

TRACING SHAMANS IN TUVA

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Abstract: In the geographical centre of Asia – in today's Tuva Republic, within the frame of the Russian Federation – there lives a small ethnic group which the historical and ethnographic literature variously calls Soyot, Uriankhai, Tofa, Todzha.

To fully appreciate the work of Mongush Kenin-Lopsan (1997), it is worth getting to know the history of research on Tuva shamanism. We need to do so especially since Hungarian researchers, including Vilmos Diószegi (1923–1972), the teacher of the present author, also collected in Tuva in 1958 and published important studies. This is why we have borrowed, with a slight change, the title of his book published in English (Diószegi 1968) as the title of this overview.

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The first Hungarian ethnographer to report on the Tuva shamans was János Jankó. He visited the Uriankhai towards the end of the 1880s and in the *Ethnographia*, the Hungarian journal of ethnography he published a report on his travels with detailed notes in its 1890 issue.

His description (JANKÓ 1890), which contains many valuable details and the local terminology (e.g. the name of the drum and drumstick, the name of the shaman's cloak: *tering*, etc.) shows that he observed not only the dance of the shamaness but also paid careful attention to all the minor details when he recorded the shaman séance. Not only did he describe the shaman's activity, he constantly compared it with phenomena found among other people (and with the linguistic material). In the chapter "Fragment from the Shaman Beliefs" he describes prediction using a shoulder bone, the reverence of fire and finally, animal sacrifice. He devotes a separate chapter to the drum, illustrated with around 12 drawings. These illustrations are of objects which may no longer exist. In the final chapter – "The Shaman's Costume" – among others he gives a detailed description of the shaman costumes he saw. Unfortunately, the richly detailed descriptions do not indicate whether he saw these costumes on the spot or in the "Russian imperial academy of science" in St Petersburg. Whatever the case, we know of only one similarly early report in Helsinki from the end of the 19th century describing the costume of a Soyot shaman (HEIKEL 1896).

Reading Diószegi's report of his journey to Tuva again and again I find (DIÓSZEGI 1968: 209) that in his opinion János Jankó never reached the southern region of the Sayan Mountains. It is possible to believe that Diószegi was right. His

first article which appeared was a detailed report of his research trip to Tuva in 1958 (DIÓSZEGI 1959). This study, which could be described as a short monograph, later appeared in English (DIÓSZEGI 1962).

After the sudden death of Vilmos Diószegi in 1972, part of his library and manuscript legacy was placed in the archive of the Institute of Ethnology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Éva Schmidt arranged and made an inventory of this material in 1973. One of the units is a thick folder containing the material Diószegi collected in Tuva between 2 and 29 August 1958. He himself divided the material in the folder into two parts. The first, under the heading “Tuva (Soyot) shamanic songs” contains around 676 lines of text from seven informants (at one point there is a note: “second reel” suggesting that this is a transcription from a tape-recorder!), then there is a glossary of words in the text, followed by 13 pages of Russian translation. The second part consists of 39 double-spaced pages of typescript field notes, probably a fair copy of entries in his collecting notebooks. He drew on these texts almost word for word for his highly successful book *Tracing Shamans in Siberia* (DIÓSZEGI 1968) and also for his scholarly reports presenting data of great importance as the following passage on shaman staffs is cited as an example:

“...The new shaman had first only been equipped with the shaman staff and he got the drum only after he had already become a good shaman.

The staff was the tool of the new shaman. It had always been made of birchwood and was usually painted red, with red clay, found in the mountains. If the shaman had been equipped with only a staff, he had to go around “on foot”. After two or three years the new shaman could request his drum. Then he could already “mount the drum”. Arikay, the shaman, for instance, had the staff for one year. Takpazhik shaman used one for two years. The shamans also kept their staff after having obtained the drum. There were shamans who kept their staff all their lives. For instance the shaman called Khodan, shamanized all his life with a staff. It is up to the spirit to decide this: he ‘informs’ the shaman whether he wants a drum or not. However, the shaman equipped only with a staff might be just as powerful as the one who has a drum.

According to some of my informants the shamanesses were only entitled to the staff. A lama-shaman told me that his aunt used a stick for her ceremonies until her death. Albis, the Kaday shamaness, had also shamanized with a staff all her life. Several persons affirmed that the “small shamans” were only entitled to a staff.

The shaman with the staff has no other instrument. Not only does he lack the drum and the drumstick, he has no headgear, garment or boots either. Such shamans are called the staffed shamans.

On the other hand, there are some who never had a staff, they were given the drum right at the beginning.

It was an old shaman who chose an experienced woodcarver for the task of preparing the shaman staff, due to the illness of the appointee, who was unconscious, very often raving. While the candidate was lying in bed at home, helplessly, the old shaman, accompanied by the woodcarver, took to the woods and chose a suitable birch tree. He tied

a white ribbon on the selected tree and with a ritual tea spoon he sprinkled salted tea with milk three times in the air towards the tree. Then the shaman asked the birch tree to consent to becoming the staff of the shaman-candidate.

Then he returned home, leaving the other man behind to cut the birch tree. Right then and there the woodcarver would carve the staff, then he would take it home and place it immediately in the tent of the candidate.

The northeastern shamans used several kinds of staffs. The branches were called the "head" usually bearing markings of a face too: they carved the eyes, the nose, the ears and the mouth on it. There were two-, three-, five- and seven- or even nine-headed staffs. Underneath the heads, on a curved metal rod, three, seven, or nine conic metal pieces were hung. They also used to fasten bell-shaped chimes on the staff. The size and number of these bells indicated the financial standing of the shaman. Two or three cylindrical rolls of fabric were indispensable parts of the staff – they were called reins. Annular carvings decorated the handle.

With the shaman staff thus prepared, certain initiation ceremonies had to be carried out before using it.

Here is, for instance, the ceremony of Albis, the Kaday shamaness:

A one-year-old white reindeer had been killed and its meat had been cooked. Then, two small dishes were placed in front of the staff on the bare ground. A small piece of the heart and a little piece of the brisket were placed in one of them, salted tea with milk had been poured into the other one. The two dishes remained for about two hours in front of the staff. In the meantime, those present had a feast. Within two hours about everything placed in front of the stick had been consumed and the participants went home ..." (DIÓSZEGI 1968: 238–239)

It can be seen from the above text that Diószegi refers to a number of shamans in his account, but he does not indicate specifically, either in the original manuscript or in the book, the informants from whom he recorded the data. He noted that he recorded stories about the shamans not so much from the shamans themselves as from people who had themselves seen genuine shamans. This is understandable since at that time the memories of shamanism were not yet valued and Diószegi waged a heroic struggle. Using the scattered data, he produced such excellent studies as the one on regional differences within Tuvan shamanism and the similarities with the neighbouring ethnic groups (DIÓSZEGI 1962), and on the ethnogenetic conclusions of his investigation into Darkhat shamanism (DIÓSZEGI 1963). He lavishly illustrated these articles with pictures of museum objects he had collected because he had discovered – and this was one of his methodological innovations – that tiny differences on the shaman objects (the drum, the shaman staff, costume, headgear, etc.) could be important distinctive features in exploring intra- and inter-ethnic relations.

The enthusiastic researcher was sometimes carried to extremes by his good intentions. He recounted that he had his informants draw the costume of the old shamans from memory and later he also published these drawings and the oral descriptions (see DIÓSZEGI (ed.) 1968: 296–323); when the reprint of the original volume

appeared in 1996 these pictures were left out because this form of “imagery ethnography” is unworthy of the great researcher. It is not by chance that he was harshly criticised already during his life for this method – cf. JOHANSEN 1967).

However, what was important and progressive in Diószegi’s approach was the emphasis he placed on the visual aspects of research with the use of many photographs of objects, maps and drawings. Few people know that he was probably the first in the history of research on Tuva shamanism to make a film on the healing séance of a shamaness which he had recorded by a crew from Irkutsk. The following passage from *Tracing Shamans in Siberia*, now a rare book, describes this:

“The old woman – Shizhep Mongus by name (or in other words: Shizhep of the Mongus clan) – the former shamaness, squatted in front of her yurt, tearing wool. She was getting ready to full felt-cloth.

In no time I was just as well informed about all the details of the making of felt-cloth, as she was about by profession of collecting the records of shamanism.

It was not difficult at all to persuade her to demonstrate her knowledge of past times. I was to promise her that she could see herself on the screen in the film, this would soon be shown at the Cultural Centre.

– Yes, yes – she agreed – but if I have to heal, then I need a patient too.

We did not even have a chance to discuss it, when a little old woman beside us joined the argument:

– Why don’t you heal me? Some time ago you already shamanized for me.

Only when the operator lifted the camera to his eyes, did we find out: we could not begin filming because it was too dark in the yurt.

– Have you not brought any flashlights?

– No, we have not, but it is not necessary. We can take the roof off.

Wonderful idea, only the felt mats had to be rolled back from the top of the yurt.

But, what would the mistress of the house say about it?

What? She agreed right away. Now, there were no more obstacles.

The gown was taken out of the chest. It was not a genuine one, it was not even a shaman gown. That had been destroyed long ago. It was the festive attire of a Soyot woman, and also a long and short scarf. The long one was wound around her head.

Somewhere behind the chest there was a long stick, she tied the short scarf on that.

This was all her equipment...

By the time the roof of the yurt had been removed, the first scenes were already explained to Shizhep Mongus. Everything went smoothly. While the camera was diligently humming, she put on her Soyot dress with the help of Minderma and prepared the shaman staff, that is, she tied the shorter scarf on the stick.

Our other “leading character” lay down on the cot, the next part could be started: the healing ceremony. The instructions of the operators were not necessary any more.

I have also prepared the tape recorder. I have learned it from my experience with Suzukpen that I must have the apparatus in my hand – I could not put it on the floor – because I had to be free to accompany the shaman in his movements with the microphone.

And then, the first lines of the chant resounded in the yurt. It was slow, a soft reciting, rather like that of a poem than of a song. One type of shamanistic healing, the black process, was under way to be immortalized by the film-camera and the tape recorder.

The voice of the shamaness had not become louder, she did not raise it at all, her recitation did not even become faster. And, in spite of that, the atmosphere was filled with tension.

The patient became genuinely ill: she reclined with a pale face and her eyes searched with trusting devotion the face of her healer.

Indeed, this old medicine-woman must have been healing her in the past. In this moment I was convinced: it might have been not so very long ago! And by this time Shizhep Mongus did not know anything about the film-camera any more, she was not aware of the tape recorder either, although I held the microphone about the length of a span in front of her face. She began to lose consciousness. Her face became contorted, her eyes were turning deliriously, like in a trance, like those of a drunk or a lunatic.

Suddenly the humming of the camera stopped. I noticed that the operator requested a new reel of film. He was signalling to me: the chant of the shamaness must be interrupted. But it would be all in vain. She had already lost contact with the world...

– I continue recording, let them go to fetch the film – I answered.

But they could have hardly reached the car, when the shamaness fainted and fell in full length upon the floor of the yurt.

She lay in a deep trance. For three and a half minutes – I checked it with my watch – she had fits of retching and then she became completely rigid. She had worked herself up so much, that she became completely entranced. The patient and the healer exchanged their roles, now the other woman was placing wet packs on the cold forehead of Shizhep Mongus, who was lying rigidly like a corpse.

The operator, running with the new film, arrived in vain, the filming had to be stopped.

– Please forgive me that I could not take all of it – he excused himself.

As if I could have been angry at him! I owed it to him that I was at last able to witness a complete ecstasy. And even if the filming had come to a standstill, the ceremony had been immortalized in its entirety. The whole ceremony was recorded on the magnetic tapes.” (DIÓSZEGI 1968: 308–311)

Another merit of Diószegi, one which is also of importance for the history of research on Tuva shamanism, is that he persuaded S. I. Vajnštejn to study the material culture of the Tuvans and nomad culture in general, in particular shamanism, not only from the viewpoint of materialism. It was perhaps under the influence of these friendly words that the young researcher who had been educated in a Marxist atmosphere began to turn his attention to shamanism. In 1961 his historical ethnography monograph on the Todzha ethnic group in the northeastern region of Tuva appeared. In this he devotes a separate chapter to religious beliefs, for the most part to shamanism (VAJNŠTEJN 1961: 171–191). However, he published only old photographs, and a few fine drawings of the shaman staff (*dayak*) and the shaman costumes, as well as texts of the shamanic songs (*algysh*). He published the same mate-

rial, considerably expanded, three decades later in his richly illustrated monograph on the world of the Central Asian nomads (VAJNŠTEJN 1991: 240–277). His articles on Tuva shamanism have undoubtedly earned him a permanent place in the history of research on shamanism in Siberia.

For this reason, the arguments he puts forward in examining the historical roots of Tuva shamanism are of special interest: drawing on old written records concerning the Huns, who were probably the ancestors of the Tuvans, he notes that they record a number of sacral rituals still practised by the Tuvans ([VAJNŠTEJN] Weinstein 1964: 11). He also points out that the similarity between many of the rock carvings and the head-dresses of today's shamans is so striking that it is impossible to deny the link (VAJNŠTEJN 1991: 271–272), especially if we consider that the masks and head-dresses may have been symbolic representations of the shaman ancestors.

S. I. Vajněstein was the first to record and publish from the fifties his personal encounters with Tuva shamans, and was able to acquire much valuable data. In 1963, for example, he was able to observe the shamanizing of a healing shaman where the focal point of the ceremony was driving out the spirits causing the sickness. He described in detail the course of the ecstasy, the struggle with the harmful spirits during which great drumbeats indicated that the shaman had driven a “steel arrow” for each beat into the spirits of sickness (VAJNŠTEJN 1977).

In one of his studies he presented the data of the 1931 census which show that 725 active shamans were counted, representing one shaman for every twenty households (yurts or families) (VAJNŠTEJN 1984: 353). In the same study he reported that a horse was sacrificed under the direction of the shaman when healing a seriously sick person. A light-coloured (grey) horse was sacrificed to the lord of the sky and a chestnut horse to the spirit of the mountain. The reference to the practice of the recent past should give researchers of culture pause for thought since such data indicate that centuries mean very little in the life of cultures. Our Siberian contemporaries, only a few hours away from us by plane, still make sacrifices like those described in the mediaeval chronicles, as I was able to see for myself in 1996.

In another excellent article he wrote about the role in Tuva shamanism of objects called *ēren*. The *ēren* is an object filled with spirit which the shaman can use, for example, to drive the sickness out of a person. He spent many years of his youth in Tuva (because his father was a political exile there in the early period of communism), in this article examined the various types of *ēren*. These valuable ethnographic data are from the 1950s when the researcher was a young man doing fieldwork (VAJNŠTEJN 1978).

It should be mentioned here that in footnote 3 of the paper, using the political terminology of the time, that is, a quarter of a century ago, the author noted that “owing to the great success of socialism in Tuva, shamanism here has now lost its significance entirely...” (VAJNŠTEJN 1978: 457). Fortunately, shamanism in Tuva has not lost its significance at all, on the contrary, simultaneously with the successful collapse of socialism, shamanism is alive and flourishing (HOPPÁL 1996).

There is a great authority of shamanic studies in Tuva, Mongush Borakhovich Kenin-Lopsan. His forebears in the extended family were shepherds, smiths, re-

nowned singers and shamans. His maternal grandmother, Kuular Khandizhap was a famous shamaness who was imprisoned on false charges under Stalin and died in prison. During an interview in summer 1996 he recounted the following about his beloved grandmother:

“My grandmother was a famous shamaness. She was the best known in the district. She had to suffer for this on three occasions. On the first she was imprisoned in 1934, the second time her son was accused of being a German spy. In the mid-forties, when Tuva joined the Soviet Union, she was arrested once again on charges of ‘conducting propaganda against the great Soviet Union’. How could an illiterate woman have conducted propaganda? All of that was only a pretext to liquidate a great living shamaness. It is a very sad story, not only in the life of an elderly woman but for the whole of Tuvan society!” (KENIN-LOPSAN 1996)

Later he became a writer, a living classic of Tuvan literature, who published poems, short stories, novels and translations (from Russian literature).

Although elements of shaman folklore always appeared in the literary works of Kenin-Lopsan, in the fifties and sixties this was naturally a forbidden subject. This is best expressed in his own words as he recalled those times in the summer of 1996:

*“At that time, it has to be admitted openly, the Tuvan scholars were not dealing with Tuva shamanism. They were very afraid. If they dealt with it at all, they did so in great secret so that no one would know what I was collecting and doing, what shaman I was meeting. Then one day they said that a foreign scholar had come, a Hungarian researcher, an orientalist and ethnographer, Vilmos Diószegi. On one occasion he asked me whether I dealt with shamanism. I told him that I had written studies but that I was afraid to show them. He said: ‘Bring one of them. I would like to see it!’ Next day I brought the one on the burial place in the air of Tuva shamans. According to the Tuvan belief, the shamans have bones which cannot be given to the earth so they must be buried on a platform – known as *seri* – raised in the air.”* (KENIN-LOPSAN 1996)

This paper written by Kenin-Lopsan is almost certainly the one which was published years later, in 1978, in the volume *Shamanism in Siberia* under the title “The Funeral Rites of Tuva Shamans” (KENIN-LOPSAN 1978). In it he gave a detailed description of the funeral rites for dead shamans and their various phases. One of these that appears especially important is when an invited shaman indicates the direction in which the shaman must be taken, that is, the place of his grave. Also important is the taking out of the body from the yurt: it is not taken through the door but through an opening made in the wall. It is also important that the skin of the drum is slashed and the drum placed on a pole (*čagy*) together with the shaman’s clothes and other objects. The body itself is placed on a platform (*seri*) resting on four poles. In other words, the custom of burial in the air existed here in the same way as among certain North American Indian tribes.

Only one scholarly article by Kenin-Lopsan had been published earlier than that. It appeared in the 1977 volume of *Sovietskaya Etnografiya* and dealt with the different types of Tuva shamans. This classification is based on the principle of the source from where the shaman (*kham*) receives his power (KENIN-LOPSAN 1977). It was essentially this category system that he described in one of his small books which appeared in 1993. I cite the typology from that work:

“In the belief of the Tuvans, the only true shaman is one who inherits the ability. This is the most popular and most powerful group of Tuva shamans. Namely 1. the shamans who trace their descent from shaman ancestors; 2. the shamans who trace their origins from the spirits of earth and water; 3. the shamans who trace their descent from the heavens; 4. shamans originating from the ‘albis’ witch-like evil spirits; 5. shamans originating from the ‘aza’ devil-like evil spirits. The position he occupied in the shaman hierarchy depended on which of these categories he belonged in, and it was on this basis that he was attributed different abilities and power to influence others, those who sought his help.” (KENIN-LOPSAN 1993: 14)

From 1966 until his retirement Kenin-Lopsan worked for the Kyzyl Local History Museum and he began the collection of shamanic objects which eventually led to an exhibition opened in 1993.

In 1982 he defended his candidate’s dissertation in Leningrad. The title was *“Syuzheti i poetika tuvinskogo shamanstva”* (Subjects and Poetics of Tuvian Shamanism). In the summary Kenin-Lopsan mentions that shamans belonging in the second type, who received their ability from the master spirits of the earth and water, obviously preserve the memory of the respect of nature and animistic beliefs of the old Turkic peoples (KENIN-LOPSAN 1982: 5). In the same way the shamans of heavenly descent (*tengri boo*) gain their power from the sky, a rainbow or flash of lightning. (In 1995 I personally met a shaman of this type named Kyrgyz Khurak.)

Kenin-Lopsan listed the modes of shaman activity (1993: 26–27) (these can be distinguished with the help of the aids and objects used:

1. Shamanising (ceremony) with a round metal mirror (*küzüngü*).
2. Shamanising with a *khomus*, a plucked instrument (resembling a Jew’s harp).
3. Sèance with drum and wearing a ritual garment; this was characteristic only of powerful shamans of higher category and in the past this rite was performed only at night.
4. Sèance with shaman drum or staff (*dayak*). The three-headed shaman staff decorated with ribbons was the principal equipment of the Tuva shamans; this was the first piece of equipment they received to begin their activity.

In 1987 his monograph *Obryadovaya praktika i fol’klor tuvinskogo shamanstva. Konets XIX–nachalo XX veka* was published in Novosibirsk by the Institute of History, Philology and Philosophy, Siberian Division, USSR Academy of Sciences. This is the full text of the dissertation (KENIN-LOPSAN 1987) from which extracts have

also been published in English (KENIN-LOPSAN 1995b). It is the pioneering merit of this work that it gives a detailed description of the structure and main features of the shaman sèance (*kamlanie*), from the preparation of the site, through the invocation of spirit helpers, to the culmination of the sèance when the shaman(ess) determines the cause of the illness/trouble and predicts the future, the passing of the sickness or improvement of the state of affairs.

In the second part of the study he listed the typical subjects of the shamanic songs (*algysht*) and the shamanic poetry which included the frequent use of alliteration, parallelism and vowel harmony within the sung lines. It should be mentioned that in recent years he has devoted increasing attention to the questions of the poetics of shamanic poetry and to publication of the texts. In the volume two parts have appeared, one in Russian and the other in Tuvan (KENIN-LOPSAN 1995: 22–288 in Russian, and 294–519 in Tuvan).

The eternally youthful, untiring collector himself translates his works from his native tongue to Russian, giving him an appreciation, as an artist and a creative poet-writer, of the poetics of the *algysht*. He feels he has a moral duty to pass on these valuable texts of Tuvan narrative folklore to future generations. It was to preserve these relics of spiritual culture that the writer-scholar compiled a manuscript of hundreds of pages containing the shamanic myths and published his collection of *algysht* (KENIN-LOPSAN 1997). He has also produced a small book on traditional Tuvan ethics, showing how morals are related to the traditional shamanic world view. During the interview he made the following remarks on this:

“This book of mine became a textbook in our secondary schools and colleges. Because Tuvan ethics is a culture of childraising elaborated over the centuries. We too have our own pedagogy, a folk pedagogy. The period of education extends from the ages of one to thirteen years. What may a child do and what is forbidden? What must be kept in sight? How must a child be treated? For we only raise children to the age of thirteen. When they reach the age of thirteen they enter manhood and become real men or, in the case of girls, grown girls. By then they know all the rules and norms of life, the ritual ceremonies of Tuvan society. During the years of communist terror no one wanted this culture. And no one wanted my textbook either! But there would have been a great need to publish this book because every people has its own language, its own customs and the customs are the original source of every ethnos, every people. Earlier, education here was conducted on the basis of curricula elaborated in Moscow which were mandatory for everyone. National culture was forced into the stern of the ship despite the fact that our national culture is deeply rooted first of all in our language, in our ancient inherited culture, our shamanic beliefs.” (KENIN-LOPSAN 1996)

The life and work of Kenin-Lopsan is of model value, an example of how the educated son of a small nation undertakes the task not only of collecting the old traditions but also of actively reviving them. This work was recognised in 1993 by the Foundation for Shamanic Studies established by Michael Harner when it declared Kenin-Lopsan to be a “Living Treasure of Shamanism” (BRUNTON 1995: 12). This represented great

recognition for the elderly professor in his homeland too where in the same year the Society of Tuva Shamans (*Dungur*) was officially registered and then the first Tuvan–American scholarly symposium was held on shamanism, attended by both researchers and practising shamans. However, perhaps the greatest success and gratification of his life came on 15 October 1993 when the president of the Tuva Republic introduced a government resolution (Act No. 383) setting up a scholarly centre for research on shamanism and also ordered the establishment of a therapeutic centre where shamans can regularly practice healing in Kyzyl, the capital city (BUDEGECHI [ed.] 1994: 42–43). The work of Kenin-Lopsan almost certainly marks the end of the classical stage in Tuva shamanism because what he launched in 1993, the period of the *Dungur* shamans, represents the beginning of something entirely new.

In Leningrad too, there was an enthusiastic researcher of Tuva shamanism, V. P. DJAKONOVA (1981) who found in the taiga the grave of a Tuva shamaness who had died in 1958. Since the shamaness had been laid to rest in her shaman costume, with her equipment and drum, the researcher was able to make a precise description and inventory. It became possible to clarify details that can only be ascertained with the help of such a fortunate find (e.g. that the symbols of the head-dress and costume show precisely whether the shaman was strong or weak, or whether he was helped by good or evil spirits). In Tuva, only strong shamans could wear the cap-like head-dress (DJAKONOVA 1978). The writer of these lines photographed such a head-dress in Kyzyl in 1995 where one of the eldest shamans belonging to the *Dungur* Shaman Federation wore a cap of this type. It should be noted that in his book, *Tracing Shamans in Siberia* (1968) Vilmos Diószegi also lamented the passing of Tuva shamanism, but Djakonova's paper showed that it still flourished in everyday practice in the remote taiga areas. It is not surprising then to see its full revival nowadays as this ancient healing craft undergoes a renaissance.

At the same time as the Russian researchers (1966–69), German researchers collected the folklore traditions of the Uriankhai ethnic group living in Mongolia. They published the tales in several volumes and wrote a study examining the links between the Central Asian heroic tales and the shamanic rites (TAUBE 1981, 1984). More precisely, together with others, they hypothesised that the tales reflect not only the material aspects of the culture but also the social relations and above all the beliefs and world view. The Leipzig researcher, Erika Taube, shows, motif by motif, the correlation between the heroic tales and the shamanistic beliefs. For example, both the hero of the heroic tale and the shaman feed the helping bird with their own flesh during their journey in the underworld. She also compares the tale motif of the princess carried away to the otherworld by dragons with the journey of the shamans in the otherworld in their ecstasy to bring back the lost – i.e. sick human – souls into the community (TAUBE 1984). She also points out that among the nomadic herders of distant Mongolia it was the shamans who kept the heroic tales and heroic epics alive, who creatively passed on and preserved oral tradition, so it is understandable that these narratives are imbued with shamanistic motifs.

It is a well-known fact that the power of the shamanic *séance* and the ceremony as a whole is made up of a variety of factors, besides the voice, dance and gestures of

the shaman, music and even more generally, acoustic effects are an important component. This aspect received little attention in research until recently with the appearance of a few articles on the subject. In 1993 Zoya Kyrgyz published a short study on the music of the Tuva shamans, more precisely, the shamanic song. It is to the great credit of the author that, as the director of the International *Khoomei* (throat-singing) Centre, she is an excellent organiser and the centre is able to provide support for researchers. Unfortunately, the paper presents only a few well-known facts but at the end it gives several precise musical scores by way of illustration, something that is not generally found in other papers. Despite the title of the publication: *Rhythms of Shamanic Drums*, there is no discussion in the volume of this subject although it would have been of pioneering significance.

Valentina Suzukey, takes as her point of departure in her studies of musical folklore the traditional Tuvan folk world view that nature (trees, mountains, springs) has Spirit-Masters whom the shamans evoked, either with the sound of the drum or with whistling or throat-singing (SUZUKEY 1995). In a symposium held in 1995, Mongush Kenin-Lopsan threw light on the role of whistling in shamanic rituals.

While preparing for a shamanic ritual, the shaman has to throat-sing a sygyt piece (sygyt means "whistling"). The symbolic essence of sygyt lies in the possibility for a shaman, with the sole help of sygyt, to urgently call his Spirit-helpers. When the Spirit-helpers do not come immediately, the shaman imitates the sounds of domestic and wild animals and did so with great skill. If they still do not appear, a shaman imitates an oriole's singing. In the old times it was forbidden for the ordinary people to sing sygyt as they could offend the shaman's spirits. This could result in a strong wind, storm, snowing, raining or even a war. (KENIN-LOPSAN 1995a)

With the easing in the political situation it is now much easier to travel in the territory of the former Soviet Union and so growing numbers of foreigners can also do research among the shamans. In 1996 Kira van Deusen summed up her experiences in a manuscript study titled "*Shamanism and Music in Tuva*". Herself a musician, she was able to identify a few important characteristics of Tuvan shamanic music:

The spiritual function of Tuvan music is especially clear in relation to shamanism. The shaman sets up a soundscape using the natural setting: bird calls, rustling breezes, voices of domestic animals, and various other sounds which, though deliberately produced, can hardly be called musical. Most of these come from the costume. On top of this soundscape comes the rhythm of the drum and the melody of the algysh, or poetic chant.

Music operates in the shaman's world in several ways. Music helps the shaman and other participants in kamlanie to locate and enter the inner world, opening the inner, spiritual ear. Secondly, musical sound calls helping spirits and transports the shaman on the journey. And thirdly, both the rhythm and the timbre of musical sound help heal the patient through the effects of specific frequencies on the human body. (VAN DEUSEN 1996: 3–4)

During the years of political oppression when loud drumming was reason to fear, the reduction in the strength of the sound also took away the shamans' strength: at least this is the explanation some people gave for the weakening of the faith in shamans. Nowadays, in contrast, the shamans consider that they can make their strength appear greater than it actually is by having a drum made and using it during the healing ceremony, even if only for a few minutes.

The problem of the rebirth of Buddhism, lamaism and shamanism is also arising, at least in part, as a political question. Excellent studies have been written overviewing the origin of Tuva shamanism and the history of its development (MONGUSH 1986, 1992, 1995; VAJNŠTEJN–MOSKALENKO 1995). This history begins with the records written by the Persian historian Rashid-ad-Din and naturally its last stage is the syncretic mingling of lamaism and shamanism. This co-existence is now being raised at the level of state policy in the issue of what state religion independent Tuva should adopt.

The same problem has arisen in the case of other Siberian peoples with an ancient shamanic tradition, such as the Yakuts where it was discussed already in 1992 (see BALZER 1993, 1996). In Tuva lamaism has strengthened in recent years, especially following the visit of the Dalai Lama.

The supporters of shamanism have also strengthened their positions and from the early nineties a new period began in its history. It is worth citing the most authentic source, Mongush Kenin-Lopsan, on how the Society of Tuva Shamans was established:

*We decided to create a forum for the Tuva shamans, that was in 1992. On 21 October we formed the Society of Tuva Shamans. I believe and know that this was a timid first step, but it was a step that brought great happiness. Then the Tuvan Ministry of Justice registered us and we gained legal rights. We regard this as the birthday of the Society of Tuva Shamans; it is called *Dungur* which means drum. We were very pleased by that event and in the same year, here in Kyzyl, capital of the Tuvan Republic, we held an international symposium, a meeting with the participation of Tuvan and American scholars and with Tuva and Austrian shamans. In the same year, on 15 October 1993 the Government of the Tuva Republic adopted a decision setting up a scientific centre for the study of Tuva shamanism. There is no other scholarly centre of this kind anywhere in Siberia, only here. We have among us shamans with membership cards certifying that they are genuine shamans. Ours is a young organisation; we have 37 shaman members with membership cards. We have talented young people too, young shamans, in every district even if not very many; there are around 100–200 persons. After a certain time we subject them to an examination and accept the best as members. At present they are still able to work without restrictions, but we keep an eye on them. Before 1937 there were more than 700 active shamans in Tuva, precisely 725. In pragmatic terms, the shaman was the only person in the village armed with knowledge. Now there are only 37 of them, although the population of the country is 210,000, that is the number of native Tuvans. I trust that the ancient sources of our old culture, our spiritual culture, Tuva shamanism will be reborn. This tradition is our ancient source because the Tuva shamans always*

conduct the shamanic rites and sing the shamanic songs in their mother tongue, the Tuvan language. The shamanic belief is the ancient faith we are born with. (KENIN-LOPSAN 1996)

Kenin-Lopsan always expresses himself precisely and poetically and, in fact, it is his prestige, the esteem in which his writings are held that made it possible for the Dungur Federation to be established. They have been given a separate building in the centre of the town, rather ironically, just opposite the municipal hospital so patients can choose where they have themselves treated.

On any given day, one to ten shamans can be working at Dungur. It just depends on who is in town. Dungur sends shamans to the outlying villages when needed. When you arrive, you can see people waiting to see one of the shamans. There are small placards on the room doors which relate the name of the shaman, what his specialties are (female organs, gall bladder, heart and circulation, etc.), and what region s/he is from. Waiting can be an all day affair sometimes. The people sit in the hallway, outside and wait. When their turn arrives, they show their receipt and receive treatment. Fees range from 5000 rubles to 15,000 rubles. Foreigners pay more: 100,000–200,000 rubles. Divination is usually made with khuvaanak – 41 stones. Drumming, singing and movement are made if necessary. Sometimes, hands on massage is given. Sometimes it is only using artysh – a juniper species which is used as incense. Individuality of the shaman functions at this level. People have their favourite shaman, just as we have our favourite doctor. There is a lot of purification work going on at Dungur. Families arrive and pick up a shaman to take home for purification, sanctification, 7 and 49-day rituals. The building is a meeting place for the shamans and the people. (BUCKBEE-LAPPALAINEN 1995:10)

In summer 1996 the author of these lines visited Tuva for the second time; the following extract is taken from the diary of that journey:

“On the morning before the day of our departure we went into the Dungur centre again. I was not disappointed this time either because one young shaman and two old ones were treating and receiving ‘patients’. I have used inverted commas because most of the patients gathered there, around ten people, sitting or standing in the corridor and in the small space before the cash table, were not sick but wanted to know the future, whether they should begin some venture or other, whether the date was lucky, or their affairs are not going well and they want to take part in a purification ceremony. Two days earlier, on Tuesday, when we visited the centre we counted fifteen patients. But this number is constantly changing because in the short half hour we spent there at least a dozen people dropped in (most of them left again but some stayed, paid and waited for their turn). At quarter to twelve people were still coming, at least a half of them young people and the majority women. Often whole families came together.

In one room an old shaman with a benevolent face was treating a young girl when I entered. I later learned that the shaman Kular (Mokurool Sevenovich) was only 59 although he looked 70 (and came from the Baj taiga where he lives in the village of Teli).

The shaman was in the process of making a prediction for the girl, using the 41 pebbles, later he drummed around the girl who was sitting on a chair. The family was seated beside the wall, watching in awe as the old man with his red drum worked himself into a kind of weak trance by his singing and drumming. This could be seen on his face and his twitching shoulders. Of course, this lasted barely more than a few moments since the ceremony was almost as mechanical as a routine visit to a doctor.” (From the author’s fieldnotes)

What is happening in the Dügür centre is in fact an entirely new development in the history of shamanism. It is an authentically late 20th century phenomenon shaped by circumstances differing from the traditional. On the one hand a very conscious organisation, formed at the initiative of local intellectuals, is serving a demand on the part of the common people as the large numbers who comes day by day. Tuva shamanism today is a typical example in the post-communist world of the preservation of changed and changing traditions that have their roots in the past but are adapting well to the present conditions. (For similar phenomena, see BALZER 1993, 1995, 1996; HOPPÁL 1996.)

There is another interesting feature of today’s Tuva shamanism, namely that it seems to function even better in the urban environment than in the rural areas, although shamans are once again working in the countryside too and the urban shamans go out into the country as well, making regular healing tours.

Finally, one more important thing must be noted concerning the current development of Tuva shamanism. This is the foreign influences coming on the one hand from the interest shown by scholars and on the other from the “Foundation for Shamanic Studies”. The latter, a nonprofit educational organisation, organised two expeditions to Tuva in 1993 and 1994. Reports on these have been published in English (PETERS 1993; BRUNTON 1994; UCCUSIČ 1995) and it is obvious from them that the researchers and practising urban shamans from the western world – as, for example, Paul Uccusič from Vienna – have done a great deal to help the Tuva local authorities and the shamans themselves to recognise their own interests. If we wished to be very critical, we could say that a kind of “shaman tourism” is beginning to emerge in Kyzyl, organised by the Dügür. (In 1995, for example, the largest ever group of “urban shamans”, including a number of psychiatrists, came to Tuva and worked together, “healing” with the local shamans.)

“Another of the magical shamanic sites that we visited was a holy spring, one of nine such healing sites in the country. The spring flowed out of a hillside, forming a stream that ran downhill and eventually emptied into a ravine. At the source was a white statue of a ram, which was said to be the emblem of the district. There were enclosed showers at the hillside, and our group, along with the other pilgrims, bathed in the icy healing waters. I later thought of this as the Lourdes of Tuva.

After we visited the spring, I heard someone drumming. In the late Central Asian evening sun, I could see the drummer sitting on a small hill, a short distance from the

spring. It was Roza, the healer who works with mirrors and worked with the lama at Khaiyrakan. I joined her, and soon a group of us were playing in a circle.

As we drummed, an old woman approached us and asked for a healing. She had swollen knuckles and toes, and complained of pain that stopped her from performing her ordinary chores. I was enraptured by the beautiful way her face was lined, a micro-cosm of the local terrain, a wizened archetype of the Tuvinian nomadic life. As our eyes met in deep connection, I was transfixed in empathy, sensing her pain in my toes and fingers. Then, in my mind's eye, I saw Gajendra in the setting sun, shining through and opening tubes in the woman's limbs. As I touched the woman's limbs, I saw pins and arrow-like pointed objects. Reciting mantras I had learned from Gajendra, I gently pulled the intrusions out until the pain subsided in me. I must have been in a type of "lucid" or dual-awareness state of consciousness. I was fully aware of my body and the woman's in ordinary reality, although observations of non-ordinary reality appeared integrated within the context of external perception." (PETERS 1993: 48)

At all events this is an extremely interesting phenomenon for research on cultural anthropology since the co-operation between the local shamans and western psychiatrists, the observation and learning of each other's methods is creating a new situation. The researcher, who came to the "field" to study local traditions, finds an "urban" shamaness from America in one of the rooms, drumming around a local young couple, and in another room a local shamaness diagnosing the troubles of a French research doctor. All this shows the complete intermingling of traditional roles: there is nothing surprising in it – it is the nature of our "post-modern" world (HOPPÁL 1996). In this context it is not a chance development that in July 1996 the four best Tuva shamans were invited to Austria, to a world congress on psychiatry where a special section dealt with the question of shamanism and psychiatry. The shamans, led by Kenin-Lopsan, flew to the West to give demonstrations. The history of Tuva shamanism is convincing proof that despite all persecution and foreign influence shamanism is alive and flourishing again, because the healing drums are being played again in freedom.

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