

MIHÁLY HOPPÁL

Shamanhood

Past and Present



MAGYARSÁGKUTATÓ
INTÉZET

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Publications of the Institute of Hungarian Research 4.

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Magyarságkutató Intézet

Budapest, 2022

Originally published in Hungarian as *Sámánok régen és ma.*
Budapest. 1994, 2016. Helikon

English translation: Orsolya Frank
Lector: Izabella Horvath

MKI editorial board: László Tamás Vizi (chairman), Bence Fehér,
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The publication of this book was sponsored by
Ministry of Culture and Innovation.



MINISTRY OF CULTURE
AND INNOVATION

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ISBN 978-615-6117-54-0
ISSN 2939-6867

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PREFACE

Every book has its own story. This story began when in 1994 the Hungarian publishing house, Helikon, brought out my work *Sámánok: lelkek és jelképek* (*Shamans – Souls and Symbols*) which within a year also appeared in German translation through an Augsburg publisher under the title *Schamanen und Schamanismus*. Both the Hungarian and the German edition sold out rapidly. With the aid of the German publisher it soon appeared in Japanese as well (a very attractive production by Seidosha publishing, Tokyo). Then this 1998 edition was in turn translated into Chinese in 2001. Comparing these last two editions is in itself an interesting exercise and as far as I know, this is the first Hungarian ethnographic-ethnological work to have been translated into two Far-Eastern languages. The Chinese translator claimed that the book's particularly rich wealth of visual material was a special inducement for the publisher. Indeed, we had plenty of occasions to see the same pictures, without reference, on the pages of various Chinese publications. Going further, the Chinese also produced their own manual on shamans (Guo Shuyun and Wang Honggang eds.: *Living Shamans: Shamanism in China*, Shenyang, 2001). It was a bilingual, English and Chinese publication, to which the author was requested to contribute a preface.

In 2001, Jürgen Braunschweiger, the editor of the German edition with Motovun Publishing, Luzern, commissioned me to produce a new extended version of the book. Naturally, I wrote the basic text in my native Hungarian, upon which the subsequent

Estonian and Finnish editions were based and published in 2003. In the meantime, during my ever-increasing trips to the Far East I not only continued my collecting work, but also amassed several hundred new photographs and videos, which offered me a broad base from which to select the visual material for the extended Hungarian edition. In this beautiful, 300-page tome produced by Akadémiai Kiadó (2005) I reviewed the roles and functions of the Eurasian shamans, their historical roots, the symbolism of their objects, and the most important characteristics of the local shamans of the various peoples. In 2009 this extended version was published in Polish and in 2012 in Turkish. After the success of the first edition, in 2014 the Istanbul publishing house, Yapi Kredi, reprinted the book, a fine publication in excellent taste but a smaller format.

It was this pleasant, more compact publication that gave me the idea that perhaps a smaller, lighter, popular version should also be produced for Hungarian audiences, because the large format edition with its rich visual material had sold out long ago, and I was frequently solicited where the original edition could be obtained and whether there was going to be a new one.

No matter how hard I try, I am finding that in producing this new edition I cannot and, indeed, do not wish to neglect the body of fieldwork which I commenced more than two decades ago and which has been ongoing ever since. So, I decided that it would be best if instead of an abridged version of this large-scale book (*Sámánok Euráziában / Shamans in Eurasia*) I were to refresh and update the valuable old documents of my very first book on shamans (*Sámánok – lelkek és jelképek / Shamans – Souls and Symbols*). I have noticed that the photographs most frequently cited were the oldest items of the collection which people were finding

most fascinating. At the same time, were I to go about it this way, I knew I could rely on the dependable, authentic data and pictures of my own collection when I offered a glimpse into the world of the contemporary shaman. Let me note here that starting from the chapter “Peoples and Shamans” all the photographs were taken by myself in the course of my field trips. Since I started my travels in the early 1990’s, the phenomena and conditions I recorded look back over almost a quarter of a century by now, presenting relics of a vanishing world. I had the good fortune to meet authentic shamans, contrary to Vilmos Diószegi who, regrettably, was not so lucky under the circumstances of the 1950’s and 60’s (see Diószegi’s diary notes published by István Sántha).

Perhaps the central feature of this book is that I use a visual language to share information which would take a lot more words even to try to describe. One of the lessons this offers is that the shaman’s activity consists of genuine, actualised speech acts, to use a key term from linguistics. Whenever they summon the spirits, sing, say a prayer, or recite a myth, the emphasis is not so much on the text itself but on the speech act. This is what elevates the ceremony to the rank of sacral communication. The sacred suddenly towers above the mundane and for a few seconds that which is holy appears before our eyes in its timeless essence and arrests the flow of time. The shaman, otherwise a most ordinary figure, is capable, merely through possessing the power of the knowledge which he or she as an ordinary mortal had acquired, of creating the air of the sacred almost any time. Thus they can envelop a common occurrence, like the healing of an ailing individual, with the aura of the extraordinary. This way the actions of the shaman may be placed, as it were, in quotation marks. They become symbolic and gain a significance which points beyond them, creating an opening

for communication with the supernatural. The shaman addresses the imaginary world of the spirits and thus makes a personal transit to the domain of visions. This moment marks the birth of the art of healing the world.

Budapest, July 2020

The author

INTRODUCTION

With regard to its spiritual culture, the life of a people or an ethnic group is most powerfully shaped and characterised by its religious phenomena.

Shamanism is the term used for the ancient religious belief system of the inhabitants of Siberia and Inner Asia. The central element of this system is the figure of the shaman who symbolically mediates between the world of humans and the imaginary world of spirits or souls. According to certain definitions, the most important characteristic of the Eurasian shaman is that he or she can voluntarily enter a state of ecstasy or trance and thus attain an altered state of consciousness.¹ During this experience of symbolic journey or transportation, so filled with visions, the soul of the shaman mediates between worlds (the experience is commonly referred to as a 'flight of the soul'). According to other definitions the ability of travelling to transcendental worlds and of engaging in ecstatic communication are what constitute the most crucial characteristics of shamans, with the restriction that the journey of the soul always happens in service of a particular purpose, and purports to help a member of the community.² The shaman is always committed to solving some existing crisis, which in fact entails considerable suffering for him or her (see the image of the shaman pulling an arrow through his body in a late 18th century travelogue from Siberia.)³

Every culture contains a traditional system of beliefs and faith which regulates, like a built-in programme, the actions of everyday life and the ritual customs of festivals.

Although scholars differ in their definition of shamanism, they do nevertheless agree that the classical territory for this religious phenomenon is the Northern and Central part of Eurasia, stretching from Lapland in Scandinavia all the way to the Korean peninsula. This is also the area covered by the pictures shared in the present volume.

In this book we mostly surveyed the peoples that the author has visited personally and among whom he carried out fieldwork for varying lengths of time.

The internationally used term *šaman* is of Manchu-Tungus origin and had found its way to the vocabulary of ethnology via Russian mediation. The original Tungus word (*xaman*) has its root in the word *sa* meaning ‘to know’, in other words shaman means ‘he/she who knows; the knower’. (The author had the occasion to hear the original Manchu pronunciation of the word, where a very soft ‘s’ sound is followed by a long open ‘a’ vowel similar to the Hungarian ‘á’ sound.) According to certain etymological explanations the word had come to Manchu-Tungus from Sanskrit through Chinese Buddhist mediation. (The meaning of *samana* in Pali or *śramāna* in Sanskrit was ‘Buddhist monk or ascetic’. The mediating Chinese term was *sha-men*.) Naturally, among the shamanist peoples of Siberia and Central Asia the local vernacular name of the shaman also survives. Thus, Altaic Turks use the word *kam*, the Yakut *oyon* or *oyun* (female shamans are *udugan*), the Buryat *böö*, Central Asian peoples use *baksi*, the Samoyed *tadibe*, the Laps *noita*, the Finns *tietöjö*, Hungarians *táltos* or *tudó*.⁴

The Origins of Shamanism

Some scholars (e.g. Leroi-Gourhan, Campbell, Devlet and Devlet)⁵ estimate the emergence of shamanism to have taken place tens of thousands of years ago, based on certain puzzling scenes in some early rock art. It is true that the figure of the hunter, clad in animal furs, can easily be compared with the shaman wearing the animal mask. Efforts to determine the age of these petroglyphs have led to fairly uncertain results. This way all we can do is limit ourselves to theoretical assumptions, and say that in the hunting cultures of the late Palaeolithic the role of the spiritual leader probably evolved in these small hordes as a result of the differentiation of social roles and the related division of labour. There was probably also some connection with becoming acquainted with hallucinogenic plants and mushrooms.⁶ Ultimately, hunting cultures were characterised by animism. Added to the world view which invests the whole of nature, animate and inanimate, with a soul, there also existed the idea that the animals killed during the hunt must have their soul restored to them. Therefore from time to time they would hold animal ceremonies to appease the forces of nature in an effort to restore the ecological balance by symbolic means.⁷

The experience of the soul's journey under the influence of these visions was the source of a belief according to which humans have two souls – one is related to the body and to life, which would only leave the body at the time of death; the other is able to move and we may sense its departure during sleep or ecstasy. (In Hungarian, this second soul is called the shadow soul and is preserved in our language in words such as *íz* or *izé*.) Such a duality of souls and the related animal ceremonies performed in the proximity of rocks, and involving journeys of the soul, are considered by

some researchers to be basic elements of Eurasian shamanism as far back as the Palaeolithic.⁸ Other scholars, by contrast, refer to archaeological findings and cave art from a considerably later period estimate shamanism to have emerged during the Siberian bronze age.⁹ Naturally, there are significant differences in lifestyle and the characteristics of shamanism among the hunting/fishing peoples of the taiga, and the nomads of the steppes or, the reindeer breeding northern nomads. All of these differences were further amplified by the impact of the major, literate religious traditions. This influence is particularly noticeable in the shamanic practices of the South Siberian nomadic peoples exposed to Buddhism, Lamaism, and Islam.

The Shamans' World View

A central part of the phenomenal world of shamanism is the narrative tradition which the shaman needs to learn during his or her period of training and initiation. Although there are major differences from one culture to the next, the tradition which accompanies shamanism includes some general traits which are highly consistent across cultures. The areas of world view and spirit belief show a particularly high degree of structural congruence.¹⁰

In shamanic cosmology the universe is of a tripartite structure: it is divided into an upper, a middle, and a lower world. This tripartite model of the world also appears seen on shamanic drums. The upper world and the lower world, i.e. the worlds of spirits, are further divided into substrata numbering three, seven, or nine, depending on the belief tradition. The middle world is the habitat

of humans. In its centre – the naval of the world – stands a huge tree or a pillar that reaches the sky, referred to as the world pillar or the world mountain. The starry sky, that is, the upper world, is envisaged in the shape of a tent, the central tent pole being the cosmic pillar, identified as the Milky Way. This pillar/mountain/tree that reached the sky which connects the different worlds became identified in shamanic mythology with the shaman tree by which the shaman can reach the upper and the lower world during his or her trips of ecstasy.

Another major area of the shamanic belief a shaman needs to be well acquainted with is the pantheon of gods and the groups of various spirits which populate the world. In general, all three worlds are indeed populated by gods and spirits. Turkic and Mongolian peoples believe in a sky god (called *ülgen* among the Altaic peoples) who is a benevolent, helping god who has seven sons and nine daughters. The lord of the underworld, Erlik Khan among the Altaic Kizhi is a malevolent god who sends harm and disease to humans. The name Erlik may be related to the Hungarian word for devil, *ördög*.

Far more significant than the gods in the shamanic belief system is the range of various spirits. These latter play a role on two different occasions: 1. when the shaman is initiated, and 2. during the visions experienced in a trance in the course of ceremonies. Even in the phase preceding the initiation, the would-be shaman has to meet his or her animal helping spirit. There may be more than one such spirit: for instance a wolf, a bear, a raven, or a seagull may appear to the shaman, but among the Ob Ugrians the helping spirit can take the shape of seven different animals. These spirits help and guide the potential shaman during the path of initiation, laden with different manners of suffering. Its appearance, often in

a dream or simple hallucination, indicates the very fact that the candidate has been selected¹¹ for the task.

The participation of the shamanic ancestor in the selection of the would-be shaman is always of decisive importance. This is particularly noticeable among the Buryat where the shamanic vocation is passed down within the clan or in the extended family.¹² Among the Evenki nomads, whose lands lie beyond the Baikal, it is the spirit of the dead shaman who summons and invites the chosen one to follow him or her and to learn the shamanic art. The spirit of the shamanic ancestor later accompanies the shaman as a genuine spirit helper throughout his/her life.

There are certain inherited spirits who not only assist the shaman but also maintain an erotic relationship with their protégé(e).

The notion of helping spirits is an extremely important element of shaman mythology¹³, since the helping spirit supports the shaman along his or her otherworldly journey and thus it is considered a distinctive trait of Eurasian shamanism.

Functions and Roles of the Shaman

It is a known fact about shamanism that the shaman always places his or her powers in the service of the society at large¹⁴. But what are the main functions of shamans? Different cultures provide for very different roles for shamans. It is only natural that in a small hunting-fishing community the shaman who is the head of a clan would play a very different role than the chief shaman of the royal court of a large horse-riding nomadic empire.¹⁵ In brief, the sphere of competence of a Eurasian shaman included the following

roles and tasks. 1) a head of the clan, spiritual leader (guardian of ethnic identity awareness); 2) a priest performing sacrifices; 3) a 'soul guide'¹⁶; 4) a diviner or fortune-teller; 5) a healer; a poet or bard, protagonist of the drama of the shamanic séance. Let us explore each through an example, also introducing the main types of Eurasian shamans.

Since in certain areas of Siberia (e.g. among the Yukagir and the Evenki) the clan system was the main organising force of social, economic, and religious life, the institution of shamanism was also tied in with the clan. The shaman's position was inherited within the clan and the new initiate received his or her power from the shamanic ancestor. As such, the shaman would also liaise between the living and the dead members. The shaman was the symbolic link, and so became the effective leader of the small community, who healed, told fortunes, and protected members of the clan through his/her song and dance.

It was among the tasks of the shaman to try and divine the future through various means of divination – e.g. the Chelkan shaman told fortunes with the help of a bow and arrow.¹⁷ This was one of the shaman's tests. They practiced several types of divination, as they needed to decide on the time and place of sacrifices, find out what sort of weather to expect¹⁸, or ascertain the kind of destiny which awaited a newborn child. They used shoulder-bones, threw fortune-telling sticks with little lines carved into them, or the shaman would use a drumstick for divination. They would tell where to look for a lost animal or whether the fishing or hunting was going to be satisfactory. The Yakut shaman threw his drumstick on the ground to tell the future¹⁹ and depending on which side of him the drumstick fell, the outcome of events would be either positive or negative. In Korea the questioner had to choose the handles of

various coloured flags. Red was clearly the sign of good things to come, as we can observe even today in the Far East.²⁰

While among the Manchus the order of ceremonies, sacrifices, prayers, gestures, and forms of divination was recorded in writing as part of an old tradition²¹, in other parts of Eurasia, in illiterate cultures the shamans' sacred or 'priestly' function was less apparent, and the shaman became the universal master of ritual (or semi-ritual) actions of everyday life. This was expressed particularly clearly through the function of healing, since diseases could occur at any time, and threaten the balance of the division of labour in a small community (family or clan). In the shamanistic tradition diseases are always caused by some sort of spirit which needs to be removed – most frequently by 'sucking out'. This is a very interesting and deeply human model of healing²², since this symbolic act has a powerful psychological effect, where the patient feels that someone else bears the burden of his or her suffering.

Shamans also have a mission which is frequently forgotten and which Mircea Eliade refers to by the Greek term *psychopompos*, that is the guide of souls.²³ The shaman descends to the lower world in order to find and bring back the soul of an ailing person – and thus, as it were, restore the health, or the whole-ness, of body and soul. In other cases the soul guide accompanies the dead soul to the other world (among the Altaic Turks this is the realm of Erlik).²⁴ It is no accident that among the various peoples different groups of shamans were named according to their function. Thus, among the Nanay shamans the healer (*siurinka*) was the most modest category, to the second group belong those who, besides healing, also practiced the shamanic art at the commemoration of the dead (*kasati*), and, in possession of total shamanic acumen, were able to accompany the soul of the dead to the other world.²⁵

Finally, we must not forget that the shamans were the guardians of oral tradition. They were poets and bards in one person. Among the Turkic-speaking peoples of Central Asia the name of healer (shaman) and the itinerant bard is *bakshi*; the Buryat use the word *böö* to denote the performer of clan traditions, genealogical histories and heroic epics. The Khanti shaman is not only the organiser of the ceremonies of the bear festival but there is also no-one who knows more about the order of songs and the various texts. During these rites, lasting several days, several hundred lines of prayers, supplications and spells have to be sung or recited.²⁶ In the meantime they had to drum, dance, and act out the details of the otherworldly journey – that is, to improvise the performance as it best fitted the venue and the particular occasion.

Some scholars claim that shamans were the first performing artists, as it was their duty to know the melody and words of old songs, and also to act out the sacrificial or healing rite or ceremony. Indeed, even during the same performance they would often need to switch roles and voices, impersonating the main god, the sufferer, or speaking in their own voice. The *séance* or ecstatic shamanic performance may be regarded as one of the basic characteristic features of Eurasian shamanism. What are the main traits of the performance? Even the preparations of the performance used to take place according to rules dictated by tradition. When a shaman took part in purifying rituals – he or she would ‘hide away’ for a longer period of time, prepare for the ‘performance’ and then don the shamanic outfit with all its props and symbols. It is interesting to observe that the shaman always appears with a helper, and the *séance* starts with the evocation of the helping spirits, to the sound of song and drumming. The tent is lit only by fire, and the increasingly ecstatic drumming and singing finally transport

the shaman into a quasi-hypnotic altered state of consciousness. In Hungarian we use the verb *révül* to describe this state. Recent scientific research has shown that it is possible to induce a so-called 'active-alert'²⁷ hypnotic state both under experimental circumstances and in motion, and that in this condition visions evoke a very strong experience. Visions and the state of ecstasy may be enhanced by certain drugs such as mushrooms (*Amanita muscaria* L.), by cannabis, tobacco, or alcohol, but none of this is of decisive importance in the near-trance experience of Siberian shamans. What is important during the journey experience and the vision, and indeed this is the climax of the *séance*, is that the shaman meets his or her spirit helpers. On these occasions he or she needs to fight with the animal helpers (or the animal spirits fight each other), and this motif is the reflection of a very old totemic tradition in the oral narratives of Eurasian shamanhood.²⁸

During the *séance* the shaman, like some kind of a one-person proto-theatre²⁹, create the illusion that the helping spirits appeared, and does all of this in such an evocative manner that those present believed they can hear the sound of the spirit creatures (the technique of ventriloquism was also known, particularly among the Chukch and Koryak shamans). Even more dramatic is the sight of the shaman entering an increasingly profound state of ecstasy toward the end of possession-type performances, finally collapsing and losing consciousness. The shaman thus imparts and shares the journey experience she/he undergoes during ecstasy and the convincing power of this performance acts to confirm the viewers' belief in the shaman's power. Thus, besides being an excellent improvising poet³⁰, the good shaman also needs to be a most convincing actor and illusionist.

The Shaman's Personality Traits

Now that we have gained some understanding of the shamans' functions in the community, in other words their social role, let us take a look at the personal aspect. What are the kinds of personality traits that render a person well suited to fill the above described roles and functions? One thing that is certain is that taking on the shaman's role requires an uncommonly strong personality.³¹ How does somebody become a shaman?

As regards the selection of shamans, researchers agree that this can have a range of different mechanisms among various peoples, but the original idea is that the required ability may be inherited. The Manshi, living along the river Ob, believed that the gift of shamanism was given to man as a gift by the gods. Among the Buryat, who live along Lake Baikal, the shamanic art is also inherited within the different clans. The first sign is that the young person suddenly becomes ill, manifests signs of the 'shaman disease', or has epileptic seizures.³² Many scholars have interpreted this as if to say that the only people who can become shamans are those with pathological psychological conditions. However, recent research has clearly shown this notion to be untenable, as we now know that the majority of shamans are healthy members of the community, powerful, leading personalities, not to mention their outstanding knowledge. A milder form of a 'shaman disease' is when the candidate obeys the 'calling' of an inner voice when accepting the pains and suffering entailed by such 'learning'. Dedicating oneself to the role of a shaman weighs heavily on the shoulders of these candidates as an inevitable moral burden – a trait which clearly indicates their heightened sensibility.

Shamanism is a special form of belief in spirits, according to which the shaman himself/herself is selected by spirits.³³ Selection

can take place in a number of different ways. One way is through a dream.

The shamans are helped in their work by helping animal spirits. These spirits first need to be acquired, and this is done through prolonged self-torture, fasting, running, or submerging one self in icy water³⁴. Finally, the candidate needs to wait until the visions arrive. The helping spirit usually appear in the shape of some bird or animal (e.g. bear, deer or snake).

A decisive element in the shaman's personal life history was the nightmare of dismemberment, which is a metaphor for death in relation to the ecstatic experience of initiation. The Siberian shaman³⁵ would lie unconscious for three to seven days and while his/her spirit is transported to the other world, he or she would also be watching all of this happening as if from the outside – at least this is what has been reported according to ethnographic accounts widely recognised as authentic. These records show a surprising degree of similarity with descriptions of vision experiences³⁶ caused by various hallucinogenic drugs (e.g. LSD), as well as with the consistently recurring details of near-death-experience accounts.

Naturally, after this symbolic death the would-be shaman is reborn, in other words they recover after their shaman disease. This means that they cured themselves (with the assistance of the helping spirits), but at the same time it also shows that their personality was strengthened, their psychological balance restored. This entitles them to heal others, and herein we may find one of the many lessons that our age can learn from this ancient and universal healing technique.

Epilogue to the Introduction

Summing up what has been said so far, shamanism is far more than an archaic technique of ecstasy, nor is it merely an early stage in the development of religion³⁷ or purely a psychological and mental phenomenon, but a complex system of related beliefs. This includes the belief relating to the helping spirits of the shaman (also as figures of shamanic mythology), as well as the knowledge related to storing the sacred texts in the form of shamanic songs³⁸, hymns, and legends. It also includes the rules which lead the shaman on to exploring and acquiring the technique of ecstasy, and finally entails familiarity with the use of the objects required for conducting the séance or divination. All of these cultural elements appear together and are never seen separately, since they jointly constitute the complex social system known as Eurasian shamanism.

It is also natural that in shamanism, as well as in other areas of culture, elements of divergent origin become mingled and combined and are found alongside each other, such as a curious shaman's grave, complete with a cross, whose representation I found in the archive of the St. Petersburg Institute of Ethnology.³⁹ Generally, there is no reason to be surprised if the pictures show incongruent elements, because shamanism is characterised by openness and a kind of syncretism.

I am deeply convinced that the reason why shamanism has managed to survive persecution by the proselytizers of the great religions is that as a belief system it was flexible and open, it successfully assimilated changes, contained hardly any dogmas, but showed all the more adaptability. Shamanism survived the merciless attempts at conversion brought on by Islam, Christianity, Lamaism and finally Communism because the shamans had

faith, a calling, a vocation, and a social mission. Hopefully it will also survive the ravages of the technological civilisation that we are witnessing today, and at a time when humanity has almost irrevocably destroyed its environment. Perhaps there will be a few who have ears for the central message of shamanism: that we should respect Nature⁴⁰, both as it exists inside us as the universally human, and as it exists in our surroundings.

Today shamanism is living its renaissance and appears in the most varied forms. On the one hand, after many years of partially forced silence it is being revived in places where it had always been an inherent trait: the rural culture. Among such peoples shamanism is one of the ideological pillars of the revival of ethnic awareness. On the other hand, in the cities we are witnessing the emergence of a highly contemporary 'urban shamanism'⁴¹. We have a great many pictures in the last chapter of this book, documenting these movements, as well as the mass movement of neo-shamanism.

Today, in this egotistical and overly-materialistic age, this renewed shamanism could successfully formulate an ideology which offers alternative ways of living, free self-healing, and various positive life programs. It is important to raise awareness of the fact that shamanism is no less of a living reality in the Korean capital than it is among the Nganasan who live along the Arctic Ocean, or among the shepherds of the Mongolian steppes. Naturally, we need not think straight away of the aristocratic figure of the shaman priest 'clad all in white, mounted on a white steed', but of a very ordinary figure: a poor man who, alongside making a living by some common means, also engages in healing. Strange as it may sound, they are our contemporaries, men and women who listen to the radio, drink Coke or eat canned food, just like we do. They are people who use firearms to hunt with even in the remotest

jungle or tundra, and will occasionally even board an aeroplane. Films have been made about many of them⁴², as well as lots and lots of photographs, not to mention the soundtracks and video footage or the multitude of anthropological studies. They are privileged contemporaries, more remarkable characters of this century than we ourselves are. It is about them and for them that this book was written.

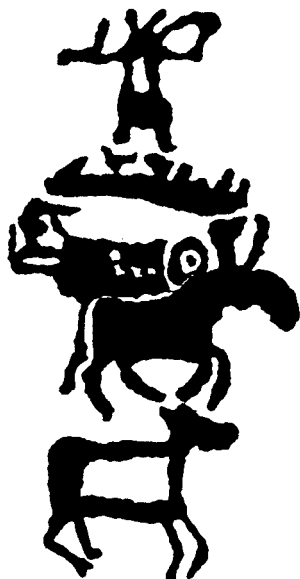
ANCIENT RELICS OF SHAMANISM

ROCK DRAWINGS AND SHAMANS

Shamanism probably has its roots in the extremely distant past – indeed, some scholars believe that the first shamans appeared in prehistoric times. Researchers are divided regarding on the question as to what kind of role shamans may have played during the Palaeolithic era, the time when the first rock drawings appeared.

It is quite clear how these early animal depictions, the human figures next to them and the circular sun symbols (!) are related to each other. One group of scholars believes that these signs and symbols, which stand alongside each other, and particularly those which clearly show humans, animals, boats or possibly drums, may

be interpreted as statements imparted by a constellation of images. This supposition indicates the appearance of the semiotic approach in the study of rock drawings and may at the same time offer the key to understanding these pictures.¹ When we see signs, i.e. carvings next to each other which are easy to identify precisely on account of their similarity, it is worth taking their meaning into account, because we may trust that a human is a



Deer, a boat and a human figure, perhaps with a drum and a drumstick, from the rocks of Novaromanovo. One deer has a sun symbol on its neck.



A very large unified body of depictions from the cliffs near the river Tom, showing the migration of large maral deer. The hunter on his skis and other human figures are almost lost in the midst of the animals. (3rd to 2nd millennium BC).

human, an arrow is an arrow. The assumption that hunting was a fact of life is also a fairly obvious conclusion for the age in question. Naturally, there are also researchers who regard such conjectures with scepticism, claiming that they are back-projections of modern notions, and fear that this may be misleading. For my part, I join the former camp, partly because I am of the opinion that it is always easier to deny something than to state something and to look for hidden connections, not to mention covert meanings. Naturally, we have no illusions; we know of hundreds of thousands of old rock carvings, and are aware that only a small portion of these have



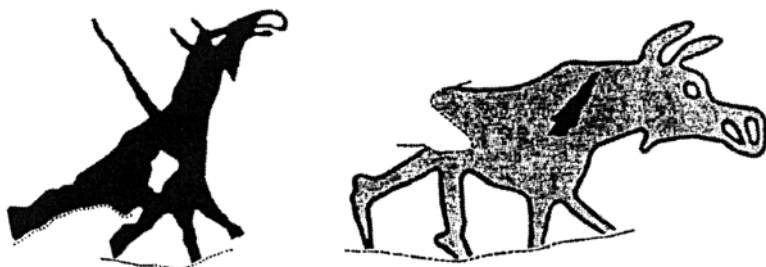
Human figures with bows and arrows on the rocks of Hobd-Somon.

been documented, even fewer published, and even within the published portion the number of instances where such pictorial “sign texts” appear is diminutive compared to the grand total. Therefore it is important to be extremely precise when working out the

methodology for interpreting such conglomerates of signs. This is exactly for what semiotics (the general theory of signs) was developed though this methodology is not widely known to the general public. We need to progress step by step and place easily recognisable shapes and signs alongside each other and so go about interpreting them. These signs may be removed from each other by thousands of kilometres, and yet, due to their iconic character (i.e. based on their similarity) they can provide us with good points of orientation during our analyses. Such recurrent repetitions include



Two sun-headed figures; underneath: a line of dancers. From the Tamgali rocks of Central Asia.



Wounded animals on the cliffs by the river Tom.

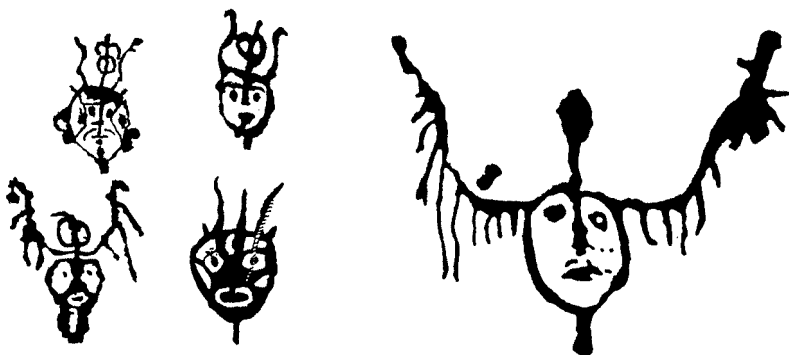
the figure of an archer which we find in the oldest carvings, which apparently refers to the hunter with his weapon. However, according to other explanations the first musical instrument of the early shamans, before the drum, was probably the bow, as its string could be used to produce a musical sound. Indeed, many believe it to have been man's first musical instrument.

Another recurring motif of the rock drawings is the depiction of phallic images, an overt sexual reference, perhaps alluding to fertility rites. The most important problem of small hunting communities had always been to sustain the continuity of the community and, quite simply, how to secure a sufficient number of offspring. They needed strong, skillful hunters, and this could only be attained through a steady stream of procreation. The rocks featuring these depictions were probably places of sacrifice, as is shown by the archaeological findings unearthed in the surrounding areas. Such venues of collective gathering² from time to time served for presenting a sacrifice to the spirits, which entailed eating the flesh of the animals killed, and also served to ritually confirm procreation. Naturally, we cannot ignore the fact that besides

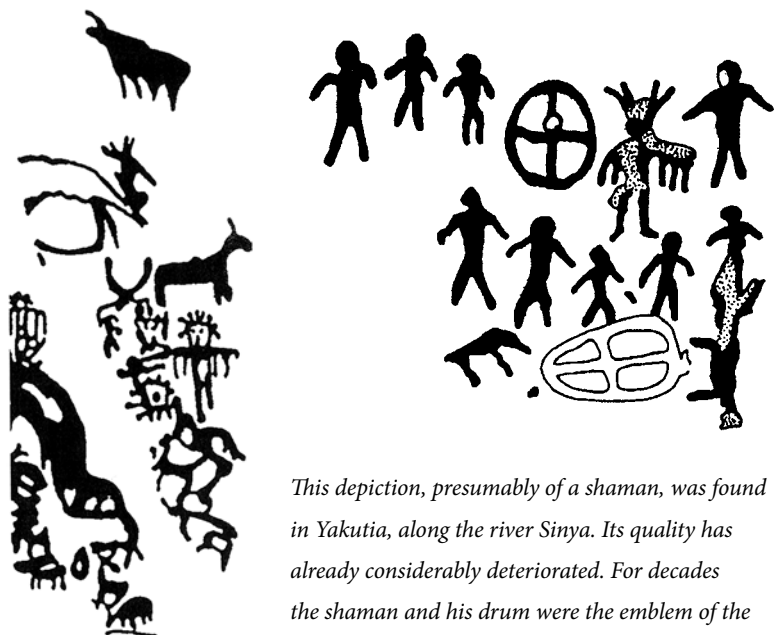


*Sun-headed human figures.
There seem to be ribbons hanging
from its arms, similarly to those
of Siberian shamans. From
around 1000 B.C., near the Altai
mountains.*

such easy-to-interpret pictorial statements the largest number of representations showed animals, the hidden meaning of which was probably to catalogue those members of the animal kingdom which were worth hunting. From a great plenitude of animals, it is always easier to kill at least a few, thus it is no accident that some animals were shown with an arrow or lance in their side. This is



*Images of humans with deer-antlered headgear on the rocks of Mugur-Sargol in
Tuva.*



This depiction, presumably of a shaman, was found in Yakutia, along the river Sinya. Its quality has already considerably deteriorated. For decades the shaman and his drum were the emblem of the International Society for Shamanistic Research. (ISSR)

Oroktoy, Altai



A group of pictures painted in red ochre on the rocks of Ahtuvansalmi in the South of Finland from the 5th-4th millennium B.C. Scholars believe the human figure standing in the middle with a headdress of deer's antlers is a shaman.



Aleksandr Oskin was kind enough to give the author a number of photographs from his own, previously unpublished collection, stating that they showed shaman representations from Central Asia. This is clearly what the drums indicate.

clear proof of the appearance of ancient hunting magic, and it is also imaginable that the veneration of certain animals, such as elks or bears, also appeared in these early times (4th-2nd millennium B. C.). As the number of human images increases, we begin to notice that the figures are holding on to each other and dancing or at least showing movements similar to dancing. Some of the figures are far larger than average, indeed the heads of these outstanding human forms are surrounded by rays similar to sunbeams. We might not be very wrong if we join certain colleagues in whose opinion such depictions presage the appearance of the concept of gods. We even have a representation, coming from the area of today's Yakutia, which shows an antlered human figure standing next to a drum, and nine human-like figures standing beside it may be

impersonations of the shaman's nine helping spirits. As for the more recent centuries these carvings also clearly depict shaman figures with their drums.



OLD ETCHINGS

Representations from the 17th-19th Centuries

The earliest representation of a shaman is found in a book by a Dutch traveller, Nikolaes Witsen³ and it shows very clearly how Europeans, particularly if religious, proved to be unable to describe phenomena of a different culture in any but the terms of their own word view. Thus, in a caption, the author refers to the shaman as a 'pagan priest'. This robust figure is depicted as a fairly intimidating presence, not only with antlers, which may indeed have been authentic, but also with animal claws by way of feet. It was common practice in past centuries for travellers to take a gifted artist along with them who would create visual records of photographic accuracy about anything of significance they witnessed along the journey. Naturally, they also could not escape the hold of prejudices and preconceptions, which acted like a prism through which they showed the figures of the local culture.

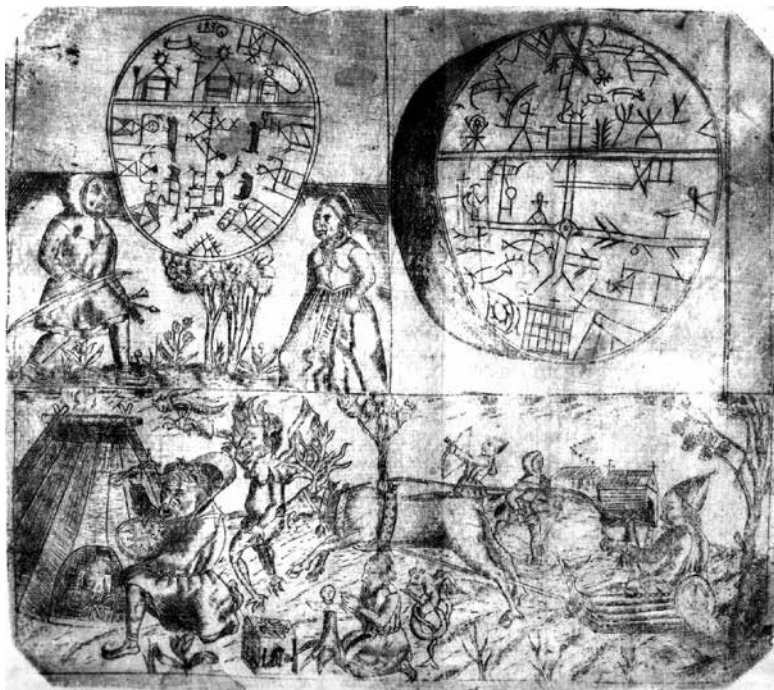
Later on, we gain an increasingly accurate picture of the inhabitants of Asia, including minor populations in the various regions of Siberia. Illustrations in the official reports describing the peoples of the great

The Dutch traveller, Nicolaes Witsen, visited Siberia in the mid-1600's. His account of his journey included this depiction of a shaman with deer antlers. Witsen's caption read 'pagan priest'. This muscular man in a furry costume flaunts massive claws on his toes, while his ears seem to grow out of the deer-skull. Clearly, the religious specialist of a foreign culture is shown as half human and half animal.



A drawing of a Lapp shaman (noiade) from J. Schefferus's book, Lapponia, published in 1673. A drum was placed on the patient's back, next to him kneels the shaman beating his drum as part of the divination.

← This depiction of a Lapp shaman comes from Samuel Rheen's book from the 17th century; next to it is a depiction of the shaman's helping spirits. Naturally, true to the Christian understanding, these were drawn in the shape of the devil, with a tail and strange wings. The ornamentation on the drums is clearly discernible on these etchings.



Etching from the first edition of Johannes Schefferus's book *Lapponia*. In the top two fields we see two Lapp shamanic drums, with the ornamentation clearly discernible and authentically representing the traditional Sami world view with its upper world and underworld. In the bottom part we see a tent (*kota*) of the kind built by Lapp people. Next to it kneels the shaman beating his drum in ecstasy. Behind him is his helping spirit depicted in the shape of a devil.

G. Buschan's book contains a fine etching about a Samoyed burial rite, the centre field including a drumming shaman. On top of the tall poles we see the heads of the reindeer that were sacrificed. →



Knud Leem's work, Finnmark, was published in 1767. Its etchings have preserved important ethnographic details including the man holding a shamanic drum (runebomme).



Russian empire offer relatively faithful representations of the main elements of local folk costumes. On occasion, this included the description of shamans. J. G. Georgi's book⁴ offers excellent images of the shaman, presenting front and back views of both male and female shamans. It is surprising to see how little this aspect of culture has changed over the centuries. As far as I am concerned, I find this quite natural, since the domain of beliefs, religious notions, and rituals represent the area which is least prone to change over time.

It has been a customary feature of book publishing, particularly in previous centuries, to re-draw earlier published images or to copy them over into newer editions and tomes, a practice which naturally entailed all manner of distortions. It is a most instructive exercise to place these side by side, because in spite of changes, new elements also appear from time to time and it is hard to decide which are the authentic elements. Sometimes, however, a new aspect also appears, and one gains the impression that the copyist may also have observed authentic shamans.

As we move on, etchings are replaced by lithographs, which allow for the registering of even finer details. I have managed to

The 18th century Russian traveller J. G. Georgi's book was published in the late 1700's. In it he offers an account of all of the nations and peoples of Siberia, more precisely of the Russian Empire, describing their life, religion and costumes. Facing us is a Mongolian female shaman (p. 43), on the following page the large figure shows a Tungus shaman (p. 44), while the smaller pictures show a shamaness of probably Altai Turkic origin from the area of Krasnoyarsk (bottom two pictures). The top ones show a Buryat shamaness, front and back (p. 45). In the following pictures we see drawings of a Tungus (p. 46) and a Kamchatkan shaman (p. 47). Note that drum-handles of this kind are characteristic among the Koryak.

collect quite a few of these over the past years and I am convinced that it is important to look to these if we are to reconstruct the image of the Eurasian shaman, particularly if we look on the matter from a historical perspective.













← These three drawings illustrate descriptions of the travels of P. S. Pallas. Judging by the drum handle it is the shows a shaman from the Altai mountains from several angles.



G. Sarychev's drawing was used in several books published in Europe, including N. Messchaert's volume published in Holland. This picture shows a Yakut winter lodging where the shaman is healing a patient with his drum and his song.

← T. F. Ehrmann's book published in 1807, shows both a front and back view of a Nganasan shaman.



Ein Schamane (Vorderansicht).

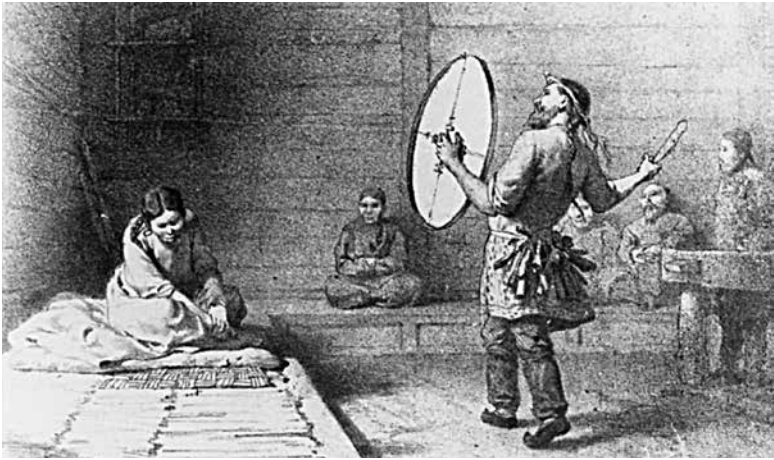


Ein Schamane (Rückansicht).

This etching published in 1872 shows a shaman of Turkic nationality from the Altai region, probably an Abakan Tatar. The front and particularly the back view shows very clearly the bird's wings attached to the shamanic costume which represent the helping spirit of the shaman (p. 50–51).



*Friedrich Ratzel's work, *Völkerkunde*, is the source for this subtle steel etching whose details allow us to identify clearly the shaman's nationality, as this type of headdress was worn only by Khakas shamans.*



Leopold von Schrenck studied the peoples of the Amur region. This fine line-drawing from his book shows a Gilyak shaman healing a sick woman with the sound of his drum.



A Samoyed shaman performing divination for Otto Finsch sometime in 1876 in the region of Beryozov. It is worth noting that the artist captured the drummer's distinct position of the hand.

OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs from the first half of the 20th century

Starting from the turn of the 19th-20th centuries, the first photographs of the shamans of that period begin to appear. These photos constitute unique documents of the shamans and shamanesses whom travellers met among the people of distant Siberia and Eurasia. To be sure, the photographic apparatus of the time was extremely heavy, particularly in the early part of the period, and researchers could only carry limited quantities of raw material. The best quality pictures from this era are those photographed onto a glass plate. Wherever these plates survived, they were able to yield prints of amazing quality. Thus, for example, the glass negatives made by the Jesup expedition can produce wonderful enlargements, since the emulsion used at that time renders this possible.

In 1909 Sakari Pälsi visited the Far East and was able to take a picture of a Mongolian shaman. He even made note of his name, which was Ochir böö (*böö* means shaman in Mongolian). He is holding his enormous drum as he looks to face the unknown photo apparatus and the unknown traveller.

Sakari Pälsi visited the area of Bayangol in 1909 where he met the böö Ochir. Holding his huge drum, the aged shaman, probably belonging to one of the Mongolian tribes, bravely faced the camera, and thus we can clearly discern his face which bears the traces of much suffering.

→

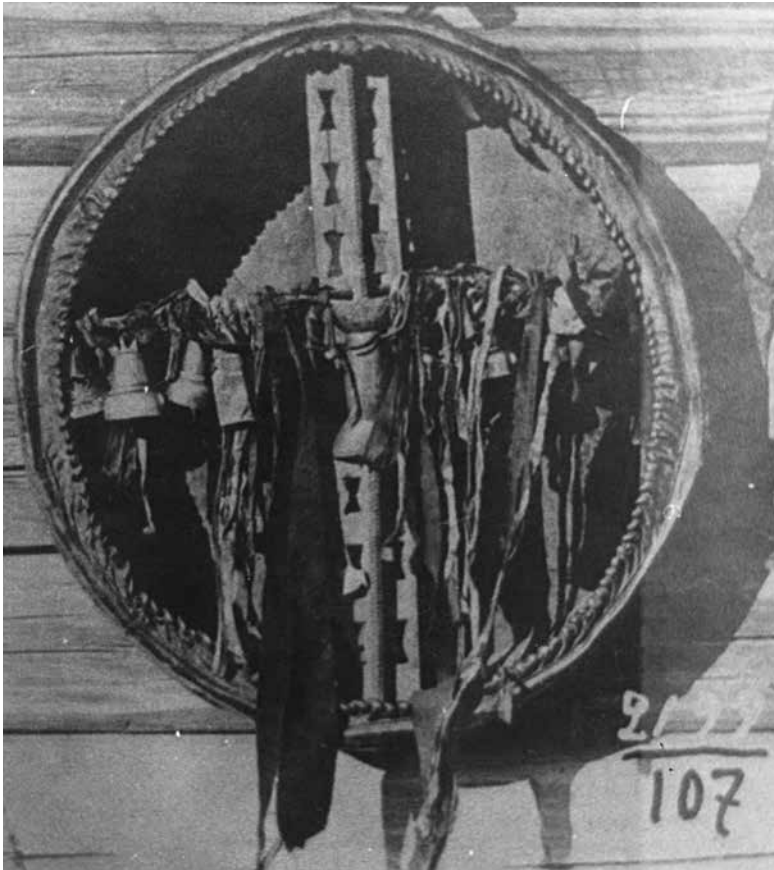




Kaarlo Hildén visited the Altai mountains in the 1910's. This is where he photographed a shaman belonging to one of the Turkic population groups. This original photograph is held by the Helsinki National Museum.



J. G. Granö visited the Altai mountains before 1919 and took a whole series of photographs of a local shaman who is giving a séance, clearly in a trance singing with his large drum for the benefit of the man from afar.



Maynagashev photographed this shaman drum with characteristic handle used by the Shor people from the Minusinsk Basin. The photograph was given to me by courtesy of the Russian Museum of Ethnography. (Inventory number: MAE 2199)

This image is, we might say, truly realistic, because it shows a poor man with a rather tormented face, for indeed, the shamanic art entails a great deal of suffering and does not bring riches to those who succumb to the calling of the spirits. The artist also



Using the large and cumbersome photographic machinery of the period, researcher S. D. Maynagashev who was of Sagay nationality used glass negative plates to record the images of a horse sacrifice ritual. His relatives were sacrificing a dark horse to Mother Earth. The sacrificial drinks in the barrels are also clearly visible (see more on p. 60–61).

produced a representation of the inside of the yurt, complete with the *ongon* of the Mongolian shaman and the inside of his drum, its handle embellished with a small mask. These pictures were given to me by courtesy of the Archives of the National Museum in Helsinki. I also acquired from the museum an image taken by B. F. Pankratoff in 1910 of a long-haired Yakut shaman (p. 66), a somewhat later photo by J. G. Granö⁵, and a further photograph by Kaarlo Hildén (p. 56) taken in the Altai mountains showing a Lebed Tatar. Granö (p. 57) also took a series of pictures, naturally out in the open so that the people could be seen more clearly, in









The American Museum of Natural History granted me permission to use a whole series of pictures from their photo archive, including this photograph of a Yakut shamaness and the other of another Yakut shaman. These rare images were probably taken by W. Jochelson in the late 19th century.





← V. N. Basilov, excellent researcher of the Turkic peoples living in the Central Asian parts of Russia and a colleague to the author, offered the use of some unique photographs from his own collection. These pictures, taken in the 1920's, show shamans of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia with their curiously shaped, violin-like instruments, called gobyz.



A Kazakh baksi sitting with his legs crossed.



Yakut shaman in a trance. This photograph was taken by B. F. Pankratoff in 1910 and it is kept in the photograph collection of the Finnish National Museum.

which the shaman is beating his drum and singing in ecstasy while those in the background look on in astonishment.

The pictures taken by S. D. Maynagashev are of excellent quality and for decades they had been lying forgotten in the collections



Shaman drumming in a trance. This picture appeared in Vilmos Diószegi's popular work on the subject published in 1962 (p. 64). Shamans were believed to have great strength both in physically and spiritually. A physical sign of this was that they would not cut off their hair for a long time, as was accurately described by L. P. Potapov in his work on Altaic shamanism. This and the picture on the opposite page both illustrate this condition.

of the St. Peterburg's museums. Maynagashev was of Sagay nationality and probably a man of some means. One day when he returned home to his clan he decided to record the shamanic ritual. In all probability he set up his photographic apparatus and kept replacing one glass negative after the other, while the shaman



Tuvan shaman in a picture taken in the 1940's by an unidentified photographer and given to the author by Mongush Kenin-Lopsan in 1995.



Tuvan shamaness drumming on her characteristic, deep-toned drum in a state of trance, with eyes closed. S. I. Vainstein took this picture in the 1950's and gave it to the author as a present during one of the latter's trips to Moscow.

and his followers continued the ritual. This provides us with an excellent series of phase recordings which show that the shaman and his escort walking several times around the sacrificial tree, with the horse tied to it, and which they subsequently killed. The dark colour of the horse shows that the sacrifice was offered to Mother Earth. We are extremely lucky that such detailed sacrificial ceremony by one group of the Altaic Turks has survived from 1913.

A last batch of old photographs was given to me as a gift during my collecting trip to Tuva. These date back to the 1940's, are of unknown origin, but seem entirely authentic. These all serve as valuable documents for posterity.



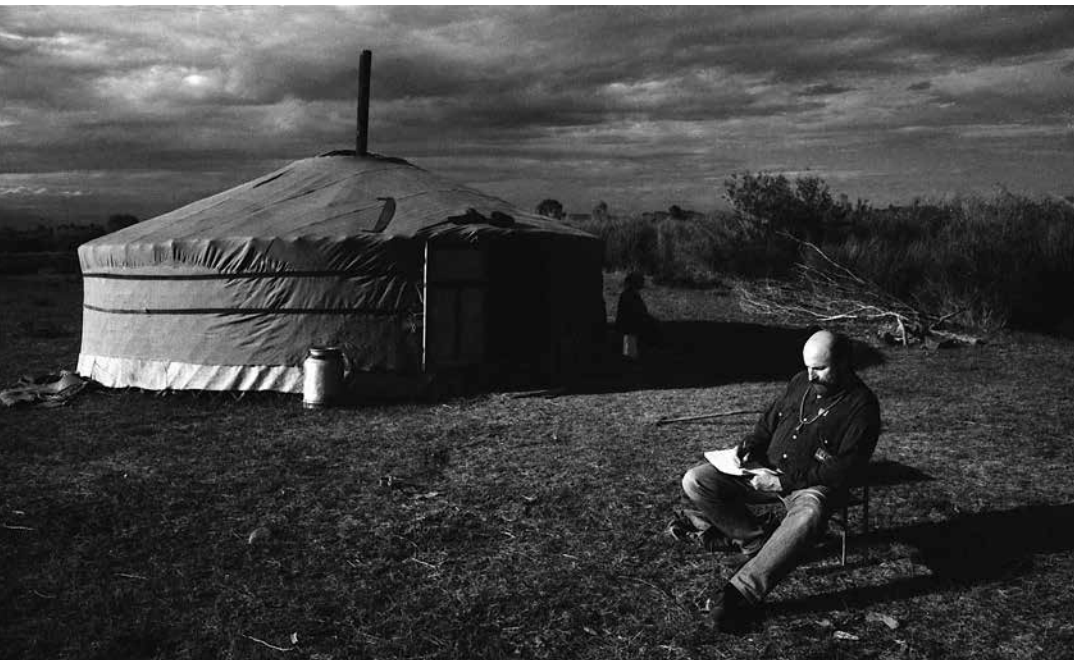
At this art festival in South Korea several shamanic ensembles performed to their large and attentive audience. A young shamaness (mudang) is singing, wearing authentic costume and accompanied by a small orchestra.

SHAMANS TODAY

FIELDWORK

Fieldwork is the very foundation of ethnological research. Ethnology is the name of ethnographic research when carried out among foreign peoples. Today, however, we are more likely to refer to this process as carrying out anthropological investigations, due to the influence of English-speaking scholars and English being the international language of scholarship this is the term that has become more widely used. The most important distinguishing trait of anthropological research is that one is expected to stay with the community under examination for fairly extended periods. Scholars from the English-speaking (and other former colonialist) countries

The author out on fieldwork – Tuva, 1996 (Photography by Lajos Nádorfi)



Vilmos Diószegi taking a photograph of one of the shamanic drums from the Museum of Abakan during his 1958 trip to Siberia – according to the account of his wife, Judit Morvay, who was kind enough to offer this photograph as a gift.



base this expectation on the idea that a researcher can only really get to know a foreign culture if he or she spends at least a year living among them. Such prolonged,

regional field work can be extremely useful from the point of view of exhaustive data collection (which was, however, often used later by a stake-holder who clandestinely financed the project).

However, one does not always have the opportunity to spend months amidst the people in question, but it is also possible to execute fieldwork after thorough preparation and profound preliminary studies. This was my predicament during my trips to Siberia and the Far East. A well prepared travelling ethnographer can ask very accurate and well targeted questions about the important details, based on previous excellent descriptions.

Another serious theoretical challenge is that research always leads to some kind of description, which was referred to in the past as ethnography, still the official name of our discipline. We were

forced to realise, however, that every description, even the most accurate one, is subjective, and inevitably reflects the individual viewpoint of the researcher. To put it in a fair and square fashion, the anthropologist is actually writing a novel about his or her experiences.¹ Describing 'other' people or a culture is never a simple task, if for no other reason than because there is a whole



line of cultural elements which simply do not exist in our culture, therefore we can only, at best, circumscribe the phenomena we experience. As for the question of language, in our European culture there existed no word which could accurately capture the meaning of 'shaman'. This is why they were described as 'pagan priests' (cf. Witsen, 1672). What is more, it is not much use if our informants share with us the local terminology using the original appellations of the individual spirits, deities, prayer texts and rites, if these can only be conveyed by means of complicated circular explanations to the members of another, in this case a European and Christian, culture.

Further difficulties may arise when having to decide more broadly what the goal of the description is for the entire research. If we wish to do no more than draft an inventory, an ethnographic description is completely satisfactory, but if we desire to see deeper into the life of a community, we need to identify the structures



In 1998 in Seoul, South Korea, I met shamaness Kim Kumhaw and her students. She receives state subsidies to officially train the shamans of the next generation.

and value system that governs it. The situation becomes even more complicated if our purpose is to explore the existing ideological systems, because intellectual culture and religious phenomena are excessively difficult to translate to another language. The two worlds simply do not square with each other.

It was in light of such considerations that early on I decided to try a new approach, and that in a foreign cultural environment, which was often inaccessible to me in the purely linguistic sense, I would try to provide authentic descriptions by making audiovisual records. This meant that I would have to make the greatest possible number of photographs and also do my best to record the ritual behaviour of people by sound and video recordings. I also tried to



Members of the famous Nganasan shaman family at a folklore festival in the South of France, drumming and singing in the streets of this small town in their spectacular winter costume. In the bottom picture they are seated in their bus and watching a documentary about their father.



*In the South of France, daughter of a famous shaman, Yekaterina Logvinova is looking at a photograph of her father in the author's book *Sámánok* [Shamans].*



On the occasion of the first international conference on shamanism held in China, a statue was inaugurated (in the background) showing the birth of the first shaman. A female figure with an eagle's head (called Isen Mama) is shown holding a baby in her arms.

take stock of the material collections in museums and make sense of them with the help of local scholars, since their knowledge could help me interpret and translate these foreign concepts.

At the same time it has also become clear that one of the most important methods in the course of short-term fieldwork is to keep returning to the same location several times and, repeatedly review and reinterpret the already collected material over and over with the help of the local cognoscenti. This creates the possibility for a

kind of 'reflexive anthropology' in which the researcher repeatedly adds on to earlier notes and texts of the field journal, and compares all of this with the work of previous scholars, the local knowledge, and explanations gained from the local informants. This way, an ongoing dialogue develops between the author and the text, in other words, the ethnologist begins to function as a translator between the cultures or cultural phenomenon under examination (in this case local shamanhood) and the reader. This way, understanding the cultural text was my most important goal and I tried to penetrate the depth of the cultural mechanism which defined the phenomenal world of Eurasian shamanism.

The dialogues² which I carried on with members of different cultures, including the shamans and the local people, always served the goal of understanding the other. In these conversations a sense of trust gradually develops between the two parties. However, this fragile trust can easily break, because film-making, video-shooting or photographing are particularly acute situations which did not use to be a part of the life of such small communities, but which is an indispensable part of authentic fieldwork today. Personally, I mostly subscribed to the technique of contemplative external observer as opposed to that of participant observation (interfering with everything, which is so fashionable today), which often tries to influence the life of the local communities with a political overtone or agenda.

I also did my best to forget the preconception that as regards shamanism I would only find usable data in the small communities of the remotest, most godforsaken locations³, because it had become clear during my travels that the world had changed and the urban environment was as much a home to shamans as the traditional rural milieu. Indeed, urban shamanism is becoming



In 2001 I had the opportunity to carry out extended field work, studying the shamanic traditions of a Manchu extended family.

more and more widespread, and it would be completely impossible to ignore it, and would contradict the basic principles of modern anthropological research.⁴ Eventhough most of the urban shamans I visited had spent their childhood in a very simple rural setting, in today's world of globalisation they adapt extremely well to the metropolitan environment. Thus when I had to reckon with this cultural fact, I needed to make a decision, knowing that any place could serve as the scene of fieldwork if I wish to encounter the spiritual experiences of contemporary man, whether in the big city or in distant Siberia. This is the kind of comparative research referred to as *multi-sited research* in the English-speaking literature.⁵ This way my brief, but repeated stretches of fieldwork enabled me

to compare analogous cultural phenomena which occurred in different locations under the influence of globalisation, not only in Siberia, but also in a number of cultures that are changing at a breath-taking pace, such as those of China, Korea, or Japan.

Participating at conferences and folklore festivals gave me an excellent opportunity to observe the functioning of different cultures. The so-called 'folk artists' were not in the least perturbed by the goings on and when their turn came, they simply performed the same songs and dances that they had learnt in their youth, mostly from their elders and family members. They were still 'authentic' performers of local folklore, but if we ask the question how they relate to their 19th century forebears, we can only answer that in comparison it would be hard to call them authentic. This is one of the paradoxes within the transmission of traditions.⁶

PEOPLES AND SHAMANS

KOREA
1991

A Hungarian researcher called Benedek Baráthosi Balogh published a fascinating travelogue in 1921 entitled *Korea, the Land of the Morning Calm*. Let me quote a passage from this book. 'According to all descriptions, the Korean people do not have a religion. About one and a half thousand years ago Buddhism tried to squeeze out





their ancient shamanic belief; then the teachings of Confucius became widespread, and most recently efforts have been made to try and introduce Christianity, in the hope that it might take root in

Korea. It is hard to imagine a people without faith or religion.²⁷ I have been fortunate enough to visit and to study in this distant land on several occasions between 1991 and 2008. In 1994 I was able to spend an entire month in the Korean capital accompanied by Professor Kim Taegon, and with his help I could attend several shamanic séances. This 70 million Far Eastern people, the Koreans, are sadly divided into two countries, North and South Korea, which represent their original homeland. A few million also live in

A famous Korean shamaness Chong Hakbong is performing a sacrificial rite in the company of her helpers, in 1991. They accompany their singing on their characteristic, hourglass shaped drum.





Hong Insun's letter of certification which declares in both Korean and English that she is entitled to carry out shamanic activity, because she is a member of the association of shamans.

China and in the Eastern part of Manchuria. Some South Korean scholars are of the opinion that the cultural roots of their people go back to Inner Asia. They mention that the burial customs of the Silla Dynasty (57 BC – 935 AD) which founded the Korean state are comparable to those *Kurgans* of the Altai mountains which became famous for their rich gold findings.

The respectful appellation for lady shamans is *manshin*, while for men it is *mugyok* or *pakshu* (on Chedzu Island it is *shimbang*). In different regions of Korea people distinguish 1) charismatic (*kangshinmu*) shamans who received their calling under the influence of some spontaneous vision experience; 2) shamans who inherited their calling (*tangol*); 3) *shimbang* type shamans who consider it most important to sustain their mental powers;



A married couple who had commissioned Hong Insun to perform a ritual kowtow in front of the shamanic altar. The mudang is dancing and beating her drum to entertain the spirits as part of the ritual.

and 4.) shamans of the *myongdu* group who dedicate themselves to the souls of dead children. According to Kim Taegon's typology, *mudang* type shamans cure diseases and they are mostly





A young shamaness is standing barefoot on top of two sharp chaffcutter which do not cut her feet. This test was seen as one of the true signs of shamanhood. According to the common explanation nothing can hurt a shaman in a state of trance.

active in the central and northern areas of Korea. They can be defined as charismatic shamans.⁸

My first visit to South Korea was when I attended the first convention of the International Society for Shamanistic Research (ISSR) held in Seoul. This was the first time I saw Korean shaman women performing a very interesting ritual at the opening ceremony of the conference. Later I had the opportunity, accompanied by colleagues Alex Guillemoz from France and Gábor Vargyas from Hungary, to participate at a shaman ritual several hours long, performed for a married couple by a local shamaness. The rite

began around 11 AM in the home of the shamaness, Hong Insun, where one room was specially furnished for such ceremonies. The longer wall was occupied by shaman icons and a sacrificial altar. The latter bore a number of different types of fruit and a freshly killed pig's head. The ceremony lasted well into the late afternoon and

the shamaness attempted to find out from the spirits, by means of divination, whether the couple's son, just getting married, had made the right or the wrong choice of bride and whether he was going to be fortunate in his new marriage. This shamaness lived in the capital, Seoul, not very far from one of the subway stations. In other words, she was a typical urban shaman. This is far from unusual in Korea, since the Association of Korean Shamans includes tens of thousands of members, this lady being but one of them.

At the end of the academic talks and discussions at the ISSR convention, the local organisers devoted an entire day to introducing the participants to the collective rituals of the Korean shamans. To our greatest surprise, on these occasions we were even able to observe animal sacrifices (usually they sacrifice a pig) as well as the shamaness standing barefoot on two extremely sharp chaff cutting knives but which did not cut her feet. By doing all



There is a ritual spot in one of the outskirts of the Korean capital, called Inchon, where from time to time shamanesses (mudang) perform rituals to local clients. One such shamaness is Chong Hakbong, who's using a shamanic rattle whose shrill tone accompanies her song summoning the spirits.



this, the fairly corpulent shamaness was indicating that even sharp iron will not hurt her. On this occasion we could also observe that the shamaness and her aides accompanied their song by hour-glass shaped drums, tin plates, and a sharp sounding pipe.

In 1994 when I had a relatively extended stay in the Korean capital, Professor Kim Taegon took me to the countryside and introduced me to one of the most famous and sought-after shamanesses. I had the good fortune to attend a ceremony she conducted in order to conjure up the dead. The event took place in Inchon, a suburb of Seoul, where several shamanesses were holding ceremonies independently of each other. The modern housing estate is clearly visible in the background of a photo (see p. 89) allowing us to classify the phenomenon as urban shamanism.



Again, the ritual lasted several hours for a large family whose mother had died a few months earlier. A ceremony of this kind is a fairly costly affair, and the expenses were covered jointly by the siblings. Naturally, once again there was an animal to be sacrificed. They had bought a pig and stuck it on a three-tonged fork in such a way that it stayed in balance, which is almost a physical miracle by our terms. If the pig does not tip over, it means that the spirits have accepted the sacrifice. During the ceremony Chong Hakbong, the chief shamaness changed her costume several times. The colourful clothes represent the various spirit helpers that had been summoned. The ceremony that lasted many hours, was divided into parts, which lent it a kind of theatrical character. Altogether the spectacle had an almost baroque richness. At the end of the



In the year 2000, organised by the International UNESCO Committee and the International Society for Shamanism Research (ISSR), a conference was held in Budapest. This is where this Korean group of shamans gave a performance, its members standing in front of the sacrificial altar in traditional dress.

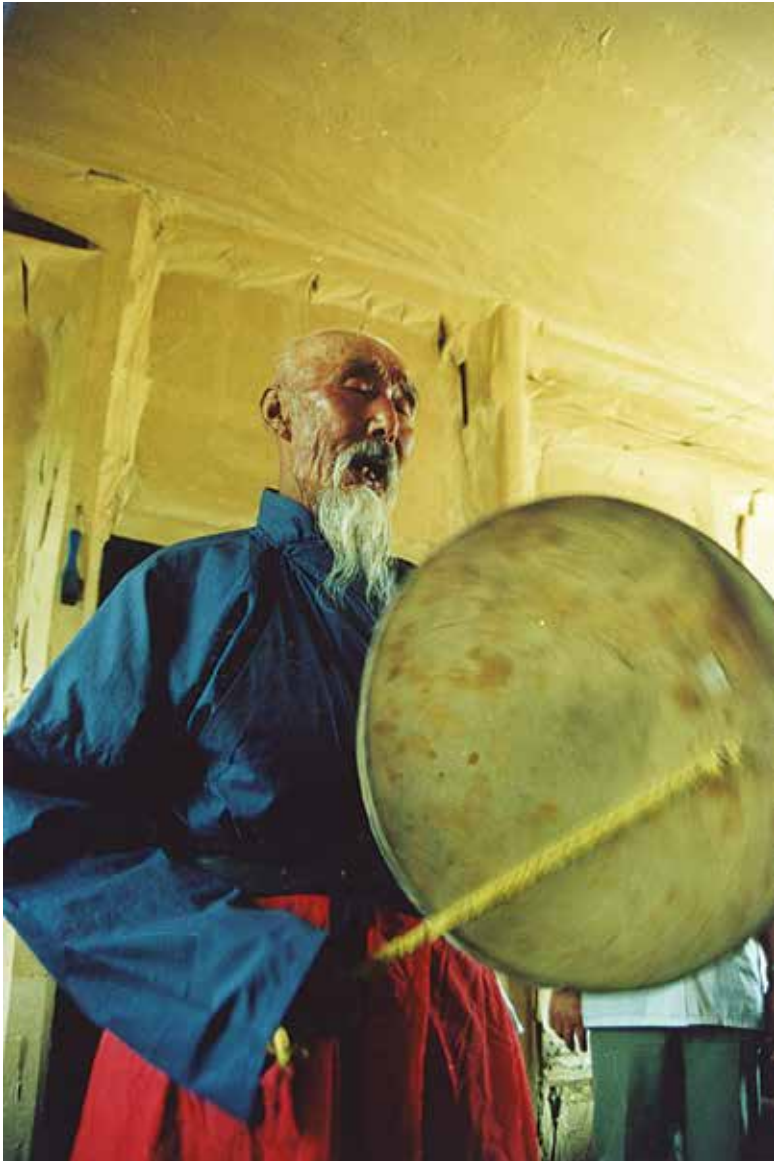
ceremony, when the sun was setting, one of the female helpers, who had been singing in front of the shaman icons wearing a white cloak, stood on the chaff cutting knives to prove that the rite had found favour with the spirits. Several of the siblings listened in awe to the shamaness' improvised song in which they deemed to hear echoes of the words, sentences and admonitions of their mother. Ninety percent of Korean shamans are women, but male shamans also exist. When conducting the ceremonies they wear female clothes. In Korea this highly male-centred society, shamanism has



become a prestigious occupation and an accepted source of living, something that had not been the case in past centuries. Today, by contrast, groups of shamans perform jointly at cultural festivals and even make appearances for good money at corporate events and celebrations. Such groups, dedicated to the preservation of old traditions, are highly respected in Korea as a means of maintaining their cultural heritage. Indeed, one of them visited Budapest in April 2000 to perform a ritual at a conference organised with the help of UNESCO. International audiences found it most instructive to witness this colourful ritual, which naturally involved the audience in the dance improvised in order to entertain the spirits. There was a kind of amazing elegance and restraint in the gestures and the movements of the performers. At the same time, it was also clear that everyone in the group was perfectly clear about his or her role, and this practiced spontaneity helped them deliver the power of the rite even in this foreign environment.



Concluding scene of the shamanic ritual presented at the Budapest conference.



The first time the author met an authentic, active shaman was in Manchuria (North-East China, Jilin Province) in 1991.

THE MANCHU 1991



The first time I travelled to China was in 1991, using the joint research fund of the Academies of the two countries. This meant that I had to spend at least one month in China. At first the Chinese looked askance

at my wish to study shamans. In the early phase we even had a bit of an argument when I stated that I had not come as a tourist but wanted to access the territory of old Manchuria. I had learnt that in that region I could expect to find active, living shamans. Today there are about 11 million Manchu in China, but this figure may be even higher, because the law governing national minorities stipulates that those who belong to the 55 ethnic minorities are allowed to have not just one, but two or even three children. The last Chinese dynasty was of the Manchu minority. This nationality had always enjoyed a degree of privilege, perhaps due precisely to their high degree of national cohesion and tight military and tribal organisation, not to mention that they were the ruling dynasty for almost 400 years.

It was on November 11th, 1991 that I finally met a real shaman for the first time in my life. He was the member of the Guardzhia clan. I was taken from Changchun to a village and the shaman was taken from his home to there. It was an odd meeting, since we could not talk to each other. He could barely speak Chinese,



In 1995 we recorded the spirit calling song of Manchu shaman Kuang Borong in his home. Here we see him kneeling down in front of his private altar, a chest containing the list of his ancestors.

so everything he said was first translated into contemporary Chinese by one of his grandchildren, and then from Chinese it was translated into English by my interpreter, Naran Bilik. At this point the anthropologist begins to wonder about the customary methods of data collection and reflect on what it means to translate things from a foreign culture into our own language and eventually into the language of scholarship. This is why I had decided, well before this journey, that visual data was going to be a far more effective medium for communication. This coupled with that unique and inexplicable psychological condition in which the tones and gestures of friendship have the capacity to forge without words a link between two human beings. This is what I felt at that moment.

It was 1995 before I was able to take a second trip to Changchun, a capital of Jilin province, where I had already laid a good foundation for later cooperation with my local colleagues during my previous trip. This time I was taken to another shaman and they told me that during my first trip they could only pacify the authorities by telling them that they were taking me for an excursion. This time they took me to see shaman Kuang Borong who performed a short ceremony invoking the spirits. Luckily, this time I was able to record the event on video. When suddenly he ended his improvised song and drumming and I asked him why he would not continue, the anthropologist from afar was given a most exacting answer: 'It cannot be continued, because the spirits cannot be called up for no reason!'⁹

After this short ceremony we went to visit a relative of the shaman's where, to my great surprise, they produced the genealogical chart (see

A characteristic attribute of Manchu shamans is their belt complete with a string of small, cone-shaped bells which they activate by moving their hips while drumming.





p. 100) of the clan, and told me that this chart was considered one of the most valued pieces of the extended family's legacy. Naturally, this, too, is part of the cult of the ancestors, therefore the data of

the deceased and the newly born are added to it regularly under festive ritual circumstances. The present occasion was the grand gathering of the clan, an occasion in the autumn when the history of the extended family or broadest kinship network was reviewed under the direction of the shamans, accompanied by an animal sacrifice. The most important consideration was the compliance with and enforcement of the moral rules prescribed by tradition. These were inventoried by Professor Giovanni Stary in a paper written for the 1997 ISSR conference held in France.¹⁰

In 2000 I had the good fortune to visit another aged shaman. He belonged to an ethnic group called the Handzhun. The Handzhun are of Chinese descent but have merged entirely with the local Manchu population and it is interesting that they have also fully adopted their customs of shamanism. They have sustained the curious ritual of piercing their cheeks with a needle similar to a thin knitting needle, and without feeling any pain, dance and drum, impersonating the tiger ancestor of the clan. This ritual is performed to this very day, at various festivals, including at the courtyard of the local Manchu museum where the assembled tourist, most of them Chinese, look on with horror at the folk custom of the 'barbaric' Manchu. It was interesting to observe that this old man had pupils, who were the young members of his own family. Thus there is a fair chance that this form of ritual might survive. The significance of the ceremony is to show that a shaman must be able to withstand pain, and that a sharp instrument will not wound him. It is worth mentioning that this same idea was also known to certain Siberian populations. Even the earliest travel journals mention that certain Samoyed (Nganasan) shamans were capable of performing this act (p. 44). The phenomenon so intrigued the different travellers that old sketches have been of this shamanic ability.



In 2001, at a conference I was able to record an entire group of young Manchu shamans in Wulajie village who were learning the songs and dances for shamanic drumming under the guidance of an older shaman. Members of the Chang clan had formed a small folk ensemble to present their acumen – including certain elements of their tradition – to the tourists who attended in increasing numbers to acquaint themselves with the culture of the minorities living in China.

It was also in 2001, in a newly built open-air ethnographic museum near the city of Jilin, that another

group dedicated to the preservation of traditions performed a full-day ceremony on



This genealogical chart recording the lineage of one of the shamanic dynasties forms part of the collection of one of the most famous Manchu shaman researchers. The item is a museum rarity.



2001, Wulajie village. A folk dance group consisting of members of the Chang clan is performing shamanic dances and the drumming technique which they practiced in harmony with the movement so as to demonstrate the musical and movement culture of their traditional rituals.



An older member of the group is teaching the young people how to move and spin the flat drum and the very rhythm for beating the drum.



In 2001 a shamanic presentation was given to participants of an international conference in a newly built open air museum not far from the city of Jilin. Two young shamans, accompanied by several older drummers, offered a mid-summer thanksgiving ceremony which is customary as a sign of gratitude for a good harvest. A great fire was lit in the courtyard which was circled by drummers, not only shamans, but also by several members of the audience. Many had drums, but what we found most surprising was that many people cooked bacon on long skewers and went on to eat the bacon with obvious gusto. In other words everybody joined in the ritual – in eating together (communio) to create a community (communitas).





In this photograph I have managed to capture the details of the shamanic altar. The small brass rattles, similar to Hungarian shepherd's rattles, play a particularly important role. The three little bowls on the right contained sacrificial drinks – a strong fruit brandy and tea with milk.

the occasion of the summer solstice, led by two young Chinese shamans. They played out all the ritual elements which they had performed earlier during the rite of thanksgiving for a good harvest. This seasonal rite had been reconstructed under the expert guidance of one of the best Manchu shaman researchers, Fu Yuguang. The most interesting feature of the presentation was that the two young shamans performed their part with feeling and intensity, in a state of light trance, and totally oblivious to the presence of the audience. Their act also included sacrificing a



In 2001 we visited an old Hanchun shaman in the village of Wulajie, who, in the company of his student, sang and drummed for the Hungarian researcher. He also donned his characteristic headgear which displayed three round mirrors. The fringe of beads covering his eyes also helps him attain a state of trance.



black pig, which they cut into pieces and cooked for everyone to partake of.

It was in Changchun that the 2004 International Society for Shamanistic Research (ISSR) was held, fully supported by the local authorities, having been given permission by Beijing. The

After the conference of the International Society for Shamanistic Research, a group of Manchu shamans, who consider themselves depositories of old traditions, gave a presentation to the scholars. They also built a sacrificial altar to make the presentation more complete, an important part of which was a pig's head bearing a great many incense sticks. The Manchu consider a pig sacrifice one of the most important offerings to the spirits.

→





← At the end of the ritual the shamans, including several young people, finally performed the main attraction: the art of walking on fire. They told us that these young people would go on to become the next generation of shamans. Naturally, the local media also turned out for the occasion and recorded the event which footage was later to be shown on the provincial television. The row of persons walking on fire was led by an older Manchu shaman who ran along the carpet of ambers some 15 meters in length.



We had the opportunity to visit one of the local museums dedicated to illustrating Manchu history and ethnographic traditions, including displays of several shamanic costumes. In the historical section, along with the standards of various Manchu clans, their warring costume was also shown. Most of these objects were reconstructions, as local experts told the author. Thus, among things we also discovered that the metal disks on the back of the shamanic costume were essentially emulating the military costumes of the past.



The shamanic crown was decorated with seven little birds made of metal, while another crown was embellished with antlers. After each shamanic séance the participants would tie coloured ribbons to the antler as a sacrificial offering. Here too, a fringe of beads was hanging from the crown in front of the shamaness' eyes. A further point of interest about this shamanic costume was that its shoulders were ornamented with feathers.



event carried special significance for the local Manchu minority, as it enabled them to attain new financial support for their local museums – a great achievement for a place so remote from the capital city. One of these was an open-air museum complex which was built in Longwan village exhibiting the characteristic cultural features of the minorities of the province. The complex includes a Manchu museum whose collections are based mostly on copies. This was also the location where the art of walking on fire was performed one evening. Once this was an important part of the initiation ceremony of shamans.

One can either marvel or even be horrified at the importance which ethnic traditions have gained lately in China, but it is also important to consider that in the past many artefacts had been destroyed, because there were but few museums. Today, partly thanks to UNESCO's activity, there has been a considerable improvement in opportunities for preserving minority cultures.

THE SAKHA
(YAKUT)
1992



One characteristic of Sakha shamanism is that this ethnic group has both white and black shamans. During our visit we managed to record a ritual led by a white shaman when he greets the sun early in the day and sprinkles milk from the sacrificial chalice on the bank of the river Lena.



Shaman Afanasy Fyodorov gives demonstrations to his visitors and trains the young people who devote themselves to the shaman's art.

In 1992 the Yakutsk National Theatre gave a performance which included a play sequence presenting the inauguration and joint ritual of several shamans (See next page also).





The Sakha people, or Yakut as they were called under the Russian Empire, inhabit a territory the size of the whole of Europe. They number less than half a million, but it is also true that this vast area, the coldest region of Siberia, is inhabited by about a dozen



more nationalities and minorities, naturally mixed with Russians who came to settle here over time. I first visited this remote area in 1992, when I attended a conference there entitled 'Shamanism as a Religion.' This was the first occasion in the history of the Soviet Union when one could talk openly about shamans and this attracted even the most famous researchers. I was able to interview them and even shot a film about the entire event. The most fascinating of these conversations was the one with V. N. Basilov. It is worth quoting his thoughts. 'Even though the entire milieu which had kept shamanism alive has changed so radically, the vitality of this tradition

is astonishing. Here, in Yakut society, despite all the profound changes, it has not proved possible to destroy the traditional views and cultures entirely. This is also true of the stratum of culture which we call shamanhood.'

Yakut shamanism has attracted a great deal of research over the past hundred years.¹¹ Indeed, one reason why we have data going back quite a long way is that many intellectuals of revolutionary sentiment were once exiled from Tsarist Russia to this region, and several of them went on to provide highly accurate descriptions of Yakut shamanism. Thus the scholarly literature has classified these roles as dreamers, fortune tellers, visionaries, diviners or prophets, healers, simple shamans (*oyuun*), and shamanesses (*udagan*). This division essentially describes the various roles which shamans play in Sakha society. The tradition also distinguishes between shamans or shamanesses of heavenly origin (*ayii algisschi* and *ayii oyuuna*) from other shamans. They are the mediators between the human world and the world of the benevolent gods (*ayii*), and they are able to supplicate for benefits for the members of the clan. They are also able to restore the balance of nature, as in case of disease. A Sakha scholar has told me that during the first years after the establishment of the Soviet central power, the most merciless crusades were led against the shamanic tradition which was later continued by labeling the healing shamans as charlatans. Soviet power tried to force the unification of the culture of the national minorities, but despite official state policies the Sakha people retained the most important elements of their traditional rituals.

During and after the conference I had a chance to become acquainted with the local healing shamans, and also with a group of actors who appeared in the local National Theatre in a play featuring a shamanic séance. This also formed a part of the conference, since the play had been directed by the local minister of culture, using archaic material and texts found in the collection of the local archive. Costumes and drums had been accurately reconstructed based on objects found in the museum. The most



A young Saha shaman in Poznan in 2002, singing at the Yakut ethnographic exhibition held in the local museum, reviving the old shamanic songs that he accompanied on his drum.

interesting aspect of the performance was that instead of Russian, the actors spoke the local Sakha language for purposes of the play, a language that had not been used for generations, as Russian had become the official language.

During our excursion I witnessed a ritual performed by a so-called white shaman, who performed a song welcoming the sun on the bank of the river Lena, held at the base of the great shaman cliffs. Afanasy Fyodorov is currently a professional actor who trains the next generation of shamans in his own studio. I met one of these

young Sakha shamans later in Poland in 2002 where he performed a short shamanic ritual as part of the opening ceremony of an exhibition presenting Sakha culture in the museum of Poznan.



A section from a play presented at the Yakut National Theatre revived the inauguration ritual of the young shaman candidate.

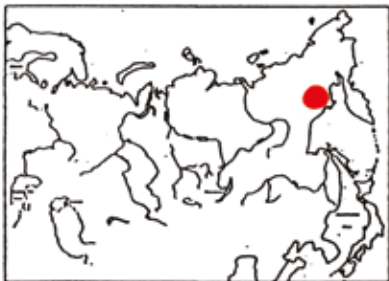


The Yakut white shaman presents a sprinkling sacrifice at dawn on the bank of the river Lena in 1992.





THE NANAY 1993



The Nanay ethnic group lives along that vast river of the Far East, the Amur, and belongs to the Manchu-Tungus language family. Around the turn of the century they numbered some 10,000-12,000, but

there are also some Nanay groups living in the north-eastern areas of China. Here they are called the *Hezhe* and their population is around four thousand. Most of them are located in the area to the north of the city of Khabarovsk, alongside such other small South-Tungus peoples as the Oroch, the Udehe and the Orok. In 1993 I had the good fortune to visit the Nanay living along the Amur River in order to make a film financed by the Hungarian Television. On this occasion I worked in co-operation with a Finnish colleague, Juha Pentikäinen, who had already visited these parts before. Together we filmed a ceremony performed by an old shamaness, Lindza Beldi (1909–1999), in which she presented a sacrifice to the spirits of her own house. Due to the poverty characteristic at the time, the

← *In the village of Daerge, the Nanay shamaness, Lindza Beldi, invites her helping spirits with her archaic style drum. We recorded her ritual on video and have since then shown it, to great acclaim, illustrating the practice of shamanism along the Amur River.*



animal sacrifice merely consisted of a cockerel, which she and her guests were to eat with the utmost gusto the same evening. During this simple ritual the researchers from afar could witness how the sacrificial trees were erected, which then were sprinkled with blood and vodka, to make sure that the spirits do not go hungry. We could also see how, similarly to the Korean ritual, those present were also expected to participate by joining in the drumming and dancing to entertain the house spirits.

During the shooting we observed that the drum was always heated up by the shaman's helper to make sure that the leather was taut and the drum could produce a fine, booming sound. Characteristically Nanay shamans wear the same kind of belt as the Manchu shamans, since they are kindred peoples. These belts have cone-shaped tin chimes attached. It is not at all easy to drum and shake the hips at the same time to produce the sounds which would

The helper of the shamaness, Nesulta, pre-heating the drum to improve its sound. House spirits, carved out of wood, were given rice to eat and vodka to drink during the ritual and the sacrificial meat dish, this time boiled cockerel, was also placed in front of them.



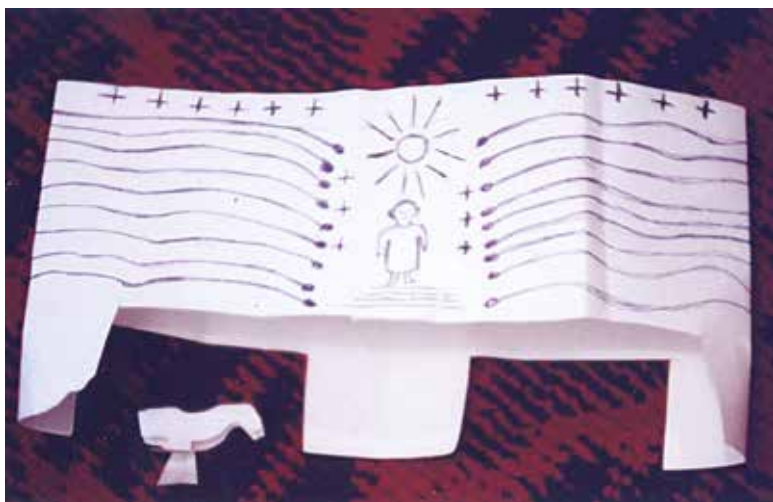


Nesulta and Lindza walked round the room beating their drums and circling each other. A point of interest about the ritual was that after the spirits were invited, everyone including each member of the audience, were called upon to entertain the spirits, so we all had to do a little drumming and dancing.



lure those the spirits who assist the shaman. It was pleasant to note that they also involved the small children of the household by giving them drums so they could also summon the spirits.

One of the notable features of the Nanay society is that they embellish their clothing with very interesting and highly decorative embroidery. This characteristic style is instantly recognisable and sets them apart from the other Siberian peoples. They also stand out by virtue of their extremely rich oral tradition, in the form of ritual folklore texts, genuine myths all of which they have preserved right to the





most recent times. One such myth is that of the creation of the world, which has also been embroidered onto the back of a shaman shirt, featuring a red snake, a tiger and two birds that played a part in creation. The red snake symbolises the chaos that existed

before creation at the time when fire and water still ruled the world. According to the latest findings of the most accurate field data the following categories of shamans exist: 1) healing shamans (*shiurinka*) who are the least effective; 2) the second group consists of the *nemati* shamans who officiate during the festival of the dead and are also able to help the sick; 3) finally, in the highest category we find the *kasatai* shamans who are in possession of the total shamanic knowledge, and are able to guide the souls of the dead to the nether world.



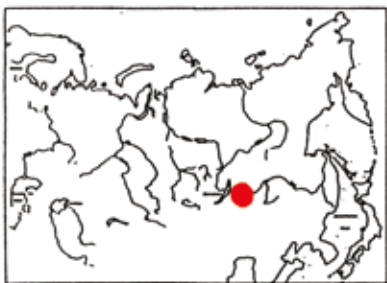
In this village along the Amur River it is the custom after the ceremony to throw away or burn the small objects used by the shaman, including their headdress or the small statuettes carved for the ritual. Even so we managed to spot some of them in one of the houses and ask permission to take them. These are the objects shown in these photographs.

TUVA 1995



Shortly after my arrival in the city of Kizil I was taken to the Döngür, the healing centre of the local shamans where an old shaman, Sariglar was performing some healing. The picture shows clearly how the shaman is internally focused when he is inviting his helping spirits.





1995 was the first time I was able to travel to Tuva. At that time, it was an autonomous region of the then disintegrating Soviet Union. To my greatest surprise this Turkic ethnic group, whose numbers,

barely half a million, had managed to preserve the belief of its ancestors to this day, which is why there were several dozen active shamans. At that time, I became acquainted with researcher Mongush Kenin-Lopsan¹² who turned out to be the central figure in the revival of shamanism in this area. Shortly after my arrival he took me to a place called the Dүngүр Healing Centre, where local shamans (the people of Tuva call them *kam*), including an aged shaman called Shariglar with his large, red painted drum, were carrying out some healing. In the courtyard of the Centre a group of men, their hands together were listening to the old man's song. A few days later I also had the opportunity to witness the ceremonies of other healers of the Dүngүр Center, and to make recordings thanks to the opportunity granted by the Hungarian Television in 1996.

Tuva is now a small republic the size of Switzerland on the edge of the great Russian Federation, bordering on Mongolia. The majority of its half million inhabitants speak the ancient Turkic language of their forebears. They consider themselves the descendants of the great conquering nomads who had founded the empires of Inner Asia. They are proud to have persisted and survived there, in the heart of Asia, and to have preserved their old culture and language. Perhaps the most valuable part of this

legacy is the unique throat-singing technique. It allows the singer to produce two tones at the same time. While we visited the countryside, we also stopped frequently to perform sacrifices at the sacrificial spots or shaman trees along the side of the roads.

Profoundly acquainted with local traditions, Mongush Kenin-Lopsan spoke to me about Tuvan shaman healers. The following paragraphs are in his own words:

'In the Tuvan capital an old shaman, Mokur-ol by name, carries out a purifying ritual in the healing yurt of the shamans with the intention of preventing disease for the members of a family – four children, the parents, and the grandmother. The ceremony exhibits elements of Lamaism and ancient shamanic tradition. The shaman uses small pebbles to divine the future, then feels around for the location of the disease, and with the sound of the drum initiates the healing. Tuvan shamanism is unique, mostly due to the fact that our country had been isolated from the outside world. The shamanism in Siberia was persecuted by the state, and so much of the tradition has been lost. In Tuva, however, we have managed to retain the old forms.

There are shamans here of heavenly origin. They are the first and most powerful because according to the Tuvan belief regarding shamans, we still have tribes living up in the white heaven. That is where shamans live, and our shamans come from them. They are what we call heavenly shamans... That is where two of our tribes are living: the azardar and the hozdar. All the most powerful shamans come from their ranks. They had been guided here by a bear, and that bear settled on this earth and this is how the other tribes appeared. In other words, the bear and the tribes come from the heavens. They have great beards and are hardy strong people. The khayrakan is not simply a bear, he is a deity, not a worldly, but a heavenly deity. This is



A healing, or more accurately, a purging ceremony in the courtyard of Düngür. The young men listened with piety and devoted attention to Sariglar's song, they are noticeably in fear of the shaman.

why when the bear settled on earth, over there where that mountain is, the tallest rocky cliff in our country, this hill is called khayrakan, that is god-hill, not bear-mountain, but god-mountain.

The second type are the ancestral shamans. The ancestral shamans own a genealogical record. On this family tree their clans can be traced far back into the past: the first generation, second generation, third... all the way to the ninth generation. Surely, one day a child will be born who is to become a shaman, and will carry on the shamanic legacy, transferred from father to son. Thus, the ancestral shamans are those who inherit the shamanic knowledge. Even today there are shamans like that living among us.

The third type are the shamans who come from the clan of the devils.

The fourth type are the shamans who come from the clans of the planes and the forests. According to old pagan Tuvan belief, shamans also have a fifth category – the shamans who come from the spirits of the earth and the water. Therefore, Tuvan shamans have five groups. I repeat, we don't have white shamans and black shamans. These are the categories of shamans that we have. So we have heavenly shamans, earthly shamans, devil shamans, shamans coming from the water, and ancestral shamans who had inherited their knowledge.

Some people say the Tuvans are Buddhists, others claim we follow shamanic beliefs. Tuvan people are of shamanic belief. Our most ancient religion is our belief in shamans. But Buddhism is a young religion with us, which began to gain ground around the middle to end of the 17th century. So we decided that we would create a “hearth” that is, a forum for the Tuvan shamans. This was in 1992. On October 21st we established the society of Tuvan shamans. This is what we consider the birthday of the Tuvan Shaman Society which carries the name Dүngүр, which means drum.’



At the beginning of the ceremony everybody is cleansed by fire, because they believe that the smoke of juniper wood has magical powers.

When we visited Tuva in 1995 and 1996 we set out in search of the still existing tradition of healing. Our goal was to record their healing activities. For several long decades it was forbidden to follow local tradition. Those who did had to face persecution, but for the past few years the opportunity has opened once more for shamans and other healers to work. Common people in both town and country still go and see the shamans and plead to be freed from their physical or spiritual troubles.

It was interesting to observe that in many cases people asked shaman healers or female shamans to purge them of their difficulties. In other words they had a kind of preventative healing to be carried out on themselves and their family members. We might say the function of the shamans was to restore their psychological equilibrium. The goal of the divinatory ceremonies was the same, but they also used ancient massage techniques, as well as using magic spells through burning incense, or the power of water and iron.

This is the yurt where Yelena Mongus did her healing. We recorded the song that she sang, which ran as follows:

*Be merciful to me
my otherworldly mountains,
my benevolent mountains,
otherworldly reward,
burn incense
let what we call faith
let there be faith.*

*May bad luck depart,
whatever is faith,
let it be faith,
let it be pure as milk.
Grant us the fruits of our
labour,
we walk free and upright.*

*Be merciful
my mountains,
bring us good fortune,
may evil vanish,
grant us the fruit of our
labour.*

*Be merciful
my mountains
bring us good fortune,
we shall overcome
difficulties.
Bring us happiness;
my remaining
days and months,
my mountains
otherworldly rewards,
burn incense.*



*Yelena Mongus receives local inhabitants
seeking her help in another healing centre
in a yurt of traditional structure.*

*Be merciful
my mountains of spring waters,
my merciful gods,
may trouble not remain.*

*Be merciful
my mountains,
grant us happiness,
may the road I walk on
grow flowers.*

*Be merciful,
let no trouble or peril remain,
let there be happiness,
my benevolent mountains,
grant us the fruit of our labour.*

*be merciful
my mountains,
let there always be happiness,
burn incense,
burn the wood of the juniper,
grant us the fruit of our labour.*

(Translations by Dávid Somfai Kara)

On one occasion we even visited the sacred spring which lies 60 km from the capital Kizil, visited regularly by the local people who seek recovery in these waters. This mainly serves to strengthen their health, but we also found that the springs (*arzhán*) were considered



Mokur-ool, an old Tuvan shaman, receives a visit from an entire family who request him to cleanse them of all evil influences, and to bring them health particularly for the children before they start school. The old shaman's headgear includes some eagle feathers which indicate that his helping spirit bears the form of an eagle.





Kirghiz Hurak was one of the most famous shamans in Kizil, the capital of the Republic of Tuva. Locals mostly visited him with the purpose of divination. Upon our visit he was telling a lady's fortune using 41 pebbles. This type of divination is similar to that used by Chángó women in outer Transylvania who use beans to tell the future.

beneficial for eye disease. The shaman who took us there performed a short sacrificial ceremony to the god of his family. Former visitors had attached ribbons and pieces of cloth to the trees nearby to thank the local spirits for their help. It may be of interest to mention an observation by the author that the litter left behind by visiting families contained not only Evian bottles, but also bags of Hungarian pasta from Gyermely, to the greater glory of the all-encompassing globalisation.

In the capital city there exists a small local museum featuring a fine exhibition of shamanic objects, including old shaman costumes, headgear with bird feathers, shamanic drums, staffs (*tayak*), and other ritual objects. This is the museum that was once visited by Vilmos Diószegi who took photographs of the collection, at that time amounting merely to a few pieces.



We recorded a rite by a third Tuvan shaman trying to cleanse a family. During the ceremony he had to offer a full bottle of vodka to the local spirits who were assisting him in his healing.



This shaman whistled instead of singing to summon the spirits' help in his cleansing ceremony.

Two decades went by, until a few years ago I once more visited the Tuvan capital. Much had changed in that time. Among other things they were just demolishing the old healing centre (true, it was a small house built of old timber), but a new, modern museum had also been built out of concrete, where special high security chambers hold the golden treasures which had recently been discovered in the *kurgan* called 'Arzhan-2' and which have since brought international recognition to this part of the world.







The handle of the shaman's drum features a symbolic bow. This clearly shows the power of tradition, since in the past the bow may have been a shaman's musical instrument and weapon at the same time.

← When we visited Tuva in 1996, a local shaman named Dugarsürün took us to a healing spring (arzhán) where the surrounding trees are richly decorated with the sacrificial ribbons left behind by former visitors expressing their gratitude for a successful recovery. The shaman's headdress was embellished with eagle feathers.



The local museum, fully reconstructed a few years ago, displays a number of remarkable objects, including a headdress with a young deer's head, several drums and a number of shaman staffs (asha tayak) complete with ribbons sewn on, similarly to those on the shamanic costumes, representing the snake-shaped (chilan) helping spirits of shamans.



The museum collection includes several complete shaman outfits whose ornamentation betrays the kind of helping spirit of the shaman who wore it. This shamaness probably also had a bird-shaped helper, presumably an eagle or an owl.

THE NGANASAN 1994



In 1994 I was invited to a folklore festival in France where, organisers claimed, genuine shamans were to appear. When I saw the phrase ‘genuine shamans’ in the invitation letter, my first thought was that this was impossible, since there were very few true shamans left by the end of the 20th century. This was partly because the old ones had long since died, and partly because true shamans tend not to travel to festivals, particularly

not to the South of France. I was all the more convinced that I was right because I had seen the Estonian writer and director, Lennart Meri’s documentary about the last true Siberian grand shaman. You can imagine my surprise when I found that the shamans participating at the festival were the descendants of the last genuine



shaman. In retrospect I am very happy that I was able to be there and make sound and video recordings of their performance.

The Nganasan live on the Taymir peninsula in the far north, on the Arctic coastline. They number barely 1200 (and this figure comes from the late 20th century), and it is reported that their numbers have not really increased, because conditions in this area were so harsh as to be barely tolerable. Originally these were reindeer-herding communities living in extended family networks, and naturally their leader was the shaman. He was in possession of the skill to heal, to divine the future, but he was also the best hunter and the best reindeer-herder. Since they had retained their archaic way



This ensemble, which had arrived from the Taymir peninsula is performing on the stage of a folklore festival in the South of France, greatly impressing the audience with their shamanic songs and drumming.



The weather was really hot when they appeared on stage, but they may not have sensed this in their winter outfit.

of life, they were the subject of several documentaries, foremost among them made by Lennart Meri back in the mid 1970's about the shaman Demnime Kosterkin (1913-1980). This film reveals what a classical shamanic séance must have been like, where a chain worn on the back of the shaman made sure that climbing the chain after the séance he could return to this world from the world of the spirits. It was also important that he should always have a helper who translated the shaman's song to the vernacular language so that the others could also understand his conversations with the spirits.

One of my films, 'Shamans of Past and Present', includes a brief summary of the Estonian director's documentary. I screened this film at this festival specially for the relatives of the great shaman. It was a moving moment for them to see their long-dead grandfather,

as the footage had never before been shown to the members of this small community.

At the festival they appeared in their finely embroidered costume and since the temperature in the South of France was around 30 degrees Centigrade above zero at the time, it was fairly strange for them to act in clothes that were designed for 30 degrees below zero. Nevertheless they sang the songs they had learnt from their forebears and so, all in all, no matter how strange this may sound, I had to conclude that their singing was authentic even in this totally alien cultural setting. It also became clear to me that their participation at this festival did indeed contribute to the survival and transmission of folklore traditions.



The daughter of the Siberian grand shaman is holding a book by the present author and looking at a photograph of her father.

THE KORYAK 1994



At a folk festival in the South of France the Koryak ethnic group were represented by only two shaman women who presented themselves as safeguards of shamanic tradition, and quickly attained tremendous popularity with their audience. The Koryak live in the northern part of Kamchatka and by now their population





A Koryak duo also took part at the folklore festival in the South of France. They performed shamanic songs they had learnt from their parents and grandparents.

has shrunk to a mere 9,000 - 10,000. Ethnographic research began to notice this people, living among excessively harsh conditions, as early as the late 18th century. In 1774 S. P. Krasheinnikov provided an excellent ethnographic description of the Koryak. Thus it is hardly surprising that later, in 1900 they were visited by Waldemar Jochelson, who in fact went on to live with them for two years, and during this time made a considerable number of good quality photographs. These photos were taken on glass negatives and thus have preserved the moments of contemporary life in excellent quality. One characteristic Koryak custom was that each family owned at least one drum, and everyone was allowed to use it, even small children, who thus easily acquired the art of shamanhood. It was a pleasure to meet them on the occasion of a festival.



My acquaintance with Koryak and Itelmen folklore (see the following pages) is an excellent example to show that fieldwork is not the only possible scene for collecting data. Indeed, festivals, such a popular feature of our time, provide equally good opportunities. Reaching Kamchatka would be quite a challenge even today, but this way it is the world that comes more than half way to a European man.

‘Festival shamans’ represent a separate group or even a cast. They are the



Organisers and participants of contemporary folklore festivals put special emphasis on making sure that costumes were precise replicas of the original. Thus this Koryak pair appeared in clothes made from local materials, the leather had been finely cured and the bead fringes were also in line with the old tradition.

ones who have no inhibitions about keeping up with the spirit of the times. Nevertheless when they step onto the stage, what they reiterate is nothing other, indeed *can* be nothing other, than the melodies they had learnt from the old people. This way we did in fact hear what can be classified an authentic performance.

Perhaps, it is a special feature of ‘folk’ artists appearing at festivals that they perform authentic material and their presentations help keep alive their inherited tradition.



Two singers, the older being Maria Pritchina, the younger one Tatyana Golikova, leaning over their drums, completely enchanted their French audience. In the scene here captured they are performing children's counting rhymes.

THE ITELLEN 1994



The Itelmen are a small minority, numbering two thousand, living in Kamchatka. Today they are famous for their extremely good folk ensemble. I had the chance to meet its members in 1994 in the South of France at a folklore festival concentrating on folk music, and was also able to take a few photographs. The festival audience found their attractive and dynamic performance. Naturally, their presentation rested on the shamanic tradition still alive in their homeland. With the help of a choreographer from Moscow, its power came from using the old songs

This ensemble of young people from Kamchatka presented the culture of the Itelmen to the audience of a festival held in Gannat, France.

It was particularly interesting to observe how attractive the young women looked in their traditional costumes compared to the nondescript jeans and T-shirts they wore after the performance.





accompanied by drums and the traditional, dance-like movements required for drumming. At first sight the entire affair seemed like a pseudo-shaman performance, but we must point out that the ecstatic dances demonstrated fully evoked the shamanic rituals carried out under the effect of the hallucinogenic mushrooms used by the genuine shamans.

The gestures of the dancers clearly reveal how much of ballet has been added to the traditional dances by their Moscow choreographer, transforming the reconstructed dances performed in a confined space into wild movement as much as possible.



THE BURYAT 1996

Fieldwork among the Buryat had been started by the famous Hungarian ethnographer, Vilmos Diószegi. I, as one of his followers, first managed to make a short collecting trip in 1986. Then in 1996 I again had a chance to record a few shamanic ceremonies. On this occasion it was to be a lamb sacrifice, as part of a characteristic sacrificial ceremony. The event took place on the shore of Lake Baikal where hundreds of people gathered, because word had spread fast that one of those sacrificial ceremonies that had so long been banned was now going to take place.¹³ The lambs were offered to the local spirits, but later one of the shamans told



The shores of Lake Baikal; cameraman Lajos Nádorfı records the séance where shamans arriving from Mongolia participated alongside their local counterparts.



me that in the past they had also sacrificed horses. 'Today that would be too costly, he said, so the leading shamans have come to an agreement with the deities to content themselves with lambs.'

This occasion also gave me a chance to become acquainted with the local shaman researchers T. M. Mihaylov and D. Dugarov, as well as N. A. Stepanova, the lady who was president of the association of Buryat shamans at the time. She shared the exceedingly interesting story of her origin. We learnt that she was a descendant of an old dynasty of shamans and her position had been legitimised by the exact same shamanic spirits inherited from





*A young Buryat researcher from a shamanic lineage called Valentin Hagdayev shows us his thumb during our interview to demonstrate that he is close to having two thumbs. A parallel to this has been recorded among Hungarian shepherds by ethnophotographer László Kunkovács. It is known that stories about the birth of *táltos* (Hungarian for shaman) usually mention having an extra finger as an important distinguishing trait.*

her ancestors. Another interesting development in the history of shamanism is that on several occasions she was invited to distant Europe, e.g. to northern Italy and to Switzerland, to hold shamanic ceremonies, more precisely shaman shows, often in front of several hundred people.

While filming the most interesting moment was when in the course of an interview with a young shaman, I asked how he knew that he came from a shamanic dynasty. Instead of answering me he simply held out his right hand to show me that he had a double thumb. With the help of cameraman Lajos Nádorfi and producer Éva Aranyosi, I recorded the ceremonies held on the bank of Lake Baikal. One distinctive feature of these ceremonies was a group of shamans from Mongolia who come specially to visit the land of their ancestors, land which they had been forced to flee

from several generations back. Now they were presenting what amounted to a thanksgiving ceremony to the spirit of the Baikal. At the same time, this was also the occasion for one of the older Mongolian shamans to be initiated to a higher level by the most famous Mongolian grand shaman.



Grand shaman of the Mongolians Tserin Zarin, who was still alive in 1996, is initiating another shaman on the bank of Lake Baikal, into a higher category on the rungs of shamanic accomplishments. In the background we see Buryat shamans standing and observing every little detail of the ceremony. The researchers also watch and record avidly.



← Late in the afternoon, after the inauguration ceremony, the shamans express their gratitude to the local spirits for assisting them and rewarding their labours with good weather.

In the local museum of Ulan Ude, after some help from a friend and a good deal of cajoling we managed to take some shots of a few important shamanic paraphernalia, including a shamanic masque carved of wood. We were told that the shamans no longer use such masques.

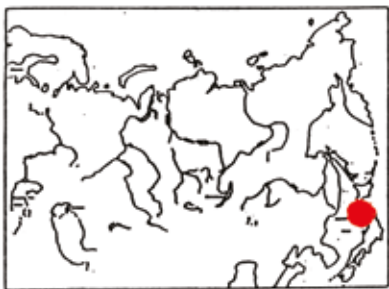


← The picture below shows one of the assistant shamans wearing the characteristic Mongolian shamans' headgear with its thick fringe covering the eyes.

JAPAN
1997



The reason we went to Japan in January 1997 was to present an exhibition of a set of Ainu objects that had been selected by a Japanese researcher, Tanimoto Kazuyuki from the collection of Benedek Baráthosi Balogh. On this occasion we also had the chance to pay a brief visit to the small town of Hirosaki in Aomori



County, where we visited the specialists of two local religions. Japanese researchers claim that both of these specialists plays a role in the life of their communities which is similar to that

of Siberian shamans. One of them is the *gomiso* (listening to my Japanese colleague's pronunciation I heard *komiso*, but in print he used the letter g). I quote the relevant entry from my field journal.

In Japan, a ritual specialist called gomiso fills the function of healer. The lady in the picture offered some healing to the author, because he had a backache during his visit. She tapped his back with the rattle seen above.





The other person acting in the role of shaman whom we visited in 1997 was an itako, a blind lady who offered divination concerning the deceased sibling of our escort. In the background we see her huge drum.

‘The gomiso/komiso is usually consulted by local people in the case of family problems. This was a woman of 50-55, very kind with warm brown eyes, and she was not at all surprised by my questions, a stranger from a distant land. She told us that even her father had been a kamisama (a religious specialist), and because she had been a frail little girl, and had lost her mother when she was 21, she did not have much of a choice. At the age of 33 she became ill, which is again a sign of being chosen. All women of this vocation dedicate themselves to the oni (the spirit), whose huge, frightening head, painted black, stands there on the left hand side of the ‘altar’.

As a religious specialist she belongs to the fourth, the bottom stratum of Japanese society. These are people who occupy themselves with the dead. Komisos do not have an organisation, but she does go out to the nearby sacred hill every summer where the spirit of the ancestors had descended and appeared from time to time. There, on the hill, every komiso has a small reception sanctuary where they receive a few dozen regular clients. Even in the winter, which is when we visited, 4 or 5 people came every day. Naturally, they need to pay for the ogam, which is perhaps best translated as 'prayer service', at least this is how Sasamori put it. (We paid 3000 yen, but there is no fixed price!) As there was no one else willing, I volunteered to be the 'sufferer'. I did indeed have a backache and had not slept well. The komiso said that because I travelled a lot, all sorts of evil spirits had descended on me (accreting on top of one another), and that was why I could not sleep. (This is a logical explanation.) Contrary to the itako, who is actually a necromancer, this religious specialist is more involved in purifying, that is, they cleanse their clients of the evil spirits. It is worth noting how important this purifying function is among Siberian shamans and how little attention has been paid to the role they thus play in restoring balance! The introductory song and the drumming lasted for about six minutes, then she placed a soft linen cloth on top of my head, then she donned a rattle consisting of brass rings, which had a long handle, and she kept pounding my back, fairly hard, while murmuring some sort of a spell or prayer. The entire ceremony did not last longer than quarter of an hour. At the end of it she told me that during the drumming and singing she is summoning the deity (kami), so that it can descend in her heart and strengthen her so she can do healing. I certainly felt better afterwards.'

The other type of Japanese shamaness is called *itako*. We got to see her on the afternoon of 23rd January, accompanied by ethnomusicologist, Sasamori Sakurai. We went into a narrow alleyway to find this blind old lady. Indeed, every *itako* is blind, this being one of the prerequisites of being initiated into this mastery. As she later told us, she was eight years old when she lost her eyesight and she was fifteen when she began to learn the ceremonies. This learning essentially consisted in acquiring a particular style of singing, the relevant melody and, to some extent, the ability to improvise. As my friend Sasamori told me, they learnt to sing 'sutras'. (The term *sutra* is appropriate here, as most of these texts are of Buddhist, while others are of Shintoist origin.) In line with our earlier agreement, while on the morning of that day I had been the volunteer, this time it was professor Tanimoto who agreed to have the *itako* summon the spirit of his dead younger brother.

The *itako* started by clapping twice, then kneeled in front of her altar which held two round mirrors, as is often the case, one in the middle and one on the left. There were long, broad, colourful strips of canvas hanging from the ceiling. The two-sided, barrel-shaped drum stood on a stand to the left of the *itako*.

It was a part of the ceremony that the *itako* took up a Buddhist 'rosary' made of 300 mistletoe seeds, and began to roll them between her palms. The entire scene produced a kind of strange, mysterious sound, and there was a magical atmosphere in the dimly lit room. After all, the *itako* was summoning the spirit of a dead person, looking for it in the underworld. In other words she, a woman who knows only darkness, was now roaming through the kingdom of darkness. She began to sing and rolled the beads around for about four minutes. The entire song lasted 26 minutes and sharing the message with Tanimoto that his brother was doing

well lasted two minutes. The reason why the singing was relatively short was because if he had been in hell, the search would have lasted longer than in paradise (there are more souls in hell). These are, of course, European concepts, but this is how they were translated into English. This was again a short visit, but it gave me some idea about how similar this ritual was to its Korean counterpart.

THE NENETS
1998





The first time I travelled to the far north of Siberia was in 1998 when I took part at a weeklong conference on ethnographic filming in the city of Salehard. This was obviously no real fieldwork, but during my stay I managed to become acquainted with a young folk singer who told me that the songs she had sung that evening were songs she had learnt from her mother, who was a shaman.¹⁴ She herself had already graduated from teachers' training college, but she decided to return home to the tundra, because instead of staying in the city she wanted to teach the children of her own nation. A point of interest about the Nenets is that at the beginning of the last century they numbered just over ten thousand, whereas by the beginning of the current millennium their number increased to some thirty thousand. This means that in



These cast lead ornaments of mythical animal figures on shamanic costumes are the shaman's helpers.

← *Elvira Tesida is a young Nenets shamaness whom the author met in the town of Salehard when she performed the songs she had learn when still young.*



Elvira Tesida singing.

spite of the extremely harsh winters, with temperatures dropping to minus 30°C, the Nenets, who live purely by reindeer-herding, have doubled in number. We can be sure that they faithfully guard their language and their songs. This is

probably due partly to the fact that they live in isolation up in the far North, on the Kanin peninsula to the North-East of Archangelsk. The Hungarian ethnographer Benedek Baráthosi Balogh (1870-1945) had also visited this place in 1911 and wrote as follows about the shamans of this ethnic group of the Samoyed language family.

It would be hard to ascertain any kind of uniform procedure as to how an ordinary Samoyed becomes a shaman. Each tries to prove in some way that he or she has a calling for this profession. Normally they start by making themselves various types of idols they talk to and which they command. They believe that the spirits that these idols represent would now become their obedient subjects. These figures are usually mammals, or sometimes they have the form of snakes. This is why the potential shamans, wishing to learn to understand the language of these idols and the animals they represent, usually kill one of these animal in question, rip out its heart and eat it. These sacrificial animals are usually thrown into a fire of juniper wood. The would-be shaman then jumps over this fire several times, while chewing on juniper berries and buds. He or she will breathe in doses of the scent and smoke, and believe that by doing so can come into



Painted and embellished edge of a shaman's cloak.



Nenets shamanic drum with its characteristic X-shaped handle at an exhibition in Helsinki, in 2003

*possession of the easy flight and other powers of fire. Besides the juniper berries, the potential shamans often eat agaric mushrooms and other stimulants which all serve to render them more susceptible to communication with the spirits. Many young Samoyeds wear their hair cut in the Russian style, but those given to the shamanic art are, by contrast, long haired.*²¹⁵

In the year 2000, students of the Estonian College of Arts had a chance to visit the Nenets Autonomous Territory, and there they collected all types of interesting objects and photographs related to the local culture. Each year a class of students would visit one or other of the small Finno-Ugrian language speaking nations to collect and make drawings of the most interesting objects. This is how they came to create drawings of a number of shamanic objects which they then went on to publish in the form of a fine calendar. A copy of this publication was given to each participant of the

I also photographed the pattern traced on another shamanic drum when I visited the exhibition of an expedition by college students in Tartu. The young people also took pictures of the idols representing the local spirits, as well as made drawings of a special shamanic drum, more precisely its inside and its human-shaped handle.



[illegible]

THE MONGOLIANS 1999

Mongolian shamanism is one of the most famous in the world. *The Secret History of the Mongols* reveals that shamans already played an important role in the ruler's direct environment in the 13th century under Genghis Khan and his descendants. They would be entrusted to divine the future before the Khan's various grand military expeditions. Hungarian scholars had always shown great



Vilmos Diószegi together with a famous researcher of shamanism called Rinchen, during a trip to the countryside to meet shamans. The Hungarian researcher stated that this was not successful, as indeed, in 1960 the political climate rendered such encounters impossible.



interest in Mongolian shamanism. In 1960 Vilmos Diószegi visited the fellow-socialist state of the People's Republic of Mongolia where he received a most hearty welcome. I myself first

managed to visit Ulaanbaatar in the last year of the 20th century on the occasion of the International Society for Shamanistic Research holding its conference in that city. This particular conference was of outstanding importance because a delegation of Mongolian shamans was also present at our discussions, and often contributed their share to the debate. This was made possible by the presence of an American lady who had lived there for many years and who provided an almost simultaneous translation of the talks, the comments, and discussions.

As we later found out, she herself also practiced as a neo-shaman, but this was far from conspicuous among over fifty Mongolian shamans.

In fact the first time I had met a group of authentic

In 1999, however, the International Society for Shamanistic Research (ISSR) did hold a conference in Ulaanbaatar with the participation of local shamans.





On the banks of Lake Baikal the Mongolian grand shaman was giving an initiation ceremony for a young colleague to advance him to a higher level along the shamanic hierarchy. These pictures represent moments of that event. The assistance of local shamans was requested for the initiation.





On the last day of the ISSR conference held in the Mongolian capital, participants made an excursion to the nearby sacred hill. Shamans active in the capital and its vicinity also attended in their full attire to offer a drink sacrifice to the spirit of the mountain.



Mongolian shamans was back in 1996 on the shore of Lake Baikal. They were visiting their closest relatives, the Buryat people, and performed a number of ceremonies, including the initiation of an aging shaman onto a new level within the hierarchy of shamans. We managed to take photographs of this ceremony. Coming back now to the conference in Ulaanbaatar, true to the usual custom, on the last day the hosts had organised an excursion to the nearby sacred hill. Besides the participants at least a dozen local shamans also turned up and offered a libation to the spirit of the hill. This is where I met these local shamans who seemed to treat the shamanic



The drum handle of one of the well-known shamans displays an interesting mask, so we took a closeup of it. We cannot say that drum handles do not tend to include human representations, but such a distorted face is rarely seen. The picture on the right shows that this shaman carries a large brass mirror on his chest which is also observable among Buryat shamans.

traditions fairly liberally, and embellished their drums with rather strange graphic elements which in no way seemed to continue the old tradition. But, being an outsider, I could not really be sure; after all, it is they, not myself, who are the depositories of traditional Mongolian shamanic culture.

The conference hosts dedicated one more day to the excursion and so we stayed in a newly built yurt camp where a young shaman presented his performance in the evening, shortly after our arrival.



Young Mongolian shaman Chinbat Chuuluum singing in trance.



After performing the songs to summon the spirits, a feast is served for the participants.



He did not use a drum, but merely improvised a song. The main point of interest in his performance was that from time to time he broke out in the kind of ritual laughter which rendered his performance indubitably authentic to observing ethnographer.

I was to meet this shaman (the Mongolians call them *böö*) once more, in 2008, almost a decade later, at a South Korean folklore festival where he presented himself as a professional shaman performer. By this time he had a drum and his séance was accompanied by a group of three dancers. The Korean audience received them with utmost enthusiasm, which is no surprise, as their show was truly spectacular, and this is my own personal opinion, had



absolutely nothing to do with traditional Mongolian shamanism. This theatrical manner of presentation must have been connected to the fact that shamans are frequently invited to participate at festivals and need to provide tourist attractions, too.

In 2008 I met this same Mongolian shaman for the second time, this time on the isle of Chindo where he appeared at an international folklore festival with his group and gave a presentation to the Korean audiences about Mongolian shamanhood. The shaman's costume and headdress still qualify as authentic, but sadly the members of the accompanying group produced a totally theatrical stage presentation which had precious little to do with their traditions.



THE EVENKI 2000



Even as late as the 20th century, shamanism was thriving among the Evenki population in many places in Siberia. The Evenki live over a vast territory and speak a Manchu-Tungus language which belongs to the Altaic language group. According to the data of the 2002 census they numbered some 35,000 in the territory of the Russian Federation, Yakutia, and other territories, spreading as far as the Amur River. In China there are another 25,000 Evenki living in



Evenki shamanic cloak with iron bird helpers on its back.

the north-eastern province around, and to the north of Hailar. The population consists of several groups which are distinguished according to their main occupation: there are groups of reindeer-herders and groups of horse breeders.

I would like to point out an important piece of data about an Evenki shaman costume. As many Hungarians know, artist Mihály Zichy was court painter to the Russian Tsar for several decades. When he returned to Hungary, he brought with him a few interesting pieces of his collection. These included a shaman costume which is believed to be of Evenki origin. Apart from the fact that it is usually considered a child's outfit due to its size, the crown attached to the cap and

the human figures cast from lead dangling from the costume, do indeed suggest a shamanic origin. There is no way of knowing how it had come into the Hungarian painter's possession. But in 2003 I did take photographs of a shaman outfit of a similar cut and ornamentation at an exhibition compiled from the collection of the Russian Museum of Saint Petersburg. (Figs. 211–214)



In Rome, in 2003 a large exhibition on shamanism was held displaying objects from the collection of the Russian Museum of St. Petersburg.

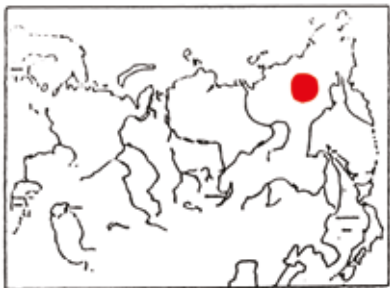


This Evenki shamanic (?) costume is found in the collection of the Zichy Memorial Museum in Zala, Hungary. The crown is authentic, but the costume is child-size.



THE EVEN
2000





The Even are an ethnic group which range over a vast territory on the north-east of Yakutia and the area around Magadan, and number some 17,000 altogether. They belong to the Tungus branch of the

Altaic language family. In their language the word for shaman is indeed shaman (*śaman*), a term which can equally refer to a man or a woman. In the older literature the Even were referred to as the Lamut. Luckily, they were visited by a number of Russian researchers as early as the beginning of the 20th century and thus a great many valuable data have been preserved about them. For instance we know that shamans used to go around on a white reindeer and whenever a shaman died, they would sacrifice an animal of that colour and leave its hide on the spot. They used to place carved bird figures on top of the poles around the grave.

In the past, the shaman's leather cloak used to consist of two colours, white and red, something no longer seen on today's shamanic costumes. The right side would be cut for a male figure, while the darker left side was cut according to a female pattern. This symbolised that the shaman could transgress the boundary of the two worlds – the human and the spirit world.

← *An Even shaman kneeling and drumming at the opening ceremony of an international conference on shamanic songs. In the background is Galina Varlamova, drumming.*



True to general Siberian custom, the Even shamans warm the skin of the drum over the fire to make sure it produces a fine and strong sound.

Late in August 2000, I once again got a chance to visit Yakutsk where, precisely eight years after the first landmark conference, a new convention was held, focussing on the folk music of Siberian peoples. I believe I can safely declare that all music researchers involved in the study of Siberian minorities were present at this scholarly gathering. This means that the eighty participants reviewed the musical folklore of practically all of the Siberian peoples and ethnic groups. The conference was organised by Yuriy Sheikin, and resulted in the publication of a very useful little volume with a rich bibliography. It is worthwhile mentioning that the conference was opened by the Minister of Culture, A. S. Borisov, and went on to feature extremely interesting talks. Particularly

fascinating were the papers of participants who themselves represented one or other of these small local minorities. Thus, for instance, Galina Varlamova, who represented the Evenki, is herself a shamanic poet and descendant of shamanic ancestors, a poet, and as such is working on salvaging their traditions, particularly the rich Evenki oral poetry. In her lecture she described how her ancestors and she herself kept in contact with their spirit helpers. Nadezhda Duvan, the representative of the Ulcha ethnic minority, explained that shamans functioned in several different roles, that is, they used to divine the future, offer healing, or secure good luck for long journeys. Valery Vasilev analysed the shaman's most important tool, the drum, pointing out that the twelve knobs on the edge of the drum may be seen, according to ancient belief, as a lunar calendar. One particularly interesting talk explained that there were certain Yakut/Sakha shamans who sang in a different language as well as in their own mother tongue (Even) because that was the language of their helping spirit. In other words, we can speak of an active bilingual performance within one single shamanic ritual.

Often the most interesting part of such international conferences is the excursion where one can have unrestrained conversations with participants, and often learn exciting details which had not been addressed in the conference talks. Thus we were driven to the open air museum presenting Evenki culture and had a chance to meet local shamans, a few of whom had actually participated at the conference. Both the Evenki¹⁶, a people currently numbering some 30-40,000 and the Even¹⁷ (with a population number around 17-20,000) joined enthusiastically in the dance so characteristic of Yakut culture (*huohay*). The tunes they chanted made a familiar impression on me, probably because

it was pentatonic¹⁸. Before we entered the territory we passed under a large tree-branch in the shape of an upturned Y, where we participated in a ceremonial incense walk-through to make sure that we carry no evil or harmful spirit. A number of shamans held a brief presentation, warming the skin of their drum by the fire to make sure it produced a finer sound, then showed us their characteristic style of drumming. We could observe how the drum and the rhythm of the drumming differed among the Even and the Evenki. We also had the opportunity to chat with the shamans of the different nationalities and to collect some good data.

Although merely performing, this shaman entirely devoted himself to his drumming and singing. His body was shaking and writhing to the rhythm just like when he is performing a true healing rite. →



THE HORCHIN MONGOLIANS 2001

In the late August of 2001 I arrived in China's Inner Mongolian autonomous region in the company of an excellent Italian colleague with the intention of visiting a Mongol shaman.

The elderly shaman called Serenchin, a member of the Horchin clan, was 76 at the time (born in 1925). He had descended from seven generations of shamans (*böö*) and gone through ten initiations. He was related to Bai Tsuying, a Mongol writer who wrote a book about the aged shaman. She was collected the songs of Serenchin *böö* while still in his prime back in the 1980's. The volume contained some 30 songs for summoning the spirits, and he gave me a copy of this book as a present. He had also taken a series of photographs in



Serenchin, a Horchin shaman, sings along with his helper, calling on their helping spirits



1984 showing the unique dance of the shaman in a state of almost complete trance.

His helper was a woman aged 40 called Tanhwar (I heard it pronounced as Tenhooer) who lives in the same village and is a disciple of the old man. They had brought their costume and gear along in a battered old suitcase. After a short discussion the event was held in one of the halls of the museum, among rather unfavourable circumstances. The first step was to get hold of a small table to serve as an altar on which they spread out their requisites, including their costume, the crown, and the drums. The two crowns (*tolga*) were particularly fine-looking objects,



The shaman's crown was ornamented with three birds. According to their explanation, these also helped the shaman's soul fly to the other world



Tenhuer, pupil and helper of the Horchin shaman, spun around several times whilst drumming.

constructed of brass plates and bearing the faint etchings of Buddhist images on the plates over the head-band.

The crown had long blue, green, and red silk ribbons (*purgutin sule*) hanging from it, while the thin grey filaments hanging in front of the eyes (*halvache*) completely covered the old shaman's face. On the top of the crown there were three birds, each attached to the top of a leafy tree, which represented the world tree (*mate*). The belt was a strip of leather, about three fingers in width, with seven round brass mirrors (*tölö*) hanging from it on thin strips of leather. These made a mighty noise when the shamans spun around. (Both participants wore ordinary shirts, they had arrived in which shows how closely the sacred and the profane are intertwined in local shamanhood.)



On the altar each placed a whip and a sword, three fingers in width with a small brass disc attached to it above the hilt. One of the swords (more of a dagger, really, as the blade was only about 40 cm long) had brass dots inlayed into the iron around the middle of the blade. The arrangement of the dots reflected the Big Dipper constellation. It is worth noting that in the museum we also looked at the collection of about a dozen shamanic objects. These again included three swords and three drums. It is interesting that these

Inner Mongolian drums are leather drums stretched over a thin wrought iron frame, and are not the huge, wood-rimmed drums one sees in Mongolia. I had seen a similar drum in the hands of the neighbouring Manchu Handzhun shaman when I visited there in 2000, and the collection of the Copenhagen Museum also includes drums of this kind (e.g. a Chakar shaman is holding one in an old photograph).

The shamans began to dress at a quarter past four, and once they were in their full attire (the crown being the last item they donned), they placed the *otong* on the table. The ongots are two sets of nine little mannequins each wrapped in a red felt pouch. The ongot represents the shaman's spirit helpers. In the middle



The aged shaman and his female helper greet the spirits of the four points of the compass, requesting help with their ritual. In the background we see an improvised altar and a short sword with the image of the star constellation of the Big Dipper chased into it.

of the table stood a small bowl of rice into which they stuck the incense sticks, and then they set fire to the alcohol in small drinking glasses. This was rather difficult using modern, gas-fuelled cigarette lighters. Eventually, the old shaman 'purified' the altar with incense, three times sprinkled some of the drink to the spirits from one of the tiny glasses, then poured the rest of the liquid on the ground around him with a broad gesture. Next, they turned to face the altar/table which held two whips along with the swords (in the meantime they collected the *ongots* and put them away), and began to drum. From time to time they leaned forward a little and raised the drum close to their heads. Then, after two minutes of drumming they drummed to the right, then after a half turn in the other direction, and so on, until they greeted all four points of the compass with their drumming.



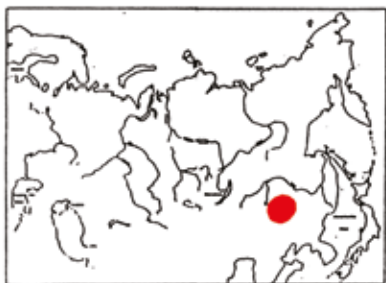
A pair of shamans drumming.

THE ÖÖLÖT 2003



This is a small Mongol ethnic group, living in the village of Jimin next to the Lake Hulumbuir in China. It was a terribly harsh winter when my colleague and I were driven to this village from the city of Hailar. We landed straight in the midst of an interesting situation, as the old shamaness we were visiting was receiving her students and helpers for a practice session. It was fascinating to observe the event. At first everyone visiting Handima, the old shamaness, took out a pack of cigarettes, took out one or two pieces, knelt down in front of her and offered up the cigarettes with obvious veneration. Next, the kneeling person would kowtow

An Öölöt shamaness and her helper Chuner drum themselves into a trance. Many traits of classical Siberian shamanism survive in these North-East Chinese territories including the state of trance.



while Handima said some sort of blessing over them, place her hand on their head for a moment, and then gave back the cigarettes. The shamaness (the locals called her *udögön*) was most welcoming to us and

willingly explained to us the details of her equipment. On the wall we could see her flag made of blue, red, green, yellow, and white silk, and next to the drum two horseheaded staffs painted red were also richly decorated with blue sacrificial silk scarves (*hadag*).

Soon someone called Chuner arrived who, as it turned out, was the shamaness's main aide and student, and who kept hanging on to her teacher's belt throughout the ritual to prevent her from falling. In the meantime a further student called Darima also arrived, the most recent of the disciplines, who instantly knelt down in front of the shamaness, and offered her and to Chuner cigarettes.

Then, as if the entire company had been waiting for Darima, they all rose suddenly and left the room where we were. I was right in the middle of replacing the film in my camera when the shamaness took her drum and donned her *toli* (shamanic mirror) with their blue silk ribbons.

They all went out to a small building which stood in the courtyard which had but a





single room 3m square. This room contained an altar dedicated to the ancestors and was laden with a great quantity of refreshments.

My second reel of film had just come to an end when the young woman, the potential shamaness, began to draw her breath more quickly, spun around, collapsed and threw her head back. (The film tends to end exactly at this point, as has happened to me so many times during such rituals.) Then Handima also fell into a trance and began to jump about and spin around. It also became clear that the people attending were not her relatives. Three times a month the old shamaness receives people coming for her 'blessing'. Their ranks included the young student shamaness and Chuner, who was also referred to as a shaman, and who held on to the young woman's belt during the ceremony, sitting behind her all the time while she sang.



The shamaness had a special ritual chamber in the yard and this was where the altar stood. There were drums hanging on the wall and this was also where the offerings piled up for the spirits. This special little building also served as the venue where pupils were taught before their initiation, as shown in the following pictures.





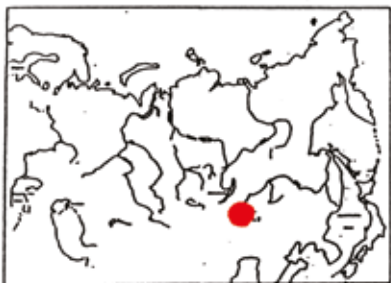
This picture shows one of the young pupils of the shamaness Handima shaking the horseheaded, carved shaman staff, in order to come out of the altered state of consciousness. It means the student is going to become a good shaman.

THE KIRGHIZ 2004



Ethnic Kirghiz living in China number some 160,000 according to the latest census figures, and are direct relations to their fellow-Kirghiz living on the far side of the mountains in the territory of the former Soviet Union. It was in the company of Dávid Somfai Kara that in the year 2004 I managed to visit the small Kirghiz village (Tegirmeti, Xinjiang, China) where, according to local scholars, we were expected by a Kirghiz

A traditional Kirghiz yurt served as the scene of a healing ritual performed by shaman Abdulkadir who did not have a drum and only a whip indicated his shaman identity.



baksi (shaman healer). It was early in the morning when we started from a small town called Artus, first driving on excellent multi-lane highways, then on a more modest road, next on a dirt road, then

occasionally we continued in a river-bed in order to approach this small village. As it turned out, this Kirghiz village had an entirely homogeneous population, the only Chinese person being the local policeman. I was full of anticipation about our fieldwork here, and came with video equipment so as to record the entire ritual. The aim of the ceremony was essentially to cure two young alcoholics and a young woman who suffered from insomnia. The local people



A shamaness collapsed in a trance right next to the author.



had erected a separate yurt especially for this purpose. The post which was driven into the ground in the centre of the yurt had two ropes affixed to it which in turn had a white cloth tied to them. This is what the shaman held on to as he walked round and round and kept striking the back of the sick individuals with his small whip. Surprising as it may sound, there were around thirty of us sitting in the yurt and even the locals looked on the ritual with interest which began with participants murmuring a prayer, often mentioning the name of Allah. Next, the shaman summoned the helping spirit of the he-camel and the blue ram. During our subsequent interview he was to tell me in detail how he had encountered the latter before his initiation. What we found surprising was that at one point during the ritual he jumped up onto the shoulders of his helpers and there worked his way up to the opening of the yurt called *tündük* (the smoke-hole) where seemed to be talking to the spirits of the other world, asking for their help with the healing. Thus he symbolically climbed the world tree.

← *Before the Kirghiz shaman (baksi) started his ritual, candles were lit and the locals prayed to Allah, using their characteristic gesture, which was then followed by an entirely pagan shamanic ritual.*



Clearly in a state of full ecstasy, at one point the shaman jumped upon the shoulder of one of those present and leaned out of the smoke-hole at the top of the yurt (tündük).



THE DAUR 2007



The Daur are an ethnic group who speak an archaic Mongolian dialect and live a few kilometres from Hailar Inner Mongolia. They number some 132,000 according to the most recent census. It is interesting that they have retained their old Mongolian costume even for everyday use, and as I learnt, they owe their relative affluence partly to owning vast flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, and partly

Sichingua the Daur shamaness is healing a young woman in 2001. After her song she gave instructions as to what the girl should do in order to recover, and then fell into a complete trance.

→



to being most competent at farming. One group of them, living to some 500 km to the east of this area, are called the Morindava Daur. They became famous for planning an impressive open-air museum in their territory to feature the archaic Daur culture. Their first phase is already complete: a monumental statue of a shaman, some 40 m in height and visible for many miles. The foot of this statue houses the shaman museum of the north-eastern ethnic minorities.

Sichingua, a Daur shamaness of the Onon clan, along with her husband, attended the International Conference for Shamanistic Research held in Changchun in 2004. In a presentation accompanied by a video recording of the stages of the process, she recounted how she became a shaman. We learnt that her grandfather had





been a famous shaman and her forebears before him had also been shamans in an unbroken line through seven generations. She also told us that she had suffered an illness that no one could cure no matter where her family took her. Eventually they sought the help of a local shaman who told her that she had to accept the shamanic vocation otherwise she would never recover. Thus in the small town of Nantun where she lives today, she became a widely known shaman.

When I first visited her in 2001 I could see how sick people were lining up outside her door like in a doctor's office and she received them one by one. The 'healing' she offers in fact consists of little more than her opening a bottle of Chinese liquor brought along by the patient, blowing into it and then sprinkling the patient with the liquid. According to her, this effectively serves to purify

her patients, removing the bewitchment or the bad feelings from the body, but it can more accurately be interpreted psychologically, because people feel purified after the procedure. On one such occasion a young woman appeared whom she purified on the spot and who clearly fell into a trance during the ritual, and could only return from her altered state of consciousness under the effect of Sichingua's drumming. I heard them arrange a bigger ceremony for the next day to be conducted at the girl's parents' house. I asked permission to participate at the ritual and to be accompanied by my interpreter and my companion. This was in the winter of 2001, sometime in January. The outside temperature was – 27 C. The ritual took place in the living room in the house of a relatively

The shamaness needed to be gathered up from the ground by her husband and an attending woman and seated on a chair. Her face clearly reflects the pain caused by her trance. In another ceremony Sichingua blessed the members of the nearby clan as part of her own initiation ceremony, as she, too, needed to move up the ladder of the shamanic hierarchy. In fact, she had now attained the highest level which is rare among shamans. All of this took place in China, rather far away from the capital, practically today, in 2007.





affluent farming family (with several tractors lined up outside in the courtyard). I had a chance to experience the amazing potency of the Daur shamaness, listen to her most suggestive performance, and see the effect she had on her listeners who all took her admonitions and advice most seriously. It was also shocking to see a genuine state of trance for the first time in my life. There were three points where the shamaness all but lost consciousness, and it was up to her husband and helpers to set her on her feet again, get her to sit down, to wipe her brow and soothe her. It was particularly interesting how she sang for a long time in her strong voice. I was fortunate enough to record the entire ritual on video.

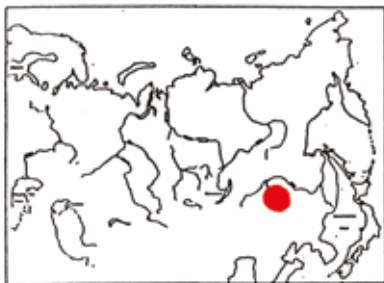
In 2007 we were lucky enough to participate at one of the last great inauguration ceremonies undertaken by this shamaness. It was one of those rituals through which from time to time Mongol shamans ascend to ever higher degrees. Her own *ominan* ritual involved sacrificing several sheep and a cow to the spirits, and as the last phase of the festivity consuming the sacrificial food and drinks as a sign of the powerful clan cohesion.

For the anthropologist it was a tremendous experience to see the devotion of the relations arriving from far and wide and the resulting mass of gifts. Sparing no cost, the members of the clan gathered from remote places to take part in this new turn in the life of Sichingua and to confirm their sense of belonging.

← *During the ceremony relatives of the Daur shamaness, Sichingua who had come from distant lands, and in small groups, and kowtowed in front of her listening to her admonitions, advice and prophecies. The members of the clan had come to attend the important event, Sichingua's latest initiation ceremony in 2007.*

THE HAMNIGAN
(SOLON EVENKI)
2007





The ethnic group of the Hamnigan amounts to some 30,000 people. In September 2007 we had the good fortune to know exactly when the initiation ritual of several important shamans was going to take place near Hailar Inner Mongolia, conducted by the famous and revered shamaness Sichingua. Thus during our field trip we made a rapid flight transfer in Beijing and headed to this north-eastern

Among the Solon, who belong to the Evenki ethnic group, shamanism has also survived to this very day. We recorded a ceremony where a young woman was initiated as a healer. Her male helper is holding her from behind to prevent her from collapsing.



province to attend various rituals through four consecutive days. The first of these was the inauguration of a shamaness called Altantuya from the Solon Evenki ethnic group to the status of *yadgan*. This ceremony of inauguration to shamanism has to be repeated every two years. One of the distinctive traits of this ethnic group is that they have miraculously preserved the beautifully elaborate costume of their shamans. The shamanic gown is famous



for its cowrie shell ornaments and several rows of small rattles. On the back we see huge brass mirrors. A shamanic gown like this can weigh up to twenty kilograms and must be quite a challenge to drum and dance in.

We managed to attend the ritual performed by the young shamaness Altantuya, and record the various remarkable details of the event. It was most memorable when this young woman fell into a trance several times, jumping around, dancing, singing and drumming. Her assistant, a man similarly in his middle years, was always standing behind her and making sure that when she threw herself back upon the onset of the altered state of consciousness, she would not fall and hurt herself. By the end, also under the

Altantuya is singing and drumming in a trance (picture on the left) to come out of her altered state of consciousness (below).





influence of some liquor (which she had to drink to humour the spirits), she almost entirely lost consciousness and could hardly return from her state of trance. It was most instructive to see how Sichingua herself and her pupils stood by her and helped her throughout the entire ritual.

The next day we attended the initiation rite of another, a young Solon Evenki woman who was called Narangerel, and who was initiated to the status of *bariasi*, meaning healer or chiropractor. This ritual was also conducted by Sichingua, the chief shamaness, because the initiate was her student. Narangarel is actually the wife of one of a leading local Evenki district politicians, but this presented no problem in advancing the woman to the status of a healing shaman. In conversation they told us at the venue of the



ceremony that they had erected nine silver-birch trees in a line connecting the yurt to the sacrificial table out in the open. These trees represent the steps of the shamanic ladder, the number nine being the sacred number of the shamanic world view, and referring to the number of layers in the upper world. This is what the initiate has to climb in order to get to the upper world. The ritual began in the yurt where Sichingua and her helpers sang the tune for summoning the spirits. They repeated this song four times, turning toward the four points of the compass. Inside the yurt stood two birch trees, like a ladder, which reached beyond through the upper hole of the yurt and had blue, green, yellow, and red ribbons hanging from it. At the base of the ladder, on a metal shovel, some kind



of incense was glowing, providing a very pleasant scent. Relatives gathered outside, and in the meantime the lambs were delivered in a van, four of them by number, and these were sacrificed, but first each of them had some milk poured over its spine. After this Bator, Sichingua's husband spread butter over them. The ritual now continued out of doors, where a fine, large carpet was spread on which the two shamanesses were sitting, constantly being offered milk mixed with brandy. The effect of the alcohol soon began to show. The relations of the initiate healer, young and old, dressed either in folk costumes or in contemporary clothes knelt in front of the shamaness in a circle on the carpet. Then, the ceremony was again transferred back to the yurt. The extended family carried in





Two young silver-birch trees erected inside the yurt represent the two sides of the shamanic ladder with a black and a white snake wound around them.

their offerings – gifts, drinks, cakes and, naturally, money. Once inside, a white shawl was spread over Narangerel's shoulder and she was made to sit down while the others sang and drummed over her. She walked round the double birch tree, first in the direction of the movement of the sun, then backwards, until finally she ran out into the open and walked around each of the nine birches in an S shape. Eventually, by late afternoon the men brought forth the cooked lamb's meat in buckets and placed it in front of the four shamanesses, then they shouted *hurai* along with the crowd, and shook their drums three times to indicate the end of the ceremony. The drums had little bells attached to them and it was the sound of these, along with the gesture of the helpers tying white silk ribbons to the antlers of the shamanesses as a sign of their gratitude, that indicated the end of the ceremony.

At the end of the ceremony all the female shamans who were present stood in line and shouted 'hurai', indicating that the ritual was over.





Today the local media is present whenever something of significance happens and are particularly keen to record the interesting participants of international conferences, in this case the pseudo-shamans of the Chinese folk ensemble, sporting their colourful clothes and totally authentic crowns.

URBAN SHAMANS

In our postmodern world all cultural phenomena become transformed, and many things that the ethnographer or anthropologist could once only study in certain areas are now available almost anywhere in the world. Thus shamanic activity is no longer limited to remote points of the world such as the Siberian Tundra or the South-American jungles. According to my own personal experience, the very first time I visited Korea walking among the super-modern high-rise buildings, local shamanesses offered all-day rituals in costumes identical to those found in mediaeval depictions, complete with instruments, songs, and deep-felt devotion. For me, this meant that regardless of modern times, globalisation, and the advancement of technical civilisation the power of old traditions continues to manifest and does not disappear from everyday life, as rituals dictated by tradition are sustained particularly by common people. This shows that the sustaining power of folk customs is far greater than we have formerly thought.

This is how a whole line of archaic rituals could survive in Siberia as well as among the Native Americans of the United States. Rituals which, from the 1970's onwards spread far and wide among what we call urban shamans took the form of drumming groups. An anthropologist, Michael Harner had recognised that it was far better if instead of using drugs, members of these groups attained the altered state of consciousness – Michael Harner called it a shamanic state of mind – through harmless rhythmical stimulation, that is, by simple drumming, rattle-shaking, or producing other forms of rhythmical noise.¹⁹ This metropolitan form of shamanhood became

highly popular, first in the US, and then went on to serve as a model for similar drumming groups emerging all over Europe.

A different form of the revival of shamanism emerged in areas where there had originally been many shamans, with whom travellers early met. This led to a radical decline in their numbers over the last century. One reason for this is that they were persecuted and even killed in the name of some kind of religious or racial prejudice, or their activities were quite simply rendered unnecessary by the advancement of technical civilisation and medical science. On the other hand, beliefs are fairly difficult to eradicate, precisely because they actually do no real harm; indeed, they may even be of some use in remote areas where modern medicine is unattainable. It is worth mentioning at this point that the spoken language always confirms existing beliefs, since the language of mythology also determines the linguistic world view





Modern urban 'shamans' in Tuva (1995)





In 1995 these urban shamans had come to Tuva all the way from Austria. They drummed along with the local shamans and the local inhabitants watched in awe the drumming of the 'shamans' from far away.



of the given culture. This way, through everyday vernacular these mythological notions become deeply ingrained, and so for the ordinary person this represents a unified linguistic world. This way the urban lifestyle was not able to entirely re-shape the belief system of the local inhabitants.²⁰

There is another interesting phenomenon that we were able to witness around the end of the 20th century. We noticed that the urban intelligentsia also turned its interest toward various religions, and even more, toward mystical teachings. The intellectual strata became increasingly sceptical about conventional medicine and the ideas represented by science in general, which produced more open questions than they could answer. Belief, on the other hand, often brought genuine recovery, and an increasing number of anthropological accounts confirmed that shamans were healing those in need with a relatively high degree of efficacy. Insofar



Chong Hakbong's successor at the head of the shaman group. The aged shamaness watched the performance of her successors from her wheelchair at a festival on Chin Island, South Korea.





The Korean mourning ritual, the Sittkim-kut, with its traditional melodies, its singing style and the manner in which it is performed bring the same sense of awe and reverence to the modern viewer as they do in its original context. The songs and the farewell ritual have such an ingrained dignity and internal rhythm that even amid the modern surroundings the effect remains unmarred. Many elements of traditional culture are so potent in the structure that it can survive even outside its original cultural context. This is the power of original folk art, song and movement, and strength of genuine tradition.



A typical festival-performing shaman group presents a traditional funeral ceremony. In 2016 the same South Korean group that I once saw on the island of Chin also visited the National Theatre in Budapest.

as these healings took place, this was possible because faith and a strong conviction about the power of the local world view provided people with psychological assistance in recovering from their various conditions. This was coupled with genuine effects of the medical herbs used by shamans.

In the late 20th century an entirely new cultural phenomenon was the emergence of what has come to be called festival culture. Here the influence of mass media is clearly palpable, driven by the profound conviction that people need entertaining, and that newer and newer types of attractions need to be developed for the masses. One of these was the appearance of various groups wearing different costumes, often speaking a language that is different



The shaman flying in a trance.

than the official state language, who sang and presented their curious dances. This kind of festival culture enhanced the ethnic identity of these small groups, gave them a sense of being special and suggested that it was worth investing energy into their own, nearly forgotten archaic culture. This was further enhanced by UNESCO's new program for the protection and promotion of traditions. I created the concept of the 'Intangible Cultural Heritage', and thus granted international protection to the visual folk

arts, the greatest works of the oral tradition such as heroic epics, or to certain singing styles, but even to various methods of food preparation. These then gained incredible popularity partly locally (because they meant good business), and partly worldwide, because these items then were included on the list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Consequently, shamans began to appear at international festivals or, more accurately, their young descendants who had seen something of the old rituals, and in some cases had also learnt the old songs, and thus were inevitably 'doomed to success' on the festival stages of foreign countries.

A separate category is constituted by writers and poets who at some point in their creative career realise that there had been shamans among their ancestors, and who therefore decide that



Paintings by Yakut artist, Timofey Stepanov, in the Yakutsk Museum. The picture bears the title Dismembering the Shaman's Body. The picture below shows the act of handing over the knowledge.





they wish to carry on the shamanic tradition of preserving an oral tradition through an improvisatory art form. Naturally, such strivings cannot produce authentic creative achievement unless the artist is indeed a shamanic descendant. Thus we may mention, for instance, Yuvan Shestalov, a poet of Manshi origin, who dedicated the last phase of his life specifically to continuing the shamanic mastery of his forebears. He even made himself a drum and planned to build an authentic place of sacrifice in an open-air museum consisting of traditional buildings where they could sacrifice reindeer, as indeed he had done a decade earlier. Besides the Vogul poet, we also know of a poet of Sámi (Lapp) origin who has described the shamanic culture of his own people, probably based on his own collections, and sees his own poetry as a clear continuation of the earlier folk tradition.

A number of years ago I also managed to visit a neo-shaman in Estonia who since has built a sacred grove around his home which then became a shrine and a place of pilgrimage. Today this place is a tourist attraction, but my Estonian ethnographer colleagues assure me that our writer friend makes a good living from functioning as a shaman and the sacred grove he operates draws great crowds and generates him a good income.

The same may be said of the Tuvan shamans I studied in the mid-1990's. Today they no longer receive ill people among the traditional circumstances, but have a separate building for rituals, where they perform their improvised drumming for tourists – in exchange for a fair sums.

We have no reason to be surprised at these phenomena because this seems to be the direction in which the world is heading, and neither the shamans nor their descendants can resist the pervasive influence of commercialism. Everything is translated into money:

belief systems, shamanic healing which used to be offered for free, and even the performance of sacred songs.

The main motifs of shamanic mythology have also appeared in the pictures of local painters. Outstanding among them is the art of Timofey Stepanov who has devoted the greater part of his creative career to preserving the main elements of Sakha shamanism in his realistic oil paintings.

In June 2006, on the 25th day of the month of the Sun God (by the neopaganic faith), I had the privilege of participating at the ceremony conducted by Karaul of the Koppány clan, Tokmak, the guardian, *táltos* of the golden lance. I had met Karaul, a man with the look of a true ascetic, two years earlier, in 2004, when he gave a talk at Nyíregyháza, Hungary. I noted with surprise his excellent, lucid style, his inner drive and passion, and his extremely intelligent thoughts concerning salvaging and perpetuating ethnic consciousness. When I engaged him in conversation he told me that he was a direct descendant of the Koppány clan and had been prepared ever since his childhood to carry on the pagan traditions in line with the family's origins.

'My father and my grandfather had always taught me, "your word and your deed should be one and the same."... The way in which the ancestors had taught me our old laws, they said, don't hurt animals, don't even break the branch of a tree if it isn't necessary; in other words, you have to live in harmony with this created world, with the universe. This is a very clean way of being...'

Shamanism has inspired the artistic imagination not only of poets but also of painters and artists. I myself have met several painters whose art was shaped by shamanism as a metaphor for their activity. A Hungarian shaman (1921–2008), József Soós, or 'Jóska the shaman-painter'²¹, to use his artistic name, has built



Ceremony conducted by táltos guardian Tokmak, Karaul from the dynasty of Koppány.

his entire oeuvre around a particular life experience. This was an episode in which he had to struggle to get over a very serious illness following a traumatic experience and finally recovered by a sustained practice of drumming. Soós was a man who had left his home country, Hungary, when still young, and lived and worked in Brussels, Belgium, in the shadow of the Atomium²², a long way from his land of origin. His drawings and paintings have a unique and unmistakeable style, and belong to the best traditions of Hungarian constructivist *avant-garde*, constituting its straight continuation. After a whole career of purely abstract art, it was only in the last years of his life that his paintings began to show some figurative

character. His works were highly acclaimed by the local art lovers, so much so that in the recently built and newly opened Museum of Antwerp, a separate corner was dedicated to his oeuvre. The exhibition also features a brief portrait film about Jóska Soós made by the author, whose crew also recorded an extended interview and took several series of photographs presenting Soós pursuing his shamanic activity. He is a typical urban shaman and has always referred to himself as such.

Hungarian urban shamans gathered in Budapest, near the Chain Bridge, on April 2nd 2000. These are true urban neo-shamans. The fans and friends of the theatre director and shaman, István Somogyi, gathered in the heart of the city with their drums. They were made up of several drumming groups which gather regularly in Hungary's capital.







Urban shamans meeting by the 0 kilometre stone by the Chain Bridge in Budapest. They beat their drums in a frenzy, wearing special clothes and masks with deer antlers.

Bearded old shaman in a shaman dress which he had designed himself, with a feather headdress. Next to him is a woman holding a tulip symbol.

→



Crossing the Chain Bridge in Budapest amidst noisy drumming, attracting the greatest amazement of the urban folk.





Zoltán Sólyomfi Nagy, a Hungarian neo-shaman greeting the author at the opening ceremony of an international shaman camp in summer 2016.



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APPENDIX

NOTES

PREFACE

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| 1 Eliade 2001. | 15 Dienes 1982 |
| 2 Hultkrantz 1984: 34. | 16 Dienes 1982. |
| 3 Georgi 1776: Abb. 62. | 17 See the image of the |
| 4 Austerlitz 1986, Janhunen | divining shaman in Hoppál |
| 1986, Voigt 1990. | 2005: 239. |
| 5 Leroi-Gourhan 1984, | 18 Birtalan 2005. |
| Campbell 1988, Devlet– | 19 Balzer 1996, 1999a. |
| Devlet 2002. | 20 Cho 1983, Howard (ed.) |
| 6 Wierciński 1989, Hoppál | 1998, Kendall 1985, 1988, |
| 2013 | Kim 1998. |
| 7 Hoppál 2005, 2015. | 21 Nisan 1987. |
| 8 Siikala 1987: 208. | 22 Balzer 2002, 2004; Hoppál |
| 9 Vajda 1959. | 2005: 25–28. |
| 10 Siikala 1987: 211. | 23 Eliade 1974: 215. |
| 11 Basilov 1976, 1995. Russian | 24 Eliade 1987: 205, quoting |
| edition, ‘Izbranniky duhov’ | Radloff. |
| – Basilov, 1984. | 25 Hoppál 2005: 164. |
| 12 Hoppál – Nádorfi 2016: | 26 Kerezsi 1993, 1997, |
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| 13 Hultkrantz 1984. | 27 Bányai 1984. |
| 14 Honko 1969. | 28 Balázs 1967. |
| | 29 Basilov 1976, 1981, 1995. |

- 30 Hoppál 1998b.
- 31 Hoppál 2005, 2010.
- 32 Diószegi 1968, 1998;
Kelemen 1979.
- 33 Basilov 1984a, Hoppál
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- 34 Halifax 1982, Jilek 1982.
- 35 Alekseev 1984.
- 36 Harner (ed.) 1973, Harner
– Tryon 1992, Hoppál
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- 37 Goodman – Henney –
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- 38 Balzer 1995, Hoppál 2010,
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Walker 2003.
- 39 Hoppál 2005: 188.
- 40 Drury 1989: X.
- 41 Interesting readings on
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Humphrey 1999, Brumann
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202., Hoppál 2001, Wienker
– Piepho 2002, Wallis 2003,
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- 42 See the author's
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- 2 Siikala 1984.
- 3 Witsen 1672
- 4 Georgi 1776– 1780
- 5 Granö 1919.
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- 1 Marcus – Cushman 1982,
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- 2 Cuisenier 2005, Auger
1995.
- 3 Frida – Ungár 2004.
- 4 Balzer 1999.
- 5 Marcus 2001: 219 uses
the term ‘multi-sited’ to
describe the ethnographic
approach he had
developed.
- 6 Cf. Geertz 1994, 2001, as
well as Hoppál 2013.

- PEOPLES AND SHAMANS
- 7 Baráthosi Balogh 1996. 18.
 - 8 Kim Taegon 1979, 1998.
 - 9 I take this occasion to thank Fu Yuguang and Guo Shuyun for taking us to see the Manchu shamans. Cf. Guo 2015.
 - 10 Stary 1997. For more on Manchu culture see also: Nisan 1987.
 - 11 Sieroszewski 1901, Balzer 1996, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2004, Vinokurova 1995, Walker 2004, Utkin 1996.
 - 12 Kenin-Lopsan 1997, Kyrgyz 1993, Johansen 2005, van Deusen 1997, 2003, 2004.
 - 13 For more on Buryat lamb sacrifices see Hoppál 2010: 158–177.
 - 14 On the shamanism of the Nenets see: Hoppál 2010: 97–113
 - 15 Baráthosi Balogh 1996: 63.
 - 16 For more on Evenki shamans see: Hoppál 2005: 142–145.
 - 17 For more on the Even see: Hoppál 2005: 146–147.
 - 18 For more on folk melodies see: Du 1995
 - 19 Harner 1980.
 - 20 Jilek 1982, Kim Taegon 1998.
 - 21 Hoppál 2016.
 - 22 The Atomium is a landmark building which was originally constructed for the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. It is now a museum.

NOTES ON THE PICTURES

LOCATIONS OF ROCK DRAWINGS

28. Shaman representations on the rock of Novaromanovo (Neolithic age, 3000 BC) Okladnykov – Martinov 1983: 29.
29. Hunt (?) or the march of Maral deer – composition on rock No. 5 of the Novaromanovo rock drawings. Okladnykov – Martinov 1983: 66–67.
30. top Hobd-Somon, Inner Asia. Siikala – Hoppál 1992: 138. (original: Okladnikov 1980: 250).
30. bottom Tamgali, Kazakhstan, Central Asia (3rd millennium BC). Cf Rozwadowski 2004. Excellent photographs of the rocks of Tamgali were taken by László Kunkovács.
31. top Rocks along the river Tom; drawing No. 5 of the scored rocks (3rd millennium BC). Okladnykov – Martinov 1983: 111 and 21.
32. top: Karakol, Altai (cca. 2000 BC) op. cit.: Kubaryov 1992: 24.
32. bottom: top: Masks from the rocks of Mugur-Sargol. Devlet – Devlet 2000: 348.
33. top right: Shaman figures in the centre (3rd to 1st millennium BC). Oroktov, Katun Valley, Altai Mountains.
33. top left: cf. Devlet – Devlet 2000: 372.
33. bottom: Rock drawings of Ahtuvansalmi, Finland (cca. 4000 BC). Siikala 1984: 82. fig. 2.
34. Aleksandr Oskin's then unpublished pictures.

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36. Witsen 1672. – The library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences contains a later edition from 1685.
38. top: Rheen 1671. – Later edition: 1897: 32.
38. bottom: Schefferus 1674: 139.
39. Pentikäinen 1984: 145.
40. Leem 1767.
41. Buschan (no date) II: 264. Abb. 316.
- 43–44. Georgi 1777. III: 62.
45. top: Georgi 1780. IV, figures 82, 83.
45. bottom: Georgi 1776. II., figures 44, 45.
46. Georgi 1777. III., figure 63.
47. Georgi 1776. II, figure 68.
48. top: Pallas 1771–1776. III: 345.
48. bottom: Ehrmann 1807: Tavle 8, figs. 10, 11.
49. Sarychev quoting in 1805: Messchaert, N. (1808) Reis in Het Noordoostelike Sibirie.
- 50–51. Lankens 1872: 281. The

shape of the drum handle allows us to conclude that the shaman in the etching probably belonged to the Altai Turkic tribe of the Shor. Cf. Hoppál 1994: 151. 209. The picture, as well as Hoppál 2005: 229.

52. Ratzel 1885: II: 552.
53. top: von Schrenck 1895: abb. 4.
53. bottom: Finsch 1879: fig. 47.

OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

55. top: National Museum of Finland (Helsinki) VKK 156: 6. Photograph: Pälsi, S. (1909). Ochir böö, Bayangol area.
55. bottom: Ochir shaman's drum in the yurt. Also from the National Museum of Helsinki.
56. VKK 11:2. Photo: Hildén 1914. Minusinsk Basin, a Lebed Tatar shaman.
57. VKK 11: 17. Photo: Granö, 1914.
58. 2199–107. Handle of the Sagay shaman's drum.

59. Photo: S. D. Maynagashev, 1913. 2409–58. A.
60. MAE Photo collection, No. 2409–65
61. MAE Photo collection, No. 2409–2. Inventory number of the series of photos depicting the Sagai horse sacrifice is: No. 2409-59–67-ig. This is to be found on excellent quality glass negatives in the photographic archives of St. Petersburg Kunstkamera.
62. Buschan (no date) 303; fig. 257.
63. left: Yakut female shaman – American Museum of Natural History Neg. No. 1825. Courtesy Department Library Services.
63. right: Yakut shaman. Neg. No. 1830.
- 64–65. V. N. Basilov offered the use of these unique photographs from his own collection. The pictures were taken in the 1920's.
66. This photograph of the long-haired Yakut shaman, taken by B. F. Pankratoff in 1910, was given to me by courtesy of the National Museum of Helsinki.
67. Vilmos Diószegi published this picture in his book of 1962.
68. Unidentified shaman by unidentified photographer.
69. A gift from Sevyan Vainstein; photographer unidentified.

SHAMANS TODAY

72. The author's photograph
74. The author taking field-notes. Photo by Lajos Nádorfi, Tuva, 1996.
75. Vilmos Diószegi taking a photograph of one of the shamanic drums from the Museum of Abakan during his 1958 trip to Siberia – according to the account of his wife, Judit Morvay, who was kind enough to offer this photograph as a gift.
- 76–252. The author's photographs

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This book was published by the Institute of Hungarian Research (MKI)

Postal address: 1014 Budapest, Űri utca 54–56.

Web: mki.gov.hu

Email: kiado@mki.gov.hu

Chief publisher: Gábor Horváth-Lugossy, Director General of MKI

Editor in charge: Márton Mati

Graphic design, technical editing: Mihály Tóth

Press and bookbinding: OOK-PRESS Nyomda, Veszprém

Manager in charge: Attila Szathmáry



Shamanhood

Past and Present

The book of the ethnographer Mihály Hoppál, in which he has condensed more than forty years of research, guides us into the hidden and mystical world of the shamans. With the help of the author's unparalleled pictures, we can gain an insight into the magical rituals and healing rites of the shamans, as well as their traditional costumes and symbol-laden drums, which help them to fall into a trance. It is a faithful portrayal of the Eurasian people's vision of the natural world, in which shamans are the living bridge between our earthly reality and the invisible realm of spirits, where only the chosen ones can enter.



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