

# A Circumpolar Reappraisal: The Legacy of Gutorm Gjessing (1906-1979)

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# CHAPTER 3

## SHAMANISM AND MATERIAL CULTURE IN THE NORTHERN CIRCUMPOLAR AREA, BROUGHT TO THE FORE BY SOME NEWLY DISCOVERED SOUTH-SAAMI DRUMS WITH ACCESSORIES IN THE NORWEGIAN MOUNTAINS

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### *Abstract:*

*Shamanism is known among native peoples in the northern circumpolar areas, but also occurs among other peoples around the world. It could be seen as a tool to decrease uncertainty and to control the future. Defining shamanism is problematic, but is usually connected to a special material culture of which shaman drums are an essential part. Three South-Saami shaman drums were discovered in the late 20th century in the Norwegian mountains. They are here presented and seen in the light of the shamanism in the circumpolar area of the Northern Arctic, especially Siberia, as it is described in the ethnographical literature. The three drums are of frame type as almost all shaman drums in the northern circumpolar area. A retrospective glance of shamanism is given and some of its important characteristics are stressed. They include both immaterial aspects of the shaman séance such as trance and material aspects such as shaman dresses and shaman drums. The use of Saami shaman drums in Scandinavia is also looked at in a historical perspective with emphasis on early authors' narratives on important characteristics of shamanism. There are also given some considerations about the use of shamanism in an archaeological context.*

### **1. Artic Circumpolar Shamanism**

Newly three Saami shaman drums were discovered in the Norwegian mountains in the northern circumpolar area. To understand the use and the meaning of these drums I here discuss shamanism in general and as it is described in Ethnographical literature, mainly concerning Siberia. Attention is then given to the material culture of shamanism, especially the drums.

#### ***1.1 A retrospective glance at shamanism***

Shamanism is a religious phenomenon primarily connected to hunters and gathers and sometimes to people breeding animals. Therefore shamanism is often looked upon as a step on the evolutionary ladder, which says that all cultures have to go through the same steps, but with different speed. Implicitly, shamanism is looked upon as a primitive religious phenomenon in contrast to the traditional world religions as Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. This point of view has its premises in the theory of evolution that Darwin (1996) presented 1859 in *The Origin of Species*. In his book *Primitive Culture* (1871) E. B. Tylor applied this to human culture. Hunters and gatherers were then considered to be on the lowest level and were called savages. The Swedish scholar, Sven Nilsson, said however already 30 years before (Nilsson 1838-1843, pp. V-VIII) that all groups of people had to pass through four developmental steps before they reached the highest step. The lowest step was "The Savage" i.e. the hunter and gatherer stage.

E.B. Tylor (1871, pp. 377-385) looked at the development of religion in the same way as he looked at the development

of culture and considered animism to be the first phase of religion. His description of animism has much in common with shamanism and therefore both often are put on the lowest step of the evolutionary ladder. Tylor (1871, p. 387) emphasizes the soul and its ability to leave the body and to act in the bodies of other men, animals and objects. He also mentions trance in connection with animism. The relationship between animism and shamanism is still much discussed, among others by Yamada (1997, pp.315-327). 80 years after Tylor, Eliade (1998 [1951]) looked at shamanism in its entirety, and placed shamanism in a religious historical perspective. He maintained that shamanism could emerge through contact between people in different geographic areas, but emphasized that shamanism could emerge everywhere. He considered shamanism as the beginning of all religion.

According to Eliade (1998 [1951], p. 134) the shaman usually is a man, but sometimes a woman. Among the Eskimos at Bering Strait in the Far East of Siberia women shamans were known, but usually the shamans there were men (Menovshchikov 1964 [1956], p. 845). Among the Koryaks, living just south of these Eskimos, family shamanism was practised in the hands of women, while the "professional" shaman was a man (Antropova 1964 [1956], p. 867). Ritual change of sex and transvestism is also known among the shamans in different parts of the world (Bogoras 1975 [1904-1909], p. 415, 451-456; Eliade 1998 [1951], pp. 154-155). The studies of Bogoras concern the Chukchee, a people in East Siberia, neighbours to the mentioned Eskimos.

It is often discussed whether shamanism is a religious

phenomenon or not. Eliade (1998 [1951], p. 32) did not acknowledge shamanism as a religion, not even in Central- and North Asia. Those who have defined religions or religious phenomena among hunters and gatherers have often been Christian scholars of the last two-three centuries. Thereby, they have consciously or not been influenced by Christian religion and its characteristics when defining shamanism (DuBois 2009, pp. 6-7) and shamanism is then mostly not accepted as a religion. Shamanism is considered to be badly defined (Bahn 2001, p. 57). It is not only the definition of shamanism that is problematic, but also the spread of shamanism in time and room.

Eliade (ibid, p. 32) says shamanism is most developed in Central- and North Asia. In "The Peoples of Siberia" (Levin & Potapov 1964 [1956]) many authors have written about native peoples in southern, northern and the Far East of Siberia before and after the Russian Revolution. Usually the descriptions include the religion of these peoples, especially shamanism. Shamanism is however not delimited to Siberia and other northern circumpolar areas. It occurs or has occurred in many parts of the world. The authors in the "The Peoples of Siberia" look at shamanism in an evolutionary perspective, in pact with the traditionally Marxist way to study societies. According to this view all societies have to pass several stages before they reach the most perfect stage, i.e. the communist stage.

When we discuss shamanism it is important to be aware of what it means. Shamanism and the shaman is usually characterised by some special traits. These traits are known from northern Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where shamanism is considered to have its roots (Eliade 1998 [1951], pp. 191-197). Eliade (1998 [1951], pp. 31-32) stresses that it is important to delimit the shaman from other magicians and medicine men. He says that it is possible to distinguish the shamans through their special technique of falling into a state of ecstasy. The shaman is an expert of trance during which the soul is believed to leave the body and to ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld. The shaman is then able to communicate directly with the transcendent world. Another distinction Eliade stresses is that the shaman controls his helping spirits, while a "possessed" person is controlled by the spirits. Many scholars think these distinctions are too definite. Several think Eliade stresses ecstasy and trance too much in his definition of the shamanism (Bahn 2001, pp. 54-56 and there cited literature). Nevertheless I choose to use these distinctions in my analysis, since a wide definition makes it difficult to limit the phenomenon. In addition, another important trait that I am going to use is that the shaman has certain objects to help him or her during the séance.

### ***1.2 Ecstasy, trance and helping spirits***

Thus, special ecstasy techniques to enter the mood to communicate with another world are important for the shaman. Scholars have tried to explain how the shaman falls into the trance with the help of ecstasy techniques (compare DuBois 2009, pp. 109-132).

Winkelman (2000, p. 77) has explained it as something that happened in the brain "...because of the interaction of innate structures of the human brain-mind with the ecological and social conditions of hunter-gather societies." According to Winkelman the shamanic trance had to be discovered repeatedly due to recurrent tendencies in the human brain (DuBois 2009, p. 115). An old explanation is the thought that epilepsy and trance have a correlation, but this seems to now be rejected (DuBois 2009, pp. 115-17). Birket-Smith explained the trance of the Greenlandic *angakok* (shaman) with mental illness as hysterics and epileptics (DuBois 2009, p. 117 and there cited literature). DuBois (2009, pp. 120-122) says that trance by Noll (1983) is explained as schizophrenia, and that he later (1985) argues for that the shamanic tradition's cultivate trance because it is useful to obtain and share visions. Hultkrantz (1977, p. 20) is of the opinion that the definition of Eliade is too limited. It could be a shamanic experience even if the soul does not leave the shaman. Several ethnographers have assumed that the shaman just pretends to fall into trance (Bogoras 1975 [1904-1909], p. 441; DuBois 2009, p. 127). The Koryak shamans in the Far East of Siberia were usually stimulated by intoxication from the fly-agaric during the trance (Antropova 1964 [1956], p. 867). Eliade (1998 [1951], pp. 134-135) says that some peoples find that their shamans have degenerated, especially concerning the ecstasy techniques as use of mushrooms. He considers such use among the Siberian peoples to be late and derivative. Some researchers do not distinct between shamanic ecstasy and "possession" (DuBois 2009, p. 129). As we have seen Eliade thinks the distinction between them is important. Another view is that meditative regimens, such as yoga, have developed from earlier shamanic ecstasy techniques (DuBois 2009, p. 131).

Thus there are a lot of explanations of the trance, many of them looked upon as mental disorders, something Eliade (1998 [1951], p. 21) considers unacceptable. The examples are from shamanic traditions among a lot of peoples, mostly Siberian. It appears that many researchers think shamanic trance has the same explanation among native peoples around the world. Those, who brought fore these opinions, did not however belong to people with shamanic tradition. They were mainly urbanised people trained in critical thinking and probably highly influenced by evolutionary thinking. Then it was difficult to understand both the trance and the meaning with it in the actual societies and that the explanations could be different in different societies. Some of them think that "to pretend to fall into trance" is an example of degeneration (Bogoras 1975 [1904-1909], p. 441). They thought the shamans in older times really fall into trance, but that they later degenerated to just to pretend it.

The helping spirits of the shaman (Eliade 1998 [1951], pp. 73-77) were animals such as the bears, wolfs, stags, hares. Often they were birds, especially goose, eagle, owl and crow. They could also be snakes and a lot of special spirits. During the séance the shaman imitates the scream or the behaviour of the animal that symbolises the helping spirit. Eliade thinks it is possible to say that the shaman during

the séance transforms to the spirit and dies ritually through the ecstasy. He acquires this state with help of narcotics, drumming and possession by spirits.

### 1.3 Shaman drums and other helping objects

The shamans did not only have helping spirits but also helping objects. They have often symbolic meanings. Eliade (1998 [1951], pp. 94-111) and many others (compare DuBois 2009, pp. 176-201) have given examples from different parts of the world, but mostly Siberia.

#### 1.3.1 SHAMAN DRESS

The shaman often used a special dress, sometimes just part of a dress. Among many peoples this dress was very important as among the Evenks in Siberia (Vasilevich & Smolyak 1964 [1956], p. 649; Eliade 1998 [1951], pp. 95-100) and the Tofas in Southern Siberia (Diószegi 1963, pp. 271-277, 315-324). Some Siberian peoples as the Shors, a people in Southern Siberia, did not have a special dress (Potatov 1964 [1956], p. 464), nor did the Eskimo shamans at Bering Strait (Menovshchikov 1964 [1956], p. 845). The Eskimos however had pendants, fringes and tassels attached to the clothes to mark the shaman (Menovshchikov 1964 [1956], p. 846). The Nganasan shamans in Northern Siberia had often two or three costumes (Popov 1964 [1956], p. 578). They consisted of headgear, a cloak with a special apron and footwear. The costumes of the Nganasan shamans had several pendants and the shamans also used iron sticks and skins of birds and other animals. Sometimes the dress itself imitates an animal. The most important ones are bird, reindeer or stag and bear, but especially the bird such as among the Altays (Potapov 1964 [1956], p. 325). Often the dress was pictured with animals, all with a special religious meaning. Sometimes it had a lot of ribbons and kerchiefs symbolising snakes sewn to it. The dress could also have a lot of metal ornaments with symbolic meaning to frighten the spirits as for example the shaman dress of the Sel'kup and Kets in Siberia (Popov & Dolgikh 1964 [1956] p. 617). It was usual to have bird feathers and bells fastened on it too.

The shaman could bear a staff. The end was often formed as a head of an animal, often a horse, that helped the shaman to accomplish the shamanic journey (Eliade (1998 [1951], pp. 96-97). It was not unusual that the shaman wore a mask (ibid, pp. 103-104). Mirrors and caps were also used to help the shaman (ibid, pp. 98-99). Often it is said that the power of the shaman was in the cap (ibid, p. 98). Sometimes the cap had lizards and other protecting animals fastened to it. They could also be decorated with feathers from symbolic birds as swan, eagle and owl. Eliade (ibid, pp. 99-100) thinks birds are the most important symbolic animal for the shamans in many parts of the world. The bird dress is seen as important for the flight to the other world (compare Siikala 2004, pp.158-159). The shamans of the Evenks in Siberia wore a coat with a lot of fringes and metal embellishments (Vasilevich & Smolyak 1964 [1956], p. 648). It is easy to understand that the shamans that had their séances in a dark room as the Koryaks in the Far East



Figure 1: A female shaman belonging to the Tofa people in the south of Siberia wearing a ritual gown and beating a frame drum. From Diószegi 1963, p.276.

of Siberia (Antropova 1964 [1956], p. 867) did not wear any special dress.

Sometimes as among the Tofas (Diószegi 1963, pp. 320-324) the dress imitates a human skeleton to symbolise that the shaman had been dead and had returned to life. Eliade (1998 [1951], pp. 101-103) says the same idea is behind the belief that the game could return to life if you collected its bones carefully. This can be compared with what Petter Dass, the great Norwegian baroque poet, tells in "Nordlands trompet" around AD 1700 (Dass 1997, p. 69). There he says that the Saami eat the meat of the bear. Thereafter they carefully collect all the bones and bury them in a cave while they are singing. Petter Dass says nothing about the reason why the Saami did so, but the thought that they in this way helped the bear to return to life is not far away. Bear graves are well known among the Saami. The Swedish vicar Fjellström told already in 1775 about the bear feast and the following burying of the bear (Manker 1957, p. 69). Th. Petersen early accentuated the bear grave archaeologically in Norway (Petersen 1940, pp. 153-166). Zachrisson & Iregren (1974) and Myrstad (1996) have later discussed North-Norwegian bear graves. Among native peoples in Siberia, as the Evenks, there are known several types of ceremonies where bones from bears are



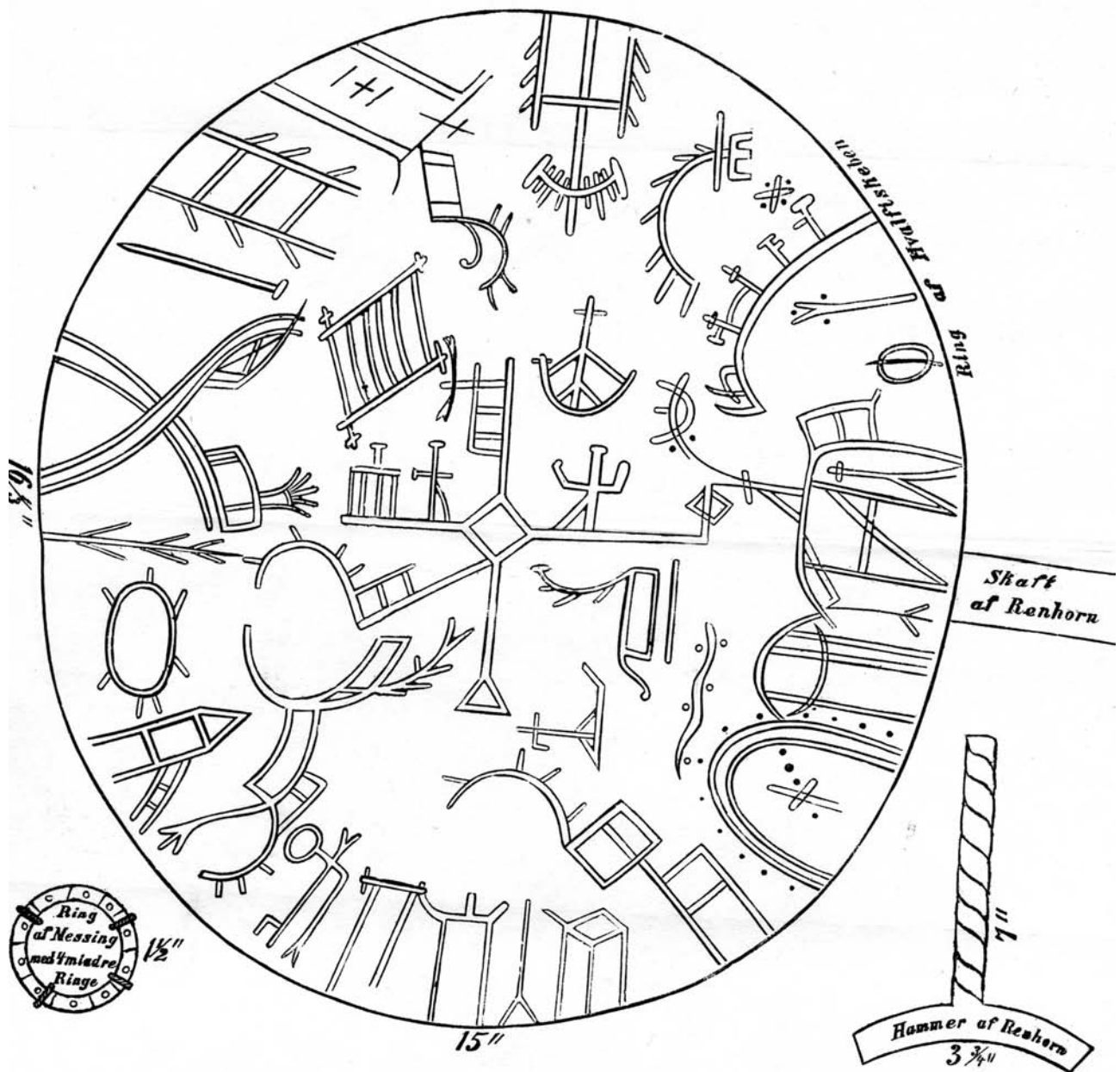


Figure 2: This drum is originally a Greenland-Eskimo drum. The frame is made of whalebone and the shaft of reindeer antler. The pictures on the membrane are however painted later in the NTNU Museum of Natural History and Archaeology in Trondheim when the drum was handed over to Bergen Museum. The reindeer antler hammer and the brass pointer were probably made at the same occasion. Probably one believed that the drum originally had figures. The pictures obviously imitate the ones on the “Meråker drum”, a drum pictured in K. Leem 1767: “Beskrivelse over Finmarkens Lapper”. From J.A. Friis 1871: *Lappisk Mythologi, Eventyr og Folkesagn*, figure 6.

collected and arranged in different ways before they were buried (Vasilevich & Smolyak 1964 [1956], p. 649).

### 1.3.2 SHAMAN DRUM

The most essential helping object of the shaman is probably the shaman drum. It is said to be the central symbol of shamanism, and without it a shaman is not a shaman. Lauri Honko said in 1964 (p. 169) that “from Altai to Lappland the drum is the liturgical handbook of shamanism” (compare Siikala 1978; Hultkrantz 1991, p. 9; Pentikäinen 1997, p. 250). Eliade (1998 [1951], pp. 53, 105) stresses the importance of the drum too. The drum was important to bring the shaman to the “Centre of the World”, to help him

to fly and to get contact with the spirit world. He says the frame of the drum is made of a branch of the “Cosmic Tree” in the “Centre of the World” on the top of the “Cosmic Mountain”. Sometimes the drum is described as an animal, often a horse, or a boat that the shaman used to bring him to the spirit world (Eliade 1951 [1998], p. 107-108; Bogoras 1975 [1904-1909]; Potapov 2004, p. 194; Siikala 2004, p. 158).

The shamans had sometimes several sets of drums. Many of the Nganasans shamans in Northern Siberia had both several sets of drums and two or three costumes for different occasions (Popov 1964 [1956], p. 578).

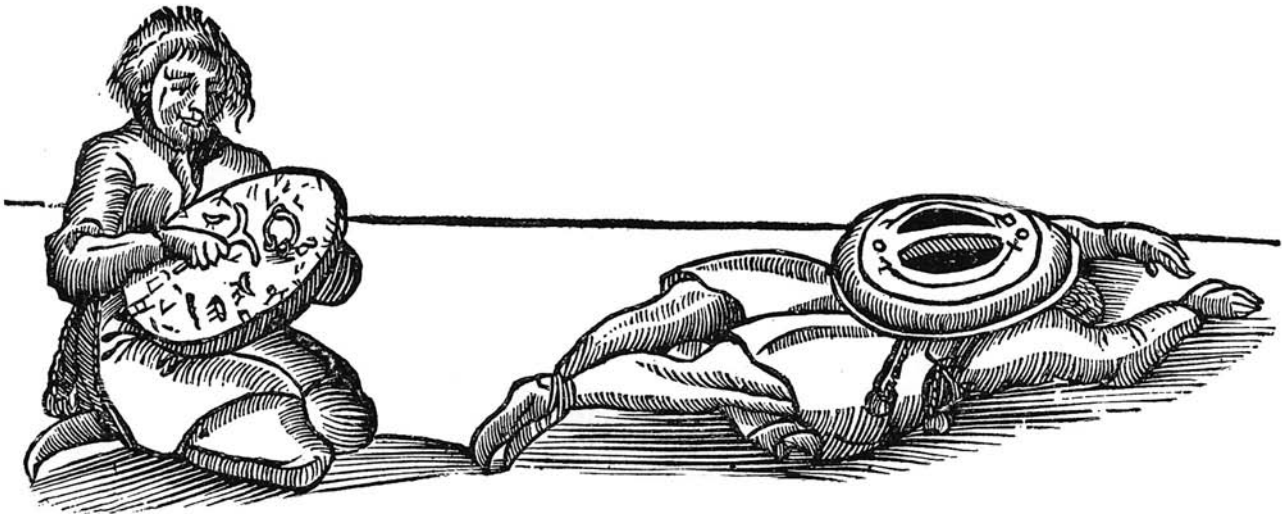


Figure 3: The picture shows a Saami shaman while he beats his bowl type drum. Afterwards he falls into trance with the drum on his back. Meanwhile he is doing his long journey. From J. Schefferus' 1956 [1673]: Lappland p. 172.

The shaman drums vary in construction and size. The most usual type of drum is the frame drum. It is known among native peoples at least in Alaska, Greenland, Scandinavia, Kemi Lapp mark in Finland and in Siberia, i.e. over the most of the northern circumpolar area. The ends of a sliver of wood are bent together to make a frame with an oval, egg shaped, circle round or edged form. A skin is fastened over the frame. On the back side there is a handle. The Greenland and Alaska drums have a handle that sticks out from the drum as well as the Chukchee drum (Bogoras 1975 [1904-1909], pp. 356-357). The Chukchee drum differs from other more southern type drums in East Siberia in size and handle (ibid). The Altai Turk peoples had anthropomorphic drum handles with many stripes of cloth (Potapov 1964 [1956], p. 325, 2004, pp. 199-202).

Another type of drum is the bowl formed drum. It was used among the North Saami. This type of drum is made of a hollowed piece of wood with symbols and handles carved on the outside of the bottom. The membrane was stretched on the top of the drum as a lid on the bowl. Bowl drums are known in Africa and among Indians in America too.

It seems like the frame type drum is the most common drum all over the northern circumpolar area. One can ask why the bowl type drum was used among the North Saami, but not among the South Saami and Greenland Eskimos. One explanation could be that the bowl type drum is an older type of drum. Another could be the supply of raw material. The reason could also be that this group of Saami had the need to mark themselves against other groups of Saami. In conflict situations this need is considered to be strong (Johansen 1979, pp. 107, 115-118; Odner [1983]1990 pp. 59-65). Since religious symbols are very strong ethnic markers the drum could have been used in this way.

Among the Saami and some Siberian peoples as the Altays and the Kets (Potapov 1964 [1956], p. 325; Popov & Dolgikh 1964 [1956], p. 617) the skin or membrane has figures painted on it, but many peoples, as the Ostyak and

the Samoyed in eastern Siberia did not paint the drum (Eliade 1998 [1951], p. 106; compare Potapov 2004, pp. 199-202). The Tartars had both sides of the drum skin painted with symbolic figures. There could also be symbolic figures carved in the frame or the bowl. The drumming prepares for the ecstatic journey, and the iconography is dominated of symbols for this journey (Eliade 1998 [1956], p. 107).

#### 1.4 Some examples of séances from Siberia and Japan

##### 1.4.1 THE CHUKCHEE IN EAST-SIBERIA

The Russian ethnographer Waldemar Bogoras described the use of shaman drum among the Chukchee in East-Siberia as late as in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bogoras 1975 [1904-1909], pp. 413-415, 433-435; Svensson 1985, pp. 25-27). Bogoras (1975 [1904-1909]), p. 413) differentiates between "Family shamanism" and "Individual shamanism". He (ibid) also tells that almost every adult occasionally took his drum and beat it just for pleasure in the sleeping-room.

The family shamanism took place in the outer tent, mostly in the daytime. Each family had one or more drums. At specific periods the members of the family were bound to perform. Then they accompanied the beating on the drum with the singing of various melodies. The performer acted as a real shaman and pretended that the spirits had entered his body.

The individual shamanism was mostly performed in the sleeping room, the inner room of the tent, at night and in darkness (Bogoras 1975 [1904-1909], p. 413). There are both female and male shamans (ibid, p. 415). The Chukchee shamans converse with the spirits, make the spirits play various tricks before the spectators and make the spirits answer the questions and give the necessary directions (ibid, p. 432). They could also pronounce incantations, perform other magical acts and treat various diseases. The Chukchee shamans were paid for their services with for example food,



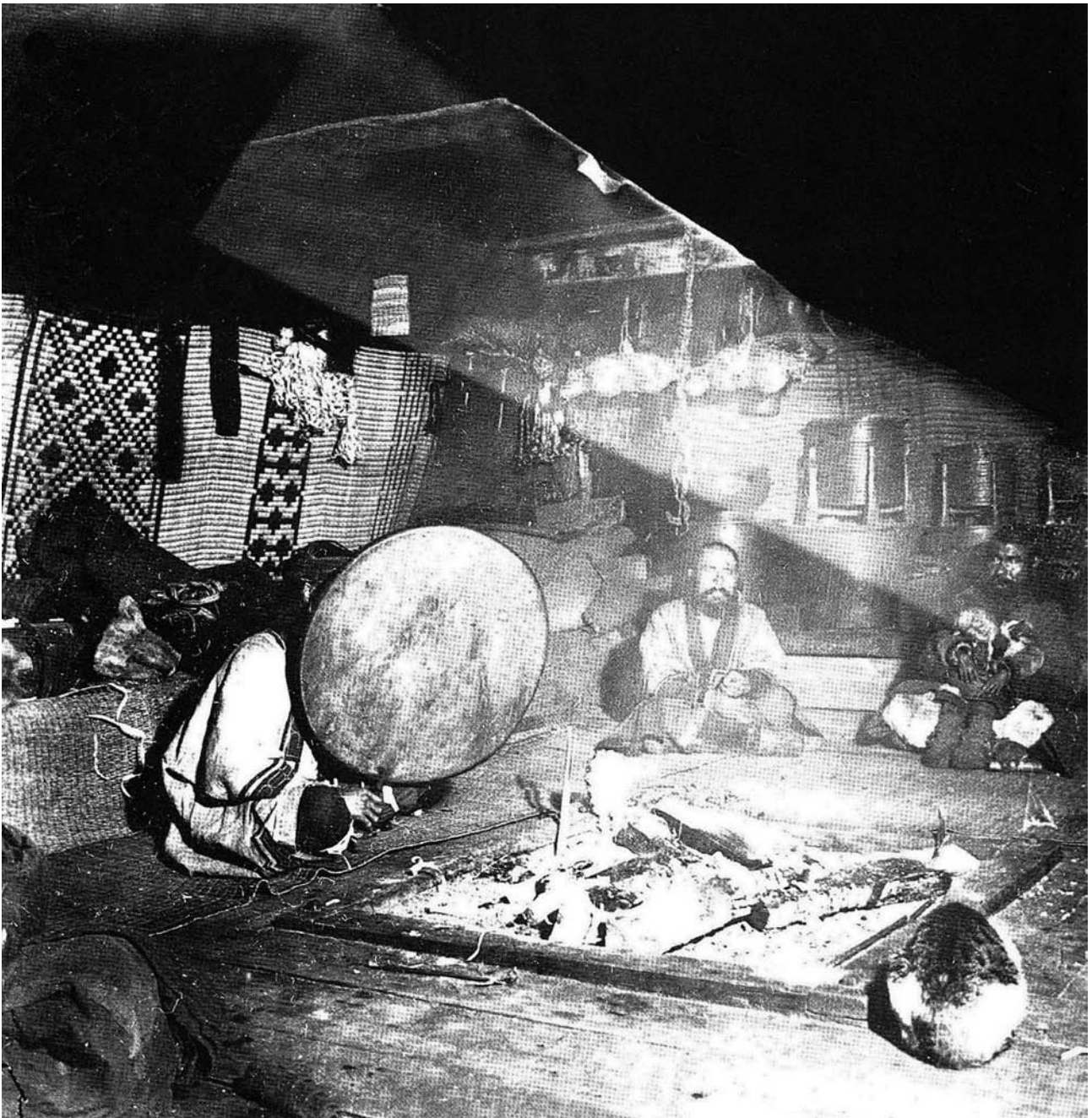


Figure 4: Shamanistic séance around a fire-place inside a Sakhalin Ainu house in Japan in 1903-05. The shaman uses a big shaman drum of frame type. Photo: Bronislaw Pilsudski. From Wada 1999:37 (NAA 98-10382).

but the payment was only a source of additional income (ibid, p. 432).

Bogoras (1975 [1904-1909], pp. 433-435) tells of a typical shamanic performance in the inner room. The shaman sits on the “master’s place”, near the back wall. He first examines the drum carefully for more than an hour. If the membrane has shrunk, it is moistened with urine. In this case he dries the drum over the lamp. Usually he takes off his fur shirt and is naked down to the waist. Often he removes his shoes and stockings too. With fewer clothes he is freer to perform. Bogoras says that the shamans did not use any stimulants in olden times, but now smoke a pipe of strong tobacco without admixture of wood. He thinks this works like a strong narcotic. The habit is copied from

the Tungus, another native people in Siberia. The light is put out and the shaman starts to beat the drum and to sing the first melodies with low voice. He beats harder and harder and sings higher and higher. After some time the *ke’let*, the spirit of the Chukchee, takes place in the body of the shaman. Then the shaman starts to beat even harder, cries hysterically and let out yells that are considered to be typical for the spirit. He also imitates the sounds of different animals considered to be his supposed helpers.

In some cases the Chukchee shaman falls into a kind of trance, says Bogoras. Then the body of the shaman lies unconscious on the ground, while his soul visits the spirit world and asks the spirits for advice. Bogoras (1975 [1904-1909], p. 441) witnessed one or two such performances



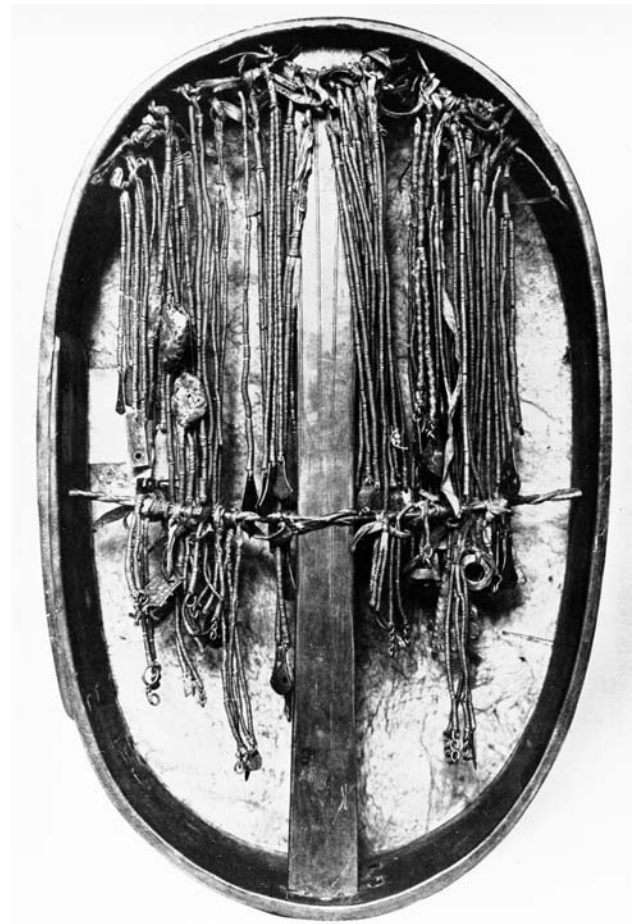
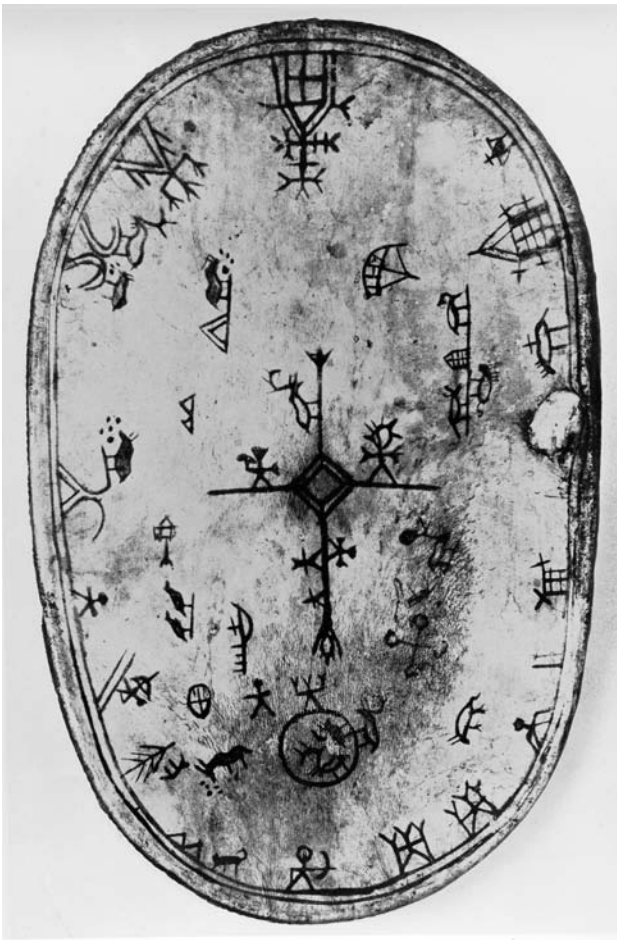


Figure 5a and b: A frame drum (*gievrie*) from Follaldalen in Namdalen, Norway. The drum is today in a museum in Meiningen, Germany. When the drum was in use the cords fastened on the back side hung down. Bendix Andersen who owned the drum has explained the pictures together with another Saami. The sun (*biejje*) is in the middle. Around the sun there are figures as God the Father, the son of God, the church, the Devil, funeral in the mountains, reindeers, wild animals, domestic animals and houses. It is unsure if the interpretations concerning God, his son and the church are something Bendix Andersen said just to please or not. From E. Manker 1938: *Die lappische Zaubertrommel I*.

too, but characterises them as rather poor. The performance began as usual in the dark. When the shaman suddenly broke the drumming, the lamp was lighted and the face of the shaman immediately covered with a piece of cloth. His wife started to beat the drum. After a quarter of an hour the shaman woke up, removed the cloth, sat up in his place and started to drum and sing. Then he gave the patient magical advices regarding his illness.

#### 1.4.2 THE AINU IN NORTHERN JAPAN

Shamanism was also practised by the Ainu in northern Japan (Yamada & Irimoto 1997; Wada 1999, pp. 261-262). The Ainu inhabited the Kurile Islands, southern Sakhalin, Hokkaido and part of northern Honshu (Fitzhugh 1999, pp. 9-10). The Sakhalin shamanism is the best documented among the Ainu in Japan through the fieldwork of the Polish ethnographer Bronislaw Pilsudski in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Wada 1999, p. 262). Pilsudski tells that the Sakhalin shamanic séance usually took place in a dim hut. It was conducted by a male shaman in a state of ecstasy who in the séance used an oval drum, sticks, carved wooden hats, metal chains, belts with metal rings and other objects providing a rattling sound. The shaman

drank a special drink during the séance. It was usual that dogs were sacrificed for or after the séance. The Sakhalin Ainu shamanism included a gradual falling into a state of self-oblivion by continuously striking drums and use of intoxicants, the invitations of protective spirits, strong dance movements, spirit gestures and initiation sounds and divine revelations.

A photo from a Sakhalin shamanic séance taken by Bronislaw Pilsudski in 1903-05 is the only one known from an Ainu séance (Wada 1999, p. 261). The séance takes place at a hearth with open fire inside a house. The shaman is almost concealed behind his big shaman drum. The drum seems to be of frame type and to have a handle. The Sakhalin shamanism is considered to be influenced by Siberian shamanism (Irimoto 1997, p. 32). According to Pilsudski's studies in 1905 the shamans heal diseases, protect against epidemics, restore good fortune in hunting, identify thieves and predict the fortune of a journey (Irimoto 1997, p. 32). They invite helping spirits by striking a skin-covered drum with a stick. Both the male and the female shamans wear crowns made of shaved willow on their heads (*ibid*).

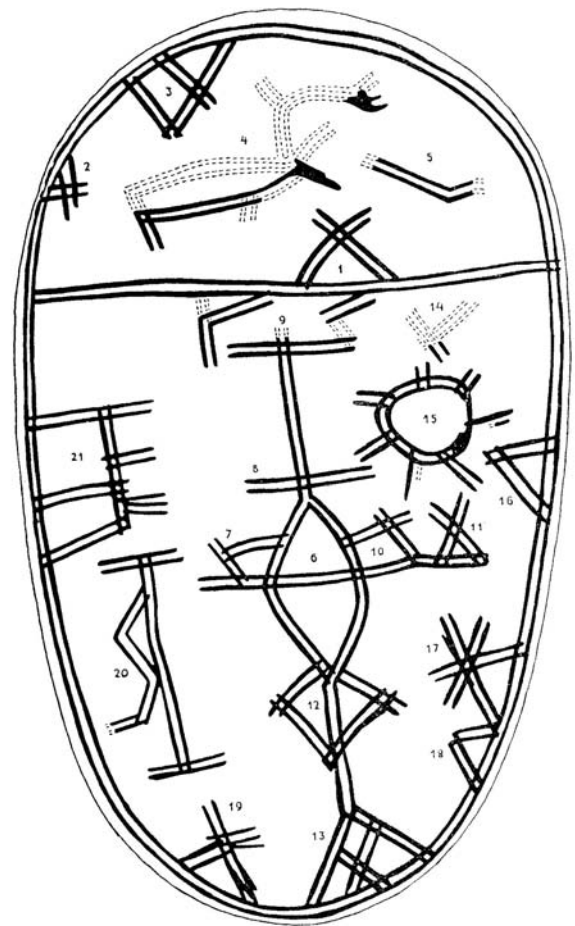


Figure 6a and b: A bowl drum (*goabdes*), probably from Rana parish in Helgeland, made of a hollowed piece of wood. The membrane is divided in two fields. From E. Manker 1938: *Die lappische Zaubertrommel I*.

It is believed that also the Hokkaido Ainu shamans used shaman drums during séances, but none is recovered (Wada 1999, p. 264). The Hokkaido Ainu shamans were mostly women (Irimoto 1997, p. 39). Wada (ibid, p. 267) is of the opinion that the Ainu shamanism has much in common with the ancient eastern Siberian shamanism, particularly the Ul'ta/Orok and the Nivkhi.

#### 1.4.3 CONSIDERATION

As we have seen there are a lot of symbolic objects which the shamans in Siberia and Japan used to help themselves in the séance. The same objects are however not used everywhere. Several of the cited authors differ between séances in the dark and in day-light. It appears that the shaman performing in the dark does not wear a special dress, but sometimes rattling objects fastened on the ordinary clothes. The audience could then listen to the rattling, but not be able to distinguish the clothes. The shaman performing in day-light seems to use a special dress with symbolic figures that the audience could catch sight of.

This explanation of the use or not use of a special shaman dress could perhaps be useful to understand why some peoples use shaman drums with pictures on the membrane while others not. If the séance was performed in the dark, neither the shaman nor the audience was able to distinguish

the pictures. If the séance was performed in the light the pictures were more useful.

The drums seem to have been used in different ways by the same people. It is distinguished between individual and family shamanism. It seems that individual shamanism is the only one that corresponds to the criteria Eliade sets up for a real shaman.

## 2. SAAMI SHAMANISM

Here I first try to shed light on the material culture of Saami shamanism, especially the Saami shaman drum. The main examples are three newly found South-Saami drums. I also discuss briefly whether the material culture of Saami shamanism consisted of other types of objects than the shaman drum. As we have seen the material culture of shamanism among native peoples in Siberia and Japan did so. Old narratives on Saami shamanism are studied not only to find out what they can tell us about the material culture, but also about the other important characteristics of shamanism according to Eliade (cf. above).

### 2.1 The material culture of Saami shamanism

Here special attention is given to three newly found South-Saami drums in the Norwegian mountains.



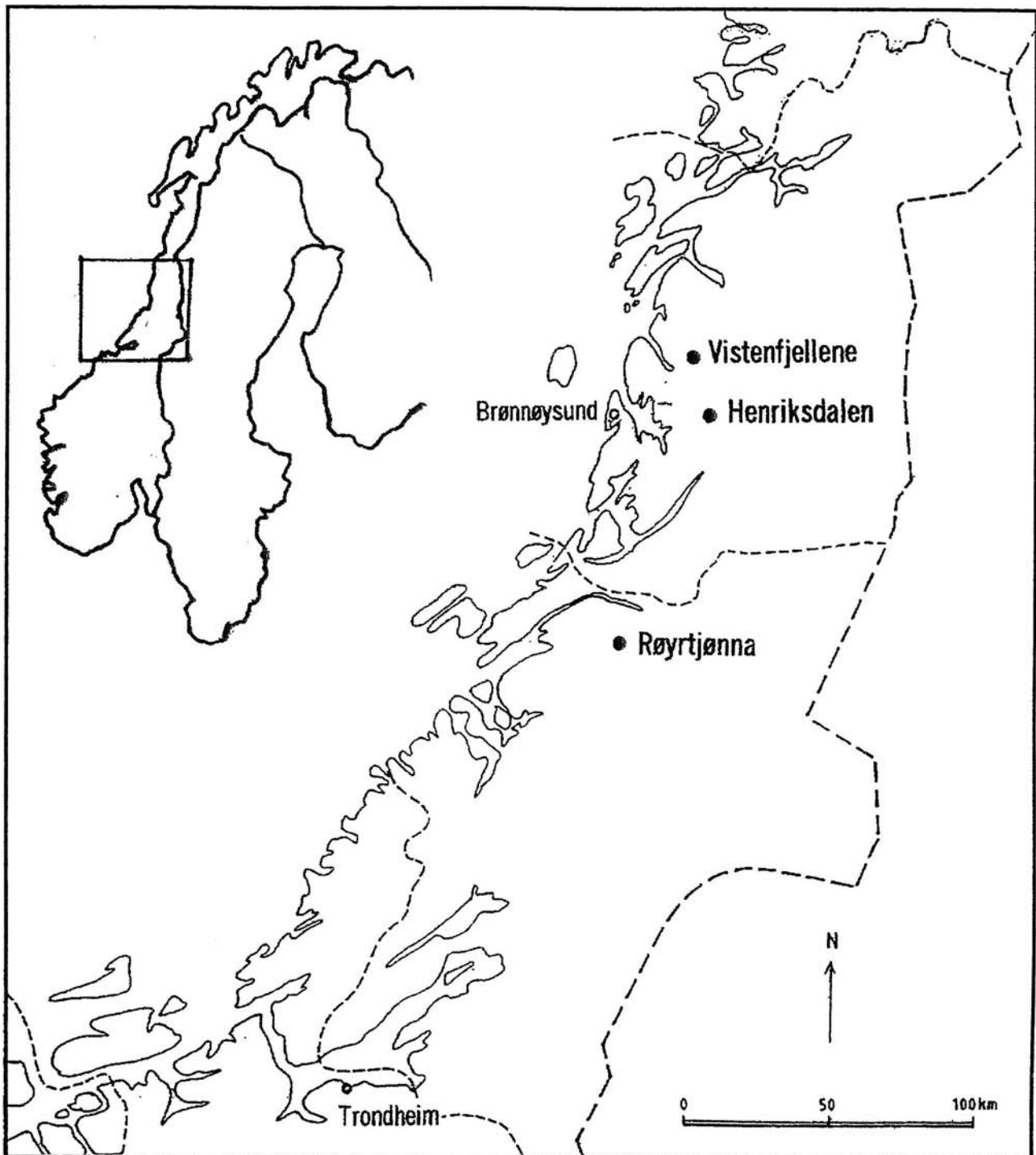


Figure 7: The find spots of the three newly discovered Saami shaman drums in Norway.

#### 2.1.1 TWO MAIN TYPES OF SAAMI SHAMAN DRUMS IN SCANDINAVIA

Both frame drums and bowl formed drums were used among the Saami in Scandinavia. In Norway the frame type drum (*gievrie*) was in use in the southern Saami areas, while the bowl type drum (*goabdes*) was in use in the central and northern Saami areas (Hallström 1910, pp. 81-104; Manker 1938; Kjellström & Rydving 1988, pp. 8-11, Berglund 2005a, p. 129). Both types of drums have pictures on the membrane. The figures were painted with boiled bark from alder that gives a red colour (cf. Berglund 2005a, p. 129).

South Saami drums have the pictures on the membrane arranged in one field around the border of the skin with the sun (*biejjie*) in the centre. Cords with rings and other objects of metal tied at one of the ends of the frame hung down when the drum was in use. The metal pieces rattled when the shaman beat on the membrane.

In Finnmark it was usual that the bowl drum had the figures on the skin arranged in rows in several fields, while further south for example in the northern part of Helgeland, the figures were arranged in two rows. The fields symbolise the different worlds which the shaman could travel between.





Figure 8: The Henriksdalen frame drum. Photo: Per E. Fredriksen, NTNU Museum of Natural History and Archaeology.



Figure 9: The Røyrtjønna frame drum. Photo: Per E. Fredriksen, NTNU Museum of Natural History and Archaeology.

The upper field symbolises the sky and the lower the earth. There could also be a lower field symbolising the underworld.

## **2.2 The use of the Saami shaman drum**

The Saami shaman drums were used to help the shaman to enable shamanic travel and to fall into a trance. It was however also used for divination. When the shaman (*nåejtie*) beat with a hammer (*vietjere*) on the membrane, the metal pieces attached to the cords rattled against each other. The pointers (*viejhkie*) jumped and danced on the membrane and the positions they took on the symbols on the membrane was studied and the meaning interpreted by the shaman (*nåejtie*). According to Louise Bäckman (1978, p.78) the use of pointers by shamans in divining a future event seems to be known only among the Saami in the Arctic regions. Other peoples used a drum stick or a staff when they were divining the future. The fact that the membranes have figures tells us, according to the theory above, that the séances took place in the light. According to the same theory shamans performing in the light used special dresses.

According to Bäckman (1978, p. 78-79) it is not clear if the Saami shamans used special dresses when performing. Bäckman (ibid p. 79) tells that Thurenius writes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that the Saami shaman dresses in his most splendid clothing, washes himself clean and combs his hair before the séance. The audience had to do the same. She also says that Leem tells that the Saami shaman prepares for his soul-journey by removing his headdress and loosening his belt and shoe laces.

Olsen (in Qvigstad 1910, p. 43) tells how the Saami shaman turned his clothes inside out and backwards while the audience was dressed in their finest clothes (compare below). Several of the Norwegian missionaries to the Saami in the 18<sup>th</sup> century write that the Saami used special clothes when they were offering. Olsen (in Qvigstad 1910, p. 88-89) tells about use of shaman drum in connection with offering of animals for sick people, but mentions nothing of the dress of the shaman. There are several written sources describing the use of shaman drum in connection with offering (cf. Manker 1957, pp. 56-64; Mebius 2003, pp. 134-136). The drum was used to point out what should be offered. Both in The Ethnografic Museum in Oslo and The Nordic Museum in Stockholm there are belts which have belonged to Saami shamans (Manker 1957, p. 72-73, 78; Bäckman 1978 p. 78-79). Manker (1957, p. 78-79) tells that there in Stockholm also is a cap decorated with several objects that is assumed to have belonged to a Saami shaman. Belt and cap were important items for the shaman in the FarCaretia, so perhaps they had the same meaning for the Saami shaman (Bäckman 1978, p. 79).

As we have seen some vague signs in the literature indicate that the Saami shamans long ago had special dresses or other items attached to the dress when they were performing. There are no indications however that rattling items were attached to the dress, only to the belt and the

drum. According to the theory that rattling objects attached to the dress were typical for séances in the dark and use of drums with signs were typical for shaman séances in the light, the Saami shaman séances were performed in the light. Rattling objects attached to the drum and the belt could however give the same effect in the dark as such objects fastened to the dress, so this is not unambiguous.

## **2.3 Three newly found South-Saami shaman drums**

Three South-Saami shaman drums were all discovered in Norway in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two were discovered in Helgeland, the southern part of the county of Nordland and not far south of the North Polar Circle. One was discovered south of these two, in the county of Nord-Trøndelag. All the three drums were discovered under a rock in the mountains. They are all of the frame type (*gievrie*). None of them had the membrane preserved, but probably the figures had been arranged around the border with the sun in the middle according to the usual way in which pictures were arranged on South Saami shaman drums. Two of the drums had accessories preserved and one of them had carvings in the frame and the other had carvings in the handle.

### **2.3.1 THE HENRIKSDALEN DRUM**

The Henriksdalen frame drum was discovered under a rock in the mountains in Velfjord in the south of Helgeland in 1969. This drum has an oval shape, with the size 24 x 30 cm. The width of the wood sliver is 4,5 cm. The ends of the sliver overlap each other and are joined with thread of sinew. Only small pieces of the drum skin are preserved, while several of the sinew threads, which fastened the membrane to the frame, were preserved. On the back, two crossing pieces are fastened as a handle and to stiffen the frame.

The last user of this drum is identified as the Saami Nils Johan Johannessen Vesterfjell. Perhaps he put the drum under the stone in Henriksdalen during his last trip there, before he died in 1871. It was his grandchild, Kristine Andersen Vesterfjell, who first discovered the drum under the rock. (Sveli 1975, pp. 80-87; Vonheim 1997, pp. 10-14; Berglund 2005a, p.132, 2005b, pp. 37-38).

### **2.3.2 THE RØYRTJØNNA DRUM**

This frame drum was discovered under a rock by a mountain brook in May 1993 near the small lake, Røyrtjønna, when three men had a coffee break (Stenvik 1993, p. 44). The Røyrtjønna drum is egg shaped, with the size 24 x 33 cm. The ends of the sliver overlap each other like the Henriksdalen drum. Holes in the frame show that it had a handle on the backside. There were also holes in the frame to fasten the membrane, but nothing of the membrane was preserved. In the wider end of the frame there were also six holes for attaching cords with different symbolic objects. In the other end of the frame there were two opposite pairs of holes to attach ribbons to collect the cords when they not were in use.



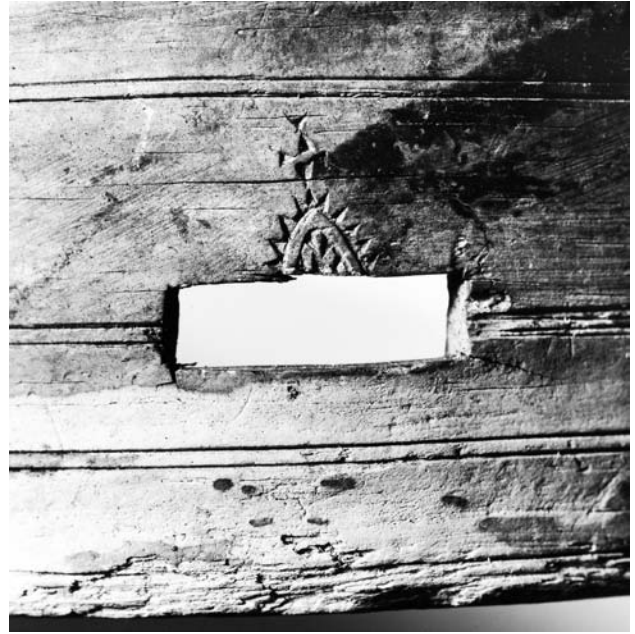


Figure 10a and b: Examples of symbols carved outside the frame of the Røyrtjønna drum. Photo: Per E. Fredriksen, NTNU Museum of Natural History and Archaeology.



Figure 11: The Visten frame drum. Photo: Per E. Fredriksen, NTNU Museum of Natural History and Archaeology.



On the outside of the frame several figures, known as Saami symbols, are carved. Such symbols are also known from other frame type drums in Scandinavia. The symbols are mostly double parallel lines, crossing lines and triangles arranged in different ways, sometimes together with crossing lines. (cf. Manker 1971, pp. 76, 87; Dunfjeld 2001, p. 136). The symbols have special meanings. The triangles are interpreted as symbols for the Saami tent or hut. An open triangle symbolises that the dwelling was inhabited, while a filled one symbolised a habited dwelling (Dunfjell 2001, p. 116). Compositions of larger and smaller triangles could symbolise the dwelling of a shaman or a sacred site (Berglund 2005a, p. 135).

Two pieces of reindeer antler and a small stone were discovered beside the drum. The pieces of antler could be the rest of a hammer, but pointers with the same shape occur (Manker 1938, p. 50). The stone was of a petrographic type that not occurs in this area. It is known that such stones could belong to the garniture of a Saami shaman drum (Zachrisson 1991, pp. 89-91).

19 May 1993 the Saami Albert Jåma interviewed Torbjørn Møllevik, the man who discovered the drum. Møllevik told that a big raven sat and looked at the men after he had caught sight of the drum. A pair of hours later some other people passed. Then a very big raven sat on the roof of the cabin next to the find spot. Møllevik also told Jåma what people said when he showed them the drum. Often they said

it was thoughtless to touch such objects and to bring them to house. It could be dangerous because it could be magical. It meant bad luck to touch such things and he could be visited by spirits. The interview shows that respect for the drum still is strong. (Berglund 2005b, p. 41).

### 2.3.3 THE VISTEN DRUM

The Visten drum was discovered in the autumn of 1997 by Bjørn Arve Bønå and his brother when they were hunting in the mountains north of the fiord Visten. On their way home they rested by a large stone with characteristic shape and under this stone they found an oval shaped frame drum with accessories. This frame drum measured 28,5 x 39,0 cm, and is made of a 7 cm wide and 7 mm thick sliver of pinewood<sup>1</sup>. The frame has been repaired with thin plates of copper. Since the frame is so worn, it must have been much used, probably over a long period of time. The ends of the sliver of pinewood overlap and they were originally joined on the inside with a small tie of copper.

In the lower edge of the frame there are nine pairs of holes in one of the ends for attaching cords. The cords hung down when the drum was in use. Some of these leather cords were preserved and some of them were twined with pewter. A button, made of copper alloy, is still tied to one of the cords. Another button, of the same size and material, was also discovered. The buttons were gifts to the drum and they rattled when the drum was in use. Two pairs of holes,



*Figure 12: Often buttons and other metal items were fastened to the cords which hung down when the drum was in use. These are from the Visten drum. Photo: Per E. Fredriksen, NTNU Museum of Natural History and Archaeology.*



Figure 13: Six fragments of textiles found together with the Visten drum. Photo: Per E. Fredriksen, NTNU Museum of Natural History and Archaeology.



Figure 14: The hammer made of reindeer antler found together with the Visten drum. Photo: Per E. Fredriksen, NTNU Museum of Natural History and Archaeology.

where the ties were fastened when the cords not were in use, are placed opposite each other as on the Røyrjtønna drum.

Across the underside of the frame a piece of wood is fastened as a handle. The handle has engraved double lines resembling an hourglass, a symbol known from other Saami frame drums (Manker 1938, pp. 127, 235). The hourglass usually symbolises the passage of time and is the attribute of Death.

Together with the drum was a crumpled up skin. The drum skin should preferably be from a one-year-old reindeer calf or a female reindeer (Demant Hatt, 1928, p. 55). No figures can be seen on the skin. The sewing holes along the edges of the skin are very small and close together and do not fit with the holes for the membrane in the frame. The skin is made of several small pieces sewn together with thread of sinew. All this indicates that the pieces of skin are the remains of a storage bag rather than a membrane. Further examinations of the pieces might however reveal other interpretations.

In addition, there were six fragments of crumpled textiles. They have cursorily been examined by Lise Bender Jørgensen in 2010<sup>2</sup>. She found that the textiles probably have belonged to the same piece of cloth woven in twill cloth, presumably with wool fibre. Further it looks like the textiles have been coloured, perhaps in blue and red, but she concludes that this needs a closer analysis. No borders or seams are visible so it is difficult to find out how the textiles were used. It is possible that the textiles





*Figure 15: The brass pointer belonging to the Visten drum. Photo: Per E. Fredriksen, NTNU Museum of Natural History and Archaeology.*

are the remains of another storage bag (Berglund 2005a, p. 131). Some examples are known where one bag was used for the drum and another for the accessories. There are however other possibilities. Jørgensen found that there is a changing spin direction in the yarn in the weft. A similar phenomenon in the Migration period textiles from Snartemo is interpreted as a magical practice (Thingnæs 2007). In this light it seems reasonable to suggest that the change in spin direction observed in the textiles discovered together with the Saami shaman drum, could be intentional and have a magical meaning. However, the Visten textiles require further examination in relation to this question.

A hammer made of reindeer antler, a brass pointer and a small white stone were also discovered with the drum. The antler probably originates from a female reindeer<sup>3</sup>. When assembled, the hammer is at least 24 cm long. The brass

pointer, 6 cm in diameter, looks like a round flat buckle similar to some from Åsele and Lycksele in Sweden (Manker 1938, p. 367 no. 586-588). The small smooth stone of white quartzite was probably used as a pointer too (cf. Schefferus 1956 [1673], pp. 304-305; Demant Hatt 1928, p. 55; Manker 1938, p. 373; Zachrisson 1991, pp. 89-90). White stone had a special religious meaning in Scandinavia for at least 2000 years and was often used in and upon grave mounds and cairns from the Early Iron Age (cf. Berglund 2001, p. 25; Wik 1991, p. 84). It is hardly accidental that the stone from Visten is made of white quartzite.

Organic materials, such as wood, skin and textile, are usually badly preserved when they are exposed to oxygen. However the drum and organic accessories from the Visten Mountains are rather well preserved, perhaps because they have been dried in the mountain wind. They could therefore





Figure 16: This small smooth stone of white quartzite belonging to the Visten drum was probably used as a pointer. Photo: Per E. Fredriksen, NTNU Museum of Natural History and Archaeology.

be older than they appear. The Th. Svedberg laboratory in Uppsala in Sweden has dated material from the frame and the hammer. Their method of dating, accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS), requires just small amounts of material. The objects thereby hardly suffer (cf. Zachrisson 1991, p. 80).

The results of the dating are not very precise, but they suggest that the frame of the drum is older than the hammer. The frame is dated to  $260 \pm 65$  BP (calibrated younger than AD 1530). The hammer is dated to  $90 \pm 65$  BP (calibrated younger than AD 1685). It is thus possible that the frame of the drum is from the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries, while the hammer is younger. If the drum was hidden in the mountains in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the Saami mission was very active, it is possible that the frame at this time was one or two centuries old. The older the drum was, the more reliable it was considered to be (Qvigstad 1903, p. 67).

## 2.4 Older narratives on Saami shamanism

In the above, attention is mainly given to the material culture of the Saami shamanism, especially the drum. By studying older narratives I here try to find out if the Saami shaman drum was used in shamanic performances according to the criteria Eliade set up. Then the shamans had to use special ecstasy techniques to come into the mood of trance and they had to use helping spirits. Another possibility is that the Saami shaman drum mainly was used as a divination drum, perhaps comparable with the family shamanism Bogoras (1975 [1904-1909]), p. 413) observed among the Chukchee?

In many of the Old Icelandic and Norwegian Sagas, the Saami are described as skilled in magic, but the use of drums is not mentioned. There are however a lot of

other narratives on the use of Saami shaman drums in Scandinavia. Some of them include ecstasy and trance. Here I briefly reproduce just some of them (cf. Berglund 2005a, p. 141-144).

### 2.4.1 HISTORIA NORVEGIE

The oldest known narrative of the use of a drum in Scandinavia is probably from *Historia Norvegiæ*. The age of the manuscript is disputed, but several historians think it was written at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Koht 1950). The manuscript (ibid) tells a dramatic story about Christian people visiting Saami people in connection with trade. The hostess suddenly fell down and stopped breathing. The Saami thought that she was not dead, but just attacked by a *gand* from an enemy, and said she would soon be on her feet again. A “wizard” then lifted something that looked like a sieve in the air. It was filled with figures and was obviously a shaman frame drum. The “wizard” danced and sang before he fell down. His body then turned black, he foamed at the mouth, his stomach burst open and he stopped breathing. Afterwards, another “wizard” tried to reanimate the hostess with better success.

### 2.4.2 OLAUS MAGNUS

In *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*, the famous history work of Olaus Magnus (1490-1557) published in Rome (1976 [1555], pp. 161-162), there is a story that includes drum, ecstasy and trance. Olaus Magnus was the last catholic archbishop in Sweden, although he did not get the opportunity to assume the office. After the Reformation he lived a vagrant life in Europe before he settled down in Rome as the leader of the house of Saint Birgitta of Sweden. There he wrote the mentioned narrative. Olaus Magnus travelled in 1518 in the north of Scandinavia on behalf of Archimboldus, a papal legate and a seller of indulgences (Wieselgren 1949, pp. 206, 330, 343; Berglund 2007 pp. 302-306). Therefore, it is not unlikely that he had come into contact with the use of Saami shaman drums or in any case had heard of it from people who had witnessed it.

Olaus Magnus tells (1976 [1555], pp. 161-162) that the “wizard” went into a chamber together with a follower and his wife after being paid to ascertain the situation of friends or enemies far away. The “wizard” beat a toad or a snake of copper and turned it here and there on an anvil while he murmured magic formulas. Soon, he fell into a state of ecstasy and lay as if dead, while his follower took care of him. Suddenly he was on his feet again and could tell about signs he had received from people far away. The toad or snake is obviously the pointer, while the anvil is the drum.

### 2.4.3 JOHANNES SCHEFFERUS' LAPPONIA

Schefferus (1621-1679) wrote about Saami conditions in Sweden in his book *Laponia*, published in Latin in 1673. In a chapter about Saami witchcraft Schefferus ([1673] 1956, pp. 151-185) explains what he had read in the literature, as the text of Olaus Magnus, about the use of the Saami drum. He also tells that he uses priests in Lapland,



Figure 17: Olaus Magnus, the last catholic archbishop of Sweden, travelled in the north of Scandinavia AD 1518-19. Here is his image of séance. The body of the Saami shaman has fallen into trance, while the soul of the shaman is doing his spirit travel. His helper protects him against several more or less frightening creatures. Vignette in *Olaus Magnus Historia* 3:17; 1976 [1555] p. 161, English version I (1996), p. 174.

such as S. Rheen and J.J. Tornæus as informants, as well as N. Lundius, a Saami student.

Schefferus ([1673] 1956, p. 155) divides the “witchcraft” into two main groups in which one uses tools while the other does not. The tools were not only drums but also, for example, knots and magic formulas. He tells about the two types of drums: the frame drum and the bowl drum. Schefferus criticizes Olaus Magnus for his version of the use of the drum and makes his own close study of drum use. Furthermore Schefferus interprets the figures on the membrane. He (ibid [1673] 1956, pp. 170-173) relates how the shaman faints while using the drum. Schefferus says explicitly that he has described the appearance of the drums with accessories in Sweden, and that the drums of the Saami in Finnmark in Norway look different.

#### 2.4.4 ISAAC OLSEN

Isaac Olsen (ca. 1680-1739) explored the old religion of the Saami in Finnmark and wrote several manuscripts on this topic (Qvigstad 1910, p. 4). Qvigstad discovered one of these manuscripts in Foldereid in Nord-Trøndelag in 1897 and published most of it (ibid pp. 7-101). The manuscripts of Olsen are very important because he had learned the Saami language, and his manuscripts do not build on the later Saami missionaries’ stories. Olsen worked as a teacher for Saami children in East Finnmark (ibid, p.3). In one of the manuscripts Olsen explicitly says that he just writes down what he has observed with his one eyes. Nobody knows what he writes as well as him, he says, since he has been among the Saami people in East Finnmark for such a long time, has been in every mans house and understands their language so well (Qvigstad 1910, p. 10).

Olsen (Qvigstad 1910, pp. 30-36, 47-48, 85-87, 94) describes a bowl type drum and how to make and use it. He tells about what happened during the séance (ibid, pp. 43-47), how the helping spirit told the shaman if the sick should recover or not, where lost animals were to be found and how the spirit taught the shaman to appear in the guise of wolves and bears. He tells about the gods (ibid, pp. 7-8) and the special food and drink the shaman should consume before he started to beat the drum with the hammer (ibid 1910, pp. 29-30, 48-49), and many other matters concerning the religion (cf. Bäckman 1987, p. 47).

The strangest episode Isaac Olsen tells of is the narrative of the Troll Mass (*trollmesse*) (Qvigstad 1910, pp. 43-47, 82-85). Here he tells about a shaman séance that is more spectacular than the ones told about in the older written sources. It is the *Noide-gadze*, the helping spirit of the shaman, who teaches the shaman how to carry out the séance. The séance was held inside a turf-hut. All the people, young and old, were gathered there in their best clothes and finery. The shaman had his clothes turned inside out. He had the drum in his hand together with among other objects hammers, specially chosen stones, a lot of wooden objects, scissors, knives, iron scrapers, brass chains and rings and axes. He sings and rattles with the chains and the other objects. Before the séance really starts he has made a kettle full of lye cooked by ash and water or a kettle full of *Rupliimzias*. The last one is the sediments of fish oil, fish offal, fish bowels and fish heads boiled in water. The shaman drank one of these drinks until the kettle was almost empty. The audience that also was active in the séance was drinking the same. Afterwards the shaman drank fish oil to grease his throat. Then he hit different parts of his body with the axe, but this did not harm him. He also picked up glowing charcoal from the hearth without harm and threw



it around the turf hut. He undresses and sits down upon the glowing charcoals in the hearth for a long time without any harm. Thereafter he drinks the last from the kettles and falls into trance as if he was dead. Then a woman takes over the séance until he wakes up. Olsen says many of the shamans never wake up, but really die. When the shaman has wakened he makes an oration and thereby thanks the woman who saved him. Then he sings obscene songs to her. He sings he has to kiss her both forward and backward and that she now is allowed to use his limb (penis) as she wants. After the mass was over the shaman tells what he experienced while he was hibernated.

#### 2.4.5 NARRATIVES OF NORWEGIAN MISSION PRIESTS

Frederik IV, king of Denmark-Norway, initiated the systematic Saami mission in Norway with Thomas von Westen as the leader. Many of the mission priests such as Johan Randulf, Jens Kildal and Hans Skanke, wrote manuscripts about the Saami and their religion. Thomas von Westen himself also wrote several manuscripts however most of them are lost. The missionaries wrote about the use of the drum and especially about the meaning of the figures on the drum skin. It seems as if the interpretations were influenced by the views of the missionaries. The figures on the membrane are compared with Roman, Nordic and Christian gods. The missionaries forced the Saami to hand over the drums. Many of the drums were sent to Copenhagen as a demonstration of the success of the missionary work among the Saami. (Cf. Berglund 2005a, pp. 143 f.)

All the narratives mentioned above are written by missionaries and others who did not use the drums themselves. Therefore there are surely many misunderstandings. I think it is almost impossible to find out if they tell about shamanism as Eliade defines it. Anyway, it seems like the narratives of *Historia Norvegiæ*, Olaus Magnus and Isaac Olsen reflect the trance or ecstasy, the travelling to the spirit world and the control of helping spirits as well as the use of the drum.

#### 2.4.6 THE NARRATIVES OF THE SAAMIS ANDERS POULSEN AND LARS OLSEN

There are some narratives that seem to reflect the use of the drums more directly. One is from an unofficial interrogation by Niels Knag 8 December 1691 in Vadsø, Finnmark in North-Norway, of the North-Saami Anders Poulsen. He was at this time 100 years old. The narrative of Anders Poulsen is published by Qvigstad (1903, pp. 68-82). Poulsen says his mother taught him to use the drum. That means his mother was a female shaman. If Poulsen really was 100 years in 1691, it could have been in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century his mother initiated him in the use of the drum. The drum brought to the inquiry was made by Anders Poulsen himself. It is a bowl drum and is today in The Saami Collections in Karasjok. The symbols on the drum are arranged in five rows. They symbolise different Saami gods but also have Christian symbols as a church, The Holy

Spirit and Saint Anna. One goddess is named both as The Virgin Mary as well as with different Saami names.

In 1885, near 200 years later, the South-Saami Lars Olsen wrote down a story about drum use. He added to this story in later conversation with Qvigstad. The whole story was translated into German before it was published by Qvigstad (1888, pp. 104-109). The German text is later translated and published by Bjørklund (1997, p. 3; Olsen 1997, pp. 4-7).

Olsen tells about the use of a frame type drum and says it was used to make predictions. Before a reindeer herder moved his animals he often asked his drum if this would be successful or not. He took off his cap and sat down in the high seat in the tent while he held the drum towards the fire and waved it to make the ornaments fastened to the drum to beat the membrane. Then he heard if the skin was appropriately tight. Afterwards he held the drum aslant by the handle and beat the skin with the flat side of the hammer. He turned his eyes up to the roof while he talked to himself or the drum. The others were sitting quietly inside the tent. Then he first beat the main stone in the corner of the tent hard with the drum, then the back of the axe nearby and at last he beat a small, round stone usually kept among the pointers. After this he put a triangular pointer upon a ring painted on the membrane and beat carefully around it while he was talking. Finally he beat somewhat harder with the hammer close to the pointer and shimmied the drum so that the pointer jumped and danced on the membrane. Dependent on how and where the pointer moved on the symbols on the skin he could find out if moving the reindeer herd would be successful or not.

The narrative of Lars Olsen is very factual and sober. The accessories he mentions correspond with the ones found together with the newly discovered drums. Olsen says nothing about ecstasy and trance. His story has little in common with the older more dramatic story in *Historia Norvegiæ*, the one Olaus Magnus told, and the manuscripts written by Isaac Olsen. The use of drum to make predictions in the family circle is also known from other late south Saami stories and seems to be the common use of drums in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Every family seems to have had their own drum, which was kept innermost in the tent. It is not obvious that this use of the drums is part of shamanism including ecstasy, travelling to a spirit world and control of helping spirits. There could however be several reasons as to why Lars Olsen did not say anything about these things:

- They existed, but he chose not to record these practices.
- They did not exist.
- They had come to an end in the mission time in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- There were at the same time shamans who gathered a lot of people and used ecstasy, trance and helping spirits and travelled to a spirit world.

Anyway, the use of the newly found South-Saami shaman drums was part of rituals in the northern circumpolar culture area, but it is unsure if the use of them included ecstasy



techniques, trance, helping spirits and travels to a spirit world at so late a date.

#### 2.4.7 CONSIDERATION

Among the narratives concerning Saami shamanism it appears that the old ones and the ones from Finnmark best correspond to the criteria Eliade set up for shamanism. These narratives talk about ecstasy and trance as well as use of helping spirits and travels to a spirit world. Both the narratives and the drums themselves indicate that the drum is essential to the séance and that the dress or parts of the dress have also played a role. It is possible that the drum in the South-Saami areas was used for predictions, mainly in the family circle, while in Finnmark it was mainly used in what Bogoras called "Individual shamanism". The narratives concerning South Saami drum use are however younger and it is possible that it also there existed an "Individual shamanism".

Both Individual shamanism and Family shamanism was practised in Siberia among the Chukchee as late as in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century according to Bogoras. It is possible that both types of shamanism have existed among the Saami.

### 3. COLLECTION OF SAAMI SHAMAN DRUMS

There are several reasons why Saami shaman drums have been collected. Here I discuss two of them.

#### 3.1 The collection of the mission priests

As we have seen all the three newly found drums were hidden in the mountains. Why? An important reason could be the Saami Mission in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1714 the king of Denmark-Norway established the Danish College of Missions in Copenhagen, primarily for missionary activities in the West Indies, but also for missionaries among the Saami. It is clear that an important reason why the mission was initiated was the wish to control land, resources and taxes in the north of Scandinavia, where the borders were unstable (Berglund 2005a, p.135). Thomas von Westen was the leader of the mission in Norway. He and his missionary priests forced the Saami to hand over their drums. In this way they collected over 100 drums. Most of them were sent to Copenhagen to the king, as evidence of the success of the missionaries in Christianizing the Saami. Most of them were unfortunately destroyed when the Waisenhouse in Copenhagen burnt in 1728 (Steen 1954, pp. 39-40). Fortunately the mission priests did not manage to collect all the drums.

The reason why the missionaries collected the drums was their reputation as the most important witchcraft tools the Saami had. Religious symbols are perhaps the strongest ethnic markers. By forcing the Saami to hand over the drums, they hoped that the mission would be eased and it would be easier to control the Saami (Berglund 2005a,

p. 137). In a conflict situation the most important symbols usually are not hidden but on the contrary made more visible (Johansen 1979, pp. 107, 115-118); Odner [1983] 1990, pp. 59-65). The Saami lived in scattered settlements and were not organised. Therefore I think it was difficult for them to resist the confiscation of drums. Their only choice was to hand them over or to hide them in a place where they could still be used.

It appears that all the three newly found drums were discovered in sites with special features. It is possible that they were sacred places where the owner could return and use the drum during his lifetime or perhaps after death. The Henriksdalen drum seems to have been put away when the owner felt his life soon would come to an end.

#### 3.2 The collection of explorers and scientists

The time of the Enlightenment stimulated an interest to discover and systematize the world and to collect objects the travellers found exotic. For 18<sup>th</sup> century explorers and scientist Saami shaman drums seem to have been highly prized.

In NTNU, Museum of natural history and archaeology (the university museum in Trondheim) there is a Saami shaman drum that is one of the first artefacts brought to this museum. It is usually called *The Gunnerus' drum*. It is probably the one mentioned already in *CATALOGUS Librorum atque Rerum naturalium & artificialium*, the catalogue over the collections printed in 1779. Its caption is: *Tympanum Lapponum magicum & sortilegum, figuris variis pictum, c. amuletis & instrumento osseo pulsante*<sup>4</sup>. It is a frame drum with figures preserved on the membrane. One of the founders of The Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters in Trondheim, Bishop Gunnerus, tried in around 1760 to get the large circle of clergymen in his huge bishopric that included the whole area up to the coast of Finnmark and the border to Russland, to send him Saami shaman drums. This drum must be such a drum (Berglund 2005a, p. 139-140).

Gunnerus corresponded with the Swede, Carl von Linné, one of the greatest enquirers into the laws of nature. Linné also obtained a drum, with which he was depicted on several occasions. It is obvious that the drums now had become interesting object for scientists. It is also obvious that these drums never were hidden in the mountains, but in some way had been collected or confiscated by local priests.

Saami shaman drums were considered as interesting and exotic objects and many curiosity cabinets, such as the one Gunnerus founded in Trondheim, wanted to have such objects. The famous cabinet of Ole Worm in Copenhagen and many other cabinets around Europe had their own specimens (Berglund 2009, p. 4-8).

### 4. SHAMANISM IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Anthropological field works as well as written sources



Figure 18: The “Gunnerus drum” belonging to the collections of NTNU Museum of Natural History and Archaeology. Photo: Bruce Sampson, NTNU Museum of Natural History and Archaeology.

of the last centuries have given a broad spectre of stories about shamanism in the northern circumpolar areas, mostly from the last centuries. Nevertheless it is difficult to define shamanism even if one uses the criteria set up by Eliade. There seems to be variations both in the practise and in the use of the magical objects. Still there are some similarities. These I think are the most obvious ones:

#### The magical objects

- Use of shaman drum to come into the state of ecstasy and trance, but sometimes the shaman manages without.
- Use of staff occurs sometimes and sometimes not.
- Use of a special cap occurs sometimes and sometimes not.
- Use of a special belt occurs sometimes and sometimes not.
- Use of shaman dress occurs often, but sometimes no special dress is used.

#### Ecstasy and trance

- Occur normally, but in younger more sober and factual narratives not.

#### The helping spirits

- Helping spirits occur often, but not in younger more sober and factual narratives.
- The helping spirits normally have the shape of different animals.

Could these varying characters of shamanism help us to trace shamanism in an archaeological context? It seems most obvious that the helping objects could be identified archaeologically, since the study of material culture is essential in this subject. However, as far as I know, such objects older than mostly the last 500 years are not identified, at least not in Scandinavia.

Ecstasy and trance are difficult to trace archaeologically since they are non-material phenomenon. An archaeological manifestation of these elements would probably consist of pictures or images of the shaman in ecstasy or trance.

The helping spirits could perhaps be traced archaeologically if one could find pictures or images of them in the form they took, for example birds, wolves and snakes. However, if one were to find an image of a wolf, it could not automatically be interpreted as a helping spirit.

Rock art is perhaps the archaeological context where it is most easy to find pictures that could be interpreted as images connected to shamanism and above all the large fields of rock art at Alta in Finnmark (cf. Helskog 1988). Here, one finds pictures which could be interpreted as shaman drums. A lot of figures and scenes could be interpreted as shamans and séances. Animals could be interpreted as helping spirits in disguise of for example wolfs, bears and birds. Anyway we can ask if it is plausible to compare the shamanism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Japan and Siberia, the shamanism that the old narratives tell about Saami shamanism and the shamanism that several thousand year old rock art seem to tell about. It is easy to say that this



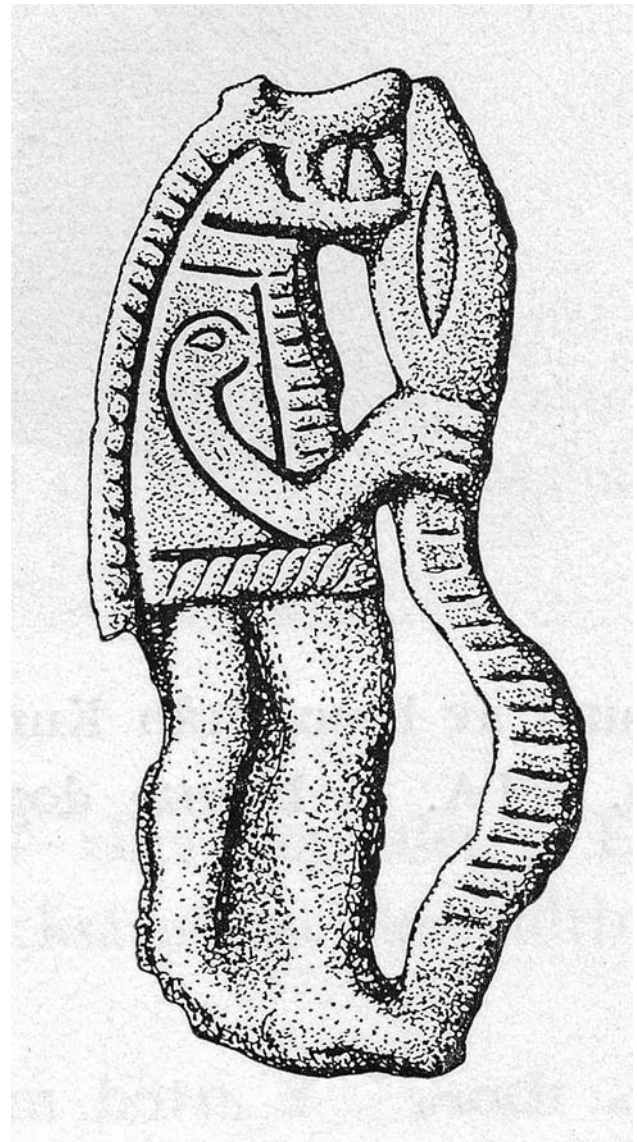


Figure 19a and b: The two Early Viking Age bronze human figures from the same grave in a cemetery in Kungsängen outside Stockholm, Sweden. Perhaps the 3 cm high figures could be interpreted in shamanistic terms. The photo of the man with horns, sword and two crossing staffs are from catview. [historiska.se](http://historiska.se), the drawing of the man in wolf-mask from Ringquist 1969, p. 289.

is a question of definitions, but anyway I think we could call it shamanism. But then we should be aware that there are a lot of variations and that these do not answer to all the criteria set up by Eliade.

Hultkrantz (1977, pp. 10-12) criticises the criteria of Eliade and think they are too strict and therefore delimit the phenomenon of shamanism. According to Hultkrantz there are four components that constitutes shamanism: 1) The shaman establishes contact with the supernatural world, 2) The shaman is the intermediary between the human group and the supernaturals, 3) The shaman receives his inspiration from his guardian or helping spirits, 4) The shaman has ecstatic experiences. Other researchers interpret shamanism even more generally as Yamada (1997, p. 327). Yamada says animism is the idea and interpretation of spiritual experiences. Shamanism, based on the ideology of animism, is “a dramatic device which provides people with energy for their everyday lives”. Thus shamanism can be understood as a phenomenon general to all human societies, also modern ones.

If the concept of shamanism should be useful in an

archaeological context, I think we need to have clear criteria to define the phenomenon. We also must have an opinion of how these criteria could be materialised, since archaeology studies material culture. It is possible that the criteria of Eliade are useful as well as the ones by Hultkrantz, but with more emphasis on the helping objects and the possible images of the helping spirits.

There are many variations in how shamanism is practised. It is noticed among people in Siberia that even two shamans in the same small group of people could practise shamanism in different ways (cf. Diószegi 1963; Mebius 2003, p. 179-180). Therefore it seems very difficult to find criteria of shamanism that could be applicable for immense geographic areas through thousands of years. Rather, I think it is time for small scale studies of shamanism whether in ethnographic studies, studies of written sources or studies in an archaeological context.

There are also other problems concerning shamanism and archaeology in a Scandinavian context. The relation between the *seid* that the Old Icelandic sagas tell about and the Saami shamanism is much discussed. Johan Fritzner



(1812-1893) discussed this theme already in 1876. Fritzner was vicar in Vadsø in Finnmark in 1838-1845, and there he could study the north Saami language as well as the Saami religion. He finds a lot of similarities between the *seid* in the Sagas and the Saami *trolldomskunst* (shamanism). Strömbäck (1935) has examined the Old Icelandic Sagas concerning *seid* and concluded (ibid, pp. 196-206) that there are parallels between the *seid* and Saami shamanism. He thinks the *seid* or shamanism the Sagas tell about is inspired of Saami shamanism (ibid, p. 206). Several archaeologists have identified shamanism in non-Saami objects in Scandinavian Iron Age as Hedeager (1997, pp. 265-278) on Migration-Period gold bracteates. As Solli (2002, p. 183, 197) has pointed out shamanism could have existed both among Saami and non-Saami in the Scandinavian countries before the Christening.

The narrative of Isaac Olsen seems very strange for us today, but he told his story only 200 years ago. I think rituals performed several thousand years earlier must be even stranger to us. What for example do two small figures from Early Viking Age found in a grave in Kungsängen outside Stockholm symbolise (Ringquist 1969, pp. 287-288)? Could they be interpreted in shamanic terms? One of the figures consists of a man with two crossing staffs in one hand and a sword in the other. He has a special headgear in form of horns and he has a belt. The other figure consists of a human being with the head of a wolf who embraces a snake? Could the figure with the headgear and the staffs symbolise a shaman, while the human being with the head in the shape of a wolf symbolizes a helping spirit? Variations of the motives are known from other Iron Age images too (ibid, pp. 289-295). In the light of the strange story of Isaac Olsen I think it is very difficult for us urbanised people to imagine what the rituals images from the past are symbolising, but of course we have to try.

## 5. CONCLUSION

From different parts of the northern circumpolar area written stories tell about shamanic séances where the drum was used. Gjessing (1944, p. 5), to whom this seminar is dedicated, stressed the drums as belonging to a northern circumpolar culture. Shaman drums are however known from areas south of the northern circumpolar area too, but as far as I know all drums in this vast area are of the frame type, except the bowl drum in the north of Scandinavia. Usually we think of contacts in a north-south perspective – at least in Scandinavia - but I think it is a very stimulating perspective to think of contacts in an east-west perspective like Gjessing did. Where people meet, they may change both ideas and artefacts. It is easier for new ideas and tools to be spread to groups with the same way of living than to people with other ways of living. Therefore I think groups of people, with different ways of living, can live close to each other and not exchange ideas. I think this is the reason why tools and other artefacts are so similar in the northern circumpolar area among people with the same way of living (cf. Gjessing 1944).

The northern circumpolar peoples had a common need for

tools to control and explain their surroundings and lives in the immense land areas with scattered settlements. They needed to find the best grazing land for their reindeer without going there and examine it, they needed to heal illnesses of man and animals and they needed to control the future. Shaman séances were well suited to this and the drum was a convenient tool to help the shaman to fall into trance. Therefore the drum and the use of it were easily spread to peoples with the same way of living. Shaman séances without the rhythmic sound of the drum must have been a far less suggestive experience for the audience. The séances were important to keep the feeling of community among the people.

Even if there are similarities concerning drum use and the phenomenon we call shamanism in the immense northern circumpolar area, there are also differences. Shamanism is difficult to define, especially in archaeological context, even if we use strict criteria. I think small scale studies are the way to find out more about shamanism and drum use in the past.

## Notes

1. Analysed by H. I. Høeg 13<sup>th</sup> November 1999.
2. Analysed by L.B. Jørgensen, NTNU, Department of Archaeology and Religious Studies, 15<sup>th</sup> February 2010.
3. Analysed by A. K. Hufthammer, University of Bergen, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1999.
4. *CATALOGUS Librorum atque Rerum naturalium & artificialium sub auspiciis SERENISSIME PRINCIPIS REGII FRATRIS FRIDERICI curâ et operâ Societatis Reg. Scientiar. Norvegicæ. collectorum in publicum Patriæ usum. Niderosia 1779. Typis Vindingianis.*

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