

# Shamanism and Northern Ecology



# Religion and Society 36

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# Shamanism and Northern Ecology

*Edited by*  
Juha Pentikäinen

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## Foreword

In May 1990 the Regional Conference on Circumpolar and Northern Religion was held in Helsinki. It was organized by the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), the Finnish Society for the Study of Comparative Religion, and the Department of Comparative Religion of the University of Helsinki as a special event to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the university of Helsinki.

It took about five years to complete the work on the present volume. The basic reason for the delay was the fact that this kind of multinational and multi-language project requires a lot of time. In the course of the work both geographical and topical scope of the publication was so significantly broadened that the work was really worth the effort and time it demanded. More information on the background of the volume is given in section 4.1 of the Introduction.

We could not have completed this book without the help and encouragement we received from the IAHR, and especially from Professor Michael Pye, the Secretary General of the IAHR; from the university of Helsinki for supporting this idea by its rectors Päiviö Tommila and Risto Ihamuotila; from the Ministry of Education of Finland and the Finnish Cultural Foundation for their financial support; from Professor Jacques Waardenburg, Doctor of Theology *honoris causa* of Helsinki university, for his taking the initiative in including the manuscript in the series "Religion and Society". Our special thanks to Mr. Veikko Anttonen and Harri Markkula of Helsinki university for their indispensable help in organizing the conference of 1990. We wish to express our gratitude to the translators of the volume Susan Sinisalo and Ritva Poom, as well as to our assistants in the editing work Heikki Pesonen, Taisto Raudalainen and Ljuba Tarvainen.

We do hope that this big international effort will serve the humanitarian purposes that inspired it.

January 1995  
Helsinki

Juha Y. Pentikäinen



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# Introduction

*Juha Y. Pentikäinen*

## 1.1. Ethnic religions in the Northern ecological context

In this volume shamanism is presented as “an expression of the northern identity”. Instead of the term “northern religion”, I prefer to use the pluralistic concept of “northern religions”. The definitions of many concepts used about the North are often different from their western counterparts. The definition of ‘religion’, for example, must be more holistic and more open than its common counterpart in Western usage, where religion is just one facet of life among others. The Northern religion becomes understood only in its relation with the ecological, social, cultural and even political problems of the North. This particularly concerns the very concept of shamanism which will be detailed below.

It might be worthwhile trying to find the difference in the meanings among the three concepts of “Northern”, “Arctic” and “Circumpolar”, which are often overlapping, within at least the religious context.

“Arctic”, first of all, is both an ecological and a mythical concept. Since the term is derived from the Greek word *arktos* ‘bear’, “Arctic” areas were supposed to be situated under the constellation of the Great Bear. Ecologically, the common definition of the “Arctic” includes the Polar and adjacent areas which are located beyond the borderline of the average temperature of below 10°C in July.

According to Hultkrantz (1987), “Arctic religions” are practiced by peoples who dwell in the Polar North, mostly living in the tundra (the permafrost zone) and partly in the taiga (the northern coniferous forest belt that stretches around the globe). I fully agree with the author’s statement concerning the impact of the severe natural environment on these cultures and religions, being, however, more sceptical as regards the conclusions of many rival schools of archaeology and cultural history using evolution and diffusion as theories explaining the Arctic survival of the Paleolithic hunter-gatherer culture (de Laguna 1993).

The term “Circumpolar” has been another concept mainly used by such archaeologists as Gutorm Gjessing (1944) who wanted to interrelate the Circumpolar traditions historically. Cultural diffusion was

again used to account for the majority of similarities discovered, in spite of the fact that many common features could rather have been interpreted on the basis of the shared Arctic environment. In my opinion, it might be more appropriate to use the term “Circumpolar” to describe the northern Polar hemisphere and the cultures located within the Polar Circle (up to 66° N.L.). Their “Circumpolar” comparison has accordingly been practiced in “cross-cultural” studies dealing with the Arctic zone.

If the “ethnic” aspect of religion is to be emphasized, the term “Northern” could embrace the holistic relationship of religion with the environment, economy and social structure. It is typical of any ethnic religion that the religious boundaries basically coincide with the linguistic and ethnological borderlines between the cultures. Ethnic religions, accordingly, seem as if to “have been born” among the peoples without any name of the founder of the religion mentioned in this connection.

## 1.2. Shamanism and Northern identity

“Northern” is a geographical concept but its meaning is much broader. In contemporary Russia, for example, northern identity has become extremely important for the 26 peoples of the North, in their joint battle for their economic, political, social and cultural rights. Ignoring their linguistic differences, the Samoyeds, Khanty, Mansi or Tungus and other minor national entities simply describe themselves as Northern peoples, feeling great togetherness and solidarity with other minorities. In March 1990 the Association of the Northern Peoples of the Soviet Union was founded in Moscow. Later this organization obtained membership in the international body of the Indigenous Peoples. This international movement has issued a statement that it represents the Fourth World whose demands should be taken into account in contemporary debates both in the Old and New World. The concept is, of course, extremely political. Cindy Gilday, a Native American woman from Yellowknife, said: “When an Indian breathes, it’s politics (Brody 1988).”

It is the feelings of cultural identity and togetherness that are strongly emphasized today. The Arctic peoples themselves are striving to take an active part in the decision-making processes occurring at the world-wide (UN, UNESCO), international (Arctic states) and nation-wide fo-

rum concerns their problems. According to them, the categories used to describe them must definitely be their own.

The United Nations proclaimed the year 1993 a Year of Indigenous Peoples. This is a clear indication that the problem is extremely important, at least at the level of the international forum. The contemporary question of ethnic death or survival is more than a political issue. Nowadays it concretely concerns the survival or death of the languages and cultures of as many as 70 Northern peoples (Graburn-Strong 1973).

In the Soviet Union, for example, in the census of 1989 26 *narody severa* 'Northern peoples' were listed (Janhunen 1990), ten of them undergoing at the moment the painful process of dying out. According to the estimate shared by many scholars, another ten would die in the course of a generation or two if dramatic changes do not take place. After this sequence of ethnic deaths which today are more frequent and rapid than ever before, there might survive half a dozen northern languages - all of them located within the boundaries of Russia (Map 1 and Table 1). What is relevant in the issue of "ethnic survival" or "ethnic revival"? This question basically concerns not only ecology, social and cultural identity, but the Arctic religion and world view as well. The contemporary problems holistically concern all aspects of human life in the Arctic environments all over the world.

Shamanism as an expression of the ethnic religions seems to have a special appeal to the Northern peoples today. These religions are undergoing a revival at the moment because they have a lot to do with sharing the common feeling of cultural identity, the Northern togetherness of the Fourth World against the pressures coming from the cultures in power, and the attitude of the majority towards minorities.

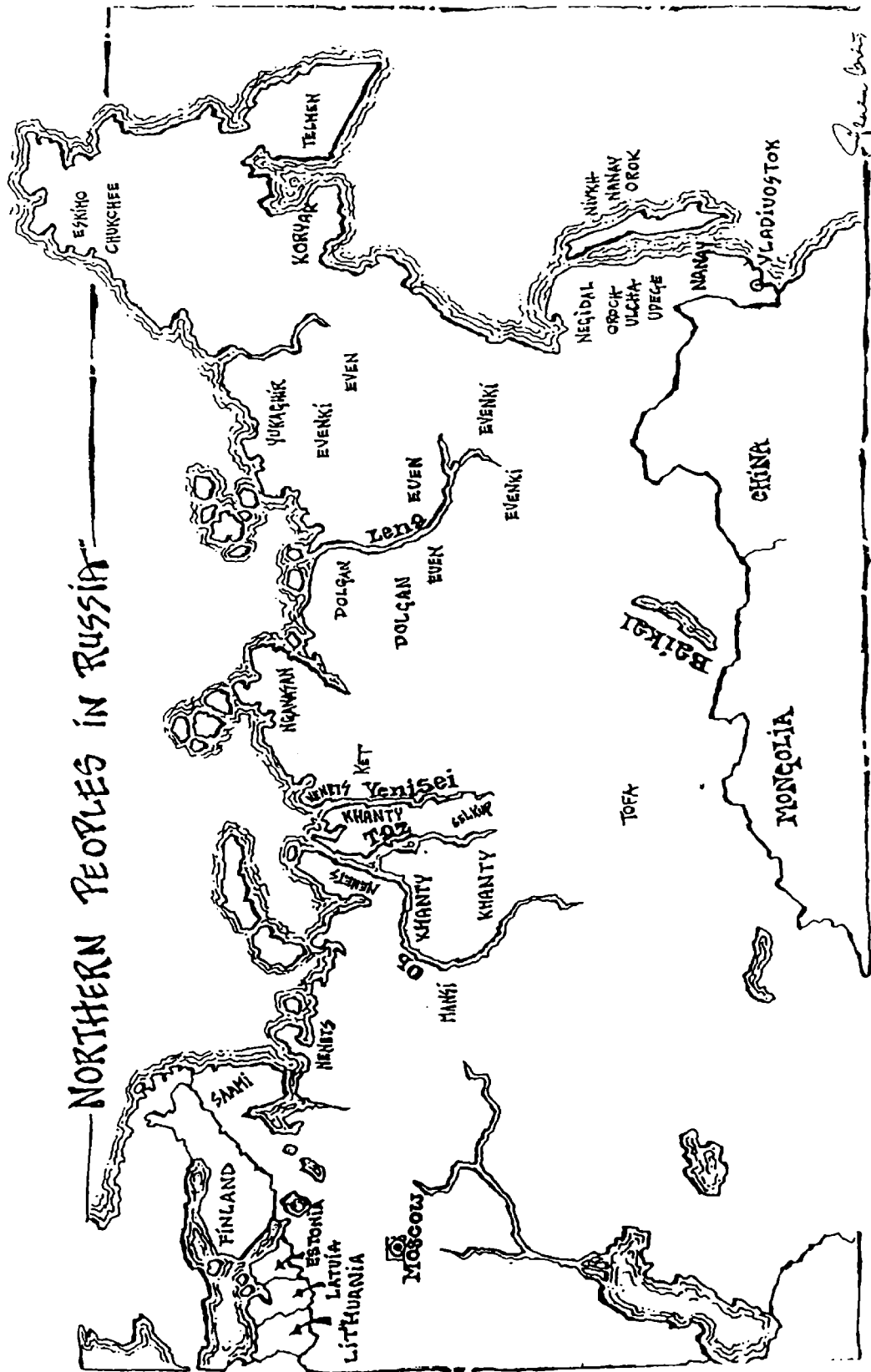
This ethnic dimension is more important in the definition of "northern" than such criteria as the geographical position inside the Polar Circle, or the existence of permafrost or low temperatures. Whether a culture or religion is finally included into the "Northern" category crucially depends on the self-definition of the culture itself. In contemporary Russia, for example, many Subarctic peoples living far below the Polar Circle consider themselves to be Northern peoples. The Ainu in Hokkaido feel a common identity with the Athapascan Indians of the western Canadian Subarctic forests, or the Algonkians in eastern Canada, for example.

*Table 1.*

Ethnic group/ language	Population	Native language speakers	%
1. Nganasan	1,262	1,084	85.9
2. Dolgan	6,571	5,618	85.5
3. Nenets	34,190	27,078	79.2
4. Chukchi	15,106	11,163	73.9
5. Khanty	22,283	14,016	62.2
6. Koryak	8,942	5,168	57.8
7. Eskimo	1,703	933	54.8
8. Ket	1,084	589	54.3
9. Enets	198	106	53.6
10. Selkup	3,564	1,796	50.4
11. Nanay	11,877	5,867	49.5
12. Saami	1,835	899	49.0
13. Orok	179	84	46.9
14. Even	17,055	7,845	46.0
15. Tofa	722	323	44.7
16. Mansi	8,266	3,273	39.6
17. Yukaghir	1,112	398	35.8
18. Ulcha	3,173	1,111	35.0
19. Evenki	29,975	10,192	34.0
20. Negidal	587	184	31.4
21. Udege	1,902	593	31.2
22. Aleut	644	190	29.5
23. Nivkh	4,631	1,199	25.9
24. Itelmen	2,428	563	23.2
25. Chuvan	1,384	309	22.3
26. Oroch	883	179	20.3

Source: Juha Janhunen: Ethnic death and survival in the Soviet North, IAHN Helsinki, May 1990.

Map 1.



## 2.1. Definition of shamanism: a psychopathological disease, religion or worldview?

The concept of shamanism has undergone a kind of devaluation in recent popular and scientific literature. It has currently been used when describing phenomena of Christianity and idols of, for example, modern rock music. The extended contemporary use of the concept has been transferred even into some scientific texts. In an anthropological Ph.D. dissertation (Söderholm 1990), both Jesus Christ and Jim Morrison, the lead singer of “The Doors”, were defined as shamans. Shamanic therapeutic clinics organized according to the principles of their Californian promoter Dr. Robert Harner have been functioning in many western cities, and shamanic retreat weekends offering guided trips to make the nuances of the “other world” accessible to everybody have been arranged both in the Old and New Worlds. Shamanism is nowadays offered as a universal means of penetrating into the depths of the human conscience.

Many advanced experts in shamanistic research have not been satisfied with the recent trends. Åke Hultkrantz, Emeritus Professor of History of Religions at the University of Stockholm, criticizes the texts of his colleagues in shamanistic research with the following rebuke: “There is today, and has been for considerable time, great confusion concerning the import of the term ‘shamanism’. This is most regrettable since this is one of the most used terms in comparative religion, folklore and ethnology, and, moreover, it can scarcely be dispensed with.”

The criticism of Hultkrantz particularly concerns the over-emphasis on the universality of ecstasy in the religious experiences emphasized by Mircea Eliade among others. Since Eliade wrote his classical work “Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy” (1964), shamanism has often been characterized as an ecstatic phenomenon found almost universally in primitive religions. Because ecstasy and soul-excursions seem to be universal, so is shamanism as well. As a universalist, Eliade included even mysticism and the spirit possession cults of African healers into shamanism.

Since the mid-19th century another trend has been proposed to explain shamanism as a mental disorder. In making such a statement the problem has, however, often been turned upside down. My field experience among the Khanty in their shamanistic initiation confirms



the following statement by Mircea Eliade (1987): "To obtain the gift of shamanizing presupposes precisely the solution of the psychic crisis brought on by the first symptoms of election or call."

The shaman Ivan Stepanovitch Sopotshin, whose repertoire is studied more thoroughly in my article in the volume, was never eager to reveal the sources of his great expertise. He rather emphasized that the knowledge and the gift had come "from above", from the gods, ancestors and the guardian spirits: "I was taught by no one, nobody gave me such a gift." Some references to contacts with the Nenets Samoyeds who were migrating across the neighbouring tundra are important clues to his repertoire. Another valuable remark concerns his mother who "also possessed such a gift" and was not "fully normal", as he once expressed the matter.

Siberian shamanism is generally interpreted as a "gift". It means both an expertise in mythology and folklore and experiencing painful dreams and some kind of madness, if not continuously, at least sometime in a person's life. Abnormal behaviour and experiences are even expected when shamanic initiation takes place as a testimony to the fact that the spirits have accepted the shaman-to-be. After that the shaman's life may be more or less normal until old age, when many shamans again may undergo critical moments. Madness is said to be typical of aging shamans, and many of them die or 'go' in their specific way "along the river of his clan without returning home any more" (Ohlmarks 1939). Modern society might call this having "committed suicide", but from the point of view of a shamanic society, it is a "voluntary departure", a normal end to a life which has been normally abnormal.

According to the well-known model employing both the evolution and diffusion theories, arctic shamanism has been regarded as the basic manifestation of the palaeolithic religion (Hultkrantz 1991) of the early hunter-gatherers, its distribution reflecting their continental migrations. Such ethnologists as H. Findeisen (1957) and V. Diószegi (1978), for example, consider shamanism as an ancient "religion" or at least a "form of religion".

## 2.2. Towards a more holistic interpretation of shamanism

A great number of ethnological studies of shamanism have been made on the basis of such visual elements as shamanic drums, outfits, bags, masks etc. These material elements also are most common and often the earliest artifacts of shamanism. When early travelers and explorers got into societies which had shamans, their interest was naturally directed to the peculiar elements of the rituals of the aboriginals. The travelers were eager to collect shamanic clothes and drums both for western museums and their own exotic collections.

Early sources often do not include enough contextual information about the uses and meanings of the materials in shamanic societies. As far as Saami shamanism is concerned, the earliest records of the shamans themselves can be found in trials held by the spiritual and secular authorities to try shamans. Many shamans were sentenced to death in the courts following the wave of witch trials which swept the extreme North from continental Europe. These were quite common in the 17th and even the 18th centuries.

These processes against shamanism led by the Swedish and Danish-Norwegian Crowns and Churches, were in fact processes against the visible elements of shamanism. The most important manifestation of Saami shamanism was, of course, a troll-drum with a hammer, rings and other implements. In the early 18th century hundreds of shamanic drums were collected in Copenhagen in the course of the active missionary work led by Thomas von Westen and his successors from the missionary school in Trondheim in Norway. Most of the drums of this collection, however, perished in the Great Fire in Copenhagen, so that Ernst Manker, a Swedish ethnographer, could describe only 71 drums in his two volumes "*Die Lappische Zaubertrommel*" (1938, 1950).

The missionaries also attacked the Saami shaman's dress. The four-edged Kautokeino Lapp hat symbolizing the four corners of the universe was out-lawed (Pentikäinen 1987) to such an extent that it almost went out of use in Finnmark. Wearing it has, until recently, been regarded as a serious sin. Although the traditional Saami way of singing epic and ritual chants, *juoigat*, was also condemned as sinful behaviour, they were, however, transmitted as part of the ceremonies and get-togethers of the clans during the reindeer year, or during fishing or hunting trips.

In the course of the active missionary period, shamanic knowledge became private property of the human mind or an esoteric capacity practised secretly either to gain better luck in fishing, hunting, reindeer husbandry, or to ensure health and happiness in marital life. In affairs concerning the fortune of the clan in comparison with other clans, it could even be a means of attacking members of other clans and bringing misfortune.

I was quite often able to observe these rituals in my field work of the 1960's and 1970's among the Northern Saami of Norwegian Finnmark, Northern Sweden and Finland. It was then still possible to observe such ancient pre-Christian practices as, for instance, shamanic *seita* sacrifices. Talking with my Saami informants, I learned that many shamanic elements had, however, been redefined and replaced with a rich caste of supernatural beings, male and female, benevolent and malevolent, both ritually expected and accidentally met, experiential and unexpected.

My observations fully agree with a statement of Saami-born Nilla Outakoski. He concludes his Ph.D. thesis (1991) about the underground spirits in the sermons and ethnographical research of the revivalist minister and scholar of Saami mythology Lars Levi Laestadius (1800-1861), and from his own Saami experience as follows:

Similarly, they (the Saami) broad-mindedly adopted Christian divinity and Christian symbols and added these elements to the figures on the drumhead of the shamanic drum, the "holy book" of the Lapps. The Christian symbols were, however, placed below the Lappish gods, and the Lapps continued to hold the Christian faith secondary to their own religion. When the rumbling of the drums finally died out, a *maahinen*, i.e., a small pocket-sized figurine of an underground spirit, easy to hide and endowed with the best Christian values and motives, replaced the troll-drum. While other creatures from Lappish folklore, who also appeared in Laestadius' sermons, could be and were easily branded as negative and evil, the underground spirit offered love, help and security . . . ."

The Saami drum is particularly complex in its structure, representing in its microcosm the seasonal variation of universe as a macrocosm. Containing much mythical information, it is a kind of a cognitive map for the trip of the shaman's ego-soul between the three levels of the universe (Pentikäinen 1987). It might also be interpreted as a star chart including such astral phenomena as the twelve star constellation of the Zodiac and the Milky Way (Sommarström 1991). Since Western and Eastern, Northern and Southern stellar maps vary, one of the exciting

tasks of future research will be a comparative study of shamanic drums in relation to their mythical background and possible parallels in the skies.

In my opinion, the term shamanism is much broader than just a “form of religion”. It is a way of life and a culture in which the chosen leader, the shaman, occupies a central role. Shamanism is rather a “worldview system” than “religion” in the strict sense of the word. It is so closely related to ecology, economy, social structure, etc., that it is very difficult to define the borders of the concept. Shamanism could phenomenologically be defined on the basis of several criteria and should, for example, include the following dimensions:

1. Ecstatic techniques used to find the way into other worlds or dimensions of reality.
2. The hypothesis of more than one soul: in the state of trance the free soul leaves the body to make trips to other worlds assuming various, e.g., animal, shapes.
3. The belief in a 3-level universe, with the shaman mediating between these levels.
4. The belief in the helping spirits of the shaman.
5. The difference in ritual paraphernalia of shamanism in various cultures: drum, dress, bag, mask, etc.

When using shamanic categories, it is important to make a distinction between the cultures, such as some Mandshu-Tungusian peoples (1) who have the concept of *saman* in their native vocabulary, and those (2) who know similar phenomena but no concept (e.g., the Khanty). Besides, (3) there exist such cultures in the world that have neither the word nor the phenomenon. According to this definition, the Afro-American spirit-possession cults, for example, do not belong to the category of shamanism.

### 2.3. Shamanism as the grammar of mind

The phenomenon of shamanism is extremely complex and multifaceted. When characterizing it, the emphasis should be made on its moral and spiritual, symbolic and mystical, ecological and sociological, esthetic and political, as well as cosmogonic aspects.

In order to understand shamanism as a religious, social and cultural phenomenon it should, for this reason, be analyzed as a whole, taking into consideration both the visible elements of shamanism, as well as its latent meanings and messages. In the societies where shamanism is practiced, it plays a central role in the lives of the individuals and the clan. The shaman is known to be present in spite of the fact that in everyday life he seems to be an ordinary man, husband, father, grandfather, reindeer keeper, fisherman. It is from this everyday status that he takes his role as a shaman when he is needed; the phenomenon Lauri Honko (1964) and Anna-Leena Siikala (1978) have called “the role occupation of the shaman”.

In my opinion, shamanism is a specific permanent state of being that never ceases to permeate the whole existence of the shaman throughout his life. The gift of shamanism does impose certain specific social roles for the shaman to perform. The social roles of the shaman are numerous and diverse: he is a healer and a priest, a fortune-teller and a psychopomp leading the souls of the deceased to the abode of the dead, an epic-singer and a politician. This competence and its mythical background is known to the society who elects him and puts him/her into office (for details see my article in this volume).

The shaman should be an expert in the folklore of his culture. The corpus of shamanic folklore is an important element of this whole. The importance of the analysis of its generic categories has been emphasized by L. Kuzmina, a scholar of Buryat shamanism, who attempted this type of classification. According to L. Kuzmina (1986), the most typical genres of shamanistic tradition were myths, charms, exorcisms, shamans' oaths, songs and genealogical tales about previous male and female shamans. The shaman's oath is a necessary element of a shaman's initiation in numerous Siberian cultures. In the presence of the community, the shaman vows to become the guardian of their religious customs. Among the Buryats, the oath is as follows:

Having performed this initiation rite and having been blessed as a shaman, I vow to be the protector of infants, not to avoid the sick and the poor, not to seek remuneration, not to avoid aliens, not to favor blood relatives, to walk on foot to a sick person and to the poor, even to travel on oxen, not to rejoice in bounteous gifts and not to be angered by small ones. I shall not withhold the truth with regard to a sick person's identity . . . Let the father of the high heavens himself know of this vow and let the broad mother-earth be witness to it (Kuzmina 1986).

Such material elements as the shaman's drum, dress, bag, mask, etc. are both important criteria of shamanism and indispensable paraphernalia for the shaman's social performances of the roles of a mediator between the worlds, a traveler between the levels of consciousness. As far as Northern Eurasian shamanism is concerned, I fully agree with Anna-Leena Siikala (1978) who writes: "The drum may be claimed to be the central symbol of shamanism, and without it a shaman is not a shaman." Similarly, Lauri Honko (1964) emphasizes that "... from Altai to Lappland the drum is the liturgical handbook of shamanism." In some cultures drums are more complicated in their motifs than in others; in some cultures they are less important than the shaman's dress or are completely missing (Hultkrantz 1991).

The shaman should be an expert in the ideological tradition in his culture. Generally speaking, the ideological aspect of shamanism has so far been underestimated in shamanistic research. The transmission of the mythical traditions from one shaman to another has been an important element of shamanistic initiation. One of the most important criteria in the choice of a new shaman was certainly expertise in the ideological traditions of the culture. The name of the Finnish sage is *tietäjä* 'someone who knows'. It has been necessary for future shamans to spend a great deal of time familiarizing themselves with the folklore related to their task. Those who were most successful in shamanistic skills became practitioners with due respect to the knowledge of their people's cultural and religious heritage.

It is important to keep in mind the distinction between two kinds of shamanistic traditions in a society. Some part of shamanic knowledge is collectively owned by rank-and-file members of the clan and the society, but the other part is a private property of the shamans only.

We could speak about a specific "grammar of mind" typical of shamanism. It means competence in certain shamanic folklore repertoire, specific skills in performing the ritual acts, knowledge of the "shamanic" language and the rules of the generic and ritual "grammar" observed not only in the shamanistic sessions but in the behaviour and everyday life of a shamanistic society.

### 3.1. Siberian shamanism in the focus of attention

The concept of shamanism has its background in Siberia, in a Tungus word *saman* which entered literature at the end of the 17th century. The author of the pioneering Russian text was Protopop Avvakum, the first leader of the Old Believers persecuted by the Russian Orthodox church and the Tsar. Avvakum, who was exiled to Siberia for opposing the Patriarch Nikon's liturgical reforms, had an opportunity to observe shamanistic rituals among the Tungus. In 1661 he wrote about his observations made in the Trans-Baikal territory not far from Nercha lake (formerly called Dauriya), which was the eastern-most point of the path covered by Avvakum after his exile (about 18,000 km). It also was the place where M.A. Castrén's scientific journey came to an end nearly 200 years later (1848).

Since Avvakum it has been typical of many writers brought up in Christian societies to view shamans as religious specialists, as rivals of the Christian doctrine and its missionaries and priests.

### 3.2. Early Explorers in Western Siberia

Interest in Siberia is related to the birth of the Russian empire. The first research-oriented descriptions aiming at removing the legendary aura enveloping the land of the Golden Baba was made by Nicolaas Witsen, a Dutchman, who was in the service of Peter the Great. His "Noord en Oost-Tartarye" (1692) was, however, still based on indirect information concerning the territories beyond the Urals.

One of the first authentic descriptions was presented by Grigorij Novitskij in his "Kratkoje Opisanije o Narode Ostjatskom" [Brief description of the Ostyak people], written in 1715 but made public only 170 years later (1884). Extensive field data concerning the peoples of all Russia were collected by a naturalist, academician Peter Simon Pallas (1771-1776), the information about Uralic peoples being added by his assistant Zujev.

Johan Gottlieb Georgi's "Bemerkungen einer Reise im russischen Reiche in den Jahren 1773, 1774" (1775) and "Beschreibung aller Nationen des russischen Reiches" (1776-1780) have been and still are

serving as an important source of classical information for scholars interested in Siberia.

A remarkable collection of dialect descriptions, folklore and beliefs was gathered by a great Hungarian researcher Reguly Antál in 1844-1845. In spite of his early death, he proved to be very productive in his field work. His materials were made public by his countrymen Hunvalvy Pál (1864) and Munkácsi Bernard (1892-1910).

Finnish researcher M.A. Castrén took on the responsibility for the Uralic and Siberian studies carried out by the St. Peterburg Academy of Sciences at the suggestion of his countryman, academician A.J. Sjögren. His long and scientifically fruitful journeys took place in 1841-1844 and 1845-1849. He worked with the Zyryans, Cheremis, Khanty, Samoyeds, Nenets, Enets, Nganasans, Yuraks, Tungus, Evenks and Kamass among Finno-Ugrians; with the Koybals, Tuvinians, Karagas and others among Turkish peoples, and his scientific trips went as far as the Buryat tribal territories (Joki 1980).

Reguly, Sjögren and Castrén were pioneers in the field of Finno-Ugric studies who paved the way for the next generations of scholars to follow in their footsteps in expeditions to northern Siberia initiated mainly from St. Peterburg, Helsinki and Budapest. The Russian Academy of Sciences played an important part in organizing expeditions, collecting materials, etc. In the field of ethnography, in-depth research was carried out in the Northern territories at the turn of the last century. Among the scholars who spent years working in various regions of Siberia were W.G. Bogoras and W. Jochelson, whose works about several ethnic groups of the North-East of Siberia are well-known. Special thanks should be given to the American Jessup North Pacific research publication series edited by Franz Boas during 1900-1930 (Siikala 1978, 1992).

### 3.3. Ethnographical studies of Siberian shamanism in the former USSR

Scientific expeditions from the West to the Russian territories were terminated by the revolution of 1917. After the Revolution the information concerning Russian studies of northern ethnicities and shamanism was insufficient and unavailable to western scholars. V.Diószegi, a



Hungarian scholar of the ethnography of shamanism, can be said to be the first of a few foreigners who managed to reach the research fields of Inner Asia and the Altai mountains after World War II in 1957 and 1958 (Hoppál 1988).

Marjorie M. Balzer, a Fellow of the Harvard University Russian Research Center, was fortunate to take part in a field trip of Leningrad University in 1975-1976. That ethnographic field experience, really exceptional at that time, was later developed into a dissertation on preserving the cultural and gender identity of the Khanty people (1979). Later she studied both the traditional forms of shamanistic séances, as well as changes in its practice today in Yakutija. Her all-embracing work on Siberian shamanism "Shamanism: Soviet studies of traditional religion in Siberia and Central Asia" was published in New York in 1990.

After the revolution of 1917, scholars from Soviet Russia resumed their activities under the new circumstances as soon as it became possible. Ivan Lopatin led seven expeditions into the Amur region (1913-1924), but he also knew the Buryat tradition since he had lived in the Baykal region for a long time. He spent the last years of his life in the USA and published, among other works, a book about the cult of the dead among the natives of the Amur basin (1960). Special mention should be made of L.I. Sternberg's monograph about the peoples of the Amur and Maritime Area of the USSR (1933). His field work was carried out at the beginning of the twentieth century. Those materials were collected and translated in the world ethnological library, Human Relations Area Files (1964).

Later A.M. Zolotarev (1939), V.A. Avrorin and I.I. Kozminskij (1949) and others continued research into the religious beliefs and shamanistic worldviews of the peoples of this area. Such scholars as T.Ju. Sem and Ch.M. Taksami belong to the indigenous population themselves, which has given them a unique opportunity to interpret the texts of the ritual folklore of their 'own' culture.

Studies among the Samoyedic and Ob-Ugrian tribes have been carried out continuously. The real pioneering works of B.O. Dolgikh, A.A. Popov, I.D. Prokof'yeva and G.N. Prokofyev, G.A. Starcev and V.N. Chernetsov should be mentioned first of all. Some of their studies have been translated into English by the Arctic Institute of North America. B.O. Dolgikh was one of the main authors of demographic and ethnogenetic studies of Northern peoples over a long period. The results of his research can also be found in the HRAF collections (1926-1927).

A.A. Popov's ethnographical and sociological descriptions of the Nganasan (Tavgi) culture are a piece of classic scientific research in the field. The English versions of his principal works can be found in the Uralic and Altaic Series (1966), as well as in the HRAF translations (1936-1938). He was the first Russian compiler of a large bibliography including the Russian materials on the studies of shamanism (1932). Je.D. Prokofyeva was studying both Selkup material culture and shamanism, as well as religious beliefs and shamanic outfits of Enets people immediately after the war (1952, 1953; "Studies of Siberian Shamanism" (1963)). G.N. Prokofyev investigated the ethnogenetical and cultural problems of the same tribes. G.A. Starcev's ethnographical monographs about the Khanty and Samoyed peoples were published in Moscow (1928) and Leningrad (1930).

A prominent figure among the researchers studying the inhabitants of Western Siberia, especially Mansi, is V.N. Chernetsov (Leningrad-Tomsk) who led expeditions into several territories, and spent several long periods among Ugrians (1925-1948). His articles and field reports were regularly published over a period nearly 50 years. He studied both the religion and prehistory of the Ob-Ugrians. Some of his results have been translated into English and German. In the twenties he was encouraged by the grand old man of Russian ethnology W.G. Bogoras himself, and, in his turn, also inspired a new generation of active scholars: A.M. Balandin, M.P. Bahrusheva, N.V. Lukina, G.I. Pelikh, Z.P. Sokolova (Lukina 1987).

Z.P. Sokolova took part in nine expeditions between 1967-1972 studying shamanism among the Khanty and Mansi, their everyday customs, ceremonies and traditional architecture. Another author is V.M. Kulemzin (Tomsk) whose extremely profound knowledge of the material culture and religious beliefs of the Ob-Ugrians (especially on the Vakh-Vasyugan Khanty traditions) might serve as a textbook for anyone who wants to become acquainted with the tradition of northern peoples (the active fieldwork period 1969-1973). A monograph on the Khanty ethnography written together with N.V. Lukina was published in 1977 by Tomsk University.

An important investigation of the Siberian North has been carried out by G.N. Gracheva (St. Petersburg). Her philological and ethnological experience formed a basis for elucidating psycho-mental ties between shamanistic texts, the shaman's drum and the traditional worldview among the Nganasans of the Taymyr peninsula. In her research, G.N. Gracheva has interrelated her extraordinary knowledge of the cul-

tural contexts with a detailed analysis of the language (Hoppál 1992). The period of her field research activities (1970-1980) marked the beginning of a new era in the ethnological and anthropological research characterized by a constant search for new methods and theoretical approaches in this field. Alongside Moscow and St. Peterburg, shamanic studies have been carried out in such newer research centers as those in Novosibirsk, Omsk, Syktyvkar, etc.

At present there are a lot of active prominent authors giving a new impetus to research activities in studying Altai shamanism in Novosibirsk. N.A. Alekseev published a historic review "The ancient religion of Siberian Turks" (1980). Four years later he made public his extended comparative study concerning shamanism among the Turkic people, which might be a relevant basis for a future comparative study.

I.N. Gemuev and A.G. Sagalaev (Novosibirsk) are an effective scholarly team to whom both the Ugrian and Altaian traditions are well-known (e.g. "Religija naroda mansi" [Religion of the Mansi people] (1986). Gemuev has tried to find some historically and phenomenologically common roots to the Ugrian religious practice and religious beliefs of a wider region of the southern territories of Asia. (e.g., his article about Ugrian Mithraism in the same volume and "Mitra i medved" [Mytre and bear] in Ural'skaja mifologija [Uralic mythology] (1992). Sagalaev has published a monograph on the mythology of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia (1984) and edited a number of collected papers. Among them mention should be made of a very successful religious-philosophical research on the traditional worldview, a fine example of collaboration among the four well-known scholars from Novosibirsk: E.L. Lvova, I.V. Oktjabrskaja, A.M. Sagalaev, M.S. Usmanova (1989).

There is a remarkable tradition in the research of the Turkic and Tuvinian (Mongolian) shamanism in Russia, initiated before World War II by such researchers as A.V. Anokhin, N.P. Dyrenkova, L.P. Potapov, the results of their earlier collecting and classifying activities published in the volumes of "Sbornik Muzeja Antropologii i Etnografii" [Collection of works of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography] (1924, 1929, 1949).

Here we have to mention T.M. Mikhailov who has been studying Buryat shamanism for a long time (one of his latest works "Buryat shamanism: history, structure and social functions" (1989) and S.I. Weinstein who met and described several shamans among the Tuva people ("Shamanism in Eurasia" (1984)).

V.N. Basilov is a scholar who combines the capability of theoretical thinking with profound knowledge of the field data in his area. Here we should mention his numerous works on living shamanism in Central Asia. Basilov is considering phenomena in the process of changing, and shamanism is, in his opinion, not a phenomenon of the past but, on the contrary, it has a future.

Shamanism has not only been viewed as a system of beliefs but also at the level of epic poetry, especially among Turkic people of Central Asia. As, for example, in the gigantic Kirghizian epic "Manas" studied by a scholar of the old generation V.M. Zhirmunskij, whose contribution to the comparative research of the heroic epic is noteworthy.

The main methodological research approaches employed were ethnographic description, research on the social life and structure among the native inhabitants of Siberia. These approaches proved to be efficient even under the conditions of Soviet totalitarianism. In the late Stalinist period a prominent tradition of ethnogenetical studies of Siberian ethnicities appeared, which made it possible to clarify some historical ties and cultural influences between several Siberian peoples. Scholars made an attempt to combine a review of the prehistory with ethnic migrations into the Siberian territory on the whole and in the neighbouring areas, in particular. Several articles concerning the study of the prehistory and archaeology were published in English by the Arctic Institute of North America (1962). Academician A.P. Okladnikov was exploring the Far East region of Siberia, and reviews of his most fruitful field trips and published results can also be found in English.

It is a Russian research tradition to interpret religions or worldviews as a complex of binary oppositions. It would be promising to try to jointly interpret from this point of view, for example, both the figures on shamanic drums and the petroglyphs (Hoppál 1992) on the basis of the vast field materials discovered and published by such scholars as, for instance, A.P. Okladnikov, V.N. Chernetsov, S.V. Ivanov, A.I. Martynov, Ja.A. Sher, etc. in Russia. International efforts to decode rock "art" problems have received a fresh impetus at the conference "Investigation and restoration of stone monuments" held in October 1991 in Moscow.

Another methodological priority was given to the historical development of social consciousness in the Soviet period. Shamanism used to be viewed by Soviet scholars as a phenomenon belonging to a certain level of socio-economic evolution. But one would, however, very often be misled by the titles of the books published during that period

because those were meant to mirror the ideological obligations and loyalty at that time (Siikala 1978; Hoppál 1988).

Some kind of comparative (phenomenological) study has been practised since L.I. Sternberg's notable works on the cult of the eagle (1925) and the choice of the shaman (1927) in Siberian tribes. Only a very small number of scientific works concerning shamanism solely (Anisimov 1951) were made public in a few journals during the first post-war decade.

Under those difficult circumstances some monographs were, however, already published at the end of the 1950's (Anisimov 1959). Some of Anisimov's works on the Evenks' mythological worldview and cosmology were published in English (1963). As has already been mentioned above, a turning point in the studies was during the 1970's, when there was published quite a large number of works of a substantially new quality (Hoppál 1992).

Both before and after World War II valuable ethnographical information about the details of paraphernalia and clothing was collected, and various rites of shamans' activities were recorded. It should be born in mind that no shamanistic research is possible without this background information (Ivanov 1978) which is huge but difficult to study since it is preserved in the collections of the central and local museums and archives all over the country.

The semiotics school (called sometimes the semiotics school of Tartu) of V.V. Ivanov and V.N. Toporov has proved to be a remarkable and fruitful undertaking. An attempt to reconstruct the ancient worldview or the so-called basic myths using erudition have been made by Toporov (1967, 1972, 1975, 1979, 1982, 1986) who termed his approach "the mytho-poetical studies". The world model of the Ket-people was analysed by them in a joint article as far back as 1962.

One can find quite promising analogous tendencies among, for example, the scholars of the Komi Academy of Sciences in Syktyvkar, such as Dr. N.D. Konakov's investigation into the calendar figures on metallic plates representing the so-called Permian animal-style (1987, 1990). V.V. Napolskikh is another scholar who has continued historic-semiotic studies in order to reconstruct the worldview of the ancient Finno-Ugric peoples.

As early as 1956 and 1958 some book series about the world ethnicities edited and partly written by S.A. Tokarev (1899-1985) were published. As a scholar with great erudition in the key works and theories of both Western and Eastern ethnologists, ethnographers and

orientalists, he was capable of viewing phenomena in the field of ethnographical studies and comparative religion at a wider angle. His first book in this field published in 1957 was devoted to Eastern Slavonic religious beliefs. He continued systematically producing books about primitive religions of the world and about the history of the major world religions (1990).

E.M. Meletinskij, a researcher of literature and epic poetry has studied common typology and epical structures of the so-called Paleo-Asiatic mythology of the North-Western Siberian peoples. His monograph about the raven as the creator, the culture hero, the protoancestor, the first shaman and trickster of Paleo-Asiatic epic poetry was published in 1979 in Moscow. E.M. Meletinskij has shown the raven (as well as the shaman) to be a mediator, an ambivalent being, uniting all the phenomena into a whole. His general theoretical interest concerns the poetical language and structure of the myth; his article in English on this subject was published in New York in 1976. Such scholars as Tokarev, Meletinskij (chief editor) and Toporov can be credited with "Dictionary of World Mythologies" published in Moscow in 1991.

#### 4.1. On the Background of the Volume

In May 1990 the "Regional Conference on Circumpolar and Northern Religion" was held in Helsinki. It was a joint venture of the International Association for the History of Religions, the Finnish Society for the Study of Comparative Religion, and the Department of Comparative Religion of the University of Helsinki that was celebrating its 350th anniversary. Most articles in this volume have been worked out on the basis of the papers and the scientific discussions held in this successful scholarly meeting.

The international debate on shamanism was carried on in a completely new collaborative atmosphere. Among the recent developments in the field it should first of all be mentioned that many representatives of the Northern peoples were taking part in the Helsinki conference. It was of great importance since "they were as if studying themselves", giving such valuable information about their cultures that is available only to insiders.

As a concrete result of the policy of “glasnost” in the former USSR in the 1980’s, an international forum on Arctic Research was held in December 1988 in Leningrad, St. Petersburg nowadays, where an agreement was reached to open the Arctic field for international scientific cooperation. After this break-through forum, a new era of Northern interdisciplinary studies has begun.

Although this book has been prompted by the Helsinki conference, it is not, however, a conference volume. Most proceedings of the conference were published in “Northern Religions and Shamanism” (1992) edited by Mihály Hoppál and Juha Pentikäinen. These two books together shed light on the current debate on shamanism, and I am proud to emphasize here that the results obtained are very much related to the new international activities among scholars of shamanism which have led to the establishment of the International Society for Shamanic Research founded in Seoul in 1991. The international conferences on shamanism initiated by M. Hoppál and myself were held in Sárospatak (Hungary) (1981), Manchester (1982), Vancouver (1983), Nice (1985), Zagreb (Croatia 1988), Seoul (1991) and Budapest (1992), and contributed much to the success of the later meetings.

This book is depicting shamanism in the north. The territories and ecological environments referred to as “northern” are far too widely spaced to be similar. One of the results the present volume can achieve upon its publication might be that we could find some interrelating phenomena to be studied comparatively both at the ideological and ecological levels.

The volume is basically religio-phenomenological and religio-ecological but at the level of specific cultures it is connected with the problems of history, sociology, psychology and anthropology of religion as well. The book is interdisciplinary, comprising the latest results of the scientific research on Northern religion, viewed at various angles and contributed from different parts of the world.

## 4.2. On the contents of the volume

### 4.2.1. Themes and concepts

In his article, Åke Hultkrantz is seeking a new point of view as regards the concept of a world pillar in Arctic and sub-Arctic religions. He considers the world pillar to be a manifestation of the motif of the center of the universe expressed in the ideas of, in particular, a world mountain, a world tree and a world hub. In his opinion, the world pillar is not an original invention of the northerners but a later interpretation of the old concept. The world pillar, however, is a genuine representation of an archaic circumpolar world view. Hultkrantz also discusses the properties and functions of the world pillar.

John P. Dourley has discovered two essays by C.G. Jung dealing with shamanic reality, one on the trickster figure and one on archaic humanity. Dourley has analyzed these essays and concluded that Jung regards shamanism as a phenomenon shedding light on the process of penetrating into the world of the unconscious and returning from it.

In his paper, Roberte N. Hamayon intends "... to call attention to the relationship between certain kinds of "game" and basic shamanistic principles, and to investigate the place, nature and function of such a partnership with supernatural beings in societies under a centralized power". Hamayon assumes that the shaman's primary function in the most archaic Siberian societies is to regularly obtain the promise of luck for hunters.

Robert Petersen, as an Inuit scholar, analyzes the important relationship between the material (body) and supernatural (soul) elements in the old Greenlandic religion. He emphasizes that some material objects were used in this religion for a person to be purged from sin after his contacts with supernatural elements.

### 4.2.2. Northern Europe

Britt-Mari Näsström finds the definition of "the Great Goddess" as "the Earth goddess", "the Mother goddess" or "the Mother Earth" to be too limiting in Nordic mythological studies. In her article Näsström compares Freyja and Frigg, two Great Goddesses in the Nordic pantheon. One of the problems considered is whether those are two different goddesses or they are two aspects of the same goddess.



In her paper, Else Mundal, a scholar of Old Norse philology, considers the concept of the religion of the Lapps (Finns) as it is viewed in Old Norse (Norwegian and Icelandic) sources. Some of the problems examined are: what was the Lapps' way of life, what kind of religion and religious customs they had been practising and, finally, what kind of contacts between the Lapps and Norwegians existed at that time, what kind of relationship did they have. She also shows what changes both Nordic and Lappish "paganism" underwent under the influence of Christianity during the period of the missionary activities of the latter.

Anne-Sofie Gräslund approaches the transition from the Old Norse religion to Christianity from the archaeological point of view. In this paper she concentrates on some aspects of the grave and rune stones. Gräslund offers six criteria to distinguish pagan and Christian burials.

There is another archeological contribution to the history of religion in this volume. Vladimir Shumkin from St. Peterburg has been studying an intricate complex of information concerning the Saami noids (wizards), posing such important questions as: "What were the preconditions for this type of Northern culture?" and "What is the testimonial value of archeological findings and written sources in studies concerning the shamanic ideology of a people?"

Nickolay Konakov's (Syktyvkar) paper is first of all interesting from the point of view of the scientific method he employs. Having studied the calendar periods of contemporary Permian hunters, he interrelated them with the ethnographical data, recent findings in archaeology and religious aspects, and has thus managed to obtain an extremely plausible semiotic interpretation of the Komi ancient calendar based on the theory of binary oppositions.

The subject of Alexander Teryukov's (a Komi scholar working now in St. Peterburg) doctoral dissertation was traditional lamentations of the Komi. In this paper two Komi concepts of the soul, their functions and interrelations are discussed. In the Komi culture there are burial customs very closely resembling the pre-Christian concept of the *lov* 'soul'. At the same time, the man has an *ort* 'another soul', like a shadow-being existing outside him. This kind of composition is so widely known among other Finno-Ugric peoples as well that it might be thought to be one of the oldest elements of the Finno-Ugric worldview.

#### 4.2.3. Ugric peoples

To describe and understand the role shamanism has been playing, the cultures of the Ob-Ugric peoples living in north-western Siberia are brought to the focus of attention. The field data the Russian and Western scholars collected recently among the Khanty and Mansi are presented in this section.

The background of my paper, as well as of that by Hungarian scholar Ágnes Kerezi, is the field work carried out independently among among the eastern Khanty. We both were able to be present at authentic shamanic ceremonies and to observe an interesting process of instructing and initiating a new shaman. Ágnes Kerezi carefully described what she learnt from the three shamans she had met during her expeditions between 1990 and 1992. One of her informants is the same old shaman whom I worked with in the winter and autumn of 1990. The two papers are thus interrelated and jointly demonstrate how the same culture, society, phenomenon or even person can be studied in different ways so that the different approaches complement each other.

Ismail N. Gemuev (an ethnographer of religion from Novosibirsk) continues discussing the problem of some interesting characteristics of the Ob-Ugric system of beliefs. According to V.N. Toporov and him, there used to be prolonged contacts between the so-called Uralic population and tribes of Central Asia as far back as the first millennium B.C. The problem has, to a certain degree, been studied as regards Ural-Altaic philology and archaeology, but not as regards interactions of different cultures.

The problems of preserving languages, cultural survival and ethnic identity are highlighted by two linguists from the city of Novosibirsk, Elena K. Skribnik and Natalya B. Koshkarova. Their paper is based on extensive factual data describing the basic points in the present-day linguistic situation in the Khanty and Mansi settlements with different number of inhabitants. Small-scale settlements of aboriginal peoples are in danger since both political and economic trends in their environment are basically oriented towards the urban mode of life.

#### 4.2.4. Central and East Asia

This section is devoted to the contributions of advanced scholars studying Central and East Asian shamanism in various parts of the world.

Manabu Waida studies stories on a flower contest collected in Central and East Asia. According to him, these stories are either found in complete isolation or integrated into various topical contexts, such as those of cosmogony, anthropogony, or the origin of black shamanism.

Tae-gon Kim intends to clarify the identity of the dogs worshipped in Korean shamanism, the ways of their worshipping, the functions of the dogs, their relations with humans beings. Kim's investigation is based on the information obtained in his fieldwork from 1960 to 1990 in the areas of Korea where shamans are still in operation. T. Kim employs the ethnological approach based on the methodology of religious phenomenology.

Walter Heissig dwells on the shamanistic tradition in East Mongolia through, for instance, shamanic songs. According to him, the research carried out during the past 10 or 12 years has proved the shamanic practice to still exist in many areas in East Mongolia. With the help of his informants, W. Heissig describes the peculiarities of both the past and present of the phenomenon of shamanism in East Mongolia.

Pertti Nikkilä's article is a description of shamanistic concepts as depicted in the "Confucian Analects", the subject of his religio-historical dissertation. In P. Nikkilä's opinion, there are both direct and indirect references to shamanism in the "Analects". Some passages refer to the training and education of shamans, and the author claims that there probably used to be schools for shamans, although this fact is mentioned indirectly.

Maria M. Tatar (working now in Oslo) gives an interesting example of how an international mythical archetype is worked out in a religious context. The topic of her research is the concept of soul as manifested by findings in sacred holes and caves of the Altay-Sayan area.

Tatyana D. Bulgakova (St. Peterburg) offers an interesting description of various rites and courses of medical treatment of Nanai *shamankas* 'female shamas' based on the field material she had collected since the 1980's. She is making use of authentic shamanic texts in the Nanai language.

#### 4.2.5. North Western Pacific

Takashi Irimoto analyzes the worldview of the Ainu in relation to hunting symbolism and their behavioral strategies in hunting. He defines the latter as a strategy to adjust the man-nature relationship through be-

havioral operations. In his paper Irimoto scrutinizes the information from the Ainu of the Saru river region. His viewpoints are both ecological and ethnological.

Kan Wada compares two general types of Ainu shamanism: the Sakhalin type and the Hokkaido type. K. Wada pays special attention to the *imu* practice among the Hokkaido Ainu, which term originally meant a typical behavioural pattern of the shaman in ecstasy. In K. Wada's opinion, both the peculiar reaction called *imu* and the chain of actions inducing it are phenomena reminiscent of the disorders in the shaman's state of health both prior to and during the initiation ceremony in the past. That is why K. Wada concludes that there obviously existed a shamanic initiation ceremony among the Hokkaido Ainu.

Taryo Obayashi's aim is to offer some pertinent material on the Ainu and Japanese, and to compare it with the North American data. In his opinion, many beliefs and practices concerning salmon of the Ainu (and of the Japanese, too) resemble those reported from North America.

#### 4.2.6. Encounters between ethnic and world religions

Inge Kleivan studies an 18th century dialogue between a Greenland shaman and a missionary taken from a book published in Western Greenland in 1857. The texts of the book were long-known and made public as far back as in 1760. I. Kleivan also offers a description of a Greenland shaman, the *angakkoq* figure in modern Greenlandian literature.

Jean-Guy Goulet proves the old religion of the Canadian Dene people to be still alive among the Indian Dene-tha community of Chateh. That was possible because the Dene-tha successfully incorporated the basic Christian symbols into their traditional religion without changing the key aspect of their worldview. Goulet studies the Dene religion and worldview and introduces a leading contemporary Dene-tha dreamer, Alexis Seniantha.

Ludmila P. Kuzmina (Moscow) deals with the problem of the relationship between "Russianness" and Eastern Orthodoxy which are important for both ancient and contemporary Russia. The analysis made by L. Kuzmina covers the territory of Siberia where Eastern Christianity was introduced under two names: Old Believers and Russian

Orthodoxy. The author shows that the topics of the ethnic and religious identity could probably never be separated from one another. The conclusion is that as long as even the smallest minorities are able to preserve their own mode of life, their ethnic survival will also be guaranteed.

Elena M. Glavatskaya (Yekaterinburg) discusses in her paper the ethnic and religious identity of Ob-Ugrians. Her article sheds light on the processes of Christianization (the period of Orthodox missionary activities), on the religious movement of Old Believers and on their communities in Siberia. The problem of a collision of extremely different cultures is tackled, one of them brought to a total collapse as a result.



## Part I

### Themes and concepts

