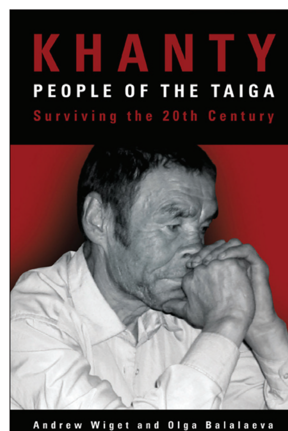
BOOK REVIEWS

REFLECTIONS ON INDIGENOUS ADAPTATION IN WESTERN SIBERIA

Andrew Wiget, Olga Balalaeva. *Khanty, People of the Taiga: Surviving the 20th Century.* Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2011. 398 pp.



This monograph presents research about the survival of the Khanty people in Siberia. The main research goals of the monograph are related to discussing contemporary survival strategies of the Khanty. The authors approach the Eastern Khanty comprehensibly, covering a wide range of aspects of the Khanty culture and everyday life.

The main arguments of the research concern problems of the Khanty indigenous movements that have been relatively unsuccessful although local indigenous leaders have been quite active and tried to adapt their strategies to continually changing circumstances. The scant success of these movements is closely related to rapid changes in the local economic, social and natural environment. Rapid and large-scale development of the oil industry in the region has decisively changed circumstances of survival for small indigenous communities. Indigenous groups had managed to preserve their way of life, traditions and autonomy relatively well until the second half of the 20th century. However, the oil industry has dramatically changed the pattern of interests in the region. The Khanty were not ready to meet the tremendous pressure (influx of migrants, building of new cities, development of industrial infrastructure, pollution of the environment) they have experienced during the last few decades. Indigenous communities have developed a variety of adaptation tools and skills to manage the situation. Still, the options of the Khanty to improve their survival chances are rather scarce.

The conclusions of the monograph are presented clearly and they deal with the prospective for the Khanty to redefine their adaptation strategies because there is always hope that the situation is still manageable. But the authors also point out a certain need for commitment from the government and local administrations to substantially improve "the fate of the Khanty and other native minorities of the Russian North" (p. 311).

The monograph presents plenty of original field data about the Khanty way of life during recent decades. Reflections on Western Siberian history and the traditional culture of the Khanty are mostly based on previous research, or studies of other contemporary scholars, but this is quite understandable. Especially important is the issue that not too many monographs exist about the Khanty people. This monograph differs from other researches on similar topics because it is obvious that it is based on a very long series of fieldwork, conducted in the same region. The authors are familiar with the

local situation and can tell us the true story of the dramatic changes over a relatively long period of time.

The scope of the monograph is embedded in time and it covers very different aspects of Khanty life. Part of the book provides an overview of the Khanty history and changes in the local religious landscape, social and economic environment. Most of this vast material is provided on the basis of earlier research, done by multiple scholars (of whom most are, or have been, prominent in the field) in different time periods. This historical and descriptive segment serves as preparation for the reader for the main, more contributive part of this research. Chapters that deal with recent and contemporary issues are remarkably sound and the analysis of the indigenous movement can be considered sufficient. The final parts of the book serve as an example of dedicated and high-level research.

The monograph contributes greatly to the studies of the Khanty people. Although ethnographic literature about the Khanty is extensive, this research explores the contemporary situation of the Iugan, Pim, and Tromyugan Khanty groups in a precise, detailed and empathic way. It must also be stressed that the Eastern Khanty groups have not been covered by ethnographic research well enough. This book helps to fill this gap substantially.

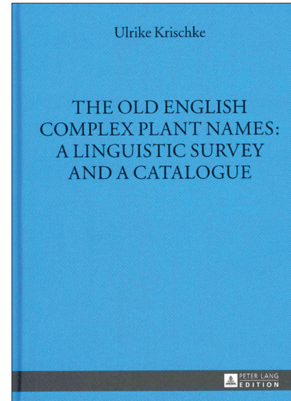
The main contribution of this research is related to documenting indigenous everyday realities and native movement attempts among the Khanty in the post-Soviet period. The authors of the research have had continuous contact with these processes for more than two decades. This has enabled them to provide an extensive and reliable documentation of these crucial decades of local Khanty life. The complicated relationship between the local indigenous population, oil companies, and administrative agents is also richly analysed.

Chapters of the monograph are organised in a logical way, the more important and intensive ones in the final section. The reader is guided towards the understanding of the Khanty people's contemporary culture and social situation through an overview of the regional history, indigenous traditions, and the Khanty worldview.

Art Leete

FROM ELF-TENDRIL TO POISON-HARM

Krischke, Ulrike. ***The Old English Complex Plant Names: A Linguistic Survey and a Catalogue*****. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2013. 486 pp.**



Krischke belongs to a group of scholars in Munich and Graz who have worked on the *Dictionary of Old English Plant Names*, a resource which is now accessible online at: http://oldenglish-plantnames.org/. Seeing plant-names as 'descriptions in disguise', Krischke notes that they "encode botanical 'facts' such as the colour of the flowers or the efficacy of the plant against thunder and lightning, as well as real distinctions in nature, such as taxonomic super-ordination or sub-ordination" (p. 50), and the book under review can be seen as an attempt to remove the disguises from these descriptions. The work restricts itself to 'complex plant names', where *complex* is to be understood as the opposite of *simplex*, i.e. it deals with compound rather than uncompounded forms. Examples of such complex names include *āttor-lāþe* (poison-harm), and *æppel-treow* (apple-tree), just to give two of the examples listed under 'A'.

The first half of the work is taken up with a 'linguistic survey' of the material. Besides the requisite introduction, statement of aims, literature review, discussion of sources, and summary, which also serve to reveal the work's origins as a University of Munich PhD, we find meatier chapters on topics such as the names' morphology and semantics, and the question of how language contact may have affected plant-names. Approximately half of the work (pp. 239–423) is then taken up with a 'catalogue' of Old English plant names. The entries typically have the following structure: the Old English name, a literal translation of that name into Modern English, and the modern terms for the plant in the Latin, English, and German languages, respectively. (Sometimes the Old English term denotes more than one Linnean species, e.g. *foxes glōfa* was used to refer not just to the plant known in Modern English as *foxglove*, but also to those we know as *thorn apple* and *deadly nightshade*. In such cases, Krischke lists the relevant forms for each referent in all three languages.)

But her entries do not consist solely of lemmata and glosses. Such information is followed by notes on the word's occurrence in the *Dictionary of Old English* and the *Dictionary of Old English Plant Names*, notices of any illustrations of the plant to be found in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, together with the Latin equivalents for the name provided in contemporaneous texts. Needless to say, these Latin plant-names differ from their modern equivalents – for example, *wulfes-tæsel* (Modern English *wolf teasel* or *wild teasel*), which modern botanists refer to as *Dipsacus silvestris Huds.* was given the Latin equivalent *chamalaela alba* by an unknown English scribe a thousand years ago. Notes on the term's etymology, morphology, motivation, and associative relations then follow, and the entries conclude, where appropriate, with a series of cross-references. We should also note that plant-names proper are not the only entries in this dictionary,

but also elements of plant-names appear as individual entries, thus *fugel* (bird) appears, due to its occurrence in the plant-names *fuglesbēan*, *fugleslēac* and *fugleswīse*.

Readers of this journal, given that it is the *Electronic Journal of Folklore,* rather than the *Electronic Journal of Linguistics*, will, I guess, be most interested in the information listed under the 'motivation', i.e. Krischke's explanations of what aspect of the plant has been settled upon to provide its name. She discusses the matter at length in chapter 6, where she delineates ten different forms of 'associative relation' (e.g. metaphorical similarity, co-taxonymic similarity, co-taxonymic contrast, syntagmatic contiguity, etc.) and thirty different categories of motives behind naming, including the plant's habitat, shape, size, texture, taste, smell, use in healing, use as food, etc. Names of natural taxa always highlight certain aspects and thus also always place other aspects into the background. For example, the bird known as *blackbird* (*Turdus merula*) in English has a name motivated by the colour of its plumage. We might imagine another English altogether in which the bird took its name from the colour of its beak, and where *Turdus merula* was known instead as *Goldbill*, or yet another English still, where the name came from the bird's song, *Melody-bird*. But as it is the common English name, it focuses on the colour of the bird's plumage, and ignores the colour of the beak and the quality of its song.

As luck would have it, the discussions of motivation are often the longest single part of her entries. We find such mythological beings represented as dragons, dwarves, and elves: *dracan-blōd* (the resin of *Dracaena L.*, literally dragon's blood), *dweorge-dwostle* (*Mentha pulegium L.*, literally dwarf's dost), and *ælf-þone* (*Solanum dulcamara*, literally elf's tendril). But the motivation for the application of such mythological names is not always straightforward. *Dracan-blōd* may be a loan-translation (direct, or indirectly via Latin) of a Greek term, rather than a reflection of Germanic mythology (although the author does also note that reference to the resin as 'dragon's blood' is not to be found in the German equivalent plant-name).

Krischke suggests the 'dweorg' in *dweorge-dwostle*, which could mean either 'dwarf' or 'fever', may have a connection with mythology, but is more likely to simply refer to the diminutive size of the plant. However, we seem to be on firmer mythological ground as far as *ælf-þone* is concerned, where Krischke feels confident in asserting that "the element *ælf-* 'elf' indicates that the plant is helpful for treating diseases caused by elves".

But even entries that involve more mundane creatures, such as horses or lambs, are not always entirely straightforward. Krischke's sources suggest that the 'horse' in *hors-elene* (*Inula helenium L.*) is either "a folk etymological rendition of *inula* in analogy to *hinulus* 'mule' ... as horse" (p. 336) or a metaphorical use of 'horse' to denote, metaphorically, the sense of 'wild'. Even with such a transparent term as *lambes cærse* (lambs cress), Krischke is unwilling to plump for one of the two possible interpretations – a kind of cress found where sheep live, or a kind of cress eaten by sheep.

Following this 'catalogue' of names, the work concludes with a 21-page bibliography, and three indexes (of word-forms, botanical names, and subjects). All in all, it can certainly be said that Krischke's weighty volume is a worthy contribution to the study of early English language and culture.

Jonathan Roper