

Report on the Presentation of *Shamanic Myths of Tuva* in Tuva and Austria

by Paul Uccusic

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After two years of hard work, in the summer of 2011 the [Foundation for Shamanic Studies \(FSS\) in Europe](#) finished the German translation of FSS [Living Treasure Professor Mongush Borakhovitch Kenin-Lopsan](#)'s book *Shamanic Myths of Tuva*. FSS European Director [Paul Uccusic](#) served as the publisher, with Isolde Schmitt as the main translator (Russian-German), supported by Aldynai Seden-Chuurak (Tuvan-English), who is a teacher at the Tuvan State Lyceum in Kysyl. Artist Alexandra Uccusic provided the illustrations.



The Tuvan-Russian original was published in 2002 in a small edition without pictures. The German version is an improved printing on quality paper, which includes stories about Tuva and its inhabitants and about the Arzhan treasure (see below), along with many color pictures and drawings of the spirits of Tuva by Alexandra.

The idea was to present the book not only in the German-speaking countries of Austria, Germany, Switzerland, but also in Tuva. Paul and Roswitha Uccusic and Isolde Schmitt decided to travel to Tuva to bring Professor Kenin-Lopsan several copies and to present the book to groups of interested individuals there: writers, poets, scientists, scholars, students, pupils, and, of course, shamans.

Paul, Roswitha, and Isolde traveled to Tuva in December 2011, where the temperatures ranged from -26 and -36 deg. C. They found Prof. Kenin-Lopsan in fine shape at nearly 86 years of age, though he had lost a little of his eyesight, but his mood was good and he was as witty as ever.

At the University of Tuva, the three visitors lectured about and discussed in German/English, sometimes with Russian translation, the precious heritage of Tuvan shamanism. For Tuvan college students, it was a new experience to learn about their own culture as seen by a publishing house from abroad. Though most of them had heard about shamanism at home, they had few clear ideas about what it is used for, or what a shaman does and how he performs healing. These encounters were fascinating, too, for the European visitors, as well as to the faculty of the University.

Dr. Zoya Kyrgys, head of the international scientific center “Chöömei” (Throatsinging Institute) set up a symposium to honor Professor Kenin-Lopsan. The first pro-rector of Tuvan State University, Lubov Tasool, awarded him with the title of “Honorary Professor of TGU/Tuvan Government University.” The visiting team received profound insight into the situation of shamans in Tuva from Tamara Budegechi, former head of the Shamanic Research Institute at the National Museum of Tuva, and a great deal of other information.

The symposium took place in the conference hall for the newly constructed National Museum of Tuva. In a central place there is a high-security room displaying the famous gold treasure of Arzhan (of Scythic origin, with more than 6000 pieces of gold); nearby, there is a fascinating exhibition on Tuvan shamanism, including in-depth information about the work of Michael Harner, Heimo Lappalainen, Bill

Brunton, Larry Peters and others from the Foundation for Shamanic studies who have supported Tuvan shamanism and shamans.

During a visit to the shamanic society “Dungur” (Drum) Paul, Roswitha, and Isolde were acquainted with the present day situation. The new chairman Dorzhu Mongushevitch Ak-kys and his shamans welcomed them with a large meal and showed them the Dungur house, which has just two rooms -- with only one room for working with clients -- and the entrance room with a kitchen. The house is now one hundred years old and needs repair and enlargement to have more rooms to work with clients. Only Tuva’s first president, Oorzhak Sherig-ool, really supported the shamans, after the First International Tuvan-American Symposium on Shamanism in 1993.



Professor Kenin-Lopsan in his office.

([Read about the expedition on the FSS website](#); or [view a video clip](#).) Then the support ceased and now there are no funds to refurbish the Dungur house.

The situation is very different for Buddhists and Orthodox Christians, which have big buildings, in contrast to the shamans’ small house. There is also no pension for shamans. All Russian citizens have the right to a pension at 55 years for men, 50 for women, which is a minimum of 6200 rubles. However, a typical person needs about 20,000 rubles to survive. Dungur serves nearly 300 members and each shaman has to contribute about 3500 rubles a month (30 rubles = \$1) from his/her average income of 15,000 rubles. This is for coal, electricity, maintenance, taxes and the Dungur staff (chairman, secretary, watchman, and others). To assist the shamans in beginning the renewal of the house, the European delegation made a significant contribution to the Dungur house and left with promises to do more.

In January 2012, FSS Europe presented *Shamanic Myths of Tuva* to the Austrian public. The Ethnographic Museum in Vienna provided rooms without charge for an introduction to the book by Paul and an additional lecture and a screening of a film about Tuvan shamanism, directed by Dr. Mihály Hoppál of the European Folklore Institute (Budapest). This became quite an event, with hundreds of people attending, evidence of the continuing interest in the work of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies. Presentations were done in several shifts and additional funds were collected, which were sent to Tuva to buy bricks, stones, and other materials for aiding the shamans in the improvements to the Dungur house. Marina and Anna Kenin-Lopsan, the Professor’s daughters, and Aldynai promised to support and supervise the progress of the work.

Read more from [The New Research of Tuva](#) online magazine:

- [Tuvan shamans speaking in German](#)
- [Austrian publishers of works about shamanism visited Tuva](#)

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