

BOOK REVIEWS

A SHAMANIC BOOK WITHOUT SHAMANIC STORIES

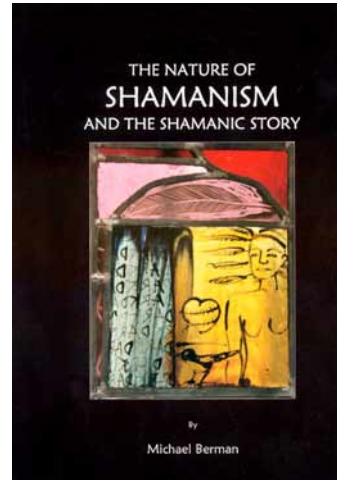
Michael Berman. *The Nature of Shamanism and the Shamanic Story.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. 172 pp.

In the first sentence of the introduction, the author announces his attempt to make out the case to introduce a new genre of tale – a shamanic story, which is either inspired by shamanic journey or contains a number of the elements typical of such a journey. This setting prompts several questions: (i) Why should a shamanic story be singled out from among other legends and memorates in this manner?; (ii) Are these tales about the selection of future shamans by spirits and the experiences that one has during the process and which do not contain elements of a journey not shamanic tales?; (iii) Is this approach not rooted in

the ideology of neoshamanism, in which a person is actively involved in procuring the helping spirits and in which shamanic (or spiritual) journey occupies a central position? The author's approach to the genre is somewhat confusing, since shamanic tales are claimed to oppose folktales, myths, sagas, and fairytales (p. vii). Since legends are omitted from this list, it should not include fairytales either, because from a broader perspective both are categorised as folk narratives.

In the first part of the book, Berman contemplates on the nature and origin of shamanism, attempting, he writes, to refute various misconceptions about shamanism and propose a modern definition of shamanism. In subchapter "Possessed or In Control" the author tries to demonstrate that unlike the possessed, a shaman is in control of the situation and his actions. Unfortunately, the discussion does not cover the period of initiation, the shamanic illness which is known among many North-Eurasian peoples (neither can it be found in the index of names and key words at the end of the book). During this state, which the community perceives as an illness, the future shaman gradually brings his visions in conformity with the corresponding tradition of the community by finding a more commonly acceptable meaning for his highly individual experiences. By using the scale of the 'possessed' and 'in control', proposed by Berman, we may say that the one chosen by the spirits shifts from the position of the possessed to one in control until the entire community acknowledges him as healthy (and a shaman).

The short subchapter "Mediums, Magicians and Shamans" largely remains unclear. First it is said that unlike shamans, mediums do not make use of musical instruments and their rituals require no conception of the cosmos, while a shaman uses the latter for "mapping" his journey. The author claims that another distinction is



that the shamanic audience remains mostly passive compared, for example, to the participants in a Haitian Vodou ceremony. It may be that the participants in a shamanic ritual do not always actively dance together with the shaman, although contrary examples are known (such as some Nganasan rituals, see Popov 1936: 78–79), but the participants who remain passive are mostly scholars who do not understand the language or are outsiders for the community. Among the Siberian peoples, the participants nearly always serve an important role in the ritual – they have to answer the shaman’s questions (with the purpose of guiding and encouraging the shaman). Without the participants’ approval (or positive responses to his questions) a shaman would be unable to achieve any results. There are plenty of examples of how shamans have taken off their robes and discontinued the session upon repeated negative answers, claiming that the spirits cannot help them. There are also other stories about how deliberately given wrong answers have misled shamans, but there is little space to discuss these here. I strongly object to the claim that participants in a shamanic ritual are seen as passive. Perhaps this might be the case in the New World and in terms of neoshamanic practises, but Siberian examples attest to something else. It is odd that the author attempts to tackle issues this extensive on a single page, while even the commenting of these would exceed the source text. Since the text is so short, it remains unclear who has referred to shamans as “Helpers and Sacred Teachers” (p. 5) and why should magicians and shamans be compared according to the capability of subjecting a deity to one’s will?

The next subchapter takes a closer look at the role of women in the development of shamanism. The author first alludes to the misconception that shamans are exclusively male. Unfortunately he has not referred to the source of these views. This is opposed to the speculation of Russian scholars, who claim, relying on the assumption of matriarchy, that the first shamans were females. Berman then gives several examples on female shamans from different areas and arrives at a rather logical conclusion that women have played an important part in the history of shamanism. Of course, it is questionable whether this argument needs confirmation in the first place. Logically, the next issue is the shamans’ cross-dressing, mostly on the example of the traditional Chukchi material by Vladimir Bogoras. In this context, the claim that *[t]he occasional androgyny of the shaman can be regarded as one inflection of paradise, where the two become one* (p. 10) appears particularly out of place. Which paradise does the author refer to: the Chukchi, the biblical Eden, or some other paradise? From this discussion, Berman skips right to postmodernism and claims that shamans are master deconstructionalists who *deconstruct the polarity of life and death* and that cross-dressing Chukchi shamans *can be seen to be doing just the same* (p. 11). Regretfully, the author does not deconstruct the model of universe in which life and death and woman and man are seen as polar opposites, instead of being, for example, different aspects of the same existence (and nature).

The following subchapter about the eristic nature of the so-called indigenous shamanism cautions everyone who thinks that practicing shamanism is harmful. Yet, the author emphasises the danger of traditional shamanism, which seems to imply that neoshamanism is dangerous only to the degree at which it attempts to apply traditional methods.

In the subchapter “Definitions of Shamanism”, Berman investigates several definitions of shamanism from the more popular Oxford dictionaries to Horwitz’s definition and points out several problems with these. Thus *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (2002) rules out female shamans by the use of ‘a priest’ in its definition, while the definition by *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (1977) operates with words ‘heaven’ and ‘hell’ and characterised shamans as ecstatic individuals who have the power to control spirits. As a flaw in Horwitz’s definitions, Berman has pointed out the absolutisation of the journey to another reality (p. 21), which excludes all these who do not make the journey. Unfortunately, the author’s own definition remains rather vague; according to him a shaman is

someone who performs an ecstatic (in a trance state), imitative, or demonstrative ritual of a séance (or a combination of all three), at will (in other words, whenever he or she chooses to do so), in which aid is sought from beings in (what are considered to be) other realities generally for healing purposes or for divination – both for individuals and / or the community (p. 24).

As becomes evident, the new information here is the blurry concept of séance (which appears to mark the complex of rituals). Also, the concepts imitative and demonstrative ritual remain obscure without further explication. What is this distinction based on? And most importantly – the definition is far too broad, entailing also ecstatic oracles who make use of the assistance of deities and other similar characters (including, among others, the Pentecostal rituals of speaking in tongues).

The first chapter concludes with a discussion of the origin of shamanism. The author appears to focus on the age of shamanism, drawing attention to many similarities in the practices and beliefs of shamans of different continents, but does not address the question why shamanism emerged in the first place.

Chapter Two is dedicated to discussing the nature of shamanism. Already the title deals with the question whether shamanism is a religion, a way of life or a methodology. The author covers the definitions of shamanism one by one and criticises the following terms: universal mode (Drury), religious complex (Halifax), religious tradition (Walsh), path to accessing spiritual information (Ingerman), methodology (Harner). In terms of the latter, the author agrees that there are terms such as ‘methodology or language learning’ and ‘research methodology’, but it is doubtful whether such a word definition is appropriate or facilitates describing of shamanism (p. 30). Some definitions are believed to be far too narrow, others are too broad. Then the author explores the components of the definition of religion and arrives at the conclusion that these are concerned with the experience of the sacred rather than belief in a God, and emphasises that this is something that is related to both the shaman’s own actions and the witnesses or participators in his practices, so that shamanism and neoshamanism may both viewed under the category of religion. Without being satisfied with this statement, the author once again returns to the definitions of religion, demonstrating that those proposed by Jung, Radin, Durkheim, McClennon, Muller, James, and others, are not entirely suitable for shamanism, and that shamanism is rather a mystical form of religion of ritual observance. Then Berman attempts to show that apart from him, shamanism is regarded as a religion also by Albanese, Ripinsky-Naxon, and

Potapov. To conclude, he touches upon the issue of whether religion can be considered a valid analytical category at all. It is difficult to follow why this rather superficial discussion over definition has to do with the main aim of the study – the introduction of a new narrative genre.

Chapter Three “Shamanic Journeys: to the Lower, Middle, and Upper World” seems to have arrived at the point. Regretfully, the author employs in this discussion not only neoshamanic terminology but also philosophy. So he claims, [d]ifferent types of shamanic journeys can be undertaken – to the Lower World where you can make contact with Power Animals and to the Upper World where you can meet your Sacred Teacher (p. 46). It is odd that the person who just a moment before indulged in detail about the definitions of shamanism and religion, uses terminology so loosely. I am not familiar with any shamanic culture in northern Eurasia which refers to the helping spirits as Power Animals, or claim that the upper world is inhabited by Sacred Teachers. There is no specific rule which states that the helping spirits can be encountered only in the lower world. For instance, the Nganasan shaman Tubyaku Kosterkin increased the number of helping spirits in “clean tent rites” by visiting different deities and received presents from them, among other things also helping spirits (Gracheva 1983: 142–144). Tubyaku is no exception among shamans. Neoshamanic teachings tell a person to close the eyes and enter the lower world through a spring, hole, or cave to look for one’s power animal. This should not be applied in traditional shamanism. The shaman’s ascent to the upper world is possible not only through a hill, tree-top or ladder, as suggested by Berman. Why should shamans then have the helping spirits who can fly? The next passage, in which Berman describes his methods and visions experienced on the journey to the upper world is decisive: the author shows that he is not a neutral scholar but a practitioner advocating his philosophy and religion. Evidently, the luminance of individual supernatural experiences blurs the visions mediated by texts, which is the stumbling block on being a scholar for many practitioners of ecstatic religions. One may quote definitions on dozens of pages or argue with eminent religion historians about terminological issues, but only up to the point where the discussion turns to individual experience. Even though the chapter is supposed to discuss the different aspects of shamanic journey, Berman rather focuses on the actions of a shaman. So he presents the neoshamanic journey to the lower world, borrowed from Sandra Ingerman, a longer tale about the initiation of an Inuit shaman (which lacks any component of a journey) and the description of the journey of a dead man’s soul to the land of the dead among Winnebago Indians by Paul Radin (which is not a shamanic journey). The latter is analysed at greater length, drawing parallels with the tale’s symbols. Among other things the author has claimed (without providing the source) that Väinämöinen and Finnish shamans had to cross a bridge of swords and knives on their way to Tuonela. In other words, the chapter dealing with shamanic journeys includes only one description of a neoshamanic journey to the underworld.

In the fourth chapter Berman analyses the Book of Jonah as a shamanic tale. Let me agree with the author in that God’s call to Jonah and his resisting indeed appears to exhibit features characteristic of a shamanic initiation period. But since Berman has defined shamanic tales through the travel, he must now find elements of a shamanic journey in Jonah’s tale, and this is already a more challenging task. Jonah’s travel is described as an actual journey from A to B: wishing to flee to Tarshish, Jonah went to

Joppa and boarded a ship bound for the suitable destination. Of course, anyone with a more vivid imagination may interpret a trip from Tartu to Tallinn, and from there on a ship to Helsinki as a journey to the underworld. But then comes the great fish that swallows Jonah! However, swallowing the chosen one, which may be regarded as an element of shamanic initiation, is not a journey. This may be compared with a detailed journey of the Nganasan shaman Ivan Gornok in the inside of Mother Earth (see Popov 1984: 81–93) or, for example, Väinämöinen's falling into Vipunen's belly, both of which, indeed, deserve to be called journeys. Berman makes an attempt to show that the repeated use of the phrase "go down" (Hebr. 'yârad' ירד) since Jon 1:3 (*and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship*) refers to the descent to the underworld (p. 73), though this is a highly common phrase in the Old Testament ('yârad' can be found in 343 verses), and analogous phrases are employed even in the New Testament (Vulgata Act 25:6 *demoratus autem inter eos dies non amplius quam octo aut decem descendit Caesaream*). One must not forget that this is, after all, a mountainous country. Berman's claim that Jonah was in a state of trance by the arrival of the storm is quite remarkable: his being sound in sleep is expressed by the word 'râdam' (רדם), which is highly rare in the Old Testament. Indeed, comparison of the verb use in other places (*Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground*, Dan 10:9) the speculation seems to be quite agreeable. Still, it does not inevitably lead to the conclusion that the word 'râdam' was used to mark Jonah's descent to the underworld. It appears that it has proved problematic for the author to think outside neoshamanic ideas, believing that initiation must take place in the course of a journey to the underworld. The chance that spirits themselves find the chosen one and the event takes place right here, in the Middle World, appears to be impossible in the light of this idea. Nevertheless, the many Siberian traditions contain examples in which initiation is referred to without mentioning elements of a shamanic journey. True, while praying to God inside the great fish Jonah says:

The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the depth closed me round about; the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever; yet hast Thou brought up my life from the corruption, O LORD my God. (Jon 2:5, 6)

This can be regarded an allusion to visiting the land of the dead. However, in the text presented to the readers the description of the journey is missing. The reference to the realm of death in this text should be taken as an obligatory element to initiation. Even more so – the great fish is sent by the God to save Jonah. Returning to discussing the state of trance (which Berman often practices), it is important to note that the state in which a future shaman or prophet saw the initiation vision are not usually described as a trance but rather as a special sleep. For this purpose, the Hebrew word râdam is particularly appropriate. Emphasising the state of trance is necessary for the author to present the journey to the otherworld from a neoshamanic angle. Following the introduction of the principles of the three-stage journey of a mythological hero (separation, initiation, and return, according to Joseph Campbell) Berman announces,

On the shamanic journey, it is not necessarily a form of initiation that takes place during the second stage of the process, rather an encounter with a Power Animal or

Sacred Teacher, and in the case of Jonah this can be seen as the encounter with the fish (p. 82).

Certainly, not every shamanic journey involves a new initiation, but what happened to Jonah applies nicely to the concept of initiation to prophethood. Not only shamans but also clairvoyants and prophets of different times (incl. Muhammad), have first resisted fulfilling the will of the spirits or God, have suffered pains or illnesses (even near-death conditions) and finally consented and healed. It is in this key that the Jonah's tale should be viewed: the fish is not the helping spirit that leads the shaman to the underworld, but a symbol marking the renewal of the future prophet through a near-death experience and his transformation into a person surrendering to God's will. Berman's attempt to draw a distinction between a hero and a shaman, arguing that unlike the hero the shaman often acts as an intermediary between those he or she represents in this world and those he or she encounters in other realities, seems also rather unfortunate (p. 82). Relying on the Ob-Ugrian (Mansi and Khanty) folklore it can be claimed that no clear-cut line can be drawn between a mythological hero and a supernatural being. The protagonist of mythological tales operates in different realities and encounters different supernatural creatures, the communication with whom facilitates establishing the world order, and is thus directly or indirectly the representative and proponent of humankind.

Berman approaches the Jonah's cabin in Nineveh as yet another shamanic element: an allusion to Jonah's initiation which was carried out in a building constructed specifically for this purpose. Even though such buildings are known in a number of places (including the special shamanic tents of North-Eurasian peoples), this is clearly not a case here. First, the use of the word *sûkkâh* (סכס) marks in the Old Testament a booth or a hut (*Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths.* Lev 23:42) and a shelter for animals (*But Jacob went to Succoth, [a] where he built a house for himself and set up shelters for his animals. That's why the place is called Succoth* (Gen 33:17). Second, Jonah built a booth only after the proclamation in Nineveh and *sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city* (Jon 4:5). Jonah had completed his mission so well that the people of Nineveh had mended their ways and Yahweh had decided to have mercy on the city. However, while Jonah was already a prophet – who was he supposed to be initiated to? Berman includes several interpretations of the Book of Jonah and concludes that the only satisfactory explanation for that would be to consider it a description of a shamanic journey. Unfortunately, it is difficult to see a shamanic journey in this tale; it is rather a tale of a prophet's initiation.

In the following chapter Berman attempts to interpret two Georgian tales, "The Earth will take its Own" and "Davit", as shamanic stories. Let us first take a look at the analysis provided for the first story. Despite all the argumentations it remains questionable why should any mention of another reality in the text (here: the crystal castle where time stood still) inevitably proceed from the shamanic interpretation. The narrative repertoire of all the cultures of the world contains numerous motifs in which the story's hero finds himself or herself in a place where time stands still or moves very slowly, so that arriving home after a few days he or she discovers that the period of human life or even more has passed in the meantime. There are also many

tales of how a living person arrives at the underworld or ascends to the upper world, but even these are not necessarily shamanic motifs. I see no reason why a threefold worldview should be exclusively reserved to shamans – on the contrary, this worldview is a precondition for the emergence of shamanism. And if there is a world consisting of many parts, it is, in principle, possible for the beings residing in these to find themselves in another world, even if it is by accident. Berman attempts to employ trinity in the Georgian tale (three encounters on a three-day journey, the hero is given three apples) to serve his ideas, at the same time being oblivious of the fact that a triple occurrence of characters, activities, events and objects in folklore is a phenomenon so universal that has come to be known by the term ‘the Law of Three’.

Since the Georgian tale has been translated from Russian to English, there emerges the question concerning the name of the female heroine: Krasoy appears to be associated with the Russian stem *krasa*¹ (‘beautiful’). A beauty, of course, never dies. This seems to point to a quite different meaning than a shamanic tale. Berman attempts to provide suitable interpretations for the deer and raven in the tale from Celtic and Old Scandinavian mythologies, but, again, both are highly common folk tale characters in other regions where they are known. In sum, it may be said that regardless of all the intricate constructions the author has proposed, there is no reason to categorise as a shamanic tale a story about a youth who is seeking immortality, encounters a deer and a raven on his way, eventually arrives at a beautiful lady living in a crystal castle, in the company of whom the centuries pass as a few days. The tale is systematised as tale type ATU 470B “The Land Where No One Dies” and is known in Finnish, Estonian, Sámi, Swedish, Irish, French, Portuguese, Flemish, Italian, Hungarian, Serbian, Romanian, Polish, Jew, Gypsy, Armenia, Japanese, Eskimo, and other traditions.

The next tale “Davit” roughly corresponds to tale type ATU 460A “The Journey to God (Fortune)”, in which the heroine sets out on a journey to the Sun to seek help for her sick brother. On his way she meets several people and animals, hears their worries and, having found solutions to all of these from the Sun’s tale, helps the troubled ones. This is a tale of even broader, one might say, global spread. Without going further into Berman’s analysis, I will give an example that requires no further comments

The narrator tells us that “this all happened in the days when men and animals still lived like friends and could speak, one to the other, in the same language”, in other words in the days of shamans. Shape-shifting can be viewed as the imitation of the actions and voices of animals ... During his apprenticeship, the future shaman has to learn the secret language required to communicate with the animal spirits and how to take possession of them, and this is often the “animal language” itself or a form of language derived from animal cries (p. 111).

For any folklorist or culture historian this citation says it all about the credibility of the author. The German tale “Bundles” in the sixth chapter could be interpreted as an initiation vision or dream, but does not contain a shamanic journey in the traditional meaning.

The tale referred to as a shamanic story from Korea, cannot be directly associated with shamans, even though Berman claims it having been told in the course of some rituals. No shamanic journey takes place in this tale either, even though the author proposes it as a genre-identifying feature. In fact, in the comments to the last tales it

becomes clear that Berman is actually after stories that might have a healing power (see p. 115, 124, 130). The latter example appears to fit comfortably in this category. I am familiar with the fact that people attribute healing properties to some folklore genres (in Estonia, for example, to Kalevala-metric folktale *regilaul*); also, I would not argue with the possibility that in certain situations the performance of folklore might have had a therapeutic effect, the knowledgeable and skilful use of which may have belonged among shamanic treatment methods. I have experienced on a number of occasions the healing effect of having been read out fairy tales while being ill as a child.

Even so, what has all of this to do with the stated aim of the study to introduce a new genre of a tale? The genre-identifying feature was supposed to be the occurrence of elements of a shamanic journey in the tale. It appears as if Berman has changed his views in the course of writing and has neglected the original objective that he set out to study. Also, this would be impossible on the basis of the material presented. As mentioned above, except for one, the tales presented as examples in the chapter on shamanic journeys did not exhibit sufficient features to define the genre. These cannot be found in the texts that are used to exemplify the newly introduced genre either. These tales contain single mentions of the otherworld – descent to the bottoms of the sea (in the Book of Jonah and the Korean tale), ascent to heaven (in the Georgian tale “Davit”) and the journey to a distant crystal castle at the sea (in the second Georgian tale) –, then again, the international folklore repertoire is full of such motifs. I believe that three tales presented here are traditional tales (representing tale types ATU 470B, ATU 460A and the Korean tale), while the Book of Jonah and the German tale “Bundles” could be categorised as religious legends linked to initiation.

Of course, all folklore genres can be used for educative purposes, and this could have been practiced by both storytellers and shamans. Since I know from first-hand experience that shamans were often fine storytellers (and bards), there are several points in the last chapter, entitled “The Parallels Between the Shaman and the Storyteller”, that I happily agree with. Still, I would like to emphasise once more that the threefold worldview, creatures inhabiting it, and the possibility of happening to move from one world to another, have not been invented by shamans but form the so-called “ideological” basis for a shaman without which the shamanic journeys and rituals would not be possible. Evidently, the preconceptions of shamans were rooted in mythological and religious legends, which is why the orientation shaping the transformation of the shaman’s conscience has been called the reality of legends (Lintrop 1996: 62–73; also available at <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/nr1/heredit.htm>).

Regretfully, the book that set out to introduce a new narrative genre featured no tale that might have belonged to the genre according to the book author’s own definition. Also, the need for establishing the shamanic tale as a separate genre remains unjustified.

Aado Lintrop

Comment

¹ Berman, by the way, mentions on page 192 that in the Georgian original source the heroine’s name is Turpa (“the Adorable One”).

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A BOOK ON THE ORIGIN OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE NEW WORLD

Березкин Ю. Е. Мифы заселяют Америку: Ареальное распределение фольклорных мотивов и ранние миграции в Новый Свет. [Berezkin, Yu. E. *Myths Colonize the Americas. Area distribution of folklore motifs and early migrations into the New World.*] Москва: Объединенное гуманитарное издательство 2007, 360 pp.

The new book by Yuri Berezkin, head of the Department of America of Kunstkamera, the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences, professor at the European University of St Petersburg and the leading Americanist in Russia, reviews American history before its contacts with Europe. Relying on archaeological, anthropological, linguistic, folkloric and mythological materials, the author presents his scenario of the populating of North and South America.

Yuri Berezkin poses the question: How did Indians end up on the other side of the ocean? In the 16th century they were thought of as successors of Israelis who migrated apart after the Assyrian invasion of Samaria. According to another hypothesis they migrated from Asia, even though America is not far from Siberia. But the ancient migratory routes are not completely clear. It has been established that Indians had settled the American continent already 11,500–11,000 years ago. This is further confirmed by archaeological evidence dated to the Clovis culture (c. 11,200–10,900 radio-carbon years ago).



According to Berezkin, the populating of America is not something that would interest only archaeologists. He employs previously unused or incorrectly used sources – mythological materials – to support his view and analyses the areal distribution of folkloric-mythological motifs. Berezkin emphasises that the comparative analysis of myths can by no means replace archaeological facts but enable scholars to considerably complement the reconstruction. He does not answer the question as to how America was settled but poses new questions, attempting to clarify certain aspects of it.

Yuri Berezkin has collected and compared Indian texts for a quarter of a century. In this book he does not only observe American mythologies, but next to the mythologies of Indians and Eskimos, also explores the mythologies of the peoples settled on the northwestern shore of the Pacific Ocean. Furthermore, Alaska is culturally closely related with Chukotka, which, in turn, is culturally related with Kamchatka and Kolyma, the latter with Sakha, and so on. The author is convinced that an unrelated study of a population area without studying the neighbouring and more distant areas would change the overall picture, since everything that happens in the world (and this is especially true of mythology) is a unified process. He gives the following example. Variants of the myth of bringing sand from the bottom of the sea in East Europe and Siberia are clearly related. It is also likely that North-American myths have not emerged independently, especially in view of the area's close proximity to Siberia. Then again, the diver's myth is widely spread in India. Does this indicate the contacts of Siberia and India, or have South-Asian myths emerged independently? If this is the case, it is possible to assume the independent emergence of the American myth.

The author's corpus of sources contains tens of thousands of texts. He has searched motifs discussed in the study from amongst about 25,000 texts. In addition, Berezkin has systematised around ten thousand Eurasian and Australian texts.

The main bulk of the book consists of two major, relatively independent chapters. The title of the first chapter *Этнокультурная карта Нового Света к моменту появления европейцев и её формирование (данные археологии и языкознания)* (Ethnocultural map of the New World at the Appearance of Europeans and its Formation (archaeological and linguistic data, pp. 21–163) already suggests that it discusses the indigenous peoples of America in the Pre-Columbian era and is a valuable overview of linguistic, archaeological, genetic and anthropological data of each indigenous group of the New World in Russian language. Until the publication of this book there has been no systematised information about American prehistory available in Russian. Relying on earlier archaeological finds, newer linguistic data, migration routes and causes and language contacts, the overview of the main cultural contacts which clearly influenced the spread of mythological motifs has been presented. The chapter does not provide a detailed account of American history but offers a general idea of the 600 ethnic groups of the New World, which have provided the source for the mythological material discussed in the book.

In terms of linguistics, the author relies on Lyle Campbell who represents the “conservative” approach. In the chapter the material is presented according to culture areas as descriptive rather than historical units. According to Berezkin, mythological motifs are related by means of culture areas rather than languages owing to migrations, assimilation processes, reciprocal influence and cultural loans. These culture areas generally do not overlap with language areas. In ten millennia, languages may

have lost characteristics that suggested their being related, or disappear altogether, but for the untraceable discontinuance of a culture and tradition (including the mythological motifs it includes) the corresponding population has to disappear with a precondition that it has no cultural contacts. But this is hardly possible.

On the basis of physical anthropological data, the author suggests that since the populating of America(s) until the first Columbian landing, the anthropological features of Indians have transformed to the degree that must have been impossible without the inflow of genes from Asia.

In Chapter Two of the book, entitled *Мифология и фольклор как материал для исторических реконструкций* (Mythology and Folklore as Material of Historical Reconstructions, pp. 164–249), the author arrives at the content analysis of the spread of motifs and presents research results.

Berezkin defines motif as *any episode or image or any set of episodes or images found in more than one text* (p. 166, 258). He approaches mythological motifs as *replicators* or self-reproducing cultural units. Unlike Thompson, Berezkin does not define motif as a minimal unit but as any recurrent element or structure which appears in culture, with minor changes and mutations, in its final form. The more complex a motif, the narrower is its temporal and spatial spread, and the simpler it is, the broader is its spread. The recurrence of the same motifs is unlikely. If the similarity or divergence of different mythological motifs correlates with certain external factors (socio-political situation, environmental conditions), then typological explanations should be considered. If this is not the case, only genetic proximity seems likely. Analogies can be found in the mythologies of even the most distant peoples. While considering some parallels and disregarding others allows one to reconstruct any course of history, such manipulation is impossible if the data of hundreds of motifs is considered at the same time.

Unlike motifs, plots are not replicators and cannot be used for reconstruction. In his study, Berezkin relies on motifs that are elementary and also those that construct plots. The author considers the terms ‘mythology’ and ‘folklore’ as synonymous, since they are similar in genre and plots from the explored aspect.

Berezkin finds the use of Thompson’s motif index rather limited for determining relationships between areas and regions. The index is intended for a formalised describing of single texts rather than traditions. Each text contains a number of basic motifs, which renders the processing of tens of thousands of texts impossible. The categorisation system based on European folklore is also not completely accurate, since, for example, Indian myths often lack borders between anthropomorphic and zoomorphic characters, the physical and supernatural world, etc. The main problem, however, is that motif indexes do not contain summaries of texts and only indicate the sources. This is why for this study Thompson’s register is only useful in searching for publications.

The statistical processing of folkloric data of different ethnic groups required the compilation of a database of the folklore and mythology of the New World. In the course of this process, ethnoterritorial units were defined and used for systematising the motifs. The maps and charts included in the book present the distribution of 1,020 motifs in 154 areas of Americas from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska. In addition, Berezkin has included 11 areas of the Far East from Chukotka to Japan. The book also includes

a list of area clusters with ethnic groups representing these areas. The geographical location of the area can be followed on the appended maps.

For determining the level of similarity of area traditions, the author of the study has used factor analysis (principal components analysis) in determining the eigenvalue of the dispersion of components (in our case, folkloric-mythological traditions) along specific coordinates (principal components) and in determining the variance of the factors. Every principal component axis is independent from others and shows one of the specific tendencies. In the tendencies of intercontinental scope, the first four principal components proved significant, while others applied to motifs of limited spread. The statistical analysis software used has made it possible to determine the influence of each motif on the formation of a specific tendency. The motifs that have influenced the overall pattern the most are characteristic of the largest number of traditions and are at the same time associated with specific areas.

Berezkin continues by presenting the results of processed data according to four principal components. The results are also demonstrated on the maps at the end of the book. While discussing each set of motifs, the author briefly characterises some motifs (though constituting only a little more than 5 percent of the used materials) which have influenced the formation of the corresponding tendency. Each description includes a comment about the people from whom it has been recorded. Source references and Russian summaries of the texts are available at www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin.

The major variance in terms of the first principal component is in the mythologies of North America (Canada and the U.S.) and the Amazon Basin. North-American mythology, for example, includes motifs of diver or a figure on the moon, etc. that are also known in the Estonian tradition. The second principal component juxtaposes the mythologies of the inner North America and the Northwest Coast. Berezkin calls the two mythologies the Mesoamerican-Kansas complex and the Northwestern complex. Analogous, though considerably smaller variances appear also in South-American mythologies. Quite surprisingly, according to the author, one can see parallels between the mythologies of the northwestern coast of North America and the area east of the Andes in South America, passing the Central America.

The third principal component registers differences between the Eurasian and American mythologies. Berezkin calls them Eurasian and Amerindian complexes, respectively. The Amerindian complex consists of motifs generally characteristic of Indians and popular both in South and North America. Similarly to the second principal component, the fourth shows the differences of mythologies mostly in North America. The two motif complexes – West and East – border the Rockies along the western coast of North America, which also forms the water divide of the Pacific and Atlantic drainage basin. Both complexes can be observed also in South America.

In the conclusion (pp. 249–257), Berezkin discusses the possible migration routes at the earlier stages of the peopling of the New World, relying mostly on the main tendencies in the spread of folkloric-mythological motifs. One of the more conspicuous tendency is the relatively high level of concentration of the motifs of the North-American complex in the southern regions of South America. This has not been confirmed by archaeological facts. Another clear tendency is the similarities in the mythologies of the eastern part of South America and the northwestern part of North America. At a superficial glance, this tendency can be reasoned with similar environmental and eco-

nomical situation (the more important role of water resources compared to the rest of the continent), but the independent emergence of such distinct mythologemes can hardly be explained by this reasoning only.

One of the most versatile and rich motif complexes can be found in the mythology of the coastal Salish, or Flathead Indians (in northwestern U.S. and southwestern Canada), which belongs to the Northwestern (principal component 2) and the Western (principal component 4) motif complexes at the same time. It is here that the earlier settlers who migrated along the Pacific coast must have arrived at the ice-free and unsettled areas and moved on to the Andes and the eastern part of South America. This reconstruction is possible only by means of mythological materials. It is likely that the Salish were the direct descendants of the representatives of the first wave of American settlers.

Widely different motifs have condensed in another area, stretching from the Great Lakes to the Rockies. This area posed no obstacles for the migration of different ethnic groups. The main bulk of the mythological motifs of the Great Plains is international by nature and seems to be a remnant of some prehistoric population whose languages have disappeared.

The typical, sometimes unique motifs which have not spread or have little spread in Eurasia can be found mostly east of the watersheds of North and South America. It is likely that in this area the ancient heritage of the first settlers has been preserved and new settlers arrived to the western areas.

The history of the Eskimo culture is relatively complicated. First, the later settlers from Asia mixed with Eskimos, second, they incorporated earlier migrants from Alaska, and third, all Alaskan mythologies were influenced on different occasions by southern and northeastern Asian ethnic groups.

The motifs of the Eastern complex, known in both North and South America, have parallels on the Pacific coast in Asia. This may point to the fact that these coastal groups arrived in America before the continental migrants, or at least played a significant role at the earlier stages of the peopling process. On the route from Chukotka in the Far East towards Japan, the North-American motifs become rarer and the amount of Amazonian motifs increases. Parallels between the Amazonian and Melanesian mythologies, discovered already in the 19th century, can be explained by the survival of the ancient East-Asian tradition in hardly accessible refuges (Amazonian Basin and Melanesia). It may be assumed that the early migrants who travelled along the Pacific coast, now under water, to North America and then South America brought to the New World similar motifs, which spread from East Asia also to New Guinea.

Most of the motifs spread in North America, Mesoamerica and the Andes did not migrate to the New World with the first settlers but arrived much later. Many North-American motifs share parallels with the ones in South Siberia. Chronologically, motifs known in the Amazonian Basin can be considered the earliest. Some of these have spread not only to Melanesia but also to Africa, the Cradle of Humankind. Did the transmitters of Amazonian mythology arrive at the New World along the coast of Alaska or through central Alaska is a far less important question than the fact of this migration itself.

The overall pattern of the transregional migration of the motifs and the results of the statistical analysis of a huge corpus of material indicate that unlike the intricate

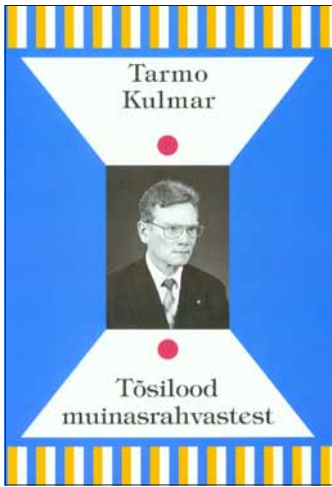
plots, motifs are stable and last for a long time. This facilitates the reconstruction of prehistoric mythologies. Among the results of the study is the conclusion that if folklore and mythology stand in any correlation with social and environmental factors, then only to a minor degree. Environmental conditions and the form of economy may only influence the selected borrowing of motifs but could hardly generate the same motifs.

The book also includes a short summary of the main principles of the study in English (pp. 258–261). The text is illustrated with a number of maps (pp. 262–281) which demonstrate the spread and distribution of single languages and language families, archaeological cultures and traditions and mythological motifs in the Americas. The extensive list of references (pp. 282–337) includes nearly 900 titles, mostly by Anglo-American authors. The book concludes with an index of ethnolinguistic groups (pp. 338–359), which should facilitate the search for specific ethnonyms in the text.

Berezkin's study is not merely an educational material for archaeologists and ethnologists but would definitely appeal to a wider audience, especially because it is well-written and the readers are not burdened by the weight of academic terminology.

Nikolay Kuznetsov

TRUE STORIES ABOUT ANCIENT PEOPLES



Tarmo Kulmar. *Tõsilood muinasrahvastest.* ('True Stories about Ancient Peoples') Eesti Mõttelu 76, Ilmamaa, Tartu, 2007, 348 pp. (Editors Simo Runnel and Urmas Tõnisson; foreword Märt Läänemets).

Tarmo Kulmar, currently professor of comparative history of religions at the Faculty of Theology, Tartu University, has finally published the main results of scientific research of the last ten years of his career in Estonian. As the author himself has stated, he had for a long time been indebted to the Estonian reader for not having written virtually anything in his native tongue in recent years (p. 7). Of necessity, most of the scholarly works must be published in international scientific volumes and there is no time left to enrich the local Estonian-language cultural and scientific area. At least for now and hopefully for the next coming decade, Professor Kulmar may feel relieved, because his debt has been paid manyfold by the appearance of *True Stories about Ancient Peoples*.

As the book title refers, the volume is composed of scientific articles about the history and beliefs of ancient peoples and cultures. During his long scientific career, Tarmo Kulmar has mainly dealt with the history and religion of the Inca people in Peru

and Aztecs in Mexican area as one of his main subjects. First supervising for the study of ancient American Indian cultures was given to Kulmar by the great Estonian theologian and writer Uku Masing (1909–1985), who was the professor of comparative history of religions in Tartu before the Second World War and whose position Kulmar now holds. Important part of Kulmar’s research deals with the mythology and soul phenomenology of ancient Germanic tribes. In this area, one of the most influential teachers of Kulmar was the renowned Estonian scholar, poet and translator Rein Sepp (1921–1995). His interest towards the ancient cultures and religions of India and China comes from Linnart Mäll, internationally recognised Estonian scholar of Buddhist studies. The topic of Kulmar’s doctoral dissertation (1994, Tartu) is the soul phenomenology and worldview of ancient Estonian tribal religion. In the area of general theories of religion, Kulmar has been influenced by the German scholar Alfred Rupp (1930–1993) and one of the leading hittitologists in the modern world Jaan Puhvel. All the teachers have left a deep mark on the future areas of interest of Kulmar who has never specialised in a single narrow field of study. He has instead continued the work of almost all his teachers and has succeeded to give several new interpretations and theories in every field as well. *True Stories about Ancient Peoples* is reflecting all the abovementioned ancient peoples and is composed of 32 different scientific papers in Estonian language.

The book is divided into six different sub-topics: “Holy Text”, “Holy Creature”, “Holy Place”, “Holy Event”, “Holy History”, and “Holy State”. The use of the term “holy” refers to the fact that in his research Kulmar has taken the viewpoint of a theologian – and not that of an anthropologist or historian. The term “holy numinous power” is according to the German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) in his *Das Heilige* (Otto 1917) explained as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, higher numinous force able to produce admiration and terror simultaneously. This numinous force is, however, understood and translated into the human language and beliefs in many different ways by different cultures. This is how different religions have been developed – by the realisation of the same numinous higher power, but interpreting it in different means of expression and imagination. Also Kulmar seems to be affected by the same kind of interpretation of the holy power – projecting itself into the human person from the outside world and in different cultures taking different forms according to local material culture, climate, historical coincidence and developments in language and mythology. However, religion as a phenomenon and human being as a religious creature remain equal in quality and similar in nature even when different cultures are separated by thousands of miles and many centuries. The papers of the book seem to be organised under different topics to allow a non-specialist reader to better find its way among 32 different themes and also to give the book a certain sense of unity. In their original form, almost all the papers have been already published in scientific journals in Germany and Estonia. Unfortunately the current short review does not allow giving any clear picture about all the topics Kulmar is dealing with in his book and only some specific aspects are discussed in the following.

The article named “Soul Phenomenology of the Ancient Estonian Religion” (pp. 71–85, Kulmar 1997) and “Soul Beliefs and Beliefs about Death of Ancient European and Ancient Germanic Peoples” (pp. 86–93) is dealing with the problems of soul phenom-

enology of ancient Estonian and Indo-European nations. The study is based on the theories of German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (1920) and Swedish indologist Ernst Arbmán (1926/1927). Those theories divide the primitive soul concept into two larger parts (body soul and free soul) which are again divided into several subcategories of different souls having their specific functions. Estonian prehistoric understanding of the soul's nature is studied from the perspective of previous works of Estonian theologians and historians Matthias Johann Eisen, Oskar Loorits, Ivar Paulson, Eduard Tennmann and Uku Masing. It seems that Kulmar is supporting the extended role of pre-animistic (fears about the return of a dead body of a person in form of a demonic creature) views in the development in early Estonian religion as well as in all the primitive religions (p. 76). It is not easy to detect the pre-animistic beliefs from the different layers of Estonian prehistoric religion because all the written evidence dates from the period when Estonian once indigenous religious beliefs were already a certain subcategory of Christian faith in the minds of people. If we were to seek comparative material concerning the fears centered on the return of the dead as harmful demons, the earliest material dates back to the Sumerian written records *ca.* 2000 BC. There is no doubt that several cultic rituals and other customs were related to the different fears of the dead relatives who, if not buried and taken care according to correct rituals, could return as harmful demons (Sumerian *gidim*). In Sumerian mythology, the human physical body can enter the underworld regions of the dead as well as the upper regions in the heaven (for the most recent studies concerning the problems discussed, see Espak 2008 and other studies mainly dealing with the phenomenology of soul in different ancient cultures). There seems to be no free soul able to unify with a certain spiritual higher being after the loss of life of the human body. In spite of this, all the nature, including artificial and natural objects, is somehow imagined "living" and full of different numinous powers. The pre-animistic beliefs cannot be described as a starting point of religion or the most ancient form of religion. Both – the so called pre-animistic fears and animistic sense of the world are parallel in existence inside the polytheistic Mesopotamian highly sophisticated religion and culture. It seems more probable to seek the beginnings of the religion in an overwhelming perception of the holy numinous force not clearly defined in the minds of ancient man, and much reasonable to name the pre-animism actually post-animism – phase or phenomenon inside religion having its starting point when man begins to understand his own body and the physical body of other men as perpetually living entities moving to an other sphere of existence after its loss of life.

Lots of papers by Kulmar are dedicated to the study of creation and development of totalitarian state systems in early societies such as Qin dynasty in China (221–206 BC) and the Incas and Aztecs before the Spanish conquests in the early 16th century AD. As the author states, *the totalitarianism seems to be in constant change of masks in different societies, and therefore presents itself as constant fear to world peace and humanity in general* (p. 7). To summarise, the totalitarian regime is an act of a certain ideological group of power-holders to make their understanding of the society, religion and culture in general the only accepted one and so destroying the previous pluralistic views. Kulmar writes, characterising the totalitarian state of the Incas, that

the sun god religion also provided justification for wars of conquest: according to the teaching of the Incas, the Father Sun had commanded to spread civilisation to all nations, which presupposed perpetual military aggressions, since the barbarians were unwilling to voluntarily embrace its benefits (pp. 265–266, Kulmar 2003: 35).

Also several ideologies of the 20th century nationalism and communism were religious phenomena in nature, headed by a deified godly figure imitating his despotic predecessors from the ancient past. Modern-day antiglobalist movement also argues that the global market-economy democracy is actually nothing more than a totalitarian system hiding behind the name of democracy and enforcing its values and ideals to all the other systems of beliefs. One of the most colorful totalitarian regimes is well alive in present day North Korea, headed by a communist living god allowing the nature its fertility and being the living sun of all the other peoples in the world. If we were to find comparative material from other societies not analysed by Kulmar, the first totalitarian empire in the history of the world – the Akkadian empire 2334–2154 BC had several aspects in common with the Inca totalitarian state. When the name of the Inca state was the State of the Four Corners of the World (p. 266), then also the deified Akkadian kings called themselves “rulers of the four corners of the world” referring to the fact, that they as central points of the universe are ruling over the whole world imaginable in every geographical direction (cf. Sazonov 2007). Several similarities between different totalitarian states having no physical connections at all with each other seem to refer to the element of totalitarianism being somehow programmed inside every culture and religion and able to develop almost everywhere when the conditions are right.

In the article “Nature of Secret Societies and Their Religious-Historical Background” (pp. 239–249), Kulmar draws an interesting parallel between the cultic secret unions of archaic (Oceania, West-Africa, North-America) and classical societies (Classical Greece) and present day student corporations or fraternities. Kulmar claims that the latter are actually a modern form of their ancient predecessors. Estonian, German and other student corporations indeed have several features in common with the archaic secret unions such as limitations for joining the union, different statuses inside the secret union based on the time of joining the union, different initiation rites, secrecy in inner life towards non-members of the union, several other secret rituals and cultic objects understandable only to the members of a certain secret society (p. 248). The modern student corporations are again predecessors of the medieval guilds which in turn developed from the Old Roman *collegium* and *corpus*. Those are again specific forms of cultic secret unions and different mystical cults practiced in the ancient world (p. 249). As a separate phase in this development, also the first forms of medieval student society – the *natio* should be mentioned. Those earliest student unions were formed by the national background of the students (archaic tribe) who had gathered into larger cities to join the university. Nation-type student organisations are still active in Nordic countries as Finland and Sweden. In mainland Europe, and especially in Germany, the present student corporations were formed at the end of the 18th century encouraged by the ideas of liberty (French Revolution) and principles of free thinking, Enlightenment philosophy and common educational purposes. The original nature of

Kulmar's interpretation of modern student organisations shows clearly how stable some ancient cultic practices and religious rituals can be in the minds of people and in the collective memory of humankind. Ancient beliefs and customs seem never to simply fade away with time – they are only transforming and taking the outer form suitable for the specific moment in history.

Concerning the Estonian reader, the most valuable parts of the book are the texts in which ancient literature of the Incas, such as myths of creation and hymns to deities has been translated into Estonian language. Tarmo Kulmar plans to continue his contribution as an introducer of Inca culture and literature to the wider range of interested readership. The translation of *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* (1609) of El Inca Garcilazo de la Vega (1539–1616) is already being prepared by Kulmar and hopefully it will appear soon in published form. De la Vega's *Commentaries* is a chronicle about the culture and history of the Inca people written by a man who himself was part Inca and part Spanish – thus having the ability to understand the both very different worlds in equal terms. The chronicle has two parts: the first one giving an overview of the culture and history of the Incas, the second part describing the Spanish Conquest in the 16th century.

There are not so many scholars dedicated to the study of ancient American-Indian cultures when compared, for example, to the number of Ancient Near-Eastern scholars in the contemporary Europe. That only makes the presence of Tarmo Kulmar in Estonian-speaking cultural area more valuable and important for us.

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