

A Buryat Shaman Woman And Her Rituals in The 21st Century
Analysis from Philological Viewpoint

Theses for The PhD Degree by Éva Aranyosi

Supervisor: Dr. Ágnes Birtalan hab. Univ. Reader
Mongolian PhD Course Programme
Eötvös Loránd University Central Asian Department
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The Antecedents of The Research

Introduction

In my dissertation, I describe the daily activities and rituals of a Buryat urban shaman woman, Maria Dambaievna Cibenova by my field-work between 1996 and 2010. Using the results of my research and my experience, I analyse her rituals comparing them with the rituals that existed a century ago demonstrating the identical features. In the introductory part, I examine the effects of the change-over on the Buryat shamanism and how it contributed to the appearance of a new social group, the urban shamans that is to say what necessity made their activities vital. M. D. Cibenova is an example and a representative of urban shamans. The observation and analysis of her activities in the long run explain that society needs the phenomenon of shamanism because the community and the individuals need guidance and this guidance is expected from individuals of special descend who are called *utxa* in Buryat.

As a researcher I could experience the change or the possibility of change in the activity and attitude of a shaman when the claim to their activity increases because of the political changes and particularly when the frame of their healing and problem-solving power spreads. It is observed that global changes do not leave even the most ancient tradition untouched. Customs, faith, tradition basically survive but they are modified and adapted to the new circumstances but conserve their fundamentals during modern changes. From 2000 as an

anthropologist, equipped with methodological knowledge, I had the chance to observe the work of an urban shaman. I lived together with her and her family thus I gained information about her everyday life as an active participant and observer. I recorded each of her activities and statements, and I instinctively tried to record any type of data by any method: tape recorder, video, photos, notes. After recording I tried to classify, analyse, then expand and explain the data.

During collecting data, I sometimes contemplated the events as an outsider, sometimes I was an active participant and experiencer of the family events. I was like a member of the family in personal and everyday events. I was either an observer or a member of the family, strongly belonging to them, having the same rights and obligations.

Shamans with their activities, their instruments, their techniques of trance, form shamanism, which concept means the existence of people with special talent whose mission and obligation is to help the community through their talent. Each shaman is an independent character. They perform their shamanic activities independently, filtering it through their own personality which is their profession, their job and after the political change-over their business. Since 1996 I have continually experienced through my research that the importance of income is strongly growing in healing work as time passes. By the narration of M. D. Cibenova, her initiating master was still the leader and cementing force of a small community. As compensation for his activity, people gave him what they had, usually food or cigarettes. Money as means of payment had no importance. After the political change-over, with the revival of shamanism, the role of money has changed. M. D. Cibenova has been to Hungary ten times and I observed that more and more people came to her and she expected more and more money for her work. She did not like getting presents, usually worthless or useless objects, instead of money, thus, most cases she did not even take them home. In the last few years if she had to perform a ritual, she set the price in advance.

So, in addition to the traditional mission, the modern financial point of view forged ahead. Namely, a shaman also has to make a living, and for risking his own life in order to help other people live their lives better and wealthier, he deserves a decent honorarium, since their prosperity or their recovery is the result of the shamanic interference. This is the creed of M. D. Cibenova, too. These changed attitudes and standards are also stated in my dissertation through the changes of the personality of M. D. Cibenova. In spite of all these, I think that the

shaman occupies the position of a person whom people can also turn to in the future. He gives faith and force to people, thus making them able to survive or tolerate conflicts or awkward situations.

Buryat Shamanism

There were articles published about Buryat shamanism among the works of European travellers very early. I. G. Georgi took on the responsibility of describing the shamanism of every nation in his writing published in 1776 *The Description of The Nations Living in The Russian Empire*, dedicating an article to each.

About the Buryats and their history, there remained handwritten chronicles in Buryat. The authors are the representatives of the 19th century educated class, who contemplated and assembled the stories of their nation through their buddhist ideology. The events are described by chronological order, and these chronicles are considered to be valuable and instructive sources.

One of the most outstanding authors of the 19th century Buryat history is Širabnimbu Hobituiev, one of the most excellent representatives of the Buryat noble class. He came from a wealthy noble family, but we do not know much about his personality. The first version of his chronicle was published in the spring of 1934 as the most authentic and the most well-known publication about Buryatia and in Buryatia.

The founder of Buryat shamanic faith research, M. N. Hangalov made observations and collects among his own nation, and his collected writings were published in several volumes in the end of the 1950s. Hangalov was the scientist who was rewarded by the French Academy 'The Honoured of The Academy' and to whom professor B. E. Petri recommended his book about the ancient faith of the Buryat, and who donated half of the exhibited objects to the museums of Leningrad (today St. Petersburg) and Irkutsk. His manuscript about shamanism, which was scattered in Leningrad, Irkutsk and Ulan-Ude, takes more than two and a half thousand closely-written pages. He created a writing system 50 years before the developing of Buryat literacy (based on the Cyrillic alphabet) to be able to record the destructing songs of the shamans and regularly visited the widespread graves of the shamans to save from annihilation the headwears and shaman sticks hanged on the trees.

The first Hungarian researcher who visited the environs of the Baikal was Benedek Baráthosi Balogh in the 1910s. It is infrequent in the history of Hungarian ethnology that a researcher tours such a huge area of Eurasia as Baráthosi did. His huge collection: hundreds of objects, photos and drawings are carefully kept objects of the Hungarian Museum of Ethnology. Unfortunately, his records and ethnographic texts are mostly not treated and are unpublished.

T. M. Mihaylov, the leading figure of the research of Buryat shamanism, has the title of Merited Researcher of The Russian Federation and The Buryat Republic. In the 1960s he predicted the disappearance of shamanism but lately his works reflect significant ideological transformations. He wrote an outstanding monography about Buryat shamanic faith, about shamanic tradition and about shamanic poetry. He gave a detailed analysis of the ritual system, the family and individual praying ceremonies.

A particularly important and outstanding figure of the research of Buryat shamanism is I. A. Manžigeev, who collected his profound data about shamanism and the traditions of the Buryats before the developing of shamanism for several years. He collected denominations, names, common names, mythological denominations, the characters of the legends and the historic figures and also, which is very important, his observations on the Buryat rituals, ceremonies, compared with the modern ones and with the rituals before the 1930s.

B. D. Bazarov in his work *Tainstva i praktika šamanizma* published in 1999 dates the origin of shamanism in ancient times about 7 thousand years ago, in the paleolithic era. He considers it the most ancient religion, mother of the other religions from which the roots of world religions evolved. The peculiarity of the book is that the author is a practicing Buryat shaman who lives in Ulan-Ude. He writes about his own shamanic activity, his rituals and about the essence of shamanism generally. It is worth mentioning, because we can gain information from the viewpoint of a shaman, about how he sees his mediating role, how a popular man, the shaman, does his ancient function of helping people in our accelerated modern civilization.

A researcher of The Russian Academy of Science, I. S. Urbanaieva, who practices in Ulan-Ude, has also got shamanic ancestors. She was also predicted to become a shaman, so she

hesitated a lot about her future. Finally, she became a philosopher but her shamanic origin stimulated her to deal with the ancient tradition.

In her dissertation, she examines a phenomenon called tengrism. Tengrism means the respect of the main celestial god (Tengri) and she considers it an essential element of shamanism.

There is an observable tendency: Nowadays the shamans themselves or their descendents start to publish about shamanism. In my opinion, this phenomenon is in connection with the appearance of the new layer of shamans, the urban shamans, since they have the chance of studying, and the freedom to demonstrate their talents after the political change-over.

M. D. Cibnova has also completed the PhD course but defending did not take place because of her shamanic illness. She chose shamanism as she had no other chance.

Vilmos Diószegi is a researcher of Siberian shamanism who became famous all over the world. He made a huge collecting work thus he laid the foundations of Hungarian shamanic research. His obsession was valued by other scientists though it was difficult for him to meet the banned and persecuted shamans. Many of his followers doubted if he had ever met a real shaman. You may doubt the veracity of meeting, but you cannot doubt that of his collecting work, the exact exploration of the shaman's life, situation, environment and instruments or the huge collected material.

The Anthropological Field Work

I consider the introduction about field-work important, because I believe that the instruments and methods of anthropological researches are indispensable in order to get acquainted with a nation or a culture. They make collecting and analysing data possible, thus they also make drawing conclusions possible. It is good and necessary that we can approach and become acquainted with living, existing, active cultures by using the well-tried methods of outstanding anthropologist scientists. However, these methods must be adapted to the given social environment by the modern researcher and they must be used flexibly in their own research field in order to gain the most data from the point of view of the topic and the target. Namely, our concepts are extended into the past, into the times which are earlier than our concept 'anthropology' or to times when this word had another interpretation than today. It is not easy to define the concept of anthropology or the activity of anthropologists or their methods. Among anthropologists, there are representatives of the experts of human biology, of

evolution, of species, or of the behaviour of primates such as those of the culture and the aspects of society. Physical anthropologists drifted apart from their colleagues examining cultural behaviour decades ago. However, the gap between physical and cultural anthropology has already been surmounted.

During getting to know, analysing, discovering the cultures of different peoples and during the talks and reports with their representatives or informants, the researcher must make an effort to remain an outsider in order to keep an objective and strictly scientific approach. This is the general rule. In this chapter, I would like to introduce the methods of some outstanding personalities of anthropologic research from the 20th century of those, who were the most outstanding representatives and innovators of cultural anthropology and who educated a whole new generation of their pupils.

Franz Boas (1858-1942) american anthropologist was born in Germany and he did a lot for the foundation of cultural relativism. His point of view, which states the equality and comparability of cultures, and the concept that there are not inferior and superior cultures, still strongly keeps its position in anthropology.

Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), who was born in Cracow, was one of the greatest field-workers. He made the idea that the social and cultural system of a society can be examined by participating observation, popular. The anthropologists, during researching modern ways of life, discovered that through this research they can understand the functioning of a social system such as their fitting to each other thus they studied their dynamics. The application of this method involves living together with a people. Observes their everyday activities, gets to know how they see the world and as an eye-witness, experiences how they behave.

A pupil of F. Boas, the American *Margaret Mead* (1901-1978), studied the forms of behaviour of the adolescent girls of the Samoan Islands in the Pacific Ocean. Her critics criticised her because she did not know their language and gained information via interpreter. Mead was the first female anthropologist who carried out field-work. In spite of the methods of field-work, which became popular in her time, Mead did not totally emerge in studying the Samoan culture but she spent almost her whole day in the company of the Samoan girls whom she made so famous. It contributed to drawing a profound description about Samoan

adolescents. Mead does not publish her results in the usual academic style. Her book was written for the average reader.

One of the most read writings of *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (1908-2009), who was born in Brussels, is *Sad Tropics* because of which he was accused of writing in a short-story-like style: His writing lacks scientific observations and his works are rather popular than scientific.

I refer to the scientists mentioned above and their research work because they undoubtedly belong to the greatest ones, and during getting acquainted with their oeuvre, I experienced to the highest degree that a researcher is above all a human being and only then a scientist. The primordial classifying and categorizing aspects, the methods and analysing techniques of field-work depend on the personality of the researcher, on their own culture and their connections to it and in it.

Choosing any category of classification or any viewpoint for the form of the research of certain cultures or peoples, processes and instruments, the final goal, which really matters, is getting to know and understand a disappeared or disappearing, an existing or a developing culture or their individuals with the help of objective facts, senses and emotions which cannot separate human beings from each other.

My Field-Work (place, time, methods)

Between 1996 and 2010 I spent a month almost every year in Buryatia, in Ulan-Ude where M. D. Cibanova shaman woman lives. I lived with her and her family. I lived my own life and theirs, too.

In chapter 'Field-Work: Methodology' I give an account of my participation in the rituals. The active and passive participation means for me the real immersion in a research since these times the shaman contacts such forces directly which do not function without her invitation and talents, which forces can both help and harm, and which can also be dangerous for an outsider. Therefore, you can only take part in a ritual if you strictly comply with the shaman's orders during shooting and taking photos, too. For those who are concerned in the ritual, the presence of a stranger means disturbing the intimacy, so you can only take part in an intimate family ritual with the permission of the shaman, by respecting the family and the local people

and becoming 'invisible'. The ritual can be disturbed in no way, neither by taking photos nor by shooting, therefore you have to observe the shaman continuously and you have to pay attention to her instructions during the collection of data. So I lived with my informant, M. D. Cibenova as a member of her family. I walked all over the villages with her while we did several thousand kilometres and I took part in many shamanic rituals while I recorded them.

However, one month, any intense it is, is only enough for collecting data, though it is only a tiny part of the whole material to get to know but as a first and most important step is indispensable for the anthropologist. Most often I chose video. I tried to record each element, each part, each moment of the rituals. I never stopped the camera, thus I was able to follow every minute of the events and I was able to record the rituals in the total spacial and time extension. After some rituals, when I was able to recognize the phases, I found the basic elements of the rituals, and I was able to distinguish between them, and decide, which events must be recorded for the collecting process and analysis of further details, and which are of less importance.

The Results of The Research

The central figure, the main character of my dissertation is M. D. Cibenova, a Buryat shaman woman. M. D. Cibenova was born on 6th April 1945 in Buryatia in the small village of Dunda-Kirety, which lies about 300 kms south of Ulan-Ude. She comes from a shaman clan. When M. D. Cibenova was born, she was predicted to become a shaman herself, as coming from a shaman clan. The community thought that the child was born stamped, so she had a third eye. The 'new' shamanic activity, the urban shamanism, is a new way of life. Now the object of research is not simply the shamanic activity, since there are many excellent explaining writings on the topic, but the new shamanic way of life, born after the political change-over which leaving the old function untouched, means taking on new responsibilities for a shaman. The new layer of shamans, the urban shamans are strongly bound to the town and they adapted to the circumstances of urban life, to the new possibilities, to the european and american impacts.

In Buryat society shamanism is a significant phenomenon. The existence of the shaman is a sacred cause of them which is important in their lives. It is a way out, a starting point, an

explanation of the troubles. It interweaves their whole lives, determines and guides them. It is a way of life for the shaman, a way of life for the people, either Russians or Buryats. Today's shaman lives in the today's world, not in the ancient world. Shamanism is not simply the sequence of rituals and healing but a special way of life, being on alert 24 hours a day.

The shamanic talent is called *udxa* in Buryat, and it is given to the shaman by his clan. This is the clannish *udxa*. This is what the spirits of the ancestors always expect, require, namely, taking on shamanism, the initiation process and the obligation of helping to people.

In chapter 'Comparing Analysis of Rituals' I analyse the rituals performed by M. D. Cibanova, comparing them with the century old rituals recorded by Benedek Baráthosi-Balogh and M. N. Hangalov in order to find the analogies. I introduce her rituals performed in Hungary and I try to find the analogies between her rituals performed at home and in a foreign country.

Shamans mediate between us and the supernatural through rituals. The knowledge to perform a ritual is taught by a master to his disciple and its elements may change as time passes, because the personality of the shaman, in possession of the knowledge, may expand it. A shaman often receives orders from its spirits that is to say, they guide his steps during a certain ritual.

A century ago, and rarely even today, there were cows or horses offered as sacrifice. Depending on which clan the people who asked for the ritual belonged to, several animals and several kinds of animals were sacrificed. Baráthosi writes about horses being sacrificed among the Buryat (in 1911) but nowadays they sacrifice sheep. A horse or a cow is exorbitant, though sheep are not cheap either, and there are only few sheep today. Sometimes it is difficult to find any sheep to offer, so the number of sheep is rapidly decreasing, there are less sheep now than before. M. D. Cibanova practised in Hungary in different circumstances in the same way as on the shore of the lake Baikal, so she adapted herself to the circumstances. The rituals she performed on the terrace of my flat were the exact copies of the ones performed in Siberian environment. Ancient rituals in modern world or the modernization of ancient rituals? It is the durability of ancient rituals. These rituals indicate the culture of a nation, too, they are united to it, thus the extinction of ancient customs may mean the dying out of a culture. So they mean the fundamentals, and though with

modifications, adapting to the inevitable changes, they always survive, therefore they are both ancient and modern.

The Arrangement Process of A Modern Sacrificing Ritual' I deal with the most important elements or 'stations' whose order indicates the course of the ritual and whose importance may influence the effectiveness of a certain rite. During analysing these cornerstones they can be separated, though they indicate continuity. However, the inadequacy of any of them disrupts unity, therefore neither the shaman in his performance, nor his ritual can fulfill their functions.

Which are these basic elements?

1. Visiting the shaman
2. Travelling on the spot
3. The scene of the ritual
4. The ritual (the ritual itself consists of three phases)
 - A./ The first phase lasts from the preparations until the end of the decoration of the birch.
 - B./ The second phase starts from the decorated birch and lasts until the skeleton of the sheep is put together in anatomical order.
 - C./ The third phase lasts from the putting together of the skeleton of the offered animal until the total burning of the skeleton and the hide.

It is important that every phase starts with the completed last step of the previous phase.

In the first phase, activities take place, there are terrestrial connections. In the second and third phase enters the supernatural, since the calling of the spirits and the gods take place in the second phase. In the third phase, the present gods and spirits are entertained. There is an ascend in point 4, though in the whole process, namely in points 1-4, a continuous ascend can be observed from terrestriality to the supernatural. If we examine the four points one by one, then the ascend is the steepest in point four, and it also reaches its culmination there.

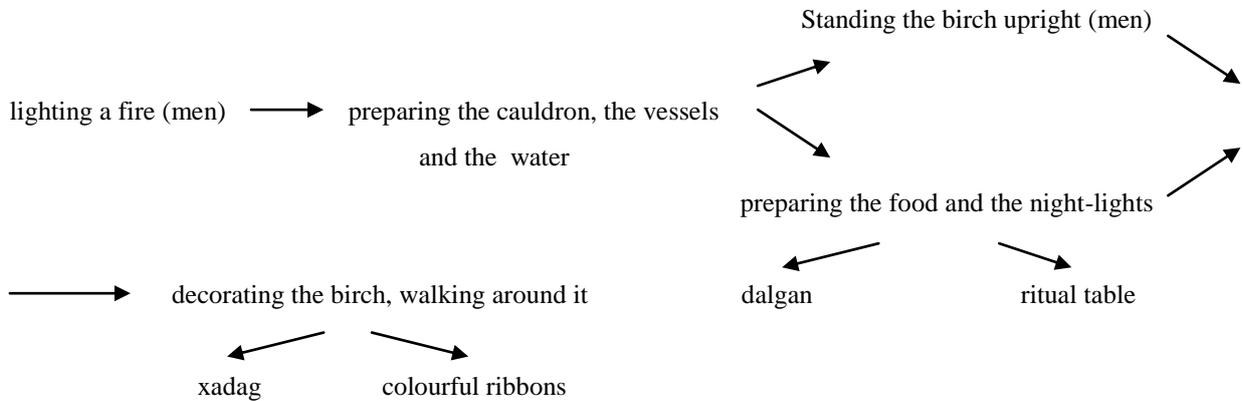
What does the terrestriality of the first phase mean?

During the preparations, there is no direct connection that is to say the purpose of connection is not induced. The presence exists but the communication has not been established, because the preparations need a total concentration of attention, since the lack of or the improper collocation of anything can basically influence the

result of the ritual. So the spirits and the gods can only be called if both the family and the shaman are totally ready to accept them.

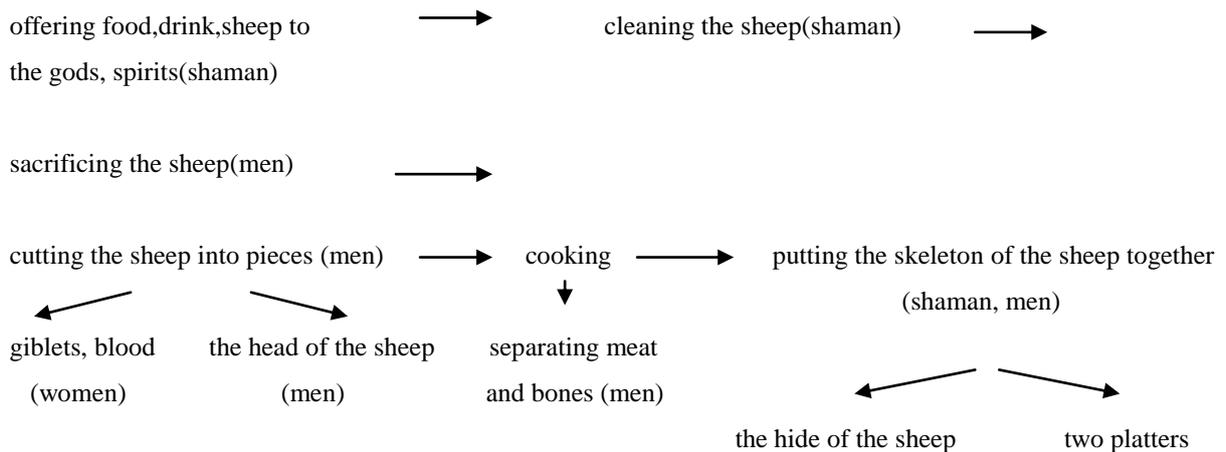
Now I emphasize the actions whose order expresses on the one hand the preparation process, on the other hand they indicate the terrestrial activity:

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At the same time, the shaman woman is preparing. She puts her shawl on her head, she bounds the shaman belt on her waist, and cleans her body with burning bark. These activities appear to be rather terrestrial than supernatural. The second phase starts by calling the gods.

Let us see the sketch of the activities:



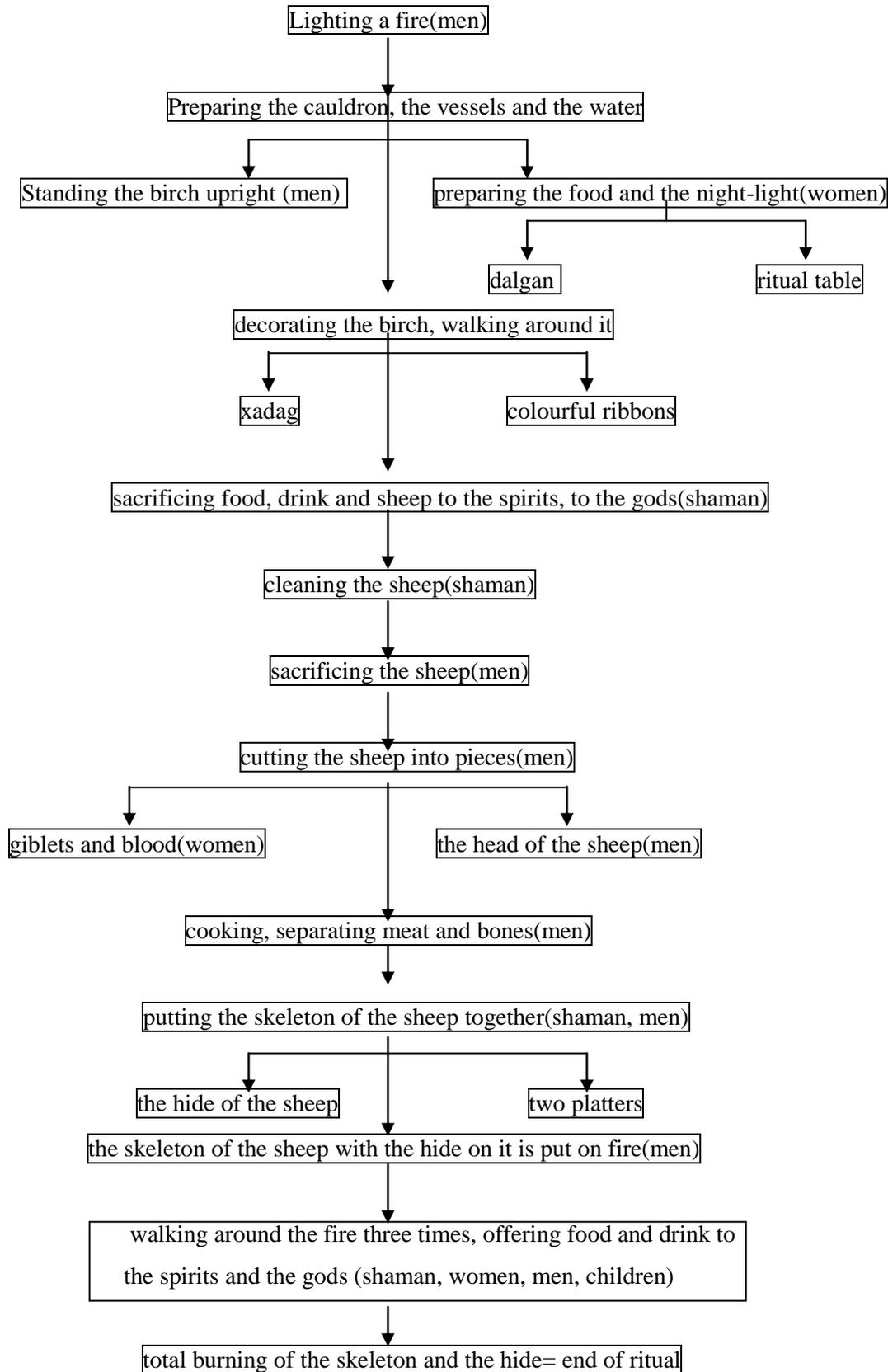
It is easy to notice that most, but at least the most important activities are in connection with the animal sacrifice. Though the processing of the sheep appears to be a terrestrial activity, profanity can be absolutely precluded, since the ritual sacrificing of the sheep, the classification and application of its carcass by strict rules and the

function of its parts unambiguously proves the establishment and existence of the direct connection with the supernatural.

The shaman and the family members are prepared for the hospitable reception of the spirits and gods. They have to prove their respect first, so that they can ask for solution for their problems. Besides the ritual role of the sheep, the vodka also has a striking ritual content. The vodka is the material which is used by the shaman from the first minute. Even on the way he sprinkles vodka to the sky at sacred places in order to gain the benevolence of the gods. The vodka is not only an alcoholic drink which creates good atmosphere, but an indispensable ritual equipment thus it must be available in sufficient quantity. Each bottle must be closed, and after opening, all the amount must be poured, and the chosen scene and the fire must be sanctified by it. It must be continuously offered to the celestials, and all of the mentioned activities must be performed by the shaman.

In the last phase of the ritual, the members of the family keep the different food and drink taken from the ritual table in their hands. They walk around the fire three times thus offering them to the spirits and the gods and to the spirit of the fire. Everybody takes part in walking around the fire, the shaman, the women, the men and the children. Then the men hold the four corners of the table cloth, which contains the skeleton of the sheep previously put together, and put it on the fire. Then they hold the hide and put it on the skeleton. The ritual lasts until the extinguishing of the fire, namely, the total burning of the skeleton and the hide of the sheep means the end of the ritual. The connection has become total. Now the shaman was not the only one to connect to the celestials. The members of the family also established direct contacts with them, prayed and supplicated to them. The total sacrifice of the sheep took place, and as most activities of the previous phase, was in connection with the sheep, thus this phase is characterised by only the connection with the spirits, which embody in prayers, supplications, sprinkling vodka and the total burning of the offered animals. After the ritual, people eat and drink, talk about the matters of everyday life. They have fun. They thank the shaman woman for her work, they hand her honorarium and the presents over to her and they only leave for home, with their eyes sparkling from the vodka or from hope, when the fire has been extinguished.

The elements of the ritual



To examine the identities, I compare the rituals performed by M. D. Cibenova in 1999 with the notes from 1909 on the rituals of M. N. Hangalov.

Basis for comparison

Sacred places (Obo) The selection of the scene may determine the success of the ceremony. No scene is selected by chance. The selection of a scene must be seriously established, since from the first ceremony, when the shaman selects a suitable area of a virgin land, this place becomes the sacred scene of a family or a clan from generation to generation.

Lighting a fire. During my research, I found that the very first moment of every ritual is lighting a fire. Just after getting off the cars, the men started to prepare the spot of the future fire. Taking care of nature, they took the matchwood from home, and if it was possible, they used dried cattledung. The necessity of fire does not have only practical reasons. It is not only an indispensable ingredient of the ritual, but also has a cultic role, since the sacrificing of the offered animal to the spirits and gods happens through the mediation of fire. Thus, fire is both the first and the last element of a ritual. It witnesses the whole process, thus giving it a frame.

Standing the birch upright. the birch (xuhan) is stuck into the ground before the ritual. By the narration of M. D. Cibenova, as many birches are stood, as many animals are sacrificed. Nowadays usually one animal – a sheep – is sacrificed. In ancient times, by the description of Hangalov's performances, there were a filly, seven or more sheep or a goat sacrificed, so the post, to which the horse was bound and the posts where the other animals were attached, and the birch columns which were used to lay the leather of the offered animals, and the birch woods, where the animals were slaughtered and their meat kept, had different functions.

I think that in spite of the different formal manifestations, shamanic rituals contain the same main elements. The origin of the identity comes from the past, from the carefully kept knowledge of the ancestors, from the fact that the traditions had not been forgotten during a devastating regime, nor the relics had disappeared, and from the fact that there have always been people who conserved and transmitted the treasures of their culture. Always came and hopefully will come a new generation which takes further the saved treasures, and the formal changes are only the necessary ones to adapt to the new circumstances and they are not substantial changes. The course of performing the rituals had no substantial changes and which is more important, neither altered their aim.

Rebirth and spreading of shamanism is so fast that the forming new layer has to face a new scope of duties. Urban shamans do not only act in towns. Sooner or later they have to take on the role of the rural shamans, too. M. D. Cibenova regularly visits the country, and often returns to the same area to lead the animal sacrifice processes. The word 'urban' is not a new word but it is a new concept in the field of shamanism, whose meaning is gradually expanding and in its content the traditional connecting, leading, educating function will hopefully appear.

M. D. Cibenova is a good object of research, since during her life she passed through the way of shamans from being banned through keeping the secret of her activity to the rebirth of shamanism. Mrs Cibenova is a good example of the activity of urban shamans, who heals, cleans, performs home rituals in exchange for honorarium. She performs traditional shamanic work, but she is also a hard business woman. She travels by air if necessary and she performs her shamanic activities in Hungary, but she is willing to any public appearance: shooting reports, presentations. Thus, she is a modern urban shaman, who conserves the past and the traditions in her mentality, conserves the instruments and the activities, and is engaged in transmitting them to the succeeding generations.



Maria Dambaieva Cibenova Buryat shaman woman calls her supporting spirits. Dunda-Kirety, July 1999

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The documentaries in connection with my research work which were produced and organized by me and were transmitted by both of the Hungarian television channels Magyar Televízió and Duna televízió are the following:

On The Land of The Yakuts, 1992	30 minutes
Yakut Traditions, 1992	40 minutes
Day of Miths, 2003	afternoon and evening programmes
Healing Drums/ Tuva, 1996	40 minutes
Buryat Sacrifice Celebration, 1996	35 minutes
Remote Paths / A Portrait of Benedek Barátosi Balogh, 2004	35 minutes
Jóska Soós, A Shaman Painter, 2004	25 minutes
Shamans Today And Before I-II, 2004	2x40 minutes
Siberian Miracle / Éva Schmidt, 2004	20 minutes
Siberian Evening, 2005	afternoon and evening programmes
World of Shamans, 2005	40 minutes
The Buryat / own editing, reporter and camera work/, 2005	45 minutes
Shaman Week, 2007	a week's programme
World Harbour / Buryatia / own editing and reporter work/, 2009	60 minutes

Éva Aranyosi
12/a Fóti Street
Budapest
1044
Tel: +36 -1-233-2584
Mobile: +36-20-520-9198