

## BOOK REVIEWS

**ART: Komi journal of literature, literary criticism, culturology, history and arts.**  
Editor in chief: Galina Butyreva. A quarterly journal published in Komi and Russian language since 1997. Syktykvar. 192 pp.

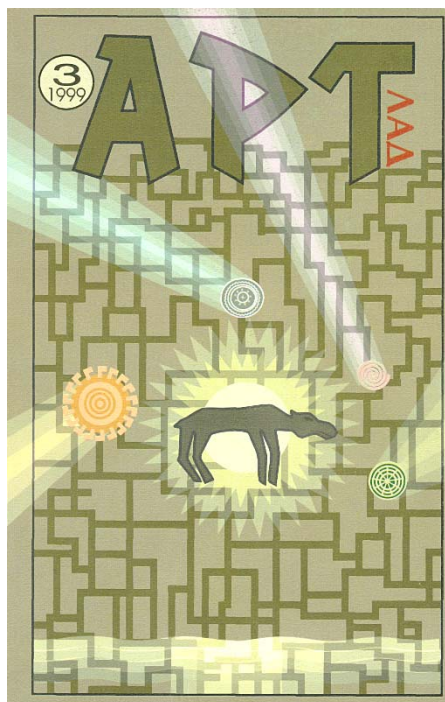
*Nikolay Kuznetsov*

*Art* is an illustrated literary, historical-cultural and belletristic magazine. The first issue (or, to be more precise, the first two issues published as one) of the magazine was published in 1997. Since then, *Art* has been issued on a quarterly basis. In recent years the magazine's print number has been 1,200. Since the beginning, Galina Butyreva, poet and cultural activist, and for a while also the Vice President of the Komi Republic has acted as the editor in chief of the magazine.

According to the board of editors of *Art*, the aim of the magazine is as comprehensive and objective presentation of modern Komi literature as possible, and the conceptualisation of phenomena of Komi culture, research, religion and society in the wider context in Russia and worldwide. The name of the magazine also reflects the same idea of intellectual and cultural integration. In Komi language, the word *art* stands for 'agreement', 'harmony', 'order', and entails also the idea of world 'unity'. Its homophony with the Indo-Iranian word *art* meaning 'space' in the sense of the universe, and the word *art* in modern European languages is no coincidence (<http://www.komi.com/artlad/redactor.asp>).

On the 192 pages of the magazine, fiction, reviews, interviews, analytical overviews, scholarly research into history, ethnography, etc., and articles dedicated to social problems, various sociological issues, and questions of intellectual and political culture in Komi and Russian language are published. Bilingualism and the contents of the published materials is the deliberate choice of the board of editors (<http://www.komi.com/artlad/index.asp>).

Next to original articles in Komi and Russian languages, *Art* also publishes translated material. Many well-known writers and poets and reputed Finno-Ugric authors from Estonia, Hungary, Finland, Udmurtia, Moscow, and elsewhere have published their work in the magazine.



*Art* is a magazine not only for scholars and people working in the cultural sphere, but also for a general public interested in literature, history, culture, social and political processes in the Komi Republic.

The magazine is structured into various parts or sections. Some are regularly published in each issue; others appear irregularly, sometimes only once. The *Literature* section (prose, poetry, literary criticism) presents Komi and Russian fiction, reviews and introductions of the creation of new authors, and articles and essays on literary criticism, etc.

The section *Zyryan Studies* (*Зырянские штудии*) presents recent studies into Komi language and culture, including local history, ethnology, folkloristics, history, pedagogy, arts, etc. The same themes are discussed in section *Finno-Ugric Studies* (*Финно-угорские штудии*), though the articles published in this section have taken a broader approach to other Finno-Ugric cultures.

The section *Ethnic Archives* publishes mostly articles on folkloristics and ethnography. Some issues include a separate group of articles on, for example, Finno-Ugric mythology, literature or prehistoric religion.

The section entitled *Personalia. Archive* publishes previously unknown or inaccessible archive materials, held in libraries and archives of scientific institutions in Syktykvar, St Petersburg, Moscow, Helsinki and elsewhere.

One of the regular sections in *Art* is entitled *Art-fact*. This section entails articles on art criticism, reviews of theatrical plays, concerts, art exhibitions, provides an overview of cultural events in the Republic of Komi, etc. This part of the magazine is also more colourful with lots of quality photos of plays and festivals, reproductions of paintings by various artists, images of sculptures and other works, incl. objects of consumer art, handicraft and the creation of fashion designers.

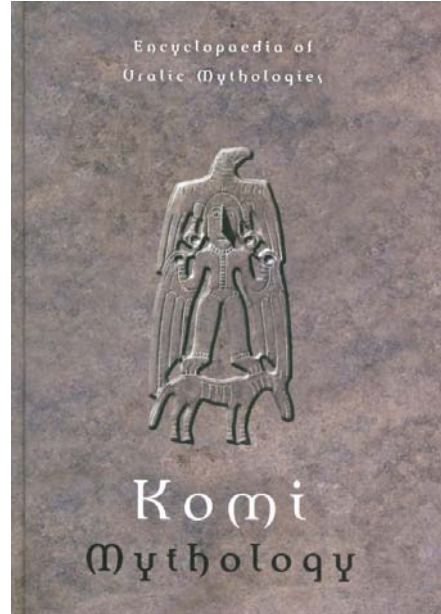
The section *Reviews* publishes critical overviews of congresses, conferences, festivals held in the Komi Republic and elsewhere, presents new books and cultural events. Each issue of *Art* also includes summaries of the published texts and discussed topics in English. The quality design of the magazine is by ethnofuturist Yuri Lissovski. The printing quality of *Art* is also high.

Regardless of the relatively few Komi-language articles in *Art*, the greater number of which would definitely have a positive impact on the prestige of the Komi language, the magazine leaves a very good impression. *Art* is a periodical and as such serves a momentous role in introducing traditional and modern Komi culture. And even though the magazine texts mostly deal with local topics, it would make an interesting reading experience for readers elsewhere in the world.

**ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF URALIC MYTHOLOGIES, VOL. 1. KOMI MYTHOLOGY.** Ed. by Vladimir Napolskikh, Anna-Leena Siikala, Mihály Hoppál. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó; Helsinki: Finnish Literary Society 2003. 436 pp.

*Nikolay Kuznetsov*

This publication is an English-language version of the Russian encyclopaedia, published in 1999, and also the first volume of the series of Uralic mythologies. The project *The Encyclopaedia of Uralic Mythologies* was initiated in 1993 as a result of the idea, as it was put forth by editors of the series in the introduction to the volume on Komi mythology, to publish a series of encyclopaedias in Russian and in English, which would form a systematic source of reference describing and analysing the mythologies, beliefs and traditional worldviews of peoples of the Uralic language family. The series is edited by Mihály Hoppál (Budapest), Anna-Leena Siikala (Helsinki) and Vladimir Napolskikh (Izhevsk). By now, the mythologies of the Khanty, Mansi, and Selkups have been published in Russian.



The volume on Komi mythology has been prepared by a group of folklorists and ethnographers under the supervision of Nikolay D. Konakov, PhD, including Professor Andrei N. Vlasov, CSc; Irina V. Ilyina, CSc; Pavel F. Limerov, CSc; Oleg I. Ulyashev; Yuri P. Shabaev, PhD; and Valeri E. Sharapov from the Institute of Language, Literature and History of the Komi Science Centre at the Uralic Department of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The editor in chief of the Komi volume is V. Napolskikh, translation is provided by Sergei Belykh, CSc.

The introductory part of the book consists of several articles. The first article, entitled *The Komi Peoples*, provides separate overviews of the history and habitation of Komi-Zyryans and Komi-Permyaks, their traditional forms of subsistence, settlements and constructions, food and clothing, intangible culture, etc.

The next article, entitled *Written Sources and Studies of Komi Mythology*, discusses the history of research into the traditional Komi culture and worldview. This is a treatment of literature and written sources on Komi ethnography, mythology, etc. from the centuries-old chronicles to the most recent studies, discussing also the research by and expeditions of the eighteenth–nineteenth-century travellers. The extant sources and research experience enable to reconstruct the common worldview of the Komi – this has been attempted with the present publication.

The last overview of the introductory part *The Mythology of the Komi Peoples* explores the nature of the Komi worldview, pointing out the structural principles of the Komi mythological system and the main elements forming the foundation of the traditional worldview. Among other things, the article discusses conceptions about soul and death, the earliest forms of worship, various narratives and legends, local unique and adopted mythological characters. The authors also investigate various types of myths – cosmogonic, etiological, anthro- and ethnogonic, etc. and observe socionormative and ecological principles in Komi mythology. Another topic that has been briefly touched upon is the changes and merging processes in Komi mythology, associated with the Christianisation of the Komi in the 14th century. The article reveals how mythology is reflected in traditional children's games and describes the use of mythological motifs in modern art, literature, drama, music, fine arts and consumer art.

The main part of the encyclopaedia consists of an etymological glossary *Encyclopaedia of Zyryan Mythology A–Z*, containing over 330 keywords and terminology entries of the Komi mythology, including names of mythological characters and mythological objects, rituals and attributes of customs, magical rituals and cult objects, animals and plants of mythological significance, various folk calendar holidays, etc. The entries are alphabetically arranged. Each article entry begins with a key word in Komi language and, if available, its dialectal variants in Finno-Ugric transcription; in some cases also the word's etymology and relation to other Finno-Ugric or other languages have been provided. This is followed by the translation and/or explanatory definition of the key word. Each entry article concludes with a reference to the used sources and the author of the article. The full list of references and sources is provided at the end of the book.

The information included in entry articles discusses topics of different fields. The descriptions and analyses of the phenomena of traditional Komi culture is often based on older and newer folklore sources, often collected by the authors themselves, who among other things describe in great detail the complex rituals and simpler activities connected with various spheres of life, present narrative plots and analyse the interrelation of these plots. Occasionally, examples of various genres have been presented in the texts. Important aspects of presenting the material are also folk medicine, social relations, gender roles, religious views, ethnography, and various other aspects of human life, the tangible and intangible culture.

In addition to the glossary, the encyclopaedia also presents a few examples of mythological texts of the Komi-Zyryans and Komi-Permyaks in English translation. To make the understanding of the key words and text examples in Komi language easier the editors have included a guide to Komi phonetics entitled *A Short Guide to Reading Komi Words* at the end of the book.

The encyclopaedia of Komi mythology is a very comprehensive work presenting the traditional Komi worldview in a systematised form by describing and explicating its unique characteristics. The encyclopaedia should be of interest not only to folklorists, ethnographers and other scholars of related fields but to everybody interested in the traditional culture of the Komi and Finno-Ugric peoples at large.

The Russian version of the Komi mythology is available online at <http://www.komi.com/Folk/myth/>

**Piers Vitebsky** **THE REINDEER PEOPLE. LIVING WITH ANIMALS AND SPIRITS IN SIBERIA.** London, New York, Toronto, Sydney: Harper Perennial. 464 pp.

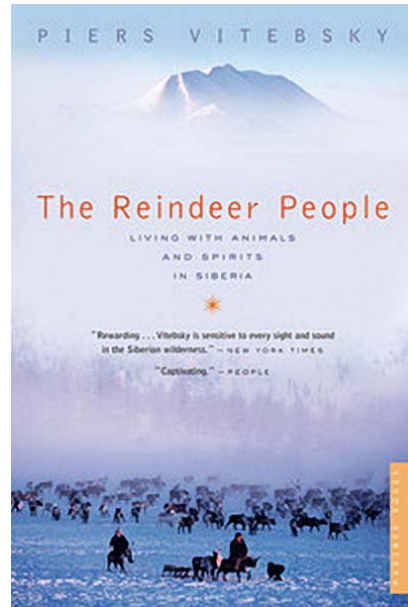
*Aimar Ventsel*

It is difficult to say with certainty whether Piers Vitebsky's *The Reindeer People. Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia* is a belletrist documentary novel or a science book. Piers Vitebsky definitely gives the reader not only a story but also an analysis. On the other hand, the way he structures his book is more similar to a documentary novel than to a science book. In *The Reindeer People*, the story unfolds along the author's travels in the remote Evenki country, where he tells stories of people's lives and introduces the characters of the book. In short passages Vitebsky describes historic events that are necessary to understand these stories, and briefly summarises the characters' biographies.

In the late 1980s, Piers Vitebsky was one of the first Western anthropologists to begin fieldwork in Soviet Arctic that only recently became accessible. Grabbing the chance, he chose the

Verkhoyansk Range in the eastern part of what later became the Republic of Sakha in one of the remotest areas of Siberia, in the Far East, as his field site. Following the tracks of classic anthropologists, he chose to study a small Eveny community in the village of Sebyan, which is located in the remotest end of this remote area. Living with the people in the village, but even more travelling with reindeer herders in the taiga mountains, he gives us the story of this extended fieldwork which lasted over ten years.

Roughly, it could be said that the book has two main focal points. Living with the Eveny people, Vitebsky studied their culture, especially the spiritual culture of the natives. And he gives us a good description of the changes that happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is not that Eveny culture exists and existed in vacuum, being stable throughout epochs of history. All changes in their environment also reflected in their culture. These changes happened often due the interference of the state into the native world. The author tells the story how sedentarisation, collectivisation and destruction of the spiritual leaders (shamans) put native people into different cultural, social and economic context than what they used to live in the Tsarist times. After the state dismantled its structures in the post-Socialist period, the life of the Eveny transformed again, this time due to the withdrawal of the paternalistic state from their lives. Using the biographies of the native people and stories of their families, Vitebsky shows how people used and chose different strategies to struggle for their lives. *The Reindeer People* is thus not only a book about the native culture, but also a book about



suffering and making decisions in desperate situations. Vitebsky's work should not only be interesting for people who study Siberia and shamanism, it is also a story about relations between nomads and the state, and therefore good to read for everyone interested in the native cultures in modern world.