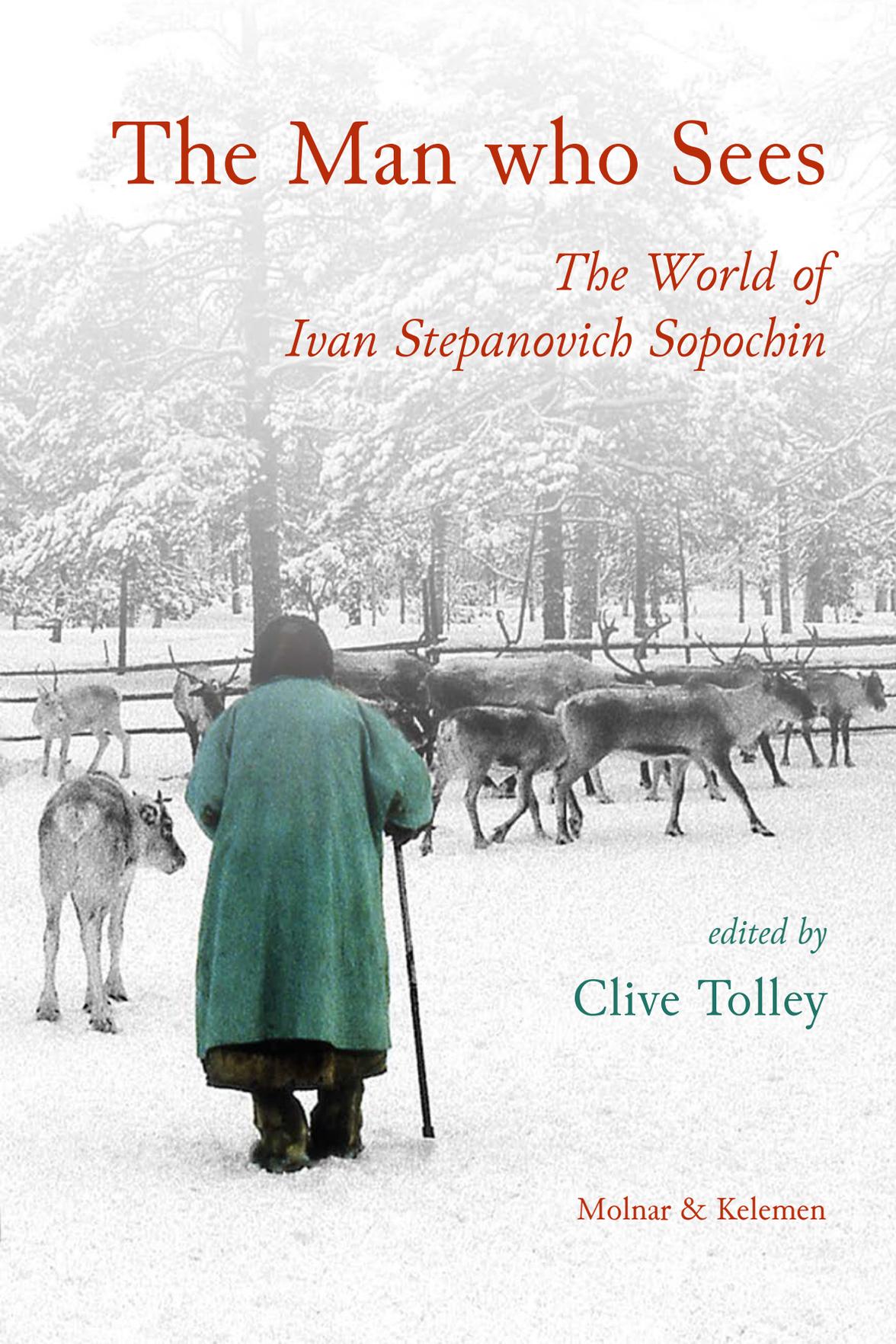


The Man who Sees

*The World of
Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin*



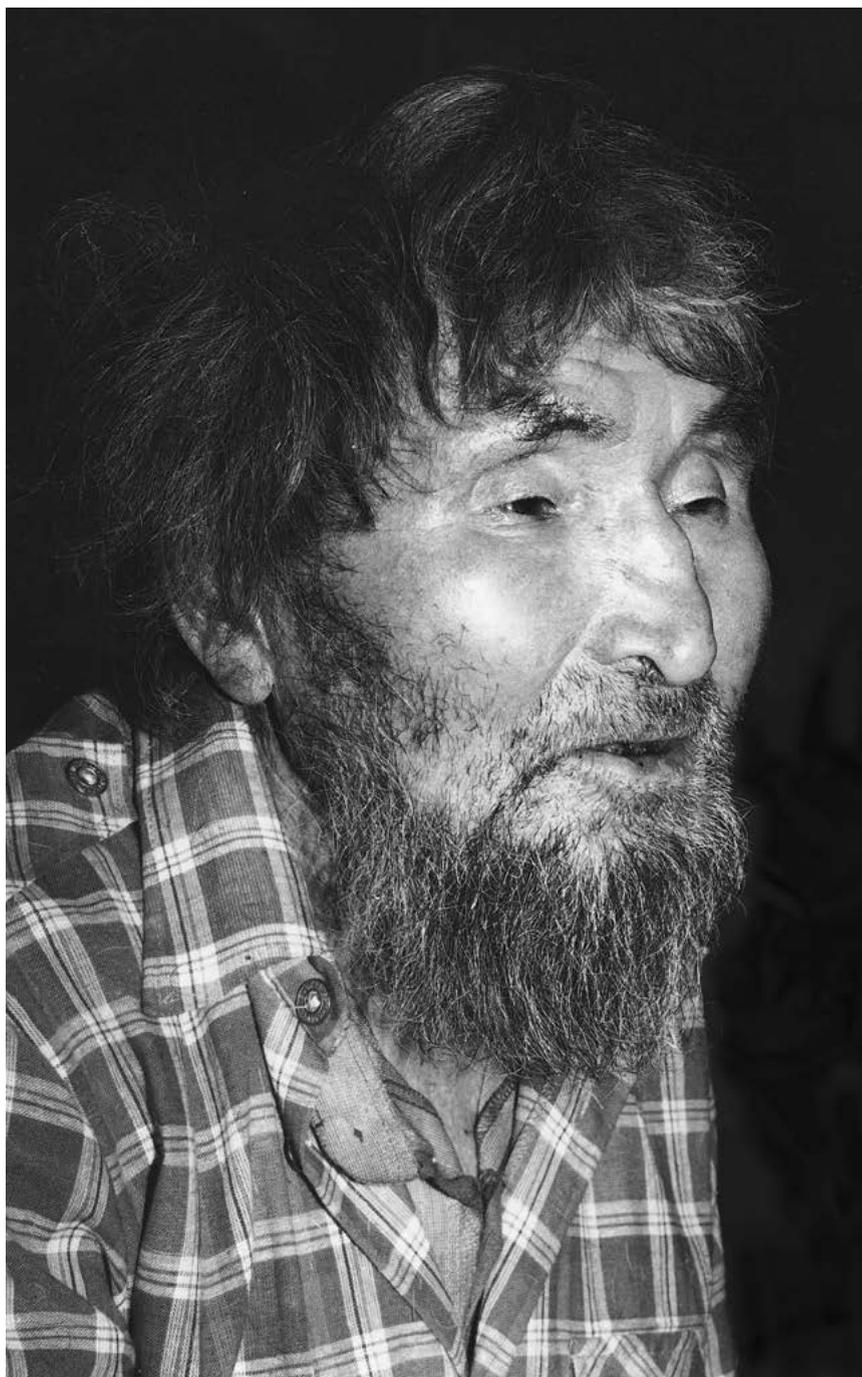
edited by
Clive Tolley

Molnar & Kelemen

THE MAN WHO SEES

Studies in Native Religion

Volume 2



Frontispiece. Ivan Stepanovich Sopochnin, 1910–1993

The Man who Sees

The World of Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin



Edited
by Clive Tolley



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Oriental Publishers

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Front cover image. Ivan Sopochnin tends his herd in preparation for a reindeer sacrifice
Photo by Juha Pentikäinen
Cover design by Clive Tolley

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Foreword

The Eastern Khanty elder, Ivan Stepanovich Sopochnin, died in 1993. He is almost universally regarded as a shaman, and indeed often as the last (traditional) shaman of his people – though he himself abjured the term. During the last years of his life in his traditional homeland north of the town of Surgut he became a focus of scholarly attention and fascination, and he and his family welcomed many visitors to their remote *stoïbishche*, or nomadic settlement. Most visitors were, naturally, Russian scholars, such as Natal'ya Koshkarëva (one of whose articles is included here), but Hungarian specialists (notably Ágnes Kerezsi and Márta Csepregi, who have both contributed to this volume) also devoted much effort to studying the traditional and shamanic culture that Sopochnin embodied. From Finland, Juha Pentikäinen followed in the footsteps of earlier Finnish scholars such as K. F. Karjalainen, whose substantial work on the Khanty, produced as a result of field work before the First World War, remains an important source of information.

Many of the field trips involved recording stories or shamanic activities that Sopochnin told or engaged in. Some of these have been published, but there is a large body of material in various archives that remains to be transcribed, translated and investigated. The task is not an easy one: Sopochnin spoke so unclearly that his language is comprehensible, and then only in part, solely to members of his close family, and they have been involved in all such transcriptions. Juha Pentikäinen recorded a diary on his trips to see Sopochnin in 1990, which we publish here to give an idea of the Sopochnins' life and its impact on outsiders; this acts as a glimpse of a world that disappeared, encroached upon by modernity, with the shaman's death three years later. It was on the first of these trips in January 1990 that Natal'ya Koshkarëva recorded many hours of tapes, and has been working, with Sopochnin family members, to transcribe and translate these. It is planned to publish a substantial selection of these later in this series. The present volume does, however, contain two texts from Sopochnin, of how he became a shaman (Koshkarëva), and of a shamanic event (Kerezsi and Csepregi).

The volume broadens the scope in Ágnes Kerezsi's wide-ranging exposition of Khanty traditions and ways of life, focused on the world of the Sopochnins, and to the wider (Eastern) Khanty world in the historical discussion by Elena Glavatskaya. Nadezhda Lukina presents a few examples of Surgut Khanty folklore from her much wider work published in Russian.

Clive Tolley

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Kordelin Foundation in Finland for funding much of the work of this project, which has spread over several years, and Tuomas Honka for managing the finances. The early stages involved work in the Arcticum Institute in Rovaniemi (where Juha Pentikäinen's archive was at that time being kept), and we thank the institute for the use of their facilities (and Tuomas Honka for smoothing things there). This project has involved scholars of several nationalities, and a good deal of translation work has been necessary; the editor has taken care of rendering Finnish into English, but we thank Will Houghton and Eszter Tarsoly for their considerable work in translating from Russian and Hungarian. We also thank Oleg Donskikh, who took part in the field trips in 1990, for checking through the volume before publication. The work has been a collaborative effort, but as editor I would mention particularly the ready assistance offered by Elena Glavatskaya over matters arising in Russian, Natal'ya Koshkarëva's checking of details relating to the field trips, Márta Csepregi for dealing with the complexities of the Khanty language (and my constant emails relating to these matters), and Ágnes Kerezi's checking of matters relating to Khanty life (as well as our publisher Ádám Molnár's assistance as linguistic go-between). Juha Pentikäinen's enthusiastic determination to see some fruits from his field work three decades ago has been inspirational throughout the project.

The Sound System of Surgut Khanty

Vowels of the first syllable

	LONG				SHORT			
	front		back		front		back	
	unr	rd	unr	rd	unr	rd	unr	rd
high	<i>i</i>		<i>y</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>ï</i>			
mid	<i>e</i>			<i>o</i>	<i>ö</i>			<i>õ</i>
low	<i>a</i>			<i>ǎ</i>	<i>ä</i>		<i>ǻ</i>	

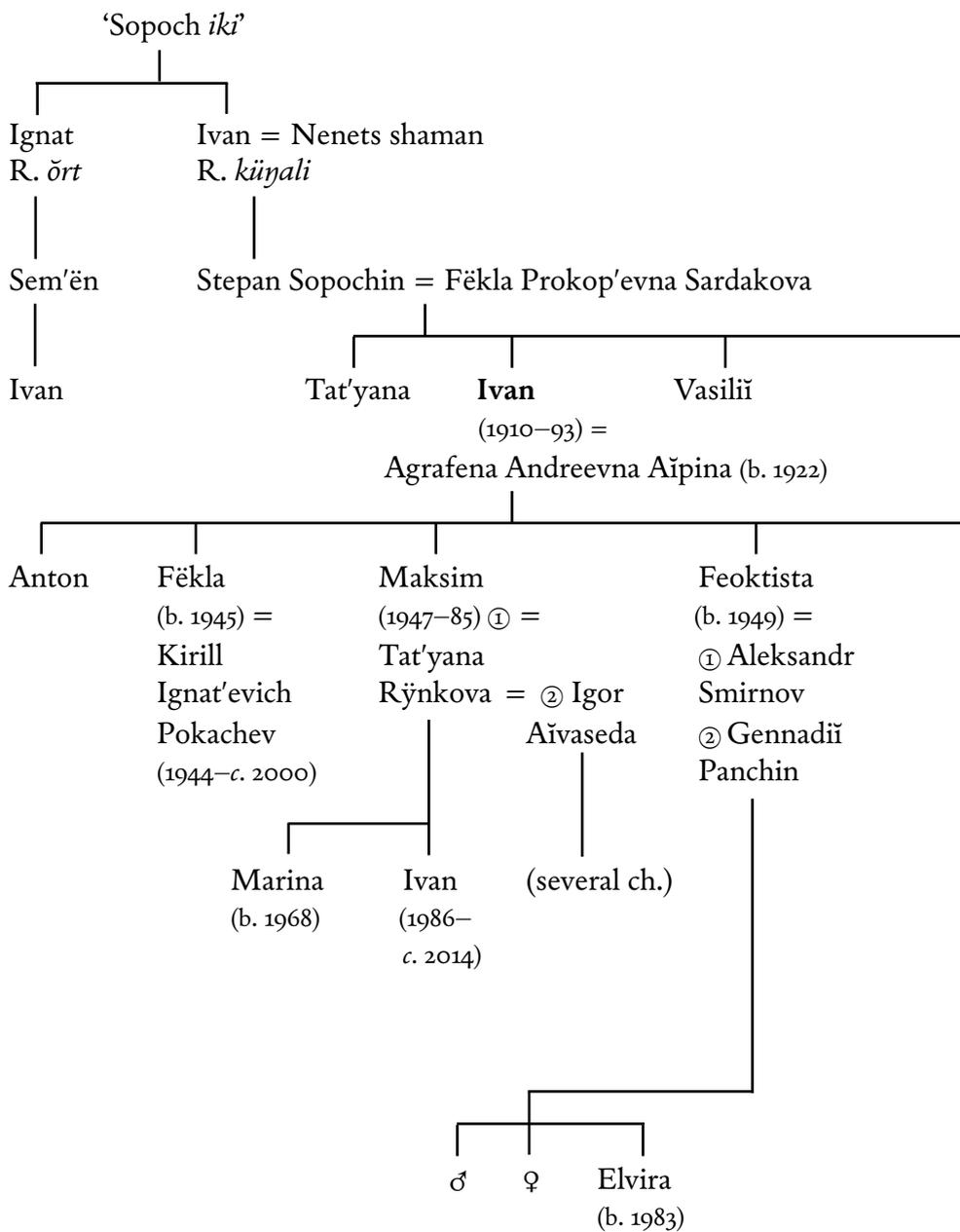
The vocalism of the first syllable is enriched by a thirteenth vowel, the hyper-reduced ə (schwa); it cannot be placed in any cell of the table because of the number and variety of its allophones with regard to all phonological parameters. In non-first syllables in addition to ə there occur the vowels *i*, *e*, *a*, which in this position are non-distinctively short and front.

Consonants

	bilabial	alveolar	palatal	velar	postvelar
nasals	<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ń</i>	<i>ŋ</i>	
stops	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>tʲ</i>	<i>[k</i>	<i>q]</i>
affricates		<i>č</i>			
non-lateral fricatives		<i>s</i>			<i>ɣ</i>
lateral fricatives		<i>ʃ</i>	<i>ʃʲ</i>		
lateral approximant		<i>l</i>			
glides	<i>w</i>		<i>j</i>		
trill		<i>r</i>			

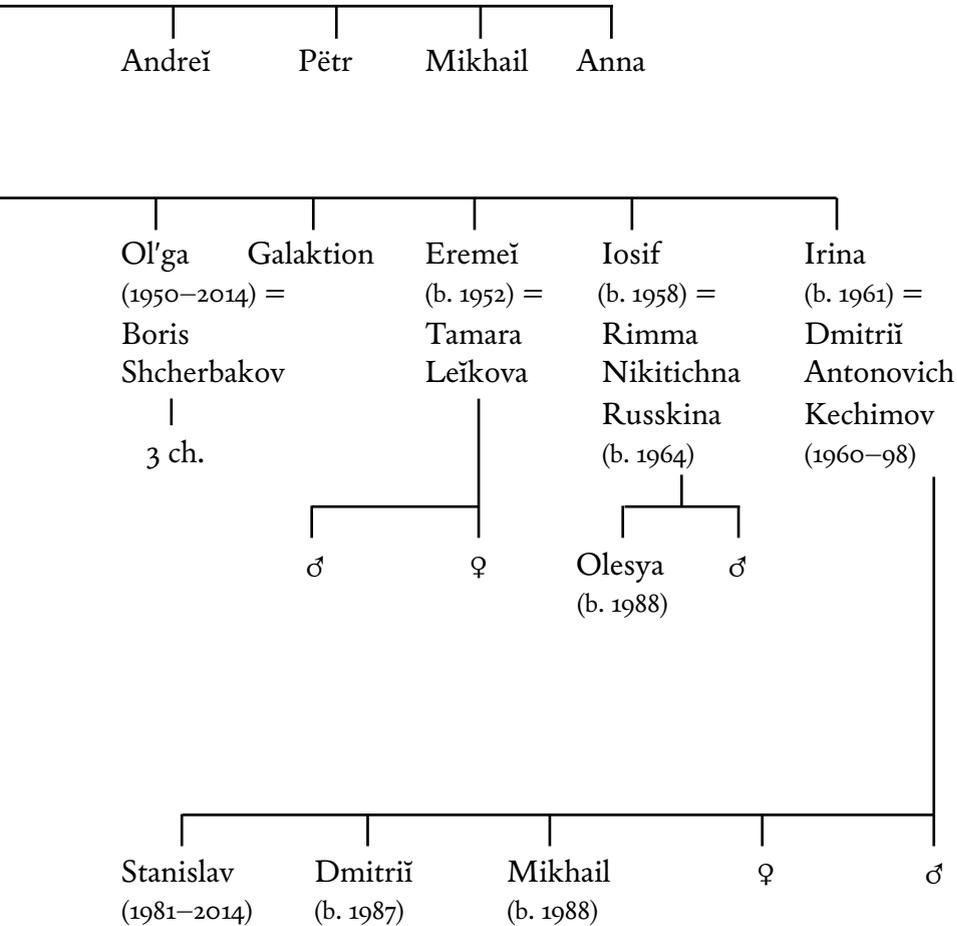
Stops are unaspirated, voiceless, lenis.

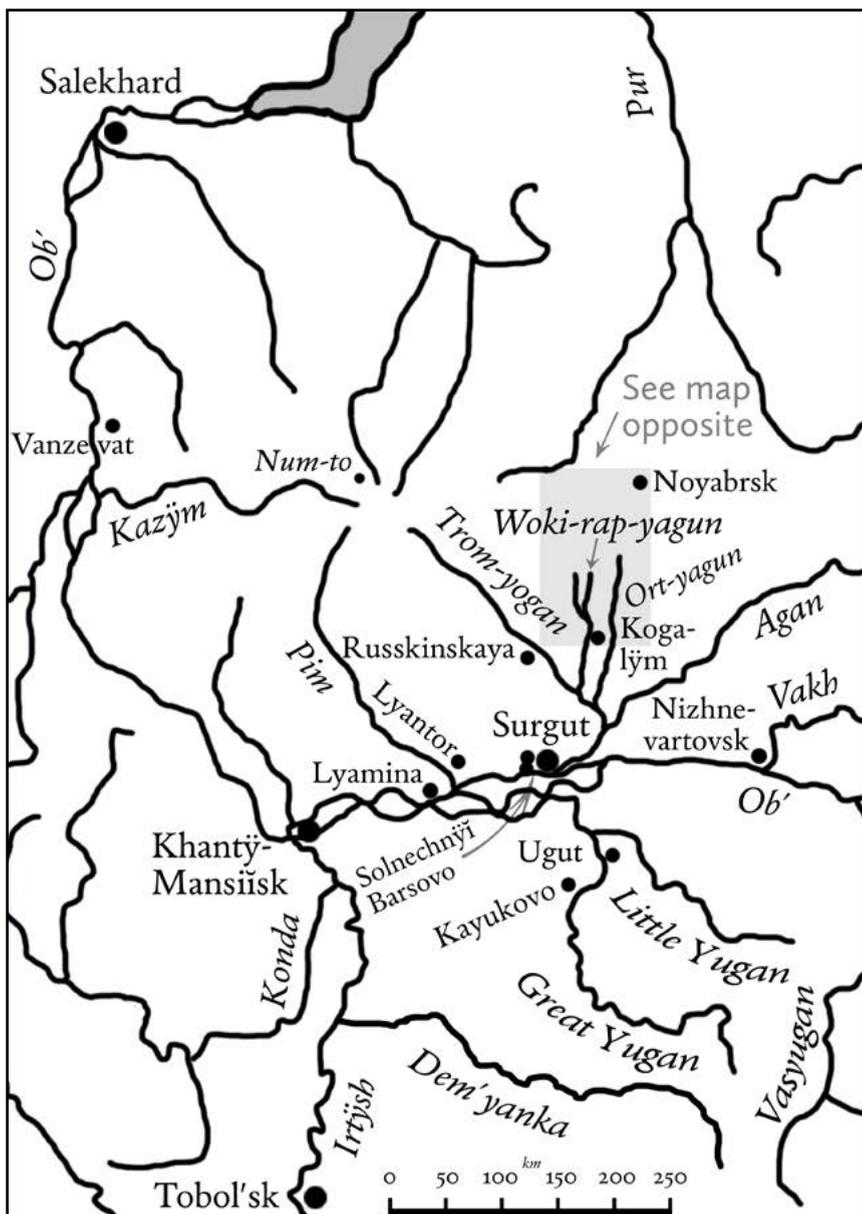
Velar *k* and postvelar *q* are allophones, the former occurring in front, the latter in back environments.



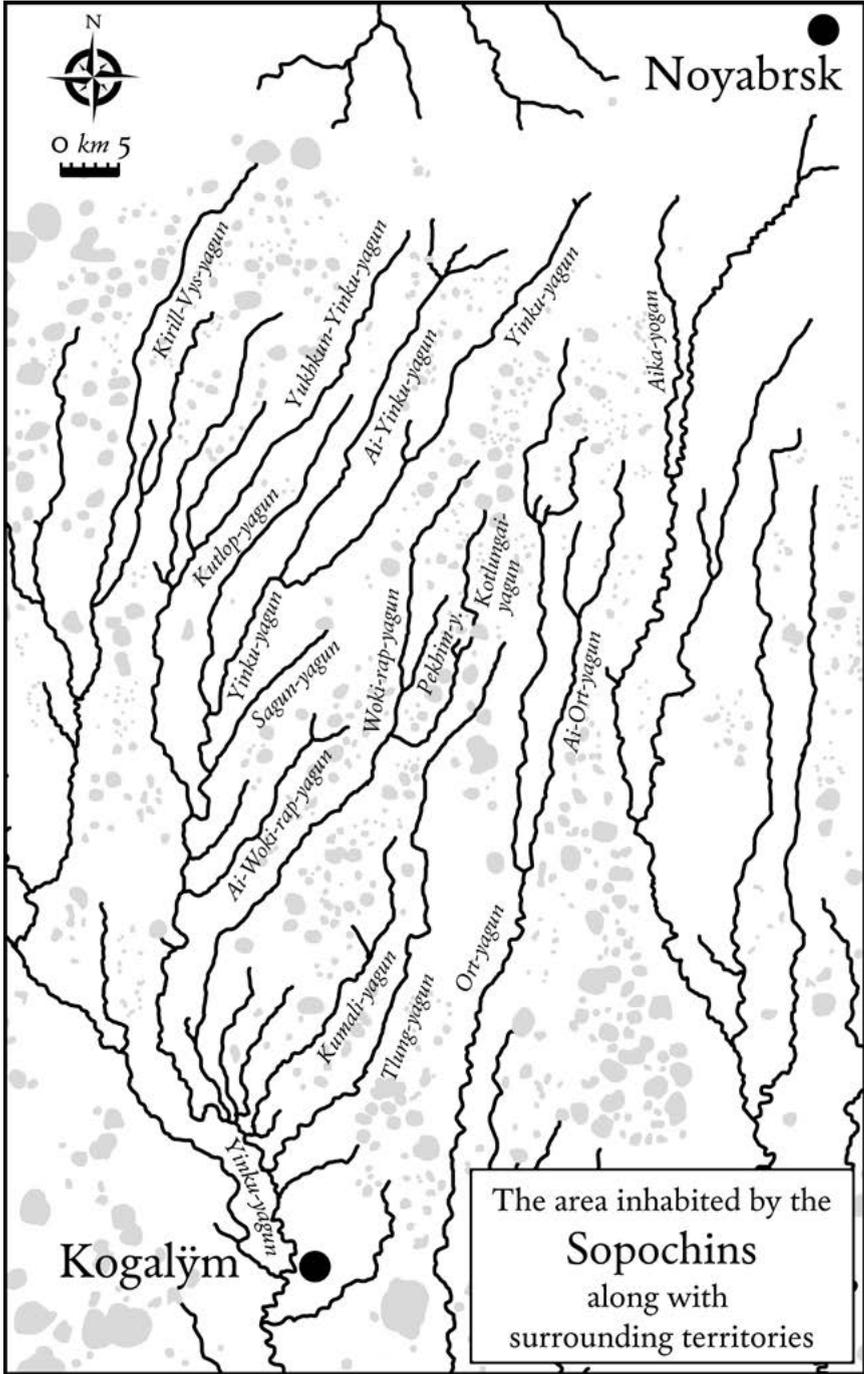
The Sopochin Family Tree

For the sake of the family's privacy, names of younger members of the family who are not mentioned in the book are omitted.

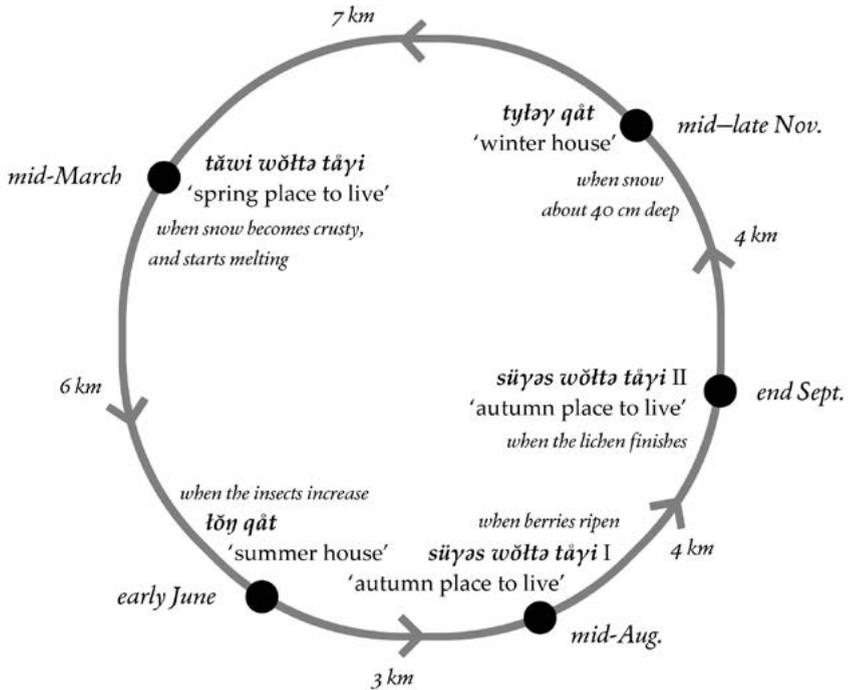




Western Siberia
 showing areas inhabited by the Khanty
 along the Ob' and its tributaries.



The Seasonal Migrations of the Sopochins



The seasonal nomadic wanderings of the Sopochin families between their five settlements. The first diagram presents a geographical circle, with the relative distances between camps represented as proportions of the circle. The Khanty names of the camps are given, with translations, and the main motivation for making the decision to move on to a camp is given with the camp that is being moved to.

A close correspondence may be observed between the length of time spent in any camp and the distance to be travelled to the next camp, measured as portions respectively of the annual cycle and of the annual migration route, suggesting a symbolic equivalence between time and space. It should nonetheless be borne in mind that the distances between camps, and the times spent in each, are approximate, and were variable from year to year.

CHAPTER ONE

Travel Diaries, 1990

JUHA PENTIKÄINEN

TRANSLATED FROM FINNISH BY CLIVE TOLLEY

Juha Pentikäinen kept an audio-diary and a written diary, along with miscellaneous observations and notes, in a series of notebooks, mainly in Finnish, during his trips to the Sopochn family in January and September 1990. The version given here is a translation of these notebooks; the text is edited, but preserves the majority of the content (purely ephemeral observations and plans are omitted). Some rearrangement has been made to bring fragmentary discussions together, and a few minor linking sentences added to assist the narrative flow; everything has been checked and approved by Juha Pentikäinen. The original notebooks are hand-written, often in haste, and are often somewhat difficult to read; the basis for the version offered here is typed transcriptions made by Pauliina Pesonen and Niko Partanen (to whom the editors are most grateful). Original materials (both written and video and audio tapes) are kept in the Sámi National Archive at the Sámi Cultural Centre (Sajos) at Inari (<http://www.sajos.fi/sajos/saamelaisarkisto>). Although some effort has been made to iron out inconsistencies, and the information has been checked as far as possible, it has been impossible to identify all the people mentioned or the accuracy of details or forms of names in all instances. Some editorial notes have been added to explain the identities of individuals or practices mentioned.

FIRST TRIP

Friday, 19 January 1990

We have left Novosibirsk – the Chicago of Siberia – for Surgut, a four-hour flight on a small plane. Oleg Donskikh,¹ sitting beside me, talks of moral decline, and the alcoholism that is rife everywhere – but the Surgut region is full of *oil lakes*! As we come towards the Ob' and I look out of the window, I feel I might join the resistance against oil and gas, as I see fifty to a hundred gas flames burning along the banks of the river. Ob' is 'grandmother', as Volga is 'mother', but here below is yet another powerful gas city. Perhaps I should write a book about the Fourth World, as the radio presenter Markku Laukkanen urged me when he heard about the trip. I turn to other thoughts.

'This trip of yours is offered to you by the Khanty shaman, and you had to accept it', Prof. Suprun had said in Novosibirsk.² But in Moscow, Lyudmila Kuz'mina, a specialist on the Buryats, Old Believers and shamans, had her doubts. 'It's not true. Who told you about the shaman?' The shaman in question is Ivan Stepanovich Sopochnin, known familiarly as Dedushka. Natasha (Natal'ya Koshkarëva) asked 'What do you want to *get* from him?' The answer to that was perhaps given at dinner last night at Prof. Suprun's. Oleg and Elena Skribnik both said we are living through frightening times.³ 'Anything is possible. You need to gather materials and take them to Finland straight away. We don't know what could happen here.'

The fear is focused on the persecution of dissidents; just before the new year, the object of the persecution was the editor of the dissident paper *Amnesty*. He fears for his family. He was targeted and his home searched under the eyes of his children and their grandparents. Materials were returned after a couple of days, as copies. Elections are coming soon – but there is fear of a regime change and a conservative resurgence.

What materials will we gather from Dedushka? According to Natasha, he had his doubts about the need for video recording. Even if he agrees, we shall see whether we succeed in taking pictures at all in the Siberian cold. It was -35° in Novosibirsk; Surgut is even worse, at -40° , we are told. How are we to protect ourselves against the frost, let alone make recordings?

¹ Oleg Al'bertovich Donskikh, a professor at Novosibirsk State University, specialising in philosophy and linguistics.

² Vladimir Ivanovich Suprun, director of the Trends Foundation for Socio-Prognostic Research, Novosibirsk.

³ Prof. Elena Skribnik was working on the Russian Academy of Sciences' Languages of Siberia project at Novosibirsk University; she was subsequently professor of Finno-Ugric languages at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich.

We shall be landing soon. 'The Siberian sun is red.' Lurid flames from the oil-drilling rigs light up the night – I can see a hundred together right now from the aeroplane window. A continuous flow of wealth floods from the oil fields into Surgut: mighty are the riches of the lands of the Ob'.

Saturday, 20 January 1990

Ivan Dmitrievich Kechemov fetched us by bus from the airport in the afternoon.⁴ I was presented, under the name Ivan Georgevich Bratvich (a Russian version of Juha Yrjänä Veikonpoika), to the president of the region, Vladimir Ivanovich Maïer. He is of German descent, a politician before whom the usual situation unfolds. A Khanty man, Ivan, asked him to speak, but said nothing himself the whole time – he didn't dare. I gave them a Father Christmas map, and spoke of Sámi self-determination, which Maïer was interested in. I taped about ten minutes of the palaver. We then went through the programme, which he approved and supported. Without a *bumaga* it is impossible to go out into the tundra, at least with a camera to do field work.

We bought sheep-skin boots for 200 rubles, which should stand the cold on the tundra. Oleg acted as interpreter, with varying degrees of success. We had varying degrees of success in finding places to eat, as well. As nothing much could be found, we ended up eating in a cafe, and thought about the strategy for our field work. We shall be joined on the journey by Feoktista Ivanovna Smirnova, a teacher and the daughter of Dedushka, and Dedushka's son Eremeï Ivanovich Sopochin. Dedushka has had nine children, three of whom live with him, and one has died recently (his widow continues to live in the settlement). Specialisms that Dedushka has include: tales, folk tales, children's lore, life history, mythology, shamanism; we are also interested in women's folklore, and Oleg hopes to discuss matters of livelihood with Dedushka's son Iosif. It was also noted that Regina Nazarenko undertook a trip to Dedushka in June 1989, during which she made several tapes of shamanic sessions,⁵ and that the film-maker Raisa Muldashevna Ernazarova had also visited and made films.⁶

⁴ I. D. Kechemov, head of the Department for Northern Peoples in Surgut in the 1990s.

⁵ The musicologist Regina Nazarenko recorded an important collection of songs from Ivan Sopochin on trips in 1987 and 1989, relating particularly to shamanic themes (such as songs of the fly agaric), but including also songs from his Nenets heritage. Unfortunately, she died prematurely, and her collection appears to have been lost; we have only a list of the titles of the pieces. Juha Pentikäinen added a note in the diary: 'Regina. 10–12 cassettes. Reindeer sacrifice. Bear rituals. All the songs he knew. Archaic Khanty.'

⁶ R. M. Ernazarova had been a member of the Union of Cinematographers of Russia since 1978, and honorary professor of UNESCO's department at Novosibirsk State University. The reference must be to Ernazarova's film *The Last Shaman* (Последний Шаман) from 1985, which, however, involves more than just the Sopochins.

However, it seems there is some concern among Dedushka's family that recordings might be used against them.

Sunday, 21 January 1990

Maier organised an excursion for today, 90 km to the Khanty village of Trom-Agan. The first part took place around Surgut. Around 20 km away is the settlement of Solnechnyi, with 11,000 inhabitants. It is not on the map: it arose as a result of geological work (oil, gas, roads, pipelines). In the township, there are thirty-five nationalities, but supposedly no problems (Armenians and Azeris live in the same house). The houses are wooden, and burn down in 45 minutes. Electricity wires hang on top of them. People are frightened to live in them.

There are five sovkhoses in the Surgut area; there used to be a reindeer-herding sovkhos, which did not succeed. Three of the sovkhoses are Khanty, two of them for fish, and also a butchering/processing unit; berry-harvesting is also taken care of by a state co-operative. Maier says that the Khanty do not want to work for a sovkhos: their way of life is based on private economy. However, he arranged a trip to a co-operative in Solnechnyi, which organises shops, transportation, schools, four children's nurseries and a cafe, in which we had a gorgeous dinner of a good soup followed by meat stew; the salami was from Finland. The co-operative is a collaborative enterprise of the inhabitants, which Maier got going, and it is now at the top of the league in Surgut.

A third of the town's inhabitants are of school age, and there is a senior school for 1500, as well as a school for over a hundred underdeveloped children, which we visited – a project Maier has got running over five years. I was in a class with sixteen children; I asked them their nationalities – six said they were Khanty. The teaching takes place in Russian, as that is what they can all understand, according to the teacher.

Maier says that the Khanty in Surgut, about three hundred of them, are radicals. They have big mouths, like Comrade Kel'min:⁷ he can make demands, but doesn't come up with any concrete suggestions. So Maier cut him out of the discussions when he turned up uninvited. It all points towards a weak self-awareness among the Khanty, at least urban dwellers. They withdraw to the margins, they are humiliated. Clearly, democracy for them remains unrealised, and the ability to make use of power and money even if it were given. So the money is shared among others. The power to make decisions lies with the Russian authorities.

We proceeded on our journey along 60 km of winter road built on the tundra bogs. Although it is a Sunday, the traffic on the road is like on a motorway.

⁷ Igor Romanovich Kel'min, the president of the Surgut branch of the Ugrian Rescue Society.

We observed how the environment has been affected. When roads are built in haste over bogs, they usually block the streams (no bridges or water-pipes are built). Ivan Kechemov said that six reindeer died when oil leaked from the pipe onto the land. The price of a reindeer is 400 rubles, and the compensation needed would therefore be 2400 rubles. The average Khanty family income is 50 rubles a month. Combustible gas is hardly a solution for the reindeer herder. I recorded this discussion with Maïer on video. His wife and two children in Khanty dress followed along. A woman from the Multanov family also came with her children.

We did not go into the houses at Trom-Agan, but we talked with a family for about ten minutes. It is an example of a village that is being destroyed by oil: that is my clear impression. The geologists' village is growing alongside the Khanty settlement. Money is acquired as so-called compensation – some houses are built, and millions of rubles are used up for this compensation. The compensation houses are, Maïer says, pretty cold. Right next to the village gas is burning.

When Khanty pay a visit, they are sold vodka as 'compensation money', a bottle per family member, since otherwise they would drink 'spirits', which have replaced vodka in geological research stations, where a good many former criminals are working. Perhaps this is the reason why 'geologists' are so ignorant about ecology; I notice that there are a good few other types of people than researchers at the geological research stations.

Maïer supports the idea of a reserve; his ideal site lies on the Lyama river.⁸ He has offered the opportunity to attend a ceremony of worship there, 12–26 September. It will include visits to cemeteries (he knows a cemetery keeper, Andreï Lazyamov, and his wife Katya) and demonstrate facets of ancient culture. The Khanty National Festival, he says, takes place on 15 September. It is only for men. The Kechemov family also live there.

Monday, 22 January 1990

We stayed the night in Russkinskaya. I woke at six o'clock to the noisy melée of people gathering in front of the hotel, waiting to fill ten buses to take them to work. We took a helicopter to the peace of Woki-rap-yagun (*wōqi-rāp-jāwəm*), 'the stream of the cliff fox', a settlement, named after the nearby stream, of just four cabins and a population of about thirty, where we arrived around eleven o'clock. The settlement is generally referred to simply as Stoïbishche, 'the camp'; the term refers to a camp where reindeer herders spend the winter. It is -18° here, but good weather, snowing on and off. It will be dark around three o'clock. In the settlement, they all speak Khanty with each other and just a few words of Russian, and even that is spoken in a broken manner with a

⁸ This is the local name for the river; the official name is Lyamin.

Khanty accent. We have been received in a very friendly manner to mark the start of our field trip.

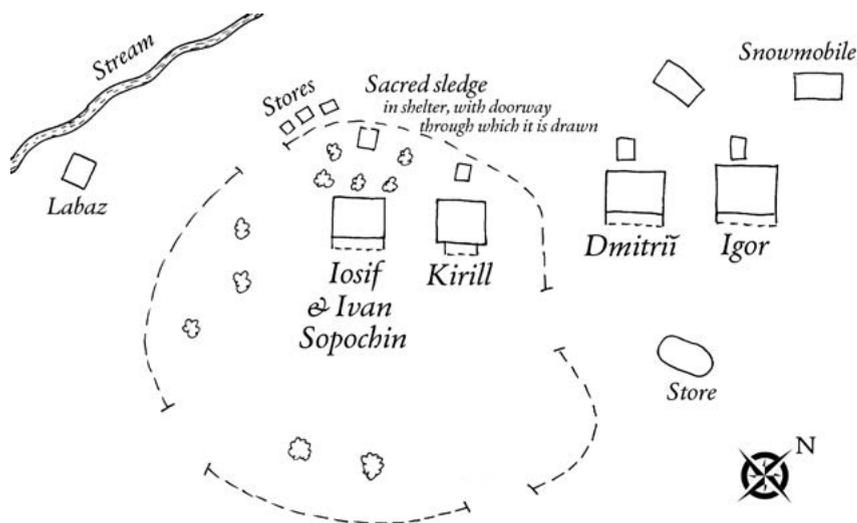
We were accompanied this morning by members of Dedushka's family: Dedushka's daughter Feoktista (along with Elvira, her six-year-old daughter) and Eremeï, Dedushka's son; he lives in Surgut. So it seems our field research here will be distinguished by a family gathering taking place; everyone in the settlement is related, anyway. The presence of Feoktista and Eremeï is no doubt called for, anyway, since otherwise we would never sort out the linguistic problems: the situation is such that Dedushka can only speak his own particular dialect of Khanty (he knows no Russian), and the Khanty specialists in our group, Natasha and Elena Kovgan, are not competent in this dialect; hence we need the help of an interpreter – this field trip is a complex matter.

Dedushka's son-in-law Igor Aïvaseda is a Forest Nenets, but does not know the Nenets language: he has become Khanty, and also knows Russian. Feoktista is a teacher in a folk school, with about five hours of Khanty for the first- to third-level classes. In her village there were 330 Khanty ten years ago, but it now has a population of 21,000, and 350 Khanty, who are becoming russified rapidly. Her husband Gennadiï is Russian.

To the north are Nenets. The nearest settlement, near Noyabrsk, has four families, also of the Sopochin clan. To the east are the Trom-yogan Khanty, to the west the Ermakovs, about 40 km away. To the south, about 50 km away, there are settlements, and Khanty beyond.

There are four cabins. In the first are Ivan Sopochin and his wife Agrafena Andreevna, along with their son Iosif, his wife Rimma and their daughter Olesya. Eremeï is also staying with them. In the second are Kirill Pokachev and his wife Fëkla; Feoktista and Elvira are also staying there. Natasha and Elena have been accommodated with them too. In the third cabin are Dmitriï Kechimov (Dima) and his wife Irina (Ira), with their sons Mikhail (Misha) and Dmitriï (Mitya); Dmitriï's mother is also staying on a visit. In the fourth cabin is Igor and his wife Tat'yana (she was the widow of Ivan Sopochin's son Maksim, who died a few years ago), and their children Marina (Maksim's daughter) and Ivan. Oleg and I are staying in this cabin too. Visitors come and go through the door of the cabin we are staying in the whole time; just now there were thirteen inside, at the moment there are five.

Our cabin is around four metres across, and there is a stove by the door, and stacks of wood drying beside it. The door opening is about a metre in size, and you get inside by crouching. There are washing vessels and a waste vessel underneath, and then the food stores are kept next to them. Then there is a roof window, and under it a piece of apparatus about a metre by a metre and a half, which can be set upright and used for putting shoes on when you come inside. Then there are two full-length planks and two shorter ones to hang about on. These little 'tables' can be moved to where people are sitting and are



Plan of the winter settlement

about ten centimetres high. The sleeping apparatus is behind these. There is a nail there where clothes hang to dry, and little shelves. All the cabins are the same, and they were all covered in snow on the outside. Although the stove is next to the opening where people enter, it is very warm inside, perhaps 30° at the moment, and fuel is being added all the time.

In terms of our work here, our visit began with us going round the four houses and presenting gifts we had got ready before setting out. We then ate a portion of reindeer meat, which had been cooked for us in a saucepan, and we met Dedushka. He had arrived with his son Iosif from the neighbouring settlement, where they had gone for a funeral. Kirill's mother Maria Pavlovna had returned to the house in Russkinskaya, as she had not been able to move, and that is where the funeral took place that Dedushka and Iosif had attended. They came back on Friday, and today it is Monday.

Our meeting with Dedushka got off to a good start, to my mind. Once we had settled down and started drinking tea, the first thing that happened was that Natasha got some ointment out of her bag and rubbed it on Dedushka's back. I got the impression that we had been expected, and it turned out that the evening before our arrival, they had seen premonitions of our coming, and so we set to work to get to know each other. We also noticed how Dedushka changed into the shirt he had been presented with, and it looked as though everyone was satisfied with the gifts; we were thus able to launch into our field work with everything auguring well.

Once we had eaten lunch (Tat'yana and Fëkla got ours ready for us), we went around the place to conduct our first interviews. I had taken the first



Fig. 1.1. The Sopochin family. Dmitriï Kechimov, Iosif Sopochin with daughter Olesya, Rimma, Ivan Sopochin, Fëkla, Tat'yana



Fig. 1.2. Ivan Sopochin with his wife Agrafena and daughter Feoktista



Fig. 1.3. Irina Kechimova with her son Mikhail



Fig. 1.4. Rimma with daughter, Olesya



Fig. 1.5. The Russian researchers Natal'ya Borisovna Koshkarëva and Elena Vital'evna Kovgan in Khanty dress

video, in fact, when Iosif came out to pick up our luggage. The reindeer were frightened by the helicopter, and aren't anywhere near the settlement any more, but tomorrow we shall go to see them in the morning. Maybe we can begin filming then.

Dedushka is a good narrator; the method is that he speaks in Khanty, and Eremeï or Feoktista translates. To begin with they recorded only Khanty texts. I asked why. 'We always have a lack of cassettes' was the answer. I opined that it is not worth saving on cassettes where Dedushka is concerned. The interview began with family history. Fëkla washed dishes in the background as Dedushka spoke; Eremeï asked questions in Khanty, and Kirill interrupted sometimes, and Oleg too, to get a translation. Occasionally Fëkla made a comment from the side. Four languages were bouncing around in the interview: Khanty, Russian, English and Finnish. They wanted to hear words in every language.

When Oleg was interviewing, with just men present, we went on to talk about shamanism. This went onto the audiotape (not video – it was dark). There was a long description of a shamanic song, which Eremeï interrupted. There was quite a palaver with Dedushka's sons, with Oleg insisting that a shaman is a psychotherapist. Eremeï brought up Uri Geller's tricks. The discussion went down the pan, and there was no point in continuing it, especially when Dedushka's wife brought in Iosif's baby for him to look after. The women had disappeared somewhere else, maybe to where Natasha and Elena were staying.

Oleg continued the conversation, moving on to chemical experiments in Akademgorodok, while the shaman sat next to him, unable to understand any Russian. Kel'min also came in to listen. Dedushka just stayed quiet, understanding nothing. That's what this field work is like: Oleg holds forth enthusiastically about various phenomena – maybe he is trying to prove that shamans are really needed or something. Kirill started discussing things with Kel'min. A woman brought some water. Her pigtailed were braided together behind, and a woman always had to keep her head covered. A young boy came in, fascinated by Natasha's dictation machine. We continued the discussion, on the significance of the Church and baptism; none of the inhabitants of the village are baptised. The men then turned to collaboration between native peoples and reindeer herders. Kel'min and Eremeï started talking about exchange between the Sámi and Ugrian rescue societies. I promised to invite Eremeï Aïpin⁹ to Finland, and asked him to send me the names of the committee. Activities are divided into seven areas; Kel'min is president of the Surgut area. During the

⁹ Eremeï Danilovich Aïpin (born 1948, Var'ëgan) is a Khanty writer, and author of over twenty works of art and journalism. He is a well-known public figure, Deputy of the Duma of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug–Yugra, Deputy Chairman of the Duma, and Chairman of the Assembly of Representatives of Indigenous Peoples of the North.



Fig. 1.6. Dedushka recites

conversation, Dedushka left at Natasha's and Elena's invitation for an interview in Tat'yana's house. We went as well to listen to a fairy tale, which lasted half an hour and more. After that we talked about Khanty tale categories. We asked about Dedushka's words and perspectives on his tales, but the conversation was tricky. Dedushka preferred to tell some riddles. We moved over to Fëkla's for afternoon tea, where the palaver continued, with Feoktista and Eremeï, as well as Kirill and Fëkla, telling in turns what Dedushka had done.

It may be that Iosif is now the chief of this village of Stoïbishche. According to what Eremeï told Natasha, Iosif has begun to interest himself in shamanism, and he has his own drum. So it's said, at least.

Tuesday, 23 January 1990

The second day in Stoïbishche. The generator is dodgy: will the battery last? The first battery is running out.

Stoïbishche is a winter settlement, like Talvadas ('Winter settlement') in Lapland; why not investigate it in relation to Talvadas? This morning I drew a plan of the village. I had meant to go fishing, but the idea was not carried out, although there are certainly fish here. Iosif and Eremeï, along with Kel'min, have brought fish in. Tomorrow, it seems, there will be a feast in our honour,

so we shall see what sort of event that turns out to be. Today we are having fish; yesterday we had reindeer, twice.

The atmosphere is friendly. Dedushka seems to be going from cabin to cabin, depending where we are at any time. He has spent the whole of today with us, as he did yesterday until half past ten. He was keen to tell stories. He told a story lasting three-quarters of an hour – and this was supposed to be the shortest of his tales! There was an interesting moment yesterday, too, when he brought along his icon and made the sign of the cross at us in every direction. I don't know if he has the icon with him now, but it would be good to film it. It shows how these things go hand in hand. He is Orthodox, alongside being a shaman. They say he keeps the icon in his bag, along with a vodka glass and images of the most important deities. Let's see if we get to see that bag or not.

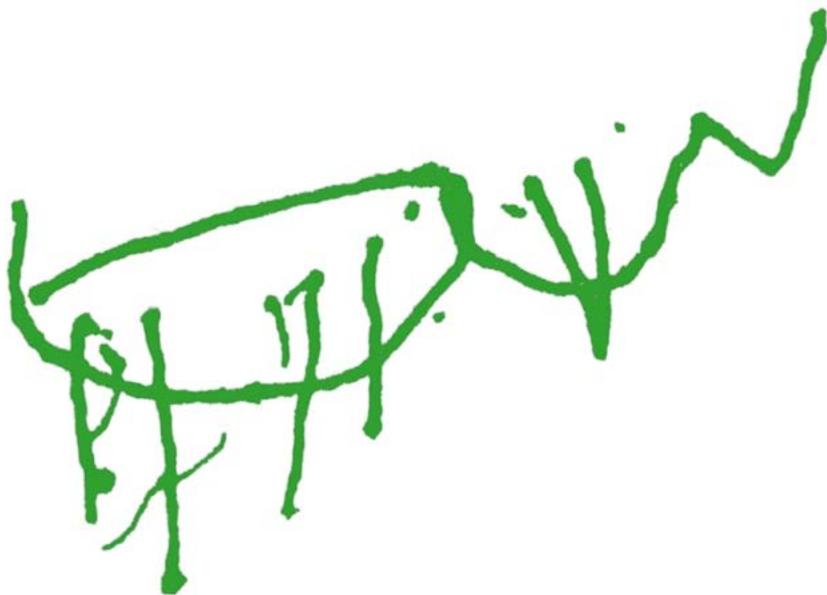
The main obstruction today was that the interviews with Dedushka were interrupted at around four o'clock by Kel'min, who brought a Tyumen' television producer and Surgut newspaper editor. They interviewed us and Dedushka. They were far from polite, and frightened the reindeer. And who could have told them of our arrival beforehand? They weren't here by chance, but luckily they didn't stay in our camp. We didn't see them the whole time we were here. We are aggravated that Kel'min is coming to disturb our work – he set out for the forest, for example, and took our interpreter, Dedushka's son Eremei, and Iosif. He is here till Friday.

Wednesday, 24 January 1990

After a night of little sleep on account of the cold, the morning began with some chopping and sawing of wood for Tat'yana for a few hours. A new settler in the village came to the house, an old man. He has been living in a nearby camp, but didn't get on with his family, and now he's here. He asked for a home and got one: this shows something of the village's approach to life. Now Tat'yana is pouring tea. I ask who the new inhabitant is; she answers Aleksandr Ermakov, but does not know his patronymic (that is not asked about here unless it happens to be known) – the Russian naming system is a form of social control, and a means of suppression. If the father's name is not known, you go without a patronymic (even I was given one).

The reindeer have returned to the village over night. They are everywhere, poking the ground and the snow and the left-overs. Tat'yana is coming to give bread to the reindeer, and she takes a calf by the neck: she wants me to take a picture, but the film has run out. Oleg is patching up his torn trousers, while I get on with my writing. It is a little annoying that Oleg left yesterday's invitation to go fishing vague. Iosif, Eremei and Kel'min have gone on the trip – Kel'min has taken our place in the group. His presence is altogether aggravating – what is he actually doing here?

Dedushka is an expressive narrator. At one point he took off the shirt I brought as a gift, as the cabin was hot. I saw the remains of the prison beatings, scars on his back, apart from his crooked nose. He speaks of man, woman, Torum (*tōrəm*) (equated with the god of the Russians), the bear and the birth of fire. Taking me by hand outside in the evening, he drew an interesting sketch in my notebook of the starry sky – the myth of the heavenly elk, which signifies the evening, since in the evening the sky looks like this elk. That is a topic for research.



To speak more generally on the matter of shamanism, which is one of the most graphic of the trip's objectives to investigate, it is known that Dedushka was imprisoned along with eight other shamans, all of them Khanty, in the 1930s and 1940s, during a time of persecution that in this country has always been focused on matters of belief. Eight of those shamans were shot, but Dedushka survived, and he came back and, according to the story, he demonstrated and declared that he was no shaman, since otherwise he wouldn't be there. He managed to survive, but it was an experience that lasted for several years. Incidentally, in the settlement of Russkinskaya there were two shaman drums. The museum curator had found one of them, a black drum that had been much used, in Yamal; the other drum was white, bigger, and new, the drum of a man who had been dead three years, who had made use of it himself.

Dedushka maintains that he is not a shaman: many so-called shamans do evil deeds, and in light of that he does not want to be called a shaman. But

the issue is more complex. Two close relatives have just died, and this has deterred him from shamanising. He says that the spirits do not allow him to shamanise when people have just died. However, he did begin to sing the bear songs when he was asked, particularly as I told him I had got these sort of songs from Karelians and Finns; he sang quite a long passage from them. One question as to whether he will or will not shamanise is that he does not know whether the spirits are favourable. If the spirits tell him that it is the right moment, then he will do it. We ponder what might induce him to do so; perhaps if someone said they needed treatment it might work. He also says that he will give his knowledge to another some time, but he will do so when he knows who to give it to; hence, he indicates that he has not yet given it. He does not want to use his knowledge wrongly, as that would cause problems. That is how things stand.

Another issue that needs to be mentioned is that shamanism is a family matter. Now that this family is doing well and thriving, there is some envy directed at it: Dedushka has been seized before now, and an attempt made to break his limbs and threaten him. Shamanism can be used against other families, but in his daughters' opinion Dedushka uses it only for the good of his own family. On the other hand, Dedushka was left an orphan when he was seven, and has suffered difficulties throughout his life. He was born in 1910, eighty years ago. He seems to have learned a good deal from his mother, who had strange mental powers, as did his deceased son Maksim, who fell under a train. Maksim's widow is Tat'yana, who then remarried. Maksim is buried nearby, and Dedushka is very bitter towards the geologists for breaking up the grave and destroying the cemetery when undertaking investigations or something. It is only Maksim that is buried there, very close by. We'll see if we can get to look at it. I've tried to find this graveyard but didn't manage to, and it's reported that he's been reburied in a general cemetery like the others, probably near Russkinskaya, about 40 km from here.

At around nine in the evening, when we had concluded the interviews and were awaiting Dedushka's arrival, Iosif and Dima came along with Kel'min, and started discussing minority politics. They got pretty wound up. Their problem seemed to be that they wanted this research work to be more helpful to them. The men turned to the topic of the 'girls' – Natasha and Elena: why were they asking about all these old things, what use is there in rummaging among ancient stuff, and so on. They must really be interested in something quite different, they reckoned. I told Oleg I wanted a turn at speaking, and spent about half an hour to explain how we have researched these 'ancient things' in other countries, such as among the Sámi and under the aegis of UNESCO programmes, and told them about Finnish minority politics and the Sámi parliament. I said that in Finland the highest leadership is interested in the Sámi people and the problems faced by Finno-Ugric peoples, and President Kekkonen's trips to



Fig. 1.7. The Russian research team,
Elena Kovgan, Natal'ya Koshkarëva and Oleg Donskikh

Siberia came up.¹⁰ I told them about my own research work among the Sámi, and how our collaboration has worked and is still working. We discussed our research topics together. What is ethically correct, and what isn't? I particularly emphasised, among all this arguing, the integrity of a culture and how important it is that we carry out our work collaboratively – native peoples and researchers can't be on different sides, and researchers should not, for example, leave a native village with information that could harm the community. I spoke of the possibility of exchanging delegates under UNESCO's Arctic programme. Finally I presented them with the proposal that we could talk about their hopes. Kel'min said he would discuss the matter with his own Ugrian rescue society, and then Iosif said it is important for them to have a territory where they could practise their own traditional way of living and benefit from the usufruct. We said we supported their aspirations, and then, around eleven o'clock, they left, with the matter feeling as if it had been resolved.

Oleg said he didn't find it any wonder that I had been vice-chairman of a political party, and that my speech saved the situation. Elena and Natasha were also happy: I had emphasised the importance of their linguistic research. Feok-

¹⁰ Urho Kaleva Kekkonen (1900–86) was president of Finland, 1956–82. He pursued a policy of active neutrality between the power blocs of the USSR and Nato/Western Europe.

tista was happy, of course, about the educational and school issues. And so the evening ended well, and I slept well. I woke in the night at the arrival of Igor, the master of the house: the Khanty men had carried on with their evening.

Thursday, 25 January 1990

Today was the reindeer sacrifice. It began at around nine in the morning, when Eremeï came to wake us. Igor and Tat'yana offered us some tea and iced lemonade, which he had brought from Russkinskaya. The reindeer were first herded, an activity that only the Khanty were permitted to be present at, since the reindeer are frightened of strangers, and then they were corralled into the pen in Stoïbishche. After this, the ceremony proper began; the women followed it from the houses. I videoed it almost in its entirety, except for a break when the machine stopped working, just at a point where the men were singing songs – why did it have to break down right at this point?

Three reindeer were lassoed and harnessed, and taken close to the sacred sledge. Two of them were offered as sacrifices. The sacrifice took place under the open sky, close to the corral fence. Shamanising, through songs, took place both before the butchering and when the meal was ready. One of the reindeer was white and male, and it was offered to the god of heaven, while the other was dark grey and female, and it was offered to the goddess of the Earth. Correspondingly, the necks of the reindeer were adorned with a white and grey cloth, which were taken away after they were deprived of their lives, and became sheets for the holy sledge. The butchering went well; the pelts were not split.

The meal followed. The essential point here was that all the meat was shared out, and even the researchers were given their own portions (we were invited to both Igor's and Kirill's homes, and went to both). Leaving no-one out signifies the true communal ideals of the community, an almost communist concept that everyone is part of a whole. Here, for example, salt and meat and fish are loaned from one house to another, and when the catch of yesterday's fish arrived, it was shared between everyone, and today the meat was shared out similarly. It was interesting that Dedushka could be seen deciding who got each portion.

Dedushka directed the ceremony, during which the sacred sledge was the main focus of attention. It was drawn from the holy back corner of the compound at the beginning of the ceremony. At various points during the ceremony the harnessed reindeer were tied to the sledge. At the end of the rite Dedushka uttered sacred words in front of the sledge, and lifted the front of it several times into the air. At the end of the ceremony the sledge was covered in reindeer pelts, the two new ones on top. It was taken away back to its hiding place behind a fence. Everything took place at Dedushka's pace, but in terms of action the ceremony was led by his son Iosif, who was the master of this event and offered a prayer at the end; unfortunately, the first part of it is not



Fig. 1.8. Preparing reindeer for the sacrifice



Fig. 1.9. Lassoing the white reindeer for sacrifice



Fig. 1.10. Prayers before the ritual meal at the reindeer sacrifice



Fig. 1.11. The holy sledge at the reindeer sacrifice



Fig. 1.12. The holy sledge laden with the sacrificed reindeer pelts



Fig. 1.13. Consuming raw liver after the sacrifice
(Juha Pentikäinen, Kirill Pokachev, Oleg Donskikh)

on the video – the machine failed, as inside the cabins it was around 30°, and outside about as much below freezing, and it could not adjust quickly enough. However, most of the prayer was recorded. The whole ceremony took an hour and three quarters.

There were also two bear heads that watched over the whole ceremony, and there was a vodka bottle behind the reindeer, and a little of it in a glass as well. Then the shaman emptied the glass at the end of the ceremony. In discussing the details of the ceremony, Dedushka was reserved, and did not speak willingly.

After the meal, I ate raw, bloody liver with my hands, as we listened to Dedushka recount the myth of the world's origin. He answers questions with stories; he leaves questions about 'belief' or 'why?' unanswered. Feoktista and Kirill act as interpreters; Eremei was also around, but asleep. Elena and Natasha asked questions, consulting me from time to time; I did not video this – there are not enough tapes, and the generator we brought as a gift does not work, yet at least.

After eating the reindeer meat in our cabin, we went over to Kirill's house, where conversations continued. Here, by the way, I heard that there had been some difficulties between Kirill and Fëkla ten years or so since, but now they are a couple, living together quite calmly, and half the research team are staying with them, and we have been well regaled, and this is where Dedushka has usually come to be interviewed.

Every tea-break gives rise to a discussion about differences between Khanty and Sámi ways of life – dress, habitation, economics, food, schooling. There is a feeling that it is important to create an atmosphere of exchange of ideas. This morning, there were questions about the differences in reindeer rituals. Then there was a discussion about the white reindeer, which is holy. I tell them that for the Sámi too the white reindeer is sacred. Dedushka tells us that in some land, not of the Khanty, were the father and mother of reindeer: was it in the land of the Sámi? Here the reindeer weigh 120 to 150kg; they are big. The animals apparently eat everything, even blood, and I experienced this myself later: they consume even the urine and dung from the toilet. The toilet is a pine-branch shelter, near the settlement, behind the kennels. The women's is higher up, about a hundred metres in front.

It is seven thirty and a story is beginning. Feoktista is an excellent interpreter; even I understand her Russian. At about eight, Dmitrii and Igor come into the cabin. Dmitrii soon seizes the microphone and takes on the role of interpreter. Clearly, he inspires Dedushka to talk of Torum and his sons and daughters. There was a good atmosphere. Dmitrii discusses things and translates, with Kirill and Igor behind, and our research group. The women – Feoktista, her daughter Elvira and Fëkla – write a list of Torum's children (one of them is Jekku, or Jesus Christ). The field work involves twelve people – and a *cat*! Dedushka's tale of the sons of Torum will continue tomorrow. Now Dmitrii

steps forward. He seems to be a true storyteller, despite his age (around thirty). Kirill accompanies him with comments; Igor says nothing. At first they speak Khanty, then Russian. The evening goes on until nine. They do not have any yoiking like the Sámi (I asked); instead they have anecdotes, for example about the Khanty and the Sel'kups, which Dmitriï now tells. Fëkla meanwhile butchers the hare that Kirill caught yesterday.

The settlement has five snow sledges: Iosif owns two of them, Dmitriï one, Igor two, but Kirill none. They say he has no money. He is the village hunter; Tat'yana is supposed to be too, when she waited for Igor to return from the army. He came back and got Tat'yana, along with her children.

Now the generator is working. The village will keep it as a gift after our departure; Oleg says that it may prove the most important thing about our visit.

Friday, 26 January 1990

This morning was the final act of yesterday's reindeer sacrifice ceremony. Igor stayed behind (not the Igor we are staying with, but a namesake), while Kirill, Igor and Dmitriï set off with Eremeï to take the reindeer antlers to the sacred grove, which is situated two hundred metres away by the stream; I took a video of this, about fifteen minutes long. Dmitriï climbed up into the crown of a tree and the men shouted. Dedushka was not there. He had been 'gadding about' the whole day. At the site, the trees' branches were hung with the skulls of a bear, an elk and a reindeer, with a cloth draped over each of them. In a white birch tree hung a white cloth, along with the bear, reindeer and elk heads, dedicated to the god of heaven, the male god Torum. Then, on a willow notch, hung antlers and a black cloth, dedicated to the Earth Mother. The head of the white reindeer belongs to the god of heaven, so it is placed high up in a white birch. A black or grey mare reindeer belongs to the female deity, and it can be left near the ground; it does not need to be near the heavens. This, then, was the sacred grove that stood near the settlement. I filmed the whole ceremony.

When we got back, Iosif said that at the previous settlement there was much finer woodland, but the townspeople stole everything away. I had been rather perplexed at why they should have come here, and how. We were told Dedushka and his family had not lived in the present settlement for very long.

The Khanty harvest a good many berries, but Tat'yana says that only reindeer eat mushrooms. She does not say why, but according to a story the mushroom is a phallus, and it may not be eaten. Dedushka later related why he doesn't eat mushrooms. If someone eats a poisonous white mushroom, he will begin to laugh. Another reason is the *cherv'*, a small worm that lives in the mushroom. Reindeer grow fat on mushrooms.

Dedushka says that God must be given money so that he will be gracious.

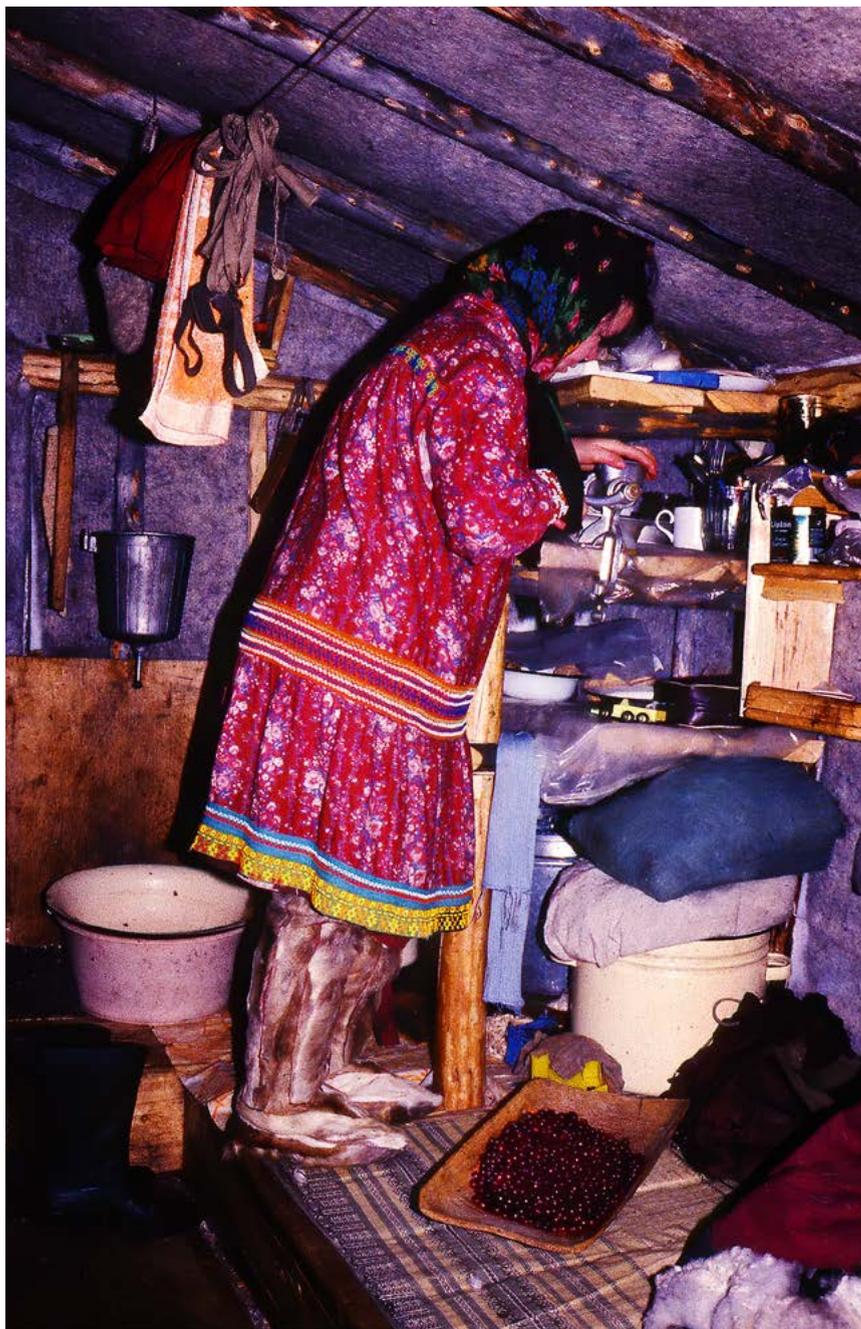


Fig. 1.14. The berry harvest



Fig. 1.15. Juha Pentikäinen examines a Khanty shamanic drum
(not at the Sopochnin settlement)

In the evening, after listening to some songs from the shaman, we discussed whether it would be possible to get him to show us his drum and arrange a shamanic session. It seemed that it wouldn't work like this: there had to be a reason. So, we pondered what the reason might be, and then I mentioned something that I had been worried about, namely that my father had been under the weather and had long been suffering from a throat problem, without any reason for it being discovered; but the shaman at first said he couldn't heal this person, as he was so far away, and Dedushka did not know this land. After a moment or two, however, he asked more about the situation, and I explained, but he refused at first to deal with the matter, but soon, after thinking about it, he said that he had spoken with his spirits, and he then asked whether it was at the edge of the land (the coast) where my father lived in Finland. He said he could perhaps find the cause by making a connection across the surface of the water. He then said he would try, but that we could not video the session; hence, it was not filmed, although the discussion that gave rise to it was recorded. He asked if I believed in God and the spirits; I said yes. Then he asked through Eremeï, the interpreter, what the power of a shaman is to the mind of a professor. I said that ability is personal. I told of the example of my experience in Vesisaari in Lapland in 1967 (where the Norwegian doctor

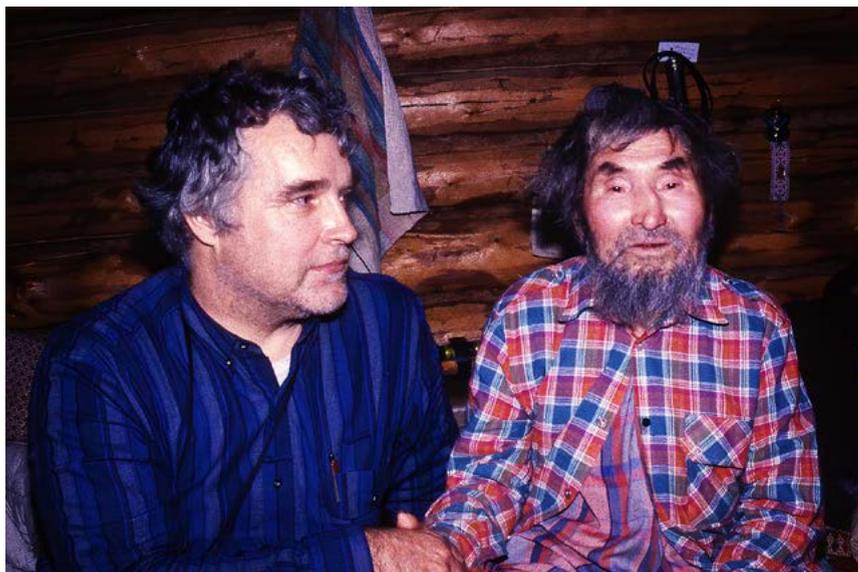


Fig. 1.16. Juha Pentikäinen greets Dedushka
at the shaman's prognostication of his father's illness

Unsgård would pass his patients over to a shaman to be healed). Then he asked me to sit on his right side, and he began to pray. He slowly gave me a bucket and asked me to lift it. I did so, and it was rather heavy, as it was half-full of water. Then he looked keenly at the stove: everyone had to clear away from in front of it. The water boiled on the stove, and then more wood was added to make fire, and he looked keenly into the stove, as if it were the object of his enchantment. He did not actually go into trance once during this event, but there was a form of charm or incantation in what he did, and every so often he tapped on the bucket and lifted it, quite violently, upwards, and then bashed it three times on the floor. This was repeated several times. Then he paused for a while, during which time he started a conversation with me. He asked whether in Finland there are animals which are believed to be connected with certain illnesses; this could be the cause of the problem. I said that indeed there are, in Finnish traditions. Then he posed a question about the frog and this and that, and, continuing his charms, he came to the conclusion that it was indeed the frog, and then the incantations came to an end. This, then, was no doubt the white goddess *Agan-imi* (*âγæn imi*), who commands the frogs and directs them (a sort of harpy figure, we might say). Finally, Dedushka said I should buy a cloth, a white one, and hang it up high in a white birch to dangle there, pointing to the white god of heaven. I must not speak of the details of the matter to anyone but my father. He said he would get better, and if he did

not heal entirely, that wasn't his fault. The journey would be long. I thanked him, grasping him by the hand (we took a photograph of this), during which he cried out three mighty charms – I felt this powerfully, though perhaps more in the spirit – as he grasped my hand tightly each time, and his body shook. I said I would remember this moment my whole life. I asked what the fee was – he said he hoped I would remember him. This episode lasted three-quarters of an hour. A powerful experience.

There was a meeting in the evening in Dmitrii's house with the elders of the village and the local reindeer-herders, and the ladies too, and finally Dedushka himself came, but he was not recorded in the minutes. The issue was that in March the land-ownership law would come into force. They were concerned about how they could keep the traditional lands they have usufruct of. We discussed these matters in the meeting together. The Sopochnin family's tragedy has been that they have thrice had to move their habitations out of others' way: geological research visits have been made there, or other things. The cemetery has also been destroyed. This place, then, is the third ideal location they have sought out. It was also asked whether Dedushka and his wife had lived in some village at some point, but this was vehemently denied: they had the whole time been a nomadic family, but they had nonetheless sought to find a place where they could practise their way of life in peace. The thought arose that we could collaborate with them on this. A letter was drawn up under Kel'min's direction to the officials about the right to this land, which they feared they would lose, that bridges, geological investigations and gas pipes would be constructed. We also discussed how to overcome this, and from my interjection arose the concept of ecological balance and its affirmation. This signifies that waters must all be preserved within their watershed, and fish must be able to swim their own courses, that game must be able to live in their own areas and reindeer traverse their own paths: and this concept was approved as their leading principle. We could produce an article together and publish it in a journal, which would demonstrate our collaboration in wishing to influence the living conditions of this region. This recent friction has arrived here with various Russians, who are trying to find Iosif and get him to collaborate. No-one knows where they came from, but in any case it has agitated this group into action. There is perpetual anxiety here that this district will be lost.

They wrote a protocol about these matters, mentioning their aspirations, and called for a rejection of geological investigation corporations being allowed to set up in the region. After discussion, it was agreed that around 200 km² should be set aside. They had a map, too, which we have a copy of, drawn by Oleg on the basis of what Eremei set out and Iosif filled in, which marked all the areas of usufruct.

This is Kel'min's set of aspirations:

1. The preservation of the Khanty/Mansi as a people;
2. Cultural renewal;
3. Strengthening of the language in relation to Russian;
4. A university of the northern peoples (perhaps in Khantÿ-Mansiïsk);
5. A museum;
6. Ecological cleansing;
7. Exchange of delegates;
8. Promotion of handicrafts;
9. Plans for a reserve;
10. Links with Moscow.



Fig. 1.17. Feoktista and her daughter Elvira, and Fëkla

Saturday, 27 January 1990

During the night, the temperature fell almost to freezing point inside, and there's ice in the corner.

Another reindeer ceremony was supposed to take place today for the sacrifice of Dima's animals, but Dmitriï's brother, who was supposed to arrive at four or five in the night, did not come, so the ritual cannot be held today. The possible fishing trip hasn't happened either. So we have been cutting up trees this morning, chopping them and sawing them and transporting them into

the houses. After that, I took some pictures and film of magical activities that Fëkla was performing. In front of the fireplace was a firebrand, and a stick was put on it, and wherever the stick fell gave the answer: for example, a forecast was set up such that if it fell towards the door, then the helicopter would come to fetch us on Monday morning, but if it fell such-and-such a way, then the helicopter wouldn't come. So, in this way we could see how we would get away from here. The weather isn't kind to the camera, though, moving from -20° to a hot and humid cabin.

Here on my knee sits the cat, and in front of me, leaning against me, is six-year-old Elvira, noticing this word and that as I write.

Feoktista is making decorations for her costume. As far as Dedushka goes, she is protecting her father; she does not necessarily want to present to us matters to do with shamanism, for example. To some extent, she agrees to, but only with trepidation:¹¹ but she is the link with Dedushka, now that Eremeï has left, and that makes it more difficult to get her to present things. The other link is Elena, who does not really understand the need to get this information. Yesterday, she shut off this machine quite conclusively, even though I said it should remain on. She said she couldn't get the information. Another colleague seemed to understand the situation a lot better. So, today we intend to go through the means and structures of livelihood with Oleg, and find the solution that could act as the basis for driving forward their advantage here in this region as one of ecological balance, and preserving the region as their own territory. If they grasp the significance of this shared interest, then for sure we shall get important information about where they are at what time, and what sort of areas they have made use of at different times. It looks like a fishing trip will take place tomorrow, and for that I need to save my battery. They have been running out here, and the generator still does not work. They got the lights working yesterday evening, but I don't know if it's worth trying the charger that works on the cigarette-lighter device, when the whole thing could break down in these conditions.

I must go outside and see what's happening.

A Bashkir man, Durka, turned up around midday, who said he was bringing 'civilisation' and 'money' by arranging 'geographical' investigations. This area is now absorbed into the 'plans', a continuation of Brezhnev's 'hundred-year project', even though the man himself is dead.

¹¹ Feoktista was probably hesitant to communicate issues related to shamanic belief since Khanty women were prohibited from discussing or presenting certain aspects of the belief system and related practices.



Fig. 1.18. A fish-weir trap

Sunday, 28 January 1990

We went on a very interesting fishing trip, led by Iosif and Igor, about six kilometres away along the stream along which their summer camp lies. They fished with a fyke net here: there were pike, burbot, perch and other fish. They prepared them with a stick and heated up a small stove, and it was very good. All our group took part in the fishing expedition. After that, we dressed in fur coats (*malitsj*).

In the evening, Dedushka told a long story, lasting half an hour, during which my battery ran out. Before that he presented a sort of children's opera, in which he dressed up as a woman. The idea here is that there is a man with two wives, and he comes home. Previously, he has stayed away, because he couldn't choose between them, but now, when he comes home and chooses them both, how nice it will be for him afterwards!

Then there was a long discussion with the men (Igor, Iosif, the other Igor) about the problems caused by the geological surveys, which we have seen in the form of a line cut through the woodlands, just a few hundred metres from this settlement. So, we have got a map drawn of the region and the village.

Durka, who was here tonight, was talking up the next investigation to be undertaken. We reacted very negatively, and then in the evening we discussed it at great length. So, the idea is that civilisation is brought here, but civilisa-



Fig. 1.19. Emptying the fyke net

tion is not the same as culture – and culture is being destroyed along with the arrival of civilisation. Yet culture is clearly something more genuine and advanced and powerful than the ‘civilisation’ that is being brought here. This is the sort of struggle that is taking place here over the land, and for our part we wish to be involved in it.

I asked Oleg about the family’s tragedies. The first thing was that the railways pushed them out of their habitations, and that was very bad, as the houses were destroyed by the railway tracks; this was nine years ago. Then after that the geologists destroyed the autumn camp site, and then the winter one. One of them used trucks. They have been living in this place for nine years. I confirmed what Oleg said with Kirill and Fëkla. The tractors, brought on the railway, had been ridden over their dwellings, and the geologists had destroyed two of their camp sites: they had suffered three dire experiences from the bringers of ‘civilisation’.

The village lives through five seasons. The first begins in this area on 15 November, and lasts until the middle of March, at which point they move away to the spring camp; then, in mid-June, they move to the summer camp, then in mid-August to the early-autumn camp, and at the end of September to the late-autumn camp (see diagram, p. xvi). The autumn camps are decided by how long the lichen is. The move in mid-June is determined by the mosquitoes (people move away from the swamps towards the river), and that in mid-August by the berry harvest. Hence the village is occupied, in different places, through all five seasons.

Igor’s mother is a sister of Dedushka’s wife. She was married to a Nenets. Igor at first used to make wine, but this caused problems here, and he stopped making it at home: the men would come and drink the wine together. The women set up a protest and stopped this activity.

We have drawn up a sociometric plan (the first version has been prepared by me, Natasha and Elena together, and Oleg will complete it from his perspective). The main thing of note is the relationship of respect by everyone towards Dedushka; he mainly enters two houses, one of them being Kirill and Fëkla’s, and the other his own house, but he has not once been seen in Tat’yana’s house, for example. Of course, in general it is clear that the village stays together by means of the power of unity that obtains here, manifested in the shared economy.

Monday, 29 January 1990

Our time is running out: we leave tomorrow. I have just come from a skiing trip with Oleg. We used skis some 20 cm broad with leather bottoms; there was no need for a stick. We did a trail of a couple of kilometres. The aim was to see the cemetery where Maksim, Tat’yana’s former husband, was buried,



Fig. 1.20. Feoktista and Fëkla at the stove

but unfortunately we did not succeed. The day drew in, and we asked both Dima and Tat'yana about the matter, but they both reckoned that only Dedushka could decide if we could go there, but he couldn't be disturbed over this at the moment.

Igor left with Vanya to go fishing, and they roasted fish there. They are there cooking them like yesterday, and they had quite a catch, it seems. This morning we also got cranberries from Vanya, and for about 300 rubles I bought some of the local handicrafts from the women: some ornaments and a pair of boots, a Khanty woman's dress and a bag for my youngest daughter, six-year-old Aino. Both the women are getting their cranberries, and before that we were given reindeer steaks from the sacrificial meal that we had enjoyed.

We met Dedushka around half past twelve, and then we went with him to cut from a birch tree a three-forked branch, which we then wrapped in fabric to prepare it as an offering, with every piece of fabric measured carefully, which I videoed (see Fig. 6.2). Dedushka prepared it. Then we had a meal, and alongside it Dedushka presented a prayer for about ten minutes, to the goddess of fire, and he threw this twig, which we had all touched, into the stove, and uttered a closing cry. This twig symbolised the goddess of fire, and her spouse and daughter. There are supposed to be two fire deities, the good fire

goddess, who seems to represent much the same as the guardian of the home fire, and then the goddess of fire who is found in aeroplanes and helicopters and industrial plants. And the present sacrifice was to both fire deities; it was a sacrificial meal that we were attending.¹²

Now, it is nearly five o'clock, and the people of the house are sitting here, speaking Khanty to each other from time to time. And here in their midst sits six-year-old Elvira, drawing, while we are doing our work. Soon it will be time to pack, but first we want to engineer a situation by which we can see the shaman's drum in use, if we can manage it. Let us see. This morning there was a rather long prayer in front of the icon, and that's how the day really began, or this tape began, or at least this third video tape which is running now.

Tuesday, 30 January 1990

Here we are, on the morning of our last day, waiting for the helicopter. For the first time, the snow is sticky; the temperature may be above freezing.

We never managed to see the drum. In the end, the reason was Iosif being away. He left late on Friday evening for a meeting in Khant'ı-Mansiisk to represent the Surgut regional group led by Kel'min. For him, this political excitement brought excitement to the field work he was coming to help with as well. He did not know what to do. The other reason is that he is clearly under Dedushka's tutelage, and I've formed the impression that he will be the heir to the shamanic tradition. He has stopped drinking, he is hankering for the spirits to come to him, he is learning how to use the drum. Dedushka said yesterday that he can't go and get the drum while Iosif is away. After that he danced a Nenets shamanic dance and sang about ten songs. This morning he came, the first time he has turned up unbidden during the whole trip. He said again that he would have shown the drum if Iosif had been around.

It's ten o'clock. No sign of the helicopter . . .

While we wait, we make plans for the future, carrying on field work in Stoibishche and elsewhere. Dedushka is in good health, but he is old. Will we see him again? But the tradition will live on after he has passed away. We paid him 100 rubles for his time and his songs and tales.

But we have been invited back to Stoibishche. The best time would be the beginning of August. Things are relaxed then at the summer camp, and there

¹² The goddess of fire, one of the most important deities, is known to all Khanty. For the Surgut Khanty, *t'arəs naj imi*, the fiery sea goddess, lives in the midst of the sea; where she lives, the fire burns for ever. Her cult was described by Ivan Sopochnin by Ágnes Kerezi: see p. 153 and p. 250, Fig. 6.2. The children of the fiery sea goddess are the fires burning at home; the goddess of the hearth fire is called *naj ajki (imi)*. She, too, is offered red cloth, thrown into the fire to help protect the residents of the house.

are no mosquitoes. The berries will be starting to ripen. Dedushka is inviting us back, say Iosif and Dmitriï. They are interested in the films, as well. We are welcome. Should we come? Oleg is planning to come with a film crew to film the berry harvest, drumming and so on. He has promised me a copy of everything, according to our agreement. Dedushka said again we are welcome.

Tat'yana is getting a costume ready; I'll give it to one of my girls.

It's been a fine trip over all, and a rest – quite a change from normal life: no electricity, no running water, no toilet, at the mercy and under the protection of nature. Six batteries lasted for nine hours of video. The current ran out at midnight last night.

The trip can certainly be compared with what I experienced in Talvadas, when the boat crunched onto the shore in 1967: work which is still unfinished, but the week here has given a good opportunity for comparing the Khanty with the Sámi.

'Helicopter' they are calling. Now it's here.

Outcomes:

3 x 3hr video tapes = **9 hr** + 16 x 1½hr audio tapes = **24 hr**



Fig. 1.21. Farewell to Stoïbishche

SECOND TRIP

Tuesday, 11 September

We arrived in Moscow, and the problems followed. L'udmila Spiridonova, the new secretary for Finnish affairs, was waiting for telegrams before giving us our permits. Our pick-up arrived an hour late at the airport, then we had to wait five hours in the hotel lobby, as my room wasn't vacated before 8 pm. The next day, the driver didn't turn up in the morning, as his car had broken down.

At dinner, I met Ol'ga Balalaeva, who was there last June with Nikolai Plotnikov¹³ and Moldanov¹⁴ (a Surgut Khanty) on the banks of the Yugan. I got some folklore about a shaman called Sushinov from a big man named Lyamskiĭ, who had eaten fly agaric (an old, dried-up piece), and given some to the researchers from Moscow to enjoy (Plotnikov three times, Balalaeva once). Eating fly agaric is a common part of the shamanism of peripheral areas, but I disagree with these people's eagerness to try everything on offer, for reasons of ethics and their and my own health.

The Tyumen' museum organise a bear ritual every fifth June in Khantĭ-Mansiĭsk. A bull was slaughtered, and died in twenty minutes. Balalaeva thinks I could come to the Yugan river and the Eastern Khanty next summer, if I want. Balalaeva thinks that shamanism is not an original Khanty feature, but acquired from the Nenets. Is it possible?

Thursday, 13 September

Oleg Donskikh picked us up from the airport in Tyumen' at 2 am local time. He said that Vladimir Maĭer is ill, so it's not clear when we can leave for the Lyamin river, and how. Oleg has video stuff with him; we'll have to see how we fare together. We went to Vladimir Pavlovich Mel'nikov's northern development institute, which is now divided into three sections. Mel'nikov, who is now in Canada, will be made director of the institute.¹⁵ One section will be the humanities section, which Oleg will lead. A huge part of the institute, however, consists of geologists, engineers and technicians.

¹³ This may be Nikolai Alekseevich Plotnikov (1898–1994), head of the botany department of Omsk Agricultural Institute, who undertook many expeditions to the Altai and Kazakhstan.

¹⁴ This may be Timofei A. Moldanov (of the Ob-Ugric Institute of Applied Research and Studies, Khantĭ-Mansiĭsk), but Moldanov is a fairly common name so identification cannot be determined.

¹⁵ Vladimir Pavlovich Mel'nikov (b. 1940) is a leading scientist in permafrost research, and a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences and director of the Department of Cryosophy at Tyumen' University.

We visited the institute's History of Arctic Policy unit, where we met Prof. Vladimir Alekseevich Danilov, Rafikov (a Tatar political activist) and the museum director, Natal'ya Fedorova. We got a copy of a map I noticed on the shelf, showing the Khanty, Nenets, Sel'kups and Tatars. I also took photos of some of the museum's holdings: decorative depictions of the bird god, and a head of the guardian spirit of the Yugan. I also found out about two folk artists.

After a meal, we went to the archaeology institute, which Aleksandr Vasilevich Matveev¹⁶ and his wife Natal'ya introduced us to. I got two prints and a picture of a Finno-Ugric idol from Irkutsk.

We are off to Surgut next. A good job, as Tyumen' is a really dirty city. At the airport, the check-in lady said she remembered me from my earlier trip in 1989!

Friday, 14 September

Kechemov was holding the fort in the Khanty representative Maïer's office; Maïer is supposed to be ill. At his home, we were told he had gone fishing for the night, and he wasn't there in the morning. The latest information is to meet him at 4 pm. We went to the shops in the morning. I bought two pairs of night slippers.

Saturday, 15 September

In the morning we tried to get to Lyantor, where Feoktista lives. The bus was supposed to leave at 9 o'clock, but never arrived at all – and we had tickets, too. We had to give up, as we would have had less than two hours there anyway. The intention is to get Feoktista to work on the project and translate Dedushka's texts into Eastern Khanty.

In the afternoon, we went to take our greeting gifts to Eremeï, with others to take on to Stoïbishche, including crosses and an icon of St Nicholas that Dedushka had asked for. Eremeï was not at home, but his lively wife Tamara was there with their twelve-year-old son and five-year-old daughter.

At last, Maïer arrived at around 3 o'clock. He intends to leave on Monday with us on our journey; Kechemov may not come if the destination is Trom-Agan. The Lyamin possibility will be realised if the helicopter can land there. Maïer reckons it would be better because of his connections there. I presented Maïer with some teaching books, which he was glad to have. We also agreed to begin our collaborative work in the educational section on the issue of problems common to both Sámi and Khanty.

¹⁶ Aleksandr Vasilevich Matveev (1955–2013) was a historian and archaeologist, a professor specialising in the Bronze Age of western Siberia, and one of the organisers of archaeology in the Tyumen' area.

Maïer came with us to dinner. At present, he is attracted by the thought of leaving behind the duties of being the region's president. He is keen to come to Finland. We spent a long time discussing the plans for collaboration. He is a matey chap, and polite. He was born on the Yugan.

Sunday, 16 September

We left on an excursion at 9 o'clock. At Lyantor we met Feoktista. There are only five Khanty families living at Lyantor, but in the surroundings about four hundred live in Khanty winter settlements. We asked Feoktista to help with the texts. She lives in a flat, quite large; they were eating breakfast in the kitchen when we called. Dedushka has lived in Lyantor in the past. They have been expecting us in Stoïbishche. Lyantor is the former Pim, for whose inhabitants compensation houses, twenty of them, are under construction, for which Khanty families have already been selected. We went in the buildings, which Maïer proudly presented.

On the return journey (190 km) we went to have a look at old Surgut. Of the Surgut known to K. F. Karjalainen¹⁷ only a few houses remain, down by the Ob'. We also visited the old cemetery, next to which a church has been built in the last couple of years, where a confirmation class was being held. The priest, a young man, was teaching about ten teenagers. Faith has returned to Surgut, then, in this form.

In the evening, I heard about the environmental destruction at the mouth of the Ob' in June, where an old oil pipe broke at the bottom of the bay. The oil had leaked into the maritime bay and destroyed a settlement altogether. Maïer said that the dead fish were like snow on land. A terrible catastrophe, of which not a mention in the newspapers. Many reindeer, two thousand or more, and twelve thousand in the whole *okrug*, have died this spring as well because of destruction of the lichen caused by oil. Maïer mentioned that reindeer meat is very good.

Monday, 17 September

Nine o'clock in Maïer's office. I interview him as he sits with his six phones; he answers me in between calls. I find out something about Khanty education. The Khanty have four schools, at Ugut, Russkinskaya, Kayukovo and Lyamina. At Lyantor there are four Khanty classes in the international school. In Kayukovo a doctor speaks Khanty, but that's it. The problem with the schools is that the small Khanty classes are expensive.

¹⁷ Kustaa Fredrik Karjalainen (1871–1919) was the great Finnish ethnographer of the Khanty whose magisterial *Jugralaisten uskonto* [Religion of the Ugra Peoples] was published in 1918 on the basis of extensive field work carried out earlier.

We find out that the Khanty are not gathering at Trom-Agan, nor at Lyamina either. The Khanty have not held a festival for three years, as there has been no reason to: there are no fish, and the reindeer are dying. Now we have to think of alternatives. Had we known, we would have gone straight to Stoïbishche, but it's no longer possible: we would have needed Feoktista. We saw her yesterday, but did not ask, as we did not know the situation. Nonetheless, I had suggested it to Oleg, and he seemed to understand the situation, as he came at half past twelve to talk about the possibility. The problem is, can anyone other than Eremeï be found for the trip? Oleg calls Maïer and Kechemov: Stoïbishche would be the best place to go, as Dedushka is old, we have contacts there, time is limited, we have a research objective, we've been wasting our time in Surgut. We'll see how it turns out.

Then Maïer's car came to fetch us at half past two. Now the plan is forming that we shall leave tomorrow for Stoïbishche, and return late on the 20th, when we shall make a boat journey to Lyamina and return on the 22nd to Tyumen'. There seems to be a fault in the system: the land may be under the sway of *glasnost'* and *perestroika*, but time is being frittered away in waiting and matters being pushed from one place to another, from one desk to another.

Kechemov was in Stoïbishche a couple of weeks ago together with Eremeï over the matter of getting logs. The Stoïbishche reindeer have not suffered losses at all. So Maïer thinks the situation is different there. We know them, of course, and Dedushka awaits us. We set off to buy some arrival gifts.

One further possibility would be to see a Khanty fish cooperative, perhaps on Saturday on the return trip to Surgut. It looks like five active, indeed tiring, days are in the offing. The most tiring thing, though, is this 'system', with all the waiting, which happens everywhere, and at every single place there is some moment of panic. Perhaps Oleg is too stringent an organiser. Now he has called Tyumen', and Kechemov turned up. We try to ask him why the Khanty autumn festival isn't taking place. Let's see if we get an answer.

The inhabitants of Surgut look done in by their way of life. When we've been eating in the local restaurants, there's always some vodka-sozzled individual sitting there. One had only just got out of jail, Oleg reckoned.

I had a private dinner in my room here in Hotel Druzhba, which incidentally seems to be costing me 55 rubles a night, whereas Oleg is paying 6.20 rubles. There was chicken and bread: we got food in a shop. The reason for eating privately was that Hotel Neftyanik ('Oilman') at this time of year is full of people arriving from all over, 'bad company and a big risk', especially for a Finnish man, as they said. So, this is a centre for travellers, as in Karjalainen's day. On Tyumen' television it was highlighted how Surgut is at the cutting edge for numbers of accidents: five people died in an accident today in a five-car pile-up. And it's no wonder: the cars drive along the pave-

ments, in the mud and slurry, in amongst people. When someone dies in a crash, they put up a cross and artificial flowers there. I was going to take a picture; Maïer said ‘There’s plenty of them’. It does not seem that people’s lives are worth much here. It’s no wonder to see that the Khanty are suffering in these circumstances. Vera, Nadezhda, Lyubov’ – Faith, Hope, Charity – these are Russian women’s names; are they to be found here? There is plenty of room for superstition to flourish, and so it does. Oleg reckons the Orthodox Church is corrupt; the Orthodox Church abroad is more genuine than in its homeland.

Tuesday, 18 September

We set off in the helicopter. It’s also transporting Moldanov, the Khanty who acted as interpreter last summer for Ol’ga Balalaeva and Nikolaï Plotnikov. The director of the whole region’s cooperative is here as well. Dirt and clay everywhere, the mud of the Ob’, which now lies under the oil and pipes. None of the Khanty are involved in agriculture, either in sovkhazes or kolkhozes.



Fig. 1.22. Traps for forest birds

We arrive in the late-autumn *stoïbishche*. Dedushka is walking round the compound, and Irina and Tat’yana’s daughter Marina come to meet us. A lovely welcome. We take three hours of video. This man Igor, a Nenets, is a true fisher and hunter; he arrived with his fishing net and a bag full of birds he had shot. Irina cooked cep mushrooms,¹⁸ and Marina macaroni. The men (Iosif, Dima and Eremeï) are gathering cranberries, and will come on Saturday. Igor gave a special thank you: ‘After your last visit, our situation got better’. Splendid! In the evening, Dedushka agreed that tomorrow I can video the shamanic drum. Looking forward to that, we went to sleep.

¹⁸ Although the Khanty in general did not appear to favour eating mushrooms, the custom seems to have been spreading from the Russians.



Fig. 1.23. Juha Pentikäinen with the Sopochin family. Ivan Sopochin, Kirill Pokachev, Igor Aivaseda, Ivan, Marina, Irina with Dmitrii (below) and Stanislav, Fëkla holding Mikhail Kechimov

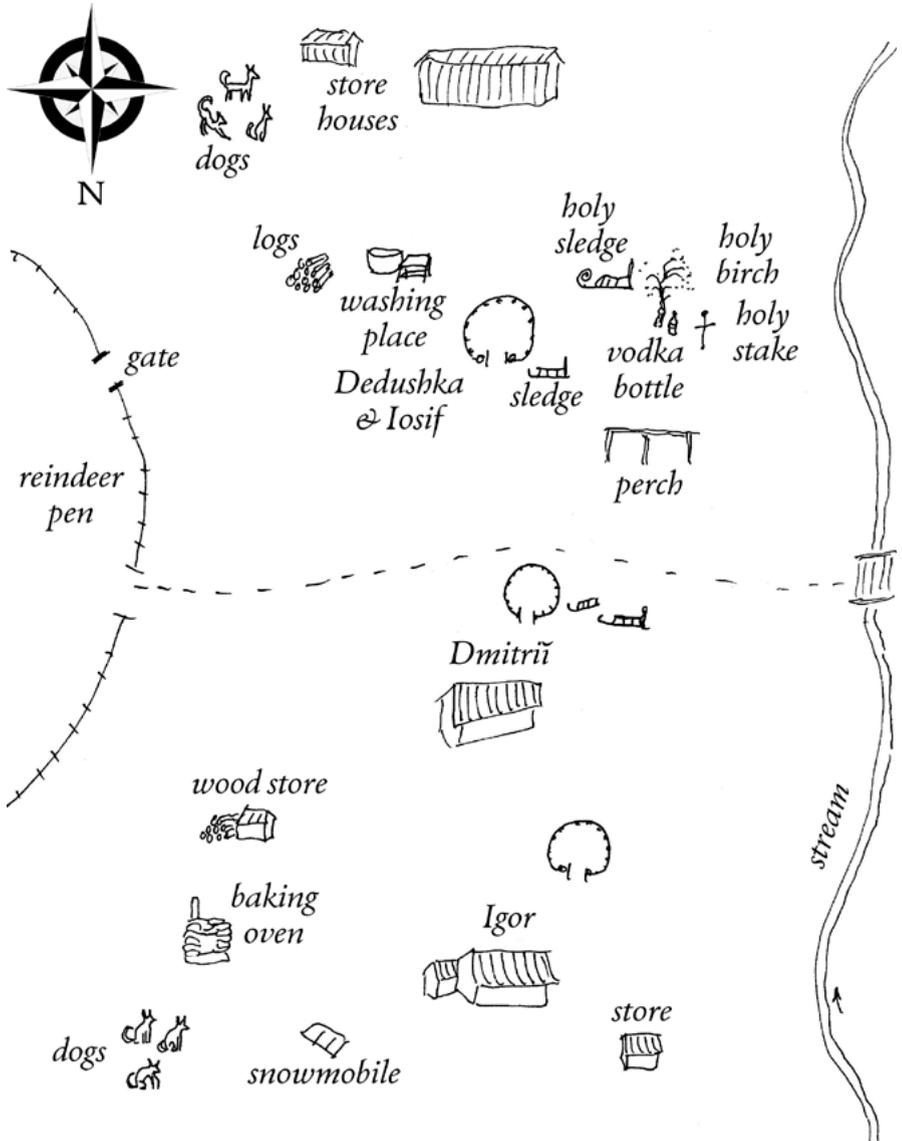


Fig. 1.24. Juha Pentikäinen with Irina Kechimova, holding her son Mikhail, with Stanislav and Dmitrii Kechimov, and Agrafena Sopochina with Ivan



Figs. 1.25, 26. The late-autumn settlement of the Sopochins





Plan of the late-autumn settlement

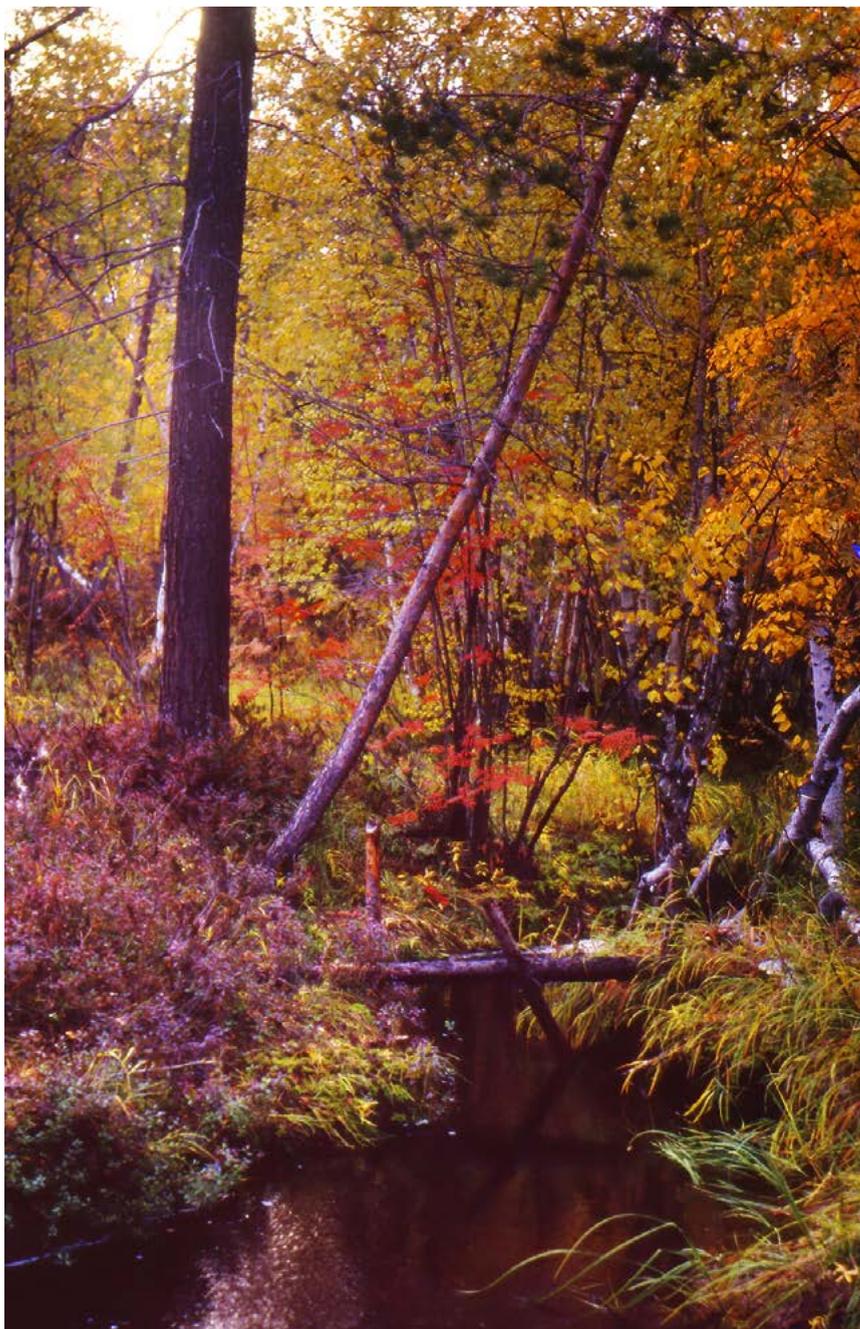


Fig. 1.27. The Woki-rap-yagun in the autumn



Fig. 1.28. The holy sledge

Wednesday, 19 September

I woke at eight after a rather cold night. We went to draw a map. I saw Dedushka circling the holy sledge, and I went over. He undid the cords, and a drama began in which he took out his drum, danced and sang. He said he could not take it into the chum to sing while Iosif was away. Nor could he strike the drum too hard, or its skin would break. It had to be heated up first. He showed the drum, front and back. It was black, stretched to around 50 cm across, and on the back five five-kopek coins in each direction, white cloths and a reindeer-hoof hammer to strike the drum with. He also showed a bear's skull, kissed it, and spat thrice. The next stage was that first Oleg and then I had to approach the bear's skull and kiss it and spit thrice into its mouth. Then he shook our hands, and closed off the sledge ceremonially

Around 12 o'clock we left for a walk for about an hour (Oleg, Irina, Marina and I) to the family *labaz* store. It was a beautiful walk of four or five kilometres through the autumn colours, first over the river then across moorland, the lichen, some bog, over a stream on a log to the *labaz*, beside a cloudberry marsh by a stream. They wanted to fetch things from the *labaz*; Marina was looking for a dress, which she had made herself with her own decoration, and which she was keen to sell to me. She is our interpreter. She may become an



Fig. 1.29. Ivan Sopochin with his shamanic drum



Fig. 1.30. Ivan Sopochin showing the inner part of the shamanic drum



Fig. 1.31. Ivan Sopochin replaces the drum in the sacred chest

ethnographer, like Tat'yana Babikova.¹⁹ She had asked as soon as we arrived if she could sell it to me, and we fixed the price at the *labaz*: I paid her 100 rubles.

From there Marina, Oleg and I went on to the early-autumn settlement site: Kirill and Fëkla were still there, but were not at home. There was no reindeer pen there; it was a beautiful sandy beach by a lake, a tree by the shore with cloths on it, places for chums. On the way back, it started to snow.

Igor said that they have seven stores (*labaz*). The *labaz* system makes it possible to keep things, and it affirms usufruct of the territory. Every family has its own.

I asked about a birch-bark basket, but it was given as a gift, with berries, so it was obviously a berry-gathering basket. Dedushka's wife had made it; she makes many of them, apparently every day.

Dedushka told a story and we went to tea, which concluded with some lovely food – duck for dinner. Dedushka told more stories to Irina, one about a dead man, but then he seemed agitated, and said that it is not good to speak of the dead. We went to sleep after the ten o'clock news.

Tomorrow, Dedushka intends to tell a tale of the shaman who travelled to heaven, and Igor will build a chum.

¹⁹ The author and researcher Tat'yana Babikova characterised the main stages in the development of the fine arts of Siberia in the second half of the twentieth century, revealing the transformation of genres and stylistic tendencies of painting and graphics in the last four decades of the twentieth century.



Fig. 1.32. Juha Pentikäinen on a walk to the *labaz* with Irina and Marina



Fig. 1.33. Crossing a bridge near the settlement



Fig. 1.34. Marina shows off the dress she sells to Juha Pentikäinen



Fig. 1.35. A *labaz* (store)



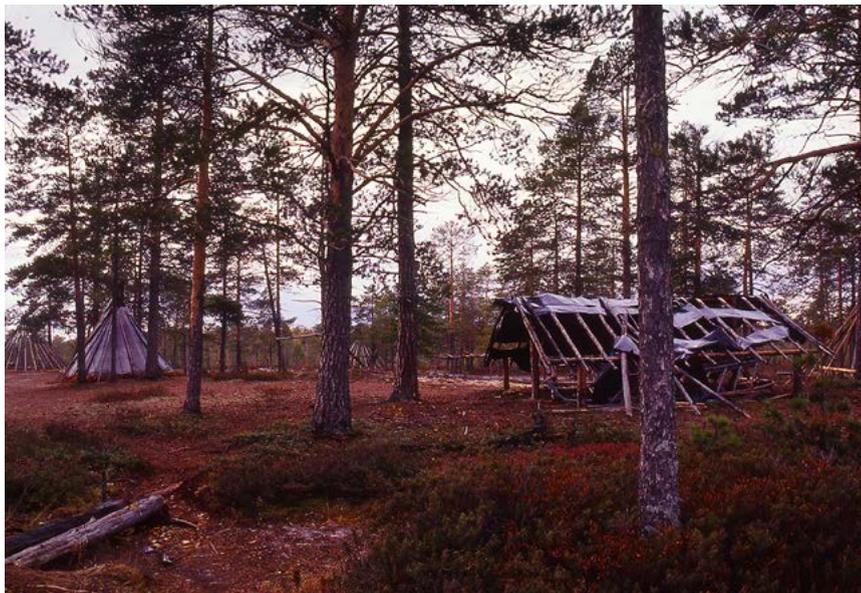
Fig. 1.36. Accessing the *labaz*



Fig. 1.37. Irina Kechimova fetching items from the *labaz*



Fig. 1.38. Woodland and glade near the settlement



Figs. 1.39, 40. The early-autumn settlement of the Sopochnins





Fig. 1.41. The lake near the early-autumn settlement

Thursday, 20 September

Dedushka said yesterday that they are inviting him by telegram to a reindeer sacrifice; we are always welcome. I am feeling like Kai Donner:²⁰ part of my self, my *itse* – which in Finno-Ugric tradition meant the soul – will remain here, among these people, these children of nature. Dedushka does not know he is the last shaman: he speaks of what he lives by, and is a level-headed man. Yesterday, he finished his narration by commenting that Oleg had dropped off in the middle of the story, and was snoring.

Today was supposed to be the Khanty autumn festival. Is it taking place anywhere? Eremeĭ, Dima and Iosif are supposed to be berry-picking – or are they at the festival? The Sámi men also make these berry-harvesting trips.

There are now two new cabins, for Dima's and Igor's families, and next year there will be a third, for Iosif. The chum I am staying in will be Kirill's after this. That's what Igor told me. He is Nenets but does not speak Nenets; at home he uses Russian, and understands Khanty, which the others in the

²⁰ Kai Donner (1888–1935) was a Finno-Ugric linguist, ethnographer and politician, a docent of Helsinki university, notable for his explorations of Siberia in the early twentieth century.



Fig. 1.42. Igor and his family build a chum

settlement speak. Marina says that her parents speak Russian with each other at home, but Tat'yana uses Khanty with the children. The others speak Khanty to each other, and Russian to outsiders.

I drew plans of the two autumn settlements. Igor showed us the chums again, and Dedushka continued his tale about shamanic journeys.

Dedushka came, and there was silence until Marina arrived to interpret at nearly half past nine. Dedushka sang his shaman songs, and told his tales. Fëkla and Kirill came, and were glad to meet us. They brought a basket of mushrooms and cranberries. Fëkla made a gift of the baskets to us both.

For lunch we had roast pike, and for dinner capercaillie soup: there could hardly be better. Dedushka's wife cooked bread in the oven, which is shared by the community, and is situated in its southern part. In the northern part is the holy back corner, where sacred rites take place.

The chum was constructed with the strength of Kirill and Igor, with the women helping. The village has a fine atmosphere. I felt a little like a Christmas elf, when I bought their wares. I had to set a price, which they agreed to. I used up about 300 rubles on gifts.

The helicopter arrived at about six o'clock. We were just changing cassettes, me the video and Oleg the audio, when it turned up. Dedushka was in the middle of a story, and there it remained. We ran for the helicopter. And so we were parted from Dedushka – perhaps we will not meet again. One of the finest people I have met.

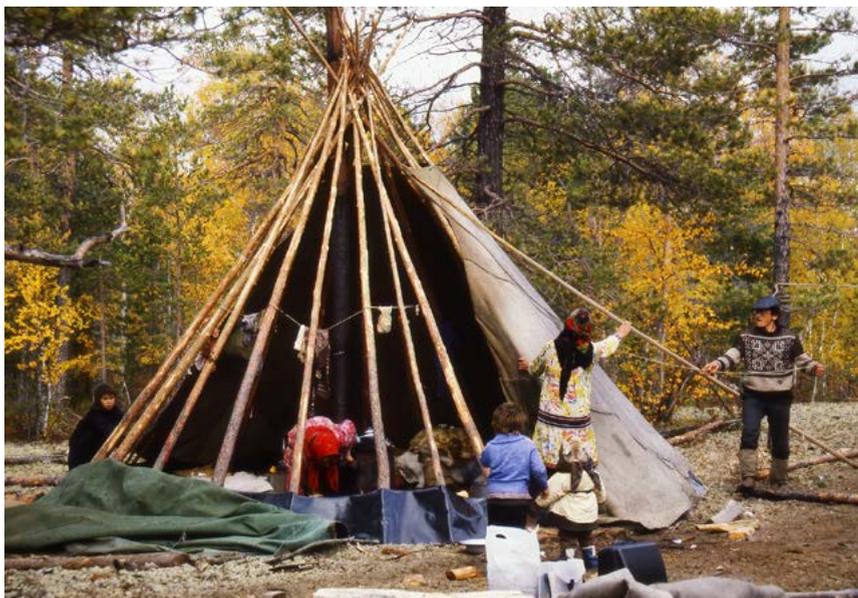


Fig. 1.43. Igor and his family cover the chum frame



Fig. 1.44. The construction of the top of the chum

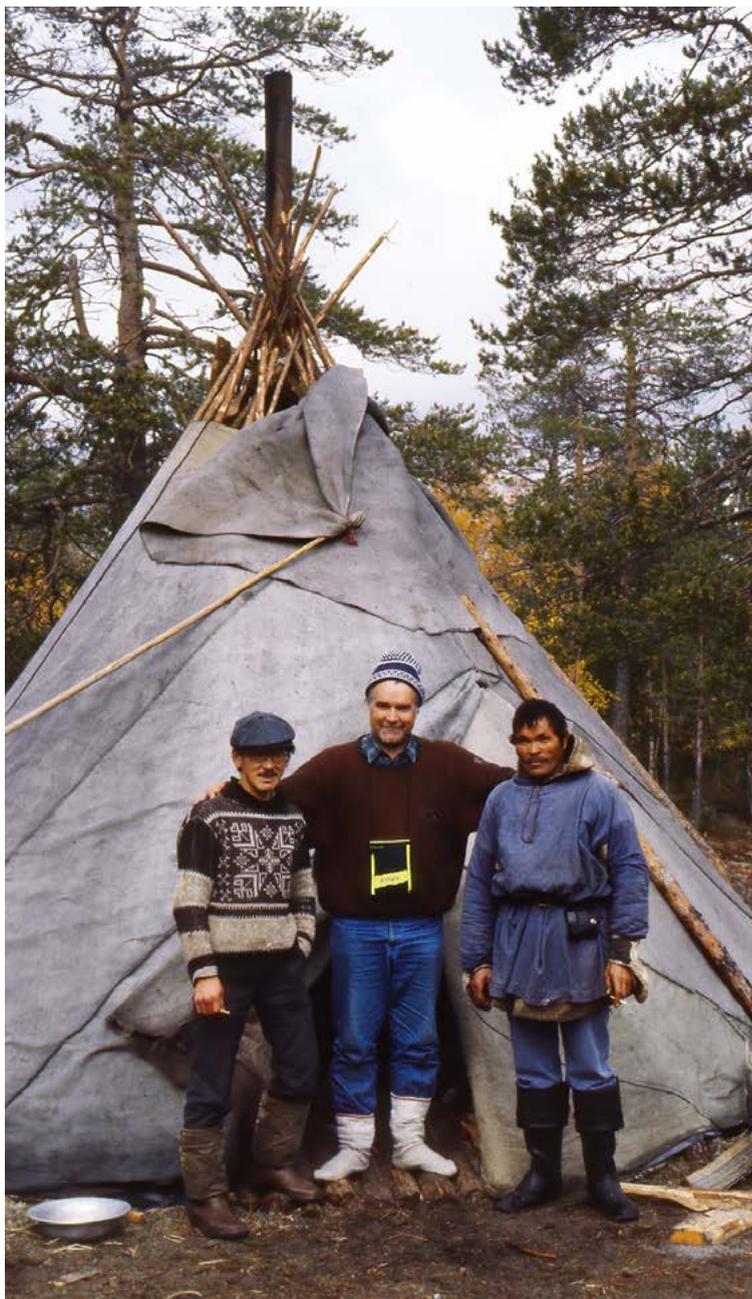


Fig. 1.45. Juha Pentikäinen with Igor and Kirill
outside the newly finished chum

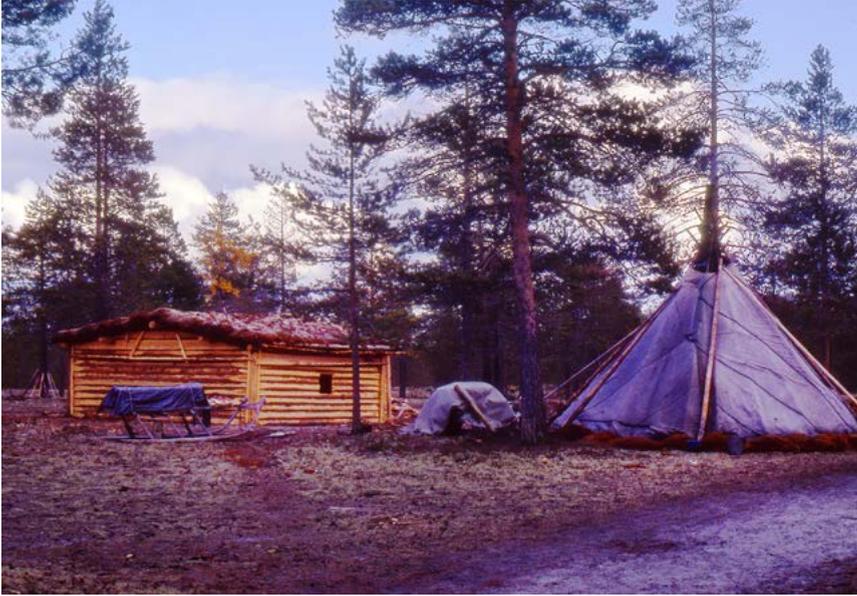


Fig. 1.46. The cabin and chum of Dmitriï Kechimov

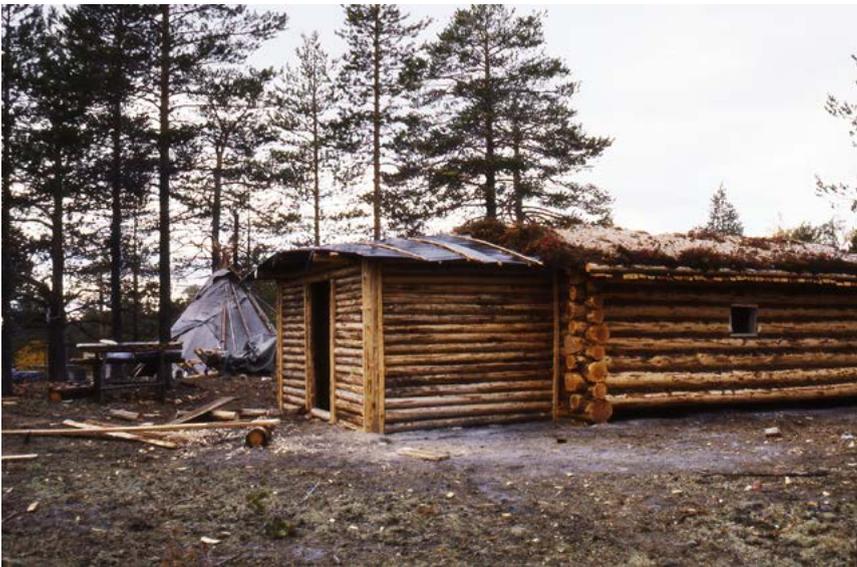


Fig. 1.47. Dmitriï Kechimov's cabin



Fig. 1.48. Cabin and chum from the woods



Fig. 1.49. A sledge shed



Fig. 1.50. A sacrificial gift in the holy grove

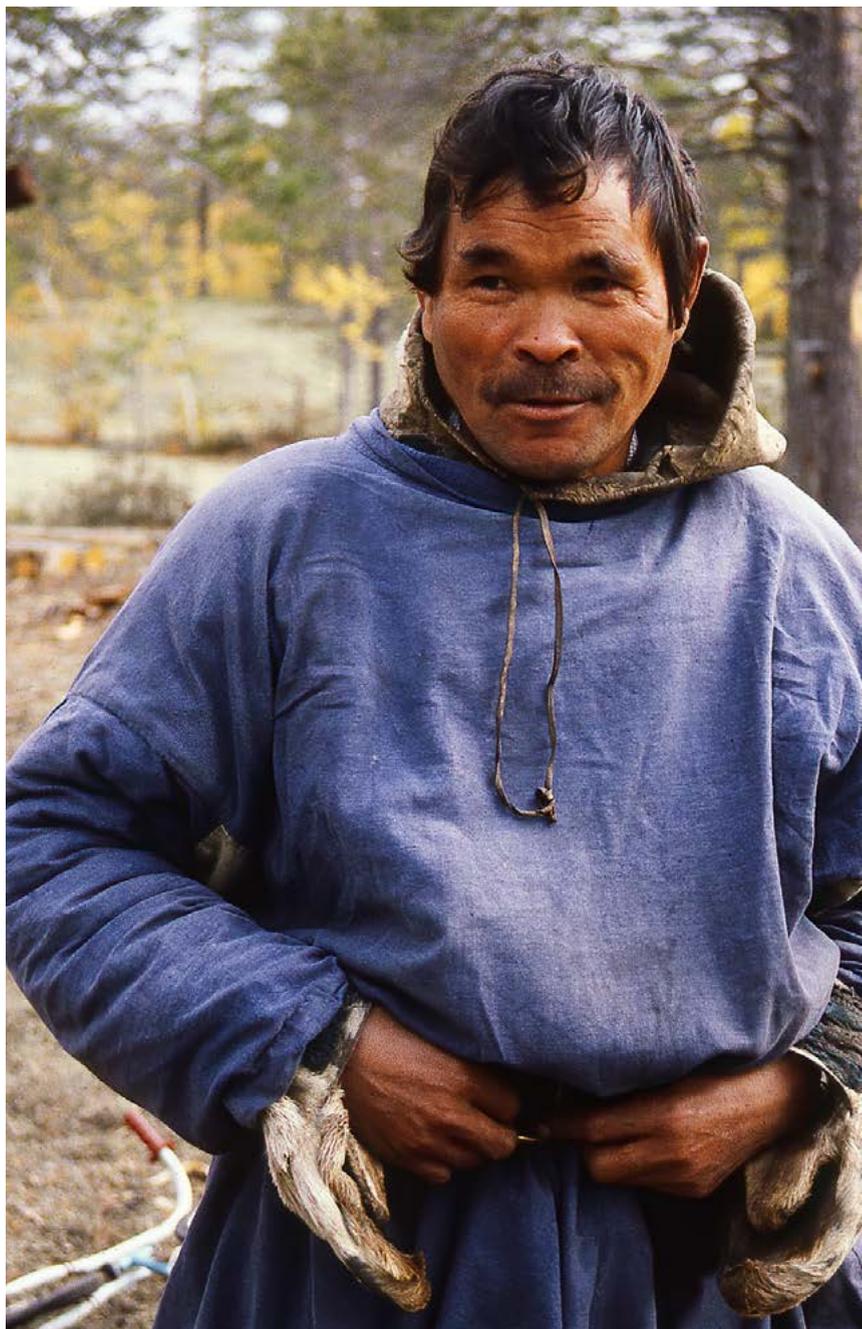


Fig. 1.51. Kirill Pokachev



Fig. 1.52. Fëkla and Kirill Pokachev



Fig. 1.53. Fëkla with the young Ivan Sopochnin, and Rimma with her daughter Olesya; Stanislav and Dmitriï



Fig. 1.54. Marina holding Ivan; Stanislav and Dmitriï behind



Fig. 1.38/39. Stanislav Kechimov with his brother Dmitriï

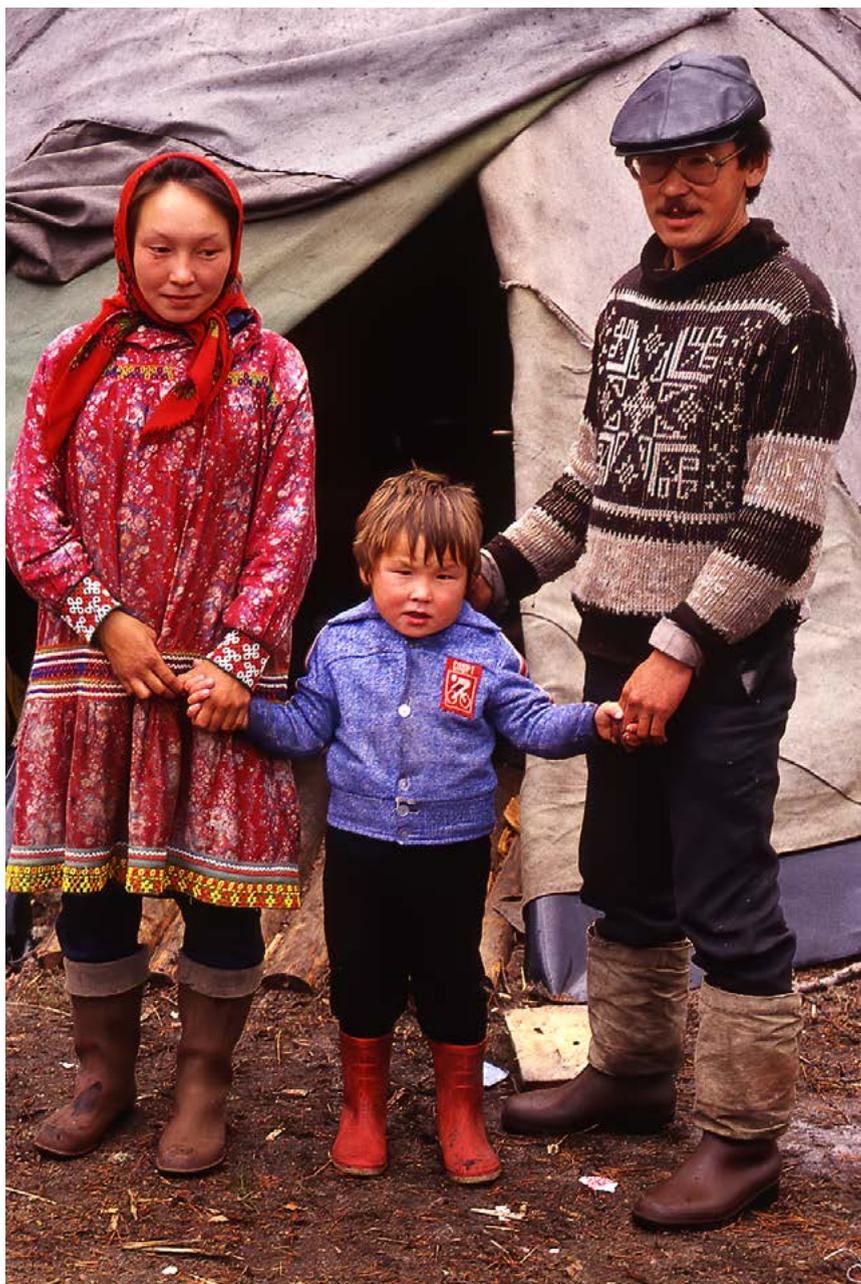


Fig. 1.55. Igor Aivaseda with Marina and Ivan



Fig. 1.56. A fine dress, outside a chum



Fig. 1.57. Marina looks on as Ivan Sopochin parades around in women's attire



Fig. 1.58. Agrafena bakes bread in the outside oven

Kechemov and Kel'min were opposite. I took pictures from the helicopter window during the journey. In the evening we were back in Hotel Druzhba. We ate some bread and slept.

Friday, 21 September

There is fog on the Ob', so the boat trip is not feasible. Instead, we are going to the Khanty cooperative on the Vynga.

The journey continued by jeep, with Maïer, Kechemov, Oleg and the driver. Potatoes are being lifted everywhere, and the roads are covered in dirt, and fog right down to the ground. Maïer bought some bread to eat on the way. Just a few Khanty live here; earlier, there were Khanty villages. We visited Barsovo mountain, a huge archaeological site with habitation from the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age. It is being investigated by a team from Sverdlovsk and Tyumen' universities. On site there was just one student, sleeping alongside his shovels, dead drunk. Kechemov remarked, 'The young man's got some sense!' Barsovo mountain was a Khanty holy place. The last prayers there took place in the early 1980s, according to Kechemov. Surgut probably became the Khanty capital because of Barsovo. The sacred site has been here longer than the Khanty. Perhaps Karjalainen writes about it; the archaeological team have written about it too. I videoed the place quite thoroughly. On the way back we

stopped to eat at a sovkhos tomato store, a windowless room, where we and the sovkhos director ate. The excursion finished around 2 o'clock. The sun was shining, and the fog had lifted.

We had a good dinner, here in Surgut, the Khanty capital, where the Khanty, living in their apartments, are on the point of losing their language; Eremeï Ivanovich Sopočin – son of the shaman – and his Khanty wife speak only Russian to their children.

Saturday, 22 September

We had intended to go on an excursion with Maier, but he said his car is broken, and perhaps it is. We must wait until evening, when we leave for Tyumen'. This afternoon I discussed writing articles with Oleg. Topics we raised included the 'geologists' at Stoïbishche, the Barsovo village, the fish mortality in the Ob' as a result of oil-pipe leaks, the demolition of the old quarter of Surgut for development, the building of Kogalym in the midst of the tundra and forest, the death of two thousand reindeer to heavy metals, urban Khanty and the demise of the language and culture, Khanty children in the school for the developmentally retarded. Plans should include a learning centre in Khantï-Mansiïsk, with satellites elsewhere, establishment of the rights to territory, developing ways forward for the native peoples on the basis of collaboration between researchers and politicians, participation in collaborative work between researchers and native people.

Kel'min showed his project to gain Yakut autonomy. Oleg asked if the Khanty autumn festival had taken place; Kel'min said there was something at Ugut. Maier is resigning his position and moving to become the director of some firm, and Kechemov may leave at the same time. The reason is administrative reorganisation in the government. Maier does not know anyone reliable that we could collaborate with henceforth after the shake-up. Kel'min spoke about the aims of the Ugrian rescue society to make Khantï-Mansiïsk and the Yamal independent autonomies and break away from the Tyumen' *oblast'*, and the idea is conceivable. Another idea was to get a radio station (Nokia was mentioned), with a range up as far as Stoïbishche; this is something to investigate in Finland.

We got back to the hotel just after seven, while Oleg went off to take the broken-down Hitachi video camera back to the institute. But at the hotel, the administrator had gone off for dinner and left the hatch closed, so I was stuck there on my own until they turned up. Truly, the idea of service is non-existent, and the system is kaput – or, at least, this *is* the system.

We had dinner with Boris Isakov, a geophysician; Oleg said he was the finest person in Tyumen' – and indeed, he was very pleasant. He was in a new dwelling on the ninth floor, with no lift, and the water had to be filtered. He was repairing the bathroom when we arrived. The grown-up sons were arranging

their father's coin collection, old coins, to which I added some Finnish marks that I emptied from my pocket. Boris and Galina prepared a meal in no time, reindeer fries and fish, and for dessert Galina baked cheese pies to go with the tea. We talked about various things, such as the possible demise of NAUKA, the academic publishing house.

Oleg and I walked back at ten o'clock or so to the hotel through the Tyumen' night, unlit by street lamps, avoiding the mud and rowdy groups. Some woman, quite off her head, was singing – in quite a beautiful voice, actually – *Kudanka*, about the famous prison (the Lubyanka). M. A. Castrén²¹ was right about the Russians: they go everywhere, they are adaptable and strong. But now they are under the system, and there is no escape. Someone that belongs to the system can be rude to others, and close the door in their face. No-one will step into the breach: the system does not call for it.

We leave at six thirty in the morning for the airport.



THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE REINDEER SACRIFICE

The cosmic significance of blood was emphasised in the ritual drama of the reindeer sacrifice, marking key points of transition. Blood was typically to be mixed with clear vodka, the favoured drink of Khanty gods, ancestors and guardian spirits. When the vodka bottle was opened at the ritual opening of the sacrificial meal, the first drops were sprinkled onto the blood of the slaughtered reindeer. The gods and ancestors were then invited to take part in the feast with a prayer, 'Invite your mother and father, invite all you wish'.

An important moment in the sacrificial ceremony was when Iosif, the leader of the ceremony (under Ivan Sopochnin's tutelage) wiped the figure of the sun in the centre of the sledge (acting as an altar) behind a bear's head with birch shavings dipped in blood. The sun thus bore the blood of every reindeer sacrificed by the clan, and hence symbolised the generational interaction of the clan and its animals, both wild and domestic, reaffirming the mythical background and the continuity of their ties to eternity.

Reindeer sacrifice was a domestic ritual which related to the fortunes of the clan's reindeer husbandry – but it was more than this. When the animals were skinned with no loss of blood, they were placed on their backs according to a precise procedure. The flayed animals were reindeer, but the mythical pattern

²¹ Matthias Alexander Castrén (1813–52) was a famous nineteenth-century Finnish philologist, a pioneer of modern philological investigation into Finno-Ugric languages.

of the ritual invoked another antlered beast: the elk, whose constellation was pointed out to me in the night sky by Ivan Sopochin. The myth of the heavenly elk relates that when life on Earth was new, the elk was six-legged, and so swift-footed that no hunter could outrun it. The son of the high god was furious at this, and often argued with his father, blaming him for making the elk like this. Spurred on by his anger, he decided to see if he could catch the elk, but however hard he ran, however fast he skied, he could not manage it. Season after season he tried, and his wrath grew, and in his rage he poked his staff into the elk's tracks, exclaiming 'What a beast you are, that no-one can catch you!' He looked up, and saw the elk gazing at him. He shot after it, and at last, in winter, he met up with it as it passed by a lake. It was not rushing off now: maybe it was tired, or ill. The hunter made himself ready, and took his knife out – and he managed to slash the elk with it, cutting off its two hind legs. He had suffered so much, trying to catch up with this elk: let it be just four-legged! Then he drew an image of the elk with his staff on the sky: let it be useful to people, and show hunters their way on the dark nights. And so now anyone can find their way by following the head of the elk across the sky, leading the way to dawn.

The bear is another animal with a significant role in the reindeer sacrifice. Its head lay on the holy sledge, which was pulled out from its secluded store, and thence it gazed towards the sacrifice. The presence of the bear rendered the whole ritual a cosmic event, an actualisation of the myth of the constellation of the headless bear. The bear was always considered a beast of prey: he attacked people and other animals. The guardian of the Earth punished him for this, cutting off his head and casting it up to the sky, saying 'You cannot live on Earth, so live in the sky. If someone gets lost on a dark night, let him find his way by your stars', and indeed, one may find his way by them. There are four main stars, and two stars mark the bear's forelegs, and two his hind legs, and another one in the middle and further up marks his neck.

The killing of the bear in Khanty tradition was an ambivalent matter, hedged round with ritual. On the one hand, the killing of the bear was strictly forbidden, since it was a representative of their godly ancestor, the son of Numi Torum, who had married the first Khanty, the foremother of the race, but on the other, the slaughter was always celebrated powerfully. The mythical relationship of the Khanty with the bear was made manifest in a concrete manner through the presence of the bear, represented by its skull in the reindeer sacrifice ritual. In the bear rites, women display an ambivalent behaviour characterised by many prohibitions, just as in the reindeer sacrifice they also kept their distance. Shamans would act out dramas dressed as women because it is their duty to play the role both of the primordial mother, the wife of the bear who was the son of Numi Torum, and the goddess of the Earth, the main female deity, whose position was nonetheless inferior to that of Numi Torum, god of the sky. The

presence of both deities in the reindeer sacrifice is signified, for example, by the choice of both a stag and a hind as victims; one is white and male, as it is offered to Numi Torum, the sky god, while the other is dark and female, and is offered to the Earth. After the ceremony, their skulls are placed in accordance with their sacrificial status within the grove sanctuary.

A FURTHER NOTE ON THE ELK

The following section is composed as a brief summary by Clive Tolley on the basis of Juha Pentikäinen's previous publications, and his personal input.

The myth of the hunting of the heavenly elk is widespread in polar regions. It comes up also in Finnish-Karelian traditions, in the form of the 'skiing of Hiisi's elk' (Hiisi is a sinister otherworld being, originally associated with death). Traditions about the elk had, it is true, faded in Finland-Karelia, but it still retained an aura of power, as we see for example in this poem recorded by Elias Lönnrot in Ilomantsi in 1838 (SKVR VII, 1348); it is a version of *Madon sanat*, 'The snake's words' – a charm intended to deal with snakes, in this case because they are stealing beer! The singer, after mentioning the question he wants to solve, as it were enters the Otherworld by envisaging it as existing within a tiny drop of water in a cloud, from which Hiisi's elk is evoked to deal with the noisome snakes:

Mist' on kyi kulolle luotu,	Whence was the adder
Mato musta maalle tehty?	made for the swidden,
Pilvi pikkuinen tulee,	the black snake for the earth?
Kaari kaukoa näky.	A tiny cloud comes,
Pilvessä vesi pisara,	a rainbow can be seen from afar:
Pisarassa laaja lampi,	in the cloud a droplet of water,
Laajalammissa venonen,	in the droplet a wide pool,
Venosessa miestä kolme:	in the wide pool a little boat,
Antti Santti airollissa,	in the little boat three men:
Pietari perän piossa,	Andrew the saint on the oars,
Jesus keskellä venettä,	Peter there in the stern,
Hiiten hirveä sukivi,	Jesus in the midst of the boat.
Poropetroo pesee.	He grooms the elk of Hiisi,
Juokse tuonne, Hiien hirvi,	he washes the reindeer.
Poropetra, poimettele,	Run there, elk of Hiisi,
Kussa kyyt olutta juopi,	Reindeer, wend your way
Maot vierrettä vetää!	to where the adders drink beer,
	the snakes quaff the wort!

Sentähen emäntä raukka
 Vähäsen on olutta saanut,
 Kuin on kyyt oluen juopi,
 Maot viertehen vetää.

Because of that, the poor mistress
 has got little beer,
 as much as the adders drink the beer,
 the snakes quaff the wort.

Reindeer and elks (and snakes) are found in ancient rock paintings in Finland-Karelia, going back to the Bronze Age and before. One of the most spectacular sites is Astuvansalmi, ‘the strait of the one who mounts’, a name which may well recall ancient rites focused on animal or animal–human erotics. It is situated just south of Mikkeli on Yövesi, ‘night water/lake’, part of the Saimaa lake system, which now has its outlet through Vuoksi southwards to the Gulf of Finland, but in very ancient times flowed north through Kalajoki, ‘fish river’ (near where Juha Pentikäinen spent some of his youth, 1944–60), to the Gulf of Bothnia – it has always been a major water route. The cliff of Astuvansalmi looks out over the strait (over to the island of Astuva), and on the rock face a whole drama seems to be depicted – including a manned boat emerging from an elk or reindeer, which appears to be the very heavenly elk who had some of its limbs removed, in some versions by the son of God (see Plate VIII in *The Golden King*). The site was clearly sacred in antiquity, and what appear to be offerings have been found in the vicinity. Ivan Sopochnin’s sons Iosif and Eremei visited Astuvansalmi with Juha Pentikäinen in 1993. Their immediate impression was that the place was indeed holy, and that approaching it without due respect would result in divine retribution. They offered some of their own interpretations of the paintings; one reindeer, they suggested, was a wild animal that had been sacrificed, its heart removed, about which Ivan Sopochnin had sung (as they pointed out).

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CHAPTER TWO

The Nature, History and Religion of the Khanty

ELENA GLAVATSKAYA

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Khanty (formerly known as the Ostyak) are a Finno-Ugric people dwelling in the north of western Siberia. Together with their closest linguistic relatives, the Mansi (Vogul), the Khanty compose an ethnic group known as Ob-Ugrians. They are one of the forty widely dispersed small indigenous peoples of the Russian North and Siberia.¹ According to the 2010 census they numbered 30,943, among which 11,879 are city-dwellers and 19,064 live in the rural forest area. The great majority of the Khanty still live in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (61.6 per cent), while others live in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (30.7 per cent) and the rest in Tyumen', Tomsk and Novosibirsk *oblast'* (Всероссийская перепись населения 2010 *a*).

Their former ethnonym, Ostyak, apparently originated from a combination of two words, *as* (Ob' river) and *yakh* (people), and means 'the people from the Ob' river'. There is also, however, the hypothesis that the term Ostyak originates from the Turkic *Ushtyak*, a taxpayer. The Khanty indeed payed *yasak* – a tax to the Siberian Tatars – until the late sixteenth century. When Russian colonisation began in the area, little was known about the indigenous people and the term *Ostyaks* was used to designate several different ethnic groups. The name Khanty ('people' or 'man' in the Khanty language) which the Khanty people use to refer to themselves was introduced in common and official usage only in the late 1930s.

¹ The category of 'The minority indigenous peoples of the north' was introduced first in 1925–6 for twenty-six northern peoples; it was renamed in the 1990s and extended to forty to include four minority Siberian groups dwelling in the south.

There are three groups of the Khanty distinguished by their language, means of subsistence and culture. Economic patterns of all three groups are largely based on fishing, hunting and gathering, supplemented by reindeer-herding in the north, and agriculture, including cattle-breeding, in the south. The southern Khanty were incorporated into Russian society both economically and culturally by the early twentieth century and no longer live a traditional way of life. The northern and eastern Khanty have managed to maintain large parts of their traditional life despite intensive industrial development beginning in the region in the 1960s.

Because of the sparse distribution of natural resources in the area, the Khanty have historically been scattered across small settlements, along rivers some 10 to 40 km apart. Such groups gradually developed dialects of their own. Beyond differences in dialects, there is considerable diversity among Khanty groups in cultural patterns and self-identification. Based on these distinctions, scholars distinguish five different areas within the Khanty territory, each, with the exception of Koda, embracing one of the River Ob's tributaries: Irtÿsh; Kazÿm; Yugan and Pim; Agan and Vasyugan. (Мартынова 1998: 5–6)

The Sopochnins traditionally lived in the Surgut region, in the middle of the eastern Khanty dialect area. The region is dominated by the Ob', which together with its tributaries is the third-largest river system in the world. The Ob', which flows west through this area, divides its vast basin territory of 105,109 km² into a northern section with the Lyamin, Pim, Trom-yogan and Agan tributaries and a southern section with the Bol'shoï Yugan and Malÿi Yugan tributaries. On the north, the Surgut Khanty homeland extends to the tundra zone and on the south to the limit of the forest taiga. Rapid freezing leads to a winter period of uninterrupted frost for 145 to 155 days per year, with an average daily low of –20 to –35° C, followed by rapid thawing and hot summers with average daily high temperatures around +20° C. The maximum winter low is around –55° C, while the maximum summer high is close to +43° C. Most of the landscape, except for forested corridors along the rivers, consists of lakes, and muskeg swamps. It has been calculated that in areas where mosquitoes swarm, up to a thousand mosquitoes and four to five thousand midges of various kinds will attack a human being within three minutes (Гемюев, Сагалаев, Соловьев 1989: 17).

The vast territories covered by spring to summer seasonal floods become prime feeding areas for a variety of fish species: the Siberian sturgeon, *nelma* (*Stenodus leucichthys*), *muksun* (*Coregonus muksun*), pike, perch, ides, *rutilus*, *carassium* and bream. Major animal species in addition to the fishes mentioned above include northern reindeer, elk, brown bear, fox, sable, marten, wolverine, squirrel, badger, otter, muskrat, lynx, hare, capercaillie, black grouse, hazel grouse and partridge. The western Siberian lowlands with their waterways rich in fish resources are also one of the major nesting places for migratory birds,

including ducks, swans and geese, which usually appear in May. Major flora resources include coniferous (pine, cedar) and deciduous (fluffy birch, aspen) trees, brown and green sphagnum mosses, sedge, wild rosemary, and a variety of berry species, including cranberry, cloudberry, cowberry and blueberry. Within this ecosystem, the Khanty have evolved a complicated land usage based on fishing, hunting, gathering and reindeer-herding that has proved sufficient to meet their needs for food, house-building, clothes and transportation (Glavatskaya 2005a).

The main city in the area is Surgut. It was a small town until the oil boom started in the 1960s, after which its population, together with that of the whole region, grew to its current size of 380,632. Most inhabitants are employed in the oil and gas industry. The Khanty population of the Surgut region is estimated at 2896 according to the 2010 census data; this amounts to 2.55 per cent of the region's population (Всероссийская перепись населения 2010b).

Traditionally the Khanty lived in extended family settlements widely scattered along the Ob' river and its tributaries. As a result of this pattern of settlement and the isolation of the various groups from each other and from the main administrative centres, the process of ethnic consolidation among the Khanty started later than among their neighbours, the Komi and the Siberian Tatars. Living far from the crossroads of trade in areas difficult to reach, the Surgut Khanty experienced little influence from Russian culture. Their reliance on hunting, fishing, gathering and reindeer-herding contributed to the persistence of older cultural patterns no longer found among other groups. In the late nineteenth to early twentieth century the basic unit of society was the extended family living in yurts. This is a term borrowed from Turkic, and is synonymous with the Russian *stoïbishche*, a settlement. These settlements were generally small, consisting of a few households linked by close kinship relations. The surrounding area or 'estate' encompassed seasonal houses and lands for reindeer pastures, fishing, hunting and gathering that made up the family property. Such groups had a common identity based on common territory, mutual economic activity, interests and religion. Members of such groups believed that they had a common divine protector, whom they venerated at a sacred place established near their dwellings through prayer, offerings and sacrifices. Communities of reindeer herders, when they increased in size, had to split and look for new territories: this entailed fights for better pastures, hunting and fishing areas, as well as women and slaves (Главацкая 2002).

Frequent clashes between tribes resulted in the evolution of the Khanty proto-state structures – squads of warriors headed by military chiefs. The most powerful chiefs managed to unite several tribes into military-political units – chiefdoms (*knyazhestvo* in Russian historical sources). The chiefs had residences in fortified towns, surrounded by high fences made of logs and protected by a system of rampart and moat. Such fortified towns were located



Fig. 2.1. Ob-Ugrian warriors in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries.
Archaeological reconstruction by Alekseĭ Zĭkov (Редин 2000: 36)

away from the trade crossroads, which allowed the chiefs to remain secure from unexpected attacks. The chief lived in the fortress together with his family, his slaves and servants. Here was a sanctuary, treasury, supply of food, weapons and armour for the militias, and the main workshops: the smithy, the weapons and metal production areas. Inside the fortress there were large dwellings made of logs. In addition, there were special buildings for public events – meetings and banquets (Редин 2000; Зыков, Кокшаров 2001). If necessary, the whole warrior population of the principality would answer the summons of a great chief. The chiefs also had economic power over their subjects; they collected tribute from the subject population. While collecting tribute, the chiefs usually visited the most revered shrines. These fortresses of the Ob-Ugrians functioned in a similar way to the feudal castles of medieval Europe.

The rise of some chiefs was due to a chiefdom's convenient geographical location. The most powerful and prosperous chiefdoms in the Middle Ob'

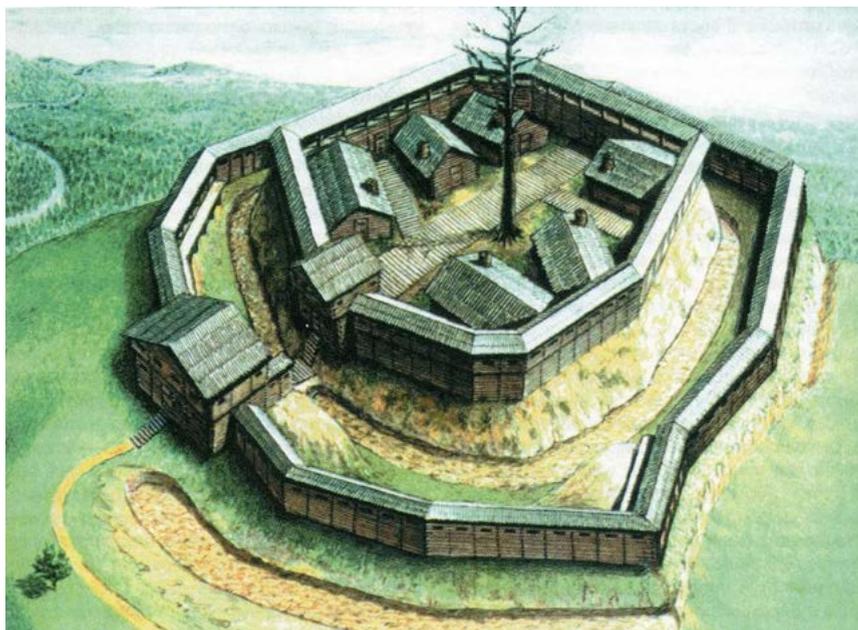


Fig. 2.2. Emdar, the Koda Khanty fortress in the sixteenth century. Archaeological reconstruction by Alekseĭ Zĭkov (РедИИ 2000: 152)

river basin – Koda, Obdorsk and Pegaya Orda – were located at the intersection of trade routes linking Europe with Asia. In the south, the powerful Siberian Tatar khanate threatened the power and independence of Khanty chiefdoms while the Russian state penetrated further into Siberia and threatened Khanty independence from the west. The need for border protection against aggressive neighbours facilitated the process of military and political consolidation among the Khanty.

By the beginning of Russian colonisation of Siberia at the end of the sixteenth century, there were several Khanty chiefdoms of varying sizes in north-western Siberia, struggling against each other for political superiority. The biggest and the most powerful among them was Koda, located on the east bank of the Ob'. The Russian conquest of the Siberian Tatars and Khanty chiefdoms put an end to these wars by establishing a new administrative system in Siberia. The new system of rule affected the social and political structures of Khanty societies and hindered their autonomous development. A few Khanty nobles died during wars and uprisings against Russian power, while some ended up as *amanatĭj* – guest-hostages to the Russian towns – and yet others had to accept subordination. The major Khanty chiefdoms lost their political independence, and hence their significance as autonomous political centres. Nevertheless,



Fig. 2.3. The Russian ambassadorial gifts (fur pelts collected as *yasak* in Siberia) to the Emperor Maximilian II in 1576. Detail of a sixteenth-century engraving.

some managed to keep their role as religious centres, each with its own sacred places where Khanty assembled to make sacrifices and worship their deities. (Главацкая 2005*b*; Вершинин 2018)

From the beginning of Russian colonisation, the indigenous people became subject to the taxes of the Russian tsar and had to pay *yasak*, fur tax. The average value of the annual *yasak* at the turn of the seventeenth century was 5–12 sable pelts per adult male, which roughly corresponded to the price of a cow. The Russian administration in Siberia demanded that indigenous people pay the tax with furs of good quality, in exact numbers, and at the proper time.

The majority of the Khanty received a distinguished social status – *gosudarevĭ yasachnĭe lyudi* (the tsar’s *yasak* people) – commonly shared by the Siberian peoples living from hunting and fishing. The Russian administration also distinguished them by their languages, and referred to them as *gosudarevĭ yasachnĭe ostyaki*. Administratively, they were organised into different *yasachnĭe volosti* (*yasak* units), usually coinciding with the indigenous communities’ foraging territories, and often named either after their headman or geographical location. The *volost*’s were administratively subordinated to the *uezd*, the next administrative division, with the nearest Russian town as its centre. Thus, according to common Russian practice, the complete formula for referring to the Trom-yogan dwellers paying tax in Surgut in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries would be *yasachnĭe ostyaki Trom’eganskoĭ volosti* (*yasak* Khanty of Trom-yogan-river *volost*’). The Russian administration took account of the



Fig. 2.4. The Khanty prince Taishin.
Painting made before 1833 (Перевалова 2000)

social, linguistic and regional criteria, with priority given to social criteria. Habeck noted that ‘People choose to highlight their common identity in order to achieve certain purposes’ (Habeck 2005: 22). The Khanty often highlighted this collective identity, designed by the Russian government, when sending their complaints to the tsar, which was a common practice in tsarist Russia, or trying to ease their tax duties. In such cases, they would always identify themselves as ‘*yasak* Ostyaks of a certain *volost*’. Every complaint sent by the Khanty (or any other Siberian indigenous people) in the course of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries inevitably contained a formulaic phrase of this kind. The Khanty, occupying a specific niche in the state’s social structure, engaging in specific foraging activities, and being identified on the basis of these criteria by the state, may have come themselves to consider the social dimension as the most important criterion for their identity.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the policy of the Russian state towards the Siberian peoples changed. The political position of the Russians in Siberia became stronger and more stable. This occurred in part because the Russian population had grown to outnumber the indigenous inhabitants of the area. The economic interests of the Russian state in north-western Siberia turned away from the fur trade and towards mining, iron production and the industrial development of the territories.

From 1822, the administrative system in Siberia developed in accordance with the *Ustav ob upravlenii inorodtsev* (the state regulations on the management of indigenous peoples). The *Ustav* divided all the indigenous peoples of Siberia into three separate categories, depending on their way of life: settled, semi-settled and nomads. It was the intention that those referred to as ‘settled’ should be incorporated into Russian peasant communities, while the others were allowed to keep their indigenous institutions. Most of the northern Khanty groups classified as nomads stayed under the rule of their own nobleman (*knyaz* in Russian sources, which corresponds to prince), the Taishins, who officially recognised their subordination to the Russian tsar, yet remained semi-independent until the second decade of the twentieth century (Перевалова 2000).

The main aim of the *Ustav* was to unify the social structure and the administrative system, and to prepare the nomads for sedentary life and incorporation into peasant communities. It also legitimised the non-Christianity of the Khanty and other indigenous peoples by stating that ‘nomadic non-Christians may observe freely their beliefs and worship of their gods’.

By the early nineteenth century, the indigenous peoples were often involved in new activities and no longer depended solely on fur-hunting for their livelihood. Even if they still paid *yasak*, it no longer consisted of sable pelts, but rather other products and even cash. The Christianisation policy also had some effects on Khanty society. This resulted in a new identification, which reflected such changes. The Khanty who managed to retain their way of life



Fig. 2.5. Vakh river Khanty. Photo by Grigorii Dmitriev-Sadovnikov, 1913 (TIAMZ – Тобольский историко-архитектурный музей-заповедник)



Fig. 2.6. A labaz. Photo by Grigorii Dmitriev-Sadovnikov, 1913 (TIAMZ)



Fig. 2.7. A Vakh river Khanty man making an arrow.
Photo by Grigoriï Dmitriev-Sadovnikov, 1912 (Glavatskaya 2013: 85)



Fig. 2.8. A Khanty canoe, Vakh river.
Photo by Grigoriï Dmitriev-Sadovnikov, 1913 (TIAMZ)



Fig. 2.9. Khanty woman with children, Lar'yak settlement.
Photo by Grigorii Dmitriev-Sadovnikov, 1912 (Glavatskaya 2013: 105)

and religion became *kochev'ye inorodtsy* or *kochev'ye inovertsy* (nomadic aliens or nomadic non-Christians). In this new ethnonym, the state stressed not only the social but also the religious dimension of Khanty identity.

Being economically interested and dependent on valuable furs, the Russian state promoted a paternalistic policy towards Siberian indigenous peoples, generally retaining their social structure and traditional way of life. Because of this, the Surgut Khanty managed to maintain their traditional patterns of land use until the early twentieth century almost unscathed.

While the new Soviet power established the *kolkhoz* (collective farm) system, quite harmful for the Khanty in general, it did not dramatically alter their lifestyle over the long run. In the 1930s, collectivisation activists took about 1500 reindeer from the wealthy Trom-yogan Khanty, exiled the opponents of collectivisation and conveyed the herd to the newly established collective farm. However, the Khanty appointed as heads of the collective farm often hired their previous owners as *kolkhoz* herders, together with their own relatives, restoring the former system and traditional way of life. (Главацкая 2005b)

Most harmful for traditional Khanty land use and life was the Soviet policy directed towards settling nomadic Khanty in *natsional'nye poselki* (national settlements), created on purpose for them in the late 1940s to 1950s. The Surgut administration established such settlements in Russkinskaya, Trom-

Agan and Ugut. The main idea was to create better living conditions, and easy access to medical care and education, and to promote 'more progressive' and 'civilised' forms of life. However, this policy brought about the opposite: concentrating large numbers of people with their herds in a few places resulted in the destruction of pastures and hunting, fishing and gathering territories, and entailed a decline in the reindeer population. It also increased the Khanty dependency on state provisions, goods and social support. Eventually this policy led to a reduction of the Surgut Khanty ethnic territory. This loss of resources necessary for conducting a traditional way of life also facilitated the process of assimilating the Khanty into a settled way of life. Nevertheless, those who managed to avoid resettlement maintained the traditional patterns of land use.

This situation changed dramatically once again in the late 1960s with the discovery of petroleum deposits in the area. In the late 1980s the Ministry of Energy and the oil industry seized huge territories of the Khanty estates for oil production. Khanty families again had to leave their traditional family hunting territories, either being forced to do so at once or as a result of being unable to conduct a traditional way of life in consequence of the effects of oil production on road construction, with which reindeer-herding, hunting and fishing deteriorated.

While the state may have had scant regard for the Khanty in terms of environmental and cultural protection during the Soviet period, worse times for the traditional life and livelihood were still to come in the late 1980s. The Soviet government, together with local authorities, always had to make certain provisions, such as state subsidies, and purchase of the products of hunting, fishing and gathering, to alleviate some of the economic and social stress of the destructive industrial intervention upon traditional Khanty life. Thus, even though the traditional way of life was under pressure, the Soviet system of social security and support directed at the most vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities gave the Khanty at least some guarantees of a minimum level of well-being. The collapse of the state social support system proved disastrous for western Siberia and its indigenous people. The state oil monopoly fragmented into separate production, refining and distribution arms. Regional oil companies, each driven by a desire for quick profits, abandoned the state-controlled system of replacing ageing equipment in a timely manner. Private companies would readily abandon existing well clusters and establish new ones for the sake of higher profit, leaving more than 50 per cent of the oil in the ground and a destroyed landscape behind. Another common problem was spillage, with over 3000 pipeline breaks a year in the Surgut region in the late 1990s. (Вигет 2002: 211–22)

The oil and gas industry's rapid development hit the Surgut region's ecology and Khanty traditional land-use patterns severely. Increased construction of pipelines, oil pumps and roads has spurred the appropriation of new territory



Fig. 2.10. The destruction of Khanty lands through oil exploration.
Photo by Elena Glavatskaya, 1992

from the Khanty and accelerated pollution of the environment. Moreover, the rapid development of the oil industry has entailed a large influx of newcomers into the region. All of these factors constitute a direct threat to the very existence of the Khanty estates and the resources necessary to sustain a traditional way of life.

These troubling circumstances, and the decreasing quality of life experienced by the Khanty, have spurred a process of ethnic mobilisation. The struggle for the right to maintain a traditional way of life and protect family estates from industrial development resulted in the foundation of the Association for Yugra Salvation in 1989. This NGO developed within a context of *glasnost'* politics (politics of openness), which brought ecological and human-rights problems into the open for wide discussion in the mass media. Moreover, one of the immediate results of this political struggle was that the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (KhMAO) became the rightful member of the Russian Federation, with legislative and executive branches of power. One of the urgent issues that the newly empowered *okrug* administration addressed was indigenous peoples' ownership rights to their family estates. On 5 February 1992, the Council of People's Deputies of KhMAO issued the *Polozhenie o statute rodov'jkh ugodii v Khantj-Mansiiskom avtonomnom okruge* (Regulation concerning the status of family estates in KhMAO). The new law established procedures for defining the boundaries of family hunting territories (*rodov'je ugod rodov'je ugod'ya*) and issuing state certificates confirming the Khanty families' rights to live and use their estates for traditional land use.

Both the Khanty people and the oil companies were interested in the process of defining boundaries because, according to the Regulation, oil companies were required to obtain signed releases from Khanty families before exploration or production work could begin. Furthermore, final decisions about taking a piece of land from the Khanty were to be approved by the *okrug* administration in conjunction with the regional administration only after receiving written consent from the landowner as well as positive results from a referendum of the native people and state environmental approval. This legislation also required an agreement between the owner of the land and the oil company, approved by the appropriate administrative authority. Separate agreement specified all details about the terms and conditions of development, including provisions for full compensation for the Khanty family losses in connection with development, as well as a lease payment for the use of the land.

Despite the agreements and the system of controlling and fining the oil companies for not following the agreements, cases of injustice still exist. In addition, there was no state law about private property on lands and resources in Russia and the *Polozhenie* issued by the KhMAO actually contradicts the Russian Constitution. This situation weakened the Khanty position in claiming their rights to the family estates and made them dependent on the oil company's

good will and decency. While the legislative efforts of the early 1990s ended the wild exploration and oil production period in the area, this does not mean that the destructive impacts of the oil industry have ceased.

A major impact was the destruction of water systems. During my fieldwork in Trom-yogan and Pim in 2000, the Khanty described many instances where road constructors would block small rivers while making roads and assembling pipelines, preventing fish from swimming to the spawning areas and causing severe fish-resource degradation in some estates. Frequent forest fires caused by inexperienced newcomers reduced territories suitable for hunting and reindeer-herding. The new settlers arriving in the forest often carried out domestic reindeer-hunting and industrial-scale berry-gathering and fishing. The uncontrolled spread of homeless dogs brought by the newcomers created a threat to both reindeer and humans. In addition, Khanty reported cases of their graveyards, sacred places and winter storages being destroyed by the newcomers in the search for valuable items or out of curiosity.

Despite these problems, the majority of the Pim and Trom-yogan Khanty admitted (in interviews in 2000) that conditions had improved compared to the situation in the Soviet and early post-Soviet years, because they had more control over hunting, gathering and fishing activities. Most of the Pim and Trom-yogan Khanty pointed out that they shared some benefits from oil production, including increased access to snowmobiles, boat motors, new houses, petroleum, small electric stations, medical care and free university education for their children, among other benefits. However, others expressed sorrows and worries about the Khanty dependence on 'Russian' goods and services, which, inevitably, fostered the destruction of their traditional way of life. Ironically, some Pim and Trom-yogan Khanty had to revitalise reindeer-herding and older patterns of land use, which some families had abandoned long ago, in order to obtain rights for their estates and economic agreements with the oil companies. Therefore the return to a traditional way of life provided them with some advantages, such as new boarding schools, kindergartens and medical services, as well as financial support (new houses, subsidies, etc.) which otherwise they would not have received.

RELIGION

Khanty religious traditions revealed themselves to observers in different forms or manifestations. Khanty religious traditions and their evolution from the seventeenth to twentieth century were the subject of a separate monograph (Главацкая 2005*b*). The descriptions left by clergy and researchers between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries have enabled us to reconstruct the main manifestations of Khanty religious traditions. According to their beliefs, the



Fig. 2.11. A renowned bear hunter, Vakh river.
Photo by Grigorii Dmitriev-Sadovnikov, 1912 (Glavatskaya 2013: 146)

universe comprises three spheres: Sky, Earth and Underworld. A multitude of spirits inhabit each sphere and humans seek to establish proper relationships with them, for the spirits each possess differing qualities of good and evil. The most detailed description of the Khanty pantheon was prepared by a group of authors involved in a research project focused on mythologies of the Uralic peoples (*Мифология хантов* 2000; English version: *Khanty Mythology*, 2006).

Khanty religious traditions were also manifested through an extensive network of sacred places, each associated with a historical event or a myth. The landscape and its various elements appear to be links between contemporary family life and their distant historical or mythological past.²

The Khanty believed that each deity demanded an offering or sacrifice; in order to survive in harsh conditions an individual had to regulate his or her relationship with the gods and spirits through numerous rituals. The Khanty had a notion of a supreme creator god, *tōrəm* (Torum) or *numi tōrəm*, antedating the Russians' arrival in their lands. Khanty mythology also included the notion of several generations within the divine family: Torum the father and his offspring, children and grandchildren. Each generation shares different spheres of influence and responsibility according to age and tenets, corresponding to a certain aspect of the landscape. Torum's sons according to Khanty beliefs are affiliated mythologically with the patrons of the main tributaries of the Ob' river. His grandsons were the protectors of the family estates. Most Khanty extended families lived on traditional family hunting territories, protected, in their view, by family deities who are the offspring of the lineage-founding deities. Traditional Khanty believe that sacred power is invested in both the landscape and their lineage (Балалаева 2002: 149–59).

The oldest male of the clan is responsible for maintaining contact with the deity who protects the family lands. He cares for *tōrəm qāt*, the deity's hut placed on a two-metre-high platform constructed on hewn tree trunks, in which the deity allegedly lives, often together with family members. He visits the deity regularly to make sacrifices, and to renovate the image and its home.

The Khanty system of beliefs also has a strong communal and social foundation. Participation in communal rituals, whether because of the annual life cycle or unforeseen crises, brought together members of different groups and unified society: getting together for prayer and sacrifice strengthened ties between people. Such gatherings became the places to discuss the most important questions and reach decisions.

The Khanty have a tradition of ancestor worship and bear veneration related to it, for according to Khanty mythology the bear is both a son of the supreme creator god and a Khanty ancestor. The family fortunate enough to hunt a bear organised a bear festival, which attracted the whole community

² For a map of Siberian indigenous peoples' sacred places, see Главацкая 2005b.

and even numerous Khanty guests from afar. These festivals lasted several days and included well-known songs performed in honour of the bear, comedy performances, dances and feasting. Public ridicule at a bear festival was one of the most common punishments for anti-social behaviour, such as theft, greed or boasting. Male actors performed sketches to mock someone well known to the audience for such behaviour. (Молданов 1999; Соколова 2002: 41–62; Glavatskaya 2005c.)

The role of the Khanty religious leaders – the shamans – was of vital importance. They were healers, prophets and mediators with the world of spirits (Kerezsi 1996: 183–98; 1997: 13–59; Pentikäinen 1998: 64–75, 102–10). They made decisions, and summoned people to public rituals; they also remembered the details of the rituals and customs, and the whole complex of ethnic heritage of their group. They played an important role in transmitting the cultural heritage from generation to generation and in this way helped their people to survive and maintain a traditional way of life through the centuries. In general, Khanty indigenous religion has always played an important role in the moulding and maintenance of Khanty identity, forming one of its most pronounced and manifest dimensions. (Главацкая 2005b.)

*

As Russians began to penetrate into the Khanty lands in the seventeenth century, they put no special emphasis on baptising the indigenous peoples. Baptism merely accompanied colonisation. Russian government policy prohibited the forced baptism of the inhabitants of north-western Siberia in view of the insecure position of the Russians in the region, who feared uprisings among the indigenous peoples. Nonetheless, despite official Russian policy, some Khanty accepted Christianity in the course of the seventeenth century. Some chiefs hoped to keep their independence in this way because the Russian state welcomed baptism of the indigenous nobles and supported them by giving them priority over their non-baptised relatives in inheritance and power over their kinsfolk. Moreover, the baptised Khanty often changed their social status and joined the Russian Siberian administration. (Главацкая 2005b)

In the eighteenth century, Russia was rapidly developing into a powerful empire with a national identity of its own. Peter the Great ordered the Russian Orthodox Church to baptise the Siberian peoples, and gave it authority to use all possible means. Filofei Leshchinskii, an archbishop, appointed as head of the Siberian diocese, made several journeys to Khanty settlements with missionary aims between 1712 and 1726 (see the map ‘Russian Orthodox Church Mission in early eighteenth-century Siberia’ in Главацкая 2005). According to official reports, altogether 40,000 Khanty, Mansi and other indigenous peoples were baptised at that time. The missionaries destroyed many sacred places where the Khanty had worshipped and made sacrifices to their deities.



Fig. 2.12. Filofei Leshchinskiĭ, Metropolitan of Tobol'sk and Siberia.
Late-nineteenth-century icon

This did not prevent them from making new images and creating new sacred places. Even if a few of those Khanty who lived in constant close contact with the Russians were ready to change their indigenous religion for Orthodoxy, the majority managed to maintain their old non-Christian beliefs, even during the period of forced baptism. The fact that mass baptisms did not give missionaries the opportunity to isolate converts from their ethnic, cultural and religious environment could explain the failure of the Russian government's policies of



Figs. 2.13, 14. Russian Orthodox church in Lar'yak settlement, exterior and interior views. Photos by Grigorii Dmitriev-Sadovnikov, 1913 (TIAMZ)





Fig. 2.15. Lar'yakskie yurts on the Vakh river.
Photo by Grigoriĭ Dmitriev-Sadovnikov, 1912 (Glavatskaya 2013: 45)

converting the indigenous peoples of Siberia to Christianity. As the Russian authorities realised that enforced Christianisation of the Khanty was not having the desired results and that baptised people usually continued worshipping their indigenous deities, they ended this form of Christian offensive, although by this time almost all the Southern and Eastern Khanty had been baptised. These new converts, however, often practised both Orthodox and indigenous rituals. (Огрызко 1941; Миненко 1975; Главацкая 2005 *b*)

Catherine II abandoned the policy of forced baptism and promoted religious tolerance. She sent a special committee of experts to Siberia to investigate the indigenous peoples' complaints regarding abuses by missionaries. The findings resulted in the policy of enforced baptism being abandoned.

A new wave of missionary activity occurred on the eastern frontier of the Russian empire during the nineteenth century. The development of Russian national self-consciousness resulted in a search for the roots and sources of Russian identity within Orthodoxy. The majority of Russian society required a quick and absolute incorporation of all non-Russian peoples into the Russian Orthodox community structure for the sake of national unity. This policy inevitably implied acculturation of the indigenous peoples. Converted Siberian peoples had to follow the Russian ways: live like the Russians, speak Russian and become true Orthodox believers and active parishioners. From this time onwards, the Khanty found themselves under persistent pressure from both the Russian Orthodox Church and the secular authorities.

In order to reconcile two different religious systems and to make it easier for the Khanty to accept Christianity, some missionaries tried to explain their ideas using terms understood by their congregation. For example, to express the idea of God they used the idea of *Torum*, the supreme deity of the Khanty. To express the idea of Jesus Christ they used *Mir Vantjy Khu* (*mir wantti xu*), another important Khanty deity, the younger son of *Torum*. The idea of the Virgin Mother they explained through the image of *Anki Pugos* (*анки пугас*), a female deity, who, according to Khanty beliefs, was the sister or wife of *Numi Torum* (*numi tōram*) and the mother of *Mir Vantjy Khu*. This approach to the promotion of Christianity brought about syncretism in Khanty ritual practice and produced a special effect on the evolution of the indigenous pantheon and mythology.

By the late eighteenth century, the Russian cultural and religious influence increased along with the growth of the Russian population. By constructing churches and chapels in the Khanty area, the authorities implemented a system of control over the converts. Some Khanty gradually accepted various elements of Christianity voluntarily, or under pressure, but preserved their indigenous religion as well. Close contacts with the Russians and the penetration of some elements of Christianity into Khanty everyday life resulted in a specific non-Christian mode of venerating icons by making offerings to them after successful hunting and fishing or throwing and beating them in punishment for being lazy and not helping the people (Огрызко 1941; Миненко 1975).

The descendants of those baptised during the first century of Russian colonisation, however, came to be increasingly familiar with Russian habits over the course of the eighteenth century, and gradually adopted the Russian ways and Orthodoxy.

The very encounter with Christianity had enriched Khanty spiritual life. This opinion is based on the assumption that the Khanty themselves actively participated in adapting Christianity to their life and needs and did not merely passively consume what was offered. The idea of religious enrichment is especially relevant for groups practising both Christian and indigenous rituals and religious syncretism. Their pantheon increased as a result of the absorption of 'Christian gods' (saints), together with new spiritual paraphernalia – crosses and icons given to them by the priests. Their mythology included new stories from the Old and New Testaments as well as written and oral Orthodox tradition. Their notion of sacred space widened with the arrival of the new churches and chapels built for the Khanty in the eighteenth century (see the map 'Khanty Orthodox churches in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' in Glavatskaya 2005 b).

Social manifestations of Khanty indigenous religion also developed because of their general acceptance of the priests' spiritual authority as well as the establishment of parishes. In addition, their ritual life incorporated new practices as a result of voluntary or forced observation of the Christian calendar and rituals

of transition and crisis. All these innovations developed within the stream of Khanty spirituality. According to Khanty traditional beliefs success in economic and social life was associated with the spiritual forces of nature approachable by ritual means. The change of ecological, economic and political circumstances called for some change in the Khanty religious heritage and its ritual manifestation. Any failure in their daily activities caused as a consequence of Russian colonisation inevitably affected the religious sphere of Khanty life. They had to adjust their religious life to the changing world, which they also did by adopting certain elements of Christianity. Those individuals who adopted Christianity and gave up their religious traditions were the most exposed to religious and other innovations. In most cases, their ethnic and group identity changed along with their religious identity (Glavatskaya 2001; Главатцкая 2005 b).

The groups who preferred to migrate to remote areas to avoid Russian and Christian pressure managed to preserve their religious traditions, though at the expense of certain inevitable modifications. The Christian missionaries and local officials directed their efforts mainly against particular religious manifestations which they considered most harmful and anti-Christian. One example was the Khanty sacred places, and the missionaries put their efforts into their destruction. Thereafter the indigenous people started to keep their sacred paraphernalia hidden, at some distance from the settlements.

Another well-known Khanty indigenous religious manifestation was the images of tutelary gods, referred to as *shaitans* (idols), and much hated by the clergy. These also had to undergo drastic modification. Initially large in size, the images were located near the houses; then people had to replace them with smaller images and keep them covered inside the houses; and finally they started to use anthropomorphic imitations, made of clothes and textiles given to the tutelary gods as offerings and wrapped together in an anthropomorphic shape. The Finnish scholar Kustaa Karjalainen was one of the first to assume that the absence of images and their replacement by offerings was due to the Russian Orthodox Church's prohibition and punishments (Karjalainen 1922).

The Russian administration in Siberia also persecuted shamans for their practices; hence they had to perform their rituals in secret. People themselves preferred not to report on those who had held shamanic séances.

The bear festivals seemed to attract less attention amongst the clergy, perhaps because they did not have many opportunities to observe the ritual, which the Khanty organised only following a bear hunt. It is also possible that the clergy did not consider bear festivals as manifestations of non-Christian religiosity, but rather as insignificant local customs and practices similar to those of the popular Russian Christmas carnivals and performances.

Siberian authorities concluded that they had accumulated sufficient basic information about the religious traditions of the Khanty by the nineteenth century; according to the official view, they had now more or less effected the

Christianisation of the Siberian indigenous peoples. Reported cases of people returning to their indigenous ritual practices and beliefs were considered to be within the competence and responsibilities of the local clergy and administration, who had the right to levy fines and to order corporal punishment.

Russian academicians did not consider the Christianisation of the Khanty and their religious traditions an attractive or worthwhile subject for research. Perhaps they thought that adoption of Christianity by Siberian indigenous peoples was just a question of time and best left to the efforts of the local clergy. Ironically, it was the local Siberian priests and enthusiasts who collected most of the information about the early-nineteenth-century Khanty religious traditions, not the professional academics. These reports were usually sent not to the Academy, but to the archbishop of Siberia's diocese in order to draw his attention to 'the problem' and to persuade him to take measures to resolve it. The intelligentsia employed as state officials in Siberia collected data on the religious traditions of the Khanty and in some cases even published it.

The middle of the nineteenth century, marked by the rapid development of Russian professional ethnography, brought many peoples in the Russian Empire within the focus of academic studies. In particular, the Finno-Ugric Khanty and Mansi, as 'linguistic relatives' of the Finns and the Hungarians, attracted the close attention of Finnish and Hungarian scholars, who conducted a series of expeditions to western Siberia (Главацкая 2005 *b*; Glavatskaya 2009). Comprehensive fieldwork studies over long periods resulted in collections of unique material on the Khanty. The researchers not only followed a specific itinerary, but also stayed long enough in some places to study the people and culture in depth. These intensive studies resulted in a series of publications containing data about Khanty dialects, everyday life and religious traditions, as well as unique collections of items brought to the European museums.

It is well known that early religious studies often caused unease among the Siberian peoples, who associated scholars with state officials, from whom they expected only troubles. Often, researchers were not welcomed and they met with open hostility. However, in the end it seems that studies of religious heritage can affect a group's religious and ethnic identities by promoting certain manifestations. Collecting Khanty religious and folklore heritage was one of the most important impacts made by scholars. They assembled a basic collection of information, including phenomena which had disappeared from daily life and survived only in the texts recorded in the early nineteenth century.

The scholars always tried to make contact with Khanty elders – the most knowledgeable people – who were the keepers of the religious heritage, namely the shamans. Someone who receives a guest from the 'outside world' rose in the esteem of his own group, creating a precedent to remember and recount year after year. Thus, the scholars indirectly promoted the shamans' authority among the Khanty.

The field-researchers, by recording the manifestations of religious traditions, restored a sense of respect for them among the people and by so doing attracted audiences. They sometimes performed rituals with no connection to any particular need or time, thus turning the performance into a more profane phenomenon, and in its own way fashionable. The interest of outsiders in certain religious manifestations of the group's heritage helped the participants to construct a notion of identity and appreciation of their 'selfness' in contrast to outsiders' otherness. Thus the very process of field research encouraged the maintenance of religious traditions, one of the main expressions of a group's identity. (Glavatskaya 2009)

RELIGIOUS CHANGE AMONG THE EASTERN KHANTY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

No-one knows exactly when Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin was born, but it was probably in the first decade of the twentieth century. By the time of his birth, the Khanty had experienced three centuries of Russian political, economic, social and cultural domination. Therefore, it was not surprising that some of them had wholly absorbed Orthodoxy while others accepted some elements of it and practised them in parallel with the rituals of their indigenous religion; those who lived some distance away from the Russians kept their religious heritage and practised their indigenous rituals. By the time of Ivan Sopochin's birth, there had already been some religious change among the Khanty. Small communities of the Northern and Eastern Khanty preserved their indigenous religion without much change. Among the Surgut Khanty, indigenous religion and Orthodoxy were functioning side by side, while the Southern Khanty (the Irtÿsh river group) had mostly absorbed Orthodoxy.

Under the pressure and influence of the Church in the early twentieth century, the Khanty had to follow Russian Orthodoxy and perform the Church calendar and transitional rituals. Some Khanty also performed Christian crisis rituals in times of emergency, while those living far away from Russian cities practised their indigenous religious rituals. Such a situation, with both religions coexisting, was typical for the whole nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

The situation drastically changed in the late 1920s, when the Bolshevik Party proclaimed the establishment of the secular state and initiated a modernisation of the indigenous peoples' life. The party activists directed their efforts against the 'religious remnants', be they Orthodoxy or indigenous religion. Although the government issued a state decree in 1918 that proclaimed freedom of worship in Soviet Russia, the actual politics of the Bolshevik Party towards religion was a

non-compromising fight against any manifestation of religious consciousness, the open confrontation between the state's secular ideology and religion became inevitable. Local administration used different measures against the Khanty religious heritage. Both state institutions and the newly founded organisation Soyuz Voïnstvuyushchikh Bezbozhnikov (League of Militant Atheists) aimed to destroy religion in the Soviet Union. In the case of the Khanty, the League campaigned against religious practices and persecuted religious leaders, the main keepers of religious heritage.

Atheist activists seized images of deities, shamanistic equipment and offerings from the sacred places. They closed churches and chapels, confiscated devotional articles and icons and then burned down the rest. The atheists did not take into consideration the sacredness of the Khanty holy sites. For example, they organised industrial fishing in the Khanty and Nenets sacred lake Num-to despite protest (Судьбы 1994: 211).

The establishment of compulsory education and keeping Khanty children in boarding schools separated from their elders and family also contributed to the destruction of religious heritage. This disrupted the transmission of cultural and religious knowledge between generations. The schoolchildren had little chance to learn the nomadic way of life and their families' religious traditions. At the same time, the school education promulgated a materialistic worldview and a critical attitude towards traditional Khanty values.

In order to isolate religious leaders from their people the local administration and public organisations exerted political, economic, social and psychological pressure. Orthodox priests and shamans along with their family members were deprived of their suffrage: shamans and priests had no right to participate in any elections (Судьбы 1994: 210). Some local authorities did not allow them to be present at public meetings or participate in the decision-making process. Religious leaders and members of their families could not join collective farms even if they wanted to. They had extra obligations, duties and taxes compared to other people. They were restricted in the use of common pastures and hunting estates. When indigenous people obtained the right to college education, some shamans and members of their families were eager to use this opportunity of higher learning for their children. However, the local soviet and the party officials expressed anxiety that religious leaders would use their knowledge to get more power over their kinsfolk as shamans. They surmised that educated shamans might use their laboratory experiments in chemistry or physics to prove their supernatural gifts. They set up a special committee to screen the candidates when they applied for this educational opportunity.

In addition, mass media slandered the priests and shamans. They described the alleged stupidity, greediness, lies and sexual crimes of the religious leaders in newspapers, magazines and special booklets (see as an example Эристов 1993). Some authors and playwrights wrote plays depicting shamans and priests as the



Fig. 2.16. Atheist anti-shaman poster, 'Elect workers to the native councils of workers. Don't let the shaman and kulak in.'

people's enemies. Some of the plays' plots were very aggressive and offensive. Every school had atheistic posters displayed on the walls.

The mass persecution of religious leaders began after 1932, when the state proclaimed extermination of religion as one of its major aims for the next five-year period. In 1933, the State Security Committee started to carry out purges of so-called counter-revolutionary elements, arresting and deporting shamans and priests. These severe overt methods were successful. The religious heritage of the Khanty generally weakened during the period of confrontation. It is interesting to note that different groups and individuals had differing attitudes both for and against this kind of purgative politics.

Many of the Khanty feared Soviet activists, militant atheists, cultural centres and boarding schools in particular. Lack of information and understanding produced many fears and rumours. When Soviet activists gathered up the Khanty children of the Kazÿm river basin and brought them to the Kazÿm boarding school, it naturally caused unrest. Parents, who later visited their children and saw them eating noodles, which they had not seen before, believed that the boarding-school staff were forcing their children to eat maggots. Rumour also spread that the Soviet activists were gathering up Khanty children to feed them to the animals (see Leete 1998: 172).

Naturally, the shamans and their kinsfolk tried to protect their interests and demanded the authorities restore their suffrage. There were a few cases when some of the poorest of the former shamans, who were never paid for their séances, managed to get back their civil rights. In these cases, they had to confirm that they had not been practising shamanic séances for at least three years, had no accumulated properties, supported Soviet power and worked hard. There were, however, no guarantees of restitution of someone's civil rights even if they provided all the evidence that they were no threat to the existing political system.

Some Khanty, including shamans, resisted Soviet power when they felt that its actions in the north were destructive for their traditional way of life and religious values. They protested against the forcible compulsory education in boarding schools, the industrial exploitation of sacred places and the settled way of life that the state forced upon them. The confrontation reached its peak in a series of tragic events during the Kazÿm uprising in 1933–4 (Судьбы 1994: 226). There were about a hundred sacred places in the Kazÿm river basin. The most important among the sacred places of the Khanty was Lake Num-to, the residence of Vut-imi (*wut imi*) – the tutelary goddess of the Kazÿm river, venerated by both Khanty and Nenets (see map in Очерки 2002: 142). The centre of the holy place was on an island in the middle of the lake and was devoted to Vut-imi. Soviet activists knew about it and despite the Nenets and Khanty protests they forced the Nenets to fish in the sacred lake. They did even worse by establishing the Kul't baza (Cultural Centre) with a boarding school in the area. The Khanty revolted and slaughtered the Soviet activists. The troops were sent to suppress the uprising and

the participants, twenty-nine of them qualified as shamans, were later executed (*Касум–Ёх* 1993: 65).

However, less religiously minded Khanty embraced atheism. They abandoned their religious heritage and beliefs and adopted the new ideology. Some even participated in the anti-religious campaign on the side of the atheists. For example, two Khanty from Sherkaly village spoke against churches and shamanism in their interview for the radio channel broadcast in the region. One of them claimed that all the Khanty of his village voluntarily decided to abandon their religion and use the church building for cultural purposes and recycle its bell metal for industrial needs (*ГУТОГАТ: Fond 695. Opis' 1. Delo 154. List 293*). Another Khanty stated that shamans, like priests, were evils for the indigenous people as they forced people to make sacrifices and threatened them with evil spirits, and destroyed their economy and health. He ended by calling for the people to boycott shamans (*ГУТОГАТ: Fond 695. Opis' 1. Delo 155. List 79*).

The period of active persecutions ended by the mid-1940s. Although there were some other waves of atheistic campaign, they were not as destructive as the purges of the 1930s. The Soviet education system routinely promulgated a negative attitude towards shamanism. According to data recalled by the Trom-yogan Khanty in 2000, who were boarding-school pupils in the late 1950s to 1960s, schoolchildren often teased and mobbed their classmates from shamans' families to make them cry (*LAG. Fond. 1. Opis. 1. Delo 6. List 12; Главацкая 2010*). Indigenous ritual life existed in secret and, even then, mostly at the level of small communities, families and individuals; in essence, it went underground. The general result was that the religious heritage of the Khanty weakened further.

State control over religion slowly weakened up to the 1980s, which coincided with a general awareness about ecological destruction in western Siberia caused by the rapidly developing oil and gas industry. There was a growing Khanty ethnic mobilisation as a response to this danger; Khanty religious heritage and identity became an important component in this mobilisation. Even if considerably damaged over the preceding decades, the Khanty religious identity started to revitalise rapidly in the form of Orthodoxy for some Khanty and the indigenous religious system for others. In the latter case it manifested itself in the restoration of some sacred places, and the reconstruction of the public sacrifice practices and bear festivals (*Молданов 1996: 266–70; Молданов 1999*). In addition, people had to return to their traditional medicine, as the state-organised system and social-support programme stopped operating after the political system changed in the late 1980s. They started to seek out shamans' help in cases where the official system did not have much to offer. According to my informants' data, collected in 2000, up to fifteen shamans were performing their duties among the Khanty of the Trom-yogan river basin. They were not

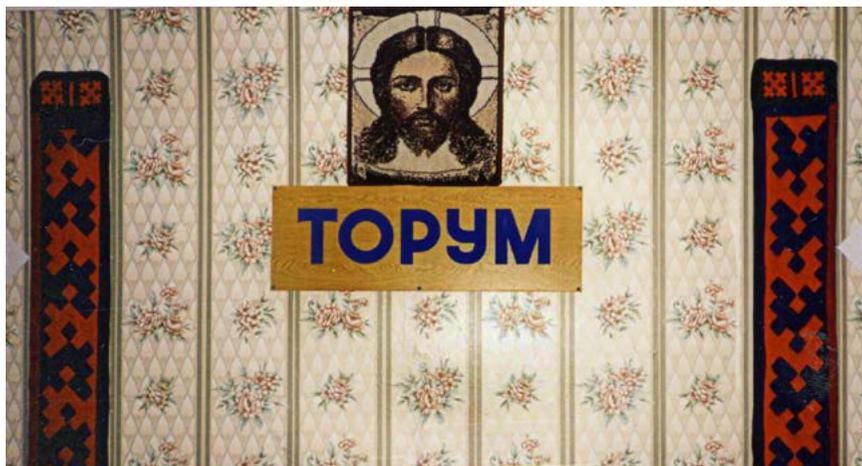


Fig. 2.17. Interior of the House of Culture in Pim settlement, 2001, featuring the name Torum (the Khanty high god) beneath an icon of Christ

old people: most were around their thirties. (*LAG. Fond 1. Opis'. 1. Delo 3. List 6; Delo 6. List 11; Delo 9. List.4; Delo 11. List 2.*)

Growing ethnic identity, investments and the financial support of the state and oil companies for the maintenance and revitalisation of Khanty culture marked the early 1990s. The Russian Orthodox Church experienced the same revitalisation, erecting many new churches and chapels. After the Communist ideology had lost its influence, Siberia became an open playing field for various missionary churches from both the East and the West. Many new religious movements and churches came to the area to recruit new converts. Thus, the Khanty who lived in the forest area were mainly involved in the process of revitalising their indigenous religion, while Khanty city-dwellers experienced influence from the Russian Orthodox Church and other religions, absorbing new forms of religiosity. (Главацкая 2005 b)

SURGUT KHANTY SHAMANISM

According to the Russian Orthodox Church, the Surgut Khanty officially adopted Christianity as early as the eighteenth century during the missionary campaign headed by Metropolitan Filofei Leshchinskiĭ, the head of the diocese of Tobol'sk and Siberia. The state built churches and chapels for baptised Khanty, organised them into parishes and erected schools for their children. The Surgut Orthodox mission did everything possible to maintain Christian religiosity among the Surgut Khanty in the nineteenth century. However, ac-



Fig. 2.18. A Khanty man with drum, probably on the Vakh river.
Photo by Grigorii Dmitriev-Sadovnikov, 1913 (TIAMZ)

According to the local priests' reports, the Khanty did not baptise their babies, the majority of whom paid their first visit to the church when all but adult. The rest of their lives they would come to church once or twice a year for

Christmas and Easter, during which they would confess and receive Holy Communion (Мартынова 1998: 158–9, 193–7; Glavatskaya 2010: 123–31). The eighteenth-century confession lists contain records of the Surgut Khanty household heads, including the Sopočins.

We may assume that Ivan Sopočin's family did not experience a very strong Orthodox Church influence. He was baptised when he was a teenager: this means that his family lived far away from the church and the priest could not visit them to baptise the new-born baby. Natal'ya Koshkarëva has reconstructed most of Ivan Stepanovich Sopočin's biography (Koshkaryova 2005; Koshkarëva, this volume).

As a result of the recently discovered materials of the 1926–7 Polar Census (see Glavatskaya 2011 for details), we have a unique opportunity to analyse the Surgut Khanty religious landscape in the early 1930s. The census was not a simple demographic data collection but rather an extensive piece of ethnographic research, conducted in the area by several expeditions for more than half a year. One of the members of the expedition was Kaïdalov, a descendant of the priests' family which had conducted missionary work among the Khanty since the eighteenth century. The census-takers described every one of 117 Surgut Khanty households in detail, including their possessions, clothes, utensils and religious practices. Fourteen Khanty households had their own shamans in 1926 and another 103 households sought their help frequently. The Surgut Khanty mentioned six especially popular shamans by name, who healed people from both the Agan and Trom-yogan river basins. Nikolaï Tevlin from Trom-yogan and Ivan Aïpin from Agan were the most powerful among them. It is likely that shamans communicated with each other. Ivan Stepanovich Sopočin had *t'artta qo aray* ('shaman song') and *pānq aray* ('fly-agaric song') adopted from among other shamans' songs in his repertoire as recorded by the linguist Regina Nazarenko in 1986–9 (Nazarenko 2005). Altogether, she recorded seventeen shaman songs belonging to other shamans, among them some Nenets shamans. Some of them I identified as songs of Agan and Trom-yogan shamans: Aleksandr Sardakov, Efim Rÿnkov, Dmitriï Aïpin (Главацкая 2010: 123–31). Therefore, the shamans were not only aware of each other but also could sing each other's personal songs.

Ivan Stepanovich, the head of the extended Sopočin family up to the 1990s, was a shaman or *t'artta qo* ('a man who knows' in Khanty) and a great representative of the Khanty intellectual elite. All of his children, although with different educational backgrounds, represent the Khanty intellectual elite as well. One of them, a high-school graduate, worked as an officer in the Surgut regional administration for many years. One of the daughters was a teacher; another was involved in Khanty cultural heritage conservation. The eldest daughter spent most of her life in the forest and was an expert in Khanty folklore and ritual life. The shaman's youngest children belong to a generation that did not

experience the full scale of atheistic repression and forcible education in boarding schools. They lived a traditional way of life, and the younger son became the head of the community after his father's death and an expert in the traditional way of life and reindeer-breeding.

We do not know exactly when Ivan Sopochnin became a shaman, but it happened when he was a young man, and the process of becoming a shaman took some years (Kerezsi 1997: 48; Koshkaryova 2005: 152–3). The Sopochnins regularly performed the indigenous calendar and crisis rituals (Glavatskaya 2005*d*). Ivan Sopochnin did not have his wedding ceremony in a church and did not baptise his children, although he kept an icon and pectoral cross in his holy sledge. As far as I know, he did not perform any of the secular/Soviet rituals. So during the shaman's lifetime all his family members participated and performed indigenous religious rituals. However, his children who lived in cities actively participated in secular/Soviet rituals, both calendar and transitional. In general the religious situation within the family was the same as among those groups of the Khanty who lived a traditional way of life. After Ivan Stepanovich's death the members of the family living in the city started to experience less influence from their indigenous religious background and the growing influence of the revitalised Orthodox Church. One of them became an active member of the Orthodox parish in the city of Kogalym and started to participate in the Orthodox calendar rituals, even including bathing in an ice-hole during Kreshchenie (Theophany, the Orthodox festival of Christ's baptism) in January. The members of the family who lived in the forest returned to the strict ritual prescriptions abandoned during their father's lifetime. Ivan Stepanovich played the role of the keeper of indigenous religious heritage and with his death the family lost its religious leader. This inevitably contributed to the family's religious diversity. (Glavatskaya 2005*d*).

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CHAPTER THREE

Ethnic Characteristics of the Trom-yogan Khanty

ÁGNES KEREZSI

THE SOPOCHIN EXTENDED FAMILY

LIVING ALONG THE TROM-YOGAN RIVER

In this essay I explore the ethnicity and cultural features of a small group of Surgut Khanty – specifically, of two extended families living along the Trom-yogan river (Khanty *tõrəm jăwən*, God’s river) – from the last decade of the twentieth century to the present. The two extended families in question are the Sopochns living along the Woki-rap-yagun (‘Fox-cliff river’), and another branch of the Sopochn family, living along the Yinku-yagun (‘Watery river’). The Trom-yogan Khanty, among whom I conducted field research, belong to the Agan–Vasyugan ethnographic subgroup of the Khanty both economically and culturally. Before the Russians appeared on the scene, this area was populated mostly by Kets, Samoyedic peoples, and smaller numbers of Khanty. The Khanty migration to this region lasted several centuries and came to a close at the end of the seventeenth century (Мартынова 1998: 203–9).

The Surgut Khanty are located in the central area of the Eastern Khanty dialect group. This area stretches about 500 km from north to south, and about 300 km from east to west. Almost precisely in the middle of this area runs the River Ob’ and one of its right-hand tributaries, the Trom-yogan. Members of the Sopochn clan have lived, and partially still live, along the Trom-yogan. Delimited by swamps to the north and by endless forests to the south, this area was almost inaccessible until the second half of the twentieth century. It is possible that these challenging geographic conditions have contributed to the preservation of archaic elements in the inhabitants’ culture

and everyday practices which can no longer be detected among other ethnic groups.

In the Surgut District of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, the number of indigenous Khanty is approximately 2800, and they make up about 2.5 per cent of the population. The number of Khanty and Mansi together is 3200 in the district.

I conducted my field research jointly with the photographer Erzsébet Winter, the linguist Márta Csepregi and the ethno-musicologist Katalin Lázár in 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993, as well as later, in 2006 and 2012.

My informants originate from two areas: some live along the banks of the Trom-yogan and its tributaries (particularly the Agan, Yinku-yagun and Woki-rap-yagun rivers), others near the source of the Great Yugan river in the Vasyugan Swamp. A discussion of the religious, ethnic and everyday practices characterising the latter group remains beyond the remit of this chapter because – despite the close similarity between the two groups' dialects – the second group's attire and customs differ significantly from the former's. The Surgut Khanty family discussed in this study is one of the few communities to maintain their traditional way of life until the early 1990s, although in later years they have been increasingly affected by oil extraction and the presence of large oil companies in the region.

Foreign ethnologists who have conducted research and published regularly on the Surgut Khanty include Finns (e.g. Pentikäinen 1998), the Estonian Anzori Barkalaja (2002), the British Peter Jordan (2003), and the German Stefan Dudeck (2013). The American Andrew Wiget and Ol'ga Balalaeva, from Moscow, co-authored a volume summarising their experience along the Yugan river (2011).

During the 1980s and 1990s the Sopochnin family's dwelling-places consisted of households of nuclear families which were related to each other and which formed together an extended family. For instance, in the settlement along the Woki-rap-yagun four families lived together. The first family included Ivan Stepanovich Sopochnin,¹ the founder of the extended family, a shaman of superior knowledge and magic power, who safeguarded their customs and beliefs. It was impossible to establish his age with absolute certainty because at the time of his birth newborns were unregistered among Khanty living in the forest. The Khanty, on the other hand, remembered dates of birth based on a significant event taking place at the time. Ivan Sopochnin, according to his own account, was born in the year 'when many reindeer calves were eaten by the bear'.

¹ Names are provided, at their first mention, in the official form, which includes the Christian name, the patronymic (father's name), and the surname. Later only the Christian name and the surname are used; I leave the patronymic out.



Fig. 3.1. The wider Sopochin family



Fig. 3.2. Ivan Sopochin's house with guests

The maiden name of Sopochnin's wife was Agrafena Andreevna Aipina. She was born in 1922 near the Agan river. She was a quiet and shy woman, who observed carefully the norms of behaviour which were compulsory for women. She covered her face among outsiders, particularly when her sons-in-law or her husband's elderly male relatives entered the house. She was usually seen wearing her headscarf covering her eyes almost entirely. In the course of her difficult life she gave birth to nine children, of whom six were still alive in 1991, and three of whom lived with them in the forest in the early 1990s.

Their youngest son, Iosif Ivanovich Sopochnin, was born in 1958, and lived in the same household with his parents. According to Khanty custom, it is the youngest male child's duty to look after his ageing parents. In turn, he is the spiritual heir of the father, and succeeds him as head of the clan.² In the Sopochnin family, too, the ageing father handed down his spiritual legacy, including ritual texts and proceedings, to Iosif. Iosif not only lived with his parents and cared for them, but also followed in his father's footsteps in respecting and maintaining Khanty customs and beliefs. He fathered three children, of whom the eldest son died in the 2010s.

Iosif's wife, Rimma Nikitichna Sopochnina, *née* Russkina, was born in 1964 near the village of Russkinskaya on the Enel-imi-yagun river ('Great lady river'). They have two children, Olesya, born in 1988, and Stepan, born in 1990.

The eldest Sopochnin daughter, Fëkla Ivanovna Sopochnina, Pokacheva after her husband's name, lived in the second nuclear family. She was born in 1945, and lived with her husband, Kirill Ignat'evich Pokachev, in a wooden house adjacent to her parents' dwelling. They had no children of their own, but in the settlement Fëkla was like a second mother to all the children, with whom they lived in a warm and mutually affectionate relationship.

The Khanty normally live in patrilocal families, in which a woman moves to her husband's home after marriage. Families living in the forest often deviate from this pattern, and men who are willing to fish and hunt, but who lack their own dwelling-place, are welcome in their wife's family. Irina Ivanovna Sopochnina, by her married name Kechimova, the youngest child of the head of the family, brought her husband to the Sopochnins' dwelling-place. Born in 1961, she lived in the third house with her nuclear family. At the time of my visit, she and her husband, Dmitrii Antonovich Kechimov, had only three children, two of whom lived at home between 1990 and 1993. The eldest son, Stanislav (Slava, Slavik) Dmitrievich Kechimov, returned home only during the summers; the rest of the year he studied at a boarding school. His brother, Dmitrii, was born in 1987, and the youngest, Mikhail, in 1988. The couple had twins in 1994, Tat'yana and Ivan. Later the family's life took a dramatic turn.

² This custom is explained by the fact that the same person can be the head of a clan for a longer period in this way.

The father, Dmitriï Kechimov, passed away in a tragic accident in 1998, and his widow moved to a different settlement within the area belonging to her clan, on the river Kumali-yagun.

In 1991, Tat'yana Aivaseda – the widow of the eldest Sopochn son, Maksim Ivanovich Sopochn, who died young – lived in the last, fourth house with her new husband, Igor Aivaseda, and their son, born in 1990. Of Tat'yana's three children, Marina, born to Maksim Sopochn, stayed temporarily in her mother's house in 1991 with her own husband and young daughter. In 1992 the family moved to Kogal'ym.

In 1994, Irina and Dmitriï Kechimov relocated to a remote settlement, and in 1995 Fëkla and Kirill Pokachev moved back to the Kumali-yagun river, to the original dwelling-place of the Sopochn clan. Thus, only Iosif and his family remained at the settlement near the Woki-rap-yagun river.

Three further nuclear families living along the river Yinku-yagun also belong to the Sopochn clan. In 1993 they lived at a distance of about 60 km from Ivan Sopochn's large family. The first of the three nuclear families is Leonid Mikhailovich Sopochn's, with his wife and two children; the second family is his step-brother's, Gennadiï Sem'ënovich Russkin's; and the third one is their first cousin's, Vladimir Ivanovich Sopochn's family.

FAMILY AND SOCIETY ALONG THE TROM-YOGAN

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the bases of Khanty society were families and villages of yurts. The average size of families varied across the region. Eastern Khanty families were the largest, with around eight members, and southern Khanty families the smallest, with five members (Мартынова 1995: 104). Their settlements were usually small, consisting of one to three households, which were made up of twenty to thirty closely related members. This social structure remained largely unchanged in families leading a traditional way of life until the end of the twentieth century.

The description above illustrates how extended family structure meant in the Sopochn clan that three generations lived together in the settlement: a number of married couples and their adult children with their own children. The extended family was patriarchal. Descent and kinship were reckoned on the father's side, and the eldest male held the position of authority. In the case of the Sopochns, the head of the family was Ivan Sopochn. He controlled the family's affairs in matters of economy, finance and sacred practices. The Sopochns, however, differed from traditional extended families in as much as two married daughters of Ivan Sopochn, as well as his widowed and remarried daughter-in-law, stayed in the settlement instead of moving to their husbands' dwelling places, as would have been expected according to patrilineal custom.



Fig. 3.3. Leonid Sopochin with bearskin

As with other extended families, the Sopochins had a hunting territory belonging to their clan. The boundaries of the family hunting ground were precisely known and respected by their neighbours as well. They never went hunting or fishing on each other's territory, and they herded back the reindeer which had wandered over to a neighbouring clan's territory.

The Sopochin extended family had five dwelling places in the 1990s: one for the spring, one for the summer, two for the autumn, and one for the winter (see diagram, p. xvi). The spring dwelling place was a wind-swept area far from the forest, which was suitable for the raising of new-born calves. The family usually moved there at the end of March or beginning of April, and they stayed there until the beginning of June, before moving to their summer quarters near the Woki-rap-yagun river. A key factor in the selection of this area was that along the river there was plenty of wind, and the animals were less harassed by the mosquitoes than elsewhere. Another benefit of the proximity of the river was that the men were able to catch enough fish for the day. At the end of July they left their summer quarters and moved to the autumn ones, where there was a fresh supply of food for their herd. Both of the autumn dwelling places were near areas rich in berries, because women's most important task, gathering, comes at the time when swamp dewberries, bilberries, cowberries and small cranberries ripen. Women and young girls scour the nearby forest in July and August, and gather fruits of the forest in birch-bark containers car-

ried on the back. They try to collect enough to supply the family for the whole winter. The family moves to the winter quarters in October. This is located in the forest, where hunters can easily reach wild animals, and begin hunting in earnest as soon as the ground is covered with snow crusts strong enough to support their weight. In the 1990s, according to custom, the hunting ground belonging to the Sopochin family was divided up into smaller areas depending on the number of men in the extended family. On the shared hunting territory each of the men was allowed to set traps and hunt only in the area allocated to him. This custom was designed to ensure that every male family member had equal opportunities during the hunt.

By the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, the world surrounding the Sopochins and the Surgut Khanty was changing radically. As a result of the increasing presence of oil and natural-gas extraction companies and of industrialisation, the proportion of virgin land suitable for hunting and fishing decreased rapidly. In the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, where the Surgut Khanty and the Sopochin extended family live, several million hectares of pasture land for reindeer grazing has vanished in recent decades, and the number of reindeer has decreased to a third of their number thirty years ago. Because of the pollution of rivers, several species of fish are now on the verge of extinction. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the catch had decreased by 20 per cent compared to the 1960s (Хакназаров 2003: 31). The natural migration routes of wild animals had suffered serious damage, and a large proportion of the game stock had been destroyed. There are data which suggest that hunting has now lost its market significance (Харамзин – Харюлина 1998). By the beginning of the twenty-first century, some of the young adults belonging to the Sopochin family had given up their traditional way of life, partly out of necessity, partly in the hope of a better and easier life. At the same time, there are examples of the opposite trend as well: children born and raised in an urban environment have eventually moved back to the taiga.

The Surgut Khanty are divided into three large sibs (*sir*) with regards to both society and religion: the group of the Elk, of the Bear and of the Beaver. The Sopochins living along the Trom-yogan belong to the group of the Elk (I. S. Sopochin, August 1991), while for instance the Kurlomkin family living along the Great Yugan river belong to the group of the Bear (Pëtr Vasilevich Kurlomkin, June 1993).³ According to Ivan Sopochin, besides the three large branches, every local group and family was divided into smaller units. Their extended family was under the protection of a spirit in the form of a frog, whose wooden statuette was handed to his eldest son, Eremeï Ivanovich Sopochin, for safekeeping. A frog spirit was the protector of another branch of the Sopochins,

³ The information provided in brackets contains the informant's name, and the place and time of the interview, throughout the essay.

too; for instance, the first husband of Tamara Sidorovna Tevlina, who lived in the village of Russkinskaya and often visited the Sopochins, was also a Sopochin by surname and had a frog-shaped protector (T. S. Tevlina – Russkinskaya, March 1991). The reason for this is that the people in question all originated from the Agan river, which is protected by the goddess Agan (*аган ими*), whose earthly incarnation is the frog.

Nuclear families belonging to the same settlement made decisions jointly on questions affecting the group; for instance, when to move from one residence to another, when, where and how to gather firewood, the beginning and end times of the hunting season, and the aid that should be given to family members in need. They held counsel sessions in which everyone was given a chance to have their say about such questions, but the final decision was made by the head of the family. Violations of behavioural norms defined by the community were punished on the basis of customary law. The severity of the punishment was also decided by the community's council, which generally consisted of the adult male members of the settlement.

The division of labour between men and women was strictly regulated even as recently as the 1990s. It was the women who carried out all the household tasks, including the processing of animal hides after the men had skinned the animals they had caught, as well as the preparation of meat and other foodstuffs. But it was also the women who sawed into smaller pieces, then split and carried into the house, the pine trunks which were collected and left in the forest by the men for firewood. Fetching of water was also women's work. In warm weather, they fetched water from a spring or lake near their dwellings, in winter they melted snow. Some of the duties were constant while others were seasonal. For instance, the making of birch-bark vessels, which was also women's work, was undertaken in spring time, that is, in June. Even today, although not to such a great extent as in the nineteenth century, birch-bark vessels are used chiefly for berry-picking, storage of foodstuffs and serving at table. On the other hand, what few wooden vessels and spoons there were, were carved by men. It was the men, too, who carved all tools and equipment made of wood, such as sledges, skis and boats. Wood carving was a task mainly for the summer, when it was impossible to either hunt or catch fish, both of which were also men's work. Men were also in charge of building dwellings, which required not only expertise but also long weeks of hard work. First, they selected the appropriate trees, cut them down, and carried the stakes home; then, they stripped off the bark, trimmed the stakes to size, and made notches at the ends to fit them together; finally, they assembled the stakes by piling them on top of one another. The processing of hides is also tied to summer. This is work for women: in the summer, they practically continuously sat by the hides, which they softened and sorted, so that they could then start the preparation of exquisitely patterned bags, furs and boots made of reindeer hides. No sewing



Fig. 3.4. Dog kennel



Fig. 3.5. Fish-drying apparatus



Fig. 3.6. Irina Kechimova prepares the reindeer fumigation apparatus

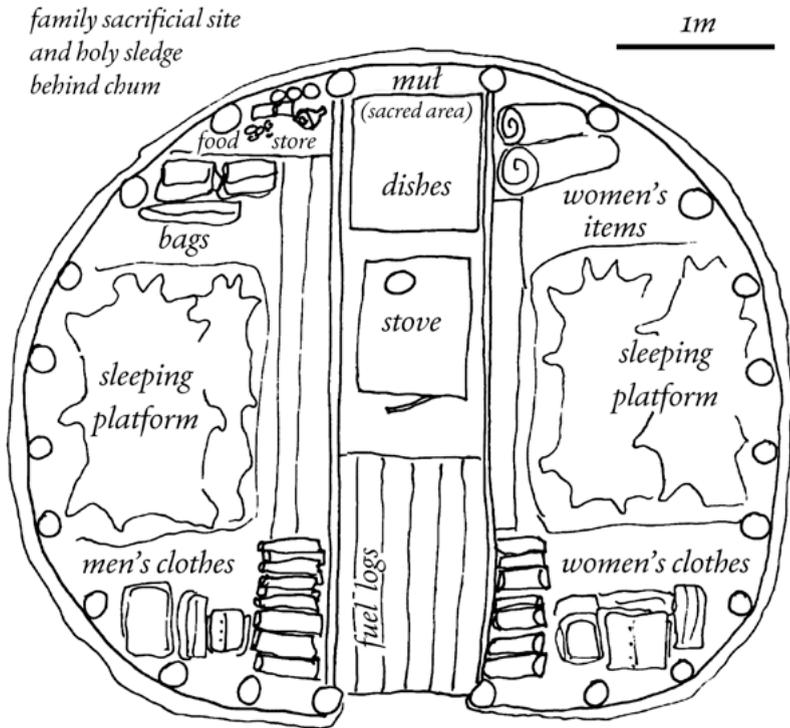
machines of any kind were used, and yet the finished products were so close to perfect that they were tantamount to genuine folk-art masterpieces. Women made the rest of the items of clothing as well. Apart from some of the men's wear, particularly shirts and trousers, everything was hand-made, although, to be sure, mostly from fabric made in factories. The exquisite women's wear attests to the women's skill: the dresses have a traditional tunic-like cut with magnificent pearl embroidery at the hem and on the cuff.

During the period of investigation girls married as young as 15 or 16, and boys also married early, around the age of 17. Nowadays, the usual marriage age has been raised. As elsewhere in the world, getting married later is typical mostly of educated women among the Khanty.

Families living in the same settlement had shared ownership of the buildings with a utilitarian purpose, which were built jointly by community members; for example, the half-closed pens for the reindeer, where the animals could find relief from mosquitoes. Since several families lived together in a settlement along the Woki-rap-yagun and the Yinku-yagun, usually two families erected jointly a relatively large building for practical purposes, where they stored their sledges, weirs and other large equipment. At the same time, each nuclear family owned their own personal tent or house, and also their boats, sledges and a share of the reindeer stock.

The residential and outbuildings of the Sopochins varied according to season and function but they showed a lesser degree of variation in the 1980s and 1990s than in the early twentieth century, when Sirelius was able to distinguish thirty types of buildings (Sirelius 1906–11). The Sopochins used permanent and seasonal buildings, log cabins and cone-shaped tents which were supported by poles and covered with bark. Among the buildings for practical purposes, there were frame-supported constructions for the smoking of fish and drying of nets, flat-roofed byres made of beams, storehouses with pitched roofs standing on high supports, and conical tents covered with earth for the dogs. Buildings for storage were usually roofs standing on legs, under which the unused sledges and fishing nets were piled up along with the animal hides to be processed as well as items of clothing put out to air.

The frame-supported, cone-shaped dwellings or chums (Khanty: *núki qot*, Russian: *chum*), which were once widespread, have been gradually going out of use in recent decades. The frame of the tent is built with 2½–3 m poles arranged in a cone shape. The tents were covered with factory-made water-resistant rough canvas. The setting of the poles, the fitting of the cover and the insulation of the inside was the duty of men – Ivan Sopochin and his son Iosif – who lived in the chum. The circular floor-area, whose diameter was approximately 5 m, was richly covered with pine branches; only a 1 m area was left uncovered in the middle. The women placed rush mats and plastic foil on the layer of pine branches on both sides of the entrance to the tent; on these



The Khanty chum

were placed the reindeer hides which served as beds in both summer and winter. The hides were folded up against the wall during the day in the tents as well as in the wooden houses. In the middle, there was a simple iron stove. The sacred area was located behind the stove; here stood the relics belonging to the family and the sacred chest of the shaman, as well as the images of the spirits assisting him. This area was forbidden for women either to enter or to step through to reach the other side of the tent. The area allocated to both family members and everyday objects was strictly regulated inside the tent. Nearest to the entrance was the area for the belongings of the two adult women of the household, Ivan's wife and daughter-in-law, specifically for their furs, clothes, sewing equipment and the hides to be processed. Next came the area allocated to their husbands. They kept their hunting equipment, personal objects and clothes here. This was followed by the children's area, and finally the place set aside for guests. The low and tiny table for serving food and the place for foodstuffs were near the sacred objects, opposite the entrance to the tent (the sacred area also extended to the area behind, outside the tent).



Fig. 3.7. Chum, holy sledge behind it

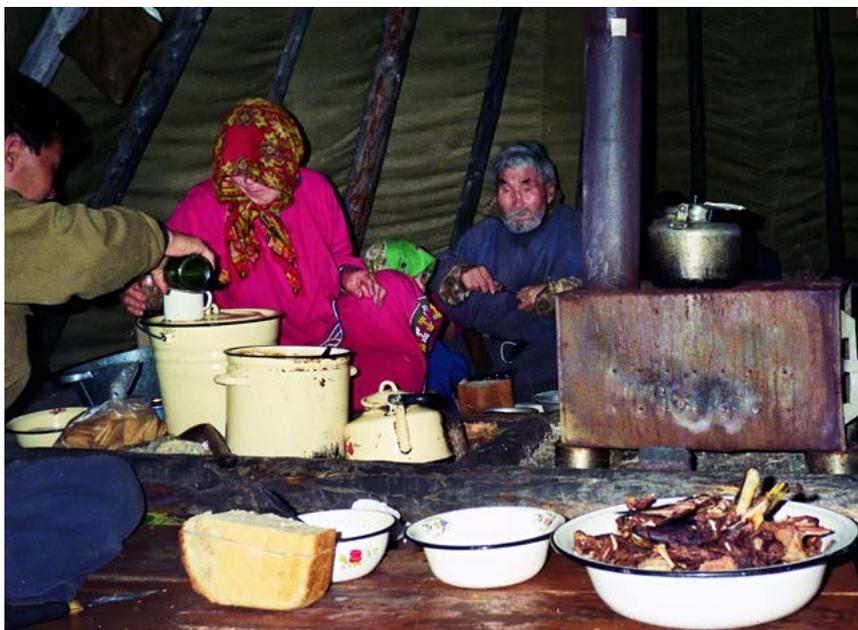
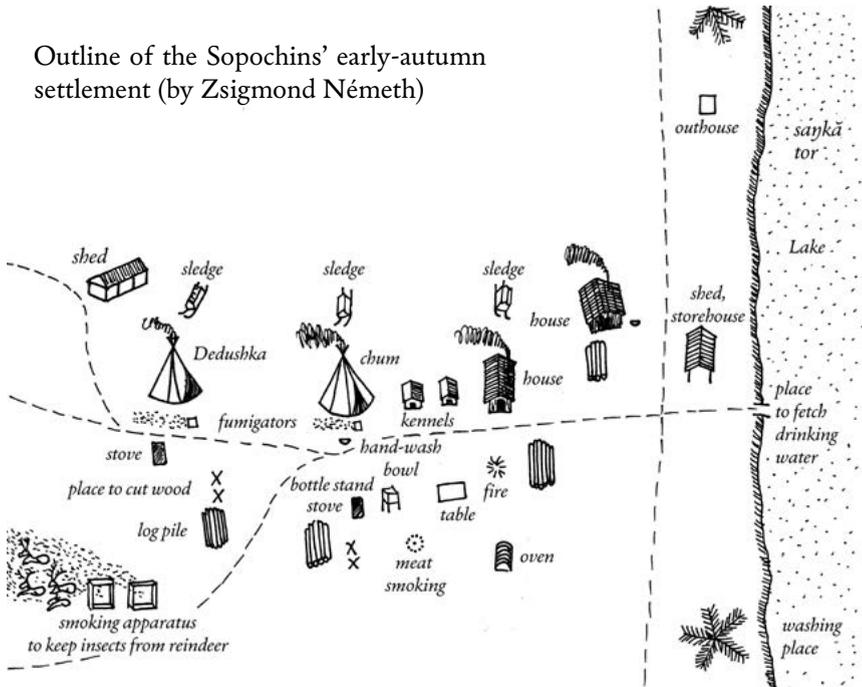


Fig. 3.8. Chum interior

Outline of the Sopochins' early-autumn settlement (by Zsigmond Németh)



During the years of my expeditions, in the 1990s, the use of chums as dwelling places gradually declined, a tendency which I noticed among the Sopochins, too. The cone-shaped tents, which were easy to disassemble and transport, were well suited for a way of life which was part nomadic, part sedentary. First, the tents went out of use in the autumn and winter quarters, and later in the summer residences, too. Since the Sopochins spent only a few weeks in the spring quarters while waiting for the reindeer calves to be born and gain strength, the tents remained in use as spring dwellings until as recently as 1998.⁴

The Sopochin family's dwelling places were always located near water, regardless of the season. The houses and tents were placed at a distance of approximately 20 to 30 metres from each other. Next to the houses stood the sledges for the transportation of goods with the necessary clothing, and behind them were stored the family's sacred sledges (*tuŋq awət* 'spirit's sledge'). Further away from the residential buildings stood the storehouses, smokers, and other buildings for practical use. (See Zsigmond Németh's outline, above.)

The wooden houses were made of thick pine trunks in all the residences, and the gaps between the logs were filled with peat moss. These log cabins were square-shaped, low constructions, built of only nine or eleven logs, with

⁴ Personal communication with Márta Csepregi.

pitched roofs but without a ceiling or foundations, and they served as both summer and winter dwellings. Inside, there was only one room, with one or two small windows at the most, which were covered with ice in winter and with stretched bladders in summer even as recently as the 1980s and 1990s. Nowadays, they use glass to cover the tiny holes that serve as windows. The roof was also made of wood, and it was insulated with layers of moss and birch bark on the top. One of the nuclear families, however, replaced this traditional method of insulation with factory-made materials.

The layout and furnishings were similar in all the houses owned by the Sopotchins. To the left of the entrance there was room to store kitchen tools and vessels on large shelves; the floor of this area was made of broad, rough-planed planks. Cooking equipment and foodstuffs were also stored on large, planed wooden shelves. To the right of the entrance there was a small iron stove with the firewood piled up next to it. An elevated platform covered the rest of the floor area; it began approximately two metres away from the entrance and stretched all the way to the opposite wall of the house. This was the residential part of the building: here people lived, ate and slept. This was the only part of the house which was insulated from below with pine branches and sand. On the wall opposite the entrance, there was another shelf made of planks: it was here that nuclear families stored their sacred objects. In the cabins, which consisted of only one narrow room, everything and everyone had a specific place allocated to them. Almost directly opposite the entrance slept the wives, to their left the husbands, and then the children.

Nowadays, the Sopotchins source most of their cooking vessels from shops, but previously they were home-made, mostly of birch bark. In addition to the vessels for the kitchen, which varied in shape and size (there were square-shaped, oval and round pots, with covers or without), ladles, cradles, storage vessels, buckets for water and containers carried on the back were also made of birch bark. These are still in use today.

The houses, which stood next to each other, and the clearing, which was as large as several hundred square metres, were enclosed within a fence (in winter), which was also made of wood. Wooden stakes were sunk into the ground at a distance of approximately two metres from each other, and two to three horizontal poles were fastened to the vertical ones. This type of fence, which was also used for corrals, separated the forest from the inhabited village area; it also served to protect the village from wild beasts. Near the dwelling places, an area was left clear so that helicopters could land without frightening the dogs or damaging property.

Purpose-built storehouses were used to keep unused furs, food supplies and other goods. These were windowless log huts on high legs and with pitched roofs, much smaller in size than residential buildings. There was at least one such storehouse near each and every dwelling place of the semi-nomadic



Fig. 3.9. *A labaz*

Sopochin extended family. Every nuclear family had an elevated storehouse of its own outside the confines of the settlement, further away in the forest. The high legs served a number of functions. On the one hand, they protected food supplies and other goods from being ransacked by wild beasts, and, on the other, they also ensured that the storehouse was not covered with snow, which could be as thick as a metre and a half by spring time. According to historical ethnography, such elevated storehouses are the oldest type of building in the region. This type of construction is known everywhere from Siberia to Scandinavia, wherever Uralic peoples have lived. In Ob-Ugric lands, it stands on four high legs, but elsewhere, as in Scandinavia, the structure has a single support, a thick column or tree trunk, in the middle. In Karelia, elevated storehouses were transformed into residential homes, in which the ground-level area was closed off by a wall.

In the Sopochins' settlements, clay ovens are located opposite the houses, and they are a noteworthy combination of tradition and innovation. Nowadays, the clay ovens of old are replaced with oil barrels, which are, of course, burnt in before use to remove the residue of chemicals. The bottom of the barrel is left in place but the top is removed, the barrel is laid on its side, and dug half-way into the soil. The part of the barrel that is above ground is then covered with a thick layer of sand, and the barrel is now ready to be used as an oven. A moss-lined, thick plank serves as the door of the oven; the plank is cut to size to cover perfectly the opening at one end of the barrel. Before baking bread, a large fire is lit in the oven. Once the fire dies down, the embers are pushed



Fig. 3.10. The bread oven

to the side and the brick-shaped metal trays containing the dough are placed into the oven. The door is closed, and after a short while the bread is ready, with a brown, crisp crust. It is made of wheat flour, purchased in the village, and sourdough starter.

The past decade and a half have brought about fundamental changes in methods of construction: nowadays the Sopochins use wood only to build the frames of the houses and outbuildings, while the rest of the structure is made of insulation material bought from oil workers or exchanged for furs. Such houses combine the advantages of both wooden houses and transferable tents. Their construction requires less wood, time and energy than that of log cabins, but they are more comfortable than the cone-shaped tents owing to their larger size. The size of log houses has also increased over the years (Kerezsi 2012: 420). The Sopochins' houses, which used to occupy 20 to 25 square metres, have now doubled in size. Furniture which used to be hand-made by the men of the household is now either combined with, or replaced by, factory-made items. In the space which has thus expanded inside the houses, beds, wardrobes and carpets are now in use. All these changes are indicators of relative economic prosperity. Iosif's family now uses ovens which operate with bottled gas in their summer and autumn residences. The gas ovens occupy the same area of the house where the iron stove once stood with the dry firewood piled up next to it. The regular maintenance of the ovens and refilling of the gas bottles is part of the compensation which was granted to indigenous peoples by contract for allowing oil companies to have access to their territory and the

right to exploit it for commercial purposes. The family now has a generator for electricity, which allows them to use computers and watch DVDs in the taiga. In one of the settlements, which is located close enough to the oil extraction company's local headquarters, the Sopochins have access to electricity directly from the grid. All that remains of the traditional layout of the houses is the elevated platform for the beds and the kitchen area with the shelves and the washbasin. In the larger houses there is room even for a 50-litre barrel for the storage of water. This makes women's life easier: they no longer need to go to the lake, river or spring several times a day to fetch water.

Alongside the changes in the structure of residential buildings, new types of outbuildings and storehouses have begun to appear as well. The Sopochins have built a bathing house, something they never had before. They now have a warehouse for barrels of fuel and even a garage for four-wheel-drive vehicles and snowmobiles. Another recent innovation is the latrine, which is dug into the ground and surrounded by walls; every seasonal residence now has one. In order to have enough storage for the increased quantity of foodstuffs, they dig a pit with three chambers into the ground with the help of machinery provided by the oil company. The temperature in the lowest and innermost chamber is permanently below zero, in the middle chamber it is around zero, and in the outermost chamber it is just a few degrees lower than the outdoor temperature. These chambers are so deep that an adult can half-stand up in them. The roof of the storage pit is covered with the excavated earth.

Not all families along the Trom-yogan have managed to come to such an advantageous agreement with the oil companies. Iosif Sopochin has been able to negotiate a convenient contract with benefits for his family and for himself.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF THE TROM-YOGAN KHANTY

There are data which suggest that in the 1980s only 14 per cent of Ob-Ugrians engaged in traditional economic practices, a low percentage which decreased further by the second millennium (Попков 2000: 130). The main reason for the decline is that the areas available for traditional economic activity, which is based on people's interaction with the natural environment, has been constantly encroached upon. While the sable and ermine stock was on the verge of extinction by the end of the nineteenth century, nowadays even squirrels are endangered. From an ecological point of view, the Surgut, Nefteyugansk and Nizhneartovsk *raïons* (districts) are in the worst position; here, 67.6 per cent of the land allowed to indigenous populations by the state is an ecologically threatened area (Хакназаров 2003: 83). What is less well known is that in certain regions of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, for instance in the Surgut district, underground detonation of nuclear explosives was used

in the 1980s and 1990s in order to reach the oil reserves more quickly. As a result, according to data from 1999, the radioactivity in the atmosphere has risen by ten to fifteen times, and in some areas to thirty times, the usual levels (Хакназаров 2003: 91).

As the number of those engaged in traditional economic activity decreases, the number of indigenous people among unskilled workers grows. They work in the villages or in the city in low-paid jobs as cleaners, porters or unskilled construction workers. Over recent decades many have become socially marginalised and disenfranchised. These lumpenised groups often cannot engage in any kind of productive activity: they have lost the knowledge and skills necessary for traditional economic practices but they have failed to acquire new skill sets required by their new, industrialised environment. As a result of alcoholism and other social challenges, their offspring are unable to survive without social benefits (Мартынова 2010: 214). These populations can be regarded as victims of ethnic segregation.

The Sopochins along the Trom-yogan, who are the focus of our research, are a group of Khanty who have successfully maintained their traditional way of life, although the number of such groups has shown a dramatic decline.

The Sopochins, like other Khanty living in the forest and engaging in traditional economic practices, had a complex economic system. The roles of fishing and hunting were of equal importance, and these activities were supplemented by reindeer-herding and gathering of fruits of the forest. It is the features of the natural environment that allowed the development of such complexity in the Sopochin's economic system. As with other groups who engage closely with nature in their day-to-day activities, a characteristic feature of the Sopochins' world view is that rather than exploiting and ruling nature, they aim to coexist with it. In their view, everything in the world is interconnected and forms a united whole, in which animals and people are equal: they mutually depend on each other, and must, therefore, respect each other. This approach to life and nature leaves no room for wasteful, unnecessary hunting for booty. The Khanty hunt and fish only as much as is needed for survival. As they consider animals to be equal to humans, they must observe and respect a plethora of ethical rules during the hunt; for instance, they never kill animals that are young or pregnant. This world view explains the economic stability in which the Sopochin clan has lived for centuries.

Hunting

One of the most fundamental ways of making use of the forest is hunting. In traditional practice, based on customary law, each community, the Sopochins included, had its own hunting ground. In this area only members of a particular community were allowed to hunt. At the same time, within this area, each and



Fig. 3.11. Dmitrii Kechimov sets out for the hunt

every male family member had a share allocated to him, where only he was allowed to set his traps. The Khanty adopted both active and passive methods of hunting. For the active practices, they used mostly hunting rifles; passive practices included the use of several types of traps. Hunting was men's work: women were allowed to hunt only in times of great need.

The aim of hunting was twofold among the Sopochins in the 1990s: they hunted for both meat and fur. The former contributed to the food supply, the latter served a primarily commercial purpose. Despite the significant decrease in the game stock, in the 1990s the Sopochins' hunting grounds were still relatively rich in animals hunted for their fur. Along the Trom-yogan the stock included mostly squirrels, but also foxes, chipmunks, wolverines, otters and beavers, as well as elks and bears among the larger game.

Until the beginning of the 1990s, it was compulsory for men to join the state-owned collectives; in this way, they were allowed to continue hunting, for which they received a salary. Along the Yinku-yagun, women were also contracted with the collective, which specialised in the purchasing of furs and provided rifles and ammunition for the hunt. There were set targets for the number and type of animal fur that had to be delivered to the collective. Usually, this was to hand in three hundred squirrels, two to three foxes, and the same number of otters per person. Those who delivered a higher number of furs than the target were paid a bonus. The collective allowed hunters two pieces of ammunition per animal. This limit was meticulously checked at the end of the hunting season. A skilful hunter, however, was able to catch the animals with traps or shoot them with a single shot; thus, he could keep the remaining ammunition for himself. Families either received payment for the furs they delivered or they could shop for goods in the collective's store to the value of their delivery. This is how families acquired factory-made fabrics, kitchen equipment and even snowmobiles.

The most important types of game hunted for their meat were elks and wild reindeer, as well as forest birds and water birds. Squirrels, foxes and hares were hunted only for their fur.

The traditional hunting season was from October to March. By October, animals had grown a thick fur for the winter, and the ground was covered with a thick snow crust, strong enough to support the weight of the hunter, who moved around on skis. Men set out alone or in groups of two or three on their hunting trips, which lasted several days, away from home. They stayed over night in huts in the forest, and covered a distance of 20–30 km a day. The hunter's main helper was his dog. Hunting for furs was usually an individual pursuit or was limited to a single family. Men hunted in groups only to kill large game.

Among aquatic animals, beavers and otters were hunted. Otter-hunting took place usually in the autumn and with the help of a dog. 'Dogs can smell

the place where the otter's holt is to be found, and they start digging there. The hunter then fences off that part of the river bank. When the otter tries to climb through the fence, they shoot it' (K. I. Pokachev – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). As a result of centuries of exploitative economy, sables, ermines and weasels had become extinct in the region by the end of the twentieth century. This meant that squirrels became the primary target of hunting for furs. It is a telling piece of data that in the 1990s each hunter had to submit 300 squirrel furs by the end of the hunting season to the collective specialising in fur trade. Taken together, adult male members of the Sopochin extended family had to deliver 1500 squirrel furs each year. The other branch of the Sopochin clan, living along the banks of the neighbouring river, had to submit the same number. These numbers explain why squirrel-hunting became increasingly difficult by the end of the twentieth century, and why hunters had to walk long distances in order to make their catch. There are data which suggest that in western Siberia the number of squirrels caught in the nineteenth century showed an increase of eight to ten times the number caught in the seventeenth century (Пика 1988: 139), and had risen even further by the end of the twentieth century.

The Khanty believe that the forest and the entire natural world are populated by invisible creatures and spirits, who have ownership and control over the territory. By mindfulness of spirits and respect for them, humans can secure their assistance in all matters of life. As in other communities, before the hunting season began, the Sopochins offered a reindeer sacrifice to the spirit of the forest, lord of the wild animals, so that he might drive the game towards the hunters. At the end of the hunting season they thanked the spirit of the forest for the game they received from him. Such rituals took place partly in the family's sacred grove and partly in the community's sacred place.

Hunting for forest birds began in the middle of August and lasted until the first layer of snow had fallen. Wood grouse, black grouse and hazel grouse were caught using dead-fall traps. Aquatic birds were hunted in spring and autumn, during the time of their migration. They were either caught with nets, or shot with arrows or rifles. Their flesh and eggs served as foodstuffs while their down was used as lining in fur coats for winter.

When a member of a nuclear family returned to the settlement from a successful hunting trip, the booty was distributed among all the nuclear families living in the settlement. The next day it was the turn of a hunter from another nuclear family to catch and share his booty. This was a rational and efficient distribution of labour among hunters, who, thanks to this method, each had to leave home only once or twice a week. This practice was adopted only in hunting for meat, which secured the necessary food supplies for households. During the professional hunting season, which served trading purposes, each of the men hunted for themselves. If they shot more birds than they could



Fig. 3.12. Capercaillie trap

consume, they stored the excess food in pits dug into the earth, which was frozen throughout the year.

According to Kirill Pokachev, in winter they went hunting without dogs because dogs would have sunk in the deep snow. Hunters tracked squirrels, foxes and other wild animals by following their footprints in the snow. They commuted on skis, reindeer-drawn sledges or snowmobiles during the hunt (K. I. Pokachev – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991).

Fishing

The Khanty had an equally good knowledge of the waters and the forests; thus, alongside hunting, fishing was their principal occupation. The Trom-yogan and its tributaries are poor in high-quality fish; freshwater bream, pike and crucian carp are the most frequently encountered types in these rivers.

The traditional fishing season lasted from June to August. The two main methods of fishing were trap and net-fishing, but ice-fishing and fishing with light attractors were practised as well. Of these techniques the most widespread in the 1990s was trap-fishing, which involved blocking the water partly or completely to drive the fish into captivity. Vertical poles were inserted close to each other into the river bed, so that the fish could not swim through the gaps. Only a single hole was left in the weir, into which a wattle fish-basket was placed to intercept the fish. The size of the fish-baskets varied between $\frac{1}{2}$



Fig. 3.13. Box-trap fishing



Fig. 3.14. Making a fyke net

and 1½ m, depending on the width of the river and the depth of the water. The baskets were usually made of strong pine wattles and twigs by the men. The wattles, which were 2 m long, were fitted into a square-shaped frame and tightened together on the opposite end. This structure was braided through with straightened Siberian pine roots for added strength. In the 1990s, I saw similar fish-baskets being made of aluminium wires. The baskets (fyke nets) were tightened to the fish weirs with their open ends facing up-stream. Through the funnel-like entrance to the basket, which tapered gently, the fish were driven in and caught inside a large container, from which they could not escape to the open water. The baskets were checked every two or three days. Trap-fishing was used mostly to provide for the family's needs. The other main technique of non-commercial fishing was to stretch nets across narrow brooks, collecting the fish which became entangled in the meshes.

In June and July the purpose of fishing was exclusively to provide for the family's needs. Towards the end of August, however, large-scale fishing began. Soon after this period, the fish descend to the bottom of the river to hide in the warmest pockets of water during winter. Some of the fish caught was set aside to secure the food supplies for winter. It was preserved by either smoking or drying in the sun. Certain types of fish (with their entrails and roe) were eaten salted and raw, others were grilled, but the most widespread way of preparing fish was to boil it. The Sopotchins did not fish for trading purposes. Fish was the most fundamental source of nourishment in their diet; they usually consumed it raw, dried or boiled. They fed fish to their dogs as well; moreover, in winter, sometimes even the reindeer were given dried fish.

Gathering

Gathering was practised merely to supplement fishing and hunting among the Sopotchins. Berry-picking occurred during the autumn months, and it was mostly the duty of women and children. They gathered various types of berries, fruits of the forest and seeds of the Siberian pine.

Autumn dwelling places were near areas rich in berries because at the time when swamp dewberries, bilberries, cowberries and small cranberries ripened women and children were busy gathering for weeks. They first put the berries into small birch-bark vessels, which were fastened to their waists, and when these were full, they transferred the fruit into larger containers, which they carried home on their back. They tried to collect enough to supply the family for the whole winter; at times they even gathered enough to sell.

Fruits of the forest were stored outside during the winter, in containers covered with water-resistant rough canvas. The Sopotchins defrosted only as much as was needed for a meal. They consumed berries raw, in tea or mixed in the dough for bread.



Fig. 3.15. Berry-picking

Reindeer-herding

In the western Siberian forested tundra belt it is difficult to keep reindeer herds large enough to act as the core element of a family's living. Among the economic practices of the Sopochins, too, reindeer-herding was merely supplementary. Reindeer were harnessed to sledges, and used mostly for travelling and in the transportation of goods. They were neither milked nor artificially bred. The males and females grazed in the same herd; the calves, if their mother died, were slaughtered: the Khanty were unable to raise them. The number of animals they kept was not enough to support their diet. Males which were unsuited for breeding were castrated. Several types of reindeer were distinguished, and designated by different terms such as *lead bucks*, *hinds*, *castrated bulls (oxen)*, *barren females* and *calves*.

During the period of investigation, the reindeer-herding Sopochins moved between their seasonal dwelling places together with their animals within a well-defined, approximately 30 km² area. The reindeer grazed freely, but they checked on them every two or three days to prevent them from straying far from the settlement; if they did stray, the animals were herded back. From October to the middle of March the reindeer grazed near the Sopochins' winter dwelling place. In March they kept the animals herded inside the corral surrounding the winter quarters; then, using a snowmobile or a reindeer-drawn sledge, two or three men drove the entire herd to their spring dwelling place. If they managed to start the lead buck in the right direction, the rest of the herd followed him automatically.

The spring quarters were at a distance of 2 to 10 km from the previous dwelling place. A key factor in the selection of this area was that it should be an open plateau with plenty of wind to prevent the piling up of snow. It is here that reindeer calves were born; the young animals would be unable to find lichen under the deep snow. The Sopochins stayed here until June, and then they drove the animals to their summer quarters. From here, they relocated to their autumn dwelling place at the end of July or beginning of August, depending on the availability of lichen. In October, the Sopochins moved to their winter quarters, the site of which was permanent (D. A. Kechimov – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

The reindeer herd entered the corral surrounding the settlements only at the time of calving and during the summer, when mosquitoes swarm. At the summer dwelling place the Sopochins built pens which were open at both ends; purpose-built birch-bark and moss burners were placed at the entrance and inside the pen, so that the smoke might protect the animals from the mosquitoes. The constant maintenance of the burners was one of the most important of the summer duties; members of each nuclear family carried it out on a rota. The burners were made as follows. A square-shaped space was



Fig. 3.16. Reindeer



Fig. 3.17. Gennadii Russkin with reindeer



Fig. 3.18. Cabin with smoke fumigation to protect against mosquitoes

created with horizontal and vertical stakes. In the middle, a fire was lit with half-rotten, easy-to-burn birch wood, which was collected specifically for this purpose. When the fire was burning, they placed on top of it some of the peat moss, which was gathered and brought in advance. This required expertise so that the fire was not extinguished and the moss was not burnt completely. At the same time, the fire had to warm the moss thoroughly so that it kept giving off smoke, which was the animals' only refuge from the invading mosquitoes. If the smoke was allowed to abate, the herd, tormented by mosquitoes, would scatter.

In the autumn and spring, when the herd could easily go astray in the thin snow-cover, they put fetters on the front legs of those animals which were likely to wander off. The fetter was a U-shaped device made of pine but closed off with a piece of birch-wood, because birch is stronger than pine (K. I. Pokachev – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). There was a sign on the side of the fetters to identify the owner. Similarly, there was a distinctive sign on the animals' ears to mark the family member to whom they belonged. Kirill Pokachev, for instance, cut a small wedge-shaped sign into the ears of his animals; Dmitriï Kechimov cut off the tip of their right ear (D. A. Kechimov – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992).

In the early 1990s the shared herd belonging to all the Sopochns consisted of 250–300 reindeer, which meant that each family member had a share of 15–20 animals. Within the extended family everyone knew the number of reindeer that belonged to them from the herd that grazed together. They also

knew specifically which reindeer belonged to each family member, and newborn calves born to a hind became the possession of the same family member to whom the hind belonged. At the time of my research everyone had a mark of ownership: a stylised, conventional or geometric pattern with which they marked objects and reindeer belonging to a particular family member. Even within nuclear families, they kept an accurate account of the number of reindeer that were brought by the husband and those brought by the wife, the person from whom the reindeer originally came, as well as the number of animals given to the children. They also kept an account of the natural increase of their livestock over the years.

Besides travel and transportation purposes reindeer were kept mostly for their meat and the hides, but the most frequent form of blood sacrifice was also to offer up a reindeer. The Sopochnins did not consume reindeer meat regularly. For the meat, they slaughtered reindeer only in autumn and winter, partly because the meat was more easily preserved in the cold and the reindeer had become fatter by this time, and partly because by then the animals had developed their thick winter fur, from which the women made various items of clothing (I. I. Sopochnin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). During a winter season a maximum of two to three reindeer were slaughtered, always from a different family member's share of the livestock. The meat was distributed between households in equal shares, but the hides remained in the possession of the family member to whom the animal belonged. They made sure that the animal slaughtered came from a different family member's stock each time (I. I. Sopochnin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). The animals intended for slaughter were caught with a lasso several metres long made of reindeer hide, and were thus separated from the herd that had been driven inside the corral surrounding the settlement. The loop of the lasso was thrown around the neck of the animal selected for slaughter. When the reindeer was caught, they tightened the loop gently, but only enough to make the animal manageable. Then, twisting the lasso around their elbow and hand, they gradually decreased the distance between themselves and the animal. When the animal was within the reach of bare hands, they tethered it to a tree before the slaughtering or the sacrificial ritual began.

The Khanty make good use of every single part of the reindeer even today. They sleep on the flayed but untreated hides and they also use them on sledges while travelling. They make household equipment or items of clothing from the soft and treated hides. From the head skin peeled in one piece they sew the hood on children's fur coats. From the fur on the animal's forehead, the soles of boots and the bottom parts of bags are prepared. The fur on the torso of the reindeer is best suited for men's and women's fur coats. The fur on the leg of the deer serves to cover wooden skis, but they also sew boots or gloves from it. From the skin which has been cleaned of fur, they make summer shoes and



Fig. 3.19. Animal sacrifice

the shaman's drum. Other than the hide, the remaining parts of the reindeer are used as well. The sinews are dried and split into thin strands; from these dried strands of sinew women twirl thread for sewing their clothes and objects made of fur. Men carve handles of tools from the antlers and thicker bones. In the 1990s they even gathered shed antlers and sold them to the state cooperative for good profit because deer velvet was used as a valuable component of certain medicinal drugs.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Khanty families such as the Sopochins, who insisted on maintaining traditional economic practices, faced two major challenges. On the one hand, the natural environment was changing in a way which was less suited to traditional economic activity, and on the other hand, selling their products was also becoming increasingly difficult. Poor transportation facilities and goods which expire quickly combined with low prices and the lack of permanent trading partners. Alongside these challenges, trading opportunities were further limited by the fact that indigenous peoples were often unable to negotiate profitable and beneficial deals for themselves. As a result, even as recently as the 2000s, there was a considerable disproportion between the working hours to prepare the products and the payment received for them. This is one of the most pressing issues to face traditional ethnic communities.

Another major challenge to traditional Khanty society is that younger generations find traditional economic practices unattractive as this involves much hard work for a small income. Given that under current circumstances it is

impossible to carry out traditional economic activities in the same conventional way as before, almost all communities along the Trom-yogan are contracted with the large oil companies. The companies pay substantial compensation to the families for the oil extraction which they were permitted to undertake on the sib's territory. In 2010, the compensation was paid every quarter, and it was approximately 100 euros per person.⁵ The financial contribution was to be paid for each and every family member, regardless of the place where they lived, whether they stayed in the forest, a village or a town. All in all, a person received approximately 400 euros per year and other in-kind contributions, such as food preserves, fuel, petrol, snowmobiles, motor boats and occasionally even cars and flats, depending on the negotiating power and strategic foresight the head of a particular community had.

THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE TROM-YOGAN KHANTY

Modes of transport

In the vast territory of the taiga, in which swamps and wetlands alternate with rivers, the only way for the Ob-Ugrians to keep in contact with the world and with each other was to have efficient means of transport. The helicopter which occasionally landed at the settlements in the 1990s offered no permanent solution to the Khanty's day-to-day commute and transportation problems. The Sopochins, as long as they led a traditional way of life, used sledges and boats, carved out of a single tree trunk, in the summer, and skis as well as sledges in the winter. Fundamentally, their means of transport in the 1990s were the same as a hundred years earlier. By the 2000s, however, the situation had changed dramatically. The oil company which was authorised by Iosif Sopochin to extract oil along the limits of his land built a compacted dirt road between their winter and summer quarters and Kogalým. Iosif, who could hardly have seen any motor vehicles before 1990, in the 2000s used his own four-wheel-drive vehicle to travel between his quarters in town and in the taiga.

There were several flat- or round-bottom boats in the settlement, as each nuclear family owned their own boat. Boats were carved out of a single tree trunk by the men. Two types of boat were in use among the Sopochins: a longer (4–7 m) boat for the entire nuclear family, and a shorter (3 m) one for one or two passengers at the most. The latter were used more frequently than the longer boats. Building a boat was a time-consuming process and required great expertise and craftsmanship. First, the right type of tree had to be selected; boats were usually made of larch or Siberian pine. According

⁵ Data from my 2011 fieldwork.



Fig. 3.20. A boat carved out of a tree trunk

to Ivan Mikhailovich Sartakov, Tat'yana Aivaseda's son-in-law (Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991) it was essential to select a tree with a straight trunk which was healthy inside. Once the tree was felled, the trunk was carried home. After removing the husk, the men carved the trunk into a boat shape on the outside. Only after the outer shape was ready was the tree trunk hollowed out. This required great care because the wood had to be chiselled to equal thickness throughout, otherwise the boat would have lost balance on water. Then, in order to prevent water from entering the boat, a narrow rim was carved all around the hollowed-out part, so that the water was blocked by the recess under this rim. Once the carving was completed, boiling water was poured into the boat, whose surface was then burnt over a low fire in order to render it water-resistant. Then, horizontal poles were fitted in cross-wise, providing additional strength to the boat and increasing its capacity to carry weight. The carving of the oars came last. These were usually made of birch wood but Siberian pine was also often used. The oars were smoked over the fire, too, but only the blades, so that they became water-resistant (I. M. Sartakov – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). Sitting at the bottom of such boats, they rowed with a single oar. There was room enough for three people at the most. Although these light boats could tip over easily, they were able to travel long distances in them. When their direction of travel was different from the way the river bent, or they had to make their way



Fig. 3.21. Sledge and model

through swamps and other wetlands on foot, they either dragged the boat or carried it on their shoulders to the next lake or navigable waterway. In the boat, foodstuffs, ammunition and even the catch were stored, yet they walked miles in this way (Kerezsi 1997: 28).

The other essential means of transport, used in both summer and winter, was the sledge. Several types were known, including sledges for travelling for women, and a different type for men, sledges for transporting goods, and hand-drawn sledges. The Sopochins harnessed only reindeer to sledges; dog-drawn sledges were unknown to them. They used halters made of leather and bone plates. Reins attached to the halter served to guide the leading bucks. A leather strap was fitted on the chest of the animals and a leather girdle around their torso. The strap was attached to the sledge by a harness trace. Usually three or four animals were harnessed to a reindeer sledge in a fan-shaped arrangement, with the deer standing side by side. The lead buck goes at the front, on the left-hand side, and guides the other animals, which are tied to the lead buck with simple equipment. The driver sat on the left of the sledge and controlled the lead buck from the left with a pole that was several metres long.

The sledges were made by the men. Each type of sledge had three basic structural elements: the runners, the seat and the stanchions connecting them. Only Siberian pine was suitable for the runners, and only when it had resin,



Fig. 3.22. Dmitrii Kechimov next to the holy sled

which rendered the wood flexible so that it did not break when it was bent over the fire. The seat was made of Siberian pine as well while the stanchions were of birch (D. A. Kechimov – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). Only four or five stanchions were needed to make simple sledges for everyday use, but as many as ten pairs of stanchions were used for ornate sledges, such as the ones made by the men as a gift for their wives. Several types of sledges were made: sledges for women with a high backrest, sledges for men with a low one, and sledges for cargo without a back panel, as well as chest-like sledges, which were entirely closed, for foodstuffs and sacred objects. Not all cargo or storage sledges were transferred between seasonal dwelling places, but sledges for the sacred objects always moved with the family; their permanent place was behind the family's tent or log cabin at each and every settlement.

The first snowmobiles appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, but they became widespread only in the twenty-first century, particularly the Russian model called Buran. As a result of contractual agreements with the oil company, the dirt road between Kogalym and one of the nuclear families' quarters was compacted and smoothed to such high standards that the family are able to commute between the settlement and the town by a four-wheel-drive vehicle.

In winter, the Khanty moved around on skis, which were light, fast and easy to use even in the densest forest. Skis were used by men, women and children, and all family members had the same type. An interesting feature of the skis was that their base was lined with fur, which allowed the skis to glide smoothly in the snow without additional grinding, waxing or any other kind of treatment. At the same time, when climbing up steep slopes or large piles of snow, the hair of the fur bent the opposite way to the downhill direction, thus preventing the skis from sliding back. The fur best suited for skis originated either from otter hide or from the hides flayed from the legs of reindeer or elks, which was stronger than fur covering other body parts of the animals. Skis were approximately 1½ m long and between 25 and 30 cm wide throughout, and had a curved tip and tail. They were fastened with leather straps to the feet, which were protected from the snow by an additional bag-shaped cover. The manufacturing, maintenance and mending of skis were men's work (Kerezsi 1997: 29–30).

The uses of birch bark

In addition to their practices, social structure and types of settlements, the Sopochnins' tools and objects for everyday use, all produced with great artistry and craftsmanship, testify to their inventiveness and to their ability to coexist with the natural environment. As in most pre-industrial societies, the Khanty made the majority of their everyday objects from materials which were easy to find and readily available in their environment, such as wood, bark, roots and hides. These have been replaced only partially by factory-made products.

There are two seasons in a year which are suitable for the collecting of birch bark. First, spring, when the trees begin to bud; second, autumn, at the end of September or beginning of October, when they shed their leaves (I. I. Kechimova – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992). Only a certain type of birch bark is suitable for the making of kitchen equipment and vessels, namely, the bark of those trees which grow deep inside the forest and have tall, straight trunks. Women selected these trees with great care. First they made a long, vertical incision on the tree trunk, and then two horizontal incisions: one at the top and another at the bottom of the vertical line. Then, they carefully peeled off the first part of the bark with a knife; after that, they were able to proceed slowly by hand. They either sewed the bark into larger sheets immediately after peeling it off, while it was still moist, or, if sewing had to be postponed, they first dipped the bark into boiling water, in order to render it soft again and suitable for sewing. They boiled the birch bark only when making objects intended for long-term use, such as cradles and covers for tents, although, as we have seen, the latter are no longer made of natural materials (I. I. Kechimova – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992). When making vessels and kitchen equipment, the white membrane on the birch bark had to be removed first. If a decorative pattern was to be drawn on a vessel, they sprinkled the surface of the bark with water, carved the contours of the pattern with a knife, and then scratched off the surface of the bark until the pattern was shown in white. Thus, the background remained dark, while the ornamental element stood out in a clear white pattern. Birch-bark vessels were sewn with either thread or reindeer sinew, and branches of rowan were used to stiffen the vessels (F. I. Pokacheva – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). Birch-bark vessels are made and used even today, although they have decreased in number and type compared to earlier days. Small, flat-bottom vessels with a low rim are still in use for the serving of fish and meat at table. A similar type of vessel is used for women's hygiene during menstruation (R. N. Sopochnina – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). Taller, round vessels, which resemble a small bag with a narrow bottom and round opening, are still regularly made and used. Women fasten such vessels to their waist when going berry-picking in the forest.

The objects made with the greatest care are cradles for the new-born. Other than the temporary cradle used just after birth (see p. 138), two types are known among the Khanty. Cradles intended for the night-time are flat, oval-shaped and usually made of larch, while cradles used during the day have a high back panel and are made of birch. On each and every one of these cradles, a wood-grouse motif is carved on the outside of the back panel; this motif is the symbol of 'the bird of dreams', which protects the children's soul while they are asleep. Other precautions are taken against evil spirits as well. The straps which serve to fasten the new-borns in the cradle can be made only of reindeer hide; the use of simple string or cord is forbidden because such strings are put around



Fig. 3.23. Olesya Sopochina in a cradle

the neck of the dead during funeral services (I. I. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). For the same reason, it is forbidden to tie a small child who is learning to walk to the wall of the tent or house with a cord made of plant fibres; only straps made of reindeer hides can be used. Cradles for infants are made by the fathers, while the patterns are carved by the mothers.

Traditional clothing

Once the animals are skinned by the men, the preparation of hides is entirely women's work. The hides that were skinned from the animals during winter are put to dry and freeze outside for several weeks because the treatment and sewing of hides usually occurs in the autumn. First, the dried and hardened skin is soaked and beaten until it becomes soft again. Once the skin is rehydrated, it is placed on a narrow plank, and a blunt knife with a short blade is used to scratch off the hard upper part on the inside of the skin. After that, the same surface is treated and rubbed against an arched, scythe-shaped iron blade, which is attached to a tree, or the wall of the house, or to the women's feet. From time to time the hide is sprinkled with flour in order to make the skin softer. The treatment of the hides then involves further softening of the skin, by kneading and rubbing it back and forth with their hands, rolling it up and stretching it. Then the treatment continues, using the blade again. Curing hide takes days, and the work continues until the inside of the hide



Fig. 3.24. Leather processing

becomes soft and snow-white (T. Aĭvaseda – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). The hides which have been cured are then used to make all items of winter clothing, which is sewn by the women, to this day, with thread made of elk or reindeer sinew.

The items of traditional clothing which are still in use today include, mostly but not exclusively, various types of male and female fur coats, fur boots and gloves.

In the 1990s, apart from reindeer hides, the Sopochins also used the down of birds to make items of clothing, particularly the downy feathers of wild ducks, wild geese, loons, eiders and swans. The down served mostly as lining inside other garments or to make ornamental patterns, typically on women's and children's clothes.

The winter attire of women living in the forest includes a fur coat which is open at the front, and which always has two layers: on the inside, it is lined with bird down, while the outer layer is made of reindeer hide, with the fur turned outward, or some other thick fabric. Among the fabrics, the most widespread is felt of a vivid colour such as yellow, green or red. The hem and the cuff of these coats are decorated with a line of complex, mosaic-like patterns or pearl embroidery.

An essential item among men's winter garments is the knee-length, closed, slip-on fur coat, which was worn with the fur turned inward (*malitsa* in Russian). The upper part of the front and the back were made from the hide of young animals, while the bottom part was made from the fur of fully grown animals. The coat slightly widened, while its sleeves gradually narrowed towards the bottom; gloves made of reindeer hide were sewn to the end of the sleeves, with the fur turned outward. The coat was tightened around the waist with a belt, which held the hunting equipment, consisting of seven knives and a whetstone. When the coat was tightened around the waist, they lifted the belt slightly; thus, a little space was formed inside the upper part, where they could keep some bread and smaller objects for everyday use (D. A. Kechimov – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). When leaving on a long journey on a reindeer sledge, the men put on a second fur coat on top of the *malitsa*; the cut of this second coat was similar to the first one, but it was made of two layers of reindeer skin. Often, they also wore a protective third coat on top of the *malitsa*; this was worn with the fur inside and its outer surface was easily soiled. This third coat had the same cut and length as the *malitsa*, and protected it from both dampness and dirt. The protective second coat was usually made of felt, tweed or calico. Unlike the *malitsa*, it had neither a hood nor gloves, and it was tightened around the neck with a string; the men could also wear it with a hunting belt, and on warm summer days, it served as an independent item of clothing.

Men had several types of footwear depending on the weather. In winter they put fur stockings on their bare feet, with the fur on the inside. On top of

this, they wore a pair of mid-thigh-high leather boots made of reindeer skin. The boots were often decorated with colourful stripes of felt on the front of the leg. Apart from their decorative function, these felt stripes served a practical purpose as well: they were usually placed on the seam where two pieces of fur were sewn together, so that they absorb water, thus rendering the footwear more solid and long-lasting. The sole of the boots was made of two layers of fur; on one of the layers the fur was turned inward, on the other one outward, and soft hay was stuffed between the layers for insulation. For short journeys, the men tightened the boots under their knee, but for longer journeys they fastened them to their belt or trousers with thongs. Eastern Khanty men fastened their boots to purpose-made leather straps, which were crossed on the chest and across the back (Лукина 1985: 58; Kerezsi 1997: 33).

The various types of fur used for different items of clothing, such as boots, coats, gloves and hats, must come from different parts of the animal. Winter boots for men and women are made from the fur on the leg of reindeer and elk, and they differ only in length. Women's boots are slightly lower than knee-high, and their leg is richly decorated with a mosaic-like pattern of fur. At the beginning of the twentieth century women, too, wore high-leg boots but by the 1990s these were no longer part of women's attire. Women's boots have two layers as well, and the dried grass between the layers provides outstanding insulation (I. I. Kechimova – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

Used winter garments which have lost their fur continue to be used as between-season coats in warmer weather; they are thrown away only when they become completely worn out.

Today, women's clothing is made exclusively from factory-made fabric but the traditional cut has been retained. The long-sleeved, tunic-shaped dresses are knee-long, or only slightly longer, with an opening in the middle of the chest, and richly decorated with an ornamental overlay or pearl embroidery on the cleavage, cuffs, mid-thigh and hem. Women along the Woki-rap-yagun wear at least two such dresses during the day in order to conceal the contours of their body, which, as they say, should not be visible. At night, they take off the dress which is on top, and sleep in the one under it (I. I. Kechimova – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). Today, they wear tracksuit pants under the skirt, as well as undergarments.

Women almost always wear a headscarf, usually a bright-coloured, Russian kashmir scarf, which is folded into a triangular shape and tied under the chin. Women pull it deep down at the front, so that it partially covers their face. According to ancient custom, which was respected even in the 1990s, it was strictly forbidden for outsiders, particularly for a woman's husband's male relatives, to catch even a glimpse of a woman's face. In the period of my research women braided their hair into two plaits which were tied to each other with colourful ribbons, with the exception of times of mourning for

someone who had died in the family. On such occasions they still braided their hair but left the plaits untied, so that everyone could see, even from a distance, that there had been a loss in the family (T. S. Tevlina – Woki-*rap-yagun*, March 1991).

There are fewer and fewer people in the Sopochin extended family who are able to treat hides and sew furs, boots and clothes. Traditional methods of sewing and decorating with a mosaic pattern are also in decline. Young women in the family, such as Olesya Sopochina, are able to carry out simple and straightforward tasks but not the whole process.

RITUALS AND FESTIVE OCCASIONS

Birth

A range of rituals and beliefs are associated with childbirth, whose aim is to ensure that the new-born is healthy and lives a happy life. Traditionally, and to this day, women in labour are taken shortly before birth to an *aj qât*, a small hut, where they remain for around six weeks until after the purification ceremony (washing and smoking); each settlement has such a hut, built specifically for this purpose. They build a low, gate-like structure, to which women can hold on while giving birth, crouching. Under this structure, they line the floor with layers of dry hay, then moss, and wood fibre on the very top, and finally, they cover it with a clean sheet. An older woman assists the one in labour; for instance, Irina Kechimova was helped by her mother, the elderly shaman's wife. At least four mothers await the birth of a new child. The first is, of course, the biological mother. The second is the 'navel mother' (*puqlaj ayki*) who cuts the umbilical cord. She ties it with a cotton thread first on the new-born's side and then on the mother's side, before cutting it in the middle (I. I. Kechimova – Woki-*rap-yagun*, August 1991). It is the navel mother's duty to wash the child and to place him or her in the first, temporary cradle. This cradle is made of birch bark by the biological mother (and is undecorated). New-borns spend only the first seven days of their life in this cradle, and are then transferred to their permanent cradle. Both mother and child are washed after the birth in a disinfectant liquid made by boiling birch bracket (polypore) in water; this is a type of fungus which grows exclusively on birch. Mother and child spend a few days in the separate hut, and only then do they move back to the family house.

At this point, the mother passes the new-born to the third mother, the 'carrying mother' (*alt ayki*), who carries the child over to the family's dwelling. Traditionally, the biological mother performed special rituals during the transfer. She stopped on the way to the house, five times if she had a boy, or

four if she had a girl, and, placing on the ground the fumigator she carried, she jumped over it. She cleansed herself in this way, which was a precondition of her return home (Ромбандеева 1993: 92–9). At the time of my research, this custom was unknown to my informants. The fourth mother, who gives the new-born a small cross, is the godmother (*pern aŋki*). According to Tamara Tevlina, a distant relative of the Sopochns who lived in the village of Russkinskaya during the period of investigation, a child could have several godmothers but the number of ‘adoptive’ mothers could not exceed seven (Russkinskaya, March 1991).

The placenta is placed in a small bark vessel and taken to the family’s sacred place, where it is hung on a birch tree. Irina Kechimova, when her son Misha was born, sewed a red scarf and clothes, similar to the clothes they themselves wear, for a small wooden idol, and placed the idol next to the placenta in a small birch-bark vessel. She also put some money and a tiny arrow in the vessel. She told us that those who had daughters place pearls in the small vessel, and this is what they take to the sacred place (Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). With this offering, and with the sacrifice that follows, they offer thanks for the gods’ help, which is mainly the assistance of *aŋki puγas*, the goddess who delivers the children, and ask them to protect the child henceforth. The next step is to find out which god is the new-born child’s protector. This can be established only with a shaman’s assistance. According to Leonid Sopochn, the protectors of children may be either *sārni qān iki* (‘the Golden Prince Lord’), *tōrām* (‘Sky’ or ‘God’), *tōrām aŋki* (‘God Mother’), *aŋki puγas* or *māy aŋki* (‘Mother of Earth’). It is only the new-born’s behaviour, however, that reveals to the shaman who exactly among these deities will protect the child throughout his or her life.

When a child cannot see, their soul is still among the gods. You hold the child in your palm and start gently lifting and lowering it repeatedly. After uttering the words of the prayer, you start enumerating the names of the gods. When you pronounce the name of the child’s protector, the new-born becomes as heavy as a small piece of iron, as if it was glued to your hand. That’s how you learn which god the child will have to pray to. If you own reindeer, you must catch a young calf, and say prayers to the god next to the sacred sledge. (L. M. Sopochn – Yinku-yagun, June 1993)

The shaman confirms through a similar ritual the ancestor whose soul has reincarnated in the child. According to Leonid Sopochn, the soul can be reborn only into a relative’s body. ‘If it is a woman who has died, [she reincarnates] into a woman, if a man, [he is reborn] into a man. The new-born will be similar in temperament and in every respect to the reincarnated ancestor. If they were

easily angered the child will be like that, too' (L. M. Sopochnin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993).

Rimma Petrovna Russkina (*née* Tevlina) told us that Leonid, the shaman, verified that her son's protector was *tōrəm*, whereas her own protector was the Earth Mother. When she was troubled, she always turned to *məy anki* for help. Rimma Petrovna sacrificed a reindeer in order to let the goddess know that she was in need of help (R. P. Russkina – Yinku-yagun, June 1993).

The name of the child is usually chosen by the father. Everyone has two names: the official Russian first name, on the one hand, and, on the other, a secret name which can be given by anyone to the child based on one of his or her typical character traits or characteristic deeds.

Khanty women along the Trom-yogan breast-feed their children for two or three years. In their mind, the longer a woman breastfeeds, the longer she is protected from another pregnancy. The mother's milk, however, is only one of the nourishments the child receives during this period.

The child spends the first years of life almost exclusively in the cradle. The day-time is spent in the day cradle, which is usually hung inside the house or the tent. The babies are fastened to the cradle tightly so that they cannot climb out while their parents are absent or busy doing something else. Despite these limitations in the first few years of their life, children are soon integrated into the family's life, and start assisting the adults first playfully, then, gradually, as earnest contributors to their work.

The period of infancy comes to an end at approximately the age of three. In honour of this age, a sacrificial ritual is performed for the deity who safeguards the child. The date was usually chosen by the child's father, and sacrifice takes place in the family's sacred grove.

Caring for children among the Khanty along the Trom-yogan resembles what is found in other neighbouring groups. Children are accustomed to work from a young age, first through toys, which are often made by members of the family, and later through their gradual introduction to various stages of the duties undertaken by adults. Children are encouraged to be independent; adults make no moral judgements or edifying comments – rather, they educate their young ones by way of example. Children are never punished or reprimanded; they have to learn from their own mistakes the consequences of their actions.

Young girls start threading pearls and making clothes or furs for their dolls around the age of three or four. Young boys start learning to shoot with arrows and to build tents around the age of five or six; at ten, they go fishing with the men and receive a rifle from their father. Like the girls, they also help their mothers with chopping wood, gathering moss and picking berries. In the 1980s and 1990s, young men and women at the age of sixteen or seventeen were considered grown-ups, and married approximately at that age. This cycle of life has been disrupted by the system of boarding-school education. At the age of

seven, children are taken to school in a large, ethnically mixed village near the family's settlements, and they are allowed to return home only for the summer vacation. To be sure, they learn Russian fluently, as this is the only language of instruction. But what is more, by the time they complete their education in this ten-grade school, they have entirely forgotten their mother tongue as well as the way of life which their parents live in the forest. Many of these children are unable or unwilling to return to the taiga. In order to prevent the complete annihilation of their communities, the Khanty who live in extended family settlements send their children to school only for a few years, during which they learn Russian and acquire advanced literacy skills, which are essential in today's world. This practice was adopted by the Kechimovs, for instance, whose eldest son did not complete the last years of primary school; he was preparing for his life in the forest with his father instead.

Marriage and weddings

Among the Khanty living a traditional way of life, the qualities in a woman which are held in high esteem are her diligence and skilfulness; beauty has no part to play. When I asked Leonid Sopochin and Dmitrii Kechimov what a beautiful woman was like, initially they did not even understand the question. In the end, they replied that a beautiful woman was healthy, able to work and bear children (Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992). An attractive husband-to-be is a skilful hunter and able fisherman, someone who can look after his family.

The first step of a marriage ritual was the preliminary proposal, which was followed by a second, final one a few months later, when the bridegroom took the bride with him to his own extended family settlement (Zoya Aïpina – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

A few decades ago, my informants recalled, a festive marital staff used to be made; it was called *sōw juy*. This was a birch-wood pole as tall as a man, with a pattern that was made by scratching the white husk off in places. To the top of the pole, colourful scarves and furs were fastened. The bridegroom held such a festive pole in his hand when he went to the young woman's dwelling place for the second, final proposal. When he was close to the woman's family house, he began pounding the earth beneath his feet with the pole; everyone could hear from afar that the bridegroom was approaching. He stepped into the house, and if the young woman's parents were displeased with the proposal, they threw the pole out of their house. If, however, they were in favour of the proposal, two of the young woman's male relatives thrust the bridegroom behind a richly decorated curtain made of reindeer hides, behind which the bride was hidden. It was regarded as a bad sign if the bridegroom tripped when he was pushed behind the curtain,

but if he remained steady, it meant that their marriage would be long-lived. The lunch that followed was attended by the relatives of both parties, and the ensuing festivities lasted seven days (or five, according to some informants). During this time, the bride and the bridegroom stayed behind the curtain; their food was also served there. After the wedding festivities, the curtain was taken down. The bridegroom lived with the bride's family for a couple of months, then the young couple moved to the bridegroom's parents' dwelling place for a short while. Here, the young man's parents gave them ten to thirty reindeer, and with their herd the couple moved back again to the bride's parents. They lived there for three or four years, before finally moving to, and settling in, the young man's dwelling place (G. S. Russkin – Yinku-yagun, August 1991).

The bride's parents received money, furs and reindeer for their daughter from the bridegroom's parents. According to Tamara Tevlina, they were given ten reindeer, and ten sable furs and ten fox furs (Russkinskaya, March 1991).

During the five or seven days which the young couple spent behind the curtain, according to custom, they were allowed only to talk and get to know each other; no intimacies were permitted. Violating this rule would have meant an ill-fated marriage, and a misfortunate, unhappy life together. This would have been caused, according to Ivan Sopochnin, by evil spirits, who have a prying character and are, therefore, always present when an event of great importance takes place in a Khanty person's life. So, the evil spirits appear at times of wedding festivities as well. If it turns out that there are merely conversations going on behind the curtain, they easily get bored and leave. If, however, there is something to feed their curiosity and keep them there, the evil spirits persist with the young couple for the rest of their life together, ruining their marriage (I. S. Sopochnin – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991).

According to Tamara Tevlina, the bride's wedding attire was different from her everyday clothing in that it was richly decorated with sable fur, and her head was covered with a large scarf (Russkinskaya, March 1991). The scarf was needed mainly to keep the bride hidden from the eyes of her father-in-law and other men. As was discussed earlier, it was forbidden for women to have their head uncovered in public; it was particularly important to cover their hair and face in the presence of their father-in-law and other male relatives of their husband.

Female members of the Sopochnin family related the range of behavioural norms which regulate a newly wedded woman's life. They were not allowed to address their father-in-law directly or to appear barefoot in his presence. It was inappropriate for women to laugh or talk loudly in the presence of their father-in-law and other male relatives, but the men, too, had to adhere to certain behavioural norms. They were not allowed to look straight at their daughter-

in-law when addressing her, and they had to use third, and not second, person forms when talking to the young woman. Before entering a house where they knew their sister-in-law or daughter-in-law would be present, men had to signal their arrival by clearing their throat to allow time for the women to cover their face with their headscarf. Likewise, instead of knocking on my door, male members of the Sopochin family gave a slight cough before entering the wooden house that was allocated to me, when they paid a visit.

There were still further limitations regulating a Khanty woman's life. Among the Trom-yogan Khanty, too, women are divided into two groups: those who are pure and those who are impure. Elderly women and little girls belong to the former group: they are seen as pure; women of nubile age are classified as impure. The classification into pure and impure groups, however, did not imply that women's social status was lower than the men's; it only meant that women had to respect certain rules and behave accordingly. Impurity applied mainly to fertile women, particularly during menstruation and pregnancy, and after child-birth, before the cleansing rituals were completed. During such times women paid particular attention to every single step they took, even if more recently they were not obliged to move out of the house or tent they lived in. They were not allowed to cross a man's path, or to step across reindeer harness or other fishing or hunting equipment because this would have spoiled the owner's luck. Women had to keep their clothes separately from men's and children's garments at all times. During menstruation and pregnancy, women could not eat elk meat, perch or burbot, or any other fish which was caught near the family's sacred place. During menstruation, women's beds were pulled out further, so that they were lying closer to the ground, near the edge of the elevated platform inside the house. Women living in the forest along the Trom-yogan calculated the length of their menstrual cycle and pregnancy based on lunar phases, which also allowed them to predict the expected date of a birth.

Before being married, women were allowed to sit on a man's sledge; once married, they were no longer allowed to do so. A married woman was forbidden from stepping into the sacred place of her house at the wall opposite the entrance, as well as from going to the space reserved for sacrifices behind her house. She was allowed to climb up neither to the attic, nor on top of the roof because all these areas were connected to the sphere of the sacred (Ivan Dmitrievich Kechemov – Surgut, March 1991). In the sacred grove, women were not permitted to stray from the road and wander among the trees, on which reindeer skulls and sacrificial scarves and fabrics were hung (I. I. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

These restrictions were somewhat relaxed after menopause but they were never completely waived. Norms governing a woman's behaviour towards her husband's male relatives remained unchanged throughout a woman's life.

Funerals

Like the entire cycle of life, the end of life and interment were also regulated by a range of customs and rituals. The length of human life is decided by the gods, mainly *tōrām*. When someone dies, the Lord of the Underworld merely executes *tōrām*'s orders. It is well known from the secondary literature that in numerous Siberian peoples' system of beliefs, the horizontal, north-to-south division of the world has primacy over the vertical, sky–Earth–Underworld divide. As Siberian rivers flow north, the notion of 'down' and the Underworld are associated with the north, while the notion of 'up' and the world of the living are linked to the south. Accordingly, the Underworld is imagined as being somewhere in the north, near the Ob' delta (Жулемзин – Лукина 1992: 109). My informants confirmed this belief, and they conducted funeral services accordingly even in the 1990s. At Ivan Sopochin's grave, they placed next to his burial mound his sledge turned upside down with the skeleton of the sacrificial reindeer in front of it, as if it was pulling the sledge. The reindeer was placed with his head towards the south. When I asked Iosif Sopochin about the reasons for this arrangement, he explained that the Underworld was, indeed, in the north, but in death everything was the inverse of the world of the living. Thus, the reindeer skeleton which was facing south, as if pulling the sledge towards the world of the living, would face the opposite direction in the Underworld, and pull the sledge, as it should, towards the north (I. I. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1993).

Everything related to death is regarded by the Khanty as a source of danger. Thus, their discourse concerning death abounds in taboos and circumlocution. For instance, they call a cemetery *a sacred village*, or *the place of crying*, or *the place of suffering*; the grave house (a small house built above graves) is called a *hut*, the verb *die* is paraphrased as *get into trouble*, or *end up in suffering*; a funeral ceremony is described as [*an act of*] *hiding*, or [*causing to*] *disappear*.

The deceased were dressed in their winter clothes among the Trom-yogan Khanty, as among many other Siberian peoples. The reason for this is, presumably, the belief that the Underworld is a very cold place (an inversion of the ideal of this world). The coat, however, was turned inside out when put on the deceased.

Following a death, the Trom-yogan Khanty laid out the deceased for four days in the case of a woman, or five for a man, on a sledge next to their house, where a fire was lit and burnt continuously for the same length of time. It was seen as a bad sign if the fire died down. Irina Sopochina explained the following details with regards to her father's funeral in the summer of 1993. Near the sledge on which the deceased lay, a fire had to keep burning, but the vigil took place inside the house. The first night the living entertained the deceased by telling tales. It was not advisable to leave the house after nightfall, and, as long



Fig. 3.25. The grave of Ivan Sopochin

as the deceased was still at home, women were not allowed to be barefoot. At night it was strictly forbidden to go near the sledge of the deceased, lest the soul of the elderly shaman should be disturbed. The fire burnt ceaselessly for five days and five nights. During the day, the women piled up firewood near the sledge, so, all they had to do at night was to feed the fire. They took turns, in pairs, in keeping the vigil, during which singing and storytelling were not permitted. Crying in excess was also discouraged because the deceased had to collect the tear drops that had fallen for him in the Underworld.

Over the course of the five days, the deceased was fed regularly, as his soul had not yet passed over to the Underworld; thus, his relatives who were alive had an obligation to look after him. The food for the deceased was placed on a small table outside; he was given the same food as the living.

At the end of the five days, a coffin was made for the elderly shaman from one of his old boats. The coffin was made up like a bed: at the bottom it was lined with furs, just like the way he used to sleep – my informants explained – and his body was covered with his winter fur coat. The dead needed their personal objects and tools, which they used while they were alive, in the Underworld as well. Hence, the elderly shaman's boots, rifle and objects for everyday use were placed in his grave, but on the opposite side because in the Underworld everything is the mirror image of our world.

We must not put too many things in the grave, only items which the deceased truly liked and used for a long time, and only one



Fig. 3.26. Sledge and reindeer skeleton in the cemetery

of each type of object. It was my grandmother who told me that even in the Underworld, it will be difficult to carry all that stuff. The soul is like a living being. It has feelings, and it also suffers. (L. M. Sopochnin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993)

The reason for death and the intentions of the deceased concerning the funeral (for instance, the number of animals that should be sacrificed in his honour, the clothes which he wished to take with him into the grave) were divined through shamanic prophecy. The shamanic practice was performed jointly by Leonid Sopochnin, a relative living in a neighbouring settlement and himself a shaman, and the youngest son, Iosif Sopochnin. They hid an axe under the coffin, and started asking questions of the deceased. When the coffin became heavy and almost stuck to the ground, it signalled that the deceased would like to take with him the object whose name was mentioned.

We asked Dedushka when he died what he needed. We lifted his sledge. 'If you need what we say, stick to the ground.' And he did it; his sledge stuck to the ground. No matter how hard we tried, we could not lift it. When we said we had understood him, it let go. We lifted the sledge and it was as light as before. You can talk to them as if they were still alive. (L. M. Sopochnin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993)



Fig. 3.27. Funeral service in the cemetery

Three reindeer bucks were sacrificed to the deceased: one at home, ‘in order to block his way, to prevent the deceased from taking anyone away with him from the living’ (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993), while the other two reindeer bucks, which drew the sledge to the cemetery, were sacrificed next to the grave. The meat and skin of the animals was taken back home, only their skeleton remaining next to the grave, as if they were still pulling the sledge.

Two planks were placed at the bottom of the grave, and on these, the open coffin. They built a roof above it and placed a cross on top. Not far from the elderly shaman’s grave was the resting place of his son Maksim, who died young; on the son’s grave house a bird motif was carved instead of a cross. The graves of those who died young, Irina Kechimova explained, were decorated with a bird symbol because these people, having vanished prematurely, had not had time to enjoy themselves, so, the cuckoo sang for them above their graves. Those who die old must not have a bird carved over their grave because its singing would disturb the elderly person, who, in their old age, would prefer to rest. That is why he needed a cross (I. I. Kechimova – Wokir-yagun June 1993).⁶

⁶ The use of the cross is borrowed from its commonplace usage in Russian cemeteries, but this borrowing does not imply any Christian symbolism.

Several memorial services were held for the deceased. Shortly after the funeral the grave was visited regularly, on the third, seventh and ninth days, then after a month, after which they visited the dead with decreasing frequency. According to Iosif Sopochnin, the dead must not be visited in the morning, but in the afternoon and evening because for them it is day when it is night for the living, and it is night when it is day for us. 'Everything is the other way around over there' (Woki-rap-yagun, June 1993). On each visit they took some food to the cemetery and placed it on the small table which stood next to the head of the tomb. Then they called out for the deceased to join them at the feast. The living must eat a little food with the deceased as well because those who do not eat on such occasions will starve in the Underworld as well (I. I. Sopochnin – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1993).

One should not wander around unnecessarily in a cemetery, and it is also forbidden to visit old graves. In the Sopochnin family a deceased person's grave is visited only for three years after their death. At memorial services, as well, they remember only those who have passed away most recently, and only these are offered food at their grave site, and not those who had died before them (I. I. Sopochnin – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1993). Once the food was shared with the deceased and consumed, a fire was lit at the edge of the cemetery, and everyone had to step across it. Through this purification ritual they ensured that the dead would not follow their relatives who came to visit them in the cemetery. Then, two large wooden poles were erected in a cross shape, one symbolising a wolf, the other a bear: 'they are the guards of the cemetery, they do not allow the souls of the dead to cross its boundaries' (I. I. Sopochnin, as above).

The relatives must respect certain rules concerning death in the family and funerary practices. Women are not allowed into the cemetery during menstruation. They must not wear a dress which is richly embroidered with pearls because the deceased would have to count these. Likewise, bottles and glassware which has numbers or writing on it cannot be taken to the cemetery because the deceased would have to read all that. Nonetheless, if they cannot avoid taking a bottle with a tag, they tell the deceased: 'Don't read, we have already read it'. For six months each family member has to wear a thread on their left leg. They must not sing or tell stories for at least six months or for a year – until the autumn, said Fëkla, because 'when the birds migrate they take our grief away with them' (F. I. Pokacheva – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1993). It is not permitted to pronounce the name of the deceased as long as their soul has not incarnated into a new-born child.

RELIGION

The mythology of the Khanty along the Trom-yogan is similar to that of other neighbouring groups. It includes elements of animism, polytheism, the worship

of animals and plants, and the three-fold division of the world into sky, Earth and Underworld. They believe that humans are on a par with all other living beings: a part of nature rather than superior to it.

The gods are thought to have endowed humans and animals with similar minds, which, however, are put to different use among humans and in the animal kingdom. In terms of their outward appearance, animals differ from humans more significantly than in terms of the quality of their mind; certain animals have been endowed with weaker, others with stronger physical abilities than humans. With regards to their spiritual qualities, however, animals are humans' equals. The Khanty consider otters and beavers the most intelligent of animals. Water, in general, is associated with the Underworld among the Khanty, who normally cannot swim. They think of animals which build their dens under water as creatures of the highest intelligence after the bear.

Humans' outward appearance – their body – and their inner being – their soul – are profoundly interconnected; only when these two parts co-exist in perfect unity can a human be healthy. Whereas on Earth, in the world of the living, time passes from the past through the present to the future, in the Underworld everything happens the other way around: time proceeds in the opposite direction. According to the Khanty, their belief in this reversal of time is also corroborated by the fact that when elderly people pass away, their life continues in the body of new-born infants. In the celestial sphere, however, time is eternal, and the creatures populating the sky are immortal.

As we have seen in the discussion of funerary practices above, for the Khanty, the division of the world is twofold: it is structured along a vertical as well as a horizontal, north-to-south axis. In this horizontal division, the north represents death and the Underworld, while the south is the realm of light, warmth and health. In these extra-terrestrial spheres, the creatures that populate them live in a way which is imagined as similar to human existence on Earth.

Plants are living beings like humans, but without the ability of locomotion. Therefore, before cutting down a tree, the Khanty always explained to the spirit of the tree why this was necessary. They never selected a healthy tree to be cut down for firewood; they used only dry or unhealthy trees for this purpose. The Khanty believed that trees were able to avenge disrespectful human behaviour. For instance, they would prick a person's hand, or trip people up on a root or branch. Trees which were old or of a peculiar shape were held in particularly high esteem; such trees acted as symbols of the world tree. These trees supported the heavens with their branches, thereby connecting the higher realms with the terrestrial world, symbolised by their trunk, and with the Underworld, represented by their roots. This explains why the Khanty hung gifts intended for the gods on the branches of birch trees, while placing offerings for the lord of the Underworld at their roots. The sudden death of a tree in the family's sacred grove often foretold the loss of a family member, according to their beliefs.

The sacred space behind each dwelling house would have either a birch or pine tree in it, to which sacrificial animals would be tethered; after the ceremony, the lasso would be cast onto it. If it stayed on the tree without falling off, it indicated that the sacrifice had succeeded.⁷

Even the smallest creatures of the natural world, such as beetles and insects, were of equal status and importance in this unified system. The Khanty believed that a human's soul transformed into a mosquito after death; thus, when a mosquito flew directly into their ear, it was considered a sign of illness or death. Even mosquitoes were regarded as useful creatures: they kept the reindeer herd together by driving the animals towards the burners and the smoke.

Frogs were also held in high esteem: they were embodiments of the female principle, and the Khanty thought of them as creatures which facilitate marital happiness and assist women in difficult childbirth. Frogs, for this reason, were also referred to as *women living on tussocks*. A frog-shaped spirit was the protector of Tamara Tevlina's first husband, whose surname was Sopochnin. Tevlina lived in the village of Russkinskaya, but her first husband was related to the Sopochnins living along the Trom-yogan. She explained that her husband respected the frog as an ancestor of his clan, and therefore neither of them would ever have harmed a frog: they never ate frog meat and if they saw one, they tried to bypass it to avoid injuring the animal. The cult of frogs was widespread among several other Siberian peoples (Бауло – Кулемзин 2005: 166–9).

The Surgut Khanty believed that the supernatural forces governing the world were just as real as the physical world surrounding them. These forces may be malevolent or benevolent, but either way, they are invisible to most humans. Only certain people, those who have been endowed with superior knowledge, are able to see them and establish a connection with them. These intermediaries were known as *shamans*. The Khanty distinguished several types of shamans, depending on their function in society. Their shamans were able to perform ritual practices and predict the future not only with drums but also with arrows, axes and chests.

Gods

K. F. Karjalainen argued, almost a century ago, that Khanty mythology is so rich, the number of their divine creatures so high, that no scholar had ever succeeded

⁷ Iosif Sopochnin indicated to Márta Csepregi in 1996 that when the lasso was cast a request for something from the inhabitants of the upper world would be made, and if the lasso stayed put it indicated the request was accepted (personal communication). The tree thus functioned as a means of communication between worlds, and could be regarded as a form of world tree. As the trunk of a birch tree is white, it is the tree of *tōrəm*, whereas the pine belonged to other spirits.

in shedding light on the exact number and name of their gods (Karjalainen 1922: 40). I shall not attempt to accomplish this impossible task here either; instead, I offer a systematised overview of the data I have collected from my informants about this inexhaustible subject.

According to the Trom-yogan Khanty, the world is divided into three main spheres: the sky, the Earth and the Underworld; all three are populated by a multitude of gods and spirits. Karjalainen classified these according to the following criteria: whether they live in the upper, middle or lower world, whether they are anthropomorphic or zoomorphic, and whether they are malevolent or benevolent. Karjalainen introduced further distinguishing factors based on areas of activity: whether a particular god or spirit assists humans in fishing or hunting, whether they are active in a small community, a larger group or an entire people (Karjalainen 1922: 291, 370).

Scholars have, then, grouped the gods and spirits of the Khanty according to different criteria, including classifications based on the spheres of the world, the place where they live, their attributes and responsibilities, as well as their importance and efficiency. Yet a close scrutiny of these classifications reveals that a particular god can be allocated to several groups since gods may have several functions. For instance, each of the gods at the top of the pantheon can be simultaneously an individual's protector spirit. It is the shaman who divines which god is destined to watch over a particular person at the time of their birth. To summarise, gods may be supernatural beings who live in one of the upper, middle or lower worlds, with responsibilities for a particular task, but they may also be protectors of a certain area, group, and even a single person on Earth. Thus, the categories into which deities are grouped are constantly in flux, depending on the perspective from which we examine them.

Adopting Karjalainen's classification with slight modifications, I shall first survey the pantheon of gods: those higher powers which are worshipped everywhere among the Ob-Ugrians but may have different names. Second, I shall turn to local gods and spirits, which are worshipped only in the area where I conducted my fieldwork. Third, I shall discuss individual protector spirits. Finally, this section concludes with some remarks on sacrificial practices.

The pantheon of gods

Among the group where we conducted our research, the chief god, who is the creator and god of the sky, is known by various names: *tōrām* (Sky), *numi tōrām* (Upper Sky), *sārni tōrām iki* (Golden Sky Lord). He is the most powerful of the gods. A creation myth involving *tōrām* is known among the Khanty. When they bring sacrificial offerings to *tōrām*, the gift must always be white. *tōrām* lives in the highest heaven, and only the most powerful shamans are allowed to appear before him (I. S. Sopočin – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). He is the one who determines the length of everyone's life, and when someone's time runs

out, they die, despite the shaman's every effort to heal them (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993). According to Karjalainen and other researchers who followed in his footsteps, such as V. M. Kulemzin, the figure of *tōrām* takes its origins from a spirit, rather than a god, living in the highest sky. It is likely that the Khanty started imagining him as a creator and their highest god under the influence of Christianity (Karjalainen 1922: 280, Кулемзин 1976: 32–4). *tōrām*'s wife is *tōrām aŋki*, or, by her other name, *мәҗ аҥки*, the Mother of Earth. Instead of the sky, she lives on the Earth. When the Khanty bring offerings to her, the reindeer antlers are not hung on the branches of trees, as they would be for gods living in the sky, but placed on the Earth. The sacrificial animal offered to *tōrām aŋki* must always be of a dark colour (I. S. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). According to some of my informants, *tōrām*'s and *tōrām aŋki*'s parents are *мәҗ пугәс аҥки*, the Earth Navel Mother, and her husband *tōrām san (qān) iki* (E. I. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992). Others, however, consider the Earth Navel Mother an independent goddess from the Underworld (Pëtr Vasil'evich Kurlomkin – Great Yugan, June 1992). From the marriage of the divine couple, *tōrām* and *tōrām aŋki*, seven sons and seven daughters were born, whose names and types of responsibilities my informants had difficulty recalling, and some of which had been entirely forgotten. Ivan Sopochin provided the fullest account of the pantheon of gods.

According to Ivan Sopochin *tōrām*'s and *tōrām aŋki*'s daughters are:

1. *tārās naj* is the youngest; she is the fiery sea goddess, whose figure will be discussed later;
2. *kaltas aŋki*, *kaltas imi* or *aŋki пугәс* (various names of the same goddess) – she assists with childbirth; we shall also return to her;
3. The goddess giving life to animals;
4. The sun, *qātt imi*;
5. *wōnt naj*: the goddess of forest fire, who burns by herself in the forest;
6. The goddess who extinguishes fires;
7. *tūwät naj imi*, the fire goddess.

(I. S. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991)

The seven sons are the following:

1. *sārni qān iki*, the youngest son; he is identical with the figure of the World-Overseeing Man, who watches over the world and its inhabitants, mediating between humans and *tōrām*; see the discussion below.
2. *as iki*, the lord of the Ob' (or the Ob''s source), master of the fish;
3. *qyń iki*, the oldest of the sons and lord of the Underworld and of illness, who causes diseases;
4. *jāwən iki*, lord of the Yugan river;
5. *ewät iki*, lord of the Trom-yogan river (*ewät* is 'peak'; the sacred place of the people of Trom-yogan was on a high headland);
6. A god causing human illness and ailments;

7. *wājəy ārt iki, wājəy ārt tōrəm*, lord of the forest, who drives wild animals towards the hunter.

(List based on interviews conducted independently with Eremei Sopochin and Pëtr Kurlomkin, June 1992)

Leonid Sopochin's list differs from the above only inasmuch as he mentioned the lord of the spirits of the forest instead of *ewət iki* (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993). The above list may, of course, be incomplete, and the order in which the names are enumerated gives no indication of the children's age, either in decreasing or in increasing order. The lists are merely a record of what my informants told me at the beginning of the 1990s.

The divine figures which I most frequently encountered in the Khanty's tales, mythical songs, rituals and narratives are two goddesses, *tārəs naj* and *aŋki puγəs*, and four gods, namely *sārni qān iki, as iki, qyn iki* and *jāwən iki*.

The goddess of fire, known among the Trom-yogan Khanty as *tārəs naj*, is known among other Khanty groups as well, under various names, but her cult is most prominent in the south and in the east. She is one of the most important goddesses to this day.

tārəs naj is the fiery sea goddess; she lives near the sea. We sing her song at the bear festival; it can be sung on any day during the festival. Where she lives, a fire is burning all the time. She is the protector of all the seas across the world. She helps the Khanty to plenty of fish and a good catch. She also helps people to have easier lives. For her help, she has to be presented with a piece of red cloth as a gift. We have to make a small boat, put the cloth into it, and send it down river, towards the sea. It is not specified when this gift has to be presented but if it is given in winter, a hole has to be cut in the ice in order to launch the boat. People never fall ill if they are helped by her. Both men and women are welcome to give her presents. The best thing is when the sacrifice is offered by the whole family, all together. You can also present her with offerings by placing food and something to drink next to the stove, and inviting her to join you by singing her song. We can also give her reindeer or elk sacrifices. (I. S. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991)

According to Leonid Sopochin, the goddess lives in the middle of the sea, right at the place where boats normally sink, and planes disappear. She is the mother of fires. The fires burning in people's houses are her children (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993). *tārəs naj imi* has a personified daughter who lives near the Vakh river in a tiny house. When she was sent to live there by her mother and first entered the house, she noticed that 'one side of the

house is dark while the other side is bright'. It is her duty to place the cradle of children who are to be born on one side of the house or the other. The cradle of those who will live long is placed on the bright side; those who will die young (around the age of thirty at the most) have their cradles placed on the dark side. The goddess lives on the bright side. Reindeer and horse sacrifices are presented to her when a child is born. Women offer her sacrificial gifts so that their children may live long lives, and that they may have an easy labour. Women perform the sacrifice at home instead of in the sacred grove, and they invite the goddess to the ceremony. Even today, she lives in her little house along the Vakh river (I. S. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). In this narrative, the character of *t'ārās naj*'s daughter is conflated with that of *aŋki puyās*, whose other name is *kəttas*, and who, according to the pantheon described above, is a daughter of *tōrəm*. It is unlikely that the informant confused the two figures in his old age or that he simply made a mistake, because a year later he repeated the same story in a song evoking *kəttas aŋki*. According to the text of the song, the daughter of *t'ārās naj*, the mother of fires, is in her cradle, and her mother is rocking her. Suddenly, the child unties the thongs which keep her fastened to the cradle and climbs out. While the mother turns away to put the cradle on the floor, the child grows into adulthood instantly. At this moment, it becomes clear to the mother that her new-born is not just any kind of child: she was destined for a special role by *tōrəm*. She has to allocate a place to those who will live long on the bright side of the house, while she has to seat those who will live only half a life-time on the dark side. She is not responsible for determining the length of these people's lives; she merely separates the cradles of people who are destined to live long from the cradles of those who will die young (I. S. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992).

The goddess of the home fire is called *naj aŋki* or *naj aŋki imi*. She is also given a red cloth as a sacrificial offering. The cloth is thrown into the fire so that *naj aŋki* will assist and protect those who live in the house. S. K. Patkanov explains the meaning of the word *naj* as both 'fire' and 'virgin' (Патканов 1891: 9). In the house of Ivan Sopochin, the elderly head of the family, *naj imi* lived in his sacred chest, wrapped in a piece of red cloth, so that 'she helps the family, prevents the break-out of a fire inside the house, ensures that children do not burn themselves, and keeps bad dreams away from those living in the house' (I. I. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). When visiting another family or receiving guests, the first thing to be done was to present *naj imi* with a sacrifice: pour a drop of their drink into the fire, throw in a little food or a piece of cloth or even money, and ask the goddess to remember those present, so that they may live lucky and happy lives thereafter.

Along the Woki-rap-yagun, during one of my stays there, the Kechimov family moved house. Their first and most important task was to transfer the fire to their new home from the old house: they did not let it die down while



Fig. 3.28. Ivan Sopochin with divination chest

carrying it over, and put a fistful of it into their new stove.⁸ When the closest family members assembled, they presented the fire with sacrificial gifts. The master of the household, Dmitriï Kechimov, scrunched up a piece of red cloth

⁸ Similarly, when moving between settlements, some embers are taken from the stove fire and carried carefully to ensure that the fire does not go out; in the new settlement it is used to kindle the renewed fire from.

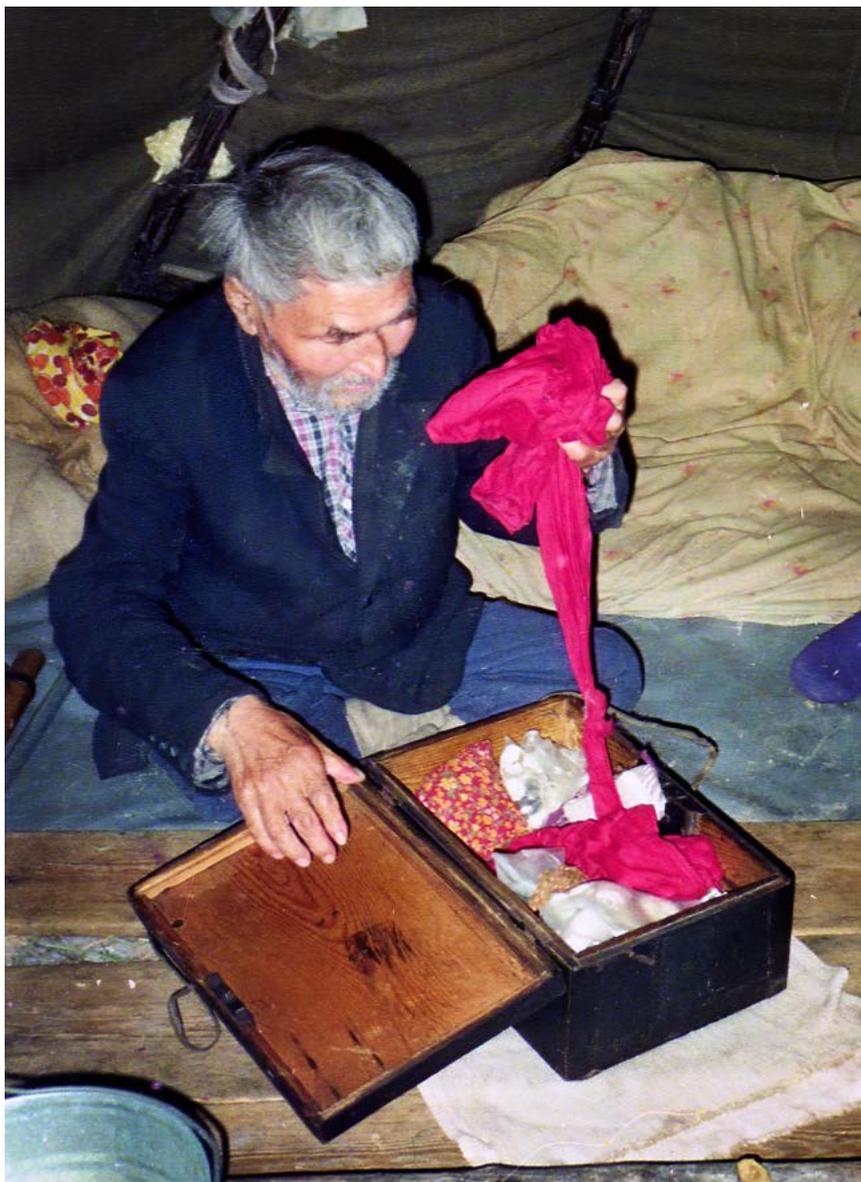


Fig. 3.29. The contents of the sacred chest



Fig. 3.30. The sacrifice to the fire

and wrapped it in a red scarf, thus sculpting a doll from the two pieces of fabric. He put this little doll on a table, on which there was sugar, biscuits, tea, vodka, bread and butter. He spoke a short prayer, in which he asked the fire to assist and protect them in the new house as well. Then, he picked up the red doll and threw it into the fire while praying. Finally, he poured a little vodka into the fire. At the end, all those present bowed several times and turned around three times. They finally sat down around the same table where the doll had sat, and everyone was given a drop of vodka and a little food.

The Khanty take special care not to offend or anger *naj imi*. It is strictly forbidden to throw rubbish or food leftovers into the fire burning inside the house because this might mean burning one's good luck. A separate fire is lit outdoors for the burning of rubbish (D. A. Kechimov – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992). Fire, if it is treated well, helps and supports people. It even foretells events of their life; all they need to do is to learn its language, that is, to decipher the message from the crackle of the fire (L. M. Sopochn, June 1992). In Khanty mythology, fire is one of the most frequently mentioned benevolent spirits or deities: it protects the house from evil spirits and has purificatory power. Thus, the assumption that fire is the Khanty's most well-established deity seems to be supported by the evidence I gathered (Кулемзин – Лукина 1992: 93).

As we have seen above, the characteristics of fire are to some extent conflated with the figure of *anjki puyəs* or *kəttas*. She is the goddess of motherhood, and

her duty is to endow infants with a soul. It depends on her whether a woman conceives; it is to her that women wishing to have a child pray. She is the one who can tell whether an unborn child will be a boy or a girl. Her figure is associated with the sun and with light; she lives on the bright side of her house. Shamans turn to her if someone needs help with childbirth (I. S. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). She is presented with gifts after the birth. Tat'yana Aivaseda explained that they sacrificed reindeer in the goddess's honour. When she had her second son, they tied a red ribbon around the neck of the reindeer, and then they killed the animal. They carried the reindeer skull to the birch forest near their settlement, and hung the skull on a birch tree together with the ribbon (Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). The placenta is also hung on a birch in a small vessel made of bark (I. I. Kechimova – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). She is the goddess who lowers a child's soul to Earth, which, as long as a newborn's vision is undeveloped, stays with the goddess *ayki pyγas* (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993).

Among the seven sons of *tōrām*, the one who is most frequently mentioned is *sārni qān iki*, the Golden Lord, who is responsible for the order of the cosmos. Other Khanty groups call him 'the World-Overseeing Man' (*mir šawitti χu*, Kazym dialect). He is *tōrām*'s youngest son, and the most powerful among the sons of God. As it is his duty to watch over the order of the world, with questions of great importance the Surgut Khanty turn to him and not *tōrām*. He is believed to be a good messenger between humans and the god of the sky, as well as other spirits. He is a helper of humans: he can grant them good health, success in hunting and fishing, as well as curing disease. However, when a man's or woman's life time expires, as determined by *tōrām*, he has no power to fend off death. He is imagined riding on the back of a white horse; wherever he appears, the space is filled with bright light. The following is a description of him:

In all important matters of earthly life, you must turn to *sārni qān iki*. If a woman is going through difficult labour, it is from him the shaman asks for help. Unless the mother's or the child's life is to be disrupted on *tōrām*'s orders, the birth becomes immediately easier for the mother. *sārni qān iki* has a horse, the size of a small white rabbit, and a sword decorated with images of the sun. When he is fighting with *bogatjrs* [evil creatures of superior strength], his sword grows so large that it covers half the sky. No one can win against him. He can change his shape and size as he pleases. He can be tiny enough to squeeze through the hole in a pearl, but he can grow as large as a human. [...] I saw him once with my own eyes, when death was standing only twenty or thirty metres away from me. [...] Suddenly, the skies opened, and as if there was gold glittering. The sky was split in two and everything

glowed in a golden colour. The snow was sparkling and shining as bright as in the winter sunlight although it had been completely dark before that. (L. M. Sopochnin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993)

Both *sârni qân iki* and *tõräm* are presented with a light-coloured reindeer sacrifice. The most suitable animal for sacrifice is the type that has a light patch of colour on its fur. The Khanty believe that the animal's soul dwells in this patch, and during the sacrificial ritual this is where they stab it (I. I. Sopochnin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

The Khanty pray to *sârni qân iki* when they experience hardship and hope for positive developments in their life. Leonid Sopochnin believed that he escaped death miraculously thanks to his assistance.

It happened before one of my longer journeys. I was a young man at the time, newly married. All my reindeer were destroyed, gone. They were torn to pieces by the bear. I had one single calf left, which I sacrificed to *sârni qân iki*, and I asked him to help me, so that I might have a great herd, and that we might live happily. I even put a sable fur on the antlers of the sacrificial calf. Then, I hung the antlered skull of the calf together with the sable fur on a large tree in our sacred place. I continued praying there, too, for *sârni qân iki*'s help. Then, we set out on our long journey, and this is when it happened. The sky opened and everything shone in that golden colour. *sârni qân iki* flew by above us. So, I thought, if I were a simple man, and had not prayed all my life in earnest, surely I would have met my end there. (L. M. Sopochnin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993)

Leonid Sopochnin related that he was pursued on this journey by gigantic creatures threatening to take his life. These creatures were the helpers of *qyni iki*, lord of the Underworld, who is responsible for causing illness. In Khanty mythology, he features as either the brother or grandson of the chief god, *tõräm*. He lives in the Underworld, which is identical to the realm of the dead. In the imagination of the Trom-yogan Khanty, everything is black there, and everyone wears black. The lord of the Underworld rules from his black throne inside a black hall, with only a fire burning next to him (L. M. Sopochnin – Yinku-yagun, June 1992). Like *tõräm*, he also has a family, children and spirits who assist him. All his subjects are malevolent, evil spirits. With their help, *qyni iki* brings illness to people; he can also order his helpers to steal people's souls. As for his outward appearance, *qyni iki* is a tall, thin man dressed in black, with a small, cone-shaped hat on his head (L. M. Sopochnin – Yinku-yagun, June 1992). As a sacrificial gift, he is usually given a dark-furred reindeer. Gifts presented to him, however, are placed under Siberian pines (*Pinus silvestris*) instead of being

hung on branches of birch trees; at times the Khanty even dig a hole and bury the gift intended for *qyñ iki* in it (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993).

The figure of *qyñ iki*, however, is not seen as the embodiment of evil; rather, he is thought of as responsible for executing *numi törəm*'s will. In certain Khanty communities in the north, such as in the village of Vanzevat, he is worshipped as a protective spirit (Молданов 1999: 73).

Another important deity in Khanty mythology is *as iki*, that is, 'Ob' ancestor' or 'the Man of the Ob', who has to do with the everyday source of living among the Khanty, namely fishing. The Khanty believe that every river, and even every section of a river, has its own local protector, who is worshipped only by people living on that particular territory, and who is unknown to other groups of Khanty. However, *as iki* is held in particularly high esteem because he is responsible for the amount of fish in the Ob' and all its tributaries in the Ob'–Irtÿsh basin, as well as the surrounding lakes. All the water spirits who live in the tributaries of the Ob' are under his command; only a few of these have their own, independent sphere of influence (Кулемзин 1984: 48). If *as iki* is honoured and presented with sacrificial gifts, he rewards his worshippers with a good catch and a generous amount of fish. During my 1992 summer expedition, I was told two stories about *as iki* on the same day. In the evening, Leonid Sopochin, Dmitriï Kechimov and the latter's little son, called Slavik, went fishing. In a short while, they returned with a large perch and several other, smaller fish. They were convinced that the fish were sent by *as iki* to reward them for having told many tales about him on the same day. They thought that the good catch was a particularly good sign because this was the first time that Slavik had gone fishing with the men. Abundant fish on that day indicated that the boy would become a successful fisherman as an adult (Wokirap-yagun, June 1992). Another belief connected to *as iki* is that if someone is hosting guests, the god sends fish to the host in honour of the guests. Thus, my presence also boosted their success at fishing (D. A. Kechimov – Wokirap-yagun, June 1992). *as iki* is presented with gifts mostly in spring, before the beginning of the fishing season, and in winter. The sacrificial offering can be a reindeer, a piece of cloth or money. In spring the animal is slaughtered on the river bank; some of its blood and hide are thrown into the water, but a dram of vodka is also poured in the river for him. Gifts for *as iki* during the winter are simply put on top of the ice, and when it melts, the offering is submerged and taken by the river to the part of the Ob' where the god lives (L. M. Sopochin – Wokirap-yagun, June 1993).

Local protective spirits

In the mythology of the Ob-Ugrians, a variety of spiritual and religious traditions co-exist. These traditions originate from various periods and are built upon each other. Among these traditions the most established appears to

be the belief in benevolent, protective spirits. A plethora of benevolent and malevolent spirits accompanies humans in the course of their life, from birth to death. It is unthinkable for a Khanty not to ask the spirits' advice before significant events such as fishing, hunting or a longer journey. All parts of nature, including forests and rivers as well as more general areas, have a ruling spirit or lord, whose will largely determines the lives of people who live, fish and hunt in the spirit's territory. Therefore, these local spirits play just as important a part in Khanty beliefs as the deities of greater power and generic significance discussed so far.

According to those who worship them, people's health, happiness, and luck in fishing and hunting depends on the spirits in whose territory they live. These protective spirits are represented in wood-carved statuettes and idols which are decorated with pieces of metal and furs. Their idol's dwelling place, or idol's house, is guarded by someone held in high respect in the community, often a shaman.⁹ Given that the sacred place belongs to the spirit who lives there, there is a range of rules which regulate what must not be done and what is allowed there. Only men living in a particular spirit's territory can enter his sacred grove, and even they must be escorted by a shaman or the custodian of the idol's house. It is forbidden for women either to enter the sacred place or to participate in the rituals.¹⁰ On the spirit's territory the cutting down of trees, breaking of branches, fishing and hunting are all prohibited. At the same time, it is only from this area that trees may be chosen for the statuettes for spirits protecting a person who belongs to the community, as well as for the preparation of shamans' drums.

The most powerful protector of those living along the Trom-yogan and its tributaries, as well as the Agan and the Pim, is *ewət iki*, that is, the 'peak lord', meaning the Trom-yogan guardian spirit, to whom the Khanty living in this region offer sacrificial gifts regularly. His house stands in the forest on a headland along the bank of the Trom-yogan; this is where his wooden idol is to be found. The spirit's duty is to help and protect the Khanty families that worship him, and to ensure they live happy lives. While both women and men were permitted to attend other sacrificial practices of the family, on rituals intended for *ewət iki*, only men were allowed to be present. The rituals were usually held in spring, before the beginning of the fishing season, and in

⁹ The term 'idol' is used here, despite its highly pejorative connotation in English. In Khanty, the term *łuyq* denotes both 'guardian spirit or deity' and 'image of the guardian spirit', made from wood or other materials. The place where the image is kept is called *łuyq qât*, 'guardian spirit house'. Prayers and offerings would be made at the *łuyq qât*.

¹⁰ In some sacred groves women have their own areas, but I did not observe this in the Sopochin family groves. Women would pray, for example, to *kăltas anki* before giving birth, but I did not see any idols of her.

the autumn, before the hunting season. Today, families sacrifice only a single reindeer, but the number of sacrificial animals at ceremonies which involve the entire community was much higher. All important deities are presented with a sacrificial animal on such occasions (I. S. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). In 1991 thirty-five reindeer were sacrificed at a single ceremony (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993). The lord of the Trom-yogan decides the type of animal that should be sacrificed to him. The shaman must determine his wish. In 1990, they presented him with a horse sacrifice, in 1991 with a cow. The head and the back of the horse were covered with a piece of fabric. Only the shaman or the custodian of the sacred house can determine the colour of the fabric that is to be sacrificed to particular gods. It is also his responsibility to set the exact date of the ceremony (T. S. Tevlina – Russkinskaya, March 1991).

Another important guardian spirit of the families living along the Woki-rap-yagun and the Yinku-yagun rivers is *wōqi rāp imi*, who lives near the Yinku-yagun in a small idol's hut. This goddess is invisible; only her sons and daughters can be seen at her sacred place in the form of idols. As in the case of other higher creatures, her wishes can be divined only by shamans. The custodian of her idol's house for many decades was Ivan Sopochin, the head of the extended family. Only in the late 1980s, after his health deteriorated, was his youngest son, Iosif Sopochin, chosen for this task to replace his father. No one is allowed to approach *wōqi rāp imi*'s sacred place, apart from the custodian of her house. Usually, it is before the first snow-fall that the Khanty must pray to her. At times a sacrificial ceremony is held in her honour every year but on other occasions only every other year. Khanty men from the region assemble for the ceremony. Several reindeer are slaughtered on these occasions, too, as is usually the case at ceremonies held for the community. On 20 January 1991, thirteen animals were sacrificed, and the number of men who attended must have been around twenty (I. I. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). Anyone can pray to the goddess even at home, provided that they live on her territory. However, if someone would like to send a gift to the goddess's place, they can only do so via the custodian of the idol's house. Many Khanty living in this region (for instance, Iosif Sopochin and his sisters' husbands) have a personal protector spirit whose idol has been carved of wood originating from *wōqi rāp imi*'s sacred grove. 'But not everyone can receive a protector from the grove, only those who belong to our clan' (I. I. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

The narratives I collected point to the following shared features of local protector spirits:

- ◆ those who worship these spirits believe that people's health, happiness and luck in fishing and hunting depend on them;
- ◆ the spirits have a statuette or idol at the place of their cult; these idols are usually anthropomorphic figures made of wood, and are wrapped in cloths and furs;

- ◆ the spirits and their idol's house usually have a custodian of their own, usually the shaman;
- ◆ given that the sacred place is the property of the spirit who lives there, what may and may not be done in that area is strictly regulated;
- ◆ at the sacred place, a 'living fire' has to be lit for the sacrificial rituals, that is, matches must not be used to light the fire; only traditional methods (flint, tinder) are acceptable (G. S. Russkin – Yinku-yagun, August 1991).

Individual protector spirits

In the ranking of spirits, those protectors who are an individual's property are less prestigious, but from the point of view of the individual they are nonetheless of the utmost importance. The figurines representing these protective spirits are kept on the sacred sledges of families who change their dwelling places every season (those who live a sedentary life, as along the Yugan, keep the images in a *labaz*, 'store house'). Every nuclear family has its own sacred sledge, on which they keep the family's most important relics, wrapped carefully within a chest. Most important of all is the statuette of the family's protector, which is typically anthropomorphic: it is carved out of wood, it has eyes, ears and nose. The protector's idol is dressed in several layers of clothes, like those of humans, in order to protect him from catching cold. Next to the idol, the gifts that have been presented to him over the years are lined up: for instance, dear furs, pieces of fabric of the utmost beauty, coins and other trinkets considered to be of value. There may be several other idols, depending on how many helpers a particular family has. The skin of bears killed and skinned by the men is also kept on the sacred sledge. Families in which no-one practises shamanism keep the shaman's drum on the sacred sledge as well, in case a shaman passes by, when they ask him or her to play something for them. They themselves are also allowed to use it and they beat the drum if this brings them relief or solace (D. A. Kechimov – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1991).

The sacred sledge is kept behind the family's house or tent, where women are not allowed to go, except for those women whose protector spirit is to be found on the sledge. These women are permitted to go to their own idol to ask for help when they need it (I. I. Kechimova – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992). The idols, made of wood, are around 20 cm high; they are endowed with a face (eyes, nose and so forth) and dressed in an ornate fur jacket. There may be several protector spirits on the sledge, that of the wife, of the husband, of their children, if they live with them, or of other relatives. A person can have more than one individual spirit protecting them. If a spirit proves to lack power, anyone can have a new idol of another spirit made for themselves, out of a tree from a different sacred grove (D. A. Kechimov – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992). Even children have their own protector, which is presented to them only when

they leave their parents' home. The boys' idol is made of wood, the girls' of fabric. Rimma Russkina's protective idol was given to her by her father when she married and moved to her husband's family's home. Her father himself made the doll-shaped idol of pieces of cloth (R. P. Russkina – Yinku-yagun, June 1993). As opposed to dolls for playing, idols have a face, eyes, mouth, nose and ears. These features signal that the figurine has a soul (R. P. Russkina – Yinku-yagun, June 1993).

Wooden idols had to be made of wood that came from the community's sacred forest. Only the owner's relatives or acquaintances were allowed to carve them, and not the owner himself. Children's idols were made by their father; if an adult wished to change his or her idol, it had to be made by the shaman or another person chosen specifically for this task.

The way this happens is that the hide, skull, and antlers of the reindeer that was sacrificed are taken to the sacred forest, where the community's protective spirit lives. You must leave the sacrificial offerings there, and ask for a new idol. This is made by someone selected specifically for this task. Usually we know the person whose great-grandfather or other ancestor used to make these things. It is his son, or his son's son, who has to make the idol. This responsibility is handed down from father to son, or, if there are no male descendants, a cousin takes over this duty. The person who has been selected to make the idol has no right to object; they cannot say they will not make it. We send someone to notify him about the date when we go to collect the new idol; he must be at home at that time, and conduct the ceremony in the forest. (T. S. Tevlina – Russkinskaya, March 1991)

This story points out that the person selected for this task is the custodian of the local protective spirit.

Iosif Sopochin's protector is called *wōqi rāp jāwən imi āwi*, that is, the fox-cliff river lady's daughter, because his idol was made of wood cut in her sacred grove (I. I. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992).

Leonid Sopochin had four personal spirits assisting him. One of these was bequeathed to him by his grandmother; she was the daughter of the spirit which used to watch over the fire of his grandmother's home. Another spirit, which he brought home from a sacred place near Noyabrsk, assisted him in hunting and fishing. The third was from a sacred place near the Yinku-yagun, whose custodian was Iosif Sopochin. His fourth protector was an elk-shaped idol, for which he travelled to a lake called *num to* ('the lake of God' in Nenets) at the source of the Kazym river; he brought the idol from an island in this region. This idol helps his reindeer, and him too during the shaman ritual. 'You can travel on it like on a real reindeer. When I have to fight evil spirits, it is this

idol that helps me. It uses its antlers as sabres' (L. M. Sopochnin, – Yinkuyagun, June 1993).

It is a shared feature of these personal protective spirits that they have to be honoured with a sacrificial ritual several times a year, but at least twice. 'In the autumn for a good hunting season, in spring for the fish and the birds' (I. S. Sopochnin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). On such occasions, the sacrificial offering is usually a reindeer, whose blood is spread on the idol's mouth. After a successful hunt or fishing, the idols are thanked for their help. They are given a beautiful piece of fur or, more recently, fabric. These are placed next to the idol on the sacred sledge. For less significant requests, instead of an animal sacrifice, the spirits are offered food or drink. The men open the top of the chest on the sacred sledge, and take the idol out. Food and drinks are laid before the idol, and then the head of the family says the prayers. The men stand in front of the idol, while the women stand to the side, a little further from the sacred area. The ceremony ends with all the participants bowing several times, and turning around three times. At the end, the person who has conducted the ceremony gives a little food and pours a little drink for the idol, and then women and men eat and drink as well.

Typically, even those members of the Sopochnin family who have moved to town carry on using the sacred objects they inherited from their fathers or more distant ancestors. These protector spirits watch over them and safeguard them. They were given these objects from the sacred grove of their clan, from the sacred chests and sledges of their family members living in the forest, and usually they are items which formed part of the set of the clan's original sacred objects. They all strongly believe, almost without exception, that these objects are connected by invisible threads to their places of origin. They have the same characteristics and power as when they were kept in their traditional homeland (in a sledge, in a *labaz*, in a sacred chest), and function as protector spirits in the new environment as well. For instance, one of Ivan Sopochnin's grandsons keeps as a sacred object a box of matches, which was given to him by his grandfather; the spirit of the fire was one of the shaman's important helpers. He believed that when we have angered the spirit, it leads to aeroplane and helicopter accidents. This spirit is responsible for wars and fires in order to punish those who do not believe in him.

Nature spirits and sacrifice

Finally, I shall discuss a category of spirits, namely, the spirits of nature, who populate the world surrounding humans. The rivers, lakes and brooks where people go fishing belong to them. These spirits are imagined as anthropomorphic, but, if needed, they can change their appearance. The Khanty take it for granted that the fish which live in the rivers or the wild animals of the forests are the spirits' possessions. Therefore, before hunting or fishing they

honour these spirits with a sacrificial ceremony, so that they will hand over to the hunters and fishermen the animals which belong to them. The gifts are usually money or a piece of cloth. They sacrifice animals to these spirits only on the shaman's instructions, and only if they have bad luck for a long time.

Every hunter must hold a sacrificial ceremony before the hunting season in order to honour *tōrām* and the spirit of the forest where he normally goes hunting. This sacrifice can be held in nature or anywhere else. It does not have to be in the sacred place. (K. I. Pokachev – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991).

A hierarchy of sacrifice has been preserved to this day. The most valuable sacrificial animal was the horse. Even as recently as the early 1990s, horses were sacrificed in honour of the community's protector spirit, and earlier data also confirm this practice. After the horse, the second-most important animal was the reindeer. In the selection of the animal to be sacrificed, the colour of its fur played an important role. Animals with a white or light-coloured fur were regarded as best suited for *tōrām* and his children, who lived in the sky, or they tried to select animals which had a clear, light-coloured patch on their body. Dark-coloured animals could be offered only to *qyń iki* and to Earth Mother, *tōrām's* wife.

The number of sacrificial animals depended, primarily, on the significance of the god to whom the sacrifice was intended. On the occasion of community rituals, the local protector spirit always had to be presented with several animals.

In some cases, the sacrificial animal was marked with certain signs, for instance, it was covered with a scarf or cloth, in order to make it clear to everyone that the animal belonged to the gods or spirits.

The Khanty along the Trom-yogan led the sacrificial animal to the sacred area in such a way that it faced the house. The men who were lined up next to each other all grasped the lasso holding the animal for a short while, one after the other, and then the head of the family began his prayers, looking occasionally up to the sky. The prayer lasted for minutes out loud. Then, they killed the animal by hitting it on the head with the head of an axe, which stunned it, and then stabbing it in the heart. The blood of the animal was collected each time, and men and boys drank of it, and then it was offered to the protector spirit as well. The Khanty believe that the blood contains the animal's soul, and those who drink from it will receive some of the animal's strength (D. A. Kechimov – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). After that, according to the custom, every male participant had to hold the lasso in his hand again. They started uttering loud cries in order to invite the god to whom the sacrifice was presented to descend to Earth, to verify if everything had been conducted properly, and to partake of the feast that was prepared for them. Generally the Khanty assume

that the gods or spirits, given their disembodied existence, are satisfied with the smell of the food, and they leave the rest of the animal for the people. For this reason, they left the slaughtered but seemingly unharmed animal lying on the ground for a short while, in order to give time for the god who had been evoked to descend to Earth and check if everything was in order. This also allowed time for the animal's soul to ascend to the sky, the realm of the gods, for whom it was intended. The sacrificial animal belongs only partially to the gods; humans also have a share of its meat. For the gods, the most important parts of the animal are its blood, its entrails which contain blood, and its head. In Khanty mythology, these are the parts in which the animal's soul lives and travels up to the gods during the sacrifice.

The tongue and heart are the most important parts of an animal. When we cook these, we put them in a separate plate, and we add some of the rest of the meat, too. We always pray with these. If we pray to the heavenly gods, we ask them to descend and eat of the sacrificial meal. After the prayers we eat the tongue and the heart as well. In our family, women can eat it, too; they can eat everything. (L. M. Sopochnin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993)

After they had finished chopping the animal into pieces and the women had cleaned its entrails, all the vessels and meat were placed on the floor, back where it had been. The head of the reindeer and a bottle of vodka were placed at the front, and the men and women lined up again, the men in the area behind the house, the women a little further off, on the right-hand side (i.e. the eastern side: the back of the house is to the north). While bowing repeatedly, they asked the spirit, who, they believed, had descended by now and was watching them from a tree, to come down and begin consuming the feast they had prepared. They waited a few minutes in order to allow time for the deity to enjoy the meal. After that, first the men and then the women drank some of the vodka or other beverage that was placed next to the animal, and the meat was divided up in such a way that everyone present received an equal share.

The hide of the animal is kept by the family member who offered the deer from his stock. The skull is taken to the sacred grove and tied to a branch together with a piece of cloth. Leonid Sopochnin explained that the gods also have to wear clothes, so, cloth serves as the fabric of which their scarves, dresses and shirts are made (Yinku-yagun, June 1993). Only birch trees belong to the heavenly gods; the lord of the Underworld and other gods of the lower world have conifer trees.

As with other Ob-Ugrian groups, in the mythology of the Khanty along the Trom-yogan, both humans and spirits are characterised by a symbiosis of bodily and spiritual components. Among the components of human existence,

the spiritual part is just as important as the physical side, and the spiritual side of existence is imagined as being encompassed in various types of souls. Today, the widespread belief among the Trom-yogan Khanty is that humans have only one soul, which reincarnates after the death of the body. The existence of spirits is not entirely incorporeal but their material component is so exiguous that only certain animals, such as reindeer and dogs, are able to sense it. Another sign of the spirits' material existence is the strong connection that exists between the spirits and the statuettes and idols that embody them. Spirits have physical needs as well, and by satisfying these, humans can influence the spirits' decisions. For instance, by presenting the spirits with sacrificial offerings of animals, food and objects, humans can exert influence over them. A sacrificial ritual is a form of exchange even today: the person presenting the sacrificial gift asks for a gift in exchange. Therefore, the most valuable sacrificial offerings for spirits are things which are otherwise unavailable to them. The spirit of a river, therefore, should not be offered fish, or the spirit of a forest wild game; they should be given gifts which they cannot secure for themselves in the river or the forest. The only useful offerings are goods which are either man-made or which can be acquired only with human help, such as money, human food-stuffs or beverages, a beautiful fabric, or domesticated – never wild – animals.

Characteristics of shamans along the Trom"ëgan

Research on Khanty shamanism has been conducted since the eighteenth century. V. M. Kulemzin lists sixteen scholars who had discussed this topic to some extent prior to the 1970s (Кулемзин 1976: 5–18). Their results have been summarised by Z. P. Sokolova in her study on the challenges that research into Ob-Ugrian shamanism faces (Соколова 1991: 225–41). Among these authors, there are only two who have examined shamanism specifically among the Eastern Khanty, namely M. B. Shatilov (Шатилов 1931 and 1976) and V. M. Kulemzin (Кулемзин 1976). Shamanism in the Trom-yogan sub-group of the Eastern Khanty, however, has been explored by few scholars, apart from the author of this study (Kerezsi 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, Pentikäinen 1998, Dudeck 2013). Below I summarise my most important findings, which I have compiled on the basis of data gathered from my informants.

A noteworthy ethnic characteristic of the Surgut Khanty is that their culture has preserved numerous archaic features, partly as a result of their relative isolation compared to other Khanty groups.¹¹ The preservation of cultural traditions in this group of Khanty is also illustrated by the fact that many of their spiritual leaders have unparalleled knowledge of ancient customs, of the archaic features of their verbal art, of their mythology and the pantheon of

¹¹ For details, see Kerezsi 1997.

their gods, as well as providing spiritual guidance in the community. The word *shaman* is of Tungusic, and not Finno-Ugric, origin; the Surgut Khanty use a different word for 'men of special powers who have the ability to connect the three world spheres'. The Khanty living along the Trom-yogan call their male shamans (in the strict sense, discussed below) *t'artta qo* and their female shamans *t'artta ne*.

Vocation

Among the Eastern Khanty various ways of becoming a shaman are known. Shamans can either inherit their skills or learn them from an experienced shaman, or they may be chosen by the gods to practise their craft (Шатилов 1931: 121). My data support V. M. Kulemzin's findings along the Vakh and the Vasyugan, inasmuch as they show that shamans were predominantly *chosen* for their vocation. According to the Khanty beliefs, only those humans can become shamans who have been selected for this task by the gods. Luck in fishing and hunting is a definite sign of the fact that someone has been destined for shamanhood. Among the Eastern Khanty, including those living along the Trom-yogan, there are no physical preconditions to becoming a shaman; shamans need not be born with a caul, teeth or six fingers, for example.

The first signs that Ivan Sopochnin was not destined to live his life as a simple mortal man but as a shaman, a man chosen by the gods, appeared when he was sixteen (see Koshkarëva, this volume). He was already an experienced hunter when one evening he set out to hunt for otters. Otter-hunting is a difficult and labour-intensive task given that it often takes hours to catch these fast and intelligent animals in the water. So, as it is difficult to catch otters single-handedly, Ivan Sopochnin was accompanied by his brother. Night had fallen by the time they left home and it was dark. As they proceeded on foot, for some reason, Ivan fell behind his brother. This was the moment when he experienced something out of the ordinary. First, he was stopped by an invisible force; he was unable to move forward, as if nailed to the ground. He felt this force weighing on him from above, from the sky, while an internal force compelled him to look at the moon. The moon was high up in the sky and shed a miraculous silver light over the landscape. For Ivan, this was so overpowering that he could not take his eyes off it. He could not tell how long he had been standing there motionless, when the series of peculiar events resumed. Suddenly, he caught sight of a bright light which did not stand still but moved around in the dark forest. At times it appeared above the branches of trees, at other times at the height of a man, travelling either towards the young man or away from him. Soon he also heard a sound, which became stronger or faded depending on the position of the light. This apparition had such a profound impact on Ivan Sopochnin that he was able to recall every single detail of it even in his old age. The voice he heard announced to him that he was chosen by the celestial powers to become

an intermediary between humans and gods.¹² The voice also told him about the songs he had to sing and the words he had to utter to establish contact with supernatural powers. The voice explained to him all the fundamental practices of his craft, such as what he had to do to cure illness, to find things that had been lost, or to foretell the future. He lost his sense of time during this strange vision and he could not tell later either how long it lasted, whether it was only minutes or hours that passed while he stood there motionless. After a while, however, his brother noticed his absence, and grew weary of waiting. Fearing that the young man had come into harm's way, he hurriedly returned to find him. In this instance, the miraculous light vanished, the voice was silenced, and Ivan slowly realised where he was and what had happened to him. He regretted his entire life that his brother had returned in search of him. Never again was the vision repeated, and, in Ivan Sopočin's view, his 'education' was thus interrupted; it remained incomplete. As a result, he lost his chance of becoming an even more powerful and knowledgeable shaman.

Leonid Sopočin was chosen by *sārni qān iki* when he was still very young. He recalls the event as follows:

I was sixteen then, still a young kid. I travelled to Russkinskaya on my reindeer. I was perfectly sober because I never tasted alcohol before the age of twenty. On my way back, I reached the brook called *pesika imi jāwān* ('*pesika* [personal name] lady river') which is a place for spirits. Dawn was just breaking when some kind of creatures started whistling and calling out to me. I could see nothing, but I shivered as if someone had poured cold water over me. My reindeer were frightened as well; they came to a sudden stop, and kept looking back and pricking their ears in an effort to understand what was happening. I started driving the reindeer faster. We finally came to a swamp. We crossed a creek and then the swamp. I passed by a lake, and when I reached the second lake I knew I should turn right but I just went straight ahead. I had no idea where I was heading. It was almost broad daylight when I came to. I was freezing and my whole body was shaking and shivering with cold. I unharnessed the reindeer and lay down to have some sleep. Suddenly, I was woken by a sound similar to thunder. I looked in the direction of the rising sun, whose light emanated from everything around me. I saw a beautiful young man travel by. He sat on a stunning white stallion, and when he passed by me, the sound of it was like that of an arrow which has just been shot with great force. It was some

¹² He might later be in touch for example with *qyn iki*, an Underworld spirit, but it was the gods of heaven that first chose him.

kind of a whistling sound. This handsome young man was none other than *sārñi qān iki*, the youngest son of *numi tōram*, the chief god. That's when I began to think and started seeing the century. Until the age of twenty-two, I just kept thinking, contemplating what will happen to people, I saw the century unfold. Then the spirits told me that I had seen everything and that I could stop my contemplation because I had learnt what would happen in the future. Since then, I have been curing illness and helping people. (L. M. Sopočin, June 1992)

One of the main signs suggesting that someone had been chosen by the gods was good luck in hunting and fishing. When Ivan Sopočin became a seer (in his own words, meaning someone who sees good hunting places in his dreams), he saw a dream which pointed out to him the direction worth taking during the hunt. 'I can see in my dream the way I ought to go hunting so that I can bring something back on my sledge' (I. S. Sopočin – Woki-rap-yagun, January 1990, data recorded by N. B. Koshkarëva). Ivan Sopočin also told me that shamans were allowed to use their capabilities to their advantage, but even without deliberately doing so, they were helped by the spirits anyway, because 'no-one has ever heard of a shaman who was poor or starving' (I. S. Sopočin – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992). The first sign of the fact that Ivan was chosen for shamanhood was, indeed, his success in hunting from a very young age. He was orphaned when still a child, and ended up living with his uncle, who was a heartless, mean man, who tired of having to provide for the child. So, when Ivan was twelve, his uncle sat him in a boat and took him back to his parents' hunting grounds. He gave the young boy an axe and a knife and left him to his fate. Left alone, the young Ivan was terribly frightened because, according to Khanty belief, a house that has been standing abandoned for a long time becomes the abode of evil spirits called *mānyk*, who might even kill people. Therefore, the young boy decided not to move into his parents' house. He built himself a hut instead with dry branches and twigs, which protected him from the early frosts. He then copied what he saw in his uncle's house: he railed off a part of the river with a fishgarth, made a fishweir, and caught plenty of fish. He set traps for birds and small mammals, and his traps were always full of prey. He had such a good life that months later his uncle wanted to take him back to work with him, but by that time Ivan had become his own master. Soon after this his encounters with spirits began and he became a shaman of superior power and knowledge (I. S. Sopočin – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992).

As with the Khanty living along the Vasyugan (Karjalainen 1927: 251), among the Trom-yogan Khanty, the chosen person learns in their dreams or through hallucinations what they have to do in various circumstances, which song they must sing to a particular spirit, and how to evoke the gods. It is during the

period of shaman sickness, which usually lasts between three and seven years, that the shaman-to-be becomes acquainted with all the spirits, gods and other creatures who are invisible to other people, and who populate the three cosmic spheres. Ivan Sopochin was tormented by visions and hallucinations for many years, in his dreams and when awake. Through these hallucinations, information covering every single detail of shamanic practice was handed down to him, which allowed him to start practising shamanism.¹³ He learnt the number of protector spirits he would have and the shape in which they might appear. He was also told how to evoke them if he was unable to handle an important task on his own. When he had to make his way somewhere under water in the body of a fish or when he had to take on the body of a bird to fly up to the sky, his disembodied soul was unable to perform these duties without help. His shaman sickness, which lasted seven years, brought great suffering and anguish, during which he never knew when his next paroxysm would begin. Thus, for days he just sat and waited; he could not bring himself to do anything, apart from listening to his inner voices. When the hallucinations and visions finally stopped, he knew his novitiate as a shaman was completed. Fully armed with knowledge, he was ready to step before his people and start completing the work with which he was tasked by the gods: to cure disease, carry people's requests to the heavenly fathers, and look after people's affairs in general (I. S. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992). During these seven years he learnt everything that he needed to know to practise shamanism. This included familiarity with the way that leads to the world of the spirits, knowing his own shaman song, whose melody is unique to him, and also the possession of such spirits who help his journey across the world spheres, as well as many other skills and abilities. The shamans of the Trom-yogan Khanty acquire their knowledge in a relatively straightforward and easy way; this simplicity is a typical feature of shamanhood along the Trom-yogan, although V. M. Kulemzin reported similarly straightforward processes of becoming a shaman among the Khanty living along the Vasyugan as well.

Besides shamans who have been chosen for their vocation, there are others who inherited their calling for shamanhood. My observations suggest that shamans usually come from families which have had other similar people among their members. Leonid Sopochin's grandmother was also a shaman, and he told us that he had learnt much from her. Ivan Sopochin's youngest son, Iosif, regularly heard voices which inspired him to become a shaman. Initially he was reluctant to accept this calling, and, as a result, he struggled with falling ill

¹³ The Khanty were clear that all skills and mythological songs were handed down from above, and could not be learnt. The presentation in this paragraph represents what native informants themselves regarded as the source of shamanic power, whatever the realities of the human acquisition of the skills may have been.

repeatedly and quasi-psychotic symptoms. It was during one of my stays with the family (during my field work in 1991) that Iosif's father, Ivan Sopochin, asked the gods what was wrong with his son. The answer he received was that Iosif had no serious illness, the trouble was only that he was not inclined to accept his calling to shamanhood.¹⁴

Regardless of the way in which they have been called to their vocation, shamans are recognised by their community only if they have the two kinds of knowledge which are indispensable to practising shamanhood successfully. The first type of knowledge is exceptional and has to do with altered states of consciousness such as dreams, visions and states of trance. The second kind includes knowledge and skills which can be acquired with conventional methods such as shamanistic practice, the names and functions of spirits, the mythology and line of descent in the shaman's clan, a secret language, and so on. It is a characteristic feature of shamanism among the Khanty along the Trom-yogan that a shaman's knowledge is not acquired through instruction received from an older shaman; shamans learn their craft on their own, through introspection and internal development. The symptoms which indicate that someone is about to become a shaman are readily identifiable: the person who has been called becomes dreamy, seeks solitude, has visions and sings in his sleep. No public initiation ceremony is held for a new shaman, which does not necessarily imply that there is no rite of passage. The initiation of shamans might take place in their dream or when they are in a state of trance.

Types of shaman

Recently, scholars working in the field have been increasingly preoccupied by a terminological question, to wit, whether it is appropriate to use the term *shaman* for any person who conducts rituals. The term *shaman* has become universal in denoting all individuals whose occupation is to oversee practices of cult, involving a personal contact with the spirit world on behalf of the community, which exist among various peoples around the world. There are, however, fundamental differences between the practices, responsibilities and powers of those people whose vocation is called 'shaman' in the literature.

Karjalainen was among the first scholars to report, as early as the opening of the twentieth century, that among the Khanty there were not only shamans but also other practitioners who conduct ceremonies of cult, including seers and medicine men (Karjalainen 1911: 31–2). Karjalainen was the first to use a Khanty term, *ʻərtəy xoj* (Southern, Irtÿsh, dialect) to denote a magician who lived along the Dem'yanka river. In his three-volume monograph, he discusses

¹⁴ Compare Koshkarëva (this volume, ch. 6), who points out that Ivan Sopochin claimed to have inherited his mother's mental powers, and that his grandmother was a Nenets shaman.

various terms that are used with reference to shamans (whom he calls *Zauberer*, ‘magicians’), but he assumes that the terminological diversity is due to dialectal differences rather than a result of functional difference between these individuals’ duties (Karjalainen 1927: 253). V. M. Kulemzin grouped into five categories the people who possess exceptional abilities and conduct sacred practices. The first category includes those individuals who heal by singing and using musical instruments; they are called *arəyta qu*, ‘singing man’ (Vakh–Vasyugan dialect). The second category is that of oracles and seers, whose name is *nuqulta qu*. The third category is for interpreters of dreams, or for those who cure illness with the help of dreams; they are called *uləm wārta qu*, ‘dream-making man’. The fifth group includes healers who are called *jisilta qu*, ‘the man who makes you cry out’, and who have the power to cut themselves or anyone else without causing any harm. Rather, this is the way they cure others. To the last, fifth group belong those who conduct ceremonies with drums and drumsticks, who are called *jolta qu*. They are the ones called *shaman* according to current terminological conventions.

Based on my own research and on secondary sources, I shall outline below a taxonomy of those vocations which involved various types of sacred practices, and which existed among the Khanty along the Trom-yogan at the end of the twentieth century. Admittedly, my taxonomy is incomplete because as an outsider, and particularly as a woman, I had only limited access to information.

The storyteller, *mānttə qo*

Storytellers (*mānttə qo*, ‘story-teller man’) were able to cure illness by telling stories. They knew numerous tales, and particularly stories that had been ‘handed down to us from the past’ (I. S. Sopochnin – Woki-rap-yagun river, March 1991). If a storyteller was received somewhere as a guest, after nightfall people left their tents and gathered in the host’s tent to listen to the storyteller by the light of the fire.¹⁵ The storytelling lasted all night, and the guests dispersed only in the morning. Storytellers were expected to know a large number of tales, on the one hand, but, on the other, their audience also appreciated their skill at presenting the stories. Old and sacred stories were usually presented in a type of language peculiar to them, characterised by archaisms and special terms to such an extent that the audience understood the stories only with difficulty. There were certain tales, particularly those relating the gods’ deeds or the story of creation, which women were not allowed to hear, so they were sent out of the tent when the time came to tell such stories. I have been told stories about women who were eavesdropping, and who dropped dead at the

¹⁵ The data I gathered among the Trom-yogan Khanty suggests that they believe, to this day, that tales can be told only in the evening, after sundown, otherwise the storyteller will grow too bold.

moment when they wanted to pass on the forbidden tales (L. M. Sopočin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993).¹⁶

Feoktista Ivanovna Smirnova (*née* Sopočina), Ivan Sopočin's daughter who lived in Kogalým, recalled that among the Surgut Khanty in the 1950s and 1960s there were many storytellers who also had healing power (Kogalým, October 1998). However, she had no recollections of their methods; thus, I summarise the details of their practices based on the secondary literature. The patient and the storyteller sat facing each other with their back towards the fire. The storyteller told tales in which various illnesses are described. When the patient felt a sense of relief at the mention of a particular disease, this indicated that their condition was caused by the disease in question.¹⁷ After having established the cause of the illness, the storyteller advised the patient about the rituals they had to perform, the kind of votive offerings they had to dedicate to a particular god, and the identity of the god to whom the sacrifice had to be presented for the sick person to be cured.

The singer, *arəy arəyta qo*

Singers (*arəy arəyta qo*, 'song-singing man') usually recounted various legends and myths in their songs. They also performed on the occasion of bear festivals. All singers were men who also had the power of healing. The Khanty had three types of stringed instruments: a boat-shaped, zither-like 'musical tree' (*panay juγ*), which was supported on legs, an instrument called 'crane-headed-tree' (*tărəy oγəp juγ*), reminiscent of a harp, which was carved into the shape of a bird's neck, and a violin-like bowed instrument with a long neck, called a 'woman-tree' (*niγ juγ*). In the Agan–Vasyugan region the zither-like *panay juγ* was more widespread. They played music in the evenings by the fire. With the help of these instruments, they evoked their spirit guides. In the presence of the spirits, the Khanty began foretelling the future using a drumstick-like wooden instrument which was covered with fur on one side, and with drawings depicting their guiding spirit on the other. They threw the stick in front of themselves three times. If it landed with the drawing facing up, this meant that the sick would be cured. If the stick landed with the fur-

¹⁶ The fatal consequences of women hearing forbidden tales is a matter of the breaking of taboos, but what the basis of these taboos is is difficult to determine (the Khanty themselves would just view it as a matter of adherence to custom). The most holy, and forbidden, narrative was that of the world's creation; the Mansi-language specialist E. Rombandeeva related that when she got hold of Munkácsi's collection of Mansi folklore, she rushed to read the creation myth – only to be left wondering just what it was about that made it so necessary to keep it from women.

¹⁷ For details, see Кулемзин 1976.



Figs. 3.31, 32. Tamara Sidorovna Tevlina demonstrates the playing of the 'crane'
Photos Juha Pentikäinen

covered side facing up, they interpreted it as a bad sign.¹⁸ The Finnish scholar Karjalainen recorded his encounters among the Vasyugan Khanty with singers who went into a trance using their zither-like musical instrument. Karjalainen also reported that shamans (the singer-musician type) retrieved the souls of the sick from the Underworld with the help of their protector spirits. The spirits were assisted by a bear-shaped helper who frightened the dead person who had stolen the patient's soul. In their fright, the dead dropped the soul they had taken, and the protector spirit carried it back to its rightful owner on Earth. 'Meanwhile, the shaman plays on a zither-like instrument, and recounts the adventures of his protector-intermediary' (Karjalainen 1927: 315). Karjalainen also recorded, based on his fieldwork among the Vasyugan Khanty, a shaman who not only played the zither but held, simultaneously, in his left hand a spoon, which served as an instrument for predicting the future. Karjalainen's report is a valid source, regardless of the fact that in his view this was merely a way of practising shamanhood. He failed to understand that the description he provided was of a person engaged in a fundamentally different type of sacred practice, namely the practices of a singer-musician. Among the Trom-yogan Khanty, my attempts to gather data about singing healers were only partly successful. The Trom-yogan Khanty have vivid memories of the musical instruments on which the uninitiated, particularly the women, were not allowed to play. They also recalled that the *panaŋ juŋ* was a magic instrument used by singing shamans instead of a shaman's drum, and that it was kept with other sacred objects on the sacred sledge behind the tent, hidden from outsiders (L. M. Sopočin – Yinku-yagun, July 1992).

The man who makes you cry out, *jistətə qo*

The third type of healer known among the Trom-yogan Khanty was called *jistətə qo* ('the man who makes you cry out'). My informants explained him as someone who is able to inflict wounds on himself (I. I. Sopočin – Wokirap-yagun, June 1992).

People are not born with this ability, they acquire it later in life. Usually, they are notified in a dream that this exceptional skill has been bestowed on them. It is the chief god himself, or his youngest son, *sārni qān iki*, who endows a person with this responsibility. The person who has been chosen finds out about his calling by experiencing an irresistible inner drive to cut himself, feeling assured that the cut can cause no harm to him. (I. I. Sopočin – Wokirap-yagun, June 1992)

¹⁸ For details see Кулемзин 1976.

The purpose of the cut was to remove from the sick person's body the evil spirit who caused the illness. This was made possible by laying hands on the sick, but also by the healer's protector spirit eating up the malevolent spirits. My informant heard a story about 'a child who was running around with a knife in his hand. The child fell, landing straight on the knife. Luckily, his father, who was a healer working with cuts, was nearby. He grabbed the knife and pulled it out of his child's body. He laid his hand on the wound, and the child's injury vanished without a trace' (I. I. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992). Among the Vasyugan Khanty, according to Kulemzin, the healer called *jisilta qu*, 'the man who makes you cry' in the local dialect, was able even to resurrect the dead. The Khanty living along the Vasyugan believed that if someone died prematurely, the *jisilta qu* was able to connect with the world of the dead, and bring back the soul of the deceased, who slowly awoke and began to speak. In order to bring someone back, the *jisilta qu* sent everyone out of the tent, lay down next to the deceased, covered himself with a shroud, and lay there for three days in a trance. The Vasyugan Khanty believed that this amount of time was needed for the healer to reach the Underworld, which took a day and a half, and to return, which took the same amount of time. My informants along the Trom-yogan were unable to recall similar events. For them, only the type of shaman called *t'ortta qo*, who uses a drum, is able to transcend to the other world. Among the Trom-yogan Khanty the same person could be simultaneously a healer who cures through cutting, and a shaman who uses a drum. Ivan Sopochin was such a person as well in his youth. He asked the gods not to make him a 'man who cuts'. He sacrificed a reindeer to *sârîi qân iki* so that he might relieve him from his temptation and capability to injure and cut himself.

He requested this for our sake, for his children, in case we noticed what he was doing and were tempted to try it out on ourselves. If an ordinary man cuts himself, he will not survive his injuries. After the reindeer sacrifice, our father lost this ability. He was no longer compelled to cut himself. (I. I. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992)

The hand woman, *jošëŋ joχ*¹⁹

Among the Kazÿm Khanty, women of special powers, who heal by the laying on of hands, are also known. They are called *jošëŋ joχ*, 'people with hands'. One of my informants belonged to this group of healers; she explained to me what she felt as follows:

¹⁹ Northern, Kazÿm, dialect.

When you drag your hand down along the body, you feel the point where the patient has pain. It feels good to sense the source of the pain. Where you feel pins-and-needles in your palm, that is where it hurts. Sometimes you feel a cold stream in your hand, and then you know that it is impossible to cure this patient, you cannot do it. If you feel only pins-and-needles, you know you can cure him. If someone has a toothache, I can cure it by removing the pain with my hand. My grandmother was also a *jošey joχ*. I remember that in my childhood [in the 1950s and 1960s] she was often called to visit patients. She was able to remove even tumours. (Tat'yana Aleksandrovna Moldanova – Khant'y-Mansiisk, December 1990)

The seer of dreams, *utəm wärtə qo/ne*

Interpreters or seers of dreams are called *utəm wärtə qo/ne* 'dream-making man/woman'; they were either men or women. Along the Vasyugan and the Kaz'ym rivers, female interpreters of dreams outnumbered the male ones. There were dreams whose meaning was commonly known to members of the community; such dreams, therefore, needed no interpreting. If someone dreamt of a sledge, it meant that the weather would turn cold, while seeing a boat in a dream meant that it would warm up. Interpreters of dreams were able to decipher uncommon dreams and access vital information in the dream concerning matters which were of interest to their community. For instance, a male interpreter of dreams living along the Yugan river had a dream in which the local protector spirit was angry because the number of his reindeer had diminished. After the interpreter related his dream to others, a date for a large-scale communal reindeer sacrifice was set without delay in order to honour the local spirit (Vasilii N. Lyantın – Great Yugan, July 1992). Another important duty of seers of dreams is to find objects that have been lost. Among the Kaz'ym Khanty, my informants knew of elderly women who had found lost items with the help of children.

I was such a child as well. I remember, at the time a wrist watch was considered a great treasure, and my father lost his. My grandmother told me: 'Sleep, sleep, be fast asleep, and have a look where your father's watch is.' I fell asleep and when I woke in the morning, I saw precisely the place, specifically a fence, where the watch was. I even saw in my dream the position of the watch, the way it lay there. I was not the one who had lost the watch, it was my father, at a place where I had never been before. And yet I could see the place with absolute precision. In the morning I got up quickly and started looking for it. I hurried to the place I saw. I knew exactly what it looked like and where I had to go. Although the first snow had already fallen, I thrust my hand into it, exactly

where I had to. I knew precisely where the watch would be under the snow. On another occasion I found a reindeer calf in the same way. (T. A. Moldanova – Khantÿ-Mansiïsk, December 1990).

The seers of dreams had no special clothing or equipment intended for sacred rituals; they were forbidden to accept payment for their services.

The process which allows shamans called *t'artta qo* (the category whose name is appropriately translated as *shaman*) to see objects is fundamentally different from the methods used by seers of dreams. Ivan Sopochin found objects not in his dreams but in an altered state of consciousness which he was able to control and direct. The spirits showed him where the lost property was to be found, exactly where it was located – as he put it: ‘They show me whether the object is on the left or right bank of the river, whether it is to be found along the upper or lower river section.’ Following my request he also tried to explain to me how he feels while looking for things. He said he could not see with absolute clarity the place, a particular birch tree or pine for instance, where the lost item was; he rather had a sense of the right direction which they had to follow to look for it. He never held a shamanic ritual to find objects; he was able to feel from inside, even without a particular ceremony, where he had to go looking for the lost items. He often lost his own knife when hunting. ‘I just had to turn back, look, and I saw instantly where my knife was’ (I. S. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

The seer, *sem woj*, and ways to tell the future

Perhaps the best translation of the Khanty term *sem woj*, which denotes people who are able to foretell the future with great precision, is *seer*. My data about such seers also originate from the region of the Kazÿm river.

A long time ago, when we were not yet born, my great-grandmother told my grandmother that she would have a son, who would have his own children, one of whom would be called Marina. This name was entirely unknown among the Khanty at the time. Everyone was surprised to hear such a name. A long time passed, and I was born but I am not called Marina, then my younger sister, Ol'ga, also not Marina. Then, the third girl was born in my family on an occasion when my father was away, yet, in his absence, the name Marina was chosen for her, somehow. (T. A. Moldanova – Khantÿ-Mansiïsk, December 1990)

Other methods of predicting the future were also widespread among the Khanty. According to data I collected in the Kazÿm region, elderly women foretold events with the help of tiny stones.

When my younger brother was born, we sat down to tell his fortune. We cast the stones. Only my grandmother and I were there. We sat together. Suddenly, one of the stones, a white-coloured one, seemed to be growing bigger. It kept growing and growing and everything was glowing white. After I told my grandmother what I saw, she explained that my brother would be a very strong child, who has turned his head towards the man of the Ob'.²⁰ (T. A. Moldanova – Khantÿ-Mansiïsk, December 1990)

The most widespread method of foreseeing the future among the Trom-yogan Khanty and elsewhere is well known from the secondary literature: this is a practice which involves the lifting of objects. After every question the shaman uttered, the object which was used to predict the future was lifted, and the spirit's answer was conveyed by the object becoming light or heavy. A variety of objects were suitable for this purpose: a sacred or funerary sledge could be lifted, as well as an axe, a sacred chest or a cradle with a baby in it. The object which served as a tool in the ritual depended on the purpose of the ceremony. Men and women who were able to predict the future without using a drum were called *molaqsətə qo/ne*, 'praying man/woman', among the Trom-yogan Khanty. These could also be people who healed by the laying on of hands. Even the shaman, the *řərttə qo* himself, used such methods sometimes: instead of taking his drum out, he divined the future using his sacred chest, his axe, or even a bucket of water. Various Khanty groups differ, however, in what is interpreted as a positive or negative answer from the spirits, whether it is the heaviness or lightness of the object that is lifted. If the object becomes lighter, the Kazÿm Khanty consider it as an answer meaning 'yes'. 'We are trying to find the answers, we keep lifting up a child. We enumerate the names of all our dead relatives.'²¹ When it is easy to lift the child at the mention of a particular name, this shows that this particular ancestor's soul has been reborn in the child. It is the ancestor in question who has arrived and lifted the child' (T. A. Moldanova – Khantÿ-Mansiïsk, December 1990). In sharp contrast with this tradition, among the Trom-yogan Khanty, a positive answer is signified by the object becoming heavy, as if it was stuck to the ground. Below, I quote from a prayer which I heard from the elderly and ill Ivan Sopočin during one of my stays with the family. I wanted to know if I was allowed to participate in the shamanic ceremony which was scheduled to be held soon after. Ivan Sopočin kept lifting up his sacred chest, in which he stored the symbols of one of their

²⁰ The meaning is that *asiki*, the lord of all rivers and waters, who rules over fish, will be the boy's protector spirit.

²¹ They try to divine which one of their ancestors has reincarnated in the body of the child.

most important gods: the god of fire. The fire was one of the old shaman's personal guiding spirits as well.

You, dear Mother Fire! I shall carry out the duties which were bequeathed to me by the gods until the end of my life. Until my dying day I shall be praying with my hands [he shows it by lifting up the chest]. Hold it [i.e. keep the chest down on the floor] if I utter a word, if I ask something, so that men cannot lift it up. For they have eyes as well, they are looking this way [that is, the outsiders who are present have eyes, too]. At the moment this chest is weightless, since there is only a piece of cloth inside. Everything on which you travel, on which you fly, is the power of fire. You are all carried by the fire. If anything I say has God's word and will, the Earth's word, embedded in it, hold it tight so that men cannot lift it. [He tries to lift his chest but is unable to, indicating that I was permitted to participate in the ceremony.] If someone else lifts it, it will be weightless. If you are also destined to foresee the future, you will be unable to lift this chest no matter how hard you try. This is something [i.e. a skill and knowledge] that was handed down by God. (I. S. Sopochnin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991)

The fly-agaric eater, *pāṅq tītā qo/ne*

A further category of people endowed with special powers includes those who use mushrooms, particularly fly agaric, to reach a state of trance. They are called *pāṅq tītā qo/ne*, 'fly-agaric-eating man/woman', along the Trom-yogan and they can be either men or women. 'After having fasted all day, in the evening they eat three or seven mushrooms and go to sleep. In a few hours, they wake up with their body shaking and shivering, and announce that the spirits have shed light by way of their intermediaries on questions such as which spirit needs a sacrifice, which person spoiled the success of the hunt, and so on. The shamans then fall into a deep sleep again, and the next morning they perform the required ceremonies' (Karjalainen 1927: 306) In his description of the use of fly agaric, Karjalainen makes no distinction between shamans who use drums, on the one hand, and, on the other, those people of special powers who use mushrooms. These two groups are fundamentally different from each other in their duties and responsibilities, as well as their methods. Karjalainen's use of the word *shaman* covers also those who use mushrooms. Mircea Eliade's description of Ob-Ugric shamanism suggests that the only difference between the two groups is in the technique they used to reach ecstasy (Eliade 2002: 205). To be sure, there are similarities between shamans and those who use mushrooms, but the differences between

them are just as significant. The most important task of those who work with mushrooms is to heal.

You pick the fly agaric in the forest. It grows in the autumn, in September. You pick only its hat, you leave its foot in the ground. You thread the seven tiny hats on a stick and you dry them. A vessel has to be made of birch bark to the size and shape of a mug. That's where you keep the mushroom, and when you need it, you take some. My grandmother used to do it like that, too. Sometimes the hunting booty diminishes, or there is trouble with the reindeer, or a child is ill, or someone who faces difficulties just turns up from somewhere. On such occasions they ask grandmother to eat a little mushroom. She then puts the agaric on a plate and prays in the same way as we have just done it, too. She puts some food on the small table standing in the middle of the house and she prays. Only after the prayer does she eat of the mushroom; this ensures that everything will go as planned, she will not end up in a state of unconsciousness, and the spirits will show her everything clearly. She eats up the mushroom and sits and waits a little while, then she becomes intoxicated with the fly agaric. After approximately half an hour, she begins to talk and sing. Then, she tells us everything. [. . .] We must go to our dear and gentle Mother God (*töram aŋki*), who lowered us all to Earth in our cradles; I was sent down by her, too. (L. M. Sopočin – Yinku-yagun, July 1992)

In the group of Khanty among whom I conducted my research a clear distinction was made between those who perform magic practices with their drums, on the one hand, and, on the other, those who use mushrooms. Ivan Sopočin, who was a *tärttə qo*, 'shaman', told us that those magicians who own a drum never eat mushrooms when they use their drum. They can use mushrooms but they are not allowed to use their drum simultaneously; if they consumed mushrooms they must lay their drum in their lap. A certain tension was even noticeable between those who use mushrooms and those who use only their drum. For instance, Ivan Sopočin did not keep in contact with Leonid Sopočin's branch of the family precisely because Leonid's grandmother was a healer who used mushrooms. Ivan Sopočin considered the use of mushrooms in shamanic practice a dubious affair. The fact that the consumption of mushrooms was generally judged unfavourably is supported by Leonid Sopočin's recollections, according to which his grandmother consumed mushrooms secretly, mostly among close family members; she was less likely to use them in the presence of outsiders (L. M. Sopočin – Yinku-yagun, July 1992).

The shaman proper, *t'artta qo*

The most important difference between a *t'artta qo* and other people of special powers who have been discussed so far is that only a *t'artta qo* has drums, drumsticks and a kind of ceremonial costume. Their social status is higher than that of others and their responsibilities are also more wide-ranging. The Khanty of the Vakh–Vasyugan region call their shamans *jolta qu*, and their practices were described by G. S. Dmitriev-Sadovnikov and M. B. Shatilov, apart from by Kulemzin, whose work was mentioned above.²²

What follows is a discussion of shamanic practices characterising the activities of shamans who belong to the *t'artta qo* category, such as Ivan Sopochnin and Leonid Sopochnin, who were my main informants on this subject. Their many duties can be classified into four main groups, according to the data I collected:

1. Finding answers to questions that concern the course of people's life on Earth, such as shamanic practices undertaken on the occasion of illness, birth and death.
2. Shamanic practices that concern the effectiveness of the community's economic activities and work.
3. Conducting communal rituals.
4. Divining and predicting future events.

Thanks to the knowledge with which superior powers have endowed them, shamans are able to travel in all three spheres of the world with equal ease, that is, in the Underworld, on the Earth and in the sky. According to accounts I have heard, their souls can leave their bodies and transmit people's messages to the supernatural powers. All the other roles of a shaman derive from their position as mediators between humans and the three world spheres.

The main function of shamans in society is to act as healers. The shamans I met scarcely used herbal medicine in their healing practices,²³ nor did they intervene in any other practical way. They understood illness as the straying of the soul, or as an act of soul-stealing, or as a result of the spirit of illness moving into someone's body. The role of shamans as healers consists of divining, with the help of their guiding spirits, which spirit had stolen the sick person's soul, and how it was possible to retrieve it. The creature responsible for ruining someone's health could be *qyn'iki* himself, the lord of illness, or his helpers, or anyone from the multitude of spirits. According to Khanty belief, questions of life or death were exclusively in the hands of the chief god, *t'oram*, so the shaman first had to find out the chief god's will. He began the shaman ritual to retrieve the sick person's soul only if the person's course of life on

²² For details, see Дмитриев-Садовников 1911 and Шатилов 1931.

²³ Knowledge of herbs was common to all, but here too the shaman's knowledge would be regarded as pre-eminent.

Earth had not yet come to an end. It was impossible to alter *tōrəm*'s will, even for the most powerful of shamans. In cases when it was possible to cure the patient, the shaman went to look for their soul, recovered it, and fitted it back into the sick person's body.

This is a difficult task, so you must use a drum. I must ascend to the realm of our heavenly fathers in the sky and beseech them to help. I usually consult *sārñi qān iki*, *tōrəm atī*, *tōrəm aŋki* or *məy aŋki* (the Golden Prince Lord, the Heavenly Father, the Sky Mother, or the Earth Mother). My soul travels to them. I learn from them if the patient's course of life is to continue or not. If it is, I practise shamanic healing to the best of my ability in order to cure the person. In such cases I turn to my own guiding spirits [...], who recover the person's health instantly. It is not a problem if the patient is far away from me when I begin to shamanise; my helpers and I fly to wherever the sick person is. [...] The sick start feeling a sense of relief almost instantly, even if they were near death before the healing started. But a sudden recovery can be harmful, too; they must be cured slowly and gradually, the way trees grow. (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993)

I have come across two main methods of healing among my informants. One of these involves the removal of the spirit of illness from the patient's body, the other requires the retrieval of the sick person's stolen soul from the lord of illnesses. Leonid Sopochin was unwell for days during our field visit in 1993: he had a sore throat and high fever for days. One morning he came to see me and told me that he was feeling better and would soon recover completely because over night he had fought with one of *qyñ iki*'s female helpers and had won. After this victory he was able to take out of his throat the thick white worms which had been eating away his throat hitherto.

The retrieval of the patient's soul is a method of healing which is more tiring and challenging for the shaman than the previous one. In such cases the shaman has to descend to the Underworld and retrieve the patient's soul from there. Leonid Sopochin summarised the story of one of his journeys as follows (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1992). First, he had to make his way to the entrance of the Underworld, which is a circular hole and leads down into the depths of the Earth.²⁴ Climbing through this hole, he arrived at a river which he crossed by boat. Apart from this first challenge, he had to overcome another six obstacles, making seven in all. These trials included fire, thorny thickets, a forest with branches of trees that close in on the traveller, minuscule, human-like

²⁴ The place is in the north, near the town of Salekhard, along the Saïtanka river.

creatures bearing weapons, and wild beasts of the Underworld, mainly wolves. Finally he reached a vast hall which was lit by the light of fire, and there, on his throne, sat *qyń iki*, clad in black. The shaman explained to *qyń iki* that the patient had still a long way ahead of him in his earthly life because some of the duties with which he was entrusted when he came on Earth were unfinished, and needed to be completed before the patient died. The shaman besought the lord of the Underworld to let go of the patient's soul. *qyń iki* agreed, and the shaman returned to Earth, carrying the person's soul, in the same laborious way as he had descended. After the shaman ritual, he fell into a deep sleep which lasted several hours because he was overcome by extreme fatigue and felt wounded. My informant refused to discuss the scenario of when *qyń iki* is unwilling to release a person's soul. From secondary sources, however, it is well known that in such cases the shaman has to either hide the soul among the folds of his clothes and smuggle it back to Earth, or lure the soul to follow him, and guide it out of the realm of shadows in this way (Басилов 1984: 20). It is also the shaman's duty to find out about the kind of gift the spirits need in exchange for the soul that has been retrieved from them. The more serious the illness, the greater the offering that is needed, typically a reindeer. The shaman conveys the wishes of the spirit that caused the illness to the patient and his family, who promise to present the spirit with the gifts he has requested.

In some cases, the shaman is unable to cure the patient, who dies. For the Khanty, this was a normal course of events, which was decided by *tõram*, so no-one ever thought of putting the blame on the shaman. It is easy to steal the soul of simple mortals and destroy them. It is, however, more challenging to steal a shaman's soul.

Shamans fight. He knows when the black spirits are coming to take him to the Underworld. He does not give in and a great struggle begins. That is what happened with Dedushka, too. [The elderly Ivan Sopochin died in May 1993.] He was not ill before his death, he was perfectly healthy. He died unexpectedly. He went out of his tent, fell to the ground, and he met his end right there. This was *qyń iki*'s doing. Dedushka was shot by him and his helpers. They had tried to kill him twice before and they succeeded on the third occasion. But Dedushka knew it all in advance. He told Iosif that he was going to die soon. (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993)

According to Fëkla, his eldest daughter, Ivan Sopochin practised shamanism even a few days before his death. He learnt during this ritual that his sons who were away would return in good health, and this reassured him. The night before his death he bade farewell to his family, and told them he was going to die the following day in front of the tent. He told them not to grieve too long,



Fig. 3.33. Shamanic ceremony of Leonid Sopochin

but to continue instead their lives as usual, the way they had done before. The following morning, when he woke up, he stepped out of his tent. His daughter, who was standing in front of the neighbouring house, saw her father collapse a few steps away from his tent. She rushed there right away but by the time she reached him, the elderly shaman was dead (F. I. Pokacheva – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1993).

A shaman's assistance is also sought when a woman has a long and difficult labour. The role of the shaman, as Leonid Sopochin explained, is to alleviate

the young woman's suffering by conducting shaman rituals in the neighbouring tent. Furthermore, according to Ivan Sopochin's comment, on such occasions shamans must turn to the fire or to *kəttas*, who is strongly associated with fire, or to *ayki puγəs*. Only they can tell the cause of the difficult labour. It is possible that the woman in labour has failed to observe a particular rule during her pregnancy, but the husband's or wife's infidelity can also be a cause of difficult birth. After the shaman has divined the cause, and the appropriate sacrifice is presented, the birth concludes successfully.

Apart from mediating in questions of life and death, health and illness, another important duty of shamans is to provide guidance concerning their community's economic activities. The Khanty believe that their success in hunting and fishing depends on the will of, and assistance from, the gods and spirits around them. If a hunter has no luck for a long period of time, he turns to the shaman, who enquires on his behalf to find out which spirit is angry at the hunter and what kind of gift is needed to appease the spirit in question. The shaman's authority in such matters originates from the fact that he can connect with supernatural powers: he is able to inform the invisible forces of the people's wishes. The shaman acts as a mediator between the gods and humans.

The third main duty of shamans is to conduct communal sacrificial ceremonies. This responsibility is tied to their other two duties, discussed above, but it is also broader in scope than the activities described so far. The mediating role of shamans with regards to this third responsibility consists in knowing which spirit to evoke if they wish to ask for success in hunting or a richer catch in fishing. While anyone can conduct individual sacrificial ceremonies at home or in their family's sacred grove, only shamans have the authority to lead ceremonies involving the entire community. Leonid Sopochin explained that when they pray to several gods or protector spirits, and sacrifice a large number of animals, several shamans have to be present, and they take turns in conducting the ceremony (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993). I witnessed a communal sacrifice in the summer of 1993 in the village of Russkinskaya. This was a large-scale ceremony held on behalf of the entire community of the Surgut Khanty. Apart from Leonid Sopochin, three other shamans were present. Each of the shamans stood next to a sacrificial animal, and the eldest shaman started beating on his drum. He asked the deity to whom he was to sacrifice the animal closest to him to descend and take part in the ceremony. After he had said his prayers while drumming, he hit the animal on the back of its neck and stabbed it. The eldest shaman was followed by the other three, who all beat their drums, said their prayers and sacrificed their animals. Eight reindeer were sacrificed, one after the other, during the ceremony. They ought to have sacrificed fourteen animals: seven for their highest gods, namely for *tōrəm*, *tōrəm ayki*, *sārñi qān iki*, *məγ ayki*, *qyn iki*, *řārəs naj imi* and *wājəγ ärt tōrəm*, and another seven for the most powerful local spirits of the Surgut Khanty.

As a result of financial constraints, only the protector of the Trom-yogan river was presented with a sacrificial animal; others received smaller gifts, mostly pieces of cloth (L. M. Sopochin, June 1993). The shamans provided guidance for members of the community throughout the ceremony: they told them what to do exactly, and which spirit received which piece of cloth. Finally, it was the shamans who took the gifts to the spirits' trees in the sacred grove.

A shaman's strength depends on the god by whom he was chosen for his vocation, although male shamans usually possess greater power than females. Women are able to shamanise only by using fly agaric, while men can do it without mushrooms as well (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993).²⁵

Iosif Sopochin told me in 1991 that they distinguished three types of shamans based on how closely they are able to approach *numi tōram*. The most powerful shamans can enter his house, next come those who can reach only his threshold, and finally those who cannot go further than the fence surrounding his house. Ivan Sopochin's soul was able to fly to the threshold of the chief god's house. However, he was unable to enter the house because he was distracted in the moment when he was called to his duty as a shaman, which also interrupted his shamanic learning.

In contrast to the shamans of the Vasyugan Khanty (Кулемзин 1976: 68), those living in the Surgut district had no particular shaman costumes. They performed shamanic practices in their everyday clothes; the only difference in their shaman attire was that they wore a white shirt and a pair of boots made of reindeer hide, even in summer. The white shirt was compulsory because white was seen as the gods' favourite colour, and they had to wear boots because it was forbidden for shamans to appear barefoot in front of the gods (I. S. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

The most essential instrument of the *t'artta qo* type of shamans is their drum. The drums used by the Sopochins were round-shaped instruments on which they stretched reindeer hide cleaned of its fur. The only kind of reindeer hide which is suitable for this purpose must come from an animal which was killed during a sacrificial ceremony (I. S. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). Several types of wood were used for the frame of the drum: it could be made of birch, Siberian pine, or Scots pine. Scots pine was the best type, because it gave the drum the most beautiful sound. The wood for the drum had to come from the sacred forest of the community (I. S. Sopochin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). The elderly shaman's drum originated from the votive place of

²⁵ A point of terminology is worth emphasising. The *t'artta qo/ne* (from the root *t'art-* 'to drum') uses a drum to enter trance (and the use of fly agaric lies outside the definition of a shaman as *t'artta qo/ne*); a user of fly agaric could also be a shaman, in that during trance, knowledge of the upper and lower worlds might be gained, but in that case, the shaman is a *pāyq hita qo/ne*.



Fig. 3.34. Interior of chum with drum

a protector spirit called *wōqi rāp jāwən imi*, who was also the protector of the drum itself (I. I. Sopočin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). A Y-shaped twig inside the drum allows the shaman to hold his instrument in his left hand. Three strips of seven coins are fastened to the inside of the frame. Previously small bells were fastened to the drum to give it a louder sound, which can be more easily heard by the gods (I. S. Sopočin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). I have seen no drawings or paintings on shamans' drums. The lack of graphic decoration is typical of shamans' drums not only along the Trom-yogan: as Karjalainen noted, the Ob-Ugrians never decorate their drums with drawings (Karjalainen 1927: 263–5). The base of the drumsticks was also made of wood but it was covered with fur taken from the legs of reindeer.

Shamans do not make their own drums; they must ask someone to make their instruments for them. Iosif's drum was made by Leonid Sopočin. The shaman must give something in exchange for his drum, such as furs, money or reindeer. A shaman can own as many drums as he wishes. According to Ivan Sopočin, the Surgut Khanty never held initiation ceremonies for, or blessed, newly made drums; this was unnecessary given that the drums were made of the hide of reindeer which was already offered to the gods. After a shaman paid for his drum and the reindeer skin dried, he could start using it. Ivan Sopočin's son, Iosif, however, brought his drum out of their tent once at the end of a reindeer sacrifice, drew a circle on the drum with the animal's blood, and added dots inside the circle which represented two eyes and a mouth. When I asked him why he did that, he told me that the drum had been made recently, and it had not been given a sacrificial offering yet. He wanted to make up for this at the first opportunity. Hence, in the absence of initiation practices, it is likely that the spirit of the drum must also be presented with votive offerings for his services, like all other spirits. Before ceremonies, coins are placed on the handle of the drum, so that 'the spirit of the drum allows the shaman to beat on it' (I. I. Sopočin – Woki-rap-yagun, August 1991). At the end of the ceremony, Iosif walked around the tent three times, and after a short prayer he wrapped the drum in a piece of cloth, before finally placing it on the sacred sledge.

It is worth noting that among the Trom-yogan Khanty, as among other Eastern Khanty groups, the drum is not believed to be the shaman's riding horse or reindeer, on which he can travel to *tōrəm* or other deities. Nor was the drum an object protected by various prohibitions, unlike among other Siberian groups. What is more, not only the shaman but also others were allowed to own a drum, on which they could beat if this brought them relief (D. A. Kechimov – Woki-rap-yagun, June 1992). Drums were used mostly to facilitate shamanic trance or to attract the gods' attention. They believed that the gods were unable to hear sounds of human speech; only singing was audible to them. Hence, they had to evoke them by singing, which was accompanied by the sound of drumming.

When completing tasks of lesser significance, the *t̄art̄a qo* shamans were not obliged to use their drum. They could shamanise instead with an axe, a sacred chest, or even with a bucket of water, as was mentioned above. Only questions which were difficult to divine or the healing of serious illnesses required drumming because 'on such occasions the shaman must turn to the highest gods' (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993). Conducting shamanic practices with an axe or sacred chest involved laying a clean cloth on the floor, and placing the axe or chest on it. Then, the shaman started putting questions that concerned him to the spirits. Normally, the axe or the sacred chest is light enough to be lifted with one hand. The shaman lifted the objects after each question he asked. If he was able to lift it, the answer to his question was negative. If the axe or chest was stuck to the ground, and the shaman was unable to lift it no matter how hard he tried, the answer was positive. This is how the shaman found out if there was a person present at the shaman ritual who should not be there, or if the soul of a deceased person had reincarnated in another member of the family. He could also divine who the guiding spirit of a new-born child was.

The essence of shamanic practices is the belief that the shaman's soul can leave his body and travel long distances in space and time. Both of the shamans whom I knew well, Ivan and Leonid Sopochin, affirmed that every individual has only one soul, which reincarnates after their death and moves into another person's body. Shamans, however, have three souls, according to Leonid. The first of these is like the soul of other mortal human beings.

It is with the second soul that you are able to shamanise. If needed, you go up to the sky, or down, inside the Earth. Your soul flies like wind, it ascends to the sky. It passes by the clouds. From there, I can see everything. My eyes become so sharp that I notice everything, nothing escapes my attention, although my eyes are closed. I can see everything more clearly because I am looking down from the sky. I can send this second soul down to the Underworld as well, to see how people live there. [...] Your third soul is the one that can see everything. You just look at someone, and you know everything about them. You may close your eyes and you can see into the distance. It is your soul that travels such long distances. You can see how someone lives over there, in the distance, whether all is well with them or not. I see them as clearly as I see you right now in front of me. All I have to do is to withdraw into myself, and send my soul over there. (L. M. Sopochin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993)

A shaman's strength among the Surgut Khanty depends primarily on the god by whom the shaman was chosen. It was this god who set the shaman's

tasks and guided his actions. Alongside this main god, the protector spirits who were under the shaman's command also influenced the shaman's strength. These protector spirits could be embodied in lifeless objects, but also, and more typically, in animals such as wolves or foxes, or in birds such as crows or water fowl (Кулемзин 1976: 94). From this it follows that a shaman could appear in the shape of a fish, a bird or an animal such as a wolf, depending on which animal was most closely associated with the particular characteristics he needed in order to accomplish a certain task.

Leonid Sopochnin's spirit-helpers included the reindeer figure which he kept on his sacred sledge, as well as fighters who were tiny men with a sword in their hand (L. M. Sopochnin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993). Ivan Sopochnin, who was a more withdrawn person than Leonid, told me very little about his helpers but I did manage to find out that one of his spirit-helpers was *najimi*, the goddess of home fire whom he kept in his sacred chest. Another one of his helpers must have been wolf-shaped because he told me that he was on good terms with wolves: not a single one of his reindeer calves was ever harmed by a wolf, they never come close to his house, and he could even speak with them, if needed (Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

Shamans' strength is put to the test not only by the efficiency of their activities but also when they fight with each other. According to Leonid Sopochnin, the number of harmful shamans is particularly high among women.

Female shamans can inflict harm on other people. Many among them have souls that descend to the Underworld and they shamanise from there. Only benevolent and strong shamans are able to remove the harm, and only with great difficulty. In such situations the souls of the good and evil shamans must fight between themselves. Men can also become black shamans. Their soul also descends to the Underworld when they perform harmful practices. The gods do not intervene in the battle of shamans. The one who is weaker may even die in the combat. They shoot arrows at each other. For instance, the shaman goes hunting, and suddenly, he feels that his body is pierced. This is caused by the other shaman's arrow. For an outsider, this may come across as if the shaman had fallen ill unexpectedly during the hunt. No-one knows why. He was injured by another shaman. (L. M. Sopochnin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993)

In sharp contrast to benevolent shamans, malevolent shamans die of a long-lasting illness which causes them great suffering (L. M. Sopochnin – Yinku-yagun, June 1993).

Shamanic ceremonies are usually held in the evening because 'during the day the gods are asleep' (I. S. Sopochnin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991). The door

of the tent or house is closed and the person assisting the shaman starts warming the drum. The shaman puts on a white shirt and boots, while another one of his helpers cleanses the room of evil spirits by filling the space with the smoke of fumigatory dried roots or bark of the silver fir (*Abies pectinata*). With the help of his sacred chest, the shaman ascertains that there are no obstacles to holding the ceremony. If all is well, the shaman ritual begins. Next to the shaman sit the men, and further away, on the side, or opposite the men, sit the women.

The dried roots or bark of fir are placed on the stove, and when it starts burning and releasing smoke, they remove it. One of the shaman's helpers walks around the room fumigating everyone who is present. In this way, he cleanses the room and the participants of the ceremony from malignant powers. Then, the participants are asked to offer sacrificial gifts, usually coins, to the spirit of the drum. In this way, they beseech the drum to help the shaman during the ceremony. The coins that have been collected are carefully wrapped in a piece of cloth and fastened to the handle on the back of the drum.

Based on my analysis of a ritual conducted by Ivan Sopochnin, shaman songs usually have three sections. The first, introductory part includes an evocation of the deities and spirits and a description of the shaman's environment. In this section, the shaman also explains the way in which he reaches the spirits. The second section describes the reasons why the ceremony is held, and why the shaman asks for help from the supernatural powers. It is in this second section that the shaman encounters the invisible creatures and learns their wishes and answers. In the third section, the shaman returns from the world of spirits, again describing his journey. At the end of the song, the shaman informs the participants of the spirits' will. The three sections may be interrupted; for instance, the shaman may pass the drum around himself three times, and hand it over to his helper, who warms it up before the song continues.

First, the shaman beats slowly and quietly, then the drumming becomes louder and faster. At the culminating point of the ceremony, he springs to his feet, and begins dancing. At this point, the men who are in attendance call out for the spirits with loud screams of *hey-hey*. This continues until the shaman sits back in his place.

The shamans of the Trom-yogan Khanty had their own sacred language, as is also shown by data available from other shaman rituals. This language included sounds of whistling, as in Leonid Sopochnin's ceremonies, or words and expressions which were either archaic or deliberately obscure, so that they were unintelligible to the uninitiated participants, as in Ivan Sopochnin's case.

Shamanic ceremonies sometimes lasted several hours. The men who were present played a few beats on the drum at the end, signalling that they had accepted the shaman's recommendations.

Shamans were not remunerated for their services among the Trom-yogan Khanty, although they were usually given a gratuity such as money, furs or

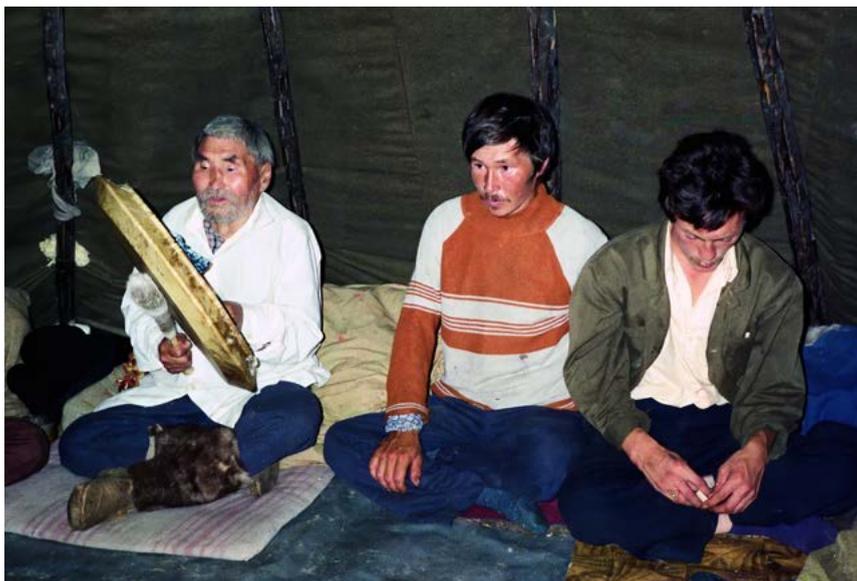


Fig. 3.35. Shamanic ceremony: Ivan Sopochnin with Dmitriï Kechimov and Gennadiï Russkin

reindeer. They were not, however, permitted to set a price on their activities because 'this would have provoked the anger of the gods, who would have stopped helping the shaman after that' (I. S. Sopochnin – Woki-rap-yagun, March 1991).

At ceremonies of great significance, such as bear festivals, Khanty shamans had no particular role to play, either along the Trom-yogan or along the Vakh. They were participants of the same rank and with the same rights as everyone else. Their only special contribution was to take part in the performance, given that they knew the ritual songs particularly well.²⁶

Shamans' everyday life is no different from that of other family members: they go fishing and hunting just like everyone else, although they are usually blessed with better luck than others. To be sure, good luck in fishing and hunting was one of the main signs of their calling.

When shamans die, they are buried in the same way as other people: both the burial ground and the funerary rituals are similar for all members of the community. In May 1993, Ivan Stepanovich Sopochnin was buried according to these customs as well.

²⁶ Conversely, it is interesting to note the opinion of Iosif Sopochnin, that anyone that knew the songs well was a shaman, since otherwise they would not know them (the songs are, in this understanding, the gift of the divine powers). This indicates that in the life of the Surgut Khanty, shamans did not have a special position; to be a shaman was not a profession.

AFTERWORD: THE FAMILY AFTER IVAN SOPOCHIN'S DEATH

In this essay I have summarised my most important findings regarding everyday life, society, economic activities, mythology and customs among the Surgut Khanty. My findings are based on data I collected during five research expeditions, which I undertook between 1991 and 1993, and on information provided by Olesya Sopochnina during her visit to Budapest. Because of limitations of time and space, only a small proportion of the material which I recorded, and which includes several hundred pages of field notes and several dozen hours of tape and video recordings, has been presented above.

Apart from time and space, however, another factor which limits my description of everyday life and customs by the Trom-yogan is life itself: the Sopochnin family's story has moved on since my fieldwork, bringing about important changes in their way of life. The settlement by the Woki-rap-yagun has become almost entirely deserted following the death of Ivan Stepanovich Sopochnin. From the former inhabitants of this area, only Iosif Sopochnin and his wife Rimma have remained in the settlement where the extended family lived in the 1990s. Their son and his wife and children also live there, following a traditional way of life (though he also works on an oil-extraction platform for half the time each month). Olesya Iosifovna Sopochnina is already married with children; the family lives in Kogal'ym.

Dmitriï Kechimov died in the late 1990s. His wife, Ivan Sopochnin's youngest child, Irina Ivanovna Kechimova (*née* Sopochnina) lives close to her sister, Fëkla, near the Kumali-yagun river. The oldest of Irina's three children, Stanislav, died in a hunting accident in January 2014, leaving three young children. The second of Irina's children, Dmitriï, is also married; his wife was born by the Agan river. The wife of Irina's third son, Mikhail, is from Var'ëgan. Irina's twins, born after the time dealt with in the present study, live mostly at the settlement but stay occasionally in town.

Kirill Pokachev, the husband of the oldest Sopochnin daughter, died around 2000. His wife, Fëkla Ivanovna Pokacheva, moved to the Kumali-yagun creek. This is the part of the clan's territory where all of Ivan Sopochnin's children were born and spent their childhood.

Eremeï Ivanovich Sopochnin lived and worked in Surgut in the 1990s. Since then, he has moved back to the forest with his family because he was unable to get used to life in the city. His main occupation is now reindeer-herding and breeding. He and his wife, Tamara, live by the Ort-yagun creek with their son's family. Their son works for two weeks in the oil-extraction industry and stays with his family in the forest for another two weeks.

In the 1990s, Feoktista Ivanovna Sopochnina worked as a teacher and lived in Kogal'ym. Meanwhile she and her (second) husband, Gennadiï Panshin, built

a house at the family's original settlement near the Kumali-yagun river. The couple have been spending an increasing amount of time in their house in the forest. Their son moved to Tver' with his own family in 2014. Their oldest daughter lives and works in Kogal'ym. Their youngest daughter, Elvira, lives a traditional way of life with her husband and their daughter at the settlement near the Kumali-yagun.

Ivan Sopočin's daughter Ol'ga lived at her husband's settlement, and died there in 2014, when she was sixty-three. Her husband, Boris Shcherbakov, now lives there alone. One of their two daughters and their son live in Surgut, and their youngest child lives in Khant'ı-Mansiisk.

Marina Maksimovna Sardakova (*née* Sopočina), the daughter of Ivan Sopočin's eldest son, Maksim, lives near Iosif Ivanovich Sopočin's dwelling place, at a distance of approximately 10–15 km. Her children live in the town of Kogal'ym.

Life has moved on since 1993 in the extended family's dwelling place near the Yinku-yagun as well. Gennadii Russkin and his family gave up their traditional way of life in the mid-1990s, and moved to the town of Noyabrsk. Leonid Sopočin died in 2014.

Those members of the Sopočin extended family who are still alive today are likely to have divided identities, which are relative, context-dependent and influenced, to some extent, by particular circumstances at a given moment in time. In the forest, a traditional worldview and patterns of life have primacy, but they give way to new forms of life in the city. In my view, the Sopočíns, like other indigenous people, have to learn two different patterns of life, and to reconcile the two cultures. Only this will enable them to incorporate in their traditional culture those practices of mainstream society which might be useful and advantageous for them. Thus, they have to forge a new, third, culture: a way of life which accommodates features of the old, traditional culture, on the one hand, and, on the other, of the new, post-industrial patterns of life.

I am of one mind with scholars who argue that 'it is not cultural change in itself that determines the chances for survival for ethnic minorities. Rather, it is the relative ability of specific minorities to master the changes and utilise new technologies and political possibilities for their own ends' (Eriksen 2008: 176). Looking back at the past few years I believe that the Sopočíns are real survivors. The extended family has fallen apart; its members no longer live together the way they used to under Ivan Sopočin's strict control. All family members, however, get by to varying degrees. An experiment in survival is taking place before our very eyes. It is possible that our wish to safeguard indigenous communities from social change and from the ills of modernity causes more harm than it solves.

INFORMANTS

- Aĭpina, Zoya Nikolaevna (*née* Sopochina) – Agan river, born in 1954.
 Aĭvaseda, Igor – Woki-rap-yagun, born in 1961.
 Aĭvaseda, Tat'yana – Woki-rap-yagun, born in 1954.
 Kechemov, Ivan Dmitrievich – Surgut, born in 1946.
 Kechimov, Dmitriĭ Antonovich – Woki-rap-yagun, born in 1960.
 Kechimova, Irina Ivanovna, *née* Sopochina – Woki-rap-yagun, born in 1961.
 Kurlomkin, Pëtr Vasilevich – Great Yugan, born in 1936.
 Lyantin, Vasilĭi N. – Great Yugan
 Moldanova, Tat'yana Aleksandrovna – Kazÿm river, born in 1951.
 Pokachev, Kirill Ignat'evich – Woki-rap-yagun, born in 1944.
 Pokacheva, Fëkla Ivanovna, *née* Sopochina – Woki-rap-yagun, born in 1945.
 Russkin, Gennadiĭ Sem'ënovich – Yinku-yagun, born in 1968.
 Russkina, Rimma Petrovna, *née* Tevlina – Trom-Agan, born in 1971.
 Sartakov, Ivan Mikhailovich – Nizhnevartovsk district, Yavoryakh river, born in 1966.
 Sardakova, Marina, *née* Sopochina – she lives in the Nizhnevartovsk district, along the Yavoryakh river; born in 1968.
 Smirnova, Feoktista Ivanovna, *née* Sopochina – Kogalÿm, born in 1949.
 Sopochnin, Iosif Ivanovich – Woki-rap-yagun, born in 1958.
 Sopochnin, Ivan Stepanovich – Woki-rap-yagun, born in the 1910s.
 Sopochnin, Eremeĭ Ivanovich – Woki-rap-yagun, born in 1952.
 Sopochnin, Leonid Mikhailovich – Yinku-yagun, born in 1954.
 Sopochina, Agrafena Andreevna, *née* Aĭpina – she came to the Woki-rap-yagun from a region by the Agan river to be married; born in 1922.
 Sopochina, Olesya Iosifovna – Woki-rap-yagun, born in 1988.
 Sopochina, Rimma Nikitichna, *née* Russkina – she came to the Woki-rap-yagun from the Trom-yogan to be married; born in 1964.
 Tevlina, Tamara Sidorovna – in the village of Russkinskaya.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Notes on the Folklore of the Surgut Khanty People

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This article was written on the basis of field materials collected from the Surgut Khanty people in the 1970s and 1980s. 'Surgut' here means the Khanty people who inhabit the river basins of the Yugan, Agan, Trom-yogan and Pim rivers. These materials were collected during ethnographic expeditions from Tomsk State University, led by the author of this article. In total, these groups went on eight expeditions: to the Yugan in 1973, 1974, 1980 and 1983; to the Agan in 1972; to the Trom-yogan in 1975 and 1978; and to the Pim in 1973. The field materials from these expeditions make up three volumes in the series of N. V. Lukina's *Khanty People from Vasyugan'ya to the Polar Regions. Sources of Ethnography*, in six volumes.

The main aim of these expeditions was the study of the cultures of these people with the following planned topics: activities (herding, fishing and hunting), means of travel and moving around, housing, clothing, food and utensils, social organisation, beliefs and practices, traditional knowledge, ethnic history, and other topics. The study of folklore was not included in the list of planned topics, but this was also carried out, in addition to the main expedition aim.

Field ethnographers know well that upon meeting the residents of a settlement for the first time, it is sometimes not that simple to explain why you have come, and why you are interested in their life. In order to establish contacts and overcome initial suspicions on our expeditions, tales and legends in particular were recorded. There was also a different kind of situation, where there was time free from having to perform the main tasks, and in order not to waste this time, works of oral folklore were recorded. However, there were also frequent cases of direct links between the ethnographic information and folklore texts. For example, during a conversation on a specific topic (such as some kind of ceremony or something prohibited) the speaker some-



Fig. 4.1. Reindeer in pen. The Pim river. *Photo taken by the author, 1973*



Fig. 4.2. The author with reindeer

times added a story to what he was saying, explaining the occurrence of this phenomenon.

The Khanty people usually told the stories and tales at night, and this often went on until morning. Customs forbade the telling of tales during the day, since this could cause your hair to fall out, or you to lose your memory, and so on. Amongst the people were well-known storytellers (*máńńtá qu*), yet many others knew tales and were able to tell them too.

Amongst the texts that we recorded are myths, legends, tales, memorates, omens and forbidden things. Almost all the texts are published in the publication *Materials on the Folklore of the Khanty People*. Seventy-seven texts relate to the Surgut group.

Our storytellers and speakers were people who were capable of speaking Russian, and the recordings were carried out in Russian. In separate cases, elderly Khanty people who were incapable of speaking good enough Russian spoke in Khanty, and then this was translated by someone else. Only magical tales were told in relative completeness, and myths and legends were usually set out in short versions, containing the main essence of the plot.

This, of course, lowers the value of the texts from the point of view of folklorists, but they are still of great value as ethnographic and historical sources, as they reflect real events and different aspects of the traditional culture of the people.

It is apparent from the content of the tales and legends that the Surgut Khanty people were fishermen, hunters and herders. Hunting weapons are mentioned – bows and arrows, snares and traps, guns and fishing traps of different sorts – fyke nets, fishing weirs and others. The activities of the people, as well as elements of traditional ethics, are reflected in the text below, recorded in 1974 in the Yugan, in the settlement of Kayukovo, from the words of Pavel Tikhonovich Kayukov (born 1906), translated into Russian by Aleksandr Multanov (born 1946):

In the old time there lived a husband and wife. They went to Urman to hunt. They were getting ready to go home, and the wife said: 'If only [I could] live here all summer!'

The husband said: 'Go on, live [here], you won't survive – I will kill you.'

They aren't afraid of killing, they won't be judged [a remark from the storyteller]. She stayed. If she were to leave, it would be bad. There is nothing, nothing to eat. She collected cranberries, berries. One time she set a snare, she started to kill grouse, to catch fish in the river, to set fish weirs. She lived, she lived, and in this way the whole summer went by. The husband came, and she was still alive. She had said it jokingly, but the husband had taken it seriously. At that time they didn't say unnecessary things. If you say something, do as you say. (Кулемзин – Лукина 1978: 172)



Fig. 4.3. A covered house-boat and dugout canoe.
The Yugan river. *Photo taken by the author, 1974*



Fig. 4.4. Snare-trap. The Agan river. *Photo taken by the author, 1972*

While collecting the ethnographic material, the author was particularly interested in the origins of reindeer-herding. During discussions on this subject, the speakers added to their answers with references to legends. In one of the legends, the emergence of reindeer among the Khanty people was mentioned. The legend also contained information about many details of their way of life and beliefs: about the use of lassoes and two-way sledges (domestic sledges are one way), about the use of dogs in reindeer-herding, about the spirit *kazym imi* and about sacrifices. This text was recorded in 1973 in the Trom-yogan area in the settlement of Kochev'ye, in the words of Ivan Konstantinovich Sopochin (born 1915):

Once *kazym jaχ* (Kaz'ym Khanty people) and *awəs jaχ* (Tazov Nenets people) were arguing about who would get the most reindeer. The owner of all the reindeer was *kazym imi*. There were two big reindeer, a female and a male. They were two times bigger than the other reindeer at that time, and all the reindeer came from them. Their owner was *kazym imi*. These reindeer were harnessed to a two-way sledge, [it was possible] either from this side to harness them, or from that [i.e. they could be harnessed from either side]. The Tazov and Kaz'ym people came together, and wanted to have a celebration, with a sacrifice. Not the sacrifice of a human, but of a reindeer. They were arguing about which of these big reindeer to hand over. The Tazov people said that it should be given to them, and the Kaz'ym people demanded the same. They had a goddess for these two reindeer – *kazym imi*.

The Kaz'ym people said: 'To whom this woman (*kazym imi*) belongs, to them these reindeer must also be given.'

They argued like this. They tied up these big reindeer with a four-fold lasso, and the reindeer started to jump. The reindeer tugged at the lasso, snapped it, and instantly ran away towards Tarko-Sale.¹ All of the small reindeer ran after them. The Kaz'ym people harnessed their sledges and went off in pursuit of them. During the night, they brought back half of the herd; from this herd, reindeer emerged amongst the Khanty people – some people got one, and some people got ten. They took the big reindeer from the *awəs jaχ*, and then *kazym imi* became their owner. The Kaz'ym people didn't go in pursuit of the big reindeer. There they divided them into two with dogs, and stole them. The two-way sledge was called *tuŋq awət*; it had to be looked for among the *awəs jaχ* people; it was left with them. (Кулемзин – Лукина 1978: 146)

¹ Tarko-Sale, founded in 1932, and since 2004 a city in the Yamalo-Nents *okrug*.



Fig. 4.5. Inside a Khanty cabin. The Agan river. *Photo taken by the author, 1972*



Fig. 4.6. The Kazym goddess, *kazym imi*. A drawing by a Khanty girl.
The Kazym river. *Photo taken by the author, 1990*

Myths, of course, answer to casual human needs. In the myths of the Surgut Khanty people, many notions are represented, including stories of a global flood, of the origins of celestial bodies, of people, animals, holy places and so on. It is also possible to detect attempts to link a person's present life with his past, and to predict the future. This, for example, is shown in the text about the flood, recorded in 1974 in the Yugan area in the settlement of Kayukovo, in the words of Alexandr Multanov (born 1946):

A long time ago there was *čək naj* ('flood'); everything flooded. *čək naj* is a time when fire goes around the Earth at a height of one metre, on the Earth and in the air at a height of 20 centimetres. It will burn everything, and then water will come and wash everything away, and then all life will start again. Only *tuyqət* 'spirits' will turn into young ones. One *čək naj* has already been. An old man remained and showed two fingers. They waited for it for two days – nothing; two years – nothing, 200 years – nothing. Then they guessed that in 2000 years' time there would be another *čək naj*. (Кулемзин – Лукина 1978: 17)

Some cosmogonic myths look naïvely materialistic, while others talk of the intervention of supernatural powers such as spirits or gods. Both points of view are represented in the myth about the origins of bears, which was recorded in 1973 in the Pim river area, in the settlement of Pim, in the words of Mikhail Lempin (born 1943):

I don't know if it's true or false that the bear used to be a god, and that he had children. And so (there are both obedient and disobedient children), the god [the bear] kicked out one disobedient bear cub and said: 'Go wherever you want.'

The little bear fell to the ground, but didn't reach the ground, and got stuck in the fork of a tree. He thought: 'I'll disappear [i.e. die] now, I can neither go up, nor drop down to the ground. Maggots will probably eat me.'

The bear really did die, and maggots started to drop out of him to the ground. From the big maggots, bears with long tails grew, big Taiga bears, and from the little maggots came little northern bears without tails. (Кулемзин – Лукина 1978: 20)

Ideas about the origins of people are most often associated with the supreme god Torum. He is considered to be the creator of the whole world, and all of the forests, animals and people; however, spirits who appeared on the Earth by themselves are not included in this list. According to one of the myths, Torum's mother (*törəm aŋki*), took part in the creation of people. In current beliefs, she,



Fig. 4.7. One of the storytellers – Efim Mikhailovich Ryskin with his family.
The Yugan river. Photo taken by E. Titarenko, 1973

as opposed to Torum, is not worshipped. They do not pray to her, and do not make sacrifices for her (one of the speakers compared an image of *tōram anki* holding Torum in her hands to an icon of the Christian Virgin Mary). Here is a myth recorded in 1975 in the Trom-yogan area in the settlement of Kochevye in the words of Galina Kechimova (born 1950):

Torum and his mother decided that someone on Earth had to gather berries. They thought [about it] and decided to make a person. They only thought about it in the evening, but by the morning a boy and girl had already been prepared. They lowered them down to the ground, as if they were on a wire. Torum and his mother watched how the people lived; they enjoyed it – after all they had [just] lowered people down to the ground, had given them intellect. (Кулемзин – Лукина 1978: 18)

In the folklore of the Surgut Khanty people, much attention is paid to various different supernatural beings – gods and spirits – and their mutual relationships. As an example, we can look at a mythological tale in which three

significant spirits feature. One of them is *qân iki*, ‘the prince lord’ (that is also what the Khanty people called their leaders). In current beliefs, he is a kind god that lives in the sky and he obeys Torum. In turn, *jəŋk tɯŋq*, ‘water spirit’, and *wōnt tɯŋq*, ‘forest spirit’ obey him, and he watches over them, to make sure they correctly give their prey to the people. They asked him for health and luck, and brought him sacrifices. When they saw fire flying through the sky, they believed that it was *qân iki* walking across the sky. The second character in the mythological tale is *jāwən iki*, ‘the river lord’ (the master of the river and the main spirit of the Yugan Khanty people). All of the other spirits who live in the Yugan area obey him. His image is stored in a hut in the yurts of the Kayukovs, those with the surname Kayukov being the protectors of his spirit image. The third character is *as iki*, ‘the lord of the Ob’, who is the son of Torum, and the main water spirit, who lives at the mouth of the Ob’. All water spirits obey him. He makes fish and scatters them throughout all of the rivers. In contrast to current beliefs, in the folklore text, these three characters are called brothers.

A text recorded in 1974 in the Yugan in the settlement of Kayukovo in the words of Pavel Tikhonovich (born 1906), translated into Russian by Aleksandr Multanov (born 1946) relates:

There were three brothers: *qân iki*, *jāwən iki* and *as iki*. They [decided] to go to sleep. Before morning, they wanted to cook breakfast. It was autumn; everything was frozen, the land and water had frozen up to a metre. They were all on horses. In the morning they made a fire:

‘What are we going to cook?’

They poked the trivet. The earth had become cold. *jāwən iki* said:

‘What, you don’t know how? Now I’ll stick it in.’

The others noticed that he had all kinds of beasts. He stuck [the trivet] into a snake’s mouth, and the others didn’t see. He hung up the cauldron, but there was nothing to boil – just water. *as iki* said:

‘Let’s mix snow in, I’ll stir it and it will become porridge.’

They looked and it turned into porridge. They said:

‘What if we end up in some place where we will need to save ourselves [i.e. escape]; let’s test our strength.’

as iki said:

‘I’ll look through all seven lands, and I’ll see through everything at father’s home.’

jāwən iki also stood up on a knife edge and said:

‘I’ll look through seven skies, and I’ll see through everything at father’s home.’

qān iki remained. *qān iki* said:

'I don't know anything, in your opinion. This is all that is left to me: now I will go around the whole country as quickly as a piece of birch bark burns.'

The brothers didn't believe him.

'How can I prove it to you? Let me prove it.'

He addressed *as iki*:

'Let me tie you to a horse, and *jāwən iki* will put a piece [of birch bark] into the fire. As soon as I touch the reins, you throw the piece into the fire.'

qān iki flew like a bullet. *jāwən iki* threw the birch bark into the fire and he was already gone. *as iki*, barely alive, got off the horse. They addressed him; he didn't breathe. *as iki* said:

'I would never be able to endure that.'

And on that [note], they finished. In that way they became sure that the strongest was *qān iki*. Then they all got married. *qān iki* left the first wives to his brothers, and he himself left, and said that he would return in twelve hundred years. Twelve hundred years passed by, but he still wasn't there. His brothers went to get him, found him and revived him.

This is a long tale, it needs a whole night to be told. (Кулемзин – Лукина 1978: 172)

The spirits are invisible and immortal; however, upon taking the form of some sort of being or object, they become visible. Therefore, in the tales we meet supernatural beings, such as cannibals in the form of people, mammoths in the form of pikes, and so on. One of these tales was recorded in 1972 near the Yugan river, in the *siṅkuri puṅət* yurts, in the words of Nikolai Aïpin (born 1913):

māṅk iki lived in the forest. He was big, sometimes with two heads. He ate people, and tore children apart. Two women lived in the forest. One of them had two or three children, and the other had one child, who had recently been born. The children were being noisy one evening, when the old man *māṅk iki* came in. He sat down on the doorstep, so that they could not leave. The younger woman placed her child to her breast inside her coat. She said to the old man:

'Let me remove this fungus from the cradle.'

He let her go. She ran into another yurt. He ate this woman and her children; only their bones remained. There used to be many *māṅkiki*, they lived everywhere. Now you can't hear them. In the evening after the sun goes down, the Khanty people don't make noise, they don't talk loudly. (Кулемзин – Лукина 1978: 92)

One of the topics in which the ethnographic data and folklore texts overlap is ethnic history. Here there are three main motifs. Two of them represent the relationships between the Khanty people (*qāntəγ jāγ*) and the *āwəs jāγ* (their ethnic background is uncertain; the literal translation of their name is 'downstream people'), and with the Nenets (*jāryan jāγ*). The third is dedicated to the *bogatyr toña*.

The first motive was mentioned during the conversations with all the Surgut groups. The biggest folklore text or legend about this group of people was recorded in the Agan area in the settlement of Var'ëgan in the words of Nikolai Kazÿmkin (born 1956).² It is presented in full:

In the past, the people of the Agan fought with the *āwəs jāγ*, but lived peacefully with the *jāryan jāγ*. The *āwəs jāγ* always tried to capture the Agan people's wealth – their herds of reindeer. The *āwəs jāγ* had two scouts, who came to the Agan to find out if strong people lived there, or not. In the Agan lived two brothers. They were very strong. The older brother was called *rāp iki*. He could squeeze juice from the trunk of thick trees. The younger brother was called *rāp iki mōñi*. The *āwəs jāγ* scouts saw that *rāp iki* had a bow. They tried to draw it, but they couldn't. The *āwəs jāγ* decided that *qāntəγ jāγ* simply wanted to scare them with this bow. *rāp iki* heard this. He took the bow and with one little finger he stretched the bow string so much that the ends of the bow came together. Then they argued about who shot better. They took the horns of a stag. *rāp iki*'s brother shot and broke through the bone a little bit. *rāp iki* shot. His arrow broke through the bone and flew further at the same speed. The *āwəs* shot, but didn't break through the bone, and only left a small dent. The scouts went back to their land and told everything as it was. Then the *āwəs jāγ* became scared of going to the Agan in war. When the scouts had left, *rāp iki* caught their canoe with his little finger and dragged them through the water for a long time. (Кулемзин – Лукина 1978: 32–3)

Short accounts about how the *āwəs jāγ* took women, especially attractive ones, from the local Khanty men, were recorded in the Yugan and Pim areas. In the Trom-yogan area only folklore texts were recorded where the *āwəs jāγ* people are mentioned, and simple accounts were not taken down. In other folklore texts, some more information about the *āwəs jāγ* people can be found. From these we discover that the *āwəs jāγ* came from the north, and lived even further

² The Kazÿmkins live in a camp on the Khalyasaveïskaya tundra; they are professional fishermen and reindeer-herders.

north than the Nenets people (*jǎryan jǎy*). In a tale recorded in the Trom-yogan area from the words of Ivan Konstantinovich Sopochin (born 1915), the main character finds out that his father was killed by the Komi people (*āwəs jǎy*) and sets out to avenge his father's death.

The second motive is about relationships with the Nenets people (*jǎryan jǎy*), and is only present in folklore texts, and only those of the Agan Khanty people. Conversational accounts on this topic were not registered in the field recordings. From the above text, we can see that the Agan Khanty people lived peacefully with the *jǎryan jǎy* people. In a different legend, however, we see the opposite. A battle with the Nenets people is mentioned, but only in the past. At the end of the recording, the speaker links back to the present, ending the account with a comment, saying: 'Now the Nenets people, and Khanty people, all live together'.

This text was recorded in 1972 in the Agan region, in the *siyk uri puḡəl* yurts from the words of Nikolai Āipin (born 1913):

I once heard this story. An old Nenets woman wanted to go to the toilet, and went outside. She began to tear up some grass to wipe herself, but the grass didn't tear. She guessed that it was hair on someone's head. She went into the house and told the people; they gathered their cups and spoons into the cauldron, and went and threw it down into the ravine. Everything rattled. The Khanty ran there; they thought that there were people there [i.e. Nenets], and threw themselves down into the ravine and drowned. If it hadn't been for the old woman, they would have killed the Nenets. Since evening they had been hiding around the huts. Now the Nenets people and Khanty people all live together. (Кулемзин – Лукина 1978: 31–2)

The third folklore motive from the ethnic history of the Khanty people is about the Yugan *bogatyr* by the name of *tońa*. Here we present one of the legends, recorded in 1974 in the Yugan area in the settlement of Kayukovo in the words of Efim Mikhailovich Rýskin (born 1939):

Above the village of Ugut lived the Khanty tsar *tońa*. He fought against the Cossacks. The Pim people sold him. From the Nyogus-yagh river he took two women. The Cossacks sent three armies against him. The weapons then were such that one aimed, another poured the powder and the third fired. Meanwhile, the Khanty people were able to kill all three with bows. The Khanty arrows were fletched with capercaillie feathers, and flew straight, but the Little Yugan people, who came to their aid, had arrows with squirrel tails, which flew halfway across

the Ur'ya river and then fell. This was where the head of *māyk iki* had grown over with moss. *tońa* had braids, and he attached a deer pole (*khoreĩ*) and ran so quickly that the pole stuck out in the air, just like an aeroplane. He didn't have calves on his legs, so he ran so quickly: calves interfere with running. (Кулемзин – Лукина 1978: 41)

In this text there are links to specific locations and a number of historical and ethnographic actualities are mentioned: the war with the Cossacks, very old Russian hand-cannons, Khanty bows with arrows, deer poles (*khoreĩ*), the male haircut with braids (the last piece of information is interesting, in the sense that in actual fact, the Yugan Khanty men did not have braids).

In conclusion, we note that in the modern oral folklore works of the Khanty people, there are many new aspects clearly visible alongside the traditional ones. This is not only visible in the emergence of new representations, concepts and comparisons such as '*ył tuŋq* flies like a satellite', '*tońa* ran like an aeroplane', but also due to changes in home life, school education and atheist propaganda: a new attitude has formed towards the traditional cosmogonic and religious beliefs firmly established in their folklore. The speakers often start their narratives with the words 'Old people said that, I don't know if it's true or false'. The decrease in the number of older ideas and the adoption of new ones sometimes results in a temporary compromise. The story about the mythological mammoth, *wəs*, serves as an illustration of these new phenomena. It was recorded in 1973 on the Pim river from Mikhail Lempin (born 1943):

I used to live in a different place, where there was a little lake nearby, and a short distance from that was a big lake. *wəs* crawled out from the little lake and into the big lake and made a ditch as wide as a room. He pushed all of the land into that lake and an island formed there. The pine trees now grow just as they used to, in the lake, on the island. Then I left to go to a different place. *wəs* could swallow an entire ferry, so say the Khanty people, the older ones. They are illiterate, and I don't believe that. But *wəs* could turn a boat over. (Кулемзин – Лукина 1978: 172)

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CHAPTER FIVE

A Shaman Ritual by the Woki-rap-yagun,

3 August 1991

MÁRTA CSEPREGI & ÁGNES KEREZSI

In July 1991, the members of a Hungarian research team, which included the ethnographer Ágnes Kerezsi and the photographer Erzsébet Winter, were welcomed back as old acquaintances by the Sepochin family because Kerezsi and Winter had already spent ten days with the Sepochins in March of the same year.¹ A new member of the expedition was the cameraman Zsigmond Németh.² Accordingly, in July, by which time summer had ended in this region, the family were staying at the Sepochins' early-autumn dwelling place of their five seasonal quarters, a dwelling place which was located near the *sāṅqi lār*, 'sandy lake'. Here, the men's main duty was the hunting of waterbirds, while the women were busy gathering berries.

¹ The authors of this study have divided up the work as follows: Ágnes Kerezsi, who was an eye-witness at the ceremony, describes the circumstances and process of the shamanic ceremony, whereas Márta Csepregi analyses the shamanic song text. They both rely on the transcription and rough translation by Feoktista Ivanovna Smirnova (*née* Sepochina), made in 1999 in Oslo.

² The Sepochins had been expecting the Hungarians at the beginning of June because Ágnes Kerezsi had promised they would return during the summer. The misunderstanding was caused by a mismatch in the meaning of the word *summer* in Hungarian and Khanty: in the Hungarian climate, the summer lasts until the end of August, whereas in the area where the Sepochins lived in 1991 the second half of July was already the beginning of the autumn.

PREPARATIONS

The head of the Sopochin extended family, Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin, by his Khanty name *quj iki*, had spent days preparing for an important ceremony, whose aim was to divine the causes of his youngest son's illness.³ Iosif Ivanovich Sopochin, by his Khanty name *osip*, had been taken to hospital because of recurrent episodes of tachycardia. He was taken home by helicopter a few days before our arrival. The ceremony was to take place in the evening on 3 August 1991, in the presence of all the family members and the Hungarian guests. First and foremost, the shaman had to find out if the outsiders, that is, the members of the Hungarian expedition, were allowed to participate in the ceremony. Ivan Sopochin divined the answer by repeatedly lifting and lowering his sacred chest, in which, among other things, one of his helpers, the local spirit of the fire, lived. This spirit protected the family from dangerous outbreaks of fire. The spirit of fire agreed to our participation in the ceremony. This was signalled to Ivan Sopochin by his sacred chest becoming so heavy that it became impossible to lift.

The proceedings involving the sacred chest were followed by the preparation of the shaman's drum for the ceremony. On this occasion Ivan Sopochin used a new drum, inaugurated only a few weeks before the ceremony and dedicated to the local protector spirit, *wōqi rāp imi*. Before being used for the first time, the drum received coins as a form of sacrificial offering. The votive offering presented to the drum was similar before each and every shamanic ceremony: the piece of cloth attached to the drum's handle was untied, the correct number of coins was placed in it, and finally the knot was tied again, and the cloth bag was fastened to the handle of the drum. The number of the coins had to be three each time. A new piece of cloth was used to fasten the coins to the drum only after the previous container had been filled up. Then, the piece of cloth that became full was stored in the sacred chest, and a new strip of fabric was taken out of the same chest. The Sopochins explained that the coins were fastened to the shaman's drum so that the spirit of the drum might allow them to play on the instrument. Only after all the permissions were granted could the ceremony begin.

For the ceremony Ivan Sopochin wore a white shirt and a pair of boots. White is the colour of the sky, and the shaman's clothes are a symbolic representation of the shaman's endeavour to establish a connection with the gods inhabiting the sky. Shamans were not allowed to appear before the gods barefoot, hence they had to wear boots.

³ Among the Surgut Khanty, the youngest son cared for his parents until their deaths, and he then became head of the family; this ensured that the family remained for as long as possible in the hands of one man.

While the shaman was dressing up for the ceremony, another family member, Dmitrii Antonovich Kechimov, started heating the shaman's drum on the iron stove in the middle of the tent. He first warmed the drum around its frame and then in the middle. Meanwhile, he tried to play on it a little to check if the drum's sound had become powerful enough. After the tuning of the drum, the roots of a Siberian fir were placed on top of the stove, so that its smoke should cleanse the people present at the ceremony. Only then did the shaman pick up his drum. He held it in his left hand, according to custom, with the drumskin facing downwards, while in his right hand he held the drumstick. The pan-shaped part of the drumstick was covered with reindeer fur taken from the forehead of the animal.

At the beginning of the ceremony, the shaman's son, Iosif, explained that his father would sing a sacred song to *törəm*, in order to ask for Iosif's recovery, so that he might no longer be ill. The drum that was used for this ceremony belonged to Iosif, not to Ivan Sopočin; thus Iosif had to play on it a little first, before passing the drum around himself three times and handing it over to his father. In this way, he gave his consent for someone else to play on his drum. In 1991 Ivan Sopočin no longer owned a drum of his own because the gods allow each shaman to have a specific number of drums in the course of his life, and the limit is set at the moment the shaman is called to his vocation. Thus, after Ivan Sopočin's last drum was broken, he was not allowed to have a new instrument made. At the same time, according to Surgut Khanty tradition, anyone who is able to shamanise is permitted to use someone else's drum. Hence, the elderly Ivan Sopočin could avail himself of his son's drum to conduct the ceremony.

THE CONDUCT OF THE CEREMONY

Shamanic ceremonies lasted at least two hours and consisted of several parts and several songs. Each shaman has his own songs, with a melody and text which is unique to him. Some of the texts are prayers to the gods, others vary depending on the purpose of the particular ceremony and the task to be accomplished.

In terms of its structure, the ceremony conducted on 3 August 1991 consisted of ten parts, which were preceded by an introduction. First the shaman asked *törəm* that his family might have a good and successful life. Second, he asked for success in life for the three outsiders, the three Hungarians, who were present. In this introductory part, he turned for help to two deities: to the youngest son of *numi törəm*, *sárni qan iki*, on the one hand, and, on the other, to *wöqi räp imi*, the female protector spirit of the Sopočin extended family, and of the nuclear families living along the Woki-rap-yagun and the Yinku-yagun rivers. One of the shaman's requests was that his prayers might be heard in the same

way as if ‘on the drum, shiny little bells of old were ringing’. In the introductory section, despite the continuous drumming, the shaman spoke in prose. At the end of the introduction, he passed the drum around himself three times, and handed it over to his helper, Dmitriï Kechimov, who heated up the drum over the fire. These steps were repeated at the end of each and every section.

The next section was performed as a song. The shaman asked the gods not to raise obstacles in the way of the ceremony, given that, as a shaman, he was merely performing duties bestowed on him by the gods. The shaman is a ‘man lowered [to Earth] by *tōram*’, who, with his ‘tree’ (that is, his drum) is ‘able to reach a hundred spirits’. In this section, the shaman also describes his journey on Earth, the way he walks ‘on fresh snow’, across rocks and lakes, and finally passes by a dense forest. Here, there was another pause in the ceremony: the shaman passed the drum around himself from left to right, and had it warmed up by his helper.

The second section continued after a short break. This part, like every other section, started with a vibrant singing of the syllables *cho-cho-cho*, and every sentence ended with the sounds *o-o-o*, *e-e-e*. This section, which describes the shaman’s journey, is divided into three further sub-sections by the singing of *cho-cho-cho*, with a slightly longer break on one occasion. In this section the shaman explains how he reaches the sacred place, and the dynamic of the ceremony, as well as the rhythm and volume of the singing and drumming become more and more intense. Here the shaman talks about himself in the third-person singular, calling himself a ‘greasy-tongued’ and a ‘false-tongued’ man (i.e. ‘a man with a false, greasy tongue’), who arrives at ‘the hundred-tethered-bulls place of God’ (i.e. at ‘the place of god with a hundred tethered bulls’). This place is right next to the house of God, and the ‘man with a false, greasy tongue’ is forced to wait here a little while.⁴ The shaman next describes the way he reaches the place which ‘hides the hundred likenesses of God’s spirits’. First, he treads on powdery snow along the Ob’, then arrives at the Agan river, a region rich in lichen, finally reaching ‘the sacred brook that bears the name of God’.⁵ At the end of this journey, the shaman reaches the sacred place of *ewät*, the place of the ‘hundred divine bulls’. Men and women arrive here from various locations, and a hundred arrows are to be found here in honour of the hundred bulls. This part is followed by a description of the

⁴ Ivan Sopochin told me once, when I asked him about the strength of his shamanic power, that he was the kind of shaman who was able to reach God’s house but could not enter.

⁵ This is the Trom-yogan river, which the Khanty hold in high esteem, and there are many sacred places in its proximity. In Khanty mythology, the Trom-yogan was created by the eldest son of the chief god, *tōram*, and he is still the most powerful protector of the river (for more detail, see Balalaeva 1999).

sacred place, which stands on a rocky elevation that can be reached only by a hand-drawn sledge, where 'the area between two rivers is covered with forests' in which 'many trees have come to the end of their life and have fallen down', trees which may not be disturbed or harmed. Following this description, the second section closes with a few forceful drum beats.

The third section of the ceremony is also divided into three sub-sections. In this section the shaman starts communicating with the world of the spirits. Ivan Sopochin turns to the eldest daughter of the god, then to the 'stone spirit of the frog',⁶ and to the 'talking fire', so that they may tell him how people should live. In exchange for their reply, he promises to sacrifice a reindeer buck tethered to a white tree (that is, a white birch) 'out in the open, at a fire which burns under the sky'. The shaman's voice and the rhythm of the drumming further intensify compared to the previous section, before this part also comes to a close with the passing around of the drum.

The fourth part is shorter than the other sections, and is full of unusual words whose meaning is obscure to the uninitiated. This section is likely to be a variant of the first part, in which the figure of the man who was chosen by the gods, and who is able to overcome all obstacles, recurs. This section closes with three forceful drum beats.

During the break that followed, while Dmitriï Kechimov was heating the drum, the shaman told us of an occasion when he was ill, and another shaman advised him to sacrifice seven animals. However, he failed to follow the other shaman's advice, a mistake which explained, for him, why misfortune had repeatedly befallen his family in recent years. He told his children to carry out a blood sacrifice before the first snowfall.

The fifth section is even shorter than the fourth. It is about the creation of the world, during which God specified where the Russians and where the Khanty should live.

The sixth section is an invocation of the gods. In this section, alongside the singing of the *cho-cho-cho* and *e-e-e* syllables, the exclamation 'thus, over here' is uttered. Thereafter only the sounds of drumming are heard, without text or singing.

In the seventh section, the dialogue between the shaman and the spirits continues. This is when the shaman's questions are answered. In this part, as in the other parts, there were expressions which were unintelligible to outsiders; not even the shaman's daughter, Feoktista Ivanovna Smirnova, who produced a first, rough translation, understood these parts. According to the gods, the source of problems is the way people live these days. They advise people to remember their religion, and be mindful of the living *tõrəm* and *sårúi qån iki*, lord of the seven fiery sledges and the hundred reindeer bucks.

⁶ The Sopochin clan was under the protection of a frog-shaped spirit helper.

Following the next break, in the eighth section, the quality of the recording becomes increasingly poor, with extended gaps in the recorded material. It is likely that in this part the shaman told people of the gods' answer because, before the sound completely fades, we can hear the following: 'This is what I tell you now. If they fooled me, then I have been fooled. The Russians live the Russian way ...'. The shaman then turns to the goddesses of fire, *naj imi*, and to *kāltas imi*.

In the ninth section the elderly shaman repeats the following several times: 'Oh, I am tired. My legs and hands are ill. My hands have become very tired.' After that, he tells a story of a female shaman, *t'arttā imi* from Kazým, who, despite being ill, shamanised at Ivan Sopochin's behest, and was completely cured during the ceremony.

In the tenth and last part of the ceremony, the shaman sings of his return journey. He again passes by the Agan river, rich in lichen, and he enumerates the locations which he travels through, including a forest that has burnt down, which the shaman can see from above. The ceremony comes to a close with the following words: *ja, sar os nəŋ t'artitəŋ*, 'and now it is your turn to shamanise'. Indeed, once the shamanic ceremony ended, every man and young boy who had been in attendance played a little on the drum, thus signalling that they assented to the ceremony.

GENERAL FEATURES OF THE CEREMONY

As is perhaps obvious from the English version of the shaman's speech and song, the text of the ceremony is rich in special terms, characteristic of 'the speech of spirits' (Молданов 1999: 21), which are not used in everyday life. It is also obvious that certain notions, such as time, are represented in a peculiar way in the text. Time is transformed in shamanic texts, so that it no longer represents the order of events in a linear and objective manner; units of time such as year, month, day are unknown. For instance, in the introduction, the shaman says that 'I wandered with my daughters for a month, a bright day we wandered', which does not represent the time that had realistically passed but the sequence of events. Numbers are treated similarly to time. The numeral *hundred* occurs frequently in the text presented below, and in Khanty folklore in general. *Hundred* is used, in fact, as a synonym of *many*, to represent 'a high number'.

The ceremony conducted by Ivan Sopochin sheds light on features of shamanic ceremonies shared by Ob-Ugric cultures. In shamanic ceremonies in general, and in the particular ceremony we witnessed, shamans often refer to themselves as *persons predestined by the gods to perform magic*. According to Bernát Munkácsi, they emphasise this in order to encourage the spirits who

have been summoned to be earnest, to speak the truth, and to avoid making mistakes (Munkácsi 1910–21: 387).

In shaman songs, spirits often introduce themselves in detail to the audience, explaining where they live, and whether or not they have a constant epithet. There are examples of this in Ivan Sopochin's shaman song as well. For instance, some spirits have epithets such as *the higher bright one* or *the living gold*, modifiers which occur several times in the text.

Another shared feature of Ob-Ugric shaman songs is that spirits usually want to know why they were evoked, and the shaman explains the reasons. This component is clearly identifiable in the ceremony presented below. In the third section, Ivan Sopochin addresses the spirit with the words: 'you have been evoked by the people who want to know how Nenets children should live, how all those who are mine [i.e. 'my people' or 'my family'] should live on Earth'.

In the shaman song, the spirit who has been evoked advises the shaman and also specifies what he or she would like to receive in exchange for the advice. In the first part of the seventh section, the spirit suggests that people's current problems are caused by 'your [i.e. the people's] way of life, the way you live nowadays'. The spirit then lists the tasks that people should complete: they should always remember the living *tōram*, and *sārūi qān iki*, lord of the seven fiery sledges and the hundred reindeer bucks.

Today, although shamanic practice is no longer frequent, it still features in Trom-yogan Khanty culture. The transformation of the Khanty way of life is coupled with changes in the pattern of their religious practice. Shamans include innovative elements in their ceremonies, while new characters also appear in their worldview. Among a shaman's spirit helpers today one encounters doctors with stethoscopes, surgeons and other persons characteristic of the modern, post-industrial world. Even though in the current economic and social environment families living a traditional way of life, along with their shamans, are increasingly marginalised, shamanism still exists today. Shamanic practice will not lose its significance as long as there are people who respect this religious tradition, and who seek the shaman's help when they face difficulties in their day-to-day life.

Iosif Sopochin, for whom the ceremony was held, still suffers from ill-health today. The ceremony ascertained that the main reason for his illness was that he refused to accept the gods' calling to shamanhood, and was unwilling to shamanise. His illness will last as long as he refuses to accept his fate and perform his duties as a shaman.

ANALYSIS OF THE RECORDING

The original recording takes up two sides of an audio tape cassette and one side of another audio tape. The length of the recordings on each of the three sides

is as follows: 29:27 minutes, 31:51 minutes and 14:57 minutes. The ceremony begins at 7 minutes and 45 seconds into the first cassette; thus, the overall length of the recording is a little more than an hour. The tape recorder was switched on at all times the shaman was active.

If we compare the recording and the transcript provided by Feoktista Smirnova, it is clear that the transcript is incomplete. The expletives which are heard after almost every line of the text have not been transcribed on every occasion. Certain passages, which are likely to be either repetitions or incomprehensible, have also been omitted from the transcript. The first part of the second section, for instance, which lasts seven minutes on the recording, adds up to only twenty lines in the transcription. The mismatches between the recording and the transcript do not call the transcriber's abilities into question, but they had to be noted for the sake of accuracy. Words and expressions which are either unclear or impossible to interpret in the lines that have been transcribed have been marked with question marks (?) or ellipses (...).

At the beginning or at the end of each section only the sounds of drumming can be heard. The jingling of coins fastened to the frame of the drum is also audible. In the first and second sections the song is accompanied by strong drum beats, which obscure the sound of the singing, thus making it difficult to understand. From the beginning of the third section, the uninterrupted singing is not accompanied by drumming. In the background, one can even hear the conversation of the family members present. Between the various sections, while the drum is being heated, participants continue to converse, and the shaman also joins in.

The melody in the singing shows a descending pattern; two lines of melody are either precise repetitions of each other or repetitions with variation. In line type A, the singer repeats the same note twice before a descending major third (*mi-mi-do*). In line type B, a fourth is followed by a minor third (*re-la-la-la-la-do-la*). The repetition of lines follows the pattern AABB, but line B is often repeated several times. Line type A is shorter, often reminiscent of a simple exclamation, whereas line type B is stretched out, and the *do-la* sequence is often repeated several times. This basic pattern shows, of course, several variations. Passages with text are preceded by lines which consist only of the expletives *čo-čo-čo-čo-čo-čo*, *γə-ə-ə-ə-ə-ə-əj*, which have no lexical meaning. Between lines of text, the expletives *o-o-o-o-o-uuv*, *ə-ə-ə-ə-ə-ə-əj* can also be heard. For prosodic reasons, the syllables *a*, *ja*, *jo*, *γa* are inserted within lines of texts (for details, see Csepregi 1997).

The genre of the shaman song under discussion differs significantly from other mythical songs of the Khanty. Khanty mythical texts are a rich and ornate form of verbal art, which is, nonetheless, characterised by well-formed, grammatically complete sentences, allowing the listener to follow the sequence of events unfolding in the text. The shaman song, by contrast, is a loose sequence

of words and phrases, which often lack cohesion, and which could be interpreted by only the shaman himself, if he were willing to provide an interpretation at all. F. I. Smirnova's contribution to transcribing the recording has been of the utmost importance, but it is possible that her interpretation is at times incorrect.

A single example should suffice to highlight the challenges of interpretation. The line *tōrəm ästəmnə* occurs several times in the text. The first word in the phrase, *tōrəm*, can be paraphrased as 'sky', 'god', 'world' and 'weather'. The second constituent of the phrase is a locative-suffixed (-*nə*) form of the past participle of the verb 'let, allow, lower' (*ästəm*), and as such it corresponds to a time adverbial clause in English ('when/after God has lowered/allowed', 'after having lowered/allowed'). Hence, the possible interpretations are the following:

1. 'when God lowered/allowed [on Earth]' (what/whom? the world? the shaman?)

2. 'at the time when the sky was lowered'

3. 'God allowed' (what? shamanising? [the practice of] shamanism?)

The translation provided below, therefore, is but one of the possible interpretations, and we can only hope that we are close enough to the original understanding of the shamanic text.

Translator's notes. In the English version of the text, the order of the constituents in a clause had to be inverted at times, altering also the order of the lines in the song text, because of syntactic differences between English and Hungarian (and, indeed, English and Khanty). When such inversion was necessary, the notation should make this clear (^ and ↓ point to the line above or below in the original). Square brackets in the English version are used to show either explanatory notes or additions which were necessary for grammatical reasons. When the Hungarian version included passages in square brackets, I have kept these in the English version wherever possible; when the Hungarian uses round brackets, they have been retained in the English text, too.

THE TEXT OF THE CEREMONY

Introductory conversation

Ivan S. Sopochin

tāqa qōjayi t̄arttayə arjəlli, äwija pə, pāya pə, ma it pāy pəri-yən tājłəm t̄ər[t]yə jəlyən wəs əntə, qōjayinə wuli.

Well, shamans are born, not made. It might be a girl, it might be a boy. I've got two poor boys. Whether they will shamanise, who knows?

Tamara Sidorovna Tevlina

rōyqəntəp müwat küjəp təypi nōq jürti, panə ył pälka ti katəltə ötətə?

Why is there a bell tied into the inside of the drum, and another bell attached to the handle on the lower part of the drum?

Ivan S. Sopochin

tit jysnə tenə wärli.

That's the way it has always been done.

məta qonə məta pəkət ura əntə jəy öləy, qāntəy jəyłəw pə taləykə-jəmyə wöllət.

Lest something bad should happen to people. May our Khanty people live well and in good health.

jiməy sārni wösən,

You are the Holy Golden One!

wärəyka wule, wärəyka qule tōya öləy.

Have your eyes open, have your ears open (with good will)

küjpiw öləy kərayə müw urnə wōł öləy,

Our drum is the way it is, look at our drum as if . . .

aj rōyqəntəp lörəy süja, küyət lörəy süj.

[listen to] the weak voice of the little bell, [to] the weak voice of the metal rattles [as if . . .]

äləməta munt wärmat qōrasəp.

it had been made a long time ago.

ja lüw məy newi tyləs sočiləw, newi qōtət sočiləw.

May we walk [under] the bright moon, may we walk [under] the bright sun.

ičək jiməy sārniw!

Our dear Holy Golden One!

wõqi räp imi – ə! jiməŋ sårñi wõsən!

Lady of the Fox Cliff – hey! You are the Holy Golden One!

küjpiw məta tayıł qõłatti əntə jəŋ õłəŋ.

May our drum be safe from all harm.

qǎntəŋ jǎyləw õłəŋ rułiw-qõnyiw il məyi jõwtəm jǎŋ õłəŋ, tǎləŋkə ři wõłət õłəŋ.

Be it our Khanty people, be it our Russians, or people coming from other lands, may they live in good health!

ma lǎri pam qo, ma əŋnam kemnam, at wõla, qõłət wõla nõriptə qo.

I am a man as weak as grass. I am a man who wanders [around] outside, whether it be night, whether it be day.

řət ma wǎle temi řewremłam pətan mustəmin õłəŋ tõjəm küjparam.

As I have children of my own, it is a good thing I have a drum.

[without drum beats]

Dmitriĭ A. Kechimov

nõq qoŋǎtlǎli ĉymǎł os.

Let's dry it out a little again.

[drum beats]

Iosif I. Sopočin

řu jasəŋ jastətayə jəŋiyəŋ qõłnə? řu jasəŋ jastətayə jəŋiyəŋ.

What did you want to say? You started saying something.

Ivan S. Sopočin

a-a?

Huh?

Iosif I. Sopočin

jəmmam qõłnə sǎŋ[k]łi, məta qyńpǎstətə wǎr uć pətan sǎŋ[k]łə, tem qõłə jõwəttayə təŋnə wǎłli.

[You wanted to say] why you were beating the drum. Because of illness or because [you want to learn] how to live longer.

Ivan S. Sopočin

a-a.

A-ha.

[He beats the drum]

[He starts singing]

Section 1

čo-čo-čo-čo-čo-čo-o

čo-čo-γaγ-ə-ə

o-o-o-o-o-o-uw

nom[ə]*n*(a-a) *newi*(ja-a)

The Celestial Bright [One] (=God)

o-o-o-o-o-o-uw

o-o-o-o-o-o-uw

qoləm(a-a) *törəm*(a-a-a)

the three worlds (=upper, middle, lower)

γəjγə-ə γə-ə-ə

ə-ə-ə-ə-ə-ə-ə

tiwma-at latnə(γ-a)

when [he] created [them]

γ-γ-γ-γ-γ-γ-yw

o-o-o-o-o-o-uw

o-o-o-o-o-o-uw

törəm(a-a) *äsləmna*(ja)

God lowered [them/it].⁷

γəjγə-ə ə-ə-ə-ə

o-o-o-o-o-o-uw

ə-ə-ə-ə-ə-ə-ə

o-o-o-o-o-o-uw

o-o-o-o-o-o-uw

soči-ja-a wöw(a-a)*am*

strength enough [for] me to walk

γəjγə-ə ə-ə-ə-ə

γəjγə-ə ə-ə-ə-ə

răypəη(a-a) *ńatəm*(a-a)

deceitful tongue

čöγət *owtənə-γa-a-a-a*

on top of fresh snow

o-o-o-o-o-o-uw

... *puyi-ja-a-a*

(onomatopoeia)

γəjγə-ə-ə...

... *a sar*(a-a)

forward

γo-γoγo-γo-o-o-o-o

γo-γoγo-γo-o-o-o-o

răypəη(a-a) *ńatəm*(a-a)

deceitful tongue

⁷ This passage illustrates the difficulties of interpretation and of the parallel translation from Khanty/Hungarian into English. A more fluent translation of lines 4, 7, 10 and 14 could be: 'When the Celestial Bright [One] created the three worlds (=lower, middle, upper), God lowered them'. (Translator's note)

t'enə-γa- newi-ja
āntəŋ-a sāt qāra-a
qoləm-a-a tōrəma-a
āsləm-a jəγəw-a
čə-o-o-čə-čə-γa-a
t'enə-γa, təyi-ja
sočči-ja-a wöwam-a-a
wojəŋ-a nátləm-a
čoyət owtnənə-γa-a
qoləm-a tōrəm-a
tiwma-at latnə-γa-a
tōrəm-a-a āsləm-a-a
āsləm wär-a-a
sāt tujk wänəm-a
söltəm-a juyəm-a-a
?sali-ja-a
.... a sära-a-a
t'enə-γa- nəyi-ja
čə-o-o-čə-čə-γa-a
 [pause, heating of the drum]

Ivan S. Sopochin

[he tests the drum]

pəryi mən! pəryi ti mən!

It has loosened up (literally: 'it has gone back')! Sure, it has loosened up!

čə-čə-čə-čə-čə-čə-o
āntəŋ-a sāt qār-a-a
qoləm-a-a tōrəm-a-a
tōrəm-a-a āsləm-a-a
āsləm wär-a-a
sāt tujk-a wänəm-a
söltəm-a juyə-a
sōqqəŋ-a məyi-ja
sārəm čoyət
jəŋk-a asi-ja-a
sōqqəŋ-a nōγnə-γa-a
nōγəs ... ?

Thus, the Bright [One]
 a hundred reindeer with antlers,
 the three worlds,
 our father who lowered [them] down,

thus, this way
 strength enough [for] me to walk
 greasy tongue
 on top of fresh snow.

✓ At the time of the creation
 ^ of the three worlds
 God lowered down
 a lowered thing (= creature),
 a hundred spirit faces,
 my carved tree (= wooden idol)
 is wobbling, it tips over.
 forward
 thus ... [just like that]

A hundred reindeer with antlers,
 the three worlds,
 God has lowered [them]
 a lowered thing (= creature).
 A hundred spirit faces,
 to the carved tree
 to the mossy ground
 powdery, fresh snow
 to the watery Ob'
 on the mossy brook in the swamp
 a sable (?)

əjpäləki-ja äwi-i-tə-təna-a
 münləy-a nōypi-ja-a
 tantəy-a äwən-a
 təynə qowəltə-ya
 aj äwi-ja-a
 äwəy-a qätta-a
 lärpəy-tə-təna-a
 əjpäləki-ja äwi-i-tə-təna-a
 törəm nämpi-ja-a
 jiməy-a jäwəy-a

təyənə-ya təynə-ja
 törəm nämpi-ja-a
 jiməy-a jäwəy-a

söyləy-a sät nātə-a
 läqi-ja-tətə-ya-a
 sät qār-a luñti-ja-
 təyləm-a-a öntə-ya
 törəm kürəta
 qöryi-ja-təyləm-a
 əj qujiw-a
 təypi-ja təyləy-a
 ar məy-a-a qujə-ya-a
 särpə təyləm-a
 törəm-a sät qār-a
 jürəm-a ewəta
 särpə təyləm-a
 jiməy-a ewəta
 wän-a-a äwət-a
 jiməy məy-a-a
 käw näwəla
 jiməy məy-a-a
 təyənə-ya təynə-ja
 čo-čo-, -čo-čo-ya-a
 kat jäwənyən-a
 küt iwət-a
 jukkəy-a jyyətnə-ya

you drift away.
 To a knotty tree-branch
 to the food-giving Agan,
 ↓ a little girl,
 ^ here, running about,
 your houses full of daughters
 you unfold them,
 you drift away.
 ↓ To the sacred river
 ^ bearing the name of God (= Trom-
 yogan),
 this way, over here,
 ↓ to the sacred river
 ^ bearing the name of God (= Trom-
 yogan),
 a hundred, cornered arrows
 hit [it],
 into a hundred bulls
 I thrust [it] perhaps.
 At God's feet
 I fall,
 one of our men
 inside [him], they themselves,
 men [from] many lands
 came (flew) here before.
 God's hundred bulls
 bound to ewət (= sacred place)
 came (flew) here before.
 To the sacred ewət,
 with a shoulder-sledge,
 to the sacred ground,
 to a stone mound,
 to the sacred ground,
 this way, over here.
 ↓ Between
 ^ two rivers
 on a tree-lined stream,

juyət ruqnə-na-a
qəjməy-a jyyət-a
ruqnəya-ya
jəy[k]təya jāwəy-a
äwəya-a qä-ätətnə-ya
äwi-ja qowləm-a
qō-ōw məyi-ja
kislətə əntem-a
qōntəy lüw-a-a
mäyət-a muyti-ja
əntə-ja sočti-ja
lantəy-a äwən-a
jəykətnə-ya
war wärt-γə-ə jətə qo-onə-ya-a
juyət-a əntə-ya-a
suñə-ya əntə-ya-a

Section 3

čö-čö-o čö-čö-o
čö-čö-čö-ya-a
müwla piti-ya
nüy tət jāynə pyri-jo lüwa
törəm ästəm-a
a lüw pa-a
sāt wōnt luy[q]ta
ənəl äwi-ja-ya
wōnt luyqət qān-a
ənəl äwi-ja-ya
tənə-ya təyi-ja-a
čö-čö- čö-čö-čö-čö-ya-a
tənə-ya təyi-ja-a
qōrə-ə naj-a-a
newi juyə-ya
qār kattli-γə-na
newi juyə-əla
təγə lārpaγ-tə-sta-a
čö-čö-o čö-čö-o

where trees have fallen,
 to a pasture-lined stream,
 to a fallen tree,
 ✓ in houses full of daughters
 ↖ by a waterless river,
 ✓ to a far-away land
 ↖ where a little girl ran,
 one cannot go there.
 Fleeing,
 cutting across the river bend,
 one cannot go there.
 ✓ On the waters
 ↖ of the food-giving Agan
 a man about to make a fishweir
 has no wood,
 has no luck.

What shall we try [to do]?
 The people are asking you now.
 God lowered,
 he, himself,
 to your hundred forest spirits'
 eldest daughter
 to the forest spirits' lord's
 eldest daughter
 thus, this way.

Thus, this way,
 to the fire burning outdoors,
 ✓ a reindeer tethered
 ↖ to a white tree,
 [the tether] tied to the white tree
 has come loose.

tēnə-ya təyi-ja-a
tōrəma-a latnə-ya-a
sārəm loyət
newi nūra(?)-a
qōlnə-ya-a wuli-ja-a
qōlnə-ya-a wuli-ja-a
jāryan –a ...
... moqəta-a
... moqlama-a
tətti-ja
əj sâ-âl-aj-a
ântəp qu-urəma-a
kāw sâ-âpərqi-ja
kujtə məγ-nə-ja
won[tə]t najnə-ya-a
ajpi ōnta-ya

Section 4

čö-čö-o čö-čö-o
āytəγ-a sāt qār-a
tōrəm-a lüw ästi-ja
čö-čö-čö-o
qāntək qoγa-a
tōpγə-ja-a wōwam-a
tēnə-ya nāyi-ja
āytəγ-a sāt qār-a
tōrəma qoγəttə-ya-a-a
tirəγ leka-a

lär qōmtəli-ja
wəjəma-a quntə-ya
aj lāri-ja
lō-ō-γətnə-ya-a
aj lāra-a qumpəta-a
tirəγ leka-a
čö-čö-o čö-čö-o
tēnə-ya nāyi-ja

Thus, this way,
 at the time of God
 dried-out rings of bone
 white tether (?)
 how to know (how can it be seen)
 how to know (how can it be seen)
 Nenets ...
 ... children
 ... my children
 are here.
 In a lined
 cradle,
 in the stone frog's
 land, inhabited by men [males],
 beside a fire of wood shavings,
 the smaller [one] is there.

A hundred reindeer with antlers
 lowered down by God himself

 to Khanty folk.
 I am short of strength.
 Thus ... [just like that]
 a hundred reindeer with antlers
 are galloping towards God,
 if upon a pure [open, hindrance-free]
 road,
 [upon a road] as narrow as a root,
 they happened.
 ✓ On the shore of
 ↗ a small lake
 to the waves of a small lake
 on a pure road

 thus [I arrive].

čö-čö-o čö-čö-o

[after several heavy drum beats, the song ends]

ʔu lapət jyr wärtə tōjəm, ʔu lapət jyr wärtəpə partilojəm.

It is about the seven sacrifices, I have been ordered to offer seven sacrifices.

ma lüw ʔu tulastatəm

That is why I was taken there.

ʔu tunq mäwtəŋ jəy os wōłət.

They were people close to the spirits.

ma jastəm, müwtəli tōyə tuləm, weli namat əntem.

I told them what I could bring with me. That reindeer, there are none.

kəš qāłəntələn, lapət jyr wəra!

Well, get them somehow. Offer seven of them as a sacrifice.

it ʔu lapət jyram atəpti ʔi mənət.

Now, we are talking about these seven animals of mine to be sacrificed.

ʔu pətama ʔi jōwtəm, it əj ʔenə ʔu tāyi nōq arəyłəti, lōnʔ owtija tālayka pitlatəy quntə.

This is why I came. This is what needs to be done, if you stay healthy until the first snow-fall.

[the song continues]

Section 5

āłəŋ-a tōrəm-a

tiwmat -a latnə-ya

At the beginning,

at the time of the creation

[ʌ of the world]

ruʔ pə ruʔyə-ya

qānči-ji wəle-ya-a

qāntək qo pə qāntək qoyə

qānči-ji wəle-ya-a

čö-čö-o čö-čö-ya-a

ə-ə-ə əntə-ya

ʔenə-ə təyija-a

čö-čö-o čö-čö-ya-a

ʔenə-ə təyija-a

čö-čö-o čö-čö-ya-a

Russian for Russians

was written, surely,

and Khanty for the Khanty

was written, surely.

No,

thus, this way

thus, this way

tit ja lüw nəy aj newremət... wõnt tunq imi... mətə tãyi
 If your small children ... forest spirit lady ... something ...

Section 7

<i>čö-čö-čö-čö-čö-čö-γα</i>	... sacred
<i>... jiməy-a</i>	this, here, thus
<i>tit ta tenə-γα-a</i>	if we must remember
<i>quntə-ə nōmtayə-ə</i>	... before the eyes (visible)
<i>... sãmti-ja</i>	[for] Russian and Khanty (=people)
<i>ruť-qãntəyənə-ja</i>	?
?	?
?	?
<i>tem àntəy-a sãt qãr-a-a</i>	These hundred reindeer with antlers [↓↓↓ belong]
<i>nãrəm tōrəm-a</i>	to the god of the forest-covered tundra,
<i>najəy-a lapət-a</i>	↓ to the lord
<i>ãwət-a qãna</i>	↖ of the seven fiery sledges,
<i>sãm alyəmtəy-a</i>	whom eye cannot see,
<i>liləy-a sãrni-ja</i>	to the One of Living Golden Colour,
<i>ãwət-a qãna</i>	to the lord of the sledge.
<i>čö-čö-o čö-čö-o</i>	
[pause]	

Section 8

Ivan S. Sepochin

ja, tət t'u köł t'i jastəli: läpəltət quntə, t'i läpəltət. tət ruťpə ruťyə wãłət.
 So, they say: if I have been deceived, I have been deceived; [so be it]. Here
 Russians live only as Russians.

[the recording is unclear]

<i>čö-čö-o čö-čö-γα-a</i>	
<i>tənə-γα təyija-a</i>	thus, this way
?	
<i>čö-čö-o čö-čö-γα-a</i>	

[the text is inaudible because of loud drumming]

<i>tõrəm äsləm-a</i>	[A goddess] lowered down by God,
<i>tõrəm kittə naj-a</i>	a goddess sent by the sky,
<i>tenə-ya-nayija-a</i>	thus . . . [just like that]
<i>äwül-a äntəpa-a</i>	to a little girl's cradle,
?	
?	
<i>kəltas imija</i>	to the lady <i>kəltas</i> .
<i>čö-čö-o čö-čö-ya-a</i>	
[pause]	

Iosif I. Sopočin

katləmtəyətli?

May I take it? [he wants to hold the drum]

Ivan S. Sopočin

əntə, sār, al katləmtəyət.

No, wait, don't touch it.

[a long section of dumming, without text or singing]

Dmitriï A. Kechimov

os pəryi mən, katləmtəyətli?

It has gone back again (=the skin of the drum has loosened), shall I take it [to warm it up]?

Section 9

Ivan S. Sopočin

kötləm-kürtəm kəčət wəte, kötyəlam kəcaγə jəkkən.

My hands and legs are sore, both of my hands hurt.

[drumming]

jāγ wōn[t]nam jāyqitət.

The men have gone hunting.

aŋkitəfəm wuŋi tōyənə kasəm imit tərtət wōlət.

In my late maternal grandfather's time, the women from Kazým used to be shamans.

t'ərttə imi jōwət, t'u iminam t'ərttayə partəl, jastəl:

A shaman lady came, she was asked to shamanise. So, she said:

əntə t'ər[t]ləm, pyrəsyə jəyəm.

'I won't shamanise. I have grown old.'

əj mət[a] latnə imi nāwəm:

Once the lady said:

t'āqa, pa məy qo təyə tułməl, pāy tōjəl, pāyəli, nüy t'ərta t'āqa.

'So, it seems you have been brought here by a stranger. He has a son, a little boy, so, you should shamanise.

pāyəli, nüy t'ərta, ma jošyəlam kəčayən, jošyəlam kəčayən.

You, little boy, you are the one who should shamanise. Both of my hands are sore, both of my hands hurt.'

pāyəł nāwəm: t'ərta, t'ərta, ayki, nüy t'ərta, pa məy ikinə t'ərtəytəyyilo.

The son says: 'Shamanise, mother, you should shamanise. A man from another [far-away] land asks you to shamanise.'

panə t'u t'ərta jəymala sāq tytyəl al owtija pōnmin, os müw tāyi jošyəlam kəčayən, t'utpə əntə qoləl.

And when she starts shamanising, placing the sleeves of her gown in her lap, there is no more 'my hands hurt'; she can feel nothing.

küjəp kilaltəmin tōypə rayipəy, məya əjnam əntə qōnal.

Picking up the drum, she launched into it, her feet barely touching the ground.

oγ-oγ-oγ

[the ceremony continues]

Ivan S. Sopočin

os qoyəttəli.

It must be warmed up a little more.

Section 10

ə-ə-ə-ə-ə-ə-ə-ə-ə-ə

lantəya āyəna

o-o-o-o-o-o-uw

t'enə-ya ne-wi-ja

To the food-giving Agan

thus, Bright One,

with the people in question by members of the community; only they can tell who the names refer to). While sitting at the table, the two men gossip about the rich merchant, Noskop Nikolaevich. As expected, at the beginning of the song, the singer hums a little, looking for the right tune; he starts singing only after that. As with the shaman song, the melody of this song also shows a descending pattern. It consists of seven-syllable lines. Line type A finishes on a descending minor third, and line type B starts a major second lower, thus allowing the repetition of the last note in line type A at the end of line type B. The melody can be sketched as follows: line A: *do-do-do-do-do-la-la*; Line B: *so-so-so-so-so-la-la*. Both line types are repeated at least twice, but several repetitions are also possible. The last clause of sentences may fall on line B, though not invariably.

Ivan S. Sopochin sings [Song of the old man called Fishweir]

γə-ə-ə γə-ə-əj

tuwəm latnə

when they brought [it]

γə-ə-ə γə-ə-əj

törəm pã-ástəm

marked by God

pãstəm wä-ä-ram

my marked thing

γə-ə-ə γə-ə-əj

pəkət qujə

a male relative

Ivan S. Sopochin

tít tì sojəp iki, pəkət qujət wärəntətə iryəł, arəγ.

This is a song, a song made by a relative, Uncle Fishweir.

γə-ə-ə γə-ə-əj

Irina I. Kechimova

nüj irənnam mənət

You sing it to your own melody.

Ivan S. Sopochin

mantemnam mənət

Yes, I do, to my own.

Irina I. Kechimova

arija!

Sing!

lük antrinə wuyojəm

šaj jeńt'ayə wuyojəm

Andreï, the Wood Grouse, called me,
he called me to drink tea with him.

lūk antrinā wuɣojəm
māwərtayə wuɣojəm
lūk antri lūw jastələn
kačəŋ ʔatnə jastələn
tōrəm čöɣətnə altəp
ńāwi manə təjʔətʲi
ɣoj-a ɣoj-a
māwər-pə ar təjʔəm-a
ʔitot-pə ar təjʔəm-a
māwərtayə wuɣojəm
šaj jənʔtʔayə wuɣojəm
qotəm sət quj qowʔitʔət
sur quńətqo wujəm wáč
manə jōwʔitʔə-əɣ-ti-i
tem noskop nīkolaj-a-wič
tem noskop nīkolaj-a-wič
qotəm jeyʔa ropitʔət qo
lūw təjʔitʔət-ən
qān-řōras qo wáčʔat pətan
lūw ti təjʔitʔət-ən
qotəm jeyʔa ropitʔət qo
ɣoj-a ɣoj, ɣoj-a
qotəm sət lūt qōɣət süjpət

säyki nōʔtə tyrəŋ käw
sōyʔam asi wüjʔa
lūwnə sujqəptəɣʔi
ɣojən-noli-ɣoja
ɣojən-noli-ɣoja
ɣojən-noli-ɣoja
ōntəm ...
manə nōməqšə-ətʲi-i
lyptət säwrəm aj kəʔyətʲi

Andreï, the Wood Grouse, called me,
 he called me to eat fish with him.
 Andreï, the Wood Grouse, says,
 always says:
 ‘From a hunt in the snow
 I have meat to eat

I have much fish to eat,
 I have food in abundance.’
 He called me to eat fish with him,
 he called me to drink tea with him.
 Three hundred people are running,
 [to] a town known by *sur quńətqo*⁹
 I arrive.
 This man, Noskop Nikolaevich,
 this man, Noskop Nikolaevich,
 thirty workers
 he’s got,
 being the tsar’s merchant,
 he surely has
 thirty workers.

His three-hundred-fathom-long
 fishweir
 a heavy stone sunk [into] the sand
 ... from the Ob’ ...
 he has repaired [it].

[by] myself
 I think,
 from a leafless little port

⁹ Like *lūk antrinā*, ‘Andreï the Wood Grouse’, *sur quńətqo* is also a descriptive Khanty nickname but its meaning is less clear. It consists of the following parts: *sur*, ‘dry’ or ‘reindeer herd’; *quńət*, ‘twilight at sunrise or at sunset’; *qo*, ‘man’. It may have been the Khanty name of a person (perhaps of Noskop Nikolaevich) who was born at dawn or dusk near a reindeer herd.

lotta juyi
jəjk... lupəm
uttən totəttə-ə
vojən-noli-voja
qoləm jeyta ropiltə qo
təyə qyrəltə-ələ-ə
vojən-noli-voja
t'u pəfa kōt jastətəyə

t'u jastəta-a
manə nōmqəsa-əli-i
məy sojəp ələy pətomšik
qōla qōjəyi wōlə-ən
wəte temi ki-i-m-en
təynam aŋkrəmtə-ə-γ-lə-t
tōntəy küryən mikeška
tōynam nüreytə-əylə-ə-t
..... kəwčərkinmin (?)
..... wəji-i
..... wəji-i
..... ənəl juy
qōlnam əntə mə-ə-nəl

munt tüwnə jāwγəttəli-i (?)

tüwnə fōryəltə-ə-li-i
noskop nīkola-a-wič
tōntəy küryən mikeška
oŋqnam jaŋqətm ənəl qōrəp juy
.....
sətəy qələp wärmamnə

yl as qori yl ələy
qoləm sət lül qōγət süjəp
vojə voj voja
ma t'u latnə jastəta-ə-m
noskop nīkola-a-wič
nün qān tōras qo wāltə pətan

↓ my wet ... oar
 ↗ ... [made of] wood
 on the shore ...

 his thirty workmen
 run over here.

 To say a word of greeting
 (=to greet someone),
 to say that,
 I think,
 our man holding the end of the weir,
 who could he be?
 But it looks like
 he is looking this way,
 Mikeshka, the Birch-Bark-Legged,
 runs over there.
 ... jumping over there (?)
 ... it was taken
 ... it was taken
 ... the great tree
 where does it not go
 [it is going everywhere].
 Earlier, he was dragging it
 behind him,
 he was surrounded by water,
 Noskop Nikolaevich,
 Mikeshka, the Birch-Bark-Legged,
 a big tree covered in resin,
 ...
 while I was weaving
 a square-shaped net
 from the lower end of the lower Ob'
 a three-hundred-fathom-long fishweir

 Then, I say:
 'Noskop Nikolaevich,
 because you are the tsar's merchant,

qoḷəm sāt lül qōyət süjəp
putčən (?) wāɣnam kənče-e
wänpəy (?) wāɣnam kənče-e

ma wiči tōjəm lōyəs jāyla
ɣoj-jələm ɣoj-a-a
ɣoj-jələm ɣoj-a-a
noskop nīkola-a-wič
ma tu wärtə jastələm
lūk antrinə wuɣojəm
šaj jeńt'tayə wuɣojəm
mäwərtayə wuɣojəm
ɣoj-jələm ɣoj-a-a
ɣoj-jələm ɣoj-a-a
lūk antri, lüw wō-ō-lə-ən

tōy ti jōyti-lə-ə-γlə-ə-əm
tōrəm čōyət'nə altəp nāwi
lūwnə tāji-lə-əli-i
mäwərtayə mant wuɣən
čaj jeńt'tayə mant wuɣən
 ?

↙↙ you [must] look for an iron hook,
 you must look for an iron rake,
 ↗↗ [and] a three-hundred-fathom-long
 fishweir.'

I have always had friends.

Noskop Nikolaevich,

I say this:

Andreï, the Wood Grouse, called me,
 he called me to drink tea with him,
 he called me to eat fish with him.

Andreï, the Wood Grouse,
 is (always) there,

there, look, now I arrive,

↙ he has

↗ meat of game killed on fresh snow,
 he called me to eat fish with him,
 he called me to drink tea with him.

[unclear]

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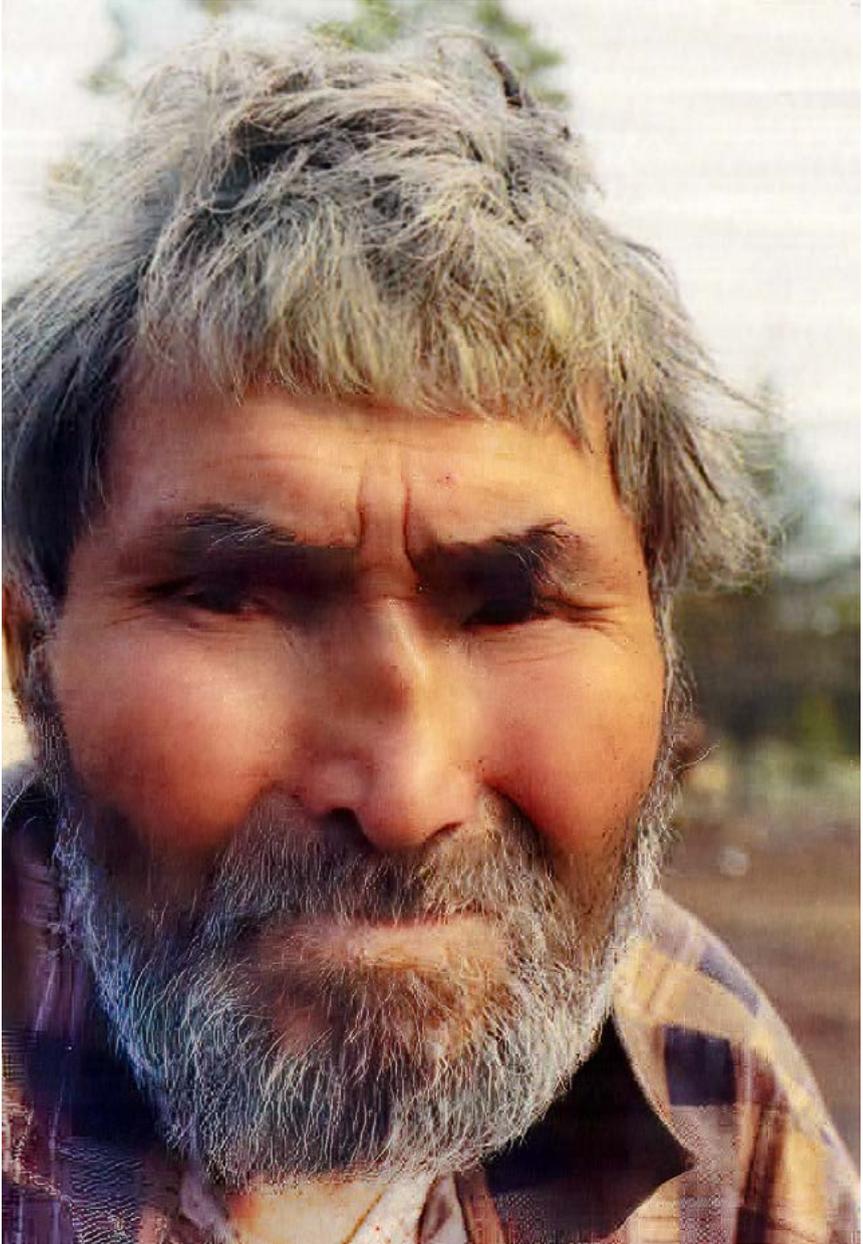


Fig. 6.1. Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin

CHAPTER SIX

How Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin became a Shaman

NATALYA KOSHKARĚVA

This article is a slightly revised version of the author's 'Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin: Biography of a Shaman', in Juha Pentikäinen and Péter Simoncsics, ed., Shamanhood: An Endangered Language (Oslo: Novus forlag, 2005), pp. 121–71. The grammatical commentary and Khanty vocabulary list are omitted, but a new piece of dialogue between the shaman and his sons is added at the end. The Khanty orthography has been slightly revised.

Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin (1910–93) was an outstanding Khanty epic-singer, healer and fortune-teller. He was born around 1910 on the Agan river, Surgut *raïon*. In fact, no one knows the exact date of his birth. He himself believed that he was ten years older.

In this article, I would like to sketch out a history of his clan and his life, as it was told to me by him during my field work in 1989–91. Unfortunately, that is not much; in my collection, there are only six short stories, out of about 150, told by Sopochin about his family.

As a rule, the attention of investigators is mainly focused on the shaman's skills and supernatural abilities, but not on the personality of the shaman. My aim is to fill in this gap in our knowledge of his personality. The main part of this article represents the text, recounted by Ivan Sopochin, about how he received his shaman's gift and song.

SETTLING ON THE TROM-YOGAN RIVER

The Sopochins lived first on the Vakh river, in Nizhnevartovsk *raïon*. The reason for moving to the Agan was a plague and the resulting death of nearly

all members of the family. Only one man survived, and it was he who settled in a new place. There exists a sacred song, describing this event, though I did not manage to record it. Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin retold its content only briefly.

Once Sopoch *iki* went to the city, and on his way back he spent the night at the mouth of the Trom-yogan river. To make a fire, he went for firewood. Coming back, he saw a man in black clothes near his boat. He was frightened to death and stopped.

The man said, 'Don't be afraid, come closer. I am *qyn'iki*, the man who sends disease. It is I that have brought all this disaster on your family. Your family was big, there were a lot of people in your family. Now you are an orphan. I have taken the lives of your relatives. I was told to do this. I feel sorry for you. People beat you. They don't permit you to come into the house, they push you out. I regret this. Stay here. Make a fire in this place. When you return home, migrate to another place, to the Agan river. There's a place downstream with good reindeer moss, it is called *lantəŋ toy*. Make a settlement over there, get married, have many children. When you move to this place, let your clan be very big, let one of your clan be very rich, let another be a powerful shaman. Live like this.

In this passage, *qyn'iki*, an evil deity, acts in a strange way. It is not usual for him to help people and to express regrets about his deeds.

The family moved, then, to the Trom-yogan river. Ivan Sopochin's grandfather, whose name was also Ivan, was told to move to this place because he was chosen to be a keeper of *ewət'iki*, a lord of the holy river, *törəm jāwən*.

As Ivan Sopochin told it, 'his grandfather was called to this land by spirits'.

The name of Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin's great-grandfather is unknown. In the genealogical table (p. xii), he is named provisionally Sopoch *iki* – a man from the Sopoch clan. Ivan Sopochin mentioned only two of this man's sons – Ivan from the *küŋali* river ('landing-net river': Kumali-yagun), who was his grandfather, and Ignat from the *ört* river ('the hero's river': Ort-yagun), who was the eldest brother.

Ivan was married to a Forest Nenets woman, who was a shaman. Ivan Stepanovich remembered her strange behaviour, when she went away to the forest, spent a lot of time there alone, wandering through the forest, speaking with someone and gesticulating. Most probably, Ivan Stepanovich inherited his gift of clairvoyance (second sight) from her. He used to say that he had had three shaman songs, one of them being from his grandmother. Ivan Stepanovich could speak the Nenets language fluently, and he knew many Nenets epic songs, fairy tales, and so forth. Unfortunately, this part of his heritage was not recorded. Nenets features in the family were very strong.

Ivan was killed by his elder brother Ignat. One time Ignat had eaten all his reindeer and came to the land where Ivan lived. In a quarrel, he beat Ivan to death with a wooden hammer and tried to hide the traces of the murder.

The story about this cruel episode obviously represents the mixing of two different stories. One of them was told by Ivan's wife and describes how she had found her dead husband. The other is about the investigation of the murder and the evidence of witnesses. It seems that Ivan Stepanovich simply repeated what he had heard from different people, not changing much in their stories.

After Ivan's death, Stepan was taken to Ignat's family to live with them. His life was very hard, and all the members of the family, especially Ignat, were very cruel to the orphan. He often went hungry and, still a little boy, had to hunt by himself to get some food. Though Ivan Stepanovich cried as he told this story about all his father's troubles, the story is not sad – I would rather say that it is reminiscent of tales about resourceful people who find their way out of any situation. This little boy, Stepan, appears in the story as a lucky hunter.

Stepan married a Khanty woman – Fëkla Prokop'evna Sardakova from the Agan river. They had seven children. Two of them died in early childhood; five reached adulthood. Ivan Stepanovich was the eldest brother in the family. His brother Vasiliï was one year younger. He was a reindeer herder who was thrown into prison because a bear killed a reindeer from his herd. He eventually died there.

The three youngest brothers, being experienced hunters and marksmen, were taken into the Soviet army during the Second World War and did not return home. Ivan Stepanovich did not know exactly what happened to them, but he felt sorry for them, for they did not know Russian, and he wondered how they could understand what they were expected to do.

Ivan Stepanovich was persecuted as well. He was put in prison for being a shaman, but soon after that, since it was known that he never took money for this, he was released on the condition that he would practise shamanism only for his own family members. For his honesty, he was even nominated as 'the red shaman'.

SHAMANIC TERMINOLOGY

Ivan Stepanovich spoke the Trom-yogan sub-dialect of the Surgut dialect, which belongs to the eastern group of Khanty dialects. He himself did not use the word 'shaman' – he even became angry when people called him a shaman. He called himself *t'arttə qo*, 'a knowing man; a man who can see'. The noun *t'ər* means 'vision'. He also used the words *uləm wärtə qo*, 'a man having a dream', *moləqsətə qo*, 'a praying man; a man who swears'. The word *mut* has two meanings: *a*. a part of a house, considered to be sacred, where women are



Fig. 6.2. Ivan Sopochnin cutting twigs from a birch tree, which will form the basis for an anthropomorphic image of the goddess of fire. A red cloth (a shawl and dress) will be put on cross-linked sticks and then burned in the stove as a sacrifice to the goddess.

not allowed to enter; *b.* an oath, spoken during a sacrifice; a curse. Obviously, these meanings are metaphorically connected with each other. The verb *mul̄ta*, derived from this noun, means ‘to ask a deity to accept a sacrifice; to curse; to conjure’. Terēshkin (Терёшкин 1981) mentions two other verbs with the same root: *mul̄qs̄ta*, ‘to swear an oath; to pray’ and *mul̄əyt̄ata*, ‘to curse’. Describing offering up his own prayer, Ivan Stepanovich used the word *pajeks̄ta*, ‘to believe, to pray’.

There is another term for people with extraordinary abilities – *šepanəy qo*. Its meaning is not very clear. Terēshkin gives a very generalised translation of the word *šepan/šipan* as ‘sorcery’, and correspondingly *šepanəy/šipanəy qo* – ‘a man knowing sorcery’. From the explanations given by our informants, it is possible to interpret this word as ‘clairvoyant’.

One more similar term, mentioned in Terēshkin’s dictionary, is *jołta*, ‘conjure, tell fortunes, practise shamanism’. It derives from the noun *joł*, ‘sorcery, shaman’s fortune-telling’. It may well be that it is connected with the words *jołəyta*, ‘murmur, mumble’, and *jołəmnəy*, ‘song performed during the shaman’s séance’.

RECEIVING THE SHAMAN’S GIFT AND SONG

The following passage represents the story of receiving the shaman’s song and gift. It is given in Khanty transcription, with an English translation. The story is represented as it was told, without any deletions. Eremei Sopočin is one of the shaman’s sons, who helped with the translation into Russian; his other son, Iosif, also turned up. Dmitrii Kechimov is the shaman’s son-in-law.

Eremei I. Sopočin

*t̄ərnə j̄öyattayə w̄ərma łatnə, q̄öłnə
t̄ərnə j̄öyto?*

When you were approached by the vision, how did the vision come to you?

Ivan S. Sopočin

*āłəy łatnə t̄umint ura j̄əyəm.
w̄ājəy kənččayə mənəm.
w̄ājəy kənččayə mənəm.
panə w̄ājəy kənččayə m̄aw t̄uñəy parlət
łayki mətli w̄älləm.*

Once such a thing happened to me.
I went hunting for animals.
I went hunting for animals.
And (they) insist on looking for animals. A squirrel or some other animal I’ll kill.

panə it̄ə ālintəm q̄ārənəm atnə.

And at night I lay down in the open air.

łuyq łār ti w̄ältət.

There is a sacred lake.

*lunq lār wōntətənə wāltamnə itə
 ālīntəm.
 əj latnə qoləŋq wiyał atnə.
 qoləŋq wiytayə jəp.
 pəltayə jəpəm.
 ōntamnə nōməqsətəm.
 panə t'u itə ālīntəm.
 panə qolittə mənəm.
 wełilam jürmin tājłlam.
 wōjəmtəjəm panə...
 panə řāqa əj latnə nōq ři qāńt'əqintəm.
 māləpsi əntəm, mətli əntəm.
 əj jārnas piyəp.
 ənəl naŋk.
 naŋk pōrəqna tōt āməsləm.
 tōt temi ři āməsləm.
 ōntamnə nōməqsətəm.
 os āwłam qōtti?
 wełi əntəm, āwəl əntəm
 munt āwłam ōsəm pətənə.*

Eremeř I. Sopočin

qārənəm qulməytən?

Ivan S. Sopočin

qārənəm.

*müw tayı t'u nōpətnə wāłt sōy uć,
 tuyrəy lāt tājłəm.*

*temi müw urnə māləpsem itə wəjəm,
 əntə wuləm.*

temi jārnas piyəp.

manə naŋka nōrałtələm.

*mayəłti t'u arit lek-řāyəp pōrəntəmam
 tayı.*

likəm ři kəncyəməm.

When I was in the forests of the
 sacred lake, I lay down (to sleep).
 Suddenly at night, a crow is crying.
 The crow began to cry.
 I began to be afraid.
 I think to myself.
 And I lay down again.
 And I fell asleep soundly.
 I keep my reindeer attached.
 So I fell asleep . . .
 And then suddenly I woke up.
 There is no fur coat, no anything,
 only one shirt.
 There is a big larch.
 I am sitting there, near the larch.
 I am sitting there like this.
 I think to myself.
 Where is my sledge still?
 There is no reindeer, no sledge.
 Before, the sledge (was) behind the
 pillow rest.¹

Did you spend the night in the open
 air?

In the open air.

There was no tarpaulin for a tent (*lit.*
 cabin skin) at that time. I had only a
 pit, covered with coniferous branches.

I do not know how this happened,
 that I took off my fur coat.

Only one shirt.

I rub myself against the larch.

It turned out that I had trampled
 down a lot of paths all around.

I began to look for my path.

¹ In other words, outside, on the other side of the wall against which pillows were placed.

likəm tət̄ti.

likəm pəryi ti ruyləm.

atnə likəm tət̄ti.

tüwtama, wāt̄l qārama jōytəm.

tüw ar juy tutə wär tāj̄ləm.

ənəl pəwərtəy juyət līt̄atəm temi.

tüwtam wəf̄imtəl, qōpləmtəl.

tet mant juyət ti tāyi, juyət üləm.

māləpsem nōk ti āmtəm.

tet tōl sāyit tu, atə pə qōlnə jastəti,

tulyə-pulyə ti jəyəm.

ilə āl̄intləm, qoptələtəm, küč̄ əntəm, nōk

lūkləm, nūrəytələm.

tōyənə ti wālləm.

əj mətə latnə tet norəkkə wär wutayə

ti jəyəm.

mətə pəkət wärəm wuləm ulmitam

tāyinə.

temi nōqnam tuyojəm, əj mətənə

tuyojəm nōqnam.

Eremeĩ I. Sopochin

čājə müw kim ālyə jəyən tu latnə?

tōya ənəl qoyə jəyən tu latnə?

Ivan S. Sopochin

čāȳkləm qoyə jəyəm.

Eremeĩ I. Sopochin

temi qōtti jəyən?

Ivan S. Sopochin

imija əntə tāj̄ləm tu latnə.

aŋkin qōl̄ya mantem əntə jōyət.

Here is my path.

It turned out that the path led back-wards.

At night, here is my path.

I came to my fire, to the place where my tent was.

Well, I have brought a lot of firewood here.

It turned out that I had prepared big trees to use for logs.

My fire blazes up, goes out.

Here are trees, chopped down by me.

I made a fire.

I put on my fur coat.

From that time, how can I say it, I became as if I was in a stupor.

(When I) lay down, I had a nightmare. Even if not, I rush aside or break into a run.

I live like this.

Once I even began to know some things.

When I dream, I get to know some things.

I was taken upward, I was taken upward by someone.

Well, how old were you then?

You were an adult man then, weren't you?

I was an adult man.

What happened to you?

I didn't have a wife then.

Your mother hadn't come to me yet.

Eremeï I. Sopochin

os nõqnam wáytayə wärmana qõlnə? How were you invited upward?

Ivan Stepanovich

ja, tit ja jastəlay wär.

Well, it is forbidden to speak about this affair.

liiw wəle ma mətə pəkət wär əntə wärəntəyətəm.

Well, you see, I did not do some sort of things.

it wəle t̄u mətə wöyamat t̄i wälləm, wälləm temi qāt̄ mōčə.

Now, you see, my power lives on, so far.

liiw temi jāy wəle qõjayinə wärtət wujat

Well, these people, who knows about their deeds?

nəy pə wəle qõjayinə wuli.

Who knows about you?

nəy pə pa jāy, uləm mətli wärtətəy.

You are different people, you see dreams or do something else.

pa jāy ma kiñt̄ayəm ičək qoqqənam jāyqilət wär təjlət.

Other people besides me can go to the distant sacred places.

inam manə, temi liłəykə wältmam latnə, jastətəyə əntə mustət.

Now, while I remain alive like this, it is forbidden to tell.

Eremeï I. Sopochin

əj mətə quja pə nõq əntə arəyləyle? Did you tell this to anyone?

Ivan S. Sopochin

ma müwat arəyləylem, əntə arəyləylem.

Why should I tell? I shall not tell.

əntə mustət.

It is not possible.

nõmsam, nəy t̄i wičə jöyətmin latnə, nõmsam t̄i mən.

My mind, every time when you came, my thought went there.

ma it t̄u mətə təyitnə.

Now I am in those places.

nõmsam atə-mətə tōtti, tōt jāyqilət.

As if my mind is over there, it is wandering over there.

ma tət əməstəm.

I am sitting here.

tət as tōjnə ruť imi, t̄ərtəm.

There is a Russian woman in the Upper Ob',² I performed a shaman's séance (for her).

ruť iminə t̄ərtətojem.

I was forced by the Russian woman to perform a shaman's séance.

² Ivan Sopochin means Regina Nazarenko, an ethnomusicologist from the Institute of Philology, Novosibirsk, who recorded a shamanic séance in 1987.

a t'u ruť imem it mättä newräm täjät.

qáñt'ě wär täjät, müw wär täjät.

mantem jöytiləmat latnə qyťəm pyr jastət.

nüŋ məy wältə täyiwa jänqilma latnə, fertlätmanə, t'it qđlnə wujta kačəy wär?

ma inam jəmγə jəγəm.

nüŋ ilta jänqilən müw noməłta jänqilən?

mantemnam jastət.

ma mantem: 'müw täyit ilta jänqilləm?'

uləm wärtə qo, mułəqsətə qo qutət təppinə əməst... .

... t'üw ma atə nōmsam jänqilləy, nōmsam t'i jänqilləy.

it nəy jastəłtəy:

'jyrəy lek, päreŋ lek'.

nəyati jastəli:

it čal kima jəy, at kima jəy.

jys iki, jys imi fərtiləm täyit inam wđłłəy tuyat məqi, t'u mułəqsətə jəy.

it nəy jəłəp qəti ättin möčə...

t'üw wəle ma t'i lekət.

nəy qāntəy jəy wđstəy.

jyrəy lek, päreŋ lek čal kima jəy, at kima jəy, t'i kima jəy nirmal pyrnə.

töt əj latnə fərttə jəy ättə latnə...

They say this Russian woman now has a child.

(At that time) she (was) sick, there (was) something wrong with her.

When she came to me for the last time, (she) asked me:

'When you came to the place where we live, performing the shaman's séance, how did you know everything?

I have recovered now.

Do you go along the ground or above it?'

(She) told me.

I (speak) to myself: 'Why should I go along the ground?'

A man, having a dream, a praying man, is sitting inside his house ...

... while my mind is just wandering over there.

Now you tell:

A road of bloody sacrifice, a road of offering.

It is told to you:

Now it reached the border, it reached the end.

Long ago, ancient man, ancient woman now completely took away those times of practising shamanism, those praying people.

Now you, until you were born in new houses ...

Well, you see, there are my roads.

You are people.

A road of bloody sacrifice, a road of offering reached the border, reached the end, it has become like this, after it was insulted.

Once, when shamanising people appear ...

tōram wəte wātəl.

tōramnə äsättin latnə t'u lekət

ōjəytəllən.

ōjəytəllən t'i tiuw!

lapət qār wintpəs lek, qut qār wintpəs lek.

nüyati pə jastəlem.

t'i lapət qār wintpəs lek, qut qār wintpəs lek inam pətał mōčə nəyati jastətə kōləł antə wuli.

t'i lekət ōjəytəlat.

Eremei I. Sopočin

müwəli antə mustəl at jaste.

atə t'u tāyi pyrili.

nüy nōqnam altilo?

Ivan S. Sopočin

altilojəm t'i, ičəkələm.

t'u jastəli, t'u lapət qār jürəm anyəł, qut qār jürəm anyəł rōrəmtəłət, pānəmtəłət.

pāj sām mitəp lapət janə qār wičə tōtti.

qāt təppija ästəytəyətmamnə ...

sar, t'u qāt.

lapəy lapəl jəm wāy anəy lapət kürəm.

t'u lapəy lapəl, jəm wāy anəy lapət kürəmi tuyojəm.

panə qāt təppija pitəma, qāt təppilnə punəy qāt muləl kējji weli aj čiwənə čəkinə äwəthi.

You see, God exists.

When it is allowed by God, you will find these roads.

You see, you will find them!

A road, left by the reins of a bridle of seven male reindeer, of six male reindeer.

I shall tell you.³

It is not possible now to tell you everything about this road, left by the reins of a bridle of seven male reindeer, six male reindeer.

(Everybody) will find these roads.

Don't tell what is forbidden (to tell).

It is asked for no particular reason.

Were you taken upward?

I was taken, my dear children.

It is said, these seven male reindeer, six male reindeer, attached to the pillar, are straightening themselves up, are bowing.

Seven white male reindeer, flashing like a thin ice crust, are always there.

When I was allowed to enter the house for a while ...

Wait, such a house.

There is the inner porch and seven tracks of a silver bowl.⁴

This inner porch, I was led along these seven tracks of the silver bowl.

When I entered the house, in the sacred part of the house there is as it were the breathing of reindeer curling like haze, curling like fog.

³ Ivan Stepanovich addresses his son.

⁴ Possibly, seven silver bowls were set up in the entrance, across which he had to pass to enter.

sárni qǎn iki tǔylǎj lǎtnǎ.

sárni qǎn iki is at the place, (beautifully) ornamented with big wing feathers.

tǔrǎm jǎyiw, lúw tǔt ǎmǎst.

Our father *tǔrǎm*, he is sitting over there.

qǎt lǎypi jǎčǎnǎ newi wajǎp kat nǎlyǎn.

In the centre of the house there are two arrows with white shafts.

tǔt sǎyit sara pǎstǎy pǎlǎk ǎj kúrǎm kúr mǎyǎttǎ qǔl ǎntǎ wuli.

It is not possible to step even one step forward from there without permission.

lek pǎtam tǔtti ti.

There is the end of my road.

qǎt lǎypija wǎjyǔjǎm.

I was taken to the house (many times for a while).

tǎrtilǎmam lǎtnǎ arǎy kǔl oytina pǎyǎttǎt tǎtti ti.

When I practise shamanism, I advance up to this place in the words of my song.

Eremeĩ I. Sopochin

tǎrtǎnǎ ti wiča ti jǔyǎtylǎlǎn?

Do you always reach this place, when you shamanise?

Ivan S. Sopochin

jǔyǎtylǎlǎm, jǔyǎtylǎlǎm.

(I) reach (this place), (I) reach (this place).

it quntǎ mǎta mǎyǎla ǎntǎ tulǎt čǎkǎt jǔyǎtta piti.

Now, if they are planning some lies,⁵ troubles may happen.

kat pǎqqǎlam inam jǔyǎtlǎyǎn.

Two of my sons now have come.

wǔyǎkǎt tǎt tǎjǎm.

I have here two sons-in-law.

it kújjǎpat sar katǎpǎttǎy quntǎ, ma sar nǎyǎt tǎursemat lejǎttǎm.

If I had got a drum now, I'd show you fun.

ǎj ǔtǎm quntǎ ǔtǎm.

That's the way!

ulǎm pǎtǎnǎ ulǎm wǎrǎntǎm.

I have seen a dream at the end of a dream.

Eremeĩ I. Sopochin

múw tǎyin wǎjǎm tǎrt arǎyla?

Where are your shamans' songs from?

⁵ Ivan Stepanovich is not sure whether to tell us about some sacred things or not, because in Soviet times practising shamanism was strictly forbidden and many shamans were persecuted. He suspected that newcomers might try to find out something in order to betray him to the authorities.

Ivan S. Sopochnin

*wǎntər manččayə rayipmən welit
pətan tuyəm ɔtamnat.*

jəkkətəw-aŋkeɣətəw aɣənnam mənyən.

*wǎntər tājtəw, kat moqqən tājtə
wǎntər.*

*mančmin əməstəmən luyqət jǎwən
pələknə.*

ətər at.

tǎqa jastəl.

temi atnə nomən əməstəmən, tōm atət.

tū əməstəmən.

kat tāyija ymətmən.

əj qujəm ył pələknə.

ma num pələknə.

*qutimən kat məyətɣən panə kat jǎwən
qǎrəs čopɣən.*

tōyənə wǎltimənnə wǎntər

mančtimənnə ...

*panə əjməta latnə tū wǎltamnə arəɣ
süj ti süjməytəɣ.*

arəɣ süj seʔəl.

ǎnta müwli ti t arəɣət?

qoləntətayə mustəmin ti jəɣəm.

temi nōqnam seʔəl.

temi nomətta əj pa tyləs čəɣkəłmat.

tyləs sayki wǎyənə.

nōqnam seʔəl.

panə nəwem tǎrəɣlətəyə ti jəɣ.

nəwem tǎrəɣlətəyə ti jəɣ.

*tōyənə əməstəmmə, əj yłnam, əj yłnam
jüt.*

qoləm arəɣ qōritə wiča ti jəɣət.

əj latnə əj yłnam, əj yłnam jüt.

We began to trace an otter with my brother, who was put (in prison) because of reindeer.

Our father and mother went to the Agan river.

We have (we have already traced) an otter, with two cubs.

We are sitting near the sacred river *luyq*, tracking the otter.

Serene night.

He says like this.

This night we shall sit upstream. (The otter with her cubs) will appear here.

We sat like this.

We sat down in two (different) places.

One man (sat down) downstream.

I (sat down) upstream.

There are two river bends and two little river swamps between us.

Living like that, tracking the otter ...

... and then, while I was like this, a sound is heard.

The sound of a song is heard.

I wonder, who is singing?

I began to listen attentively.

It is heard above.

It turned out that the moon had risen.

The moon is in the sky.

It is heard above.

And my body began to shiver.

My body began to shiver.

While I am sitting, (the song) approaches lower and lower.

Three songs became clear.

At that time (the song) approaches lower and lower.

əj latnə ti kima jəy.

ōyər juyət kütəp palt ti jōyət.

ńáyəl juyət tōjəta ti jōyət.

ti pə ti jōyət ńáyəl juyət tōjəta.

panə ma jəmat tārəylətəyə jəyəm.

pātłojəm qōti jəyəm.

panə t'u wiča jōyət mam latnə, panə əj qujəm ti jütəl setəl.

t'u qujəm əj wanyə, əj wanyə jōyətəyə jəymət latnə, tet pōčəy pälkami jül.

panə t'äqa t'u süjəl əj əjyət ti pit, ti pit.

ńáyəl juy tōjəta pit.

t'u süjəl tōyi ti tərəm.

mantem niməl alə tōjyət ti ätyən.

jastəl: 't'äqa, ma panam qolat jəyəm.

jäqənam məntimən müw atəm?'

t'äqa mamə mantem pättəyə wärojəm.

'jäqənam mənəm öləy'.

panə t'u jäqənam ti mənməm.

ti iryəm ma ti tōjəm ti.

os ti qujəm əntə tōjəm quntə, tuta

sämama ti pit öləy.

muwli pə wöl?

tem arit jəm jekəl čəyk əntə wujəm, ruť

qāntəy čəkətəti.

ma ja ruť qāntəyənə əntə čəkatojəm.

Once it became like this.

(The songs) have reached the middle of the high trees.

(The songs) have reached the tops of the low trees.

So it reached the tops of the low trees.

And I began to shiver strongly.

As if I began to freeze.

And when I reached this place, one can hear that my brother is coming.

Coming closer and closer, this man approaches me from behind.

And, well, this sound became lower and lower.

(The sound) reached the tops of the low trees.

This sound has stopped.

Ski tips are revealed to me.

(He) says: 'Well, something strange has happened to me.

We had better go home.'

Well, I also began to become frozen.

I'd better go home.

And I went home.

I've got my song like this.

If it were not for my friend, I would have seen (that singing person).

Who could it be?

I would not have seen so much trouble, because Russian people tormented me.

I would not have been tormented by Russian people.

Eremeĩ I. Sopochnin

wutanə samat wuje quntə t'u mətli jəm wöl?

Do you think that if you had seen this with your own eyes, it would have been good for you?

Ivan S. Sopochnin

jəm ti wōł, jəm-jəm ti wōł.

tüw jəm ti wōł sämama pit quntä.

*čäpəŋqə tōm pajłəy t'ərttə qoγə ti jəγəm
ōłəŋ.*

*tem jāy wəle toγa əti jastəltə ruť məγnə
wəle əti čipanət tājłətəγ.*

nün pə moťet čipan wōsən.

ał ut pytəmta.

nin tu wär pə müwat kənčłəttən.

māqi militsəγətnə äsłəjəm.

ylə pitəm.

*manə ał pə nōγəltətəγə, myčəŋ qoγə
əltəγə.*

māqi ləwtə kōł pə qutəm.

šumanəŋ kōłət pyrəłta qorəγtəγəłtə.

wiytił qoliləγləm.

it əjməta qonə pə əntə wiyłəjəm.

Eremeĩ I. Sopochnin

it ja, qōjəγinə kənčli?

*os əj ma tiγəttə arəγ tōjəŋ t'ut t'eťəŋkemi
qytəm arəγ?*

Ivan S. Sopochnin

*t'eťəŋki qyjəm arəγ, inam qoləm arəγ
tājəł.*

pənə ti noməłta jōγtəm irəγəm.

müw tāyil qānitiyəłti?

*nəγati wəle ti totəγləm tōrəm əŋki
pajəksəm.*

It would have been good, it would have been very good.

You see, it would have been very good, if (this man) had appeared to my eyes.

Then I would have become a real shaman.

These people will also tell that there are people who know sorcery in the Russian land, too.

Maybe you are a man who knows sorcery, too.

Don't be angry.

Why are you asking about this?

Long ago I was released by the militia.

(These times) have gone away.

Do not disturb me, do not regard me as a criminal.

Long ago I heard wicked words.

(People) shouted 'shaman' behind me.

I constantly hear how they cry.

Now nobody cries to me.

Well, who will investigate this?

It turns out that the song we are talking about is a song left from my grandmother?

A song, left from the grandmother, now there are three songs.

And my song, which came from above.

Why hide it?

I brought it for you, I prayed to the heavenly mother.

töräm anki wäle lapət jəm wäy ankləm qāta lejləm wäle. You see, I have seen the house of the heavenly mother, standing on seven silver pillars.

t'u latnə lüw äsəlmat arəp t'i. This is the song, given to me at that time.

quntə t'i əj qujəm ənta tenə jətał wuli. Apparently, it was already known when this man would die.⁶

wəs lüw kōti wārli? There's nothing to be done.

qāntək qo jətə qōl əntə wul. A man can't change anything.

t'ut ma tömpajləy t'ərttə qoqə t'i jəyəm öləŋ, sāmama pit quntə. I would have become a real shaman, if he had appeared to my eyes.

Iosif I. Sopochin

qōjajyi wōł t'ut? Who was that?

Eremeï I. Sopochin

mōñil wuťyi. The dead younger brother.

Ivan S. Sopochin

a t'u pōstuaqə, welit pətan tuwəm ötam. The one who was taken because of the shepherd reindeer.

Iosif I. Sopochin

jōliptə quje? The one a year apart in age?

Ivan S. Sopochin

t'utəm t'i. Yes, that one.

pyrnə qyťəŋ quntə, t'i latnə, jələp tyləs uləntəm tāyinə, čājə kūrək quntə, t'ut čājə. When the two of them were left behind, at that time, it was the new moon, during the month of the true eagle, surely.

Dmitriï A. Kechimov

temi čājə kūrək, temi rāypəŋ kūrək, müw čājə kūrək mətapi kūrəkəl sar t'it? Did it (take place) during the month of the true eagle or the delusive eagle? Which eagle comes first?

⁶ Ivan Stepanovich means that the date of death of his companion was already known to God. That is why his youngest brother, who was later put in prison, was not allowed to hear this sacred song, for if he had heard it, he would have died immediately, but the day of his death had not yet come. This unexpected witness had prevented Ivan Stepanovich from acquiring the shaman's skill in full measure.

Iosif I. Sopochin

răypəŋ kürək.

The delusive eagle.

Dmitrii A. Kechimov

răypəŋ kürək.

The delusive eagle.

Ivan S. Sopochin

*temi tōyənə quntə, răypəŋ kürək, čăjə
kürək tōm, os pyrnə ätəl.*

Assuming that's true, then, perhaps, it (took place) during the month of the delusive eagle. The true eagle comes after that, later.

Dmitrii A. Kechimov

*it ättə, čăjə kürək ti ätəl, tem mətə
qōtlətnə.*

Right now it's a crescent moon; the true eagle will appear soon.

Eremei I. Sopochin

a t'u tyləsnə?

During this month?

Ivan S. Sopochin

*tem răypəŋ tyləsyə tājətə tyləs quntə,
əntemyə jəyəm ötyələm, ti tyləsnə
əntemyə jəkkən ...*

During this (month of the) delusive eagle, during this current month my brothers died, they died during this month.

tōyənə ti.

That's how it was.

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Khanty River Names

The nomenclature of Khanty hydronyms is difficult to render in both Russian and English. Instead of directly using the Russian forms transcribed from Cyrillic letters, some account has been taken of the native Khanty forms, in particular of smaller, relatively unknown rivers and streams, in the English versions, while also aspiring not to produce orthographic monstrosities for English-language readers. In the table below, Márta Csepregi has provided putative Khanty forms underlying the Russified forms of names; these Khanty forms are not always certain (it has not been possible to consult native speakers). The list consists of items found either in the text or in the map at the front of the volume; we do not endeavour to provide etymologies of all toponyms with Khanty origins.

Standardised form	Khanty form	Meaning
Agan	<i>áγan</i>	Stream
Ai-Ort-yagun	<i>aj ört jáwən</i>	Small Hero's river
Ai-Yinku-yagun	<i>aj jáŋkəw jáwən</i>	Small Our water river
Aika-yogan	<i>ajka jáwən</i>	Aika stream
Dem'yanka	<i>ńəmńan</i>	N'emn'an (the name of a Khanty prince)
Enel-imi-yagun	<i>ənət imi jáwən</i>	Great lady's river
Kirill-Vys-yagun	<i>kirill wəs jáwən</i>	Kirill's mammoth river
Kotlungai-yagun	<i>qōłəŋ aj jáwən</i>	Little river with pines
Kumali-yagun	<i>küŋali jáwən</i>	Landing-net river
Kutlop-yagun	<i>quləp / qulip jáwən</i>	Fishing-net / Qulip river
Lyamin	<i>łiməŋ</i>	?
Nyogus-yagh	<i>ńōγəs jəγ</i>	Sable brook
Ob'	<i>as</i>	Big river
Ort-yagun	<i>ört jáwən</i>	Hero's river
Pekhim-yagun	<i>? pyqəm jáwən</i>	Rotten river
Pim	<i>piŋ</i>	?
Sagun-yagun	<i>? səwən jáwən</i>	Birch-bark basket river

Tlung-yagun	<i>tuyq jāwən</i>	Spirit river
Trom-yogan	<i>tōrəm jāwən</i>	God's river
Vakh	<i>wāγ</i>	Iron
Vasyugan	<i>wāt jāwən</i>	Narrow river
Woki-rap-yagun	<i>wōqi rāp jāwən</i>	Fox-cliff river
Yavoryakh	<i>jayərjay</i>	Branching brook
Yinku-yagun (Инку ягун)	<i>jənkəw jāwən</i>	Our water river
Yukhkun-Yinku-yagun	<i>jukkəy jənkəw jāwən</i>	Tree-clad Our water river
Yugan	<i>jāwən</i>	River

Khanty Names and Terms

- aj jəŋkəw jəwən* Ai-Yinku-yagun river
aj ört jəwən Ai-Ort-yagun river
aj qāt small hut for women in confinement
alt aŋki carrying mother, assistant at birth who carries baby to family dwelling
aŋki puɣəs goddess who delivers babies
arəɣ arəɣta qo, *arəɣta qu* singer (type of shaman)
as Ob' river
as iki tutelary god of the Ob'
āwəs jəɣ 'downstream people', folktale opponents of the Khanty
āɣən Agan river
čək naj a flood (in folktales)
ənət imi jəwən Enel-imi-yagun river
ewət iki tutelary god of the River Tromyogan (*ewət* is 'peak')
iki 'man, lord', used as an honorary term, for example in names of local guardian spirits
imi 'woman, lady', used as an honorary term, for example in names of local guardian spirits
jəɣɣən jəɣ the Nenets people
jəwən river, Yugan river
jəwən iki tutelary god of the Yugan river
jayəɣjay Yavoryakh river
jəŋk tɯŋq water spirit
jəŋkəw jəwən Yinku-yagun river
jisłətə qo, *jisilta qu* 'man who makes you cry out', a type of shaman
joł 'sorcery', *jołta* 'perform sorcery', *jołəɣta* 'mumble, murmur', *jołəmnəɣ* song performed in shamanic séance
jołta qu a type of shaman
jošəɣ joɣ woman who lays on hands to heal
jukkəɣ jəŋkəw jəwən Yukhkun-Yinku-yagun river
yagun river
kazym imi tutelary goddess of the reindeer of Kazÿm
kazym jaɣ people of Kazÿm
kəłtas, *kəłtas aŋki*, *kəłtas imi*, *kəłtas puɣəs* alternative names for the goddess of birth
küŋali jəwən Kumali-yagun river
lantəɣ toɣ a place in the tale of Sopoch *iki*
timəɣ Lyamin river
tɯŋq āwət sacred sledge
tɯŋqət spirits
mānttə qo, *mānttə qu* storyteller
māŋk (iki) evil forest-dwelling spirit
məɣ aŋki Earth Mother
məɣ puɣəs aŋki Earth Navel Mother
mir šawitti ɣu World-Overseeing Man (Kazÿm)
mir wantti ɣu World-Watching Man (Northern Khanty)
mołəqsətə qo/ne (muləqsətə qo) praying man/woman, able to predict future without a drum
mul sacred part of house; oath sworn during sacrifice; *muləqsəta* swear an oath; pray; *muləɣtətə* curse; *multa* ask deity to accept sacrifice
naj fire; virgin
naj aŋki (imi), *naj imi* goddess of the home fire
nəmñan Dem'yanka river
nij juɣ 'woman tree', a Khanty bowed instrument
nōɣəs jəɣ Nyogus-yagh river
nūki qot chum, traditional conical frame dwelling
nūqulta qu oracle, seer
numi tōrəm the supreme god of heaven
numto (Nenets, 'god lake'), the source of the Kazÿm river

- ört jāvæn* Ort-yagun river
osip Iosif Ivanovich Sopochin's Khanty name
pajeksata believe, pray; word used by Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin for his offering of prayer
panay juy 'musical tree', boat-shaped zither
pānyq arəy fly-agaric song
pānyq hitə qo/ne fly-agaric eater, a type of shaman
pern aŋki godmother, one of the newborn's assistants
pesika imi jāvæn Pesika woman river, a haunt of spirits in Leonid Sopochin's tale
pij Pim river
puqtəy aŋki 'navel mother', assistant at childbirth
qān iki a princely god living in the sky, an underling of *tōrəm*
qāntəy jāy the Khanty people
qāt tunqə jāvæn Kotlunga-yagun river
qātł imi goddess of the Sun
quj iki Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin's Khanty name
qyn iki god of the Underworld
rāp iki 'cliff man', a Var'ëgan folktale character (presumably so called for his great strength, though the name (mediated through Russian) could also represent *rāyəp iki*, 'sly man')
rāp iki mōñi 'cliff man younger brother', a Var'ëgan folktale character
sārñi qān iki Golden Prince, one of the gods
sārñi tōrəm iki Golden Sky Lord, another name for *numi tōrəm*
sāvæn jāvæn Sagun-yagun river
sem woj a seer, a type of shaman
šepan/šipan sorcery; *šepanəy/šipanəy qo* a sorcerer, a type of shaman
siŋk uri puyəł a settlement near the Yugan river
sir Khanty sib
- sōw juy* a festal marital staff
tər 'vision'
tərttə qo/ne a type of shaman (male/female); Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin regarded himself as a *tərttə qo tārəs naj (imi)* fiery sea goddess
tārəy oyəp juy 'crane-headed tree', a type of harp
tərtəy xoj shaman (Southern Khanty)
tərttə qo arəy shaman song
toña name of a bogatyr (knight)
tōrəm heaven, sky, the high sky god
tōrəm aŋki mother god, spouse of *tōrəm atı*
tōrəm atı the Sky Father
tōrəm jāvæn Trom-yogan river
tōrəm qāt hut dedicated to *tōrəm*
tōrəm san (qān) iki the husband of *məy puyəs aŋki*
tüwət naj imi goddess of the fire
uləm wārtə qo/ne, uləm wārtə qu a seer of dreams
wājəy ārt iki, wājəy ārt tōrəm god of the forest, who drives animals towards hunters
wāt jāvæn Vasyugan river
wāy Vakh river
wəs a mythological mammoth
wōnt tunq forest spirit
wōnt naj goddess of forest fire
wōqi rāp imi tutelary goddess of the Woki-rap (Fox Cliff) area (cf. *wōqi rāp jāvæn imi*)
wōqi rāp jāvæn Woki-rap-yagun river
wōqi rāp jāvæn imi tutelary goddess of the Woki-rap-yagun, protector of the Sopochin shamanic drum
wōqi rāp jāvæn imi āwi Woki-rap-yagun goddess's daughter, guardian spirit of Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin
wut imi tutelary goddess of the Kazym river, 'the lady (dwelling) above', i.e. in the upper reaches of the river
yl tunq a 'lower' spirit (of the Underworld?)

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Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin lived his whole life following the traditional customs of his people, one of the branches of the Eastern Khanty, on a tributary of the Ob', the Woki-rap-yagun ('Fox-cliff river'), near Surgut. He remained a monolingual speaker of his dialect, and was a guardian of spiritual traditions. In his youth he was arrested for the practice of shamanism – though he called himself not a shaman, but a 'man who sees', who has visions. In the last years of his life (he died in 1993), he attracted many visits from researchers into shamanism and traditional culture. The present volume presents the research of some of the scholars who carried out field work or have studied Sopochin's spiritual traditions, and marks a significant contribution to English-language research into Eastern Khanty shamanism and traditional culture.



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