

**KHANTY AND MANSI RELIGION.** Together with Hungarian, the Mansi (Vogul) and Khanty (Ostiak) languages form the Ugric branch of the Finno-Ugric (and, ultimately, the Uralic) language family. During the first millennium BCE, the proto-Ob-Ugrians withdrew along the Ob River northward from the forested steppe region of southwest Siberia, simultaneously assimilating the autochthonous population and losing their own Iron Age culture and equiculture. The Ob-Ugrians (Khanty and Mansi) thus became secondarily primitivized, emerging as a fishing, hunting, and reindeer-breeding sub-Arctic people. Between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries the Ob-Ugrians split into quasi-tribal or clan-based "chiefdoms," a system that disintegrated as a consequence of sixteenth-century Russian colonization. The Eastern Orthodox church began conversion of the Ob-Ugrians in the eighteenth century, but the character of this conversion was formal and thus did not essentially influence the original religion.

The Mansi number 7,700, the Khanty, 21,000; of these, respectively 49 and 68 percent speak their ancestral language. The ethnographic macrogroups correspond to dialect groupings. Yet, while the culture and language of the various macrogroups is divergent enough to justify their classification as distinct peoples, the Mansi and Khanty *within* the same microgroup differ from one another only in language and in their consciousness of identity. The ethnographic subgroups (i.e., dialects) subdivide according to fluvial regions. The religion of the Mansi and Khanty is identical: within one and the same macrogroup the same supernatural beings are revered regardless of which people's territory they are affiliated with. Mansi and Khanty folklore, too, is uniform on a nearly word for word basis. A few general nature deities are known to all groups; key figures of mythology are associated with the northwest region, although these same figures may appear in the religion of the other groups under different names. The Northern macrogroup, for instance, is familiar both with a high-ranking spirit from the Eastern Mansi and with another high-ranking spirit from the Western Mansi. On the other hand, Eastern Khanty spirits are completely unknown to them. From the perspective of both system and cult, the religion of the Vasjugan Khanty is the most complex. Ob-Ugric culture as a whole is of a marginal West Siberian type, distinct in quite a few traits. Its study is complicated by the factor of secondary primitivization.

The following is a description of the best documented macrogroup, the Northern. Characteristic of this society are a dual moiety system (*moš* and *por*: the former relatively positive, the latter relatively negative in connotation) and the loose agglomeration of patriarchal con-

sanguineous groups that trace their origins to spirit ancestors conceptualized as simultaneously anthropomorphic and zoomorphic. This description, however, must unavoidably portray a more archaic form of social organization than is actually the case today. When technical terms are referred to, they derive from either the Sosva Mansi (Man.) or the Kazim Khanty (Kh.).

Anthropomorphy is dominant in Ob-Ugrian religion today, but a latent zoomorphic character can be demonstrated for many categories of supernatural beings. The cult of spirits that arise from the shadow souls of the dead is a productive element in many forms, supporting (1) the ancestor cult in general; (2) the cult of hegemonic personalities, of which the earlier (chiefdom period) variant is a hero cult, and the later variant is the cult of shamans and other worthies; and (3) the cult of those who have died extraordinary deaths. It is a peculiarity of the northern groups that they have incorporated both the major mythological personalities and various individuals of the unindividuated classes into a system of guardian spirits tied to concrete places and societal units. This category, which may be termed "warlord guardian spirits," became primary in both the religious system and cultic life.

Roughly speaking, the following categories may be distinguished according to the degree of the cult:

1. The true individual cult beings. These have their own prescriptions and prohibitions and their own regular festivals and sacrifices; in folklore they have their own summoning songs and prayers. The terms *pu-pigh* (Man.) and *tungx* (Kh.) refer to their most general class (which may be represented in idol form as well).
2. The higher-level belief beings. Relations with these beings are well regulated, and their benevolence may be won with the practice of hospitality or, in unusual cases, by means of more serious sacrifice. A lower level of belief being is also acknowledged. It is connected only with prohibitive and preventative practices. The lesser forms of word magic (incantation, short prayer) are addressed to the belief beings, who are portrayed in plays at the bear festival. Certain belief beings have no cult whatsoever. Folklore beings play no role in either belief or cult.

### Conceptions of the Universe

Ob-Ugric cosmology was originally vertical and tripartite: upper (sky), middle (earth), and lower (underworld). A conception of these worlds as seven-layered is known, but not concretely elaborated. In the lower sphere of the sky dwell the Wind Old Men, named after the cardinal points. In the various upper layers of the

sky revolves Sun Woman, with her team of horses, or Moon Old Man with his arctoid dog sled. Later, this worldview became contaminated with a horizontal system: Upper-Ob (southern), Middle-Ob, and Lower-Ob (northern). Accordingly, the productive region is located in the South, which sends migratory birds and which is the home of the world tree and the fountain-of-youth lake. Conversely, at the mouth of the Ob, on the Arctic Ocean, lies the dark land of the dead. At present, syncretistic twofold conceptualizations predominate.

The earth, brought up as a chunk by two bird representatives of the netherworld (a little and a big loon), is spread out over the primeval sea; it is disk-shaped: a fish or a fantastic animal holds it up. In the present-day version, the son of the mythic ancestral pair (identified either with the Pelim god or with World-Overseeing Man, both warlord guardian spirits) plays a salient part. With the collaboration of the chief god's counterpart, the folklore figure Kuł, he created man; he then decimated his progeny with a fiery flood and scattered them over the world. Before the present-day Mansi and Khanty, the myth alleges, there were many other periods: in folklore the most richly depicted are the period of the moiety ancestors and the heroic time of the origin of the warlord guardian spirits.

**General Mythological Personalities.** In the vertical system, the upper sphere is embodied by the positive-functioning chief god, Upper Sky Father (Man., Num Torem Aś; Kh., Nüm Turem Aśi). Symbolized by the vault of heaven, he has the form of an old man and is active in climatic changes connected with the change of seasons, passive in regard to humans. He may be approached only through the intervention of high-ranking spirits, having scarcely any cult. [See Num-Türem.] His wife is (Lower) Earth Mother (Man., [Joli-]Mā Angkw). His counterpart is the lord of the netherworld. Admixture with the horizontal worldview and the localization of cults to particular places produced syncretistic personality trinities. Above Sky Father there appeared two ancestors (Man., Kośar Törem and Kores Törem, both folklore figures), or there appeared alongside him two other personifications (the Khanty folklore figures Nüm Siwes and Nüm Küres). His wife was reinterpreted as belonging to the same category, with the name Sky Mother (folklore figure). Elsewhere she was identified with the warlord guardian spirit goddess Kalteś. This same female fertility principle is repeated in the trinity South Woman, Kalteś, Gold Woman. Concrete incarnations of the lord of the netherworld include the warlord guardian spirits Sickness Lord and Lower-Earth Old Man, and "Devil," the fictive master of the harmful spirits called *kuł*.

**Warlord Guardian Spirits.** These are nature deities tied to societal units of a higher level (moieties, perhaps

at one time tribes). Their antiquity is evidenced by the fact that their *attributa* often preserve features of the euculture of the steppe rim. Their most representative group is now indigenous to the Middle-Ob territory of the Mansi and Khanty, the once-famous region of the Koda principality. The members of this group, listed here with corresponding zoomorphy, associated moiety, and cult center, are as follows:

1. Kalteś, popularly, Mother (Man., Šań; Kh., Āngki; female wild goose, swan, hare; *moś* moiety; village of Kaltisjan). Originally a sky goddess, Kalteś is the only equestrian female warlord guardian spirit. It is she who decides the number, sex, and longevity of children; she also aids in childbirth. Her persona is interpreted variously as wife, sister, or daughter of the sky god. Among her properties there is a negative one: infidelity or stubbornness.
2. World-Overseeing Man (Man., Mir Susne Xum; Kh., Mir Šawijti Xu; wild goose, crane; *moś* moiety; village of Belogorje). His other names include Golden Lord, Horseman, and Upriver Man. He is the youngest son of the sky god, the central figure of Ob-Ugric religion, and functions as a mythic hero in the creation of the world order. Married to the daughters of persons symbolizing nature, he excels in providing humans with their needs. His sphere of activity ranges through all three worlds. His is the highest position of honor among his brothers: the overseeing of the world and of humans. He accomplishes this by circling the world on his winged horse. In early formulations he is a solar god; later formulations preserve traces of the shamanistic mediator: he is the chief communicator with Sky God.
3. Holy City Old Man (Man., Jalp-ūs Ōjka; Kh., Jem Woš Īki), also known as Clawed Old Man (Man., Kongsing Ōjka; Kh., Künšeng Īki; bear, mouse; *por* moiety; village of Vežakar). In the region of his cult center he is held to be a son of the sky god. Functionally, he is the counterpart of World-Overseeing Man: in the shape of a mouse he goes under the earth and regains the shadow souls of sick people from underworld spirits who have stolen them. He is a totem ancestor of the *por* moiety.

Sickness Lord (Man., Xuł Ōter; Kh., Xiń Wurt; big loon, village of Sumutnyol) and Lower-Earth Old Man (Kh., Ī Mūw Īki; little loon; Sumutnyol) are two incarnations of the lord of the netherworld. The former steals souls; the latter either rules over them or eats them. In their empire they have a family and teeming army of servants consisting of illness spirits. They are also the source of unpleasant insects and vermin. Some versions interpret the lord of the netherworld as the son of the

sky god; in any case, he functions as the subordinate of the sky god in the vertical system and the subordinate of Kalteś in the horizontal system. Under the name Downriver Man he also constitutes a complement to World-Overseeing Man.

**Models of the Middle World.** Beliefs concerning the middle world reveal a general but not extensive symbolization of natural elements. The most significant is Fire Mother, but Earth Mother and Water Mother enjoy lesser cults.

**The land-water opposition.** Such an opposition is clearly represented by the forest and aquatic variants of the positive-functioning *lungx*-type spirits; these oversee the natural resources of a particular territory. In eastern and southern areas they are important cult beings; in the north, they have been overshadowed by local warlord guardian spirits and the cult of the *mis* people. Closely connected with their cult is that of the more individualized *lungx*-type spirits associated with particular natural objects (high places, boulders, trees, whirlpools). Their negative counterparts are the forest and aquatic *kuł*, beings that represent the netherworld.

**The forest sphere.** In the animal world-model there is no notion of lord over the individual animal types. In addition to the totemistic animal cult, the greatest veneration surrounds the larger aquatic birds (symbols of fertility), the elk (because of its celestial references), and the bear. Around the bear, merged with the totem ancestor of the *por* moiety, developed a highly characteristic feature of Ob-Ugrian culture: a bear cult that is one of the most elaborate in the world.

**The bear cult.** The fusion of conceptualizations from various periods has conferred upon the bear the character of universal mediator. His origins tie him to the upper world; his dwelling place and connections with human society tie him to the middle world; his mouse-shaped soul ties him to the netherworld. Child of the sky god, he acquired knowledge of the middle world despite paternal prohibition and conceived a desire to descend there. His father permitted the descent but prescribed the most harmless manner of acquiring food. (At the same time he makes the bear the judge of societal norms, the guardian of the bear oath.) But the bear violates the prohibitions, thus becoming fair game for humans.

The slain bear is a divine guest who, after the ritual consumption of his flesh, transfers into the heavens the sacrifices dedicated to him and the cultic folklore performed for his benefit, thereby ensuring his own rebirth and that of the natural order. A separate taboo language exists in connection with the bear and the bear hunt, and the activities therein are highly ritualistic.

What follows is a description of the bear festival in its

most characteristic (northern) variant. After purifying ceremonies, the bear (i.e., the bear hide, placed on a stand) is regaled for three to seven nights (depending on the bear's age and sex) with performances of a hospitable, educational, and amusing nature. Only men may participate as performers. The diurnal repertoire begins with a didactic section in which the offense of murder (of the bear) is brushed aside and epic songs are sung about the origin of the bear, the first bagging of a bear by a mythical personage, the bear's function as judge, and the death of the particular bear present at the ceremony. Thereafter follows a section punctuated by danced interludes, intended as entertainment for the bear, although its function for humans is didactic. Players in birchbark masks perform brief plays with song and pantomime. The plays are only a few minutes in duration, but they may number in the hundreds. These reflect the key motifs of nature and society and supra-normal and everyday categories and their interdependence. Their aesthetic quality ranges from the comic to the sublime. Separate genres are represented by songs and games that depict the proliferation, way of life, and capture of various animal species, and by songs and games performed by a mythical being or clown figure who draws the spectators into the action.

In the most sacred section of the festival the warlord guardian spirits are summoned. Portrayed by costumed performers, they perform a dance that ensures the well-being of the community. When the bear meat is consumed, it is consumed under the illusion that birds are feasting. After this, the bear is instructed on the manner of returning to the heavens. Meanwhile, the bear's skull and the festival paraphernalia are taken to a special place where cult objects are stored.

**The mirroring of social structure in the forest sphere.** Two types of anthropomorphic forest beings pursue daily activities similar to those of the human community and may even intermarry with humans. The *mis* people are outstanding hunters; their benevolence provides humans with a good hunt. The *mis* take as their mates those people who disappear in the forest without a trace. The *mengk* people are supposed to be simple-minded malevolent giants. Northern Mansi associate the *mis* people with the *moś* moiety and the *mengk* people with the *por* moiety. The origins of certain warlord guardian spirits is derived—with the mediation of the cult of the dead—from these beings.

**The aquatic sphere.** While the dominant being of the forest is the bear, the lord of the waters, Water King (Man., Wit Xōn; Kh., Jīngk Xon, Jīngk Wurt) is similar to a high-ranking warlord guardian spirit. Water King is not tied to a societal unit, but each group thinks it knows of his dwelling place, which in each case is the

stream from which fish migrate (e.g., northern groups place it in the mouth of the Ob, southern groups in the mouth of the Irtysh). Water King has a family and is the superior of water sprites and other beings. The chief function of Water King is the direction of the migration of fish; warlord guardian spirits that dwell at the outlets of tributaries supply a redistribution network.

**The forest-settlement opposition.** The sylvan pantheon is much richer than its aquatic counterpart. This is explained, in part, by the fact that the forest participates in the opposition of forest and settlement. The proper place of *lungx*-type spirits is indicated by the location of their sacred place; certain lower-ranked beings (e.g., the Eastern Khanty ghostlike *potčak*) are subdivided into explicitly forest or village variants. Other figures may lack pertinent counterparts but may nevertheless be construed in terms of this opposition. Examples include the birchbark-rucksack woman, identified with the (folkloristic) figure of the anthropophagous *por* woman, the elf called Village-Square Being, Trash-Heap Woman, Bathhouse Woman, Sinew-String-Making Woman, and others.

### The Human Sphere

The warlord guardian spirit that is tied to a concrete place is not only the sole form representing the community but also the central category of all of cultic life. The primary functions of the warlord guardian spirit are to ward off harmful (especially disease-causing) spirits, to provide succor in situations of peril, and to ensure good fortune in hunting and fishing. The warlord guardian spirit appears in two forms: as a human, generally in the form of a luxuriantly ornamented woman or a warrior in sword and armor, or as an animal, in the form of a specific species of wild beast, which is then taboo for the pertinent social unit. These may be portrayed by wooden images in the form of a human (or, more rarely, an animal), sometimes with the addition of metal disks, or made entirely of metal. The appurtenances of the image are a sacred spot outside the settlement and the items stored there: the idol and/or its *attributa*, a small chamber built on stilts for preserving offerings, a sacrificial table, poles or trees called *tir*, and a sacred tree. The warlord guardian spirit addresses his kindred group as his "little ones" or "children"; as a projection of the actual relations within the group, he enjoys spirit kinship both ascendant and descendant, agnate and cognate. Characteristic features of the cult are a special idol guardian or shaman and prescriptions concerning both cyclical communal ceremonies and sacrificial animals and objects.

Although tied to a concrete place, a warlord guardian spirit may appear anywhere and at anyone's summons.

Its connection with the individual is manifested by the fact that it selects a protégé. Every human has a warlord guardian spirit "master of his head." Higher-ranked spirits can select anyone as protégé; lower-ranked spirits are restricted to members of their own community. Ob-Ugrians oriented themselves with one another in terms of the relations obtaining among their warlord guardian spirits; they identified the spirits according to the village held to be the center of a given cult.

**Hierarchy of Warlord Guardian Spirits.** The community associated with a spirit can be of various levels in the social hierarchy—upper (moiety, base clan), middle (roughly, units corresponding to a clan and its branches), or lower (smaller, local groups). The rank of a spirit is determined by this hierarchy and by the "power" and functions attributed to it, which are generally in direct proportion to the antiquity of the spirit and the complexity of its typological profile. Roughly speaking, the Ob-Ugrians distinguish three hierarchical categories of spirits. Spirits belonging to the high (and upper middle) rank are qualified as "powerful" (Man., *ňangra*; Kh., *tarem*). Among these, the children of the sky god are set apart as a separate group. To this rank belong, besides mythological personae in general, Old Man of the Middle Sosva, the Lozva Water Spirit, the Tegi Village Old Man, and the Kazim Lady. The middle category, which is the chief locus of the hero cult, is subdivided in terms of the opposition between indigenous and immigrant groups. The spirits of immigrant groups are called "land-acquiring" spirits. Among the lower-ranked spirits, those of local character are sometimes distinguished by the terms "master of the village" or "master of the region." The superior of the spirits is the chief deity.

The warlord guardian spirits, like the social groups associated with their cults, do not form a clearly structured system. The interpretation of their rank and kinship varies from one fluvial region to another. Genealogical, local, or functional subsystems, however, can develop in particular regions. The basis of the genealogical order resides in the fact that migrating groups either bring a copy of their original spirit with them or declare the indigenous spirit of their new home to be their original spirit's offspring. The range of the cults of higher-ranked spirits roughly corresponds to dialect areas. Their descendants may appear with names differing from those of their parents, and may even appear in animal form. The children of middle-ranked spirits are often—at least with regard to name and form—exact copies of one another. For example, spirits named Winged Old Man or Old Man with the Knife, in eagle and firefly form, respectively, crop up in villages

at far remove from one another. In local subsystems, the high-ranked spirits are the superiors of all other spirits in their cult sphere.

The development of these spirits was determined along two lines: diverse nature cults and multiple inter-twinings of cults of the dead. Both lines of development contain zoomorphic and anthropomorphic elements that are reflected in the diploid form of the spirits. The animal symbology of natural forces is zoomorphic. The oldest layers of this symbology (e.g., the cult of aquatic birds) date to at least the Finno-Ugric period. The other zoomorphic component is totemistic in character; its earlier layer may be Ugric, while its more recent layer is arctoid and may bear the influence of the religion of assimilated autochthonous Siberian populations. The oldest demonstrable layer of the anthropomorphic component is a group of nature deities that preserves traces of southern equiculture. Similarly anthropomorphic are the ancestor cult and hero cult, which are the source of the dominant mark of warlord guardian spirits. To the cult of warlord guardian spirits was juxtaposed the cult of those persons whose decease is in some way extraordinary. A further component is the cult of proprietary spirits of natural places and objects.

**Family Guardian Spirits.** Termed "house spirits" (Man., *kol puping*; Kh., *xot tungx*), these anthropomorphic spirits are difficult to differentiate from the lower-ranked warlord guardian spirits. They are variously conceived as descendants of a warlord guardian spirit or its spirit assistant, as the spirit of a deceased relative, or as the proprietary spirit of an object that is interesting in some way (e.g., an archaeological find made of metal). Its votaries approach them through dream or the instructions of a person with cult functions. Such spirits serve to protect and to ensure success in hunting and fishing. Successful execution of this latter office may occasion a widening of its circle of devotees; in case of failure, on the other hand, its idol representations suffer mistreatment or even complete destruction as punishment. The idol, its *attributa*, and ceremonies associated with the family guardian spirit are miniature duplicates of those of the warlord guardian spirits; its folklore, however, is on the wane. Individual protective spirits have similar typological profiles.

**Mediator Spirits.** Documentation for the individual shaman spirit assistant—known as a "living spirit" (Man., *liling puping*; Kh., *tileng tungx*) or, when functioning purely as an acquirer of information, a "talking spirit" (Man., *potertan puping*)—is extremely poor. Typologically, such a being is similar to family and individual spirits and probably serves merely as a messenger in the interactions of shaman and warlord guardian spirits.

**Conceptions of the Soul.** Conceptions of the soul are syncretistic and not always clear even to the Ob-Ugrians. Originally, they were twofold: breath spirits (Man., *lili*; Kh., *tit*) and shadow spirits (Man., Kh., *is*).

The breath spirit—roughly, a symbol of the individual personality—has the form of a small bird; its seat is the hair or crown of the head. Characters in heroic epics could send birds that lived on the crown of their heads or caps to fetch information; they also practiced scalping, by which they were able to take possession of any enemy's soul. The soul called *is* may have been regarded as a posthumous variation of the breath spirit (in men, it consists of five parts, in women, three; it is reborn in consanguineous progeny).

The shadow souls—symbols of emotional and vegetative functionings—have the form of humans or birds. One subtype may leave the body during sleep or in case of fear or fainting; it may also fall prey to illness spirits. After death it remains for a certain time in the vicinity of the house, then departs, northward, for the land of the dead. The other subtype has a more material character; its properties are roughly those of shadows. After death it lives a quasimundane life in the cemetery until the body fades away. The free soul is a type of sleep soul living in the form of a grouse; its destruction results in sleeplessness, then death. Under unfavorable circumstances shadow souls turn into ghosts.

**Conceptions of the Hereafter.** The hereafter is a mirrorlike inversion of the real world, lacking, however, the celestial bodies. The soul lives the same life, in the same form, as its owner did on earth, but backwards. Once returned to the time of birth it reappears in the real world as an insect or spider. Differentiation is minimal, but separation and punishment of the souls of suicides is known. Atonement for moral offenses seems to be the result of nonindigenous influence.

The soul of a dead person can have three material representations. It was obligatory to make for the reincarnating soul a doll of wood, cloth, or hair (Man., *iterma*; Kh., *šungöt*; literally, "suffering one"; *upet akañ*, "hair baby"). Long ago, this figure was so identified with the deceased that widows fed it regularly and slept with it. Among certain groups, the doll was passed from generation to generation; among others it was eventually placed in the grave or burned. A special wooden figure was carved for the souls of outstanding individuals. Through time, the worship of such a figure made it possible for these souls to achieve the status of family guardian spirits. Finally, for those whose remains were inaccessible, in some regions a figure was made and kept in a separate storing place after a symbolic burial ceremony.

**Mediators.** The Ob-Ugrians belong to the marginal zone of Siberian shamanism. The figure of the shaman

is relatively unimportant, the shaman's significance being somewhat overshadowed by mediators who function without deep ecstatic trance. Overall, the study of Ob-Ugrian shamanism is hampered by extraordinarily imprecise documentation.

If as a hypothesis we limit true shamanism to the practice of drum-accompanied deep ecstatic trance, we are left with two types of people who fall outside this strict delimitation. The first group, the "one-sided interaction type," includes those who transmit from the human sphere to the spirits, but who cannot perceive the spirits' reactions. To this class belong the idol guardian in the role of master of ceremony, the "praying man," and epic singers, whose activity is not of a healing nature. The second group, the "two-sided interaction type," consists of those capable of obtaining information from the spirits, and who—to a certain degree—can set them into motion. They can perform these feats in sleep, however, or in a light trance. The only categories known among the Eastern Khanty are those who mediate through singing accompanied by string instruments, dreams, or the summoning of the spirits of forest animals. To the north, a possible equivalent is the Mansi *potertan pupgheng xum* ("talking spirit-man"), who summons his prophetic spirits by means of a stringed instrument.

Terminologically, the Ob-Ugrians make little distinction between the activity of shamans and that of persons who mediate by means of iron objects (axe, knife) and light trance: the noun "magic" (Man., *pēnigh*; Kh., *šārt*) and its verbal derivate "perform magic" (Man., *pēnghungkwe*; Kh., *šārtti*) can refer, in both languages, to the activity of either practitioner. The Mansi consider the "magic-(performing) person" who operates without the use of a drum (Man., *pēnghen xum*) to belong to a lower degree of the shaman category; they do, however, distinguish terminologically between this degree and the full-fledged drum shaman.

Destructive magic, which moves the spirits to negative ends, is used by the "spell-casting one" (Man., *sēpan*; Kh., *šepan(eng) xu*; the latter term is also used to refer to the shaman) and by the Mansi "destructive person" (*šurkeng xum*) or "spell-knowing person" (*mutrang xum*). These persons are capable of spoiling luck in hunting; they can also cause sickness and death. While terminologically distinct, they stand in an unclear relation to the shaman.

**Shaman.** Shamanism among the Ob-Ugrians is apparently a rather developed variant of a Paleo-Asiatic type that lacked the shamanistic journey. Exceptionally, and owing to foreign influence, there exists among the Eastern Khanty a more elaborated system of journeying and assistant spirits. No special folklore is associated with the shaman. Similarly, the figure of the fe-

male shaman who prophesizes by means of a gyratory dance appears conspicuously late, in a more recent type of heroic song. There is no specific evidence of the influence of neighboring peoples on Ob-Ugrian shamanism; although in peripheral regions certain features have been adopted from every possible donor, none of the various influences can be called dominant.

The shaman can provide any cultic service. His chief task is the defense of one's shadow soul against disease spirits. The shaman also fills an extremely important role as acquirer and interpreter of information (given that at least a dozen different supernatural causes may give rise to unfavorable events). His functions also include prophesy, the finding of lost objects, inquiry after the souls of the dead, and the steering of a sacrificial animal's soul to the spirits. The number of functional elements that may be demanded of the shaman varies from region to region. The shaman's participation in rites of passage, the bear festival, and lesser sacrificial ceremonies is not typical. There is no evidence of the shaman possessing the role of conductor of souls. The shaman acquires the greatest significance in situations of peril that affect the community.

There are no explicit categories of shamans among the Ob-Ugrians. The shaman's strength depends on the nature and number of his spirit assistants, or on the warlord guardian spirits, which are susceptible to influence. Stronger and weaker shamans are distinguished, but without special terminology. There are no reliable data for a distinction between "black" and "white" shamans. In fact, the activity of the shaman is ambiguous, since he may, to redeem the sick person's soul, offer up the soul of another; at times of rivalry he endangers the life of himself and his family.

The shaman, like all other mediative persons, is in principle at everyone's disposal. His activity, whether unreciprocated or remunerated with minor gifts and/or hospitality, is insufficient for independent subsistence. The shaman can increase his income only as the preserver of high-ranked warlord guardian spirits. Both men and women can be shamans, but in general the former have higher status.

There are no reliable data for special shamanic attire or accoutrements; the cap and the headband, however, are documented as headgear. The primary type of drum is oval, with a frame both decorative and resonating; its Y-shaped handle is sometimes embellished with representations of a spirit's face. The skin is unadorned; the position of the pendants (made of metal) varies. The drum may be replaced by a stringed instrument. Fly agaric is the usual narcotic.

Selection and recruitment of apprentice shamans is passive; it is generally attributed to the will of the chief deity, or World-Overseeing Man. Sensitivity, deviant

behavior, and musical proclivities are required; somatic marks, illness, and inheritance are also documented but not universal. The candidate rehearses his repertoire as an assistant without benefit of initiation, only gradually assuming his role.

The shamanic séance takes place in a darkened house, where the shaman communicates—with drum-accompanied song, then with gyratory dance—with the warlord guardian spirits appropriate to the occasion. Metal objects (such as arrows) set out for the purpose announce by their rattling that the spirits have arrived (through the roof). When contact is established, the shaman is overcome by a warm breeze. Thereafter a protracted, dramatized debate takes place on the following subjects: (1) determining the cause of the problem; (2) summoning the spirit responsible or contacting it through an assistant spirit; (3) probing the cause of the problem and the nature of the sacrifice needed for its termination; and (4) ensuring the benevolence of the spirits. The role of the shaman is limited to setting events in motion; the actions themselves (i.e., journey, recovery of the sick person's soul) are carried out by the spirits, who, should they resist, can torment the shaman severely. The shaman ends his state of trance and announces the result; he may also take part in the offering of a sacrificial animal.

#### Other Features of the Cultic Life

Characteristic of the entire region are the restrictions on religious practice for women considered impure. If invested with any kind of special significance or cultic character, an object, living creature (especially the horse), place, or ceremony carried a list of prohibitions for such women. They were not allowed to visit the sacred locales of warlord guardian spirits. At the bear festival they could participate only in the interlude dances. Customs connected with birth and death were in the hands of the old women. Women sometimes had a separate sacred place near the village and a separate cult rendered to Kalteś. Among males, those who had assumed the care of the family idols after their parents' death were most fully esteemed.

In the cult of warlord guardian spirits there were presumably differences of ceremony according to moiety (especially with regard to the bear cult) and according to consanguineous group. Accordingly, at joint ceremonies the proprietors of the cult being played active roles, while newcomers or guests played relatively passive roles.

Periodic communal holidays were important in the maintenance of social relations. The most inclusive and involved such holiday was the festival organized by the *por* moiety in the village of Vežakar. Held every seven

years, it lasted three months and followed the pattern of the bear festival. Several hundred participants were attracted to this event from northern regions. Periodic visits to warlord guardian spirits were sometimes prescribed, during the course of which the devotees made joint sacrifices. Regularly intermarrying groups invited one another to the larger festivals, which could be linked with cultic competitions, prophetic practice, the singing of epics (for the entertainment of the spirits), plays, and amusements. Generally prescribed pilgrimages to high-ranking warlord guardian spirits brought about more extensive relations, as did various alms-collecting tours undertaken in the interest of maintaining the cults of such spirits.

**Sacrificial Ceremonies.** There are two kinds of sacrifices. (1) In bloodless sacrifice (Man., *pūri*; Kh., *por*) the spirits absorb the vapors (or "strength") of the food and alcoholic beverages that have been set out for them; later, the humans present eat it. (2) In blood sacrifice (Man., Kh., *jir*) the spirits receive a portion of the animal's soul-bearing body parts (the blood, certain organs, the head, the entire skin) and thus take possession of the animal's shadow soul. The most precious sacrificial animal is the horse, which was sacrificed to high-ranking mythological personalities (especially World-Overseeing Man) throughout the entire region irrespective of the presence or absence of an equestrian culture. In addition, reindeer (in the north) and horned cattle and roosters (in the south) were usual sacrificial animals. Spirits of the upper sphere were said to favor light-colored animals; those of the nether sphere favor dark-colored animals. In a typical northern sacrifice, the animal is either strangled or dealt a blow to the head with the back of an axe; simultaneously, the spirit is summoned by shouts. The animal is then stabbed in the heart with a knife and its blood is let. The blood and entrails are consumed raw on the spot; there are separate prescriptions concerning the cooking and distribution of the flesh. In addition to animals, fur, cloth, and coins may serve as objects of sacrifice. Among metals, silver has the highest value.

Periodic sacrifices may be classified into two types, annual and macroperiodic (every three or seven years). Required communal sacrifices are tied to the economy of the seasons; so, for example, in spring (fishing season) and autumn (hunting season) sacrifices carried out to ensure a good catch and bountiful quarry were frequent at the beginning of the season, while thanksgiving sacrifices were general at the end of the season. For animal sacrifices autumn was the most propitious season. During important communal sacrifices the shaman would take part, and men in a light ecstatic trance would perform sword dances in commemoration of the ancient

heroic deeds of certain warlord guardian spirits.

It should also be mentioned that the idol-like representation of spirits among the Ob-Ugrians is not fetishistic in character and is thus not absolutely obligatory. It is of importance only as an exterior representation or as a dwelling-place for the spirit; if necessary, the image can be replaced with a new representation.

**Nonindigenous Influences.** The most archaic (but far from the oldest) exterior influence may be found in the cultural elements derived from assimilated sub-Arctic populations. These elements are evident in magic related to production, in certain elements of totemism, and in the bear cult. If we accept the hypothesis that the *por* moiety is connected with this unknown sub-Arctic people, the number of such elements grows larger. Iranian speaking and Turkic speaking peoples influenced the proto-Ob-Ugrians in several phases from the Finno-Ugric period (fourth millennium BCE) through the Ugric period (until circa 500 BCE). These peoples played an important role in the development of equiculture among the Ob-Ugrians. Traces of steppe culture are preserved in the dominant role of the horse as a sacrificial animal and divine *attributa*, in the representation of mythological persons from the upper sphere dressed in open, wide-sleeved garb, and in the symbology of images found on hitching posts. Contact with Turkic peoples also brought, most recently, elements of Islam (from the Siberian Tatars), as can be seen in the book of destiny that occurs as an *attributum* and in elements of relatively differentiated conceptions of the netherworld. A surprisingly large number of religious terms were borrowed from or through the Komi (Zyrians), especially in connection with conceptions of the soul and the goddess of fertility. Such Komi influence may have been enhanced when the Komi fled into Siberia to escape conversion to Christianity by Stephen of Perm (fourteenth century).

The first intention of Eastern Orthodox efforts at conversion (which began in the eighteenth century) was the annihilation of the most important idols. This external threat had two consequences: heightened solicitude for cultic objects and a disassociation of spirits from their representations. Within a century, a network of church-centered villages had developed, displacing, wherever possible, the cult centers of ranking warlord guardian spirits. At times, the clergy exploited the possibilities of identifying the personalities of the two religions; formulas of correspondence thus quickly gained ground; the sky god was equated with God the Father, Kalteš with the Virgin Mary, World-Overseeing Man with Jesus, Pelim with Saint Nicholas. Ob-Ugrians understood the new religion entirely in terms of their own categories. Thus, a church was the idol chamber of the Rus-

sian god, the icon was the idol itself (before which even animals were sacrificed), the cross worn about the neck was an amulet for warding off harmful forest beings, and so on. The Christian worldview brought little change other than a gradual increase in the significance of the sky god. Qualitative change arose in step with russification, especially for southern groups. At present, in consequence of the spread of civilization and atheism, Ob-Ugrian young people are ill-informed about religious matters, and their attitude toward their religious heritage is inconstant.

[See also Finno-Ugric Religions; Shamanism, *article on Siberian and Inner Asian Shamanism; and Bears.*]

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