



Algyshes from Tuva
Collected by Professor Mongush Kenin-Lopsan
Compiled and presented by Aldynai Seden-Khuurak
Submitted by Anna Kjellin



Tuvan Petroglyph¹

In the summer of 2007, Anna Kjellin, Foundation Three-Year Program student from Sweden, visited Tuva, hoping to deepen her knowledge of shamanism and to experience the people, culture, and music. She found Tuva a place of exceptional beauty and friendly people. In the capitol Kyzyl, Anna met with Professor Kenin-Lopsan. The Professor related some sad stories about how shamans and their families had been treated in Soviet times. He also wished to have more of his writings about shamanism translated into English and published in the West and asked Anna to help him. He gave her a compilation of algyshes – songs of shamans. Anna plans to help get the compilation published as soon as it is ready. She hopes to return to Tuva next summer and interview the Professor and other shamans about what is happening there and how shamanism is evolving in the culture.



Professor Kenin-Lopsin, FSS Living Treasure of Shamanism.
Photo by Aldynai Seden-Khuurak.

The Foundation has had a long relationship with the esteemed Professor Mongush Kenin-Lopsan. He was present at the Foundation's first expedition to Tuva in 1993, and at three subsequent expeditions. He was named by the Foundation as a *Living Treasure of Shamanism* for his work, at great personal risk, in preserving shamanism in his country under the Soviets. Professor Kenin-Lopsan is currently working on a book, which he hopes to have published in the West, with the working title of *Algyshes of Tuvan Shamans*. Aldynai Seden-Khuurak and Rollanda Kongar are helping him with his work and his translations and Anna Kjellin with publication.

We are grateful to Prof. Kenin-Lopsan for sharing with us a few of these beautiful algyshes and allowing us to print them in this publication; and to Anna Kjellin, FSS Three-Year Program student, for sending the Professor's work to the Foundation.

Descriptions of the Foundation's four expeditions to Tuva can be found in *Shamanism*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1994), Vol. 8, No. 1 (1995), Vol. 9, No. 2 (1996), and Vol. 13, Nos. 1 & 2 (2000). You may also read about the first and the fourth expeditions to Tuva in the Articles section on the website, www.shamanism.org.

An algysb is a shamanic song or hymn that the shaman performs during a ritual. Usually in this song the shaman talks with his or her helper-spirits. The shaman tells them the reason why they are being called, for healing a sick person, and so forth.

–Anna Kjellin, August 2008

Algysb of a Shaman Dedicated to His Shaman Origin

My father is a daring Delger!
My grandfather is a renowned person!
And I am a descendant of seven shamans!
My ancestors' shamanizing has fallen to my lot.

I am the one who is fated to be a shaman.
I am the youngest of six shamans living now.
I am the one who has followed in my ancestors' footsteps.
A famous shaman I am.

Bowing, let's cross
A magnificent silver threshold.
Without stumbling, let's cross
A magnificent golden threshold.

Now into a bear I turn,
Now into a wolf,
Now into a black raven,
Via the shaman Delger.
All through the power of the shaman Delger.

Holding a drum of bear skin,
Holding a drumstick of juniper,
It's as if with a drumstick of stone,
I beat a mountain-like drum.



The rear of the Museum of Shamanism from Professor Kenin-Lopsan's office. The stones are ancient. The stone on the right appears to be marked with lines for the different worlds. Photo by Anna Kjellin.

How the Shamaness Chyvaa Misses and Addresses her Grandmother

When my grandmother had passed away ages ago,
She became Mistress-spirit of ridges and rivers.



Time-worn Tiuan petroglyphs (above). Computer-enhanced to make the striking glyphs visible (below).



*Algysb of a Shaman Who Used to Live in the Region Mongun-Taiga²
Dedicated to the Forefather of his Shaman Family*

Oi-ooi. Oi-ooi. Oi-ooi. Oi-ooi.
Oi-ooi. Oi-ooi. Oi-ooi. Oi-ooi.
Oi-ooi. Oi-ooi. Oi-ooi. Oi-ooi.
Oi-ooi. Oi-ooi. Oi-ooi. Oi-ooi.

For a long, long time
He has been the chief shaman, the
forefather of shamans.

He has shown me my destined path,
And has shared with me my difficult
burden.

My shaman grandfather is venerated
by all.

He has shown me the way to the
Lower World.

He has been declared by gods and
khaans³ alike

Foremost among all shamans.

On the wagon with wheels of lead clouds,
He has fallen asleep turning away.
My amazing shaman, my respected elder,
Shamanizing has fallen to his lot.

On the wagon with wheels of bronze clouds,
He has fallen asleep facing the sun.
My dear old man has shown me the way
My shaman daai⁴ has given me a drumstick.

His face is pale and sallow,
My ancient grey-haired shaman,
The scarf 'round his neck is of colored silk,
Very, very old is my shaman daai.

I remember the unrememberable,
Sometimes I am saddened.
Thinking the unthinkable,
I lose myself in thought.

My dear old daai, a shaman by fate.
Gracious and kind is my old daai.
I feel your help and support,
I sense your grace and protection.



Algysb of a Black Sky-origin Shaman

I am a shaman of the Black Sky
I have become a light wind
I have flown down in the darkness
I am hurrying to find out

Among the Pole Star and other stars
I am flying to fulfill my task
As the path I am to reach is so far away,
I am going and shamanizing

Having passed the white sky
I was burnt by the bright Sun
I escaped from the dangerous fire
I am descending softly, smoothly

When I was hauling down mildly and gently,
I reached the Moon as well
Having been frozen by bitter coldness,
I am flying down smoothly and flowing.

When I came to the clouds,
I was lost, I got confused.
Having separated from the clouds,
I landed on the grey mountain.

*Algysb of the Shaman Who Originated
from Master-Spirits of the Earth and Water*

You are my swimming in a spring water [sisters],
You are my riding a grayling [sisters],
You are my wrapped with ooze [sisters],
You are my playing and riding young fish [sisters].

You are my [sisters], making the drum beat
At the confluence of rivers and lakes.
You are my [sisters], making the drum thunder
At the confluence of springs.

You are my bronze-faced,
You are my black-eyed merry girls.
My yellow-faced elder sisters,
Master-Spirits of the Earth and Water!

*How a Shaman of the Earth-and-Water-Origin
Prays to the Master-Spirits of Rivers*

Oh, Master-Spirits of rivers with bead-like stones!
Let's make inquiries and search for my lost beings.
Oh, Master-spirits of rivers with golden and silver stone!
Come to me. Let's treat the sick.

Oh, my high Taiga smelling with artysh⁵!
Oh, my great peak giving rise to arzhaan⁶ waters.
I am burning artysh, shaanak,⁷ agy and kangy⁸
To save children's lives and souls.



How an Aza⁹-Origin Shaman Calls the Soul of an Ill Person

Your white yurt has been left alone. Please think.
Your children are going to become orphans. Please pity them.
Cattle you've raised begin to wander the forests,
Becoming the food of the bears and wolves.
Kurai! Kurai!

Platter and plate have become full with fatty meat,
Tea kettle has become full with yellow tea.
Tethered to the pole moving its head,
Your horse awaits anxiously for you to come home.
Kurai! Kurai!

To the bright-wonderful land, to the sunny world
Having returned, please enjoy it, please live.
That person all alone is your wife who made two braids in your hair.
All alone. Troubled. Sorrowful.
Kurai! Kurai!

Under the wide calm Azar Sky,¹⁰
Under the light of the Moon and the Sun
Won't you enjoy your work freely and to heart's content?
Please quickly to your aal, hurry up!
Kurai! Kurai!

–Translated by Aldynai Seden-Khuurak and Rollanda Kongar



NOTES

1. Photos of Tuva and petroglyphs from *Travel to the Art of the Ancients* by V.N. Yelizarov and V.P. Kuznetsov, Tuva Kyzyl, 2006.
2. *Taiga* is a high mountain covered with and surrounded by thick wood.
3. A *khan* is a king, a ruler.
4. *Daai* is mother's brother who is elder than the speaker.
5. *Artysb* is a Siberian juniper used as incense. Used to purify all shamanic attributes and belongings, people and places. Latin name: *Juniperus pseudo sabina*.
6. Means holy, sacred healing spring water. The location of a spring is referred to as "*arzhaan*."
7. *Shanaak* is another kind of juniper used as incense.
8. *Agy* and *Kangy* are two kinds of Tuvan feather-grass used as incense for purifying.
9. *Aza* is a malicious spirit or demon. *Azas* can be male or female. They resemble humans. As for the male *Aza*, he appears in different ways. His feet can hang in the air or he is a dog with three heads or an eagle-owl with a long beak. He can also be a horse with little stars and big horns. On some occasions a male *Aza* can be seen with a man's head and a wild boar's tusk. At other times he can have a cow's tail with bare feet and no head. At night he appears as a luminiscent blue light which sings beautiful songs through the night. At sunrise the *Aza* becomes invisible.
10. The *Azar* sky is the land in the nebulous areas. A land in the Universe. A land in the starriest of stars areas. The highest sky; a land of the upper world. ☁

