a considerable amount of freedom for improvisa-

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[5] For a comparative analysis of this mythological complex see Bagdevi Rai (2008).

tion can be observed, especially when the songs drift toward a singing competition between the men and the women (often possible marriage partners) known all over Nepal as *dohori*.

An Incident under Investigation

I managed to maneuver through the crowd and ask our friend why he had been so excited, to which he replied: "I saw that they were dancing 'carrying the basket'." Enquiring further, it turned out that inside the house, the ritual performed by the nāgire *and his helpers had in that very moment reached the point when the ritual* laito *basket is carried to the upper floor of the house by an old woman. He was convinced that this moment had not been coordinated in advance by the participants. The obstructions in the view through the closed architecture of the house and veranda and the densely assembled crowd; the noise of the drums, cymbals and voices; and the improvisation factor in both the ritual and the dancing would make a predictable temporal overlap or a conscious coordination of the two movements highly unlikely. The spontaneous simultaneity of this very moment in the ritual had obviously been highly meaningful to our friend.*

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As a first step in examining this incident I wanted to check whether the recorded field data confirmed the observed simultaneity. In order to coordinate field data concerning simultaneous happenings, our research team has calibrated all of the electronic equipment and synchronized the time, and we always entered the times, especially of ritual processes, in our handwritten field notes. For the incident under investigation, my own diary notes read:

	(. . .)
16:40	"There is dancing in the courtyard again. *The tupsumi*[6] says the *bali* puja[7] will be held somewhere further up, not here. But now they bring the maize plant, so there will be something here after all."

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[6] The current house-owner of the *tupsumi* house, the first house of the settlement, is called *tupsumi* as well.

[7] *Bali* puja is Nepali for jalim *puja*, the maize offering.

17:00	"The shaman comes out of the house with the maize and sits down in the entrance. The woman with the *laito* basket dances by his side. (There is dancing going on in the courtyard as well). The *masumadi* are inside. After 1–2 minutes the shaman starts with the *mundhum* sprinkles the plant with *raksi* (several times)."
17:04	"The maize is brought outside and placed in a corner, the shaman goes inside. *CB comes to look at the dancing, it seems he expects a certain step? He tells me that in this moment the* laito *has been brought upstairs and just in that moment the dancers in the courtyard have 'unknowingly' been dancing 'carrying the basket'. His eyes are gleaming. Who else has noticed this?"*
17:09	"*Dhāmi* ['shaman'] out, on we go. Dancing in the courtyard. He sprinkles [*raksi* on] the spears, etc. *Dhāmi* and *Tupsumi* dance in the opposite direction to the dance circle."
	(. . .)[8]

With this the timing of the events can be determined quite precisely. Also my research partner sitting inside the house took notes around the same time, which read:

	(. . .)
ca. 16:40	"The old helper explains something that sounds like a translation (it can be heard in the background). At 41 minutes I switch to internal microphone as the old man seems to be relating a myth.[9] Stop the tape at around 50 min. It seems unclear whether the *bali* puja will take place here at all."
17:15	"Track 106. *Bali* puja. The chicken seems to have come to land on an inauspicious side. Discussions. End of the puja. Recorded directly. The shaman moves on (probably going home). Farewell *mundhum* to ancestors."
	(. . .)[10]

Since the notes do not mention the *laito* basket, we can check on the two relevant audio recordings whether any new information concerning our incident can be found:

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[8] Research records NP11_NbM01_118.

[9] The wireless microphone was attached to the *nāgire*'s dress during the ritual so that his recitations would be recorded clearly while the volume of the other voices and noises was kept low. During the recording the quality was simultaneously checked via headphones, which explains the comment about what can be heard somewhere in the background.

[10] Research records NP11_NbA01_00030.

(. . .)

ca. 16:00 Short ritual recitation, chatting. An old helper, asked about the *sakhela* by a visitor, starts to relate the myth of Toma, Khema and Kakchilipu mentioned above. A woman sitting next to him prompts him to go on telling details by asking questions.

16:45 The story reaches the point where the little brother Kakchilipu sends a cock to call his sisters to his home. The storyteller and the old women melodiously imitate the way he crows, "tomakhemakakchilipu," in order to lure the sisters to Kakchilipu's house. The old helper explains that the feast the sisters were invited to was a *chhamdam* ritual.[11] He believes that there was no dancing at this feast, but one of the conversation partners insists that there were *masumadi*, dancing helpers. At this point the discussion is interrupted by a newcomer who wants to know about the foreign visitors, and the myth is not resumed after that.

(. . . recording interrupted . . .)

16:59 Loud cymbal playing, the *nāgire* is outside on the veranda at the place for offerings for the *jālim* puja. People around him ask where the leaves are for the offering, they have to be looked for. In the background one can hear the singing and the cymbals of the dancers in the courtyard. Then the cymbals grow quieter; the *nāgire* is inside the house again. For a while it is quite silent, everybody waits for the start of the offering, only the cymbals from the courtyard can be heard further in the background.

17:02 People are asking for the chicken for the offering, someone is sent to get it.

17:03 The *nāgire* starts with the recitation.

17:04 *Discussions about the chicken, the ritual cymbal player and dancer is next to the* nāgire *as the sound of the single cymbals is quite loud.*

17:05 *Discussions about where the maize is.*

[11] Among the Dumi Rai, the *chhamdam* is the third ritual of status after the *tidam* and *chhidam*. The series of rituals resembles the feasts of merit performed by many groups in Northeast India. The completion of the *chhamdam* qualifies the feast giver for a special ritual name, which will be integrated into the genealogy of ancestors and will be recited as such in other rituals, thus distinguishing him (or her) from other recently deceased people. Not all Rai groups know such status rituals, and the *chhamdam* is hardly ever performed nowadays among the Dumi because of the very high ritual and economic outlay involved and the lifelong ritual duties attached. It is highly likely that the *chhamdam* ritual indeed included dancing, as the literal translation of the term is 'dance' (DKRF 2011: 69).

17:06	The helpers start to loudly recite their part, while the *nāgire* calmly continues reciting his.
17:09	A short silence, people moving.
17:10	The singing from the courtyard is loud now while the *nāgire* recites outside the house.
17:11	The *nāgire* is dancing with the dancers in the courtyard, their singing voices can now be understood clearly on the recording.
	(. . .)[12]

The audio recording does not help any further. At the time when the *laito* should have been brought upstairs, the *nāgire* and his helpers were busy with other matters. But the photographs that were taken by my research partner from inside the house show the *laito* basket being brought upstairs:

	(. . .)
16:59:53-16:59:58	Maize plant in the hands of the *nāgire* in the doorway to the veranda.
17:00:16-17:03:29	The *nāgire* and the woman with the *laito* basket in a corner of the veranda.
17:03:50-17:03:53	*The woman walks through the room with the* laito . . .
17:03:58-17:04:06	. . . *and starts to climb upstairs on the ladder.*
17:04:37-17:08:26	The *nāgire* and older helpers are sitting around the hearth directing their attention to it. (Which is to say a recitation is given to the ancestors through the hearth).
17:09:01-17:11:14	The *nāgire* is coming out the door of the house into the open and dances in the courtyard.
	(. . .)[13]

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12 Research records NP11_AuL11_00105, NP11_AuL11_00106.

13 Research Records NP11_Ph5D2_02850 to NP11_Ph5D2_02910.

Fig. 2. A woman carries the ritual *laito* basket through the room during the *jālim* puja, heading for the ladder to bring it upstairs. Sabru village, Eastern Nepal, 21st May 2011, 17:03:53 pm. Photo: Alban von Stockhausen (research record NP11_Ph5D2_2868).

We are thus able to confirm that the *laito* really was brought upstairs. But there was never any question about this, for otherwise our friend would not have come outside to check which movement was being danced at that moment. Unfortunately, no video recording was taken of that very moment in the courtyard. At every *sakhela* dance event on the preceding days, I had systematically filmed the movements and noted them down with time coding, in order to be able to identify them later on. But for some reason I had decided to take a different approach that day and put the camera away, only observing the overall happenings and the structure of the ritual process as a whole.

Since I was already quite familiar by then with the different dance movements, I am sure I would have recognized and noted it down if I had thought that the movement danced in the courtyard was not "carrying the basket." I am thus confident to take my friend's observation and my own silent agreement on this point as guarantee for the temporal simultaneity, and will treat it as a fact.

Correct Ritual Action and Moments of Ritual Beauty and Perfection

Returning to my observation post I asked myself: "Did anyone else notice this temporal overlap, had anyone else been interested in it apart from our friend?" Looking around, it did not appear so. On mentioning it to three or four people sitting next to me I received an irritated "yes, of course" in return. Owing to the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the villagers, I dropped the idea of investigating any further. But the situation stuck in my mind and I started to wonder: What did this moment of temporally overlapping movements mean—or not mean—to the villagers; to our friend as a person embedded in both, the local intellectual elite and the local religious system; and to me as a foreign researcher?

*

Many theories on ritual have been put forth in anthropology and religious studies, some focusing on its relation to myth, others on social function and structure or on symbolism and meaning, as Catherine Bell's overview (1997) proposes, and in more recent times on cognition, communication, emotion, or embodiment, to name just a few aspects (Kreinath, Snoek and Stausberg 2008). To approach the particularity of our incident under investigation, I shall start by considering a classic and highly germane analysis of the nature, reality and effectiveness of ritual in Siberian societies: Taking the bear hunt festival as his ethnographic example, Jonathan Z. Smith wrote in his "Bare Facts of Ritual" that

> . . . ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things. [. . .] It provides an occasion for reflection and rationalization on the fact that what ought to have been done was not done. From such a perspective, ritual is not best understood as congruent with something else: a magical imitation of desired ends; a translation of emotions; a symbolic acting out of ideas; a dramatization of a text. Ritual gains its force where incongruency is perceived. (1980: 125)

To contextualize this approach to ritual, Smith explains that on considering the mythology of the bear hunt (and actual hunting practice) it becomes obvious that "[t]he hunter does not hunt as he says he hunts, he does not think about his hunting as he says he thinks," but is aware of this discrepancy between word and deed (1980: 124). The bear festival

as a ritual provides the perfect hunt, the model in which all variables are under control, a condition never encountered in everyday life. The ritual as a model of action has also recently been described by Meredith McGuire in her look at *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. She stresses action as such when she observes that

> . . . ritual effectiveness depended on performance, not intention or individual consciousness. Thus, ritual action performed correctly was believed to be more effective than one performed incorrectly, even if the incorrect actions were done with greater earnestness and fervor. Likewise, actions done with sacrilegious intent or even by accident could effectively tap religious power if they happened to be performed correctly. The tale of the sorcerer's apprentice (even in its trivialized Disney cartoon version) illustrates this conception of performative power. (2008: 36)

Of course, this approach can also be contested, as Rappaport (1999: 115) has shown: "And if a befuddled cleric recited the funeral liturgy rather than the marriage service I doubt if the couple standing before him would thereby become objects of mourning."

An impressive record of the importance of performing a ritual correctly can, however, be found in the case of a Vedic Agni ritual among the Nambudhiri Brahmins in Kerala, which, when it was the first recorded by foreigners in 1975, had not been performed for almost twenty years. Being the only place in India where the Agni ritual had actually survived as a living performance, it was the subject of Frits Staal's monumental work published in 1983, and triggered a discussion on the "meaning" and "meaninglessness" of ritual.[14] From the Agni ritual we learn once again that "ritual correctness" is not a matter of mental or scriptural concepts (the classic texts of the Vedas in this case), but of performative action:

> When the Nambudiri ritualists are told that, according to classic texts, certain rites used to be performed differently in the past, they say, "Interesting." Not for a moment would they consider changing their own ritual practice in the light of such information. They perform the rituals as they have learned them from their preceptors. It is their tradition. (1983: 2)

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[14] See for instance Staal 1979; 1989; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; Michaels 1999; 2008; Grimes 2014: 317 ff.; Meshel 2014: 189 ff.

How important the model performance is in relation to the actual performance and in what way the author has handled the dilemma of the ethnographic recording versus the ritual model becomes evident in Staal's introductory note to the description of the performance part:

> It is a description of the *ritual competence* of the participants, rather than of their *ritual performance*. For example, obvious and irrelevant mistakes have not been recorded. Rather, they have been rectified. A general example of such a mistake is a false start, immediately corrected. A specific example is the commotion caused by the *adhvaryu*[15] when he tried to shoot an arrow at the outset of the setting up of the Agni field (page 387), but held the bow the wrong way round. Helpers showed him how to hold it. Such a "mistake" is not recorded. All it would show is that the *adhvaryu* is out of touch with archery, which fact interfered with the exercise of his ritual competence, but does not affect it. (1983: 274)

Mistakes are already anticipated in the ritual and a special priest, the "brahman," has the role of supervising the rites,

> . . . in general without participating. When mistakes have been made, he determines what should be done and prescribes, if necessary, expiation rites." (1983: 46)

Likewise in the ritual performances of our ethnographic example among the Rai, although not based on a written but on an oral tradition, mistakes that occur through a deviation from an envisaged model and the immediate corrections through helpers can be observed on a regular basis. In some rituals, for instance, the lineage of ancestors has to be recited and many ritual specialists take advice from elder members of the family for whom the recitation is given during the performance. It is also not uncommon for parts of a ritual to be repeated spontaneously by the ritual specialists; or that bystanders correct the recitations or performative process or question the performance; or that lengthy discussions occur on how to proceed during breaks between ritual episodes.

The *correct* action is, however, not what is at stake in our incident under investigation. In our ethnographic example, the ritual would be considered correct even if the dance movements in the courtyard did not belong at all to the sequences of agricultural technique, or if the

[15] One of the chief priests.

dancing had for some reason come to a halt. What was witnessed in the eyes of our protagonist was a moment of *perfect* ritual action. Even if scarcely anyone else attached great importance to this perfection, nobody seemed to be surprised about it either. Such moments of ritual beauty and perfection are part of the experience of most local people who attend, and are assumed to happen every now and then. They are an intrinsic part of ritual satisfaction and persuasiveness.

While *correct* ritual action and the consequences of mistakes have been a theme of thorough investigation in many academic fields (Hüsken 2007), it seems that the notion of *perfect* ritual action as distinct from correct ritual action has hardly been touched on. Apart from J. Z. Smith, we find marginal mention of the phrase here and there, but more as a paraphrase and alternative expression for correct ritual (for instance Smith 1996; Gliders 2009: 246; Schipper 1993: 42; Bell 1997: 225). Staying with our example, we can venture to conceive of perfect ritual action in this ethnographic context as having added value. Perfect ritual actions assume the quality of moments of individual transformation and therefore need not necessarily be replicable, repeatable, institutionalized, commonly recognized, or of the same kind for all participants. But as they happen to people from time to time in different ritual settings, especially in societies in which community rituals are held as frequently as in such local religious systems as those of the Rai, the experience of ritual beauty and perfection as such can be assumed to be commonly known and understood in its essence as shared cultural knowledge. Experiences of transcendence or ritual perfection are often considered to occur individually and spontaneously. And because many participants have such experiences in the course of their lives, single moments like the one we observed are no surprise for them.

However, our incident of perfect ritual action did not come unexpectedly or as a spontaneous revelation: it was anticipated as a possibility in that very stage of the ritual and successfully passed the test on inspection. The ritual sequence of bringing the *laito* basket to the upper floor of the house was identified by our local research partner as a key moment which in his view called for special attention. The perceived possibility of overlapping was based on a predefined model in his ritual knowledge. Viewed from both angles, as a local researcher highly interested in his own culture, and as a knowledgeable practitioner of the tradition of his local group, he was alerted to this moment in advance. Even if the local religious and ritual system is not traditionally codified

or standardized in written form, moments of excitement or bewilderment about our local key partners—if we give them our attention as researchers—can inform us about the unwritten ritual models. They can often only be identified through participant observation in field research, because they are only seldom recalled in interviews. In other words, ritual models are often only revealed when moments of excitement or bewilderment happen in real time. These are the moments when parts of the model get activated in practice.

Fig. 3. The *nāgire nakcho* (local priest, left with spear) dances some steps of the *sakhela* dance together with the villagers in the courtyard of the house where the *jālim* puja (maize offering) is performed. Sabru village, Eastern Nepal, 21st May 2011, 13:57:08 pm. Photo: Alban von Stockhausen (research record NP11_Ph5D2_2673).

During our research we attended many *bhume* and *jālim* pujas. In none of the others did I experience our local research partner anticipating such a perfect overlap. I have never observed him check for such or similar connections in other rituals, either before or after this incident. Among other things, this circumstance should alert anthropologists to a crucial but nowadays often forgotten requirement of their craft: Long-term field research—or repeated field visits over many years—is the master key to gaining access to the groups one studies. Of course

a ritual can be described and interpreted after having recorded it once or twice and made some interviews about it. But only in one of maybe twenty rituals—of the same kind—will a situation like the one observed open a door to a different understanding. In our case this different understanding is accomplished by a new knowledge of the existence of a specific ideal ritual model which would not otherwise have come to our attention.

The Work of Ritual

Triggered by the incident, I started to move between inside and outside the house, checking for a special "resonance" or further connections: Might perhaps the special moment of matching movements add to a positive ritual outcome? Everybody eagerly awaited the divination of the chicken sacrifice that was now to be held. After some attempts to escape, the chicken accepted its role as messenger of the ancestors and agreed to being sacrificed by shaking the brandy off its head. But alas, the message of the ancestors—sent through the sacrificed chicken's movements and feet—did not bode well. I caught myself quietly asking whether the ancestors had not just been presented with a wonderful ritual moment and should thus be pleased. But then I remembered a local assistant once commenting: "The ancestors are always dissatisfied. We have to negotiate with them and please them all the time, and yet they demand more offerings, again and again. It's a constant worry and hassle. What can you do?!"

*

To grasp the events during the chicken sacrifice, I shall refer once more to the field recordings. While the chicken was already alluded to in my research partner's notes above, in my own notebook the chicken's moment reads as follows:

	(. . . continued from above)
17:12	"Going inside again (the *dhāmi*), puja at the hearth, dancing continues outside."
17:14	*"The chicken is being sacrificed. One of the* tāyās [*ritual helpers*] *is helping somewhat with the final position of its feet.* Outside they are 'planting *paddy*'. Now they are dancing 'collecting'. Discussions inside. The weather seems to change, a cold wind is blowing."

17:25	"Inside people are getting up, general departure? Dancing continues outside. No, again a *culo*[16] puja with hearth fire, cables already disconnected, Alban has to hold.[17] The shaman goes 'up' (to his house, changing dress?). *The chicken has fallen in a bad way, probably they will have to supply some addition later on.*[18] We are going up [to another house], he [the shaman] is taking off his dress."
	(. . .)[19]

The chicken's message is also documented in photographs . . .

	(. . .)
17:12:42- 17:13:23	The *nāgire* goes back inside the house
17:14:05- 17:15:49	*The* nāgire *holds the chicken in his hands by the hearth. The chicken is sacrificed and its movements are followed by the camera. After nearly disappearing under a basket, its final position is documented.*
	(. . .)[20]

. . . and the excitement about its movement, which passed however as quickly as it came, can be gathered from the sound of the reciting voices of the ritual helpers on the audio recording.

	(. . .)
17:11	A short break in the dancing, people moving and walking (back into the house). Then the single cymbals of the ritual helper start playing.
17:12	The *nāgire* starts reciting.
17:13	The helpers start reciting their part loudly.
17:14	*A loud mixture of intensely reciting voices.* People have resumed their dancing in the courtyard.
17:15	*The cymbals stop playing, reciting continues.*

[16] Hearth fire (Nepali), here the traditional fireplace with three firestones (*daulo*).
[17] The meaning here is: Alban von Stockhausen, my research partner, had to hold the microphone in front of the *nāgire*.
[18] Meaning an offering or a ritual that improves the situation.
[19] Research records NP11_NbM01_118.
[20] Research records NP11_Ph5D2_2912 to NP11_Ph5D2_2932.

17:16 The recitation is finished, people discuss how to proceed now. In the background the dancers in the courtyard can be heard.

17:19 The *nāgire* gives the signal "*aba jāne belā*," that is, "now it's time to leave." But discussions continue about what to do. The *nāgire* remarks that everybody is dancing now.

(. . .)[21]

Fig. 4. During the *jālim* puja (maize offering), ritual helpers at the hearth fire are trying to persuade the chicken to shake off the *raksi* (local liquor) that had been put onto its head, and thereby agreeing to being sacrificed. Sabru village, Eastern Nepal, 21st May 2011, 17:15:11 pm. Photo: Alban von Stockhausen (research record NP11_Ph5D2_2925).

What we can gather from this is that a perfect ritual moment—at least in our ethnographic context—does not necessarily lead to a more positive ritual outcome. Also the effectiveness of the anticipated outcome of a ritual is not lessened in the participants' eyes when such a perfect ritual action is missing, just as long as it is correct. But in our

[21] Research records NP11_AuL11_00106.

case "correct" seems to have a dimension that goes beyond the aforementioned underlying model ritual—written or not—which prescribes the correct ritual action and is the basis on which the execution of the ritual process is set: Among the (Dumi) Rai, a correct ritual is essentially one that is done in such a way that the ancestors are pleased and extend their support to the local community. The one who loses the ancestor's support will be struck with misfortune. A great number of Rai rituals have the sole purpose of reestablishing the relationship with the ancestors, or in other words, of keeping them in a good mood.[22] In return, the ancestors support the community by providing health, good fortune, or a good harvest. There is a clear idea about what exactly it means to perform a ritual in a way that pleases the ancestors. In most ritual recitations we hear phrases such as: "We are doing it the way you have done it." The ancestors provide the perfect model for life in general and today's living community receives their support if it repeats the model in exactly that way. This extremely conservative approach to the ancestors bears a crucial and unavoidable problem for today's living community: change and memory. Change has always happened and always will, and memories of what was before fade or become distorted. Therefore troubles are pre-programmed in the system itself.

Depending on one's perspective, one can argue that the problems are either caused by change, or by the stubbornness of the ancestors. A large number of Rai accept change as a fact and in many respects welcome it as a positive development. Social, personal, or economic problems are often attributed to the fact that the ancestors—being as they are long since dead—cannot possibly accept the changes and therefore insist on the primordial model, which, however, is just not suited to conditions of people living today. It is not the ancestor's fault, but theirs is the power to provide support in life, and they will only do so if one lives up to their expectations. Ritual is thus not only an "occasion for reflection and rationalization," as in Smith above. It is the medium through which cause and treatment for problems are actually handled in practice. While the ancestors are both the source and solution of problems in one, ritual is the work that mediates between the two. Argued from a traditional (Dumi) Rai point of view, ritual is necessary work that must be done, for instance, to make the crops grow, just as

[22] Gaenszle (forthcoming) therefore calls the Rai traditions an "ancestral religion."

hoeing the field is necessary for that. Both are indispensable if you want to have food to eat.

Consequently the "work of ritual" is not understood here in terms of the preparatory work for a rite (Grimes 2000: 323) but in terms of the effectiveness of an activity that can be done right or wrong, well or less well. In this respect I am adhering to a point made by Howard and Kathleen Bahr (2009: 273), who argue that formal definitions of ritual have often been made on the assumption that "the work of ritual [is] not (. . .) the same as the pragmatic, means-end oriented work of the world." Cases such as the Dumi Rai rituals clearly show the contrary. The equivalence between ritual work and other everyday work is quite direct. Ritual work falls into the same category as, for instance: If you sow your seeds in the wrong season they will not grow, and if you build a house without a roof you will get wet. Cause and effect in ritual activity are, from a traditional emic Rai point of view, a matter of hands-on experience with the ancestors. Psychological theories of projection or theories of social relations that implicitly or explicitly exclude the ancestors as "real" players and see rituals only as catalysts for social relations are not very helpful here if we as outsiders want to try and understand this "other" culture from within.

Of course we always encumbered with our own personal worldview, with or without an academic background. But as ethnographers I would argue that it makes sense to try to understand what life means to people when we take their accounts seriously. In other words: If the *nāgire* says the ancestors are angry and asking for another offering, then that is just how it is. Just as if your boss says that you have to fill out a form to get your travel costs reimbursed you wouldn't doubt him or hesitate. You might curse bureaucracy though, and that is exactly what is happening when a Rai complains about the constant hassle he gets from the ancestors. So I would like to refrain from saying "the Rai believe that . . . ," and treat rather the ancestors here as members of (Dumi) Rai society just as we would treat any living person.[23] This approach has an impact on my behavior as researcher when in the field because I automatically incorporate the ancestors into my activities there. If, for instance, we want to clip a microphone to the *nāgire*'s ritual dress it is better if we first let the ritual specialists perform a small

[23] For an inspiring discussion on the possibilities of how to handle the "invisible" witch on the tree see Oppitz (1981).

divination and ask the ancestors whether that is okay with them. And if the microphone inexplicably switches itself off during the most crucial phase of a recitation, the intuitive reaction is better not to curse the technical equipment, but to share the opinion of our local companions that we should consider ourselves lucky, because this was surely the most harmless warning the ancestors could have sent. Trying to embody the emic perspective as a researcher, but without compromising analytical distance, also has implications for the interpretation of the recorded data and suggestions for concepts of what ritual is or can be seen as.

Some Concluding Remarks

In our ethnographic example we can test an analogy which was already hinted at above. We can—among other things, of course[24]—conceptualize ritual as a working contract with a relationship of mutual exchange between two parties: the living community and the ancestors (and spirits and deities, which in the Dumi Rai case were all once ancestors). The members of the living community are "the workers" who by performing ritual offerings ("the work") get health, prosperity, and general well-being ("the payment") in return from the ancestors ("the contractors"). Employing a "working contract" analogy to the "work of ritual" elucidates a few other aspects of the incident under investigation: a moment of ritual beauty and perfection can be compared by analogy to one element in a working process—such as for instance a well and intrinsically carved central post in a house, which, as such, gives and will continue to give satisfaction to those who appreciate it. But if the overall working process is dysfunctional, if the roof for instance is not stable, the carpenter will usually not get paid until he has made the house safe to live in. Another detail noticeable in this context is a side note in the diary entries mentioned above: As it became foreseeable that the chicken would most probably come to lie in an unfavorable position,[25] a ritual helper tried to shift the position a bit by nudging it slightly with his foot, hoping that it would continue moving and turn to

[24] What I am focusing on here is one possibility among many. I do not wish to reduce ritual to this one aspect but find it worth considering.

[25] A beheaded chicken dropped to the floor flutters and moves around for about 10 seconds or longer before it lays still.

an auspicious position. "Cheating" in rituals is therefore another pointer to the pragmatic approach to the outcome of the "work" of ritual. What counts is the agreement in the negotiations, and in this ritual sequence it is a performative, not a spoken negotiation. In our case the ancestors didn't buy it. But in other rituals I observed "cheating" or "helping a bit" worked quite well. The analogy to contract work, of course, has its limitations, for instance when we consider some current transformations in the Rai cultural context. An ever-growing part of Rai society doubts the impact of the ancestors and rituals, agrees to have roads built right through landscapes that are inhabited by important ancestral spirits, stops performing certain rituals, and even converts to other religions. We might easily say that this corresponds to ending, or not renewing, a contract—and taking up another one to sustain oneself. But it is not as simple as that. As I have shown elsewhere (Wettstein and von Stockhausen 2013), turning away from the ancestors can have a severe impact on some people, especially on those who have been chosen by ancestral spirits to be the main communicators, such as the shamans, and for those who have aspired to get incorporated into the remembered lines of ancestors by performing a *chhamdam* ritual and constructing a *chhamdam* hearth (see footnote 11).

Although the working contract analogy may be oversimplified, it can help us to understand ritual from a perspective other than "psychological" or "sociostructural," and to forego concepts such as "transcendence" or "religion." In many regions of the extended Himalayas we find communities similar to that of the Rai, who largely rely on "autonomous ritual specialists" (Huber 2015). I suggest that in such societies, whose ritual practitioners are not organized in larger institutions, the employment of a pragmatic approach to ritual might—and this remains to be tested and discussed—prove beneficial for getting close to an understanding of ritual from within, from the emic point of view.

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Ladakhi Shaman in the Multireligious Milieu: An Agent of Incorporation and Mediation

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This paper is, on the basis of a diachronic methodology, to explore how religion in a local society, in particular Ladakhi shamanism, has changed or transformed in the present process of interactions with religions and ethnicities. Ladakh is one example of such societies that have maintained their indigenous cultures under constant interactions with other religions and ethnicities. Buddhism flourished in this region from as early as the middle of the eighth century. Since the sixteenth century Ladakhi have had a history of encounters of other religions: Islam and Christianity. The analysis is based on source materials collected during my field research on village shamans in the 1980s, 2003 and 2009. First, the impacts of Tibetan Buddhism on Ladakhi shamanism are examined based on the field data collected in the 1980s. Second, the outcome of recent encounters of religions is explored focusing on the relationships between shamans and multiethnic/religious clients, including Muslims, Christians, Hindus and others, in terms of changes of shamanic practices during the 1980s and 2000s. Finally, the transbordering and/or transcultural characteristics of Ladakhi shamanic practices are presented in order to show a new framework for the mechanism of religious interactions in the face of modernity.

The history of anthropology has provided a variety of theories on the mechanism of the encounters of cultures. Classically, the theories of diffusionism, acculturation, assimilation, syncretism, nativistic movements, and culture change have formed the major analytical framework, while recently the perspectives of hybridity and continuity have been suggested for understanding this mechanism. A theoretical shift in the anthropological framework of understanding the encounters of cultures can be considered as the shift from the viewpoint of the outsider (Other) to the viewpoint of the insider (Self).

A recent trend toward the revival of shamanism can be partly considered the consequence of religious and cultural interactions under

globalization and modernization. The revival of shamanism has spread simultaneously and similarly in the postsoviet era among various northern ethnic groups throughout Siberia despite the antireligious policies of the Soviet era (Yamada 1996a; 1997; 1999; 2004; 2005; Hamayon 1994; 2004; Yamada and Irimoto 1997; Balzer 1996). Case studies of traditional societies in other areas that are attempting to maintain a shamanic tradition in the face of modernization also show the dynamism of religious interactions between the local and the global (Connor and Samuel 2001; Johansen 2001; Demanget 2001; Walraven 2001; Vazeilles 2001).

As an English word 'encounter' originally means 'to meet as an adversary' (*Oxford Dictionary of English* 2003), the encounter of religions or religious traditions has often been explained as a syncretistic and/or conflicting process of different and opponent religions. However, the perspective to view this as a process of creating symbiotic relationships under the continuity of indigenous religious tradition will be significant, particularly when we deal with societies that have maintained their indigenous cultures under constant interactions with other religions and ethnicities.

Ladakh, which I will treat as a case study in this paper, is one example of such societies. Ladakh, an area of the State of Jammu and Kashmir of India, is often referred as a part of Western Tibet that includes also the Zanskar and Purig regions of India and the Baltistan region of Pakistan. Located at a crossroads of trade routes between India and Central Asia (Irimoto 1986: 409–25), early Indian Buddhism thrived in this region from as early as the fourth and fifth centuries (Francke [1907] 1998: 40; Yamada 2009: 22–3). However, Buddhism through Tibet flourished in Ladakh since its inclusion in the Tibetan Empire from as early as the middle of the eighth century (Petech 1977: 10). Ladakh is one of the Tibetan societies where Tibetan Buddhist monasticism has become firmly established (Samuel 1993: 317–18), while it has had a long history of encounters of religions: Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism (Bray 2005a; Grist 2005).

For example, the establishment of Muslim kingdoms in Baltistan between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Cunningham 1854) had brought several wars and conflicts between Ladakh and Muslim kingdoms, resulting in the first settlement of Shia Muslims in Chushot of Ladakh in the latter half of the sixteenth century (Francke [1926] 1972). The Ladakh King Deldan Namgyal negotiated a peace treaty

with the Sultan of the Mughal Empire promising the construction of a mosque in Leh, which was completed circa 1666–7 (Jina 1999; Srinivas 1998). The drastic political change in the mid-nineteenth century, the conquest of Ladakh Kingdom by the Maharaja of the Dogra, not only brought Ladakhi into contact with Hinduism, but also allowed Christian missionaries easier access to Ladakh, leading the Moravian missionary Wilhelm Heyde to visit Leh in 1855 and to built a church in Leh in 1856 (Bray 2005b: 264–5). The Ladakhi had thus developed tolerance to and/or accommodation of religious diversity.

This paper explores, on the basis of a diachronic methodology, how religion in a local society, in particular Ladakhi shamanism, has changed or transformed in the present process of interactions with religions and ethnicities. The analysis is based on source materials collected during my field research on village shamans in the 1980s, 2003 and 2009. First, the impacts of Tibetan Buddhism on Ladakhi shamanism are examined based on the field data collected in the 1980s. Second, the outcome of recent encounters of religions is explored, focusing on the relationships between shamans and multiethnic/religious clients, including Muslims, Christians, Hindus and others, in terms of changes of shamanic practices during the 1980s and 2000s. Finally, the transbordering and/or transcultural characteristics of Ladakhi shamanic practices are presented to show a new framework for the mechanism of religious interactions in the face of modernity.

Religious and Ethnic Landscape Surrounding Shamanism

Independence and partition has greatly changed the religious and ethnic landscape of Ladakh. The incorporation of Ladakh into the Jammu and Kashmir State of India caused a revolution in the political dynamic between Buddhists and Muslims: the Ladakhi fell politically under the control of the dominant Kashmiri Muslims. The relationship between Buddhists and Muslims was not so hostile as to cause belligerence toward each other when the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA) was established under the Dogra polity in 1934 and formally registered in 1937 (Srinivas 1998: 22). Ladakhi, reflecting upon the encounter of religions in their country's history, often say that the Ladakhi have never created any conflicts between religions so far, but instead maintain a peaceful religious coexistence. However, having realized that they had

become marginalized politically and that the Islamization of Ladakhi Buddhists was gradually developing, Ladakhi Buddhists since 1949 began to promote political movements against Muslims by demanding separation from the Jammu and Kashmir State, which ultimately led the enactment of the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order in 1989 and of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill District Development Council Act in 1995.

Further, contact between the Ladakhi people and other ethnic groups has unimaginably increased amidst border disputes. Border conflicts between India and Pakistan as well as India and China resulted in a military presence in the area. The Ladakh population of 88,000 in 1961 almost doubled in the 30 years to 1991 due to population flow from other regions (Beek 1996: 185; Jina 1994: 86–7). Moreover, since 1959, due to such political changes as Tibet's incorporation into China, Tibetan refugees have immigrated to the Ladakh region, where a refugee camp of 617 members was established in Choglamsar in 1969. Today, the inhabitants of the Ladakh District include not only Ladakhis comprising Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians, but also those with ethnic identification as Zanskari, Balti, or Arghon, Tibetan refugees, and newcomers from Kashmir and Hindustan.

In reality, the Indian Census of 1981 shows that in Leh Tehsil (Subdistrict) there were 55,514 Buddhists (81.2% of the population), 10,475 Muslims (15.3%), a mere 156 Moravians (0.2%), 2,040 Hindus (3.0 %), and 184 Sikhs (0.3%). In Leh City, there were 4,488 Buddhists, (51.5% of the population), 2,985 Muslims (34.2%), 87 Moravians (1.0%), 1,058 Hindus (12.1%), and 100 Sikhs (1.1%) (Khan 1985: 23–6). It is difficult to estimate precisely the percentage of Muslim Ladakhi. However, the figures presented by Beek (1996: 252–3) indicate that among those who received Scheduled Tribe Status as Bot/Boto (indicating a Tibetan-language-speaking group, i.e., indigenous Ladakhi), 12.8% were Muslim, which indicates around 10% of Ladakhi Buddhists had converted to Islam by 1989.

Thus, religious and ethnic mobilization has developed in Ladakh since the independence of India. In this process, shamanic practices have been retained without significantly diminishing. Shamans-to-be were still being continuously produced in 2009: clients having an illness of spirit-possession visited senior shamans to receive training to become a shaman. Moreover, Ladakhis themselves identify their region as the "home of shamanism," admitting that "the effectiveness of their (i.e. 'shamans') spirit healing is an article of faith with the Ladakhi" (*Tour-*

ist Directory of Ladakh 2003: 23–4). The faith in the power of shamans is still deep-rooted in the Ladakhi people along with faith in Tibetan Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

Incorporation of Tibetan Buddhism into Shamanic Tradition

Ladakhi shamanism is characterized by and based on an idea of spirit-possession (Kaplanian 1981; Day 1989; Yamada 1993; 1995; 1996b; 2009). Although the idea of spirit-possession is incorporated theoretically in Tibetan Buddhism as well as in the theory of *am chi* medicine (i.e., Tibetan medicine), Ladakhi are more deeply concerned with the idea of spirit-possession, regarding it as the very root of a variety of misfortune.

The idea of spirit-possession may have its origin in the remote past. In reality, to explain why they become ill, the Ladakhi generally say, "*zug mo yong nga rag ga,*"[1] (i.e., an illness is coming from the outer world of his body). They may have an archaic idea of an illness as the result of an operation from the outside (cf. Yamada 1999: 6–10; 2009: 199). The belief that an unstable and abnormal psychic state is caused by spirit-possession and regarding this as a calling to become a religious functionary known as a shaman may have been fundamentals for Ladakhi shamanic tradition since early times.

Once current shaman practices are observed, however, it can be seen that Ladakhi shamanism is inseparable from Tibetan Buddhist tradition in terms of modality and formality. The types of shamanic functionary in Ladakh are almost equivalent with two typologies of Tibetan oracles described by Nebesky-Wojkowitz ([1956] 1993: 410–14). One is the *btsan* (demonic spirit) class, referring to those who would mainly give a divine message during a monastery festival while being possessed by a higher deity such as the monastery's dharma-protector. The other is the *yul lha* (village god) class, referring to those who would heal or give divination to the villagers while being possessed by a lower deity of *yul lha*.

The practices of village shamans also suggest the incorporation of Tibetan Buddhist modalities into their performance, especially in

[1] The transcription of Ladakhi words is based on Wylie's standard system of Tibetan transcription (Wylie 1959).

terms of shamanizing and the shaman's séance. High spiritual lamas, *Rinpoche,* play a significant role in the shamanizing process. Without this acknowledgement, shamans-to-be cannot follow further the initiation rituals under senior shamans, although formerly the initiation was not necessary for shamans since they could be possessed by *lha* easily from the very beginning. In reality, the initiation ritual, in which I participated in 1990, shows that the whole initiation process has an educational role where the novice shaman can learn about different types of deities and spirits fundamental to Tibetan Buddhism as well as the way to perform properly necessary liturgies including *gser skyems* (lit. "offering golden wine") (Yamada 2009).

An informant of middle age said in early 1980s that he saw a shaman perform simply dressed in traditional coat with no special Buddhist implements when he was a child, that it was not common for a shaman to wear special clothing like a Tibetan Buddhist monk. However, incorporating Tibetan Buddhist paraphernalia into a shaman's séance became popular in the 1980s: the *rigs lnga* (a five-lobed crown), each lobe representing a *dakini,* or the Buddhas known as *dhyani-buddhas*; *da ru* (small drum shaped like an hourglass); *dril bu* (bell), and *rdo rje* (thunderbolt) (Waddell 1978). Tibetan Buddhist liturgies are accepted in the procedures of a shaman's séance: the burning of juniper (*Juniperus*) leaves for purification of the place; the way of arranging an altar; and the recitation of the prayers of *spyan 'dren* (inviting deities) at the beginning, *gser skyems, bsangs* (purification by incense), and then *gshegs gsol* (sending-off the deity) at the last moment.

However, all those shamanic characteristics that are widely common in shamanic tradition throughout cultures remain intact. The introductory process of a *lha*'s embodiment is shown by body expressions as follows: praying in a relaxed and monotonous rhythm; uniquely rhythmical scripture recitation, while in a trance body movement techniques expressed by rather "automatical" hiccups, occasional screams, whistling and heavy breathing; the beating of the hand drum in a violent manner; the recitation in a high-pitched voice; change in vocal sound and tone and speaking in incomprehensible languages, glossolalia. Furthermore, a shaman's supernatural power and spirituality is demonstrated by the revelation of the cause of disease in an instant; the sucking out of black liquid that represents impurities removed from the body; the applying of a heated knife to the tongue; a scene of interaction with possessing spirits.

The application of Tibetan Buddhist elements are confined to the liturgical aspects, while shamanic techniques are preserved basically unchanged. Ladakhi shamans have refined the modalities of their shamanic practices on the basis of Tibetan Buddhism by keeping unchanged the essence of techniques specific to their practices.

Recent Changes in Shamanhood

The independence of India has dramatically changed the Ladakh area. Since the 1960s local development has been promoted by the government to modernize and improve local infrastructures: roads, medical care, electricity, drinking water facilities, and irrigation canals. In particular, not only the increase of Indian stationed troops but also the settlement of Tibetan refugees and the opening of Ladakh to foreign tourists have made Ladakhi interact more with different ethnicities. Even their economic life has begun to shift from self-sufficient subsistence to global cash economy. In effect, the eighties was a period when tourism was actively promoted and their lives were facing drastic changes.

Under local development, tourism has become one of the major economies. Consequently, the mobility of the population in Ladakh has also developed: more Kashmiri as well as Ladakhi villagers have settled in Leh City and its precincts and more foreigners walk around in summer. Furthermore, as is symbolically shown by a prevailingly spreading discourse in 1990 that, as a result of the settlement of Tibetan refugees in the Ladakh region the number of deities of Tibetan origin increased symbolically, Ladakhi as well as monasteries in Ladakh have closer connections with Tibetans as well as with Tibetan monasteries under the Tibetan Government-in-Exile.

Irrespective of these changes surrounding Ladakhi lives, in the 1980s shamanism functioned as a living practice along with devotion to Tibetan Buddhism and an undeniable faith in the possession of deities and spirits (Yamada 1993; 1999: 1–33). However, slight changes are observed if shamanic practices are compared between the early and the late 1980s. In the early 1980s becoming a shaman was unwelcome in village life, while at the end of the 1980s an increase was observed in the number of clients who hoped to become shamans. Family members of the clients suffering from possession illness longed for them to become shamans because of the economic benefits they could expect to receive. There

appeared some Ladakhi who even recognized shamanhood (Pentikäinen 2004: 212; Pentikäinen et al. 2001: vii) as a viable form of business.

In 2003 changes were more advanced. First are changes of the séance in terms of space and time. A kitchen was needed as a room only at the very moment when the *lha* (deity) possessed a shaman. Shaman DT performed a séance in front of an altar beautifully set up in a living room. Shamanic rituals are performed almost daily not restricted to auspicious days according to the Buddhist calendar (fig. 1).

Second, the relationship between shaman and her assistant has also developed into something like that of a business enterprise beyond a simple relationship within a family. A female trainee who can speak Hindi also serves as an assistant to her master shaman by interpreting the *lha*'s words for non-Ladakhi Indian clients. Third, the category of shaman's relying spirits/deities has begun to change. Shamans are not always relying on the god of the village from which they come. The possession by *yul lha* was not necessarily needed to lead one on the path toward becoming a shaman by 1990. Deities of Tibetan origins like *Thang lha* and dharma protectors of Tibetan Buddhism such as *Tse ring*

Fig. 1. The shaman who is responding to the clients in her room almost daily. Photo: Takako Yamada, 2009.

mched lnga, dPal ldan lha mo, or *Jag men* (*Jag pa me len*) are more likely to become patron deities (*srung ma*) of shamans.

These changes indicate a trend toward the professionalization and routinization of shaman's practices. In addition, a shift in the list of patron deities from indigenous local deities to those in the Tibetan Buddhist divine hierarchy may suggest the spread of pan-Tibetanism to shamanic tradition. Moreover, as the contact between Ladakhi and His Holiness the Dalai Lama has become more and more intimate and frequent, Ladakhi display accordingly more devotion to and belief in dharma protectors of monasteries than local deities. The encounter with the Dalai Lama have restored firmly the relation of Ladakh with Tibet, which is again reflected in the practices of Ladakhi shamans.

Remodeling Causality in the Encounter with Clients of Other Religions

How does a shaman deal with clients of other religions and ethnicities? In this section, based on the dialogues of a shaman with clients during a séance, a shaman's engagement in remodeling causality in the encounter with clients of different religions is explored.

Traditional Causality

To begin with, Ladakhi traditional causality is based on supernatural principles, which is manifested more within the local context of an idea that the spirit or the soul of an individual might affect one's health or fortune. Therefore, Ladakhi visit shamans hoping their physical problems may be freed from a supernatural agent.

In response to a client's somatic complaints or a request for divination, a shaman usually suggests supernatural causes. In accordance with the nature of supernatural agents, some advice is given to clients, mostly by simply offering wine, tea and prayers to the patron deities; doing purification ritual with incense without any suggestion of a particular scripture recitation; and occasionally instructing the client to ask a doctor or *am chi* (Tibetan 'medicine doctor') to prescribe medicine. Other advice given is to suggest reciting certain mantras mentioned by name, such as *Tshe gzungs* (life-long *dharani,* a prayer for long life) and *Gdugs dkar* (white umbrella tantra), or by doing certain ritual performances. In 1990 PD remarkably mentioned by name 21 different ritual

performances in total during her séance, of which 10 were the names of Buddhist Scriptures.

The causality thus revealed by a shaman to the client is based generally on the Ladakhi traditional view of the world. But it becomes gradually common to suggest certain tantric scriptures based on Tibetan Buddhist theology.

Causality Revealed to Muslims

Those Muslims who visit Ladakhi shamans are not Kashmiri, but mostly Balti or Ladakhi. The Balti, who were historically Buddhists, are known to have similar folk beliefs with the Ladakhi. But being Shi'a Muslim, they have no shaman of their own. Therefore they often rely on a Ladakhi shaman for diagnosis of their physical condition, believing in supernatural causality. Examples follow of how a Ladakhi shaman responds to Muslim clients, observed during my fieldwork in 1990.

Example 1: A Balti man with body pain

Lha mo SZ advised him, while confirming that he was a Muslim, as follows: "You, don't eat the kernel of the walnut. You are the enemy of teachings [a metonym for a Muslim]. Don't eat whatever [you will get]. Consult an *am chi.* Inside your body there is an illness. Don't eat meat and butter much. Rely on an *am chi*. If you want, you can rely on a doctor, too. You can go to a hot spring to take a bath. But if you don't consult an *am chi,* the hot spring is not good. You should rely on an *am chi* who resides in the eastern direction [from your house]."

In this example, SZ did not suggest any supernatural causality but showed that food habits were a cause. She simply advised the client whom to ask for treatment. Here although the shaman's answer is naturalistic, the shaman's positive approach of displaying her supernatural ability is noticed; by referring to the eating of a walnut's kernel that is their specific food habit, she showed her full recognition of who he was and what he used to eat.

The next example reveals some remodeling of the causality. An antagonistic relationship between Muslims and Buddhists, which in reality burst into violence in 1989, is revealed to be the real cause of physical disorder of a Muslim client.

Example 2: Another Balti man with a physical disorder
Lha mo SZ started to respond to him by saying, "Enemy of the teachings, you are using paper charm (*shog bu*).[2]" Then she continued as follows: "Why are you drinking the water of paper charm? What is the reason? [i.e., Do you come here for an illness?] Paper charm is good? To have written (spells) on the paper, to soak the paper in the water, and then to drink the water is not good. If you drink properly, it is good. If it is not done properly, it is not good. Then, you are getting angry, making mistakes, and having no children, aren't you? A paper charm is a curse (*ngan gtad*); take out the defilements once again. If you don't do the taking out of defilements, it will not be cleansed."

After revealing the cause of the illness and advising the removal of defilements, SZ continued to make clear the real causes for his problems as follows:

Such things are needed in your village. Why you use it? Why you don't eat each other's meat. Why you don't drink other's blood.[3] Then, your village god, *Pokar chomo* (*Pho dkar jo mo*), does nothing for you. You don't know reading and writing, do you, the enemy of the teachings? Have you gone by, spitting on the statue of Maitreya in Mulbek, you the enemy of teachings, haven't you. You can't get purified, even you will confess later. *Pokar chomo* is the owner of the disease. She may definitely make you get disease. If you don't respect *Pokar chomo*, she will become the cause of your disease. If you respect her, she will be good. If do good, it is good. If don't do better, it will not be good.

When it was revealed that someone had spit on the Maitreya Statue in Mulbek, other Ladakhis present at the séance began to become noisily excited. Then, SD tried to calm all of them by saying to the Muslim client, "No. No. Your villagers, not you." The dialogue continued as follows:

Spitting on the statue, burning the prayer flag (*dar chog*) was made, I swear by the Eight-Great-God. Long time ago there was leprosy in the Kargil District. The statue was made to protect from that disease. All the statues were thrown

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[2] The literal meaning is 'paper' (Das 1981: 1246; Jäschke 1998: 568), but signifies a charm made of paper that was commonly used by Muslims by tying to the body or soaking in the holy water to drink.

[3] These two sentences are metonyms signifying that people have become very selfish.

at by stones. Formerly your villagers were Buddhists. You are called Purig pa (i.e. the people of Purig). Some are coming from Tibet. Your father is a Muslim and mother is a Buddhist [signifying his family is a mixed-marriage family]. Then, there are many stupas (*mchod rten*) in your village. If you keep them in respect, it will be good.

At the last moment the client promised that his family would not harm the stupas. Then, telling him to perform the ritual of asking protective deities for a favor (*phrin bcol*), SD stopped replying to him.

In example 2, demonstrating from the start some sort of irritability by saying "Enemy of the teachings," shaman SZ diagnosed first that the cause of clients' physical disorder was a paper charm commonly used by Muslims. Then notice that SD played a role of accuser: she accused the Muslims of antagonism by revealing a Muslim spat on the Buddhist statue and disrespected a village god. However, she also functioned as an intermediary to relieve this antagonism by welcoming a Muslim as her client as well as making him promise not to do any harm to Buddhists. Lastly, the reply was ended by advising him to perform a Buddhist ritual of asking protective deities for a favor. As this example shows, a shaman can play also a role as mediator, perceiving local political circumstances.

Even in 2003, Ladakhi Muslims in conflict with their Buddhist neighbors visited a shaman. The following story about a Muslim Ladakhi mother with her child was spreading among Ladakhi Buddhists. The mother was at a complete loss because her child had many boils on its face. Although she had sought medical attention, she was told by the doctor that nothing could be done for the child. The shaman revealed that the child's troubles were caused by Muslims' harmful action against Buddhism by telling the mother, "The destroyed stupa near your house is the cause of the boils." Then the mother visited the shaman for seven days for purification rituals.

When a Buddhist client asks a shaman about a skin disease, the shaman generally diagnoses the cause by naming a spirit, saying that it is a harmful effect of *kLu* (serpent demi-god) or *Sa bdag* (god of the ground). However, in this example the revealed cause was not a spirit, but an action of destroying a stupa, which is a symbolic action of antagonism against Buddhists shown by Muslims. Moreover, this story shows that even if the family destroyed a stupa as Muslims, they feared the harmful effects of *Sa bdag* or *kLu*. A Buddhist ritual is always needed to avoid their harms before building or destroying a structure. Interestingly, this story thus

shows that the ultimate cause of the harmful effect of *Sa bdag* is not highlighted, but rather the direct cause of the destruction of a stupa is stressed. Moreover, this shows that only a shaman can cure the troubles of Muslim woman by a purification ritual, or by sucking out impurities.

Furthermore, in 2003, shaman DT was visited by a Muslim mother with her daughter (fig. 2). She replied to their request as follows: "It is caused by a harmful effect of the spirit of a dead person," and explained, "*jadu* (lit. 'magic') (Kagaya 2005: 447; *Ferozsons Urdu–English Dictionary* 1967: 249) (was provided with)" in Urdu. DT offered a prayer to drive away the evil spirit, advised the burning of juniper leaves for purification purpose, and sucked out impurities from both the daughter and the mother.

Obviously, Muslim clients have no means to perform Buddhist rituals for expelling harmful effects of a spirit on their body, nor can they ask monks for rituals. Consequently they visit shamans who can always perform exorcism rituals for them. Here, a shaman not only identifies the causes of an illness but performs a ritual for a Muslim client.

Fig. 2. The shaman is responding to the Moslem mother and daughter while mother and child from Manali region are waiting their turns.
Photo: Takako Yamada, 2003.

Causality Revealed to Other Ethnicities

In the séance performed by DT in 2003 a woman with a small child who came all the way from the Manali district in the state of Himachal Pradesh was also there. For them DT performed divination using grains and then told the woman that there was a harmful effect of an apparition/soul of a living person on her child. No special treatment was offered to the child on that day. The purpose of this woman's visit from Manali to the shaman was to invite her to her village. After finishing the ritual, DT told me that she would be traveling around Manali and other villages for approximately one month. This example shows that since Manali people have similar ideas of causality with the Ladakhi, Ladakhi shamans are also responsible for them.

Furthermore, how do shamans deal with people with other religious and cultural backgrounds? There was no opportunity to see how shamans approached Western people. However, in the rituals in which I participated, I, as one of the clients, was always required to consult a shaman transformed into the *lha*. In some cases, non-Ladakhi Indians also participated in the rituals that I attended. Here, this topic is considered based on shamans' approach to Indians and myself.

As for Hindu clients, in some cases the cause was explained to be black magic (*jadu* in Hindi), in place of a supernatural or spiritual factor. In other cases, it was demanded that an Indian client believe in the *lha*, being told by a shaman, "If you pray to *dPal ldan lha mo*, I will respond to you." In still other cases, an Indian client who complained of pain in the stomach was told:

> Do not eat too much pepper and garlic. Offer a prayer to the guardian deities. Never forget to pray every year. Do not eat harmful food. Consult a doctor and an *am chi*.

It often happened that one of the persons present interpreted the shaman's words into Hindi. This example also shows the shaman's approach of providing answers in accordance with the customs of the Indian people.

Moreover, in response to my question, "How is my family in Japan?" shamans used to simply give an answer to make me feel at ease. For example, *lha mo* TD (September 3, 1990) confirmed the country I came from and then told me, "They are all fine." About a trip to the Hindustan region I was planning to take, *lha ba* PK (September 29, 1990) responded,

> You will return safely. Go back to your father's country. Nothing bad will happen.

However, in 2003 *lha mo* DT (September 19, 2003) replied with much involvement with me,

> They have no problems. However, your family members worry about you, so when you visit monasteries, you should make monetary offerings. It is alright even if it is a small amount. And offer a prayer and have the wind horse prayer flag (*rlung rta*) displayed.

Then she cast a mantra over me, pressing a *vajra* over my back for purification.

No shamans in 1990 performed upon me the procedure of sucking out impurities, but simply and uninterestedly performed purification with a hot knife. However, DT did seriously offer me purification with a *vajra*. In DT's attitude toward me, shamans' explicit effort of incorporating foreign clients into their practices while adjusting their responses to clients' situations can be perceived.

Discussion and Conclusion: Shaman as an Agent of Incorporation and Mediation

From what I have described above, the following points can be summarized in conclusion. Although Ladakhi shamanism has incorporated the modality or formality of Tibetan Buddhism in its practices during the course of encounters, a variety of body techniques that characterize their shamanic traditions has been retained to the present. Supernatural etiology is supposed to be revealed through shamans' glossolalia, while rather innate and universal human body techniques (Yamada 2005) are utilized to demonstrate shamans' oneness with spirits and their power.

Secondly, although Ladakhi shamans' etiology, in which each spirit is named individually as a cause, is strictly defined within their cultural context, it becomes easily replaced by a general causality such as the effect of "evil spirit" or "black magic." Thus, shamans deal with the clients of different religions by giving answers in separate contexts, e.g., cultural explanations rooted in Ladakhi culture and noncultural explanations that can be understood across different cultures. A sort of deculturalization or decontextualization of etiological explanations is developed.

Thirdly, the process of Tibetanization is again actively forwarded. Some shamans would travel all the way to the state of Arunachal Pradesh, trying to respond to the requests of clients of Tibetan origins, which indicates that Ladakhi shamanism possesses the nature of pan-Tibetan practices, which are accepted broadly by Tibetan societies. By reincorporating more Tibetan Buddhist interpretation of etiology in their shamanism, Ladakhi shamans positively revitalize their practices to be accepted by other Tibetan peoples. Although such transformation of Ladakhi shamanism is definitely sustained by the idea of the omnipresence of higher Buddhist gods over a wider area, it is also inseparable from the deeper devotion to the Dalai Lama. The encounter with the Dalai Lama today has made Ladakhi shamanism more integrated and incorporated into the context of Tibetan Buddhism.

Lastly, further surveys are needed in terms of contemporary shamanic practices in Ladakh. However, Ladakhi shamans have certainly begun to play a new role as healers and mediators beyond borders with a core universal belief of "faith in the supernatural existence" as well as a pan-Tibetan belief. It can be said that Ladakhi shamans, as agents of interacting religions and ethnicities, have been playing a two-tiered role as inheritors and innovators of tradition in the present circumstances of modernization and cultural dynamics. In these new circumstances of interactions of religions and ethnicities, local religious tradition will survive by making accommodations to transform itself to be more general and decultural as well as to retain local and regional ideology. It is shamans' versatility that becomes an active agent in this process.

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An Encounter with a Kyrgyz Dervish in the Talas Valley

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I have been doing research on the spiritual traditions of Kazakh and Kyrgyz peoples since 1994. The Kazakh and Kyrgyz are two traditionally nomadic groups that emerged from among the Turkic-speaking nomadic tribes of the Mongol Empire (J̌ochi Ulus/Golden Horde and Chagatai Ulus/Mogulistan). After the acceptance of Islam by the local ruling elite in the fourteenth century, Islamization of the nomadic peoples also started. In the result, pre-Islamic spirituality was replaced by Muslim traditions, especially by Ṣūfī practices (e.g. the *d̲h̲ikr* and *d̲jahr* rituals). Only some remnants of pre-Islamic beliefs can be detected in their nomadic spirituality, e.g. Umay (women's protecting spirit) and *kut* (spirit of luck). There were various spiritual specialists in nomadic societies, like the *baqšï* (sorcerer) or *balger* (fortune-teller), but the Kyrgyz *dubana* or Kazakh *diywana* (dervish) was one of them that had the strongest links with Ṣūfī practices.

During the Soviet times these dervishes almost disappeared from Soviet Central Asia, so I was quite surprised when during my fieldwork in October, 2008 in the Talas Valley of Kyrgyzstan I had the opportunity to meet a real *dubana*. Atamkul Ismailov (born 1940) from the Bagysh clan was 68 years old at the time of our meeting. I visited him at his house in the village of Chong Kara-Buura (Kara-Buura district, former Kirov) not far from Sheker, where the famous Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov was born. He performed his spirit-chasing song and showed me his magic staff (*asa*) too.

The Kyrgyz word *dubana* (Baialieva 1972: 121; Basilov 1992: 242) comes from the Persian word *dewāna* (Steingass 1892: 555; the Persian word itself is a derivative from *dew*, *dīw* 'devil; demon' (Steingass 1892: 554). The original meaning in Persian is 'a person possessed by a demon'. In Central Asia, people usually believe that mental illnesses are

caused by demons. The Arabic equivalent of this word is *djinnī* (possessed by a demon; made crazy by a *djinn*). The *djinn*s are evil spirits that some people believe to be part of Šaytān, so Muslims usually reject them, but the Iranian *dew* is quite different (Basilov 1992: 238–42). It is not obviously a malicious spirit, but more ambivalent. It can cause harm, but can also help human beings similar to the spiritual being *parī* (fairy). That is the reason that people use the compound *dew-parī* for these ambivalent spirits (Divaev 1899: 324). In Central Asia it is quite common that certain religious specialists are possessed or helped by demons. Some Ṣūfī ascetics are called *darweš* 'poor, indigent' (Steingass 1892: 516) in Persian, especially those practiced their ascetic rituals while travelling from place to place (Brown 1868). When people saw these rituals with religious ecstasy they thought that the dervishes were possessed by these spirits. Even though *djinnī* and *dewāna* has the same etymology the latter was used in the context of dervishes, members of the Ṣūfī order (*tarīqa*).

Because dervishes (*dewāna*) used to travel a lot, wandering across regions and countries, they usually carried a big staff, called *asa* in Kyrgyz, being a loanword from Arabic *ʻas*ā (Baialieva 1972: 58; Basilov 1992: 76). They had their special robes too with big hats. People believed that their rituals (*dhikr*) helped them to chase away evil spirits (Snesarëv 1969: 41) similar to other spirit-invoking specialists, like the Kyrgyz *baqšï*, the Uzbek and Uighur *baxši*, or the Persian *parīxān,* the Karakalpak and the Türkmen *porxan*. So some religious specialists in Central Asia started to legitimize their activity by copying these dervishes *dervishes*. Their main activity was not performing *dhikr* rituals, but visiting places and houses cursed or possessed by demons and driving them away. They were similar to the demon chasers (Kyrgyz *kuuču* or Kazakh *kuwgïnšï*, see Baialieva 1972: 96). The *dewāna* (Kyrgyz *dubana* or *dumana*, Kazakh *diywana*) specialists wandered around villages (*kïšlag*) and nomadic camps (Kazakh *awïl*, Kyrgyz *ayïl*) with their magic stick and performed spirit-chasing rituals. They received food and other gifts for their services. These wandering dervishes quite often appear in photographs taken at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in bazars and at places of pilgrimage (Almásy 1903: 271, fig. 1) in Central Asia.

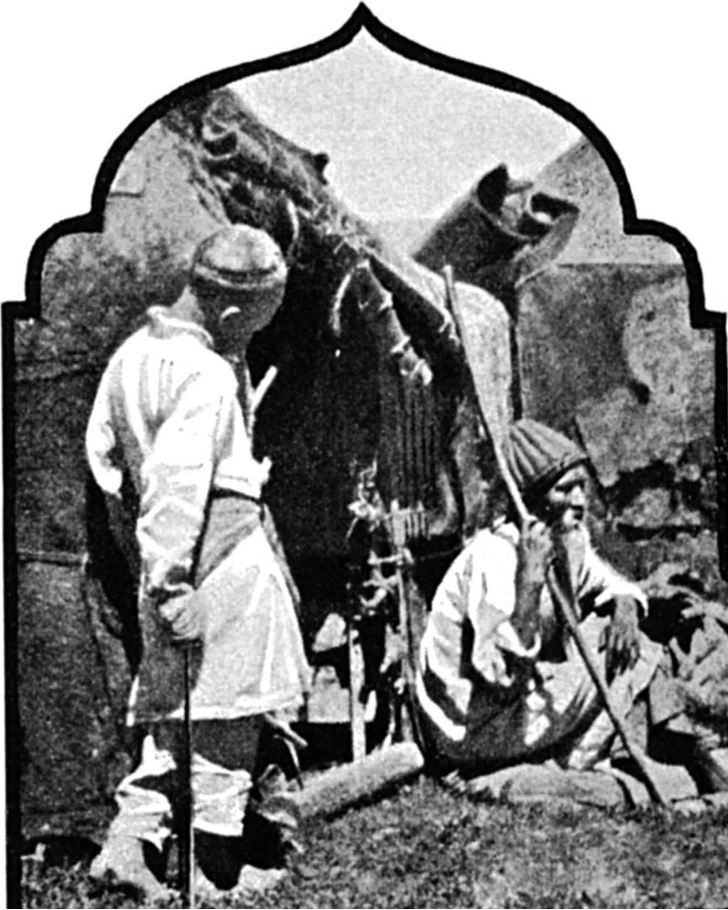

Fig. 1. A Kazakh dervish in the bazar of Karkara (Almaty province, Kazakhstan) in a picture taken by György Almásy in 1900.

But, let us get back to my encounter with the Kyrgyz dervish in the Talas Valley. Before the ritual Atamkul put on his light yellow coat (*ay sarï ton*) to which six rattles (*šïldïrak*) were attached. He went outside his house which he built specially for himself (fig. 2). The house was round like a felt house which he used to perform rituals. He was dancing around the house singing his song and shaking his staff (fig. 3). As he was shaking his staff the rattles were making a sound that accompanied his singing. Atamkul explained that the sound of the rattle invokes his helping spirits that are mentioned in the song. Atamkul

learned his profession from his grandfather who, despite the prosecution of the communist authorities, performed some demon-chasing rituals in villages in his childhood in the 1950s. In the 1970s Atamkul had some mental problems and started to wander around singing the songs he learned from his grandfather. He said he could feel the evil spirits who possessed some of the houses and caused illnesses and bad luck to the people who lived there. When he realized that he could chase them away by his song he made a staff (*asa-tayak*) to accompany himself. By the 1980s local authorities began to apply a milder policy towards local folk healers so he could start to perform some spirit chasing rituals openly in the villages. People do not call the dervish to chase away the evil spirits. He feels an urge to leave his house and starts to wander around. His helping spirits lead him to the houses that are possessed by the demons. The owner of the house is sometimes unaware of the fact that the house is possessed by demons. The dervish approaches the house singing his song and shaking his magic staff. When he enters the house the demons flee from there (this is expressed in his song, lines 9–10).[1]

The Song of Atamkul dubana

(1) *Tögöröktün tört burčun*
tört aylangan dubana
Dubana özü bir adam,
atïn satkan ming adam
(5) *ming adamdan bir adam*
čigat eken dubana
Asa tayak šar kuru,
ay sarïdan ton kiygen
Dubana kelding ešikten,
(10) *baleket čïksïn tešikten*
Alda iy dep sayragan
dubananïn saltï eken
Ilgerten kalgan nark eken,
Ata-baba nark-nuska,
(15) *aytpay koysok bolo-bu,*
Kayda ǰürsö ǰol ačïk,
Baabedindin közü ačïk.
La illahu illalaa,
Baadedinim kayrulla
(20) *Allah iy, Allah iy.*

Özön tolgon talï bar
Oysul-ata piri bar,
oluyasï dagï bar
Čalkalgan ǰeri bar,
(25) *aynalayïn Čak mazar*
Kabïlan, ǰolbors, šeri bar
Arasïnan karasang
ǰalgïz ayak ǰolu bar.
Narï betin karasang,
(30) *kelin tašï dagï bar*
Keng ǰayloo, Čong mazar
ïdïragan baskan ǰol,

[1] Aitpaeva (2007: 321), also published a short extract from Atamkul's song.

kïdïrïp nečen ötkön ǰol
La illahu illalaa,
(35) *Baadedinim kayrulla*
Allah iy, Allah iy.

Bu dünüyö amanat,
Musaka öttü, kim kalat?
Čar dünüyö amanat,
(40) *Čaldïyar öttü, kim kalat?*
Sïzïp akkan suu kalat,
sïdïrap ötkön tal kalat.
Aram menen adaldan
ǰïynagan düynö mal kalat.
(45) *Azabïna, agayïn,*
bir čïmïnday ǰan kalat
Ayal kalsa bay tabat,
bala kalsa mal tabat
Azabïna agayïn
(50) *bir čïmïnday ǰan kalat*
Karï da bol, ǰaš ta bol,
kadïrlaškan tirüüdö
Kalat go bir kün altïndar
Kazïlgan kördün tübündö,
(55) *kïrkka čïkkan tal kalar*
Kïyamdap akkan suu kalar,
Kïl köpürö Kïyamat
Tar ǰay ötsö kim kalar?
J̌akasï ǰok, ǰengi ǰok
(60) *uzun köynök kiyersing*
Ešigi ǰok, törü ǰok
karanggï üygö kirersing
O dünüyö beybapaa
ötörsüng da ketersing
(65) *Üngkür-Mangkir surasa*
bašïng salïp turarsïng
La illahu Illalaa,
Baadedinim kayrulla
Allah iy, Allah iy.

(70) *Dünüyögö berilgen,*
özümmün dep kerilgen
Künü-tünü aldanggan
insan anda kalbagan
Kapa kïlïp koygonu,
(75) *diline kaygï tolgonu*
J̌akïn kelse aǰalï
kalbay kalat amalï
Malïngdï berseng ïylaba
J̌aratkangga ǰalïnsang da
(80) *ǰanïng aman kala-bï?*
Almaday bašïng šalk etip,
ǰüröktön ǰanïng bïlk etip
Aldadan kelse bir buyruk
keterbiz bir kün šïlk etip
(85) *Ak söök bolot kabïrgam,*
al ǰerde kalat tabïlgan
Kök söök bolot kabïrgam,
köp ǰerde kalat tabïlgan
Engkeyiške barganda
(90) *nečen pirim koldosun!*
Oykoylošup sayrasa,
Oysul pirim koldosun!
Šamal kubat eselep,
ǰaan ǰaayt sebelep
(95) *Dubana kirse ešikten*
balaketti tebelep
La illahu Illalaa,
Baadedinim kayrulla
Allah iy, Allah iy.

(100) *Paygambar öttü, sap öttü*
baykalbay nečen ǰïl öttü
Oluyang öttü, pir öttü
Doomattuu dalay ǰïl öttü
J̌ïlang aylak, ǰïlang baš
(105) *Baabedin sayrap bul öttü*
J̌übüt kïzï Bulkaakï
J̌ügünüp ǰürüp bul öttü

Dubandan čïkkan Duldulday
Uyadan učkan bulbulday
(110) *Alïstan kelip sayrayt ko*
Dubana baykuš bulbulday
Bozorup atkan tang menen
Boz torgoy sayrayt šang menen
Boz torgoy sayrap til katar
(115) *Boz Dubana til katar*
Kökölöp turup sayrasa
Kanatï talïp konboy-bu?
Kündö kakšap sayrasa
Dubana baykuš talbay-bï?
(120) *Boz torgoy učat ǰel üčün*
Bolǰolu ǰok ǰel üčün
Kündö kakšap sayrayt ko
Dubana baykuš el üčün
La illahu Illalaa,
(125) *Baadedinim kayrulla*
Allah iy, Allah iy.

Kün čïgïšta ǰatkamïn
Kündö kakšap baskamïn
Oozum ačsam ǰel čïgat
(130) *Ördök učsa köl kalat*
Dubana mïna keldi dep
Agayïn tuugan el kütöt
Kündö kakšap sayrasam
Kaygï menen zar bütöt
(135) *Karagan beleng, tal beleng?*
Kaygï menen zar beleng?
Kündö kakšap sayrasam
Tügönbögön ken belem
Kündö tokup minerge
(140) *Duldulu bolsom beyištin*
Kündö kakšap sayragan
Bulbulu bolsom beyištin
Aǰïdar taš baskanïm
Aradan ötüp ketkenče
(145) *Atagïngdï dangktadïm*
La illahu Illalaa,
Baadedinim kayrulla
Allah iy, Allah iy.

Zamana akïr, ǰer takïr
(150) *Kolunda ǰok el ǰakïr*
Zamanam keldi zakïndap
Ay menen künggö ǰakïndap
Körüp kelgen kiši
Özöndöp akkan suu okšop
(155) *Ömürüng ötör zakïndap*
Kim bilet kimdin armanïn
Tarazï bilet salmagïn
Kïl köpörü kïyamat
Tar ǰay bilet ar ǰagïn
(160) *Barïp körgön kiši ǰok*
Baylïgï menen iši ǰok
Körüp kelgen kiši ǰok
Al ǰakta kanday ǰašarïn
Ötkön adam kele-bi?
(165) *Ömürüngdö kördüng-bü*
Ošol ǰaktan kelgendi?
Bakït menen ïrïskï
Birge ǰüröt turbaybï
Biri kelse biri ǰok
(170) *Bilinbey ötöt turbay-bï*
Salamat bolsun ǰanïngïz
Salamat esen turunguz
Bakït konsun üyünggö
Baktïluu bolup turunguz!
(175) *Sandalïp turgan dubana*
Sayrap keldi debengiz!
Aldanïn kïlgan ǰumušun
Atkarïp keldim agayïn
La illahu illalaa,
(180) *Baabedinim kayrulla,*
Allah iy, Allah iy.

Üyüng üyüng üy eken
Üyüng tokoy čïrpïgï
Malïm, malïm deersing
(185) *Malïng tokoy čïrpïgï*
Čïrpïgï üyüng biyerde,
čïnïgï üyüng tiyerde
Čïrpïgïng sïnsa tal bolboyt
Čïndap ağal kelgen song
(190) *Tim koyboyt bizdi bul ğerge*
Üyüng üyüng üy eken.

Üyüng čiydin tübü eken
Kündö kakšap sayragan
Dubananïn ünü eken
(195) *Jergem tal menen kubargan*
Čïrpïgï sïnïp mungaygan
Adamday pende bar beken?
Armanïn aytïp mungdanggan
La illahu Illalaa,
(200) *Baabedinim kayrulla*
Allah iy, allah iy, Hakk.

(1) The four corners of world
Four times orbited by the dervish
The dervish is a man,
Thousands claim to be one
(5) But only one out of a thousand
Can become a dervish
With his staff, tight belt
He wears a light yellow coat
The dervish came to the door,
(10) Calamity should leave from holes
Allah, hey, singing is
The custom of the dervish
A gift given long time ago,
The teaching of forefathers
(15) Can we stop singing it?
Wherever he goes the way is clear,
Bahā-addīn's eyes are open.
There is no god but Allah,
Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah
(20) Allah hey, Allah hey.

The valley is full of willow trees
Oysul-ata is their helping spirit
It has other helping spirits
It is always swaying
(25) Dear Chak Mazar[2]
There are spirits of heroes, panthers, tigers and lions
If you look around
There is a narrow road
If you look from the other side
(30) There is a wives' stone
A wide pasture, Big Mazar
There are many tracks around,
Tracks of people walking by
There is no god but Allah,
(35) Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah
Allah hey, Allah hey.

This life is a gift from God,
Musaka[3] passed, who will remain?
The whole world is a gift,
(40) Chaldiyar[4] passed, who will remain?

[2] Chak Mazar is one of the holy sites visited by the dervish (the *mazar* is a Muslim saint's tomb, a site of pilgrimage).

[3] Musaka was a local Muslim saint.

[4] Chaldïyar was a local Muslim saint.

The fast flowing water remains,
And the shaking willow trees
remain
By *ḥarām* and *ḥalāl*[5] ways
Gathered Livestock will remain
(45) In the suffering, my relatives,
Just the leaving soul[6] remains
If wife remains she remarries,
The children take the livestock
In the suffering, my relatives,
(50) Just the leaving soul remains
Whether you are old or young,
Be happy that you are alive!
You will lose the gold you have
At the bottom of the tomb,
(55) There will be a forty-year-old
willow[7]
The noisy flowing water will remain
Through the narrow bridge of
Judgment Day[8]
Who will pass?
No collar and no sleeves,
(60) You will wear a long shirt[9]
No door and no main place,
You will enter a dark room
To the unavoidable other world
You will encounter
(65) When Mangkir and Üngkür[10]
Judge, you will bow your head.
There is no god but Allah,
Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah
Allah hey, Allah hey.

(70) Anyone who lives
Says it is me proudly
None of the people
could avoid the deception
[of Šaytan].
He was offended
(75) His heart is full of sorrow.
If his death comes, he cannot do
anything.
If you sacrifice your livestock
Do not cry about it!
Even if you worship God,
(80) One day you lose your life!
Your small head falls,
And your soul leaves your heart.
If Allah makes his order,
One day we leave from here
(85) My ribs will be white bones,
They will be found there
My ribs will be blue bones,
They will be found everywhere
When I will go down
(90) All my spirits should help me!
When they are crying,
Oysul pir should help me!

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[5] The words *aram* (Arabic *ḥarām*) and *adal* (Arabic *ḥalāl*) are terms in Islam meaning allowed and prohibited by Islamic law.
[6] The expression *čimïnday ǰan* is a term for the soul that leaves the body when a person dies.
[7] He suggests that the coffin will be made of a forty-year-old willow tree.
[8] *Qiyāmat* is the Muslim term for the Judgment Day symbolized by passing a narrow bridge.
[9] He talks about the shirt that is put on a dead person before the burial.
[10] Üngkür and Mangkir are the corrupt form of the Arabic names for angels (*malā'ika*) of Munkar and Nakīr.

Wind blow strongly,
It rains gently
(95) The dervish enters the door
And tramples the bad spirits
There is no god but Allah,
Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah
Allah hey, Allah hey.

(100) There were prophets and saints
So many years have passed unnoticed
There were *oluya* and *pir* saints
So many years of trouble have passed
Bare feet and uncovered head
(105) Baha-eddin used to sing [*dhikr*]
J̌übüt's daughter, Bulkaakï[11]
She used to bow her head
Like the Duldul horse[12] from that region
Like a nightingale flying from the nest
(110) Coming from afar he sings
Poor dervish like a nightingale
When the dawn is lighting up
The grey lark sings in a nice voice
The grey lark sings using it tongue
(115) The poor dervish also uses his tongue
If the bird sings flying in the sky
Will its wings get tired and will it land?
If he sings all the time every day
The poor dervish also gets tired
(120) The grey lark flies with the winds
With the unpredicted wind
Everyday all the time he sings
Poor dervish also sings for the people
There is no god but Allah,
(125) Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah
Allah hey, Allah hey.

I was living in the East
Singing all the time I was walking
If I open my mouth wind comes out
(130) When the duck flies the lake remains
The dervish is coming!
The relatives are waiting
If I am singing all the time every day
Sorrow and pain will disappear
(135) Were you a pine or a willow tree?
Were you in sorrow and pain?
If I am singing all the time every day
I am an endless source of good
Every day wearing a saddle

[11] J̌übüt's daughter, Bulkaakï is a Jewish *peri* (spirit), *ǰübüt* is from Arabic *yahūdī* 'Jewish'. There are different types of *peri* spirits, Muslim, Christian, Jewish and pagan (Kyrgyz *kaapyr*).
[12] In the Kyrgyz tradition, Duldul is a swift horse, or a stallion, but originally it was the name of Caliph 'Alī's grey mule.

(140) I am like the Duldul horse from heaven
Singing all the time every day
I am like a bulbul from heaven
The dragon steps on the stone
Before I leave this world
(145) I am praising your name
There is no god but Allah,
Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah
Allah hey, Allah hey.

During the last days the World will be empty
(150) People will be poor, they will have nothing
My time has come like a mirage
Getting closer to the Moon and the Sun
One who travelled there and returned
Is like a flooding river
(155) Your life passes like a mirage
Who knows what other people want
Scale knows the weight of things
Judgment Day is like a narrow bridge
That narrow place decides what lies further
(160) Nobody ever returned from there.
No one knows what riches it has
Nobody ever saw that place
How people live over there
Anybody who died will he return?
(165) Did you see in your life
Anyone who returned from there?
Luck and blessing are
Related to each other.
Sometimes one of them is lacking
(170) It passes without noticing,
May your soul be safe.
May you be healthy always,
The luck should descend on your house[13]
May you be lucky always!
(175) The wandering dervish
Do not say that he is just singing!
The order by Allah
I am fulfilling now, my relatives
There is no god but Allah,
(180) Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah
Allah hey, Allah hey.

Your house is indeed a house.
Your house really worth nothing [like twigs]
You are worried about your live-stock.
(185) Your livestock really worth nothing [like twigs]
You have a twig house here,
your real one is there [afterlife]
If your twigs are broken, your tree dies [life ends]
When death really comes
(190) It will not leave us in this life

[13] The expression *baxt qon-* 'luck descends' comes from Persian and it means that luck can descend from heaven as a bird. Its Turkic counterpart *qut* 'spirit of luck and happiness' in pre-Islamic belief was sort of spirit or soul that could leave a person's body. In Central Asia *qut* is just a synonym of the Persian word *baxt*.

Your house is indeed a house.
Your house is covered with needle grass
Singing every day all the time
The sound of the dervish
(195) My place is full of dry trees
Their branches are sadly broken
All humans are sinners,[14]
And they tell about their grief.
There is no god but Allah,
(200) Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah
Allah hey, Allah hey.

Fig. 2. Atamkul in front of his round-shaped house (Chong Kara-buura village, Kara-Bura district, Talas, Kyrgyzstan). Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2008.

Atamkul refers to Baabedin many times in his song, which is the Kyrgyz form of the name of Kh^{w}ādja Bahā' al-Dīn Naḳshbandī (1318–89), a famous Muslim scholar and Ṣūfī from the fourteenth century. He lived in Bukhara and founded the famous and very influential Naḳshbandiyya

[14] Kyrgyz *pende*, from Persian *panda* 'slave'.

Fig. 3. Atamkul in front of his house (Chong Kara-buura village, Kara-Bura district, Talas, Kyrgyzstan). Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2008.

Ṣūfī order (*ṭarīḳa*). His tomb is the most famous pilgrimage site in Central Asia 12 kms from Bukhara in his native village of Ḳasr-i Hinduwān (now in Kāgān District).

Actually all of Atamkul's song testifies a strong link to Islam mythology and Ṣūfī philosophy. He talks about the vanity and idleness of this temporal world. He also talks about the Judgment Day (*qiyāmat*) and that all souls will be judged by Allah. He mentions the two Angels (Üngkür and Mangkir, from Arabic Munkur and Nakīr), who question the dead person's soul that lies in his grave about his faith. If the dead gives the right answer the soul will live a nice life until qiyāmat and their body might be resurrected. Atamkul also mentions his helping spirits as oluya and pir. These are Muslim terms also denoting Ṣūfī and other Muslim saints. Kyrgyz *oluya* comes from Arabic *awliyā* plural for *walī* (friend of Allah). The word *pīr* in Persian simply means 'old'. It was used among Ṣūfī followers as a respectful title for their leaders or masters.

He also mentions the *mazār* tombs or holy places that some people visit during a pilgrimage (*ziyārat*). Wandering dervishes also spent a lot of time visiting these holy sites and asking the help of the spirits of those tombs.

The only character that is not well known in Ṣūfī practice is Oysul pir, a mythological Muslim saint. The Muslim nomads believe that all four types of livestock (*tört tülük mal*) are protected by a Muslim saint (*pir*): the horses by Kambar-ata, the sheep by Čolpan-ata, the cattle by Zenggi-baba and the camels by Oysul-kara or Oysul pir. By invoking the pir of the camels the dervish expresses the popular belief of the nomads that some spirits of the Muslim saints appear in the form of a camel.

Nowadays the Ṣūfī orders have lost their influence in Central Asia and the dervishes have nearly disappeared from the region. Atamkul must be one of their last representatives. But some of their attributes, like his magic staff, is used by other types of spiritual specialists (e.g. *bakšï*, *bübü* and *balger*) and certain beliefs linked to their activity are also preserved in the modern spiritual life of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh (e.g. the veneration of Muslim saints). Modern religious movements nowadays unfortunately are against the veneration of saints and invocation of their spirits. As a result traditional spirituality is gradually disappearing in the region and it is replaced by fundamentalist Muslim ideology. In the meantime many popular beliefs are being adopted by esoteric healers and practitioners who mix various ideologies and spirituality.

Although the dervish is a religious specialist coming from the Ṣūfī Muslim tradition, modern fundamentalist Muslim movements look at it as a

sort of shaman, as that was suggested by Soviet scholars (Basilov 1992; Baialieva 1972). These scholars argued that many of the religious and spiritual tradition practiced by the nomad Kyrgyz and Kazakh were the remnants of pre-Islamic beliefs, although nobody really knows what those beliefs were or when the Islamization of these nomadic societies occurred.

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