

WITCHES AND SCIAMANS. WOMEN'S RELIGION FROM LAPLAND TO THE ALPS

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It is said that wizards were once much less numerous than today. They lived in isolation on mountains, deserts, or in the northern countries such as Norway, Denmark, Swede, Gotia, Ireland, Livonia: therefore their idolatries and their spells were quite unknown, and were often considered stories or old wives' tales.⁽¹⁾

It is Pierre de Lancre, one of the most ferocious persecutor of witches of all time, who after about four hundred years, presents us the image of a strict relationship, that he, shrewd expert of the offensive launched by Satan against humanity, has no difficulty in discerning. And consequently he connects the followers of Diane of the French Pyrenees to the Laplander sciamans described by Olaus Magnus and Peucer. Stating a common factor, characteristically of both cultures, one generally of witchcraft and the Nordic one: the "trance", the diabolical ecstasy that for some is interpreted as the soul's capacity to leave the body, to "start a trip".

After four centuries, in the pioneer's researches wake of Carlo Ginzburg, (and grateful for the opportunity I had to stay some time in Lapland as project manager of an European project, from 1999 to 2001, which allowed me to operate as an anthropological and cultural researcher on the spot), I'll try to put together again the lines of an ancient plot that covered Europe from Siberia to Ireland, entering the paths of imagination and ritual.

Remember the archetype, out of focus, that has been maintained above all in the Alps and the Pyrenees, the mountains that have been able, more than other territories, to maintain an archaic sub stratum of mysterious origin, which translates in rituals and traditions that bring us back to a animist and sciamanic past.

Years in which woman was the supreme administrator of power. As priestess, but also as divinity. And as mother.

Europe of nomads

People that have no towns, no fortified walls, but bring with them all they own and are

mounted archers living not by agriculture, but by breeding, and have their houses on wheels, how can they be invincible and unassailable?⁽²⁾

Once it was believed that social human evolution was characterised by some successive levels: first hunters – gatherers, then shepherds (both nomads) and finally farmers⁽³⁾. Actually, the first two categories are an invention of sedentary: populations that live on wide and hard territories always have belonged to the three categories. And if necessary they also moved from one to the other with a certain ease.

To look closely, prehistoric Europe seems crossed far and wide with people who moved and mixed among each other continuously, through waves of migrations that trail behind myths and cultures. When one thinks the Old Continent of thousands and thousands of years ago, it seems empty, crossed by hordes that, we can only say, come from a unidentified "Hindi basin", from which the Hindi-European civilisation began; as if humanity was born there and eventually populated the entire empty world. Actually this is only a supposition. Because, while a sea journey presupposes a starting point and an arrival, in which those who travel remain the same, the way of men and forms on the steppe happens with Brownian movements: exchanges, fusion, contamination which confuse paths, obliterate tracks. What starts is never what arrives.

Examining the fossil discoveries besides the archaeological ones, it is known that with the slow retreat of the ice, reindeer and parts of the hunting tribes, who on this totemic animal based their nourishing, moved towards the North. Those who remained amalgamated with those arriving from the South, this being the Mediterranean. To the reindeer who is not a mountain animal, next came, on the now habitable alpine

⁽¹⁾ Pierre de Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons*. Parigi 1631, p.253 and foll., in Carlo Ginzburg, *Storia notturna*, Einaudi, Torino, 1989, p.115.

⁽²⁾ Erodoto, *Storie*, IV libro.

⁽³⁾ Eugenio Turri, *Gli uomini delle tende*, Edizioni di Comunità, Milano, 1983, p. 9-10,48

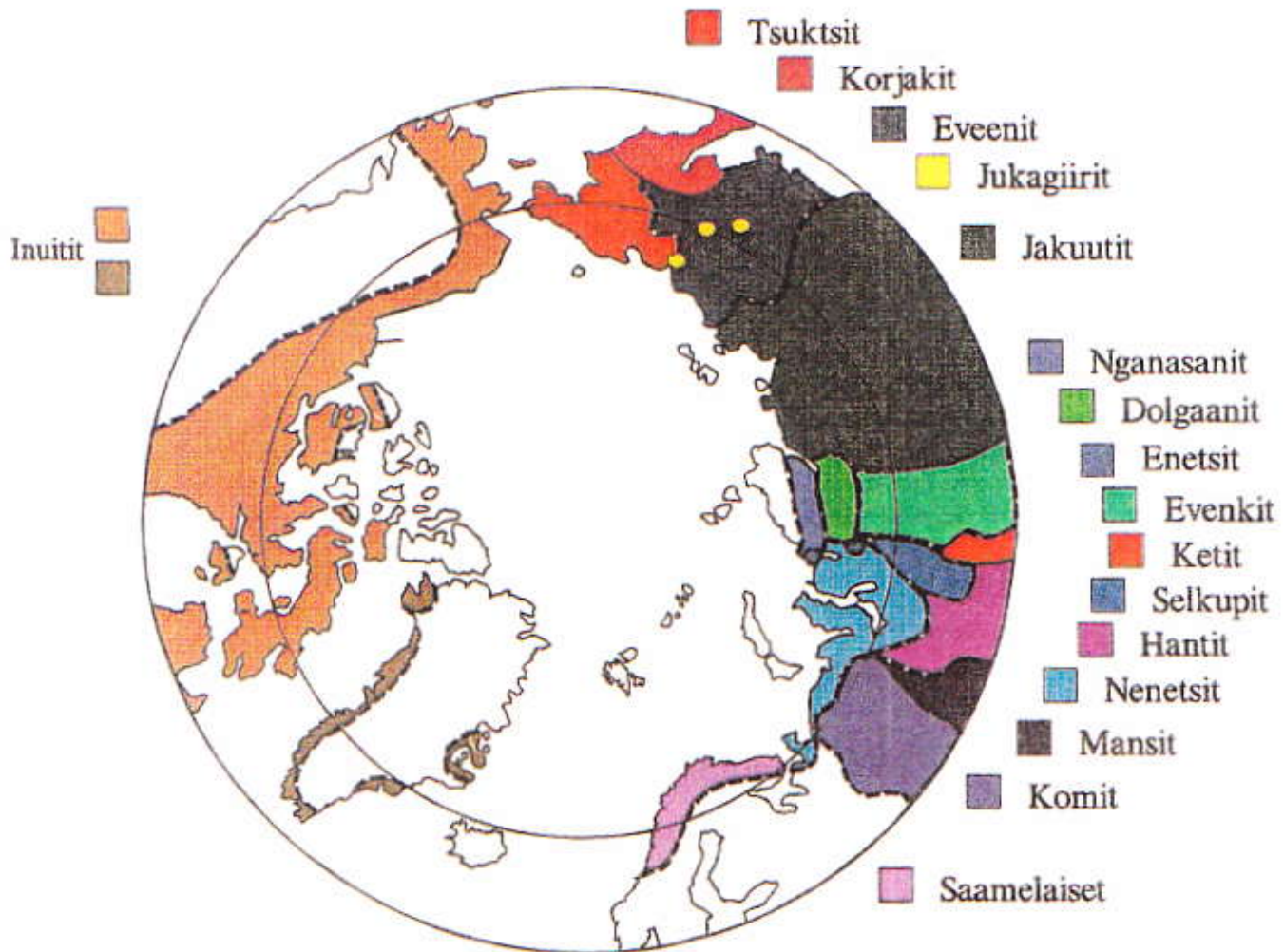


Fig.1 - The Arctic populations of today. Map by the Arctic Centre of Rovaniemi, Finland.

valley, the deer, which also became a fertility symbol. Hunting techniques of polar populations, based on the utilisation of sexual baits, for deer, elk, and wild cattle, in the Middle Ages were diffused much more in the South, up as far as Germany¹⁴.

Much later, from the 800 BC, nomadic populations coming from the steppes of Central Asia, from Altai and Siberia, started to make incursions west, at the border of the Iranian plateau, and east to the area between Mongolia and China. Among them, the Shiites, of certain protoceltic matrix, settled in the end, in the Caucasus and on the Black Sea. At the beginning of 600 BC, large nucleus of Shiites left the strands of the Black Sea and moved west. They crossed the Dniestr and the Danube, and settled in Dobrugia, where the Traci were already but they recognised the Shiites supremacy. At the beginning of 400 BC, Celtic tribes converged here who,

after having settled on a part of the Balkan peninsula, founded colonies in Asia Minor. All this is documented in Erodoto Book IV, which he actually dedicated to the Shiites; and from an uncanny resemblance of artistic forms which is how these ancient peoples express themselves; by figurative animalistic and fantastic art, which contains figures that are still today part of the culture of the Alpine population: dragons, sirens, winged lions, griffins ...

The nomads territory covers a grassy area in the heart of the Eurasian continent between the 40th and 50th parallel, which runs from the Yellow River to the Danube for over 5,000 kilometres. The physical image that remains to us, from west of the steppe, is one of Greek-roman art, with almost ethnic precision, is one of a long

¹⁴ Gaetano Forni, *Gli albori dell'agricoltura*, Ramo editoriale degli agricoltori, Roma, 1990, p.123

haired man, often bearded and moustached, with an oval face and straight marked nose. All texts, both Greek or Chinese, suggest a predominance of blond or red hair and light skin, the colour of milk⁵⁰. The Shiites, like the Celts, very similar in somatic traits and hairstyle, wear a characteristic garment, unknown to Romans and Greeks: the trousers. And also a long conic hat: like that attributed traditionally to Merlin, wizards, gnomes, and fairies.

The steppes merge even in winter: in fact, the immense marshy peat-bogs that stretch from Lapland to Vladivostok were surely busier in winter, on sledges pulled first by reindeer and later by dogs, than in summer, the period when mud and mosquitoes made travel difficult. The pattern followed the arctic and the nomads of the steppes were Shiites, Traces and the Celts to the South; and the Sami to the North.

Nomads of the Alps

Wandering, the habit of roaming, the ability to bear solitude for a long time, to measure oneself with the "open space" (the grassland and even the glaciers) which was considered part of their essential territory, and beautiful even if it was dangerous, such as the frozen steppe or the desert; the ability to speak many languages and to recognise the other person immediately, as well as also those who wanted to live on the fringe; the isolation, the ability to give refuge to the persecuted, are not only conditions imposed by a hard environment, or reaction in defence of a hostile society that try to conquest and assimilate. These are cultural co-ordinates, that differentiate permanent people, or hierarchically organised societies where private ownership of land exists, from nomadic tribes, who move around huge spaces used communally (and unregulated). A certain type of determinism of the '800 sews in nomadism the manifestation of man conquered by nature. And also when a kind of culture was recognised, it seemed too light, of little importance, unable to rise above the conditioning of the environment, almost inconsistent. Today, this concept is overturned. Just as an original and specific civilisation allowed the nomadic communities to live in large territories, where resources were spread over enormous distances or at various levels of altitude: a middle line between history and ecology.

For all these reasons, without considering

shepherds in a strict sense which is on the Alps is a recent craft, we can consider anthropologically the majority of the alpine people as assailable culturally to the areas where there was or still is migration and animal husbandry. This means we can consider them nomads. It is enough if we look at the history of the nineteenth century emigration in Italy: in similar conditions, those who chose to leave were not the urban proletarian or sub-proletarian, plains or seaside inhabitants, but the highlanders both from the Alps and the Apennines.

These were heirs of a nomadic culture that considered roaming natural. The house was not a particular place or building: the concept of home included the territory which all the eye could see ("my mountains").

For all these reasons, one of the fundamental characteristics and typical of the Alpine people was, as in Sebesta, an active life. The nomadism is maintained in the migration to the mountain summer pasture, in addition to seasonal emigration and of the production of many specialised crafts, both by male and female, which caused continued and prolonged roaming; so when people travelled from one valley to another, it led men and women along never ending prehistoric paths, to adore and propitiate the mountain divinities who were then transformed in Madonna, the Virgin and Saints.

Since ancient time, as now, where the tradition of moving to the summer pasture continues, the migration towards the high pastures is not made by experts: this led to an economy that overcame the subsistence farming, and went on in a way, to a market economy; instead a large part of the Alpine culture is managed by women supporting the family budget, not using wage-earners but kept within the family.

This means that when, twice a year, the cattle move, the whole village moves, also often the priest: the owners of the cattle, in order to give them fresh grass, and children follow their mothers; the others go on holiday so as not to stay alone on "the plains". At any rate, the migration consists of the entire tribe. Women are the first to start: once they put infants and food into the pannier, then it was by car, recently also by helicopter: but still, never! Men usually visit their wives for the weekends because they often have a different job on "the plains".

⁵⁰ Véronique Schiltz, *Gli Scitti dalla Siberia al Mar Nero*, Universale Electa/Gallimard, 1995, p.101, 128-130

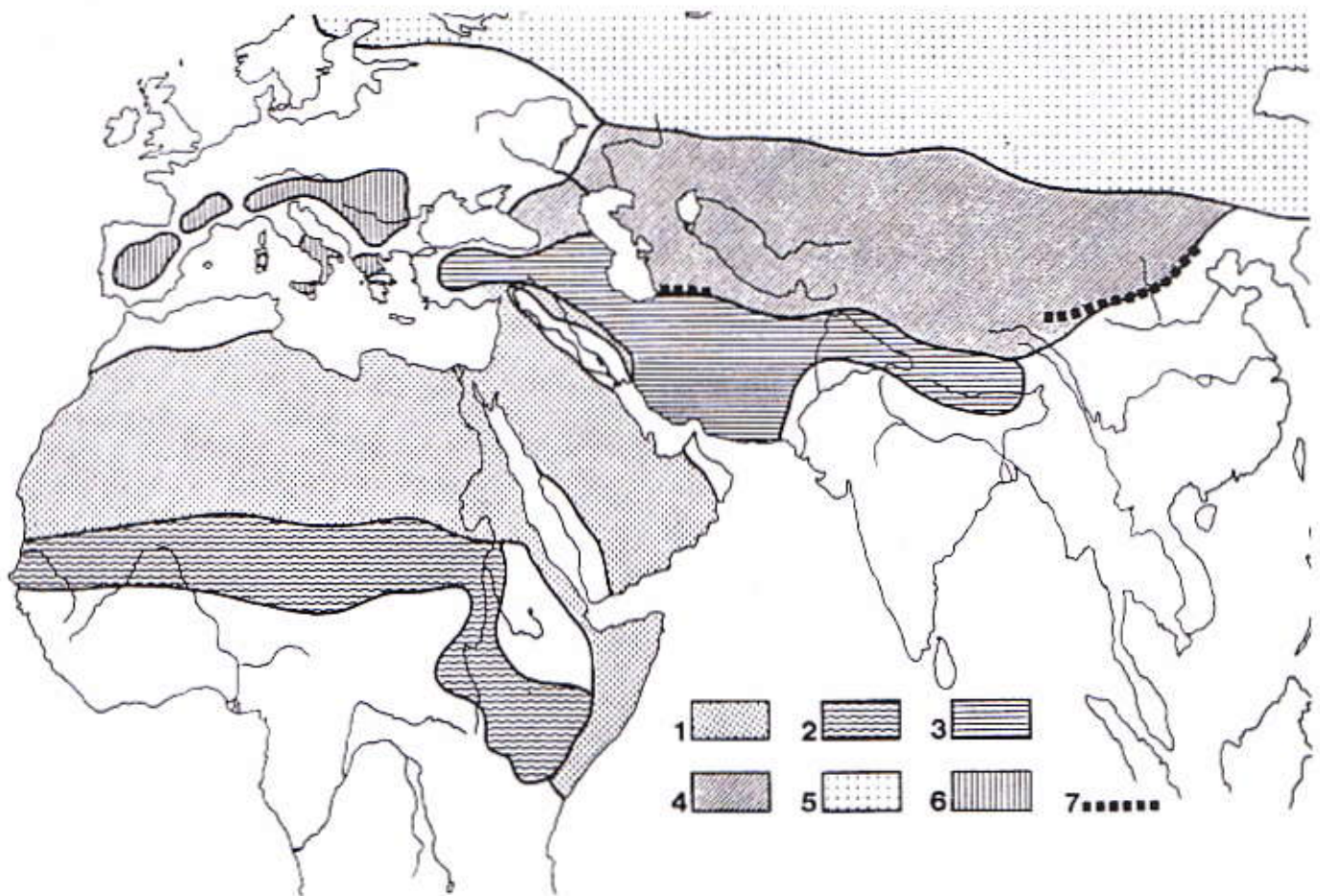


Fig. 2 - The great nomadic areas. Figure taken from Eugenio Turri's *Gli uomini delle tende* (The Tent People), published by Edizioni di Comunità, Milan, 1983.

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| 1. Saharian Arab nomadism or Bedouin (or Bedouinnesque) nomadism | 4. Northern nomadism of the Asian steppes |
| 2. Sahelian nomadism | 5. Northern nomadism of the reindeer herders |
| 3. Taurus-Anatolic mountain highland nomadism | 6. Alpine, Balkan and Mediterranean nomadism |
| | 7. Great walls built to defend against nomads |

Even if today only a few work the soil, the habit and attitude of moving are difficult to forget: and when summer starts, the urge to move to the mountains is aroused. So much so that recently many old "malgas" (shepherd's shut?); and it became acknowledge that it was better than the sea. On top of this has come an end to the pride in rebuilding where ancestors have built in the past, stone on stone (not metaphorically speaking). This has been noted also in other nomadic civilisations: for example among the Australian aborigine, who for some months of the year makes a trip into the desert, one of the harshest places on earth. Of the Sami we shall speak later.

Woman, mistress of animals

The principal characteristic of nomads is that of moving with their cattle: man is the servant of his cattle; their necessities come before any other. There is a direct line, a reciprocal dedicated relationship, a mutual dependency. And this is even more so with the woman: because she is the one who began the breeding; and because she is the one who, in a hunters' society, bestows the gift of reproduction through rituals of sympathetic magic (meaning that if human reproduction is the gift of the woman, also that of the animals will be better bestowed by she who ensures the birth of children birth - the mother).

Male attitudes, especially hunters, towards adult animals is distinguished by cruel acts: careless hunting which causes hurt, sometime even for fun. And domestic animals are not better off. Their way of operating is different concerning pets, of which the care is usually in women's hands, as they have more tolerance, and often become fond of their pets, even today and probably more in prehistory.

Reindeer and deer (who look so similar, as their names are too) have a principal role in nourishing, as well as in religion, in mythology and on rocky outcrops of the Alps and northern peoples. In France, on the Langerie Basse, a cave drawing was found of the Late Maddalenian period representing a pregnant woman sucking a reindeer's milk; the sucking preceded the milking. And indeed reindeer have been milked up to as late as 1950 in Lapland. On the walls of Mystery's Villa in Pompeii there are women suckling fawns (kids). At Ercolano there representations of human infants suckling deer's milk. Milk of deer and chamois were used to produce cheese (this was always performed by women). On the Alps there are many legends about children raised on deer's milk, of the magical transformation of women into (white) deer, of deer who speak...

Images of deer and reindeer are present from Anatolia to Carelia, from Valcamonica to the Spanish peninsula, as far as Scandinavia. Often they have symbols of fertility (solar and spiral symbols) between their horns, curiously similar if not identical. The breeding of deer (as indeed still of reindeer) was done in quite a rudimentary way. That was integrated and gradually changed into one of domesticated animals: goats, sheep, cows, horses, even if on particular occasions (ceremonies and rituals) the ancient tradition prevailed: it was impossible to abandon the deer, the sacred and divine animal on which a civilisation was based, overnight. And so deer masks for horses have been discovered in a mid-First Century Siberian tomb at Pazyrkian.

The deer was sacred to the German god Freir; and Cernunnos, the Celtic god of fertility, had deer horns on his head. But if we go further back in time, we find that the closest relationship is not between man and deer but between women and deer (or reindeer).

Artemide's priestess was represented on carts pulled by deer. The goddess herself was represented always with a deer, or on a cart pulled by them. But Artemide is only the Greek translation

of a more ancient divinity, maybe the most archaic adored by earlier peoples: the wood and Mistress of Animals ⁶⁶. To Diane in the whole Celtic world are associated the Matron, the three mothers, to which are dedicated a great numbers of inscriptions. Usually commissioned by women. Diane, East (Orient) Madonna, Mistress of The Buon Zogo is at the same time Mistress of animals as of witches. During the firsts confessions of the Sabbath, when the Inquisition has not yet created the stereotyped image of these ancient ecstatic cults, to the feasts participated also animals; and the Goddess (often named expressly as Diane, with the Latin name of Artemide) is the animals mistress, also expert in officinal herbs.

But Artemide was also associated to the animal sacred on the whole arctic area: the bear. Or better the she-bear.

The affection of the she-bear towards her cubs was famous in the whole ancient world: maybe for this reason she became a motherhood symbol. There was a Celtic goddess, in she-bear image, called Artio: epigraphs dedicated to her have been found on the Renan Palatinate near Buitburg, in the north of Germany, maybe in Spain. In Old Irish language, the bear is *art*; in Gallic, **art*.

The goddess image, in bear form first and then human, is associated to the Matres, and resemble the one of a sitting Demetra. The connection bear-goddess nurse-goddess arises also from the cult of Artemide Kalliste and Artemide Brauronia, and in the Crete's cults and myths.

It does exist the possibility of a linguistic relationship between *Artio*, *Artemis* (which signification is still unknown) and *Arthur*.

Shiites adored a goddess half woman and half snake that recall immediately the Melusine's myth, ancient divinity of woods, humiliated by the patriarchal society and forced to leave this world (but she'll bring with her the art and the magic knowledge). Goddess that is reproduced all over the Alps, often in a double tailed form ⁶⁷. Still today, on the Alps and surely much more in the traditional society, beasts represent entities with soul, sensibility and cleverness: sometime of wisdom higher than human. Anyway beings with which relationship was at least at the same

⁶⁶ Gaetano Forni, *Gli albori cit.*, p. 38, 43, 126, 128, 131, 140-141.

⁶⁷ Michela Zucca, *I draghi delle Alpi*, in AA.VV., by Michela Zucca, *frammenti di cultura alpina (e) esistere in quota*, report no. 18, Centro di ecologia alpina, Trento, 199, p. 109-111.

level; in some cases, the way of doing with them has traces of an old deification. In Fassa Valley, in old prehistoric villages, the building more protected by avalanches, landslides, and weather inclemency are not houses, but stables.

In a society where the man is often absent, in the antiquity is out for hunting, or in agriculture to mow, digging (the most heavy), are the family women the ones that take care of cows, sheep, goats and relative operations of milking, grazing, curing them with herbs when sick.

The mistress recognises each of her beast by the voice. Every cow has a proper name, specific ones. To talk with cows (often in a gentler way than with humans) is considered normal. "Beasts are well treated or better not having them at all". The animal surely has feelings, for which, in the limit of the possible, is correct not to hurt them ("all animals cries"); but not only: every animal has a proper different character, and should be treated in a certain manner. There is who spoke of "ethnographic interest (primitive) for this devotion, of "boolatry", as if to cows were attribute supernatural qualities. Alps is not exception.

It is also to be remembered that the relationship with animals was always very straight for these men and above all for these women; they were dividing the same territories and the same rooms. When there was a feast, the beasts free, were not hunted and surely these stayed near their mistresses hoping to receive some dainty, giving demonstration of joy and affection for the good food, participating to the balls. Animals were considered capable of intending and desiring, considered guilty even from tribunals: we think to the numerous proceedings institute, from a side to the other of Europe, against the processionary (that was an insect!).

"Alpine" slept with their animals since little ago: and not for room reasons⁽⁸⁾, but for a certain "devotion to the beast". Habit that always provoked scandal and pity in anthropologist and "outside observer".

But not only: during the course of millenniums the Alps farmers (but probably all farmers. Only that on the Alps some traditions arrived to our days) elaborated a communication system based on voice modulation, that reaches some frequencies (even very shrill) of a nearly singed rhythm, that is recognised by the animals even after years, and that is not possible to be repeated by other that haven't heard such kind of sounds since childhood.

For what concerns the "deification of the beasts" still at the beginning of our century, some famous scholars like Freud, Frazer and Robertson Smith were convinced that all religions were starting from belief that human kind descended from different animal species, and that separate clans and tribes were due to the fact that some were convinced to descend from wolves, other from snakes, other from foxes ...if not, directly from some plant species like some Celtic races. In consequence of this, these creatures were subject of adoration and not of disregard. But since from the beginning, in "erudite" groups, it started a counter mythology, that attributes to the Man a separate creation and destiny, not touched by the metamorphosis chain in which were always mixed the different components divine, human, vegetal and animals.

But only in the Judaic - Christian - Islamic tradition, with the myth of the Man created as God's image, it have been asserted with absolute determination the superiority of the Human Kind on their brothers and sisters with no speech. Likewise, because only the Man is similar to his Creator, God could be represented only as a man: beasts start to be discriminated, and therefore those men that in some way were with them mixed, too.

But if "boolatry" does exist, it is included in a functionalistic existence vision. Without the reindeer in the Arctic, without cows on the Alps men could not survive.

Witches coming from the cold

*Mother, tomorrow we draw,
we draw deservedly⁽⁹⁾!*

As per Ginzburg, "trait d'union" between Lapland sciamans and a variegated European witchcraft, alpine and Pyrenean especially,

⁽⁸⁾ Giacomo Doglio, Gerardo Unia, *Abitare le Alpi*, Cuneo, L'Arciere, 1980, p. 53 and foll. And Arnolf Niederer, *Economia e forme tradizionali di vita nelle Alpi*, in *Storia e civiltà delle Alpi*, by Paul Guichonnet, vol II, Milano, Jaka Book, p. 74-75.

⁽⁹⁾ Saying said on Deaths day by the children still today in Roana (Vr), among the cimbres communities, that testimonies the antiques believing yet alive on the Mother Earth. By Bruno Schweizer, *Le credenze dei Cimbri sulle forze della natura*, Taucias Gareida, Giazza, Verona, 1984, cit. in *Oltre - Rivista di cultura integrata per la sostenibilità ambientale*, n° 5, march 2001, Italia Crea, Milano, p. 32.

forgotten into space and time, that speak mythic different languages, but tied up by strict relationships, (of ritual behaviour and of beliefs, and of way of living) was made by the travel of the alive to dead world.

But actually similitude go more far.

The mountains pastures, "where air is lighter", can surely be associated to the plains of the extreme north, because to rise in quote, apart some endemism bio-geographic tied up to particular events (glacier retire, etc.) is as to risen in latitude. The enormous extensions of grazing ground of common property are what remain of the ancient tribes that colonised the Alps, on which no ground was private and in which the social differences were very shaded: these characteristics associate alpine to the old nomad population of North and of East. These spaces are part of a physic and environmental dimension but also fantastic, in which the woman, and the witch-woman-matriarch, exercises a not discussed power.

The ecstasies of the goddess followers conduce irresistibly to these of the sciamans, men and women but above all women, of Siberia, up to the Hokkaido island and the Japanese Ainu,⁽¹⁰⁾ and of Lapland⁽¹¹⁾. In both we find the same elements: the flight of the soul to the dead world, under animal resemblance, on animal horseback or other magical vehicles. The strong sexual symbolism. The Lapland sciamans batons can be related to the sweep handle with which the witches declared to fly to the Sabbaths.

The Sabbath folkloristic nucleus - magic fly and metamorphosis - seems to be extracted from a remote, very remote Eurasian substrate. In night flights described by witches and wizards of Valais, processed in '400 and different from the stereotype of Inquisition, it can be recognised the echo of an ecstatic cult of Celtic origin first and then Nordic. And so in numberless confessions of witches and wizards from a side to the other of the Old Continent.

The religion that stay at the basis of these believes looks extraordinary similar, on Alps and North Europe, both for believes than for rituality, and for what concern the conformation of the sacred spots. Principal divinity is always a mother goddess that is the earth and the whole universe⁽¹²⁾, and, among Samis, is represented by the Sun. Even in a place flat as Lapland, she is adored principally on hills, the "Sacred Mountains"⁽¹³⁾, and marked by stones: we can in fact say that the habit to define a sacred spot with the menhir, or with the cromlech, is diffused

from Lapland to Siberie, from Pyrenees to the Alps to the Danube basin and Mongolia⁽¹⁴⁾. Rocks that, on the Grigions, are still called *moma velha*, the ancient mother, and should be kissed by the young shepherds that bring the cows to the high pastures, to avoid mountain dangers. The Sami's reindeer shepherds told me that "these stones", called *sieidi* in their language, speaks to them, gives councils, on personal matter but also on reindeer breeding, as for instance, where to bring the to graze, or how to save them from an epidemic. Each of them, goes to that place in which the sacred stones are known by everybody, but they have also some personal ones in a special place put by some ancestor they keep occulted but of sons or close relations. It is just around these old stones that the old sciamanic religion of the northern population is slowly organising again, after the Christian persecution first and Marxist next (in soviet and Chinese versions).

The sacred spots of the Alps, Celtic or pre-Celtic, seems copied on these of Sami's, and of the northern population. They adored their divinities in places signed by waterfalls, enormous rock, stones, caves, springs, lakes and round sacrificial places⁽¹⁵⁾, marked by stones (cromlech), by paling, enclosure walls etc. probably the sacred disk is connected with the religion of the Mother Goddess: because the first enclosure was

⁽¹⁰⁾ Kira van Deusen, *The Flying Tiger: Women Shamans and Storytellers of the Amur*, Mc Gill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, Canada, 2001; Takashi Irimoto, *Ainu Shamanism*, in AA.VV., by Takako Yamada and Takashi Irimoto, *Circumpolar Animism and Shamanism*, Hokkaido University Press, Sapporo, Giappone, 1997, p. 31, 42; Bo Lundmark, *Rijukuo-Maia and Silbo-Gammoe: toward the Question of Female Shamanism in the Saami Area*, in AA.V., by Tore Ahlback, *Sami Religion*, Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stoccolma, Svezia, 1987, p. 158-169.

⁽¹¹⁾ AA.VV. by Tore Ahlback, *Sami Religion* cit.

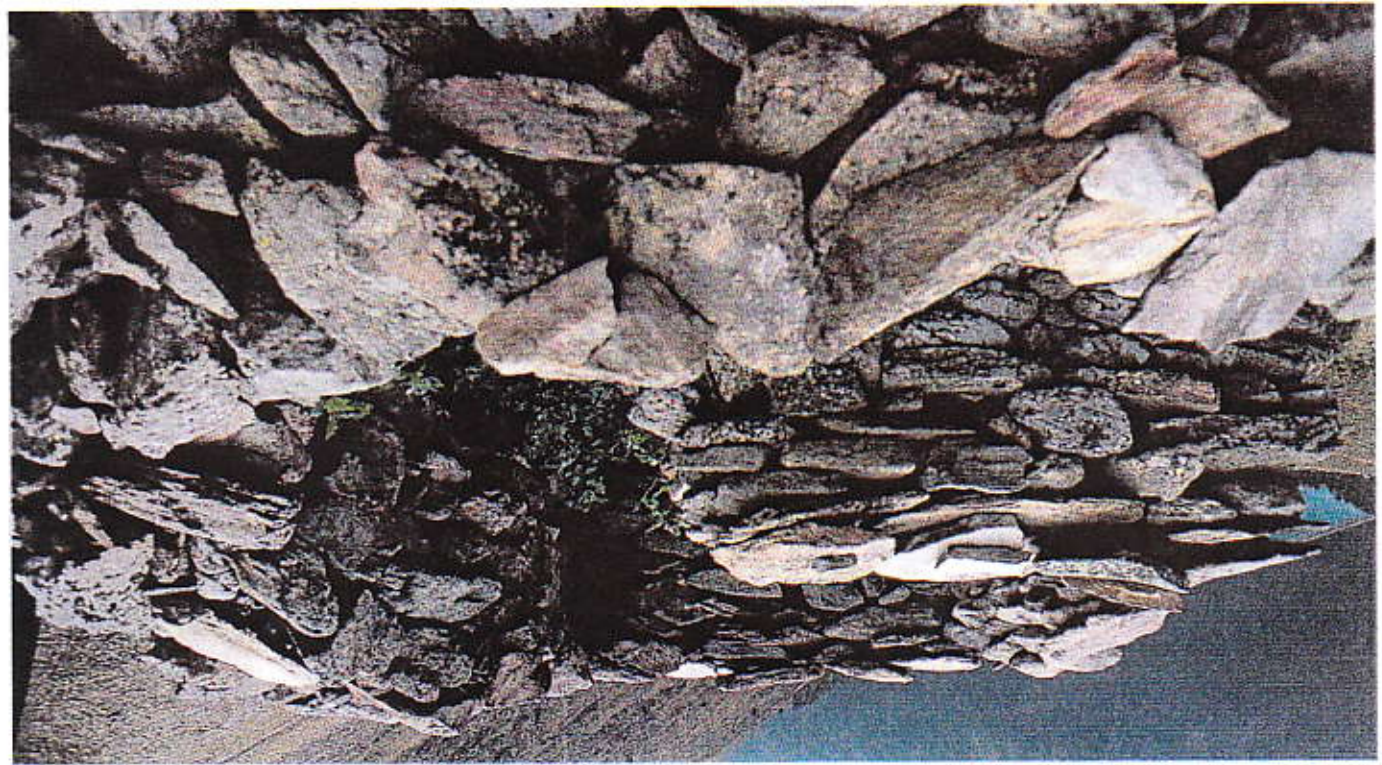
⁽¹²⁾ Takako Yamada, *The Concept of Universe and Spiritual Beings Among Contemporary Yakut Shamans*, in AA.VV., by Takako Yamada and Takashi Irimoto, *Circumpolar Animism* cit., p. 218

⁽¹³⁾ Olog Petersson, *Sami Ideas about the realm of the Dead*, in AA.VV., *Sami Religion* cit., p. 72

⁽¹⁴⁾ Nacunbuhe, *Stone Worship in Mongolian Shamanism*, in AA.VV., a cura di Takako Yamada e Takashi Irimoto, *Circumpolar Animism* cit., p. 255-259

⁽¹⁵⁾ Ornlly Vorren, *Sacrificial Sites, Types and Function*, in AA.VV., by Tore Ahlback, *Sami Religion* cit., p. 94-109; AA.VV., by Louise Backman and Ake Hultkrantz, *Saami Pre-Christian Religion*, *Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion* n° 25, Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm, Sweden, 1985.

Fig. 5 - Stone Spiral: ancient place of prehistoric sacredness on the Similauu Massif, Alto-Adige. Photo by Gianni Nicolini.



Figs. 3 & 4 - Front and back of a Sacred Stele from the Venosta Valley in Alto-Adige, which had been used as part of the altar in a Christian church. Hidden for centuries it was accidentally found only a few years ago. Photo by Gianni Nicolini.

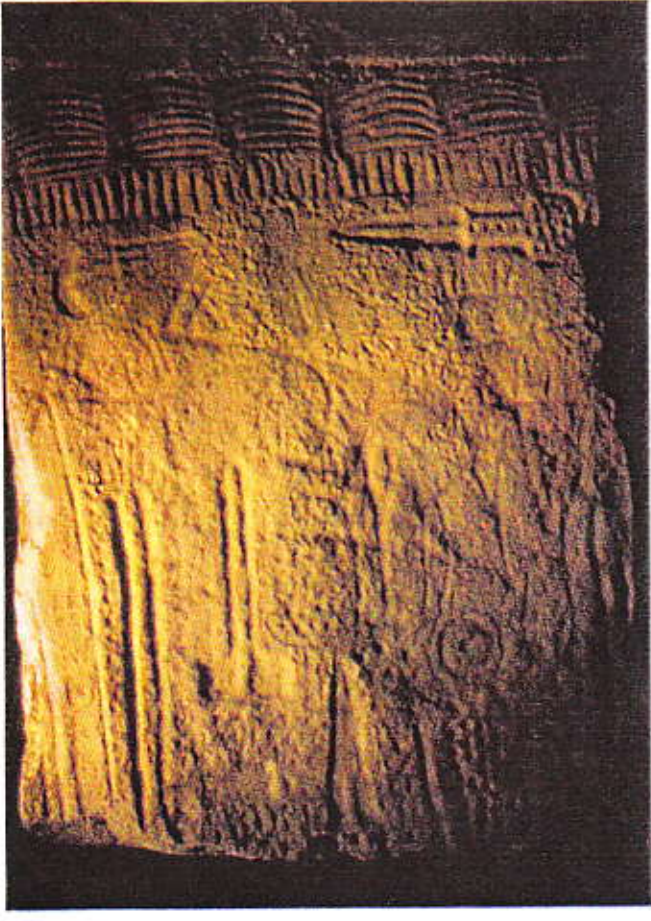
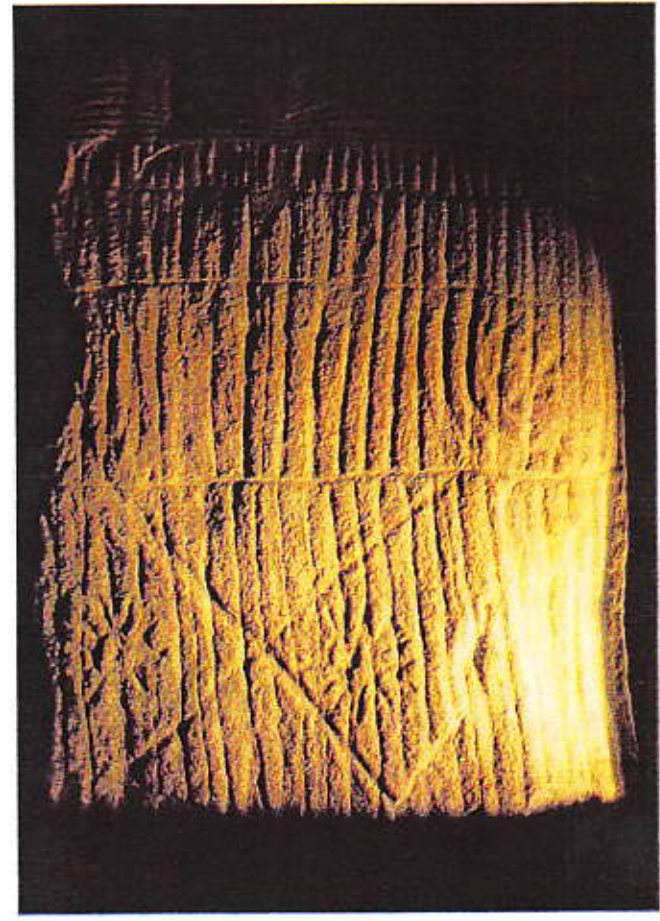




Fig. 6 - Sacred place on the Kola Peninsula, now Russia. Photo by Vladimir Kuznetson, with the permission of Leif Rantala, University of Rovaniemi, Finland.

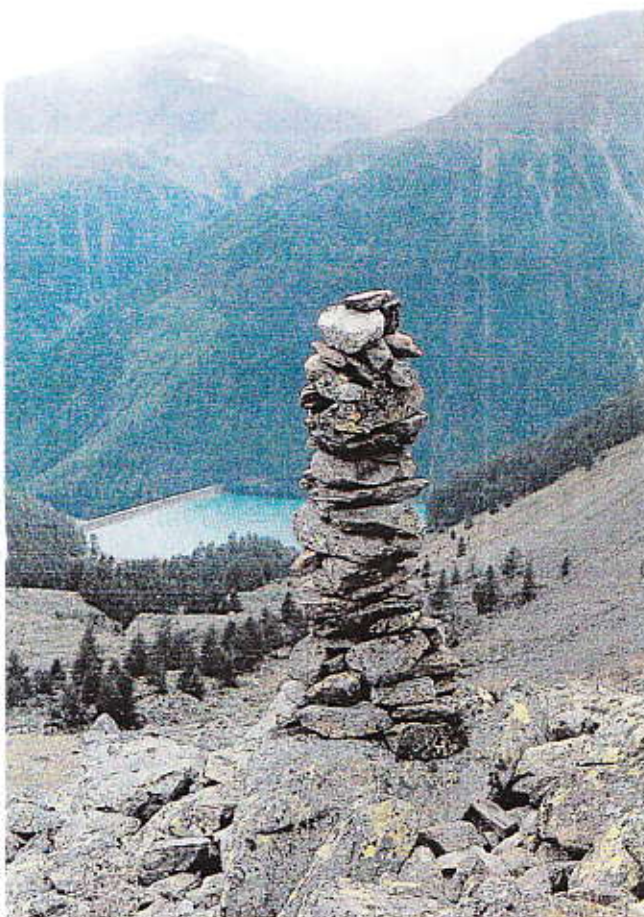


Fig. 7 - Sacred cippus built by herdsmen while carrying out the millenary transhumance of sheep from one side of the Similaun Massif to the other, between Austria and Italy, where the Similaun Ice Man was found.

the one of the birth, place of life but also of death, in which it was performed the mystery of procreation, from which men were definitely excluded. Symbols round, filled with rays and solar drawings (we interpreted as solar), have been cut, for centuries and millenniums, on the spouses chests, that should bring children; on the houses soils, that marked the border between the house inside protected and the outside unknown and exposed to cold, dark, night's spirits, from which to defend oneself; on houses ridgepole (and in the nomads tents), that give men a warm and sure refuge: another uterus in which to be cured and protected by the Mother.

Spirits are everywhere, but the most important are these of the sacred trees and of the springs above all if these are under the earth in caves. In the dark caves inside the earth, from which water springs out, tied up to female symbolism of fertility, often, in both cultures, was occulted a being that successively will be demonised, but that will never lost his positive power: the dragon. The most damned beautiful, strong, extremely strong beast, warm (spites



Fig. 8 - The Witches' Stone, Venosta Valley, Alto-Adige. Photo by Gianni Nicolini.

fire) and cold (is a reptile) at same time, represents sexual and generative qualities of woman: irresistible, consent to the world to continue its existence. Since ever, it is together with the goddess, then to the Virgin, or the Saint that have substituted the archaic female divinity in the Christian iconography.

Another myth that relates the Alps peoples with these of the extreme North is the presence of the Wild Man ¹¹⁶. Nude, strangely red is covered only by a skin on the flanks; bearded and longhaired, brandishing a club, or an uprooted tree, protect Rovaniemi and Lapland. It is documented, and represented on the Jubilee coin of King Charles IX of Sweden in 1606 (at this age Lapland was part of Swede). A few know, who this really was: among the Sami, is remembered as Varaldenommai, god of fertility of the men and of reindeer. He is represented covered by the blood of his reindeer, while he holds a young

birch with roots towards the sky ¹¹⁷.

Actually, even Sancta Claus, is the transposition of the mythic Ancestor ¹¹⁸, wild not because not civilised (on the contrary, he is a civilisation hero) but because he comes from woods; this means from another world.

The Wild Man is present, as mythological person, on the whole Siberie, up to the Sakhalin Island and to the Japanese Ainu civilisation. And he is not only similar aesthetically and acts the same way of his alpine equivalent: he also end in the same way: angry with humanity because upset nature (reindeer and fish), return to his divine world from which he comes, this means that he disappear ¹¹⁹.

The Sabbath the drug and the sciamanic ecstasy.

In Shiite diviner are a lot...

The Shiites then pick up the seeds of this hemp, and go under the blanket and then threw the seed on the red-hot stones; these make smoke and produce a warm vapour so hot to be superior to any other Hellenic vapour bath. Shiites scream for pleasure... ¹²⁰.

The concept of Arctic North is at the same time ecological and mythical. The word derives from the Greek arktos Bear. And the myth is not easy to be destroyed. Because it is born in very much extended territories, it took enormous time to form itself, elaborate, refine, and then be ready to be transmitted to a long chain of men generations. Superficially, these traditions transformed themselves into history and geography: actually they remain inside, in the archetype memory, in art, in hope, in dreams, in hallucinations, in the fears.

¹¹⁶ Michela Zucca, *Chi è salvatico si salva: l'uomo selvatico sulle Alpi*, in AA VV., by Michela Zucca, *La civiltà alpina - R - esistere in quota*. IV Vol., L'immaginario, Centro di ecologia alpina, Trento, 1998.

¹¹⁷ Odd Mathis Haetta, *The Ancient Religion and Folk Beliefs of the Sami*, Fagtrikk Alta as, Alta Museum, 1994, p. 15.

¹¹⁸ Phyllis Siefker, *Santa Klaus Last of the Wild Men*, Mefarland and Company, Jefferson NC, 1997.

¹¹⁹ Takashi Irimoto, *Ainu Shamanism*, in AA VV., by Takako Yamada and Takashi Irimoto, *Circumpolar Animism cit.*, Hokkaido University Press, Sapporo, Giappone, 1997, p. 26-27.

¹²⁰ Erodoto, *Storie cit.*



Fig.9 - Nganasan Shamans of the Taymir Peninsula. Photo by Alexander Milovsky. By kind concession of the Arctic Centre of Rovaniemi, Finland.

In Kalevala, the epic poem of Finnic, the hero goes to Lapland to find his spouse, that should be asked to the Queen (not to the King) of Pohjola, powerful sciaman. Pohjola is called also Pimentola, dark land, Untamola, land of Untamo, iced spot, in which heroes are devoured. When the mother (always her) tries to forbid the son to go to North, she says as follows:

you do not know the language of Turja, nor the magic idiom of Lapland

Intending not the language itself, the usual speech, but the ability to put on magic and spell,

considered peculiar for Pohjola.

Since some years ago, all Sami were considered wizards; it was discouraged to patronise them to the Christian people, because they could put on spells, and, women, to enchant. Since some years ago it was thought (and read on specialised print) that the ancient Sami religion and the magic rituals of drums have been uprooted, and therefore disappeared, between the XVII and the XVIII century, in consequence of civilisation. Laplander practised the sciamanism up to 1687, when, last in Europe, were converted to Christianity by evangeliser of no pity that hanged those not abjuring the old faith (that

substituted monks, there since the year 1000, which tried to educate them with less bloody methods). Conversions continued, registered on the church books, up to the XIX century. This means that Lapland is the territory where the most ancient archaic civilisation has lived the longest: it means that it maintains the pre Christians roots. This can signify that evidences gathered and the confrontation we can do between the alpine witchcraft and the Lapp sciamanic ones could bring to interesting results.

Analogies between the Sabbath, the witches feast, and the sciamanic trip of the Lapp wizards, are numerous. First of all, the way to obtain the ecstasy: drugs, music, dance. A lot of reports from the North, written by travellers as Giuseppe Acerbi (Mantua end of '700) or by priests, tell of the "*Amanita Muscaria*" use (the white spotted red mushroom) to reach the trance status by sciamans. Mushroom was eaten dried or fresh, or it was absorbed as active principle concentrated in the urine of whom has eaten it some hours before, as modality still presently used by some people of Southern America with "psilocibine".

The use of "*Amanita Muscaria*" to reach the trance is surely very old. Language's reasons let believe its use at least 4000 years before Christ, when the single common Uralic language exist. A group of words that define the "*Amanita Muscaria*", mushrooms in general, the consciousness lose, the sciamanic drums, in ugro-finnish and samoiede languages would derive from a single root.

Anthropologically cultures pro mushrooms are distinguished by these anti mushrooms: probably the mushrooms pickers are the heirs of an ancient sciamanic heritage, in which these vegetables were even divined. "*Muscaria*" is still now the magic mushrooms in excellence on the Alps; it appears in fairy tales illustrations, and obviously, into witches ointments, terribly active principles mixture blended with grease, to be absorbed by skin in areas with many capillary vessels and near the lymphatic glands (armpits, vaginal mucosity, the haunches and elbow inside, neck).

Green witch's ointment: receipt dated 1737

Mix drops of belladonna, giusquiamo, amanita muscaria, aconite,, datura, digitalis, poppy and conium with grease ; smear the ointment on face, armpits, hands. You'll fly ⁽²¹⁾.



Fig. 10 - Nganasan Shamans of the Taymir Peninsula. Photo by Alexander Milovsky. By kind concession of the Arctic Centre of Rovaniemi, Finland.

This receipt, of the XVIII century, testimony the permanence on the Alps of very old practices, that many scholars considered cancelled with the Inquisition and the Trento's Council. And it demonstrates also knowledge and use of the same psycotropes, on our mountains and on the arctic steppe.

At the same way unquestionable the affinity between *amanita muscaria* and toad. Even in Alaska frogs, very rare, are associated with sciamanism ⁽²²⁾. Still today, toads are often represented on the most beautiful mushroom, and are usually represented in the gardens in this position.

⁽²¹⁾ This and other receipts of the witches oilment, are reported by Martha Canestrini, *Orti in Tirolo e in Trentino*, supplement to n. 21 of *Arunda*, Silandro (Bz) p. 97.

⁽²²⁾ Ann Fienup-Riordan, *The Human and in Yup'ik Eskimo Iconography and Oral Tradition*, in AA. VV., by Takako Yamada and Takashi Irimoto *Circumpolar Animism* cit., p. 180.



Fig. 11 - Nganasan Shamans of the Toymir Peninsula. Photo by Alexander Milovsky. By kind concession of the Arctic Centre of Rovaniemi, Finland.

For a long time it was a mystery. Since when it have been discovered that the toad's skin contains the "bufadielonyde", anaesthetic chemical substance which action is 90 times stronger of cocaine, synthesised and isolated a few years ago by G.R. Pettit of Arizona's University, in a research done together with the Miami's University.

These are very complicate chemical structures, very strong local's anaesthetics, which

action on the human heart is similar to digitalis.

The witchcraft knowledge of the natural essences was so deep to allow to specialists the use of very dangerous substances, above all on organism that were in a state of chronically starvation, both for therapeutic action than hallucinogen, to "open the door of perception" and "to enter another dimension".

To talk with the spirit and to understand their will or only to forget the reality made of



Fig. 12 - Poppy crop in Alta Val Senales, Alto-Adige, which bears witness to an ancient use of psychotropic substances. Photo by Gianni Nicolini.

sorrow, misery and hunger, they caused themselves a hallucinate state in which they were doing a "real trip over there".

Is Adam Lonicer that, first, describes scientifically the *Claviceps purpurea*, called spurred rye, in year 1582. But in the medical popular culture, above all female, spurred rye was part since very long. Its properties were well known and controlled: midwives gave it to accelerate the labours. In Old French is called *siegle ivreo* (drunk rye), in German *Tollkor*, crazy corn. It did exist a "rye's mother", *Roggenmutter*, image definitely sciamanic, associated to rye's wolf and to werewolf¹²³. Still today in Amazon, wizards speak of active principle of the hallucinatory agent as "mother" (mother of *ayahuasca*, for example). The hypothesis that spurred rye was consciously used to alter conscience is more believable from the richness of these mythic associations.

With hallucinogen assumption, while in catalepsy or sleep, the soul leaves the body: in other words is entered a modified state of conscience,

that for a sciamanic culture, is characterised by the trip or by the fly. On a sweep handle, for the Alpen witches; these tell (above all in the most ancient confessions) also of flies on animals horseback, as he-goat, or quite in animal transmutation. Also in arctic territories, the sciamans 's soul, transformed in wolf or bear, reindeer fish or on animal horseback (horse or camel), that in the rite is represented by the drum, abandons the inanimate body. After a certain time more or less long, the sciamans come out from catalepsy to tell onlookers what have he seen, or learned, what did he done in the other world. Olaus Magnus tell us that Lapp Wizards brought back a ring or a knife as a proof of the travel made. Same for the witches: they said they really have participate to the Sabbath, to have met the "Mistress of Buon Zogo" with all animal races and to have received from her knowledge and advises on officinal herbs.

¹²³ Carlo Ginzburg, *Storia cit.*, p. 284-287.

The evil comes later, first with auxiliary spirit, then as infernal god: but imposed and created after tortures.

On sciamans drums has been recognised, in many cases, a map of dead land. But also protagonists of the ecstatic cult documented in every corner of the European continent considered themselves, and were considered, the intermediaries between dead and alive. In both cases the ride on animals horseback expressed symbolically the ecstasy: the temporary death proved by the exit, under animal resemblance, of the soul from the body.

Another analogy between the two civilisations concerns the use and the typology of the masks wear during the sciamanic rites: masks that present a large quantity of similitude among them. For example, the presence of horns, characteristic also of the Celtic divinity of Cernunnos, animal's god, and of different charts of prehistoric pre Celtic sciamans. The obscene expression, the tongue out: that if from one side alludes to an exasperate sexuality, from another seems to be a desire of tasting everything, to eat

up the whole world. Same for eyes. Wide opens, no expression, spirited bloodshot eyes, open in front of the unbelievable vision of the spirits world, that comes from inside, from themselves, caused by the hallucinogen, not from touchable objects; open to the interpretation of the unknown, of the indescribable, of the unbearable: the nature's amorality⁽²⁴⁾.

Because the beings world is not good nor bad, it is, and stop: the sciamans 's duty (and of the witch) consists in ensuring the community 's survival, by all means: from the propitiator sacrifice of a living being to infanticide of children that cannot be transferred, or that community cannot bear.

It is one of cultural facts that shocks the not animist religion members, atheist included, to see as who believe in spirits does accept naturally the idea and practice of death. Parents in front of their children dead for starving or ill-

⁽²⁴⁾ Joan Halifax, *Shaman: the Wounded Healer*, Thames and Hudson, Londra, 1982, p. 32 e 82.

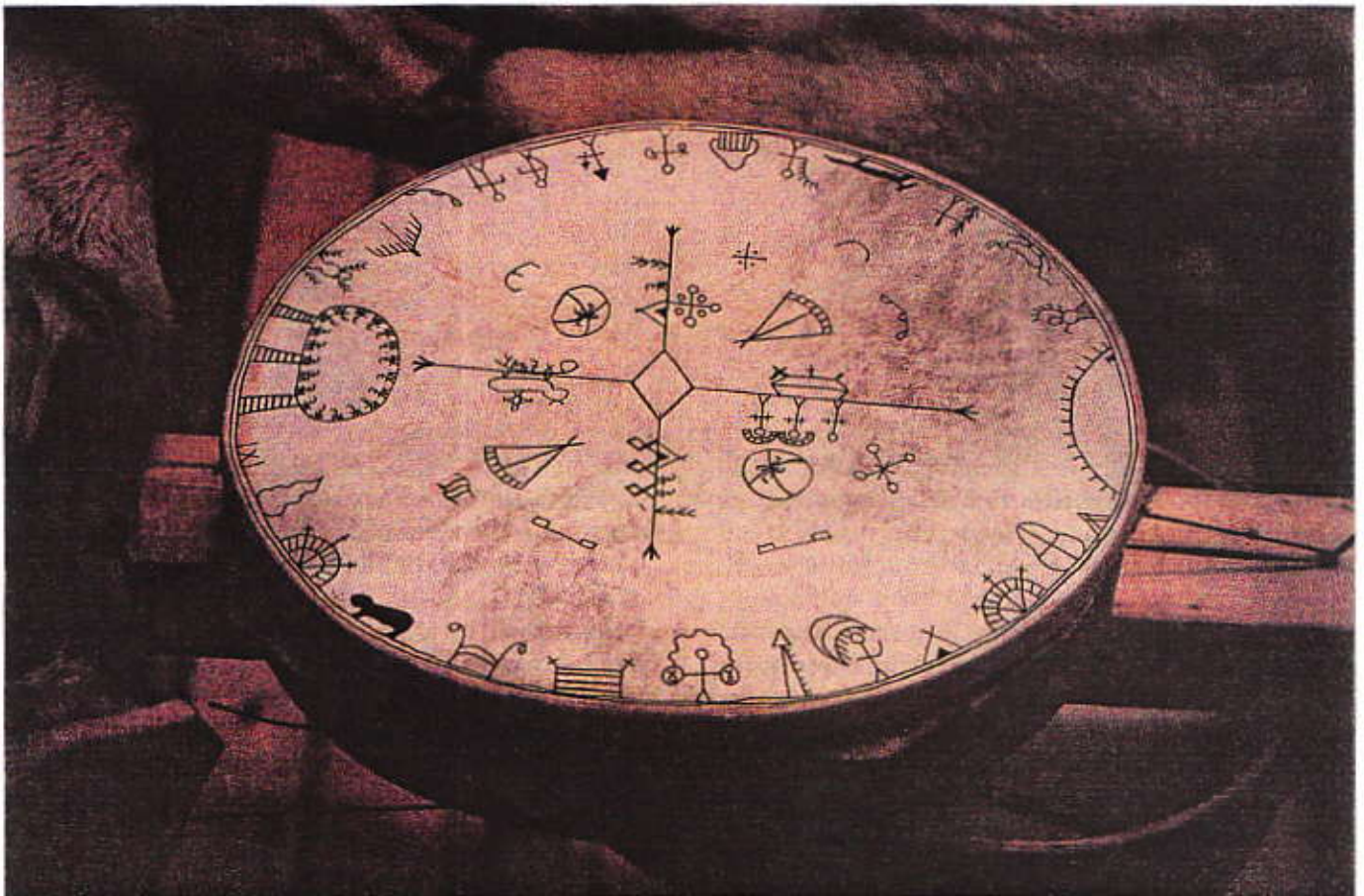


Fig. 13 - A reproduction Sami drum. Photo by Gianni Nicolini.



Fig. 14 - Nganasan Shaman of the Taymir Peninsula. Photo by Alexander Polyakov. By kind concession of the Arctic Centre of Rovaniemi, Finland.

ness, not only does not rebel, but liquidate the lost with short rites, while there are ceremonies very complicate and long for the death of adults and important members of the community.

We remind that also in the European and alpine countries, when the poverty and dependence of environment were high, and the Christianity was only starting to scratch the previous beliefs, the death of weak individual, when was not deliberately provoked (with lack of care if not with an proper homicide) was lived as a heavy necessity, that was not causing too many remorse.

Yoikos e Jodlers: trances music

*He sat on the joy rock,
on the singing's stone* ⁽²⁵⁾

After assumption of hallucinogen, the sciamanic reunion, so as the witches Sabbath, go on with music. There are particular rhythms: based on percussion. It seems that, rated on the inside noises (the blood pulsation, for example: the hearth beating), the drums sounds repeated for hours, are more than other is, inductive to trance. Maybe this the reason for which on the Alps, the Church and the State's defender were so much against the percussion instruments, that are documented both in iconography than in written evidences, commanding their destruction.

In fact they did not survive: were too big to be occulted, as other instruments forbidden as the "ghironda" that saved itself for many generations in hay-lofts and "occitane" cellars.

⁽²⁵⁾ *Kalevala*, runo III, Mondadori, Milano, 1988, p. 58.

See as Virdung, in his "General Music", in year 1511, describes these ancient drums, of which in alpine popular tradition, have been not saved even the memory:

they are enormous rumbling drums. They disturb old and respectable people, the sick, those that inside the abbey dedicate themselves to study, to literature, to pray, and I think and am convinced that the Evil have produced and invented them...⁽²⁶⁾.

The Lapp sciaman is the agent of his own trance, which is obtained by playing the drum: is not other playing for him. For this reasons it is used in conscience the rhythm acceleration. Sound can also vary in intensity, highness and timbre, depending on the effect desired (on themselves or on public), obeying to music rules transmitted for different functions, symbolic descriptive.

Hoarse breaths, barks, sigh, whistles, screams, invocations, panting, are the signal of the spirit's presence. The sciaman tell what see, and fix in his memory, thanks to the music, a very long text, and at the same time he get magic energy. Every sciaman has a proper personal song to invoke spirits. Often, language is a secret "totemic" imitation of the animals screams⁽²⁷⁾.

The Finnish songs are of two kind: of narration as the Kalevala, and of magic, these of sciamans. But often distinction is not so neat.

The Lapp melody is exclusively a vocal art, focalised on *yoikos*, very old ceremony 's song, which significant is lost. The *yoik* play a very important role on the sciamanic ritual. It was also a way to reach the trance. This was the reason for which the missionaries forbid the *yoikos* even if they do not contain a real text. Often it is a sequence of few words correlate among them, to which are superimposed vocalism similar to these of *Jodlers*, that remind these of the animals. These monosyllabic vocalism, that appears of no meaning, actually express the opinion of the singer about the person of which is spoken, or sat in front of him.

It seems that this strange sound wants to deliberately cover, occult the words that for no reason were revealed to strangers. Probably because originally they were magic formulas, that transmitted us the echo of the most archaic life condition of the human kind. Usually the *yoikos* were composed for small communities, sometime for a large family, in which also the smallest allusion, totally not understandable by others,

could let understand the signification. And so they became esoteric secret songs, still today, their texts are not revealed to strangers. Moreover the singer not always understand the names and words signification: simply repeats them as he heard them being sung by the olds; but in this way they survived.

In this view, the particular modality of Sami's singing, represents a level extremely sophisticated of music art. Thorough sounds and trills feelings are performed: techniques should be high. Also because are imitated and expressed the nature's sounds: animal's voices, sounds of water, but also sun arising end setting.... To invoke the spirit's help, to talk with the invisible.

Only the alpen *jodlers* can be compared to the Lapp *yoikos*. The firsts were originally magic songs that did not described but expressed nature and transcendent, often imitating the animal's voice. Even words are similar, even if I cannot make suppositions of a common origin.

The animal's knowledge is so deep, among the people of the Alps, to be their great wisdom. Poor of technology, they carry on all their experience on the animals world. For this reason the *Jodlers* typical song of the pastures was believed to be originally a recall for animals. And it was diffused on an area much larger than the present one (for example also in Valtellina and Val Chiavenna). To make music imitating not human voices is not a prerogative only of the shepherd peoples: but, while the hunter of the past produced noises in various ways, both for attract than for frighten and then kill animals, the shepherds were trying to calm the beasts, to attract and contract an alliance with them. Music was a help. If a goat got lost on the rocks, hearing the flute's sound could find its way back. If two herds meet at a springs and mixed, the shepherds sang each "*leit motiv*" and the animals followed him. For this they repeat endlessly the same motive, monotonic and familiar. For who is not used these singsongs are terribly uniform, very similar to the high quote plains. Even if they reached a technical execution level very high (the trill, the tir singing) very difficult to imitate, they seem out of tune for who is used to the harmonised music, modern. This art typical of Alps, tied, in its origin to animals, exactly contrary of

⁽²⁶⁾ C. Sachs, *Storia degli strumenti musicali*, Mondadori, Milano 1980, p. 388

⁽²⁷⁾ Gregorio Bardini, *Musica e sciamanesimo in Eurasia*, Società editrice Barbarossa, Milano, 1996, p. 12-13, 19.



Fig. 15 - Nganasan Shamans of the Taymir Peninsula. Photo by Alexander Polyakov. By kind concession of the Arctic Centre of Rovaniemi, Finland.

art and beauty intended by the "high culture", are once more women the best, because starts the chorus, give the acute, dragging always higher the singers voices. And remember the songs.

In Lapland, the sciamans singing assumed the character of a performance set in music of the spirits names, but the Christian persecution made stop the public exhibitions. Sciamans were forced to silence, these magic names become secret, and then, gradually forgotten by the successive Lapp educated generations. But melodies remained, because constitute the music nourishment of people, that needs spiritual food, that satisfy the mind, more than belly. Names of spirits forbidden were changed with these of the common people. The propitiatory ritual of the singing slowly disappeared, to be replaced by descriptions of normal men situations, which were not forbidden by Christian laws. Only in these last years, deep researches are made to relate the yoikos to the sciamanic culture.

Sexuality, sin, trance and Sabbath

Alpine witches and arctic sciamans absolve the same important function: they cure mental disease, or physical, that often derives from a cause connected with the sexuality, considered mortal sin by the imposed Christian morality, without asking or discussing on the causes of pain. The reasons of pain are always laid on a spirit's malevolency. Moreover, women of animist tribes has not only the Christian to fight with, that pretended to reduce them to a simple reproductive role and then condemned every not fecundating practice and whatever use not generative for sex. The Buddhist monks that tried to convert (and educate) those population of sciamanic religion as Mongolia, Altai, northern Japan, often preceded by centralised powerful states like China or Japan, believed as the Christians colleagues that the innate female nature were the one of sin.

Not marrying, abortion, abandon or kill a

baby, were all actions that would condemn for the eternity and thrown to the deep Inferno. But seen the condition of nature in which they should survive, abortion, antifecundative and infanticide were commonly done. Moreover the animist conception does not divide so much life from death, considering one consequence of the other; and in case of need the elimination of weak, of useless or simply the abandon of those in surplus, were not considered crimes but consequences due to necessities. The centralised power, instead, condemned severely what normally was done: but the institutional religion was organised and focused around men interests, not women's.

Witches and sciamans offer comfort, relief, and redemption to suffering people. The "itako",



Fig. 16 - Slovenian carnival mask, Sculpted in wood. Private collection, Trento. Photo by Marco Simonini.

the blind sciaman of the Japanese Ainu, call the spirits of the dead children. Mothers can hear the children voices and usually, the children souls do not reproach, but console them with nice words and affection. In tears, women ask for their forgiveness: and the sciaman alleviate the psychological pain and relief them from remorse of their sexuality ⁽²⁸⁾.

Witches and sciaman are strictly connected with sex. Witches told to be demon lovers. But also the "buriat" male sciamans are very intimate relationship with their guide spirits, so intimate to arrive to the sexual relationship. On the other hand the entire sciamanic affair consists in playing the drums at a speed always more intense, up to reach the trance with symbolic movements miming the sexual act ⁽²⁹⁾.

It is one of the principal ingredients of sciamanic sitting, above all if conducted by women. The exasperate sexuality find an explanation in old fertility rituals, necessary to reproduce the human kind, of animals but also of plants, and therefore to save the world from ruin and ensure food for everybody. Thorough imitation (no doubt that once was not only imitation, due to the fact that the witches Sabbath became often an orgy), it is meant the sympathetic magic, inducted all organism of the worlds, to reproduce themselves through joining, to prevent the community from extinction. Extenuation that both on Alps as on the arctic steppe, should be a feared eventuality because of easy realisation. For starving, cold, abandon, sick, or foray. Or also for "melancholy": depression, which brings to death or suicide, was a well-known disease in both cultures. On the Alps, it was believed it was even contagious; and in this way doctors talk about up to the XIX century.

The Russian anthropologist Anutshin, which worked on field in the extreme North at the beginning of the century, published in 1914 this exceptional testimony, gathered during the festivity of 10 June 1907 in Kaljagino's district.

The Sciamanic sitting is hold by a woman, Salda, which starts singing a song:

⁽²⁸⁾ Takefusa Susamori, *Healing Arts of the Itako*, in AA.VV., by Takako Yamada e Takashi Irimoto, *Circumpolar Animism* cit., p. 45, 53.

⁽²⁹⁾ Mihaly Hoppal, *Animistic Mythology and Helping Spirits in Siberian Shamanism*, in AA.VV., by Takako Yamada and Takashi Irimoto, *Circumpolar Animism* cit., p. 201.



Fig. 17 - Slovenian carnival mask. Sculpted in wood. Private collection. Trento. Photo by Marco Simonini.

Men and women, look at what is doing the old Salda...
Girls and boys, look...
Am I a stranger for you?...No, I am your mother...
I lived a lot...
I feed a lot of people: some of them are still alive,
Other is dead...
Give something to old Salda, she will well dance...
She has alas danced well...
Hey, men, give me some vodka...
Hey, women, threw some wood into fire...

The people around give her vodka, and added wood to fire. After having drunk, Salda start to scream and jump wildly around the fire, holding the breasts with the hands, and continuing singing.

Burn well, fire...
The fire is hot, the smoke is bitter...
The front is hot for the fire; the back is cold for wind...

The front is hot for man; the back is cold for ground...
The bird has much brain, the bear ha much brain...
Why am I not a bird, why not a bear...
Every night the sun sinks into the earth and comes back...
My old man was a good worker; my old man was as the Sun...
You don't remember him, are you not his children?
My old man was good to make me warm...
He was doing so and I was doing so...

At this point the old woman started to make gestures that recalled the sexual act.

Now that the old man is gone, I became as frozen ground...
Hey you, those still make sex, why stay there seated?
Come here, dance together...

After some calls, a part of the women reach Solda and start moving still with reserve. Men and girls do not participate to dance; they sit down, talk, smoke, sometime laugh at the obscene words of the old woman that moves as if possessed.

If my vulva had teeth, could cut all penis, so that they could remain there forever...

This kind of activity continued up to dawn. The ring of the dancers was moving in clock way (also sabbatical dances are in rings).

Due to this story, it is reachable a cultural syncretic substrate, which ties sexuality to the clan's relationship to the year cycle, to vegetation, to reproduction. Sexuality is sacral and projected into universe. The audience spares feelings with the rest of world, during moon rotation, which is monthly and annual⁽³⁰⁾.

Sami women, yesterday and today

To speak of Sami women I'll recall data that US Anthropologist Myrdene Anderson, of Purdue University, West Lafayette, gathered

⁽³⁰⁾ Juha Pentikainen, *Shamanism and Culture*, Etnika Co. Tampere, Finlandia, Gummerus Printing, 1998, p. 53-56



Fig. 18 - Carnival mask from the Matisone Valleys, Gorizia, Italy. Sculpted in wood by Silvana Pulfera. Private collection. Trento. Photo by Marco Simonini.

during years of job on field between the 1972 and the 1980 in the North Norway. Territories in which, even the Government efforts to transform the reindeer breeding in a meat industry, integrated with the market economy and based on money, and therefore managed by men only, the women's efforts and determination have allowed, until now, the survival of an economy of subsistence diversified, that maintained environment and culture.

Because a civilisation survive if maintain the economical ecological system which originated it, which nourished it, which raised it : when reindeer will be considered only for slaughter meat, Sami will die.

First of all must be said that if something of the ancient Sami's religion survived, it could be thanks to the cultural resistance of women. Because, while men, considered head of family, were forced to participate to the Christian ceremony and therefore to mass, an to bring children to get sacraments, their wives found easily excuses to stay at home, and continue to pray their spirits as always done: distance from church, the snow, the cold, the children...

Actually, the state religion did not consider the women, gave them not importance; to priests men were enough, they had to christen children with godfather and godmother. But missionaries have not understand that in the Sami society who imposed the name was not the father but the mother; they did not understand the importance of the name in an animist culture. So was the ceremony of christens in Lapland: father brought the baby to church, and he was christened with holy water. At home mother washed out the holy water with the sacred ashes of the home fire, dedicated to fire goddess, and renamed him with a Sami name. For centuries, the men of North have showed they have embraced the new faith, publicly during ceremonies in front of the state. Surely some of them could also be convinced. But the "other half of sky", instead was not pressed too much because lived a life less public: continued therefore to practice archaic rites, in spite of power's ignorance. Once more women memory guardian. Once more two different communities distinct per gender, in which some things of live if not precluded to men, are anyway women affairs only, to be managed in a matriarchal and matrilineal way: inside the mother's clan.

Coming to present time, some characteristics of the modern Sami women can be delineated, which make recall the cultural inheritance of a civilisation that assigned (and assign today) to women a very important role, and leave them a large possibility of manage.

The first son and often the first two, are often born before marriage; but are not the consequences of youth "oversights": antifecundative and abortion are largely diffused; in the past was used also the infanticide. They cannot be considered "fertility tests": simply they are desired and are included inside the family extended (of the mother). Both relatives maternal and paternal welcome them, but is the maternal grandmother that usually brings up the baby.

Actually it does not exist contradiction be-

tween extended family and personal freedom: the informal courtship is one of the way in which the time is spent during prolonged youth, even in presence of other 's partners sons. In a matriarchal society or of matriarchal ascendance in which all what has to do with children is a women business and of the matrilineal dissidence, it has no sense to get married to get out of home (and live finally as desired). Moreover the constitution of a familiar nucleus independent, and the costs that derive, are considered at least frivolous, for a single couple, and even in presence of one or two children: this is the reason for which women between 20 and 30 years old make a couple of children.

They will be taking care of by grandmother and in consequence the entire clan of the mother. In the meanwhile the mother can work and travel without difficulties: once more the moving is at the basis of this way of life. Then when she will have enough money for a house (usually after her thirties) she will leave the parents house, with a man (not necessarily the father of the children) or alone. But she will maintain strictly relationship with the original family: because the vision of the family is not nucleus, isolated from the contest, but as clan, inserted in neighbourhood relationship, friendship, solidarity and relation, much more of the mother than of the father.

Inside the Sami's communities, men move essentially with the motor-sledge, to reach the pastures of the reindeer. Women have cars instead: this means that has a better freedom. They do the public relation of the clan: with the potential guests – partners, with friends, relatives, with other farms owners with which exchanges goods and with which argue for damages produced by reindeer that damage the field and eat up sprouts, with handle centre, with tourists.

They are the diplomats, the commerce agents, the border guards (territorial but also cultural), that dominate the mechanism of goods distribution and manage the consuming activities inside the family so as toward the outside world.

Statistically they have an education level higher than their partners, often speaks also 2 or three languages. This can ease the job of communication and of extension of the relationship net, with friends but also for work and political, that mistresses does no stop being out also many days. The necessity to maintain relationships gives them the excuse to spend a lot of time by

car, to visit this and that. Children are with granny, and when are bigger, they go with her for company. If they are not big enough a sister or a friend will borrow one to them. To maintain friends network extended (and introducing in it young people) is useful also for another important function: to consolidate the relationship among generations, to impress the cultural identity. Choosing attentively as personal friends people that have children of the same age of themselves, giving them the habits to stay together since small, it means also to open "preferential ways" to possible marriages inside the community, (and of the culture of belonging), without apparently forcing. So, using modern method (used also in other communities, for example by Jewish, in which the families exchanges children for some months to "teach them languages") it is realised an ancient dream: to save goods, materials, like reindeer, but also cultural, like traditions, thorough the marriage exchange between friend families, in which everybody know well all defects of others and each one will bear them for the common good, over passing the not important things.

In reindeer breeder families, also girls receive as present alive animals. Still today a Sami, boy or girl is the same, if comes from a breeder family do not move without his knife hanging from his belt.

Houses so as tents, where an adult woman lives is considered hers: the man has not trouble. The only residences that can be possessed by a male are these occupied exclusively during the periods in which reindeer pastures far from home and from family. Handicraft, and monetary economy is largely in the hands of women: men works with reindeer and do heavy job, even if mistresses participate anyway in animals selection for slaughter, and in meat, carcass and consequent gains distribution. But are women that manage the complex net of social and economical relationship with the outside: commercial exchange, energetic, information. The women are those that cast off discover, chose, or cast off the goods that in various ways the markets offer.

Even the mobility in large ray, are the women that reinforce the ethnic identity: they wear and saw traditional costume, for themselves and for the family, and try to reserve the privilege to wear them only to the Sami people. Again they are the guardians of memory.