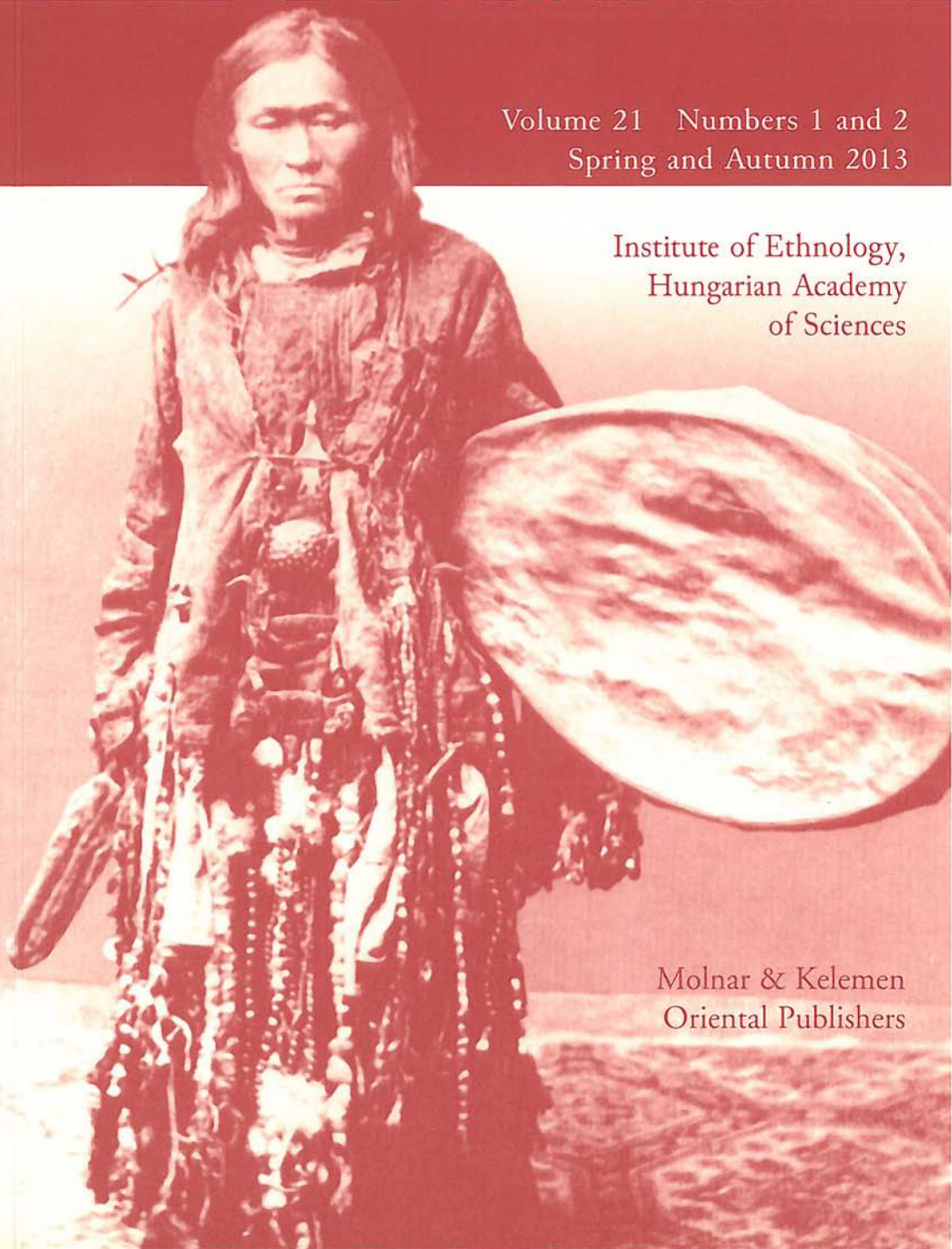


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*Articles in this volume are dedicated
to the memory of the late*

PROFESSOR CATHERINE URAY-KÓHALMI (1926–2012),

*an outstanding scholar
of Mongolian and Manchu-Tungus studies,
and a member of the Editorial Board of*

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Reindeer Evenki in Manchuria," by Georg F. Heyne

Back cover: After a Yakut (Sakha) rock drawing,
from A. P. Okladnikov, *Istoriia Iakutii*

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Visiting a Sakha (Yakut) Folk Healer

DÁVID SOMFAI KARA and LÁSZLÓ KUNKOVÁCS BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

With a Musicological Note by JÁNOS SIPOS

In the summer of 1997 two Hungarian researchers visited the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), the largest region of the Russian Federation which occupies around 3.1 million square kilometers of northeast Siberia. It is inhabited mostly by Sakha (Yakut) people, a Turkic-speaking ethnic group who migrated to the north from Lake Baikal due to the Mongolian invasion in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Traditionally they are sedentary and their economy is based on horse and cattle breeding near round meadows (*alaas*) in the woods along the River Lena (Ölüöne or Uloxan Örüs) and other major east Siberian rivers.¹ The Sakha population of the republic is around 470,000 (50% of the total population). Besides the Sakha, there are Russians (38%), Tungusic groups (Evenki and Even; 36,000), Tatars (8,000), and Yukagirs (1,300).

Shamanic Traditions of the Sakha

Sakha shamanic traditions were thoroughly described by several scholars through the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries (Seroshevskiĭ 1896; Ksenofontov 1928/1922). During Soviet times the Sakha were heavily oppressed, which resulted in the loss of many aspects of their ethnic culture, including epic and shamanic traditions. When the Sakha Republic became more independent in 1992, the local intelligentsia wanted to revive their shamanic traditions. They expressed they will to support traditional belief and healers. But when in 1997 we

¹ Major rivers of Yakutia (names in Sakha/Russian): Bülüü/Viliüi, Allaan/Aldan, Jaanji/Yana, Amma/Amga, Xalima/Kolyma, Indigir/Indigirka, etc.

visited the republic we could find no living or revived shamanic tradition in the rural areas. Post-Soviet neo-shamans were all members of the urban society who had revived or created some new traditions to strengthen their ethnic identity (Balzer 2008: 9–13). All that we found was the tradition of folk medicine and healing, and this was practiced not by shamans (*oyuun* and *udayan*) but by folk healers (*emčit*). The word *emčit* derives from *emp* ‘medicine’ (Turkic and Mongolic *em*) carrying the well-known Turkic *nomen agentis* suffix *-bit/čit*.

The Sakha Folk Healer

We traveled by bus to Berjigesteex (*berjiges* means ‘small, short pine tree’) in Gornay *uluus* (Russian Gornyi district), 184 km from the capital Jokuuskay (Yakutsk). In those days the village had some 5,000 inhabitants. Although the name of the district means ‘mountainous’ (Russian *gornyi*), it is in fact a very flat area surrounded by taiga forest. But the Sakha call the taiga *tia*, which originally meant ‘mountain’ (cf. Turkic *taγ*), thus explaining the name (figs. 1, 2).

During our stay we met an old woman by the name of Ilekhen (fig. 3), who was born in Bülüü District (1901). I did an interview with her about her life and healing activities.² She started to heal people at the age of sixteen (1917), but during Soviet times she had to continue her activities secretly due to the Stalinist repression. Her husband died during World War II and she became a so-called “military widow,” receiving benefits from the Soviet state. She has six children and 27 grandchildren. She had moved to Berjigesteex four years before because her younger brother lived there and the government granted her a house in the district center. She used to travel to other villages visiting her children and relatives (Ölüöxme, Čurapčī, Bülüü, and Yakutsk), and she healed there too. But since growing old she was only accepting local people and some visitors. There was a lack of qualified doctors in Yakutia, so people visited her from distant parts of the republic to ask for healing. A couple of years previous to my interview Vladimir Alekseevich Kondakov, a writer and leader of the Sakha revival

² The interview was transcribed and translated by Dávid Somfai Kara with the assistance of Anna Argylova, of the Sakha Republic, and Csaba Mészáros (Institute of Ethnology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences), to whom he expresses his gratitude.



Fig. 1. View of a Sakha homestead in the village of Berjigesteex.
Photo: László Kunkovác, 1997.



Fig. 2. A Sakha cowshed (*xoton*) in Berjigesteex. Photo: László Kunkovác, 1997.

of shamanic traditions (Kondakov 1992; 1999), visited her and granted her some sort of certificate as a folk healer (*emčit*). Subsequently, French and Canadian anthropologists and film-makers visited her and recorded her activity. She treated one of the Canadians for infertility.

Ilekhen treated pregnant women, especially those who had suffered miscarriage, and healed conditions related to cold as well as liver sickness (e.g. jaundice) and stomach problems. She used herbs and massage (*imeriy-* 'to apply herbs' or *massaastaa-* 'to apply massage') and performed healing by charms, all part of Sakha folk healing. She gave blessings (*algis*) for weddings and opening ceremonies (e.g. for clubs or clinics). The blessings were performed in the Sakha singing style (*kiliha*). She also used a little bucket made of birch bark (*iayās*) to perform fortune-telling.

A Healing Ritual

When we asked if we could see Ilekhen's healing ritual she immediately agreed, but we had to find a patient for her. Our companion from Yakutsk, a Sakha lady, agreed to be her patient. She had to lie down on a bed in the healer's house. The healer told her that she had probably suffered from cold many times during her childhood. During the healing Ilekhen used a Sakha fan (*deybiir*) made of horse tail. She felt her pulse while putting the fan on her shoulder. Then she symbolically drove away the evil energy from her body with the fan. Then Ilekhen placed the fan by the top of the patient's head, reached out her right hand over the patient's body (figs. 4, 5, 6, 7), and started to sing her blessing song (*algis*).

A Blessing (*Algis*) by Ilekhen *Emčit*

1st part

Ĵie-buo, Ĵie-buo!
Bultaydammit iarü
bulgučču köttün dien

*Ĵie-buo, Ĵie-buo*³
 The illness that attacked you, let it fly
 away quickly

³ Magical words with no meaning.

Sapsaybīt iarū
saas-saabīnan arayīstīn dien
Algīs kurduk arayaččīlaatīn dien

Kebis, kebis . . . arayīax⁴
Kepselge kiirbit
Emčīt dien min buollum dii
Orosxuota suox
 . . .
Emčīt oloxxo kiirbit
Bilīr-bilīrgūtītan
Ūs saxa üösküöyūtten
Tüört saxa törüöyūtten
Uraaṅxay-saxa onon buluoyuttan

Emteetim dien emtiibin eyigin
Ĵol doṅordobo turuox̄tun
Ieyiex̄sit kördöbö turuox̄tun

Ayīibīt argīstaba turuox̄tun

Damidi, damidi, damidi
Ņirin buollun, űirgil buollun

· · ·
Ĵe, būtte

2nd part

Ūrdee, űrdee, sargītaa, sargītaa
Ĵolo üöbee űllüktener
Maayīn eppitim kurduk

The illness that seized you,
 let it go away forever
 Let these words protect you like a
 blessing

Throw it away . . .
 People started to talk about me
 I have become a healer
 The poor (with no means)
 . . . [Elekhen stops singing here.]
 Healer earned a living
 Long time ago
 When the three Sakha clans appeared
 When the four Sakha clans were born
 Since the Uraangkhai-Sakha⁵ have
 lived

I am healing you as much as I can
 Luck should be your friend
 The *ieyiex̄sit* spirit should show the
 way
 The *ayīibīt* spirit should be your
 friend

Damidi, damidi, damidi⁶
 Let her be vivid, let her be strong!
 [She is using the horse-tail fan]
 Well, that is it!

⁴ For technical reasons, the recording was interrupted here for a while.

⁵ Sakha people also use their Mongolic name *uraaṅxay* (Mongol *uriangqai*) as an endonym, usually saying it together as Sakha-Uraankhai. Mongols used to call all Siberian Turks *uriangqai*—including the Tuva.

⁶ These words have no meaning either.

Uu ǰulayǰittan
Uluḡax xaraǰar dieri
Min emteebitim kennitten
Kibi berde buolan
Oxtooxton oxtubakka
Xaban dayanı sanaaǰın tüherbekke
Onnuk kibi buoluoxtaaxxın.

From her head
 Down to the paleness of her feet
 After I have healed you
 You will become strong
 You will not fall down
 You will never lose your good mood
 That kind of person you will be.



Fig. 3. Ilekhen (center), the Sakha native healer (*emčit emeexsin*),
 in front of her house with her sister-in-law (right) and our guide (left).
 Photo: László Kunkovác, 1997.



Fig. 4. Ilekhen checks the veins of the patient to make her diagnosis while holding a Sakha horsetail fan (*deybitir*) in her other hand. Photo: László Kunkovács, 1997.



Fig. 5. Ilekhen holds the fan over the head of the patient as she sings her healing song (*algis*). Photo: László Kunkovács, 1997.

The first part of the blessing was a song in traditional Sakha singing style (*kiliha*), although Ilekhen stopped singing after one minute and continued in a normal speaking voice. She was not singing during the second part of the blessing and, having finished it, the whole ritual came to an end.

Some Notes on the Text

In the first part she is chasing away the illness as well as introducing herself to the spiritual world. She then refers to mythical times when the Sakha clans were formed, saying that her healing ability (*ujuor*) comes from the ancestors (*öbüge*). She also mentions two important helping spirits from Sakha mythology, namely the *ieyiexsit* and the *ayiihit*. The Sakha *ayii* means 'goodwill' but also means 'fate'. The word *ieyiex* derives from the verb *iey-* 'to love or soothe' (cf. Turkic *seb-*). Both names are constructed by the Turkic *nomen agentis* suffix *-čit/sit/bit*, which means that these spirits bring goodwill, luck, loving, and health. Good helping spirits used to be called *tañaralar* 'deities'⁷ in Sakha folk belief, but nowadays this word is used only for God. She only mentions those spirits but does not invoke them since she is not a shaman who is entitled to do so. Then Ilekhen repeated the magic words *damidi* a couple of times while using her fan to chase away the illness. In the second part of the blessing she literally blessed the ill person with good health and fortune. She emphasized that after she had healed someone that person would have a happy and healthy life.

A Musicological Note on the Blessing of the Sakha Healer

There are several publications on Sakha folk music, and we will mention some of them here. In his book, V. L. Seroshevskii (1896/1993) devoted an entire chapter to folk songs, especially to the *degereŋ iriia*.

⁷ The word *taŋara* originally meant 'heaven', but nowadays it has lost that meaning as people use *xallaan* for 'sky and heaven'. It is related to Old Turkic *teŋri/taŋrı* 'sky'.



Fig. 6. After placing the fan by the patient's head, Ilekhon raises her left hand as she finishes her blessing. Photo: László Kunkovács, 1997.



Fig. 7. The patient sits up and expresses her gratitude to Ilekhon for the healing and blessing. Photo: László Kunkovács, 1997.

The famous Russian ethnomusicologist V. M. Beliaev (1937) was the first to study the metric and rhythmic features of the same song style. In 1947–1949 M. N. Zhirkov (1981), the first Sakha composer and researcher on local folklore, wrote the first comprehensive study on Sakha musical folklore, published in 1981. Here he discussed the song styles *ĵieretii degereŋ* in detail, introducing the characteristics of the rhythm, harmony, microtone system, form, and manner of performance. In the 1960s to 1970s fundamental works on Sakha folklore were written by S. A. Kondratev, G. I. Litinskiĭ, Z. Z. Vinokurova, G. M. Krivoshapko, and others, among whom we will mention here only G. M. Krivoshapko's monograph (1982). Finally, mention should be made of the works of the renowned researcher Ė. E. Alekseev (1965; 1967; 1976; 1986a; 1986b; 1988; 1990; Alekseev and Nikolaeva 1982).

MAIN SAKHA MUSICAL STYLES

There are two main old Sakha musical styles, the *degereŋ irĭia* and the *ĵieretii irĭia*. The *degereŋ irĭia* (rhythmic, measured song) style is usually linked to songs of fishing, weddings, maternity, and different rites and dances. *Degereŋ* melodies are melodically more developed, and are based on a wide range. The structures of *degereŋ irĭia* tunes are stricter than those of *ĵieretii irĭia* (see above), and the pitches of their scales are more stable. G. I. Litinskiĭ (1958: 93–94) states that *degereŋ irĭia* are more suitable to reflect the variety of emotional states. The texts of the *degereŋ irĭia* are improvisatory but—in contrast to the *ĵieretii irĭia*—the rhythmic structure of this style follows more rigid formulas.

ON THE SONG OF THE SAKHA HEALER

The song of the Sakha healer belongs to the *ĵieretii irĭia* type (lingering, smooth, flowery song) characterized by spontaneous improvisation, heterorhythmic melody sections, microtones, and sustained tones ornamented with overtones. Among Sakha people *ĵieretii irĭia* is considered the “high” style of singing. These kinds of songs are typical in the Sakha heroic epic (*olonxo*) and also among melodies sung on ceremonial occasions for good wishes, calling the spirits, etc.

These melodies are characterized by a colorfully ornamented entry, usually with the solemn cry *ji-e-buo* "well here!" The entry is followed by sections of different lengths, rhythm, and numbers of syllables. The last tone of the sections is usually decorated with the same pulsation in eights as the long notes of the entry. This pulsation is stressed by accented overtone *appoggiatura*.

ǰi - e - bu - - - - - o, ǰi - e - bu - o!
 Bul - tay - dam - mīt ī - a - rīī
 Bul - guč - ču kōt - tūn di - - - en
 Sap - say - bīt īa - rīī
 sa - as - saa - hīn - an a - ra - ǰis - tīn di - - - - - en
 Al - ǰis - - - - kur - duk - -
 a - ra - ǰač - - čī - laa - tīn di - en
 Ke - bis ilb..... *the recording is interrupted...* a - ra - ǰi - ax
 kep - sel - ge kiir - bit
 Em - čit di - en min buol - lum dii

O - ros - xu - o - ta su - ox

Em - čit o - lox - xo kiir - bit

Bī - līr - bī - līr - gīt - tan

Ūs sa - xa ü - ös - kü - ö - γūt - ten

Tū - ört sa - xa tō - rūō - γūt - ten

Sakha scholars developed a system of symbols that reflect the non-tempered nature of the Sakha melodies, dividing the whole step into six parts. Instead of that, I now use arrows to indicate pitches that are unusual to a European ear. The melody basically moves on A and (b)B—though rarely, at the beginning of the sections, it may jump up to C. In contrast to the simple range, and simple melodic progression, there is no characteristic rhythmic formula and the rhythmic patterns are unique even at the ends of sections.

To sum up, here we meet with a unique and beautifully simple musical phenomenon, and we may once again admire the richness of the folk music of the Turkic-speaking people, where the relations between languages are basically different from the relations between folk songs. It is not rare that the music of a given Turkic people is in closer contact with a neighboring non-Turkic people than with other groups that are related by language. The Sakha people were gradually formed from out of a mixture of different ethnic groups, and the Sakha language includes a number of words and concepts of Mongolic origin, while some words related to fishing are of Tungusic origin. The musical dialects too are in closer contact with that of the Tungus than with the folk songs of any other Turkic people.

Conclusions

Unlike in Southern Siberia and Northern Mongolia where shamanic traditions survived the Soviet Era and one could find traditional religious specialists (Turkic *kam* or Mongolic *böö/udgan* and *zaarin*), the Sakha people lost their shamanic traditions in the first half of the twentieth century. The last shamans and their song were recorded by Pëtr Terentievich Stepanov in the 1940s. In a booklet entitled *Oyuun* (fig. 8), texts collected by N. T. Stepanov between 1944 and 1946 (Emelianov and Mukhopleva 1993) were published in the Sakha language with no translations. The two shamans who provided invocation songs (*küürü*) were S. V. Andreev Xaxxa and P. A. Abramov Alaja. A. A. Savvin also recorded invocations by S. A. Fomin Chiämahin in 1938, and those are also included to the booklet.

During our stay the villagers categorically stated that no shamans (*oyuun* or *udayan*) practiced among them in the districts of Gornay, Xangalas, Menge-Xangalas, Nam, or Tatta, Tompo, Čurapchī and Amma. The so-called “white shamans” were also unknown among them. The *emčit* ‘healer’ on the other hand is very different from a shaman, because as the name suggests that person only heals and has no relation to the spirits of ancestors (*emeget*) and other owner spirits of nature (*ičči*). Yakut healers are similar to the healers (*imsē*) among the Bashkir whom we discussed in an earlier field report (Somfai Kara and Kunkovács 2010), where shamans also disappeared in the nineteenth century. Sakha healers do pray (*algis*) to certain helping spirits such as *ieyexsit* and *ayiihūt*, but they never fall into trance. Healers never go through the so-called shamanic disease (*saxa iariī-ta* ‘Sakha disease’), where the body of a future shaman is symbolically chopped up (*etten-*) into pieces by the spirits to make it reborn. These healers have no drums (*düñür*) or shamanic dress (*son, kumu*). Some of the literature notes that Konstantin Chirkov from Abyī district was an *oyuun* (‘shaman’, see Balzer 2008: 9), but he did have a drum too (Iliakhov 1993: 76). Apparently it was confiscated in 1932 when Chirkov was arrested. He continued to heal after he was released from prison but he stopped his shamanic activities. Chirkov was considered as an *ürüñ oyuun* (‘white shaman’, Balzer 2008: 9), a term that was created probably at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Christianity influenced shamanic traditions, falling into trance (*küür-*) and having contact with the evil spirits (*abaabi* and *üör*) became more and more unacceptable to the Sakha society.

Post-Soviet Sakha neo-shamanism chose a different way from other revitalized shamanic traditions in Southern Siberia (Tuva, Buryatia), where proper shamanic initiations (e.g. Buryat *šanar*) and shamanic trance (Tuva *xamnaaškin*) were revitalized. Sakha intellectuals created

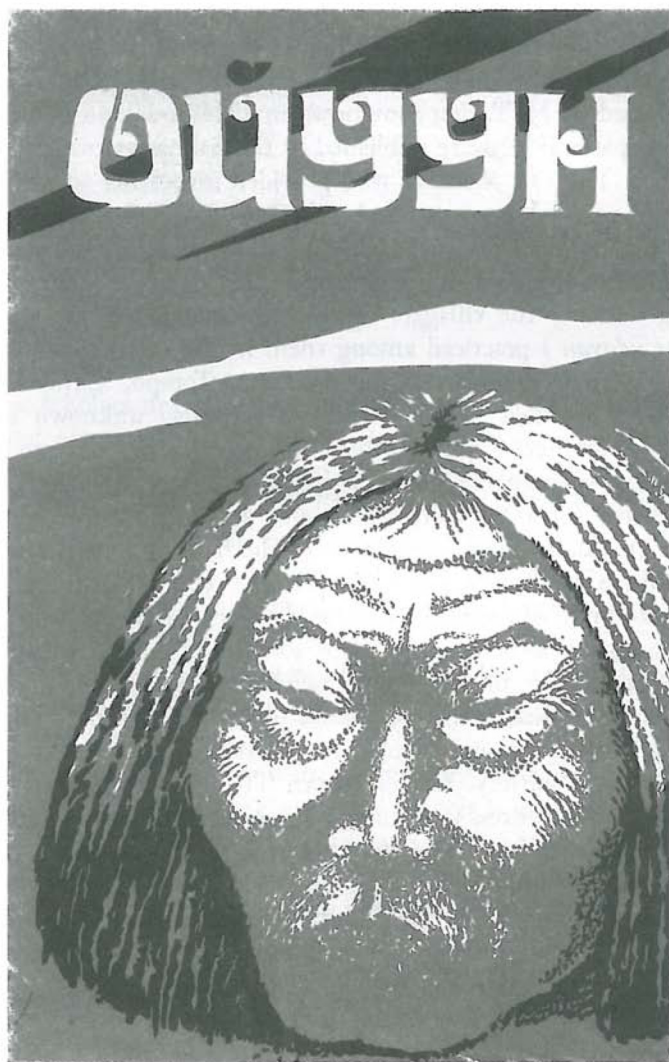


Fig. 8. The front cover of Emilianov and Mukhopleva's book *Oyuun* (Shaman) containing shamanic invocations (*kīrīi*). Photo: László Kunkovács, 1997.

the term *ürüŋ oyuun* 'white shaman', whose role is very similar to that of an *emčit* 'healer,' and they even made attempts to merge the two types of specialists into one.

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