

NEWS IN BRIEF

EXCAVATIONS IN SOUTH-ICELAND, SELJALAND

Tõnno Jonuks

Archaeological investigations proceeded in Seljaland in South Iceland in August 2002 within the framework of the doctoral thesis of the Edinburgh University postgraduate student Kristján Ahronson. Three objects were chosen for closer scrutiny.

I supervised the clearing of a 3x3 m area at 120 m altitude, on top of a mountain, to investigate the layers of volcanic ash, tefra, and to test a new method for analysing tefra layers. Previously, layers of tefra had only been opened vertically in cross-section to help date artefacts, but this time the tefra layer was cleared as a horizontal surface. This was to test the hypothesis that the forming of tefra layers recorded prints of trees growing at the site, and to determine whether this could be used as a basis for making assumptions about contemporary vegetation. Tefra layers have previously been identified as to their volcano of origin and time of

layer formation. For purposes of comparison, three layers from different periods were chosen: 1500 AD (volcano Katla), 920 AD (volcano Katla) and 871+/-2 AD (volcano Veidivötn). Excavations were located on sites of no known settlements as the investigation aimed for natural landscape.

The site dated to 1500 revealed terrane similar to contemporary, the vegetation consisting mainly of sedges, forming closely located intertwining tussocks. However,



Photo 1. An opened tephra profile. Photo by T. Jonuks, 2002.



Photo 2. Icelandic landscape. Photo by T. Jonuks, 2002.

the tefra layer from 920 depicted a radically different scene: the land was more open, with indications of only one sedge tussock. There were three clearly outlined lighter round areas of ca 10 cm in diameter, possibly prints from trees around which the tefra layer formed. A similar result was gleaned from the 871+/-2 AD tefra layer.

These results confirmed the hypothesis that this method could be used to gain information about contemporary landscape and vegetation. In the case of Iceland, this is important in determining what the island vegetation was like before human habitation, or, what kind of changes were introduced by man.

Even though these are preliminary results, the island can be said to have been covered with sparse low forest-forming vegetation prior to human settling in approximately the 9th century AD. Changes caused by man included cattle, mainly sheep and horses, destroying the earlier ecological balance in their free herding. As a result, the land is covered instead with thick herbage that is more durable to herding and cattle.

Further investigation planned for 2003 include excavation of a wider stretch and comparison with layers originating from periods definitely prior to human habitation.



Photo 3. Three layers of tephra from 1500, 930 and 871+/-2 AD. Photo by T. Jonuks, 2002.

The second excavations site was positioned in front of an artificial cave dug into tuft. The aim was to attempt dating the time of the cave's creation. Under the 871+/-2 AD tephra layer were a number of stones that seem to have originated from the digging of the cave. Thus the cave must be older than year 783. However, these are preliminary results – stone samples are currently at the geology centre of Edinburgh University for more precise dating.

The third site of investigation was the remains of a three-part artificial cave, the walls of which are covered with engraved cross motifs. The cave was mapped, the crosses were noted on the map as well as copied in real-life size. The crosses were probably carved on the walls by early inhabitants of Iceland, possibly a Christian community originating from the northern part of the British Isles. This hypothesis is supported by comparison of the crosses with those found on the coasts of both Ireland and Scotland. More will be certain after further excavations in summer 2003 as the original plan of the cave will be attempted to be reconstructed, and the cave dated.

TRIINU OJAMAA DEFENDED HER DOCTORAL DEGREE

Triinu Ojamaa. *Glissando nganassaani muusikas. Morfoloogiline, süntaktiline ja semantiline tasand* [Glissando in Nganasan Music. Morphological, Semantic and Syntactic Levels] *Dissertationes Philologiae Uralicae Universitatis Tartuensis*, 5. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2000. 171 pages. Summary in English, notations, figures.

The different areas of Samoyed culture have been studied to a various degree. The Russian ethnographers have done a tremendous job in introducing to the rest of the world the cultures of both the Northern Samoyeds and the other small nations of the Far North. The works of the ethnographers enable us to get a comprehensive overview of all the aspects of life of these peoples starting with reindeer herding and ending with religious cults. As far as the Samoyed languages are concerned, the overall impression is that their study has been patchier than that of material culture and religion. However, the work of the Uralicists that has continued over a hundred years has put at our disposal a large collection of data about the Nenets as well as the Nganasan languages.

Samoyed music has been studied the least. Figuratively speaking, a briefcase could hold all the existing studies, and there would be even some room for future ones. The most important study of Samoyed music is the doctoral dissertation by Jarkko Niemi “The Nenets Songs” (1998). Niemi also provides a comprehensive summary of all the previous studies of Samoyed music. Most of them focus on problems of genre – genre terminology, contents, performance, and use of songs.

The present study takes a different the path than is usually taken by ethnomusicologists. The reason for doing so is not to reject the previous research but to try out a novel approach that has not been used before. The present study does not deal with by whom, how, and why these songs were composed and in what situations and to whom they are performed. It contains a detailed analysis of the music, leaving aside their traditional background. The methods for analysis have been selected on the principle that they should be as formal as possible.



Photo. Triinu Ojamaa and the Nganasan singer Djulsymjaku Kosterkin enjoying their leisure. Spring 1990.

The dissertation consists of three chapters: *Glissando on the morphological level*, *Glissando on the syntactic level* and *Glissando on the semantic level*.

Glissando on the morphological level. A glissando in Nganasan vocal music is a sound with a pitch that can increase or decrease smoothly in the course of its duration. The glissando is not a state but a process. Neither the pitch nor the duration of glissando can be established accurately in the course of auditory analysis. For clearing up the morphological structure of glissando the help of computerized speech laboratory had used by the author.

The results are the next. The glissando set in Nganasan songs consists of simple and compound glissandos. A simple glissando consists of a single morpheme. A compound glissando may consist of as many as three morphemes. These include the rising morpheme that is characterized by a constant pitch increase and the falling morpheme during which a sound constantly loses its pitch. Between the rising and the falling morphemes there may be a plateau or a part with a stable pitch. One morpheme in the glissando structure is always more prominent than the other morphemes. The prominent morpheme determines the main direction of pitch change in the glissando. Some 95% of the analyzed glissandi had a falling main direction.

Relations are identified between the glissando and the text. A gliding sound in a melody may affect the shape of the song text on the phonetic level. It is manifested in the diphthongization of the monophthong that occupies the same position as the glissando. The changes are the next: *a > au, ou, eu, aj; u > ou*.

Glissando on the syntactic level. The glissando is not at all a rare phenomenon in vocal or instrumental music, in traditional or professional music. In traditional music, as well as in jazz, the glissando often occurs at the end of some unit, thus having a distinct demarcative function. In the Nganasan melody lines that are analyzed in the present study the glissando occurs regularly in the first part of the line. No doubt it is a rare position for a glissando. What is the syntactic function of a glissando that occurs in such a position? What rules underlie the formation of the melody line? The syntactic analysis attempts to find answers to these questions. In order to describe the syntactic peculiarity of the melody lines with glissandi, analytic procedures borrowed from descriptive linguistics will be applied. The study rests mainly on the views of Zellig S. Harris.

Melody line can be divided into three segments with a different character: segments in which the melody proceeds in the high-pitched zone – A-segment; segments in which the sound glides from the high-pitched zone into the low-pitched zone (glissando) – B-segment; segments in which the melody proceeds in the low-pitched zone – C-segment. The glissando acts in the melody line with the ABC structure a conjunction between the high and the low zone.

Glissando on the semantic level. In the present study semantics involves the synthesis of musical structure and meaning. This concept of semantics has been taken from linguistics. Musical semantics often turns to linguistics in order to solve its problems. It is much easier to show the essence of meaning on the basis of linguistic examples than using musical examples. There is, however, at least one example where the situation is quite the opposite. Ludwig Wittgenstein turns to music when he explains the meaning of the sentence, finding similarities in the manifestations of meaning in a sentence and a musical theme. In connection with the meaning of music itself he takes the view that it can express only musical meaning, or, as he puts it, “music conveys to us itself”.

As a glissando is often used for the imitation of something, then it can have a denotational or referential meaning. In melody lines with the ABC structure glissando does not refer to anything music-external – it does not imitate or identify anything. For giving an explanation the musical meaning of glissando, the author applies Meyer's theory of musical meaning.

According to Meyer's theory, the glissando can be regarded as a stimulus, which can create an expectation of some musical event that is going to follow. As various musical events may follow a glissando, then it may have different meanings.

The structural analysis revealed that in melody lines with the ABC structure a segment moving in the low-pitched zone always followed a glissando. Therefore, knowing the style, a glissando creates an expectation in the listener that the melody is going to continue in the low register. Once this melodic segment has followed the glissando then the glissando that has acted as a stimulus has become a term. This is the musical meaning of the glissando in the melodic line with an ABC structure.

Conclusion. The interrelationships of different levels can be easily explained moving in the opposite direction from the previously conducted analysis: semantic level > syntactic level > morphological level.

In order that the meaning of a glissando could be manifested in the form as it was manifested in the semantic analysis, a glissando must occupy a certain position in the structure of the melody line. A glissando must be positioned before a segment that moves in the low-pitched zone as only in that case it can create an expectation of a melodic segment moving in the low-pitched zone. Thus, we can claim that the meaning of the glissando is dependent on the relations of the glissando on the syntactic level.

The glissando (B) is positioned in the syntactic structure of the melody line between A and C as a conjunction. In order that the glissando could connect a melodic segment that moves in the high-pitched zone with a low-pitched melodic segment, its prominent morpheme must take a falling turn. Therefore, the morphological shape of the glissando is of utmost importance to its syntactic function and thus to the formation of the meaning as well.

ESTONIAN FOLK ASTRONOMY. FOLKLORE AND INTERPRETATIONS

Jaak Jaaniste

The editor of the journal *Folklore* Andres Kuperjanov who majored in physics and astronomy defended on January 2002 his thesis on folklore studies “Eesti Taevas. Uskumusi ja tõlgendusi” (Estonian Sky. Beliefs and Interpretations).

The thesis presents an overview of prior research history, constellation= names, cosmology, beliefs and legends related to celestial objects. Longer discussion concerns beliefs related to the Moon, the Sun and the Milky Way.

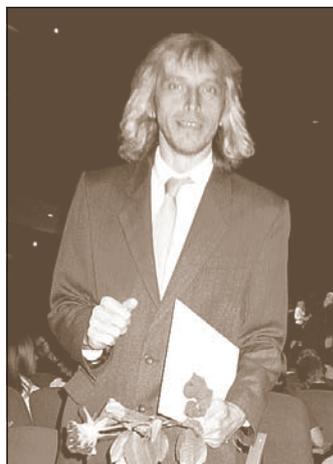
Dr. Jakob Hurt first gave a speech about Estonian astronomy at the Young Men’s Society of the Estonian St. John’s congregation in St. Petersburg more than 102 years ago. His presentation was of great consequence in the study of the Estonian firmament. In this speech Hurt first presented the results of his collection work on Estonian folk astronomy. Constellations described in his study have become the basis of modern Estonian sky charts. However, J. Hurt was by no means the first scholar to study the Estonian starry sky. The first data about star names and star lore was published by H. Stahl in his “Dictionary of Estonian language” in 1637. The names of constellations are first included in Vestring’s “Dictionary” issued 1720–1730. Other scholars of the 18th and 19th centuries also collected and published a lot of material. An overview of earlier collection material has been compiled by Paul Prüller.

Folk astronomy literature in the Estonian language was also published in the 19th century. In 1848–49 F. R. Kreutzwald published his articles in the collection ‘Ma-ilm ja mõnda, mis seal sees on’ (“The World and Those Things Inside It”) and in 1886 the first Estonian star map, by A. Grenztein, was issued as an extra to the newspaper “Olevik”. This map is peculiar compilation of traditional mythological and pseudomythological names, invented by the author.

The Estonian Folklore Archives contain approximately 9000 belief records related to the starry sky. The varying quality and different

regional origin of the material are the reasons why popular astronomy is contradictory and blurred regarding the names of celestial bodies and popular conceptions. The Estonian folk astronomy material as a whole comes primarily from three regions of Estonia – the Saaremaa Island, one parish in North Estonia and one in South Estonia.

The only certain fact is that the names of constellations have changed in the course of time. While the formation of asterisms and the images of some constellations like Suur Vanker (literally, “The Great Cart”, the Big Dipper, the eastern part of *Ursa Major*) and Orion supposedly originate in the distant past, their present names are of relatively recent origin.



Andres Kuperjanov. Photo 2003.

Since the late 19th century the general population’s the practical use of folk astronomy (or astronomical knowledge) has decreased considerably due to easy availability of clocks and printed calendars.

The most legend fragments have been recorded about the Sun, the Moon and some single stars. Planets are not mentioned in myths, except Venus which was seen as two separate stars – the Dawn and Dusk Stars. Weather forecasting, beliefs and behaviour instructions were related to the Sun and the Moon. Phases of the Moon had vast influence on horticulture and cattle-breeding as well as health, followed to date.

Other phenomena discussed in the thesis include meteors, comets and halos which forecasted catastrophies and wars and were related to a number of stories.

Close to two hundred different star names have been recorded from Estonians, but most of these are strictly local names. The tradition

does not always specify the position of a star in the sky, making it impossible to identify.

Milky Way (*Linnutee* literally “the Birds’ Way”) is almost always referred to as the way on which the birds move, sometimes also as the path that the Old Heathen has treaded upon with his huge birch bark shoes. Associating *Linnutee* with the Great World Tree is characteristic of almost all nations.

Most recorded beliefs are related to the *Suur Vanker* (Ursa Major) and the *Orjatäht* (Sirius, the Slave Star). A significant number of constellation names reflect magical signs or objects (snake, cross, pentagon, etc.), several bear the names of significant calendar dates. The star-related beliefs still active today are that stars are the souls of people and a place for unborn children and the souls of the dead.

FILM REVIEW

LIVE ETHNOLOGY ON THE SILVER SCREEN

“Elu pärast maailmalõppu”. “The life after the end of the world”. Lege Artis Film. Produced by Peeter Simm.

Ethnological documentaristics is no novelty genre, not even in the modest Estonian film art. Yet this genre often resembles tourism advertising calling on people to stare in wonderment at followers of archaic lifestyle, minorities and other marginalia. Peeter Simm has successfully avoided following this slippery road in his film “The life after the end of the world” depicting the Russian Old Believers (Russian *starovery*, *raskolniks*) on the western coast of Lake Chudskoe (for Estonians, Lake Peipsi). Instead, he puts emphasis on the difficulties and



Peeter Simm. Photo 2003.

pain the little community that has been exceptionally closed for centuries experiences in its opening and he repeatedly admonishes people to spare the film heroes and to respect their lifestyle.

The whole production carries an undercurrent of respect for these people who have lived in Prichudie for three hundred years. In less than one hour we see interviews intertwined with scenes of everyday life, containing probably among others unique peeks on the customs of Russian Old Believers ordinarily hidden from outsiders. The Russian Old Believers fled from Russia after the church reform of Nikon and expected the world to end. They had to hide their religious beliefs and to keep their homes closed to outsiders. For that reason they have maintained much archaic. The two cults of Russian Old Believers in Estonia are *pomortsy* and *fedoseevtsy*. The so-called *bezpopovcy* ‘people without priest’ have specially had to maintain

traditions as their religious leaders rise from among people according to their qualities and are not professional clergymen.

The life of the community in Prichudie is hidden even from close neighbours. Lying hardly a few dozen kilometres from Tartu, a city of 100,000, the community gives the impression of a remote country. This impression is stressed by carefully chosen nature shots. This “far-away look” is what makes it possible to look at things close and familiar as a bystander.

Now was probably an optimal moment to film Russian Old Believers. They are still a closed community, but on its way towards opening. An old lady who had spent a while in the “world” had returned and became overwhelmed with fear and anger at a touristic sign to “The Worship House”, saying that she wants to take it off because a worship house can not be a tourism object. But the sign is already installed. And anybody who happens to visit the church during worship can stay. In fact, they must, because according to the beliefs of Russian Old Believers who expect the world to end it is not allowed to leave the worship house before the end of the worship. They have also given permission to film them, given interviews kindly, etc. In the regional newspaper Tartu Postimees, there is traditionally an article about Russian Old Believers about once a year. This year it was written by Vallo Nuust and it was published when Peeter Simm’s film was being played first times. This coincidence could contribute to the Russian Old Believers becoming more and more tourism objects. The poorer the borderland becomes the more a serious believer learns to gain through showing himself. And then, resulting screen production would really be a part of tourism advertising.

Now is an optimal time also in another sense. Legalising the Russian Old Believers as in Estonia is rare. The growing respect towards their activities is encouraging. This has also given the Russian Old Believers cause to rely at least to some extent on the “world” and thus they are prepared to talk about their customs and to introduce their views and fears to other people. It is no longer a bunch of refugees from more than 300 years ago who were ready for the world to end just to stay loyal to their religion. They are modern Old Believers whose wardrobe holds both old church clothes and modern coats and hats making them identical to the common person.

At the same time this little community still (successfully!) teaches their children the old Church Slavic language and when going to the church women wear head-shawls with a safety pin because it is forbidden to make a knot – it would attract evil.

In fact, one of the most powerful scenes from the film is associated with a shawl. In the church, a maiden tries to settle her sliding shawl and finally she ties it under her jaw. So the evil and the end of the world are so close that it was more than an optimal moment to film the abandoned cloister sites of Russian Old Believers and the crowded worship houses.

Kalmer Kand, Estonia